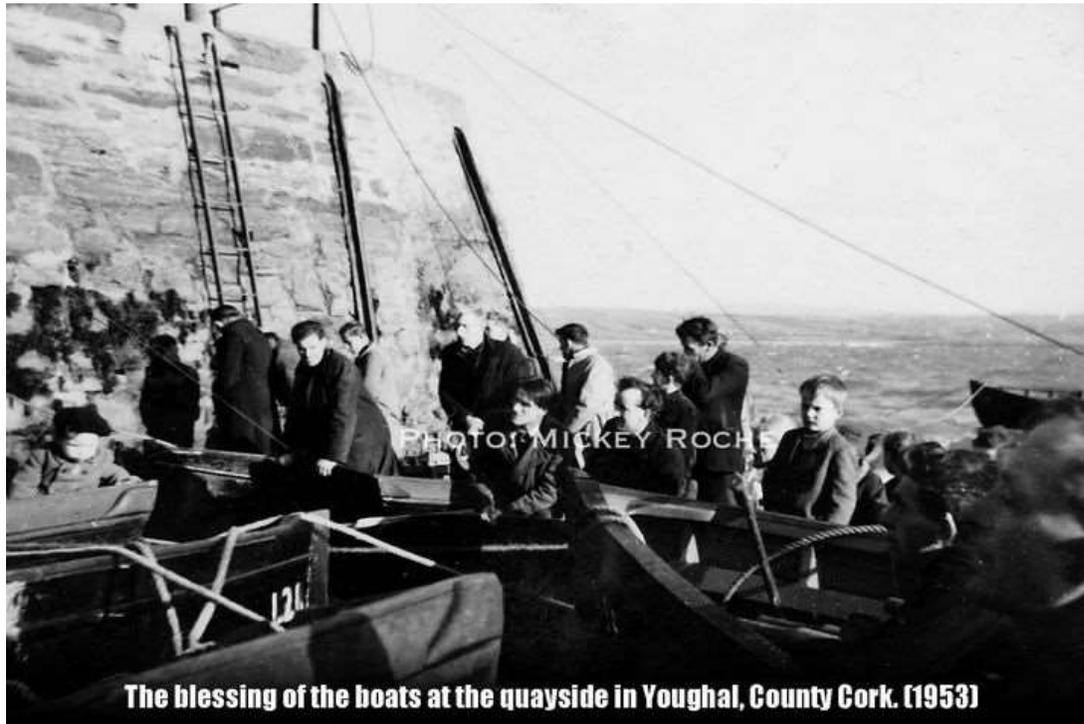


# Blessing of the Boats in Youghal

Centuries old tradition continues in coastal towns



Blessing of the Boats in Youghal in 1953 – credit Mickey Roche

By Sean Kenefick , Pobalscoil na Tríonóide



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The Blessing of the Boats is an important tradition among Irish coastal towns and villages. For centuries it has been an annual expression of faith by the sea community, taking place every year on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, St Brigid's Day. This year, locals

gathered to witness Rev. Canon Thomas Browne P.E. perform a blessing to ensure a safe and bountiful fishing season for the fishermen.



**Blessing of the Boats in Youghal taken at the ferry slip in Youghal 1960/70s - credit Bobby Bickerdike**

In Youghal, crowds gathered on the quayside with their boats to watch the priests perform the ceremony where prayers and passages are read but this is not a purely religious event. It is also a time where everyone can come to look and enjoy the sea that's right on our doorstep. The Mayor of Youghal, Cllr Mary Linehan Foley, and members of the Youghal Boat Club also spoke of upcoming events followed by a water display of boats and jet-skis.

The Blessing of the Boats is a time-honored tradition that dates back many centuries across many different countries. One of the earliest stories comes from Sicily where it is said that a group of fishermen were saved from certain death in a storm. They lost

their way in thick fog when they saw a glimmering light in the distance, they followed this light and it brought them back to shore. There they saw that the light from a Madonna del Lume medallion's reflection is what led them back, since then the "Mother of Light" has been a symbol for fishers' safety and patroness of fishers in Sicily and some parts of America. It was after this that fishers would start asking people of the clergy to bless their fleets.



**Madonna del Lume medallion (Mother of Light)**

Local fisherman Mickey spoke of the significance of the blessing: *"Though the ceremony is getting smaller in recent years with Covid I think it is still important to us in the boating community that we carry on the tradition."* It is clear that this small event is still meaningful to the community and a good morale booster to start off the fishing season on a high note: *"The fishers have a hard old job that goes unrecognized often, this is a way to give them a little boost of spirit."*

What inspired this article:

Living in a coastal town kind of instilled a love for the sea in my head from birth but the sense of community from this event is what hooked me since it is such an old simple ceremony yet so important to the participants of it, it is a special event you don't hear of often, it brings the community closer which is something we all need