From 1937 to 1939, more than 50,000 children from 5,000 schools in the 26 counties gathered folklore in their home communities. This included oral history, local geographical features, folktales and legends, riddles and proverbs, games and pastimes, trades and crafts. All material was gathered from parents, grandparents, and neighbours resulting in the creation of over half a million manuscript pages, generally referred to as Bálúchán na Scol or The Schools’ Collection.

This collecting scheme was initiated by the Irish Folklore Commission, under the direction of Séamus Ó Duilearga and Séan Ó Súilleabáin, Honorary Director and Registrar of the Commission respectively, and was heavily dependent on the cooperation of the Department of Education and the INTO. (Source: http://www.duchas.ie/en/info/cbe)

duchas.ie

The entire collection is being digitised and available on duchas.ie. It is available for six counties at present – Dublin, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo and Waterford; and will be made available for all counties on a phased basis. If your school is in one of these counties, go to http://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes. All schools are detailed according to the volume of the book the collection was archived in but are generally in close proximity geographically.

Once a school of interest is located, the collection can be viewed with a lot of rich metadata. From the screen capture below, the school, teacher, collector and informant are all named. Such is the neatness of the handwriting, it is reasonable to expect that a lot of emphasis was put on this at the time and the collection was seen to be important for each school. It would be great to locate a living ‘collector’ from that time.

If this collection was replicated today, how might the collection be presented and how might we as teachers encourage students to record oral history, local geographical features, folktales and legends, riddles and proverbs, games and pastimes, trades and crafts. In addition to writing accounts of times past from family and community members, the following could be considered.

Short vocal recordings of family/locals can be captured easily and shared on blogs/web pages as sound files. Rather than having hours of sound files, it is best if they are focussed and interesting. What questions are you going to ask? How can you ask a question so the person will give you interesting information: “Did you like going to school?” or “Tell me what school was like for you?”

Video is a very powerful medium through which local folklore/heritage can now be captured visually and through sound. Schools have been using this effectively for years and the capture and editing of video is getting easier with advances in mobile devices and related software/applications. The capture and sharing of local information may even form the basis for a full submission to the Fís Film Project as demonstrated by St Colman’s, Derrinabrog, who created http://tinyurl.com/school-daysover based on local man Tom Finn’s memories of his own schooling. Behy NS, Ballina created http://tinyurl.com/battleo-fardnaree based on local research and an interview with local historian, Terry Reilly. These would make magnificent submissions to a 2015 folklore collection.

Digital images are easily captured using a variety of mobile devices - mobile phones, tablet computers and digital cameras! Apps like Skitch make it easy to add annotations and captions to images. One class (right) highlighted what they discovered on a visit to a local abbey.

Online mapping has become extremely powerful and through Scoilnet maps, schools can access OSI maps of incredible detail. Google have also mapped Ireland and provided street views of much of the country. For example, the Ring of Kerry can be viewed in StreetView without leaving your desk (not the real thing, admittedly!).

What if we want to capture 360 degree images of our local area? A dolmen in a local field? An old abbey now in ruins? This is now possible using an app called Photo Sphere which will run on a variety of smartphones and tablet computers. It guides the user into taking photos all around them – left, right, up, down – and will stitch all images together. Once completed, the panorama can be published on Google maps with the local details. You can view the photosphere of Rosserek Abbey at: http://tinyurl.com/rosserkabbey Rather than looking at a two dimensional image, it is now possible to take a ‘full look around’ the location. It would be a greatway to share views of historical locations/geographical features throughout the country.


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