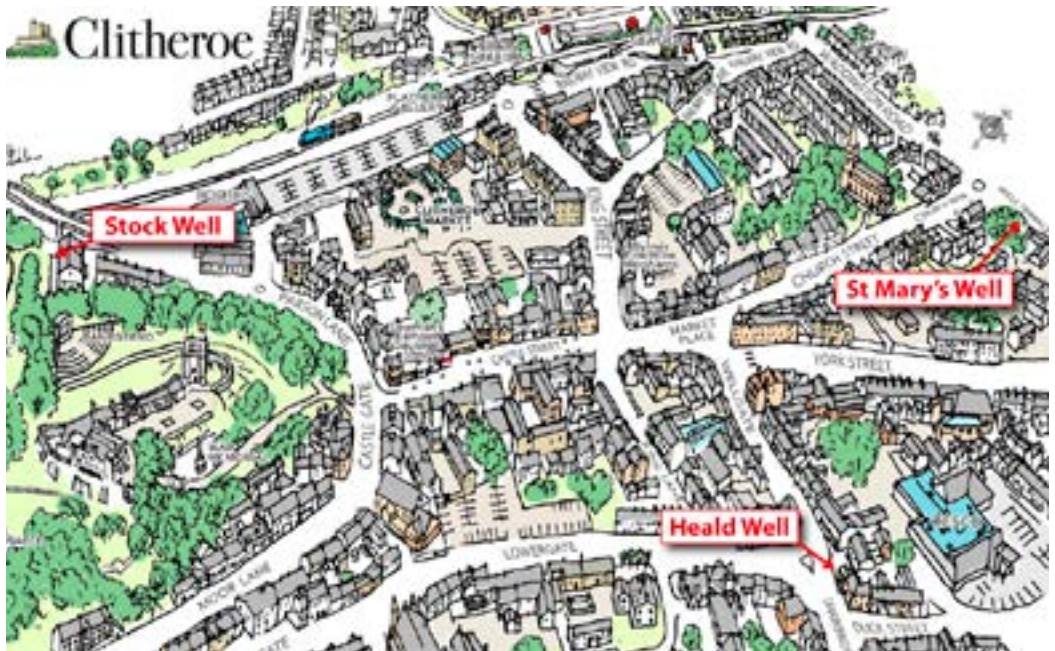
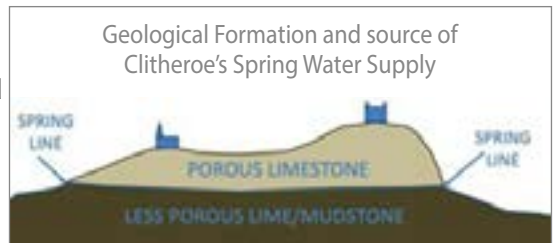




A Visitor's Guide to Clitheroe's Three Ancient Town Wells



These town wells were not 'bored' or 'sunk' wells. All are naturally occurring **spring wells**. Before Clitheroe received 'mains' piped water, in 1856, water sprang naturally out of the ground due to the geological formation of the rock outcrop on which the medieval settlement of 'Clyderhowe' (Possibly a combination of the Old English 'clyder' or clither – for loose stones and 'hoh' for hill) was built. Here then is the natural geological and hydrological connection, wisely taken advantage by generations of settlers here in the lee of Pendle.



Water builds up in the upper permeable limestone strata and percolates down and through to the lower, harder rock base. As indicated in the extract from the British Geological Survey, this eventually sprang out in many places around this interface.

In 'Clitheroe's Thousand Years', Arthur Langshaw identifies the land directly behind The Alleys, (to the North of St Mary's Well - and one of the town's oldest residential areas) as 'Springs Field', further evidence of the geological and hydrological influence on Clitheroe place names.



Extract from British Geological Society

History

What can be seen today are, considered, for the most part, to be Tudor constructions. Stock Well is the most altered of all three, with only two walls of the C16th enclosure now visible – the Victorian East and South walls. This Campaign believes these stone enclosures (with the partial exception of Stock Well) were built in response to the grant of two additional 'Fair Days' by Henry VIII. The good people of Whalley had been defaulting on revenues from the annual fairs. There were also '...inquieting of the religious person of the said monastery.' Consequently, in 1519, these rights were transferred to Clitheroe, the administrative centre of the 'Blackburnshire Hundred', to Whalley's distress - and Clitheroe's benefit!

Fairs were the source of great interest, amusement and - particularly - revenue in Tudor times. Large amounts of fresh drinking water for livestock and people would be required, hence our three public town wells, so significant and substantially constructed then that they remain standing today. This provision survived until a series of local - and national - cholera outbreaks occurred in the mid C19th, resulting in the formation of the Clitheroe Waterworks Corporation in 1854 and the delivery of mains Water in 1856.



Bronze Age Wellspring Illustration



Ancient Open Pool or Spring Well at St Helen's, Eshton, N. Yorkshire

It is accepted that all the pre-C16th dates referred to here are debatable however recent research published in Andy Bowes' 'Reflections on the Water' firmly places both Heald and Stock Well as sites which existed prior to the Norman Conquest. This Campaign looks forward to the day when archaeological investigations, can be commissioned to back up the etymological provenance of these sites being of Anglo-Saxon, if not earlier, origin.

All three are Listed Grade II. Each listing recognised all were **'the only public water supply for the town until 1854'** This confirms their joint and equal significance in the supply of public water from the Tudor period (at least) until the 20th year of Queen Victoria's reign. Sadly, Heald and St Mary's have yet to be registered with HMLR. This impedes the due care for these sites which Listing warrants. This Campaign seeks to address this by raising their profile and the public consciousness via such presentations as this guided walk and other reference information on our website.

Heald Well: The well at the foot of the eponymous 'Wellgate'.

This well has had many names including, at least, the following: **Heil/Hald/ Heild Well and known as the 'Town' or 'Lower' Well.** These closely associated names – differing perhaps due to the varied pronunciation and fluid approach to spelling at the time, and subsequently Early Norman interpretation of Anglo - Saxon words, all mean the **'well on the slope'**. **'Tun'** is the Old English name for a manor or homestead and the root of our present day word Town - which the Norman **'ville'** eventually competed with and **'Lower'** probably from the Old Norse **'lagr'**, still recognisable and in use after over 1000 years. In the forthcoming 'English Place-Name Society: **Lancashire** volume' it is referred to as 'Heald' Well. This has now become the adopted spelling for this site by this Campaign.



Edmundson Buck Image: Heald Well Circa 1900

This well is sited at what is now the bottom of **Wellgate** and just opposite – to the South West – is **Lowergate**. Both are further confirmations of the town's pre-Norman roots. These sites, by their names alone, are clearly of great antiquity, supporting the case for an Anglo-Saxon settlement here in Clitheroe - or 'Clyderhow' or 'Cletherwoode' and connect us to a settlement period prior to the building of the Norman Keep.

This is the largest of our three enclosed spring wells, with a stepped central pool and a missing South East wall - built over to accommodate what is now Wellgate Fisheries. Here we can see the sunken central section with the raised paved surround enabling users to dip their buckets, flagons, or tankards into the sunken well area for refreshment as they passed over the junction of four of the town's oldest thoroughfares – Lowergate, Wellgate, Duck Street and Shawbridge Street.

This would have been a place of great daily, communal, gatherings as the water carriers bent or knelt on the paved and enclosed, spring-fed pool and exchanged their news and the gossip of the day. **Note the following features here too:**

1. The pair of horse mounting steps flanking the NW entrance - and the wear of centuries use both display.
2. The equally smooth and worn steps into the well and the top 'coping' stones, clear evidence of the essential and prolonged use of this well caused by the iron rimmed bucket, the gloved hand, and the iron shod clog which have gone into, onto, and out of this ancient well.
3. The late Victorian or Edwardian cast iron surface water pipe, brutally breaking into, and out of, the walled enclosure. One of the many previous visitors to this site believed this was cast at her grandfather's foundry, sited at Well Fold, the Victorian Industrial area that existed behind 28d Wellgate, immediately to the north of Heald Well, now occupied by Tesco's supermarket.

Now pause for pause for a moment before we move on. Imagine the conversations that have taken place here over the centuries: between the Burghers - or Burgesses - of Clitheroe - their sons, daughters and servants; the town's tradesmen - many employed in the nearby early Victorian Industrial area of Well Fold, Also, their forebears: the Travellers and Traders entering the town from all points of the compass - and all ready to slake their thirst after a pack-horse trek over the Pennine Hills from Yorkshire, or from one of the great Lancashire ports or cities.

Finally, here, think of the weary pack or coach horse after their journey and the relief brought to them - and their drivers - by the assured provision of clear potable water from Heald Well at the foot of the slope to the town centre - and perhaps something stronger in one the many Public House on their arrival there!

St Mary's Well or 'Upper' or 'Over' Well in Well Terrace

Welcome to St Mary's or the '**Upper**' or '**Over**' Well. All are references used in the records of the '**Courts Leet**' - established in the late C13th - but taking on many of the practices previously used to administer the pre-Conquest, Anglo- Saxon 'Hundreds' and 'Wapentakes'. The first reference to St Mary's Well, was in 1599 where 'Presentments' (suspensions) were recorded that '**Edmund Standen, Thomas Worswicke, Edward Dugdall, and Annes Deynne, for baynnen, borne or boyrn (to wash or rinse) in the Over Well onse.**'

It is interesting to note that many of these surnames still survive here in Clitheroe to this day - though no longer under any '*Presentments*' - we believe!



Edmundson Buck Image: Heald Well Circa 1900

St Mary's Well is often considered to have been a Holy Well with all the attendant curative and good luck power associated with such pre-Christian sites. Arthur Langshaw's annotated copy of Lang's 1776 map identifies this as a 'Holy Well'. Certainly, the site's antiquity and proximity to the Parish Church of St. Mary Magdalene - atop one of the town's two rock outcrops - makes this a possibility. There is no actual provenance for such a connection here though it certainly does exist for many ancient well sites associated with subsequent early Christian Churches.

This well is the most complete and unaltered of all our three wells and was close to three of the great late medieval houses here in Clitheroe - 'Fishes', 'Well Hall' and 'The Alleys' - all now long gone.

Like Heald Well, St Mary's does not have the benefit of a registered title with the Land Registry. The consequence of this is that no funds can be raised, or grants applied for to conserve and better interpret this site.

Obtaining registration, for Heald and St Mary's Wells, in the same manner as was done by Ribbles Valley Borough Council for Stock Well, is thus now the top priority of this revived campaign to address this issue. Take note now the following details of this most complete structure of all the towns former public wells:

1. The central walkway runs, east/west creating an unequal upper and lower division in the sunken pool complete with a central overflow channel. Was this separation for filtration on the upper incoming side? - or for clothes washing on the lower side? We are unlikely to know, for sure, pending future, hoped for, archaeological investigations.



St Mary's Well: Edmundson Buck circa 1900



St Mary's Well: Edmundson Buck, Circa 1920



The now concealed, three chamber horse trough, revealed by 1989 drain repairs: Photo John

2. The Ordnance Survey Benchmark 'Arrow' incised adjacent to the West corner coping stone and the bronze mounting pin. These were used by the OS to relate local levels to the National Ordnance Datum, founded in 1921. It refers to the height above 'mean sea- level' point taken at Newlyn, Cornwall and is the basis of the national datum height for all of Great Britain. This benchmark indicates it is 260.77 feet above the NOD in Newlyn.
3. From the well-worn gritstone cube in the centre of the lower, northerly, outfall section, it is apparent just how the iron shod washerwomen - and waterboys - could have been the cause of the extensive wear to this hardest of Northern stones after two or three centuries of near constant use – probably accompanied by much conversation too!
4. The robust Carboniferous Sandstone construction, ('Gritstone' as it is known locally), used here for the squared Copings, Jambs, Steps, and Walkway are typical of all three wells. This, as it was much easier to 'dress' these key elements neatly than the Carboniferous Limestone, used for the roughly coursed wall stones. Today's quarrymen inform us that the Gritstone would have been from one of the many Pendle Hill 'delphs' and the Limestone from one of the many quarries between Clitheroe & Chatburn. The similarity of construction strongly suggests a similar source of materials and a similar construction date for all three sites.

A most unfortunate incident occurred here in June 1888 when the one-year-old John Houghton drowned. It was the opinion of The Coroner's Jury at the following inquest that: **"Clitheroe Municipal Borough Corporation - remove the horse block and the square stone in the middle of the well as they were a great danger to children."** For whatever reason neither direction was acted on. The standing block remains and though the trough isn't visible now, it does remain - more or less - intact.

During works to alter the adjacent roadway and repair adjacent surface water drains in 1989 - the two chambered stone horse trough was uncovered. This is the same one referred to in the 1888 Coroner's Jury report.

What older and more fascinating discoveries may lay beneath our feet here - and all the town's other ancient well sites? They would certainly make a fascinating subject for full archaeological investigations – 'Digging for Britain' on our doorstep! Regrettably, all show signs of advancing dilapidation, and ill-considered siting of incongruous street furniture and signage - most evident here at St. Mary's Well.



Illustration by Steve Ragnall

Stock Well, Castle Gardens off Wesleyan Terrace

Recent research into the actual meaning of 'Stock' indicates that the name for this well is not related to 'Stock Meadow'. This former 'pinfold', lay adjacent to Stock Well until, probably, the arrival of the railway and its marshalling yards in the 1850s. Nor has this well any relationship to the Town's Public Stocks, which were almost always located in a central location to provide full retribution to the offending person.



Edmundson Buck at Stock Well circa 1900

Andy Bowes' recent etymological research in his 'Reflections on the Water' confirms that we can say - 'with near complete certainty' – that Stock Well name is derived from the middle/late English 'stocc' - a tree stump', thus this is the 'well at the tree stump'. The significance of such stumps is that they were where communal proclamations were made in pre-Norman times. Some may recognise the term 'On the Stump' which derives from an early Georgian expression and custom - in both England and in America. This was where electoral candidates campaigned from town to town and stood upon a sawn-off tree stump to deliver their speech - the origin of our 'Speakers Soapbox Corner' perhaps?

Stock Meadow certainly was used to marshal 'live-stock' coming into the town on its three Fair Days, and Market Days. The provision of a reliable source of drinking water - for livestock and visitors alike - was now vital to support these.

Stock Well is the smallest and most altered of our three public wells. The first specific written reference we have for it is in the Courts Leet records of 1645, when Charles I reigned, it was recorded 'Two for looking to both wells', ie the wells in Well Gate called Heild Well and Stock Well. Please take time now to consider – yet again the well-worn Stock Well today. Only two original walls standing entrance jamb and coping stones, the result of centuries of daily use by townsfolk and frequent visitors to Clitheroe's Market Days and Fair Days in past times.



Stock Well today. Only two original walls standing.

The raised and levelled floor is likely to have followed from an 1880 incident when two children almost drowned! What lies beneath this Victorian intervention we can only imagine.

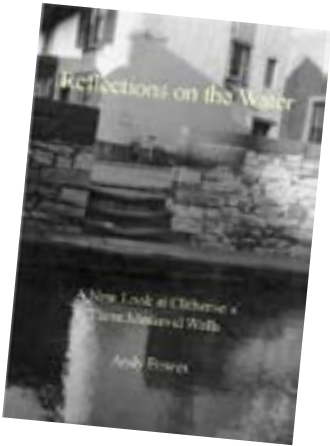
What we can say is that, given its proximity to the Publicly owned Castle Gardens, this would be a prime site for detailed Archaeological Investigations into this site's history and the town's Pre-Norman origins.

The Municipal forebears of our present Authority consistently cared for all three of these sites and prosecuted anyone who 'despoiled' these vital communal amenities, this Campaign seeks to encourage our present Council take all of these sites under its wing and register all three sites, thus enabling a joint Community to Municipal initiative 'to secure the lasting and meaningful future' these unique Heritage Asset sites deserve.

Related Resources:

**Andy Bowes' "Reflections on the Water":
A new Look at Clitheroe's Three Medieval Wells.**

This book was published by Clitheroe Library Assistant Andy Bowes' in Sept. 2024. This new publication uses the three spring water sites and their development into three Public Town Wells - as narrative 'stream' for one of, if not the, most comprehensive and readable history of this ancient Parish. This self-published book is on sale at Clitheroe Library now.



**Steve Ragnall's "Water From The Well":
Clitheroe's Ancient Town Wells Video**

Local & Marine Historian, Steve Ragnall, an excellent 30min video of Clitheroe's former Public Wells.

This can be viewed on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QLVI0PKLJ4>



Concluding Resume

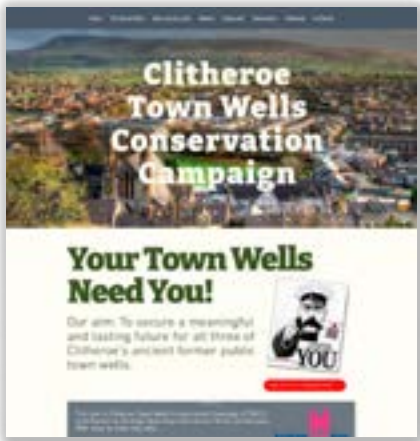
We are fortunate to still have such monuments to the indigenous bond the first settlers here had with the natural environment and one of its prime elements – potable drinking water.

These three sites were rigorously tended by our municipal forebears during their millennial service to this town. This is a clear indication of their significance to the town's history, its ancestors and their present descendants. This stewardship has regrettably, but not irreversibly, stalled since the turn of the last Century. It is the aim of this Campaign to see this care and appreciation restored for the beneficial reflection of present and future residents of, and visitors to Clitheroe.

Far too many similar sites have been lost forever. This should not be the fate of our precious Town Wells - should it?

This concludes this Guide to our ancient spring well sites and their significance to Clitheroe's development over the last millennia. We hope it has been of interest and will encourage you to support this Campaign to ensure their lasting and meaningful future.

Please scan the QR code and sign our petition or visit our website: www.clitheroe3wells.com





the ancient and unique down wells of clitheroe

THE ANCIENT WELLS OF CLITHEROE

*Even we, can not recall
Who owned the land, enclosed with walls.
But here we remain, here we still stand
Since clash of roses, over wild northern lands
and we served all, **well!***

*As charters were writ, our pure waters ran free
We slaked your thirst; you filled your canteen.
All partook freely, with rarely a thought
Of where, by whom, this bounty was wrought
Yet still, we served you, **well!***

*With clear and free water you prospered, then grew
Then - beyond our means - too many of you.
Dams, pipes and valves are now your supply.
Yet still we were cared for - and the reason why,
For we had served you, **well!***

*Thirsty minds we'll still slake - with will to look,
For History ran through us - from fell, down to brook.
We're ancient sites - among th'oldest in t'land,
With a great story to tell - if you'll now lend a hand,
To save those that served you -*

Well?

St Mary, Heald & Stock.
'Clitheroe, 1st December 2020' - and for hundreds of years before.

The Campaign's aims are promoted on our website: www.clitheroe3wells.com
Messages can also be left there. Direct contact can also be made via email to the
secretary@sbcaltd@outlook.com

Also please note and sign our Change.org Petition accessible via our website or the
QR Code below

CLITHEROE WELLS CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN

As seen on **BBC NEWS**



Sign our petition to
get **Ribble Valley Borough
Council** to accept its
ownership of Heald Well
and St Mary's Well.
Your support will help
convince **RVBC** to accept
their responsibility, at no
cost to the public purse,
and help us preserve the
historic heritage of Clitheroe.
**This is your chance to help us
save the wells!**

**OUR WELLS NEED
YOU**



Please scan this
QR code and sign
the petition at
www.change.org

AT RISK



Heald Well - at Millgate outside the Dog & Partridge Pub

AT RISK

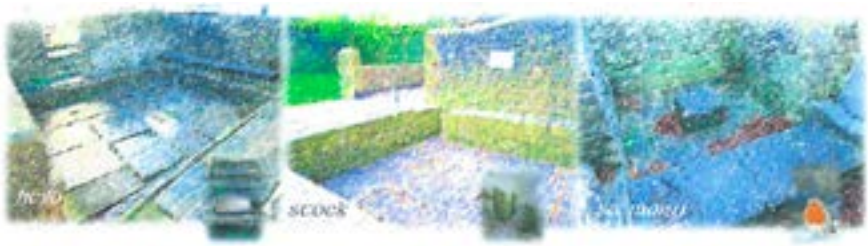


St Mary's Well - Well House beside the Grammar School

SAVED!



Stock Well - Castle Park entrance at Trinity Church



the ancient and unique tower wells of clitheroe

With special thanks to our Supporters and Sponsor:

THE BOWLAND CHARITABLE TRUST

THE CLITHEROE
LIONS CLUB



John Flanagan
GRAPHIC DESIGNER



AND

the people of this ancient parish of Clitheroe/'Clyderhow'
for their generous, positive and continuing support for this
campaign **to secure a lasting and meaningful future for our
three former public town wells.**

If you would like to help or donate then please contact Steve at: sbcaltd@outlook.com
or visit our website: www.clitheroe3wells.com