

## **St Willibrord**

St Willibrord was born near York in England. He is the Patron Saint of Luxembourg and he is buried in the Basilica of Echternach, which is the centre of his monastery. Located in the townland of Garryhundon, Co Carlow, is an archaeological site commonly referred to as Killogan, Rath Melsigi (Rathmelsh) or Clonmelsh Graveyard. During the seventh and eighth centuries this site was the most important Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical settlement in Ireland. It was here from 678AD to c. 720AD that Willibrord and many other Englishmen were trained for the continental mission.

In 690AD Willibrord led a successful mission from Carlow, made up of Irishmen and Englishmen. As part of his abbey in Echternach he established a very important scriptorium and for a considerable period of time the Abbey produced many of the bibles, psalms and prayer-books that are to be found today in the great libraries of Europe. It is likely that the first generation of these scribes were from Co. Carlow or had trained here. Many of the earliest Anglo-Saxon manuscripts were written in Irish script either by Irish monks based in Britain or by Anglo-Saxons who were trained by the Irish. From Echternach he continued to co-ordinate missions to the surrounding countries until 739AD, when he died aged 81. He is buried in Echternach, and he is the only saint buried in Luxembourg. His Feast Day is November 7<sup>th</sup>.

Great devotion and religious festivals are still held to this day in his honour and in particular a hopping procession, a dance that dates back to, if not predates St. Willibrord's life time. The hopping procession which takes place annually on the Tuesday after Pentecost Sunday sees thousands of people descending on Echternach to partake along with dozens of Cardinals, Arch-Bishops and Bishops from over one hundred and sixty parishes across Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland and Germany who still have devotions to St. Willibrord. The hopping procession starts in the Abbey Square and proceeds for approximately one and a half to two kilometers through the streets of the town, then into the Basilica, down into the crypt and past St. Willibrord's remains. This unique procession coupled with the European importance of the Abbey saw the procession granted UNESCO World Heritage Status in 2010. At the launch the Presentation School Band under the baton of music teacher Edwina Hayden played the hopping tune. This is the tune that pilgrims hop to through the streets of Echternach.

Towards the end of World War 11 the Basilica was badly damaged during the Battle of the Bulge but during the 1950s it was reconstructed including the instillation of a stain glass window depicting St Willibrord's training, ordination and first mass in Co. Carlow.