

SCÉIM NA SCOL

Séamas Ó Catháin



IT'S US THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT

Proceedings from the McGlinchey Summer School 1998

Edited by Margaret Farren and Hary Harkin

SCÉIM NA SCOL

Séamas Ó Catháin

IT'S US THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT

Proceedings from the McGlinchey Summer School 1998

Edited by Margaret Farren and Hary Harkin

The School's Scheme, from which stems the Schools' Manuscripts Collection, was organised under the auspices of the former Irish Folklore Commission (now the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin).¹ It began on 1 July 1937 and ran for the duration of the entire school year of 1937-1938, following which it was extended for a further period until the end of the calendar year 1938. For the entire length of its existence (1935-1971), the Honorary Director of the Irish Folklore Commission, and therefore the person in charge of the Schools' Scheme, was James Hamilton Delargy (Seamus Ó Duilearga), Lecturer and later Professor in Irish Folklore (1947-1971) at University College Dublin.

From the time of its establishment in April 1935, the programme of collecting work undertaken by the Commission through its panel of full- and part-time collectors, and its network of questionnaire correspondents in every corner of Ireland, was designed



to document as thoroughly as possible Irish Folklore throughout this Island. The fruit of this activity can be found in the form of sound recordings, films, photographs, drawings, sketches, paintings and manuscripts. The latter element makes up what is known as the Main Manuscript Collection which runs to 2,246 volumes of approximately 500 pages each, all paginated and

¹ Renamed the National Folklore Collection UCD in 2005.

² This was adverted to in the following terms in an *Irish Times* report of 1 February 1939, detailing the success of the Schools' Scheme: 'Except for a remote and similar example in the little Italian republic of San Marino, the scheme has no parallel in European education'.

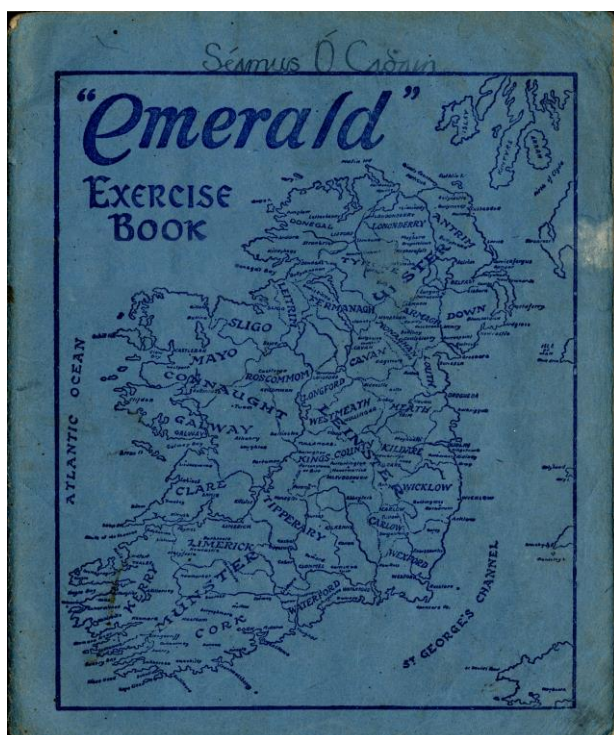
handsomely bound in a numbered series.

Roughly three-quarters of the Main Manuscripts Collection was assembled by the Commission. The remainder has been collected by the Department of Irish Folklore, since it came into being in 1971. In the same period, the audio and photographic collections as well as the library holdings inherited by the Department from the Commission have each almost doubled in size and a substantial number of video-recordings has also been made.

In all likelihood, Delargy's ambition to recruit the schools and the schoolteachers to the cause of collecting the folklore of Ireland was inspired by some of his experience in northern Europe to which he had paid an extended visit in the period April to October 1928. There, he had come across a number of folklore collecting schemes involving schools and, inter alios, had met with Professor Walter Anderson, Head of the Estonian Folklore Archive (Tartu) who had been responsible for organising a highly successful folklore scheme among schoolchildren in San Marino.²

The Schools' Manuscripts Collection presents a different profile to that of the Main Manuscripts Collection. The former is a sixty-year old corpus of manuscript material which is static and unchanging and thus distinguished from the rest of the National Folklore Collection whose constituent parts are dynamic and developing. It is tempting to think of it as a snapshot of the state of Irish tradition across the greater part of

Ireland, a long exposure, as it were, taken over a period of eighteen months.



This is not its only hallmark for, unfortunately, the principle of seeking to document the Irish tradition on an island-of-Ireland-basis, did not prevail in the case of Schools' Scheme, and this circumstance also sets it apart. Its sphere of operation did not extend beyond the confines of this state and as a consequence, the Schools' Manuscripts Collection contains no material from schools in the six counties of Northern Ireland. Consequently, the historic province

of Ulster is represented by only three of its constituent counties, namely, Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal.³

Like the material in the Main Manuscripts Collection, the Schools' Manuscripts Collection is bound in volumes which are paginated and numbered. These run in a series from volume 1 to volume 1226.⁴ In this respect, the Schools' Manuscripts Collection differs once again from the Main Manuscripts Collection in that its contents are arranged in sequence, county by county, and province by province, beginning with Connacht (and county Galway) and ending with Ulster (and county Donegal). This circumstance makes it quite easy to isolate and examine the folklore from, say, a single county, a single barony, a single parish or even a single school, as the material is further broken down under all of these headings.

However, not every aspect of the Schools' Manuscripts Collection is so straightforward. Another of its distinguishing features creates some special problem and, for the folklore scholar, brings its own fascinating research possibilities. It is not in fact, a single unitary collection, but rather a body of material which is divided into two distinct parts - the above - mentioned bound and paginated material and a lesser-known, unbound, unpaginated and equally extensive corpus consisting of the original school copybooks in which the schoolchildren of 1937-1938 first penned their 'compositions'. Consequently, we might speak of 'The Schools' Manuscripts Collections' rather than 'The Schools' Manuscripts Collection', so radically different in some respects are these two bodies of material.

The wording of a Department of Education circular (Circular 9/37), entitled *Circular to Managers and Teachers of National Schools: Scheme for the Collection and Preservation of Folklore and Oral Traditions* (= CMT 9/37), provides an explanation of how this circumstance arose in the first place:

Material collected by the pupil may be entered in their school jotters and the compositions written in their copybooks from that material. These compositions, or as much of them as is not unduly repeated, together with stories, songs, proverbs and other material collected, should be transcribed by selected pupils into the official Manuscript Books which were issued to all National Schools in March, 1934. A second Manuscript Book will be

³ The late J.H. Delargy assured me that the Northern Ireland authorities were approached with a view to securing participation of Northern Ireland schools, but that this was unsuccessful. For an account of the attempt to emulate the Schools' Scheme some twenty years later by the Committee on Ulster Folklore and traditions (under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Northern Ireland), see K.M. Harris, 'The Schools Collection', *Ulster Folklore* 3, Part 1 (1957), 8-13.

⁴ Two further volumes (1227 and 1228) which also form part of the Schools' Manuscripts Collection contain folklore collected in counties, Cork, Kildare and Wicklow. Some of this material came into the possession of the Department of Irish Folklore as late as 1988.

supplied at an early date in cases where the Book supplied in 1934 has been completed and returned [§3]. All Manuscript Books officially supplied should be forwarded to this office at the end of the current school year - June 1938 - for immediate transmission to the Folklore Commission. The composition copybooks, or a selected number of them, should also be forwarded to this Office [§4].

Circular 17/38 (=CMT 17/38), issued to managers and teachers in December 1938, contained instructions regarding the arrangements for the return to the Department of the official notebooks and the school copybooks. It also called for the return of all the copybooks:

The scheme provided that all Manuscript books supplied should, at the termination of the period of operation of the scheme, be returned to this Department for immediate transmission to the Folklore Commission, and that the pupils' composition copy books, or a selected number of them, should also be forwarded. The Folklore Commission desires particularly that all the copy books used by the pupils for composition and notes on Folklore subjects should be collected and transmitted with the official Manuscript books, especially as variants of the same story, tradition, belief, custom, etc. may have been recorded therein.

Upwards of 5,000 primary schools took part in the Schools' Scheme and most of them followed the instructions of the Department to the letter, returning, in due course, not only the official notebook into which the items collected by the schoolchildren had been dutifully transcribed from the copybooks by 'selected' pupils, but also the copybooks (or a selection of them) as well. When combined with the injunction to avoid unnecessary duplication, this process of 'selection' had the unfortunate effect of relegating the work of some participants to relative obscurity by minimising the chances of its being represented in the official notebook.

In certain cases, an even worse fate awaited the material collected by some hapless pupils for, following completion of the Scheme, these compositions were effectively consigned to oblivion, when the copybooks of the individuals in question failed to be included among the 'selected number' (as per the injunction in CMT 9/37) chosen for despatch to the Department of Education. Regardless of their potential value to the Commission and despite the instruction in the subsequent circular - CMT 17/38 - to return all copybooks, it is likely that these copybooks were discarded soon after the completion of the Schools' Scheme. Some copybooks survived by chance - indeed, some may well still do - like the one which fetched up on the Dublin antiquarian book market a few years ago among the books and papers of a retired schoolmaster from the West of Ireland.

In a Scheme as large as this, it is not surprising, perhaps, that some schools returned no material at all. Happily, such schools were few in number. In such cases, it is likely that none of the material collated by the pupils in their copybooks had ever been transcribed into the official notebook and neither the copybooks or the official notebook came into the possession of the Commission. Occasionally, for one reason or another, schools from which no official notebook was received returned instead a bundle of the copybooks. Thus, the school copybooks can assume an all-important role in some instances insofar as they represent the only material preserved from certain schools.

Happily, in the majority of cases, a well-filled official notebook was accompanied by a full complement of copybooks. This serendipitous circumstance renders it possible to examine the totality of the material collected and helps in determining to the fullest extent all the circumstances which attended its compilation. The copybooks often reveal the exact date when a particular item was noted, something which adds a certain urgency and piquancy, for example, to reports of the traditional celebration of calendar festivals recently observed and, often, newly experienced by the young collectors whose eyes had been opened to the wider context of many items which may have been regarded by them thitherto as being of little significance beyond the confines of their own townland or parish.

Many teachers showed a deep personal commitment to the Scheme, even to the extent of voluntarily taking on the laborious task of transcribing in their own hand the material which had been collected by their pupils. On a regular basis, teachers also inserted details concerning the ultimate source of the material - the full names, addresses and ages of the informants and, often, an indication of the nature of the relationship between collector and informant. Sometimes the teachers added explanatory glosses and, not infrequently, they became active collectors themselves by gathering significant amounts of additional material on particular topics. This constitutes some of the most valuable and most reliable material to be found in the Schools' Manuscripts Collection and, indeed, in the entire manuscript holdings of the Department of Irish Folklore.

The interest they showed in local tradition, their understanding of it and commitment to attending to its documentation caused these teachers to be identified as possible future collaborators with the Irish Folklore Commission. This led to the recruitment of some five hundred of them to form the backbone of the network of questionnaire correspondents established by the Commission.

Three separate organisations were intimately involved in the operation of the Schools' Scheme, to wit, the Irish Folklore Commission, the Department of Education and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). Each of these parties can lay claim to having made its own special contribution to the overall success of the venture. The

INTO facilitated the Commission by securing the agreement of its members to operate the Scheme and by organising teachers' meetings at which information about the Scheme and its mechanisms was mediated to members; the Department of Education offered practical assistance by providing the official notebooks, by covering postal charges for the return of the notebooks and the school copybooks on completion of the Scheme, by printing and circulating the booklet which contained the necessary guidelines for the collection of the material and, perhaps, most importantly of all, by responding positively to the Commission's suggestion (approved by the Central Executive Committee of the INTO) that the usual 'weekly composition' written by the pupils of Fifth Class and upwards should be substituted by a 'composition' inspired by one of the many topics outlined in the booklet and based on field-work to be conducted by the pupils from week to week in connection with particular subjects;⁵ the Irish Folklore Commission was responsible for devising the entire Scheme, drafting the guidelines for it, organising and conducting a campaign to explain the purpose of it and to fire the teachers with enthusiasm for it and, afterwards, for housing and processing the results of the efforts of all concerned.

Two men of outstanding ability masterminded this entire affair - James Hamilton Delargy (Seamus Ó Duilearga), Honorary Director of the Irish Folklore Commission and Sean Ó Súilleabháin, Archivist to the Commission. During the period of operation of the Irish Folklore Institute (1930-1935) - precursor to the Irish Folklore Commission - Delargy, as Director of the Institute, had been endeavouring to interest teachers in collecting folklore and had succeeded in engaging the co-operation of both the INTO and the Department of Education to that end. The *Irish Press* of 7 April 1934 reported that:

In a booklet, National Tradition and Folklore, issued to the principals of all Primary Schools throughout the country, the Department of Education invites teachers to render material assistance in the work of collecting, conserving and popularising the nation's folklore. The Department is prepared to issue free to all schools a manuscript book suitable for making entries concerning local traditions and folklore. Although the work is voluntary, official recognition is to be taken of it

⁵CMT 9/37 §I reads: 'During the period from September to June in the school year 1937-38 the time allotted to English Composition for pupils in Fifth and higher standards in Galltacht [=English speaking] areas, the time allotted to Irish Composition for these pupils in Gaeltacht [Irish-speaking] areas, and the time allotted to Irish or English Composition for pupils in Breac-Ghaeltacht [English- and Irish-speaking] areas, shall, as part of the ordinary school work be devoted to Folklore composition and the recording stories and traditions.'

Almost immediately, another circular (Circular to Teachers of National Schools [9/'34]), dated April 1934 and entitled 'Questionnaire Regarding Holy Wells', followed. The introduction read in part:

In connection with the booklet recently issued regarding the general question of the collection of Irish folklore and antiquities, it is considered desirable, as an initial step in this direction, that a survey of Holy Wells be made.

It is felt that the teachers of national Schools could assist considerably in making such a survey a success and accordingly teachers who are in a position to furnish information regarding Holy Wells in their respective districts are earnestly invited to do so.⁶

In an address to the annual conference of the INTO in the Mansion House, Dublin, Delargy was reported by the *Irish Independent* of 24 February 1935 as having urged the:

...cooperation of the teachers of Ireland in an attempt to rescue from oblivion and to preserve for all time the oral traditions of the Irish people...

In some quarters, official encouragement of this kind seems to have been instrumental in generating opposition among teachers. However, Delargy was a persuasive speaker and his powerful advocacy was capable of winning over doubters, as we learn from a report in the *Irish Press* of 3 April 1935:

Proposing a vote of thanks to Dr. de Largy (sic) who lectured on Irish Folklore Collection to a meeting of national teachers at Drogheda, Mr. W. P. Allen, T.C., said that he (speaker) had been struck with the thought that had the powers that be been so wise as to have sent Dr. de Largy through the country to talk in that informal way of his, the Department would have had far more results than they might expect from the threatening circulars that were dished out to the teachers some time ago. He could tell them that he had not opened his Folklore notebook yet, but now that he had heard Dr. de Largy he would open it and endeavour to fill it.

The Irish Folklore Commission was established in 1935 for a term of five years and, immediately, strenuous efforts were concentrated upon the invigoration of the moribund 1934 scheme as part of its work programme. The propaganda campaign begun in 1934 was intensified and expanded to include radio broadcasts by

⁶This 'invitation' was taken up by some 230 teachers many of whom sent in lengthy and detailed replies giving O.S. references and often including photographs and sketches. These replies for the period 1934-1937 are bound in volumes 466-8 of the Main Manuscripts Collection.

schoolteachers such as David Cantwell from Croom, County Limerick, Pádraig Mac Gréine from Ballinalee, county Longford and Séan Ó Cuinneagáin of Míin an Aodhaire, Carrick, county Donegal, all of whom had already submitted outstanding contributions which illustrated their understanding of the nature of folklore and principles and concepts which motivated Delargy in advocating and spearheading its collection.

In spite of Delargy's and - following the establishment of the Commission - Ó Súilleabháin's best efforts, however, the teachers were not won over and this first scheme petered out, an unmitigated failure. Only a relatively small number of notebooks - fifty-two in all (nine from Connacht [Galway, Leitrim, Mayo and 51 nine from Leinster [Carlow, Kildare, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, Offaly, Westmeath and Wexford], twenty-six from Munster [Cork Limerick, Kerry, Tipperary and Waterford], and eight from Ulster [Donegal]) - were turned in. A goodly number of the overall total was submitted by enthusiastic teachers who sent in not one but two or more notebooks. Against this, entire countries failed to register any response at all. All in all the effort had been expended in organising and promoting the scheme had brought a poor return and the failure of the scheme constituted a serious setback to Delargy's plans to mobilise the educational system in support of documenting the nation's folklore.

The reasons for the failure of the 1934 scheme were manifold. First, the scheme got off to a bad start, its proper functioning from the outset impeded by lack of consultation and coordination. For example, Delargy, preoccupied with the negotiations which were to lead to the establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission in April 1935, was unaware until months afterwards that the official notebooks for the scheme had already been sent out to the teachers by the Department of Education. Then, the INTO refused to carry out the scheme because it objected to a clause in the booklet, National Folklore and Tradition, a difficulty which was eventually resolved when the Department entrusted the INTO with the entire operation of the Scheme. The Irish National Teachers' Organization Quarterly Bulletin for July 1934 reported that a deputation from its Executive had discussed with the Minister of Education the 'Pamphlet recently issued dealing with the Collection of Folklore'. The delegation had pointed out that:

the teachers strongly objected, on principle, to the particular paragraph wherein it was indicated that official recognition would be taken of the work, that the special book would be examined by the inspectors, and that credit (and, inferentially, discredit) would be given to the teacher in estimating his general usefulness, for the industry, accuracy and intelligence displayed in its compilation. They stated that many teachers who were interested in the collection of folklore would refuse to have anything to do with it under these objectionable conditions; that even

where it was done the work would lose its real value, there would be overlapping, there might even be attempts to fill the book for no other purpose than to satisfy the inspector to fulfil what was regarded as an official obligation. In this way much of the information gathered together would be valueless.

The upshot of the matter was that the INTO produced its own blueprint for executing the scheme, the central element of which involved the setting up of special sub-committees to oversee its management at local level so as to expedite the endeavours of each branch of the organisation in carrying it out. 'This', as Delargy sharply observed, 'was the end of the beginning', and, he added testily, 'the task of sub-committees [was] lightened by general lack of interest, entire absence of direction from headquarters, complete ignorance of how to set about the task- and so on'.⁷

Undoubtedly, the wrangling that attended the launch of this scheme exercised a hugely negative influence upon it. However, the very novelty of such a venture may also have militated against its easy acceptance and it could be argued that the language of the booklet, *National Tradition and Folklore*, by presenting the guideline in a much too remote and, perhaps, intimidating format, provided a further disincentive to participate in it.⁸

These guidelines were addressed exclusively to the teachers who, in the words of the Department circular were 'to render material assistance in the work of collecting, conserving and popularising the nation's folklore'. Attention was focused upon the teachers and, in the final analysis, the demands placed upon them in terms of collecting and, where appropriate, interpreting and mediating the principles of the scheme to their pupils, were counterproductive.

Chastened, but undeterred, by the singular lack of success which had attended this first effort, the Irish Folklore Commission set about carefully and systematically laying the ground for the even more ambitious attempt which was to follow. Valuable lessons had been learned and fewer mistakes would be made the second time around.

Once again, the cooperation of the Department of Education and the INTO were to be crucial underpinning elements. In his memorandum about the Scheme (typescript, in Volume 1 of the Schools' Manuscripts Collection), Sean Ó Suilleabhain states that:

⁷Delargy Papers. National Folklore Collection University College Dublin.

⁸This fifteen-page booklet was issued by the Department of Education under the name of 'Seosamh Ó Néill. Rúnaí'. The nature of the contents indicates that the author was a folklorist, in all probability, Delargy himself.

At the request of the Irish National Teachers' Organization the scheme was a voluntary one - teachers were free to have the school take part in the scheme or not, as they thought fit.

CMT 9/37 presents a slightly different picture, however, in declaring that the 'scheme will be voluntary in its application to schools in the cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford', a statement which would seem to imply that it was to be seen as being less than voluntary elsewhere.⁹ However, the circular went on to soften the blow, as it were, by admitting:

... that for historical and other reasons, some districts are relatively poor in folklore and that in some districts where folklore abounds the efforts of the pupils may be hampered by the apathy of the older people. It will be open to a teacher in such circumstances to make representation to the District Inspector for a modification or discontinuance of the scheme [§8].

In short, the evidence seems to point in the direction of the explosive issue of voluntary v. compulsory participation having been defused by means of a fudge. However that may be, the nation stood to benefit once the cooperation of the teachers was guaranteed - by whatever means. Two further considerations served to clinch the success of the 1937-1938 Schools' Scheme, namely, as already mentioned, its being accorded a special standing as part of the regular school curriculum and, of no less importance, the provision of a new teacher-friendly /pupil-friendly set of guidelines - a thirty-seven page booklet entitled *Irish Folklore and Tradition* which was issued by the Department of Education 'for the information of Managers and Teachers of National Schools' in September 1937. In the introduction to the booklet, strong emphasis was placed on the national importance of the work and great play was made of securing the cooperation of pupils and teachers alike:



In every rural school in Ireland the children will vie with one another in collecting from their parents and friends these [oral] traditions, and with the friendly help and encouragement of their teachers there is no doubt that a huge body of very valuable information will be recorded from every

⁹The previous scheme included no such provision.

*part of the country. When this urgent task of collecting is over a vast store of immensely important material will be available to research. We appeal to the children of the Primary Schools and to their teachers to help in this great work. In writing down these traditions the standpoint should be taken that this is the first time, and perhaps the last time, that they will be recorded.*¹⁰

These guidelines were drafted by an individual who was equipped with extensive experience of field-collecting, archiving and indexing procedures, and who was to boot a pedagogue with a long-standing and distinguished record in teaching, particularly primary school teaching. It was this unbeatable combination of skills which enabled Seán Ó Súilleabháin to reach out to teachers and pupils alike and to describe simply and succinctly what was required of them.

Under the heading 'Subjects for compositions', fifty five separate topics were laid out by Ó Súilleabháin. Most of these followed the pattern of providing the general background to the enquiry to be conducted and then outlining a series of questions about it that were to be answered by the children. Appropriately enough, in view of the task set the pupils in uncovering evidence of their local traditions, the first of these topics was 'Hidden Treasures'.

There is scarcely a district in Ireland in which stories of hidden treasure are not current. The wealth may have been hidden for many years or may date from quite recent times.

Where is the treasure supposed to have been hidden? By whom placed there? Why? Have attempts ever been made to unearth it? By whom? With what result?

What does the buried treasure consist of gold or silver or valuable vessels? What is the supposed value?

Has buried gold or such treasure ever been discovered in your district? Give an account of this.

What traditions are connected with the Danes in regard to secret hoards, or with the 'fairy' people? Have people ever been enabled to see this hidden wealth by eating certain food? With what result?

Are animals or supernatural guardians supposed to safeguard this hidden treasure? Give an account.

¹⁰ *Irish Folklore and Tradition*, An Roinn Oideachais, Meán Foghmhair 1937, 3-4.

Any other treasure stories?

Many tales of this character current in Ireland are of great antiquity, and when many hundreds of such narratives are recorded (and their exact location given) an important source of scientific investigation will be made available.¹¹

Nowadays, 'projects' of one kind or another which involve a direct interface between schools and the local community are commonplace but, in the 1930s, this was an idea far ahead of its time. The teachers were advised to choose a topic and to discuss it in detail with the pupils a week or so in advance. These were then despatched 'into the field' to gather the information which was subsequently noted down by them in their jotters and then written up in their school copybooks in the form of a composition.

The children had recourse to their parents and grandparents and other relatives as well as neighbours in pursuit of the information which they had been directed to acquire. They also drew directly on their own resources in researching topics such as 'Games I Play' or 'Home-made Toys'. Generally speaking, the topics were tackled by children in the order outlined in the booklet. The material in the copybooks generally follows the same order, as does the material in the official notebooks into which the choicest pieces were subsequently transcribed.

One gets the impression that the children entered into the Scheme with enthusiasm and that for the most part the gathering of the information and, perhaps, even the writing of the 'compositions' seems to have been regarded by them as a labour of love rather than just another school chore. For many - collectors and informants alike - it was a voyage of discovery in the realms of their very own 'hidden Ireland', an exercise which served to fashion a link between the generations and connect youngsters to the traditions of their forebears. The Schools' Scheme of 1937-1938 singled out 50,000 or so youngsters for a remarkable experience which left its mark upon them in later life and which, to judge by the large numbers of them who seek out the original Schools'

¹¹*Irish Folklore and Tradition*, 7. The remaining fifty-four topics were: A Funny Story, A Collection of Riddles, Weather Lore, Local Heroes, Local Happenings, Severe Weather, Old Schools, Old Crafts, Local Marriage Customs, In the Penal Times, Local Place-Names, Bird Lore, Local Cures, Home-Made Toys, Lore of Certain Days, Travelling Folk, 'Fairy Forts' Local Poets, Famine Times, Games I Play, The Local Roads, My Home District, Our Holy Wells, Herbs, The Potato Crop, Proverbs, Festival Customs, The Care of Our Farm Animals, Churning, The Care of the Feet, The Local Forge, Clothes Made Locally, Stories of the Holy Family, The Local Patron Saint, The Local Fairs, The Landlord, Food in Olden Times, Hurling and Football Matches, An Old Story, Old Irish Tales, A Song, Local Monuments, Bread, Buying and Selling, Old Houses, Stories of Giants and Warriors, The Leipreachan or Mermaid, Local Ruins, Religious Stories, The Old Graveyards, A Collection of Prayers, Emblems and Objects of Value, Historical Tradition. Strange Animals.

Manuscripts Collection in the Department of Irish Folklore or view it on microfilm at other centres around the country, was never forgotten by them.

In spite of the obvious rural bias in the field of enquiry and the fact that dispensations had been issued in respect of the capital and certain other cities, some material was collected both in and around these and, of course, other urban centres. Members of the majority Roman Catholic population probably found the confessional approach to the topics relating to religious matters congenial and those of other faiths less so. Protestant schools surmounted this particular difficulty by silently passing over topics of lesser relevance to their beliefs.

The Scheme finally came to an end on 31 January 1939 and the official notebooks and school copybooks were returned to the Department of Education who then handed them over to the Irish Folklore Commission. The headquarters of the Commission at that time was located in University College Dublin, Earlsfort Terrace. There, the returns of the Scheme were taken in hand by the archivist, Seán Ó Súilleabháin, and his co-worker, Máire MacNeill. By the end of March 1939, some 4,575 notebooks had taken their place on the archive shelves and a veritable mountain of copybooks was packed away for safe-keeping elsewhere, due to lack of space. Some of these notebooks belonged to the first tranche issued by the Department of Education in March 1934.

The arrival of this massive body of material did not pass unnoticed: 'The Work of 50,000 Children ... Weighing over 20 Tons', trumpeted the *Irish Independent*; "'Magnificent" Result of Schools' Scheme', declared the *Evening Mail*, while the *Irish Times* soberly noted the 'Success of Primary Schools' Scheme'.¹² The *Irish Press* of 15 February 1939 featured a photograph of Máire MacNeill standing by archive shelves laden with manuscripts, and referred to 'over 20 Tons of Folklore', while the English newspaper, *The People*, announced on 19 February 1939 - 'Children Swamp Teacher (Mr. Sean O'Sullivan) with Thousands of Copy-books'.

This euphoric reception drew a tart response in some quarters. The *Irish Press* and the *Irish Times* of 3 April 1939 both reported the somewhat less than enthusiastic remarks - echoing some of the reservations articulated by the INTO in 1934 - of Mr Justice Louis J. Walsh.

What he called 'the folklore ramp' was assailed by District Justice L.J. Walsh in a Carrick, Co. Donegal lecture on 'Danish Folk Schools'. He asserted that there was a tendency to allow 'one track mind faddists' to overload the primary school programme to the detriment of the people's needs.

¹²All on 1 February 1939.

District Justice Walsh said that to 'burden' teachers and pupils with the collecting of folklore was absurd and that the results were undesirable. Children, afraid of slapping, were having parents invent tales for them and he had been told teachers had to use 'similar devices' against inspectors' importunities. If the Folklore Commission was obtaining folklore 'by the ton' from the schools he believed much of it was spurious.

Fortunately, these remarks came too late to have any effect on the Schools Scheme, but they may have prompted the poet, Patrick Kavanagh - a regular reader in the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission - to offer his own tuppence worth of comment. Some weeks later (18 April, 1939), Kavanagh fulminated in an *Irish Times* article entitled 'Twenty-three tons of Accumulated folklore -is it of any use?':

Folklore collecting like its modern sister, mass-observation is an attempt by sentimental science to do without the poets who are now starving to death...Not only is this stuff culturally useless, it is definitely harmful. Let Dr. Deleargy (sic) say what he may, this weighty collection is a rubbish heap that sooner or later will have to be destroyed Supposing the money that is being spent - or should I say wasted? - on dead things was spent to keep cigarettes in the mouths of poets, there would be a hope that April might wake green beauty in Ireland's thought....

To judge the enthusiastic participation of teachers, pupils and parents, Walsh's and Kavanagh's assessments of the Schools' Scheme and the Schools' Manuscript Collection was wildly out of line with the general view at the time. Needless to say the Irish Folklore Commission and particularly its Honorary Director and Archivist did not share these opinions but welcomed with open arms the arrival of this large body of manuscript material which, practically overnight, more than doubled the archive holdings.

Time has given the School Manuscripts Collection added value and it has come more and more into its own as a much sought after and highly popular documentary resource with a wide application not only in the field of folklore studies but also in the history, genealogy, and related areas. For many parts of the country, it constitutes the only significant archival record of local folk tradition and its usefulness as a tool for helping to elucidate a broad span of Irish folk tradition, not least in respect of its various manifestations in places where no collector had ever set foot, has long been recognised.¹³

¹³See, for example, C. Ó Danachair, 'Some Marriage Customs and their Regional Distribution', *Béaloides* 42-4 (1974-6), 136-75. As part of scholarly analysis, this and other folklore materials are subject to stringent source criticism - see the remarks in this regard

Le Dúil sa Dúchas, the exhibition mounted in University College Dublin in 1991 to commemorate the Schools' Scheme, drew many thousands of the youngsters who had taken part in it to Dublin for the occasion. One senior citizen from among that proud band was heard to remark - 'Wasn't it well that it was kept!' - a sentiment which echoes the views of many and which might be taken as a good example of the kind of feeling which this remarkable collection engendered and continues to engender.¹⁴

Not long after the arrival in the capital of the fruits of the 1937-1938 Schools' Scheme, following the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the Schools' Manuscripts Collection, as we may now describe it, was on the move again. The Irish Folklore Commission decided to transfer key parts of its holdings for safe-keeping, in case of bomb damage, to locations outside Dublin and, accordingly, the official notebooks - destined in due course to become bound volumes 1-1226 - were placed in storage in the outskirts of the Dublin suburb of Rathfarnham, not far from the Hell Fire Club.¹⁵ The school copybooks, however, remained in situ being kept under the main staircase in Earlsfort Terrace, University College Dublin. The Main Manuscripts Collection was transferred to Altnabrocky Lodge, Erris, county Mayo.

The collections never returned to Earlsfort Terrace and were first re-united in 1949 at another location. Their new home was in another part of University College Dublin - 82 St Stephen's Green, Dublin - a house which was made available to the Irish Folklore Commission as its new headquarters after the war.

Soon afterwards, the work of arranging the official notebooks according to parish, barony, county and province began and a complete list of the schools which had participated in the Scheme was made. The notebooks were then bound in large cloth volumes (1952-1953), paginated and numbered.¹⁶ An interim catalogue of the contents of these volumes was completed in 1955 and their entire contents have now been microfilmed. The school copybooks have been boxed and labelled with the number of the corresponding bound volume, the name of the school, the barony and

with reference to the Schools' Collection by B. Almqvist in 'The Uglie Foot', *Béaloideas* 27-8 (1969-70), 12-6 and, in a slightly different but related context, by R.M. James in 'A Year in Ireland -Reflections on a Methodological Crisis', *Sinsear, The Folklore Journal* 4 (1982-83), 83-90.

¹⁴This exhibition has since been shown at numerous county libraries and other centres throughout Ireland.

¹⁵They were kept in a rented room in a house in Woodtown Park, owned by Arnold Marsh, a Waterford Quaker, whose acquaintance Seán Ó Súilleabháin had made in the 1920s and 1930s. They were stored in large wooden boxes which accommodated about twenty volumes each. Ó Súilleabháin would cycle out to Woodtown Park every week to inspect the boxes whose contents suffered no damage apart from a few volumes which were affected by rain resulting from a storm which shattered a window in the room in which they were stored.

¹⁶They were rebound (board binding) in 1988-1989

the county. A microfilm copy of volumes 1-1126 has been supplied by the Department of Irish Folklore to a number of institutions (such as St Patrick's College, Drumcondra) and the various 'county' collections have been made available on microfilm to all the county libraries in the state where they may be consulted by interested parties. The original bound volumes as well as the boxed copybooks are available for consultation in the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

The return in terms of the number of manuscript pages contained in volumes 1 - 1126, county by county and province by province was as follows:

CONNACHT	(104,580)	MUNSTER	(123,840)
Galway	35,100	Cork	41,040
Mayo	32,760	Kerry	32,400
Leitrim	14,040	Clare	16,200
Roscommon	11,880	Limerick	15,120
Sligo	10,800	Tipperary	14,040
		Waterford	5,040
LEINSTER	(87,900)	ULSTER*	(68,340)
Meath	12,000	Donegal	30,240
Westmeath	11,340	Cavan	24,300
Kilkenny	9,000	Monaghan	10,800
Wexford	8,840	* Three counties participated	
Longford	8,100		
Offaly	6,840		
Laois	5,800		
Louth	5,760		
Wicklow	4,860		
Dublin	4,320		
Kildare	3,960		
Carlow	2,880		

As is apparent from this list, one of the largest contributions was that made by county Donegal (30,240 manuscript pages). The parish of Clonmany which, in common with the rest of Inishowen, had contributed no a jot to the 1934 scheme,¹⁷ submitted a very creditable total of 738 pages from the following schools - Gaddyduff (Boys and Girls), Cros Chonaill, Béal Trágha, Tír na Sligeach and Ráth Sionnaigh (contained in volumes 1120, 1121 and 1122). In addition, no less than 127 school copybooks were returned. It was a rich harvest, indeed, one that has yet to be fully assessed and analysed by folklore scholars. One day, I am sure, it will be edited and published as it deserves.¹⁸

In the meantime, the contents of volumes 1120, 1121 and 1122 are available on microfilm in Donegal County Library. Copies of the available copybooks have been presented by University College Dublin to the surviving individuals who were once pupils of the above-mentioned schools and who participated in the Schools' Scheme of 1937-1938.

¹⁷ The 1934 Holy Wells Questionnaire drew only one response from the teachers of Inishowen in the period 1934-1937.

¹⁸ A number of collections from individual schools has been edited and published in recent years. See, for example, S. Ó Catháin and C. Uí Sheighin, *A Mhuintir Dhú Chaochain. Labhraígí Feasta. Cnuasach béaloidis a bhailigh daltaí de chuid Scoil Náisiúnta Cheathrú Thaidhg, Contae Mhaigh Eo, faoi Sceim na Scol 1937-1938* (Indreabhán 1987).