

= St Cuthbert Gospel =

The St Cuthbert Gospel , also known as the Stonyhurst Gospel or the St Cuthbert Gospel of St John , is an early 8th @-@ century pocket gospel book , written in Latin . Its finely decorated leather binding is the earliest known Western bookbinding to survive , and both the 94 vellum folios and the binding are in outstanding condition for a book of this age . With a page size of only 138 by 92 millimetres (5 @.@ 4 in x 3 @.@ 6 in) the St Cuthbert Gospel is one of the smallest surviving Anglo @-@ Saxon manuscripts . The essentially undecorated text is the Gospel of John in Latin , written in a script that has been regarded as a model of elegant simplicity .

The book takes its name from Saint Cuthbert of Lindisfarne , North East England , in whose tomb it was placed , probably a few years after his death in 687 . Although it was long regarded as Cuthbert 's personal copy of the Gospel , to which there are early references , and so a relic of the saint , the book is now thought to date from shortly after Cuthbert 's death . It was probably a gift from Monkwearmouth @-@ Jarrow Abbey , where it was written , intended to be placed in St Cuthbert 's coffin when his remains were placed behind the altar at Lindisfarne in 698 , or in the next few decades . It presumably remained in the coffin through its long travels after 875 , forced by Viking invasions , ending at Durham Cathedral . The book was found inside the coffin and removed in 1104 when the burial was once again moved within the cathedral . It was kept there with other relics , and important visitors were able to wear the book in a leather bag around their necks . It is thought that after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in England by Henry VIII between 1536 and 1541 , the book passed to collectors . It was eventually given to Stonyhurst College , the Jesuit school in Lancashire .

From 1979 it was on long @-@ term loan from the British province of the Jesuit order to the British Library , catalogued as Loan 74 . On 14 July 2011 the British Library launched a fundraising campaign to buy the book for £ 9 million , and on 17 April 2012 announced that the purchase had been completed and the book was now British Library Additional MS 89000 .

The library plans to display the Gospel for equal amounts of time in London and Durham . They describe the manuscript as " the earliest surviving intact European book and one of the world 's most significant books " . The Cuthbert Gospel returned to Durham to feature in exhibitions in 2013 and 2014 and will next be on display in the British Library in the summer of 2015 . A new book on the gospel was published in 2015 , incorporating the results of research since the purchase ; among other things this pushed the likely date from the late 7th to the early 8th century .

= = Description = =

The St Cuthbert Gospel is a pocket @-@ sized book , 138 by 92 millimetres (5 @.@ 4 x 3 @.@ 6 in) , of the Gospel of St John written in uncial script on 94 vellum folios . It is bound in wooden cover boards , covered with tooled red leather .

= = Context = =

The St Cuthbert Gospel is significant both intrinsically as the earliest surviving European book complete with its original binding and by association with the 7th century Anglo @-@ Saxon saint , Cuthbert of Lindisfarne . A miniature in the Codex Amiatinus , of the Prophet Ezra writing in his library , shows several books similarly bound in red decorated with geometric designs . This miniature was probably based on an original in the Codex Grandior , a lost imported Italian Bible at Jarrow , which showed Cassiodorus and the nine volumes he wrote of commentary on the Bible . Whether the bindings depicted , which were presumably of leather , included raised elements cannot be detected , but the books are stored singly flat in a cupboard , which would reduce the wear on any raised patterns .

Early medieval treasure bindings with a structure in precious metal , and often containing gems , carved ivory panels or metal reliefs , are perhaps better known today than leather bindings , but these were for books used in church services or as " book @-@ icons " rather than for use in

libraries . Of treasure bindings from this period , only the lower cover of the Lindau Gospels (750 ? 800 , Morgan Library) now survives complete , though there are several references to them , most famously to that of the Book of Kells , which was lost after a theft in 1007 . Various metal fragments of what were probably book @-@ mounts have survived , usually adapted as jewellery by Vikings . In the context of the cult of Cuthbert , the lavishly illuminated Lindisfarne Gospels were made at Lindisfarne , probably shortly after the St Cuthbert Gospel , with covers involving metalwork , perhaps entirely made in it , which are also now lost . Plainer very early bindings in leather are almost as rare as treasure bindings , as the bindings of books in libraries usually wore out and needed to be renewed , and earlier collectors did not consider most historical bindings worth retaining .

= = = Text = = =

The text is a very good and careful copy of the single Gospel of John from what has been called the " Italo @-@ Northumbrian " family of texts , other well @-@ known examples of which are several manuscripts from Wearmouth @-@ Jarrow , including the Codex Amiatinus , and in the British Library the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Gospel Book MS Royal 1 . B. VII . This family is presumed to have derived from a hypothetical " Neapolitan Gospelbook " brought to England by Adrian of Canterbury , a companion of Theodore of Tarsus who Bede says had been abbot of Nisida , an equally hypothetical monastery near Naples . In the rubrics of the Lindisfarne Gospels are several that are " specifically Neapolitan " , including festivals which were celebrated only in Naples such as The Nativity of St. Januarius and the Dedication of the Basilica of Stephen . The Neapolitan manuscript was probably at Wearmouth @-@ Jarrow .

Apart from enlarged and sometimes slightly elaborated initials opening the Ammonian sections (the contemporary equivalent of the modern division into verses) , and others in red at the start of chapters , the text has no illumination or decoration , but Sir David Wilson , historian of Anglo @-@ Saxon art and Director of the British Museum , used it as his example in writing " some manuscripts are so beautifully written that illumination would seem only to spoil them " . Julian Brown wrote that " the capitular uncial of the Stonyhurst Gospel owes its beauty to simple design and perfect execution . The decorative elements in the script never interfere with the basic structure of the letter @-@ forms ; they arise naturally from the slanted angle at which the pen was held " .

The pages with the text have been ruled with a blind stylus or similar tool , leaving just an impression in the vellum . It can be shown that this was done for each gathering with just two sets of lines , ruled on the outermost and innermost pages , requiring a very firm impression to carry the marks through to the sheets behind . Impressed lines mark the vertical edges of the text area , and there is an outer pair of lines . Each line of text is ruled , only as far as the inner vertical lines , and there are prick marks where the horizontal lines meet the verticals . The book begins with 19 lines on a page , but at folio 42 changes to 20 lines per page , requiring the re @-@ ruling of some pages . This change was evidently a departure from the original plan , and may have been caused by a shortage of the very fine vellum , as two different sorts are used , though the change does not coincide exactly with the change in the number of lines .

Four passages are marked in the margin , which correspond to those used as readings in Masses for the Dead in the Roman lectionary of the mid @-@ 7th century . This seems to have been done hastily , as most left offset marks on the opposite pages from the book being closed before the ink was dry . This seems to indicate that the book was used at least once as the gospel book for a Mass for the Dead , perhaps on the occasion of Cuthbert 's elevation in 698 . In the example illustrated at left , the start of the reading at line 10 is marked with a cross , and de mortuorum (" for the dead ") written beside . The reading ends on the next page , which is also marked .

= = = Binding = = =

The original tooled red goatskin binding is the earliest surviving intact Western binding , and the virtually unique survivor of decorated Insular leatherwork . The decoration of the front cover includes

colour , and the main motif is raised , which is unique among the few surviving Early Medieval bindings . The panels of geometrical decoration with two @-@ stranded interlace closely relate to Insular illuminated manuscripts , and can be compared to the carpet pages found in these . Elements of the design also relate to Anglo @-@ Saxon metalwork in the case of the general origin of interlace in manuscripts , and Coptic and other East Mediterranean designs .

The decoration of the covers includes three pigments filling lines engraved with a sharp pointed instrument , which now appear as two shades of yellow , one bright and the other pale , and a dark colour that now appears as blue @-@ grey , but was recorded as blue in the earliest descriptions . The front cover includes all three colours , but the pale yellow is not used on the back cover . The pigments have been analysed for the first time , as one benefit of the purchase of the manuscript by the British Library , and identified by Raman spectroscopy as orpiment (yellow) and indigo (grey @-@ blue) . The balance of the designs on both covers is now affected by what appears to be the greater fading of the dark blue @-@ grey pigment . The bookbinder Roger Powell speculated that the " pale lemon @-@ yellow ... may once have been green " , giving an original colour scheme of blue , green and yellow on the red background , although the recent testing suggests this was not the case .

Given the lack of surviving objects , we cannot know how common the techniques employed were , but the quality of the execution suggests that the binder was experienced in them . At the same time an analysis by Robert Stevick suggests that the designs for both covers were intended to follow a sophisticated geometric scheme of compass and straightedge constructions using the " two true measures of geometry " , the ratio between Pythagoras ' constant and one , and the golden section . However slips in the complicated process of production , some detailed below , mean that the finished covers do not quite exhibit the intended proportions , and are both slightly out of true in some respects .

Although it seems clear from the style of the script that the text was written at Monkwearmouth @-@ Jarrow , it is possible that the binding was then added at Lindisfarne ; the form of the plant scrolls can be compared to those on the portable altar also found in Cuthbert 's coffin , presumed to have been made there , though also to other works of the period , such as the shaft of an Anglo @-@ Saxon cross from Penrith and the Vespasian Psalter . Small holes in the folds of each gathering seem to represent a " temporary sewing " together of the pages , one explanation of which is a journey made by the unbound pages .

== == Front cover == ==

The decoration of the front cover is divided into fields bordered by raised lines . The central field contains a plant motif representing a stylised chalice in the centre with a bud and scrolling vine stems leading from it , fruit and several small leaves . Above and below the central motif are fields containing interlace ornament in finely incised lines . The three motifs are enclosed within a border containing further interlacing .

Continuous vine scrolls in a great variety of designs of the same general type as the central motif , with few leaves and round fruits , were very common in slightly later religious Anglo @-@ Saxon art , and are often combined with interlace in the same work , especially on Anglo @-@ Saxon crosses , for example the Bewcastle Cross and the Easby Cross now in the Victoria and Albert Museum . One face of the fragmentary silver cover of the portable altar also recovered from Cuthbert 's coffin has a similar combination of elements , with both areas of interlace and , in the four corners , a simple plant motif with a central bud or leaf and a spiral shoot on either side . The combination of different types of ornament within a panelled framework is highly typical of Northumbrian art , above all the Lindisfarne Gospels . Interlace may well have still been believed to have some quasi @-@ magical protective power , which seems to have been its function in pre @-@ Christian Germanic art . The vine motif here differs from the common continuous scroll type in that the stems cross over each other twice on each side , but crossing stems are also seen on the upper north face of the Bewcastle Cross and a cross in the church at Hexham . Meyer Schapiro compares the motif with one in an initial in the later Book of Kells . It was suggested by Berthe van Regemorter that in the St

Cuthbert Gospel this design represents Christ (as the central bud) and the Four Evangelists as the grapes , following John 15 : 5 , " I am the vine , ye are the branches " , but this idea has been treated with caution by other scholars .

The two panels of interlace use the same design , of what David H. Wright describes as the " alternating pair thin @-@ line type " which he calls " perhaps the most sophisticated of Insular interlace types " . The panels are symmetrical about a vertical axis , except for the left end of the upper panel , which is different . Whereas the other ends of the pattern finish in a flat line parallel with the vertical framing line , part of a shape like an incomplete D , the top left finishes in two ellipses pointing into the corners . The lines forming the interlace patterns are coloured in the dark blue / black and the bright yellow , but differently . In the lower panel the yellow colours the left half of the design , but the upper panel begins at the (deviant) left in the dark colour , then switches to yellow once the pattern changes to that used for the rest of the panels . It continues in yellow until the central point , then changes to the dark colour for the right hand side of the design .

The transition between the top left , perhaps where the artist began , and the standard pattern , is somewhat awkward , leaving a rather bald spot (for an interlace pattern) to the left of the first curving yellow vertical . The change in pattern pushes the halfway point of the upper panel rather off @-@ centre to the right , whereas in the lower panel it falls slightly to the left of dead centre . These vagaries in the design suggest that it was done freehand , without marking @-@ out the pattern using compasses for example . The lowest horizontal raised line is not straight , being higher at the left , probably because of an error in the marking or drilling of the holes in the cover board through which the ends of the cord run . The simple twist or chain border in yellow between the two raised frames resembles an element in an initial in the Durham Gospel Book Fragment , an important earlier manuscript from Lindisfarne .

=== Back cover ===

The back cover is decorated more simply , with no raised elements and purely geometric decoration of engraved lines , which are filled in with two pigments which now appear as the bright yellow and the dark colour , once apparently blue . Within several framing lines making rectangles of similar proportions to the cover itself , a central rectangular panel is marked with pricks to make a grid of 3mm squares , 21 tall and 10 wide . Lines on the grid are engraved and coloured in yellow to form two stepped " crosses " , or squares standing on one corner , with additional stepped elements in the four corners and half @-@ way up the vertical sides , between the two " crosses " . The vertical axial line down the grid and the two horizontal axes through the crosses are also coloured in the yellow pigment right to the edges of the grid . The remaining lines on the grid and all the lines along the edges of the grid are coloured in the dark colour . This is a simple version of the sort of design found on Insular carpet pages , as well as in Coptic manuscript decoration and textiles , and small stepped crosses decorate the main panels of the famous Sutton Hoo shoulder @-@ clasps . The alignment of the various outer framing lines with the innermost frame and the panel with the grid is noticeably imperfect , as the top framing line was extended too far to the left . Traces of an uncoloured first attempt at this line can be seen on the right hand side , above the coloured line .

=== Construction ===

Although the binding has never been taken apart for examination , a considerable amount can be said about its construction . A combination of looseness through wear and tear , damage in certain places , and the failure of the paste that glued the pages to the inside of the covers , now allow non @-@ intrusive inspection of much of the binding construction , including the rear of the actual wooden front cover board , and some of the holes made through it .

The raised framing lines can be seen from the rear of the front cover to have been produced by gluing cord to the board and tooling the leather over it , in a technique of Coptic origin , of which few early examples survive ? one of the closest is a 9th- or 10th @-@ century Islamic binding found in the Mosque of Uqba in Kairouan , Tunisia . There are holes in the board in which the cut @-@ off

ends can be seen from behind .

The chalice and plant motif on the front , of which there is no trace from behind , has been built up using some clay @-@ like material underneath the leather , as shown by CT @-@ scans since the purchase . In the 2015 book Nicholas Pickwoad suggests that this raised decoration was formed using a matrix which was pressed into the damp leather over the clay @-@ like substance and the wooden board . Previous authors had suggested that the material under the relief decoration might have been built up in gesso as well as cord and leather scraps before applying the cover leather . A broadly similar plant motif in similar technique is found on a later Middle Eastern pouch in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore .

The boards of the covers , previously assumed to be limewood , are now thought to be birch , an unusual wood in later bindings , but one easily available in northern England . Both have four holes where the binding threads were laced through ; the two threads were run round the inner edges of the cover and knotted back at the holes . The front cover has an additional 12 holes where the ends of the cords for the raised framing lines went through , at the four corners of the two main frames , and the ends of the horizontal bars between the interlace panels and the central vine motif .

The stitching of the binding uses " Coptic sewing " , that is " flexible unsupported sewing (produced by two needles and thread looping round one another in a figure @-@ of @-@ eight sewing pattern) " Coptic sewing uses small threads both to attach the leaves together and , knotted together , to attach the pages to the cover boards . Normal Western binding uses thread for the former and thicker cord running across the spine of the book for the latter , with the thread knotted onto the cords . Coptic sewing is also found in the earliest surviving leather bookbindings , which are from Coptic libraries in Egypt from the 7th and 8th centuries ; in particular the design of the cover of one in the Morgan Library (MS M.569) has been compared to the St Cuthbert Gospel . In the techniques used in the binding , apart from the raised decoration , the closest resemblance is to an even smaller Irish pocket gospel book from some 50 years later , the Cadmug Gospels at Fulda , which is believed to have belonged to Saint Boniface . This is also in red goatskin , with coloured incised lines , and uses a similar unsupported or cordless stitching technique . The first appearance of the cords or supports that these " unsupported " bindings lack is found in two other books at Fulda , and they soon became universal in , and characteristic of , Western bookbinding until the arrival of modern machine techniques . The cords run horizontally across the spine , and are thicker than the threads that hold the pages together . They are attached , typically by lacing through holes or glue , to the two boards of the cover , and the threads holding the gatherings are knotted to them , resulting in a stronger binding .

= = Dating = =

The manuscript itself carries no date but a rather precise dating has been given to it , based mainly on its palaeography or handwriting , and also the known facts of Cuthbert 's burial . The dating was revised after the acquisition by the British Library , who added to their online catalogue entry :

Previously dated to the end of the 7th century (The Stonyhurst Gospel , ed . T. J. Brown (1969) , pp. 12 ? 13) , R. Gameson dates the script to c . 710 ? c . 730 and L. Webster dates the decoration on the covers to c . 700 ? c . 730 (The St Cuthbert Gospel , eds C. Breay and B. Meehan (2015) , pp. 33 , 80) .

The script is the " capitular " form of uncial , with just a few emphasized letters at the start of sections in " text " uncial . Close analysis of the changing style of details of the forms of letters allows the manuscript to be placed with some confidence within a chronological sequence of the few other manuscripts thought to have been produced at Wearmouth @-@ Jarrow . The Northumbrian scribes " imitate very closely the best Italian manuscripts of about the sixth century " , but introduced small elements that gave their script a distinct style , which has always been greatly admired . However , there were several scribes , seven different ones working on the Codex Amiatinus , whose scripts may not all have developed at the same pace .

Key to this sequence is the Codex Amiatinus , an almost complete Bible for which we have a very precise terminus ante quem , and within which , because of its size , developments in style can be

seen in a single manuscript . The Codex Amiatinus can be precisely located as leaving Wearmouth @-@ Jarrow with a party led by Abbot Ceolfrith on 4 June 716 , bound for Rome . The codex was to be presented to the pope , a decision only announced by Ceolfrith very shortly before the departure , allowing the dedication page to be dated with confidence to around May 716 , though the rest of the manuscript was probably already some years old , but only begun after Ceolfrith succeeded as abbot in 689 . The script of the dedication page differs slightly from that of the main text , but is by the same hand and in the same " elaborated text uncial " style as some pages at Durham (MS A II 17 , part ii , ff 103 @-@ 11) . At the end of the sequence , it may be possible to date the Saint Petersburg Bede to 746 at the earliest , from references in memoranda in the text , although this remains a matter of controversy .

There survive parts of a gospel book , by coincidence now bound up with the famous Utrecht Psalter , which are identifiable as by the same scribe as the Cuthbert Gospel , and where " the capitular uncial of the two manuscripts is indistinguishable in style or quality , so they may well be very close to each other in date " . Since the Utrecht pages also use Rustic capital script , which the Cuthbert Gospel does not , it allows another basis for comparison with further manuscripts in the sequence .

From the palaeographical evidence , T. Julian Brown concluded that the Cuthbert manuscript was written after the main text of the Codex Amiatinus , which was finished after 688 , perhaps by 695 , though it might be later . Turning to the historical evidence for Cuthbert 's burial , this placed it after his original burial in 687 but possibly before his elevation to the high altar in 698 . If this is correct , the book was never a personal possession of Cuthbert , as has sometimes been thought , but was possibly created specifically to be placed in his coffin , whether for the occasion of his elevation in 698 or at another date . The less precise hints about dating that can be derived from the style of the binding compared to other works did not conflict with these conclusions , though in the new 2015 study , Leslie Webster now dates the cover to " c . 700 ? c . 730 " , and Richard Gameson " dates the script to c . 710 ? c . 730 " , as quoted above .

= = History = =

= = = Background = = =

Cuthbert was an Anglo @-@ Saxon , perhaps of a noble family , born in the Kingdom of Northumbria in the mid @-@ 630s , some ten years after the conversion of King Edwin to Christianity in 627 , which was slowly followed by that of the rest of his people . The politics of the kingdom were violent , and there were later episodes of pagan rule , while spreading understanding of Christianity through the kingdom was a task that lasted throughout Cuthbert 's lifetime . Edwin had been baptised by Paulinus of York , an Italian who had come with the Gregorian mission from Rome , but his successor Oswald also invited Irish monks from Iona to found the monastery at Lindisfarne where Cuthbert was to spend much of his life . This was around 635 , about the time Cuthbert was born .

The tension between the Roman and Irish traditions , often exacerbated by Cuthbert 's near @-@ contemporary Saint Wilfrid , an intransigent and quarrelsome supporter of Roman ways , was to be a major feature of Cuthbert 's lifetime . Cuthbert himself , though educated in the Irish tradition , followed his mentor Eata in accepting the Roman forms without apparent difficulty after the Synod of Whitby in 664 . The earliest biographies concentrate on the many miracles that accompanied even his early life , but he was evidently indefatigable as a travelling priest spreading the Christian message to remote villages , and also well able to impress royalty and nobility . Unlike Wilfrid , his style of life was austere , and when he was able to he lived the life of a hermit , though still receiving many visitors .

He grew up near the new Melrose Abbey , an offshoot from Lindisfarne which is today in Scotland , but was then in Northumbria . He had decided to become a monk after seeing a vision on the night in 651 that St Aidan , the founder of Lindisfarne , died , but seems to have seen some military

service first . He was quickly made guest @-@ master at the new monastery at Ripon , soon after 655 , but had to return with Eata to Melrose when Wilfrid was given the monastery instead . About 662 he was made prior at Melrose , and around 665 went as prior to Lindisfarne . In 684 he was made Bishop of Lindisfarne but by late 686 resigned and returned to his hermitage as he felt he was about to die , although he was probably still only in his early 50s . After a few weeks of illness he died on the island on 20 March 687 , and his body was carried back to Lindisfarne and buried there the same day .

= = = Lindisfarne = = =

Although first documented in 1104 , the book is presumed to have been buried with Cuthbert at Lindisfarne either in 687 or more likely in 698 , and to have stayed with the body during the wanderings forced by the Viking invasions two centuries later . Bede 's Life recounts that Cuthbert was initially buried in a stone sarcophagus to the right of the altar in the church at Lindisfarne ; he had wanted to be buried at the hermitage on Inner Farne Island where he died , but before his death was persuaded to allow his burial at the main monastery . His burial was first disturbed eleven years after his death , when his remains were moved to behind the altar to reflect his recognition , in the days before a formal process of canonisation , as a saint . The sarcophagus was opened and his body was said to have been found perfectly preserved , or incorrupt . This apparent miracle led to the steady growth of Cuthbert 's posthumous cult , to the point where he became the most popular saint of Northern England .

Numerous miracles were attributed to his intercession and to intercessory prayer near his remains . In particular , Alfred the Great , King of Wessex , was inspired and encouraged in his struggle against the Danes by a vision or dream he had of Cuthbert . Thereafter the royal house of Wessex , who became the kings of England , made a point of devotion to Cuthbert , which also had a useful political message , as they came from opposite ends of the united English kingdom . Cuthbert was " a figure of reconciliation and a rallying point for the reformed identity of Northumbria and England " after the absorption of the Danish populations into Anglo @-@ Saxon society , as Michelle Brown puts it . The 8th @-@ century historian Bede wrote both a verse and a prose life of St Cuthbert around 720 . He has been described as " perhaps the most popular saint in England prior to the death of Thomas Becket in 1170 . " Cuthbert was reburied in the decorated oak coffin now usually meant by St Cuthbert 's coffin , though he was to have many more coffins , and it is thought likely that the book was produced for this occasion , and may well have been placed in his coffin at this point .

= = = Fleeing the Danes = = =

In 793 Lindisfarne was devastated by the first serious Viking raid in England , but Cuthbert 's shrine seems to have escaped damage . In 875 the Danish leader Halfdene (Halfdan Ragnarsson) , who shared with his brother Ivar the Boneless the leadership of the Great Heathen Army that had conquered much of the south of England , moved north to spend the winter there , as a prelude to settlement and further conquest . Eardulf , the Bishop of Lindisfarne , decided the monastery must be abandoned , and orderly preparations were made for the whole community , including lay people and children , to evacuate .

It was possibly at this point that a shelf or inner cover was inserted some way under the lid of Cuthbert 's coffin , supported on three wooden bars across the width , and probably with two iron rings fixed to it for lifting it off . Eardulf had decided to take the most important remains and possessions of the community with them , and whether new or old , the shelf in Cuthbert 's coffin was probably loaded with the St Cuthbert Gospel , which was found there in 1104 . It may also have held the Lindisfarne Gospels , now also in the British Library , and other books from Lindisfarne that were , and in several cases still are , at Durham Cathedral . Other bones taken by the party were those remains of St Aidan (d . 651) , the founder of the community , that had not been sent to Melrose , and the head of the king and saint Oswald of Northumbria , who had converted the

kingdom and encouraged the founding of Lindisfarne . These and other relics were reverently packaged in cloth and labelled , as more recent relics are . The community also took a stone Anglo-Saxon cross , and although they had a vehiculum of some sort , probably a cart or simple wagon , Cuthbert 's coffin was carried by seven young men who had grown up in the community .

They set off inland and spent the first months at an unknown location in west Cumberland , near the River Derwent , probably in the modern Lake District , and according to Symeon of Durham 's *Libellus de exordio* , the main source for this period , Eardulf tried to hire a ship on the west coast to take them to Ireland . Then they left the more remote west side of the country and returned to the east , finding a resting place at Craike near Easington , County Durham , close to the coast , well south of Lindisfarne , but also sufficiently far north of the new Viking kingdom being established at York .

Over the next century the Vikings of York and the north became gradually Christianized , and Cuthbert 's shrine became a focus of devotion among them also . The community established close relations with Guthred (d . 895) , Halfdene 's successor as king , and received land from him at Chester-le-Street . In 883 they moved the few miles there , where they stayed over a century , building St Cuthbert 's Church , where Cuthbert 's shrine was placed . In 995 a new Danish invasion led the community to flee some 50 miles south to Ripon , again taking the coffin with them . After three or four months it was felt safe to return , and the party had nearly reached Chester-le-Street when their wagon became definitively stuck close to Durham , then a place with cultivated fields , but hardly a settlement , perhaps just an isolated farm . It was thought that Cuthbert was expressing a wish to settle where he was , and the community obeyed . A new stone church ? the so-called White Church ? was built , the predecessor of the present Durham Cathedral .

== Durham Cathedral ==

In 1104 , early in the bishopric of Ranulf Flambard , Cuthbert 's tomb was opened again and his relics translated to a new shrine behind the main altar of the half-built Norman cathedral . According to the earlier of the two accounts of the event that survive , known as " *Miracles* 18 ? 20 " or the " anonymous account " , written by a monk of the cathedral , when the monks opened the decorated inner coffin , which was for the first time in living memory , they saw " a book of the Gospels lying at the head of the board " , that is on the shelf or inner lid . The account in " *Miracle* 20 " adds that Bishop Flambard , during his sermon on the day the new shrine received Cuthbert 's body , showed the congregation " a Gospel of Saint John in miraculously perfect condition , which had a satchel-like container of red leather with a badly frayed sling made of silken threads " . In addition the book itself has an inscription on folio 1r " written in a modest book-hand apparently of the later twelfth century " recording that it was found in the translation .

As far as is known the book remained at Durham for the remainder of the Middle Ages , until the Dissolution , kept as a relic in three bags of red leather , normally resting in a reliquary , and there are various records of it being shown to visitors , the more distinguished of which were allowed to hang it round their neck for a while . According to Reginald of Durham (d. c 1190) " anyone approaching it should wash , fast and dress in an alb before touching it " , and he recorded that a scribe called John who failed to do this during a visit by the Archbishop of York in 1153 ? 54 , and " held it with unwashed hands after eating was struck down with a chill " . Books treated as relics are especially characteristic of Celtic Christianity ; several of the surviving Irish book-shrines were worn in this way .

Another recorded copy of the Gospel of John has also been associated with Cuthbert , and sometimes thought to be the St Cuthbert Gospel . Saint Boisil (d . 664) of Melrose Abbey was Cuthbert 's teacher . Bede 's prose life of Cuthbert records that during Boisil 's last illness , he and Cuthbert read daily one of the seven gatherings or quaternions of Boisil 's manuscript of the Gospel of John . The sermon in *Miracle* 20 identifies this manuscript with the one at Durham , and says that both saints had worn it round their necks , ignoring that it has twelve gatherings rather than seven . There are further references from Durham to Boisil 's book , such as a list of relics in the cathedral in

1389 , and some modern scholars were attracted to the idea that they were the same , but Brown 's palaeographical evidence seems to remove the possibility of Boisil 's book being the St Cuthbert Gospel . In the 11th century Boisil 's remains had also been brought to Durham , and enshrined next to those of Cuthbert . Around the same time Bede 's own remains were stolen from Monkwearmouth @-@ Jarrow for Durham , by a " notably underhand trick " , and placed in Cuthbert 's coffin , where they remained until 1104 .

= = = After the Reformation = = =

It is thought likely that the book remained at Durham until the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII , although the various late medieval records of books and relics held there do not allow it to be identified with certainty . Durham Cathedral Priory closed in 1540 , and some decades later the book was recorded by Archbishop Ussher in the library of the Oxford scholar , antiquary and astrologer , Thomas Allen (1542 ? 1632) of Gloucester Hall (now Worcester College , Oxford) . However it is not in a catalogue of Allen 's library of 1622 , and was not in the collection of Allen 's manuscripts that was presented to the Bodleian Library by Sir Kenelm Digby in 1634 . Nothing is then known of its whereabouts for a century or so .

According to an 18th @-@ century Latin inscription pasted to the inside cover of the manuscript , the St Cuthbert Gospel was given by the 3rd Earl of Lichfield (1718 ? 1772) to the Jesuit priest Thomas Phillips S.J. (1708 ? 1774) who donated it to the English Jesuit College at Liège on 20 June 1769 . Lichfield was an Anglican , but knew Phillips as the latter was chaplain to his neighbour in Oxfordshire , the recusant George Talbot , 14th Earl of Shrewsbury (1719 ? 1787) . The manuscript was owned between 1769 and 2012 by the British Province of the Society of Jesus , and for most of this period was in the library of Stonyhurst College , Lancashire , successor to the Liège college .

The manuscript was first published when in 1806 it was taken to London and displayed when a letter on it by the Rev. J. Milner , presumably Bishop John Milner , Catholic Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District , was read to a meeting of the London Society of Antiquaries , which was subsequently printed in their journal *Archaeologia* . Milner followed the medieval note in relating the book to Cuthbert , and compared its script to that of the Lindisfarne Gospels , by then in the British Museum , examining the two side by side . However he thought that " the binding seems to be of the time of Queen Elizabeth " ! After the lecture it took some years to return to Stonyhurst as an intermediary forgot to forward it . That the binding was original , and the earliest European example , was realised during the 19th century , and when exhibited in 1862 it was described in the catalogue as " In unique coeval (?) binding " . The whole appearance and feel of the book , and the accuracy of the text and beauty of the script was highly praised by scholars such as Bishop Christopher Wordsworth (1807 ? 1885) , nephew of the poet and an important New Testament textual scholar , who described the book as " surpassing in delicate simplicity of neatness every manuscript that I have seen " .

= = = From 1950 = = =

From 1950 onwards the binding was examined several times , but not altered , at Stonyhurst and the British Museum by Roger Powell , " the leading bookbinder of his day " , who had rebound both the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow , and also fully photographed by Peter Walters . Powell contributed chapters on the binding to the two major works covering the book , the first being *The Relics of St Cuthbert* in 1956 , a large work with chapters on Cuthbert 's coffin and each of the objects recovered from it . The main chapter on the St Cuthbert Gospel was by Sir Roger Mynors , and Powell 's chapter incorporated unpublished observations by the leading bindings expert Geoffrey Hobson . The second came in 1969 , when T.J. (Julian) Brown , Professor of Palaeography at King 's College , London , published a monograph on the St Cuthbert Gospel with another chapter by Powell , who had altered his views in minor respects . Brown set out arguments for the dating of the manuscript to close to 698 , which has been generally accepted . The book was

placed on loan to the British Library in 1979 where it was very regularly on display , first in the British Museum building , and from 1999 in the Ritblat Gallery at the new St Pancras site of the Library , usually displaying the front cover . Despite minor damages , some of which appear to have occurred during the 20th century , the book is in extremely good condition for its age .

In 2011 an agreement was reached with the Jesuit British Province for the British Library to buy the book for £ 9 million . This required the purchase money to be raised by 31 March 2012 , and a public appeal was launched . In the early stages the emphasis was on raising large individual donations , which included £ 4 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund , which distributes some of the money from the profits of the National Lottery , £ 250 @, @ 000 pledged by the Art Fund , and " a similar sum " by The Garfield Weston Foundation , and a large gift from the Foyle Foundation . By early March 2012 the British Library reported that there was " only £ 1.5M left to raise " , and on 17 April announced that the purchase had been completed , after their largest ever public appeal . The purchase " involved a formal partnership between the Library , Durham University and Durham Cathedral and an agreement that the book will be displayed to the public equally in London and the North East . " There was a special display at the British Library until June 2012 , and after coming off display for detailed investigation the book is planned to go on display in Durham in July 2013 in Durham University ? s Palace Green Library . All the pages are accessible on the British Library website .

= = The Gospel of John as an amulet = =

There was a long and somewhat controversial tradition of using manuscripts of the gospel of John , or extracts such as the opening verse , as a protective or healing amulet or charm , which was especially strong in early medieval Britain and Ireland . Manuscripts containing the text of one gospel only are very rare , except for those with lengthy explanatory glosses , and all the examples known to Julian Brown were of John . Disapproving references to such uses can be found in the writings of Saints Jerome and Eligius , and Alcuin , but they are accepted by John Chrysostom , Augustine , who " expresses qualified approval " of using manuscripts as a cure for headaches , and Gregory the Great , who sent one to Queen Theodelinda for her son . Bede 's prose Life mentions that Cuthbert combated the use of amulets and charms in the villages around Melrose . However , like many other leading figures of the church , he may have distinguished between amulets based on Christian texts and symbols and other types .

The size of the Cuthbert Gospel places it within the Insular tradition of the " pocket gospels " , of which eight Irish examples survive , including the Book of Dimma , Book of Mulling , and Book of Deer , although all the others are or were originally texts of all four gospels , with the possible exception of a few pages from the Gospel of John enshrined with the Stowe Missal in its cumdach or book @-@ reliquary . There was a tradition of even smaller books , whose use seems to have been often amuletic , and a manuscript of John alone , with a page size of 72 x 56 mm , was found in a reliquary at Chartres Cathedral in 1712 . It is probably Italian from the 5th or 6th century , and the label it carried in 1712 saying it was a relic of St Leobinus , a bishop of Chartes who died in about 556 , may be correct . The other examples are mostly in Greek or the Coptic language and contain a variety of biblical texts , especially psalters . Julian Brown concludes that the three Latin manuscripts of John " seem to attest an early medieval practice of placing a complete Gospel of St. John in a shrine , as a protective amulet ; and it seems reasonable to conclude that our manuscript was placed in St. Cuthbert 's coffin to protect it " .

= = Exhibitions = =

Apart from being usually on display at the British Museum and British Library (see above) , the book has been in the following exhibitions (* denotes that there was a detailed published catalogue) :

1862 , Victoria & Albert Museum , Loan Exhibition

1930 , Victoria & Albert Museum , Medieval English Art *

1987 , Durham Cathedral Treasury , An exhibition of manuscripts brought together at Durham to celebrate the saint 's 1300th anniversary and the work of his early community

1991 , British Museum , The Making of England : Anglo @-@ Saxon Art and Culture AD 600 ? 900 *

1996 , Laing Art Gallery , Newcastle upon Tyne , Treasures from the Lost Kingdom of Northumbria

1997 , British Museum , The Heirs of Rome : The Shaping of Britain AD 400 ? 900 , part of the series The Transformation of the Roman World Ad 400 ? 900 *

2003 , British Library , Painted Labyrinth : The World of the Lindisfarne Gospels *

2007 , British Library , Sacred : Discover What We Share

2013 Palace Green Library , Durham University , in an exhibition which also included the Lindisfarne Gospels , items from the Staffordshire Hoard , the Yates Thompson 26 Life of Cuthbert (from which several illustrations here are taken) , and the gold Taplow belt buckle .

2014 , Palace Green Library , Durham , " Book binding from the Middle Ages to the modern day " .
Additionally , a digital version of the manuscript was produced to run on an Apple iPad , which was exhibited in April 2012 at the British Library .