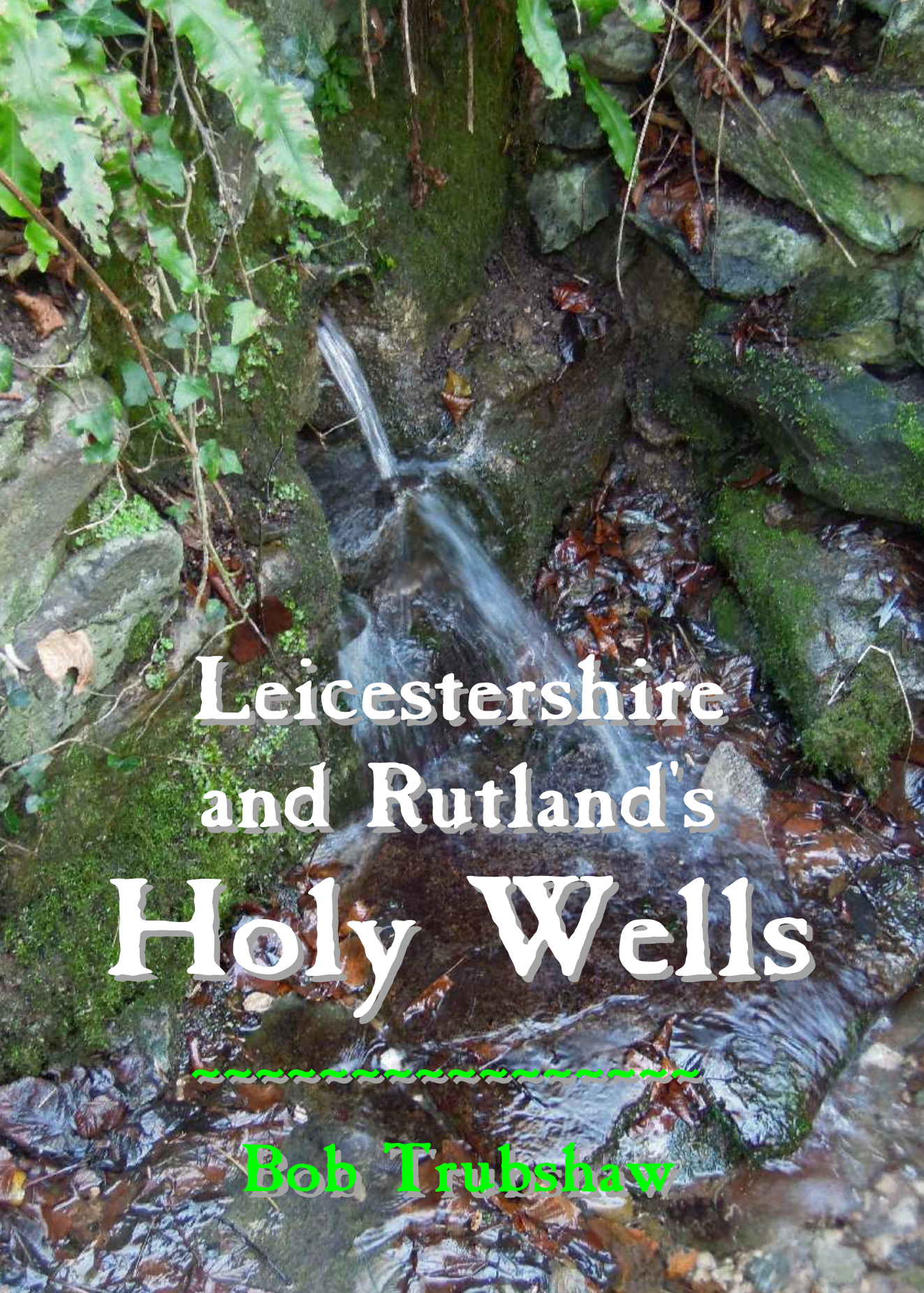

Leicestershire and Rutland's Holy Wells

Bob Trubshaw

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Cover: the discharge from the Whitwick well in December 2016.

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Heart of Albion

Syringa Cottage, Chapel Street
Orston, Nottingham, NG13 9NL

albion@indigogroup.co.uk

Visit our Web site: www.hoap.co.uk

Heart of Albion

Introduction

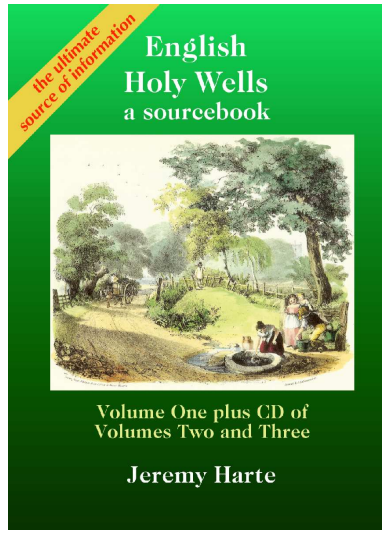
Wells and springs are an undervalued part of our heritage. They are frequently built over, culverted away, filled in with rubbish, allowed to become muddy pools, or simply overgrown. Yet, up until the introduction of piped water during the twentieth century, they were an everyday aspect of life – so much taken for granted that historical documents rarely record them.

Some wells still have names. Many wells had names that are now all-but lost. Among them are 'Holy Well', 'Lady Well' and dedications to often-obscure saints. Presumably before the Reformation the Lady Wells were known as 'Our Lady's Well', a common byname for the Virgin Mary. Some wells are holy simply because a chancel was built over them. This survey looks at all such examples in Leicestershire and Rutland.

Hydra-headed hydrological hagiographers

The study of the natural water sources of Leicestershire and Rutland has a substantial bibliography. John Nichols' *History and Antiqities of the County of Leicester* includes a few brief references to wells, as does Charles Billson's pioneering study of Leicestershire folklore (Billson 1895). But the first county-wide survey of Leicestershire's water sources was Lindsall Richardson's, published in 1931. He had the advantage of visiting villages before the installation of piped water so the wells were either still in use or part of local lore. The downside is that the locations are rarely described as the wells would be used on a daily basis so everyone knew where they were.

Interest in the folklore of wells that were either called 'Holy Well' or dedicated to saints (or simply reduced to 'Lady Well') was kick-started by Janet and Colin Bord's book *Sacred Waters: Holy Wells and Water Lore in Britain and Ireland* , published in 1985. The same year Roy Palmer published his study of folklore in Leicestershire and Rutland, including several references to wells. Unfortunately Palmer never provides any clues as to the sources of his information, greatly reducing the value of what is otherwise a substantial amount of research and collecting. So far as I am aware the first person to look specifically at the holy wells of Leicestershire was Clive Potter. He published his findings as an article in the same year, 1985.



Around 1988 and 1989 Clive accompanied me on a number of field trips to places of mutual interest in Leicestershire and Rutland, happily sharing his knowledge. I published a preliminary gazetteer of holy wells in Leicestershire and Rutland in 1990 (it was one of the first titles under the Heart of Albion imprint).

Just a few years later, in 1993 James Rattue published 'An inventory of ancient, holy and healing wells in Leicestershire' in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*. Sadly James did not contact me prior to publication so reproduced at least two errors in my 1990 booklet. In 1995 Rattue published a book-length study:- *The Living Stream: Holy wells in historical context*. In 2002 I expanded my list of Leicestershire and Rutland wells, incorporating Rattue's findings, and published on CD-ROM as *Interactive Little-known Leicestershire and Rutland*.

Around 2004 I commissioned a revised edition of *Sacred Waters* from Janet Bord. In the event she completely rewrote her material as two books:- *Cures and Curses: Ritual and cult at holy wells* (2006) and *Holy Wells in Britain: A guide* (2008). At more-or-less the same time I also agreed to publish Jeremy Harte's *English Holy Wells: A sourcebook,* which appeared as three volumes at the end of 2008. Yes, there is an overlap between *Holy Wells in Britain* and *English Holy Wells.* But the approach of the two author's is different, with Bord majoring in folklore while Harte restricts his scope to documentary evidence of the phrases 'holy well', 'Lady Well' and wells dedicated to saints.

Over fifteen years have passed since Harte's survey. Many more examples of 'holy well' in minor place-names have come to light in the volumes of Barrie Cox's survey of the place-names of Leicestershire published since 2008. In this survey I aim to include and discuss all the examples identified by previous researchers.

Following this Introduction are details of all holy wells and some 'folkloric' wells, arranged as a gazetteer in alphabetical order, combining Leicestershire and Rutland in the same list.

What is a 'holy well'?

As with all areas of Britain there are certain wells in Leicestershire and Rutland known as 'holy wells' and several dedicated to saints. Almost invariably such holy wells have reputations for clean water and never running dry. Presumably most such wells have been flowing continuously since the last Ice Age. Before piped water such a dependable source of unpolluted water would have been treated with reverence.

Holy wells are not, as many people might imagine, brick-lined shafts. Instead they are springs where water naturally flows out at the surface. The Old English word *wella* means 'spring' and predates by many centuries the practice of digging deep holes to access the water table. Indeed *wella* also includes the first few yards of water running away from the spring. I shall return to this when discussing Stockwells.

The adjective *heilag* is found in every Germanic language, derived from the noun *heil* 'omen, good fortune' which also yielded an adjective *heil* 'whole, healthy'. In its original sense, *heilag* must have had the senses of 'awesome, strong in power, knowing what is to come, fortunate'.

The Old English phrase *halig wella* is unique to English. No other European language has a term translating as 'holy well'. For example the Welsh *ffynnon* means only 'spring or well'. So while 'holy wells' are a widespread English phenomena the term is peculiarly English. In other countries wells were dedicated to saints or the Virgin Mary.

Tristan Hulse's detailed research into Welsh wells lead him to conclude that a 'holy well cult' was part of a whole 'package' of Mediterranean christianity adopted in the British Isles around the eighth century, of which the most noticeable feature was the veneration of numerous saints (Hulse pers. comm.).

Medicinal properties

As will be readily seen from Richardson's examples in Leicestershire and Rutland, there are many wells attributed with impressive medicinal properties. Various attempts have been made to explain this. The iron in chalybeate wells may have been beneficial. More subtle traces of minerals may have overcome vitamin deficiencies. Or maybe it was just that enough faith in the efficacy of such waters was able to overcome some psychosomatic symptoms. The more cynical have observed that, where the sufferer is required to fully immerse in the waters, the act of having a bath may have itself been beneficial in an age when vermin such as lice and fleas were rife and personal hygiene was a luxury.

Divination

The Cornish clergyman Richard Polwhele wrote in the first decade of the nineteenth century that:

> … from those streams and wells put into agitation after a ritual manner, our forefathers pretended to foretell future events. This mode of divination... has been transmitted from age to age in Cornwall; and still exists among the vulgar, who resort to some well of celebrity at particular seasons and there observe the bubbles that rise, and the state of the water, whether troubled or pure, on their throwing in pins or pebbles, and thence read their future destiny. (Cited in Morris 1989)

The name 'pin wells' or 'pinnal' clearly, therefore, derives from the offerings made. In many parts of the country there is clear evidence that the pins were bent before being thrown in, although no such pins are known to have been recovered from Leicestershire wells – but there is a village called Pinwall. Other pin wells in Leicestershire include Sheepy Magna, Church Gate Spring, Leicester and Our Lady's Well, Oakham.

The practice is known to have continued until at least the nineteenth century in some parts of England and Wales. Most typically the pins were bent in two places; this deliberate damage echoes the similar bending or breaking of swords, knives, coins and other metal items which is familiar from archaeological finds of all periods from iron age to medieval. Such ritually-damaged goods are usually deposited in water, such as ancient wells, or major rivers such as the Thames, where 'mudlarks' have recovered a wide selection of such items. The best explanation (Merrifield 1987) is that an inanimate object was thereby 'killed' and its normal use transferred to spiritual purposes.

Pin wells are not direct evidence of holy wells. But they are evidence of a popular worldview that associated sources of water with 'numinosity' and access to 'divine' information.

Liminal locations

Wells are often found in, or closely adjacent to, churches and other religious establishments. This could be for simple practical needs such as providing the water for baptism, ritual ablutions and cleansing of the vessels used for the Eucharist. Add to that early priests lived in their churches and needed water for day-to-day living. At least four wells in Leicestershire (Hathern,

Kings Norton, Waltham on the Wolds and Wymeswold) are in the walls of churchyards, while a 'Church Well' at Wistow is mentioned in 1609.

Some seventh century churches seem to have been erected as baptismal chapels (Petts 2003: 99–101) and all early churches must have been close to reliable water sources. Whitwell and Whitwick are part of a national trend for early single-cell churches to be erected to the immediate west of a spring, only for the spring to be 'buried' when the fashion for erecting chancels required the building to be extended over the water source.

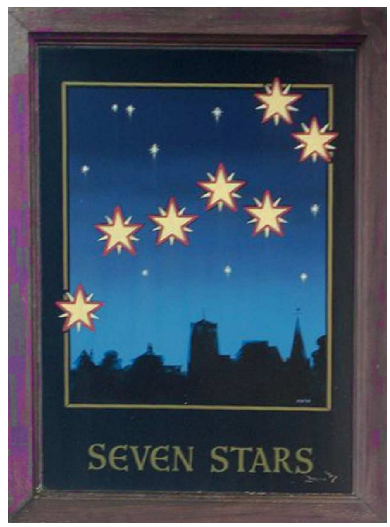
All these 'practical arrangements' do not, however, mean that a church was built to christianise an already sacred watery site. So far no evidence has been discovered to support that notion, although it is a widely-believed 'myth'.

Cross wells

Barrie Cox notes two instances of 'Cross Well' in Leicestershire, at Barkby and Market Bosworth plus one in Rutland, at Barrowden (Cox 1994: 237; 2004: 26; 2014: 172). The crosses are likely to have been removed or destroyed during the mid-sixteenth century.

Seven Wells

Keith Briggs considers that Seven Wells 'belong to a continuous tradition starting from pre-Christian sacred springs with associated superstitions. Early Christianity first tried to suppress these superstitions and, when this failed, adopted the names with a new interpretation.' (Briggs 2007). There are also numerous examples of 'Seven Barrows' – which may have more than seven surviving burial mounds. Throughout the country are pubs named after the Seven Stars. This is most likely a reference to the constellation known variously as the Plough, Big Dipper or Charles' Wain. However some have suggested that it refers to the 'Seven Sisters', an asterism also known as the Pleiades (after the invention of telescopes the Pleiades were revealed to have far more than seven stars). Seven is a prime number and (unlike three and five, also primes) not a factor in decimal, duodecimal or vigesimal (base 20) traditional number systems. So seven is



more 'odd' than most odd numbers, perhaps prompting a sense of something 'extramundane'.

Rather appropriately Cox lists seven examples of Seven Wells in Leicestershire (albeit some with very variant spellings) and considers them to be a sub-category of sacred springs. In chronological order of surviving records they are Kirkby Mallory, Great Bowden, Lockington, Ashby Parva, Orton on the Hill, Lubenham and Coleorton (Cox 2019: 57).

Stockwells

Numerous wells in Leicestershire were known as Stockwells. This is unlikely to derive from a place where livestock were watered as the term 'livestock' (in the sense of 'animals kept for use or profit') is not attested until the 1520s.

The main sense of Old English *stocc* is 'stump, wooden post, stake; trunk of a living tree; log' with the secondary sense of 'pillory' (usually used in the plural, 'stocks'). It remains part of the expression 'lock, stock and barrel' i.e. the three main parts of a gun, with the stock being the wooden part. Bearing in mind that Old English *wella* was not only the spring but also the water running off then a *stocc wella* would seem to be where a log bridge straddled the run-off (Cox 2004).

Known Stockwells in Leicestershire include Beeby, Billesdon, Drayton, Burton Lazars, Frisby, Hinckley (coincidentally near the punishment stocks), Houghton, Little Bowden, Nevill Holt, Saddington and Wymeswold (Cox 2009: 373). Knighton, a suburb of Leicester, also has a Stockwell Road. Rutland had a Stockwell in Caldecot.

The Beeby Stockwell is also referred to as a holy well and is close to the church. The Wymeswold Stockwell issued from the side of the churchyard mound (but has now been culverted) and may formerly have been dedicated to St Wulfstan. If nothing else this suggests that wells once thought of as 'holy wells' become renamed, presumably after the Reformation.

Gazetteer

Ab Kettleby

One of the few surviving well structures in Leicestershire, a truncated stone pyramid topped by a stone basin. Presumably the basin was once what the water flowed into. Around 1990 a metal grating was inserted over the discharge. Although close to the village pond, the water does not flow into the pond but instead continues southward. According to Palmer (1985) this was a holy well and the water was believed to be good for rheumatism. However no older references to this being a holy well have been found.

To find the well, turn left off the main road in the village into Church Lane. The pond is on your right, the well to your left. NGR SK724229

Arnesby

In a list of place-name elements Cox includes a 'Holowell Field' in Arnesby. However this is absent from his detailed survey of field-names in the parish

Left: *Ab Kettleby well in 1989.* Right: *the same well in 2008.*

(although a surprising variety of other well names are recorded) (Cox 2011: 5–8; 265). Possibly the 'Armitage field' (from 'hermitage') recorded between 1673 and 1708 was the location of the putative 'holy well'. However the origin of 'Holowell' is most likely from 'well in the hollow' (compare Holwell below).

Ashby de la Zouch

A holy well

> … is recorded in the field-name Holly Well, 1735 (Rattue 1993). Nichols (1795–1815: 3ii.615) says that 'Ashby is well watered with springs, by the name of… Holywell', and Richardson (1931: 101) calls it 'a good spring (30,000 to 35,000 gallons a day, not now used)… half-a-mile NNW of the Church'. (Harte 2008; cf. Cox 2016: 8)

Slightly over 1 km to the west-north-west [sic] of St Helen's church is a Holywell House Hotel. Cox also cites a field-name *Halywell* in the daughter settlement of Prestop (Cox 2016: 17). Prestop was 1.5 km west-north-west of the parish church (it is now a modern housing development known as Annswell). Just possibly Holywell House Hotel was once within the bounds of Prestop.

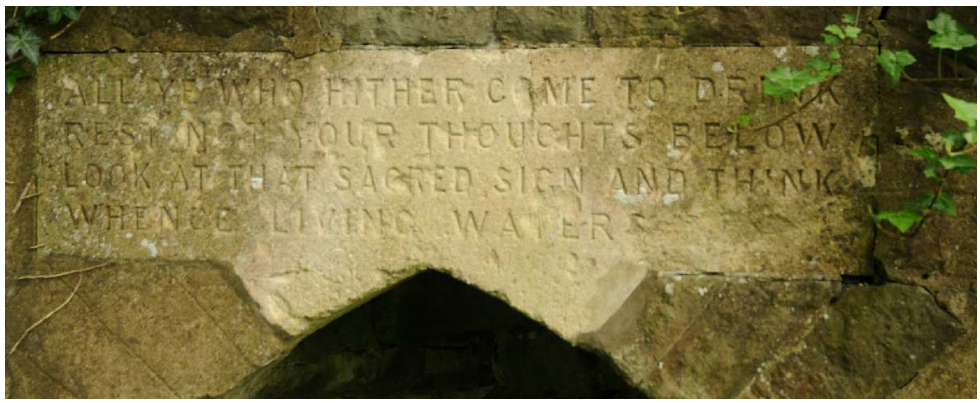
A Holywell Farm is shown on modern OS maps about 1km further north of Prestop and nearly 2 km north-west of the parish church.

Identifying the names of wells in Ashby is tricky. Nichols refers to Perring's Well. Other sources refer to Lyon's Well . Near the parish boundary is Ann Well (NGR SK33951815); this may be a corruption of St Ann's Well although Rattue (1993) states that all known references to this well are modern.

If Richardson is correct about 'half-a-mile NNW' (though I suspect this is an error for 'WNW') then there seems to have been at least three holy wells in or near Ashby and plausibly an additional holy well (dedicated to St Ann) at Prestop.

Ashwell

Palmer (1985: 30–1) refers to 'the so-called Wishing Well… It has also been referred to in the past as the Holy Well'. But for once this 'really is' a holy well. Because it has a scriptural inscription. Which reads:



All ye who hither come to drink
Rest not your thoughts below
Look at that sacred sign and think
Whence living water[s flow]

The inscribed stone has clearly been inserted later into the 'dog kennel' style well house (probably of the late eighteenth century). The cross on the roof was replaced in 2000 as the previous cross had broken off and been taken away (around 1990 R.W. Morrell knew the location but he has since died).

Ashwell's eponymous well in June 2009.

This inscription is closely matched by the words on a conduit-head at nearby Greetham. This reads:

> All ye who hither come to drink
> Rest not your thoughts below
> Remember Jacob's Well and think
> Whence living waters flow.

Jacobs Well is a modern Protestant spring-name, first recorded in 1674, coined in allusion to *John* 4: 1–14:

> When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that
> Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,
> (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)
> He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.
> And he must needs go through Samaria.
> Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar,
> near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.
> **Now Jacob's well was there.** Jesus therefore, being wearied with
> his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.
>
> There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith
> unto her, Give me to drink.
> (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)
> Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou,
> being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?
> for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.
> Jesus answered and said unto her, **If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.**
> The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with,
> and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living
> water?
> Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well,
> and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?
> Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this
> water shall thirst again:
> **But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst;** but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a
> well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Greetham's conduit house in November 1988. At that time there was still an iron cistern at the back; this has since been removed.

Greetham's conduit house was designed in the High Gothic style fashionable around 1880, just when the Scripture Movement was underway. My guess – and it can be no more – is that the residents of Ashwell were miffed that Greetham's conduit looked better than their 'holy well' so commissioned the inscription, presumably also in the 1880s.

Aylestone

> The Sale Plan of the Aylestone estate, 1869 (Dare 1924: 74) includes Holywell Farm. According to Dare, 'a persistent local tradition speaks of a "Holy Well", somewhere along the "cut" to Glen'. (Harte 2008)

The Holy Well (NGR SK574006) is now lost. Also gone is a well on the village green, about 250 yards west of St Andrew's church (NGR SK572010), as the green has been built over.

Barrowden

The field name *hallewellescros* was recorded about 1275 (Cox 1994: 237).

Beeby

In 1804 this well – known as both the Stockwell and the Holy Well – was depicted as a normal well-house with a pitched roof. However this was replaced by a stone pyramid in 1855 (and restored in 1953). The pump presumably dates from 1855; it would be there to prevent animals from

Left: *Beeby well in the late eighteenth century as shown in Nicholas.*

Below: *Beeby well in 1988.*

fouling the water. Richardson (1931) states it produced 'excellent mineral waters' which were good for stomach disorders. This well is at the roadside just north of the church (NGR SK664084).

An inscription on the stone cover, part of the 1855 structure, read:

> In Summer's heat and Winter's cold
> One constant temperature I hold
> When Brooks and Wells and Rivers dry
> I always yield a full Supply
> My Neighbours say, I'm often told,
> I'm more than worth my weight in gold.
> (Palmer 2002:36)

Blackfordby

Blackfordby Spring still survives. It is situated near the chapel in the lower part of the village (NGR SK331182), which is at the bottom of the hill some 200 yards south-west of the church. This may be the well once known as St Margaret's Well.

There is a substantial flow, probably over five gallons a minute when I visited in September 1989. According to Richardson [1931] it has never been known to fail and, until piped water was introduced, it was used by practically the whole village.

Burrough on the Hill

A 'Holy Well Brook' is suggested by the field-name *Haliwell Broc*, recorded 1327x77 (Cox 2002: 225).

Blaston

A holy well is shown on old maps to the east of the village (NGR SK820956) although Rattue [1993] gives the location as 823953, close to the site of the Augustinian Priory of St Mary, now Priory Farm. This well is called Our Lady's Well by Nichols.

Burrough on the Hill

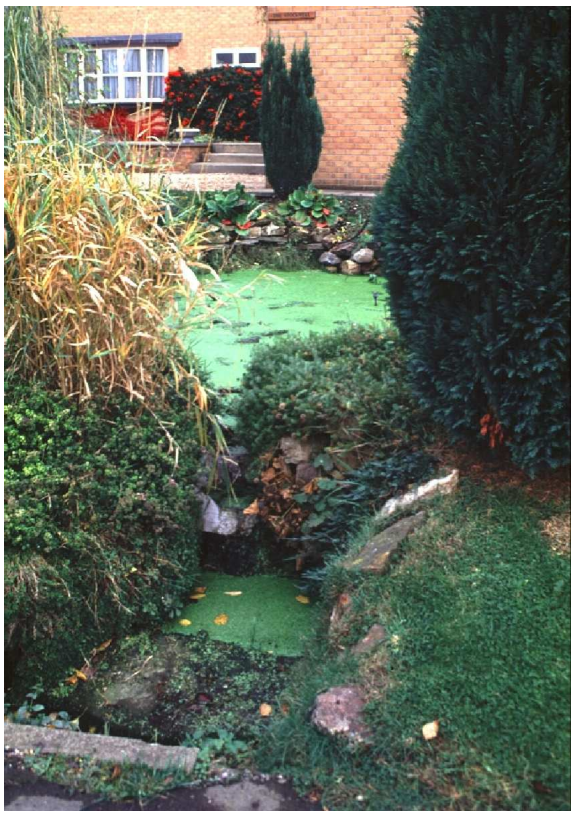
Cox (2002: 235) notes a reference in about 1430 to *haliwell broc,* 'holy well brook'.

Burton Lazars

> 'Holy Well. By the east side of the road immediately south of Burton Lazars village is a neglected brick-sided pond… Into it discharges a small spring'. (Richardson 1931: 85)

On some early OS maps it is described as a Holy Well or St Ann's Well. In 1561 there was a reference to an 'Annwell Crosse' (Cox 2002:65). Various writers have confused this well with a well (now lost) associated with the site of the Preceptory to the west of the village. This confusion seems to have originated with the promotion of a 'spa well' at Burton Lazars which, when it was discovered in 1760, was identified with traditions of 'a bath, which, during the existence of the hospital… was in high repute' (Nichols 1795–1815: 2i.269; Harte 2008).

As if this wasn't confusing enough, a separate well was known as the Stockwell. This had been adapted to a garden pond before 1991.



The Stockwell at Burton Lazars in December 1991.

Church Langton

The field-name St Anne's Well is recorded in 1638 (Rattue 1993).

> 'About a quarter of a mile North of the church, near the public road leading towards Staunton Wyvile, is an excellent well, or spring, called St Anne's or Saddington's Well, which in dry seasons has frequently been found highly serviceable… At the time of the inclosure, this spring was carefully preserved' (Nichols 1795–1815: 2.659).

It appears as St Ann's Well on the 1886 OS at NGR SP728 938.

In the late 1980s a small and ruinous stone structure could be made out at the roadside. Since then the stones have seemingly been removed and the well is nothing more than a muddy patch.

Claybrook Parva

In my 1990 booklet I state that 'near High Cross was a Holy Well or Chapel Well or Cawdel Well' but did not record the source. According to Rattue (1993) a holy well is shown on a tithe map of 1843 (NGR SK487877); in 1843 this was part of Wibtoft (since 1974 in Warwickshire).

Cranoe

> 'Upon the side of the road leading from Hallaton to Leicester, and very near the village, is… Holy Well or our Lady's Well. The water is excellent and is much esteemed by the inhabitants; the spring is a most abundant one, supplying the whole parish with water during the driest summers' (Hill 1867: 174 cited in Harte 2008).

Rattue (1993) gives the location as NGR SK761951.

'Holiewell furlong' was recorded in 1606 (Cox 2009: 33).

Croxton Kerrial

Harte (2008) states:

> The foundation charter of Croxton Abbey by William Parcarius de Lions, 1162 (Dugdale 1817–30: 6ii.877) refers to 'the heath which he had in the scrub land beyond the park; and in all that

scrub land around the spring called Haliwelle; and in all the heathland'. It is recorded in the field-name *Haliwell*, 1246, 1216x72 (Cox 2002: 107).

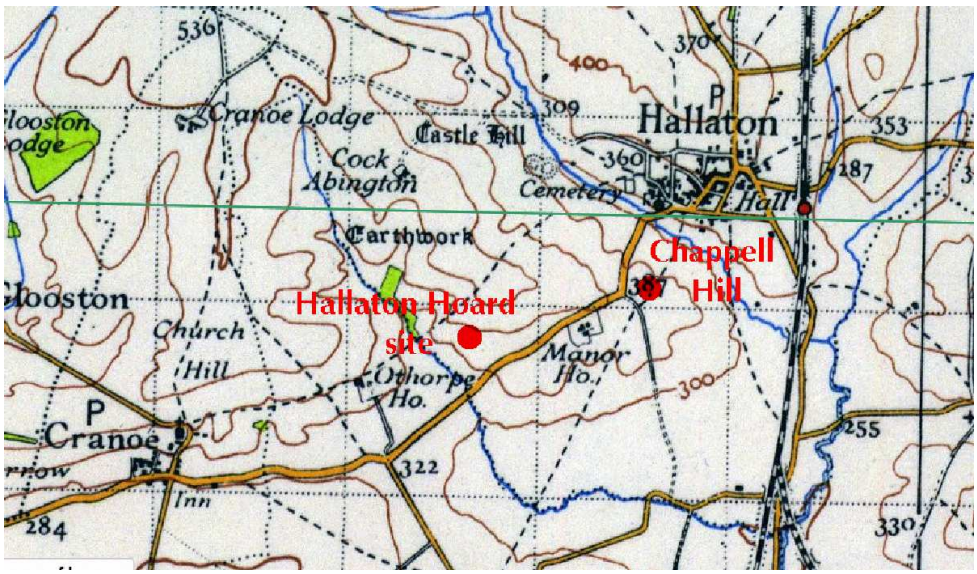
East Norton

There was a Holliwell where East Norton parish boundary meets with those of Tugby, Loddington and Skeffington (NGR SK774015). The name is probably a corruption of 'hollow well' rather than 'holy well' (Cox 2004: 178–9).

Hallaton

The field-name St Morells Well is recorded in 1606 (Morison and Daisley 2000: 197, 215, with map). St Morel (Maurille or Maurilius) was an early bishop of Angers.

St Morells Well is probably the *Stowe Welle* mentioned in 1317; a field nearby is Chappell Hill (recorded in 1606). In recent years a medieval chapel has been partially excavated at 'Chappell Hill'. The location is exactly where the annual 'Bottle Kicking' custom kicks off each Easter Monday. A large Iron Age enclosure with ritual deposits ('the Hallaton Hoards') and evidence of large-scale feasting has been excavated about a kilometer to the south-west.



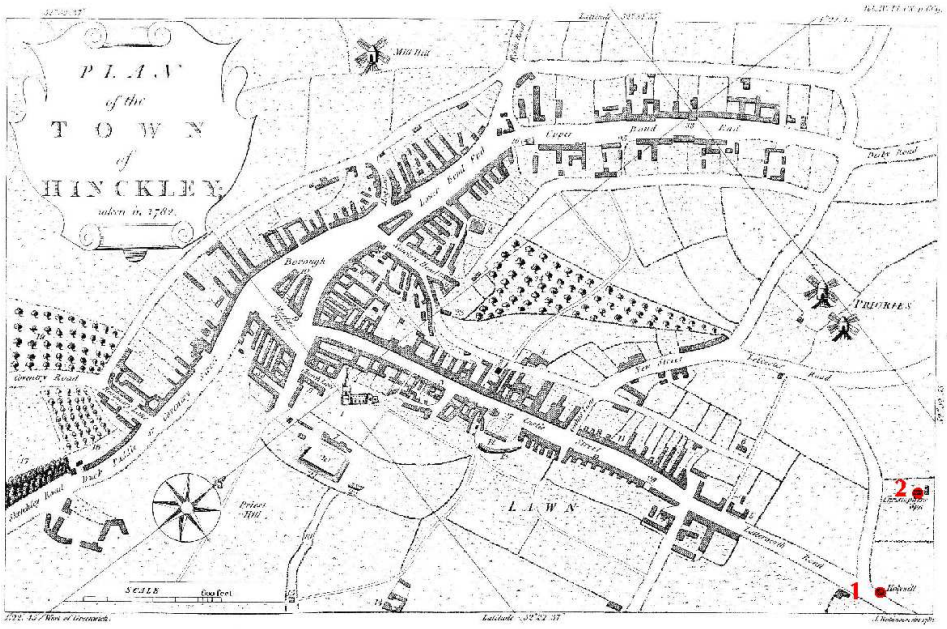
Hinckley

> [John] Floyer (1702: 25) says that 'Marle-waters taste smooth, and have a little Stypticity, such as the excellent Spring, called Holywell, near Hinckley'. It appears in Nichols (1795–1815: 4ii.765) as 'a spring called The Holy Well, originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and once known by the name of Our Lady's Well, the water of which is exquisitely clear and good. The Holy Well having been dried up by digging for gravel, a new well was opened on the opposite [north] side of the road, over which was placed a neat brick pillar, inscribed "Rebuilt 1757" '.
> (Harte 2008)

John Nichols includes a map with the well marked (Nichols 1782 plate 110, facing page 669).

A poster put up in 1842 states that 'A Meeting Of The Inhabitants Of Hinckley Will Be Held Near The Holy Well' to protest at the Poor Rates (Palmer 1985: 28–9) .

Richardson was told that 'a large conical brick pump stood on the site until about thirty-five years ago, but now nothing is to be seen' (Richardson (1931: 110).



Hinckley circa *1782 with (1) the Holywell (2) Christopher Spa.*

The Holy Well Inn in 1991.

The name is preserved in a nearby pub, The Holy Well Inn. The earliest surviving reference to this inn name is 1835 (Cox 2014: 123).

Holwell

There is a splendid chalybeate spring 'lost' in steep woodland to the side of the road to the west of Holwell village. At one time, according to Roy Palmer, there was a stone surround and seat. There was no evidence of these in February 1989.

It is known as 'Holwell Mouth' and is the source of the River Smite which flows northwards to join the Devon north of Bottesford and then flow into the Trent at Newark. This means it is the point in the landscape where the Vale of Belvoir starts and ends.

However, splendid as this is, and despite frequent confusion, it is *not* a holy well. The origin of the name is 'hollow well', in the sense of 'a well in a hollow'.

Holwell Mouth in February 1989.

Hungarton

A *Ladywell* is recorded 1467x84 (Cox 2004: 146) and later by Nichols. The possible locations could be NGR SK691054 or 689078 or 688086 according to Rattue (1993).

Kings Norton

There are no records of this well being called a holy well, nor of it being dedicated to a saint. But the location in the churchyard wall must have given it a nuance of numinosity, at least in some people's minds. In Leicestershire there are other wells and troughs on the boundaries of churchyards at Hathern, Waltham on the Wolds and Wymeswold. Only at Wymeswold is there a possibility of the well having once been dedicated to a saint.

The well at Kings Norton is inserted into an arched recess in the west wall of the churchyard. Although obviously rebuilt in recent years, the large stone basin (three feet deep by five feet wide) still exists. This basin has always been full at the time of my visits, although never any perceptible flow of water from the feed pipe.

Kings Norton.

Kirby Bellars

A holy well was recorded during the mid-thirteenth century in the field-name *Haliwell.* (Cox 2004: 90)

Before the Reformation a Canons Regular of Saint Augustine had a small priory at Kirby Bellars (probably located to immediate north of the parish church).

Leicester

St Augustine's Well

St Augustine's Well is recorded 1666/7 (Cox 1998: 229).

> A footbridge called Bow-Bridge ran from the Friary near the West Bridge, over a back water of the Soar, to the garden called Bow Church Yard 'for the use of the friers to a constant spring of limpid water, on the paved road side, a few paces distant, called St Austin's Well (Bow-bridge was repaired by the corporation in 1688… and St Austin's well for £2 14s 8d), still overflowing with contribution to the back water… the well is three quarters of a yard broad, and the same in length within its inclosure, the depth of its water from the lip or back-edging on the earth, where it commonly overflows, is half a yard. It is covered with a mill-stone, and enclosed with stone and brick on three sides; that towards Bow-bridge and the town is open. (Since this was written, it has been entirely destroyed, occasioned by widening the road)' (Nichols 1795–1815: 1ii.301, 434).
>
> 'Leicestriensis' says (1852) that 'the well is now covered and enclosed; but within the memory of persons still living it was in the state… described by Nichols… "Good for sore eyes"… even since the enclosure of the well, many applications for water from the pump erected in the adjoining ground have, I know, been made… On making some enquiries a few years ago of "the oldest inhabitant", he… exclaimed "Oh! you mean *Tostings's* Well!"'. (Harte 2008)

St Sepulchre's Well

> The rental of the chantry of Corpus Christi, 1458 (*Records of Leicester* 1899–1974: 2.266) records payment *de Joh. Paulmer pro crofto juxta fontem S. Sepulchri.* It is recorded as *Pulchre*

> *Well*, 1476 (*Records of Leicester* 1899–1974: 2.154) and appears in later sources as 'the spring at St James Chapell' 1573, 'the spring & well in the Southe gate' 1600, 'the hermitage well' 1638, and 'the Chappell Well' 1689, 1718 (Cox 1998: 229). 'Leicestriensis' (1852) calls it St James's Well. A nearby chapel or hermitage was dedicated to St Sepulchre; the chapel of St James survived after that of St Sepulchre was demolished. Billson (1895: 20) notes it as 'a holy well close to the old pond at the corner of Infirmary Square. This well had a never-failing supply of fresh water, until the deep drainage of the town diverted it from its original outlet'. (Harte 2008)

Loughborough

To the west of the town, between the university campus and the M1 motorway is Holywell Wood and 'Holywell Hall'. However the early forms are 'holy well *haw*' – the enclosure around a holy well (Cox 2016: 146).

> A grant by Robert de Jort to Garendon Abbey, 1180 (Potter 1842: 189) states that he has given *heremitorium de Halliwellhaga*. The *Testa de Nevill*, 13th century (*Testa* 1807: 88) records 'a dairy, with a small wood, called Haliwelle Hawe'. 'The excellent spring is yet preserved', according to Nichols (1795–1815: 3i.122). (Harte 2008)

The well is associated with an interesting legend of a young lady from Groby Castle who, in order to escape the attentions of one of the Comyn family, popularly thought of at that time as giants, fled from the castle in bad weather intending to seek refuge at Grace Dieu Priory. To avoid detection she went by a circuitous route but became exhausted and collapsed, or perhaps died. Her body was discovered by a monk from the Holywell Haw hermitage and, in the words of this extract from T.R. Potter's lengthy poem published in 1842:~

> The sun had not glinted on Beacon Hill
> Ere the Hermit of Holy Well
> Went forth to pray, as his wont each day,
> At the Cross in Fayre-oke dell.
> Ten steps had he gone from the green grassy mound
> Still hemming the Holy Well Haw,
> When, stretched on the gras by the path he must pass
> A statue-like form he saw!
> The hermit upraised the stiffened form,
> And he bore to the Holy Well;

Three Paters or more he muttered o'er
And he filled his scallop shell.
He sprinkled the lumph on the Maiden's face
And he knelt and he prayed at her side –
Not a minute's space had he gazed on her face
Ere signs of life he spied.
(Potter 1842: 189–91)

The girl later married and made a pilgrimage to the spring after the wedding, accompanied by her husband. In the poem the girl is stated to be Agnes, a daughter of Lord Ferrers and her husband Edward Grey. In fact it was Elizabeth Ferrers who married Sir Edward Grey, in 1446.

There are some similarities between this legend and that associated with the Running Well in Essex.

Potter also states the well gave its name to Holywell Dyke, an eighteenth-century boundary mark for Charnwood Forest (Potter 1842: 18).

Until the late 1980s the well was used as a source of water for both human and animal consumption. In December 1989 the water flowed into an elliptical stone basin measuring about eight feet by three feet, with a corrugated iron roof over. By August 2001 the corrugated iron had been removed and the water was inaccessible.

The water is chalybeate and rather cold. Its flow is said to be a constant 20,000 imperial gallons (over 90,000 litres) per day. The water has been credited with impressive medicinal properties.

The spring-name Holy Well, house-name Holywell Hall and field-name Holywell Wood all appear on the 1885 OS at NGR 507180. The house and

Holywell Hall in 1989 or 1990.

Holywell Haw well

Top: *December 1989 (the well is to the left)*

Centre *October 1990.*

Bottom: *August 2001.*

spring are still extant, although in overly-close proximity to a science park built in the early 1990s. Excavations ahead of the development revealed the foundations of a substantial medieval wall near to the well.

The farmhouse retains a front door (and probably other structural features) from a fifteenth-century building built to a cross-passage plan. One of the barns associated with the farm incorporates 1½ bays of medieval timber-framings, consisting of 2 cruck trusses with collar and tie beams, ridge beam, purlins and wind braces. See historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1361138 and historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1320128 for further details.

Lubenham

> 'A chalybeate spring in the grounds [of Papillon Hall] used to be known as St Mary's Well' (Lloyd 1977: 6). This would apparently be the spring 'within a few yards of the Welland… in a stone cistern, formerly in some repute for weak eyes' mentioned by Nichols (1795–1815: 2.708), who does not however give it a name. Papillon Hall was also the home of the 'Everlasting Well', David Papillon's magic well, which was supposed to possess great medicinal virtue' (Lloyd 1977: 20), unless this is another name for the same site. (Harte 2008)

Lutterworth

Jeremy Harte wrote an excellent account of St John's Well:~

> A contributor to Nichols' *History* says that 'in the neighbourhood of Lutterworth is a petrifying spring called St John's well, the water of which is exceeding cold, and so strongly impregnated with petrifying qualities, that in a very little time it is said to convert wood and several other substances into stone' (Nichols 1795–1815: 4i.257). But Nichols himself (4i.257) gives the name to a different site: 'St John's Well is in the town, opposite to the last house, on the left hand side towards London. It is a soft water, and used for drinking'.
>
> 'Tradition also says, that, at the time of [the exhumation or burning of John Wycliffe's bones], one person who staid, after the rest had left his grave, in order to search as strictly after the least bit of bone… having found one, ran hastily to his companions with it in a triumphant manner; but, before he

reached them, fell down, and dashed his brains out; and from the very place where he fell immediately gushed out a spring of water, which to this day is called St John's Well' (Nichols 1795–1815: 4i.297). A later version of the legend (in Dyson 1913: 46) tells how this bone fell from the bier and was later dug out, and how a spring issued from the place.

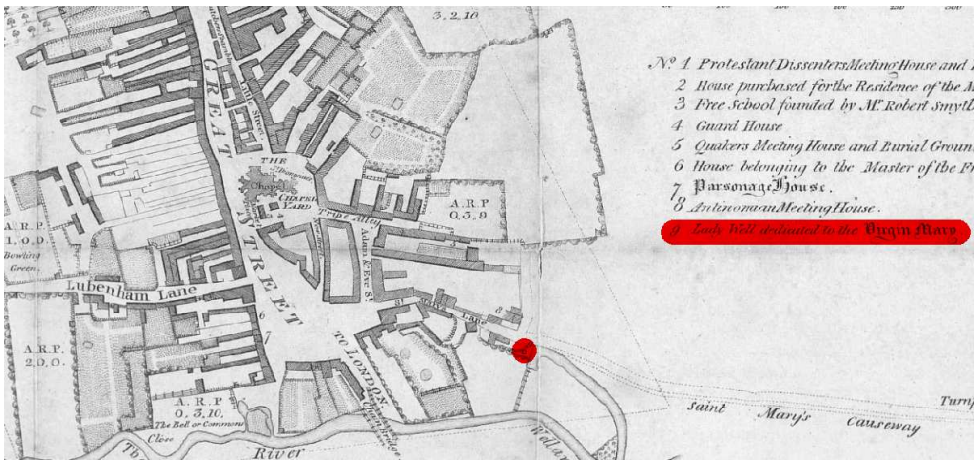
It would be ironic if this well was really named after the reforming cleric and opponent of pilgrimages. However, a hospital in the town was dedicated to St John the Baptist, so the dedication may derive from this source instead.

Gaspard Bauhin in his *Pinax Theatri Botanici*, 1623 (Nichols *op. cit.* 4i.257) states that *ibi sunt aquae petrificantes*, and a note of 1695 by Edmund Gough (Camden 1695: 443) refers to 'Lutterworth… near which is a spring of water so very cold, that in a little time it converts straws and sticks into stone'. Neither author identifies this petrifying spring as St John's Well, but as Gough mentions it just before describing the exhumation of John Wycliffe from Lutterworth churchyard as a heretic, later readers may have confounded the sites. It seems clear that St John's Well and the petrifying well were two separate sites.

'The power to cure all manner of diseases, especially where the eyesight was affected, was attributed to this water, and the actual stone basin which received it is believed still to exist behind the brick wall which was built in front of it some sixty years ago. The spring itself was tapped a few years ago in excavating for a sewer, and was so strong that it had to be conveyed into the common drain' (Dyson 1913: 47). According to Palmer (1985: 31) it 'still flows in the grounds of a house called The Springs which today stands on the site, at the bottom of Lutterworth on the London Road'.
(Harte 2008)

Manton

A Holywell Gutter, Crosswell Gutter and Crosswell Spring are all recorded in 1774 (Cox 1994: 197). Seemingly the same well was known as both Holywell and Crosswell.



Above: *Detail of Samuel Turner's 1776 map of Market Harborough.*
Left: *The approximate location of St Mary's Well (from Google StreetView dated September 2023).*

Market Harborough

A 1776 map of Market Harborough by Samuel Turner (reproduced in Nichols 1795–1815: 3 pl.152) features 'Lady Well dedicated to the Virgin Mary'. The mother church of the settlement was St Mary in Arden, and the well was sited at the junction with St Mary's Road.

By the nineteenth century it was known as both St Mary's Well and Lady Well. By 1886 the water was considered unfit for drinking. It has now been built over.

Measham

Holywell Close is mentioned in a deed of 1823 (Cox 2016: 266).

Nailstone

Nichols refers to a Lady Well and the field-name Lady Well appears on a 1841 map (NGR SK404065) (Rattue 1993).

Nevill Holt

> 'There is still a deep well, of excellent water, walled below the surface, about 100 yards NWN from the present house (supplying it with water), which is called Our Lady's Well'. (Nichols 1795–1815: 2.510)

Nevill Holt was known as Bradley at the time a priory of Augustinian canons was founded *circa* 1200. The priory was dedicated to St Mary (Cox 2009: 202–4).

The holy well was about 150 yards from the site of Bradley Priory (now Priory Farm) and is referred to as both St Mary's Well and Our Lady's Well.

Beware of confusion! In 1728 a farmer, attempting to construct a pond, struck medicinal water. Lady Miglionucci built an arch over the site and the water was promoted as a spa. The supply was very small, according to Nichols 'only a hogshead [usually about 50 imperial gallons or approx. 250 litres] of water in 24 hours and sometimes less in a great drought.' The building, hidden in a larch wood that forms the eastern part of Holt Wood, was decayed in the 1920s but the ruins allegedly still existed around 1980 (NGR SK823939). I have never been able to locate such ruins.

Oakham

Our Lady's Well was once famed for curing sore eyes – providing that a pin was thrown in first. In 1291 indulgences could be obtained by visiting Oakham Church during its patronal festival and, for a price, joining a pilgrimage to Our Lady's Well. In 1881 it was visited by the future Queen Alexandra. The well is to the north-east of the town, in a somewhat overgrown area between the Cottesmore road and a modern housing estate (NGR SK:866095). (Cox 1994: 119)

There is also reference to a Chrisswell (or Christ's Well?) which was reputed to have curative water; this has not been located.

Ratby

> 'Not far from the encampment [of Bury Camp] is a place called Holywell; the water antiscorbutic' (Nichols 1795–1815: 4ii.879).

Richardson describes it as 'a good spring, "never been known to freeze"… has been piped into a now well-kept pond in the grounds of Holy Well House' (Richardson 1931: 72; cf. Cox 2014: 222).

The holy well is at Holywell Farm (NGR SK502056) and still exists, with the water now piped into a pond.

Rothley

Cox notes a *Halywelsyk* in 1487 (Cox 2016: 190). This is presumably an alternative name for the well which gives its name to Wellsic Lane. This was known as 'Wellesykelane' in 1421 (with later variant spellings) (Cox 2016: 187).

Wellsic Lane is on the western site of the town green. Presumably water from the well flowed away south to the Rothley Brook along a 'syke'. A little further to the west is the Templar Preceptory (now a hotel) so this well may have been dedicated to a saint or simply seemed holy by association with the Preceptory

Ryhall

Jeremy Harte's survey of English holy wells provides no reliable instances in Rutland. However, according to folk traditions, there was once a St Tibbas's well and a St Eabba's Well in Ryhall.

These wells originate with Charles Billson (1895: 21–2) who cited Stukeley's *Diaries and Letters* [vol.3 167–70] as quoted in *Leicestershire Notes and Queries* vol.2 pp208 and 259 and Hope 1893: 127–8).

Roy Palmer paraphrased Billson thus:~

> St Tibba, neice of King Penda of Mercia, and her cousin, St Eabba, are said to have lived at Ryhall in the seventh century. At first they were 'wild hunting girls', but later became holy hermits. The present church at Ryhall is supposed to have been built over the cell of St Tibba, who, because o of her early love of the chase, is the patroness of falconers and wildfowlers. She was buried at Ryhall, but in 936 her body was transferred to Peterborough. A tradition which has lived for more than 1,000 years in the village is that she used to walk up a hill to wash at the spring which is named after her. The spring in turn gave its name to the hill, but over the years this became garbled, first to Tibb's-well-hill, then to Stibbal's-well-hill. On the brow of this hill, near the spring, is Halegreen (the first syllable of which may signify 'healthy'), where gatherings in honour of St Tibba were once held on 14 December – the day of her translation, and perhaps more congenial to wildfowlers than that of her official feast, 6 March.

> St Tibba's cousin, St Eabba, also had her spring, near the River Gwash. St Eabba's Well is now called Shepherd Jacob's Well. The ford on the river nearby, originally St-Eabba's-well-ford, is now Stableford, or rather Stableford Bridge, since the ford is no longer used.
> (Palmer 2002: 35–6)

As 'folk etymologies' go I've encountered plenty worse. Let's start unpicking Palmer's version. Halegreen is not attested before 1979 so Old Scandinavian *heill* seems unlikely to be the origin. The *Victoria County History* of 1935 has 'Stablesford Bridge' (note the medial 's'). Cox dismisses the 'popular etymology' of St Eabba's well (Cox 1994:163). Instead he suggests that this was once a *stapol ford* – a ford over the River Gwash marked by a large post that may have been carved as a pre-conversion icon. Compare the settlement name Stapleford near Melton Mowbray, and other examples in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. Note that when Cox was preparing the Rutland volume in the early 1990s *stapols* were thought only to be large posts; recognition that they were also icons came later.

Cox also mentions an *Upper Wye Sike* (1677) and *Wysike Close* and *Wysike furlong* (1799) (Cox 1994: 165). He is uncertain of the first element and tentatively suggests Old English *wigga* 'beetle' (here presumably water beetle). However *Wy(e)* in place-names is often the later spelling of Old English *weoh* or *wig* 'shrine or idol'. There is a Wyfordby near Melton Mowbray and several Weefords and Wyfords elsewhere in England. *Weohs* are thought to be smaller than *stapols*. But there must have been some ambiguity. Just possibly there was a syke ('ditch') near a *weoh* which may or may not have been the same as a *stapol* near the ford.

Have negated the existence of St Eabba, Cox attests to the reality of St Tibba, although noting that the earliest mention of 'Tibba's Well' is 1935 in the *VCH*. *Tibael Hill* and *Tipple Hill Furlong* are the seventeenth and eighteenth century forms (Cox 1994: 164). This hill seems to be the same as 'How (or

A photograph in Roy Palmer's 1985 book captioned 'The site of Tibba's Well, near Ryhall.'

Hoe) Bridge Meadow' which seemingly derives from Old Scandinavian *haugr* 'mound'. Previous research by myself has suggested (though certainly not proven) that such mounds near boundaries (and Ryhall is right on the county boundary with Lincolnshire) could have been pre-conversion 'boundary shrines'. So although Tibba had a hill named after her, the available evidence on suggests she had a well named after her sometime not too long before 1935.

Seagrave

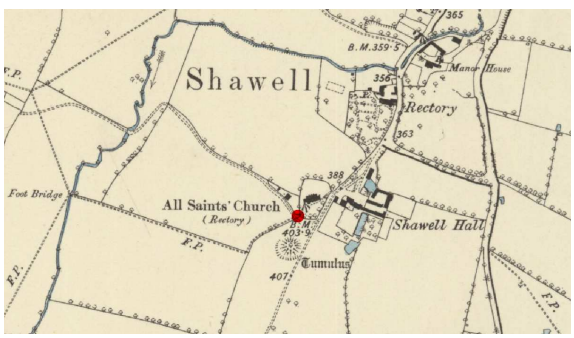
Haliwell is recorded as a field-name in the mid-thirteenth century. At the same time there is a reference to a possible 'priest well syke'. (Cox 2004: 211; 213).

Furthermore the name 'Seagrave' denotes a 'pool in a grove' as the early forms are Old English *seath graf*. Plausibly this is a pre-conversion sacred pool in a grove (cf. nearby Barrow on Soar from *bearu*, 'sacred grove' and the proximity to Vermeneton, 'Great Sacred Grove'). The eponymous pool may have been at what is now a road junction near a culvert (NGR 623174).

Shawell

Halywell is first documented in 1279 and appears (with variant spellings) through to the early seventeenth century. According to Cox 'the lost small Holywell Priory lay on Watling Street at Cave's Inn at the site of Roman *Tripontium* and took its name from this sacred spring' (Cox 2011: 184).

'Shawell' is from *sceath wella* 'the boundary stream or well'. Cox presumes this refers to a stream running across the county boundary. However more plausibly this was the 'boundary well' and so making the *sceath wella* and the *halywell* identical. Compare Teffont in Wiltshire, Old English *teo* and Latin *funta,* 'the boundary spring' (probably with the specific sense of the water collecting in a metal [?lead] container or 'font').



Shawell in 1886 with the probable site of the holy well marked in red.

What the OS described as a 'tumulus' is now known to be the motte of a twelfth century castle.

King Richard's Well in September 2018.

Slawston

A *Holliwell* is repeatedly attested in field-names from 1762 onwards. Perhaps not coincidentally in 1494 there was a *Ladyes land* – 'land whose rents were dedicated to the upkeep of a chapel to Our Lady, the Virgin Mary' (Cox 2009: 241; 243). Whether the *holliwell* was on or adjacent to the *Ladyes land* is currently unknown.

Sutton Cheney

Although not a holy well, King Richard's Well is famous for being the place where Richard III allegedly drank during the fateful Battle of Bosworth in 1485, when he was killed.

The stone cover was erected in 1813 and restored in 1985. The well is located close to the battlefield centre's car park (NGR SK402000).

Syston

'In this town is a well called St John's' (Nichols 1795–1815: 3i.453). No other details have been discovered.

Thurmaston

The field-name *Halywell Herne* is recorded between 1467 and 1484 (Cox 2004: 241).

Tur Langton

Having included King Richard's Well then, for consistency, I also need to include King Charles's Well (NGR SK722949). Reputedly Charles I stopped there to drink on his way to the Battle of Naseby in 1645. However, early versions of the name predate 1645 and include 'Carles Trough' (recorded in

King Charles' Well in October 2018. The onlooking ceorl *is author Jeremy Harte.*

1625) which suggests a possible origin from the Old English *ceorl* (meaning 'freeman'), as in nearby Carlton Curleiu (Cox 2009: 286).

The well was the only source of water in the area and did not dry in the 1976 drought. The present structure dates from 1813. This well once had an inscription over it.

Wigston Magna

The field-name 'Holywell Close' appears on a map of *circa* 1840. However this is most likely a corruption of an earlier 'Holwell Close' (documented in 1766) with the sense of a 'well in a hollow' (compare Holwell, above). (Field 1972: 106; Cox 2011: 225–6)

Whitwell

'Well' forms part of three settlement names in Rutland (Ashwell, Tinwell and Whitwell) but Cox gives no instances of holy well in minor place-names anywhere in Rutland (Cox 1994).

The village takes its name from the 'white well'. At the time of the formation of this toponym the word 'white' had connotations of 'clean and pure', as it still does. So the 'white well' would have been regarded as somewhat sacred.

The parish church of St Michael and All Angels is situated on a large mound (made all the more prominent by cutting away the churchyard on the north side and creating a retaining wall to reduce the severity of the gradient of the Stamford to Oakham road [A606]). No stonework surviving in the church suggests a pre-Conquest origin. But the size and proportions of the nave strongly suggest an early single-cell building with a chancel added later.

A spring rises up underneath the stone floor of the chancel; the water is piped to a 'conduit head' at the side of the road to the east of the churchyard.

Whitwell church in 2008. The chancel is on the left.

Numerous people have reported that after heavy rain water can be heard flowing under the chancel floor.

Seemingly the single-cell church was built to the immediate west of the White Well, *de facto* making it a holy well. The water may have been used for baptism (around the seventh and eighth centuries baptism was usually by affusion not immersion). When the fashion for adding chancels (initially ciboria or apses) arose then the building needed to be extended over the well. The same scenario arose at Whitwick (see below) and at other churches in Britain, such as Romsley, Worcestershire, where St Kenelm's Well has been recreated to the east of the chancel (see Smith and Taylor 1995); also at

The east end of Wells Cathedral reflected in one of the spring-fed pools which give the city its name. Photograph taken September 2008.

Wells, Somerset, where spring-fed pools are located to the east of the cathedral that takes its name from these water sources.

The well under Whitwick church is unusual in being on the summit of a small hill. This may have been one of the reasons it was venerated. Technically it is an 'artesian well' fed with water from higher ground to the north.

Proving that a christian holy well was venerated before the conversion is almost impossible. But the building of Whitwell church at the side of the eponymous spring does allow for this hilltop location to have been a pre-conversion shrine.

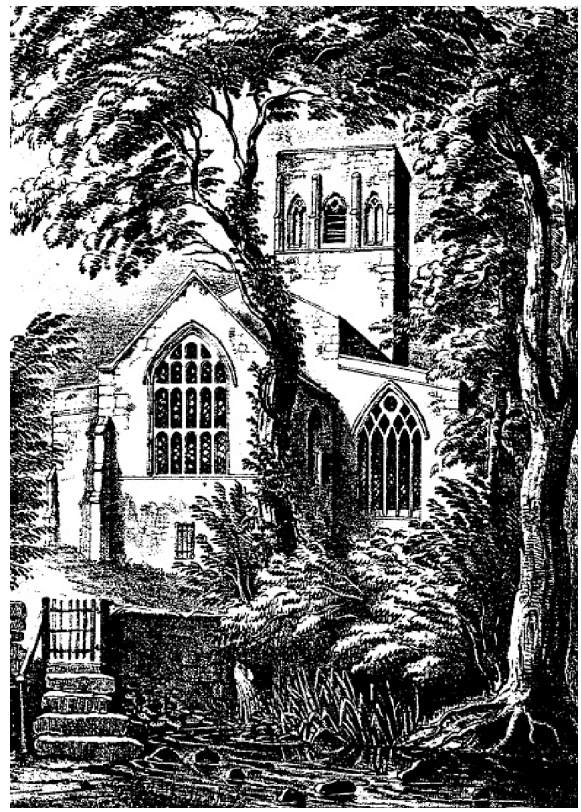
Whitwick

The place-name indicates a white dairy farm or trading place. Anglo_Saxon dairies would have primarily produced cheese and this needed to be traded – at a time when bartering rather than money was the principal method of exchange. So dairy farms would have been trying to sell on all sorts of 'tat' traded for the cheese. Perhaps more like a Sunday car boot sale than a modern delicatessen.

The parish church of St John the Baptist is located in a natural amphitheatre. This is unusual. As is the spring rising up underneath the chancel and piped to the bank of the Grace Dieu Brook. The oldest visible part of the structure is the base of the tower, which is twelfth century. However the eroded fragment of an Anglo-Saxon cross-shaft now incorporated into the south wall of the chancel indicates that this has been a place of christian worship since at least the tenth century.

Left: *Whitwick church.* Right: *A fragment of Anglo-Saxon cross-shaft now incorporated into the chancel wall.*

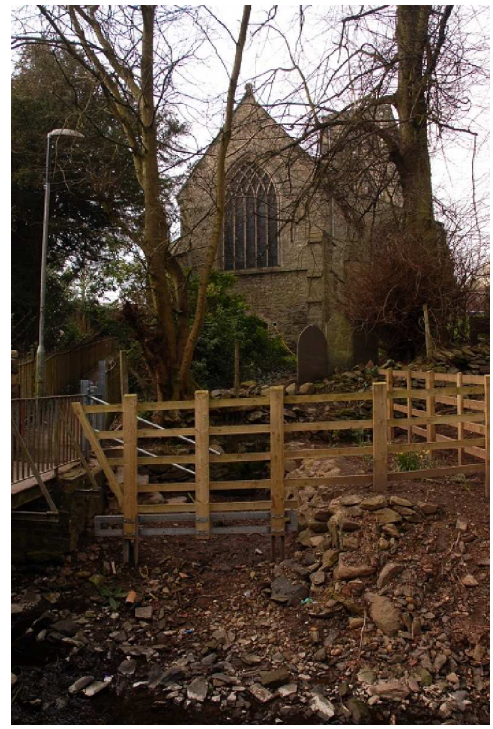
Right: *Whitwell as depicted in T.R. Potter's* The History and Antiquities of Charnwood Forest *published in 1842.*



Below left: *The discharge from Whitwick well in 1989.*

Below right: *The same view in 2007.*

A close-up view of the discharge is used as the cover illustration.



The location of the well suggests an early singe-cell church later extended with a chancel; see Whitwell above for the same scenario. Unlike Whitwell, the church at Whitwick seems to have been extensively rebuilt around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The water flowing out into the side of the brook maintains an almost constant rate and temperature. In the late 1980s I stopped by at various times of year, especially after droughts or heavy rain. I took a measuring jug and thermometer. I can confirm the flow rate was almost constant and the temperature never fluctuated by more than +/- 1C. However my records of dates and exact figures have long been lost. I seem to recall the median temperature was about 12C. This is consistent with water flowing through the water table rather than merely being surface drainage.

When I first visited this church about 1988 the vicar at the time told me that before there was electricity in Whitwick then the water from the well was used to power the bellows of the church organ. Whether or not this was a unique arrangement I have never been able to establish.

Wyfordby

In about 1638 there is reference to an Annie Well, which is probably a contraction of St Anne's Well (Cox 2002: 143–4); the location is not known.

Wymeswold

In the late twelfth century there were several references to 'Wolstonwell' and 'Wulstanwellesice' (Cox 2004: 282). While this could take its name from a secular person called Wulfstan more probably it indicates a well dedicated to St Wulfstan of Worcester (*circa* 1008 – 20 January 1095), although such dedications are otherwise unknown in the county.

This would be consistent with a pre-Reformation dedication for the well which rises to the west of the churchyard mound. At some time, perhaps the nineteenth century, the water source was covered with a pump and the run-off culverted. It gives its name to the street running over the culvert, The Stockwell. As previously noted Old English *stocc wella* denoted a simple wooden bridge over the run-off from a spring. This is consistent with the formation of 'Wulfstan well syke'. The culvert discharges into the River Mantle at the southern end of The Stockwell. The water flows almost continually. Since 1986 (when I moved to the village) it has only dried up in the driest of summers.

1930s postcard of Wymeswold's Stockwell.

To me it seems most probable that a well near a churchyard wall would once have been dedicated to a saint. While I have no way of confirming that before the Reformation the Stockwell was also known as Wulstanwell there is no other natural spring in the village, although perhaps three elsewhere in the parish. Cripwell Farm is on the northern border of the parish – perhaps from Old English *cryps* 'winding (stream)', although the farm may take its name from a surname once common in south Nottinghamshire (Cox 2004: 275). Muswell, recorded in 1543 and perhaps from 'mouse well', had became corrupted to Mushill Farm by 1877. And in 1543 there is a reference to an otherwise unknown 'Fourwell hades' ('heads').

Summary

This list is verging on the over-inclusive (e..g. Holwell, King Richard's Well and King Charles' Well). But ignoring these then about thirty-nine different 'holy wells' seem to have once existed in Leicestershire. Twenty-seven are named 'holy well'. Twelve are Lady Wells or were dedicated to saints. One, at Whitwick, was deemed holy enough to seemingly have an early church built to the immediate west. In addition there were two 'Cross Wells' in Leicestershire and seven examples of 'Seven Wells'.

In comparison Cox gives no instances of 'holy well' in minor place-names anywhere in Rutland, though there are four candidate 'holy wells'. But of those Ashwell may not have been thought of as a holy well until recent centuries, Ryhall's may have been invented in the late nineteenth century, leaving only St Mary's at Oakham and the spring under the chancel at Whitwell. Rutland also has one Crosswell, at Barrowden.

Acknowledgements

My debt to all previous researchers is considerable, especially to Barrie Cox. Without his magisterial study of minor place-names in Leicestershire and Rutland this list would be considerably shorter. In addition to wider debts to Jeremy Harte I owe him one specific credit – providing the detailed bibliographical references to John Nichols. I trawled all of Nichols volumes prior to compiling my 1990 booklet but had failed to keep page numbers. Judith Holliday discussed why seven might seem a 'magical' number.

This survey was written because in March 2024 Gillian Rawlins (Membership Secretary of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society) requested a sub-2,000 word overview of Leicestershire holy wells. This 10,000+ word survey is not the work she requested but seemed necessary by way of preparation for the shorter summary.

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