

# Benedict Biscop!

## Patron Saint of the City of Sunderland



Sunderland Male Voice Choir evolved from the former Shiney Row Male Voice Choir in July 2022.

The Choir has recorded and performed some great material over the years. Recently, it has embarked on a programme of creating new musical material. Some of this material incorporates new arrangements of traditional numbers.

An exciting new initiative is the creation of brand-new songs based upon the region's rich local heritage and its people.

The Choir is now singing annually at The Mayor's Carol Service in Sunderland Minster.

Members of the Choir undertook some research work in preparation for a community project bid, which included the life of Benedict Biscop.

The Choir has taken the opportunity to harness this work to help create a new song on Sunderland's rich heritage.

### The Benedict Biscop Project

Benedict Biscop (pronounced Bishop) lived from 628 to 690.

He was born of a noble Northumbrian family and as Biscop Baducing, his family name, he was in the service of the Northumbrian King Oswiu until 653.

#### The First and Second Visits to Rome

He then decided to become a monk, but went first with Wilfred, a friend, to Rome to visit the tombs of the apostles. He returned to Northumbria and soon took Aldfrith, son of Oswiu, back with him to Rome.

On this second visit, Biscop became a monk at the monastery of Saint Honorat at Lerins. Here he took the name of Benedict.

#### The Third Visit to Rome

His third visit to Rome coincided with the presence of Wighard, archbishop-elect of Canterbury, who died in Rome before his consecration.

Biscop returned to England with Theodore of Canterbury in 669 and became Abbot of St. Augustine's, Canterbury for two years.

#### The Fifth Visit to Rome

After he visited Rome for the fifth time in 679, Biscop returned with an 'innumerable collection of books of all kinds', with relics, calendars, and service books. He also returned with John, the Archcantor of St Peter's, Rome, and Abbot of St Martin's Basilican Monastery.

John taught the monks by word and writing, the Roman liturgy and the uncial script. Uncial is a majuscule script (written entirely in capital letters) commonly used from the 4th to 8th Centuries A.D. by Latin and Greek scribes. Uncial letters were used to write Greek and Latin, as well as Gothic and Coptic.

### Sunderland Male Voice Choir

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St. Peter's Church, Monkwearmouth

### The Foundation of Wearmouth

Benedict Biscop soon decided that he wanted to make his own foundation.

With the help of King Egfrith, who gave him seventy hides of land (about 8,400 acres), he founded Wearmouth in 674.

In 675, new assistance for his mission:

- Importing Frankish stonemasons who built a Romanesque church,
- glassmakers and other craftsmen, for their expertise and to teach local men,
- Books bought in Rome and Vienna were added to the endowment.

A rule for his community, based on that of Benedict and the customs of seventeen monasteries he had visited, was created.

### The Influence of Wearmouth

Pope Agatho used John's visit to assure himself of the orthodoxy of the English Church. Other treasures brought by Benedict included a series of pictures of Gospel scenes, Our Lady and the Apostles, incidents in the Apocalypse, for display in the church, and a privilege of the special protection from the Holy See.

## A Centre of Christianity

### The Creation of Jarrow Monastery

In 682, Benedict founded the Monastery of Jarrow with the help of Egfrith, who provided an estate of forty hides (4800 acres). Benedict provided twenty-two monks under Ceolfrith. It was dedicated to St Paul and was intended to be a sister monastery to St Peter's, Wearmouth. In 685, Biscop made his last visit to Rome, returning with even more books and sacred images. He brought some fine silk cloaks which he exchanged with the King for three hides of land (360 acres).

At this time, he delegated the Abbacy of Wearmouth to Eosterwine and then to Sigfrid: Ceolfrith was abbot of Jarrow. Biscop retained a founder's interest in both. He and Sigfrid were stricken with paralysis at about the same time.

### The Succession of Biscop

Biscop's final address to his community included exhortations to keep to his eclectic rule, to keep his library together in good repair, and to elect an abbot for his manner of life and his teaching according to the Rule of St Benedict, rather than for his membership of a particular family; in particular, he would prefer his monastery to become a wilderness than that his own brother should succeed him as Abbot. Biscop's library recognised the achievements of Bede.



St. Paul's Church, Jarrow

### Sunderland Male Voice Choir Information Sheets

Sunderland Male Voice Choir is producing a range of information sheets on its new music creation and project work. These sheets will be published within the 'Project' page of the Choir website.