

## ST CEDD 1350@TILABURG



26<sup>th</sup> October 2014 marked the 1350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of St Cedd and it was a day of celebration of this unique missionary at the Church founded by the saintly Bishop Cedd, St Catherine's East Tilbury. Bede in his famous 731AD *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, recorded Cedd coming up the Thames and founding the church and monastery at Tilaburg (East Tilbury) most probably in 654AD.

Tilaburg had been the lowest crossing point of the Thames since Bronze Age times, and most probably the Thames was then shallow enough at low tide for there to be a ford linking Essex and Kent. In Emperor Claudius' time, in 43AD, the Roman General Plautius and his legionaries marched south along the Roman road from Chelmsford and Billericay to East Tilbury and on to Kent across the ford. As the Thames river levels rose, the crossing was by ferry and by 1293 it was run by the Prioress of Higham in Kent and on the pilgrimage route to Thomas a Becket's shrine in Canterbury. This pilgrim route was still in use until at least the mid 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

In Cedd's day, as this Thames crossing was either still a ford or a shallow ferry route, it meant that the crossing at Tilaburg was the limit of navigation by sea going ships up the Thames. So Bishop Cedd and his companions would have left the boat that had brought them from Lindisfarne and began their mission in Essex at Tilaburg where they had landed and established what Bede called "a community of the servants of Christ" here under the patronage of the newly baptised, Anglo Saxon King Sigbert.

What made Cedd unique as a missionary, and what St Catherine's East Tilbury is specially celebrating, is not that Cedd was a pioneer missionary going to communities that had never heard the Gospel. The East Saxons *had* been Christians but the imported and imposed Christianity of the Roman missionaries and bishops like Augustine and Mellitus had just not stuck in this area at least. Firstly, and important for the Church today, Cedd showed the Christian Faith could be re-ignited where it had become, at best, dying embers.

But secondly, St Cedd's gift came from his Celtic heritage which earthed the Christian faith in the life and experiences of the people he preached to. Those who are familiar with the history of mission will recognised this same pattern in other eras and mission areas, most distinctively in our time perhaps by Vincent Donovan in his "Epistle from the Masai - Christianity Rediscovered". This time, the Gospel brought by Cedd took root and Bede celebrates how Cedd's "the Gospel of eternal life made daily headway throughout the province".