

## Saintly venue brings history alive at Old Melrose

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**IT may be one of the most important early Christian sites in Scotland, but for many the site of Old Melrose remains an undiscovered gem.**

However, all that could be about to change with this week's opening of a new interpretation centre as part of Borders Heritage Week.

Children from primary schools in St Boswells and Newtown St Boswells were the guests of honour yesterday, as they had played an integral role in the conversion of the once-crumbling summerhouse at Old Melrose – part of Ravenswood Estate.

After a grant helped Ravenswood's owner, William Younger, rescue the stone-built summerhouse from further deterioration, the youngsters were invited to help in the creation of a series of interpretation panels telling the history of the original monastery at Old Melrose, the first spiritual home of St Cuthbert, and forerunner of nearby Melrose Abbey.

Old Melrose is the location of what was the original monastery of 'Mailros' and St Cuthbert's chapel and lies on the peninsula formed by a wide bend of the River Tweed where it cuts into Bemersyde Hill below Scott's View.

The monastery was founded by King Oswald of Northumbria in 635AD and the man who would eventually become St Aidan, the then Bishop of Lindisfarne, together with monks from Iona.

Cuthbert was accepted as a novice by Boisel, abbot of Mailros, in 651AD.

As well as the unveiling of the panels at the event at the summerhouse yesterday, Christopher Bowles, Scottish Borders Council's archaeology officer, gave a presentation followed by a walk to the restored Ravenswood summerhouse for the official unveiling.

Mr Younger admitted he had almost been forced to demolish the building, such was its perilous state.

However, a listing as historically important helped make the case to obtain funding, with 75 per cent of restoration costs coming from the Scottish Rural Development Programme.

“Part of the proposal for funding involved plans for an interpretation centre,” explained Mr Younger, whose great-grandfather, William Younger of brewing fame, bought Ravenswood in 1902.

“The panels which local schoolchildren have been involved with producing, depict the history of the site, as well as the stories of St Cuthbert and early Christianity in the Borders.”

Mr Younger says the summerhouse had originally been constructed as a bothy around 1800.

“The summerhouse had fallen into a fairly bad state – the windows were almost non-existent, while the roof had pretty much collapsed.

“So I was close to thinking it would have to be pulled down.

“But this project has been really enjoyable to have been involved with and I think the building looks great now after all the renovation work.”

The aim is for the centre to be open to the public from March until Saturday, October 6 this year, with Mr Younger having plans to next year develop a ‘monks’ trail’ around the estate, taking into account various points of historical interest.

“Outwith the March to October period, the panels will be on view in the tearoom at Old Melrose,” he told **TheSouthern**.

“Next year, we’re also looking at possibly developing things further with guided walks of the monks’ trail.

“Having three children of my own, having the youngsters from local schools involved with this project has been great fun and I think it has turned out really well.

“Hopefully, visitors will think so too.”

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