

## Parish Pilgrimage to Dorchester, Oxon 28<sup>th</sup> June 2009 The feast of SS Peter and Paul

A coach full of parishioners from IHM and St Anne's enjoyed a wonderful afternoon of good company, history and prayer.

The Abbey Church of SS Peter and Paul has been a centre of Christianity for nearly 1400 years. In 634, Pope Honorius sent Birinus to convert the pagan people of Mercia. Before Birinus reached Mercia, he encountered the pagan Saxons in the Thames Valley and, finding them in need of Christian teaching, decided to stay there. Here he met King Cynegils of Wessex and later baptised him. This was the beginning of Christianity in the royal house of Wessex which produced King Alfred the Great and from which today's Royal Family traces its descent. Birinus was given the old Roman town of Dorcic, now Dorchester-on-Thames, on which to build a cathedral. He became the first Bishop of Wessex and his shrine in Dorchester became a great place of pilgrimage.

The bishopric moved to Lincoln and the building became a parish church but in 1140 it was re-founded as an abbey of Augustinian Canons.

We left Great Missenden and Wendover after Mass and when we arrived in Dorchester ate lunch. Afterwards, we met our guide to the Abbey who gave an introductory talk in the beautifully restored timber-framed guest house. She then took us on a tour of the Abbey. Later there was time to explore on our own and have a cup of tea or visit the small museum and book shop. Evening prayer was led by Canon Timothy Russ in the peaceful choir of the Abbey. We sang *Salve Regina* which must have echoed round the medieval stones so often in previous centuries.

Thanks to Keyna for organising the pilgrimage so well.  
Photographs by Ann Crisp



*A glass roundel 1225-50 showing St Birinus between an archbishop and a man in prayer*



*Cast in about 1170, this is one of the best preserved lead fonts in England and the only one belonging to a monastic church to have survived the reformation*



*The great east window and sanctuary c1340*

*Gathering for evening prayer in the abbey choir*

