

Trades in Ireland 1850–1950

The National Museum of Ireland – Country Life is home to the Irish Folklife Collection, a collection of objects representing Irish rural life from 1850–1950. This online activity is suitable for Families and Senior Primary (3rd to 6th Class) and Post-Primary Junior Cycle.

Museum
at Home
Country Life

Blacksmith &
an apprentice
shoeing a wheel.



That looks
like hard
work!

Trades 1850 – 1950

How were things made before 1950?

Before the advent of mass-production, most of the objects that people needed for their daily lives were made by hand using locally available raw materials. These objects were made by traditional craft workers. Their skills were passed on from generation to generation and learned through a form of apprenticeship.

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National Museum of Ireland
Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

What was school like?

A national system of primary education was introduced in Ireland in 1831. This meant that children could avail of free primary education. The main subjects taught in schools at the time included the three R's: reading, writing and arithmetic.



Schoolhouse with master & schoolchildren, Aran Islands.



Punishment in school

In the 19th century children were discouraged from speaking Irish. A tally stick on a piece of string was worn around a pupil's neck. A notch was cut into the stick if they spoke Irish, as punishment.

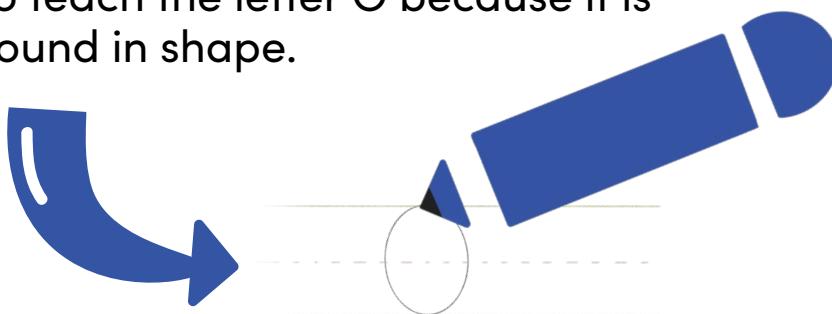
Here's a Task

1. What year was the national system of primary education established in Ireland?
2. What were known as the 3 R's ?
3. What was the bata scór or tally stick?

How did they learn?

In the past teachers used the following words to teach the shape of letters in the alphabet.

Example: The full moon was used to teach the letter O because it is round in shape.



Moon

 **Comet**

Spectacles —

Spade-handle —

Eel

Here's a Task

Can you guess which words were used to teach the letters Q B S T?

What was a blacksmith?

He made and repaired a very large range of objects from gates to domestic cooking ware as well as agricultural and craftsmen's tools. The blacksmith was also the farrier responsible for shoeing horses and donkeys.

Here's a Task!

Can you spot these objects in the photograph? 

Horseshoes
Bellows
Hammers
Anvil



Did you know!

Bellows: Used for blowing air into the fire.

Hammers: Used for hammering the hot iron.

Horseshoes: Some blacksmiths worked as farriers. They made or forged shoes for horses.

Anvil: Iron was hammered and shaped on this large block of metal.

A blacksmith's tools

The following are tools used by a blacksmith in the forge. The blacksmith had hundreds of tools for all the different tasks they were required to do.

Here's a Task!

Can you match the blacksmith's tool with its use? For example: callipers are used to measure the diameter of an object.



Callipers are used to...

shape metal on an anvil.

Bevel squares are used to...

shape scrolls in decorative iron work.

Cramps are used to....

measure the diameter of an object.

Tongs are used to...

handle hot metal.

Bottom swages are used to....

measure angles.

Here's a Task!

Here are three images of objects made by a blacksmith. Can you identify the object and its use?



I didn't know
a blacksmith
made these!

Did You Know!

When you visit the National Museum of Ireland – Country Life you can view the range of objects made by blacksmiths in the past.

Learn about other trades

Tradespeople in the community worked together and shared their skills and expertise. The blacksmith was essential in helping other tradespeople with their work. For example the blacksmith made nails for the cobbler to make hobnail boots.

Here's a Task

Complete the sentences below to show how the blacksmith helped the following tradespeople!



Wheelwright: A person who makes or repairs wooden wheels.

The blacksmith helped the wheelwright by _____

Cooper: A person who makes barrels or churns.

The blacksmith helped the cooper by _____

Cobbler/Shoemaker: A person who makes, fixes or mends shoes.

The blacksmith helped the cobbler by _____

Learn about other trades

The following are photographs of objects in the National Museum of Ireland's Folklife Collection. You will see many of these objects on display in the Museum. They represent objects made by different tradespeople.

Here's a Task

Can you match the object in the photograph with the tradespeople listed opposite?

Tailor
Carpenter
Woodturner
Cooper

Thatcher
Basketmaker
Cobbler
Tinsmith



Woodturner



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Learn about other trades

When you get a chance to visit the National Museum of Ireland – Country Life you will see video footage of tradespeople working. Below are images of people working at their trade.

Here's a Task
Can you match the tradesperson to the image below?



Tradespeople

Weaver
Woodturner
Harness Maker

Thatcher
Cooper
Tinsmith

