

Assessment of Sunday's Well,
Clane,
County Kildare

Cultural Heritage Report

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For
Clane Community Council

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report assesses the archaeological and historical context for, and cultural heritage significance of, Sunday's Well in Clane, County Kildare, on behalf of the Clane Community Council. The well is located on the south side of the village, in Carrigeen townland (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Site location

2. STATUTORY PROTECTION

Sunday's Well is listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP KD014-026009) and as a recorded archaeological site, it is afforded protection under the National Monuments Acts (1930-2004; Appendix 1). The spring that serves the well is listed as a thermal spring by the Geological Survey of Ireland (Goodman *et al.*, 2004). The holy well is located in very close proximity to a recoded Anglo-Norman motte (KD014-026004), which lies c. 3m east, and is c. 370m south of an associated early medieval ecclesiastical site (Figure 2).

RMP No.	KD014-026009
Site Type	Ritual Site – Holy Well
Townland	Carrigeen
ITM	687705, 727113

<p>Description</p>	<p>According to the Ordnance Survey Letters (OSL; Herity 2002), this was formerly frequented as a holy well. Jackson (1978-80) mentions a late 19th century reference that a procession and pattern were held at the well up to the late 1830's, but comments that, since Sunday was a day of devotion, patterns were not usually held at 'Sunday's' wells. The well lies in level pasture c. 3m to the west of Clane motte (KD014-026004). It is enclosed in a concrete-roofed, rectangular structure (L 1.8m; Wth 0.8m; H 1m) of concrete blocks, open at the north end, from which a pipe draws water off for domestic use. This spring may once have fed the outer fosse of the adjoining motte?</p>
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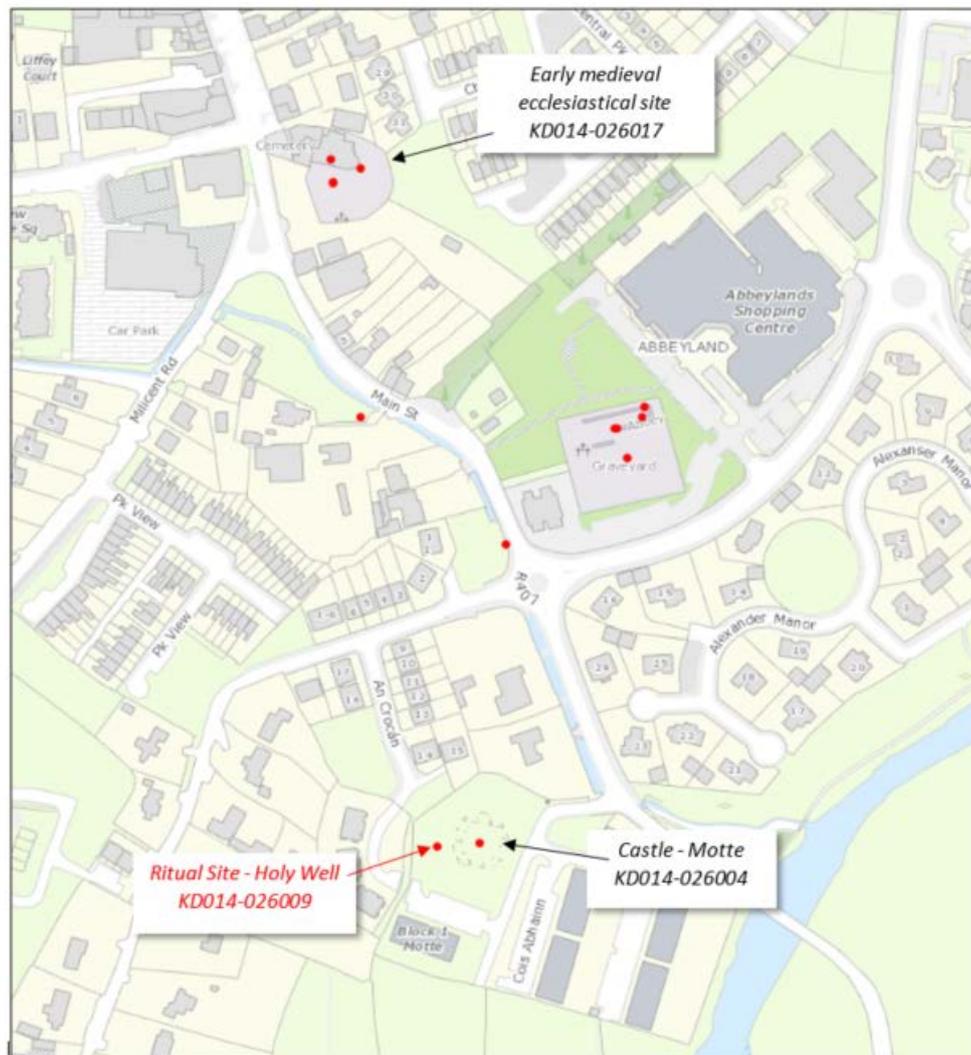


Figure 2 Map showing location of relevant RMP sites

3. THERMAL SPRINGS

Irish thermal springs (also known as warm springs) occur in unusual geological settings where groundwater which is warmer than normal (at least 12°C) rises up through limestone catchments and issues at the surface as a geothermal spring. The warm springs of Ireland are generally located in two clusters, one occurring in Leinster, the other in Munster; the areas with the most abundant warm springs are the Dublin / Meath / Kildare area and the Mallow area in north

County Cork (Goodman *et al.*, 2004). All warm springs in Ireland issue from the same bedrock (Dinantian Limestone) which occurs between the granite, metamorphic and Silurian rock of the Leinster Caledonian granite massif on the southeast and the Ordovician - Silurian Balbriggan and Louth blocks to its north (Aldwell & Burdon, 1980). Water temperature in Irish thermal springs has generally been recorded between approximately 12.5 °C and 23.5°C.

A total of 29 warm springs have been identified across Ireland, with a significant proportion of these recorded in Leinster. Until the 1960s only two warm springs were recognised in Leinster, with a third added to the list in 1965 when Granger and Davies rejuvenated interest in St Gorman's Well in Enfield, County Meath, a warm spring first visited by the antiquarian Du Noyer in 1859 but subsequently forgotten (www.ecoserve.ie). Since then geological surveys have identified a number of additional warm springs, bringing the total to seventeen in Leinster and six in Munster (Aldwell & Burdon 1980; Minerex 1983).

Descriptions of thermal springs in Ireland are limited and often restricted to a discussion of their geological or ecological value, rather than their historical or cultural heritage significance. The oldest recorded warm spring in Ireland is located at Mallow, County Cork. In 1757 Ruttly (from Bristol Spa in England) noted that '*Mallow water was first discovered and introduced into practice by Dr. Rogers of Cork about the year 1724*' (Aldwell & Burdon, 1980). The Mallow warm spring is one of a number of springs that rise naturally in an area that is known locally as Spa Glen. However two of the best known warm springs in Ireland were brought to the surface through human intervention; Louisa Bridge spring at Leixlip, County Kildare came to light during the construction of the Royal Canal in 1794 and Kilbrook spring near Enfield, County Meath was discovered when gravel quarrying was carried out during railway construction in the 1890s.

In addition to Sunday's Well in Clane, there are five other thermal springs in County Kildare: Louisa Bridge (Leixlip), St Brigid's Well (Kilbrook), St Patrick's Well (Celbridge), St Patrick's Well (Morrinstown) and Dysart Warm Spring. All but the last of these are also recorded holy wells, each associated with a nearby early medieval ecclesiastical foundation.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

4.1. Pre-Christian Associations

It is possible that holy wells were venerated as sacred sites prior to the introduction of Christianity; the adoption of existing pagan rituals, ceremonies or sacred sites into the new religion was a common practice and one that eased the process of conversion to Christianity. Natural springs would have been valued from the prehistoric period onwards, with sources of fresh water being a prerequisite to survival in the first instance and permanent settlement in the

long term. That many of these springs were subsequently regarded as holy wells, with specific or general curative properties, might indicate that they had played a similar role in the pre-Christian period. It is not difficult to imagine why this might be; the presence of a fresh-water supply that continuously bubbled up from the earth would have defied explanation and therefore, in the eyes of our ancestors, would have seemed the work of the spirits, gods or other magic. Unlike other springs, thermal or warm springs did not freeze up in winter and, on a cold day, steam would rise from the surface. Given these apparently mystical properties, it is likely that they would have held a particular significance.

There is no indication of any prehistoric activity at Sunday's Well, though it is likely that there was human activity (if not settlement) in the wider area during the prehistoric period. While direct evidence of prehistoric activity in Clane or its vicinity is scarce, a polished stone axehead was found in the vicinity of the church and graveyard in the village (the site of the early Christian monastery), c. 370m north of the well (recorded in the topographical files of the National Museum of Ireland, Ref. No. 1975:255). The proximity of the River Liffey, which provided a means of communication, transport and easy access to natural resources, would have made this an attractive location for settlement, either permanent or seasonal.

4.2. **Links with the early Christian monastery of *Cluain Damh***

Christianity was introduced into Ireland in the 5th century AD, bringing with it the introduction of the country's earliest churches, generally in the context of small monastic or ecclesiastical sites. Some of these early medieval ecclesiastical sites would eventually be abandoned, with others thriving and evolving into proto-urban centres and later towns and villages.

These sites generally conform to a basic settlement pattern, most notably of concentric enclosures, with the inner enclosure being the most sacred and holding the church and burial ground. They tend to be defined by a large curvilinear outer enclosure (bank and ditch or stone), enclosing an area circa 90-120m in diameter, often preserved in the line of townland or field boundaries and roads (Swan, 1983). Other elements associated with these sites also appear to have had allocated positions, such as an eastern site entrance marked by a cross, the placement of the round tower (where present), and the location of holy wells, which were usually situated some distance outside of the site itself and seldom within the enclosure (Swan, 1994). Other characteristic features of such sites include religious associations (church structures, crosses, holy wells, bullaun stones, founder's tomb etc), placename evidence, burial evidence and townland boundaries as enclosing elements (Swan, 1983).

Sunday's Well is classified as a holy well and does appear to have been venerated as such in the past. It is probable that it was associated with the monastery that was founded at Clane in the

mid-6th century, given its position c. 370m to the south (i.e. well outside of the ecclesiastical enclosure). The monastery of '*Cluain Damh*' – variously translated as the 'Meadow of the Ox' or 'Meadow of the Ford' – was founded by Ailbhe, with Senchell (died 549) being the first abbot (Gwynn & Hadcock, 1970; RMP KD014-026017). According to O'Donovan, the monastery was plundered in 1035 and a synod was held there in 1162 (OSL; Herity 2002), suggesting that it was a flourishing settlement at the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion a few years later. There is little surviving evidence for the early monastery, though it almost certainly occupied the site of the medieval St Michael's parish church (KD014-026002; now the Abbey Community Centre), with the D-shape of the graveyard (KD014-026011) possibly reflecting an earlier, monastic enclosure line. In addition to Sunday's Well, there is a bullaun stone (KD014-026003) recorded c. 120m to the south and the base of a wayside cross (KD014-026006) c. 340m to the southwest.

4.3. Sunday's Well and the Anglo-Norman Motte

Following the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland in 1169, the barony of O'tyny (modern Barony of Clane) was granted to Adam de Hereford, who in turn granted it to his brother Richard, and the De Hereford's were probably responsible for the erection of the motte in the late 12th century (Bradley et al. 1986). According to Cooke-Trench (1899-1902) there was a local tradition that the top of the monument sank c. 1830 and skeletons were found there and in 1940, Leask described the motte as being surrounded by a concentric bank and ditch and noted a report that it was being dug away (Cf. SMR file). Although these destructive activities led to the placing of a Preservation Order on the site (No. 88, 15/10/1940), further disturbances to the monument were reported c. 1970 (Cf. SMR file) and in the 1980s (McEvoy 2014). According to McEvoy (2014), Sunday's Well was 'removed' during the unlawful work undertaken by the landowner in the 1980s, when the sides of the motte were excavated back on all sides by a JCB to create an extended area of level ground to ring horses. It is not clear what, if anything survives of the well now, though the concrete superstructure described in the SMR file was apparently destroyed.

The proximity of Sunday's Well to the adjacent Anglo-Norman motte is the result of topographical and strategic concerns, with no evidence to suggest an archaeological or historical connection (other than, presumably, the use of the spring as a water source for the motte). The area of level pasture on which the motte stands is located c. 370m south of the early medieval monastic site, where it could control a natural crossing point on the River Liffey. When constructing the motte, the Anglo-Norman builders appear to have taken advantage of a natural gravel hill or ridge; there are annalistic references to the 'round hill of Clane' in a description of the Battle of Allen, which took place in the early 8th century (O'Donovan, 1860).

5. PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

There have been no archaeological investigations undertaken at Sunday's Well, nor at the adjacent Anglo-Norman motte, though several have been carried out in their vicinity during the 1990s and early 2000s. In general, these investigations revealed nothing of archaeological significance and indicated that there had been a substantial amount of disturbance in the past, as a result of agricultural activities or the laying of utilities. In 2003, a programme of archaeological monitoring and testing identified medieval activity on the southeast and south sides of the motte, comprising a human burial and two medieval pits, as well as scatters of medieval pottery sherds (Meenan, Licence No. 03E0904; Excavations Bulletin Ref. 2003:899).

6. HISTORICAL CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

Sunday's Well is not depicted on the Down Survey map of c. 1656 (Figure 3), though its location can be approximated to the west of 'Claine Bridg'. The only feature shown in this area is a built structure of some kind, though there is no indication of either the Anglo-Norman motte nor the adjacent well.



Figure 3 Down Survey Map of the Barony of Clane, c. 1656

Noble and Keenan's Map of County Kildare (Figure 4), published a century later, shows the motte but not the well. This is unsurprising given the large scale of the map, which only allows for major topographical or archaeological features, road networks and estate houses and their lands.

The recorded well appears on the first edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map of 1837-8 (Figure 4), which represents the first accurate and detailed mapping of the area. While no associated structure is shown, the location is marked at the base of the motte, on the southwest side; it is named 'Sunday Well', with the script indicating its antiquity. A line runs directly west of the

spring to the Carrigeen / Moat Commons townland boundary, presumably a channel feeding a pond that is shown on the far side of the boundary.



Figure 4 Noble and Keenan's Map of County Kildare, c. 1752



Figure 5 First edition OS map, 1837-8

The greater detail provided by the 25-inch Ordnance Survey edition of 1907-9 (Figure 5) shows a circular well structure and an associated channel of water that flows into a ditch that curves around the northwest quadrant of the motte, before continuing north east towards the field boundary. The well is now indicated as 'Sunday's Well', a name that persists in present usage.

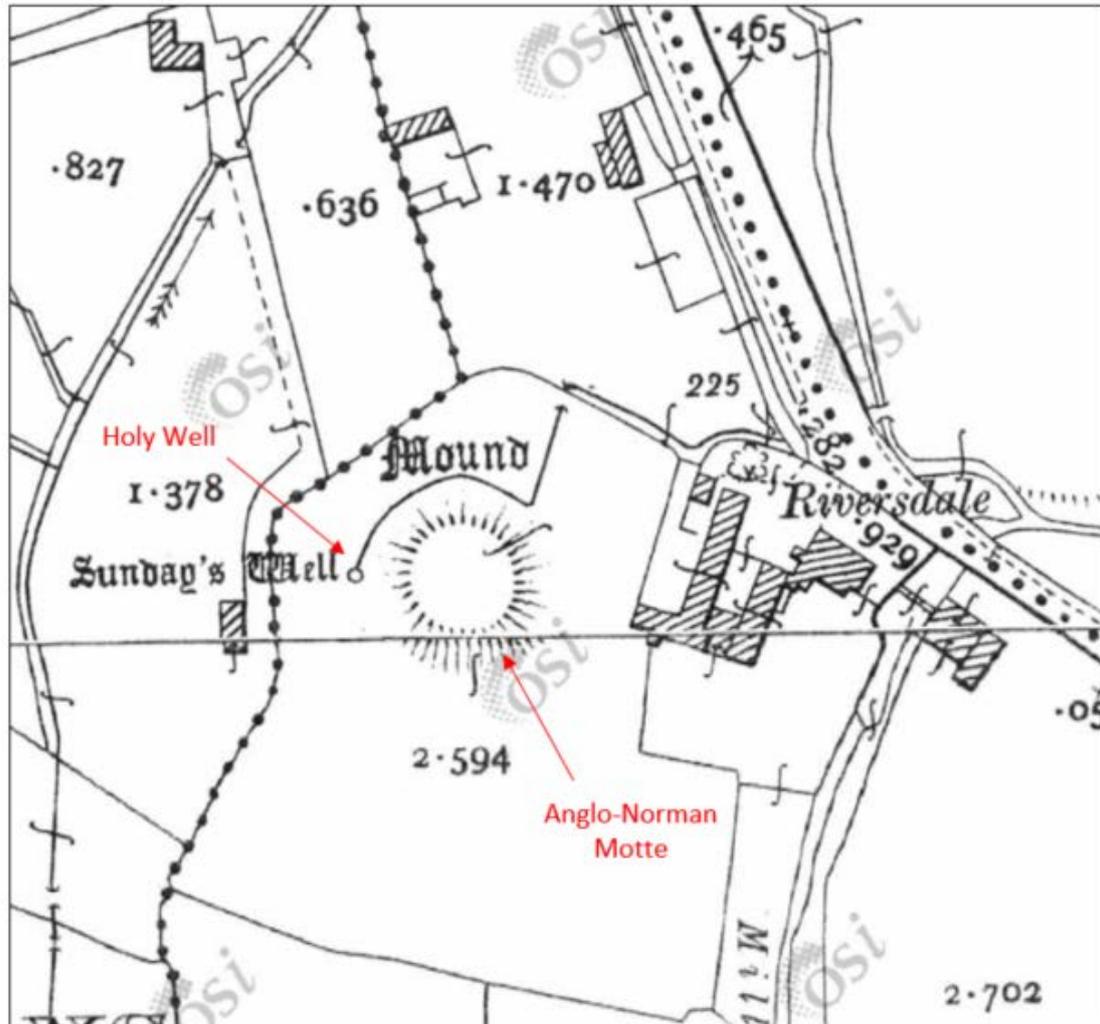


Figure 6 Revised edition OS map, 1907-9

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1. There is no evidence that any distinctions that may have existed between normal springs and thermal springs in the prehistoric period were carried over into the Christian period. Where thermal springs have been identified as holy wells, there is nothing of note in local folklore nor in the associated legends or the ecclesiastical foundations to indicate that they were of particular merit during this period, beyond that of other holy wells. The fact that thermal springs and non-thermal springs alike were adopted by the Christian Church and venerated as holy wells would suggest that by this time, there was no perceivable difference between them.

- 7.2. Sunday's Well has already proved vulnerable to modern agricultural practices and development. It is recommended that a field inspection by a qualified archaeologist be undertaken to establish what remains of the recorded archaeological site.
- 7.3. While the previous built structure surrounding the well was reportedly destroyed in the 1980s, the description in the SMR file of a concrete superstructure indicates that this was a relatively modern intervention. There may be an opportunity for the development of the site as a local heritage attraction, with a focus on the holy well and its associations with the early Christian monastery and possible prehistoric associations as one of a number of thermal springs in County Kildare.
- 7.4. Any works that may be proposed for the recorded holy well would need to be carried out under licence to, and be subject to the permission of, the National Monuments Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

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Online Resources:

www.excavations.ie

www.libguides.ucd.ie

www.osi.ie

www.heritagemaps.ie

www.ecoserve.ie

Appendix 1 National Monuments Legislation 1930-2004.

All archaeological sites have the full protection of the national monuments legislation (Principal Act 1930; Amendments 1954, 1987, 1994 and 2004).

In the 1987 Amendment of Section 2 of the Principal Act (1930), the definition of a national monument is specified as:

any artificial or partly artificial building, structure or erection or group of such buildings, structures or erections,

any artificial cave, stone or natural product, whether forming part of the ground, that has been artificially carved, sculptured or worked upon or which (where it does not form part of the place where it is) appears to have been purposely put or arranged in position,

any, or any part of any, prehistoric or ancient

(i) tomb, grave or burial deposit, or

(ii) ritual, industrial or habitation site,

and

any place comprising the remains or traces of any such building, structure or erection, any cave, stone or natural product or any such tomb, grave, burial deposit or ritual, industrial or habitation site...

Under Section 14 of the Principal Act (1930):

It shall be unlawful...

to demolish or remove wholly or in part or to disfigure, deface, alter, or in any manner injure or interfere with any such national monument without or otherwise than in accordance with the consent hereinafter mentioned (a licence issued by the Office of Public Works National Monuments Branch),

or

to excavate, dig, plough or otherwise disturb the ground within, around, or in the proximity to any such national monument without or otherwise than in accordance...

Under Amendment to Section 23 of the Principal Act (1930),

A person who finds an archaeological object shall, within four days after the finding, make a report of it to a member of the Garda Síochána...or the Director of the National Museum...

The latter is of relevance to any finds made during a watching brief.

In the 1994 Amendment of Section 12 of the Principal Act (1930), all of the sites and 'places' recorded by the Sites and Monuments Record of the Office of Public Works are provided with a new status in law. This new status provides a level of protection to the listed sites that is equivalent to that accorded to 'registered' sites [Section 8(1), National Monuments Amendment Act 1954] as follows:

The Commissioners shall establish and maintain a record of monuments and places where they believe there are monuments and the record shall be comprised of a list of monuments and such places and a map or maps showing each monument and such place in respect of each county in the State.

The Commissioners shall cause to be exhibited in a prescribed manner in each county the list and map or maps of the county drawn up and publish in a prescribed manner information about when and where the lists and maps may be consulted.

- In addition, when the owner or occupier (not being the Commissioners) of a monument or place which has been recorded, or any person proposes to carry out, or to cause or permit the carrying out of, any work at or in relation to such monument or place, he shall give notice in writing of his proposal to carry out the work to the Commissioners and shall not, except in the case of urgent necessity and with the consent of the Commissioners, commence the work for a period of two months after having given the notice.

The National Monuments Amendment Act 2004

The National Monuments Amendment Act enacted in 2004 provides clarification in relation to the division of responsibilities between the Minister of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Finance and Arts, Sports and Tourism together with the Commissioners of Public Works. The Minister of Environment, Heritage and Local Government will issue directions relating to archaeological works and will be advised by the National Monuments Section and the National Museum of Ireland. The Act gives discretion to the Minister of Environment, Heritage and Local Government to grant consent or issue directions in relation to road developments (Section 49 and 51) approved by An Bord Pleanála and/or in relation to the discovery of National Monuments

14A. (1) The consent of the Minister under section 14 of this Act and any further consent or licence under any other provision of the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2004 shall not be required where the works involved are connected with an approved road development.

(2) Any works of an archaeological nature that are carried out in respect of an approved road development shall be carried out in accordance with the directions of the Minister, which directions shall be issued following consultation by the minister with the Director of the National Museum of Ireland.

Subsection 14A (4) Where a national monument has been discovered to which subsection (3) of this section relates, then

- (a) the road authority carrying out the road development shall report the discovery to the Minister
- (b) subject to subsection (7) of this section, and pending any directions by the minister under paragraph (d) of this subsection, no works which would interfere with the monument shall be carried out, except works urgently required to secure its preservation carried out in accordance with such measures as may be specified by the Minister

The Minister will consult with the Director of the National Museum of Ireland for a period not longer than 14 days before issuing further directions in relation to the national monument.

The Minister will not be restricted to archaeological considerations alone, but will also consider the wider public interest.