

ST PIUS X WEEKLY REFLECTION

Saints and Place Names (4 of 6)

St David

This week we consider St Davids in Pembrokeshire. St Davids is a tiny cathedral city, really no bigger than a village.

March 1st is St. Davids Day, the National Day of Wales and has been celebrated as such since the 12th Century. Today the celebrations usually involve the singing of traditional songs followed by a [Te Bach](#), a tea with bara brith (famous Welsh fruited bread) and teisen bach (welsh cake). Young girls are encouraged to wear national costume and leeks or daffodils are worn, being the national symbols of Wales.

So, who was St. David (or Dewi Sant in Welsh)? Not too much is known about St David except from a biography written around 1090 by Rhygyfarch, son of the Bishop of St. Davids.

David was reputedly born on a cliff top near Capel Non (Non's chapel) on the South-West Wales coast during a fierce storm. Both his parents were descended from Welsh royalty. He was the son of Sandde, Prince of Powys, and Non, daughter of a chieftain of Menevia (now [St David's](#)). The site of Davids birth is marked by the ruins of a tiny ancient chapel close to a holy well and the more recent 18th century chapel dedicated to his mother Non can still be seen near St. David's Cathedral.

In medieval times it was believed that St David was the nephew of King Arthur. Legend has it that the patron saint of Ireland, [St. Patrick](#) – also said to have been born near the present-day city of St. Davids – foresaw the birth of David in approximately 520AD.

The young David grew up to be a priest, being educated at the monastery of Hen Fynyw under the tutorage of St. Paulinus. According to legend David performed several miracles during his life including restoring Paulinus' sight. It is also said that during a battle against the Saxons, David advised his soldiers to wear leeks in their hats so that they could easily be distinguished from their enemies, which is why the leek is one of the [emblems of Wales](#)!

A vegetarian who ate only bread, herbs and vegetables and who drank only water, David became known as Aquaticus or Dewi Ddyfrwr (the water drinker) in Welsh. Sometimes, as a self-imposed penance, he would stand up to his neck in a lake of cold water, reciting Scripture! It is also said that milestones during his life were marked by the appearance of springs of water.

Becoming a missionary David travelled throughout Wales and Britain and even made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he was consecrated bishop. He founded 12 monasteries including [Glastonbury](#) and one at Minevia (St. Davids) which he made his bishops seat. He was named Archbishop of Wales at the Synod of Brevi (Llandewi Brefi), Cardiganshire in 550.

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Monastery life was very strict, the brothers having to work very hard, cultivating the land and pulling the plough. Many crafts were followed – beekeeping, in particular, was very important. The monks had to keep themselves fed as well as provide food and lodging for travellers. They also looked after the poor.

St David died on 1 March 589A.D., at Minevia, allegedly over 100 years old. His remains were buried in a shrine in the 6th century cathedral which was ransacked in the 11th century by [Viking invaders](#), who plundered the site and murdered two Welsh bishops.

After his death, his influence spread far and wide, first through Britain and then by sea to [Cornwall](#) and Brittany. In 1120, Pope Callactus II canonised David as a Saint. Following this he was declared Patron Saint of Wales. Such was Davids influence that many pilgrimages were made to St. David's, and the Pope decreed that two pilgrimages made to St. Davids equalled one to Rome while three were worth one to Jerusalem. Fifty churches in South Wales alone bear his name.

It is not certain how much of the history of St. David is fact and how much is mere speculation. However, in 1996 bones were found in St. David's Cathedral which, it is claimed, could be those of Dewi himself.

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