

A detective on trail of little-known saint

IT took a fair bit of detective work for Diana Cave to track down a little-known seventh-century saint – and now she's put her investigations into print.

The 71-year-old grandmother and former college tutor on the Isle of Wight has realised a long-held ambition to write a book on Saint Cedd.

She had been 'on the trail of St Cedd' since 1994 and had travelled all over Britain seeking evidence of the life of this mysterious saint, a man of "loyalty, ability and commitment".

She said: "I was so excited to see the book – at last, there is something in print on St Cedd. I just wanted there to be a record of what I've found out."

Diana, who goes to All Saints Church in Gurnard, has lived on the Isle of Wight for over 40 years, after moving there from her native Essex when her first husband was in the navy.

She worked for 25 years as a lecturer at the Isle of Wight College and only started to pursue her own interest in religious history and theology when her two children were older.

In the 1970s, her Christian faith grew stronger and with it her long-standing interest in theology. This led her to study for a Bachelor in Theology at Southampton University.

She felt a 'leaning' to enquire more deeply into spiritual matters – not a 'calling', she says, but a profound desire to educate herself about her faith and its roots in British history.

A seed of this interest stems from her childhood in 'the open spaces' of Essex. Having seen churches dedicated to St Cedd, she had always wanted to know more about the man – who was he and what could be found out?

She felt her life-long faith growing and an enormous fascination and respect for the

WHO WAS SAINT CEDD?

Born: Unknown, but Diana Cave argues that it would be about 612

Died: 664, of the plague
What do we know about him? Seventh-century Celtic monk who, according to Bede, began his ministry on the island of Lindisfarne. He later became the bishop of the East Saxons and founded a monastery at Lastingham.

He has largely been overshadowed by his brother Chad.

Notable sites associated with him: Lindisfarne, Lastingham, Bradwell-upon-Sea, Tilbury

The book: *Saint Cedd: Seventh-century Celtic saint*, by Diana Cave, PublishNation, 2015

artistry and spirituality of the early Celtic tradition. In part, this was fuelled by some of the inspiring lectures on the subject by her Southampton tutors, as well as by her love of visiting sacred sites.

While studying theology, Diana was prompted by her local vicar, the Rev Clive Burland, to consider becoming a priest.

"He said that I should go forward for the priesthood," she

said. "I wasn't sure but wanted to find out."

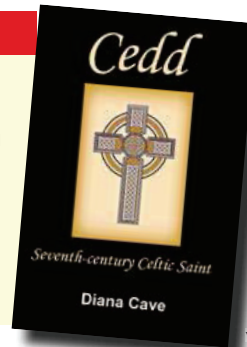
She was put forward for selection – an unusual move in the 1990s when there were far fewer female priests.

After attending a selection conference at Ely, she realised she was not suited but felt that her calling lay elsewhere – as a theological researcher and writer.

She decided to continue her studies with a Masters at Southampton University in medieval culture and specialised in the Celtic tradition and its symbols, honing her expertise in understanding early gospels and inscriptions.

In particular, she developed a love of the writings of St Bede, one of the early chroniclers of early English history – in the dark ages as it's sometimes called. If there is one thing she would urge readers of her book to do, it is to have a go at reading Bede for themselves.

Bede is one of the few chroniclers of this period of



very early Christianity, when some of the English kings were still pagan and when many of the nation's first churches were built.

The Celtic tradition had its own character, which was moulded by the

local landscape, reflecting a love of nature and the wonder of creation, yet often the monks endured great hardships when they withdrew to spend long periods in prayer.

Celtic monasteries were often in remote isolation – placed in the glorious natural settings. To visit these places, and try to understand them became her mission.

This led her back to St Cedd and a simple methodology of

century archaeology could hold some clues.

For example, she visited the ancient village of Forthingall in Perth and Kinross where there is a church whose patron saint was Cedd, according to a 19th-century author. This ancient settlement lays claim to have the oldest yew tree in the world said to be 5000 years old.

The current church dates to 1902, but recent archaeological digs have uncovered evidence of very early Christian presence here, with an ancient hand bell to be seen inside the building.

In the nearby Glen Lyon, two other ancient hand bells have been found – evidence again of a significant Christian settlement here around the time Cedd lived.

But how did Cedd travel up to Scotland and what was his mission? Diana conjectures that he was there to evangelise, and act as a diplomatic go-between between the local peoples.

my faith

Former Isle of Wight College lecturer Diana Cave spent 11 years researching the history of the little-known St Cedd. Now she's realised her ambition to have a book published about him

setting out to visit key places that had associations with him. There were no written records to consult, apart from three chapters in Bede's *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, but material evidence of seventh-

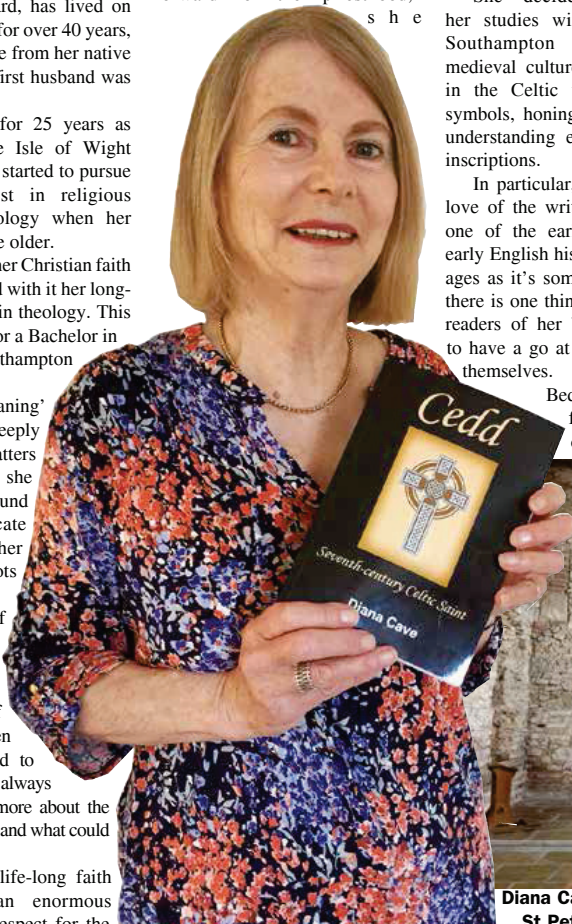
She argues that he probably was highly educated and spoke several languages, allowing him to act as a translator at a time when this was a rare skill.

She tries to imagine how Cedd would have travelled so extensively across the country – using the remains of the Roman road network, perhaps, and travelling by foot, or taking a boat around the coast.

Part of the skill of the book is the way Diana helps you imagine how things must have been for the very early saints at a time when the Roman legions had left Britain and much of the land had reverted to paganism.

We take their names and achievements for granted, but through her eyes their travels, artistry and feats are imagined as something truly remarkable, given the constraints of life at that time.

She makes the early Christian world quite vivid and reminds us of the origins of the church in this country.



Diana Cave and (above) inside St Cedd's chapel in St Peter-on-the-Wall, Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex.