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Díriú

A Journal of Geography Vol. 1: Holy Wells



Opening

I have been thinking for some time about assembling a journal that would bring together items relating to culture and geography in an open-ended form. It is an opportunity to present a theme and see what arises. The holy well suggested itself as a suitable focus for an inaugural volume. It is a subject I have researched and an area there is a pronounced interest in.

The following pages are filled with sentiments, encounters, and images from springs across Ireland that are held to be special having spiritual, curative, and heritage meanings. This small collection highlights the considerable passion for these sites but also present are warnings of wells that have been lost or are fading away. There are prompts and challenges in these accounts calling on the reader to consider how they view these springs and what, if anything, should be done to preserve them?

Culture is an active linear process stretching back in time and out into the future. We inherited strands from previous generations, some of which we pass on, others are cut short, others are transformed. Holy wells are a part of this tapestry.

I am grateful to all the contributors who have made this volume possible. Some of them I am lucky enough to know, others kindly responded to my call posted online. Each of them volunteered their words, images, and time. Each is an offering, of a kind, to the holy well.

Richard Scriven, August 2025

Díriú (verbal noun of dírigh, meaning direction, aiming, guidance) is a culturally oriented journal exploring geographical themes. It is reposited in UCC's Cork Open Research Archive (CORA), available at: https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17778

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Cover Image: *Tobar Fiachtna*, Clare by Richard Scriven

Understanding Holy Wells

Richard Scriven

Holy wells have attracted renewed attention in recent years. Dedicated enthusiasts, heritage groups, artists, researchers, and others have highlighted the distinct role of these physical features in the Irish landscape. These spaces exist at the overlap of topography, mythology, history, religious beliefs, and local traditions. This volume captures a brief glimpse of the interest in and passion for this subject.

Holy wells are among the most distinct socio-cultural features of the Irish landscape. There are over 3,000 recorded sites on the island. While there are prominent examples, such as St Gobnait's Well Ballyvourney and St Patrick's Well in Clonmel, many of them are in secluded spots. While some springs have fallen into disrepair or have been forgotten, there is a significant amount that remain as active sites of devotion.

Many have associations with a saint or a sacred figure. In the case of Celtic and medieval saints there can be stories about the miracles of the holy person, both in life and posthumously, linked to the well.

On the saint's feast days, or Pattern Days (Patrón Days), people visit the wells, perform rituals, called 'the rounds', drink the well water, and take some of it away to bless homes and farms, or the sick. The rounds often involve people, reciting a series of prayers, circling the area, and imprinting crosses.

Votive offerings or tokens are left at wells. Small strips of cloth put on the branches of trees (Rag Trees) are the most obvious example, but also there will be religious statues, candles, coins, memorial cards, and a selection of very personal items. Each of these items represents intentions, supplications, and wishes brought to the saint or spiritual presence.

Wells are a rich and significant part of our cultural heritage. We act as stewards to understand and respect them. This volume is a small contribution to that goal.

Providing milestones to the passing of the year

Gail Tangney

The Pattern Days of Holy Wells are my milestones to the passing of the year. Each well holds a connection to its month or season through its weather, light and landscape.

The wet snow and a raw bite in the air for St Gobnait's Day in Ballyvourney, on 11 February. The golden stretch of evening light at *Cathair Craobh Dearg* (The City), Shrone, on 1 May. Autumn blackberries dropped in the water at each round of *Tobar Eoin Baiste* in Minard on 29 August and the closing in of nights, as I drive the dark roads of North Kerry after work, heading for the evening Pattern Mass at St Michael's Holy Well, Lixnaw on 29th September.



Tobar Manacháin: Symbolic sticks being thrown on the St Johns Eve Bonfire. 23 June 2017. Photos by Gail Tangney

But my favourite of them all is the midsummer celebration on St John's Eve, 23 June, at *Tobar Manacháin* in Ballyeightragh. There, under a night sky that still holds light, we sit beside the traditional bonfire marking the peak of the year in a blaze of warmth and community.

The Tobar is situated on high ground west of Dingle town, on the farm of Laoch and Well Keeper, Micheál 'Toose' Mac Gearailt. With no well house, ash tree, or hawthorn to signal its presence, a thick circle of rushes in an otherwise grassy field draws you towards it. Within this hidden place, a small rivulet appears flowing above ground for just a few feet before it disappears quickly underground again. This is the Tobar.

On the 23rd of June, the Well Field of *Tobar Manacháin* draws a mostly local group of neighbours, friends, and the occasional blow in (like myself)! Each visitor is welcomed warmly by Toose, his hospitality flowing into glasses pressed generously. West Kerry Irish flows freely here and those of us not quite *liofa* do our best with our garbled grammar.

Beside the Well, turf bags are laid out, filled to the brim with windblown twigs and branches. These are symbols of possible concerns or worries, sins, or transgressions. How you interpret them is personal to yourself, but great fun is had in ensuring you choose the biggest stick to hoosh whoever you are with around the field. Once everyone has chosen their stick, Toose strikes out, leading the *deiseal* procession around the well. Murmurings of *Sé do Bheatha, a Mhuire* and *Ár nAthair* are interspersed with stifled laughs from those still being poked with a stick. Each year there is confusion, is it three rounds, is it six, is it eight? With newcomers being authoritatively informed a higher number by mischievous locals!

One by one people peel away from the rounds and begin the steep pull up the hillside to the blazing bonfire in the top field. Sparks fly as each person launches their stick into the blaze, and with it, their own interpretation of its symbolism. Casting off their cares, their regrets, their intentions, all surrendered to the flames.

And with that, the year turns again.



Tobar Manacháin: The gathering of the community 23 June 2016 (above); St Johns Eve Bonfire with Dingle Harbour and the Supermoon 23 June 2021 (below).



St Brigid's Well
North Westmeath



Photo by David Lynch, Jan 2017

Water from the deepest Well

Louise Nugent

The quiet village of Emly in Tipperary has a long and interesting history. It was here that St Ailbe (d. 528) a pre-Patrician saint founded a small monastery which went on to be one of the most powerful ecclesiastical sites in early medieval Ireland and, in later centuries, a Diocesan centre.

The place name Emly derives from the setting of the monastery- *Imleach Iubhair* - which translates roughly as the 'Border of the Lake of the Yew Trees'. Aside from some architectural fragments located at that modern Catholic church and graveyard situated within the footprint of the early medieval monastery, little physically remains of the early monastery and the lake was drained in the 1700s.

Tucked away in the northeast corner of the graveyard is a very unusual holy well. The well, dedicated to St Ailbe, is a natural spring that fills a 5m deep, circular dry-stone lined shaft (internal diameter of c.1.2m) making it one of the, if not the, deepest holy well in Ireland. The Ordnance Survey Letters for Tipperary written in the 1840s suggest that the well was at this time 7m deep. The upper section of the stone shaft was replaced at some point in the nineteenth century by a cut limestone surround. Descriptions of the well from the late 1890s note it was surrounded by a railing at the time, a likely precaution to prevent any accidental falls into the well which could only but result in injury. This danger of falling into the well is illustrated in a surviving folk tale where a misfortunate man who fell into the well was only saved from drowning by the intervention of the saint.

"It is said that a man with a bundle of straw was tired and seated himself on the side of the well. As he was sitting down, he fell into the well. When he fell in the water overflowed and he swam out of the water." (The Schools' Collection, Volume 0580, Page 013)

Access was further reduced during the twentieth century when the top of the well was covered by a low concrete capping slab that incorporates a small metal door.

The well's waters can only be accessed today by lowering a cup attached to a chain into the well. In the past a similar set up would have existed with vessels lowered down into the water.

Folklore in the 1930s Schools' Collection recalls this holy well was created when St Ailbe jumped from the hill of Knockcarron to Emly and the well sprang up at the very spot the saint's feet landed.

"It is said that St. Ailbe jumped from the top of the hill of Knockcarron to where the well stands now and that is what caused the well to be there." (The Schools' Collection, Volume 0580, Page 013)

The depth of the well and difficulty of access to its waters are most unusual for a holy well and perhaps this and the proximity to the early monastery may suggest it began as a domestic well supplying water to the monks and religious who lived here in past centuries. Over time a religious significance developed.

Like for many Irish wells, historical sources relating to the holy well do not survive prior to the nineteenth century by which time it was recorded as a place of pilgrimage. Interestingly historical records for the year 1898 tell that the water from the well was being used to supply the entire village for domestic use as well as filling the needs of pilgrims. The waters were said to be beneficial to those suffering from rheumatism. Given the well's location within a graveyard, I would not recommend ingesting the waters today.



St Ailbe's holy well. Photos by Louise Nugent



St Ailbe's Cross

Folklore also tells that in the distant past the well's waters were sprinkled on crops to keep the birds away.

"When St Ailbe was young, he was sent into a garden to keep birds off of it and since that people go to the well and take water from it and sprinkle it on the corn to keep the birds away" (The Schools' Collection, Volume 0580, Page 013).

Traditionally pilgrims visited the well on the Feast of St Ailbe, 12th of September, or within the octave of the feast. Pilgrim rituals, known as rounds, were performed at the well up to the middle of the twentieth century and folk memory recalls that a pattern day was held on this day.

What records survive indicate that the pilgrimage rituals were focused not just on the holy well but also included circuits of the surrounding graveyard and a visit to an early medieval sandstone cross, known as St Ailbhe's cross, located some 60m to the southwest of the well.

In the 1930s, pilgrims began their prayers by saying five Our Fathers and Hail Marys at the holy well. The visitors then recited three rosaries while walking around the graveyard. If the pilgrim visited on a day other than the feast, they carried out the same prayers at the holy well but recited nine rosaries while walking clockwise around the graveyard. Other accounts recall pilgrims walking around the well nine times and every three times they circle the well they say the rosary. They then made five rounds around the graveyard reciting the rosary on each round.

Pilgrims also visited St Ailbe's cross. It was tradition for all who passed the cross to make the Sign of the Cross.

"The Sign of the Cross is made by the people on it with three stones which are laid on top of it. Long ago the people used swear by the Holy Stone of Emly. Every time people respect it as they pass it by carving a cross on it with stones." (The Schools' Collection, Volume 0580, Page 016)

The cross was also said to cure back pain when the back was pressed against the cross and a prayer to the saint uttered. People without back pain performed the same ritual to strengthen their backs.

"When a person has a pain in his back he would get it cured by putting his back against the stone and praying to St Ailbe. When a person has no pain in his back and to do the same it would strengthen his back. "(The Schools' Collection, Volume 0580, Page 016)

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Interior of St Ailbe's holy well.

Dr Louise Nugent is an archaeologist, researcher and blogger specialising in the archaeology and material culture of medieval and modern pilgrimage in Ireland. She is the author of the book *Journeys of Faith: Stories of Pilgrimage from Medieval Ireland* and the blog Pilgrimage in Medieval Ireland.

St Dominic's Holy Well / Cronee Well / *Tobar na Cruinnithe,* Glanworth, Cork

Aisling Cotter



Photo by Aisling Cotter

Cronee Well / St. Dominic's Holy Well

A place long forgotten, reclaimed by nature.
We visited on summer rambles, but saw
only the stream of clear, cool spring water.
The marshy ground stopped us from exploring further.
There were stories of a structure, now
obscured by brambles, which we could only imagine.
Water was central to our childhoods.
The river flowed not just through the land,
but through our memories.

Childish meandering turned into adult tedium.
She lay forgotten while we were busy with life.
But were we really living?
Lockdown reawakened something: a connection
with nature, with heritage, with culture and history.

One crisp spring morning, I found the courage to
cross the bog. I stood before the place where I knew
the tower to be. I could see it yet how to reach
it? There was no direct path. (The best ones seldom are.)
I climbed a mound in my wellies. Battling briars and
nettles until… I found myself behind the tower.
Carefully lowering myself through
branches and thorns until I had finally arrived.
What a feeling! Why had I neglected her for so long.

Today she is a beauty to behold; a calm serene energy exists.
A rose grows from the source of the well. Swans and ducks glide past.
Horses frolic in fields across the way. Pheasants,
Herons, and foxes rear their young here.
Nature is alive and omnipotent as is memory,
Many people remembered her, but it was collective remembering
and toiling that enabled her rise again.

It will be our great legacy to ensure this beautiful spring continues
to flow and is never neglected again.

Cathair Crobh Dearg
The City of Shrone, Rathmore, Kerry

Amanda Clarke

One of my very favourite sites, The City nestles under the Paps of Anu - twin-peaked mountains dedicated to the mother Goddess of the Tuatha de Danaan, Anu or Danú. It is considered to be the oldest still revered spiritual site in western Europe and may have been founded by the Tuatha de Danaan over 10,000 years ago. A large cashel contains an altar, ogham stones, and other interesting monuments, but it is the little well just outside its borders that I find most intriguing.



Photo by Amanda Clarke

Although now enclosed in rather stark concrete, the holy well contains cold, fresh water, seen to be percolating vigorously. A Bealtaine site, it is traditionally visited on May Eve and May Day when bonfires were once lit in the centre of the cashel and cattle herded through to purify them for the coming year.

The water is still considered good for cattle (and humans) and is collected by farmers who continue to sprinkle their beasts with it.

The patron is the enigmatically named Crobh Dearg, or Red Claw, who is sometimes referred to as the sister of St Gobnait or St Latiaran but probably predates them by centuries. A remote and ancient site, it is an astonishing example of connection and continuity through the millennia.





Photos by Richard Scriven, May 2013



D Callanan – Analogy II (Source), 2018, St Patrick's Holy Well, Castletownroche.



St Ciaran's Well, Inishmore
Ciara Diamond

Tobernalt Holy Well
Sligo

Val Robus

Tobernalt is one of the most picturesque holy wells in Ireland, the name derives from the cliff from which the well gushes from. The well has a double sanctity, for it was not only blessed by St. Patrick who, it seems, baptised his converts, but in the Penal days its waters were used in the celebration of mass. The history of the well predates the advent of Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century. It is a natural spring well that established itself in a primeval forest.

Tobernalt became a secluded haven for the celebration of Mass in the early years of the eighteenth century when the penal laws were applied most severely. The congregation often set out the night before to journey in small quiet groups to be at Tobernalt before dawn. Originally the entrance to the holy well was down from Cairns Hill, at the back of where the crucifixion statue is now. The area was very secluded and far less developed from what we have today.

Priests were hunted in penal times, so they would be dressed in rags, step up to say mass and after mass would return to their rags and join the crowd to leave the Tobernalt.

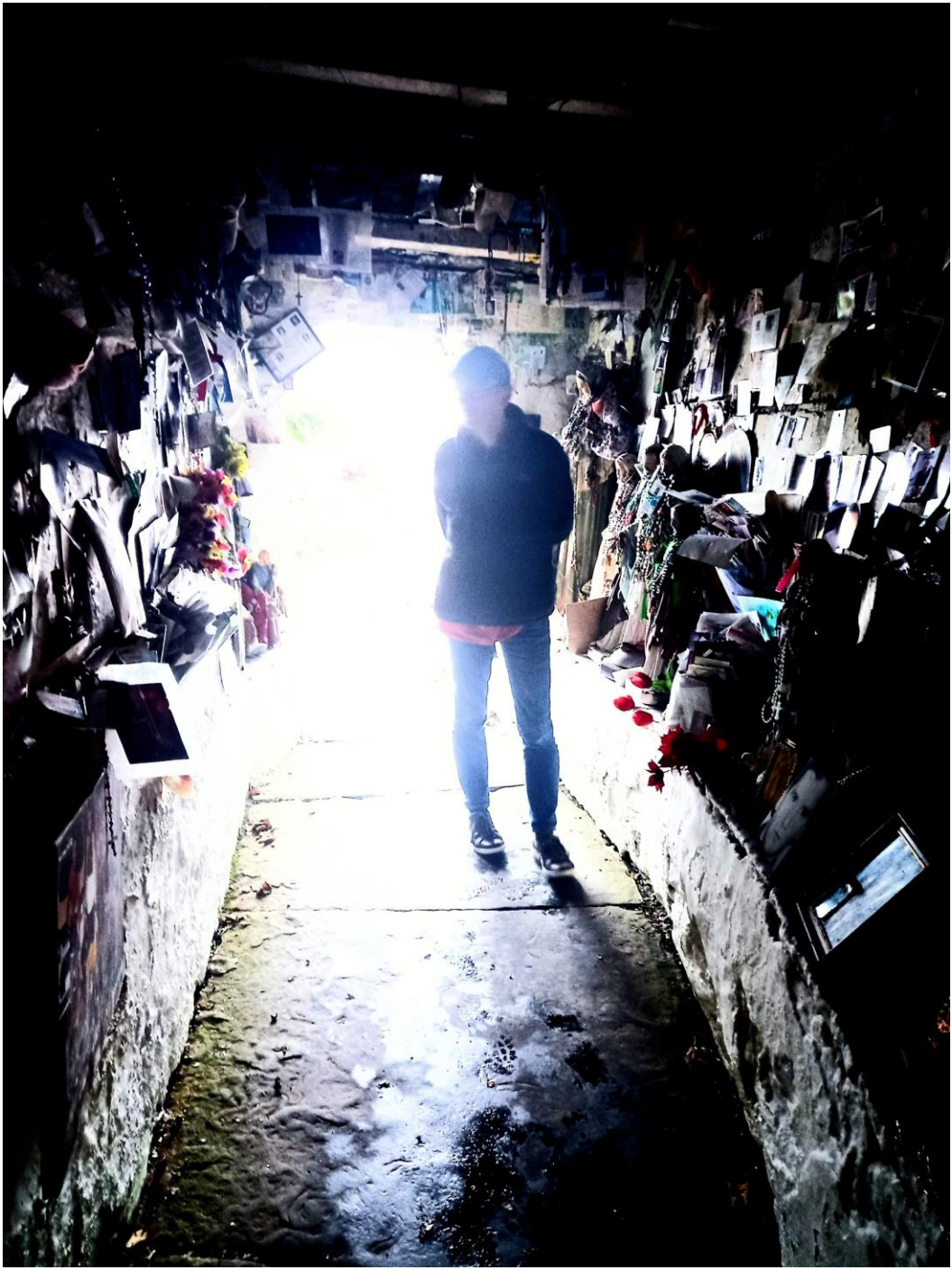
I met up with Father Jim Murray, who has been the parish priest of Carraroe for over twenty years, and he told me more about the Tobernalt Holy Well. “I love the Holy Well, it’s like looking after another church but an outdoor one which is very unusual. Our parish promotes Tobernalt in a gentle way and I’m happy to share the story with anyone who wants to know more about it.”

“People come from all over the world to visit Tobernalt. I get emails every day from people asking me more about the history of the place. A lot of the visitors to the holy well tell me they aren’t religious, but they find a great sense of peace there. I’ve noticed a lot of tourist buses that come to the area visit the Holy Well and we have some lovely comments left on TripAdvisor.”





Photos by Val Robus



Photos by Epi Rogan

Portals and transitions

Epi Rogan

In August of 2021, I visited St Brigid's Well near the Cliffs of Moher in Co. Clare. It was not the first holy well I have visited and I'm not sure if it was even the first time I'd been to this particular well. I can say that this visit -at this time- changed me. Perhaps it was because it was Lughnasa- when I visited, on the fine edge of summer, transitioning into winter.

Michael Houlihan (*The Holy Wells of County Clare*, p.114) notes that the folklorist, Máire Mac Neill determined the well to have pagan roots and was likely a Lughnasa site. Mac Neill suggested that this festival, marking the harvest season, was a struggle over the harvest between two gods- Crom Dubh keeping the corn as his treasure and Lugh winning it for humankind. There are other interpretations where Eithne, whose name means kernel or grain, is fought over and killed. (*Festival of Lughnasa*, p.416) In a nutshell (*ha!*), from this harvest or agricultural pagan tradition comes an association with death and bounty- the need to re-establish equilibrium via spectacle, ritual, sacrifice, and offerings.

During Lughnasa pilgrimage to holy wells would have been common practice. Pilgrimages to Brigid's Well at this time continue, however they are for the Christian festival referred to as the Assumption of Mary which commemorates the summer harvest as part of its festivities. Though Mary does not technically die, according to Catholic dogma, she is taken to heaven at the end of her earthly life (perhaps there are echoes of Eithne here?).

St Brigid, a pagan holdover herself, is associated with healing and protection and the patron saint of newborns (amongst many, many other associations). Her feast day marks the beginning of spring and the death of winter i.e., Imbolc. It was/is common practice to make pilgrimage to holy wells during this time.

It's interesting how unremarkable many wells appear from the outside- including St Brigid's. From the road a passerby would think nothing of this place. There's a church, a graveyard and a statue of St Brigid -none of these things are unusual. I can picture the graveyard, the church and the statue but I cannot quite picture the outside of the building housing the well.

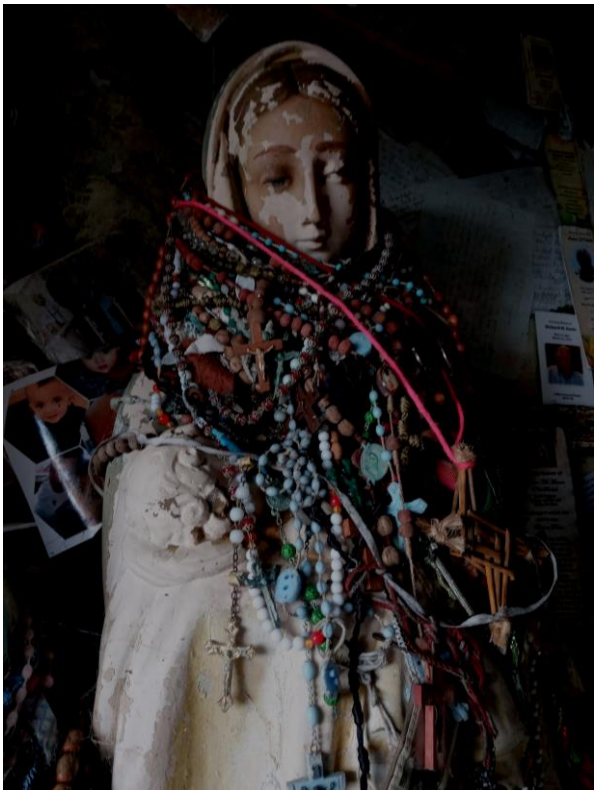
I'm reminded of the 1989 film *Little Monsters*. This movie terrified me as a child, so it rushes forth with more immediacy than, say... *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. However, both serve the same function here: innocuous portals to other realms. One portal, I was certain, could be found underneath my childhood bed. Thus, I was unable to sleep with my extremities outside the duvet. The other -spoiler alert- a wardrobe. Portals were a constant worry for me. Despite not being allowed to watch horror films, I was aware that in the *Poltergeist*, TVs were a portal. I learned from *Nightmare on Elm Street* that dreams were portals and because of The Gate, there were in fact, ACTUAL portals to hell.

At St Brigid's, there is a dramatic shift in environment between realms. You are not merely passing from one space to another -and the juxtaposition is noteworthy. You are passing from this world to... an "in-between world" (not unlike The Wood Between the Worlds in *The Chronicles of Narnia* or The Red Room in *Twin Peaks*). While the pagan and Christian entities associated with the well mark transitions -



winter to spring and summer to winter - the well itself serves as a portal from the world of the living to the spirit world, and vice versa.

The atmosphere changes as you walk through the doorway, you go from light to darkness and every part of this space is covered in offerings and ephemera. Plaintive letters regarding loved ones, asking for protection and healing in myriad forms. Letters spelling out regrets, missed opportunities, worries, fears...death. Photos of fathers, daughters, sons, aunts, mothers, brothers, uncles, grandparents, babies... candles, statuary, postcards, money, ribbons, St Brigid's crosses, rosaries, so many rosaries, and everything in varying states of disintegration. It's damp, the air is thick, votives flicker and amidst all this you hear water...



Saint Fanahan's Well
Mitchelstown, Co. Cork

Philip Spillane



Photos by Philip Spillane



On the grid streets of Mitchelstown
there are two holy wells, one honest,
the other oneself.

From Mulberry Lane, there's a gap in the wall,
and down a path pillared by trees lies a sanctuary of St Fanahan's well.

Yet, before that, pay attention to the mysterious grotesque,
scowling from the walls, I always give him a kiss as people often miss him.

The well is a soft pool of water,
under a statue of the Saint itself.
The snake is here, curled under its feet.

Snakes are associated with wells as it's a global symbol of rivers and guardians of secrets.

The well is on a small Island, the meeting of three streams,
where mushrooms grow, and a trickle of water chimes.
I come here to fill up my glass jars.

I search for holy wells across Éire,
From springs of St Patrick's and St Berrihert's Well in Tipp,
the rain water collector - St Sourney's Well in Galway,
even St Domonic's well by Glenworth, dry and nearly forgotten.

Nothing like a holy well by your home,
As well as a well inside your house.

As I take the glass jars, full of Fanahan's tears.
I fill them into my own colourful well on my bookshelf.

A clay lantern for water. Snakes are here too, guarding the well.
A Cailleach gave it to me, they went with the season, and I think of them often.

If you and I become friends, I'll take you to both wells of Mitchestown.



Photos by Angela Byrne



St Moling's Well,
St Mullins, Carlow

Angela Byrne

St Moling's Well, located in the historic monastic site of St Mullins, Carlow, is a revered holy well long associated with healing and pilgrimage. Named after the 7th-century saint, poet, and bishop Moling, the well is believed to hold curative powers, particularly for skin and joint ailments.

Pilgrims have visited the well for centuries, often walking the traditional route barefoot and ritually washing in the spring's waters on Pattern Sunday and other holy days. The well remains a site of living folklore and faith, where belief in the healing power of water continues to shape local narratives and traditions.

A Personal Encounter, 2023

When I visited St Moling's Well in 2023, I was walking through the old graveyard when I asked a local man for directions to the well. He paused and, with a smile, told me there was a cure in the water. He explained that he had once used the well water to heal a persistent skin problem on his neck — and that it had worked. "It's in the water," he said, "but it only works if you believe in it."

He went on to share a story about a woman visiting from America. She had come to St Mullins with her cousin, who lives locally. The American woman had a sore knee, and her cousin encouraged her to go to the well and bathe it in the water. She did, though apparently not with much conviction. After returning home, her cousin phoned to ask how her knee was. "Still sore," she said — and, more surprisingly, she had developed a verruca. "You see," the man said, "it didn't work because she didn't believe. That's the way with these things."

The encounter stayed with me — not just for the charm of the story, but for how it revealed the enduring connection between local people and the well, and the importance of belief in the effectiveness of folk practices. In that moment, I was reminded that folklore is not just something found in archives, but something living, shared, and passed on, often by chance, in quiet conversations among gravestones and holy places.

St Patrick' s Well
Mayo

HOW TO PERFORM A STATION

There are two wells. St Patrick's Well is the one nearest to the Altar. St Brigid's Well is the part left as you kneel at St Patrick's Well, facing the hill of Tochar. The walk is done by a process of kneeling.

Kneeling at St Patrick's Wall, recite SEVEN OUR FATHERS and SEVEN HAIL MARY'S until you reach the narrow lane saying ONE OUR FATHER and ONE HAIL MARY each time.

At the end of this lane, kneeling say SEVEN OUR FATHERS and SEVEN HAIL MARYS.

Then proceed to St Brigid's Well where you recite FIFTEEN OUR FATHERS and FIFTEEN HAIL MARYS AND THE CREED.

Then walk back to St Patrick's Well where you again recite SEVEN OUR FATHERS and SEVEN HAIL MARYS until you reach the narrow lane saying ONE OUR FATHER and ONE HAIL MARY each time.

At the end of this lane, kneeling say SEVEN OUR FATHERS AND SEVEN HAIL MARYS.

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At the end of this lane, kneeling say SEVEN OUR FATHERS and SEVEN HAIL MARYS.

THIS ENDS THE TRADITIONAL STATION AND MASS IS CELEBRATED






Photos by Carol Nally O'Leary

Our Lady's Well
Athenry, Galway





Photos by Lucinda Blyth

The pilgrimage, which, we understand, dates back to the sixth century, of visiting Our Lady's Well, Athenry, on Lady Day, August 15, each year, was taken part in this year by a huge crowd, stated to have been bigger than that of recent years. Excursion trains and buses brought large numbers on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning. The train on Wednesday morning was crowded with pilgrims from Connemara and the Claddagh, Galway.

This pilgrimage is one of the oldest in Irish tradition. It is traditional amongst the old people that the Blessed Virgin appeared at one time at this well and that that was the origin of the pilgrimage.

Connacht Tribune, Saturday 18 Aug 1934

St Brigid's Well
Rathcoole, Co Dublin

Mervyn Ennis & Bróna Ui Loing

Tradition has it that St Brigid rested at this well on her return to Kildare from Dublin. It was around this well that the village of Rathcoole took root. During the Famine period, almsgiving and relief were provided to the poor of the locality at the well in the tradition of St Brigid the almsgiver. Soup and Tea was provided, and it is believed the name Tay Lane is derived from this.

Several years ago, the well was covered over. A local historical society, inspired by the addition of a public holiday named after the saint, began a campaign to restore the well. There is a strong tradition of devotion to St Brigid in the Rathcoole area, such as a church and graveyard dedicated to St Brigid at Baldonnel.

St Brigid's well in Rathcoole was located at the edge of Tay Lane. The original spring well was later piped into a basin which was reached by a series of steps over which a niche holding a statue of St Brigid was located.

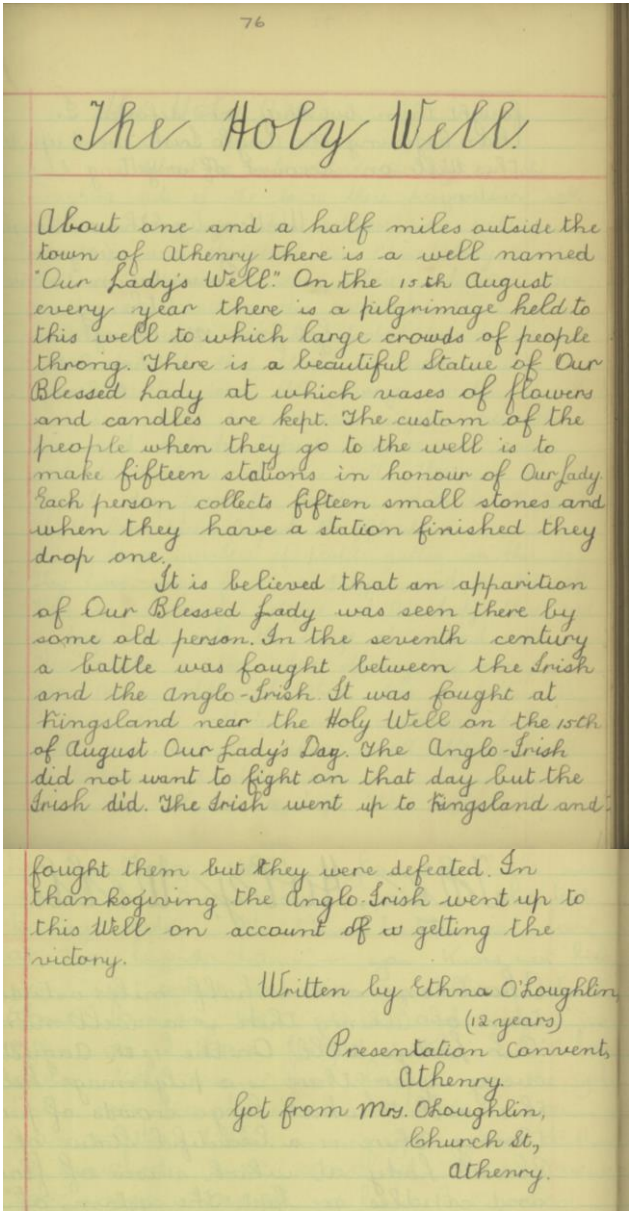




Photos showing the remains of the well site, including Brigid's Crosses and an image of the former well, taken by Mervyn Ennis

School's Collection

The School's Collection was an incredible initiative to capture folklore and tradition involving primary school students in the 1930s interviewing family members and neighbours. There are numerous stories about holy wells gathered.



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The Holy Well.

About one and a half miles outside the town of Athenry there is a well named "Our Lady's Well." On the 15th August every year there is a pilgrimage held to this well to which large crowds of people throng. There is a beautiful Statue of Our Blessed Lady at which vases of flowers and candles are kept. The custom of the people when they go to the well is to make fifteen stations in honour of Our Lady. Each person collects fifteen small stones and when they have a station finished they drop one.

It is believed that an apparition of Our Blessed Lady was seen there by some old person. In the seventh century a battle was fought between the Irish and the Anglo-Irish. It was fought at Kingsland near the Holy Well on the 15th of August Our Lady's Day. The Anglo-Irish did not want to fight on that day but the Irish did. The Irish went up to Kingsland and fought them but they were defeated. In thanksgiving the Anglo-Irish went up to this Well on account of w getting the victory.

Written by Ethna O'Loughlin
(12 years)
Presentation Convent,
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Got from Mrs. Oloughlin,
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'The Holy Well' by Ethna O' Loughlin describes Our Lady's Well, Athenry

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In former times people used to go to Saint Marshale's well [Unshinagh, Leitrim] to get water to cure their sick cattle. They had to say certain prayers before lifting the water. –

Kathleen Mc Gowan, Volume 0189, Page 301

Every year from 15th August till 8 September, people visit this well [St Columbkilles Well, Gap of Mamore, Donegal] to make " The Turas " or Pilgrimage. The Turas is made as voluntary penance, and it takes the following form - The pilgrim, fasting and barefooted, walks around every cairn five times saying one Pater and Ave every time and one creed at each cairn. The same is said kneeling at every cairn, and three stones are thrown on to every heap, in conclusion the Rosary is said kneeling at the well, and a drink is taken of the water. At the last cairn it is usual to leave a token.

Mollie Duffy, Volume 1122, Page 80

There is a Holy Well in Terrerath [Wexford] and it is called St. Anne's Well. It cures a disease that horses get called Pharacy. Father Clancy blessed that well and when he was blessing it he said that the blessed water would cure Pharasy which no other water would cure. There is a tree growing over it and it is always green. It is by the side of the road near Terrerath.

Dominick Hearn, Volume 0873, Page 316

There was supposed to be a holy well in the townland of Loist [Monaghan]. This well was down on low ground on a meadow. This well was in Micky Smith's farm. A long time ago people used to go to that well. They don't go to it now because no one had any belief in it and in that way it went down.

Kathleen Rocks, Volume 0948, Page 285

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Ha' Penny Well (or Well of the Glen)
Caherclough, Tipperary

Heather Louise Brett

I am researching the Ha' Penny Well, located in the townland of Caherclough, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. I am third generation in this locality, and it appears unfortunately the existence of this holy well has almost entirely been forgotten.

Its mention in a 17th Century document indicating that "Ha' Penny Well" was a mistranslation from old Irish ‘the well of the glen’ which given its location would fit very well. Rev. P. Power (1907, *Place names of the Decies,* WAJ. 10, 14) writes that it is 'a well-known holy well formerly much resorted to and still occasionally visited devotionally. The name is due, presumably, to the number of halfpenny votive offerings.’

I personally feel a great connection and guardianship over the well and hope that perhaps bringing its existence to more people's attention may go a little way to protecting and preserving this ancient site for many more generations to come.

Dedication:

For the forgotten Well of the Half Penny, the ancient Well of the Glen,

with reverence to the land, the waters, and all our ancestors who have come in quiet pilgrimage before.

May it's still and sacred waters be blessed and endure,

Honoured by those who remember, watched over for those yet to come.

Photo by Heather Louise Brett



St Brigid's Well
Castlefinn, Donegal

Catherine McGlynn

I began photographing holy wells as I found them when out and about in County Donegal taking photographs for my website, WeLoveDonegal.com. At some stage it occurred to me that many of these wells are falling into disrepair and many, at a not-too-distant time, may be lost forever both in reality and in memory. At that realisation, I decided to make it my mission to find, photograph, gather information on, and write about them. There are around 130 in Donegal as far as I can ascertain and the following is one of the well-kept ones.

St Brigid's Well sits at the top end of a large field at Cormakilly near the village of Castlefinn. It can only be approached on foot and there is no path, just two large, steep, fields to cross to get to it. If you are visiting this holy well it is very important to check with the farmer who owns the land, whether he has cattle in the fields first. His sheds are at the initial turnstile to the first field.

At the well, I met a local man who was there praying, which he told me he did a few days every week. Although nearly 80 years old, and with some health issues, he makes this pilgrimage to give thanks for having come through three operations for cancer and being now pain free.

He had great faith in this well and when I asked him about it, he pointed to a crutch sitting on the surrounding wall and told us the story behind its being left there. His story goes that a man arrived at the farmyard beside the entry to the first field leading to the Well and he asked the farmer if he had a quad (which a lot of farmers now have to get over their land quickly). The farmer said yes, I do, and the man told him he was unable to walk to the holy well and would the farmer take him on his quad.



Photo of well taken by Catherine McGlynn

The man was reliant on a walking frame to get around and had taken a crutch with him so that he could get from his car to the quad as obviously a walking frame won't move on rough ground. It was mid-winter, bitterly cold. Snow lay on the fields. The man managed to get on to the quad with the farmer and off they went across the fields to the holy well.

Once there the man asked the farmer if he would leave him and come back for him in an hour. The farmer was concerned because it was so cold; but the man assured him, he would be fine and just wanted to pray.

Nearing an hour later the farmer returned to the holy well on his quad to find the man with his trouser leg rolled up and his 'bad' leg in the water of the well. The farmer was shocked and asked the man was his leg not freezing and the man replied that no, his leg was in fact almost boiling hot.

When he stood up from the well the man was able to stand without the aid of his crutch and was able to walk to the quad to travel back to his car. He left his crutch on the boundary wall of the well for all to see and there it sits to this day. The man who told me this story assured me when I asked that yes, the man is still able to walk unaided still.

Was it a miracle? The man who told me the story believed it to be so as did the farmer and most importantly, the man who can now walk without the use of either walking frame or crutch.

Doonpeter or St John's Well
Glenville, Cork



Photo by Luigina Ciolfi

Newspaper Clippings

Over thirty members of St Brigid's Girls' Club joined in their second annual visits to St. Brigid's Well, Doneyloop. Punctual to the time appointed the girls assembled at the Club Room, Townhall Street, Strabane, from whence they set off—about twenty making the journey on foot, the others on bikes. The hikers arrived at Doneyloop Chapel to find the cyclists awaiting them and all paid a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. All then proceeded to the well, where the Rosary, prayers for peace and the safety of our Holy Father the Pope, were recited and hymns were sung.

Strabane Chronicle, Sat 13 May 1944

The annual Devotions at St. Columba's Well, at Tailaght, Co. Dublin, will be conducted tomorrow by the Augustinian Fathers at 5 p.m. The Derry- Association makes this service a yearly pilgrimage in honour of the saint.

Irish Press, Sat 6 June 1964

Are there chemicals in holy well water that are also used in modern medicines? This is the question 15 year old Kevin McNamara, a student at St. Joseph's Secondary School, Tulla, set out to examine. At the Aer Lingus Young Scientists Exhibition next week-end, Kevin will present his analysis of water samples from eight holy wells.

Clare Champion, Fri 1 January 1993

At the instigation of Bishop Bill Murphy of Kerry, a number of churches and sacred places in the Diocese of Kerry have been designated for Jubilee Indulgences. Selected for the Deanery of Beara parishes is the ancient Holy Well known as St. Finian's which is to the north of Castletownbere and is situated some 100 yards to the west of the Old North Road at Tbormore...The annual pattern held at this Holy Well was on May Day and the pilgrimage to it this year will take place on Sunday, May 21.

Southern Star, Sat 20 May 2000

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Understanding Holy Wells, Richard Scriven
Providing milestones to the passing of the year, Gail Tangney
St Brigid's Well, Westmeath, David Lynch
Water from the deepest Well (St Ailbe's Well), Louise Nugent
St Dominic's Holy Well / Cronee Well / *Tobar na Cruinnithe*, Glanworth, Aisling Cotter
Cathair Crobh Dearg, Rathmore, Amanda Clarke
St Patrick's Holy Well, Castletownroche, D Callanan
St Ciaran's Well, Inishmore, Ciara Diamond
Tobernalt Holy Well, Sligo, Val Robus
Portals and transitions, Epi Rogan
St Fanahan's Well, Mitchelstown, Philip Spillane
St Moling's Well, St Mullins, Angela Byrne
St Patrick's Well, Mayo, Carol Nally O'Leary
Our Lady's Well, Athenry, Lucinda Blyth
St Brigid's Well, Rathcoole, Mervyn Ennis & Bróna Ui Loing
Schools Collection Samples
Ha' Penny Well, Caherclough, Heather Louise Brett
St Brigid's Well, Castlefinn, Catherine McGlynn
Doonpeter Well,Glenville, Luigina Ciolfi
Newspaper Clippings