

CAN YOU DIG IT?

THE LOST WELLS OF GALLOWAY

AN ONLINE PROJECT

We're looking for your help to rediscover our lost wells and bring their stories back to life.

All you need is internet access and we'll introduce you to the many free resources available right at your fingertips. We'll give you an area to focus your research on – you can then hunt through old maps to identify any named wells that appear in your area and then see what you can find out about their history and the origins of the names.



Green Well of Scotland, Carsphairn

There are over 600 **healing wells** across Scotland for curing anything from gout and hangovers through to blindness and 'lunacy'. Separate healing wells can also be found for curing the ailments of animals!

Wells come in all shapes and sizes, from simple ponds or springs in the ground through to more substantial stone-lined features. So it's not just named wells that we're interested in, but any named water sources including springs, pools and watering holes. Even placenames that hint at the site of a water source which has since been lost are worth including.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT WELLS?

In the days before indoor plumbing, wells were obviously essential to the everyday needs of the people, but many held importance which surpassed merely keeping hydrated (although that is pretty important).

Scattered across our landscape from the centre of towns and cities to, quite literally, the middle of nowhere, wells have long been associated with both healing and cursing. Some are simply linked with the people who drank from them, while others are named after saints, the devil, fairies, the dead, hermits – the list goes on! They are shrouded in folklore, myths and legends and play an important role in our cultural heritage.

Despite this importance, many of these wells, springs and pools have long been forgotten and are often overlooked in our records.

Visitors to **clootie wells** would leave small scraps of cloth - clooties – behind and as the cloth degraded, then the sick would heal. At many of these sites, cloths still remain, since anyone removing the offering is believed to fall victim to the same misfortunes which befell its owner.

WHY 'NAMED' WELLS?

What's in a name? Well, where there's a name there's a story. The locations of numerous wells can be seen across maps both old and new, but it is the ones that have been given a name that indicate a site which has been important enough to mark in some way. Whether a well became known for its healing properties or was named to commemorate an event or a notable figure – their names can reveal a lot about how people related to these features which were once so renowned.

For some, we may never know the story and for many, we are likely hearing the result of a tale that has been retold across several generations.

It's possible that there was a practical reason for the stories – to protect vital water sources or to discourage children from venturing too close. Or perhaps they represent the only record of an event or person from local history. Some will reflect the medical reasoning of the time, while others featured prominently in spiritual and religious rites.

It is through these names that we can gain insights into the significance they held in both the beliefs and the imaginations of those who visited them – so why not help us see what we can find!

Chalybeate waters are mineral spring waters that are rich in iron salts. They have been promoted since the 16th century by doctors for their curative powers, with some even developed as commercial spas in the 18th century.

SO WHERE DO I START?

It's simple, just email Helen at helen.keron@dumgal.gov.uk and we'll assign you a 'map square' that will be exclusive to you. We will email you an image of the map square, marked with its corner coordinates, and we'll tell you what parish it's in.

This map square will represent the area for your research to focus on – look through the mapping to see what named wells, springs and pools you can spot within your map square and then go on to see what you can find out about them. We've attached a detailed guide to help you get started.

Let us know if there is a specific area or even a specific well that you would like to research and we'll send you the relevant map square. Or if you're happy to have a random one picked out for you, just say. Once you have finished finding out as much as you can about your area, then you can have another of course!



Holy wells can be associated with the site of a church or can sit along a pilgrimage route. Many saints are remembered at wells and springs, with several said to have supernaturally created the wells which bear their name.

Some wells are named after the offerings that people would leave. These include pin wells and even a cheese well at Minch Moor in the Borders, where travellers would make offerings of cheese to allow them to pass unmolested thanks to the protection of the fairies.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE INFORMATION?

We'll compile all of the information that you send us to create a database of named wells, springs and pools within the Galloway Glens area, which will then be sent to both the Dumfries and Galloway Museums Service and the Dumfries and Galloway Council Archaeology Service. This will preserve the knowledge and make it publicly available, but it will also highlight the sites as a consideration for any future developments proposed in their area.



There's also a private Facebook group for you to join if you'd like: Search for '**Lost Wells of the Galloway Glens**' on Facebook and ask to join or email Helen.keron@dumgal.gov.uk for the link. You can ask questions, let others know about any good resources you find and also share any discoveries that you make along the way!

You can also feel free to share with us on social media what you've managed to find – we're always interested and love a good photograph! Simply tag us by including **@GGLPArchaeology** in your post or tweet.

LOST WELLS PODCAST

We've commissioned a local Creative Producer, Katch Holmes, to see what inspiration our Lost Wells can provide for a series of podcasts about this topic. She'll be closely involved with the project, seeing what stories you unearth and how she can present them differently. We're really excited about this creative response to the Lost Wells – let's see where it can take us!

ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this project, just email helen.keron@dumgal.gov.uk or get in touch with us through the Can You Dig It Facebook or Twitter accounts (**@GGLPArchaeology**).

CAN YOU DIG IT SUPPORTERS

Thanks as ever to the funders of CYDI: Historic Environment Scotland and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It is thanks to them that we can put on all these events and projects for free.

Thanks as well to the Can You Dig It steering group, who give up their time to keep us on the straight and narrow, and to Dr Peter Hewitt of the D&G Museums Service for his support for this project. Also to Rathmell Archaeology who are delivering the Can You Dig It project for the Galloway Glens. Thank you all!