

**St Hilda of Whitby: A Cantata** (2018) EP 73178

Text: Wendy Cope

SATB choir, with soloists (S and B) and chamber ensemble or keyboard.

**Ensemble:**

Oboe

Bassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Violin

Violin

Viola

Cello

Duration : 25'.

Programme note:

The Cantata was commissioned by the Association of Senior Members of St Hilda's College, Oxford, in celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the College's foundation. It was written for first performance by the College choir, soloists and instrumentalists, conductor Jonathan Williams, on February 18<sup>th</sup> 2018.

St Hilda (c.614-680) was a learned woman of the seventh century; what little we know of her comes from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. In Wendy Cope's poetic text, the narrative is carried by the choir, by Hilda and by people in her life.

The cantata begins with the choir singing Hilda's praises and is followed by the dream of her mother, Breguswith, which foretells Hilda's future. The choir continues: Hilda is chosen to be Abbess of Whitby, and Hilda herself sings of her mission, enjoining study and good works as well as contemplation. A lively feasting chorus leads to the herdsman Caedmon; too shy to sing at the feast, he has a vision enabling him to sing the praises of God and creation. Hilda takes him into the monastery; the chorus, singing a round, suggest time passing as he studies there till the end of his life.

Kings and bishops seek her advice, and Hilda prays that God will help her be a peacemaker. Finally, a nun, Begu, dreams of Hilda's soul ascending to heaven; the news comes of her death. The cantata finishes with the chorus singing Hilda's praises.

In composing the cantata I thought how remarkable Hilda must have been. Well educated, energetic, commanding the respect of the most eminent men of her time – yet also greatly loved. In Bede's words 'All who knew her called her mother'.

NL