

# Three Day Walking Retreat - 2023



**T**his year we will be taking in some of the delights of the famous Hadrian's Wall Path. Over three days we expect to cover around 33 miles of what is arguably the most picturesque section of this 84 mile trail

Heading from West to East ( hopefully picking up the benefit of the prevailing wind ) we will start at Old Wall ( just to the North of Carlisle Airport ) and conclude our pilgrimage at Heavenfield, the site of the famous battle where King St Oswald and his Northumbrian Army defeated the Welsh under Cardwallon in 633. This section of the route will take ( in amongst others ) the forts at Birdoswald and Vindolanda and include the famous sycamore gap ( above ).

## Itinerary

The standard itinerary for the three days is as below with each day noting a second starting point for this who do not wish to walk the full distance. The bus will drop off at both starts with the group coming together at the second start point

**Day One:                      Old Wall to Birdoswald**

Distance                      10 miles

Total Ascent                900 ft

Second Start Walton - Distance 7 miles

**Day Two:                      Birdoswald to Houseteads**

Distance                      12 miles

Total Ascent                2,000 ft

Second Start Walton Country Park - Distance 9 miles

**Day Three:                    Houseteads to Heavenfield**

Distance                      12 miles

Total Ascent                1,200 ft

Second Start Brocolitia Fort and Temple - Distance 7 miles

## **Maps - Please Ignore Weather Forecasts**

### **Day 1**



## Day 2





## Day 3



## **Day 1 Notes**

### **Camboglanna (with the modern name of Castlesteads)**

This was the twelfth fort on Hadrian's Wall counting from the east, between Banna (Birdoswald) to the east and Uxelodunum (Stanwix) to the west. It was almost 7 miles (11 km) west of Birdoswald, on a high bluff commanding the Cambeck Valley. It guarded an important approach to the Wall and also watched the east bank of the Cambeck against raiders from the Bewcastle area. The site was drastically levelled in 1791 when the gardens of Castlesteads House were laid over it. The name "Camboglanna" is believed to mean "Crook Bank", or "Bent Valley" because it overlooks a bend in the river Irthing; the name is Brythonic, made of cambo- "curved, bent, crooked" and glanna "steep bank, stream/river side, valley with a stream".

There was some confusion over the Roman name for the fort. At one time Camboglanna was the accepted name for Birdoswald, but this is now believed to be an error in the Notitia Dignitatum. The Roman name for Birdoswald is now thought to be Banna

### **Lanercost Priory - Nearby but not visited**

The Priory was founded by Robert de Vaux between 1165 and 1174, the most likely date being 1169, to house Augustinian canons. The priory is situated at the village of Lanercost, within sight of Naworth Castle, with which it had close connections. The Lanercost Chronicle, a thirteenth-century history of England and the Wars of Scottish Independence, was compiled by the monks of the priory.

The dedication is to Mary Magdalene.



Lanercost Priory from the south. The foundations of the conventual buildings are in the foreground.

The fortunes of the priory were linked to the state of warfare and raids on the border. The priory was in relatively affluent circumstances before the outbreak of the war of Independence in 1296, and the annual revenue of the house was returned at £74 12s 6d in the 1291 valuation of Pope Nicholas IV. But by the taxation of 1318, the value had fallen almost to nothing.

### **Birdoswald Roman Fort**

This fort was known as Banna ("horn" in Celtic) in Roman times, reflecting the geography of the site on a triangular spur of land bounded by cliffs to the south and east commanding a broad meander of the River Irthing in Cumbria below. It is one of the best preserved of the 16 forts along the wall. It is also attached to the longest surviving stretch of Hadrian's Wall.

This western part of Hadrian's Wall was originally built using turf starting from 122 AD. The stone fort was built some time after the wall, in the usual playing card shape, with gates to the east, west and south.

The fort was occupied by Cohors I Aelia Dacorum and by other Roman auxiliaries from approximately AD 126 to AD 400.

The two-mile sector of Hadrian's Wall either side of Birdoswald is also of major interest. It is currently the only known sector of Hadrian's Wall in which the original turf wall was replaced, probably in the 130s, by a stone wall approximately 50 metres further north, to line up with the fort's north wall, instead of at its east and west gates. The reasons for this change are unclear, but at any rate, this remains the only area in which both the walls can be directly compared.

As of 2005, it is the only site on Hadrian's Wall at which significant occupation in the post-Roman period has been proven. Excavations between 1987 and 1992 showed an unbroken sequence of occupation on the site of the fort granaries, running from the late Roman period until possibly 500AD.

Approximately 600 metres east of Birdoswald, at the foot of an escarpment, lie the remains of Willowford bridge which carried Hadrian's Wall across the River Irthing. The westward movement of the river course over the centuries has left the east abutment of the bridge high and dry, while the west abutment has probably been destroyed by erosion. Nevertheless, the much-modified visible remains are highly impressive. Until 1996, these remains were not directly accessible from the fort, but they can now be reached by a footbridge.

The fort at Birdoswald was linked by a Roman road, sometimes referred to as the Maiden Way, to the outpost fort of Bewcastle, seven miles to the north. Signals could be relayed between the two forts by means of two signalling towers



## Day 2 Notes

### Milecastle 49



**MILECASTLE 49 & WILLOWFORD BRIDGE**

This is a representation of how it looked in about 140AD with the first bridge at Willowford. Since the wall was built the river has moved nearly 80 yds. Further west and the slope to the bridge is far steeper. As originally built the wall would have been built of turf with probably a wooden palisade and Milecastle would have used the same materials. The change occurred from the west bank of the River Irthing. The visible Milecastle is 75ft by 65ft and replaced after only about 10 years the original smaller turf Milecastle.



### Milecastle 49 and west to Birdoswald

This is one of the few places where about 2 miles of Turf wall is moved with the building of the stone wall. The turf wall joined the fort just north of the Eastgate of the fort, while the stone wall aligned with the north wall of Birdoswald Roman Fort.

## Turrets 48a & 48b

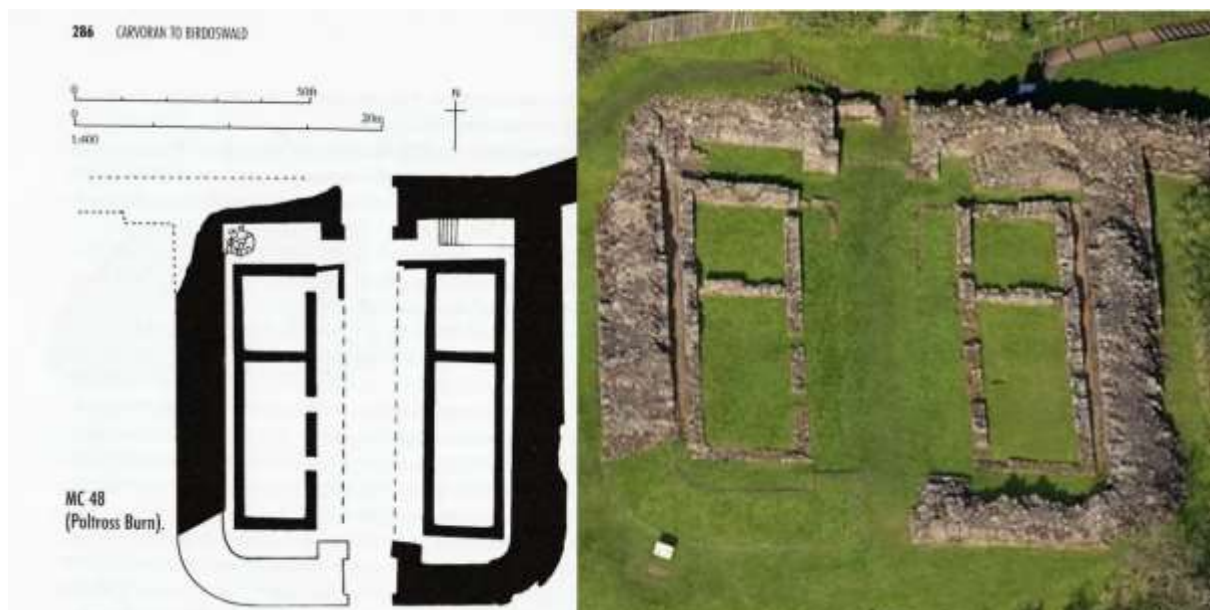


Turret 48b is a similar size to T48a and is again recessed into the wall. This time there were 4 floors 3 of which were flagged.



Along the Wall passed Willowford then descend into the Irthing. Valley. At the end of the wall in the picture is the bridge abutment in a field

## Milecastle 48





This is one of the most significant Milecastles on the Wall, both in respect of its state preservation and the information it has provided. It has a broad gauge wall (9.5ft. thick) built of large masonry and is 70ft by 61ft. Inside were 2 large stone buildings probably barracks.



The broad walls indicate that the Milecastle was built well ahead of the wall and before the decision to narrow the wall. In addition, there are three steps shown in the middle picture above, which indicate that the steps led to a walkway 12ft. from the floor. This is the only indication anywhere that the walls of the Milecastle were 12ft. high and the wall itself was possibly also 12 ft. high. It is assumed though there is no evidence that there was a parapet and a walk along the top of the milecastle and possibly the Wall.

Extract from a House of Commons Debate 1958

“It is reliably reported that on the section near Birdoswald four workmen are employed with only occasional supervision. They dismantle the Wall, nine feet at a time, stacking the square masonry and rubble filling and consolidating the foundations. The Roman mortar, which varied in colour from one age to the next and therefore shows repairs and alterations. Which is a matter of importance to arachnologists— is destroyed without record? Far worse, the work emerging from the hands of these excellent workmen is not Hadrian’s Wall at all—it is a copy lost in the gifts of time.”

Here is not the only place this has happened. 7% of the wall is visible, of which 2% is a nineteenth century reconstruction, from generally from Roman materials to hand. Of the

remaining 5% it is not known how much of the wall has been rebuilt. English Heritage now insists that after any excavation everything is reburied.

## Thirlwall Castle

In the small valley crossing the River Tipait and the 12th century Thirlwall Castle is on the right. This is largely built of stone from the Wall. Follow the path and cross the Gilsland road into the field, the Vallum is visible.



## Carvoran Roman Fort



Carvoran North West Tower

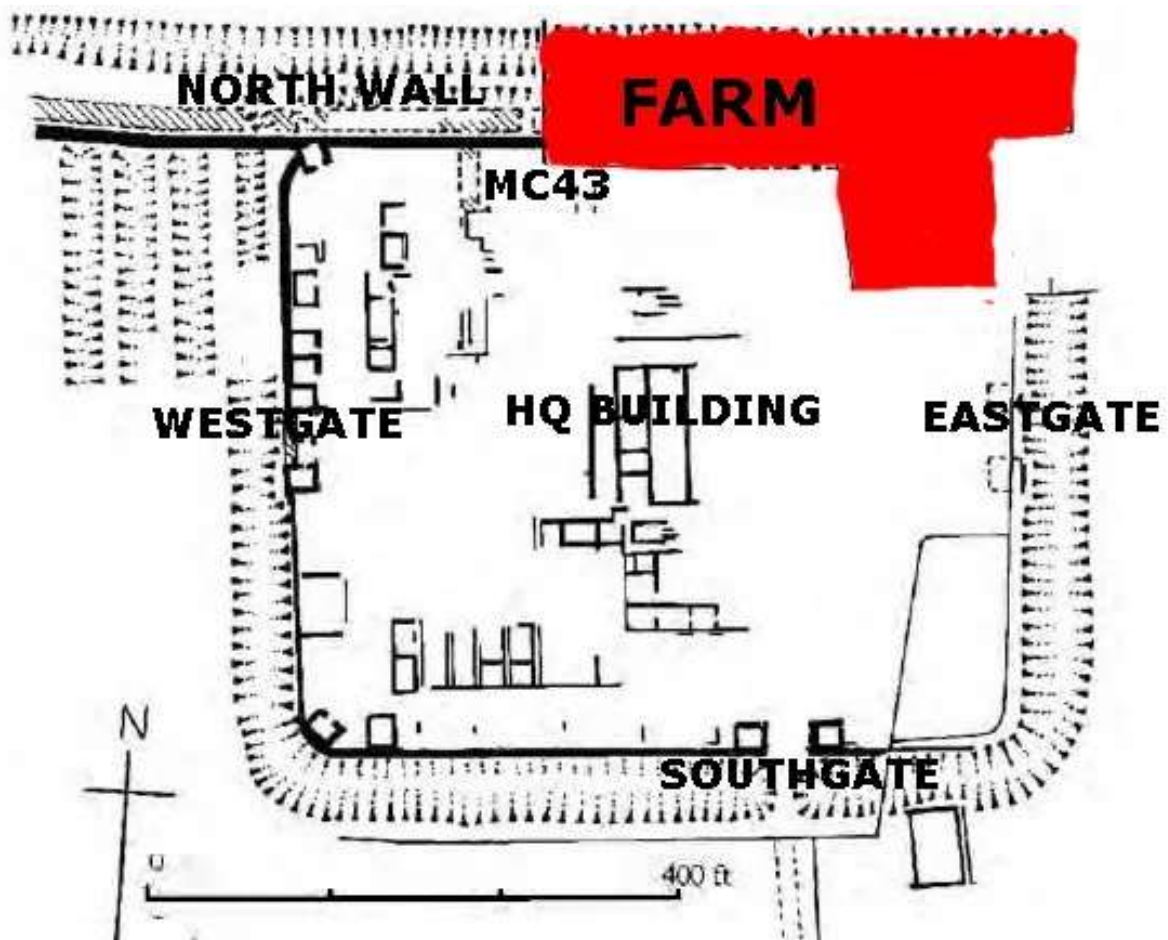
As you go through the gate you see on the right raised ground, which are remains of the northwest wall. It is about 3 miles west of Great Chesters and 3 miles east of Birdoswald. The fort is interesting in spite of the fact there is not much to see. It is at the junction of the Stanegate (the earlier road which heads to Carlisle south of the River Irthing), the Maiden Way (the road heading south to Kirby Thore, between Appleby and Penrith) and Hadrian's Wall. It is usual in that it is only 200yds south of the Wall.



What you can see is a turf platform surrounded by a ditch with some exposed masonry at the North West corner tower. It measures 435ft by 360ft just under 4 acres. Next to nothing is known of the interior, except that the bathhouse was inside the fort. It appears that a significant amount of stone has been extracted for the site.

The first fort possibly dates from the early 1st century although there is no dating evidence. There are indications that the fort was possibly reduced in size when incorporated into the Wall defences. The stone outer wall was built in 136/7AD by a cohort of Hamians, who garrisoned the fort at that time. Usually, they were Syrian Archers. As a result of a geophysical survey undertaken in 2000, it was found that the fort faced south and there is a very extension civilian settlement to the west, south, and east. There has been no extensive excavation. The indication is that the site will be excavated in the 2020s. as ground, similar to Vindolanda is drying out, which will destroy the artefacts under the fort.

### Great Chesters Fort / Aesica



Great Chesters Fort Layout

It is 6 miles from Housesteads to the East and 3 miles from Carvoran to the West. It is smaller than most Wall forts at 3 acres. A large farm has been built in the north east corner. It measures 355ft by 419 ft. and like Housesteads faces east and is behind the wall. It is probably an afterthought as it was built after 128AD. It was built on the site of Milecastle 43, which had to be demolished. A road leading to the Stanegate enters the fort at the Southgate.

The first garrison was the 6th Cohort of Nervii, originally from Belgium, an infantry regiment. In 1894 during excavations, a hoard of jewellery was found, dating from about 70 AD to the third century and considered masterpieces of Celtic art.



The Westgate is the only gate visible and one of the gates was soon blocked eventually, both were blocked. The vault is all that remains of the Headquarters building. Although it cannot be seen from the site, the fort has an aqueduct extending 8 miles to the north winding along the contours of the hills

## The Whin Sill or Great Whin Sill

This is a tabular layer of the igneous rock dolerite in County Durham, Northumberland and Cumbria in the northeast of England. It lies partly in the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and partly in Northumberland National Park and stretches from Teesdale northwards towards Berwick.

It is one of the key natural features of the North Pennines. A major outcrop is at the High Force waterfall in Teesdale. Bamburgh Castle, Dunstanburgh Castle, Lindisfarne Castle and stretches of Hadrian's Wall all strategically take advantage of high, rocky cliff lines formed by the sill.

The Whin Sill complex is usually divided into three components: Holy Island Sill, Alnwick Sill and the Hadrian's Wall-Pennines Sill, which were created by separate magma flows, but at about the same time.

The Little Whin Sill is an associated formation to the south, in Weardale.

Much of the early study of geology began in the British Isles, whence much of the terminology is derived. Quarrymen of Northern England used the term 'sill' to describe a more or less horizontal body of rock. 'Whin' was applied to dark, hard rocks. As the intrusive

igneous origin of the Whin Sill was determined in the 19th century, the term 'sill' was adopted by geologists for concordant, tabular intrusive bodies.

## **Sycamore Gap**

The Sycamore Gap tree is one of the most photographed in the country. It stands in a dramatic dip in Hadrian's Wall in the Northumberland National Park. In late 2016 it took the crown for English Tree of the Year in the Woodland Trust's awards.

The Roman Milecastle 39 is just to its left. It's known as Castle Nick, as it sits in a nick in the hillside.

The site was excavated between 1908 and 1911 and re-excavated between 1982 and 1987. In the south-east corner was a stone oven and the south-west corner a rectangular building with a sunken floor associated with Roman finds. The milecastle appears to have been occupied until the late 4th century. In the 18th century, a possible milking house was built in the west corner.

The circular wall nearby protects a small replacement sycamore sapling from the local sheep, who would otherwise nibble on it. Sycamore Gap is looked after by both Northumberland National Park and the National Trust.

## Day 3 Notes

### Housesteads

Housesteads Roman Fort is the remains of an auxiliary fort. The fort was built in stone around AD 124, soon after the construction of the wall began in AD 122. Its name has been variously given as Vercovicium, Borcovicus, Borcovicium, and Velurion. The 18th-century farmhouse Housesteads gives the modern name.<sup>[2]</sup>

Hadrian's Wall was begun in AD 122. A fort was built in stone at the Housesteads Roman Fort site around AD 124 overlying the original Broad Wall foundation and Turret 36B, about two miles north east of an existing fort at Vindolanda. The fort was repaired and rebuilt several times, its northern defences being particularly prone to collapse. A substantial civil settlement (vicus) existed to the south, outside the fort, and some of the stone foundations can still be seen, including the so-called "Murder House", where two skeletons were found beneath an apparently newly-laid floor when excavated.

In the 2nd century AD, the garrison consisted of an unknown double-sized auxiliary infantry cohort and a detachment of legionaries from Legio II Augusta. In the 3rd century, it comprised Cohors I Tungrorum, augmented by the numerus Hnaudifridi and the Cuneus Frisiorum, a Frisian cavalry unit, cuneus referring to a wedge formation. The Tungrians were still there in the 4th century, according to the Notitia Dignitatum. By 409 AD the Romans had withdrawn.





The northern granary at Vercovicium, looking east. The pillars supported a raised floor to keep food dry and free from vermin.



The latrines at Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall, hygienically placed at the lowest corner of the fort. The water tank at left still has original lead sealing between its slabs.

Most other early forts straddle the Wall and therefore protrude into barbarian territory. It is also unusual for Britain in that it has no running water supply and is dependent upon rainwater collection (for which purpose there is a series of large stone-lined tanks around the periphery of the defences). It also has one of the best-preserved stone latrines in Roman Britain.

### **Brocolitia - the Temple of Mithras**

This a fascinating temple dedicated to the god beloved by Roman soldiers. It was the largest of such buildings to occupy the site and, like many Mithraic temples, it was situated near a military base.

There are also a few remains of a sacred well dedicated to the Celtic water goddess Coventina.

The Roman name of Brocolitia was probably based on the original Celtic name for the area meaning 'Badger Holes'. We have provided a helpful information panel that relates the history and details of the Brocolitia Temple of Mithras to visitors.

The altars in the Temple of Mithras are replicas. The original altars are in a full sized reconstruction of the interior of the Carrawburgh Mithraeum on display at The Great North Museum in Newcastle upon Tyne.

A large number of the altars and votive offerings to the shrine to Coventina are on display at the nearby Chesters Roman Fort. Also, there is a dedicatory altar to the Temple of Nymphs from Brocolitia there too.

### **Cilurnum or Cilurum**

This was a fort mentioned in the Notitia Dignitatum. It is now identified with the fort found at Chesters (also known as Walwick Chesters to distinguish it from other sites named Chesters in the vicinity) near the village of Walwick, Northumberland, England. It was built in 123 AD, just after the wall's completion.

Cilurnum is considered to be the best preserved Roman cavalry fort along Hadrian's Wall.

The site guarded a bridge, Chesters Bridge, carrying the Military Way Roman road behind the wall across the River North Tyne. Massive abutments survive of this bridge across the river from the fort. Cilurnum was a cavalry fort at its foundation, for retaliatory raids into barbarian areas north of the wall, then given over to infantry later. Hadrian himself encouraged the "Cult of Disciplina" among legions stationed at the wall, and an early inscription on an altar dedicated to Disciplina, found in 1978, indicates the earliest known military presence was a wing of cavalry, ala Augusta ob virtutem appellata ("named Augusta because of its valour"). Inscriptions have also been found showing the Cohors I Delmatarum, from present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina (Yugoslavia), and the Cohors I Vangionum Milliaria Equitata from Upper Rhineland in Germany were also stationed here.

Four large Roman columns, believed to come from Cilurnum, may be seen supporting the south aisle in the church of St Giles at Chollerton, a couple of miles upstream from the fort.

In the early 19th century Nathaniel Clayton, owner of Chesters House and Estate, moved hundreds of tons of earth to cover over the last remains of the fort as part of his parkland landscaping, thereby creating a smooth uninterrupted grassland slope down to the River Tyne; However, he collected, before they disappeared, a number of Roman artefacts which he preserved in the family.

His son John Clayton, a noted antiquarian, when he inherited the estate in 1832, with a crew of workmen, undid his father's landscaping, exposing the fort, excavating the ruins, and establishing a small museum for the finds. John Clayton also purchased and made excavations at Housesteads Fort, Carrawburgh Mithraic Temple, and Carvoran, and other historic sites.

## Heavenfield

The Battle of Heavenfield was fought in 633 or 634 between a Northumbrian army under Oswald of Bernicia and a Welsh army under Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd. The battle resulted in a decisive Northumbrian victory. The *Annales Cambriae* (Annals of Wales) record the battle as *Bellum Cantscaul* in 631. Bede referred to it as the Battle of Deniseburna near Hefenfelth.

An alliance between Cadwallon of Gwynedd and King Penda of Mercia had led to an invasion of Northumbria. This was an odd alliance between a Christian king of Brythonic descent and a pagan king of Anglian descent. At the Battle of Hatfield Chase on 12 October 633, the invading Welsh and Mercians had killed Northumbrian king Edwin and Northumbria was split between its two sub-kingdoms, Bernicia and Deira. Cadwallon's army laid waste to Northumbria.

Eanfrith, who had been exiled under Edwin, became king of Bernicia, whilst Deira was ruled by Osric, a cousin of Edwin. Eanfrith's reign was short, as he was killed by Cadwallon whilst trying to negotiate peace. According to Bede, Osric was killed by Cadwallon whilst trying to besiege him. Eanfrith's brother, Oswald, then returned from seventeen years of exile in Dál Riata to claim the crown of Northumbria. However, the threat of Cadwallon lingered and Oswald had to raise an army as soon as possible to deal with his invading force.

It seems that the Welsh army advanced northward from York along the line of Dere Street. Oswald, who may have been accompanied by a force of Scots, took up a defensive position beside the Roman Wall, about 6 km (4 mi) north of Hexham. It was claimed that the night before the battle, Oswald had a vision of Saint Columba, in which the saint foretold that Oswald would be victorious. Oswald placed his army so that it was facing east, with its flanks shielded by Brady's Crag to the north and the Wall to the south. According to Bede, Oswald raised a cross, and prayed for victory alongside his troops.

It is believed that the Welsh had greater numbers, but they were forced to attack from the east along the narrow front between the Wall and Brady's Crag, where they were hemmed in and unable to outflank the Northumbrians. It is not known how long the battle lasted or what the losses were, but the Welsh line finally broke. This began a headlong flight southward by the Welsh, pursued by the vengeful Northumbrians. Many Welsh soldiers were cut down as they ran, and according to Bede, Cadwallon was caught around 16 km south of Heavenfield and killed at a place called Denisesburna ('Brook of Denitus'), now identified as the Rowley Burn (sometimes Rowley Brook) near Whitley Chapel.

The battle was a decisive victory for Oswald, and it was likely that the Welsh losses were substantial. Afterwards, due to the miraculous victory by Oswald's smaller force, the main battle site became known as Heavenfield (Heofenfeld) and became a place of pilgrimage for Christians at the time.

After the battle, Oswald re-united Deira with Bernicia and became king of all Northumbria. Bede believed that the importance of the battle was that it restored Christianity to Northumbria. Oswald spent eight years upon the Northumbrian throne before he was killed in the Battle of Maserfield. Oswald was succeeded as king of Northumbria by his brother Oswiu.

## St ( King ) Oswald

Oswald (Old English pronunciation: [ˈoːzwaʈd]; c 604 – 5 August 641/642 ) was King of Northumbria from 634 until his death, and is venerated as a saint, of whom there was a particular cult in the Middle Ages.

Oswald was the son of Æthelfrith of Bernicia and came to rule after spending a period in exile. After defeating the Welsh ruler Cadwallon ap Cadfan, Oswald brought the two Northumbrian kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira once again under a single ruler, and promoted the spread of Christianity in Northumbria. He was given a strongly positive assessment by the historian Bede, writing a little less than a century after Oswald's death, who regarded Oswald as a saintly king; it is also Bede who is the main source for present-day historical knowledge of Oswald. After eight years of rule, in which he was the most powerful ruler in Britain, Oswald was killed in the Battle of Maserfield while fighting the forces of Penda of Mercia, who then himself was defeated by Oswald's brother Oswiu.

Oswald's father Æthelfrith was a successful Bernician ruler who, after some years in power in Bernicia, also became king of Deira, and thus was the first to rule both of the kingdoms which would come to be considered the constituent kingdoms of Northumbria. It would, however, be anachronistic to refer to a "Northumbrian" people or identity at this early stage, when the Bernicians and the Deirans were still clearly distinct peoples. Oswald's mother, Acha of Deira, was a member of the Deiran royal line whom Æthelfrith apparently married as part of his acquisition of Deira or consolidation of power there. Oswald was apparently born in or around the year 604, since Bede says that he was killed at the age of 38 in 642; Æthelfrith's acquisition of Deira is also believed to have occurred around 604.

Æthelfrith, who was for years a successful war-leader, especially against the native British, was eventually killed in battle around 616 by Raedwald of East Anglia at the River Idle. This defeat meant that an exiled member of the Deiran royal line, Edwin (Acha's brother), became king of Northumbria, and Oswald and his brothers fled to the north. Oswald thus spent the remainder of his youth in the Scottish kingdom of Dál Riata in northern Britain, where he was converted to Christianity. He may also have fought in Ireland during this period of exile. It has been considered that Oswald is one of the three Saxon princes mentioned in the Irish poem Togail Bruidne Dá Derga, being named as 'Osalt' in that work.

After Cadwallon ap Cadfan, the king of Gwynedd, in alliance with the pagan Penda of Mercia, killed Edwin of Deira in battle at Hatfield Chase in 633 (or 632, depending on when the years used by Bede are considered to have begun), Northumbria was split into its constituent kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira. Oswald's brother Eanfrith became king of Bernicia, but he was killed by Cadwallon in 634 (or 633) after attempting to negotiate peace. Subsequently, Oswald, at the head of a small army<sup>[8]</sup> (possibly with the aid of allies from the north, the Scots and/or the Picts), met Cadwallon in battle at Heavenfield, near Hexham. Before the battle, tradition says Oswald had a wooden cross erected; he knelt down, holding the cross in position until enough earth had been thrown in the hole to make it stand firm. He then prayed and asked his army to join in.



Adomnán in his Life of Saint Columba offers a longer account, which Abbot Ségéne had heard from Oswald himself. Oswald, he says, had a vision of Columba the night before the battle, in which he was told

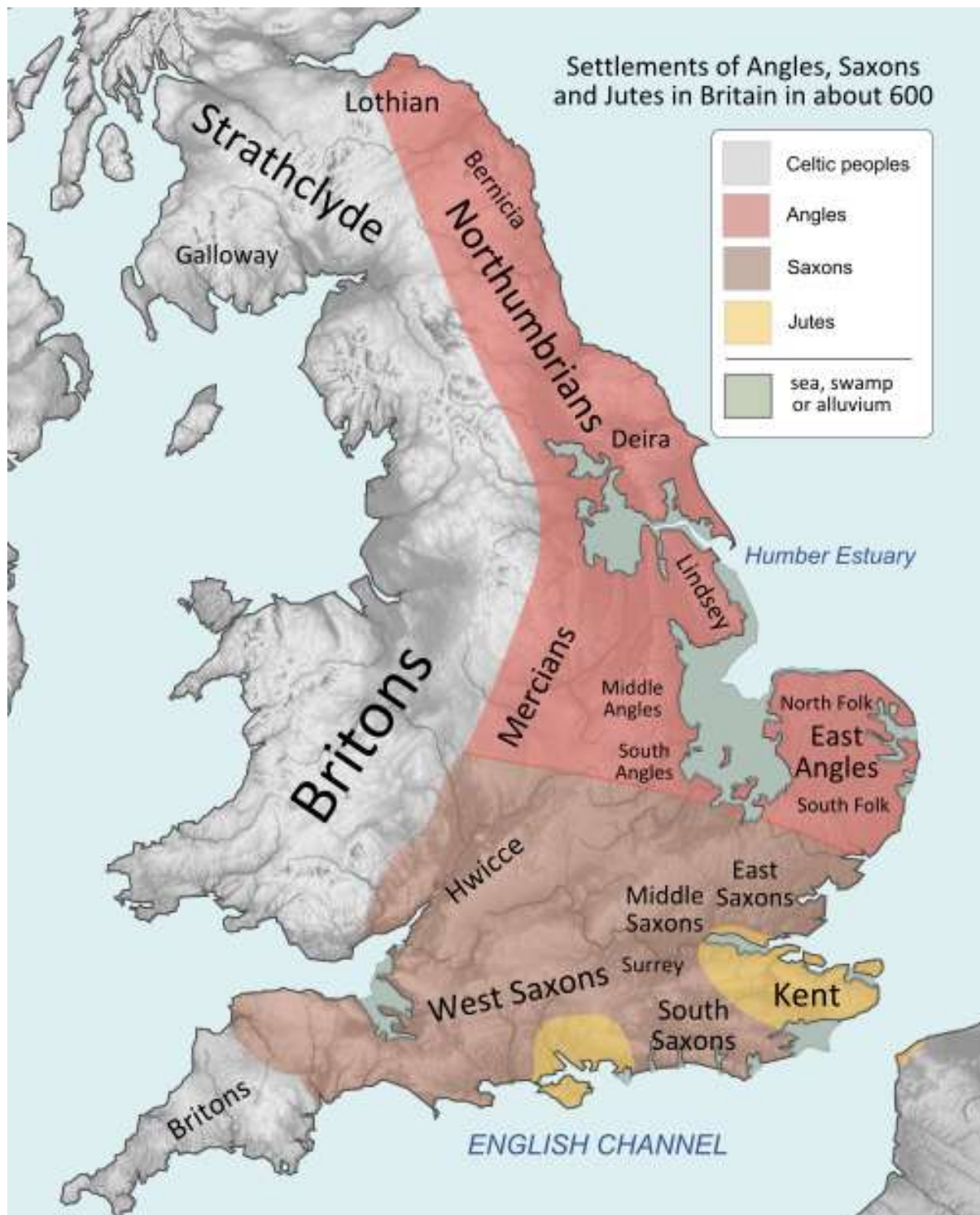
Be strong and act manfully. Behold, I will be with thee. This coming night go out from your camp into battle, for the Lord has granted me that at this time your foes shall be put to flight and Cadwallon your enemy shall be delivered into your hands and you shall return victorious after battle and reign happily.

Oswald described his vision to his council and all agreed that they would be baptised and accept Christianity after the battle. In the battle that followed, the Welsh (Brytons) were routed despite their superior numbers; Cadwallon himself was killed.

A map showing the general locations of the Anglo-Saxon peoples around the year 600

Following the victory at Heavenfield, Oswald reunited Northumbria and re-established the Bernician supremacy which had been interrupted by Edwin. Bede says that Oswald held imperium for the eight years of his rule (both Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle say that Oswald's reign was actually considered to be nine years, the ninth year being accounted for by assigning to Oswald the year preceding his rule, "on account of the heathenism practised by those who had ruled that one year between him and Edwin"<sup>[15]</sup>), and was the most powerful king in Britain. In the 9th-century Anglo-Saxon Chronicle he is referred to as a Bretwalda. Adomnán describes Oswald as "ordained by God as Emperor of all Britain".

Oswald seems to have been widely recognized as overlord, although the extent of his authority is uncertain. Bede makes the claim that Oswald "brought under his dominion all the nations and provinces of Britain", which, as Bede notes, was divided by language among the English, Britons, Scots, and Picts; however, he seems to undermine his own claim when he mentions at another point in his history that it was Oswald's brother Oswiu who made tributary the Picts and Scots. An Irish source, the Annals of Tigernach, records that the Anglo-Saxons banded together against Oswald early in his reign; this may indicate an attempt to put an end to Oswald's overlordship south of the Humber, which presumably failed.<sup>[18]</sup>



The Mercians, who participated in Edwin's defeat in 633, seem to have presented an obstacle to Oswald's authority south of the Humber, although it has been generally thought that Oswald dominated Mercia to some degree after Heavenfield. It may have been to appease Oswald that Penda had Eadfrith, a captured son of Edwin (and thus a dynastic rival of Oswald), killed, although it is also possible that Penda had his own motives for the killing.

Oswald apparently controlled the Kingdom of Lindsey, given the evidence of a story told by Bede regarding the moving of Oswald's bones to a monastery there; Bede says that the monks rejected the bones initially because Oswald had ruled over them as a foreign king. To the north, it may have been Oswald who conquered the Gododdin. Irish annals record the siege of Edinburgh, thought to have been the royal stronghold of the Gododdin, in 638, and this seems to mark the end of the kingdom; that this siege was undertaken by Oswald is suggested by the apparent control of the area by his brother Oswiu in the 650s.

Oswald seems to have been on good terms with the West Saxons: he stood as sponsor to the baptism of their king, Cynegils, and married Cynegils' daughter. Her name is reported by only one source, Reginald of Durham's 12th century *Vita S. Oswaldi*, which says that it was Kyneburga. Although Oswald had one known son, Æthelwald, it is uncertain whether this was a son from his marriage to Cynegils' daughter or from an earlier relationship—since Æthelwald began ruling in Deira in 651, it has been argued that a son from this marriage would have been too young at the time to be trusted with this position, and therefore may have been older, the product of a relationship Oswald had during his exile.

Although Edwin had previously converted to Christianity in 627, it was Oswald who did the most to spread the religion in Northumbria. Shortly after becoming king, he asked the Irish of Dál Riata to send a bishop to facilitate the conversion of his people. The Irish at first sent an "austere" bishop who was unsuccessful in his mission, and subsequently sent Aidan, who proposed a gentler approach. Oswald gave the island of Lindisfarne to Aidan as his episcopal see. Aidan achieved great success in spreading the Christian faith. Bede mentions that Oswald acted as Aidan's interpreter when the latter was preaching, since Aidan did not know English well and Oswald had learned Irish during his exile.

Although Oswald could be interpreted as a martyr for his death in battle, Bede puts a clear emphasis on Oswald being saintly as a king. Bede does not focus on his martyrdom as being primary to his sainthood—indeed, it has been noted that Bede never uses the word "martyr" in reference to Oswald. Bede's portrayal of Oswald stands out as unusual as a king regarded as saintly for his life while ruling, in contrast to a king who gives up the kingship in favour of religious life, or who is venerated because of the manner of his death. Bede recounts Oswald's generosity to the poor and to strangers, and tells a story highlighting this characteristic: on one occasion, at Easter, Oswald was sitting at dinner with Aidan, and had "a silver dish full of dainties before him", when a servant, whom Oswald "had appointed to relieve the poor", came in and told Oswald that a crowd of the poor were in the streets begging alms from the king. Oswald, according to Bede, then immediately had his food given to the poor and even had the dish broken up and distributed. Aidan was greatly impressed and seized Oswald's right hand, stating: "May this hand never perish." Accordingly, Bede reports that the hand and arm remained uncorrupted after Oswald's death.

It was a conflict with the pagan Mercians under Penda that proved to be Oswald's undoing. He was killed in 642, by the Mercians at the Battle of Maserfield, in Oswestry (although other candidates for the location of the battle have been suggested) and his body was dismembered. Bede mentions the story that Oswald "ended his life in prayer": he prayed for

the souls of his soldiers when he saw that he was about to die. Oswald's head and limbs were placed on stakes.

The traditional identification of the battle site with Oswestry, probably in the territory of Powys at the time, suggests that Penda may have had British allies in this battle, and this is also suggested by surviving Welsh poetry which has been thought to indicate the participation of the men of Powys in the battle. It has also been considered that, if the traditional identification of the site as Oswestry is correct, Oswald was on the offensive, in the territory of his enemies. This could conflict with Bede's saintly portrayal of Oswald, since an aggressive war could hardly qualify as a just war, perhaps explaining why Bede is silent on the cause of the war—he says only that Oswald died "fighting for his fatherland"—as well as his failure to mention other offensive warfare Oswald is presumed to have engaged in between Heavenfield and Maserfield. Oswald may have had an ally in Penda's brother Eowa, who was also killed in the battle, according to the *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae*; while the source only mentions that Eowa was killed, not the side on which he fought, it has been speculated that Eowa was subject to Oswald and fighting alongside him in the battle, in opposition to Pen

Oswald soon came to be regarded as a saint. Bede says that the spot where he died came to be associated with miracles, and people took dirt from the site, which led to a hole being dug as deep as a man's height. Reginald of Durham recounts another miracle, saying that his right arm was taken by a bird (perhaps a raven) to an ash tree, which gave the tree ageless vigour; when the bird dropped the arm onto the ground, a spring emerged from the ground. Both the tree and the spring were, according to Reginald, subsequently associated with healing miracles. Aspects of the legend have been considered to have pagan overtones or influences—this may represent a fusion of his status as a traditional Germanic warrior-king with Christianity. The name of the site, Oswestry, or "Oswald's Tree", is generally thought to be derived from Oswald's death there and the legends surrounding it. His feast day is 5 August. The cult surrounding him even gained prominence in parts of continental Europe; cf. Ožbalt in Slovenia.

Bede mentions that Oswald's brother Oswiu, who succeeded Oswald in Bernicia, retrieved Oswald's remains in the year after his death. In writing of one miracle associated with Oswald, Bede gives some indication of how Oswald was regarded in conquered lands: years later, when his niece Osthryth moved his bones to Bardney Abbey in Lindsey, its inmates initially refused to accept them, "though they knew him to be a holy man", because "he was originally of another province, and had reigned over them as a foreign king", and thus "they retained their ancient aversion to him, even after death". It was only after Oswald's bones were the focus of an awe-inspiring miracle—in which, during the night, a pillar of light appeared over the wagon in which the bones were being carried and shone up into the sky—that they were accepted into the monastery: "in the morning, the brethren who had refused it the day before, began themselves earnestly to pray that those holy relics, so beloved by God, might be deposited among them".

In the early 10th century, Bardney was in Viking territory, and in 909, following a combined West Saxon and Mercian raid led by Æthelflæd, daughter of Alfred the Great, St Oswald's relics were translated to a new minster in Gloucester, which was renamed St Oswald's



Priory in his honour. Æthelflæd, and her husband Æthelred, ealdorman of Mercia, were buried in the priory, and their nephew, King Æthelstan, was a major patron of Oswald's cult.

Oswald's head was interred in Durham Cathedral together with the remains of Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (a saint with whom Oswald became posthumously associated, although the two were not associated in life; Cuthbert became bishop of Lindisfarne more than forty years after Oswald's death) and other valuables in a quickly made coffin, where it is generally believed to remain, although there are at least four other claimed heads of Oswald in continental Europe. One of his arms is said to have ended up in Peterborough Abbey later in the Middle Ages. The story is that a small group of monks from Peterborough made their way to Bamburgh where Oswald's uncorrupted arm was kept and stole it under the cover of darkness. They returned with it to Peterborough and in due time a chapel was created for the arm – Oswald's Chapel. Minus the arm, this can be seen to this day in the south transept of the cathedral. When creating this chapel the monks of Peterborough had thought of how they had acquired it and built into the chapel a narrow tower – just big enough for a monk to climb to the top by an internal stair and stand guard over Oswald's arm 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The monk had to stand because the tower is not large enough for him to sit – sitting could lull him to sleep – and they knew what could happen when no-one was watching.

Several churches bear the name of St Oswald, including The Church of Saint Oswald on the location of the wooden cross left by Oswald at Heavenfield, the night before the battle. This was rebuilt in 1717. St Oswald's Grasmere is purportedly on one of the sites he preached on, on a bank of the River Rothay. William Wordsworth's grave is located in the cemetery here. St Oswald's Church, Compton Abdale in Gloucestershire was dedicated to St Oswald following Æthelflæd's foundation of St Oswald's Priory in 909. St Oswald's Catholic Church lies to the north of Peterborough City Centre.

Some English place names record his reign, for example it has been claimed that Oswaldtwistle in Lancashire – meaning the twistle of Oswald – is linked to the saint, although it's more likely to be the name of the owner of the land. Kirkoswald in Cumbria is so named because it is believed that his body was taken there after his death. The local church is ascribed to him. Another Kirkoswald in Scotland also commemorates him.