The Female Saints of Cornwall

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to identify the female saints of Cornwall and their connections to each other and to the saints of other Celtic regions. The aim of the research was to establish if there were common links and themes between these saints, given that so many of them are found and remembered solely in Cornwall and, in the majority of cases, have only one church dedicated to them. Given the lack of contemporaneous written material relating to these saints, much focus was placed on material evidence relating to them in terms of churches and holy wells, many of which I visited. Secondary evidence relating to these saints has also been considered, including the work of both modern scholars and earlier sources. Although much work has been carried out on the saints of Cornwall, little has been done to establish any parallels between the female saints. In many cases, the lack of knowledge about them means that they are all but forgotten outside of their parish boundary. It became clear as I researched more that there were links between them in terms of common themes (in particular, the themes of water and holy wells, and of the virgin martyr). There were also geographical links with other Celtic countries, namely Ireland, Wales and Brittany. These formed a clear pattern of their own, with regard to the location of the saints in Cornwall.

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Introduction

> Many years ago the Devil decided to avoid Cornwall as he had no desire to be made into either a squab pie or a saint, and that was the fate of anyone who ventured west of the Tamar.[1]

There is an old Cornish saying that there are more saints in Cornwall than there are in heaven.[2] This is as true for female saints as it is for male saints in Cornwall. Some of the saints are unknown except for their name which they bequeathed to a church; and in some cases, a lack of information means it is unclear whether the saint was male or female. Some of the saints are famous outside of Cornwall; many are known only within Cornwall. This study aims to explore further the female saints of Cornwall, their links and similarities with each other and with other Celtic saints, and the legacy they left in terms of their holy places and legends. It is important to establish here that the title refers to 'the female saints of Cornwall' rather than 'female Cornish saints'. This difference is significant – the majority of the saints who have left their mark in Cornwall were not of Cornish origin. This study will be limited to those with a material link to Cornwall, in the form of a church dedication or holy well, for example, not those who are mentioned only in passing or in reference to other saints (such as St Dominica). Note here, too, that for reasons of space, reference will not be made to the saints of the Isles of Scilly, which, although classified as part of Cornwall for political and economic reasons, have their own traditions and legends.

The aim of this research in the first instance is to establish if there were patterns or similarities between the female saints of Cornwall, given that many of them are found

[1] T. Deane and T. Shaw, *Folklore of Cornwall* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2003). See Robert Hunt for more information about the Devil avoiding Cornwall: *Popular Romances of the West of England, or The Drolls, Traditions, and Superstitions of Old Cornwall* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930), p.212.
[2] Quoted by, for example, M. A. Courtney, *Cornish Feasts and Folklore* (Wakefield: EP Publishing Ltd, 1973 reprint of 1890 edition), p.1.

and remembered solely in Cornwall and, in the majority of cases, have only one church dedicated to them. Thus they can be truly considered as purely local saints. I wanted to discover the reasons why this was so and why, in so many Cornish cases, the original dedication of the church to its female saint had remained whereas outside of Cornwall, many local saints have been 'lost', with the church dedication changing to a more universally well-known saint who did not necessary have any specific link to the area.

In order to achieve this, I looked for any contemporaneous evidence that I could find. Unfortunately, there is a lack of written evidence from the early Celtic period (around the 5th–6th century when churches and holy sites were being established in Cornwall as elsewhere). Although *Lives* of certain saints survive from this period, there are no surviving copies of any *Lives* of female saints of Cornwall (it is known that some did exist, e.g. the *Life of St Breage*, but no copy remains). There is a Breton *Life* of St Non but this places Non's life and work firmly in Brittany, rather than Cornwall. There are some *Lives* of male saints associated with Cornwall, such as St Samson of Dol, but little if no information about female saints can be gleaned from this. Although some early examples of written Cornish texts have survived, e.g. the *Ordinalia*, again, these contain no reference to the female saints.

As a result of this, I turned to more material evidence, in the form of church sites and holy wells. I visited as many of these relating to female saints in Cornwall as possible (a map showing the sites visited is included in Appendix 7). These proved very different in their usefulness. Those in the far west of Cornwall tended to show more pride in their local female saint, for example, St Ia of St Ives is remembered in stained

glass windows in the church and her statue is displayed above the altar in the Lady Chapel. Her image also features on the modern church banner, which was the case in many of the female saints' churches, even if no other trace of them could be found (see Appendix 2). It could be argued that St Ia is not the best example as she is more well known than many of the other female saints of Cornwall but such examples were to be found in many of the churches of the far west.

However, as my search moved east, references to the saint in the church grew less. Many of the churches in mid Cornwall had no stained glass relating to their saint. The most common form of remembrance of the saint was the banner, but this was not always true in all cases. Some of the churches in this area did display the same pride in their local saint as did many of the churches of the far west (for example, St Neulina of St Newlyn East was commemorated in a number of ways in her church) but it would be fair to say that this was more true of those churches that were geographically more isolated (such as St Newlyn East and Minster). Churches in more populated areas, such as those around St Austell and Truro, tended to have less information relating to their saint. In the far east of the county, towards the Devon border, there were far fewer churches dedicated to female saints. Those that were tended to be quite isolated, such as St Anne's at Whitstone, which is situated outside of the village itself.

I also looked at secondary literature relating to these saints, in particular the work of Nicholas Orme on the saints of Cornwall and the work of Oliver Padel on Cornish

place names.[3] This led me to look at other, slightly earlier sources, such as Nicholas Roscorrock and his work on church dedications in Cornwall in the sixteenth century, and the work of historians and folklorists such as the Reverend Gilbert Doble and Robert Hunt.[4] This enabled me to investigate how stories relating to the saints have survived and changed over the years, such as the legend of St Ia and the leaf on which she sailed to Cornwall and the local legends relating to holy wells and their miraculous properties, such as St Keyne's Well near Looe.

Although much work has been carried out on the saints of Cornwall, little has been done to establish any parallels between the female saints. In many cases, the lack of knowledge about them means that they are all but forgotten outside of their parish boundary. It became clear as I researched more that there were links between them both in terms of common themes (such as the theme of the virgin martyr) found in hagiographical texts generally and links with other Celtic countries, namely Ireland, Wales and Brittany. These geographical links formed a clear pattern of their own, with the Irish saints being located primarily in the far west of the county and the Welsh saints (many of whom were also linked through their relationship as daughters of Brychan Brycheiniog) in the middle and the east of the county. It was also notable that the female saints were more numerous in the far west, with the number decreasing as I travelled east through the county (see the maps in Appendix 7). A

[3] N. Orme, *The Saints of Cornwall* (Oxford: OUP, 2000); N. Orme (ed.), *Nicholas Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints: Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1992); N. Orme, *Cornwall and the Cross: Christianity, 500–1560* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2007); O. J. Padel, *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-names* (Penzance: A. Hodge, 1988); O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place-name Elements* (Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 1985).
[4] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*. G. H. Doble, *Cornish Saints: A Set of Monographs on the Celtic Saints of Cornwall* (2 vols) (Shipston-on-stour: King's Stone Press). Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England*.

possible explanation for this is the remoteness of this area, and it may well be that the tradition of the local saint lasted longer here because of this.

Rather than providing a list of saints,[5] the intention is to discuss the female saints of Cornwall in terms of the connections between them, as well as any differences that can also be seen. I begin by considering the geographical origins of the saints, looking first at the cluster of saints such as St Ia and St Breage who travelled from Ireland and settled in the far west of Cornwall. I then turn to Wales, in particular to the daughters of Brychan Brycheiniog, such as St Mabena and St Adwenna, who established themselves mainly in mid Cornwall, as well as the more universally known St Non, who was also of Welsh origin. Non features again in the following section, which discusses links with Brittany.

The discussion then turns to universal themes which may connect the female saints both in Cornwall and with female saints elsewhere. The major theme here is that of water, in particular the holy wells associated with the saints. Although many of these have vanished over the years, leaving only the memory that such a well existed, there are a number of holy wells linked to female saints still to be found in Cornwall. The condition of these varies greatly, as does the local knowledge and traditions associated with them. Reasons why the well remains an important part of local life are discussed, as well as the reasons why, in some cases, the wells are no longer to be found.

[5] There are already a number of books which provide just this, although they cover both male and female saints. See, for example, Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*; C. R. John *The Saints of Cornwall. 1500 Years of Christian Landscape* (Padstow: Tabb House, 2001); J. Mildren, *Saints of the South West* (St Teath: Bossiney Books, 1989); P. Berresford Ellis, The Cornish Saints (Penryn: Tor Mark Press, 1992).

There are other universal themes of sainthood which can be applied to the female saints of Cornwall, and examples of these are discussed in Chapter 7. The key themes here are those of the virgin martyr, such as St Columba and St Piala, and of the holy mother, such as St Anne (mother of St Samson of Dol) and St Non (mother of St David). This will lead into connections with male saints, focusing on those who are related to the female saints as well as those who are the female saints' companions. Finally, I will consider the importance of folklore and tradition, such as the miraculous legends connected to St Endelienta and St Morwenna, amongst others, to explore the role that this has played in perpetuating the importance of the saint in her own locality.

In conclusion, I hope to be able to demonstrate the uniqueness of the female saints of Cornwall and, above all, their role in their communities as truly local saints. I begin, however, by discussing some of the background information relating to this topic before moving to consider the potential sources of information.

Chapter 1 Background

> Cornwall is an attractive region, peopled by a folk who are friendly, yet rightly proud and possessive concerning their ancient beliefs and customs.[6]

Cornwall has always been an area that is distinct in many ways from the main part of the British Isles. Bordered to the north, south and west by the sea, it has only a small land border to the east with the 'mainland', as the rest of the eastern border is formed by the River Tamar. This geographical isolation, or what William Borlase referred to as the 'retired situation of the country',[7] has resulted in certain features of the landscape which have a bearing on the influence of the female saints.

Cornwall was and remains an area which, aside from a few major towns, tends to be sparsely populated, with a pattern of small rural villages and hamlets. This is particularly the case in the far west of Cornwall and in the middle of the county, the Bodmin Moor area, where the inhospitality of the landscape does not lend itself to large-scale inhabitation. Its distance from the main centres of Roman and Saxon rule meant that the influence of these was much less in Cornwall than in much of the rest of England. Cornwall was more influenced by, and more similar to in terms of language, traditions and beliefs, other Celtic nations such as Wales, Brittany and Ireland, than its English neighbour.

One of the ways in which the influence of the Celtic nations can be seen in Cornwall is in terms of the Celtic saints. Nicholas Orme's research has highlighted 133 ancient churches which have a Celtic patron saint. Of these, 91 are male and 37 are female (there is one saint whose gender is unknown, and the remaining four churches have

[6] Deane and Shaw, *Folklore*, p.44.
[7] William Borlase, *Antiquities, Historical and Monumental, of the County of Cornwall* (London: Bowyer and Nichols, 1769), p.366.

two patrons each). In total, 88 saints are linked to only one church, thus demonstrating a pattern of local saints and saints' cults (unlike England where many churches are dedicated to the more 'popular' saints such as Mary, Peter, Michael, etc.).[8] Given the lack of contemporaneous written evidence, church dedications are an important source of information about the Cornish saints, even if this is limited to the likelihood that such a saint existed.[9] Such information can be supplemented by details of feast days relating to the saints, listed in church calendars.[10]

Cornwall has been described as 'a land rich in Celtic saints and poor in their medieval hagiography'.[11] The earliest extant Cornish literature dates from the medieval period, but although it is religious in nature, it contains no reference to the female saints. The *Ordinalia*, for example, relate Biblical stories such as the Creation and the Passion of Christ, whilst *Bewnans Ke* (the *Life of St Ke*) and *Beunans Meriasek* (the *Life of St Meriasek*) are both plays based on a male saint's life. There are, of course, extant saints' *Lives* in other languages, notably Latin, Welsh and Irish, which relate to male saints associated with Cornwall, including St Samson of Dol, St Nectan and St Piran. There are also references to *Lives* of female saints of Cornwall, such as Breage, Ia and Keyne, but unfortunately no copies of these survive. Such *Lives* will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, as will the Vatican codex *Reginensis Latinus* 191, 'a

[8] N. Orme, *English Church Dedications* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), p.15. See also the work of Oliver Padel (listed in the Bibliography) on local saints in Cornwall, particularly in relation to Cornish place-names.
[9] The main work on this is Orme's *English Church Dedications*, which includes a gazetteer of Cornish churches.
[10] See, for example, *Cornish Church Kalendar: Being a Kalendar of Saints For the Use of the Diocese of Truro* (Shipston-on-stour: King's Stone Press, 1933) and Sarah L. Enys, *Perpetual Calendar of Cornish Saints, with Selections of Poetry and Prose Relating to Cornwall* (Truro: A. W. Jordan, 1923).
[11] N. Orme, 'Saint Breage: a medieval virgin saint of Cornwall', *Analecta Bollandian* 110 (1992): 341.

unique piece of Old Cornish' which 'contains the earliest reference to several Cornish or pan-Brittonic saints'.[12]

Later sources, such as Nicholas Roscarrock in the sixteenth/seventeenth century, Richard Carew in the seventeenth century, William Borlase in the eighteenth century and the Reverend G. H. Doble in the nineteenth century, provide much of interest, though this cannot be deemed to be historical fact.[13]

In addition to the material evidence such as churches and holy wells already mentioned, many of the female saints left their traces in place names of villages local to their church or well. In many cases, these are immediately apparent, for example St Endellion, St Ives and St Minver, or easily discernible, such as Marwenschurch (St Marwenna), Advent (St Adwenna) and Altarnun (St Non).[14] Reference will be made to such examples throughout.

[12] B. Lynette Olson and O. J. Padel, 'A tenth-century list of Cornish parochial saints', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 12 (1986): 33–71.
[13] See, for example, Orme (ed.) *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*; Richard Carew *The Survey of Cornwall*, ed. F. E. Halliday (London: Andrew Melrose, 1953); William Borlase *The Age of the Saints: A Monograph of Early Christianity In Cornwall* (Felinfach: Llanerch, 1995); G. H. Doble *Cornish Saints*.
[14] Oliver Padel has produced perhaps the essential works on Cornish placenames and their origins: see Padel, *Cornish Place-name Elements* and *Cornish Place-Names*.

Chapter 2 The Irish connection

> The name of almost every ancient parish in West Cornwall is the name of a saint or contains a saint's name.[15]

The far west of Cornwall is a sparsely populated and remote location even today, and would have been even more so at the time of the saints. Accessibility would have been a problem, in terms both of overland distance and because the rugged nature of the coastline renders it largely inhospitable to shipping. There is only one landing point of note in this area and that is the Hayle estuary, on the north side of the coast. It was to this estuary that missionaries were said to have travelled from Ireland, among them women who would become known as saints of Cornwall, such as Breaca (or Breage), Ia and Piala. It is worth adding a word of caution here – in the case of all the female saints of Cornwall, there is no evidence to prove that they were in fact historical characters. Although traditions and legends may record what people believed about the saints, their origins and their lives, it cannot be said with certainty that such events took place. Orme makes the following comment in relation to St Breage, but it is just as valid for the other 'Irish' saints: 'This [the story of the saint arriving from Ireland] should be regarded not as history, but as legend of the later middle ages. It was common to give saints Irish origins by that period'.[16]

It is known that there was a *Life* of St Breaca, the patron saint of Breage, near Helston, as John Leland makes reference to it in his *Travels*.[17] Reverend Doble believes that Leland would have seen a copy of it himself, as Leland stayed in this area in 1538. He copied the part of it relating to Breaca's origins:

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[15] G. H. Doble, *A History of the Parish of Crowan* (The King's Stone Press, Shipston-on-Stour: 1939), p.3.
[16] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.72.
[17] More information about this *Life* and Leland's comments about it can be found in Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.72 (entry on Breage).

> Breaca came to Cornwall [from Ireland] accompanied by many Saints, among whom were Sinninus the Abbot … Maruanus the monk, Germmochus the king, Elwen, Crewenna, Helena.[18]

Among these companions, Crewenna is the patron saint of Crowan church, whose parish adjoins that of Breage and St Breaca. Nothing else is known of St Crewenna; however, she remains an important focus of the church dedicated to her. A stained glass window in Crowan church shows her cradling the church in her arms and flanked by St Michael and St George (see Appendix 3 Figure 7)[19] and she is spoken of with much respect in the Crowan parish guide:

> In terms of national fame, St Crewenna … is virtually unknown outside her own parish, but here in Crowan she is deeply rooted in our religious observances, and respected as the bringer of the Gospel to our parish. Her anniversary or Feast is still celebrated in the Anglican and Methodist churches on the nearest Sunday to Candlemas Eve (1st February) … she is represented in our Memorial Window as a gracious lady.[20]

The *Life* of St Breaca provides some limited information about her origins – she is said to have been born in Ireland and to have lived in a monastery founded by St Brigid before travelling to Cornwall with a number of other saints. They landed 'at Revyer on the Eastern bank of the river Hayle in the hundred of Penwith, where Theodorick … had his castle of residence, and slew great part of this holy assembly also'.[21] Theodorick is also known as Tewder or Tudor, and appears in a similar role – that of unconverted tyrant – in both *Bewnans Ke* and *Beunans Meriasek*, although in relation to different saints. St Breaca herself escapes the massacre and flees to Breage, where she founds her church.

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[18] Doble, *Parish of Crowan*, p.4.
[19] The 'Memorial Window' in which St Crewenna features commemorates the fallen of the First World War, and thus dates from shortly after this.
[20] *History of Crowan Parish Church*, pp.6, 22. Church guide reproduced from the original by G. C. Richards, Camborne.
[21] Borlase, *Antiquities, Historical and Monumental,* p.366.

Another Irish saint who encountered Tewder on arrival in Cornwall is St Piala. Like St Breaca, Piala is said to have travelled to Cornwall from Ireland with a number of companions and landed at Hayle. Piala is named in the *Life of St Gwinear* as his sister.[22] She leaves Ireland for Brittany with her brother and a number of other companions (including, according to the *Life of St Gwinear*, 770 men and 7 bishops).[23] However, they are blown off course and land instead at Hayle, where most of them are executed by Tewder.

Piala is linked to the church at Phillack, near Hayle, where there is also a holy well bearing her name (see Appendix 1 Figures 4–6). However, doubts over her association with the church exist. The church was originally dedicated to a St Felec, who appears in the list of saints identified in *Reginensis Latinus* 191, and about whom nothing is known, although later attempts were made to identify her with St Felicity.[24] Modern scholars including Nicholas Orme and Oliver Padel have traced Piala's identification with the church at Phillack to William Borlase in the eighteenth century and this appears to be based purely on the similarity between the two names.[25]

Mention is also made in the *Life of St Gwinear* to perhaps the best known of the west Cornwall female saints, St Ia (or St Hya). According to the *Life*, St Gwinear and his party had just left Ireland when:

[22] Gwinear is the Cornish form of St Fingar. His *Life* dates from around 1300 and was written by a Breton cleric called Anselm. For more information, see Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, pp.135–136; Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, pp. 136–138.
[23] See H. Miles Brown, *The Church in Cornwall* (London, Reading and Fakenham: Cox & Wyman Ltd, 1964), p.14.
[24] See Orme, *English Church Dedications*, pp.110–111, Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p.138.
[25] See Olson and Padel, 'Tenth-century list, pp.48–49; Orme (ed.) *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.165.

> A virgin of noble birth, named Hya, came down to the shore, meaning to go with them. Finding she was too late, she knelt down on the beach in great grief and prayed. As she did so, she noticed a little leaf floating on the water. She touched it with the rod she carried … and it began to grow bigger and bigger as she looked at it. She saw that it was sent to her by God, and, trusting to him, she embarked upon the leaf and was straightway wafted across the Channel, reaching her destination before the others.[26]

There was originally a *Life* of St Ia, which was kept in the parish church – as with the *Life* of St Breaca, this was seen by John Leland in the sixteenth century. No copy survives to the present day, although Leland made brief notes, describing her as a 'nobleman's daughter of Ireland'.[27] She was described by William Worcester in 1478 as being the sister of St Erth and St Euny, male saints whose parishes are close to St Ives. Worcester also states that her tomb is in St Ives church.[28] Although her tomb is no longer to be found in the church, there are a number of other features relating to her in the church, including a modern stained glass window (see Appendix 3 Figures 17 and 18) and a statue in the Lady Chapel, which is used every day (Appendix 4 Figure 7). Her holy well, Venton Ia, is sited some distance from the church, near Porthmeor beach. Venton Ia will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

St Ia also appears in the stained glass of other local churches. In Zennor, to the west, she appears alongside the patron of that church, St Senara (Appendix 3 Figure 5). Nothing is known about St Senara, although she is believed to be female. In Lelant church (to the east of St Ives), St Ia appears with St Anta (Appendix 3 Figures 1 and 2). Given the location of this church, St Anta may perhaps be the 'holy virgin' referred to in the *Life of St Gwinear*:

[26] G. H. Doble, *St Ives, Its Patron Saint and Church* (St Ives: James Lanham Ltd, 1939), p.9.
[27] See, for example, Doble, *St Ives*, p.10. Doble discusses the similarity between the *Lives* of St Breaca and St Ia on pp.10-11.
[28] See Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.144.

> From the 'Life' of St. Fingar or Gwinear we learn that the band of missionaries who came with him and St. Piala found not far from the shore at Hayle a cell inhabited by a holy virgin. This cell may have been on the site of a medieval chapel on the rock known as Chapel Anya.[29]

The church at Lelant (which means 'church-site of Anta)[30] is dedicated to St Euny, who is believed to have been a brother of St Ia, although in the parish documents and the church, St Anta is commemorated with him (see, for example, the church banner, Appendix 1 Figure 1). St Anta is also the patron of Carbis Bay church in the next village to Lelant (see Appendix 3 Figures 3 and 4).

The parish of St Buryan (St Buriana or Beriana) is found in the far tip of Cornwall, not far from Land's End. Like Felec, Buriana appears in the list of saints in *Reginensis Latinus* 191 (as Berion).[31] She is also referenced in a tenth-century charter of King Athelstan, and her church was founded by Athelstan around 930, near the site of her original oratory. She is believed by many to be Irish, although there is no firm evidence that this is the case. Despite the importance of her church in medieval times, little is known of the life of St Buriana aside from a mention in Bishop Grandisson's *Exeter Martyrdoms* that she cured King Gerent's son of paralysis (although Gerent was Cornish, this act supposedly took place in Ireland).[32]

There may well have been other female Irish saints in Cornwall at this time – equally, it may well have been the case that the saints (or at least, the traditions associated with them) described in this chapter were Welsh or Breton rather than Irish in origin. From a practical point of view, it would seem reasonable to assume that the saints said to have landed in Hayle would have come from Ireland or Wales, rather than Brittany

[29] Brown, *The Church in Cornwall*, p.13.
[30] Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p.108.
[31] Olson and Padel, 'Tenth-century list', p.48.
[32] See Olson and Padel, 'Tenth-century list', pp.45, 48; Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.78.

(where they would have been more likely to land on the southern coast of Cornwall). Whatever their origins, there appear to be strong links between the saints – for example, the sibling links of St Ia, St Euny and St Erth. St Ia has also been linked to St Gwinear and St Piala (such links will be discussed further in Chapter 7). Looking at a map, it becomes clear just how close these locations are (see Appendix 7 Map 2). St Breage has been linked to St Germoe and St Crewenna, and the proximity of these parishes should also be noted. Whether Irish or Welsh, it seems likely that these saints knew of each other and, on reaching the same landing point, chose to stay in the far west region. It may, of course, equally be the case that these saints did not visit Cornwall at all, and that their popularity in a given area may have arisen through the cultural transmission of the stories of the saints from other Celtic sources. However, given the fact that, with few exceptions, these female saints are not commemorated outside of their own parish, let alone in the country of their birth, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that they did indeed settle here.

Chapter 3 The Welsh connection

> Brochannus, a prince of Wales, begat of Gladwis his wife twenty-four sons and daughters … All these sons and daughters were afterwards saints, martyrs or confessors in Devon and Cornwall, leading the life of a hermit.[33]

Although some of the saints of the far west may well have been Welsh, there is stronger evidence to suggest that many of the saints (or the traditions of these saints) of mid Cornwall (in particular the area around Padstow and moving down towards Bodmin Moor) did come from Wales. Most of these were connected through being the daughters of Brychan Brycheiniog, an early Welsh nobleman or king. Brychan's story survives in different versions where the details may vary but the essence of the account is the same – he had a number of sons and daughters who all became saints. The Welsh manuscripts (*De Situ Brecheniauc* and *Cognatio Brychan* being the main sources) are listed and discussed in great detail elsewhere;[34] however, it is worth noting here that different versions of the Welsh manuscripts provide different numbers of sons and daughters and their names vary in some cases. The Welsh Triads also claim that Brychan married three times and that his lineage was one of the three saintly lineages of the island of Britain.[35] The other main source, the twelfth-century *Life of St Nectan*, lists 24 children for Brychan. Some of those named have disappeared into obscurity (for example, Helie, Tamalanc and Wensent), whilst there is disagreement about the gender of the others (such as St Yse (Issey), whom Padel links to the male St Iti named in the tenth-century *Reginensis Latinus* 191 and the churches of St Issey and Mevagissey).[36] However, there are a number of female

[33] Leland, 'From the Life of St Nectan', quoted in G. H. Doble, *S Nectan, S Keyne and the Children of Brychan in Cornwall* (Exeter: Sidney Lee, 1930), p.4.
[34] See for example Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.44; Doble, *S Nectan*, pp.5–9. Lists of the children can be found in P. C. Bartrum (ed.) *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff: UWP, 1966).
[35] See R. Bromwich (ed.) Trioedd Ynys Prydein (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), pp.211, 243.
[36] See Olson and Padel, 'Tenth-century list', p.47; Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, pp. 99, 120. Information about showing how the form of the name used in the churches switches between male and

names included in the list who are commemorated as saints in Cornwall – Adwen, Endelient, Mabon, Menfre, Marwenna, Morwenna, Tedda and Wenna – and these will be discussed below.

Advent church is unusual in that it has not given its name to a village; instead, it is situated just outside the hamlet of Tresinney near Camelford, on the edge of Bodmin Moor. The church is dedicated to St Adwen or Adwenna. Evidence from the church dedications over the centuries have shown that, with only one exception, Adwen was believed to be male – however, that exception became the tradition and Adwen is nowadays presumed to be a female saint and daughter of Brychan.[37]

Adwen has been called the 'Cornish patron saint of sweethearts',[38] and attempts have been made to link her with the Welsh patron saint of lovers, Dwynwen, who appears in the Welsh lists as a daughter of Brychan. In *The Age of the Saints*, William Borlase discussed the various forms of the saint's name (including Andewin, Athewenna and Athawyn) and proposed the following link to Dwynwen: 'Andewin is the same as Lan Dewin … and Llandwyn is a church in Anglesey, called by the name of Dwynwen'.[39] Like the Welsh 'llan' (which originally meant a circular enclosure surrounding the site associated with a saint but nowadays has been simplified to 'church'), the Cornish 'lann' indicates a 'church-site'.[40]

female can be found in Orme, *English Church Dedications*, pp. 87, 104. The church at Mevagissey is nowadays dedicated to St Peter.

[37] Further information about the dedications can be found in Orme, *English Church Dedications,* p.67.

[38] See, for example, Ellis, *Cornish Saints*, p.5; John, *The Saints of Cornwall*, p.32.

[39] Borlase, *Age of the Saints*, pp.153–154.

[40] See Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, pp.190–191, for a discussion of the Cornish 'lann'.

Such a link between Adwen and Dwynwen cannot, however, be established on the basis of name only and despite the many legends associated with Dwynwen, nothing else is known about St Adwen. Borlase also links Adwen with the parish of Ludgvan, near Penzance, again on the basis on name: 'It had occurred to me, for example, that the word Ludgvan might be a corruption of Lan (or La) Dwynwen … whose name we have previously seen in Andewin, or Advent.' He continues by discussing the forms of the name Ludgvan that occur in various sources (John Leland, for example, uses Ludewin, which is very close to Andewin) and concludes by pointing out the closeness of the two feast days – that of Dwywnen is held on 25 January whilst the feast day in St Ludgvan is held on the nearest Sunday to that date.[41] The feast day of St Ludgvan is also given as 25 January in other sources.[42] Interestingly, the feast day of St Paul is also 25 January and Paul has been the co-patron of Ludgvan church since the middle of the eighteenth century – as Orme says, 'it is difficult to know whether this is conjecture from the parish feast day, or whether the latter arose from him [Paul] being co-patron of the church'.[43] However, the link with St Dwynwen is purely conjecture on the part of Borlase, and Ludgvan is traditionally associated with a male saint, about whom nothing is known. It may well be the case, as Padel states, that in this instance, 'the saint was evidently invented from the place-name'.[44]

Another example of this could well be St Endelient (more commonly known as St Endelienta), described by Borlase as 'a purely fictious name, made … out of the real name of a church, which contained in turn that of a Saint called Teilo or Delian'.[45] However, it is more often assumed that there was a female saint of this name, and that

[41] See Borlase, *Age of Saints*, p.158.
[42] For example, Enys, *Perpetual Calendar of Cornish Saints* (n.p.).
[43] Orme, *Church Dedications in Cornwall*, p.99.
[44] Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p. 112.
[45] Borlase, *Age of the Saints*, p.131; see also his further discussion on the name, p.134.

she was one of the daughters of Brychan. Although there are no other known dedications to the saint aside from this church, more is known about her (in the form of legend) than many of her sisters, due to the work of Nicholas Roscarrock, who lived in St Endellion parish in the sixteenth century. Although his work on the other Cornish saints is of great interest, it is to St Endelienta, his 'Patronesse' that Roscarrock devotes the most attention:

> Sweit Sainct Endelienta virgin pure,
> daughter of Prince & Sainct, yea sister deara
> Of manie Saincts which stowlie did indure
> Conflict*e*s in Worlde with Sinners living here.
> Voutsaife, sweit Sainctm my Patronesse to bee,
> To praye for him whoe humblye prayes to thee.[46]

The legends relating to St Endelienta will be discussed in a later section but it is interesting to note here that in them, Roscarrock links her to another legendary Cornish character: 'she had a great man to her Godfather which they also saye was king Arthure'.[47]

The tomb, or shrine, of St Endelienta can still be found in the church bearing her name. According to Roscarrock, the church was built on the site of Endelienta's burial. Nicholas Orme has described another artefact linked to Endelienta, the Langdale rosary, which:

> contains a bead depicting Endelient with a plam of martyrdom, an ox or cow, and a pot-shaped object, presumably meant for a well … An inscription on the bead reads S[ancta] Endelienta V[irgo] M[artyr] and, like the martyr's palm, is puzzling, because Roscarrock's 'Life' does not depict her as a martyr.[48]

The church of St Minver lies just under three miles away from that of St Endelienta, and is dedicated to another of her sisters, St Menfre or Menefreda. Like Endelienta,

[46] Entry for St Endelient in Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saint*s, p.72.
[47] Entry for St Endelient in Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saint*s, p.71.
[48] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.112.

Menfre is linked to a more famous male character in the legend associated with her – in Menfre's case, the Devil (see later discussion).

If little is known of St Adwen and St Menfre, still less is known about their sisters Maben and Tedda, although both settled in the same area. St Maben (or more commonly St Mabena) is commemorated in the church at St Mabyn, where she is depicted in a nineteenth-century stained glass window alongside St Cecilia (see Appendix 3 Figures 8 and 9). It is not clear why she is shown with St Cecilia, rather than one of her many sisters. This may perhaps be linked to the fact that St Cecilia is the patron saint of music – Roscarrock relates that 'the church of which St Maben being new builded about the yere of our lord 1500, there was, I have heard from the report of such as lived there at that time, a Song or Hyme sung of her [St Mabena]' and there is another stained glass window in the church, dating to the same period as the window showing the saints (1890–1891), which was given by the church choir to demonstrate the church's love of music. St Cecilia was also a martyr and although St Mabena does not appear as such in the St Mabyn window, she is depicted in the stained glass of St Neot's church holding the palm branch signifying a martyr. In St Mabyn, St Mabena also appears in the sign for the local pub (see Appendix 6 Figure 2) as a shepherdess, with Celtic standing stones in the background, an image which is replicated in the modern banner found inside the church (Appendix 2 Figure 7).

The church of St Tedda (or St Tetha) is found in St Teath, not far from the church of St Adwen at Advent. Apart from the appearance of her name in the list of Brychan's children, nothing is known of St Tedda. A link has been suggested to Landéda in

Brittany (with 'lan' signifying 'church of', as it does in Cornish), with the name of the saint presumably being Teda but the church there is dedicated to St Congar.[49]

The parish of Morwenstow is the most northerly in Cornwall, bordered on two sides by Devon and on a third by the Atlantic Ocean. On a clear day, it is possible to see over to Wales, and it is said that this was the reason that St Morwenna settled here. Like several of her sisters (including St Endelienta and St Menfre), Morwenna is reputed to have lived not at the spot where the church was founded but at a short remove, near to her holy well (unlike those of Endelienta and Menfre, the well of St Morwenna still exists, albeit in an inaccessible location, and will be discussed later). Nicholas Roscarrock's entry on St Morwenna is amongst his shortest: 'Sct Morwenna is noted to bee one of the children of Brechanus in St Nectaines life'.[50] He does suggest that she might be the same saint as Moren (of Lamorran), but there seems to be no evidence to support this. Moren appears to be a different saint, usually thought of as female, but nothing else is known about her. Some sources have discussed a link with the Breton saint Moren or Moran, but aside from the similarities in name, there is nothing solid on which to base this.[51]

The closeness of the names has also led to some confusion between St Morwenna and St Marwenna (also known as St Marwenne or St Merewenne) of Marhamchurch, although it appears now to be widely accepted that they were separate saints and, if the list of Brychan's children in the *Life of St Nectan* is to be believed, sisters. However, it has also been suggested that St Marwenna/Merewenne may in fact be St

[49] See Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.245; Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p.162.
[50] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.92.
[51] For example, Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p.105; Ellis, *Cornish Saints*, p.22, although Ellis believes both the Cornish and Breton saints to be male.

Merwenn, a tenth-century English abbess who lived in Romsey, Hampshire. Again, no obvious reason, aside from the similarity of the names, is evident, although Orme suggest that this 'proposal is possible because Marhamchurch lies in an area of early English settlement in Cornwall'.[52] Certainly Marhamchurch is much closer to the border with Devon, and therefore England, than the majority of the other locations discussed in relation to female saints.

St Wenna is unusual amongst the daughters of Brychan in that there is more than one church dedicated to her in Cornwall – the church at St Wenn, in mid Cornwall, and the church in Morval, near Looe on the south coast. William Borlase also mentions a chapel in St Kew parish which was dedicated to her.[53] The first location is fairly near to the area of north Cornwall where many of the daughters of Brychan are said to have settled – for example, St Mabena, St Menfre and St Endelienta. Unfortunately, in all cases, it is only the history of the church dedications which provide the link to the saint – the original dedications of the churches at both St Wenn and Morval are to 'Sancte Wenne'.[54]

However, the case of St Wenna is interesting as she has been linked to St Gwen or Guen, who appears in the Welsh genealogies as a daughter of Brychan. There is also a St Gwen who was a granddaughter of Brychan. Nicholas Orme has suggested that there may be a link between the Welsh male saint Gwyn and the Breton male saint Guen, given that there are a number of sites associated with these saints in both Wales and Brittany. However, he concludes that:

[52] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.188. Padel also suggests a link with Merwenn; see *Cornish Place-Names*, p.115.
[53] Borlase, *Age of the Saints*, p.150.
[54] See Orme, *English Church Dedications*, pp.106 (Morval) and 123 (St Wenn).

> In the absence of information other than names, places, and a consistently female gender, it is difficult to know which saint or saints gave rise to the cults of Wenna in Cornwall … A distinct Cornish saint is not impossible, but no church or chapel proposes itself as an obvious starting point of the cult.[55]

Whatever her origins, like many of her 'sisters' Wenna is still held in high regard in the parishes dedicated to her. In Morval, for example, it was decided to create a new stained glass window in the church to commemorate the Millennium. This has taken the form of three panels, and it is the figure of St Wenna who is shown in the central panel (see Appendix 3 Figure 13). The reasoning behind this is explained in a parish guide book:

> The figure of St Wenna … is also the embodiment of the spirit of the people, and she is within her curragh [coracle], which represents the parish itself … Morval means sea valley in some Celtic language or other. St Wenna chose the spot for our conception … and the parish developed around her. Our modern appreciation of our environment is indicated here in the very transparency of the glass upon which she is engraved, allowing us to make the link between outside the church and inside – the natural and the spiritual.[56]

Orme's reference to 'the absence of information other than names, places' highlights the difficulty faced in discussing these saints, where no clear facts or evidence can be found. It may well be that some of the other names listed as Brychan's children in the *Life of St Nectan* are female saints, but the passage of time has led to disagreement over their gender. St Keri, for example, has been linked to St Keria, the patron saint of Egloskerry ('church of Keri'), although the church itself has been dedicated to St Petroc since the eighteenth century. In the *Life of St Nectan*, Keri is placed amongst the sons of Brychan rather than the daughters, and it may well be that the tradition of

[55] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.252.
[56] Taken from *The Morval Millenium Window Guide Book* (no publication details, no page numbering), available from the parish church.

the saint being a woman arose solely from a female Latin form of the name being used in an medieval manuscript.[57]

Like St Gwen, mentioned above, St Keyne was thought to be a daughter of Brychan, but her name appears in the Welsh genealogical lists, rather than in the *Life of St Nectan*. St Keyne is unusual amongst the female saints as there is a *Life of St Keyne*, which was included in the fourteenth-century *Nova Legenda Anglie*, compiled by John of Tynemouth. This Latin *Life* was translated by the Reverend Doble in 1930, and begins by describing the origins of the saint:

> For the Blessed Keyna, Virgin, sprang of royal stock in the Western part of Greater Britain. Her father, king of the Breghenocenses was named Bracghanus. Now that king had twelve sons and the like number of daughters, all pleasing to God and of holy life. His first-born was Saint Canochus; his first-born daughter Gladus, mother of Saint Cadochus, the second (daughter) Melari, mother of the father of Saint David.[58]

The reference to St Cadochus (also known as St Cadog or Cadoc) is interesting as St Keyne is also named as Cadog's aunt in his *Life* and met with him on St Michael's Mount when he went on a pilgrimage there. The *Life* of St Keyne describes how she left Wales and travelled 'beyond the Severn', establishing a number of oratories and becoming well known for her holy work. When she met St Cadog on St Michael's Mount, he

> filled with great joy desired to bring her back to her own land, but the people of the land would not permit it. At last, warned by an angel, the holy virgin returned to her native land and made for herself an habitation in a certain hillock at the roots of a certain great mountain, and after pouring forth prayer to God, she caused a well to spring out of the earth … [59]

[57] For further information on this, see the list of dedications for Egloskerry church in Orme, *English Church Dedications*, p.79. Padel also discusses this in *Cornish Place-Names*, p.81.
[58] See Doble, 'De Sancta Keyna Virgine', in *S Nectan*, p.37.
[59] Doble, 'De Sancta Keyna Virgine', in *S Nectan*, p.38.

The references to 'her own land' and 'her native land' are presumably to Wales, given that this was a Welsh *Life* – indeed, there are a number of possible locations for her 'habitation', well and later grave.[60] What is interesting here is that the Cornish tradition has taken these features of the Welsh *Life* and relocated them in Cornwall, so that the well mentioned above is that of St Keyne near Looe, and that is also where her last resting place is found. The motifs of her legend and the well itself will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

As well as sites in Wales, including Llangain ('church of Cain/Keyne'), and the parish of St Keyne itself, St Keyne is also associated with Keynsham in Somerset (where she is said to have turned snakes into stone) and with St Martins by Looe in Cornwall, although this association was not made until the sixteenth century, with the church previously being dedicated to St Martin only. In the words of Orme, this 'may suggest a cult which was flourishing rather than declining on the eve of the Reformation'.[61]

The daughters of Brychan were not the only high-ranking Welsh noblewomen who have been commemorated in Cornwall as saints. St Materiana (also known as Mertherian) is the patron saint of the church in Tintagel and its mother church at Minster, a short distance along the coast at Boscastle. She has been identified by some sources (including the guide books of the churches, which perhaps represent the local traditions more than a historical reference) with the Welsh princess Madrun, daughter of King Vortimer of Gwent, who fled to Cornwall after the death of her father.[62] In

[60] Doble puts a good case for Llangeinwyr ('church of Cain [Keyne] the virgin') in Glamorgan, see 'De Sancta Keyna Virgine', in *S Nectan*, pp.40–41, 43–45. Other suggestions include Llangeneu in Brecon and Kentchurch (or Keynechurch) in Herefordshire, both of which Doble dismissed.
[61] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.163.
[62] In addition to the guide books, see, for example, T. D. Breverton, *The Book of Welsh Saints* (St Tathan: Glyndwr Publishing, 2000), p.380.

the banner commemorating her in Tintagel church, St Materiana is shown wearing the purple and ermine robes of a princess, and holding her church in her arms (see Appendix 2 Figure 12). However, others (notably Orme) have dismissed this link with Madrun, as there is little similarity in even the names.[63]

Despite its isolated location, Minster church was an important religious site in the Middle Ages, as there was a priory attached to the church. It was also believed that the body of St Materiana was buried under what is now the chancel (see Appendix 6 Figure 3); Orme cites William Worcester who was told in 1478 by the rector of the church that this was the case and that a number of miracles had been carried out there (by this time, the priory had been converted into a rectory).[64]

In additional to the daughters of Brychan, there were two famous mothers, originally from Wales, who made the journey to Cornwall – St Non and St Anne. Both these saints then moved on to Brittany (in legend if not physically) where they are venerated most strongly and there will therefore be considered in the following chapter, in relation to Brittany.

[63] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.190.
[64] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.190.

Chapter 4 Brittany

> Even today, we see in the place-names and parishes of Brittany and Cornwall, the extraordinary parallels created by these early Christian martyrs.[65]

Given the strong associations between Cornwall and Brittany from early times, it is not surprising that there are suggested links between the female saints of the two countries as well. Cornwall and Brittany shared trading routes and close similarities in language, to the extent that a Old Breton speaker and a Old Cornish speaker would have been able to understand each other in their native language.[66]

However, with the exception of those discussed below, strong links between the female saints are not easy to establish. There may be some links between names – for example, Nicholas Orme suggests that St Buriana may be linked to Berrien in Finistère.[67] Oliver Padel has posited a possible connection between St Breaca (Breage) and St Briac, who, although Irish like Breaca, was male.[68] St Ewe may be linked to St Evette or Avée (Eva is the Latin form of this name), who sailed to Brittany in a stone boat. She was said to have been one of the many companions of St Ursula (although these were thought to have travelled together, rather than alone).[69] A link has also been suggested between St Senara of Zennor and the Breton princess Azenor, the mother of St Budoc.[70] However, aside from the similarities in names, there is little extant evidence to connect these.

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[65] Mildren, *Saints of the South West*, p.10.
[66] See T. Taylor, *The Celtic Christianity of Cornwall* (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1995 (facsimile of 1916 first edition)), pp.37–49, for an interesting discussion of the close links between Cornwall and Brittany at this time, including the assertion that miracle plays '[W]hether written in Cornish or Breton … could be understood by the inhabitants of both countries' (p.46).
[67] Orme*, Saints of Cornwall*, p.79.
[68] Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, pp.58–59.
[69] See Baring-Gould and Fisher, Lives of the Saints, vol.2, pp.475–476.
[70] See Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p.181.

The main difference between the female saints associated with Brittany and Cornwall, and those associated with Cornwall, Wales and Ireland (discussed in the earlier chapters) is that, in the majority of cases, the saints are said to have moved from Cornwall to Brittany, establishing religious centres in both countries, rather than moving to Cornwall from either Wales or Ireland. Indeed, in the case of the Cornish/Breton saints, many of these were said to have originated from Wales or Ireland, and settled initially in Cornwall before moving on to Brittany. It is important to note here, again, that it may of course have been the transmission of the traditions and legends of the saints, rather than actual people, that passed between the Celtic countries.

This is certainly true of the best-known of the female saints linked to both Cornwall and Brittany – St Non. She is unique amongst the Cornish saints in that she is venerated not just in Cornwall and Brittany but also in Wales. It could therefore be argued that she is remembered above other female saints because she is a universal, rather than a truly local saint.

There are no extant *Lives* of Non, although she is mentioned in the *Lives* of her son, St David (no mention is made of her in relation to Cornwall in these *Lives*, however). A number of sources make reference to a *Life* of St Non which could be found in the service book in Altarnun church in 1281, but no copy of this has survived.[71] There is a Breton mystery play, *Buhez Santez Nonn* (*Life of St Non*), which used to be performed on her feast day in Dirinon. The *Préface* to the Buhez Santez Nonn, published in 1837, talks of 'le petit nombre de viellards qui … connaissaient l'existence du Buhez,

[71] See, for example, S. Baring-Gould and J. Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints*, vol. 4 (London: Honorable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1913), pp.1, 22; Orme refers to a *Life of Nonnita and David* in *Saints of Cornwall,* p.205.

se rappelaient bien avoir entendu raconter à leur pères, qui eux-mêmes le tenaient de tradition, que ce drame se représentait le jour de la fête de sainte Nonne', suggesting that the memory at least of this play was still alive in the minds of the older generation, even if it was no longer performed.[72] The *Préface* dates the surviving manuscript to no later than the fifteenth century and suggests that the play would have been composed two or three centuries prior to this.[73] As Elissa Henken points out, the events in the play are very similar to those relating to St Non in the *Lives* of St David.[74]

This transference of location is also to be found in Cornwall, in relation to St Non, where both the location of her tomb and the birthplace of her son have been thought by some to have been in Cornwall. William Worcester said that he copied the following from the church calendar of St Michael's Mount:

> Sancta Nonnita mater Sanctii Davidis jacet apud ecclesiam villæ Alternoniæ … ubi natus fuit Sanctus David [here lies St Non the mother of St David in the church town of Altarnun … where St David was born][75]

Certainly the name of the church and village reflect this tradition – both are given as 'Altrenune' (later Altarnun, 'the altar of St Non'), in the earliest recorded form of the name, which appeared at the turn of the twelfth century.[76] However, Worcester thought that this tradition was confined to Cornwall.[77] It is interesting that the parish of St Non in Cornwall is situated in close proximity to Davidstow, the parish linked to

[72] 'the small number of old people who … knew of the existence of the *Life*, remembered having heard it told to their fathers, who themselves held the tradition that this drama represented the feast day of St Non' (my translation). L'Abbé Sionnet, *Buhez Santez Nonn ou Vie de Sainte Nonne* (Paris: Merlin, 1837), p. xxv. Available online at: http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=uzUJAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=xv&f=false (accessed 16 November 2011).
[73] See *Buhez Santez Nonn,* pp. xxviii–xxix for a discussion of the evidence relating to this.
[74] See E. R. Henken, *Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), pp.156–157.
[75] Cited in Borlase, *Age of the Saints*, pp.139–140. My translation.
[76] See Orme, *English Church Dedications*, p.68; Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p.50.
[77] Cited in Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.162.

her son. According to Breton tradition, St Non is buried in a chapel at Dirinon, where her tomb can still be seen, while the birthplace of St David is generally said in Welsh tradition to be in Pembrokeshire, at the place now known as St Non's Chapel. Interestingly, there are holy wells associated with St Non at the locations in Cornwall, Brittany and Wales.

St Non is also commemorated in Cornwall in Pelynt, although the original dedication of the church was to St Nennyd, and in Grampound, where the saint was known as St Naunter. Although these may have just have been local forms of the name Non, it is also possible that these were in fact separate saints – indeed, it has been suggested that these were originally male saints. There is a male saint Nynnid commemorated in Wales (at Eglwys Nynnid, near Port Talbot) and a male saint Neventer in Plounéventer ('parish of Neventer') in Brittany. Interestingly, in both Pelynt and Grampound, there was a separate chapel and well dedicated to St Non in the parish, at some distance from the church, and it is not unfeasible to imagine that the name of the better-known St Non came to dominate and eventually replaced that of the two lesser-known saints to whom the churches were dedicated.[78]

Confusion over names is intensified in the case of St Anne, as there were a number of different women called Anne commemorated as saints and it is likely that some aspects of their separate legends became mixed together. The St Anne commemorated at Whitstone, in north Cornwall, is thought by some to have been the Anne, or Anna, named in the seventh-century *Life of St Samson of Dol* as Samson's mother.[79] She is described as being from Gwent (Monmouthshire) since Samson was believed to be a

[78] For more information about this, see Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, pp.197, 205–208 (entries on Naunter, Nonn and Nunit/Nynnina); Padel, *Cornish Place-Names*, p.132 (Pelynt).
[79] Mildren, *Saints of the South West*, p.72.

native of Wales, so like Non she was of Welsh origin. There are a number of similarities in the story of Anne (as told in the *Life of St Samson*) to Biblical stories – Anne is barren until she is visited by an angel who tells her 'thou shalt have a child and thou shalt call thy first-born son Samson: he shall be holy and a high priest before Almighty God'.[80] St Samson grew up to become one of the seven founder saints of Brittany and although St Anne is commemorated as the patron saint of Brittany, it is as St Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary, rather than St Anne, mother of St Samson. However, the mother of the Virgin Mary is also described as being childless until visited by an angel and it is possible that aspects of the legend of this Anne may have been replicated in the *Life of St Samson*.

The confusion over the St Anne at Whitstone deepens as the first dedication of this church to her was in 1883; previously the dedication had been to St Nicholas.[81] Indeed, by 1881 a history of the church stated the original chapel (on the site of the present-day church) was dedicated to 'St Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin'.[82] This name change could perhaps have come about because of the holy well in the church grounds. The carving above the door of the well house (which was restored in 1883) reads 'Saint Anna'. Much more interesting than this carving is, however, the carved face that can be seen at the back of the well (see Appendix 1 Figure 19). The current vicar of Whitstone, the Revd Canon R. C. W. Dickenson explains its significance:

> Like the church, the well has a strange history … About twelve years ago I asked a friend from the British Museum to comment on the primitive carved

[80] T. Taylor, *The Life of St Samson of Dol* (Felinfach: Llanerch, 1991 (first published 1925)), pp.8–12, esp. p.11.
[81] Orme, *English Church Dedications*, p.124.
[82] O. B. Peter, *Historical and Architectural Notes on the Parish Church and Parish of Whitstone, Cornwall* (Launceston: J. Brimmel, 1881 (reproduced 2002)), p.2.

> face at the back of the inner part of the well. He consulted with some colleagues who were certain that, apart from the 17th century facade, it was an early Celtic water shrine to the pagan water spirit, Annas. It is interesting, therefore, that the church, built close nearby several hundred years later was dedicated to the much disputed St Anne, probably by local demand![83]

Viewed in this context, a link with the Breton St Anne occurs only because of the name. Whatever her background, St Anne is an exception to the majority of the female Cornish saints in that she never visited, or was believed to have visited, Cornwall herself – rather, her name became associated with the church at a relatively late stage in its history because of the well and its earlier Celtic link.

The case for a Breton link with St Neulina (of St Newlyn East) seems stronger, as she has been linked by some sources to the Breton saint Noualen,[84] who is commemorated at Pontivy in Brittany. As is so often the case, no *Life* survives for her, neither is she mentioned in the *Lives* of other saints. There are a number of traditions and legends associated with her, which display some of the themes common in hagiography. As was the case with St Non, these relate to her life in Brittany rather than in Cornwall. St Neulina is described as being one of the few saints who were actually of Cornish origin.[85]

In the chapel at Pontivy which is dedicated to her, there was a roodscreen illustrated with scenes from Neulina's life. Although this was destroyed in 1684, the inscriptions found under the paintings were copied into the parish register at the time. These contain some familiar motifs – Neulina and her nurse cross the sea from Cornwall to Brittany on a leaf (the same way that St Ia travelled to Cornwall). Neulina is beheaded

[83] Personal correspondence, 8 November 2011.
[84] See, for example, Baring-Gould and Fisher, *Lives of the Saints*, vol. 4, p.10; Mildren, *Saints of the South West*, p.89. She is also known as Noyala (Latin) and Noalhuen (Breton).
[85] See Baring-Gould and Fisher, *Lives of the Saints*, vol. 4, p.10; also Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.99, where she is described as a 'virgin martyr of Cornwall'.

when she refuses to marry a local chieftain, in line with the theme of the virgin martyr.[86] A holy well and the chapel were established at the site of her tomb. There are still a chapel and a tomb on this site today, and the chapel contains decorated panelling showing the life of Neulina.[87]

In the Cornish version of the legend, St Neulina is also beheaded (this will be discussed further later). The church guide book states that it 'is generally accepted' that St Newlina [sic] is the same as the Breton saint of that name; however, despite the similarities in name and legend, Nicholas Orme has categorically stated that 'Her cult is unique to this church [i.e St Newlyn East], there being no reason to link her with a Breton saint Noyale'.[88] His reasons for this are not given.

It may be that there are yet further links between the female saints of Cornwall and those of Brittany, for, as the quotation at the beginning of this chapter highlighted, there are remarkable similarities in names between parishes and churches in Cornwall and those in Brittany. In his *History of the Parish of Crowan*, for example, Doble discusses a number of places in Brittany which bear a strong resemblance to Crowan, in particular the parish of Crozon (pronounced *Craon*) on the west coast.[89] In his *Noms de Saints Bretons*, Joseph Loth makes the same connection with Crozon (also known as Crevan): 'Il me paraît probable qu'on a affaire au meme nom que dans

[86] Baring-Gould and Fisher, *Lives of the Saints*, vol. 4, pp.11–12, describe this in more detail. They also point to the similarities between Neulina's story and that of the Welsh saint Winefred (Gwenfrewy).
[87] Unfortunately I have been unable to visit this site personally, but have relied on evidence from several websites, including that of the local *commun*: see http://www.noyal-pontivy.fr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=28 (accessed 17 November 2011).
[88] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.203.
[89] Doble, *Parish of Crowan*, pp.4–5.

Crewen ou *Crowan* patron ou patronne de la paroisse de Crowan, Cornwall'[90] (although it is interesting that he does not commit to the saint's gender).[91] This is certainly an area that would benefit from further research.

[90] 'It seems likely to me that we are dealing with the same name as in Crewen or Crowan patron or patroness of the parish of Crowan in Cornwall.' (My translation)
[91] J. Loth, *Les Noms des Saints Bretons* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1910). Available online at http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k111238c/f1.image (accessed 4 December 2011).

Chapter 5 Holy wells

> Little in the study of Cornish saints and their wells can be stated with total certainty.[92]

Links with water, in particular holy wells, are a common theme in international hagiography and, aside from geographical origins, are the major theme connecting the female saints of Cornwall. Many of the Cornish saints are associated with a holy well, although the current condition of such wells varies enormously. A map of Cornwall showing the location of holy wells visited is provided in Appendix 7 (Map 4). Some wells remain an important part of the religious life of the surrounding parish – for example, the water from the well of St Anne's at Whitstone, north Cornwall is still used in the baptism ceremonies in the church today (Appendix 1 Figures 17 and 18).[93] The well of St Brevita at Lanlivery (Appendix 1 Figure 7), although it is situated some distance from the church, figures prominently in the local Feast Week. This is held in early May each year to commemorate St Brevita's feast day, and the celebrations always begin with the blessing and the dressing of the holy well.

Perhaps the most famous well of a female Cornish saint is that of St Keyne, near Looe (Appendix 1 Figures 11–15). Like the well at Lanlivery, it is situated outside the churchyard (about half a mile south of the village of St Keyne) and it is the distance from the church that adds to the challenge of accessing its powers. Local legend holds that whoever of a bridal pair is the first to drink the water from St Keyne's well after their wedding will be the dominant one of the relationship. St Keyne is said to have blessed the waters of the well on her deathbed, then gave them their powers hoping

[92] P. Cope, *Holy Wells: Cornwall* (Bridgend: Seren, 2010), p.236.
[93] Confirmed by the current vicar Rev. Rob Parsons (personal correspondence 8 November 2011).

‘to benefit the world, by giving to woman a chance of being equal to her lord and master’.[94]

The first written reference to the legend appeared in 1602, in Richard Carew’s *Survey of Cornwall*:

> In name, in shape, in quality,
> This well is very quaint;
> The name to lot of Kayne befell,
> No over-holy saint.
> The shape, four trees of divers kind,
> Withy, oak, elm, and ash,
> Make with their roots an arched roof,
> Whose floor this spring does wash.
> The quality, that man or wife,
> Whose chance, or choice, attains,
> First of this sacred stream to drink,
> Thereby the mastery gains.[95]

The four trees that Carew lists as being above the well are confirmed by Nicholas Roscarrock in his entry on St Keyne, although he later expresses concern that Carew is ‘erreverent in discoursing of them [i.e. saints]’: ‘If Carew consider well, hee will ommitt his Poem on St Kaynes or Keynes well and <his> irreligious scorning’.[96]

This ‘erreverent’ attitude to the powers of the well was further illustrated in a poem by Robert Southey (1774–1843), who later became poet laureate. ‘The Well of St Keyne’ was published in 1798, nearly two hundred years after Carew’s remarks, but contains much of the same detail, including that of the trees:

> A Well there is in the west country,
> And a clearer one never was seen;
> There is not a wife in the west-country
> But has heard of the Well of St. Keyne.

[94] Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England*, p.269.
[95] Carew, *The Survey of Cornwall*, p.203.
[96] Orme, *Roscarrock’s Lives of the Saints*, pp.85, 91.

An oak and an elm tree stand beside,
And behind doth an ash tree grow,
And a willow from the bank above
Droops to the water below.

The poem continues by describing an encounter at the well between a traveller and a local man, who tells the traveller the history of the well:

"St. Keyne," quoth the Cornish-man, "many a time
Drank of this crystal Well,
And before the Angel summon'd her
She laid on the water a spell.

"If the Husband of this gifted Well
Shall drink before his Wife,
A happy man thenceforth is he,
For he shall be Master for life.

But if the Wife should drink of it first, …
God help the Husband then!"

The local man then goes on to say how he was outwitted by his new wife on their wedding day:

"I hasten'd as soon as the wedding was done,
And left my Wife in the porch,
But i' faith she had been wiser than me,
For she took a bottle to Church."[97]

Today there is a large slate engraved with a summary of the legend standing near the well (see Appendix 1 Figure 15) and couples who marry at St Keyne's church still go to drink from the well after the ceremony.[98]

[97] Southney, *The Poetical Works of Robert Southney, Collected by Himself*, vol. 6, pp.144–146. Available online at: http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=SbA8AAAAYAAJ&pg=PA139&lpg=PA139&dq=robert+southey+st+keyne&source=bl&ots=mM_F54rCNu&sig=xw3JMnwMF2YoBWSgbQ_vn_NJUlY&hl=en&ei=Mc_cTrfCLsLDhAfzqvn9CQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CDoQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed 5 December 2012).

[98] Information provided unprompted in a conversation with a churchwarden at St Keyne's church, 29 October 2011.

The well was visited by the Quiller-Couches in 1891 during their research for *The Ancient and Holy Wells of Cornwall*, when they reported that the well was in 'a very dilapidated state'. However, the well-house was rebuilt by the Liskeard Old Cornwall Society in 1936 (see Appendix 1 Figure 13) and remains in good repair today. Evidence of its continued use can be seen both by the votive offerings left inside the well house and by the pieces of cloth, including ribbons, tied in the branches of the trees above (see Appendix 1 Figure 14).

Another well which appears still to be in use is the well of St Nun, near Pelynt, which is also known as the Piskies' well (Appendix 1 Figures 9 and 10).[99] It is possible that this was the original name and that the well became associated with St Nun at a later date – there is no legend connecting the well with the saint directly, unlike that at St Keyne, for example. The Quiller-Couches suggested that:

> it was anciently believed to be the haunt of some beneficent elf, who here dispensed her bounties in the shape of health and good fortune when her fountain was reverently consulted, but could show enduring anger to those who desecrated it.[100]

There is an enduring tradition of leaving offerings at the well (see Appendix 1 Figure 10) and, like the well at St Keyne, pieces of cloth are tied to the trees around the well. The pieces of cloth also act as votive offerings; they are often dipped into the waters of the well before they are tied to the trees as part of a healing ritual.

Although there are no legends directly linked to the saint at St Nun's well, it is 'guarded by a legendary tale' – a local farmer wanted to use the stone basin in the

[99] Piskies are pixies or 'little people' in Cornish folklore.
[100] M. and L. Quiller-Couch, *Ancient and Holy Wells of Cornwall* (Cornwall: Tamara Publications, 1994), p.179.

well in his pigsty. Using his oxen, he eventually managed to dislodge it from its position in the well and began to drag it up the (extremely steep) hill:

> When nearly up it burst away from the chains, rolled down towards the well, and, making a sharp turn, rolled into its own place … retribution overtook [the farmer] on the spot, the oxen falling dead and their owner being struck lame and speechless. No one since has been hardy enough to try the removal of the font.[101]

There were also holy wells associated with St Non at Grampound and at Altarnun. Both these wells were situated outside of the churchyard, and all that remains of the holy well at Grampound is the stoop, which is built into a barn wall. The well at Altarnun is overgrown and neglected;[102] however, it was once an important bowssening (immersion) pool whose waters were believed to cure insanity. Carew described the process in his *Survey of Cornwall*:

> The water running from St. Nunn's well fell into a square and close walled plot … Upon this wall was the frantic person set to stand, his back towards the pool, and from thence with a sudden blow in the breast tumbled headlong into the pool, where a strong fellow … took him and tossed him up and down … until the patient by forgoing his strength had somewhat forgot his fury. Then he conveyed to the church, and certain masses sung over him; upon which handling, if his right wits returned, St. Nunn had the thanks, but if there appeared small amendment he was bowssened again and again …[103]

It is not known when this practice died out, but by the time that the Quiller-Couches visited towards the end of the nineteenth century, the well house was in a state of disrepair and the spring feeding the well was dry.[104] The lack of water is an unusual occurrence, as holy wells are more normally believed to never run dry; indeed, in many cases they provided a water source for the nearby inhabitants. Venton Ia, the

[101] Quiller-Couch, *Ancient and Holy Wells*, pp.177–178.
[102] Indeed, it proved impossible to find when I visited the village, despite an OS map reference. No reference is made to it in the church guide book (although curiously this does mention the holy well of St Non in Wales).
[103] Carew, *Survey of Cornwall*, pp.193–194.
[104] Quiller-Couch, *Ancient and Holy Wells*, p.174.

well of St Ia in St Ives (Venton is the Cornish word for well), was until 1843 the main water source for the Downalong area of St Ives (see Appendix 1 Figure 2).

In common with the wells already discussed, Venton Ia is situated some distance from the church itself. It is in a beautiful position overlooking Porthmeor beach and St Ives Bay, but the well itself is easily missed and largely ignored by the tourist population (see Appendix 1 Figure 1). However, it does play a part in the feast day celebrations for St Ia each year (held on the nearest Monday to her feast day of February 3), when a civic parade walks from the Guildhall in St Ives to Venton Ia, where a short service is held to bless the silver hurling ball.[105]

One of the wells of St Endelienta was also used as the water source for the village, as the Quiller-Couches record: 'The spring … is never failing, even in the driest seasons, and is in common use by the villagers, who are dependent on it for their water supply.' However, its significance as a holy well had diminished: 'there seems to be no remembered legend nor tradition connected with it, nor is there any building over it to make its former importance'.[106] In some cases, although there is no longer a well house covering the well (if, indeed, there ever was), the spring that fed the well still remains. Such an example can be found at Minster Church, where the holy well of St Materiana appears to be just a pool in the churchyard (Appendix 1 Figure 16).

The holy well of St Piala (at Phillack, near Hayle) is just across the road from the church. For many years ignored, it was restored and reconsecrated by the Old

[105] Cornish hurling is unique to the county and now only played in St Ives, St Columb Major and Bodmin. In St Ives, the game is played by children – the ball is 'hurled' into the crowd then passed around the streets and beaches until noon, when the child holding it is declared the winner.
[106] Quiller-Couch, *Ancient and Holy Wells,* p.66.

Cornwall Society in 1993 when a grating was placed over the water source and a dedication plaque erected (Appendix 1 Figures 4–6). Despite this, it does not seem to be particularly well known in the local community and there are no references to it in the church.[107]

This lack of local knowledge of a holy well was not just restricted to St Piala. A regular churchgoer at St Endellion was unable to tell me where her two wells could be found, and similarly very few of the wells were signposted.[108] Other wells are even more inaccessible – the well of St Morwenna at Morwenstow, for example, is situated on the cliff face.

In the light of this, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that there were other wells dedicated to female saints in Cornwall which have vanished into obscurity. This can be illustrated by the example of St Wenna' well, in St Wenn. The Quiller-Couches reported that:

> The water of this well was at one time used for baptismal purposes; but that must have been very many years ago, for the inhabitants of St. Wenn village, both old and young … declared that they had never even heard of the well; there appeared to be neither trace nor recollection of it remaining.[109]

Borlase talks about a well in St Wenn, presumably the same one as 'the water was always fetched for the church font', and says that it was 'destroyed by Puritan soldiers'.[110] This may have been the case for other holy wells. Other factors may also have contributed to the neglect and eventual forgetting of the wells such as the

[107] Although it is so close to the church, it is not easy to find. When looking for it, I asked four local people for directions, none of whom had even heard of it despite living in the village all their lives.
[108] An exception to this as St Brevita's well at Lanlivery which, as previously mentioned, despite being located in woodland a short distance from the church was probably the easiest of all to find, as every turn is signposted.
[109] Quiller-Couch, *Ancient and Holy Wells*, p.216.
[110] Borlase, *Age of Saints*, p.97.

distance between the church and the well, and a move away from the belief in miracles. This latter difficultly was expressed by the Quiller-Couches in 1894: 'It is difficult, even now, to gain authentic information of the old customs, ceremonies, and traditions of these holy springs, so quickly and surely does the hand of civilisation and progress wipe away the old beliefs and superstitions.'

However, it is worth noting that there has been a resurgence in interest in ancient monuments such as holy wells, demonstrated by the restoration of wells such as St Piala's and St Keyne's. St Keyne is also an example of a well which has a specific local tradition attached to it, which might explain its survival. This would also go some way in explaining why the well of St Nun's at Pelynt (the Piskies Well) is still used whereas the well of St Nun's at Altarnun is not. Access to the Pelynt well is not easy – it is located off a single-track road, with only a small sign to it at the very end – but the offerings left there suggest that it is still visited frequently. The Altarnun well was located in the village itself, but is not in use today. As the extract from Carew quoted earlier illustrated, the Altarnun well was used for public displays of miraculous cures, whereas the Pelynt well is a 'cloutie' well, where offerings are left in private and so, perhaps, the tradition has lasted longer:

> That superstition still lingers among the Cornish is beyond doubt; but it lurks in their minds, and betrays itself in the wearing of a secret charm, or the half-playful dropping of a pin into the well by the sentimental maiden; not in serious visitations to the consecrated spot, with solemn ceremonies, in search of health or tidings of the future, as in former times.[111]

Although in some instances only the tradition of a holy well remains, there would seem to be sufficient material evidence remaining to conclude that holy wells are an important theme that links many of the female saints of Cornwall. Given the number

[111] Quiller-Couch, *Ancient and Holy Wells*, p.xii.

of wells associated with female saints, it may indeed have been the case that the majority, if not all, of the female saints of Cornwall had a well associated with them at some point, but many of these have disappeared over time, leaving behind only those with a strong tradition attached to them, such as those at St Keyne and Pelynt.

Chapter 6 Virgins, martyrs and mothers

> Sct Nuline or Newline was a virgine martyre and saint who liued in Cornwall att a place wher ther is a church dedicated to her[112]

The biographical patterning of a saint's life can illuminate important themes which serve to link them, and this is particularly important in the case of female saints where they are generally classified by their female characteristics as virgins or mothers, for example. Although the lack of extant material relating to the female saints of Cornwall does not allow for full details of their lives in the majority of cases, the female classification has survived. Thus, for example, the *Perpetual Calendar of Cornish Saints* categorises the following saints as 'Gwerhes' (Cornish: 'virgin'): Ladock, Sitha, Bride, Crowan, Ia, Kew, Maker, Derva, Matherian, Newlyn, Dominica, Buryan, Breag, Morwenna, Stythyan, Electa, Sidwell, Keyn, Wendron, Gulval, Issey, Minver, Creed, Phillak. Agnes and Columb are described as 'Gwerhes ha Merther' ('virgin and martyr').[113]

Virginity is an important hagiographical theme which 'may almost be considered a prerequisite for feminine sanctity'.[114] In some cases (for example, Maker and Stythyan in the list above), nothing else is known of them and it is only the classification as 'virgin' that signals their female gender. It is interesting that many of the male saints in the same list are classified as, for example, 'Ermet', 'Abbas' or 'Managh' (hermit, abbot, monk), thus by their rank in life rather than by their gender at birth. Female saints who are traditionally thought to be abbesses, such as Breaca and Buriana (Breag and Buryan in the list above), are still only classified as

[112] Orme, Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints, p.98.
[113] Enys, *Perpetual Calendar of Cornish Saints* (n.p.).
[114] J. Cartwright 'Dead Virgins: feminine sanctity in medieval Wales', *Medium Ævum* 17 (2002), available online at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6408/is_1_71/ai_n28930393/?tag=content;col1 (accessed 6 December 2011).

'gwerhes'. Nicholas Roscarrock does not mention Breaca but Buriana is referred to as 'virgin'.[115]

The lack of detail relating to the female saints of Cornwall means that it is difficult to expand on the theme of virginity to reveal other common themes (such as that of the virgin martyr) in the way that this has been done for the Welsh saints, for example. The Welsh female saints are described as very beautiful:

> they are frequently of noble birth and have to flee their native land in order to avoid an arranged marriage … they seek a simple ascetic life, worshipping Christ (their eternal husband) … they unwittingly become the objects of male desire and are frequently abducted, threatened with rape or forced marriage, tortured and decapitated.'[116]

These aspects can be found in the traditions associated with the female saints of Cornwall, although no saint follows exactly the pattern described above. In the *Life of St Keyne*, for example, the saint's nobility is made clear in the first line:

> the Blessed Keyna, Virgin, sprang of royal stock

She is exceptionally beautiful:

> a certain wonderful beauty of spiritual grace appeared in the virgin's face, which shone – sometimes like snow, and sometimes like the brightness of the sun.

Like the Welsh saints, Keyne does not wish to marry:

> when she had reached the age when she might be wedded, and many noblemen sought her hand in marriage; the holy virgin, refusing altogether to be joined to a husband, consecrated her virginity to the Lord by a perpetual vow.[117]

[115] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.61.
[116] Cartwright, 'Dead virgins; see also Henken, *Traditions of the Welsh Saints.*
[117] Doble, *S Nectan*, p.37

However, it is St Keyne's own decision to leave Wales – she is not forced to flee by a suitor – and she travels via Somerset to Cornwall. The fact that this is an active choice on her part led the Reverend Doble to query whether she was female: 'It seems difficult to believe that a woman could, in those wild ages, travel so far and found so many settlements, and St Keyne may quite well have been a man.'[118] St Keyne was not, of course, the only female saint alleged to have travelled to Cornwall and those reputedly travelling from Ireland, such as Ia and Piala, would also have had perilous journeys.

St Piala is interesting in that she fits with the pattern of a saint fleeing her native country only to be killed but there are differences in the detail. According to the *Life of St Gwinear*, Piala and her brother Gwinear were children of an Irish king, who were forced to leave Ireland when Gwinear was converted to Christianity by St Patrick. They settled in Brittany before returning to Ireland after the death of their father. As neither of them wanted to take over the succession, they left again for Brittany but were blown off course and landed instead in Cornwall, where they were killed by the local chieftain.[119] Although she is classified only as 'virgin' in the *Calendar* list, Nicholas Roscarrock calls her 'virginge and martire'.[120]

Of the two saints listed as 'virgin martyrs' in the *Calendar*, Agnes is not generally considered to be a Celtic saint (Roscarrock, for example, makes no mention of her). She was a fourth-century Roman martyr, who was killed when she refused to marry the local governor's son. There is no obvious link with Cornwall, although the

[118] Doble, *S Nectan*, p.47.
[119] S. Baring-Gould, and J. Fisher, *The Lives of the British Saints*, vol. 3 (London: Honorable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1911), pp.24–30.
[120] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.105.

eighteenth-century historian Thomas Tonkin described a local legend that Agnes had fled from Rome to Cornwall, where she performed miraculous deeds such as turning the Devil into a stone.[121]

St Columb has sometimes been confused with the male Irish saint Columba; however, there is a strong tradition in Cornwall making her a distinct female saint. She is commemorated at two sites in Cornwall, St Columb Major and St Columb Minor. Nicholas Roscarrock relates an 'olde Cornish Rymthe containing her Legend, translated by one Mr Williams, a Phis[it]ion there' but adds 'howe Autenick it is I dare not saye'. According to the legend, Columb was the daughter of a pagan king and king. When she converted to Christianity (Roscarrock says she 'vowed virginitie'), her parents imprisoned her, but she escaped with the help of an angel and fled far away. She was then captured by 'a great enemie of Christian religion' and taken to his master, a local tyrant, who on seeing 'her beautie & modest behaviour' wanted her to marry his son, on condition she renounced her Christianity. As Columb refused, she was once again imprisoned. This time, when the angel helped her escape, she fled by ship to Cornwall. However, the tyrant caught up with her and beheaded her, and a holy well was formed at the spot where her blood landed on the ground.[122] The place where she was martyred is named as Ruthwas, the present-day hamlet of Ruthvoes (Cornish: 'red bank').

There are a number of parallels between the story of Columb and that of other saints, particularly the Welsh saints Eluned (a daughter of Brychan Brycheiniog) and Gwenfrewy (Winifred). Like Columb, both saints were beheaded when they refused

[121] See Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.60.
[122] See Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, pp.67–68, 125–126.

the advances of local princes, and wells formed at the site of their blood.[123] It may well be the case, as Orme suggests, that Columb's story is 'based on that of another saint, with the addition of topographical details about Cornwall'.[124] Roscarrock had also believed this to be the case:

> This Cornish legend maye seeme to bee collected or at least mixed with the storie of the other Columba, if she were not the forementioned Columba being one of the 10,000 [sic] virgins which suffered with St Ursula.[125]

As well as the male saint Columba, there is a St Columba of Sens, France and a St Columba of Cordoba, Spain, both female saints who were martyred for their faith, so it is not improbable that aspects of their legends, or indeed those of the Welsh saints Eluned and Gwenfrewy, passed into the legend of the Cornish Columb.

St Neulina of Newlyn East is also described by Roscarrock as 'a virgine martyre and saint', the daughter of a Cornish king 'who in contempte of Christian religion martyred her with his owne hands'.[126] Other versions of her legend (including that given in the church guide book) say that she was fleeing a pagan prince who wished to marry her. When he caught up with her, he beheaded her and a well was formed where her head fell.[127] There is a Gothic lantern head cross in the church which shows a female figure holding her head in her arms, which is thought to be Neulina (see Appendix 6 Figures 7–8). Different versions of the story locate it in Cornwall or Brittany, providing another example of a legend or tradition being adapted for a local context.

[123] See Cartwright, 'Dead virgins'.
[124] Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, p.92.
[125] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.68.
[126] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.98.
[127] Baring-Gould and Fisher, *Lives of the Saints*, vol 4, p.10.

The other classification for female saints in the *Calendar* list is that of mother. St Non is listed as 'Mam S. Davy' and St Anna as 'Mam Agen Arlethes' ('mother of Our Lord', although Anna is more generally thought of as the mother of the Virgin Mary). The female saint is therefore categorised here in relation to the male – thus despite her own importance as a saint in Cornwall and not just as a mother, it was felt necessary to add the name of her son to her own. Non was not the only female saint of Cornwall whose sanctity seems to be dependent on a male figure and these will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Male saints

> St Piala was the Daughter of a pagan king of Ireland and sistir of St Guigner and suffred with him in Cornwall.[128]

Mention has already been made of familial links between the female saints of Cornwall and male saints. As discussed above, St Non was the mother of St David. St Anne of Whitstone may have been the Anne who was the mother of St Samson of Dol, or she may have been the grandmother of Jesus. St Keyne was the aunt of St Cadog, a relationship noted in both their *Lives*.[129] There were also strong sibling links between some of the female saints of Cornwall and male saints, such as the children of Brychan Brycheiniog.

According to the twelfth-century *Life of St Nectan*, Brychan Brycheiniog had twelve sons as well as twelve daughters. St Nectan himself was the oldest son. He is not commemorated in Cornwall directly, as his church is at Hartland in Devon, although this is just up the coast from Morwenstow, where his sister St Morwenna lived. Of the other sons named, only St Clether seems to have made any impression in Cornwall – he settled not far from his sisters in mid Cornwall and, like them, has a church and village named for him. It is interesting in the case of the Brycheiniog siblings that it was the female saints who had more influence in Cornwall than their brothers (who, given the patriarchal traditions of the times, might have been expected to have been better remembered), even if this influence was restricted to the locality of the church.

There were a number of sibling relationships amongst the Irish saints also. St Piala was the sister of St Gwinaer and travelled to Cornwall with him from Ireland. St Ia

[128] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.105. St Guigner is also known as Gwinear or Fingar.
[129] See Chapter 3 for more information.

was the sister of St Euny and St Erth, and the three siblings are all commemorated in the Carbis Bay/St Ives area of west Cornwall. It was not uncommon for the Irish settlers to travel with companions – St Breaca travelled with St Germoe, who was said to be her foster son, and they settled in adjoining parishes.[130] According to a nineteenth-century tradition in St Levan parish, Breaca was the sister of St Levan, although an earlier tradition had named St Manacca as his sister.[131]

An interesting aspect of the relationships of the female saints of Cornwall with male saints is that these male saints are also strongly associated with Cornwall, in many cases in parishes close to those of their female associates. However, with the exception of St David (and possibly St Samson of Dol, if St Anne was indeed his mother), the male saints discussed in this section are, like their female counterparts, known mostly in their own locality. The better known of the Cornish male saints, such as St Piran and St Petroc, contain no references to female saints as either relatives or companions in their *Lives*. Given their anonymity outside of Cornwall, and perhaps their own parish, it is not, however, surprising that none of the female saints of Cornwall are linked to male saints elsewhere.

[130] Courtney, *Cornish Feasts and Folklore*, p.88.
[131] See Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, pp.72, 173, 228.

Chapter 8 Folklore and traditions

> They are simply the creation of the imagination of the peasantry of North Cornwall during the Middle Ages long after the true story of the lives of these saints had been entirely forgotten, and tell us nothing that is historical about them.[132]

The Reverend Doble's remarks (quoted above) about the legends of the saints recounted by Nicholas Roscarrock are an important reminder that these stories are not facts. Nevertheless, folklore and traditions have an important role to play in keeping a saint's name alive, whether this is limited to their parish boundaries or known more widely.

Traditions associated with holy wells, such as miraculous powers, have been discussed in Chapter 5. It is interesting to note here that the powers associated with St Keyne's well (that of mastery in marriage) are also attributed to a stone chair found on St Michael's Mount, namely that 'Whichever of a married pair sits in it first will have the power in the marriage'.[133] According to her *Life*, St Keyne was staying on the Mount when she met with her nephew St Cadog.

Of the female saints themselves (rather than their wells), only one is associated with a miraculous cure. St Buriana was said to have cured King Gerent's son of paralysis, an event that was recorded in the twelfth-century *Exeter Martyrology* compiled by Bishop Grandisson. Although Gerent was a Cornish king, this took place in Ireland, before Buriana settled in Cornwall.[134]

[132] Doble, *S Nectan*, p.20.
[133] Milden, *Saints of the South West*, p.39.
[134] See Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, pp.78, 126–127.

Most of the legends attached to the female saints are connected to miraculous events. St Ia sailed to Cornwall on a leaf, which grew to be big enough to fit her. In one version of the story of St Neulina, Neulina and her nurse sail from Cornwall to Brittany on a leaf. According to the legend recounted in the parish guide, which sites the saint firmly in Cornwall, St Neulina landed at Holywell Bay on the north coast of Cornwall, and walked inland until she became too tired to continue:

> "Here shall be built a church to the honour of God" she exclaimed and struck her staff in the ground to mark the spot. The staff is supposed to have taken root and produced the remarkable fig tree which grows out of the south wall [of the church] to this day without any visible means of nurture.[135]

It is not known how old the fig tree is, nor how it came to be growing out of the wall of the church but it is still there today (see Appendix 6 Figure 4). There is a similar, but larger, fig tree growing out of the church wall at the church of St Manacca, in Manaccan (see Appendix 6 Figures 5–6). However, this tree is not attributed to the saint – in fact, the parish guide gives a more practical explanation:

> The Norman walls [of the church] consist of two outer facings of stone with the intervening space filled with rubble. This made it possible for the well-known fig tree to root itself and grow out of the south west wall of the church. How the tree originated is not known, but it is known to have been growing there for two hundred years.[136]

In all probability, this is the most likely explanation for the fig tree at St Newlyn East as well. The church there was completely rebuilt in the 1880s, but no mention is made of the fig tree at this time.[137] Unlike St Neulina, about whom a number of stories exist, very little is known about St Manacca and this could perhaps go some way to explaining why no legend is associated with her tree.

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[135] *The Parish Church of St Newlyn East*, p.1.
[136] *The Parish Church of Manaccan. Our History* (n.p.).
[137] *The Parish Church of St Newlyn East*, p.2.

There is a curse placed on the fig tree at Newlyn East:

> Upon it lies a dreadful curse,
> Who plucks a leaf will need a hearse.

In a similar vein, there is a legend attached to the well of St Non at Pelynt that if the basin is moved, the person attempting to steal it will drop dead.[138] Another version of this legend (where bad luck befalls the farmer who tries to move the basin) was discussed in Chapter 5. In both cases, the legends would seem have been enough of a deterrent for both the tree and the basin to remain in situ.

None of these legends are mentioned by Nicholas Roscarrock in his *Lives of the Saints*. As he lived in the parish of St Endellion, it is not surprising that he did recount the legends attached to the saints around this area and placed particular emphasis on the legend of his 'patronesses', St Endelienta. The legend of St Endelienta is interesting not least because it contains a number of elements which can be found in the *Lives* and legends of other saints. St Endelienta is said to have lived solely on milk produced by one cow. When the cow was killed by the local lord as it had strayed onto his land, Endelienta's godfather, King Arthur, had the man killed. Endelienta then brought the cow and the lord back to life. On her own deathbed, Endelienta requested that her body be drawn on a cart by year-old calves and that a church should be built in her name at the place where the calves stopped.[139]

St Endelienta was not the only saint associated with Cornwall to live on food from one source. St Corentin, who is commemorated at Cury, on the Lizard peninsula, was a hermit who lived near a stream containing a miraculous fish. Each day the saint

[138] *The Religious Sites of Pelynt Parish*, p.14.
[139] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.71.

would cut off a piece from this fish to eat, and the missing part would then grow back. In a similar way, St Neot had a well containing three fish and as long as only one fish was eaten each day for food, there would always be three fish in the well. The theme of a saint resurrecting the dead is a common one in hagiography; unusually, in the case of St Endelienta, it is a woman who brings a dead man back to life (female saints are often more passive: compare, for example, the legend of St Gwenfrewy who is beheaded by a local lord and restored to life by the male St Beuno). The powers of resurrection do not seem to be attributed to any other saints, male or female, associated with Cornwall, although it may be the case that such traditions have been lost.[140] Finally, St Melor's body was carried in a cart by two bullocks until they stopped and his body was then buried at that site (although this took place in Brittany, rather than Cornwall).[141]

In a twist on the theme of the unwanted suitor, St Endelienta's sister St Menfre was approached by the Devil: 'the Ghostlye Aduersarie coming to molest her as she was combing her head by [her] well'.[142] She threw her comb at him and he fled, leaving behind a 'strange deepe Hoale', which Roscarrock calls Topalundy and is nowadays known as Lundy Hole, a collapsed sea cave.

The idea that the location of the saint's church would be decided by miraculous means has been discussed in relation to St Endelienta. The church of her sister St Morwenna was also said to be established in such a way. According to tradition, when the people of the parish were building the church, St Morwenna chose a stone to be

[140] By this I mean, in addition to the female saints discussed here, the main male saints associated with Cornwall such as Piran, Petroc, etc, rather than the more universal saints such as Michael and Mary.
[141] More information about these saints can be found in Orme, *Saints of Cornwall*, for example.
[142] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.90.

used for the font and carried it up the cliffs. As the stone was heavy, she stopped to rest on the way, and where she put the stone down, a holy well was created (the well of St Morwenna is still to be found on the cliff face). She then carried it up to the top of the cliff and put the stone on the ground. As the parishioners had already begun to build the church in a different place, they carried Morwenna's stone there. However,

> what was built by day was pulled down by night, and the materials carried to this place [where Morwenna had laid the stone originally]; whereupon they forebore and built it in the place they were directed to by a wonder.[143]

Many of the feast days of the female saints are still celebrated by their local churches – the well dressing at Llanlivery (St Brevita) and the Feast Monday of St Ives have already been mentioned. St Endellion, St Buryan and Zennor (St Senara) also celebrate feast days. The Marhamchurch Revel takes place on the Monday nearest to 12 August, the feast day of St Marwenna. A local girl (who must have been born in the village and be a pupil at the village school) is elected by the village children as 'Queen of the Revel'. She wears a white dress and a blue cloak, which is passed from queen to queen. The Queen and her six attendants (all local school-children) walk to the site of St Marwenna's original cell (where the war memorial now stands) and she is crowned by 'Father Time' who recites the following to her on behalf of St Marwenna:

> Now look! That this by all is seen,
> I here do crown thee, of this year, the Queen!

The Queen, now on horseback, leads a procession through the village to the Revel Field, where various 'revels' (music, dancing, fancy dress competitions, etc.) take place.[144]

[143] Baring-Gould and Fisher, *Lives of the Saints*, vol. 3, pp.496–497.

It is interesting to note that some of the churches dedicated to the female saints, particularly in the far west, have ancient Celtic crosses in the churchyard (see Appendix 5). These are believed to date from the sixth century, placing them around the time that the female saints are supposed to have been active in Cornwall. Although they do not provide any information about the female saints themselves, they can be seen as evidence of early Christianity in Cornwall.

[144] See Deane and Shaw, *Folklore*, p.181. Photographs of the 2010 Marhamchurch can be seen at http://www.budepeople.co.uk/pictures/Marhamchurch-Revel-2010/pictures-6535735-detail/pictures.html (accessed 6 December 2011).

Conclusion

> Itt is likely that this Saint which giveth name to this church, well and poole liued ther, but I dare not assure my selfe of it tell I finde more warrant than a bare coniecture.[145]

Roscarrock was speaking of St Non but his remarks hold true for the female saints in Cornwall considered as a whole. There is a distinct lack of material information and evidence that can be directly connected to them. What evidence there is, in terms of churches and their contents, dates from long after they are supposed to have lived, as do the few saints' *Lives* in which they feature. Nicholas Orme pointed out that: 'Most of the Cornish Celtic saints … were honoured in parish churches or parochial chapels, where the resources for writing Lives and audiences for reading them were limited.'[146]

In the light of this, it is perhaps even more surprising that the legacies of the female saints, in terms of the churches dedicated to them and the villages that bear their names, have remained such a strong feature of the Cornish landscape. The female saints of Cornwall can be seen in many ways as the truly local saints – they may be little known outside of their own parish, but in their local area they are celebrated and remembered. The evidence for this is striking – female saints are an important feature of stained glass windows in their parish churches, from the medieval image believed to be of St Non in Altarnun Church (the only piece of stained glass in the entire church, see Appendix 3 Figures 10 and 11) to the modern image of St Wenna at Morval (Appendix 3 Figure 13). Appendix 3 contains a number of images of female saints in stained glass windows in Cornwall. Images of the female saints also feature heavily on the modern banners displayed in their churches (see Appendix 2) and as

[145] Orme, *Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints*, p.98.
[146] Orme, 'St Breage', p.341.

statues, often near the Lady Chapel (see Appendix 4), an indication, perhaps, of the continued importance placed on them by their parish church. In some parishes, such as Marhamchurch, St Ives and Lanlivery, the feast day of the local saint is still celebrated.

Although most of the female saints of Cornwall are commemorated in just one parish (a notable exception to this is St Non, who can be considered an universal Celtic saint, given her importance in Welsh and Breton traditions also), this study has demonstrated that there were common themes linking them, in terms of geographical origins (Wales, Ireland and Brittany) and other hagiographical themes, such as the importance of holy wells and the theme of the virgin martyr. The origins of the saints have also had an influence on the patterns of settlement in Cornwall, as the female saints thought to be Irish congregated in the far west of the county, whilst those saints believed to be from Wales settled in mid and north Cornwall (see Appendix 7 Maps 2 and 3). There were insufficient saints with links to Brittany for any discernable pattern to appear.

The importance of holy wells to the female saints has also been demonstrated. There are still a number of wells dedicated to female saints in Cornwall that survive in reasonable condition to this day, such as those at Lanlivery and Pelynt; indeed, there are a number of wells that have been restored in modern times by local societies, such as those at Phillack and St Keyne. In addition to this, it has been shown through sources such as local traditions and earlier historical work (for example, the writings of Nicholas Roscarrock in the sixteenth/seventeenth century and the work of the Quiller-Couches towards the end of the nineteenth century) that other wells linked to

female saints were once in existence but become neglected and forgotten at some point in their history.

Other themes, including those of the virgin martyr and the holy mother, have been found in the traditions of some of the saints of Cornwall, and it is interesting that legends associated with them, in particular St Endelienta, contain themes which are common in Celtic hagiography. Whether the commonality of these themes is due to cultural transmission of legends between the Celtic countries, or whether there are some elements of historical fact within them is impossible to say, just as it is impossible to establish if the saints were historical figures. What is clear, however, is that the female saints of Cornwall, or at least the traditions associated with them, continue to play an important role as patron in many of the parish churches dedicated to them.

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Appendix 1 Holy wells



Figure 1 Venton Ia, St Ives. Location of the holy well



Figure 2 Venton Ia, St Ives. Inscription above the well



Figure 3 Venton Ia, St Ives. The holy well



Figure 4 St Piala's well, Phillack. The holy well



Figure 5 St Piala's well, Phillack. Inscription by the gate



Figure 6 St Piala's well, Phillack. Entrance to the site of the well



Figure 7 St Brevita's well, Lanlivery. Entrance to the well



Figure 8 St Brevita's well, Lanlivery. Local sign



Figure 9 St Nun's well, Pelynt. Well entrance



Figure 10 St Nun's well, Pelynt. Interior showing well basin and votive offerings



Figure 11 St Keyne's well. View from the road



Figure 12 St Keyne's well. Entrance to well



Figure 13 St Keyne's well. Inscription by well



Figure 14 St Keyne's well. Offerings left at the well



Figure 15 St Keyne's well. Slate carved with the legend of St Keyne



Figure 16 St Materiana's well, Minster



Figure 17 St Anne's well, Whitstone. The well house



Figure 18 St Anne's well, Whitstone. Inside the well house



Figure 19 St Anne's well, Whitstone. The Celtic face inside the well house

Appendix 2 Banners



Figure 1 Lelant – St Anta and St Euny



Figure 2 St Buryan – St Buriana



Figure 3 St Buryan – St Buriana



Figure 4 Breage – St Breage



Figure 5 Crowan – St Crewenna



Figure 6 Newlyn East – St Newlyna



Figure 7 St Mabyn – St Mabena



Figure 8 St Minver – St Minver



Figure 9 St Teath – St Tetha



Figure 10 Altarnun – St Non and St David



Figure 11 Pelynt – St Non



Figure 12 Tintagel – St Materiana



Figure 13 Minster – St Materiana



Figure 14 Whitstone – St Anne



Figure 15 Whitstone – St Anne

Appendix 3 Stained glass

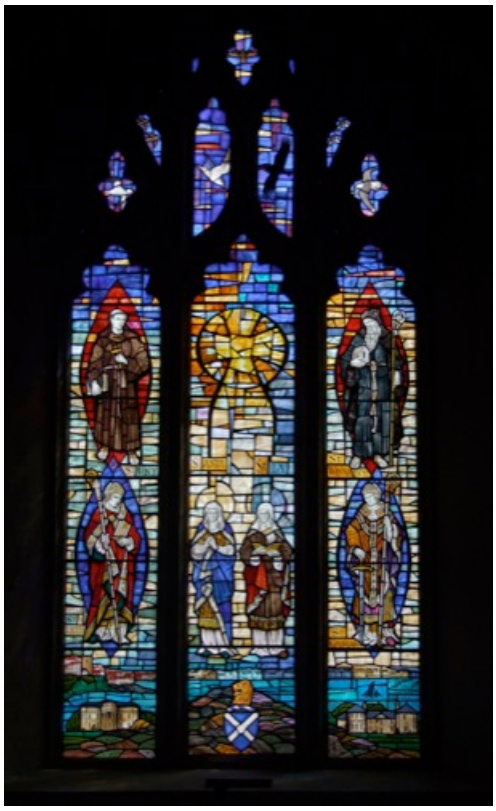


Figure 1 Stained glass window at Lelant



Figure 2 Detail of window at Lelant, showing St Anta and St Ia

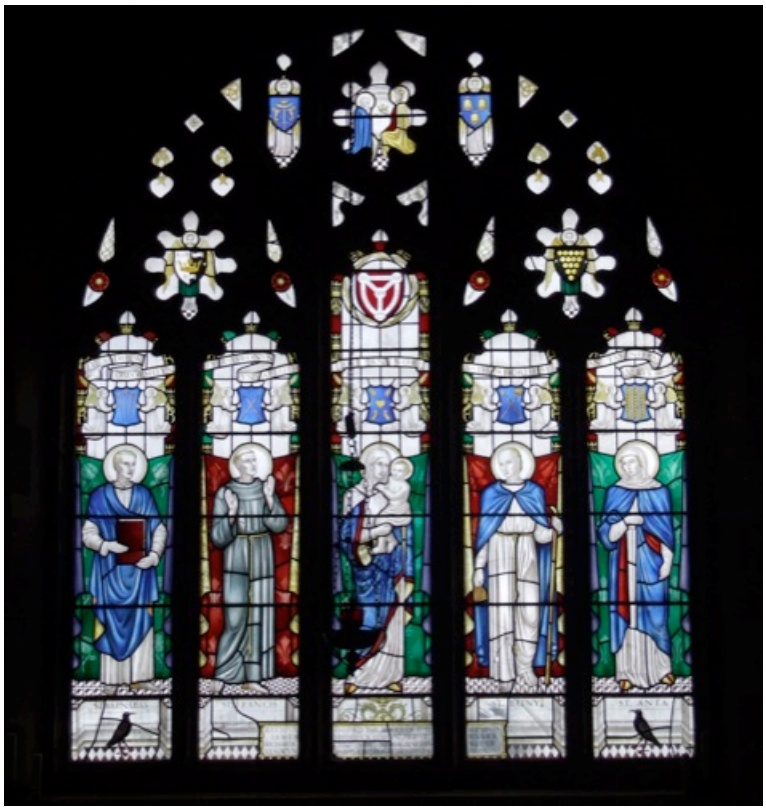


Figure 3 Stained glass window at Carbis Bay



Figure 4 Detail of window at Carbis Bay, showing St Anta



Figure 5 Stained glass window at Zennor, showing St Senara ‘Patron of this Church’ and St Ia ‘Virgin and Martyr’



Figure 6 Stained glass window at Breage, showing St Breaca



Figure 7 Stained glass window at Crowan, showing St Michael, St Crewenna and St George



Figure 8 Stained glass window at St Mabyn, showing St Mabena and St Cecilia



Figure 9 Detail of window at St Mabyn, showing St Mabena



Figure 10 Stained glass window at Altarnun



Figure 11 Detail of window at Altarnun, showing St Non



Figure 12 Stained glass window at St Keyne, showing St Keyne



Figure 13 Stained glass window at Morval, showing image of St Wenna in the centre panel



Figure 14 Detail of stained glass at Tintagel, showing St Materiana

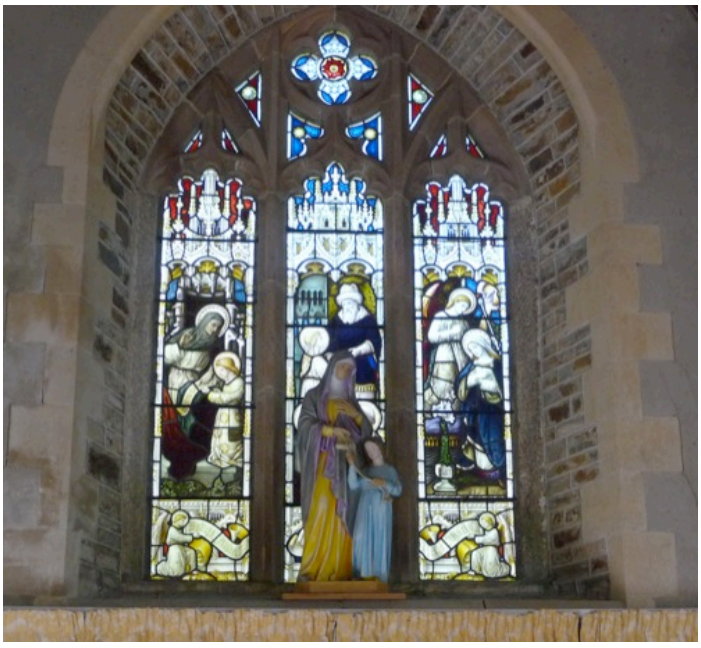


Figure 15 Stained glass window at Whitstone, with statue of St Anne and the Virgin Mary



Figure 16 Detail of the stained glass at Whitstone, showing St Anne and the Virgin Mary

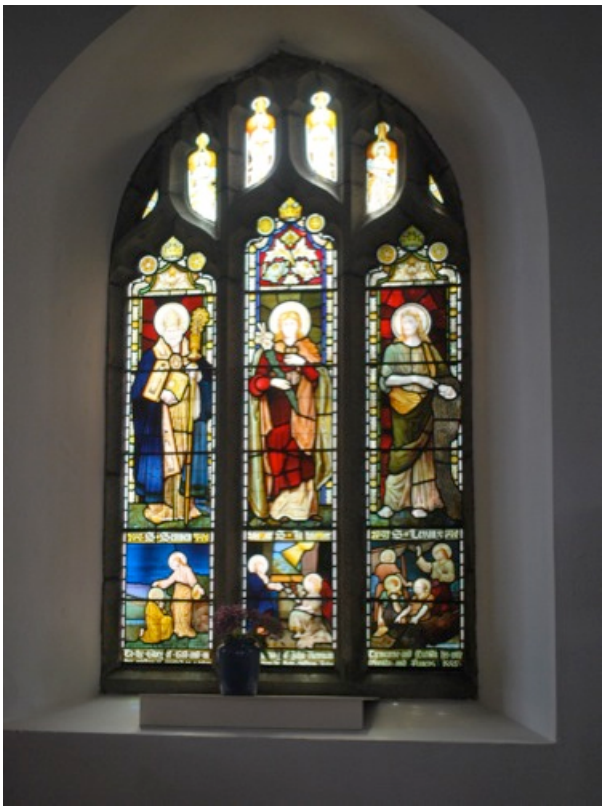


Figure 17 Stained glass window at St Ives, showing St Sennen, St Ia and St Levan



Figure 18 Detail of the window at St Ives, showing St Ia

Appendix 4 Statues



Figure 1 Carbis Bay – St Anta (interior)



Figure 2 Carbis Bay – St Anta (exterior)



Figure 3 St Buryan – St Buriana



Figure 4 Newlyn East – St Neulina



Figure 5 Tintagel – St Materiana



Figure 6 Marhamchurch – St Marwenna



Figure 7 St Ives – St Ia

Appendix 5 Crosses



Figure 1 St Buryan – churchyard cross



Figure 2 St Buryan – detail of cross



Figure 3 Breage – churchyard cross



Figure 4 Crowan – churchyard cross



Figure 5 Wendron – churchyard cross



Figure 6 Phillack – churchyard cross



Figure 7 Newlyn East – lantern cross head



Figure 8 Newlyn East – lantern cross detail



Figure 9 Altarnun – churchyard cross

Appendix 6 Miscellaneous



Figure 1 St Buryan church interior showing banner and statue



Figure 2 Pub sign in St Mabyn village



Figure 3 Minster chancel



Figure 4 Newlyn East fig tree in church wall

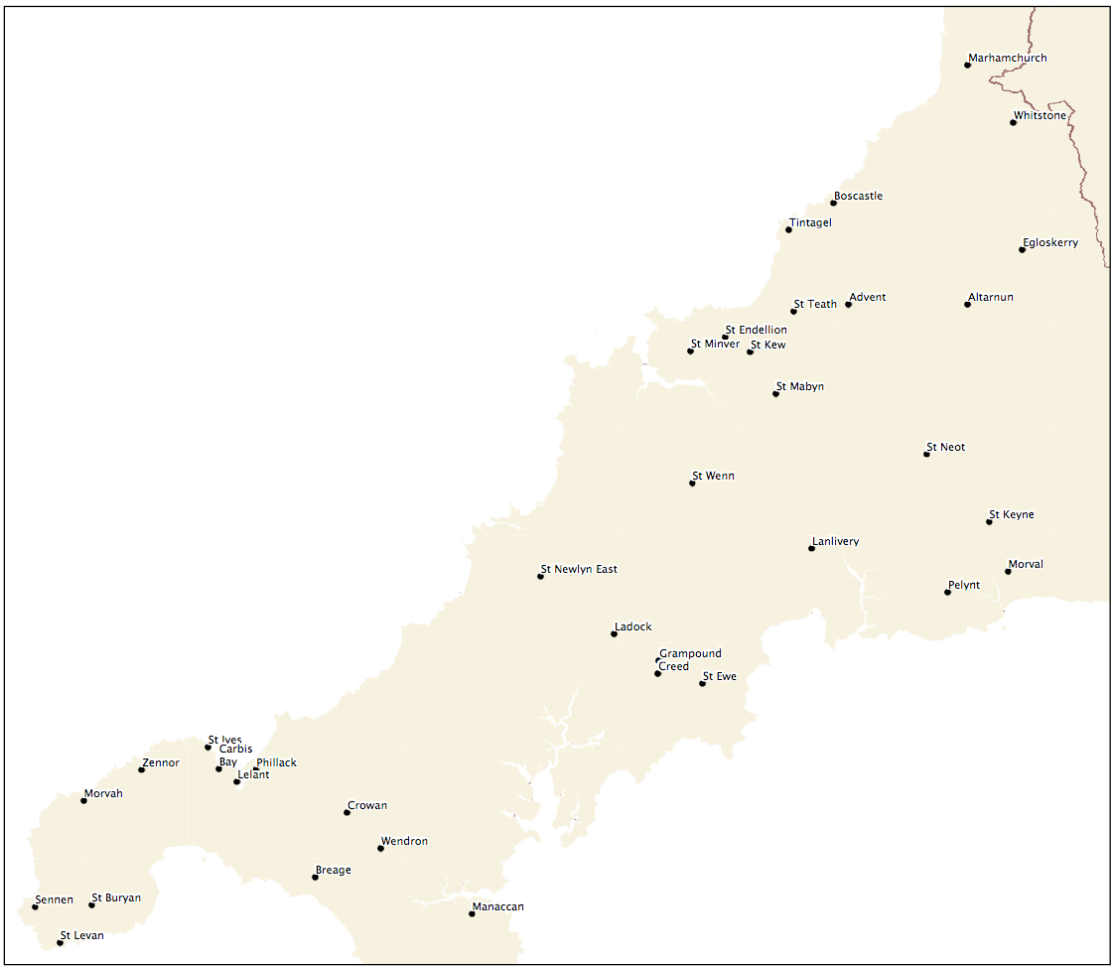


Figure 5 Manaccan fig tree in church wall

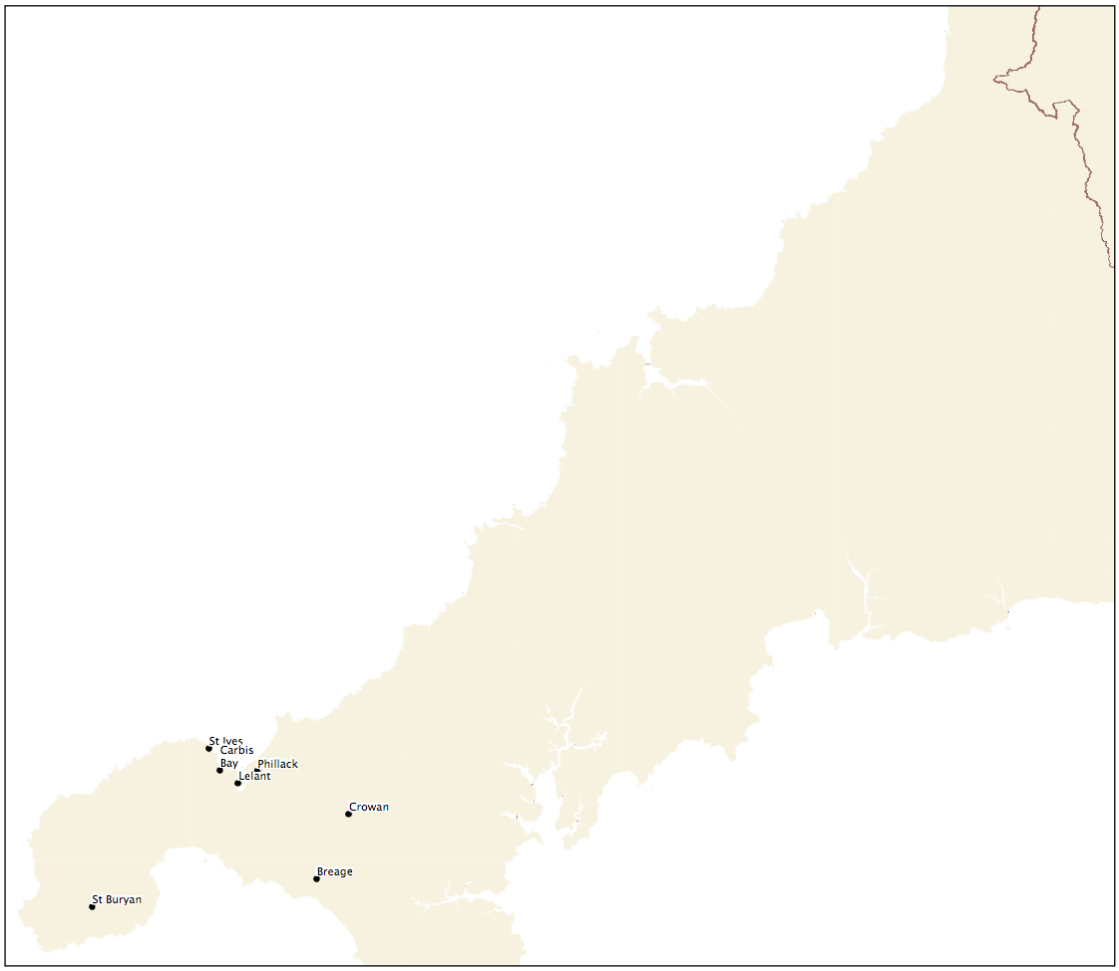


Figure 6 Manaccan fig tree detail

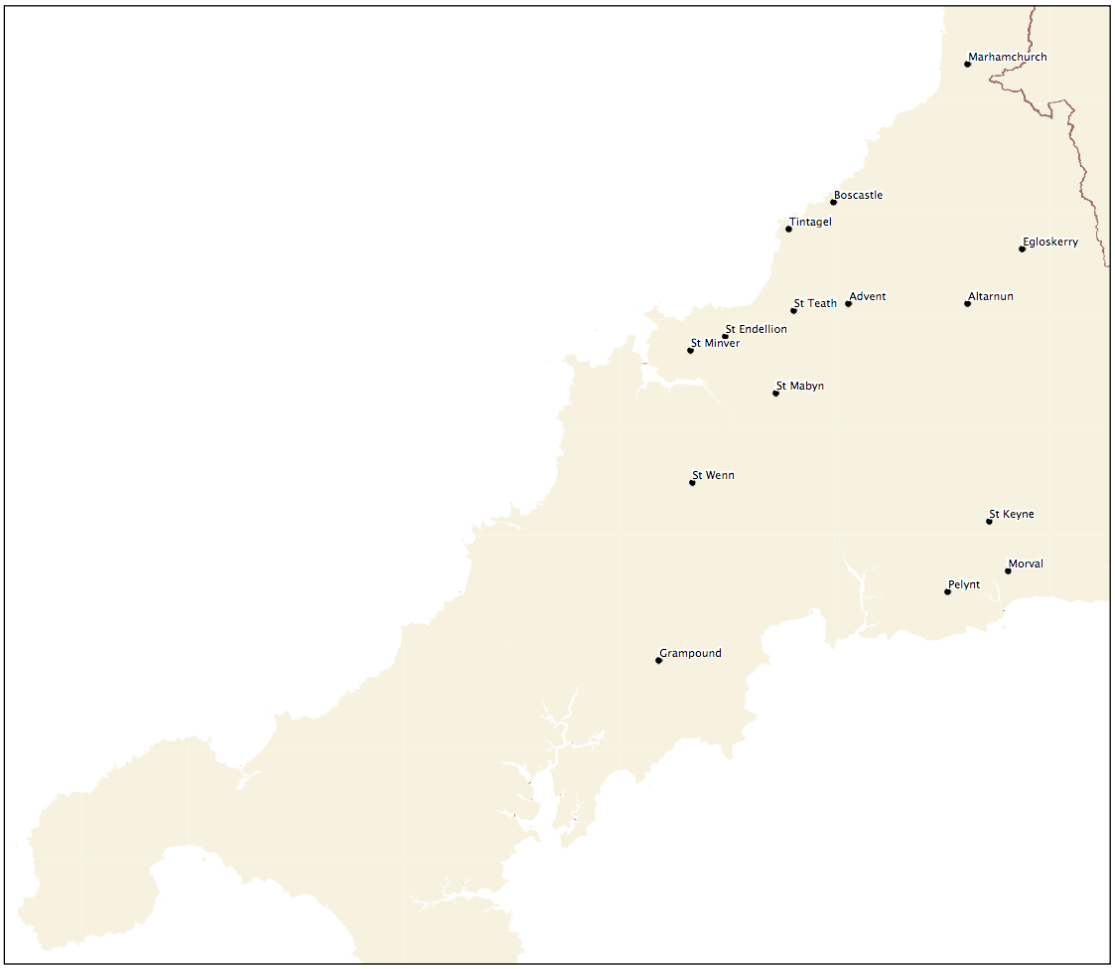
Appendix 7 Maps



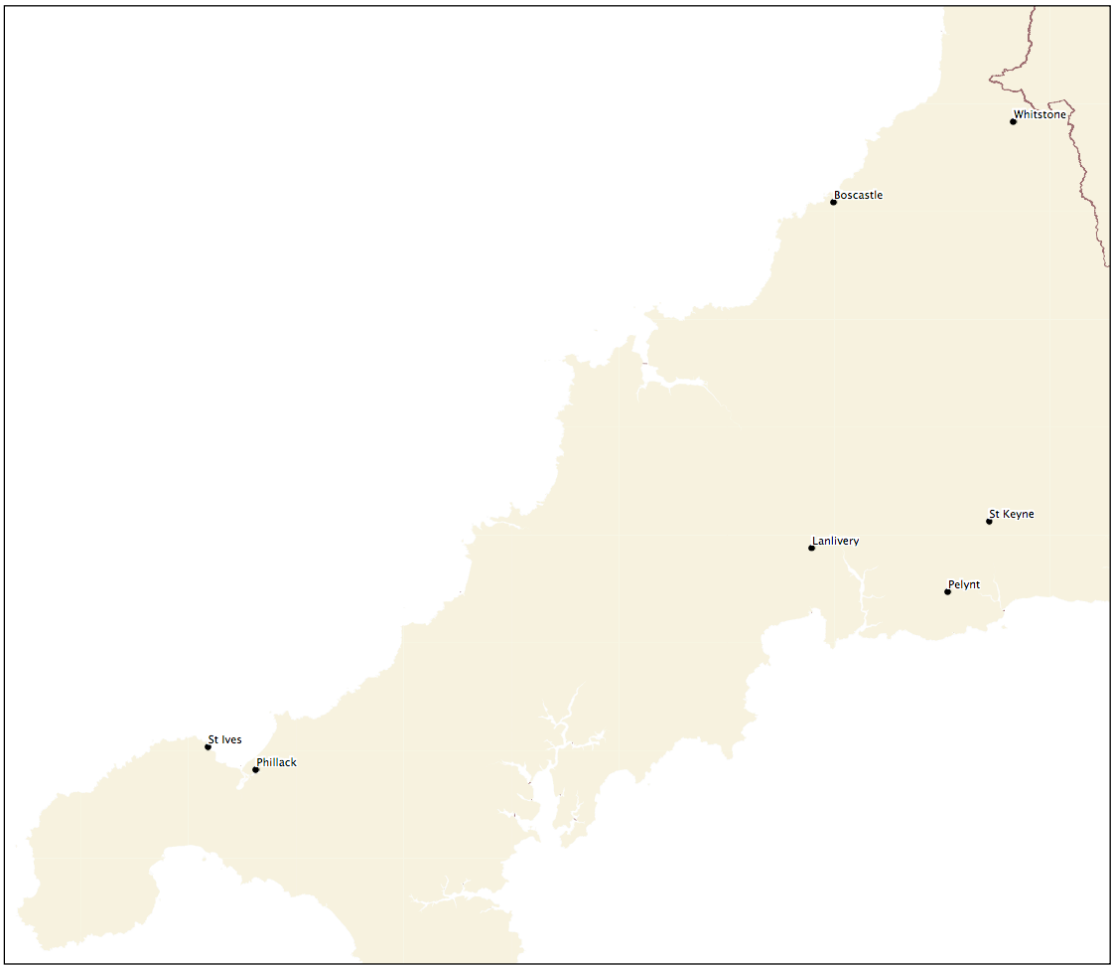
Map 1 Sites visited



Map 2 Irish saints



Map 3 Welsh saints



Map 4 Holy wells visited