**Briefing sheet for St Oswald – LP 25**

616AD – King Aethelfrith, - King of Bernicia, who also became King of Deira, making him the first ruler of both kingdoms that would later form Northumbria. Killed by his brother in law, Edwin. So his Queen, Acha took her children away to seek sanctuary in Dal Riata (West Scotland / Northern Ireland). She sent her boys to “School” in Iona, where they were educated by the Monks.

They were refugees and so faced tough choices. At some point, these exiled young people decided to become Christian, following the faith of their hosts. These personal conversions to the Christian faith had immense consequences for the future.

633 AD - News arrived from North-East England: British warlords were attacking Saxon settlements in the North-East, probably aimed at driving the invaders and settlers back into the sea. Eanfrith (the eldest brother) returned in 633AD to seek a peace settlement with Prince Cadwallon of the British and Welsh- and was quickly murdered. His brother Oswald remained in Dal Riata, serving the King and gaining a warrior’s reputation (‘Whiteblade’).

634 AD- Oswald assembled his own warband, who sailed across the Irish Sea to land in Carlisle. From there he marched East along Hadrian’s Wall, to encounter a massive British and Welsh force waiting in ambush at Heavenfield, near Hexham. Cadwallon had heard they were coming!

That night, Oswald had some kind of vision, and afterwards brought his warband together to kneel before an improvised wooden cross staked in the ground. He prayed to Jesus Christ for victory, then at first light, led a surprise attack on the larger force. After a long day’s battle, Prince Cadwallon was dead, and the victorious Oswald could now return to Bamburgh and establish a new Saxon Christian kingdom from 634AD. He was 30 years old. Ascribing his victory to God’s help, he requested that the monks on Iona send him someone to teach this new faith (and everything that came with it) to his own people.

The first teacher, Corman, came and tried his best but admitted defeat, claiming these Saxons had skulls ‘too thick for learning’. His replacement, Aidan, took a different approach, making his base not at Bamburgh castle, but on Lindisfarne island and with Oswald’s help went on to create a whole new network of Christian communities across the North-East and beyond. The king (who was bi-lingual) sometimes served as Aidan’s interpreter when he was preaching.

Oswald was also noted for his generosity to the poor (dubbed ‘The Openhanded’). He died in battle a few years later, but had already provided a seed-bed for the Christian Gospel in the North-East.

For interest - His sister Ebba refused to enter the political marriage-market, choosing a religious life and established new Christian communities in Coldingham, Beadnell and elsewhere. His brother, Oswy became king a few years after, winning battles like his brother and eventually chairing the Synod of Whitby which decided who controlled all these burgeoning Christian communities.