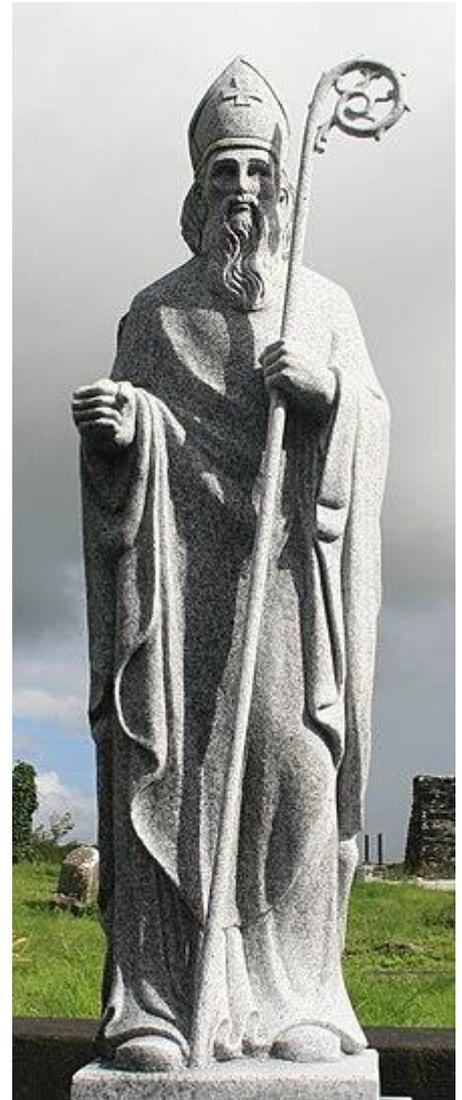


St. Patrick and his Relics

St. Patrick is Ireland's patron saint and he is celebrated each year on the 17th March. He was in Ireland during the 5th century AD, over 1500 years ago. It is thought that he came to Ireland in the year 432 AD during the time period archaeologists and historians call Early Medieval Ireland. St. Patrick is most famous for bringing Christianity to Ireland and teaching the Irish people about God. Before St. Patrick, a lot of people in Ireland believed in lots of different gods. We know a lot about St. Patrick, how he came to Ireland, and his work because he wrote two documents about his life that have survived.

St. Patrick was born and lived in a part of Britain. When he was nearly 16 years old, he was captured and brought to Ireland as a slave. He spent about six years working as a farmer tending sheep in the west of Ireland. One night, when he was out in the woods, he heard a voice telling him that a ship was waiting for him in the east. He travelled across Ireland and got on a ship that brought him home. However, he never forgot about Ireland or the Irish people. He began to study and learn more about God and became a bishop. One night, he had a dream in which the people of Ireland were asking him to return. He decided to travel back to Ireland to spend his time travelling all around the country teaching people about God.

It is thought that he died on the 17th March, which is why St. Patrick's Day is celebrated on this day each year. We know a lot about the work and miracles of St. Patrick as many of them were written down by his follow, Muirchú, many years after his death in the 'Life of St. Patrick'. Today, there are many objects, called relics, which are thought to have been owned and used by St. Patrick while he was alive. To keep these relics safe, special boxes called shrines were made. These are beautifully decorated, and are made out of silver, gold, bronze, glass, and even amber. Some of these are on display at the National Museum of Ireland – Archaeology.



St. Patrick's Bell

There are a few bells in the Museum's collection that are thought to have belonged to St. Patrick. This one dates to between the 8th and 9th century AD. It is made from iron and it is coated in bronze. On the top, it has a handle, and on the inside, there is a clapper so that it could be rung. Bells were very popular at churches and monastic sites, a place where monks and priests lived and prayed. They were used to call people to prayer throughout the day.



St. Patrick's Bell Shrine

To keep the bell safe a special box, called a shrine, was made for it. St. Patrick's Bell Shrine was made around 1100 AD. It is made out of bronze and is decorated with gold, silver, amber and glass. Much of the shrine is decorated with gold wire twisted into patterns and spirals. This is called filigree. If you look at this decoration really carefully you might be able to see some animals, especially snakes.



St. Patrick's Tooth Shrine

This shrine was made much later and dates to between the 14th and 15th century. It is believed that it holds a tooth of St. Patrick's. According to the story, St. Patrick was visiting a church in Co. Sligo when his tooth fell out. The bishop held onto the tooth, and much later on, had the shrine made to keep it safe. It is made out of wood and is decorated with pieces of gold, silver and amber. The shrine also has an engraving of a harp; another important Irish emblem.

