



## Ireland's Holy Wells County-by-County

Ireland's National Monuments Service documents the early nineteenth-century locations of over 2900 holy wells. After almost two centuries, most counties retain several dozen well sites and larger ones like Cork, Galway and Clare have hundreds. Even the most populated and urbanized County Dublin has nearly 80. Yet, these sacred and historic sites are inconsistently documented across the country. Fewer than a dozen counties have archaeological inventories of the late twentieth-century locations of holy well sites and only four have county-wide surveys of sites and samplings of associated folklore and tradition.



Financed by National Geographic, the “County-by-County” project is a Citizen Science, nation-wide survey of extant holy well sites and traditions. In 1934, Seamus Ó Duilearga and Sean Ó Súilleabháin attempted a survey of holy wells, but received just a 10% response rate by the following year. This project encourages large-scale participation through tools of the digital age. Employing revised questions from 1934, the information gathered will be a publicly-accessible database donated to UCD's National Folklore Collection.

Local researchers will be capturing accounts of the prayer “rounds” unique to each holy well site, patron saints, associated flora and fauna, and cures. The mobile-phone-friendly Omeka website can also receive audio clips of pronunciations of well names and their townland locations, video clips of interviews, pattern days, or persons demonstrating the rounds, and photographs of well sites, votive offerings and any associated stations.

Participants will find the suggested research questions and instructions here: <http://ihwcbc.omeka.net/>  
All should feel free to answer as many questions as they can, in as much or as little, detail as they like.

The project is intended to involve all generations and the participation of history, heritage and archaeological societies is crucial to the work's success. I would also encourage members of these societies to involve the young people in their lives (neighbors, nieces and nephews, children and grandchildren).

When I began holy well research in the year 2000, every child could tell me where their local well was and direct me to the oldest person in the neighborhood who knew all about it. Now, when young people are tethered to cell phones and social media, their knowledge of local landscape lore is something a fieldworker can no longer take for granted. With that in mind, I designed the “County-by-County” project to encourage young persons to engage with older relatives and neighbors and upload their stories about local holy wells using the very gadgets that generally discourage such engagement.

Children and teenagers have the technological know-how to make uploading holy well stories easy for those who don't use computers or smart phones. At the same time, the process is meant to foster transgenerational exchanges and encourage young persons to become acknowledged stakeholders in their community cultural resources and traditions.

To learn more about the County-by-County survey, contact  
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087 091 7817 (Irish number valid through November 5<sup>th</sup>)

