

St Illtyd of Wales

There are some 26 churches dedicated to St Illtud in Wales.

In reality we know very little about him. The earliest 'Life' of St Illtud was written some six hundred years after his death and unfortunately is full of historical inaccuracies.

The earliest mention of St Illtud comes in a 7th century 'life' of St Samson in which the five year old Samson is brought "to the school of the famous master of the Britons, Illtud by name" who is "most accomplished in all the Scriptures and in those of philosophy of every kind, and of rhetoric, grammar and arithmetic".

This monastic school at Llantwit Major was well established by 490, and developed a reputation throughout south Wales and beyond as not only a place where children would be taught, but also as a training 'college' for priests and missionaries from which they would be sent out to Wales, Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany.

It is claimed to be the cradle of Celtic Christianity, with many churches and communities in the Celtic lands being able to trace their origins to one of the pupils of the school.

t is in the later 'Lives' of saints that we can trace the origins of the dedication to St Illtud of some of the Welsh churches. For example there is a tradition that St Illtud came to a small hermitage by the river Neath for Lenten observances, and on this site is built the present medieval church of Llantwit-juxta-Neath. The non-rectangular churchyard suggests that that was a pre-Norman church here which could have been founded by a missionary from Llanilltud Fawr.

Illtyd is one of the most revered saints of Wales, by tradition a cousin of the fabled Kin Arthur of the Britons. Reportedly a Briton, he and his wife Tyrnihild lived as members of a Glamorgan chief's army until they became hermits near the river Nadafan. Illtyd then studied with St. Dudricius and founded the great abbey of Llanilltud Fawr in Glamorgan, Wales. He was a disciple of St. Cadoc. According to one Welsh legend, Illtyd was one of the three Knights of the Holy Grail. He died in Brittany.