

**PATRON SAINTS IN MARCH**

**St David's Day** is celebrated in Wales on 1 March, in honour of Dewi Sant or St David, the patron saint of Wales. Little is known about him for certain. What little information we have is based on an account of his life written by Rhigyfarch towards the end of the 11th century.



According to this Latin manuscript, Dewi died in the year 589. His mother was called Non, and his father, Sant, was the son of Ceredig, King of Ceredigion. After being educated in Cardiganshire, he went on pilgrimage through south Wales and the west of England, where it is said that he founded religious centres such as Glastonbury and Croyland. He even went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where he was made archbishop.

He eventually settled at Glyn Rhosyn (St David's), in south-west Wales, where he established a very strict ascetic religious community. Many miracles have been attributed to him, the most incredible of which was performed when he was preaching at the Synod of Llanddewibrefi - he caused the ground to rise underneath him so that he could be seen and heard by all. How much truth is in this account of his life by Rhigyfarch is hard to tell. It must be considered that Rhigyfarch was the son of the Bishop of St David's, and that the Life was written as propaganda to establish Dewi's superiority and defend the bishopric from being taken over by Canterbury and the Normans.

From the 12th century onwards, Dewi's fame spread throughout South Wales and as far as Ireland and Brittany. St David's Cathedral became a popular centre of pilgrimage, particularly after Dewi was officially recognised as a Catholic saint in 1120. From this period on, he was frequently referred to in the work of medieval Welsh poets such as Iolo Goch and Lewys Glyn Cothi. In 1398, it was ordained that his feast-day was to be kept by every church in the Province of Canterbury. Though the feast of Dewi as a religious festival came to an end with the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the day of his birth became a national festival during the 18th century.

Now March 1 is celebrated by schools and cultural societies throughout Wales. It is the custom on that day to wear either a leek or a daffodil - two of our national emblems - and for young girls to wear the national costume. *Cymru am byth*.

*Reprinted from the website of the National Museums and Galleries of Wales*

**St. Patrick's** birthplace was probably Roman Britain - most likely Wales, but perhaps Scotland or France. Patrick was about sixteen years old when he was abducted and enslaved by Irish marauders, under their leader, Niall of the Nine Hostages. He worked as a shepherd on the slopes of Slemish Mountain in County Antrim. During this time he prayed to the Christian God while captive in a pagan land.

After six years an angel came to him in a dream, prompting him to escape and seek out his homeland. After travelling for more than 200 miles by foot, he was eventually given passage on a boat travelling across the Irish Sea. His first destination was Britain, but he soon settled in France.

Patrick spent twenty years of his life as a monk in Marmoutier Abbey. There he again received a celestial visitation, this time calling him to return to the land where he has been enslaved, though now with a mission as a priest and converter. Patrick was called to Rome in 432 whereupon Pope Celestine bequeathed the honour of Bishop upon him before he left on his holy mission.

Patrick and 24 of his followers arrived in Ireland in the winter of 432. In the Spring, Patrick decided to confront the high King of Tara, the most powerful King in Ireland. Patrick knew that if he had the King's support he would be free to take God's message to the people of Ireland.

Patrick and his followers were invited to Tara by the King of Laoghaire. While he was there he plucked a shamrock from the ground and tried to explain the to the druids and the King that the shamrock had three leaves just like God had three personas - The Father, The Son and the Holy Ghost. This was called the Trinity.



King Laoghaire was very impressed and chose to accept Christianity. He also gave Patrick the freedom to spread Christianity throughout Ireland.

St. Patrick is also known to have driven the snakes out of Ireland. However, the snakes were at that time a symbol of Paganism, and it was the Pagans that were driven out.

Patrick is thought to have died sometime between 463AD and 493AD. There is a dispute as to his place of burial; the site with the strongest claim seems to be Down Cathedral, where a large slab of rock on which the word Patric is inscribed protects "the grave" of St Patrick.

Veneration of Patrick gradually assumed the status of a local cult; he was not simply remembered in Saul and Downpatrick, he was worshipped. Indeed, homage to Patrick as Ireland's saint was apparent in the eighth century AD. At this time Patrick's status of national apostle was made independently of Rome; he was claimed locally as a saint before the practice of canonisation was introduced by the Vatican. The veneration in which the Irish have held St Patrick is evidenced by the salutation, still common today, "May God, Mary and Patrick bless you".

Within the Christian calendar Patrick has long been remembered with fondness. This began as early as the ninth century AD with the Feast of St Patrick's "falling asleep" - in other words his passing on 17 March. The Book of Armagh included a note directing all monasteries and churches in Ireland to honour the memory of the saint by the celebration, during three days and three nights in mid-spring.

Fables about Patrick ridding Ireland of snakes or his use of the shamrock to explain the Trinity, still endure as part of modern St Patrick's Day folklore and custom. *Erin Go Gragh*

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 Brahms: Violin Concerto; Sibelius: Symphony No 1  
 7.30 pm 20 March Trinity Church, Conduit Road, Abingdon  
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