

Further excavations at St Patrick's Chapel

More early burials anticipated

Further excavations are due to begin again this month at St Patrick's Chapel at Whitesands, with a dig being organised once again under the auspices of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust. It is hoped that the project will cast more light on the remarkable discoveries made during the last excavations in 2014, 2015 and 2016 when it was revealed that the site contains over 100 burials some of them dating back to the 6th century AD, and all long predating the medieval chapel dedicated to Ireland's patron saint.

The experts anticipate that up to a 1,000 people may have been buried at the site with the tradition continuing right up to the 11th century, and that they could have been local people, men, women and children, sailors, traders and pilgrims travelling to St Davids. One of the most remarkable outcomes of the previous excavations was the discovery of a large number of children's burials, incorporating what appears to have been a unique burial rite with white quartz pebbles placed on top of the stone slabs which covered the skeletons.

Many of the skeletons had been buried in cists, graves lined and capped with stone slabs, a common burial tradition in western Britain in the early medieval period, with the graves being aligned east to west, and, in keeping with Christian burial tradition, no possessions being buried with the bodies.

The project is being carried out as part of an EU funded programme *Rediscovering Ancient Connections – The Saints* being led by Pembrokeshire County Council, the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Wexford County Council in Ireland and Visit Wexford. The initiative aims to form links between the two regions and attract tourists. Notwithstanding the imminence of Brexit, funding has also been secured for 2020 and 2021.

Over the years much damage has been done to the site by coastal erosion despite efforts by the National Park to protect it, and that is why the project has become so significant before the sea washes away any more historical evidence.

Once again the Trust anticipates being able to offer regular guided tours of the site during the dig from 9th - 27th September. There will be no need for advance booking and the tours will be free.



Some more dates for your diary and things to look out for:

24th September – *Ancient Connections project launch* at Ty'r Pererin, St Davids, 9.30 am - 4.00 pm.

All welcome, spaces are limited, please book using following link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ancient-connections-project-launch-lansio-prosiect-hen-gysylltiadau-registration-65027612339>

October 2019 – *Community Consultation* on public art being commissioned by the project. This is open to anyone to have their say and influence the commissioning process. Date and venue TBC.

October to December 2019 – *Community Research*. An independent researcher is being appointed by the project to draw together existing research and unearth the ancient stories of connection between here and Ireland. The project needs your help! If you're interested in local folklore, history and genealogy, please get in touch with project manager rowan.matthiessen@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

There will be an opportunity for community groups to gain financial support for projects which align with the overall programme. Guidelines will be published on the 24th September at the project launch. For more information contact project officer ruth.jones@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

Ancient Connections is a collaboration between Pembrokeshire and Wexford county councils, the National Park Authority and Visit Wexford. Funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Ireland Wales co-operation programme. Follow project activity on Facebook [@AncientConnect](https://www.facebook.com/AncientConnect)

