

Saint Kessog



By kind permission of the painter, Dr H P Cooper Harrison



St Kessog lived in the 6th century around 460 and died on 10th March, 520. Also known as St Kessoc or MacKessog, it is purported he was born into the Royal family of Munster in Ireland, son of King Cashel of Munster and made his name as a missionary in Scotland although he began his religious life in Ireland. It is said that a swimming accident when he was a child led to the deaths of the sons of a number of visiting Princes. Kessog is alleged to have brought them back to life and averted a war by spending a night in prayer. He was educated at a monastery by St Patrick and St Malachoi before setting out for Scotland.^[1] However, there is another perspective on the historical background of St Kessog. It is reputed that he was of Roman decent, part of the Roman Army as was his father. He was known as the soldier Saint as he went about with a sword tied to his waist.^[2]

St Kessog's Footprint in Scotland

St Kessog was mainly active in west and central Scotland, having established a monastery on the island of Inchtavannach (Monk's Isle) on the western side of Loch Lomond. He frequented the Lennox area from the Firth of Clyde inland to Callander, Stirling and Glasgow. There are references to him having a session with 'Brude', the Pictish King at Inverness, and a ferry to the Black Isle was called the St Kessog's ferry. More recently the Kessock Bridge (1982) and the Kessog Oil field (2000). The St Kessog's Well formed the division between Leddriegreen and Ballewan estates in Strathblane. There is also a 'well' at the Honey Holm between Balfron and Fintry called St Kessog's Well where he baptised his converts. Some say he was found dead at this well, where he had gone to quench his thirst and rest after walking some considerable distance. Others recorded that he was attacked and killed at Bandry, on the western shore of Loch Lomond overlooking the island of Inchtavannach, and that the place was marked by St Kessog's Cairn. He was buried on the western shore of Loch Lomond and the herbs that grew up around his grave led to the place becoming known as Luss (Gaelic for 'place of herbs').^[3]

St Kessog was widely venerated in the medieval period and the troops under Robert Bruce used 'Blessed Kessog' as a battle cry during the wars of independence and was considered the patron saint of Scotland until the adoption of St Andrew, crucified on an X shaped cross which is represented by the white cross on the Scottish flag, the Saltire, since at least 1385. St Kessog is remembered in a number of churches and fairs across Scotland. An ancient fair at Auchterarder in Perthshire (1200 AD) recalled the feast of St Kessog once kept in Scotland on 10 March (date of his death). Other fairs were held at

Comrie, Callander and the island of Cumbrae of the west coast of Scotland accessed by ferry from Largs. There can be found old parish churches in the Perthshire area including Comrie, Callander and Auchterarder. Further afield are North and South Kessock near Inverness. In the Luss church there is an effigy of St Kessog; his cell was near the top of Luss Glen where stands a memorial stone and a cell on the right side in the wood. St Kessogs church in Strathblane was built in 1893 when the congregation of the parish was at its zenith.

[1] Farmer, D. (2011) The Oxford Dictionary of Saints, eISBN: 9780191727764 and <http://omniumsanctorumhiberniae.blogspot.com/2014/03/saint-kessog-of-lennox-march-10.html>

[2] Guthrie Smith, J. (1886) The Parish of Strathblane and its inhabitants from Early Times (pp. 167, 168, 229 and 261 accessed and collated by J Arthur Muir for Strathblane Heritage Society exhibition)

[3] <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usbiography/k/stkessog.html>