

Primary Schools Competition:
In my grandparent's time ...this is your life!
National Museum of Ireland – Country Life
Education & Outreach

As grandparents have been around for a long time, it is not surprising that they are a font of knowledge about life in the past. Many older people love to talk about when they were young and can pass on unique memories to children and help them learn more about their own heritage and history. For this year's competition we are asked school children to find out about life in the past by talking to their grandparents or an elderly person they know. They could then enter by sending in a book with all their hardwork! It was a great success with over 140 entries. We were very impressed with all the wonderful entries we received and enjoyed reading them all. Well done to all the pupils and teachers for all their hard work. Many of the children commented that they really enjoyed getting to know their grandparents, granduncle or grandaunt better! We are delighted to announce the winners and give you a sample of their books.

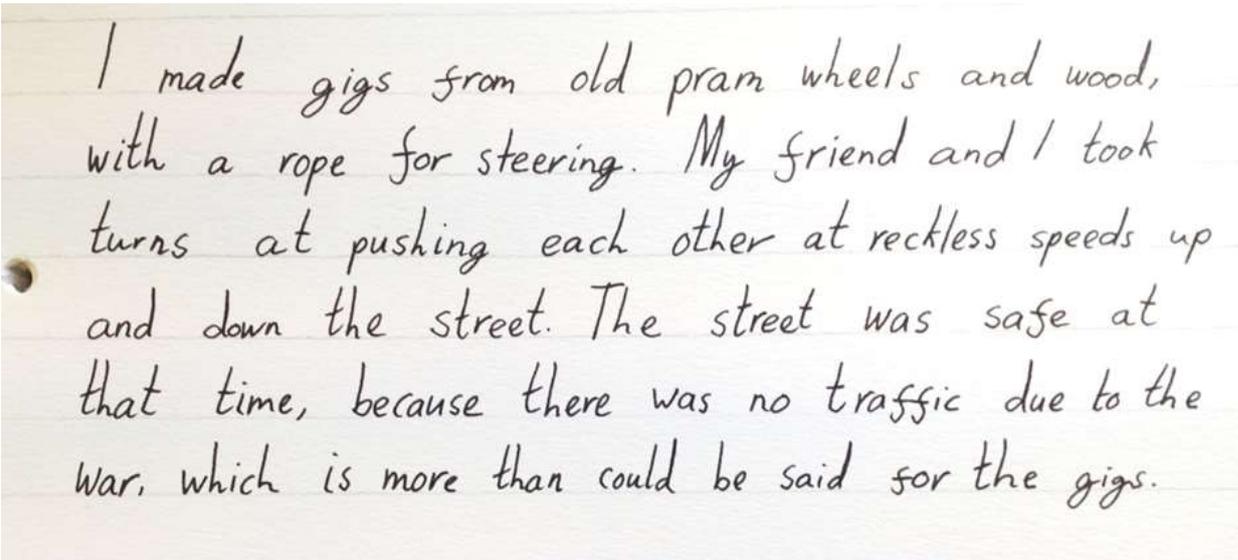
Extracts from the winning entries:

3rd and 4th class Prize Winners

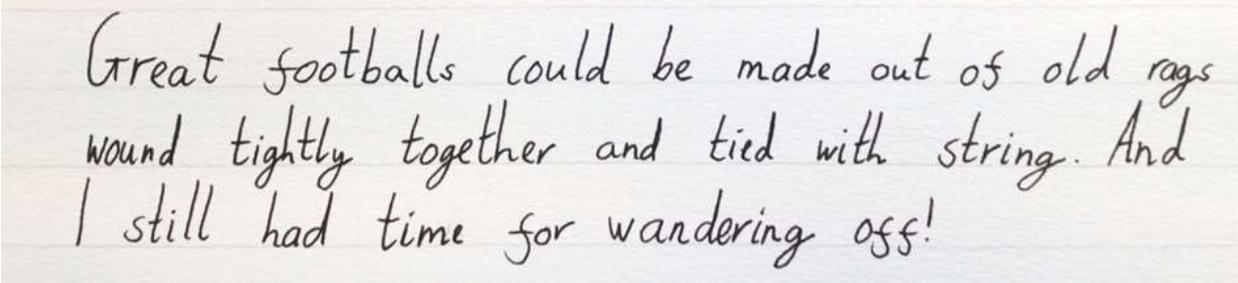
1st Prize: Sorcha Treanor, Gaelscoil Uileog de Búrca, Claremorris, Co. Mayo.

Sorcha put great effort into her handmade book about her grandparents childhood. It has a beautiful cover and thirty handwritten pages. Again this entry goes into a lot of detail about life long ago.

Toys during World War Two



I made gigs from old pram wheels and wood, with a rope for steering. My friend and I took turns at pushing each other at reckless speeds up and down the street. The street was safe at that time, because there was no traffic due to the war, which is more than could be said for the gigs.



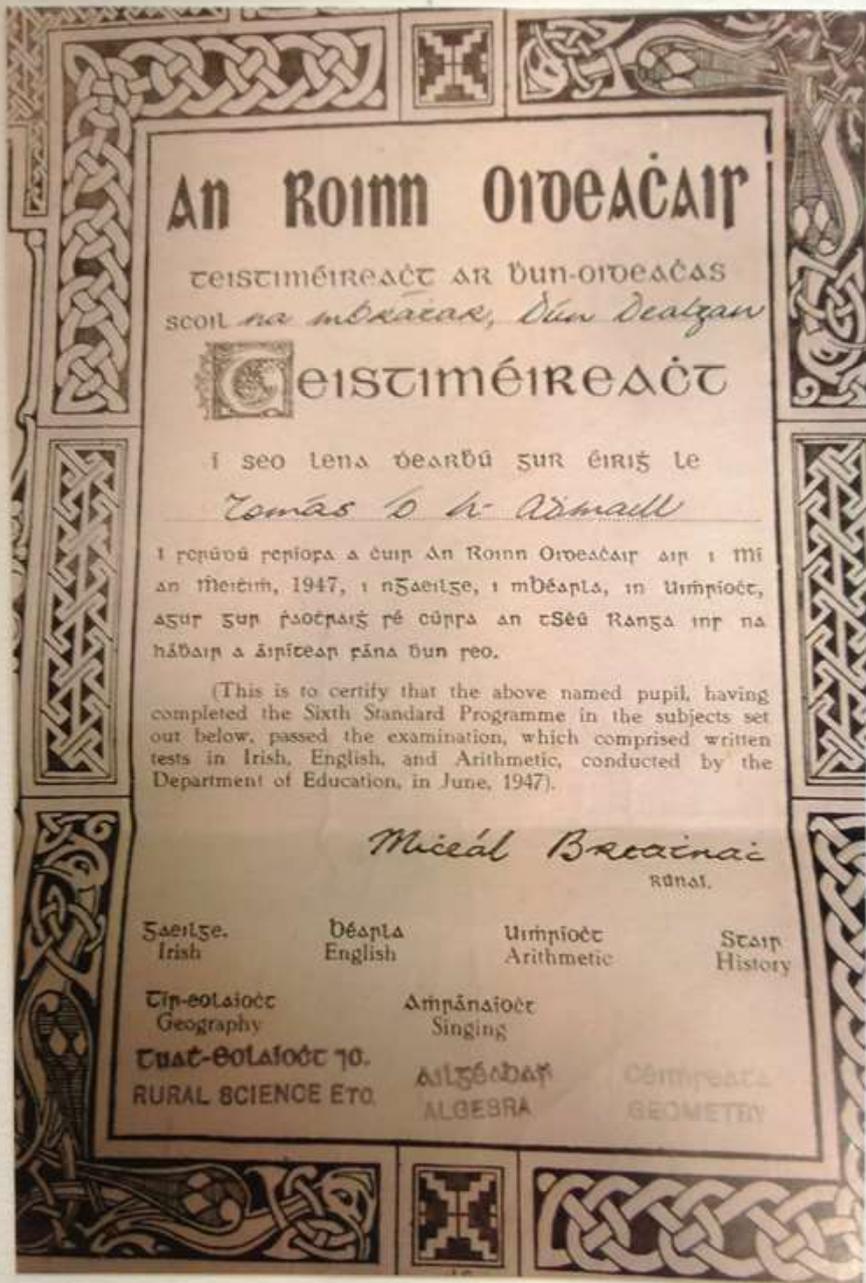
Great footballs could be made out of old rags wound tightly together and tied with string. And I still had time for wandering off!

Making your own toys

There was very few toys available in the shops during the Second World War, which was happening when I was between 5 years of age and 11, so I made my own toys. I made sailing boats from pieces of wood, with sails made from paper. I sailed my ships in the pond in park.

Easter eggs were not invented

Because of the war, there were hardly any sweets, chocolate, biscuits or buns available. Chocolate Easter Eggs were not even invented. Lots of ordinary good items such as tea, coffee, cocoa, sugar, jam and butter were rationed. There was a substitute for tea or cocoa called "shell cocoa". It looked like hazelnut shells and tasted awfull.



Grandad Tommy's
 Primary Certificate

2nd Prize: Tara Cooley, Gaelscoil Uileog de Búrca, Claremorris, Co. Mayo.

Tara's book about her grandmother Maire is very interesting with lots of great stories and pictures. A great insight into life on Inis Oirr.

Where were you born?

My name is Máire Conneely and I was born at home, the same as all my brothers and sisters. My mother was helped in childbirth by the local women; there was no hospital or doctor available. Home was on Inis Oirr, the smallest of the three Aran Islands. I spent my whole childhood on the island, and only left for the first time when I was sixteen.

Tell me about school.

We would have to walk a mile or two to get to school. The school was situated on the highest hill on the island. I was told it was built there by the English when they were in power and the reason it was built on the hill was to make it awkward for the children to get to school. They would have preferred the children to remain uneducated. My favourite school memory was getting a new school I didn't have to walk up that big hill anymore. Every child had to bring a sod of turf to school with them and this would be used to heat the classroom. We would get milk and brown bread at break. There was no secondary school on the island and if you wanted to go past primary level you had to go to the mainland and go to boarding school, and being the eldest girl I had to stay at home. My younger sister Sarah got chosen to go, I was so jealous. I helped out at home when my mother went to America for two years and I then got a job in the knitting factory on the island making socks. A TD from Galway visited the island at one stage, looking for votes. He told me if I ever needed any help, to come and visit him in Galway and he gave me his address. I kept that address like it was a lottery ticket.

Day to Day life

One shop on the island.

We didn't have much. But we knew no different. There was one small shop on the island but all we really need to get from the shop was flour sugar and tea. Everything else we either grew in the ground, caught in the sea, reared on the land or baked over the fire. My mother used to send me to the shop and it was a job I loved. Sometimes there would be a delivery of bread. Shop bought bread was a luxury we never got. I used to pinch a corner off a loaf when the fear an siopa had his back turned. Oh it tasted so nice. I got caught eventually but I don't think he was mad at me. He told me years later he used to watch me from the reflection of the weighing scales. I remember buying a packet of USA biscuits out of my first wage packet. I ran down to

the beach and ate the whole packet on my own. I didn't want to share with all the folks at home. What luxury!

We all had our jobs to do.

Collect water from the pump. Help sow potatoes, cabbages and onions. Gut and salt the fish my father caught. Bake bread. Collect seaweed. The list was endless. The seaweed was collected to put into our fields to make soil. Because of the rocky terrain on the island, all of the soil you see today was painstakingly made by the hard work of the inhabitants. The fields were full of stones which were used to build the many walls that separate the fields.

But we knew no different and every family as the same. We also had to make our own clothes, knit our own jumpers and socks and even make a little leather shoes called pampooties. We were very sufficient.

Playtime

The island was our playground. We had sand, stones, water. We didn't have toys or board games. We would play on the beach, on the rocks, gather periwinkles. The neared thing to a toy would be handmade dolls that we would make out of the old sacks that the flour came in. At Christmas we might get some pencils or fruit or chocolate in our stockings.

Life was simple and uncomplicated for us children. My parents worked very hard though and in all weathers. The winters were fierce and the storms were both magnificent and terrifying. Everything was dictated by the weather.

5th and 6th Class Prize Winners

1st Prize: Saoirse Gallagher, St. Angela's, The Lawn, Castlebar, Co. Mayo.

Saoirse's book 'The Story of John Gallagher' really stood out from the entries. She put a lot of research into finding out about the life of her granduncle. It is also well laid out and presented.

My name is John Gallagher and I was born 79 years ago beside the Abhan Dubh river in Ballycroy, County Mayo. The years have taken me a long way from that river, but I'll always remember growing up with my parents, six sisters and two brothers.

Life in Ireland today is much different than it was when I was born 79 years ago. In those days, we lived on a small farm and had very few of the comforts and luxuries of today.

We had to produce almost all of the food we ate. The clothes we wore were also made by my mother and the other ladies in the village and shoes didn't really feature.

Life was very different back in those days but it was also very enjoyable at times and we felt loved and cared for by our parents. I had six sisters and two brothers and I was the sixth to be born to my parents, Michael and Rose-Ann.

Maud, Mary-Ellen, Rose, Delia and Michael were older than me. Peggy, Catherine and Pat were born after me. All of us were born at home in our house by the river. When the time for having the baby was close, my father would get the horse and go for Nurse Dyra and she would make sure we were all born safe and sound!

There was no such thing as television or radio in those times for us. In later years, a house in the village got a radio and in September 1951 we listened to Mayo winning the All-Ireland final on it.

Men and boys would go from house to house play cards or darts or just visit and have a chat. They'd come to our house and play by the light of the paraffin lamp but we'd also try to have some bog-deel for the fire too because that always gave a good flame when mixed in with the turf.

At the end of the night the men would go home by moonlight but some used to have a candle in a jar and this would give them some light if the night was cloudy or the moon was small. The candle would be held in place in half a potato in the bottom of the jar and shielded from the wind by brown paper.

We also spent many happy hours playing 'Blind Man's Buff' with neighbours of all ages in our home. We played in the dark, so that made it even more fun and led to many interesting moments.

2nd Prize: Alan Richardson, Scoil Phadraig, Westport, Co. Mayo.

Alan's entry about his granddad, William Browne is really well thought out. We especially like the photograph of Alan and William outside the ruins of the old school and all the articles about historical events his grandfather witnessed.

My granddad's name is William Browne. He lives in Derrygorman. He is 75 years old. My granddad went to a country school in Derrygorman. The school opened in 1862 and closed in 1976. There was two teachers Mr. Padraig Mc Laughlin and Miss Sweeney. There was just one room in the school. There was about twenty-five pupils in the school. One teacher taught in one half of the room and the other teacher taught in the other half. All the children in the school were in the same room. He learned English, Irish, maths, history and geography. They didn't use biro's they used a pen with a nib on it and dipped it into an ink well. There was no TVs. Computers, mobile phones, school uniforms and there was no central heating. All the children used to take it on turns to bring turf to school for the fire. In the summer time they used to walk to school in their feet. Grandad lived near the school and they all walked to school every day. There was no school transport or cars. The ruins of the school is still there.



Story of a day in the bog when my grandad was young

My Grandad and his Dad would leave their house at eight o'clock in the morning to go to the bog. They cycled to the bog. The first job they did was put on a fire and go to the stream for water for the kettle. Grandad's Dad would cut the turf with a slane and grandad would spread it out in the bog. At lunch time they would boil eggs on the fire.

Later they would have to foot the turf (stack it up in piles). When the turf was dry they would bring the donkey to the bog to help them bring the turf out of the bog and they would stack it in a reek on the side of the road. When all the turf was out of the bog they would bring the

horse and cart to the bog to bring it home. This took a good few days to do because they could only bring one cart load home a day. Grandad said it was very hard work.

Thank you

Well done to all the children for all the hard work they put into their books. A special thanks to teachers, schools, families and grandparents who helped out. You can view more entries and on Our Irish Heritage website, the online community archive network:

http://www.ouririshheritage.org/category_id_51_path.aspx