

## History of Iona

Scottish Christianity developed differently to Christianity in England. Whereas Christianity was brought over from Rome by Roman soldiers stationed in England during the period of Roman occupation (43 CE- 410 CE), it was brought to Scotland from Ireland by various monks, who later became saints. English Christianity was thus Roman and Scottish Christianity was Celtic, or Irish. There were many religions in Britain when Christianity was introduced, including British pagan traditions, Nordic beliefs and other cults brought by the Romans, such as Mithraism.

A major distinction between Roman and Celtic Christianity was the dating of Easter. The Celtic church followed an Eastern tradition of dating Easter based on the dates of the Jewish Passover. The Last Supper was Jesus and his followers' Passover feast. The Roman church declared their own date for Easter every year without reference to Passover. Other differences in the Celtic and Roman churches are of culture and presentation.

According to legend, the Irish monk Columba left Ireland and arrived on the Island of Iona in 563 CE. Columba and 12 companions founded a monastery there. It was successful and very influential, earning many converts to Christianity from the Picts, the tribal group in present-day Scotland, and the Anglo-Saxons in present-day Northumbria. Smaller churches founded in these regions centered on the monastery at Iona, which grew to be one of the most significant monastic systems in Britain and Ireland.

Much art and literature was produced in Iona's heyday- the 6<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries, notably the stone -carved crosses, possibly the first Celtic crosses. The Book of Kells was produced in a Columba monastery, likely to be the monastery at Iona. This is an illuminated Gospel of great beauty and historical significance.

Viking raids began in 794 CE and its treasures stolen repeatedly. By 849 CE the monastery was abandoned. However Iona is identified as one of the birthplaces of Scottish Christianity. Scotland fought to retain Iona from Norse control. From the 9<sup>th</sup> Century many Scottish kings were buried on the island. A convent for Benedictine nuns, Iona Abbey, was established in 1203.

Iona Abbey is now an ecumenical church. It hosts the Iona Community, made up of Christians from many traditions, and remains of great historical and spiritual interest to visitors and pilgrims.