

The Story of St. Brigid's Fire

BRIGID  1500

In Pagan times, long before St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland, the Hill of Kildare was a sacred site where ritual fires burned in honour of Brigid - a pagan Goddess after whom St. Brigid was named.

The fires on the Hill of Kildare were tended to ensure herds of livestock and fields of crops were protected by the Goddess and that a bountiful harvest was provided each year for the local people.

When St. Brigid built her monastery in Kildare, known in Irish as Cill Dara meaning the Church of the Oak, she decided to continue this custom of keeping the perpetual fire burning on the Hill of Kildare beside her church.

With nineteen of her followers, these nuns kept the fire burning. They tended the fire a day each in turn, with St. Brigid looking after the fire every twenty days.

The perpetual fire burned bright in the Fire Temple, the remains of which can be seen in the grounds of St Brigid's Cathedral, the site of Brigid's original monastery in Kildare Town.

It is believed that this fire burned for over a thousand years after St. Brigid's death, only being extinguished around the time of the Suppression of the Monasteries undertaken by the British King Henry VIII in the late 1530s.

St. Brigid's Perpetual Fire was re-lit in 1993 in the Market Square, about 100m south-east of the original Fire Temple, in Kildare Town.

The original fire was tended by the Sisters of Brigid and the current fire was re-lit by Sister Mary Teresa Cullen, the leader of the Brigidine Sisters. It burns bright in a specially commissioned sculpture in Kildare's Market Square to this day.

It is also protected and tended by the Brigidine Sisters at their Solas Bhride Centre nearby.