

FOLLOW THE FOOTSTEPS

Heroes and Heroines of Wales

Santes Dwynwen



 **Cadw**

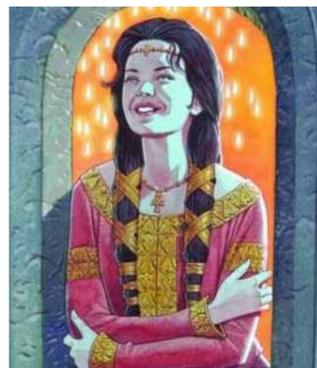


Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

This legend is set in Wales in the 5th century (1,500 years ago). It was a time of power struggles and rivalries, and women were often married to make alliances – love didn't come into it. There are many versions of this popular story – this is just one of them.

Santes Dwynwen

Welsh patron saint of love



Welsh patron saint of love
Source: Graham Howells

Princess Dwynwen was the beautiful daughter of the king of south Wales. When she was forbidden to marry the man she loved, she ran away and became a nun. She devoted the rest of her life to helping other lovers find happiness.

Dwynwen became the Welsh patron saint of love. She's celebrated each year on **St Dwynwen's Day, 25 January, the Welsh equivalent of St Valentine's Day.**

Forbidden love turns to fury

Dwynwen was said to be the most beautiful and spirited of the 24 daughters of Brychan Brycheiniog, king of south Wales (Brecon). When she was a young woman, she met Maelon Dafodrill, the son of a neighbouring king. The couple fell passionately in love, and planned to spend their lives together.

Maelon went to ask the king for Dwynwen's hand in marriage. But her father refused, saying that he had already arranged a suitable match for her. Maelon was furious, taking out his anger on Dwynwen. Then he left the palace in a rage.

Three wishes

Dwynwen ran away into the woodland, then threw herself to the ground and cried herself to sleep. While she slept, she dreamt a spirit came to her and told her Maelon wouldn't trouble her further because he'd been turned into a block of ice. The spirit then granted her three wishes.

The kind-hearted Dwynwen told the spirit that her first wish was for Maelon to be thawed. Her second was for true love to always be protected in her name. The third was that she would never again fall in love, nor marry. All three wishes came true.

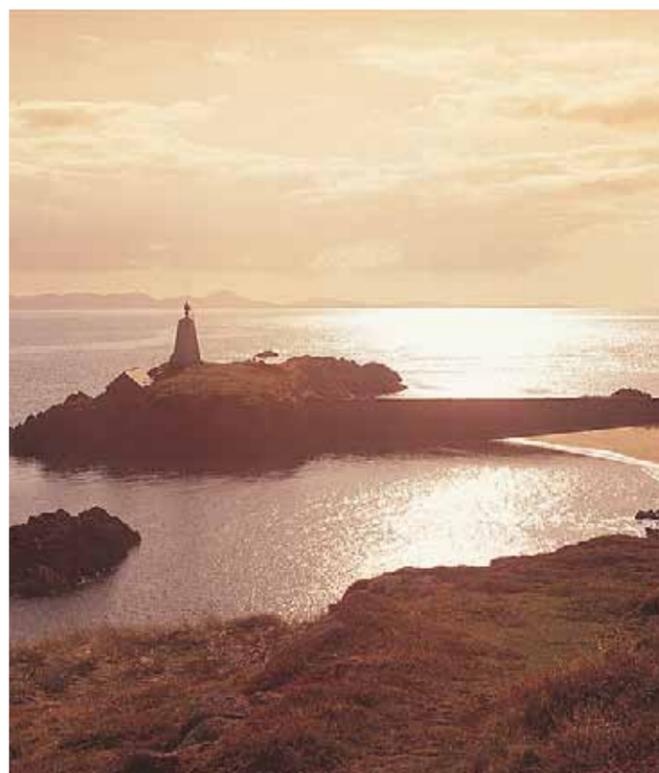
Devoting her life to lovers

Dwynwen left home to prevent her father from making her marry for power or greed. She became a nun and travelled Wales, setting up churches and praying for those who were troubled in love. Her final stop was the island of Llanddwyn, off the coast of Anglesey, where the remains of Dwynwen's church can be seen today.

After Dwynwen's death, a well was dedicated to her. Some believe that this well is the home of a sacred fish whose movements predict the future for lovers. Others say that the well sometimes boils up, and those who see it will be lucky in love.



Santes Dwynwen Day is celebrated by Welsh lovers today



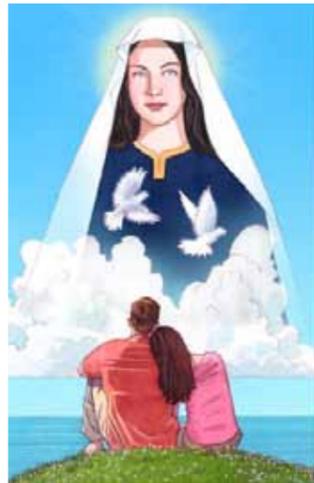
Llanddwyn: a spiritual and sacred island



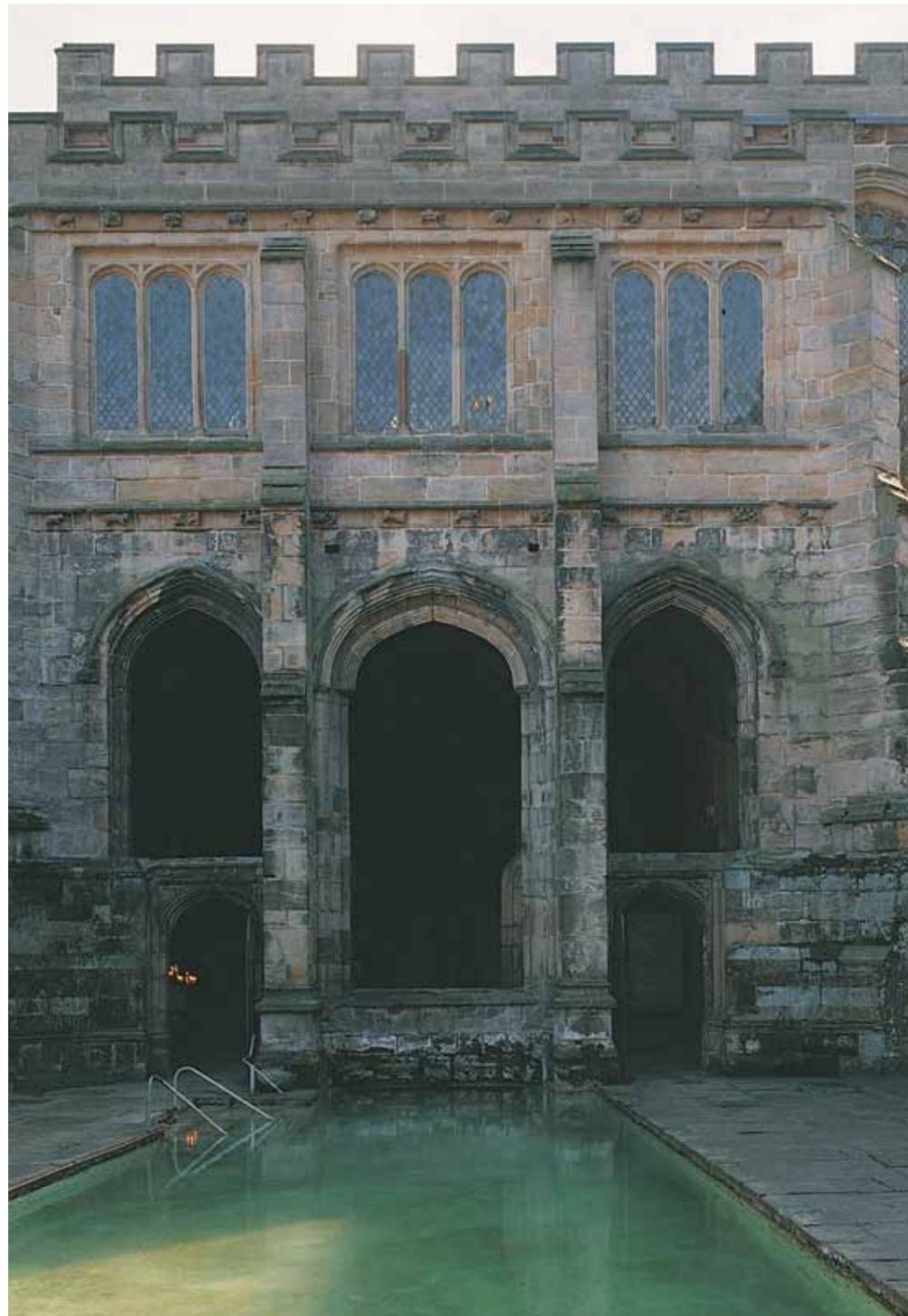
Llanddwyn Island today



A boss in the Well Chamber Ceiling of St Winefride's Well



Dwynwen devoted her life to lovers
Source: Graham Howells



St Winefride's Chapel and Holy Well, Holywell

After Dwynwen's death, a well was dedicated to her. Some believe that this well is the home of a sacred fish whose movements predict the future for lovers. Others say that the well sometimes boils up, and those who see it will be lucky in love.

A rival to St Valentine's Day

In recent years, the popularity of St Dwynwen's Day has grown. Like St Valentine's Day, it is celebrated with greetings cards, heart-shaped gifts, flowers and parties.

One of the most unusual of the St Dwynwen's Day events took place in Denbighshire in 2007. On the day, bachelor farmers attached pictures of themselves to their milk cartons, with a message to 'Fancy a Farmer'.

Follow the footsteps

You've read the story of Dwynwen, so why not explore some of the romantic places connected with her story?



The entrance to St Seiriol's Well at Penmon, Anglesey

Llanddwyn Island

The tiny island sits just off the west coast of Anglesey. It's a magical place, whether on glistening summer days, in autumn mists, or when the exhilarating winter wind stirs up the waves. In the centre of the island are the ruins of St Dwynwen's church, with its holy well, which are being restored. To many, this is a spiritual and sacred place.

- Look around the unspoilt landscape. What has changed since Dwynwen arrived there 1,500 years ago? Imagine how the beauty of the place gave Dwynwen the strength to turn heartbreak into healing.
- Find St Dwynwen's well. Will you see the fish, or the waters boiling up to predict good luck for lovers?
- Explore the island and find the most romantic spot. Share your favourite love stories, or make one up. Can you make up a different ending to Dwynwen's story?



St Cybi's Well

Holy wells

The landscape of north Wales is scattered with holy wells, each with their own fascinating story.

St Seiriol's

St Seiriol's Well, Penmon, Anglesey. St Seiriol is said to have founded the well in the 6th century and it was believed to have healing powers. Nearby is the site of Penmon Priory founded in the 12th century.

St Cybi's Well, Lleyn Peninsula

St Cybi was said to have settled in this part of Wales during the 6th century. Upon landing on Anglesey, he struck a rock with his staff and water immediately flowed from it. The place was probably Holyhead where Cybi established a monastery.

Sadly, there is little evidence to support an association between the well on Lleyn with the saint himself. The charming little well was a place of pilgrimage and the waters were reputed to cure warts, lameness, blindness, scurvy and rheumatism.

St Winefride's Chapel and Holy Well, Holywell

The holy spring of St Winefride has long been a place of pilgrimage. It is said to have risen in the 7th century when St Beuno brought his niece back to life after her head had been severed by a rejected suitor.



Interior of St Winefride's Well

Visit www.cadw.wales.gov.uk to explore the sites.