

Remembering Rhydian as statue of saint gets go-ahead

Brittany's Valley of the Saints will have a new addition next year after funding was secured for the statue of the Welsh saint. Fr Tim Ardouin, vicar of Llanrhidian Church on Gower, tells us more

In the Summer of 2016, Yves Le Therisien, Bishop's Assistant and Director of the Diocesan Spiritual Centre in the diocese of Quimper et Léon, arrived in Llanrhidian with news that St Rhydian was remembered in Brittany and that there was a desire to commission a statue of the saint for La Vallée des Saints in France.

On July 19, Yves and his family joined me and some of the Christian people of Llanrhidian at their usual Tuesday morning prayer at St Rhydian and St Illtyd's. Later, in the garden of local residents, Richard and Elizabeth Verge, and then at Arthur's Stone up on Cefn Bryn, we discussed the plan while playing Celtic music together, having happily found the music of our ancestors was still being carried in each other's hearts!

Though Yves (whose surname, Le Therisien, is a French translation of Rhydian) and I (my surname is French of course) kept in touch, it was just at the end of October 2019, that Yves sent the news that the funding for the statue had been secured and that the artwork is beginning.

Rhydian was a Welsh saint who crossed the Channel and became established on the north coast of continental Brittany.

He later became a bishop of Yaudet in 532.

At the moment, how Rhydian will be depicted is yet to be discerned. It is likely a dragon will be involved though, says Yves, who camped near the 'Wurm' (Viking word meaning dragon), otherwise

(but wrongly) known as 'Worm's Head'.

The people of Llanrhidian have been invited to attend the unveiling of the statue on August 1, 2020, with the villagers of Lanloup offering them to stay in their homes. I will bless the statue that day.

There are currently around 50 statues standing on the grass, representing the monks who came over from Ireland, Wales or Cornwall to bring Christianity to Brittany. Year by year, new creations are erected in the memory of these saints, each bearing the signature of a different sculptor.

In 50 years' time there will be 1,000 of them. St Tugdual, St Hernin, St Gildas, St Brieuc and St Malo were the first of the stone saints to illustrate the legendary history of Brittany.

Guides are on hand to tell you all about their mysteries. You'll find that everyone you meet here - whether a guide, sculptor, sponsor or visitor - is full of enthusiasm for this incredible project, now a permanent tourist attraction with trails, markets, storytelling and much more.

It's not just the statues that impress visitors and fire the imagination. The valley also has a Gaulish fountain, with waters that are supposed to cure animals, with a lovely chapel standing above it. In the middle of the stone saints, looking down over the valley, are the ancient earthworks of a motte-and-bailey castle and its moat. From this height, the views span the horizon, taking in the summits of the Monts d'Arrée mountains and the forest of Fréau.

