

Devon Day and Patron Saints

Report of the County Solicitor

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation: that the Committee notes the mechanism by which St Boniface is honoured in the national church calendar on 5th June and the Council's ongoing support for the Boniface Link Association in working towards the adoption of St Boniface as the patron saint of Devon.

1. Summary

- 1.1 At Procedures Committee on 15 September 2020, Members agreed to consider the matter of Devon Day, how the current date of the 4th June was chosen, the link to St Petroc's Day and also St Boniface and asked that research was undertaken and a Report be brought back to the Committee at a later date.
- 1.2 This report provides information on the matters highlighted above.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 A saint is usually defined as a Christian who has shown heroic virtue in some respect. A 'saint', is a Christian whom the Church knows and agrees has lived and died faithfully. A 'canonized' saint, recognised by the Church, does not differ really from many unknown saints except in recognition and therefore, the feast of All Saints' Day (November 1st) honours not only the canonized saints, but the countless men and women of faith who died in obscurity.
- 2.2 The Roman Catholic Church has an elaborate, formal, canonization process for investigating claims of sanctity, yet for the Eastern Orthodox and Anglican Catholic Churches the process of canonization is much less formal. The Church of England has no mechanism for canonising saints and avoids the use of the prenominal title "Saint" with reference to uncanonised individuals. The practice of adopting patron saints goes back to the building of the first public churches in the Roman Empire.
- 2.3 The patron saints of churches, and more broadly of regions and countries, have generally been chosen because of some connection of that saint to that place – (preached the Gospel and / or died there / relics transferred there). Patron saints tend to differ in importance from the general calendar of saints because they are, or become, cultural icons as well as religious figures.

3. Saint Petroc & Devon Day

- 3.1 County days are relatively recent observances, formed to celebrate the cultural heritage of a particular county. For example, Norfolk Day, a 2018 project between BBC Radio Norfolk and the Eastern Daily Press, is now held on 27 July. Hampshire Day was held for the first on July 15 last year to provide an annual opportunity for people across the county to share in celebrating the county's history, traditions, and the diverse culture.
- 3.2 Devon Day is currently celebrated on 4th June and is linked with St Petroc; one of the three Patron Saints of Cornwall; along with St Piran (5th March) and St Michael (8th May).
- 3.3 St Petroc ministered throughout Dumnonia, which included Kernow (Cornwall), and parts of Dewnans (Devon), Somerset and Dorset. He is associated with a monastery at Padstow, which is named after him (Pedroc-stowe, or 'Petrock's Place'), where he established a community of his followers; and then became a hermit at Bodmir Moor, where he again attracted followers and was known for his miracles.
- 3.4 He was responsible for founding a number of churches and monasteries right across the south-west, with several important clusters found around Barnstaple in North Devon and the Devon villages of Petrockstowe and Newton St Petroc which are named for him. Petroc was also strongly associated with Exeter, for most of its history the most important, richest and most pious city in all of Devon. His association with these important towns in the county established his firm presence in Devon's heritage. There are dedications to him at several key churches in the county and a strong focus on his cult around Torridge, north-west Devon, along the Cornish border.
- 3.5 With Saint Piran and Saint Michael, he is one of the patron saints of Cornwall and was described by Thomas Fuller as "the captain of Cornish saints". His feast day is 4 June and his major shrine is at St Petroc's Church in Bodmin.
- 3.6 The idea for Devon Day began in 2014 when one of Visit Devon's directors, along with BBC Radio Devon, put forward the idea of having an official date in the calendar to celebrate Devon. The idea was to promote the best of Devon for the whole day in the hope of getting the County trending on social media, and is a celebration of everything great about Devon - its towns & cities, farms and countryside, the Devon food & drink, moorlands & coastlines as well as the characters and people who live in Devon.
- 3.7 The pioneering force behind the Devon flag, the Devon Flag Group, had also suggested several significant county dates when the flag might be raised, primarily the Feast Day of Saint Petroc's on June 4th and this date has since been acknowledged and commemorated by Devon residents as Devon Day.
- 3.8 Since becoming an official day in 2016, Devon Day has attracted a massive online following, with people sharing their love for the County on social media. In 2017, more than 2.4million Twitter followers saw #DevonDay and in 2018, the subject was trending on Twitter nationally for more than eight hours.

4. Saint Boniface as Patron Saint of Devon

- 4.1 St Boniface was born in the Devon town of Crediton in Anglo-Saxon England around 675AD and was a leading figure in the Anglo-Saxon mission to the Germanic parts of the Frankish Empire and is credited with bringing Christianity to Germany. For this, some historians call him the “First European” and he is still revered in Germany to this day. Boniface believed that church and state should work together and was dedicated to a peaceful co-existence among the peoples with whom he worked.
- 4.2 Boniface was killed by a mob in Frisia in 754 and his remains returned to Fulda, where he had built an abbey. He is venerated as a saint in the Christian church and became the patron saint of Germania, known as the ‘Apostle of the Germans’.
- 4.3 Saint Boniface’s feast day is celebrated on 5 June and a statue stands in the grounds of Mainz Cathedral. The UK National Shrine to St Boniface is at the Catholic church in Crediton. There is also an aisle dedicated to him at Crediton Parish Church.
- 4.4 Boniface has had an enormous impact on English and European history, far beyond the simple conversion of people to Christianity. His guidance of the early church in Germany, his establishment of structures which allowed it to co-exist with monarchy were massively important, and the educational and literary influence from his monasteries and churches in his lifetime and over the next centuries was very significant. He is described as the Apostle of Germany and is greatly revered in Holland.
- 4.5 Boniface has been described by eminent historians as “The greatest Englishman of all time” and “the Englishman who has had a greater influence on the history of Europe than any other Englishman”, however in England he is not greatly known about.
- 4.6 The idea of St. Boniface as Patron Saint of Devon originated with The Boniface Link Association who suggested that St. Boniface could be adopted as Patron Saint of Devon and his feast day, 5th June, should also be celebrated as Devonshire Day. The Boniface Link Association (Crediton) believe that celebrating St. Boniface as Devon’s patron saint could celebrate its Saxon heritage, to encourage tourism and support the economy.
- 4.7 In February 2019, a motion was bought to Full Council by Councillor Way asking for the adoption of St Boniface as the Patron St of Devon. It was agreed by Cabinet on 13 March 2019 and later resolved by Council in May 2019, that Council:
 - (a) note the work of the Boniface Link Association (Crediton) and also the mechanism by which Boniface is honoured in the national church calendar on 5th June;
 - (b) note the anticipated announcement by the Bishop of Exeter about an initiative that honours and commemorates St Boniface; and
 - (c) supports the work of the Boniface Link Association in working towards the adoption of St Boniface as the patron saint of Devon and in line with the letters of support received from the Bishop of Plymouth, Bishop of Exeter, Senior Pastor at

Crediton Congregational Church, Crediton Methodist Church and Rector of the Orthodox Parish of the Holy Prophet Elias, also lends it support to the Notice of Motion.

- 4.8 The idea of Boniface as Patron Saint of Devon has also gained the support of all the main churches and letters of support have been received from the Bishop of Plymouth, Bishop of Exeter, Senior Pastor at Crediton Congregational Church, Crediton Methodist Church and Rector of the Orthodox Parish of the Holy Prophet Elias.
- 4.9 In 2019, the Bishop of Exeter also introduced a new initiative in the name of St Boniface. The Company of St Boniface honours people who have made a substantial contribution to the life of the church in Devon. Up to six Companions of St Boniface would be admitted each year. Last year there was a service of investiture at Exeter Cathedral in September at which the recipients were presented with a special medal designed by Devon priest and artist Father Andrew Johnson.

5. Designation of a Patron Saint

- 5.1 Having sought clarification from the Diocese of Exeter, there is no formal system within the Church of England for the designation of a patron saint. The last time this happened was in the Middle Ages when the King, in response to the returning crusaders, declared St George to be the patron saint of England thereby displacing St Edward the Confessor, the Saxon King buried in Westminster Abbey. The dedication of individual churches to a saint is the decision of the Bishop, normally in response to public acclaim.
- 5.2 In the case of Devon there has been no official patron saint, however in some quarters St Petroc has been titled as such, partly as a result of Devon's shared Celtic heritage with Cornwall and the joined histories of the Dioceses of Exeter and Truro.
- 5.3 The Diocese of Exeter advised that they are proud to have many outstanding Christians representing Devon, some of whom are commemorated in the official calendar of the Church of England. Notwithstanding the tide of enthusiasm which began in Crediton, wanting St Boniface to be more widely recognised, there is no desire within the church to side-line St Petroc or any of the other saints associated with Devon. Instead they feel it represents a golden opportunity to celebrate a person of courage and integrity who gave his life for the Gospel. In a secular age which is often antipathetic to Christianity the initiative to accord Boniface this status is something that should be embraced rather than undermined.
- 5.4 In a joint statement, the Rt Rev Robert Atwell, Bishop of Exeter and Rt Rev Mark O'Toole, Bishop of Plymouth, said:

"We are delighted to champion the groundswell of support to acclaim St Boniface as patron saint of Devon. At a time when our links with Europe are under scrutiny, it is good to honour our historic, spiritual links and to celebrate the faith and courage of this extraordinary man of whom Devon can rightly be proud."

6. Government Policy

- 6.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published guidance in July 2019 on celebrating the historic counties of England which includes a list of all the county days. The guidance highlights that the Government “is committed to seeing a greater level of activity to celebrate the historic counties, but believes local approaches must be locally-led if they are to be truly owned by communities and therefore fully effective.”

More information, including a list of County Days, can be found on the government website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/celebrating-the-historic-counties-of-england/celebrating-the-historic-counties-of-england>

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The Council recognises the importance of celebrating the history and traditions of this county through Devon Day and also notes the mechanism by which St Boniface is honoured in the national church calendar on 5th June. The Council supports the work of the Boniface Link Association in working towards the adoption of St Boniface as the patron saint of Devon, but also recognises the popularity and strong branding of the 4 June as Devon Day, as evidenced on social media.

8. Financial considerations

- 8.1 No financial implications have been identified

9. Legal considerations

- 9.1 There are no specific legal considerations.

10. Equality, Environmental Impact and Public Health Considerations.

- 10.1 No equality, environmental, climate change impact or public health implications have been identified.

11. Risk management considerations

- 11.1 No risks have been identified.

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Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers: None

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