

Saint Boden's Well, Lacken

Compiled Notes by Tom Bowen



Extracts from “Beneath the Poulaphuca Reservoir”:

In the Schools Manuscripts a story is told by John Richardson (aged 87), of Templeboden, by Marcella Meagher (aged 12) of Manor Kilbride, regarding St Boodin's Well: “ The people invoked the aid of a very holy man by the name of Father Germaine, who caused a well to spring up. He Blessed the well and placed two fishes in it. He said while these fishes were in the well, the waters would cure people, who have devotion. Thousands of people have been cured by Leacain well and the waters have been sent all over the world. The two fishes can still be seen”.(IFC 913:131).

The attribution of the well to Fr Germaine, parish priest of Blackditches, was also recorded by Lord Walter Fitzgearld c. 1907:

“Some years ago as Father Germaine... was driving in the locality on a perfectly calm day, his hat was suddenly lifted off his head, as if by a gust of wind, and was carried away, leaping the hedges and ditches as it went. Father Germaine, dismounted from his car, went off in pursuit.... It appeared the priest's hat never stopped its steeple chasing until it reached St. Booden's Well: and when the car eventually came up. Father Germaine was discovered kneeling at the well, reading his breviary. Before driving off again he blessed the well, and hence it now goes by his name.”

“ As with other blessed wells, the water is only used for drinking purposes. But in the little stream which flows from it. Sores are washed and limbs are bathed, to effect a cure. Around the well are stuck in the ground many crutches and sticks, left by the cripple or the boccagh, who after the third visit, had no further need for them. On one occasion, Pat Carr [an old soldier who was Lord Fitzgearld's informant] went on to say, a man who paid a visit to the well took a fancy to a certain smooth and straight blackthorn stick that was stuck in the ground, and when he left took it with him. That night the ailment that crippled the previous owner of the stick seized on the new

proprietor, and never left him until he returned the stick, and had made the three visits to the well. The bottom of the well according to Pat Carr, is crawling with little fish called “Colliach roo” (or stone loach). He knew a woman who filled a gallon of water from this well, and took it home for the purpose of “wetting the tea”. The kettle was filled and put on a turf fire; but when the water should have been boiling, it was noticed that it had not even become warm, and further investigation led to the discovery of a little colliach-roo in the kettle, which naturally accounted for the mystery. Without loss the woman returned hot-foot, and restored the little fish to the well. [An identical story was recorded by Lil Kavanagh of Blessington in the Schools Manuscripts (IFC 913:175), and also by Micheal O’Connor (IFC 468:66)]

‘There are small round stones in the well, which have a reputation of curing the tooth-ache’ (Omurethi, ‘Father Germaine’s Well in Lacken’, Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society 5(1905), 203-4).

In an Irish Folk Commission questionnaire regarding holy wells, Michael O’Connor provide an interesting description of the well.

“ Annual processions held on the first Sunday in May, and, headed by the Ballyknockan band (when in being) proceed to the well. The people carried objects of piety and sang hymns in honour of Our Lady...[Lacken church was dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1882].

The acts of devotion or “Rounds” according to the best authority were

- A visitation on each of three days
- On each day the patient walked around the well three times, at the end of each journey they knelt down and recited seven Our Fathers and seven Hail Mary’s after which recitation the affected part was bathed in the water (a separate part of the well was used for bathing purposes, as the water was also drunk)...
- The patient began the Rounds facing north, and proceeding from left to right, completed each round of the well...
- The patient drank three times each day at the well in the name of Blessed Trinity. The water was often carried from the well for use of patients who were unable to attend.
- Offering of objects of piety such as rosary beads, medals, scapulars and pieces of cloth were made. Patients who were cured left their crutches.

- The offerings were placed on a little green mound beside the well, pieces of cloth were tied on the bush. When the wall was erected however, the objects were placed on it.

According to O’Connor, the protecting wall was built about 1900 by Fr. Heffernan P.P., Valleymount according to Lord Walter Fitzgearld:

‘About the year 1902...Father Thomas Heffernan, finding the well much neglected and easy of access to cattle, had it enclosed, and a place for bathers attached. At the same time it was dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel (16 July). The old “Pattern Day” appears to have been forgotten.

O'Connor also recorded:

'I am informed that when the protecting wall had been built the springs rose outside the wall. The crutches and other objects were buried by the two men who built the wall, this and the fact that those same men accepted money from visitors was greatly resented by local people'

O'Connor was the informant for an article on the well that appeared in the Irish Press (28 March 1938).

The correspondent wrote:

' Many stories are told of the cures effected by the well, but in the minds of the people of the valley, especially the older generation, is the long remembered saying:

"Mairgdo'n t-e a d'olas gan pleidhe

O uisge-bhaisde Bhodain"

(Evil to him who drinks without prayer

From the Baptismal waters of Boden)'

According to Joseph Bradey (a.k.a Fr Maurice Browne), the well was encircled by elder trees that 'were decorated with votive offerings in the form of ribbons, strips of clothing and perpetuelles. Close to the wall a large stone slab lay embedded in the ground, and it is said that on certain evenings the last rays of the setting sun reveal the outlines of Bishop Boden's knee and left foot imprinted on the stone' (In Monavalla (1963), 201)

In the Leinster Leader, 3 October 1903 an account of a miracle at the well on the previous Sunday is given: 'A little girl named Murphy who had never any use of her limbs walked away perfectly cured'.

According to Kay Clarke (pers. Comm.), The man who built the wall around the well about 1900 suffered badly from arthritis and suggested to Fr. Heffernan that he would not be able for the job in question. The water from the well cured him of the arthritis, however, and he was able to finish the wall.

Not sure where this came from:

On Saturday, 26 February, I visited the site of St Boden's Well in Lacken (on the shores of Blessington Lake) in Co Wicklow.

I understand that the original St Boden's Well was submerged into the Lake after it was flooded in the 1940's. However, I was fascinated to hear that the water had been piped to the shore and an alternative well constructed.

I found the 'location' of this well, but could not find any structure at all.

I made local enquiries and spoke with an old man in the shop on the main 'Lake Drive' road.

He explained that when the well was submerged, a large number of locals were upset that their well was being taken away from them against their will, and vowed that the next opportunity they had, they'd do something about it.

In 1977, when the level of the lake was lowered to allow repairs to be done on the Poulaphouca Dam, he and a number of locals piped the water from the well to the shore and constructed an exact replica of the original well.

He advised that they had even removed the original Granite Cross from the submerged well and re-erected it on the new well.

Unfortunately this cross was stolen a week after it was erected, and the well was so mistreated and vandalised by weekenders to Blessington that its waters were not safe for consumption.

People stopped visiting and maintaining it as all their good work was being undone each weekend by the drunken shennanigans of 'outsiders'.

This gentleman could not say whether the well was still there or not, as nobody visits it anymore and my searches could not reveal anything. The entire structure is now either very overgrown, or has been removed totally.

A sad ending to what could have been a 'fairytale rescue'.

Father Germaine's Blessed well also known as St. Boden's well was known for its healing powers.

The well was submerged by the lake in 1940 and later in 1978 when the waters retreated it reappeared and the well source was piped to the shore so that people could have access to the curing waters.



1978 when the waters retreated the well appears

Reference from “The Book of the Liffey from source to sea” 1988

“The well was a spring, some distance down the hill from where the beach now lies, and therefore inundated in 1940. It was revealed again in 1978 when the lake level fell lower than ever before. This time the devotees were ready to act and sought help from the secular powers. To atone for its past sins in swallowing the well, the ESB laid a pipe from a point above the high water mark down to the well, planted a village pump at the top and donated the land to the worshippers. Now you can pump the holy water into a rectangular font, hewn from a single granite block. The shrine stands, surmounted by a small cross and surrounded by concrete walls, to the west of the car park”.



'NEW' ST. BODEN'S WELL

This has now gone into disrepair and has been vandalised.