

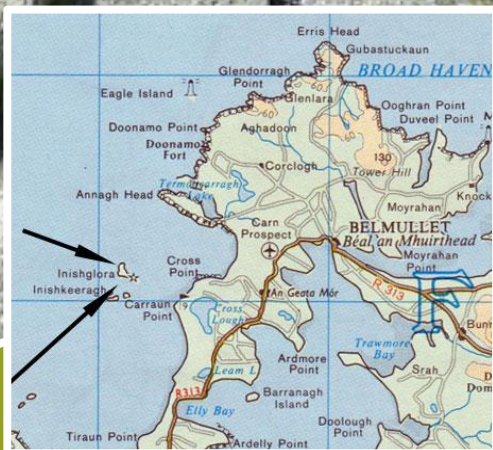


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An insight into the
Island of
INISHGLORA
'the holiest of the islands'

**St. Brendan's well
and superstitions
associated with it**



The Children of Lir



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Cover images:

St. Brendan's well, Inishglora (from Errisbeo.ie) and Mass being celebrated on the island in 1982 (from *Western People*).

Inishglora Island – an island steeped in history and superstition

A place where dead bodies do not decay! Where infertile couples have their problem resolved! Where rodents instantly die! Where water turns to blood! Is this the narrative of some futuristic science-fiction film?

Quite the opposite in fact! According to legend, the small island of Inishglora, located off the coast of the Mullet peninsula in Co. Mayo, is such a place! And there is so much more to this fascinating island.

The belief that the island is rodent-free is very well documented. Furthermore, if clay from the island is scattered on the mainland, it dispels rodents from the vicinity.

There is a less well-known tradition that infertile couples who did a station on the island were blessed with a family the following year. Having done the station they retired to a special bed on the island - Leaba na h-Athchuinge.

The belief that dead bodies do not decay on the island is described in the Book of Ballymote¹ by Roderic O'Flaherty

*At Inisglóire in view of Irrus shore, should we the bodies of our sires explore,
We'd find them blooming, both nails and hair, no human-flesh can fade or perish there.*

Another superstition stipulates that women should not take water from St. Brendan's well on the island as it would turn to blood and contain worms.

This though may have been fabricated to prevent nuns and monks meeting there and perhaps giving way to temptation!

Perhaps the most well-known legend associated with the island of Inishglora is that of the Children of Lir, when, in ancient Ireland, there lived King Lir, his wife Aoibh² and their children Aodh, Fionnuala, Fiachra and Conn. Following the death of Aoibh, Lir remarried Aoibh's sister Aoife. Driven by the jealousy of the love Lir had for his children, she cast a spell³ whereby they were transformed into swans destined to spend 300 years on Lake Derraverragh, Co. Meath, 300 years on the Sea of Moyle⁴ and 300 years on Inishglora island. Only the sound of the Christian bell could break the spell. On Inishglora, when the long-awaited Christian bell echoed throughout the land, they instantly reverted back to a human form.

A monk named Brendan (later known as St. Brendan the Navigator, 484 AD to 577 AD) baptised them just before they died and buried them in one grave. Four upright stones mark their final resting place and locals who lived on Inishglora up until the mid-1930s ensured their grave was covered in white stones and well maintained.



Parish excursion to the island May 1982

Open-air Mass was celebrated.

Baby Sarah Marie Fionnuala Gaughan, with her parents Dick & Sadie Gaughan (Emlybeg) being baptised on that day. (images from Western People))



Many many years later, in May 1982 the parish of Kilmore Erris organised an excursion to the island, to mark the feast of St. Brendan, (the 16th of May) and held an open-air Mass there. Returning to the island that day was 71 year old, Mrs. Kate Gaughan who was one of the last inhabitants to leave in 1934 and who recalls visiting the grave of the Children of Lir, as a young girl.

History was made that day when a descendant of hers, baby Sarah Marie Fionnuala Gaughan, was baptised on the island. The baby was given the name Fionnuala after one of the children of Lir. Was this the first baptism there since the Children of Lir?

Over twenty years later, that baby Sarah Marie Fionnuala Gaughan and her husband Chris renewed their wedding vows on Inishglora and had later planned to have their daughter baptised there, but bad weather hindered their plans. However, in keeping the Inishglora tradition alive, they hope one day their daughter will be able to be married on Inishglora.

So whether you believe in myths and legends or not, the island of Inishglora, regarded as being the 'holiest of the islands' is indeed a fascinating place.

¹ The Book of Ballymote is a 14th century Irish manuscript.

² Aoibh was daughter of Bobh Dearg, King of the Tuatha Dé Danann - who were a supernatural race in Irish mythology.

³ Being of the race of Druids she had magical powers

⁴ Sea of Moyle is located between Scotland and Ireland.

Sources:

The Kilmore Come Home Week Booklet Within the Mullett by Rita Nolan
Irelandsmythsandlegends.com
Irishislands.com

SUPERSTITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH WHIT SUNDAY

as recorded in the National Folklore Collection (Dúchas.ie)

SUPERSTITION

It is unlucky to bathe in the sea on Whit Sunday. It is believed that you will be drowned.

If any animal is born on Whit-Sunday it will be cross. If it is born at a certain unlucky hour, it will die at the same time on a Whit-Sunday also.

It is unlucky to "clip" sheep or cut off a lamb's tail at Whitsun. It is said that a "pick" of wool will never grow while there is a hair in a man's head.

If a person is drowned on Whit Sunday three persons from the same townland will be drowned before the year is out.

Informant: Miss P. Munnely, Donaghintrain, Dromore West, Co. Sligo



The name "whit" is thought to be derived from "white" referring to the purity of Christ

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