





## Tuesday 1st February—St Brigid's Day

February 1st marks Lá Fhéile Bríde or St Brigid's Day. There are many traditions and customs associated with this feast-day, some of which are highlighted below.

### Spring and protecting the farm and home

St Brigid promised fine weather from her feast day onwards. Spring, the season of hope and new life, brought better weather, longer days. With it came new life on the farm and new growth on the land. On St Brigid's Eve, a festive meal of potatoes and butter was eaten and all of the family made special crosses in honour of the saint. They sought St. Brigid's protection for the fertility of the household, farm and land and to safeguard them from illness and disease.

In parts of Connacht, people would carry a large straw belt (a Crios Bríde) through which the inhabitants passed while saying a prayer to St Brigid, in the hope of gaining the saint's protection from illness during the coming year. Throughout Ireland, there are many holy wells dedicated to St Brigid and it was traditional to visit these either the evening before or on her feast day. Water obtained at this time, was believed to be particularly blessed.

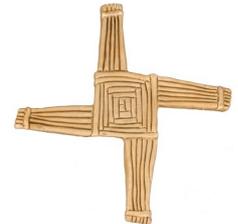
Sometimes a piece of cloth or ribbon (Brat Bríde or Ribín Bríde) was left outside on the windowsill or near the door for the night. It was believed it would be touched by St. Brigid on her travels and thus be endowed with the power to ward off illness and pain in both humans and animals. For the coming year, it was kept safely and used for healing, or incorporated into clothing so as to offer protection to the wearer.

In many of parts of Ireland 'Biddy Boys' (or girls) went from house to house with 'Biddy', an effigy of the saint, often a straw doll, collecting money and food for a party in her honour while reciting a rhyme similar to this one:

*Here is Brigid dressed in white.  
Give her a penny for this dark night.  
She is deaf, she is dumb,  
For God's sake, give her some.*

### St Brigid's Crosses

The St Brigid's Cross, pinned up above the front door or in the kitchen, is still a familiar feature in many homes. The making of crosses - in a variety of styles are traditionally associated with the celebration of the feast of St. Brigid.



The most recognisable cross is the four-armed St Brigid's Cross. This style was favoured in the north of Ireland. Regional styles and variety existed throughout Ireland and the Irish Folklife Collection, located in the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life has an example of most of these.

Although straw, rushes and reeds were most common, grass, hay, wood, goose quills, wire and fabric were also used to form crosses. Whatever material was used, it was sprinkled with holy water before-hand and a prayer to welcome the saint into the home was often recited. Traditional designs were diamond, interlaced or wheel-shaped and could have two, three or four arms. In some areas of the west coast, two strips of wood were tied together to form a simple cross.

Crosses were hung up in homes and animal sheds and then leftover straw was often sprinkled on the crops or incorporated into bedding for animals so as to invoke the saint's blessing as she passed through the country on the eve of her feastday. It was common to give a St Brigid's Cross as a gift to those with a new home, and to newlyweds, so as offer protection and to wish the couple well in starting a family.

### Brigid's Fire

A perpetual flame burned in Kildare in pre-Christian times and was kept alight by Brigid and her nuns until the 16th century. Scholars suggest that priestesses used to gather on the hill of Kildare to tend their ritual fires while invoking a goddess named Brigid to protect their herds and to provide a fruitful harvest. When Brigid built her monastery and church in Kildare she continued the custom of keeping the fire alight. For her and her nuns the fire represented the new light of Christianity, which reached Irish shores early in the fifth century. In Brigid's time, the number of her nuns who tended the flame was nineteen. On the 20th day, Brigid tended it herself. The sacred flame survived possibly up to the suppression of the monasteries in the sixteenth century. In 1993 the flame was re-lit in the Market Square, Kildare, by Sr. Mary Teresa Cullen, then congregational leader of the Brigidine Sisters. Kildare County Council commissioned a sculpture to house the flame in Kildare Town Square in 2005. President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, presided at the lighting of the Perpetual Flame in the Town Square on St. Brigid's Day 2006. This flame was lit from the flame tended by the Brigidine Sisters in Solas Bhride. The Brigid Light is still guarded and tended in Solas Bhride as it was in Kildare many centuries ago by the Sisters of St Brigid. The flame burns as a beacon of hope, justice and peace for Ireland and our world.



Year 7 making traditional crosses will be one of our celebrations to mark St Brigid's day at school - photographs in the next edition of the Newsletter.



**Can you think of a film that has made a difference to you?  
Has a film made you change the way you think about something?**

**Has a film empowered you to face difficult situations?**

**How do you feel when you watch a really great film?**

If you are aged between **13** and **17** and can answer any of the questions above, then **YOU** are invited to take part in a research study that aims to explore and investigate the impact of film on adolescents' lives and wellbeing.

**Who will conduct the research?**

My name is Laura Barnsley and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University, conducting this study as part of my training.

**What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

6 pupils from your school will be selected at random to take part.

If selected you will be asked to **attend an interview that is likely to take 45 – 60 minutes**. This will be organised at your convenience. The interview will involve answering some questions based on your experiences and perceptions of the impact film has on you and your peers' lives.

Information discussed during interviews will remain confidential and not be passed on.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is entirely voluntary and completely up to you whether you take part or not. If you do not wish to take part then you do not need to do anything.

**The benefits of the research:**

It will give you an opportunity to express your views on how film has had an impact on your life, and to experience discussion in an interview for research setting.

The finished study will help future researchers, teachers, schools, educational psychologists, and policy makers to better understand the impact film has on teenagers and how the outcomes of the study may have implications for them.

**If you are interested in taking part, please inform your headteacher** and they will contact me confirming your interest.

Open to all pupils, closing date Wednesday 2nd February 2022