Iona has been a place of pilgrimage since the 6th century when, sailing from Ireland, St Columba with 13 followers, landed on the island and established a monastery there. Iona was famous for its role in the development of Christianity in Scotland and also for the beautiful illuminated manuscripts that the Iona monks produced, probably including part of the Book of Kells. Iona was also an important place in the history of Scotland - in the graveyard of Oran, next to Iona Abbey, lie the remains of no less than 48 Scottish kings, 8 Norwegian kings and 4 Irish kings. In all the centuries that have passed since St Columba's arrival, this very small island has continued to be a very special place, a place where visitors still come from all over the world on spiritual and religious pilgrimages or just to visit.

On 8 October some 23 pilgrims from Richmond Team Ministry set off for their pilgrimage to Iona. Some had been to Iona before but to others it was a new experience. We travelled by train or air or by car but because of the remoteness of the destination, we all had to take the Calmac ferry from Oban to Mull, a road journey across Mull to Fionnphort and a last, shorter, ferry trip to Iona.

In medieval times pilgrims, when crossing Mull towards Iona, would travel some of the way on their knees as a sign of humility. The RTM pilgrimage was less onerous than that, but the travelling, both there and back was testing. Cancellation of the ferries to Mull and Iona because of bad weather meant we had to stay in Oban an extra night although this was a chance for us to get together for a joyful meal at a fish restaurant by the ferry terminal. (Oban lives up to its name as the Seafood Capital of Scotland.) On the return journey, for those travelling by train on the Saturday all went well till we reached Glasgow and found that the main line to London was blocked by a landslide in...
Cumbria. So we had to stay the night in Glasgow and then, the next morning, took the first train to leave Glasgow in 18 hours. And whilst we were actually on Iona, Storm Callum happened to pass over one night. We were anxious lest there be a power cut – thankfully there wasn’t. But this is what pilgrimage is about – through long and difficult journeys, through physical and mental challenges, but giving time to prepare and reflect, to anticipate the joy of reaching the destination and the wonderful memories that one brings back.

When we finally arrived on Iona it was the most beautiful sunny uplifting day. We soon settled into our accommodation at the Bishop’s House, a house of retreat and reflection built in 1894 for the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Scottish equivalent of the Anglican Church in England. The Bishop’s House is situated in the main settlement on the island, with beautiful views over the Sound of Iona, close to the ferry and also to Iona Abbey and has its own chapel named after St Columba.

Our days on Iona were bookended by a Eucharist in the chapel first thing in the morning before breakfast and by Compline after supper at night. Those who wished to, could then go on to the service held every evening at Iona Abbey. The Revd Wilma Roest and Felicity Collins who organised our programme on Iona had, with very great prescience, decided on a theme for our pilgrimage of ‘Praying with the Elements - Water, Wind, Earth and Fire’ which in view of our experiences in reaching Iona was really appropriate. Each morning after breakfast we would consider one of these elements through prayers, bible readings and poems. Then we were free to do as we wished, to explore the island, visit the Abbey and the Museum, to visit the beaches, watch the splendid wildlife of Iona, or just sit and look at the views. In the late afternoon before our evening meal we would meet together again to share how the day had gone.

On the Thursday many of us took part in a Pilgrimage Walk around the island led by the Revd Joyce Watson, the Resident Episcopal Priest on Iona, stopping for prayer and reflection at various places along the route and ending on the western side of the island at the stupendous Bay at the Back of the Ocean, with nothing between us and Canada except the Atlantic Ocean. Here we ate our packed lunch,
walked along the foreshore, collected some of the pebbles from the beach marvelling at the wonderful vista of this bay, the rocks, the white foam of the waves, the clear pure air. The final and very meaningful feature, it seemed, was the appearance high above us of a beautiful rainbow, like a message of approval from God.

It was sad when the Pilgrimage came to an end and we had to leave the peace and loveliness of Iona to come back to our busy lives. As well as the pebbles to remember the island by, we also brought home in our hearts very special memories of the companionship of pilgrimage, the shared endeavour, the spirituality and love between us all.

Pilgrimage to Iona
Heather Montford

Pilgrimage to Iona
In the steps of St Columba
To search, to join together
To find God.

Earth, Fire, Air and Water
Four elements of our being
Theme of our journey where
We look for God.

Earth shows us Nature’s beauty
Seas, mountains, rocks and stones
Woods, fields, all living things
The gift of God.

Fire to bring us warmth and comfort
To cook our food, destroy our waste
Lights candles at the altar
We pray to God.

Air is the breath of life
Fresh air to raise our spirits
The atmosphere around us
Do we feel God?

Water essential to our life
Allays our thirst. Transports us
Blessing at our baptism
Blessing of God.

Water, Earth, Air and Fire
Theme of our journey to Iona
In them and in our time together
Will we find God?

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Water, Earth, Air and Fire.
Rain and the crashing waves upon the rocks
The turbulence of the sea.
Earth’s beauty in white sands
The coloured rocks and stones.
The atmosphere of the abbey
The power of the wind.
The rising of the sun like fire
And fire within us to learn more.
In faith and in our love for one another
Did we find God?

Whilst getting ready to come to church I was aware of the service being celebrated on the radio and the congregation singing out lustily ‘How Great Thou Art.’

My mind turned immediately to walking with Peter in Iona, with the wind blowing so hard that it was sometimes hard to stand up and the waves crashing on to the white sands. How comforting in a way to know how small and insignificant we are and that Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory.  Carole Cregeen

Iona Acrostic
Felicity Collins

THIN PLACE OF POSSIBILITY
SACRED SPACE,
COLUMBA, COMMUNITY, COMPLINE BY CANDLELIGHT
ELEMENTAL, EYE-OPENING

TRANSFORMATIONAL
FERRY HAPPILY ARRIVING

PILGRIMAGE, PRAYER AND PRAISE
GOD IN STONE, STORM AND SUN
RAINBOWS, RAIN AND REVELATION
ANCIENT AND AGELESS
When the War Ended

Elspeth Fearn

After an exhausting four years of conflict the end was, it seemed, at last in sight. In December 1918 the Revd H C Brocklehurst of St John the Divine wrote:

‘When writing the letter for last month’s magazine, good news was coming in apace from all the Battle Fronts. Since then we have lifted up our hearts in true thanksgiving for the signs of the Armistice and the cessation of fighting. This, we sincerely hope is the forerunner of the Peace. By the middle of this month the 36 days of the Armistice will have run out, and by then we shall know more definitely how things stand and whether the terms will have been carried out satisfactorily and if the way will be opened for justice to be done and for the longed for Peace to be established.’

The Armistice held and life began to return to normality although things could never be the same. A representative of the newly formed Welcome Home Committee at St John’s paid a personal visit to each demobilised man as he returned, thanking him for what he had done and inviting him to a smoking concert. The first concert took place as early as Saturday 15 February 1919 but there was some way to go for, of the 640 men from St John’s parish who had gone to war, only about 200 had been demobilised at that stage. Some consternation was caused when the Government requisitioned part of St John’s Hall for a Labour Exchange to deal with demobilisation. The Embroiderers Group amongst many other activities were dislodged from where they normally worked.

The parish magazines of our churches reflected the country’s desire after the war for looking forwards not back so in the 1919 editions onwards there is a limited mention of the war, save about the proposals and fundraising arrangements for the war memorials that were being planned. The official policy of not repatriating the dead from the battlefields meant that memorials provided the main focus for their families and communities. Considerable sums were required for the construction of the memorials and it took much time and effort for the congregations to raise the monies needed.

St Mary Magdalene and St Matthias formed one parish at this time so their memorials were joint ones commemorating the fallen of both churches. The first is a tall stone cross, now Grade II listed, in the churchyard at St Mary’s with similarities to an Eleanor Cross, tiered in form and with a small statue of St George and the Dragon. There is a striking view of the memorial from George Street looking up Church Court. The memorial was designed by Sir Charles Nicholson (1867-1949) an English architect and designer who specialised in church architecture and war memorials. As well as the stone cross two wall mounted war memorials listing all the names of the dead, one for...
the interior of St Matthias and one for St Mary Magdalene were installed. The cross was unveiled on 29 March 1921 by the Mayor Councillor Loney following a short prior service in St Mary’s conducted by the Revd Claude Beckwith.

As well as these official war memorials there were private ones. The family of Basil Umney who worshipped at St Matthias and who had died aged only 19 at the Battle of the Somme, endowed four windows at St Matthias in his memory, representing four saints and very poignantly with the face of St George based on a photograph of Basil. He is listed on the Thiepval monument having no known grave but lives on in the window at St Matthias.

At St John the Divine it was decided that its memorial should take the form of two parts. It had long been the intention that a rood screen with the figure of Christ be erected at St John’s and so it was decided to go ahead with the erection of that rood screen as a memorial. In addition, a wall memorial, a white tablet, listing all the names of the St John’s fallen would also be installed. On 1 October 1921 at 8 pm during a special Evensong of the Dedication the Rt Revd Cecil Hook, Late Bishop of Kingston, dedicated first the tablet and then the rood – ’The love and majesty which beam upon us from this Holy Rood’.

The dead of St Mary Magdalene, St Matthias and St John the Divine were also commemorated along with all the other dead from Richmond at the town’s war memorial at Whittaker Avenue by the riverside. The memorial takes the form of an orb on a circular column on a double plinth with all the names engraved on adjoining walls, and was unveiled by Field Marshal Sir William Roberts on 23 November 1921 at a ceremony attended by the Mayor and Corporation.

All these war memorials continue to remind us of the great price that Richmond paid in the First World War.
Chaplains in the First World War

Elspeth Fearn

German troops fighting on the Western Front commonly had the phrase 'Gott mit uns' (God with us) inscribed on their belt buckles or helmets, an old tradition from Prussian times. The British Tommies, with their sardonic irreverent humour responded 'Got mittens? We've got mittens too!' But, there is a very serious point to be made here, about the irony of a war in which the principal adversaries were Christian countries fighting each other, all seeing themselves as engaged in a just and moral war and in which all claimed divine endorsement in aid of victory. However where was God in all of this? Was He some omnipotent lofty being above all the tumult and the agony or was He a God of Love in which case how could He allow the immense loss of life and suffering?

To these difficult questions from their men, the chaplains - the padres - had to respond. There were around 5,000 chaplains in service with British troops and the Royal Navy during the War, in all theatres. Chaplains were mostly recruited straight to the Front from parishes at home and had very little training. Commissioned initially at the honorary rank of captain but always never bearing arms they had to cope with a variety of duties – organising church parades and services including on the eve of battle, helping to bring in the wounded, attending the field dressing stations, comforting the dying, finding the dead in No Man’s Land, recording their names and where they were buried, conducting the Burial Service which often had to be a truncated version because of the dangers, and giving spiritual guidance to the soldiers. Two chaplains were awarded the Victoria Cross and 200 the Military Cross. Some 180 chaplains lost their lives in the conflict.

One particularly famous chaplain was the Revd Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy or 'Woodbine Willie' as he was known by the troops because he handed out Woodbine cigarettes to them as well as New Testaments. Originally he had a fairly conventional attitude to his faith and to the war but his experiences in the Somme in 1916 and at Messines Ridge in 1917 (at which he himself won the Military Cross for bringing back wounded men under heavy fire) changed his whole thinking. He could not reconcile divine power with the presence of evil on such a scale in the battlefields and famously remarked 'Real war is the final limit of damnable brutality and that’s all there is in it......if God does not suffer agony because of war, and if He does not will that men should live at peace, then I cannot and will not worship Him'.

Instead Studdert Kennedy believed in 'the suffering God', the God of Sorrow that shared in human pain and anguish rather than being distant from it all, the God that suffered on the cross through Jesus Christ, the God of Love that was in the trenches suffering along with the troops on both sides and who made no distinction between them. His God was the Comrade God - as he wrote in a poem of the same name:

'Only in Him can I find home to hide me,
Who on the Cross was slain to rise again;
Only with Him my Comrade God beside me,
Can I go forth to war with sin and pain.'

Studdert Kennedy’s many books and poems were widely read and he became a well known figure both during and after the War, although often attracting controversy. He then became a missioner for the Industrial Christian Fellowship for 8 years trying to heal divisions between capital and labour, but died in 1929 aged only 45. In recent years his radical theology has become of renewed
interest influencing many including the distinguished German theologian Jurgen Moltmann, who had experienced at the age of 17, the firestorm following the Allied bombing of Hamburg, but later came to terms with that by referring to the suffering of God in the same way as Studdert Kennedy had done.

To commemorate both the 100th Anniversary of the ending of the First World War and of the publication in 1918 of Studdert Kennedy’s book ‘The Hardest Part’ setting out his belief in the suffering God, a centenary critical edition of that book has recently been published by SCM Press. Edited by Thomas O’Loughlin, Professor of Historical Theology at the University of Nottingham and Stuart Bell, honorary research fellow at St John’s College, Durham the book costs £25. ISBN 978 0 334 05656 0

Richmond and Remembrance

Elspeth Fearn

As special as our churches’ war memorials are to us, Richmond, the place, is also important in terms of national remembrance. This is because it is the home of the the Poppy Factory, and until 2013 the Star and Garter Home on the top of Richmond Hill. The Poppy Factory, which moved to Richmond in 1925 from the Old Kent Road to the site of the old Lansdown Brewery, had been founded by Major George Howson MC to provide work making silk and paper poppies for some of the thousands of disabled former soldiers. The first poppies sold in November 1921 raised the sum of £106,000, a massive sum for the times. Major Howson went on in 1928 to found the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey where for a week in November people leave wooden crosses with the names of members of the armed forces killed in all conflicts, in special plots on the the lawn outside Westminster Abbey. At the end of the seven days the crosses are collected up, burnt and the ashes scattered on World War 1 battlefields.

The Star and Garter Home was built in 1921-24 to replace a military home for badly disabled young soldiers in the old Star and Garter Hotel and was the Women of the Empire’s Memorial of the Great War providing long term care for 180 people. The building was designed by Sir Edwin Cooper based on a plan by Giles Gilbert Scott 1880-1960, grandson of the architect of nearby St Matthias Church, George Gilbert Scott 1811-1878. So the two landmark buildings, the Star and Garter Home and the Church on top of Richmond Hill are connected in this way.

Also important in the story of the First World War was the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, because of its role in the development of the war cemeteries on the Western Front and across the wider world. The scale of national losses in the War led to the setting up of the Imperial War Graves Commission (now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) and considerable work was undertaken whilst the war was still going on to establish proper dignified last resting places for the fallen. Arthur Hill, an Assistant Director at Kew (later as Sir Arthur Hill the Director) was sent to France and Belgium in 1916 accompanied by horticultural colleagues, some from Kew and all in uniform, to act as Botanical Adviser for the various cemeteries that were being set up. Hill advised on the suitability of locations, the layout of the cemeteries, suitable soils, plantings and the overall setting. In 1917 he visited over 100 cemeteries and also many in Italy, Salonika and Gallipoli. Different countries required different approaches, depending on local climate conditions, for example lower headstones where a cemetery was subject to very windy conditions.

Hill and his colleagues were particularly interested in the effects of regeneration on the battlefield in which a landscape, seemingly devastated for evermore, could suddenly spring into life with colourful wild flowers offering hope for the future and he wrote the book ‘The Flora of the Somme Battlefields’ in this connection.

By 1917 the Allies were confident of final victory and so permanent nurseries were set up across Northern France and Belgium to provide plants for the cemeteries. Many nurseries were tended by women gardeners who also helped with the making and laying of wreaths for the graves. Some of the nurseries were however bombed and overrun in the German offensive in Spring 1918.

After the war Kew continued to supply advice and plants to the IWGC (now CWGC) and training for their gardeners and close links have continued to the present day.
Christ’s School

Phil Rushby

Christ’s School of England Comprehensive School is a vibrant, friendly and increasingly successful school, based in beautiful grounds on Queens Road in the heart of Richmond. It also has a long and proud history, dating back over 300 years with an ethos based on Christian values as a common theme throughout the ages.

Christ’s was founded in 1713 as the Blue School; a charity school to “teach poor children to read and instruct them in the Christian religion”. Right from the beginning it was linked to St Mary’s, with its original site being nearby on George Street before a move in 1854 to a new site at the corner of Paradise Road and Eton Street. At this time the school became known as St Mary’s; the name it kept for more than a century until it was renamed as Christ’s in 1978.

For much of its history Christ’s has been a flourishing school, but in the 1980s and 90s its reputation started to suffer and numbers fell, to the extent that it was threatened with closure in 1999. It survived, happily, and soon after began a long steady recovery in fortunes, overseen by many members of Richmond Team Ministry, and leading to the popular and thriving school we see today.

Christ’s today is relatively small by secondary school standards, with around 850 students across 7 year groups. It has slightly more boys than girls, and is culturally diverse with only half of students classifying themselves as white British. Although in general the demographic profile of the school reflects the relative affluence of its catchment area, there are still around 25% of students with entitlement to free school meals. Ensuring actions are in place to counter barriers to educational achievement for these students is a special area of focus for school leaders and governors alike.

Inspectors reports are by no means the only measure of success for schools, but they remain key and media scrutiny ensures they are very much in the public eye. From its low point in 2000 Christ’s has improved steadily to now reach a strong ‘good’ grading in the latest (2016) Ofsted report. Also in 2016 a SIAMS report (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) concluded that Christ’s is an ‘outstanding’ school. The two regimes are slightly different, but in simple terms the extra credit given in the SIAMS report reflected the way the Christian ethos of the school is brought into its daily life, and the Christian leadership displayed by the Head Teacher Helen Dixon.

Alongside this characteristic ethos, Christ’s today enjoys many other strengths. Academic results are now impressive, well above national averages and comparing well with other local state secondary schools. Sport has become a major focus in the school, with Sport England designating it a Gold Award school, uniquely in Richmond Borough. Music and dance are other areas where the school excels, contributing greatly to the rich and diverse atmosphere that Christ’s enjoys.

The links between Christ’s and Richmond Team Ministry are many and strong. First and most importantly, amongst our congregations are students attending the school and parents supporting their progress eagerly. The Revd Wilma Roest is a governor, and also spends significant time in the school, particularly in support of the Chaplain Tom Rutter. The governing body also includes Susan Bourne, Peter Cregeen, Fay Johnstone, Peter Sharp, and Chair Phil Rushby, meaning that Richmond Team Ministry is very well represented in the strategic leadership of the school.

Although the future of Christ’s is bright there are still many challenges to be faced, and resources remain under seemingly constant strain. The school is keen to build closer links with all local churches over the coming years, and is always interested in exploring new and creative ways to build working partnerships, whether with groups or individuals. If you have an idea to share, perhaps some time or expertise to offer, please do get in touch with Phil at St Mary’s. He will be delighted to hear from you!
If you watch Match of the Day (or MOTD as the BBC sometimes likes to call it), you’ll often see players cross themselves as they come onto the pitch or perhaps after scoring a goal. It’s not that the world of English football is awash with indigenous Christian believers. Most of those who cross themselves have come from abroad to ply their sporting trade in this country and have brought their faith with them. Take away these foreign players and I presume that the rest would be as indifferent to the Christian faith as the population at large.

Britain has become a place where many people are impervious to the idea of God – impervious if not downright hostile. No doubt there are many reasons for this but a major one is a widespread perception that religion is incompatible with science.

As I retire from licensed ministry in the Richmond Team, this is one topic on which I wish I’d found more opportunity to preach for I believe firmly that this perceived incompatibility is simply a modern myth. And yet it’s a stubborn one.

Some Christians do hold beliefs at which the vast majority of scientists would look askance. A case in point would be a literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis. Take them literally and you get into all sorts of difficulties with current scientific understanding about the origins of the world and of the universe. It’s all so unnecessary. You can be an unimpeachably orthodox Christian and still reject a literal interpretation of Genesis.

It seems to me that the core of this supposed conflict of science and faith lies in the common contemporary belief that all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge.

Let’s leave aside the fact that scientific knowledge is perpetually changing. It never stands still. If you’re looking for solid rock on which to build, science can never provide it. Genuine science is genuinely humble about what it claims to know.

Leaving that aside science cannot tell us, for instance, what actions have or do not have ethical value, and yet all of us intuitively know – or have been taught to know – which actions are good and which are not. Science can help us pursue the good but it cannot tell us what the good is.

And I would claim that something similar pertains with regard to, for want of a better phrase, the spiritual realm – the realm where that which we call God resides. The sphere of science – its entirely legitimate sphere – is the material world around us and within us. Science cannot tell us whether there is or isn’t a spiritual realm. It has nothing definitive to tell us either way. Our knowledge of the spiritual comes to us by other means.

That doesn’t mean that the Christian faith is necessarily true. I merely make the more modest claim that science cannot in any sense whatsoever tell us that faith is untrue, or even hint at it. Faith therefore, and by definition, is compatible with science.
The History of Christingles

Richard Rondel

In 1747, John de Watteville, a Minister in the Moravian Church, had the idea of giving children at the service a lighted candle with a red ribbon round it. This represented Jesus being the light of the world, and the final prayer of that first service was: ‘Lord Jesus, kindle a flame in these children’s hearts. That theirs like Thine, become.’ Later, in the 1700s, missionaries brought the Moravian Church to England, and with it, the Christingle Service, held usually on the Sunday before Christmas.

Over the years the symbolism grew into the Christingle as we know it today where:
- The orange is round like the world
- The candle shines in the dark like the love of God
- The red ribbon is a symbol of the blood Jesus shed for us
- The four sticks represent the points of the compass; also the four seasons
- The fruit and sweets serve to remind us of the fruits of the Earth

The modern Christingle Service as such was introduced into the Anglican Church in England in 1968 from Germany, at the suggestion of John Pensom (who became known as ‘Mr Christingle’) and celebrates its 50th Anniversary this year.

Christingle services have been made popular in England by The Children’s Society which traditionally has strong connections with the Church of England. The Society began at St Anne’s South Lambeth in 1881 when it was known as the Waifs and Strays Society and provided children’s homes, adoption and fostering facilities for poor children in the area before extending its work around the country. In April 1921 a member of the clergy at St John the Divine, the Revd J A Sumner, was headhunted (the St John’s church magazine of the time described it as ‘taken away’) to become an officer in the Society. Today the Children’s Society’s work has moved away from homes and adoption and instead fights child poverty and neglect and aims to help all children to have a better chance in life.

This Christmas think of the tradition of the Christingle, its 50th birthday and that the money raised goes towards the good work of the Children’s Society, so please be generous with your donation.

Making Christingles

Christingles are beautiful to look at and are a very special part of our Christmas services but assembling them involves quite a lot of work. Each of our churches has its own Christingle making team of both adults and children and each Christingle is made by several people. One person cuts the orange for the candle, another puts the ribbon around the middle then someone else puts in the candle (with tin foil at the base). Cocktail sticks are made up with the sweets and fruit and then positioned in the orange and finally quality control is applied! The completed Christingles are then boxed and at this stage it’s amazing to see how many there are.

Speaking to Team Talk Helen Williams our Children and Young People’s Ministry Leader said: 'Personally, I love Christingle making and most of all I love the smell, which hangs in the air! A joy for the senses; the colours, the feel, and the wonderful smell of fresh orange and dried fruit and sweets. The laughter, getting to know one another and the rush as we work hard to get them ALL made in time, while thinking about what is to come; the waiting, the expectation of going from dark to light and the hope of some tasty treasures to take home after the service.'

And Maia Rushby of St Mary Magdalene says: 'Christingle making is a lovely opportunity for people of all ages to get together for a chat - the adults get wine and the kids eat some of the sweets!'

'Thank you Christingle makers for all your hard work.'
ANGLO-SAXON EXHIBITION AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY

Elspeth Fearn

This winter, the British Library is hosting a major exhibition ‘Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms  Art, Word, War’ which it describes as a once-in-a-generation chance to see treasures from both the Library’s own collection and from museums and institutions at home and abroad. This is no exaggeration as one of the 180 items in the exhibition is a Codex Amiatinus, a giant single volume Bible of 1030 pages, made by the monks at Wearmouth/Jarrow and taken as a gift for the Pope in 716. The Codex returns to this country for the first time in 1300 years!

The exhibition, which has taken five years to bring together, covers the six centuries from the end of Roman rule in 410 to the Norman Conquest in 1066 and includes a wide range of manuscripts and objects, both religious and secular. When the Angles and the Saxons first arrived in Britain they brought their pagan religion with them but their conversion to Christianity began at the end of the 6th century and was largely completed in the second half of the 7th century. The exhibition includes many important Christian manuscripts – Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People, the Durham Gospels, the Lindisfarne Gospels, the earliest copy of the Rule of St Benedict, to name but a few. It also includes the earliest European book with an original intact binding, the 8th century St Cuthbert’s Gospel (of St John) found in 1104 when the coffin of St Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindesfarne, who died in 687, was opened at Durham Cathedral.

There are important secular documents as well, including the law code of the first Christian king of Kent, Aethelberht, who died in 616, which is the first piece of English law and the earliest datable work composed in English. The Council of Kingston document from 838 evidences a new political arrangement across the south of England paving the way in the 10th century for a unified kingdom of England. Bringing us up to the Norman Conquest there is a copy of the Domesday Book from 1086. Literature is also not forgotten with the British Library’s unique copy of Beowulf and the Vercelli Book which contains one of the finest poems in the English language, the Dream of the Rood.

Many interesting objects are also on display including the stunning belt buckle and enamelled sword belt metalwork from the Sutton Hoo collection together with the cross pendant - made with garnet and filigree - from the Staffordshire Hoard, found as recently as 2009. The famous Alfred Jewel, pride of the Ashmolean Museum Oxford, a jewelled reading pointer, also makes an appearance but there are more mundane objects such as a writing tablet and stylus, a portable sundial and coins. These include the famed Anglo-Saxon silver penny, a coin of up to 1.5 grams of pure silver which was introduced by King Offa of Mercia in 785. Similar silver pennies were to remain a fundamental part of English currency until the 13th century.

There is so much to see at this fascinating exhibition and you must visit it if you possibly can! The exhibition is on at the British Library until Tuesday 19 February 2019 and is open on Mondays and Fridays until 6pm, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays to 8pm and on Saturdays and Sundays to 5pm. Because it is such an important exhibition in which there has already been great interest, you will find it very busy at times and you may want to consider visiting either first thing in the morning or in the late afternoon when things are a little quieter.

Further information is available on the British Library’s website both about the exhibition and about Anglo-Saxon history and culture generally - http://www.bl.uk/anglo-saxons

A Page from the Lindisfarne Gospel
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St John the Divine
St Mary Magdalene
St Matthias