

# Tale from the Garden!

**Daffodils have long been considered the heralds of Spring - Yellow Trumpets that spend all winter developing their roots underground before the flowers burst through in Spring.**

We all know that the traditional **emblem** of Wales is the Daffodil. But proudly sported every St. David's Day on 1st March and at every international rugby match, the leek is now widely recognised as the national **symbol** of Wales. But why is it that patriotic Welshmen and women across the world attach this strong-smelling member of the onion family to their clothing? The true origins are now perhaps lost in myth and legend; however, the history can certainly be traced back at least seven hundred years.



During Elizabethan times, Shakespeare refers to the custom of wearing a leek as an "ancient tradition", and his character Henry V tells Fluellen that he is wearing a leek "for I am Welsh, you know, good countryman." Even earlier than this, entries in the household accounts of the 'Welsh' Tudor Kings of England, record payments for leeks worn by the household guards on St. David's Day.

Earlier still in the fourteenth century, it is known that the feared Welsh archers adopted the green and white colours of the leek for their uniforms, perhaps at the Battle of Crecy.

Earlier than this however, myth and legend begin to intertwine. According to one legend the leek was associated with St. David the Patron Saint of Wales who died in 589 AD. Dewi Sant (St David) was a Celtic monk, Abbot and Bishop, who lived in the sixth century. He spread the word of Christianity across Wales.

St David, or Dewi Sant as he is called in the land of his patronage, Wales, is the only patron saint of the four British nations who hails from the nation he represents. He is remembered particularly on the day of his death, March 1st. On this day many Welsh people sport one or other of the national emblems: the national flower, the daffodil, or the symbol of St David, the leek. Usually men and boys wear leeks, while the fairer sex opt for the bright yellow daffodils. The Welsh flag is flown on this day and there is an annual parade in the capital, Cardiff, celebrating the heritage of Wales.

So why leeks? The story goes that the Welsh were struggling in battle against Saxon invaders and part of the problem was that, in the heat of battle, they couldn't tell which men were on which side for both parties wore similar dress. Dewi Sant was nearby and seeing what was happening shouted to the Welsh men, "You must mark yourselves so that you can better tell who is Saxon and who is Welsh." He plucked a flowering leek plant from the ground and said "Here, wear these so you will know that any soldier who does not have a leek is your enemy." This turned the battle around and with the aid of the leek the Welsh were victorious! It's also said that in his life as a monk, Dewi Sant lived off only bread, water, herbs and leeks.

Dewi Sant was the son of Non, daughter of Cynyr of Caio, and Sant, of the royal house of Ceredigion, and was born in the fifth century. He studied Christian history and literature and founded a Celtic monastic community at Glyn Rhosyn, 'The Vale of Roses', which is on the western coast of Pembrokeshire, where the Cathedral of St David's now stands. Dewi Sant went on to gain fame as a teacher and puritan. It's said that when he went to give a speech to a great crowd at Llanddewi Brefi in Ceredigion, those at the outer edges could not hear him, so he placed a handkerchief on the ground and the earth rose to form a small hill under his feet, enabling all to see & hear. While he was giving his address, a golden-beaked dove landed on his shoulder, further demonstrating his sanctity.

But it is indeed likely that the Welsh association with the leek predates St. David by hundreds and possibly thousands of years, to an age when people worshipped trees, plants and other such aspects of Mother Nature. To an age before Christianity, and perhaps to the last stronghold of the Druids on the Island of Anglesey. The Druids were not only the Priests, Doctors, Poets and Minstrels of ancient Celtia, they were also the teachers who retained the sacred knowledge of ancient times.

It is in such times that the leek's reputation as a medicine to cure a variety of illnesses would have been most appreciated and perhaps even revered. It was highly regarded as a cure for the common cold, alleviating the pains of childbirth and was a tasty, healthy ingredient in cawl, the traditional Welsh broth. It could seemingly offer protection against wounds in battle or against being struck by lightning & was also a means of foretelling the future and for keeping away evil spirits. It is also claimed that by placing a leek under a pillow at night, young maidens could see the features of their future husbands!

And so today, each year on St. David's Day, the leek is worn in the cap badges of every soldier in every Welsh regiment.



Outside the army however, many other Welsh folk have substituted the daffodil for the leek, perhaps because it looks more attractive and certainly smells a lot better!

The Victorians are probably responsible for the fact that daffodils are pinned to Welsh lapels instead of leeks on St David's Day. The leek wasn't considered glamorous enough to be the Welsh national emblem and the daffodil, which flowers close to the Welsh patron saint's holiday, became the replacement.

There are two varieties of daffodil unique to Wales – the Tenby (*Narcissus obvallaris*) and the Welsh or Lent daffodil (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*). Both species have declined over the years as a result of development on land where they once thrived. Tenby daffodils suffered in Victorian times from being too popular – regularly dug up, they became quite scarce, but replanting has helped and nowadays there are plenty to see in springtime around Tenby. Tenby daffodils are all one colour, whereas the Welsh daffodil or Lenten lily are two toned in colour with a different shade of yellow/orange on the trumpet to that of the petals. Tenby daffodils are not only found in South Pembrokeshire, but also in Carmarthenshire and parts of Ceredigion. The Welsh variety is more widespread, but still quite scarce.

The National Botanic Garden of Wales, has about 100 varieties of Daffodil growing in the Double Walled Garden plus huge drifts on the banks below the Great Glasshouse, a wonderful sight. One variety, special to The National Botanic Garden, is the 'Derwydd Daffodil', named after a garden in Llandybie where it was first found.

Interesting to note however, that one of the many Welsh names for a daffodil is 'Cenhinen Bedr', or 'Peter's leek'! This 'nickname' riddle may have been an accident! The Welsh for leek is 'Cenhinen', which can be easily confused with the Welsh for daffodil, 'Cenhinen Pedr', which translates to "Peter's Leek".

David Lloyd George (the only Welsh Prime Minister from 1916-22) was said to be an advocate for the daffodil, as their beautiful bloom would often coincide with St. David's Day.

As to the relative merits of the leek and the daffodil, it is purely a matter of personal choice as to which to wear on St. David's Day. However, the authorities decided in 1984 that the British £1 coin representing the Welsh part of the United Kingdom would feature the leek on the reverse, which says something for the respect with which it is held.

To finish this chronicle of the humble leek, let's go back to St David where it all started. Shortly before his death, in around 589 AD, Dewi Sant spoke to his fellow monks, saying: "Brothers be ye constant. The yoke which with single mind ye have taken, bear ye to the end; and whatsoever ye have seen with me and heard, keep and fulfil. Lords, brothers and sisters, be cheerful, keep the faith, and do those little things which ye have seen me do and heard me say."

What a strong message to take us into the future.