

## Saint Attracta

St Attracta, Patroness of the Diocese of Achonry, is said to have lived in 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century and to have been a contemporary of St Nathy who is its patron. Veneration of St Attracta is still strong in Mayo, Sligo and Roscommon. Many churches, holy wells and schools are dedicated to her. Her principal feast day is August 12<sup>th</sup> and she is also associated with February 9<sup>th</sup>.

The *Vita* (Life) of St Attracta is incomplete and was written long after her lifetime probably in the Cistercian Abbey of Boyle, Co Roscommon. While the historical facts of her life are difficult to piece together her place in religious and folk tradition attest to her importance in early Irish Christianity. It is believed that Attracta was the daughter of a chieftain named Talan and that she was born close to Lough Gara. Tradition tells us that she was consecrated to God by St Patrick and that she established a community on the eastern side of Lough Gara, which became known as Cill Attract or Killaraght. Attracta establish a reputation as a woman of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. She is also believed to have had the gift of healing. However, she is best revered for her hospitality and care for the wayfarer. She set up a House of Hospitality at a place where seven roads met. This place of welcome to the stranger is said to have continued in existence until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

There are many holy wells dedicated to St Attracta, possibly the best known is Clogher, Monasteraden, Co. Sligo, other wells are Killaraght, Tobar Attracta in Attymass, Tobar Athracht near Charlestown to mention but a few. It is noticeable that in modern times St Attracta has been named as patron of several schools which include Primary Schools at Kingsland, Ballaghaderreen and Charlestown and the Community School in Tubbercurry.

Today part of the Lough Gara area is a designated Wildlife Sanctuary. Its wetlands and raised bogs are home to the Whooper and Mute swans, ducks and the Great Crested Grebe. In winter they shelter some of Europe's rarest Geese, Greenland White-fronted Geese. It is interesting that we welcome migrating birds the "wayfarers" of the sky.

Perhaps we might adopt something of the spirit of hospitality of St Attracta in caring for the stranger in our midst today.

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