

Hidden gems, Forgotten people

Nestled in a wooded area, near the river Sullane on the outskirts of Baile Mhuirne, (Ballyvourney), Co. Cork is a holy well known as St.Gobnait's well, tobar Ghobnatan.

After a long peregrination in search of a holy place where she would find solace and peace, St.Gobnait settled in this area of west Cork. She was born in Co.Clare sometime during the 6th and 7th centuries.

Amanda Clarke in her fine book entitled *the Holy wells of Co.Cork* relates that 'visited by an angel, she was told to search for the place of her resurrection which she would know when she saw nine white deer '.

From the same author, we are told that 'coming down to the hills towards the Sullane river, wooded on each side, she stopped to cleanse and restore her white feet in icy cold water'. 'There in the dappled woodland, surrounding Baile Mhuirne , she saw nine snow white deer'. Here search was finally over.

On arrival she was helped by St.Abban, her mentor and possibly another brother who was already living, closeby. He gave her land and he helped her to establish a spiritual centre for women. Here, the water at the well under her patronage was plentiful and pure. It became known as a place of healing. There is a pattern day held here on her feast day 11th February, and also on Whit Sunday.

A tranquil holy oasis, it well repays a trip from the city to partake of its sanctity and seclusion. A quiet retreat. The well is visited frequently but it is indeed a hidden holy gem. Surrounded on all sides by thick verdure, and off the old main Cork/Killarney road, it remains a special sacred place of wonder and peace. A lovely surprise to stumble upon, as one travels through the nearby busy village. For many a year, I passed through its environs, oblivious to the beauty and treasures nearby.

St.Gobnait looked after her community in those far off days, especially the poor and the sick. She is the patron saint of beekeepers and smiths.

To this day, she is revered in these parts and a visit to the beautiful holy well leaves one refreshed and at rest. It is in the air, the residual holiness of such a special saintly woman. To say a few prayers at the well, is time well spent, following in the footsteps of countless pilgrims down the millenia.

Geraldine Healy.