

Oes y Sant

The Age of the Saints

Wales, c. AD 450 to 600

In the centuries that followed the withdrawal of Rome from Britain, Wales did not fall into silence. While much of the island drifted into conflict and fragmentation, something remarkable was taking shape in the west. Across the valleys and coastlines of Cymru, from the Wye to the Llŷn, men and women of extraordinary conviction were building communities, founding schools, walking pilgrim paths, and giving their names to the land in ways that endure to this day. The period running from roughly AD 450 to 600 has come to be known as Oes y Saint, the Age of the Saints.

It was not a planned movement. No single authority directed it. What emerged was something more organic, a flowering of faith in the Celtic tradition shaped by the collapse of Roman order, the persistence of Christianity in sub-Roman Britain, and the influence of remarkable individuals who chose to live, teach and die in ways that left permanent marks on the landscape of Wales. More than eight hundred saints of Welsh origin are known by name. Their legacy survives in the llan, the sacred enclosure of almost every parish church in Wales, in the ffynnon, the holy well at the edge of a field, and in placenames that have carried a saint's memory through fifteen centuries.

This article follows the age through the lives of five of its most significant figures, and ends at the place where they and thousands like them are said to lie: Ynys Enlli, the Island of Twenty Thousand Saints, out in the tidal waters beyond the Llŷn Peninsula.

The World They Inherited

Rome had administered Britain for nearly four centuries. When the legions finally departed in the early fifth century, they left behind roads, towns, a Romanised church, and a population that had grown used to order. What followed was not immediate collapse, but a slow unravelling. The kingdoms of the Britons reasserted themselves. The Irish raided the western coasts. The Anglo-Saxons pressed from the east. The old certainties dissolved.

It was into this world that the saints were born, the children and grandchildren of people who still remembered Roman Britain, who spoke the ancestor of Welsh, who carried a Christianity that had taken root in the imperial era but now needed to find new forms. The church they

built was not the church of bishops and dioceses that Rome had known. It was a church of the clas.

The clas, whose plural is clasau, was the defining institution of the Age of Saints. Part monastery, part school, part mission station, it was a community gathered around a founding figure, set within a consecrated enclosure, and responsible for the pastoral care of the surrounding countryside. Unlike the great Norman abbeys that would come later, the clas was a living, working community embedded in the landscape. Its head was at once abbot, teacher and bishop. Its members were scholars, farmers and missionaries. Its reach extended along the old Roman roads and by sea to Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany. Wales in this period was not isolated. It was part of a connected Celtic Christian world that stretched from the Hebrides to the Loire.

Saint Dyfrig (Dubricius)

c. AD 465 to c. 550 | The Father of Welsh Monasticism

Dyfrig stands at the beginning. He was born around AD 465, most probably at Madley, six miles west of Hereford, in territory that was then part of the Welsh kingdom of Ergyng, which is today's Herefordshire. The tradition of his birth describes it as miraculous, and records that even as a boy he healed his grandfather, a king, of a long-standing illness. Whether legend or fact, what is clear is that Dyfrig grew into a scholar of exceptional reputation and founded a monastic school at Hentland on the Wye, where disciples came to learn from across the region.

From Hentland he established a second community at Moccas, near his birthplace. Tradition records that no fewer than two thousand monks lived in the communities he founded or inspired. He was a teacher of teachers. The Vita of Samson, written within living memory of these events, describes Dyfrig visiting the monastery at Llantwit Major, ordaining Samson there, and spending his Lenten retreat on Caldey Island. He moves through the early records as a figure of authority, the person to whom others came for ordination, instruction, and counsel.

It was Dyfrig, together with Saint Deiniol, who is said to have persuaded David to attend the Synod of Llanddewi Brefi around 550, the great gathering where the direction of the Welsh church was debated, and David's authority confirmed. By that point Dyfrig himself was in his final years. Oppressed by age and infirmity, he withdrew from his communities and made his way to Ynys Enlli, Bardsey Island, to live out his remaining days as a hermit. He died there and was buried on the island.

His bones did not rest there for ever. In 1120, when the Normans were reshaping the Welsh church to their purposes, Bishop Urban of Llandaff had Dyfrig's relics translated from Bardsey to Llandaff Cathedral, where he was recast as the founding archbishop of the see. The politics

of that translation belong to a different age. What it confirms, at least, is that the memory of Dyfrig's death on Ynys Enlli was still alive and credible six centuries after the event.

Saint Illtyd (Illtud)

c. AD 450 to c. 525 | Scholar, Abbot, Master of Masters

If Dyfrig was the father of Welsh monasticism, Illtyd was its great educator. Born around 450, most probably in Glamorgan or on the Breton border (the sources differ), Illtyd was ordained priest by Germanus of Auxerre, the bishop whose visits to Britain had done much to stabilise Celtic Christianity in the years after Rome's departure. Tradition connects Illtyd with Arthur and the military world of post-Roman Britain. He is sometimes called Illtyd Farchog, Illtyd the Knight, and one account has him renouncing a life of soldiering for the monastery. However that transformation came about, what followed was one of the most significant acts of institution-building in the history of Wales.

Illtyd founded his clas at Llanilltud Fawr, known today as Llantwit Major in the Vale of Glamorgan, and established there what is sometimes described as the oldest college in Britain. The school was well established by AD 490 and drew scholars from across the Celtic world: from Ireland, Cornwall, Brittany and the kingdoms of Wales. The Life of Samson, written in the seventh century, describes Illtyd as the most accomplished of all the Britons in the Scriptures, in philosophy, geometry, rhetoric, grammar and arithmetic. One later account, more celebratory than precise, speaks of three thousand members of the community and a hundred monks employed in continuous chanting of the Divine Office through day and night.

What matters beyond the numbers is the list of those who passed through the school. David, the future patron saint of Wales, studied at Llanilltud Fawr. So did Samson, who would carry Celtic Christianity to Brittany; Paul Aurelian, who became bishop in Finistère; Gildas, whose *De Excidio Britanniae* is among the few written records of this period that survive; and the bard Taliesin. The school at Llantwit Major was not merely a Welsh institution. It was a seedbed for the whole Atlantic Celtic church.

Illtyd died at his foundation and was buried there. His name endures in the place, in the church that stands on his ground today, and in the long pilgrimage route that bears his name, St Illtyd's Way, still walked across South Wales.

Saint David (Dewi Sant)

c. AD 500 to c. 589 | Patron Saint of Wales

David, known in Welsh as Dewi and in devotion as Dewi Sant, was born around AD 500, the son of Sant, a prince of Ceredigion, and Non, whose own chapel on the Pembrokeshire coast

near Caerfai still marks the place where tradition says she gave birth to him during a storm. He was raised by his mother, educated at the monastery of Hen Fynyw under the monk Paulinus, and then went forth as a missionary across the length and breadth of Wales.

He founded his monastery at Glyn Rhosyn, the Valley of Roses, in the far west of Pembrokeshire, on the banks of the small river Alun. The community he built there was demanding in a way that set it apart even from other clasau. David's monks pulled the plough themselves without draught animals, drank only water, ate bread with salt and herbs, and spent the evening in prayer, reading and writing. This austerity earned David his Welsh cognomen: Dewi Ddyfrwr, David the Water Drinker. It was a monastic ideal closer in spirit to the Desert Fathers of Egypt than to the scholarly comfort of Llantwit Major.

His influence spread far beyond Pembrokeshire. He travelled through Wales establishing churches and communities, and two companions, Padarn and Teilo, are said to have often journeyed with him. The three of them, in one strand of the tradition, made a pilgrimage together to Jerusalem. At the Synod of Llanddewi Brefi, where the assembled church gathered to address theological controversy, David's preaching was so compelling that the ground beneath his feet was said to have risen so that all could see and hear him. That hill, some say, can still be identified at Llanddewi Brefi today.

David died on 1 March, most probably in 589, and was buried at the monastery he had founded. The cathedral city of St Davids, Tyddewi in Welsh meaning the House of David, stands on his ground. His shrine survives within the cathedral, rebuilt many times after Viking raids stripped its precious metals, but never lost. His last words to his followers, recorded in the Welsh Life of David, were simple and plain: be joyful, and keep your faith and your creed, and do the little things that you have seen me do and heard about. Gwnewch y pethau bychain, do the little things, remains among the most quoted phrases in the Welsh language.

Saint Teilo

c. AD 500 to c. 560 | The Saint of Three Bodies

Teilo was born at Penalun, now Penally near Tenby in Pembrokeshire, around the year 500, a contemporary and close companion of David. He studied under both Dyfrig at Hentland and under the monk Paulinus at what is now Whitland in Carmarthenshire, and it was at Whitland that he and David first became friends. They travelled together, founded together, and shared a vision of the monastic life that shaped the south Wales church for generations.

Teilo made his principal foundation at Llandeilo Fawr on the banks of the Tywi in Carmarthenshire, a place whose position on or near the old Roman road gave it easy communication east and west across the country. He gathered disciples, founded churches, and built a community that endured long after him. When plague swept through Wales in 547,

decimating communities and forcing many survivors to flee, Teilo led his followers through Cornwall to Brittany, where they were received by his friend Samson at the great abbey of Dol. He stayed in Armorica for seven years and seven months before returning to Wales and to Llandeilo.

After the death of David, Teilo became the most venerated churchman in Wales. He died at Llandeilo Fawr on 9 February, most probably around 560. What happened next gave rise to one of the most famous stories of the age. Three churches, Llandeilo, Penally and Llandaff, each claimed the right to bury him. The clergy of all three prayed and left the body overnight. In the morning, they found it had become three identical bodies, each equally authentic, so that each church might have its saint. Miracle or legend, the story is a perfect expression of how deeply Teilo was claimed by the whole of Wales. His skull is still held in a reliquary in the south chapel at Llandaff Cathedral.

<https://tinyurl.com/St-Teilo-Two-Nations>

Samson, Cadfan and the Wider World

The Saints Who Crossed the Sea

The Age of Saints was not contained within the borders of Wales. One of its defining characteristics was movement: across the Irish Sea, along the Atlantic seaways, and above all to Brittany, where Welsh missionaries carried their faith and gave their names to the landscape of Armorica as thoroughly as they had to Cymru.

Samson of Dol was educated at Llantwit Major under Illyd and ordained by Dyfrig. He sought solitude on Caldey Island, Ynys Pyr off the Pembrokeshire coast, before eventually making his way to Brittany, where he founded the great abbey of Dol and became its bishop. An inscription on Caldey, fragmentary but ancient, reads Magl Dubr: the tonsured servant of Dubricius. Dyfrig, Illyd and Samson are woven together in the records as teacher, student and missionary successor.

Cadfan came the other way. A Breton missionary, he crossed to Wales and received the island of Ynys Enlli, Bardsey, from Einion, King of Llŷn. There, in the sixth century, he founded what is said to have been the first monastery in Britain. His successor Leuddad cultivated the belief that those who died on the island would not face damnation. In an age of plague, war and uncertainty, that was a promise of extraordinary power. The pilgrims came, and did not stop coming for a thousand years.

Ynys Enlli — The Island of Twenty Thousand Saints

Ynys Enlli lies 3.1 kilometres off the tip of the Llŷn Peninsula in Gwynedd, separated from the mainland by a sound of powerful tidal currents. The name means the island of the tides, Enlli being the streaming current, and the crossing in an open boat in all weathers was itself an act of commitment. To reach Ynys Enlli was not easy, and that difficulty was part of the point.

The island measures barely two kilometres by one. It rises to a summit of 167 metres at Mynydd Enlli, and the ruins of a thirteenth-century Augustinian abbey still stand near its southern end, built on the ground where Cadfan's earlier foundation had stood since the sixth century. Human habitation reaches back at least four millennia, with pieces of worked flint from between 2000 and 1000 BC found on its western slopes. But it is the Christian centuries that define Ynys Enlli in memory.

By the early Middle Ages, the island had acquired a status that made it one of the great pilgrimage destinations in the western world. Three pilgrimages to Ynys Enlli were held to equal one to Rome. Pilgrims gathered at Aberdaron, where St Hywyn's Church stands to this day at the cliff's edge as the last sanctuary before the sea and crossed to the island in the hope of spiritual renewal, healing, indulgence or simply the blessing of dying in a holy place. The North Wales Pilgrims' Way, beginning far to the north and east at Basingwerk Abbey, was laid out across the whole breadth of Wales with Ynys Enlli as its destination. Pen draw'r byd, the edge of the known world, the pilgrims called it.

The claim that twenty thousand saints lie buried on the island is not meant as a census. It is an expression of accumulated holiness across many centuries of use as a burial place for monks, pilgrims, hermits and the devout. Dyfrig came here to die. Cadfan built his monastery here. The great figures of the Age of Saints converged on this small island as the place where, closer than anywhere else to the edge of the world, one might hope to approach the edge of eternity.

The legends of Ynys Enlli do not stop with the saints. For those drawn to the Arthurian tradition, the island is also said to be the resting place of Myrddin, known in English as Merlin, and the identification of the island with Ynys Afallach, the Isle of Avalon, is an old one. Some scholars place the battle of Camlann in 537 or 542, when Cadfan was abbot on the island, and suggest that if Arthur was carried to Avalon to heal his wounds, it was here he came. None of this is provable. All of it is part of the remarkable density of story and memory that has gathered around this small piece of land in the Atlantic tides.

Today Ynys Enlli is a nature reserve and in 2023 became the first site in Europe to be awarded International Dark Sky Sanctuary status. It is home to grey seals, 310 bird species, a working farm, and a small number of residents. Visitors may cross by boat from Porth Meudwy between

March and October, weather and tide permitting. The tower of the ruined abbey still stands. The sense of the island's long past is not difficult to find.

What the Age of Saints Left Behind

The clasau these men and women founded did not survive for ever in their original form. Viking raids, Norman reorganisation and the eventual dissolution of the monasteries dismantled or transformed most of them. But the landscape they made endures. The llan, the sacred enclosure at the heart of a parish church, is almost always the ground of a clas or an earlier Christian community. The ffynnon, the holy well, preserves the memory of a saint's presence at a spring. The place-name preserves the name itself. Llandeilo, Llanilltud Fawr, Tyddewi, Llancarfan, Llanbedr, Llanbadarn: each name is a memory in the landscape, each llan the echo of a person and a purpose.

More than eight hundred saints of Welsh origin are known by name. The majority of them lived in this single century and a half between the departure of Rome and the coming of the Normans. No comparable flowering of religious life has occurred in Wales before or since. The missionaries who left Llantwit Major for Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany carried with them not just a faith but a method: the clas, the school, the committed community, that shaped Christianity across the Atlantic Celtic world.

Wales remembers them on the first of March, Dydd Gŵyl Dewi, Saint David's Day, in the daffodil and the leek, in the cathedrals and the parish churches, in the holy wells still visited and the pilgrimage routes still walked. But their deepest memorial is the land itself: a country whose map is, in large part, a record of where they walked, founded, prayed and died.

Vivit Post Funera Virtus — Virtue Lives On After Death

Graham Tudor Emmanuel, Kidwelly | 2026

Sources and Further Reading

Annales Cambriae (Annals of Wales), 10th-century Latin chronicle, primary source for dates of Dyfrig and other saints

Life of Samson of Dol, 7th-century Vita, earliest written source for Illtyd, Dyfrig and the communities at Llantwit Major and Caldey

Buchedd Dewi (Life of David), compiled by Rhygyfarch of St Davids, c. 1090

Liber Landavensis (Book of Llandaff), 12th century, containing lives of Dyfrig, Teilo and Oudoceus

Dictionary of Welsh Biography, National Library of Wales: entries for Dyfrig, David, Teilo, Illtyd, Cadfan

Wales: Early Christianity, Monasticism, Saints, Encyclopaedia Britannica

Archaeology Travel: Monasteries and Abbeys of Wales, archaeology-travel.com

Bardsey Island Trust, enlli.org

National Churches Trust: Dewi Sant, St Hywyn's Aberdaron, North Wales Pilgrims' Way, nationalchurchestrust.org

Llandaff Diocese: The Story of Saint Illtyd, llandaff.churchinwales.org.uk

Cult of Saints in Wales, University of Wales, saints.wales

Wales Religious Heritage and Pilgrim Ways, master document v6, 2026 (research source)

Oes y Sant

The Age of the Saints Interactive Map

Wales, c. AD 450 to 600

A Digital Heritage Map by Graham Tudor Emmanuel, Kidwelly



About This Map

The Oes y Sant map is a free, publicly accessible interactive digital map covering the sacred landscape of Wales during the Age of Saints, the period running from approximately AD 450 to 600 when an extraordinary number of Christian figures were active across the country, founding monasteries, establishing schools, walking pilgrimage routes, and giving their names to the land in ways that endure to this day. More than eight hundred saints of Welsh origin are known by name. This map places the most significant of them, and the places most directly associated with their lives and legacies, onto the modern landscape of Wales so that the geography of the age can be read and explored for the first time in a single integrated resource.

The map was created by Graham Tudor Emmanuel of Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire, as part of an ongoing programme of digital heritage research and publication. It forms part of a wider Welsh Religious Heritage mapping project that includes separate maps dedicated to individual pilgrimage routes and saints' ways across Wales. The Oes y Saint map is the foundational layer of that project: the people and places from which everything else in the Welsh Christian landscape grew.

The map is hosted on Google My Maps and is free to access, explore and share. It requires no account or login to view. It can be opened on any device: desktop, tablet or mobile. A direct link to the map is provided below. A companion series of narrative documents, one for each layer of the map, provides full biographical and historical accounts of every location shown. Those documents are also freely available and are designed to be read alongside the map.

<https://tinyurl.com/Age-of-Saints-Wales-map>



What the Map Contains

The map is organised into five layers, each covering a distinct category of sacred site from the Age of Saints. Each layer can be switched on and off independently, allowing the map to be read as a whole or explored one category at a time. The five layers are described below.

Layer 1 — The Saints

Layer 1 places the saints themselves on the map, marking their birthplaces, principal foundations, and death sites. The seven figures in this layer are Saint Dyfrig (Dubricius), the founding father of Welsh monasticism, born at Madley in the kingdom of Ergyng; Saint Illtyd, whose great monastic school at Llanilltud Fawr drew scholars from across the Celtic world;

Saint David (Dewi Sant), patron saint of Wales, born near Caerfai in Pembrokeshire; Saint Non, mother of David, commemorated at Capel Non and Ffynnon Non near St Davids; Saint Teilo, companion of David and founder of Llandeilo Fawr, born at Penally near Tenby; Saint Samson of Dol, educated at Llantwit Major and ordained by Dyfrig, whose missionary career carried Welsh Christianity to Brittany; and Saint Cadfan, the Breton missionary who founded the first monastery on Ynys Enlli.

Each pin in Layer 1 opens a detailed information balloon giving the saint's dates, principal connections and a summary of their significance. Fuller biographical narratives for each figure are available in the Layer 1 companion document.

Layer 2 — The Clasau and Monastic Foundations

Layer 2 maps the principal monastic communities founded during the Age of Saints. The clas, plural clasau, was the defining institution of the period: a community of clergy living together under an abbot, responsible for education, pastoral care and missionary activity across the surrounding countryside. The seven clasau in this layer are Llanilltud Fawr (Llantwit Major), the greatest monastic school in Wales; Glyn Rhosyn (St Davids), David's monastery in the Valley of the Roses; Hentland, Dyfrig's first monastic school on the Wye; Llandeilo Fawr, Teilo's foundation on the banks of the Tywi; Llancarfan, the clas of Cadog in the Vale of Glamorgan; Caldey Island (Ynys Pyr), the island hermitage associated with Dyfrig and Samson; and Llanbadarn Fawr, Padarn's foundation near Aberystwyth in Ceredigion.

Layer 3 — Holy Wells of the Saints

Layer 3 maps the holy wells associated with the Age of Saints figures. The wells of Wales are among the most ancient features of the sacred landscape, many of them in use before Christianity arrived and then consecrated and renamed by the saints whose communities gathered around them. The four wells in this layer are Ffynnon Non, the healing well of Saint Non near St Davids; Ffynnon Ddewi, the spring of Saint David within the valley of the Alun; Ffynnon Teilo, the well of Saint Teilo at Llandeilo Fawr; and Ffynnon Illtyd, the spring within the monastic precinct at Llantwit Major. These four wells survived the dissolution of the monasteries and the Reformation because local communities continued to use and maintain them, and they remain accessible today.

Layer 4 — Pilgrimage Destinations and Sacred Islands

Layer 4 maps the culminating destinations of the Age of Saints pilgrimage tradition. The four sites in this layer are Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island), the Island of Twenty Thousand Saints and the greatest pilgrimage destination in Wales; Aberdaron, where St Hywyn's Church stood as

the last sanctuary on land before the crossing to Ynys Enlli; Porth Meudwy, the Hermit's Cove from which the boat crossing to Bardsey departs; and Llanddewi Brefi in Ceredigion, the site of the great synod of around AD 550 at which David's authority within the Welsh church was confirmed. Three of the four sites cluster at the tip of the Llŷn Peninsula in north-west Wales, where the greatest destination of the pilgrimage tradition lay.

Layer 5 — Churches Bearing a Saint's Name

Layer 5 maps the parish churches across Wales whose dedications preserve the memory of an Age of Saints figure. Each church stands on the ground of an original llan, the sacred enclosure within which the founding monastic community gathered, and each carries a saint's name that has been in continuous use since the sixth century. The eight churches in this layer are St Davids Cathedral (Tyddewi); Llandaff Cathedral in Cardiff; St Iltyd's Church at Llantwit Major; St Teilo's Church at Llandeilo Fawr; St Cadfan's Church at Tywyn; St Hywyn's Church at Aberdaron; Capel Non near St Davids; and St Padarn's Church at Llanbadarn Fawr near Aberystwyth.

How to Use the Map

Opening the Map

The map can be opened at any time by following the link provided below or by searching for Oes y Sant on Google My Maps. It opens in your web browser and requires no download, installation or account. On a desktop or laptop computer the full map with its legend panel opens automatically. On a mobile phone or tablet the map opens in the Google Maps or Google My Maps application if it is installed, or in the mobile browser if it is not.

Navigating the Map

On a desktop or laptop, the map can be zoomed in and out using the scroll wheel of the mouse or the plus and minus buttons in the lower right corner of the map window. The map can be panned in any direction by clicking and dragging. On a mobile device, the standard pinch and spread gesture zooms the map in and out, and a single finger drag moves across it. The map opens at a zoom level showing the whole of Wales, which allows the distribution of sites across the country to be read at a glance. Zooming in to any area reveals the individual pins in greater detail and makes it easier to distinguish closely spaced sites.

Using the Layers

The five layers are listed in the legend panel on the left side of the map on desktop, or accessible through the layer icon on mobile. Each layer has a tick box or toggle beside its name. Clicking

or tapping the tick box switches that layer off so that only its pins are hidden while all other layers remain visible. Clicking again restores the layer. This allows the map to be read in many ways: all five layers together for a full picture of the sacred landscape, or individual layers switched on one at a time to focus on a specific category of site. A visitor planning a journey to the clasau of South Wales, for example, might switch on Layer 2 alone; someone following Teilo's story might keep Layers 1, 2 and 5 on together to see his birthplace, his foundation and the church that bears his name in a single view.

On mobile devices the layer panel may need to be opened by tapping the list icon at the top left of the screen. The layers are listed in order from Layer 1 to Layer 5, and each layer name is preceded by a small, coloured icon that matches the pin colour used for that layer on the map.

Reading a Pin

Every pin on the map opens an information balloon when clicked or tapped. The balloon gives the name of the site, its layer, its location, its dates where known, and a summary description of its significance. The description is written to be read as a standalone piece of historical information rather than as a bare data entry: it tells the story of the person or place in plain language without academic jargon, drawing on the same research that informs the companion narrative documents.

To close an information balloon, click or tap anywhere outside it or press the cross in its top right corner. On mobile, swiping down from the top of the balloon panel closes it.

Switching Between Map and Satellite View

Google My Maps allows the base map to be switched between the standard street map view and a satellite or aerial photograph view. On desktop, the option to switch view is available at the bottom left of the map window. Switching to the satellite view is particularly useful for sites such as Ynys Enlli, Caldey Island, Porth Meudwy and Capel Non, where the physical character of the landscape is as important as the historical information, and where the aerial image shows the relationship between the site and its surroundings in a way that the map cannot.

Sharing the Map

The map can be shared directly by copying the link from the browser address bar and sending it by message, email or social media. It can also be shared using the share button within the Google My Maps interface, which generates a short link or allows the map to be embedded in a website. The map is set to public visibility and can be shared freely. If you find the map useful, sharing it with others who have an interest in Welsh history, heritage, pilgrimage or the early church is the most direct way of extending the reach of the project. Copy link below.

<https://tinyurl.com/Age-of-Saints-Wales-map>

The Companion Narrative Documents

The map is designed to work alongside a series of six narrative documents that provide full historical and biographical accounts of every site and figure shown. The documents are written in the same plain, unhurried prose as the map's information balloons, but at greater length and depth, and they are structured to follow the map layer by layer so that a reader can move between the document and the map without losing their place in either.

The six documents are: the Preface, which gives a full account of the Age of Saints as a period and introduces the five key figures whose stories run through the whole project; and five layer documents, one for each layer of the map, each opening with an introduction to the layer's category and then working through every site in legend order. Together the six documents form a complete companion volume to the map, providing the depth of context that the map's information balloons can only summarise.

All six documents are freely available. Links to each document are provided below. They can be downloaded and read at any time, on any device, without requiring an account or login.

About the Project

The Oes y Saint map is part of a wider programme of digital heritage work focused on the history of Wales and the Welsh people. The project was created and is maintained by Graham Tudor Emmanuel of Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire, an independent digital heritage researcher whose work encompasses GPS survey, archival research, FindAGrave memorial documentation, Google My Maps, and publication on People's Collection Wales, the national digital heritage platform of Wales.

Previous maps in the same programme include the Welsh Fortresses Through Time map, covering 186 Welsh defensive sites across eight chronological layers from the Iron Age to the late medieval period; A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616 to 1421, a 164-pin interactive map with an eight-volume narrative companion; the Wind, Water and Tidal Mills of Wales map, the first integrated digital map of Welsh mill sites; and the West Wales Wellbeing and Connection Map, a community resource covering health and wellbeing services across Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

The Oes y Sant map represents the beginning of a dedicated Welsh Religious Heritage map series. Companion maps covering specific pilgrimage routes, Cistercian foundations, and other aspects of the religious landscape of Wales are in development. All maps in the series are free, publicly accessible and designed to make the history of Wales available to anyone who wants to explore it, wherever they are and whatever their starting point.

Comments, corrections, and additional information are welcome. If you know of a site, a well, a church dedication or a local tradition connected to the Age of Saints that is not yet on the map, please get in touch. This project grows through the knowledge of people who know their own landscapes, and local knowledge is always the most valuable source of all.

The Age of Saints left no stone fortresses and no written chronicles of its own. What it left was something more durable: a sacred geography etched into the placenames, the churchyards, the holy wells and the pilgrimage routes of Wales, still readable in the landscape fifteen hundred years after the last of its great figures walked it.

This map and its companion documents are an attempt to make that geography visible again, to restore the human stories behind the placenames and to give anyone with a curiosity about Wales a way into a period that shaped everything that came after it.

The project began with a single question about a shared social media post and became, in the course of one day, a GPS-verified interactive map, thirty confirmed locations across five layers, and a suite of narrative documents covering every saint, every clas, every holy well, every pilgrimage destination and every church in the map's legend.

That is what digital heritage research can do when the methodology is right and the subject deserves it. Wales deserves it. Oes y Sant deserves it. The saints who walked this land and gave it its sacred character deserve to be known by name, placed on a map, and read about in plain language by the people whose country they helped to make.

<https://tinyurl.com/OES-Y-SANT-450-600-AD>



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