

## Saintly Ducks?

A single Eider Duck with distinctive plumage of white feathers on its back and black feathers down to the waterline sat soporific in the water, drugged by the Sun's warmth. Their wedge-shaped brow and beak give them a distinctly Roman look and they are the



only duck or coastal bird with their particular pattern of plumage. Tufted Duck (drakes only again), Guillemot, Razorbill, Puffin, Manx Shearwaters and Oystercatchers all have black and white plumage, but the black feathers are on the back with white undercarriage.

The Eider holds an unexpected place in the history of animal conservation for it was the first wild creature to be protected, not by statute but by the protective holy grace of St Cuthbert (634-687 AD), one of early Northumbrian Christianity's most revered saints. He lived out the last years of his life in a turf

and stone hermit's cell on the Inner Farne Island and decreed that the Eider Duck should no longer be killed or disturbed by local fisherman who had been in the habit of paddling out to the island in their coracles to poach a few.

The duck's association with the saint has been perpetuated in their local Northumberland nickname of Cuddy's (Cuthbert's) ducks. The good man's fame doesn't stop there for he is further commemorated in the appetising Cuddy's Cave cheese.

Thank you Dorothy for this interesting story.

We have just received some news from the Dunnings about their daughters Heather and Louise.

Heather, the oldest daughter, is coming to the end of her third year in training as a midwife at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, the home of the Para-Olympics. So far Heather has successfully brought 26 babies into the world and needs another 14 before she can qualify. The only other practical part of the course she has to complete is a placement at the Newborn Intensive Care Unit which has had to be rearranged as she tested positive for Covid19 in December.

Heather is currently working on a dissertation as her final academic assignment which has to be submitted at the beginning of June. Heather would value our prayers for the successful completion of this dissertation. Assuming all of this is successfully achieved Heather will then move on to a Preceptorship Post which is a 12 to 24 month period for newly registered midwives designed to guide and support them in making the transition from student and develop their practice further. Heather had an interview recently and has been offered a Preceptorship Post at Peterborough, so will be moving there in the near future all being well.

In the meantime Louise has chosen a completely different career path. She is an apprentice working for the Siemens Mobility Team studying for a degree in Environmental Health and Safety. Siemens, amongst other things, are involved in the installation and maintenance of railway signalling. Louise is at the end of her second year and is currently

living in Chippenham. A recent highlight was the successful completion of a Personal Track Safety course which means that she can work near railway tracks with DC conductor rails with currents of 750 volts. Louise particularly enjoys site visits which have had to be curtailed due to Covid19 restrictions. She has been catching up on some of these visits lately and has enjoyed trips to Wales and Birmingham. She was at Canary Wharf recently and was particularly impressed with Cross Rail.

I am sure that we all wish these two young ladies every success in their chosen careers and look forward to more news from them in the future.

We conclude with some more musings from Dave Lee about the church in bygone days aided by past member Cyril Smith: Cyril's earliest memory is of being around three years old, probably 1927/8, sitting on his mother's lap at the back of the church. He remembers the organ playing, the church full of people. Then the vestry door opens and a man dressed in black and white appears holding a long pole with a gold cross on the top. He is followed by the minister, choirboys and men all singing a hymn. They walk towards Cyril, then up towards the choir stalls in the chancel area. Cyril soon needs the toilet - but there aren't any, so his Mum takes him outside to go behind one of the pillars.

The choir stalls are long gone, replaced by an expanse of blue carpet, piano, drum kit and at 10.30 services, a mass of music stands, guitars, bottles of water and wires leaking everywhere for people to drown in. There are toilets now in the large hall at the side of the church; no-one has to wee outside any more. The church has not been full for several years - at least full in numbers. It is full in spirit and friendship, full in hope and ambition, full in memories and dreams.

Cyril moves to Sunday School held in the old corrugated iron hall in the Old Highway. There are several groups of children taught by severe looking adults. Now we use our lovely hall and the groups are diminishing after boom years in the late 90s and 00s. Perhaps children are taught now by less severe adults, but no less committed.

Cyril goes on a Sunday School outing in 1930 to Theydon Bois, part of Epping Forest, on a bus. There, he plays among the trees, on the roundabouts and swings. He is invited to go for a ride with Rev Mongar and his wife in a pony and trap through the forest. Later, wooden stairs are climbed to enter a tearoom perched up among the trees.



Please remember St Cuthbert's in your prayers as we consider how we might re-open at the end of lockdown.