What was it like for children at school in 1916?

Learning was a tough experience, says Emma Dineen

Today, every teacher must be fully qualified to teach in primary school. A teacher had any formal training at all. Many teachers who were trained had qualifications that were out of date. Even though the colleges were full they only had enough places for about one in ten of the students who applied each year. Another problem was that many teachers could not teach music or art, so they called singing and dancing, so these subjects weren’t taught in many schools. This meant classes often consisted of only reading, writing, arithmetic and, of course, religious education. 

Ireland was ruled from London at the time and money for Irish education was in short supply. Because of the need for food, from the Boer War and then World War One, there was not enough funding for teacher training, classroom equipment and materials or modern school buildings. As a result, rote learning was common for by teachers out of their own pockets. Pupils didn’t get off lightly either being forced to light the fire to warm the classroom. In short, many schools were old and fell down and many children lived in poverty. 

Recently, a group of young people from the National Teachers’ Organisaton (INTO) were kept off work because of the strike. 

Ms Collins, who has written many children’s books and is the granddaughter of Thomas Kent, explained how her great-grandfather was a member of the Easter Rising. She said: “My mum was involved in bringing him home to Ireland for burial 99 years after his execution. Kent’s remains were exhumed in the immediate aftermath of the Easter Rising. Kent’s remains were exhumed from a mass grave in April of this year after the remains of 12 other rising men were discovered. It is believed that the remains could be those of Thomas Kent.” 

Kent was a decorated military officer who was involved in both the Boer War and World War One. He was killed during the Easter Rising in 1916. 

Ms Collins said: “I'm glad he came back to Castlelyons as the place he was born. He was my great-grandfather’s first cousin.”

Nine-year-old Ellie O’Driscoll’s mother, who works in the Irish Navy, looked after Thomas Kent’s coffin before and after the state funeral. “He was very special and I'm very happy that my mum was involved in bringing him home to Castlelyons,” she said.

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