

ILLTUD (c. 475 - c. 525) a Celtic saint and one of the founders of monachism in Britain

Name: Illtud

Date of birth: c. 475

Date of death: c. 525

Gender: Male

Occupation: Celtic saint and one of the founders of monachism in Britain

Area of activity: Religion

Author: Emrys George Bowen

The earliest document that tells us anything about him is the 'Vita Samsonis,' which was written at Dol, Brittany, about the year 610. There we are told that the youthful [Samson](#) is taken by his parents to the school of 'an illustrious master of the Britons named Eltut.' We are informed, too, that Eltut had been a disciple of S. Germanus of Auxerre and that he was 'the most learned of all the Britons in the knowledge of Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and in every branch of philosophy - poetry and rhetoric, grammar and arithmetic, and he was most sagacious and gifted with the power of foretelling future events.' From references in the 'Lives' of other saints written at a much later date, and from the medieval 'Vita Illtuti' itself, we gather that this famous school must have been at Llantwit Major in the Vale of Glamorgan and that other distinguished persons such as [Gildas](#), [S. Paul Aurelian](#), and [S. David](#) were also pupils of S. Illtud. Similarly, from late sources we are informed that the great teacher was of Armorican birth, i.e. born in Brittany, and that both his parents were of royal lineage. It may well be, however, that we can afford to disregard all the later material and see in the few pregnant sentences of the 'Vita Samsonis' a fairly accurate picture of a cultured Briton living in the years following the withdrawal of Rome from the west, who, nevertheless, had inherited some at least of the classical learning, coupled with some learning still derived from the native priesthood, and to which had been added a knowledge of Christianity and its literature.

Modern students recognize that an analysis of church 'dedications' and of the toponymy of districts associated with Celtic saints must go side by side with a study of the documents which profess to describe their lives. The ancient churches dedicated to S. Illtud are found for the most part in south-eastern Wales, especially in Brecknock, South Glamorgan and Gower. There are vivid traditions of him in these parts which possibly may lend authority to the view that he came from the Welsh and not from the Armorican Llydaw. Like so many of his contemporaries he seems to have travelled widely by way of the western sea routes, which were reviving after the withdrawal of Roman power. This explains the 'dedication' to S. Illtud at Llanelltyd near Dolgelly, as well as the 'dedications' in the ancient dioceses of Léon, Tréguier, and Vannes in Brittany.

Author

Professor Emrys George Bowen, (1900 - 1983)

Sources

G. H. Doble, *Saint Illtud* (Cardiff 1944) (Cardiff 1944)

Baring-Gould and J. Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints*, iii, 303-17

E. G. Bowen, 'The Settlements of the Celtic Saints in South Wales,' in *Antiquity*, December 1945, 175 ff

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Illtud](#)

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