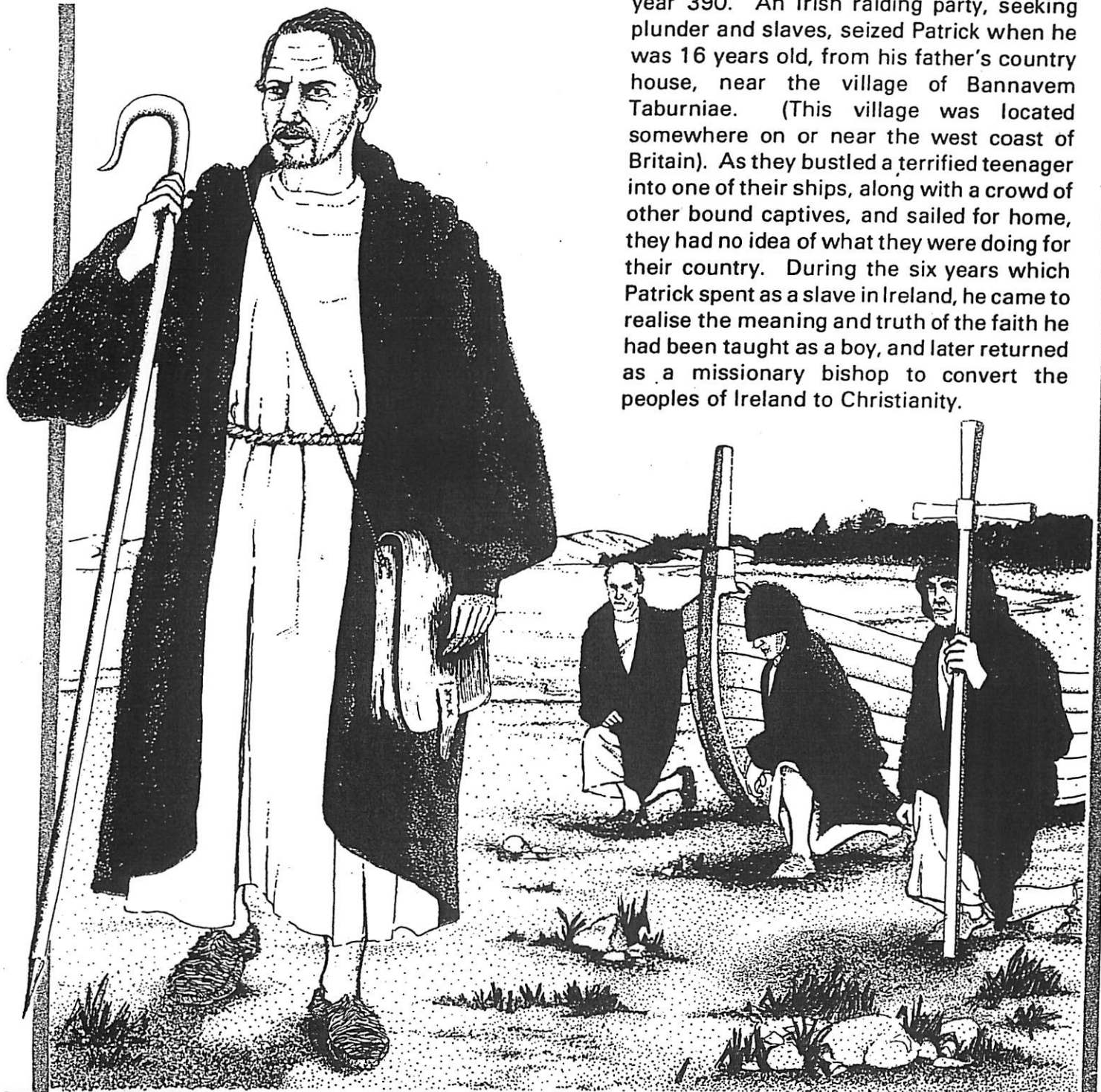


Saint Patrick and early Christianity in Downpatrick & Lecale

Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, was born into a Christian family in Britain, around the year 390. An Irish raiding party, seeking plunder and slaves, seized Patrick when he was 16 years old, from his father's country house, near the village of Bannavem Taburniae. (This village was located somewhere on or near the west coast of Britain). As they hustled a terrified teenager into one of their ships, along with a crowd of other bound captives, and sailed for home, they had no idea of what they were doing for their country. During the six years which Patrick spent as a slave in Ireland, he came to realise the meaning and truth of the faith he had been taught as a boy, and later returned as a missionary bishop to convert the peoples of Ireland to Christianity.



The landing & settlement

Place Names with Irish Translations

Clogher - *(field of oxen)*

Downpatrick - *Dun-leth-glaise*
(fort of the two halves of the chain)

Lecale - *Magh-Innis (the island*
plain)

Mouth of the Slaney - *Inver Slain*

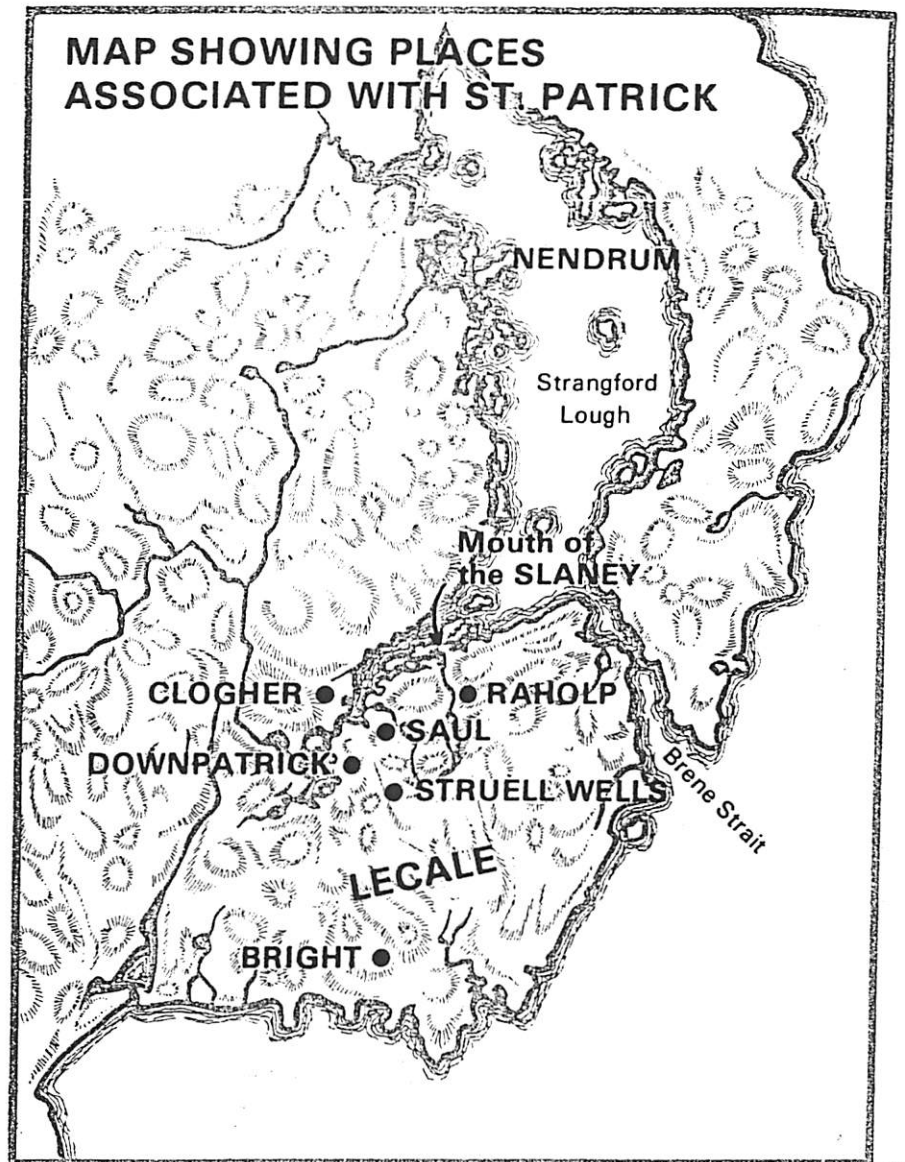
Nendrum - *Noendruim*

Saul - *Sabhall (a barn)*

Strangford Lough - *Lough Cuan*

Struell Wells - *Slan (health)*

Raholp - *Rathculpa (fort of the*
heifer)



Some time after Patrick escaped from slavery and returned to his home in Britain, he had a dream in which a messenger arrived from Ireland with many letters, one of which he handed to Patrick. A letter at this time began with the personal name of the sender, but when Patrick looked at his letter, it opened with the words 'The Voice of the Irish'. As he read the letter in his dream, it was as if he heard voices from Ireland calling to him in unison, 'we beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us'. He was so moved that he could not read further and awoke. Patrick became sure that God was in fact calling him to become a missionary to bring the news of Jesus Christ to the heathen Irish. After many years of preparation, he was at last able to answer this call. As he made his plans to return to Ireland, friends pointed out to him the danger he would be in and said 'why is this fellow walking into danger among enemies who do not know God?' But the knowledge of God's love for him in Christ had taken away any fear of returning to the land of his captivity and Patrick declared that he was ready to spend the rest of his life there, 'even to the point of death' if God would so grant.

Patrick came to Ireland as a missionary bishop, with some helpers, probably around the year 432. He may have landed first at Inver Dea in Wicklow, and at the island which bears his name Inis Patrick (Holmpatrick) off the coast of Skerries some miles north of Dublin. He sailed northward, steering the boat through the Brene Strait as the narrow entrance to Strangford Lough (Lough Cuan) was then called, and landed at the mouth of the river Slaney (Slain). Patrick and his helpers tried to hide the boat, but they had been spotted and a swineherd who thought that they might be pirates or robbers ran away and called his master, a man whose name was Dichu. Dichu was the local ruler



(Above)
A sketch of Dichu by William
Conor (by courtesy of Armagh
Diocesan Council).

(Left)
The mouth of the river Slaney.

and when he was told of the secretive landing of a group of strange men, came at once armed with a sword and set his dog at them. The story goes that Patrick chanted the prophetic words 'leave not the souls that confess to Thee, O Lord, a prey to beasts', and that the dog immediately became silent. Impressed by the appearance of Patrick, Dichu became gentle, listened to his preaching of the Christian faith, and believing in it was baptized, the first man in Ulster to have received belief and baptism through Patrick. As an act of gratitude, he gave Patrick his Barn at Saul to serve as a Church. (Saul is derived from the Irish word 'Sabhall', meaning 'Barn'). Patrick is reported to have said in response:-

'God's blessing on Dichu,
Who gave me the Barn!
May he have afterwards
A heavenly home, bright, pure, great!'

The Mission of Patrick had begun.

There were probably small groups of Christians in Ireland before Patrick came, especially in the southern areas, where there were trading contacts with the continent of Europe. Patrick's mission seems to have involved work over a wide area in north-east, central and western Ireland, and among people who as yet had no contact with Christianity.

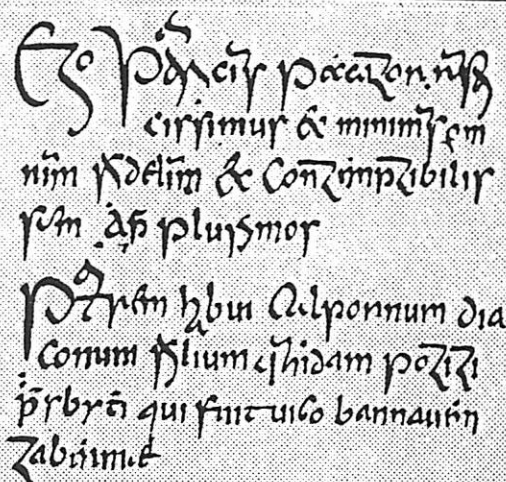
The writings of St. Patrick

We don't really know what St. Patrick looked like, but we do know what kind of man he was; for he has given us a picture of himself in his writings, which are called the Letter and the Confession.

Patrick wrote the Confession, when he was an old man, but the days when he was captured and taken to Ireland as a slave are still vividly real to him. And what a dreadful experience it must have been for a young boy, brought up in a well-to-do Roman home, used both to comfortable surroundings and the love of his family and friends, to find himself forced to do slave work in hunger and cold on an Irish hillside and among people who didn't care for him and whose language he couldn't understand. In his terrible loneliness he found that there was just one person to whom he could talk. He'd been taught about God as a child and knew the story of God's love to man in the life of Jesus; but like many another boy it didn't seem to make much difference to the way he lived. Now however all was different. He needed God and found that he could talk to Him in prayer, and grew to love Him and trust Him. And as a result he writes that 'I would say up to one hundred prayers in one day, and almost as many at night; I would even stay in the forests and on the mountain and would wake to pray before dawn in all weathers, snow, frost, rain'. When Patrick finally escaped, he didn't forget how good God had been to him, but determined to give his life totally to God's work. He began to read and study the Bible, the book that he would treasure for the rest of his life, and which he quotes again and again in his writings.

Patrick had been cruelly treated by the Irish, and it would have been understandable if he had never returned again to Ireland or even attempted to get his revenge in some way. But out of love for Christ he comes back to spend his life for those who had so wronged him. When a British ruler, called Coroticus came to Ireland with a raiding party and killed a number of Irish Christians, taking others prisoner with the intention of selling them as slaves Patrick is filled with 'grief and sorrow', and writes in great anger a letter to condemn the men who are stained with 'the blood of innocent Christians, whom I have begotten for God in countless numbers and have confirmed in Christ'.

Though he was able to do so much to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Ireland, Patrick is a humble man, who thinks of himself as an 'unlearned sinner' and wants us to know that anything good he may have done is because of God's goodness to him. Perhaps with the thought in his mind of the stone ditches of the Irish hillsides, he tells us that he was 'like a stone lying in deep mud, and He that is mighty came and in His mercy lifted me up and indeed raised me up and placed me on top of the wall'.



Ego Patricius peccator rusticissimus et
civissimus & minimissimus
nim fidelium & contemptibilissimus
patrem ap plurimos
patrem habui Calpornium dia
conum filium quondam potiti
presbyteri qui fuit vico Bannavem
Taberniae

LATIN TEXT: Ego Patricius, peccator rusticissimus et minimus omnium fidelium et contemptibilissimus apud plurimos, patrem habui Calpornium diaconum, filium quondam Potiti presbyteri, qui fuit vico Bannavem Taberniae.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: I, Patrick, a sinner, quite uncultivated and the least of all the faithful and utterly despicable to many, had as my father the deacon Calpornius, son of the late Potitus, a priest, who belonged to the town of Bannavem Taburniae.

The opening lines of the Confession from The Book of Armagh.

The legends of St. Patrick

The earliest book in which we have records of what was remembered about Patrick, is known as the Book of Armagh. It was written about the year 807 at Armagh by a scribe named Ferdomnach. We are told that what was recorded there was written 'to the honour and praise of the Lord and in beloved memory of Patrick'. But between the time that Patrick lived and the first 'lives' of him that were written, the memory of what kind of man Patrick actually was had faded, and in order to honour him these writers credited him with fantastic miracles. Instead of the lovable, humble writer of the Confession we have a super wonderworker who puts curses on those who oppose him.



A story about St. Patrick's grave.

A story is told, for example, of his boyhood. He was living with a foster-mother. It was winter time and he had gathered some icicles which he brought to her. She suggested that it would have been more helpful if he had gathered some wood for the fire to keep them warm. Patrick put the icicles on the fire, blew on them and at once they burned like firewood. 'God's name and Patrick's' it is said were magnified by that miracle'.



St. Patrick's Bell can be seen in the National Museum Dublin.

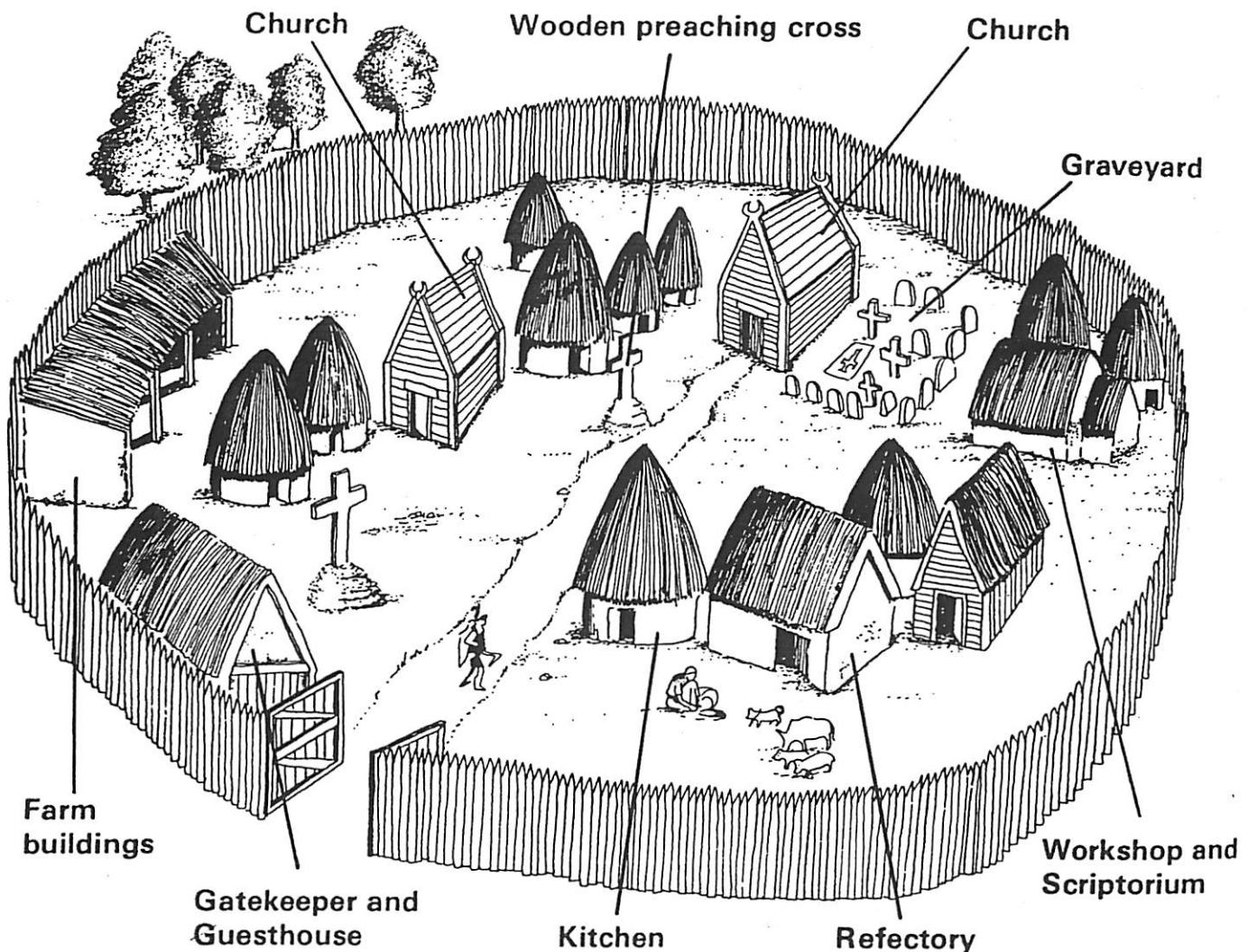
Later writers added to the legends. One of the best known stories tells of how Patrick explained the idea of the Trinity, the three in one, by means of the little three-leaved shamrock.

There are many legends about Patrick associated with the Lecale area.

In one, it is said that Patrick is buried at Downpatrick, and an angel speaks to him. 'Let no relics of thy body be taken from the ground, and let a cubit's depth of earth be over thy body'. And it was proved in recent times that this was done by the command of God. Because, when a church was built over his body, the men who were digging the ground saw fire bursting from his tomb; and ran away in alarm at the flame-bearing fire of flame'.

Another story, linked with a tradition that St. Columba found Patrick's grave at Saul, states that 'the relics of Patrick were enshrined sixty years after Patrick's death by Colmcille (Columba). Three valuable relics were found in the tomb, the chalice, the Gospel of the Angel and the Bell of the Will'.

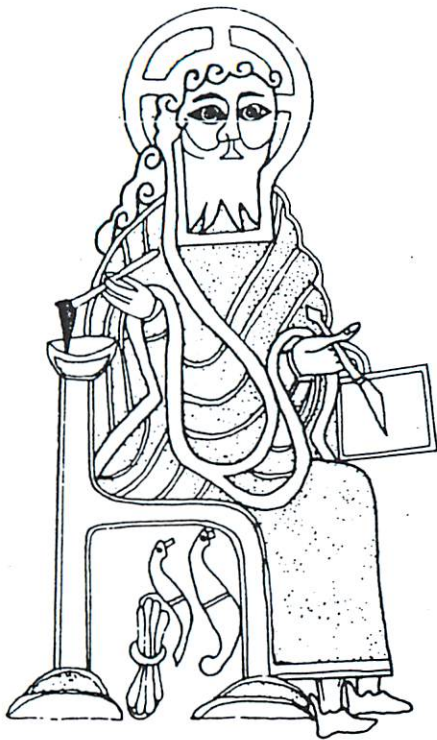
Life in an early Irish monastery



An artist's impression of what the monastery at Saul might have looked like.

At the time when Patrick was growing up, many people were being attracted to the monastic way of life, and Patrick himself may have been a monk. In his writings he speaks of how as a result of his work, many Irish men and women had become monks and nuns. Perhaps it was the usual thing for a little monastic community to grow up beside each of his churches.

The buildings of an Irish monastery were set within a rath a circular earthen-work enclosure, with a wooden fence. All the buildings at this early date would have been of wood or wattle and thatch, except where wood was scarce and where stone was used. (A stone-walled kind of rath was called a cashel). The buildings would consist of a few small cells used as living quarters, with a small number of larger buildings to serve the community as a whole. Near the entrance gate, and gatekeepers house there might be a guesthouse, for the monasteries were always very hospitable places for weary travellers. The Church would be in a central position. As it was generally small in

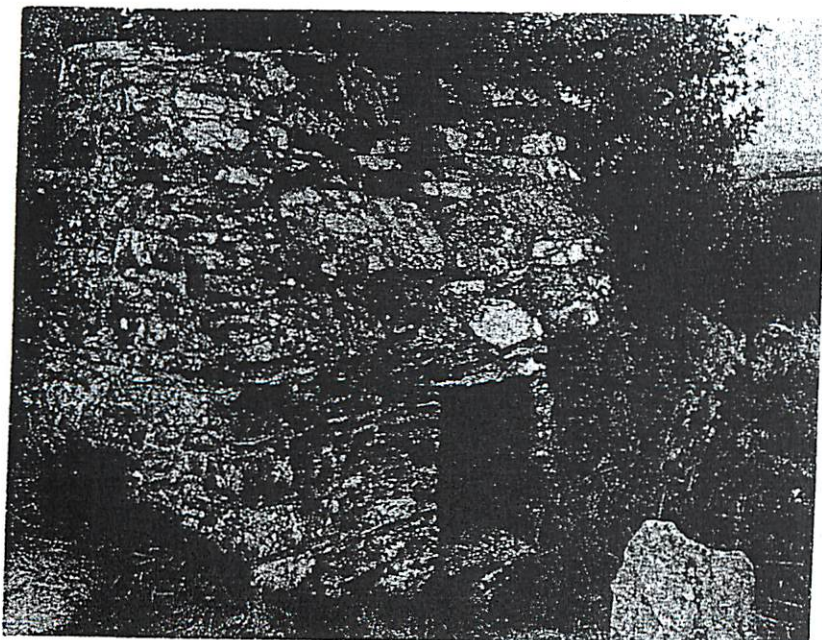


A monk at work in the Library.

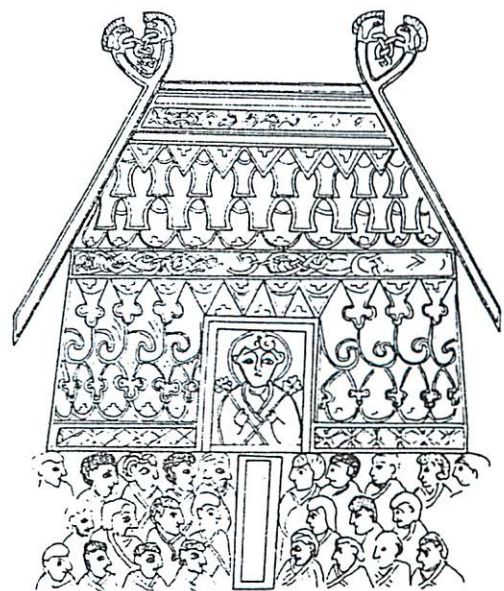
size, there would be an open area nearby with a plain wooden cross, where congregational worship could take place. Where more space within the Church building was required, rather than enlarging the existing building, a second one would be erected. Close to the Church was a graveyard with graves marked by small wooden or stone markers. Not far from the houses or cells of the monks (the Abbot would normally have a cell to himself) there would be a refectory or dining-room with a kitchen. Here the monks would eat their modest meals. The staple diet was bread and vegetables, though in some monasteries fish, eggs, fruit and milk products were allowed and on a rare occasion meat. Somewhere close at hand there was of course a well to provide water. Married relatives of the monks, who helped to farm the monastery lands, might also be housed in a group of cells, attending church services on Sundays and feast days. The monastery might have a library or scriptorium (writing room) where some monks worked at copying and illustrating the Bible and with other books. There would also be some barns and workshops.

Irish monks generally wore a tunic or long inner garment, with an outer cloak which had a hood. Sandals were commonly worn and a staff always carried on a journey. The daily life of the monk was a constant round of prayer, manual work and study. The discipline was very strict. St. Columban, one of the most famous of the early Irish missionaries to Europe, who spent many years at

the noted monastery at Bangor, tells us that a monk's duties are to always obey his seniors and to be ever humble. He is to eat and drink sparingly and to think only noble thoughts. If a monk forgets to wait for grace at table, to say 'Amen', to smile or burst out laughing during prayers, he is liable to be punished by being beaten with a leather strap on the hand, a severe fast, or being ordered to be completely silent. The punishment for leaving the gate of the monastery open in the daytime was twenty-four strokes; if a monk left it open at night, the penalty was a special fast. This discipline was accepted, because it was one of the ways by which the monk hoped to devote himself totally to the love of God and of his neighbour.

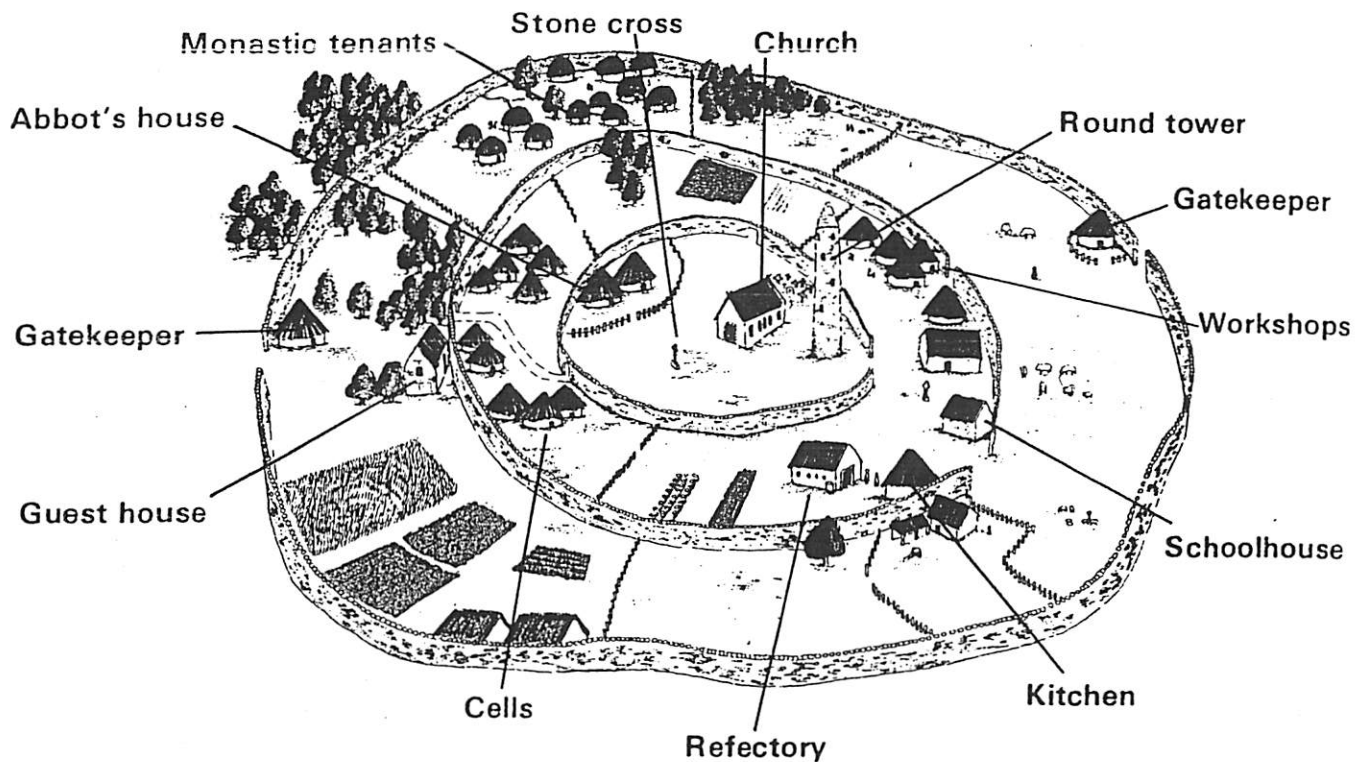


What may have been a monk's cell at Saul.



An early illustration of a wooden church from the Book of Kells.

Nendrum & the earl



An artist's impression of the monastery at Nendrum.



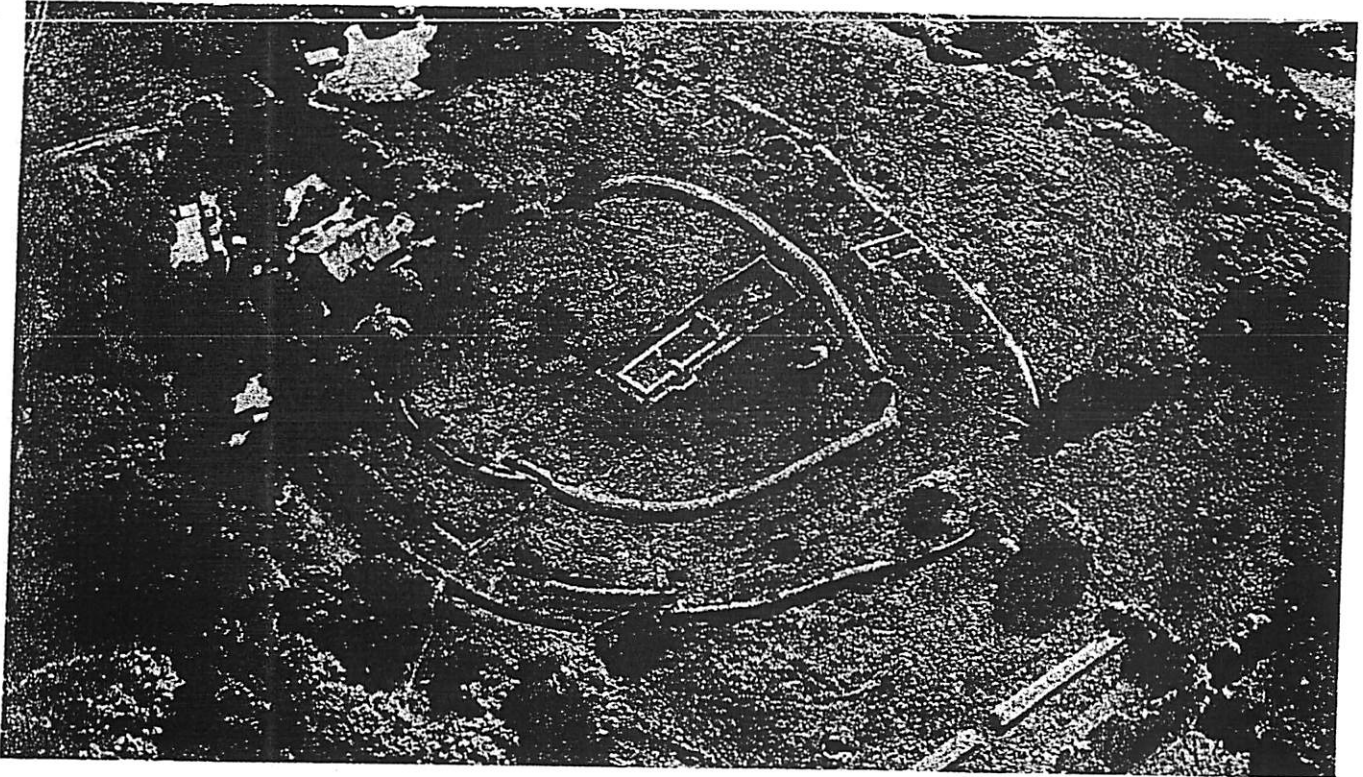
The sundial at Nendrum.

About 100 years after the mission of Patrick, the monasteries in Ireland had grown in number, size and importance, and from these missionary monks went to spread the word of God in Britain and Europe. On Mahee Island, (or as it was then called, Nendrum), there was an important monastery which dates possibly from about 450 until its destruction by the Danes in 974. Later another abbey associated with English monks was established on the site.

It is reported that in Patrick's time, a very 'ungodly, savage, tyrant' lived at Nendrum. Patrick came to visit this wicked chief, who decided that he would first show Patrick to be a fraud and then kill him. He got one of his followers to pretend to be sick or dead, and covered him with a blanket. When Patrick arrived he was asked to heal him or bring him back to life. Patrick saw through the plot and called for the blanket to be removed. To everyone's astonishment they found the man actually dead. The pagan chief was so impressed, that he at once became a Christian. He asked for the man to be raised to life again, (Patrick being happy to do so) and giving all his possessions to Patrick, was set adrift on the sea in an open coracle with his feet bound in chains. Eventually it is said he drifted to the island of Man where he became its bishop. Nendrum had come into the hands of the Church.

Another story tells how Patrick, near Downpatrick, met one day at Bright a young swineherd called Mochaoi, whom he converted to the Christian faith, and ordained to the ministry. Mochaoi became in turn the founder of the monastery at Nendrum, the name Mahee being derived from his name.

y Irish monasteries

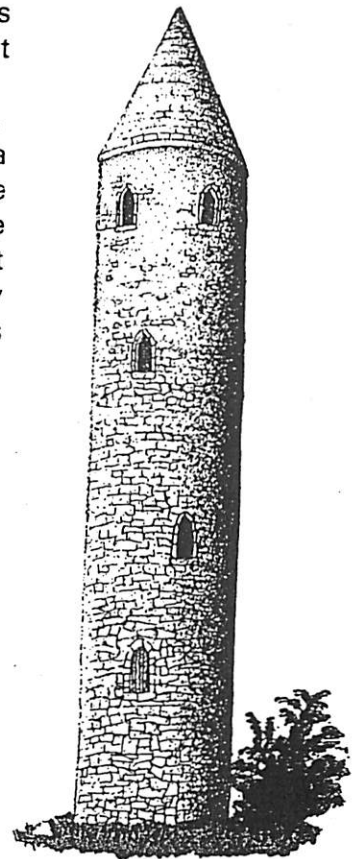


An aerial photograph of the site at Nendrum (Cambridge University Collection: Copyright reserved)

The monastery at Nendrum is surrounded by three circular walls. As well as the Church, cells for the monks, workshops etc. there was at Nendrum a round tower, the stump of which you can still see there. Round towers have been described as 'upward pointing stone fingers'. They were originally from about 18.30m to 36.60m high and had a conical cap at the top. The door was well above ground level. Inside were several wooden floors, and you got to each by a series of ladders. The towers were probably used as bell towers, monks ringing hand bells out of the four top windows. They also served as look-outs, places of safety both for the valuables of the monastery and for the monks themselves during a Viking attack.

There would probably also have been a tall ringed stone cross, with scenes from the Bible and other artistic symbols carved on it. Open-air preaching could take place at such a cross, and it served much the same purpose as a stained glass window in later churches.

Many of the Irish monasteries had schools associated with them, and the remains of a school house can also be seen at Nendrum. As well as the daily round of work, whether on the farm, in the library or in one of the art and craft workshops, monks continued to live a life of prayer and meditation. The daily services they attended together are called the 'hours' and there were either six or eight of these. They were called to the church by a bell, a poet speaking of the 'sweet-sounding bell ringing on a windy night' to call the monks to worship. Sundials helped them to tell the time, and again you can see one of these at Nendrum.



A typical round tower.

RAHOLP

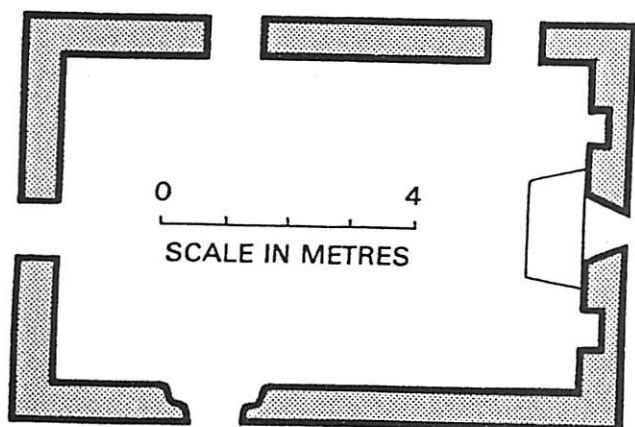
an early Irish church



The ruins of the early Irish Church at Raholp.

In the village of Raholp, there are the ruins of an early church, built with stone and clay. This church is associated with St. Tassach, who is said to have given his last communion to Patrick just before his death at Saul. Tassach appears to have been one of Patrick's converts and helpers, being described as his 'artisan'. He may have been responsible for making metal vessels for use in the Church services. (The name Tassach means 'bronzeworker').

Raholp church, as most of the early stone churches that have survived, is small in size, measuring 8.46m by 5.08m on the inside.



Plan of St. Tassach's church.



The east window with in-built spaces often used for keeping communion vessels.

Very large stones were sometimes used, especially, for the lintels, the stones above the doors and windows. There were few windows (sometimes only one, in the east end of the building) and these too were small, so that inside the Church it must have been quite dark. The roofs were usually made of timber, with a wooden shingle, reed or straw covering, though some were also made of stones. They were plain churches with little carving on the stones, but were no doubt decorated with some woodwork, painted screens and cloth hangings, showing something of the beautiful Irish artwork that is found in early manuscripts such as the Book of Kells. When you visit the ruins of these churches, you need to remember that what is left is just like a ruined deserted house, which must naturally appear bleak and bare.

It is often difficult to tell just how old the ruins of such churches are, due to the fact that they must have been repaired many times. Apart from ordinary 'wear and tear', and accidental damage due for example to lightning, Irish churches were often damaged by foreign invaders and in quarrels between local factions, so that they had often to be practically rebuilt.

The healing wells

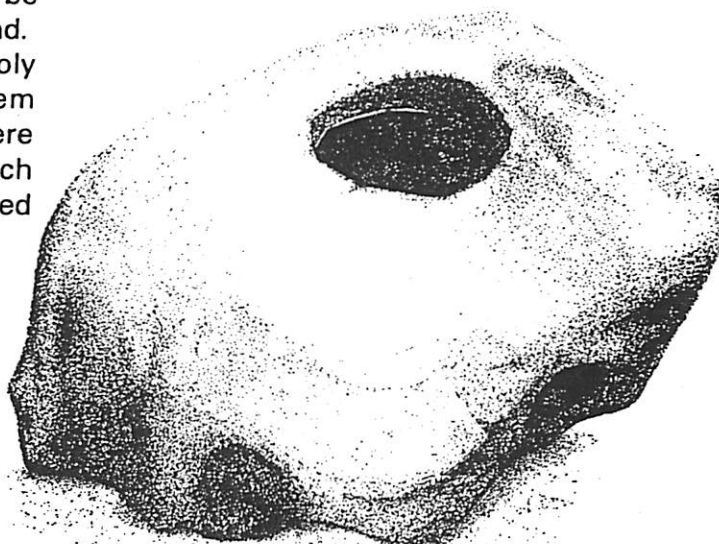
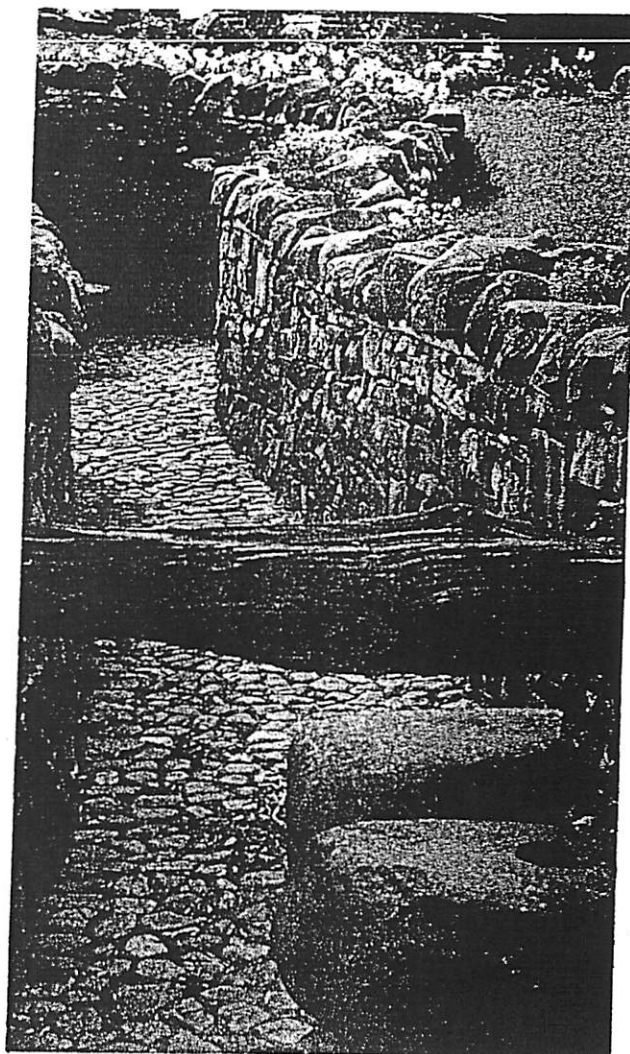
In Ireland there are some thousands of holy or healing wells, and people have visited them to seek healing down through the centuries. Many of the wells are connected with particular saints who were said to have used the water of the well to baptise their converts and then left a blessing on the well. In other cases the saint is said to have driven wicked spirits away from the well to make it safe. Quite often he is said to have caused the well to appear by working a miracle. If a cup is provided by which to drink from the well or if coins or other gifts are in the water, you can be sure that people are still coming to that well in search of healing. Sometimes bandages are tied to a nearby tree, or crutches have been left to show that people have believed they were cured.

In one Life of Patrick we read how he built a monastery at Saul and of how for the use of the monks 'he not long afterwards, by his prayers produced a fountain out of the earth'. This is thought to be a reference to the Mearn well, which can still be seen just below the present Church of Ireland Church at Saul on the road leading to the Quoile River and Downpatrick.

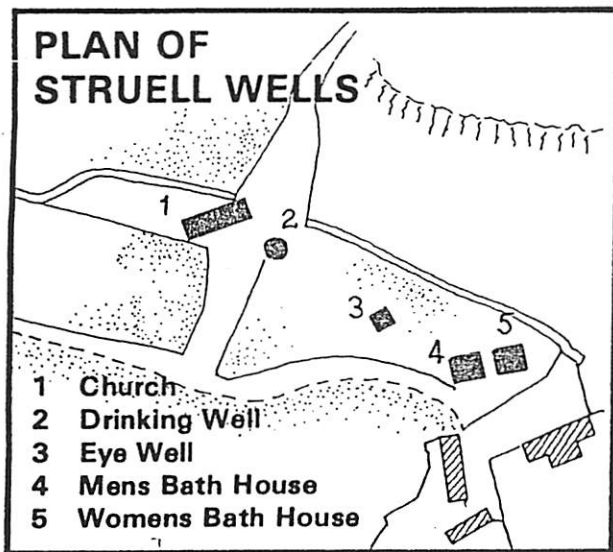
Near the well is a stone with a hole in it, according to legend a sign that Patrick knelt there. In fact such hollowed stones are to be found at early church sites all over Ireland. Some people think even of them as holy wells, the rain water that is caught in them being used as wart cures. They were probably originally used as vessels in which the monks ground their food, and are called 'Ballauns'.

(Top Right)
The Mearn Well as it is today.

(Right)
The ballaun stone at Mearn.



Struell Wells



About a mile from Saul, in a quiet valley, you will find the Struell Wells. Patrick is said to have both made use of them for rest and worship and to have blessed them. An early poem which tells the life of Patrick speaks of how,

'In Slan in the territory of Benna-Birche,
hunger and thirst possessed him not.
Each night he sang a hundred psalms to
adore the King of Angels.
He slept on a bare stone then, and a wet
sackcloth around him.
A bare rock was his pillow, he allowed
not his body to be in warmth'.



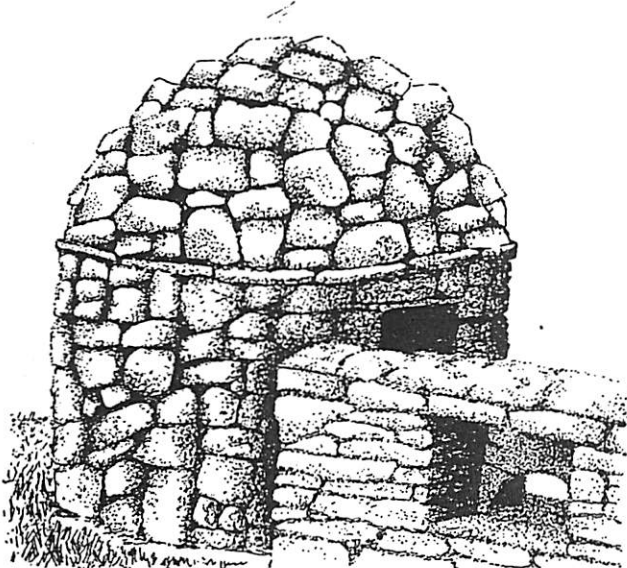
'Slan' meaning 'health' is a reference to Struell, and the last two lines of this verse are a good description of what it would be like to sleep close to the spray of the stream which flows through the Mens Bath-House.

At Struell there are two wells, the Drinking Well, shaped as a circle with stone walls and a domed stone roof; and the Eye Well, rectangular in shape with a pyramid type stone roof. These wells are fed by an underground stream which provides water also for two bath-houses, the Mens Bath-House and the Womens Bath-House. In each case there is a changing room and a bathing room. In the bath-houses the whole body was bathed; the wells were used for drinking and for bathing particular parts of the body, such as the eyes, head, limbs etc.

Close by you will see the ruins of a Church building, begun to be built in 1750 to replace an earlier building but never finished.

Until quite recently, people used to come to the Struell Wells in search of healing, especially on Midsummers Eve.

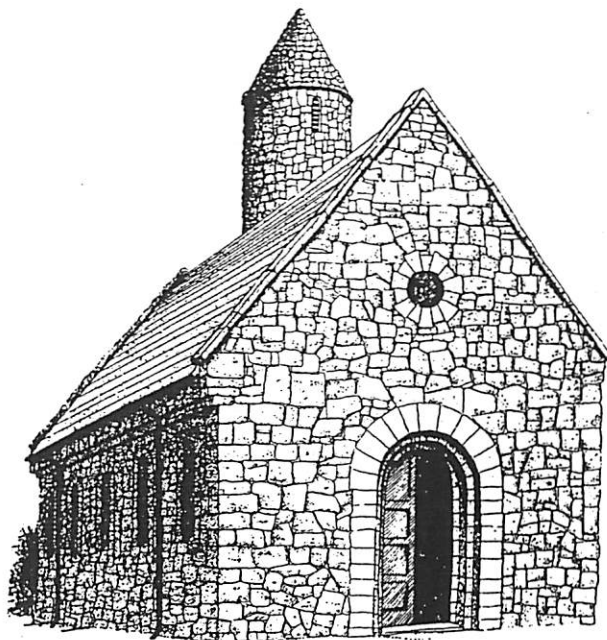
(Above left)
Photograph showing the Eye Well and the Bath-Houses at Struell.



(Left)
Sketch of the Struell Drinking Well.

Places of worship associated with St. Patrick SAUL

Ever since the day when Dichu gave his Barn at Saul to Patrick, Saul has been a place of Christian worship. From a very early date there was a monastery there, which like Nendrum was destroyed by the Vikings. A later abbey on the site was destroyed by Edward Bruce, in 1316. You can still see part of a wall of this abbey at Saul, as well as two small stone cells. Local people over the years carried away the rest of the stones from the ruined abbey and some of them can be seen built into walls nearby. The present Church of Ireland church was built in 1932 to commemorate the 1500th anniversary of the landing of Patrick in 432. It is built of Mourne granite and reflects some of the style of building of the early Irish Church, though of course the round tower would not then have been attached to the church but separate from it.



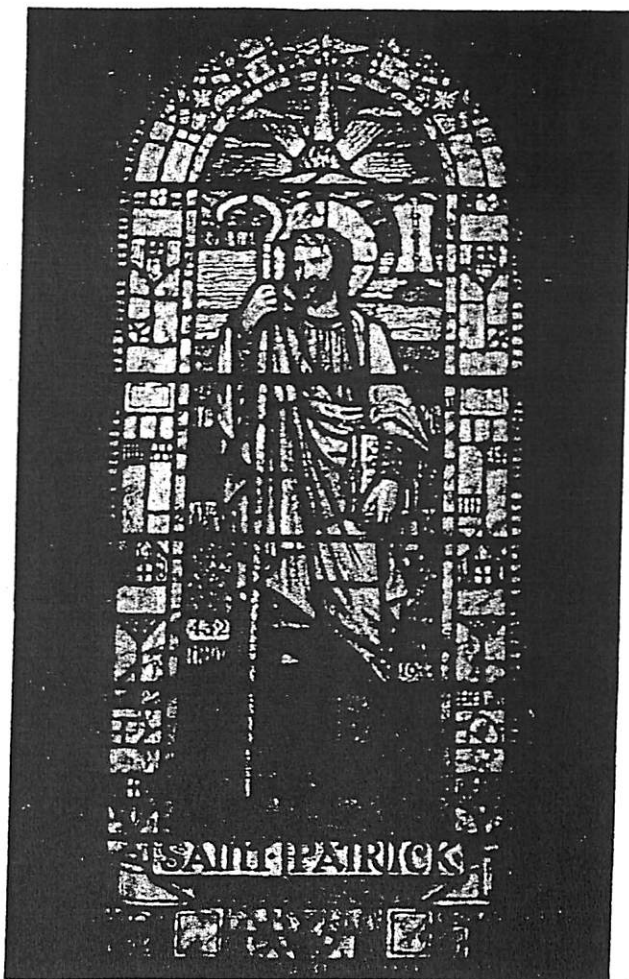
Special services are held here each year on St. Patrick's Day. This is one of the prayers used in these services:-

*Almighty God,
in your providence you chose your servant
Patrick to be the apostle of the Irish people,
and to bring those who were wandering in
darkness and error to the true light and
knowledge of your Word:
Keep us in that light, and bring us to
everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our
Lord.*

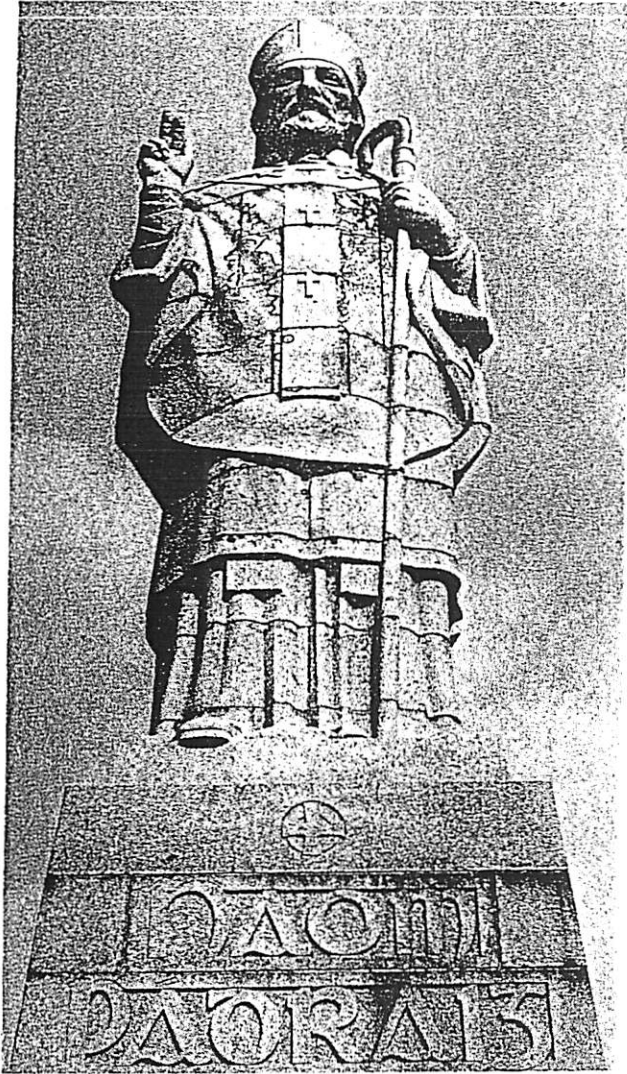
Amen

*(Top Right)
Sketch of the memorial church at Saul.*

*(Right)
The east window in the memorial church.*



SLIEVE PATRICK



If you climb to the top of Slieve Patrick, you will be able to look right across the peninsula of Lecale where so long ago Patrick began his missionary work. You will also find here a statue of Patrick, erected by the Roman Catholic church as part of their celebration of the 1500th anniversary of his landing. Here too on a special Sunday each summer, services in the open air are held to honour the memory of Patrick, and this prayer is used.

*Let us pray
That, like Saint Patrick, we may be loyal to
our faith in Christ.
Father in Heaven you sent the great bishop
Patrick to the people of Ireland to share his
faith and to spend his life in loving service.
May our lives bear witness to the faith we
profess, and our love bring others to the
peace and joy of your gospel.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen*

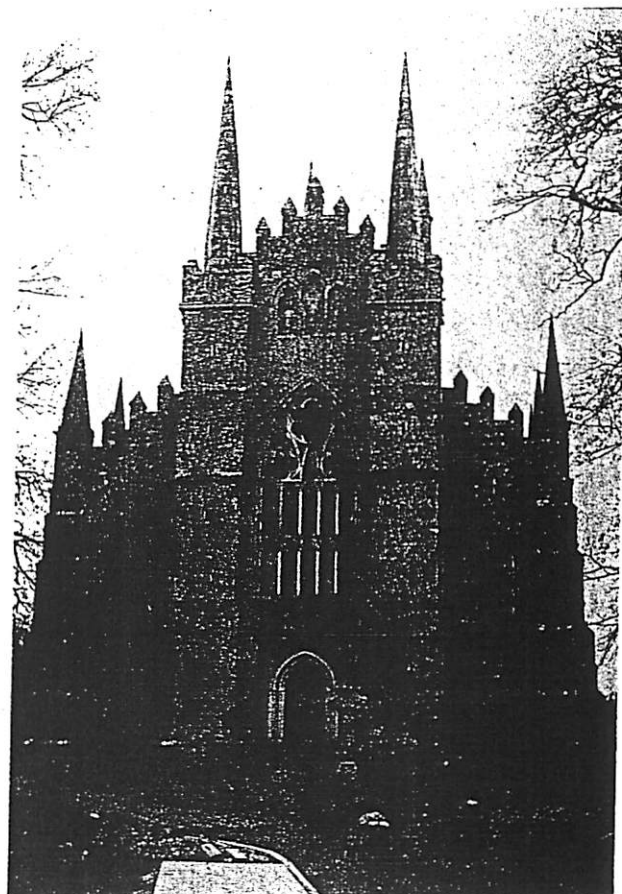
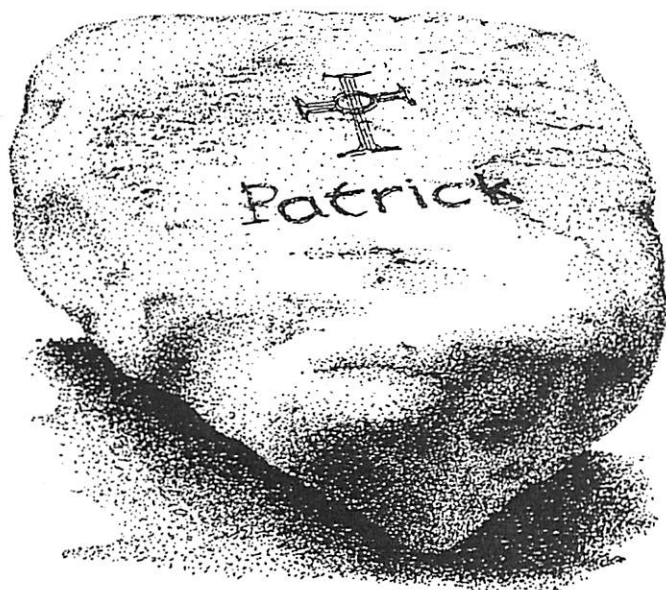
*(Left)
The statue of Patrick.*

*(Below)
The view from the top of Slieve Patrick.*



DOWN CATHEDRAL

The death and burial of Patrick are shrouded in great mystery. It appears likely that he died at Saul about the year 460. We are told that a bitter feud broke out as to where his body should be buried, and that this was resolved by taking two untamed bullocks whp pulled the cart on which Patrick's coffin was placed. Starting from Clogher, close to Finnebrogue, they were allowed to go wherever they liked and it was agreed that at the place they stopped, there the body should be buried, and a church built in honour of Patrick. The bullocks, it is said, stopped at Dun-Lethglaisse, the site of the present Church of Ireland Cathedral of the Holy Trinity at Downpatrick. You will find in the graveyard at the Cathedral a large granite stone to mark this traditional burial place of Patrick. This memorial stone was placed there in 1901. But there is no sure knowledge of where Patrick is buried. Other early traditions assert either that Patrick was buried at Saul where he died or that like Moses the place of his burial was unknown. Special services are held in the Cathedral in honour of the memory of Patrick on St. Patrick's Day.



(Above)
Holy Trinity Cathedral, Downpatrick.

Later traditions suggest that the bodies of St. Columba and St. Brigid were at some date brought to Downpatrick and buried with the remains of Patrick. The three Roman Catholic churches in Downpatrick are dedicated to the three saints said to be buried there.

(Left)
A sketch of the memorial stone.

A hymn in honour of St. Patrick

Lord, for Irish saints and scholars
We would offer Thee our praise,
And for memories that recall us
To the glory of their days.

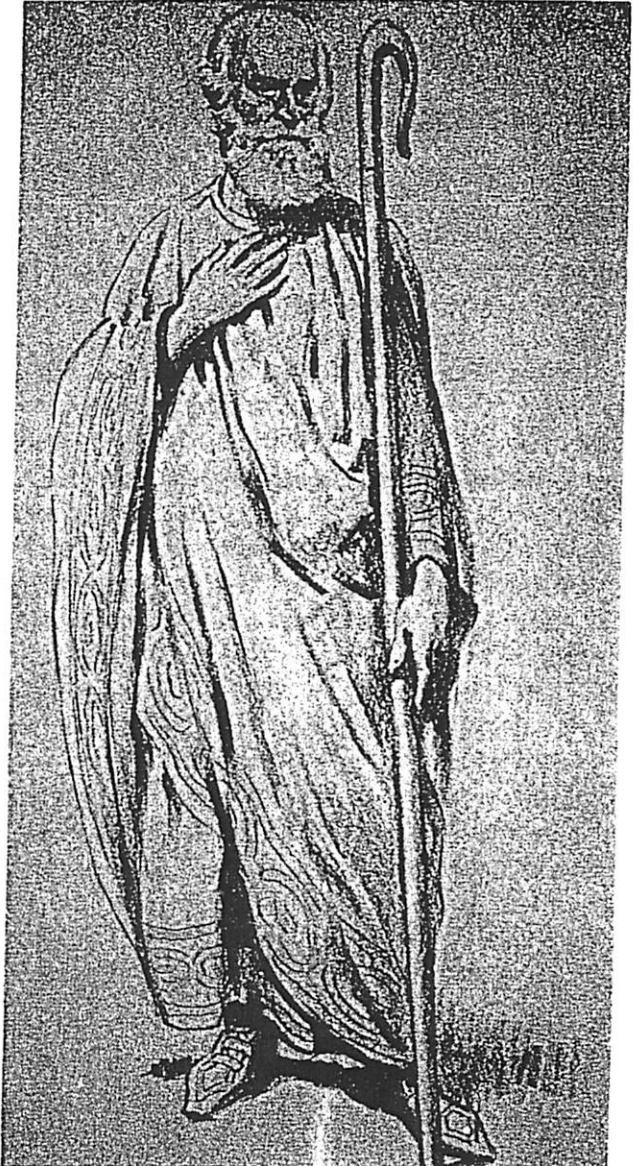
For Saint Patrick's youthful vision,
For the call he clearly heard,
Lord, we thank Thee and remember
His obedience to Thy Word.

For the Gospel brought to Ireland,
For the truth that set men free,
For the light that conquered darkness,
Praise and honour be to Thee.

For the courage of Thy servant,
For his valiant stand for right,
We extol Thee and acknowledge
Power that helped him in the fight.

Lord with Patrick's faith endow us,
And his hope is us beget,
That through love for God and country
Ireland may be holy yet.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Triune God whom Patrick served,
By Thy grace may we be guided
And our heritage preserved.



A sketch of St. Patrick by William Conor (By courtesy of Armagh Diocesan Council).

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