

## ASPECTS OF FRANCONIA

### November 2024

Enjoying a cool glass of Silvaner wine recently after a pleasant hike in the Franconian Switzerland, I was reminded of the lyrics of the famous Franconian song "Wohlauf, die Luft geht frisch und rein...", in which the patron saint of Würzburg and of vintners is praised: "*Der Winzer Schutzherr Kilian beschert uns etwas Feines*". Having been in Würzburg a short while before, I started to think about how this man Kilian, from a tiny village in Ireland, could end up being buried in the Baroque splendour of the Neumünster Church in one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, Würzburg.

Kilian was born in Mullagh, County Cavan, in 640 AD. His name means man of the church, since kil/kill or cill in old Irish refers to a church (this is the reason so many Irish placenames start with Kil, e.g. Kilkenny, Killarney). The century into which he was born saw the small local dioceses set up by St. Patrick replaced by large monasteries such as Clonmacnoise. These monasteries were centres of learning where scribes produced illuminated manuscripts, one of the best examples being The Book of Kells, a copy of the Four Gospels. It was also in these monasteries that a distinctive type of journeying developed - "*peregrinatio pro Christo*", or travelling/ going on a pilgrimage for Christ. Kilian is said to have been a monk in Ireland and then on the island of Hy, later known as Iona, off the coast of Scotland.



In the summer of 686, Kilian, along with eleven compatriots, set sail for Gaul. He would have been an interesting sight, with his long cloak and cowl and his Celtic tonsure, which meant that his hair was shaved from ear to ear. He would have carried a satchel and a crozier. After travelling to Rome to receive missionary faculties from Pope Conon, Kilian and two companions Colonat and Totnan arrived in Würzburg. Among Kilian's early converts to Christianity was Gosbert, the local duke. Kilian rebuked him for his irregular marriage to Gailana, his brother's widow. In revenge she had Kilian and his companions assassinated in 689.

The Kilian cult really took off in 743 when Burkhard, appointed by Boniface as the first Bishop of Würzburg, had the remains of the three Irishmen brought to the

Marienberg and then later on their bones were placed in the Kilian Crypt in the Neumünster Church. Irish pilgrims apparently often broke their journeys in Würzburg on their way to the Holy Land or Rome in order to visit the graves. In 1139 the Irish Benedictine monastery of St. James, known as the Schottenkloster, was founded to provide lodging for them. Nowadays the Kiliani Volksfest, a two-week festival around the saint's memorial day on the 8<sup>th</sup> July, is one of Franconia's biggest folk festivals and has its origins back in 1030. A German-Irish Society was founded in Würzburg in 1986 and has organised many events such as school exchanges with Bray, Co. Wicklow and every year on St. Patrick's Day the Neumünster lights up green.



There is a St. Kilian's Heritage Centre in Mullagh. It was built by the local community and the Diocese of Würzburg and this year St. Kilian's relics were returned to Mullagh to be on display for a while- a homecoming after thirteen centuries.

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