

Lindisfarne Landscapes



The retreat will focus on allowing God to speak to us through the landscape, wildlife and artefacts of the island. There will be guided walks each day, looking at the bird life, geology, flowers, shorelines, beaches, sea and clouds, as well as the well-known attractions such as the castle, priory, village and harbour.

We will be using our walks to provide inspiration for **artwork** for those interested. Pastels and paper, and possibly some textiles, will be provided, but if you prefer to work in a different medium you will need to bring the necessary equipment and materials with you. Experienced artists and complete beginners are both welcome. There will be plenty of guidance available, especially for those with little experience.

Anyone **not** wanting to paint, might want to express their ideas in prose or poetry, or just use the time for rest, birdwatching, reading or visiting the island attractions – you are still welcome! The island has an impressive range of bird-life, especially during the autumn and spring migrations, and wild flowers, which should prove very attractive to those interested in birdwatching or botany.

The retreat will be led by **Paul Swinhoe** and **Maureen Simpson**. Paul has been visiting the island regularly for over 50 years and hosting retreats there since 2003. He is a bird watcher, artist, member of the Community of Aidan and Hilda and the Secular Order of the Discalced (Teresian) Carmel. Before retirement, he taught Earth Sciences and later Computing, for many years in the further education sector. Maureen is a Methodist Local Preacher, Prayer Guide, Spiritual Director, Group Coordinator for the Community of Aidan and Hilda, retired teacher, trained in Environmental Studies, and artist. Both your leaders have experience in spiritual accompaniment and will be available on request, when a time and place will be found.

Although the island is relatively flat and the paths good, there are places where stout shoes or walking boots are advisable. The walks vary between a few hundred yards and four miles, but there are cut-off points on longer walks where you can return to the village if you are finding it difficult. Our pace of walking is always slow with many stops! For those struggling to walk far, the village and its surroundings provide plenty of inspiration for art work – you will be well catered for.

Depending on the time of year, the weather, the tides, and the wishes of the group we *may* also make a visit to a site on the mainland such as Bamburgh, Seahouses, the Farne Islands.

During the evening there will be an opportunity to prayerfully meditate and reflect on the experiences of the day. You will also be welcome to join in the Community's prayer services and those in the island churches.

All activities are optional.

Finally, **a note on the weather**. Lindisfarne is generally drier and brighter than the mainland while the wind is blowing from the west, which is most of the time. *However*, it can be very windy, and you need to make sure you have the necessary clothing to stay warm and dry out of doors. During the spring and early summer sea-fog may also be problematic but it can create some very atmospheric views, and an excellent challenge for water-colourists!

Painting

Media and Materials

Paul will provide basic instructions on the use of pastels, sets of which, along with suitable paper, will be provided. Maureen will be available if you want to work using fabrics and textiles. If you want to work in another medium, you will need to bring along your own materials. Your leaders have experience in watercolours, acrylics, oils and textiles, and will be able to offer advice in all these areas, but neither of them would claim to be experts, despite decades of experience!

Subject Matter

The retreat title refers to *Landscapes*, but you should feel free to select anything which you feel has *meaning* for you. For some, this may well mean close-up studies of objects that have caught the eye, the fishing boats, lobster pots and markers, mooring rings and so forth. Abstraction is also fine.

Places to Paint

The Open Gate is the oldest continuously inhabited property on the island. Its walls are thick and the windows relatively small, but there is space in the dining room for several people to do *small* paintings. There is no real space in the building to erect a full-scale artist's easel. However, there is plenty of space in the courtyard, which is well protected from the wind, and something of a sun-trap at times. Beyond that, we will also have space inside two other properties on the island, and of course, if you are hardy and don't mind onlookers, *en-plein-air* is an obvious option.

While you are painting

Painting is by its very nature a meditative act, but might also ask yourself a few questions about your choice of subject, style, etc. What spoke to you particularly in the subject? Why were you drawn to it? Allow your thoughts to wander. If you are comfortable with it, have a conversation with God about it; imagine that Jesus is standing right next to you while you paint, ready to listen – not to tell you about the mistakes you might be making!

Daily Routine

The normal routine is as follows, but you can choose which things you want to take part in.

- 0730: Morning Prayer at Saint Mary's
- 0800: Holy Communion at Saint Mary's
- 0840: Breakfast
- 0945: Morning Activity
- 1200: Community Midday Prayer – Prayer Room, Lindisfarne Retreat, Mary Gate
- 1230: Lunch
- 1345: Afternoon Activity
- 1700: Evening prayer at Saint Mary's
- 1815: Dinner
- 1930: Evening Activity – usually a short talk and a period of reflection on the day
- 2100: Evening or Night Prayer of the Community - Prayer Room, Lindisfarne Retreat, Mary Gate

On some days, when we have longer activities, e.g. walking around the island or visiting the Farnes, we might not be back in the village for Midday Prayers, and we may be taking a packed lunch with us.

For those who want to spend a quiet morning not committed to a particular activity, there are also brief morning prayer services at 10:00 in the Cuthbert Centre (United Reform) and at the same time in Saint Aidan's Catholic Church. When there is a priest present on the island Mass is said, otherwise it is likely to be Morning Prayer from the Northumbria Community.

Evening Sessions

These will consist of a series of illustrated talks with periods of reflection and meditation. The talks *may* include:

- The history of Northumbria at the time of the Island Saints
- The lives of Aidan, Oswald and Cuthbert
- Art and Prayer
- Finding spiritual meaning in nature
- Approaches to Meditation and Contemplation
- Plus others, which are still to be written!

A Plan for the Week

We often swap things around because of the tides and the weather!

Monday

The plan for Monday is simple:

1. Once everyone has arrived, we will have a short meeting of welcome where we offer a prayer of thanks for safe arrivals and for the success of the retreat, placing leaders and retreatants in God's hands, accompanied, of course, by tea or coffee and cakes.
2. There will be a brief introduction to the retreat and a discussion of our *flexible* plan for the week, depending on weather, tides and the abilities and disabilities of all present. We will be explaining the *optional* nature of the activities on offer, and the possibility of doing different things.
3. While we are sat around the coffee table, everyone will be invited to introduce themselves, very briefly stating their name and where they have come from, and anything else they feel would be helpful for others in the group to know; a *getting to know each other* session.
4. Assuming the weather is not dreadful, there will follow a short familiarisation tour of the village, pointing out:
 - The main attractions – priory, churches, castle, visitor centres, etc.
 - The Heugh, Slakes, harbour, the Kyloe and Cheviot Hills
 - Scenes and features that may provide some inspiration for painting.
5. Dinner at 18:15
6. First Session: Painting, Prayer and Meditation – a short illustrated talk
7. Evening Prayer



Day 2 – Tuesday

Morning

We will walk from the Open Gate to Cuthbert's Beach, talking about the natural history of this part of the island, looking at the:

- Geology
- Landscape
- Clouds
- Birds
- Archaeology

We will have a brief look at the lifeboat museum (free entry) and will look at the rocks in the area. Explanations will be provided of the geological history of the island, but we will always have one eye out for the seals and birds.

We may visit **Cuthbert's Island** if the tide is low enough, but we will definitely see the Heugh (a sharp rocky ridge), and the harbour. Saint Cuthbert's Island is the site of Cuthbert's original retreat from the monastery, before he decided to retreat even further onto Inner Farne.

If you have binoculars do bring them. Paul may have a spare pair and he will also be bringing a telescope and tripod, so we can see the seals and the birds. He is an experienced birdwatcher and makes regular contributions to the British Trust for Ornithology database.

Depending on the weather and the state of the tide, views back to the mainland can be stunning, particularly the *skyscapes*. These are often at their best near sunset, but much depends on the weather!

The rocks at the foot of the Heugh contain lots of fossils and the colours and patterns in the rock forming the Heugh are very attractive.

Wading birds pick their way along the shoreline, while Eider ducks and Cormorants dive in the waters further out. Because of its position on the NE Coast, Lindisfarne often attracts migrant birds, some of which turn out to be major rarities. At high water hundreds of waters and ducks roost on Cuthbert's Island.

The harbour and the priory provide further interest, the colours changing markedly with the weather and the time of day.

Afternoon

Painting



Day 2 - Wednesday

Morning running into the Afternoon

The day will start with a longer walk, taking in the harbour, the castle, Gertrude Jekyll's Garden, the eastern side of the island, including the Lough, bird hide, Emmanuel Head, Sandham Bay and returning down the Straight Lonnen into the village.

This walk is conducted at a **slow pace** with many stops to allow you to look at the scenery, take some photographs and watch the birds. For those who do not want or feel able to complete the whole walk, there is an **easy short-cut back to the village** along the Crooked Lonnen, which has good views back over the castle and surrounding fields.

The paths are fairly level and there are no steep climbs, but on the longer walk there are areas where you will need to walk on shingle and sand. We will be taking a **packed lunch** with us.

The castle, the lime kilns, the remains of the old gantry and views across the harbour all make ideal subjects for landscapes, but there are many smaller features which lend themselves to a more detailed close-up study.

We usually manage to accumulate a total of 40 or more bird species on the walk. Eider are common throughout the year, as are the usual gulls, cormorants and gannets, which come very close at high tide at Emmanuel Head. In the late spring and summer Sandwich and Little Terns are quite common, and in the autumn Red Throated Diver is quite frequent, as are Light Bellied Brent Geese. In Sandham Bay and in the Harbour a whole range of waders poke their bills into the sand or scuttle along the shore picking up invertebrates. Red Breasted Merganser are common, and on the Lough in summer reed and sedge warblers are normally present along with a range of ducks and waterfowl.

Wild flowers are common in the dunes with Vipers Bugloss, orchids, Marsh Helleborines and Grass of Parnassus all common at the right time of year.

Once north of the Castle, the views are extensive and skylscapes, dunes, cliffs, shorelines and breaking waves make good subjects for painting. There are also some good rocky outcrops at Nessend. The sweep of Sandham bay is also an impressive sight, and we are often the only people on the beach!

Mid Afternoon

We will have time for tea or coffee and cakes and the rest of the time will be available for painting



Thursday

Morning

In the spring or early summer, we usually visit the dune slacks in the **Snook**, where wild flowers abound. Orchids and Marsh Helleborines are common, as is Marsh Pennywort and Grass of Parnassus. We will also pass the Snook House and at associated cottages, which make good subjects for painting.

Before we look at the flowers, we pay a short visit to the North Shore where we look at the plants which colonise the tideline and help to form the dunes.

Skylarks and Meadow Pipits are the most common birds in the dunes, but Short Eared Owls often occur in the winter half of the year and sometimes stay on until May

There is little walking involved as we will drive up to the Snook.

Afternoon

There will be a further opportunity to paint, or if you chose to miss out the morning walk, then there will be another in the afternoon walking from the village to the *Old Lime Kilns* and then through the dunes to the North Shore, passing through dune slacks filled with orchids, helleborines and Grass of Parnassus in the summer.

Assuming we arrive on the north shore near high water, large numbers of waders collect close to the fringe of the dunes, especially sanderlings, dunlin and turnstone in the winter half of the year. In the summer, Little Terns and Ring Plovers breed in this area. Rock pipits and oystercatchers are commonplace and over the sea Eider, Scoter, Red Throated Divers, Gannets, Sandwich and Arctic Terns all often put in an appearance.

We continue our walk to the remains of the medieval village of **Greenshiel** which is *hidden* in the dunes and is often only found with the help of a guide – fortunately, you will have one!

Beyond the village we pass through the dunes overlooking Coves Haven, a sandy bay with cliffs and caves on its eastern side, providing some good scenes for landscape painting. After reaching Nessend Quarries, we turn south down the Straight Lonnen (a bridle track) and return to the Open Gate.

In autumn, the hedges along the Lonnen, offer a temporary home to many migrant birds. In October, Yellow Browed Warblers are often present, with Redwings, Fieldfare and Blackbirds in the trees. Barn owl is often seen near the farms close to the village.

Friday – Breakfast and departures!



Farne Islands and Bamburgh

We *may* run this trip if there is enough demand and if the weather and tide conditions are in our favour. The trip needs to be done over high tide, so that we can get off Lindisfarne before the tide and back onto it afterwards.



We will be taking the boat from at Sea Houses and depending on what is available we will be doing a tour *around* the islands looking at the birds and seals, and possibly *landing* on Inner Farne. Even where landing is not possible the boats get very close into the cliffs of Staple Island and good photographs of the birds can be taken.



Sea Houses harbour itself, with its wide variety of fishing craft, piers and docks, provides some good subjects for painting. The boats are all very stable and the captains have years of experience so very few people suffer any sign of sea sickness. When the boat stops, we are usually in calm waters in the lee of cliffs.



The Farnes need little introduction holding the biggest breeding colony of Puffins in the country, up to 48,000 pairs in some years. Similar numbers of Guillemot are present and there are colonies of Arctic Tern, Sandwich Tern, Razorbill and Eider along with smaller numbers of other birds. If we are landing on Inner Farne it is essential that you take a mac and a hat, preferably ones that easily washable as the Arctic Terns use every strategy to drive you away from their nests! If you have a National Trust membership card do take it with you – otherwise you will have to pay to land on Inner Farne.



Over the sea Gannets and gulls fly close over the boat while Puffins are often seen surfacing with their bills full of sand eels.

We will also be visiting **Longstone Island** where **Grace Darling** and her father sailed to save those shipwrecked on an adjacent island during a storm.



We will also be visiting **Bamburgh**, possibly going onto the beach to see the classic view of the castle, and also going into the church to see the memorial to Saint Aidan, who died at this locality. The grave of Grace Darling is in the churchyard and there is a museum housing the lifeboat that was used in the rescue on the opposite side of the road.



How long we stay in Bamburgh is very much determined by the opening and closing of the causeway across to Lindisfarne. Occasionally, we have visited the castle itself and the Copper Kettle, a popular café situated close to the village green.

There will be little time for painting on this day!

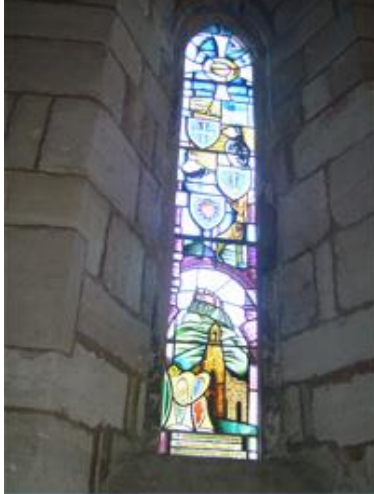


Other Activities

We are also several other activities that we might offer depending on the circumstances

Walking the Pilgrim Posts

This traditional walk is a definite option for those are fit enough and don't mind wading through a little mud! Thankfully, most of the route is good sand.



Beachcombing

Collect shells, stones, driftwood, etc. from the beach and bring them back to the Open Gate, where you might arrange them for a painting exercise.

Places of Interest

There are a number of tourist attractions on the island which are well worth visiting if you have not already done so:

- **The Priory** and its Visitor Centre
- **Lindisfarne Castle** – recently refurbished, but without its normal furniture until 2020 when the plaster fully dries!
- **The Scriptorium** – a shop run by Mary Fleeson, who combines painting and calligraphy to portray the Christian message
- **The Island Visitor Centre** – just around the corner from the Open Gate, on Mary Gate – it includes a very realistic facsimile of the Lindisfarne Gospels and tells the story of the island
- **The National Trust Shop** – roughly opposite the Ship Inn on Mary Gate
- **The Window on Wild Lindisfarne** – a luxurious hide looking out over marshy fields, just beyond the village on the way to the Castle
- **Art Studio** – John Tierney – on Mary Gate
- **The Community Centre** – on Cross Gate behind the Open Gate car park – they host a number of events and exhibitions through the year
- **The Churches** – **Saint Mary's** - parts of the existing structure date back to the 7th century, several hundred years before the appearance of the Priory, it also house Fenwick Lawson's sculpture in wood, *the Journey*, of the monks carrying Cuthbert's coffin off the island after the Viking invasions; – **Saint Aidan's** – the recent refurbishment and the glass engravings are worth a look; **Saint Cuthbert's** – often hosts exhibitions.

