

ST. MAWES

*A
Cornish
Saint*





SAINT MAUDEZ

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AUTHORITIES

St. Maudez . . . par A. de la Borderic, Rennes, 1891

*Vies des Saints de la Bretagne Armorique . . .
par Albert le Grand (17th cent.)*



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THIS short account of the life of St. Maudez (the modern form is now St. Mawes) is the result of an attempt to revive the village Feast, which in years gone by was a day to be looked forward to with great eagerness.

I have to thank my friend, the Rev. G. H. Doble, M.A., for all the care and scholarship of the story, and also Mrs. Cobden-Sanderson for the thought and labour of producing it in its present form.

I am indebted to M. le Chanoine Abgrall and M. le Goaziou of Quimper for the photograph of the ancient statue of St. Maudez in the church of Saint Guenolé Ergia-Gaëric (Finistère).

St. Mawes is a combination of the old world and the new. Its cottages are ranged simply against the hillside that runs down to meet the sea, and are all huddled together like so many nests, for warmth and protection from the gales in winter. No design or town planning is to be found here! But stretching to the right and left are modern houses of moderate size, and many post-war bungalows with all up-to-date conveniences.

The main industry in summer is fishing, and it is interesting to watch the men spreading their nets in the sunshine, mending the broken meshes, or making and repairing the huge lobster pots, against the ravages of the fish itself, or the hidden elements in the depths of the sea; and in the winter the mouth of the lovely river Fal is dotted with little sailing boats, in which the fishermen secure the world-famed oysters.

It is safe to say that there is at least one old inhabitant who has never seen a train, but now the

modern means of transit by road and water draw the younger people farther afield.

We boast of a castle, complete in every respect, even to an oubliette and dungeon; its history says that Henry VIII spent his honeymoon there with Anne Boleyn. This is certainly a Cornish name, and it still found frequently amongst us in the form of "Bullen." One imagines that Anne Boleyn must have had a Cornish connection somewhere, and no doubt the local history is correct.

We number less than a thousand inhabitants, and we possess in addition to the tiny Church of St. Mawes, three Nonconformist places of worship, so whatever may be said of us, religion in one form or another takes its place in the life of the people.

The foliage and colouring of St. Mawes is sub-tropical, the deep blue of the sky meets the deep blue of the sea; even in winter occasionally we have "borrowed" days of brilliant colour and sunshine.

We are apt to call the seasons of the year by the wonderful display of flowers as the months pass on. First comes the white and gold of Hawthorn and Gorse, then "Primrose time," followed by "Bluebell time," then "Foxglove time" makes the fields and hedges one mass of brilliant pink, and the cliffs tone in with their sea pinks stretching down to meet the ever varying colour of the sea.

St. Maudez, our Patron Saint, certainly found a bit of heaven on earth when he rested here and proclaimed his heaven-sent message to the primitive people of Cornwall, long before the coming of St. Augustine to Canterbury.

ST. MAWES,

June, 1923.

PHILIP J. COLEMAN.

ST. MAUDEZ

ABBOT AND CONFESSOR

(A SERMON PREACHED ON NOV. 17TH, 1922, AT ST. MAWES, BY
REV. G. H. DOBLE, CURATE OF REDRUTH.)

*"Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name
liveth for evermore."*—Ecclus. xlv. 14.

ONE of the things that strikes a stranger coming for the first time to Cornwall is the number of places bearing the names of Saints. He looks out of the window as the train passes and sees "St. German's," "St. Austell," "St. Erth for St. Ives"; at Penzance he sees the motor-bus going to St. Just, at Falmouth he finds the steamer waiting to take him to St. Mawes. His first thought is: "This is a land of Saints," his next thought is: "What strange, unfamiliar Saints!"

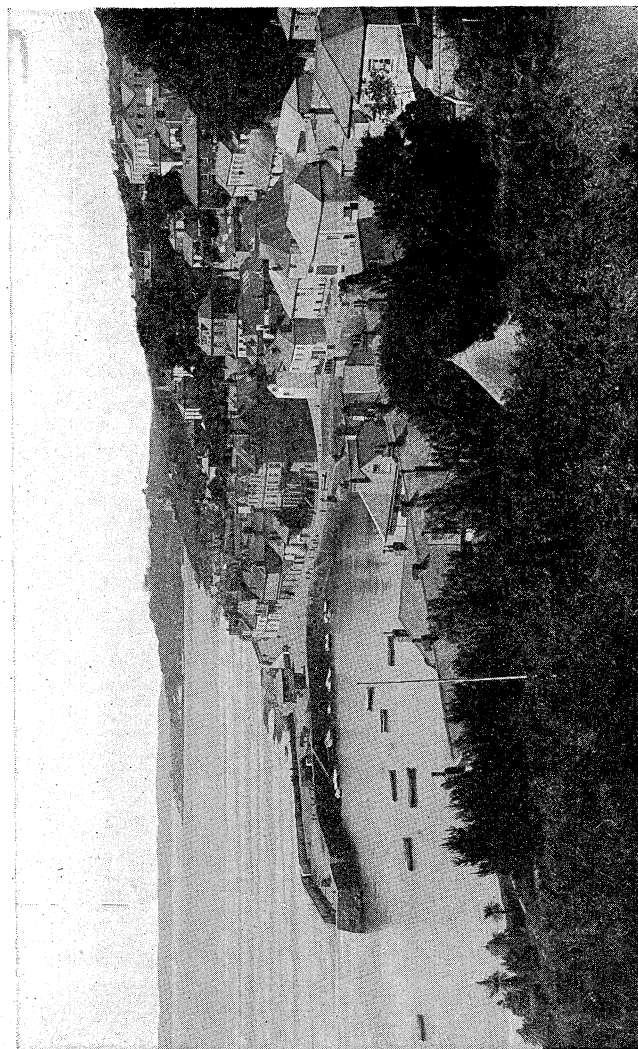
The reason is that when he crosses the Tamar he enters a land which is not really English at all. He has come to a country which was once not only hostile to the English, but whose people differed fundamentally from the English in race, in civilization, in language, and in religion. The fact that nearly every parish in Cornwall is called after a Saint reminds us of the difference in religion which once existed between the people of Cornwall and the people of England. It was a *Celtic* custom—as soon

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as you enter *Wales* you find it. Even after the English became Christian, their Christianity differed from that of the Cornish, for the English Church was organised after the Roman pattern, the Cornish after the Celtic.

The Saints whose names we find in Cornwall were mostly Celtic Saints, and their names remind us of a very important epoch in the history of Great Britain—the Celtic revival which followed the abandonment of Britain by the Romans in 410. This great revival of Celtic nationality was inspired from Ireland. The bond of union between the Celts of Ireland and Scotland and Wales and Cornwall and Brittany was the Celtic Church, and the different parts of the Celtic world were kept in touch with each other by the missionaries and scholars who travelled from Ireland to Scotland and to the great new Celtic colony in Brittany. Most of the Cornish Saints came from Wales or Ireland, and stayed in Cornwall on their way to Brittany. Sometimes they never went further than Cornwall. They chose some convenient spot, usually where there was a well or spring, they consecrated it by living on it for forty days, fasting and praying, and then they built their little oratory which was called after them—"the church (or chapel) of St. Perran," or "St. Uny," or "St. Budock," as the case might be.

St. Maudez (Mawes) was an Irishman. His father



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Erçleus, was King of Ulster. His mother's name was Gentusa. He was their tenth child, and so was vowed to God as a *tithe*. At the age of seven he entered a monastery school, where he distinguished himself by his brilliant talents. He became a priest and abbot, and God gave him the gift of working miracles. Then he left his native country and sailed for Brittany. A late mediæval legend gives as his reason for leaving Ireland, a pestilence in which his father and mother and all his brothers and sisters died. The people wished him to marry and be their king; he prayed that it might not be so, and became leprous, until the people, disgusted, made another choice. Then the leprosy vanished, and he fled from the country. No doubt he landed on the shores of Falmouth Harbour on his way to Brittany, and stayed where you now see the little town which bears his name. Dense forests covered this part of Cornwall, and the river was almost the only means of communication—nearly all the ancient parish churches in this neighbourhood are built by the river. He lived here by a spring, and built a little oratory. In Henry VIII's reign Leland saw here "a chapelle of hym, and his chair of stone a little without, and his welle. They caulle this Sainct there S. Mat: he was a bishop [this is a mistake] in Britain [Brittany] and was painted as a scholemaster."

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Later legends state that Maudez landed in Brittany near Dol and resided at the monastery of St. Sampson there. Then he visited the other monasteries in Brittany. St. Tugduval, Bishop of *Domnonia* (there is a *Devon* in Brittany as well as a *Cornwall*) welcomed him and persuaded him to settle in the Abbey of Trecor (Trèguier). From this centre Maudez started on preaching tours over the whole of the North of Brittany. After some years of preaching he retired to the Abbey of Trecor, and then, feeling a desire to live a solitary life, he went (by the advice of St. Ruelin, the Abbot) to a lonely place on the shore near by, still called Iliz-Modez or Lan-Modez. Here he built an oratory and cell and spent his time in prayer night and day. His reputation for sanctity attracted hundreds of people who sought advice or healing. These visitors so disturbed his repose that he left Lan-Modez and retired to a little island off the coast close by, still called Enez-Modez. [The oldest "Life of St. Mawes," written at the end of the eleventh century, tells us nothing about this period of his life except that he "traversed the north of Brittany accompanied by a great multitude of people who obeyed his saving words," and that it was in the reign of Childebert, King of the Franks.]

The island of Enez-Modez had originally been called Gueld-Enes (i.e. the savage, uninhabitable

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island). It was infested with venomous insects and worms. Maudez banished them by his prayers. He prayed again, and a well of pure water sprang up. He built an oratory and cell, and then other cells for his disciples who followed him. The names of two of these disciples have been preserved—Botmael and Tudy. (St. Tudy is a patron of a parish in Cornwall, near Bodmin.) The place in which he taught them was still called in the eleventh century "The Chair of St. Maudez." A church was built on the island, and Maudez invited all the bishops in Brittany to come to its dedication. His cell, a little round tower eighteen feet high, on the highest point of the island, called Forn-Modez (i.e. the oven of Modez) still exists—sailors in the seventeenth century when they came in sight of it used to pray to St. Maudez for a safe passage through the dangerous strait of Raz de Modez. In a cavern on the north side of the island you may see the deep mark in the rock where the Saint used to sleep, called Guelé Sant Modez (St. Maudez's bed). Around Forn-Modez can still be seen the traces of cells arranged as in a typical Irish monastic settlement. Standing at the door of Forn-Modez the Saint could survey his whole flock.

On this island St. Maudez died (about the year 600, according to one account). During the invasions of the Northmen his body was removed to Bourges,

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where it still lies. His head was afterwards brought back to Brittany and given to the Abbey of Beauport, near Tréguier. Other places in Brittany possess relics of him.

St. Maudez became one of the most popular Saints in Brittany. A story as old as the eleventh century shows us the veneration in which he was then held. During the private wars so common among the nobles during the early Middle Ages the unfortunate peasantry used in Brittany to put their property in the *minibi* or sanctuary of some saint. A band of brigands on one occasion raided a *minibi* placed under the protection of St. Maudez and seized all the valuables they found there. The peasants whom they had robbed called on St. Maudez to avenge them and the story relates that one of the robbers going on horseback to the holy well of the Saint which was within the sanctuary, with a bucket to draw water for the refreshment of his companions, a flame of fire issued from the well and consumed the robber and his horse. The brigands restored the plunder and fled in panic from the *minibi*, vowing in future to reverence St. Maudez's lands.

No Saint in Brittany possesses so many statues as St. Maudez, with the one exception of St. Ives. Ten parishes, and sixty churches and chapels are dedicated to him. He is represented vested as

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abbot in cope, crozier and mitre. It is still believed that dust from the island of Enes-Modez if mixed in water is a cure for snake-bite. It is even a common custom to take dust from his chapels or from near any statue of him and mix it with water for children suffering from worms. At Edern the high altar of the chapel of St. Maudez has fallen owing to the quantity of earth removed from underneath it!

He is known as St. Mandé at Orléans and Tours.

“Their name liveth for evermore.”

In the case of many of our Cornish Saints little but their name remains. But we know from Adamnan's very human “Life of St. Columba,” what a Celtic missionary was like. St. Maudez, we know, was an earnest preacher. He must have been, too, like Columba and Aidan, a gentle, tender-hearted, impulsive, yet rigidly ascetic man, fond of animals, kind to all. Let us remember the debt we owe to the Celtic Saints. We have all of us much to learn from the earnest devotion and deep piety of our Celtic cousins in Brittany, the country in which St. Maudez lived and died.

His day is November 18th.

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