St Patrick’s Day
St Patrick’s Day has been celebrated in a variety of ways for a thousand years or more...

The ninth century Book of Armagh directed all monasteries and churches in Ireland to celebrate Patrick’s death in mid-spring with three days and nights of feasting.
In 1631 he was declared a Catholic saint by the Vatican.

For two centuries or more, street parades have been central to St Patrick’s Day observance in Ireland and, even more so, in those parts of the world touched by the Irish diaspora.

In North America especially, St Patrick’s Day street parades quickly became an important annual expression of Irish immigrant society and culture.
In Irish folk tradition the saint is sometimes portrayed as a mythical figure who combats the pagan god Crom Dubh, and a large number of other legends are told about him.

The concept of the patron saint banishing snakes from Ireland is, however, a motif borrowed from French tradition of the twelfth-century saint Honoratus of Lérins –

the absence of snakes from Ireland’s fauna has been noted by the Graeco-Roman writer Solinus some 200 years before Patrick’s arrival in Ireland.
Traditionally, **crosses** of various kinds were worn on the saint’s feast day, while the earliest report of the wearing of a **sprig of shamrock** dates from the early 1700s.

The custom of **‘drowning the shamrock’** on the **feast day** of the saint appears to arise from the custom of placing sprigs of the plant in a **glass** when **toasting** the saint.
‘It is customary for the people to wear a bunch of shamrock in their coats in honour of St Patrick. Shamrocks are sent to the members of the family who are in exile. In the evening it is customary for the old men of the district to go to the town for a wee drop’

~ Carndonagh, Donegal

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‘I always wore a St Patrick’s Cross on the 17th of March. It is made from a piece of cardboard, round in shape covered with green paper. A piece of shamrock was put in the centre. I wore it on my left shoulder. All the children around the place were comparing the Patrick’s Cross to see whose was the nicest.’

~ Ballyadams, Laois

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'At Tara today may God be my stay,  
May the strength of God now nerve me,  
May the power of God preserve me,  
May the God Almighty be near me,  
May the God Almighty espy me …'

~ Garvagh, Donegal

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‘That your cows may be white’

‘That your wife may be handsome’

~ Cregduff, Mayo
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