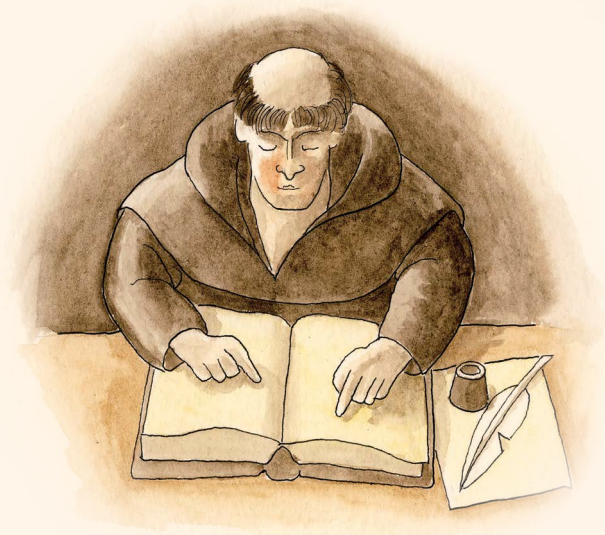




# St Boniface Way

wander and wonder



# St Boniface

Boniface was born in Crediton in 680AD into a Saxon family. He was baptized Wynfrith or Winfrid (from the Saxon words *wine* – friend and *frith* – peace). He received his early education in a Benedictine monastery in Exeter.

For many years he had felt called to missionary work and started this, at the age of thirty-six in Friesland – now part of Northern Holland, in 716. His first mission was unsuccessful, and he returned to Wessex initial and then travelled to Rome where, in May 719, Pope Gregory II commissioned him as a missionary to Germany. He was given the name Boniface, meaning maker of good or good deeds. His work took him to Hesse, Friesland and Bavaria.

In 722 he was consecrated a bishop. Over the next two years Boniface's mission continued in Hesse and Thuringia where he established convents and started to create a disciplined system of churches.

Boniface made frequent pleas to the Christian Saxons of England to send supplies of both money and books, and of people and sought and gave advice to many clerics in his home country in writing. Many of his letters still exist.

In 753, Boniface set off for further missionary work in Friesland, and in 754 his life ended in martyrdom at the hands of a pagan band, who killed him as he was reading to a group of new converts on Pentecost Sunday. He would not allow his companions to defend him. His body was taken to Fulda, where it still rests..



## Felling of the Sacred Oak

A well-known legend about Boniface concerns the felling of an oak tree. On his arrival in Hesse, among half-believers with residual pagan beliefs, Boniface announced in advance that he would destroy their gods. Armed with an axe he approached a sacred tree, the giant oak of Geismar, dedicated to Thor. He felled the oak, and its branches lay on the ground in the shape of a cross.


## Impact on History

Boniface has had an enormous impact on English and European history, far beyond the simple conversion of people to Christianity. He is described as the Apostle of Germany and is greatly revered in Holland.

Boniface has been described by eminent historians as “the Englishman who has had a greater influence on the history of Europe than any other Englishman”, but in England he is not greatly known about. Boniface was officially recognized as the patron saint of Devon in 2019. His feast day is celebrated on 5th June.

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Exeter Cathedral

**Exeter Cathedral was founded by St Edward the Confessor in 1050. The current building is the third cathedral on this site. There is no longer evidence above ground of the first (Saxon) minster that once stood here. But the towers of the second (Norman) cathedral survived and were incorporated into the Gothic building you see today, completed in the 14th century.**

When approaching the cathedral, look at the striking West front, covered with images of apostles, saints and angels. As you enter, cast your eyes up at the vaulted ceiling, the longest uninterrupted mediaeval vault in the world. In the north transept, find the astronomical clock; possibly the origin of the nursery rhyme 'Hickory, dickory, dock' – about the mice that nibbled at the wire and mechanism. In the quire, notice the canopy of the bishop's throne, the tallest piece of mediaeval woodwork in the country, constructed without the use of nails.

A particular place for pilgrims to visit is the tomb of Bishop Edmund Lacy in the north quire aisle. It is the burial place of a much-venerated bishop, whose prayers were thought effective for healing. During the late middle ages, pilgrims would pray at the tomb, often leaving wax 'votives' – models of the people, animals, or limbs for which they sought healing. Many of these votives were discovered in 1942 when a bomb dislodged them from their hiding place, and a model of the finest is on display by the tomb.

Other parts of the cathedral are newer. The Chapel of St James in the south quire aisle was rebuilt after the cathedral took a direct hit from a bomb in WW2. The carvings contain the face of the mason who worked on the reconstruction and of the much-loved cat that lived here at the time.

Today the cathedral continues the tradition of daily worship and hosts great occasions for the county, such as Remembrance Day services every November.

The cathedral green is the venue for the annual Exeter Christmas Market, which attracts over half a million visitors each year. And during the summer the green is the main place of the city for people to gather outside and enjoy the summer sun.

Before leaving the cathedral, visit the Lady Chapel at the far east end. This is a place of prayer where you may light a candle and bring to God whatever is in your heart and mind. You join your prayers with those of pilgrims down the ages, who have sought the grace of God in this place.



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# Flora and Fauna

**Seeing God in all Creation -  
the flora and fauna of St Boniface Way**

**St Boniface Way runs through very productive farmland thanks to the fertile deep red sandstone soil, mixed with clay. It colours the fields and valleys and feeds the many birds and animals that live along the streams and hedges. Larks hover and sing high above; pheasant and red legged partridge feast below; while swallows, swifts and martins duck and dive all summer. High above, keeping a watchful eye, buzzards wheel.**



At Shobrooke Park, a deer park since the 16th century, look out for bird life on the Shobrooke lakes, (laid out in 1845 by Henry Hippisley Tuckfield when a stream was dammed to create a cascade of small lakes) including moorhen, coot, divers, mallards, kingfishers and herons. It is also the home of large flocks of Canada geese. Morning and evening, skeins of them fly along the River Creedy, to or from Shobrooke, their mournful honking heralding spring or autumn. From the lakes you leave Shobrooke Park along an avenue of lime trees or linden, considered sacred in many cultures. In England they are a symbol of fertility.

Moving on to Shobrooke Church, Devon violets, deep purple and strongly scented, grow in the bank opposite early in the year. The way through the copse to Shobrooke Mill follows the old leat. Hundreds of snowdrops bloom along it in spring.

Otters have been seen along the River Creedy. Grey wagtails and dippers bob. Egrets, kingfishers, goosander and flights


of dragonflies all feed along the river. Peacock, tortoiseshell, comma and sometimes, in autumn, painted lady butterflies flit haphazardly.


Any of the Devon lanes you walk will be filled with flowers most of the year. They foam with cow parsley in spring, livened by pink campion and herb robert, deep yellow archangel nettle, and early purple orchid. Later in the year you'll find yellow honey-scented lady's bedstraw flowers, honeysuckle, and rose hips. In autumn pilgrims may be drawn more towards the blackberries. The sloes are a bit dry but good in gin!

Into Exeter and the pilgrimage route winds through Exeter University and through the garden of Reed Hall, founded by James Veitch, one of the first pioneers to travel widely to collect for new plants. Many were named after the Veitch family. The campus has two arboreta, with a large collection including redwoods, cherries, azalea and rhododendrons.



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