

# THE NATIONAL FOLKLORE COLLECTION – GRANGE NATIONAL SCHOOL

By Dan Conway

**I**n 1937, the Irish Folklore Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Education and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, initiated a revolutionary scheme in which schoolchildren were encouraged to collect and document folklore and local history.

Over a period of eighteen months, some 100,000 children in 5,000 primary schools in the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State were encouraged to collect folklore material in their home districts. The topics about which the children were instructed to research and write included local history and monuments, folktales and legends, riddles and proverbs, songs, customs and beliefs, games and pastimes, and traditional work practices and crafts. The children collected this material mainly from their parents and grandparents and other older members of the local community or school district. Now known as the Schools' Manuscript Collection, the scheme resulted in more than half a million manuscript pages of valuable material. (*Reference: National Folklore Collection website*).

Grange National School participated in the scheme. For the purpose of this book, the Director of the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, provided Grange Book Committee with access to the original copy books of the children of Grange National School, with permission to publish the contents, subject to acknowledgement of the source and full compliance with the stipulated terms and conditions laid down by UCD. The book committee is most grateful to the director and staff of his department, who assisted a committee representative in accessing the Grange material (*Volume 516*) and kindly made copies of many pages selected from the copy books.

Selected essays from the copy books of ten children are reproduced below. The reproductions are accurate copies of the original writings. No adjustments have been made to language, spelling or punctuation in order to maintain the authenticity of original writing. In all cases, the children's stories are not compromised by writing errors that may have occurred and can be fully understood. The stories told are fascinating and clearly illustrate how different modern life is compared

to times when the essays were written in 1937 and 1938. For example, the simplicity portrayed in *The Games I Play* is striking.

In what follows, the name of the pupil is followed by his/her essay(s). Each essay has a heading that also indicates the date on which it was commenced by the pupil. At the end of some essays, the name of the "Informant" is mentioned, if the pupil provided it. An Informant was a person, perhaps a grandparent, who provided story information to a child. Of course, the teacher of the pupils, Thomas Lynch, had a great interest in folklore and wrote an amount himself on the subject. No doubt, his knowledge must have been available to the children as they sought out information for their essay-writing.

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*By Dáití O Síotcáin (David Sheehan)*

*Local Happening (30-11-1937)*

There was once a plumber named George Dunlop living with Count de Salis on the shores of Lough Gur. This plumber was a noted swimmer and was a friend of John deSalis. One day the plumber went down to the lake and went out boating.

It happened that John de Salis was watching him from the top window of the house. He saw the plumber strip himself and jump into the lake out of the boat. Then he heard a piercing cry.

He rushed down to the waters' edge and swam towards the empty boat. There was no trace of the plumber and he was not found for a week. His body had turned black. He is buried in Grange Cemetery. The cause of his death has never been solved.

*A Local Happening (13-12-1937)*

There once lived on the shores of Lough Gur an old woman whose name was Moll Ryall. When she was young she could remember to hear her parents cheering when King William died. She had a daughter whose name was Moll.

One day when Young Moll was washing clothes in the lake near the Earl's Castle which is situated on the south eastern shore of Lough Gur she saw a gentleman coming towards her. When he was near her he put a ring down on a stone near her and made signs to her to pick it up.

She was going to pick up the ring when she perceived that the water beneath her had turned red. She crossed herself and muttered "My God and Jesus Christ."

On mentioning the Holy Name the gentleman vanished. If she had spoken to him she would be bewitched. The gentleman was the Earl of Desmond who in his days was a magician and he made wicked spells and frightened people.

The object of ghosts is to mortals speak because the more mortals they can bewitch the shorter their time of punishment.

*Local Cures (14-12-1937)*

In this locality an herb called the “dandelion” was used for curing consumption. First the dandelion is boiled and the water in which it is boiled is strained. Then it is put in bottles for some time. Then the person who is ailing drinks it.

Blessed wells are also used for curing ailments. “Tobar an Amráin” in Ballinagarde which is situated about 7 miles south of Limerick City is dedicated to the curing of many ailments.

An herb called the “dock-leaf” is used for curing a sting from a nettle. Milk left from a ferret is supposed to have the power of curing the whooping-cough.

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By *Máire Ní Dublaoic (Mary Dooley)*

*My Home District (22-3-1938)*

Grange is so-called on account of the amount of grain that grew in the district long ago and there was a granary in Lower Grange where the grain was ground by the Cistercian Monks who supplied their own monastery in Manister with food.

In this district long ago there lived a man whose name was Seamus Donnelly and he was noted for playing bagpipes. Some of his bagpipes are still to be seen in the Museum in Dublin. He resided in Lower Grange in a house which is now in ruins.

*Holy Wells (28-3-1938)*

About three miles east of Holy Cross there is a holy well called St. Patrick’s Well.

It is so-called because St Patrick visited it long ago when he was on his way to Limerick. About fifteen yards east of the well at the trunk of a tree is a green piece of ground called “St. Patrick’s Bed” because St. Patrick slept on this bed one night.

One day a woman living in the neighbourhood went to the well for a barrel of water and she forgot to take a cover for the barrel. On her way back the water began to spill. She left down the barrel and went back to the tree and broke off a branch of it and placed it over the barrel. In the middle of the night she heard a voice calling her to get up and replace the branch of the tree.

It is said that the trees near the well were never set and it is a remarkable fact that the trees grew in the shape of a shamrock.

If a person was very sick and if sour milk could not be got it is said the water of the well mixed with new milk would make whey which would cure the sick person. On St. Patrick’s Day every year people come from far and near to visit this well and to do “rounds” there. Invalids comes there too, to drink the water. The well is in three parts and one part is capped.

It is said that the waters of the eastern or first part of Patrick’s Well can never be boiled no matter how long a person tries to boil it.

One day a girl who was a stranger in the district filled a pot of water from the

eastern part of the well and she put it on the fire. When it was on the fire for a couple of hours she found it was as cold as when she first put it into the pot.

She went out and told her master and he told her to throw out the water and never again bring the water of that part of the well because it could never be boiled.

*Herbs (26-4-1938)*

Ragwort is a very harmful weed. Thistles are harmful too, but where ever they are very plentiful it is a sign of good land.

There is an herb called balm and it is used for making balm tea which is supposed to be a good drink for invalids.

Horehound is an herb that is used for putting in syrup as a cure for a cough.

Watercress is an herb that grows on the banks of rivers and it is said it is to be a cure for pains in the bones.

*(Informant – Anna Toomey, Grange, Kilmallock.)*

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*By Séamus O Cátasaig (James Casey)*

*Local Cures (1-2-1938)*

Long ago a plant called the hoar-hound was used by the people of this locality as a cure for a cough. The plant is like a nettle but it has no sting. It is boiled in water and the juice is sweetened with sugar and used every morning for the cough. Milk that is left after a ferret is supposed to cure the whooping cough.

The juice of an ivy leaf mixed with bees wax and un-salted lard is the best cure for a burn. Long ago holy wells were used by the people of this locality to cure warts and many other ailments.

*(Informant – Mrs William Casey, Holy Cross, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.)*

*Travelling Folk (28-2-1938)*

Long ago travelling “people” used to travel from locality to locality. They used to stay a night in a house. All the neighbours used to gather around them to hear them telling stories, and sometimes they used to remain by the fire until near midnight.

Some of these “Travellers” were “Peg the Quilter”, Biddy Bourke, and Nancy “Till”. “Peg the Quilter” used to make bed clothes and sell them. Some of her quilts are still to be seen in this locality. Biddy Bourke used to tell how the Irish people suffered in the Famine days and she had a very impressive way of telling a story.

*(Informant – Mr William Casey, Holy Cross, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.)*

*Games I play (22-3-1938)*

The games I play in spring are marbles, picky, hurling, football and tops. The games I play in summer are duck, frog-leap, swimming, boating, skipping, fishing, and frog-jump.

I gather nuts, apples, black-berries, and cherries in Autumn. The games I play in Winter are ludo, draughts, snakes and ladder, crown and anchor, and hunting.

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By *Cáit De Graoin (Kathy Greene)*

*A Local Hero (1937)*

There lived a man at Holycross which is situated south of Lough Gur. He was a walker at Cannocks shop in the city of Limerick. He was a famous road walker. Some mornings he used to leave his own house at the same time as the long car and he always arrived in the city about a half a hour before it. He went to England after and won a walking match there. He died about three months ago.

(*Informant – Mr James Greene, Meanus, Bruff, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.*)

*Old Hedge Schools (14-12-1937)*

The Irish people owe a great debt of gratitude to the hedge school-masters, because through their efforts the majority of the poorer classes were kept in touch with both secular and religious instructions. Up to 1832 the hedge schoolmaster taught the following subjects. Prayer and Religious Instruction in general, Reading, writing, Arithmetic, grammar and euclid. They also taught the Irish language.

The travelling schoolmaster better known as the “Poor Scholar” taught Latin. His fee was board and lodging, but whilst the fee of the hedge master was very meagre. Generally a few sods of turf, and sticks formed the schoolhouse. In very rare cases he got a little cash. In the parish of Grange there were three such schools. One was at Rahin under the charge of Mr. Scanlan, another was at Grange under the charge of Mr. O Donovan, and the other was at Holy Cross under the charge of Mr. Kelly.

In 1832 the foundation of the first national schools were laid down, and we are informed that Caherelly National School in the County Limerick was one of the first in the country to be opened.

(*Informant – Mr Pat Dwyer, Caherguillamore, Bruff, Co. Limerick.*)

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By *Tomás O Duinín*  
(*Thomas Dineen*)

*Festival Customs (17-5-1938)*

One St. Stephen's Day the boys of this locality go around from house to house to gather money to bury the wren. They dress in their oldest close and they carry a dead wren on their holly bush.



Hedge school.

Some of the adults go around from house to house playing games. On St. John's Day people of this locality make great bonfires on the hilltops and at the crossroads. They gather money also.

On St. Brigid's the people of this locality put a ribbon on the field.

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By *Pádraig Mac Gearailt (Patrick Fitzgerald)*

*Local Happenings (6-12-1937)*

On the 22 July, 1907, Patrick Joseph O'Connell, New Farm, Grange was drowned in Lough Gur. He went for a swim near the Ash Point which is situated on the eastern shore of Lough Gur with a school companion. O'Connell was a noted swimmer.

His companion saw O'Connell in trouble and he came out of the water and to some people nearby and after half a hour a number of people collected near the Ash Point.

A man named Charles Hayes dived into the lake for his body and brought it to the bank.

O'Connell was buried in Clonkeen Barrington's Bridge.

*(Informant – Mrs. P. Fitzgerald, Grange, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.)*

*Local Happening (12-12-1937)*

Once there lived by the shores of Lough Gur an old woman whose name was Moll Ryall. Moll remembered her father and mother cheering when King William of Orange died. Moll had a daughter called Young Moll. One day as Young Moll washing clothes near the Earl's Castle which is situated in the south-eastern shore of Lough Gur she saw a gentleman coming from the Old Castle towards her.

He was dressed in a silk cloak and he put a ring on the ground and he urged her by signs to take the ring.

She was going to thank the man when the water at her feet suddenly changed into blood and when she saw the red water she said "Oh My God and Jesus Christ!" and when the man heard the word "Jesus Christ" he vanished away and whom do you think the man was but Lord Desmond who was a magician in his day.

If young Moll had spoken to him she would have been bewitched. The object of ghosts is to make mortals they can bewitched the shorter their time of punishment.

*Place Names (17-1-1938)*

A field between Upper Grange and Lower Grange in Co. Limerick is called Lough Dearg. It is called Lough Dearg because The Old Milesians fought between themselves there in the year 56 BC.

Another fight field beside the river Comog [*Camogue*] which flows between Lower Grange and Mr Tom O'Donnell's farm is called Mount an Árd. It is called

Mount an Árd because it consists of material taken from a bog which lay near its base years ago.

A rock in Mrs Quilty field Grange Kilmallock which is called “Bolder” is said to be the grave of a giant (sic) who was buried under this rock.

(Informant – Patrick Clancy, Grange, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.)

*Place Name (18-1-1938)*

There is a field in Michael Power’s farm, which is situated in the parish of Bruff and about nine miles south of Limerick City (held the sports there every year) called “Barla Tarla.” In that field the Monks who lived in the Abbey in Lower Grange in a farm now owned by Mr Gerald Barry, held their sports there every year.

The best athlete was presented with a big cake, and the winner always divided the big cake between all the athletes.

They ate the cake near a well in the field which can be still seen but this well is said to have moved three times.

Once a woman named O’Hanly was crossing “Barla Tarla” at night time saw a leipreacán and she dropped dead.

*Local Marriage Customs (25-1-1938)*

The luckiest day for a marriage to take place is on Shrove Tuesday. Many marriages used to take place on that day this locality.

Long ago a match-maker used to go around from house to house making matches and he was paid by both the man and the woman.

When two persons used to be getting married long ago (and even still in some places) people used to throw rice or an old shoe after them in order to bring them luck.

*Fairy Forts (7-3-1938)*

There is a fairy fort in Mrs Casey’s farm Grange, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick. There is a fence of bushes and big stones around it. There is a number of big stones in the middle of this fort.

It is said that if any person remove any of those stones the fairies will come to them. Lights are often seen in this fort, by night. The fairies were often seen patrolling around the fort by night.

(Informant – Patrick Clancy, Grange, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick.)

*Games I play (15-3-1938)*

The most important games I play are hurling, football, marbles, nut cracking, snakes and ladders, ludo, draughts, rings and spinning tops.

The games I play in summer are handball running and jumping frog jump and marbles.

The indoor games I play in Winter are snakes and ladders draught, ludo, rings and snap cards. The out-door games I play in Winter are hurling football and spinning tops.

The games I play in Autumn are nut cracking four corners, duck, and skittles.

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*By Nóra Ní Briain (Nora O'Brien)*

*Old Schools (7-12-1937)*

The schools in olden days were very different to what they are now. There was a hedge school at Holycross and another at Rahin. Both of them were small and there wasn't any Irish thought in those days books were cheaper and school hours were shorter, and a large number of children attending the schools.

*Story (13-12-1937)*

Over a hundred years ago, Cumurtún was a servant employed by the Bloody Judge O Grady who lived in Rockbarton House Co Limerick. "The Bloody Judge" sent word to the keeper of the stocks at Adare that Cumurtún was misbehaving himself and that a couple of days in the stocks would do him no harm.

The "Bloody Judge" gave a letter to Cumurtún to give to the keeper of the stocks. The letter was about his own misbehaving. When Cumurtún gave the letter to the keeper of the stocks the keeper read it. Cumurtún then asked him how the stocks worked. When Cumurtún saw him in the stocks he locked the keeper in the stocks and brought the keys home to Rockbarton.

He gave the keys to the Bloody Judge who immediately send a servant to Adare to release the Stock keeper.

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*By Miceál O Briain (Michael O'Brien)*

*Weather Lore (29-11-1937)*

- (1) If you see a hen picking herself we will have rain.
- (2) If it rain on a Friday it will rain on the Sunday.
- (3) If a cat sits with his back to the fire we will have rain.
- (4) If you see the swallows flying low we will have rain.
- (5) If the sun shines early in the morning we will have rain.
- (6) If you see a rainbow in the evening the following day will be fine.

*Old Crafts (7-12-1937)*

There is a mill which is Garveys Mill in Ballingoola, Grange. Kilmallock Co. Limerick. In that mill they used to make flour and paper about a hundred years ago.

There was also a large bakery attached to the mill. This bakery used to supply the small neighbouring towns such as Herbertstown, Hospital, Killeely and Pallace with bread.

The ruins of the mill and the bakery are still to be seen there.

*Local Cure (15-2-1938)*

A cure for a pain in the head is to put out a ribbon in a hedge on St Bridget's night and bring it in the morning after and put it around your head when you get the pain.

A cure for a toothache is not to comb your hair on a Friday or shave on a Sunday. A cure for rheumatism is mix three ounces of brown sugar and four ounces of flowers of sulphur and to take a spoon of the mixture every morning fasting.

A cure for the chin-cough is to drink the milk left after a ferret or to go under an ass three times.

There is a holy well which is called Tobar na n-Amrán Ballinagarde Co Limerick. It is said that if a person has a bad stomach he will be cured of ailment by going to that well and doing nine rounds there and drinking some of the water.

*Lore of Certain Days (28-2-1938)*

Friday is a lucky day to remove from one house to another and Friday is also a lucky day to start planting or to start new business. If a person get money on Monday he will get money every day during the week. Wednesday is the luckiest day for a marriage to take place.

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*By Seán O Bulfín (John Bulfin)*

*A Collection of Riddles (22-11-1937)*

- (1) What goes up the ladder with their head downwards. *Answer* – The nails of your boots.
- (2) What is a big man lazier than a smaller man. *Answer* – Because he is longer in bed.
- (3) How many sides in a Bucket. *Answer* – Two, inside and outside.
- (4) Up the road and down the road and I carry the road on my back. *Answer* – A ladder.
- (5) What part of a car goes into a town first. *Answer* – The noise.
- (6) If I were in the sun and you were out of it what would the sun be. *Answer* – Sin.

*Local Toys (22-2-1938)*

Young girls make chains out of daisies. The girls get a number of daisies and join the stem of one daisy to the head of another daisy.

Long ago my grandfather used to make spinning tops, and the blacksmith used to make the spears. Long ago my grandfather also used to make bows and arrows.

Many boys make cribs out of sally rods to catch birds in winter.

*(Informant – Mary Clancy Grange Kilmallock)*

By *Brigid Ní h-Artaig (Bridget Harty)*

*Hidden Treasure (30-11-1937)*

It is believed that there is a pot of gold hidden in Rochestown Castle. Over two hundred years ago this gold was hidden there.

About thirty years ago an old man named John Kane and a number of companions from Skule Bog went to dig for it but a man dressed in black frightened them.

*A Funny Story (7-12-1937)*

It is said that Patrick Hogan of Cahir used to visit his sons house every night and Pat Bourke of Grange used to visit this house regularly. Pat Bourke and Pat Hogan's son made up to frighten Pat Hogan one night.

They all met at Martin Hogan's house one night. Pat Bourke and Martin Hogan went out before Patrick went home and they meant to frighten him.

When Patrick came out, Pat Bourke walked along the trench near the house and as Patrick was coming along Pat Bourke jumped up out the trench and as quick as he did Patrick hit him a crack of a stick and so that finished all the fun.

*A Collection of Riddles (24-1-1938)*

- (1) Why do a hen across a road. *Answer* – because she wants to go to the other side.
- (2) What part of a cow goes over the ditch first. *Answer* – her breath.
- (3) Two little men standing on a hill. They are going they are going they are standing still. *Answer* – two lighted candles.
- (4) Kitty inside the ditch. Kitty outside the ditch. If you go anear Kitty she will bite you. *Answer* – A nettle.
- (5) As I was going out a slippery gap I met my uncle Davy. I cut off his head and left his body easy. *Answer* – A head of cabbage.
- (6) I have a little Kerry caw. She stands by the wall. She eats all she gets and she drinks non atall. *Answer* – A fire.
- (7) Long legs crooked thighs small head and no eyes. *Answer* – A tongs.
- (8) There was a little house and a mousee could not fit in it and all the men in Ireland could not count the windows in it. *Answer* – thimble.
- (9) Why do a hen pick a pot. *Answer* – because she couldnt lick it.
- (10) What burns to keep a secret. *Answer* – Ceiling wax.
- (11) Under the water over the water and never touches the water. *Answer* – the moon.
- (12) Walking all day and there heads down words. *Answer* – the nails of our boots.