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TRUNK CALL: Worshippers at the Holy stump in Limerick



DEVOUT: Crowds at Knock waiting for an apparition



MIRACULOUS: The shrine at Kerrytown, Co. Donegal

BY GERALDINE COMISKEY

THERE was a mixture of hysteria and mayhem at Knock Shrine, in Co. Mayo, recently when 15,000 pilgrims flocked there in the belief that Our Lady would appear.

The recent rash of apparitions began in Rathkeale, Co. Limerick, where locals claimed to have seen The Blessed virgin in a tree stump.

Commentators blamed the recession as visits to shrines seem to have replaced house-hunting and shopping as Sunday pastimes - whether for religious reasons or curiosity.

However, the scenes at Knock have not been seen since the late 1980s, when the residents of Ballinspittle, Co. Cork, claimed their statue of the Blessed Virgin was moving.

Whether visions of Our Lady are imagined or are optical illusions caused by natural phenomena, Ireland's link with shrines and holy wells is extraordinary. With an estimated 3,000 holy wells and countless grottos around the country, check out some of the oddest (see map right):

CO. CAVAN

A St Brigid's Stone, Blacklion. This holy stone of St Brigid is believed to have the power to cast curses!

CO. LONGFORD

B Tobar Riogh an Domhnagh, Abbeylara. This well is believed to curse anyone who violates it. Built on an old pagan site, it is said to have originally represented a vengeful pagan god.

CO. KILKENNY

C St Fiacre's Well, Ullard, Graignamanagh. Said to cure venereal disease. St Fiacre is the patron saint of taxi drivers.

CO. LETRIM

D Cluainin Well, Manorhamilton. Believed to heal sores. Kilfinane Lady's Well and statue is said to have cured a blind man many years ago. The statue is buried in briars.

CO. LIMERICK

E St Brigid's Well, Kilbreedy and St Fintan's Well, Doon. Both reputed to cure eye ailments.



HEALING: Climbing Croagh Patrick in bare feet

Holy Stump of Rathkeale. Locals claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin in the stump, which is located in the church grounds.

CO. CARLOW

F St Moling's Well, near village of St Mullins. The water is believed to cure blindness and internal medical diseases.

CO. GALWAY

G Our Lady's Stone, Grotto and Well, Athenry. The stone, which has a hole in it, is believed to cure headaches.

CO. CORK

H St Columdearg's Well at Knockaneris. The well has dried up but it is still believed to cure whooping cough.

Ballinspittle grotto. Back in the late 1980s, a group of locals, including retired Garda sergeant John Murray, told the world their statue of the Virgin Mary was moving. The crowd claimed that at one stage it floated for half a minute - despite being embedded in concrete.

CO. MEATH

I St Finian's wells, Longwood and Anneville. Both wells are believed to cure stomach trouble. The well at Longwood is also reputed to cure warts.

St Brigid's wells, Carbury and Ballinadrimna. Both said to cure headaches and toothaches.

CO. CLARE

J St Brigid's Well, Liscannor. This well is hidden in a cliff, high above the road which runs along the Cliffs of Moher. To reach it, you have to enter a dark, narrow tunnel - where pil-

grims have left everything from Rosary beads to prosthetic legs. The site is usually full of teddy bears and family photos.

CO. DONEGAL

K Kerrytown, in the Rosses district near Dungloe. In 1939, two young girls claimed to have seen the Virgin appearing on the rock-face beside their parents' cottage.

Doon well, Kilmacrennan, Co. Donegal. This well is surrounded by crutches left behind by people who were healed on the spot.

Lough Derg, near Pettigo. The site of St Patrick's penitentiary is not one for the faint-hearted. Three days of fasting and no sleep would give anyone 'visions'.

CO. DUBLIN

L St Valentine's remains, Carmelite Chapel, Whitefriar Street, Dublin city. The martyr's bones, brought here from Rome by Irish Carmelite John Spratt in 1835, are believed to cure blindness, reunite couples and fix broken hearts. St Val is also the patron saint of journalists - the *Sunday World* will be lighting a candle in the hope of getting some respite from the curses of Christina Gallagher and Joe Coleman.

Venerable Matt Talbot's tomb, Our Lady of Lourdes church on Sean McDermott Street, Dublin city. The patron saint of alcoholics is believed to cure various addictions.

CO. KERRY

M Well of the Wethers, Ardfert. Stone 'saints' heads' nearby have been worn down by pilgrims rubbing and kissing them.

CO. KILDARE

N Fr Moore's Well, near the Curragh. Believed to have healing properties. Named after a heroic 19th century priest who is buried in the nearby chapel.

CO. LOUTH

O St Brigid's Shrine and well, Faughart (birthplace of St Brigid). Part of the saint's skull was found here and is said to have healing properties.

CO. MAYO

P Knock. Some people claimed to have seen 'visions' of Our Lady and Jesus, as well as the 'sun dancing in the sky' on Hallowe'en this year and earlier the same month. But most of the 15,000 who turned up on Hallowe'en were left disappointed.