

# Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

## Illtud [St Illtud, Illtyd]

(fl. 5th–6th cent.)

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**Illtud [St Illtud, Illtyd]** (fl. 5th–6th cent.), abbot of Llantwit Major, the monastery in the south of Glamorgan of which he was also patron, was famous during the middle ages (and perhaps in his own lifetime) for his erudition and wisdom. His school at Llantwit is said to have attracted to him such renowned disciples as saints David, Gildas, Samson of Dol, Paul (Paulus Aurelianus), and Leonorius of St Lunaire. Analysis of ecclesiastical dedications to Illtud shows that, next to St Cadog, he was the most important saint whose cult was based in south-east Wales. Information relating to his life comes almost entirely from later hagiographical sources and is therefore of dubious historical reliability. His own extant Latin life, probably composed at Llantwit no earlier than c.1140 and preserved in BL, Cotton MS Vespasian A.xiv, is extremely derivative; and the earlier traditions recorded in two Breton saints' lives—that of St Samson (now thought to have been composed c.750), chapters 7–12, and that of St Paul of St Pol-de-Léon (written by Wrmonoc in 884), chapters 2–5—are perhaps more useful up to a point.

The account of Illtud's miraculous encounter with a floating altar given among the *Mirabilia* appended to the *Historia Brittonum*, compiled c.830, is the earliest surviving notice from Wales of the saint. The *Vita sancti Samsonis* describes how at the age of five Samson was brought to the master Eltut, 'the most learned of all the Britons', and was ordained deacon by him, and adds that Illtud had himself been a disciple of St Germanus of Auxerre, by whom he had been ordained. This synchronism would suggest that Illtud was a youth in either 429 or c.445 (the dates of Germanus's two visits to Britain), in which case he must have been of advanced years when Samson (who is known to have attended the Synod of Paris in 561 or 562) entered Llantwit. This chronology, though stretched, is not wholly impossible, but equally it may encourage suspicion regarding Illtud's connection to Germanus. The account of how two of Illtud's nephews resident at Llantwit conspired unsuccessfully against Samson, since one of them, as a presbyter, might be 'deprived of his hereditary right in the monastery' by Samson, possibly demonstrates something of the internal organization of Illtud's church. Samson's life also contains a detailed description of Illtud's death at Llantwit. The early chapters of Wrmonoc's *Vita sancti Pauli* similarly describe the education of its subject at Llantwit but imply that Paul was first brought to Illtud on Caldy Island: this has been taken to show that

Illtud's first hermitage was on the island, but it may rather have arisen from a textual error. A completely separate tradition about Illtud is preserved in the twelfth-century life of St Cadog by Lifris of Llancarfan, which recounts that he had been a veteran warrior who was ordained through the influence of Cadog and thus became his disciple. This tradition probably underlies Illtud's later epithet Marchog ('horseman', 'knight') but probably reveals more about the rivalry between the houses of Llantwit and Llancarfan in the twelfth century than it does about Illtud's origins.

The extant *Vita sancti Illtuti* seems to be a mixture of local Llantwit traditions, such as the date of his death as 6 November, with material extracted, often very clumsily, from earlier saints' lives. For example, the claims that Illtud was son of a Breton warrior Bicanus and of Rhieinwylydd, daughter of Anflawdd 'King of the Britons', and thus a cousin of King Arthur, are no doubt wholly fictional. Indeed, the detailed episodes of the life are of interest from a hagiographical rather than historical perspective. Archaeology offers little extra help in this regard. There are no surviving traces of Illtud's original monastic site at Llantwit Major and, while the later insertion of Christian burials at the nearby Roman villa (abandoned c.350) have been connected by some scholars with the saint or his community, there is no direct evidence to support this view. The handful of inscribed memorial stones housed in the present church are of a later date, possibly eighth century, although one contains the name form Illtuti. The cult of Illtud in Wales, like that of Cadog, is focused on the south-east and, in addition to some dedications near Llantwit itself (including Llantrithyd and Llanhari), follows the coastal routes into Wales (on the Gower peninsula and the opposite Carmarthenshire coast) and the inland routes (through north Glamorgan and Brecon). Otherwise, there is one outlying dedication to him at Llanelltyd, near Dolgellau in Merioneth. Illtud has no known dedications in Cornwall, but has seven or eight in Brittany, in the dioceses of Léon, Tréguier, and Vannes, which appear to parallel those of St Tudwal.

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