

Wokingham Remembers

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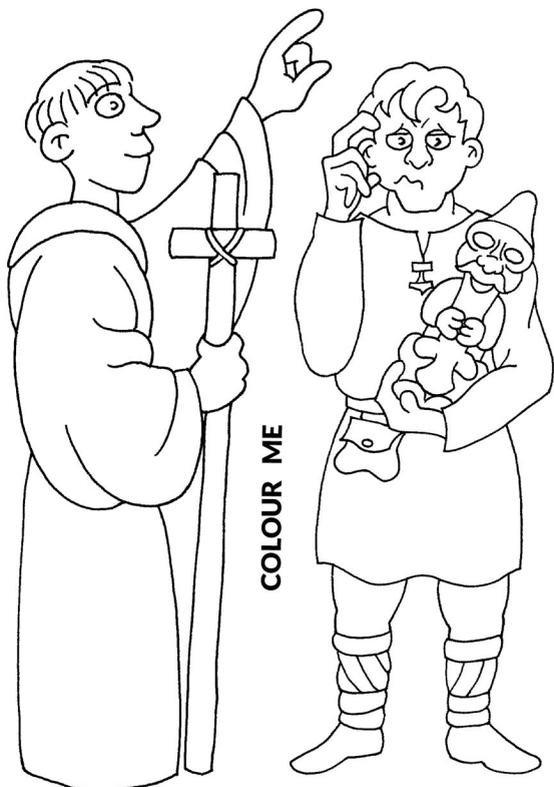
Christianity Rules! from Saxon Sonning

Although some Romans had been converted to Christianity, the incoming Anglo-Saxon were pagans worshipping many gods. So the Pope sent out saints to do something about it. To the southern English Kingdom of Wessex came St. Birinus... CHRISTIANITY HAD ARRIVED!

Join DAVID NASH FORD to find out some fun facts about this new religion.



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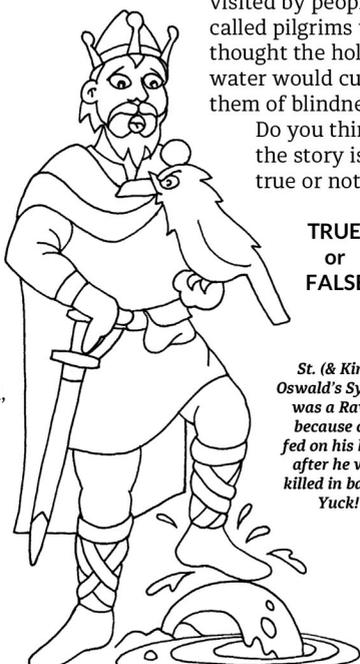
Birinus in Berkshire

St. Birinus travelled from Italy in AD 634 to see Cynegils, the King of Wessex (the area around Berkshire). He preached to the king and his people up on the Berkshire Downs (north-west of Reading). He told them about the single Christian God, Jesus & the Bible. It was not easy to persuade the King to abandon his old Saxon gods, but eventually he did. Number the suggested reasons why in the order of importance:

- * Change would increase trade with Christian Europe
- * Birinus was very persuasive
- * Worshipping just one God was much easier
- * Change could bring new alliances against enemies
- * The Church could help control his people
- * The old gods had not struck down Birinus

Legend of St. Oswald

The history books tells us that Cynegils wanted to be friends with the Christian King Oswald of Northumbria (on the Scottish border) so they could fight against the King of Mercia (Midlands) together. When Cynegils became a Christian, Oswald agreed. He even married Cynegils' daughter. A local story says that Oswald travelled down to Easthampstead Park for the wedding. On the way, he stopped at Finchampstead, needing a drink. He struck the ground with his foot & a miraculous spring of water gushed forth. We know there was definitely a holy spring there called 'Dozell's (or St. Oswald's) Well'. It was visited by people called pilgrims who thought the holy water would cure them of blindness.



Do you think the story is true or not?

TRUE or FALSE

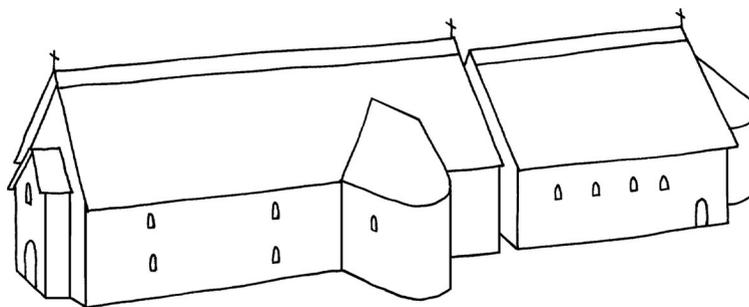
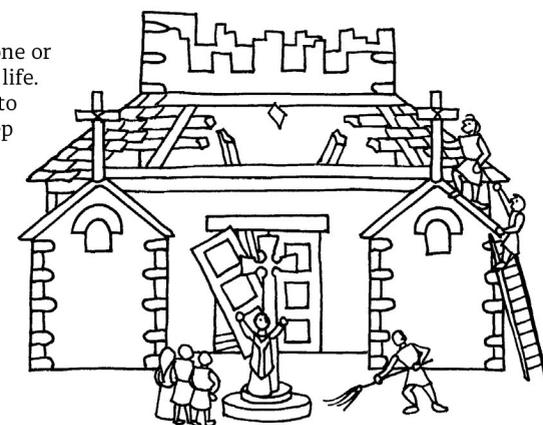
Why was Religion so important?

In Anglo-Saxon times, everyone believed that one or many gods controlled everything that went on in life. Many people still believe this. As the Saxons had to work hard just to survive, it was important to keep gods happy. Below are pictures of things they might worry about. What do you think they are?



Converting Buildings too

Birinus did not only get people to change. The Pope had told him to make old pagan holy places into Christian ones too. This might mean building a church on a Saxon 'sacred grove,' like Woden's possible holy site at Remenham; or converting an old ruinous Romano-British temple, like the one at Finchampstead. The present church is built right on top of a Roman temple site, so the first Christians may have re-used the temple itself (above right). Sonning was chosen as the place to built an important Christian Church. It had been an important Royal village since Chief Sunna lived there. It may also have been a holy site for the Celtic Goddess of the Countryside, Anu. Her name may have been changed to 'Andrew' when the church was dedicated to this saint.

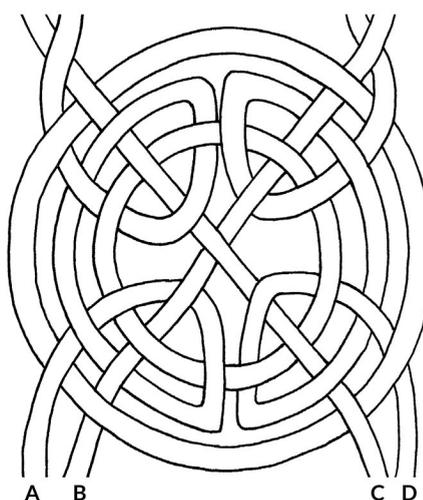


Minster Churches were often built as a series of chapels all in a row end-to-end. Sonning probably had its main Church of St. Andrew and also a Chapel of St. Sarik. Right on the roofs which you think is which.

Nutty Names

These are the names of the Bishops of Ramsbury & Sonning: Do we use any of these names today? YES / NO

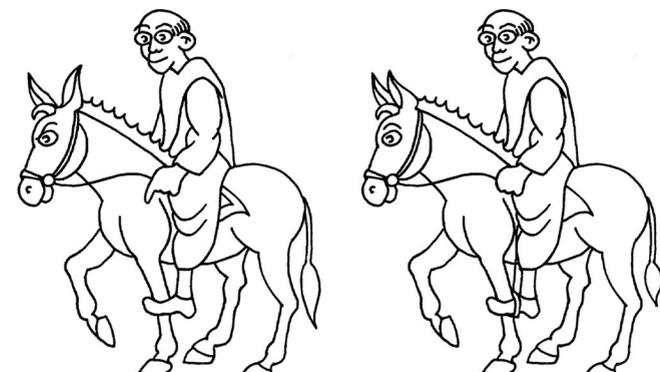
- * Athelstan
- * Odo *the Good*
- * Alfstan
- * Alfgar
- * Sigeric *the Serious*
- * Alfric
- * Britwold
- * Herman



Sonning Sculpture Maze

Above is a Saxon carving still to be found at Sonning today. Can you mark where the other ends of the four lettered strands are?

Some of the bishops had 'epithets' telling you about their character (like 'the Good'). Can you make up ones for the others?



Minster to Cathedral

Sonning Church was built as the local 'minster'. These were used as centres for preachers who went out into the countryside to tell people about God. These priests moved around a large area including Wokingham, Hurst, Ruscombe, Sindlesham, Sandhurst & Arborfield as these places had no churches of their own.

In AD 909, Sonning was even made the centre of a bishopric. That meant that a bishop lived there. He was called the Bishop of Ramsbury & Sonning. He was in charge of all the priests & land belonging to the church in Berkshire & Wiltshire. The church became a cathedral & Sonning was a very important place for nearly 200 years - until the Bishop finally moved away.

St. Sarik

It was probably Bishop Sigeric the Serious who gave Sonning a bone from the body of St. Sarik for pilgrims to worship. Here are two riding into the village. Can you spot the 6 differences?

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