About Saint Patrick

St Patrick, the national saint of Ireland, was a fifth-century missionary, credited with spreading Christianity in Ireland.

Since 1903, his feast day, 17 March, has been a public holiday in Ireland. In recent years, St Patrick's Day has become a global celebration of Ireland and Irishness. As a result, after St Nicholas (Santa Claus), Patrick is arguably the most widely known saint in the world.

Myth-Busting
- Patrick wasn't Patrick – he was born Maewyn Succat.
- Patrick wasn't Irish – he was born in Roman Britain.
- Patrick wasn't the first to bring Christianity to Ireland – Pope Celestine sent Palladius to the Irish as their first bishop in AD 431.
- Patrick is not Ireland's only patron saint; he is one of three.
- Patrick did not, literally, drive snakes out of Ireland; unlike neighbouring Britain, Ireland has no native snakes.
- Patrick was never formally canonised by the Church, but is a saint by popular acclaim.
- The first recorded St Patrick's Day parade took place in the USA, not Ireland.
- Shamrock is actually clover!

Life of St Patrick
Patrick was born somewhere in the west of Britain to a family of Romanised Celts in the fifth century.

At the age of sixteen, he was kidnapped by Irish raiders and brought to Ireland as a slave. He spent six years tending animals on Slemish Mountain, Co. Antrim. Then, guided by a dream, Patrick escaped and fled Ireland for the Continent, where he studied and was ordained. Following another dream, in which he heard "the voice of the Irish" calling him back, he returned to Ireland as a Christian missionary around AD 460.

Back in Ireland, Patrick and his band of monks toured the island banishing the old gods, battling kings and druids, and converting the Irish to Christianity.

Two of the best known legends about St Patrick are that he used shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity to the pagan Irish and that he banished snakes from the island.

According to another legend, St Patrick spent forty days and nights on Croagh Patrick in Co. Mayo. Afterwards, while travelling through Joyce Country in north Co. Galway, he climbed to the mountain pass at Maumean and blessed Connemara.

In old age, St Patrick was cared for by St Bridget at Saul, Co. Down and there he died on 17 March, c. 493. According to tradition, he is buried – alongside St Bridget and St Colmcille – at Dowpatrick, Co. Down. The short rhyme goes: "In Down, three saints one grave do fill, Patrick, Brigid and Colmcille". Patrick, Bridget and Colmcille are the three patron saints of Ireland.

St Patrick's Day Parade
The first recorded St Patrick's Day parade took place not in Ireland but rather in Boston, USA on 17 March, 1737. New York City held its first parade in 1762. The first parade in Ireland took place in Waterford in 1903. The first official, state-sponsored parade in Dublin took place in 1931.

Popular Irish Name
Some sources claim that St Patrick was born Maewyn Succat, and that he later became known by the Latin *Patricius* meaning 'noble'. In times past, Patrick was one of the most common boys' names in Ireland. There are many variations of the name – Pat, Paddy, Paudie, Pattie, Patsy, Packie, Pa, and, in Irish, Pádraic and Pádraig.

Further Reading:
- Cormac Bourke (2009) Patrick (Patricius, Pátraic, Pádraig) in *The Dictionary of Irish Biography* (online)
- Kevin Danaher (1972) *The Year in Ireland: Irish Calendar Customs*
- Maire Heaney (1994) *Over Nine Waves: A Book of Irish Legends*
- Dáithí hÓgáin (2006) *The Lore of Ireland: An Encyclopaedia of Myth, Legend and Romance*