

COLOPHON FROM THE LINDISFARNE GOSPELS

Eadfrith, Bishop of the Lindisfarne Church, originally wrote this book, for God and for Saint Cuthbert and — jointly — for all the saints whose relics are in the Island. And Æthelwald, Bishop of the Lindisfarne islanders, impressed it on the outside and covered it — as he well knew how to do. And Billfrith, the anchorite, forged the ornaments which are on it on the outside and adorned it with gold and with gems and also with gilded-over silver — pure metal. And Aldred, unworthy and most miserable priest, glossed it in English between the lines with the help of God and Saint Cuthbert.

This colophon, placed in the back of the book, is in the hand of Aldred, the priest who added an Anglo-Saxon gloss between the lines of the Latin text, probably about 950-970. He presents the traditional authorship of the volume. Written (and, presumably, illustrated) by Eadfrith, the book was then bound in boards covered with tooled leather by Æthelwald, then decorated on the outside with a cover of precious metals and gems, the work of Billfrith. Eadfrith was bishop of Lindisfarne from 698 until his death in 721. Scholars assume that he must have been head of the Lindisfarne scriptorium prior to becoming bishop, and also that his episcopal duties would have prevented him from carrying out so ambitious a project as this manuscript. Therefore a date of about 696-698 — associated with the increasing cult of Saint Cuthbert, and with the exhumation of his body in 698, recounted by Bede — seems likely. Æthelwald was Eadfrith's successor as bishop of Lindisfarne (721-740). However, the book must have been bound right from the start; otherwise it would have been useless. So Æthelwald must have bound it long before he became bishop. On the other hand, the precious cover by Billfrith (long since disappeared) could well have been made later on in the 8th century.

Cuthbert  
Eadfrith  
Aldred