

**IRISH HISTORY**

# 03

**CHRONOLOGICAL AWARENESS**

- 8000 BC**: Old Stone Age (Mesolithic) - No evidence of people living in Ireland
- 6000 BC**: Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic) - First people in Ireland
- 4000 BC**: New Stone Age (Neolithic) - First farmers in Ireland
- 2000 BC**: Bronze Age - First use of metal
- 0**: Iron Age - Iron replaced bronze; arrival of Celts
- Early Christian Ireland**: Arrival of Christianity

**L.O. 2.6**  
The Nature of History: 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11  
CBA1  
CBA2

**You will learn to ...**

- Consider the historical significance of Christianity
- Consider the contribution of Christianity to culture and society in Early Christian Ireland
- Explore the Nature of History

**Skellig Michael**

**Clonmacnoise**

What do these pictures tell you about Early Christian Ireland?

**KEY WORDS**

- Excavations
- Evidence
- Stratigraphy
- Round Tower
- Tonsure
- Crozier
- Manuscripts
- Radiocarbon dating
- Monastery
- High Cross
- Scriptorium
- Filigree
- Sources
- Dendrochronology
- Beehive hut
- Scribe
- Chalice

# Early Christian Ireland

## Pre-Christian Ireland

Before the coming of Christianity to Ireland, the country was dominated by **Celtic culture**. The Celtic way of life had come to Ireland about 900 years before. It coincided with the development of the **Iron Age**, when iron replaced **bronze** as the main metal for weapons and tools.

Unlike Britain, the **Romans** had not conquered Ireland. The Celtic language, laws and religion were spoken and practised here. The **druids**, or priests, controlled the Celtic religion. It was a **pagan religion** which believed in many gods.

## The coming of Christianity to Ireland

There were Christians in Ireland by the early fifth century (400–499 AD). Some came from **Roman Britain**, where they had been captured in raids by Irish warriors, while others were Irish people who had been converted during contact with Christians in Britain.

The pope sent a number of **missionaries** to visit the Irish Christians. The first of these was **Palladius**, who was sent in 431 AD as a bishop to 'the Irish who believe in Christ'. But the most famous of the missionaries was **St Patrick**, who told his story in his *Confession*.

## St Patrick

St Patrick was born in **Roman Britain**, but at the age of **sixteen** he was captured by Irish raiders. He was kept as a **slave** for six years, tending sheep on mountains in the West of Ireland. Then he escaped and eventually returned to his family in Britain. Some time later, he became a priest and bishop and returned to Ireland as a **missionary**.

Through the work of St Patrick and other missionaries, Ireland was largely a Christian country by the early sixth century. The coming of Christianity made **significant changes** to Irish culture and society. It replaced the pagan religion and many Celtic festivals became Christian festivals instead. For the rest of this chapter, we will consider other **significant changes**.

## What is St Patrick's *Confession*?

The *Confession* is an account written by St Patrick. It gives brief details of his life. It explains why he did certain things and it defends his good name against any attack on his character. The Book of Armagh, housed in Trinity College, Dublin contains the earliest copy of Saint Patrick's *Confession* known to exist.

- © Describe the story of the coming of Christianity to Ireland
- © Consider the meaning of 'historically significant'
- © Outline some of the work of the early Irish monasteries
- © Investigate how historians and archaeologists know about Clonmacnoise



### Celtic Ireland

Go onto YouTube and look up 'Miss Stout's History Class The Celts'

### WHAT DOES 'HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT' MEAN?

**Definition:** The **significance** of something is the importance that it has, usually because it will have an effect on a situation or shows something about a situation. (**Collins English Dictionary**)

**Historically significant events** include those that resulted in **great change** over long periods of time for large numbers of people.

In relation to **Early Christian Ireland**, you will be asked to judge

- How did the events cause change?
- What impact/effect did the events have on their own time?
- What impact/effect do the events have on us today?

## HISTORICAL EMPATHY

**Q Extracts from St Patrick's Confession****1.**

My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers. I am looked down upon by many. My father was Calpornius. He was a deacon; his father was Potitus, a priest, who lived at Bannavem Taburniae. His home was near there, and that is where I was taken prisoner. I was about sixteen at the time. At that time, I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity in Ireland, along with thousands of others. We deserved this, because we had gone away from God, and did not keep his commandments.

**2.**

**I**t was there [in Ireland] one night in my sleep that I heard a voice saying to me: 'You have fasted well. Very soon you will return to your native country.' Again after a short while, I heard someone saying to me: 'Look – your ship is ready.' It was not nearby, but a good two hundred miles away. I had never been to the place, nor did I know anyone there. So I ran away then, and left the man with whom I had been for six years.

**3.**

It was while I was there [back home in Britain] that I saw, in a vision in the night, a man whose name was Victoricus coming as it were from Ireland with so many letters they could not be counted. He gave me one of these, and I read the beginning of the letter, the voice of the Irish people. While I was reading out the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard at that moment the voice of those who were beside the wood of Voclut, near the western sea. They called out as it were with one voice: 'We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us.' This touched my heart deeply, and I could not read any further; I woke up then. Thanks be to God, after many years the Lord granted them what they were calling for.

**4.**

How has this happened in Ireland? Never before did they know of God except to serve idols and unclean things. But now, they have become the people of the Lord, and are called children of God. The sons and daughters of the leaders of the Irish are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ!

(Source: [www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio\\_english#01](http://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#01))

1. What does Patrick say about himself when he was young?
2. Why did he write the *Confession*?
3. Why did he go back to Britain?
4. Why did he return to Ireland?
5. Is the *Confession* a primary or a secondary source for the life of St Patrick?
6. What information is not included that you would like to know?

## CHRONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

**Timeline of St Patrick**

Patrick provides no dates in his *Confession*. Later writers provide some of the dates but they may be wrong.

387 AD	Birth of Patrick
403	Captured as a slave
409	Escaped and returned to Britain
??	Trained as a priest and bishop
432	St Patrick came back to Ireland as missionary
461	Death of St Patrick

**Early Irish monasteries**

In the sixth century (500–599 AD) and after, many monasteries were built in Ireland. Holy men who wanted places to pray and honour God founded most of the monasteries. However, women, such as, St Íta and St Brigid, also founded some. Men such as St Enda in the Aran Islands, St Finian of Clonard, St Ciarán of Clonmacnoise and St Brendan of Clonfert built monasteries, which became centres of learning and culture:

- The Bible was studied
- Manuscripts (hand written books) were studied

- Metal-working and stone-carving produced great works of art
- Visitors were welcomed

However, the monks lived simple lives:

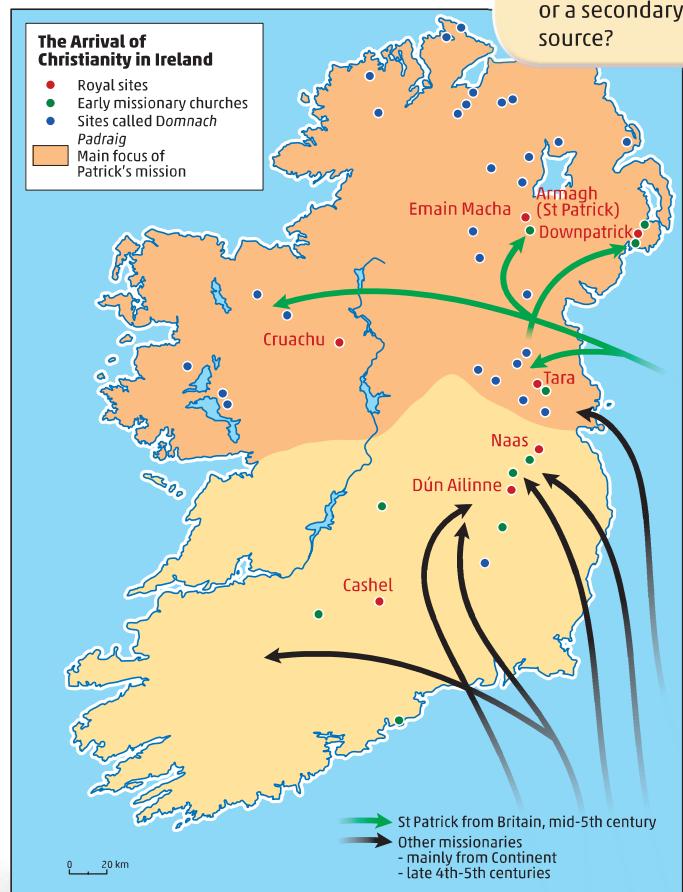
- They followed strict rules, with an abbott in charge
- They produced their own food
- They wore long tunics with woollen cloaks, and shoes or sandals

## TIME AND SPACE



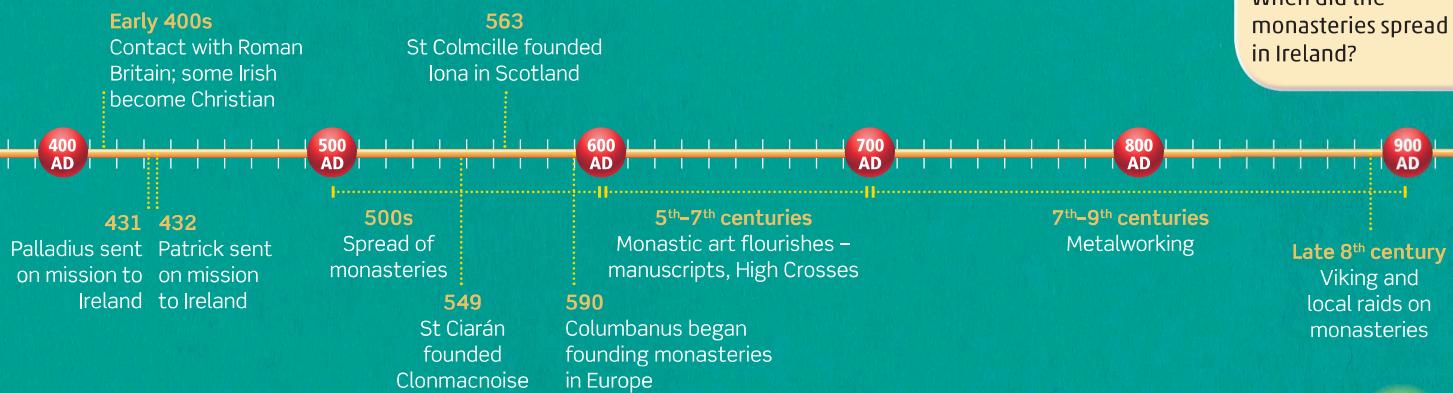
1. What does this map tell you about how Ireland was converted to Christianity?
2. Is this a primary or a secondary source?

## Christian missions to Ireland in the fifth century



## CHRONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

### Early Christian Ireland



When did the monasteries spread in Ireland?

# How do Historians and Archaeologists know about Clonmacnoise?

Historians and archaeologists often begin their investigations with **questions**. They research **sources** to provide the **evidence** which will answer the questions.

**Clonmacnoise**, on the banks of the River Shannon, just south of present-day Athlone, was one of the greatest monasteries in Early Christian Ireland.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

1. How old is Clonmacnoise and who founded it?



2. Did many people live here?
3. What did they work at?
4. What connection did the monastery have with the river?
5. Why was this location chosen for the monastery?
6. Was there only one wall around it?
7. What use was made of the buildings?



Are there any other questions you would like to add to the questions above about Clonmacnoise?



Go onto YouTube and look up 'The Lost City of Clonmacnoise – Secret of the Stones Excerpt'. Next, look up 'The Lost City of Clonmacnoise 3D App'.

Visit ...

Clonmacnoise,  
Co Offaly

## How does new technology help in the investigating and understanding what life was like in Clonmacnoise?



Geophysical survey



Touch screen and virtual reality (VR)



Underwater archaeology

You will be able to work out some of the answers to the questions on p. 42 by matching 1–7 there with A–G on this page.

**A**

**Historians** say the **annals** tell us about the rules and work of monasteries. They say Clonmacnoise was a major centre of **Christian art and learning**. They also say that the Annals of Clonmacnoise and other manuscripts were produced there in a **scriptorium** (room where manuscripts were written).

**Archaeology excavations** show that there is **evidence** of much craftwork, animal slaughtering, metalworking, stone-cutting and farming at Clonmacnoise.

**D**

**Historians** studied **8<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts** which said there were two or three rings around large monasteries.

**Archaeologists** excavated a **ditch** which showed a second ring; **aerial photography** showed a third outer ring around Clonmacnoise.

**B**

**Historians** say the **annals** record the building of the **cathedral** in 909 AD. They also refer to the other churches on the site and to the **High Crosses**. The annals give the date of the **round tower** as 1124 AD.

**Archaeologists** have shown that there were later **changes** to the cathedral. They have analysed the **panels** on the High Crosses. They also say that **postholes** in other round towers show that wooden steps were built up to the high door.

**C**

**Historians** and **archaeologists** say that the site was chosen for the location of the monastery because it is the junction of the **north-south route** on the navigable **River Shannon** with the **Eiscir Riada** (Great Road) – a great glacial deposit – which was the main **east-west route** across Early Christian Ireland.

**F**

**Historians** said traders could sail up and down the river. **Archaeologists** used **underwater archaeology** to discover the remains of a **wooden bridge** which crossed the Shannon there. They used **dendrochronology** to date the timber to **804 AD**.

**E**

**Historians** have accounts which tell how **St Ciarán** looked for a site for his monastery – 'Here will I live' – and began building in **549 AD**. He died shortly after in a plague.

**Archaeologists** are able to **date** activity on the site through **radiocarbon dating**, **dendrochronology** and **stratigraphy**.

**G**

**Documents** said that Clonmacnoise was a **large urban centre**. Historians also used old maps to show that there was a **Fair Green** where great fairs were held.

**Archaeologists** used **excavations** and **stratigraphy** to show that a large population lived between the first and second rings around the monastery. A **geophysical survey** showed that Clonmacnoise was a very large site.

1. What **primary sources** used by **historians** are mentioned in the accounts here, A–G?
2. What **new technology** used by **archaeologists** are mentioned in the accounts here, A–G?
3. Select one of the questions, 1–7, and explain how **historians and archaeologists** have helped each other in answering that question?

p. 24

What have you learnt in relation to how historians and archaeologists have investigated the history of Clonmacnoise?



Investigate the contribution of Christianity to culture and society

## The monastery buildings



1. What features show that this was a very important monastery?
2. Do you agree that the monastery was also a large town? Explain your answers.

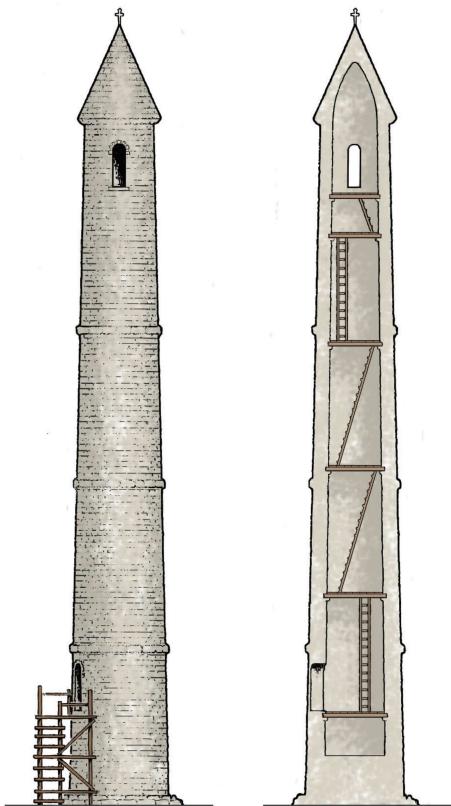
There were other large monasteries besides Clonmacnoise. These included **Clonard**, **Kells**, **Cork**, **Clonfert**, **Glendalough** and **Armagh** which were built along important routes. These were **monastic towns**, like Clonmacnoise, with many lay people living around the monastery. These were important centres of **economic activity**.

There were also small, remote (out of the way) monasteries built on islands off the west coast of Ireland. The most famous of these is **Skellig Michael**, off the coast of Co. Kerry, where the monks lived in **small stone beehive huts** beside a small stone church.



**Skellig Michael, off the coast of Kerry**

## The round tower



pp. 26–27

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Round towers were built in larger monasteries, such as Clonmacnoise, Glendalough and Cork. They were stone towers between 25 and 40 metres tall, with four windows on the top floor, facing north, south, east and west. The towers were used as belfries when a handbell was rung from the top windows to call the monks to services. Here is a cross-section of a round tower showing timber floors in the inside.

## Some of the rules of St Columbanus

St Columbanus founded monasteries in France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy from 585 AD until his death in Italy in 615 AD.

- At the first word of a superior [those in charge] all must rise to obey, because by obeying him they obey God.
- The rule of silence must be carefully observed, for it is written: ‘The service of justice shall be quietness and peace.’
- The food of the monks shall be coarse, consisting of cabbage, vegetables, flour mixed with water, and a biscuit, and taken toward evening lest the stomach be burdened and the mind confused. Gorging (eating greedily) must be guarded against in eating, and drunkenness in drinking.
- While the monks will have much in heaven, on earth they should be satisfied with the small possessions of greatest need.
- Let the monk live in a community under the discipline of one father and in company with many, so that from one he may learn lowliness, from another, patience.



1. Which rule would you consider is the most important, and why?
2. Which rule would you consider is the least important, and why?
3. Which rule would you think was the most difficult to keep?

## Work

The main activity of the monks was prayer. They had six or eight prayer services each day. During the rest of the day there was work to be done on the farm – ploughing, milking, and harvesting and grinding corn. In some monasteries there were lay monks to help out with this work.

The early Irish monasteries are most famous for their great works of art, which were produced to honour God.



Go onto YouTube and look up ‘Miss Stout’s History Class –The Life of a Monk in Early Christian Ireland.’

# What was the Contribution of Christianity to Ireland?

## Reading and writing

Christianity brought reading and writing to Ireland. The first reading and writing was done in **Latin**, which was the language of the Catholic Church. It was done by the early missionaries such as Palladius and St Patrick. New words came into the Irish language from Latin. Very soon, manuscripts were being written in Irish. These changes brought Ireland into **written history**. It also brought the learning of Roman scholars and early Church writers to Ireland. Some of this learning was used in compiling **laws** for the new Church and for society around it.



## Ogham stones

The first form of writing in Ireland was done on the side of stones. Lines carved along the edge of the rock represented words. The **ogham alphabet** of twenty letters was based on the Latin (Roman) alphabet. But it was the **coming of Christianity** to Ireland that made full use of the Roman alphabet which was used to write manuscripts in Latin and, later, in the Irish language.

## Contribution to art

### Manuscripts

The monasteries produced manuscripts. **Manuscripts** are hand written books. The Gospels, the psalms, the lives of saints and the Celtic sagas (legends) were written down in **Latin**, the language of the Church. Later ones were written in **Irish**. Some manuscripts record the events of early Irish history.