

A MONASTIC presence of 500 years ago

A fascinating insight into the Gilbertines of Ravenstonedale has just been compiled by Christopher and Mary Irwin. Ravenstonedale was the only Cumbrian settlement of the Gilbertines — the only purely English monastic order.

The booklet tells the early story of St. Gilbert's life. He was born 900 years ago in Lincolnshire. His father was a Norman knight and his mother was English. He is believed to have been deformed and unfit for a knightly career. He was therefore educated to become a clerk.

Gilbert taught morals to both boys and girls. He was ordained at the age of forty and in about 1131 he started the Gilbertine order which included both men and women.

The Gilbertine house at Ravenstonedale is believed to have been built in about 1200 and the presence of the order ended in 1540 at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries.

Excavations in the 1920s by Mr. Edward Frankland, and in 1988-89, have revealed more information on the Gilbertines. Remains of cockle, mussel and oyster shells and a large number of animal bones give clues to the monks' diet.

The booklet is an interesting glimpse into the known history of the Gilbertines. It is published by The Book House, Ravenstonedale, and is available at bookshops, price £1.50, or direct from the Book House at £1.80, including postage.