

€1.9m EU funds to link communities in Ireland and Wales through stories of Celtic saints

St David, the patron saint of Wales, is commemorated in the city of St Davids, where he spent much of his life, whilst St Aidan is closely associated with Wexford, particularly in the town of Ferns. As well as enabling both communities to rediscover their shared heritage, the project aims to use this shared history as a way of attracting new visitors to these coastal communities.

Led by Pembrokeshire County Council, in partnership with Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Wexford County Council and Visit Wexford, this cross border project will drive forward economic growth across the two regions through regeneration, cultural and educational projects and business to business mentoring.

It is claimed St Aidan travelled from Wexford to Pembrokeshire to study under St David for several years. This mentor relationship inspired St Aidan to return to Ireland to build his own monastery at Ferns. Both Ferns and St Davids have historically important cathedrals, the cathedral at Ferns is the smallest in Ireland and the cathedral at St Davids being a key tourist destination.

There are plans for the restoration of St Non's well at St Davids which is said to be the birthplace of St David, permanent artworks will be commissioned in both regions which will thematically correspond with each other. Schools will take part in a joint project to animate the story of the 2 saints, with pupils taking part in a visit to the partner country.

Jeremy Miles said:

“Ancient Connections is a great example of EU funds being used to benefit cross border areas in Ireland and Wales by encouraging visitors to find out more about our fascinating shared history. I'm delighted we've been able to fund this unique project which celebrates the ancient links between our 2 communities.

“By sharing knowledge and experience, we hope this will stimulate economic growth and create and safeguard jobs in the cultural, heritage and tourism sectors. In light of Brexit, it is more important than ever that we support and celebrate the strong links between our 2 countries.”

The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe TD, said:

“I welcome the announcement of another project funded by the Ireland Wales Programme. The EU funding granted to Ancient Connections will promote understanding of our shared history and support tourism development to the benefit of both our countries.”

The Leader of Pembrokeshire County Council added:

“We are absolutely delighted to hear that we have been successful in our Ancient Connections grant application. This has been a truly collaborative piece of work with a great many partners in the private, public and third sectors working with us throughout the application process. We can now look forward to 3 years of exciting cultural, heritage, arts and community-based tourism development activity in Wexford and North Pembrokeshire which will help to attract more overseas visitors, particularly out of high season.”