

Margaret, Hilda, Hugh and Elizabeth

St Margaret of Scotland (1046 – 1093) 16th November

Margaret was born in what is now Hungary, of Anglo-Saxon royal heritage – her father's family had been forced to flee by Norman invaders, and he married into the Hungarian ruling house. She married Malcolm 111 of Scotland in 1070 and bore him eight children, but lived to see him, and one son, killed in battle four days before her own death.

In a 14th c diagram of royal genealogy Margaret appears crowned, and icons also usually show her with a crown on her veiled head.



Margaret was renowned for her strong support of Church reform, and the foundation of monasteries, churches and hostels for pilgrims, but also for her personal prayer life and relief to the poor. While her husband was illiterate, she was a patron of writers, and mss copiers. Her own personal Gospel Lectionary – sold at auction in 1887 for six pounds - is now in the Bodleian Library. It is beautifully and richly illuminated – note the lavish use of gold leaf in the beginning of Mark.



St Hilda of Whitby (c 614 -680) 17th November

Another saint from a ruling family Hilda (Hild) was born in Yorkshire, and brought up at the court of her uncle Edwin, ruler of Northumbria. In 625 Edwin married a Christian princess from the south, who brought her chaplain, Paulinus, who had been sent by Pope Gregory to evangelize in England (see 3rd September). Edwin and all of his court including Hilda, were baptized. The Venerable Bede, writing not long after her death, records that she became a nun at 33 in a foundation established by St Aidan, with whom she worked closely. In 657 she set up a "double monastery" for both men and women at Whitby. Five Bishops were among the many religious formed there. St Hilda became famous for her wisdom and practical advice at all levels. Bede wrote "All who knew her called her mother because of her outstanding devotion and grace".



The ruins of Whitby Abbey

She was a strong advocate for learning – hence her name being used for University Colleges for women – and worked to build up libraries. She was also a patron of the earliest recorded poetry written in English by Caedmon. The combination of leadership and administrative ability with promotion of the gifts of others coincided in Hilda with a capacity for peacemaking. The churches of the north used the Irish method for determining the date of Easter. At a debate held at the Synod of Whitby in 663/4 advocates of the Roman dating system prevailed, and although Hilda had supported the Irish method she calmed conflict by accepting the change. Virtually all icons and windows of St Hilda show her holding a model of Whitby Abbey.



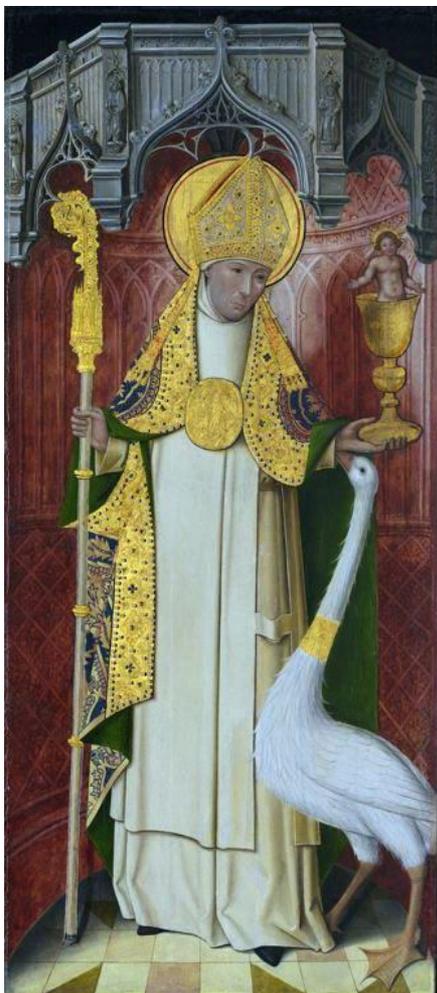
Detail from the west window of All Saints' Cowley by Sir Ninian Comper, one of many windows designed by the Scottish born Gothic Revival architect in the late 19th/early 20th c

St Hugh of Lincoln (c 1135-40 – 1200) 17th November

Although now associated with the town of Lincoln St Hugh was born in France, and accompanied his widowed father to a monastery near Grenoble as a child. From the age of 15 he was a novice, and at around 20 became the prior of an Augustinian foundation. However, attracted by the greater austerity of the Benedictine Carthusians he entered the Grande Chartreuse, renowned then, as it still is, for its exceptional commitment. In 1179 he was sent to England to become Prior of the first Carthusian foundation there, set up by Henry 11 as part of his expiation for the murder of Thomas A'Becket.

Although he frequently came in contact with the King, who visited the Charterhouse when hunting nearby, St Hugh maintained a firm independence. When Henry summoned a council to select a Bishop for the vacant see of Lincoln, and Hugh was elected, he insisted on a second, private election being held without the king's presence. As Bishop, he was diplomatic, but firm with the monarch. He excelled in pastoral care, promoted scholarship, and was particularly attentive to the needs of the sick and elderly.

A charming account is given by his chaplain, Adam of Eynsham, of his pet swan, which followed him about, ate from his hand, and displayed protective behavior towards him. Hence he is often shown, as in this altarpiece from the Charterhouse of Saint-Honoré, Thuison, near Abbeville, France (c. 1490-1500), accompanied by a white swan, which also emphasizes his devotion to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Although he commenced the rebuilding of Lincoln Cathedral he died before its completion. However the Choir area has been named in his honour.



St Elizabeth of Hungary (1207 – 1231) 19th November

The short life of Elizabeth, born a Princess of Hungary, encompassed marriage at 14, the birth of three children and widowhood at 20; her husband Ludwig's death, on his way to the Crusades, devastated her. She had been greatly attracted by the teachings of Franciscan missionaries, who had arrived in the country in 1223, and began to live as if a member of the Third Order. In 1226 the area of Thuringia ruled by her husband suffered devastating floods and plague with resulting famine.

Elizabeth had a hospital built, personally attended the sick, and sought to relieve as much suffering as possible, with her husband's support.

After his death she struggled to regain her dowry in order to devote it to the poor. She took vows equivalent to those of a nun, and followed the orders of her spiritual director Konrad, who was particularly harsh in his treatment of her.

When miraculous healings were reported after her death she was rapidly canonized in 1235.

Images of her often depict the "Miracle of the Roses". While carrying bread to the poor she was angrily stopped by her brother (in some accounts, by her husband). However when she opened her cloak masses of red and white flowers had replaced the bread.

Zurbaran's painting (c 1635-40), one of a series of female saints, emphasizes her youthfulness and openhandedness.



Mariahof Parish Church.
Anonymous 16th c

