

Missing History

Some minor events in the past that have had disproportionate effects on the present.

The Trouble with Easter

The Last Supper was a Passover seder.

Passover is fixed in the Jewish, luni-solar calendar on the 14th day of the month of Nisan.

Easter must fall on a Sunday and must not precede Passover.

The Christian calendar is solar which complicates the task of fixing the date of Easter in it.

In 325, the First Council of Nicea selected a formula and demanded that it be adopted universally.

In 525, Dionysius Exiguus (Dennis the Little, who was the first

Latin writer to use the concept of zero and to use the term 'Anno Domini') devised another formula that was adopted by Pope John 1.



The Roman Papacy based its authority on its establishment by St Peter but there was another body of Christian doctrine stemming from St John the Evangelist. This Johannine Church, Gnostic in flavour, was brought to Celtic Britain well before St Patrick's mission in 432, possibly in the second century by Coptic Christians known as Culdees (or 'certain strangers'), and had developed its own Easter formula, known as the *insular latercus*.

The rest of Britain was Anglo-Saxon and pagan until 595, when Pope Gregory the Great dispatched St Augustine to Christianize King Aethelbeht of Kent, who had married Bertha, Christian daughter of King Charibert I of Paris.

In 597, Aethelbeht converted, mass baptisms were held and St Augustine was appointed first Archbishop of

Canterbury. Missionaries were dispersed throughout the land but were resisted by the Celtic Bishops.

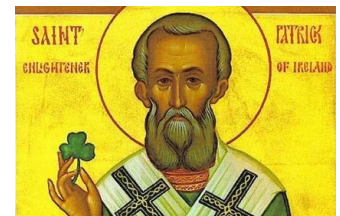


In 633, the Kingdom of Northumbria was ruled by Oswald who followed the traditions of the Celtic Church because he had been exiled as a young man to St Columba's monastery on Iona.

In 642, Oswald's brother, Oswy, married Eanflæd, daughter of King Eorcenberht of Kent and they ruled Berenicia together. Their courts observed Easter on different dates and this became intolerable for many reasons, not least being the injunction to abstain from sexual activity during Lent.

So in 664, King Oswy convened the Synod of Whitby to resolve this matter (and other disputed issues, such as the shape of monks' tonsure). The Synod ruled in favour of Rome and effectively doomed the Celtic Church to oblivion, where it rested for 1000 years.

When the Protestants broke with Rome in the 16th century Reformation, they considered the Celtic churches, and even St Patrick himself, to have been early examples of Protestantism, free of the errors of the 'Romish' Church.



In 1688, the Glorious Revolution replaced the Roman Catholic King of England, James II, by the Protestant William of Orange,

In 1690, James' attempt to regain the crown ended in Ireland at the Battle of the Boyne, and the Orange Order, founded shortly afterwards by working class Ulster Presbyterians, sought to guarantee that the Protestant succession would never again be challenged by Rome.

The rise of Irish nationalism in the predominantly Catholic south erupted into rebellion against British rule in Easter 1916.

And the Troubles that blighted Irish life for most of the 20th century came to an end, officially at least, with the agreement signed on Good Friday 1998.

And all because, one Easter long ago, the ruler of a minor kingdom on the fringes of civilisation couldn't get his leg over.