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On this day: St. Ninian

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NCR Today

On this day we celebrate the feast of St. Ninian (c. 360-c. 432), considered "the earliest Christian missionary to spread the Gospel message on Scottish soil."

A year ago, on St. Ninian's Day, Pope Benedict XVI visited Scotland, "where he was first welcomed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, members of the Royal Family, and Scottish dignitaries. The Pontiff was then welcomed by the people of Scotland with a grand 'St. Ninian's Day Parade' through the streets of Edinburgh. The parade featured pipers and drummers from across Scotland and further abroad, and over 1000 pupils from some 14 schools in Scotland named after St. Ninian. But none could take the spotlight off of Benedict XVI, waving at the gathered crowd from his popemobile, wearing the St. Ninian tartan draped across his shoulders."

Click here to see the Pope wearing the St. Ninian tartan, newly created for the visit, commissioned by the bishops.

"Whithorn Priory was one of the most holy places in Scotland having been founded by St Ninian in 397 AD; the first Christian settlement north of Hadrians wall. St Ninian was born in Galloway, and as a young man visited Rome. He is reputed to have been friends with St Martin of Tours.

"The first church, the centre of St Ninian's mission to the Picts and Britons, was whitewashed and known as 'Candida Casa', The White House, which became translated by the local Picts as 'Hwit Aerne', hence Whithorn. During recent archaeological excavations remnants of white plastered wall remains were found possibly indicating this first church. Saint Ninian had chosen to found the church on top of a rolling plain a few miles inland from one of the major trading ports in Scotland (at that time): the Isle of Whithorn.

"The present day picturesque town of Whithorn's main street echoes the old high street which was built when it was a major site of pilgrimage in medieval times. Mary Queen of Scots visited in 1563 as had her father, James V, and her grandfather, James IV who used to visit annually."

--"Whithorn Priory and St Ninian, Galloway, South West Scotland: The first Christian settlement in Scotland," About Scotland. The page includes Sketches of Archaeological History.

Click here to read the Life of St. Ninian, written by St. Aelred of Rievaulx.

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