

DR. F. M. HILLIARD

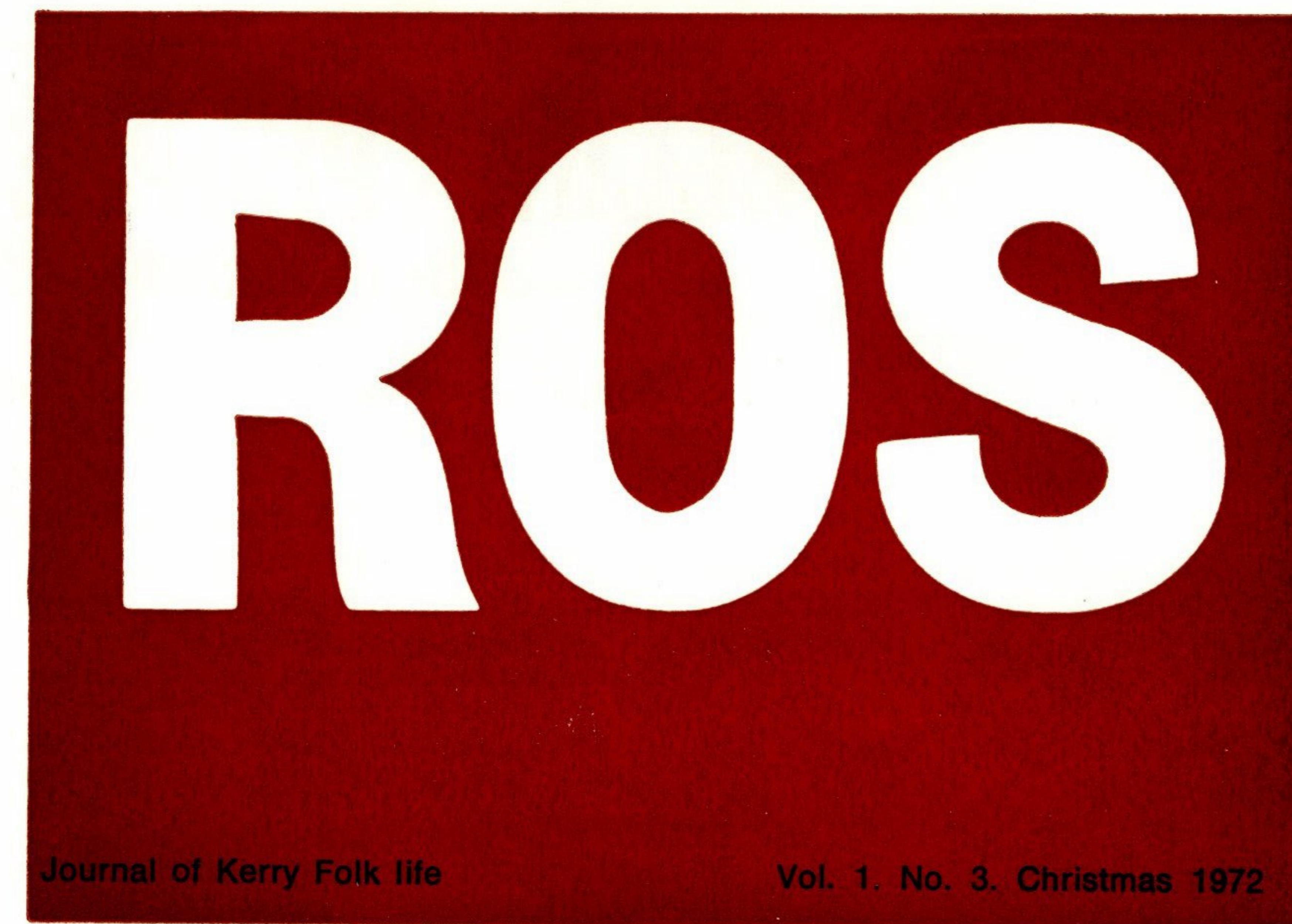
He had a vision of Kerry Folk Life that was unequalled. He saw its importance before it ever became popular. The founding of the Folk Museum at Muckross was inspired by Dr. Frank Hilliard. ROS could not have happened without him. We will ever be in his debt. His death has left us with very many happy, enlightened memories, mingled with a sadness for our loss. We offer our sympathy to Mrs. Hilliard, to his daughter Rosemary and to his son, Christopher and thank them for giving us such a wonderful person for so long.

National Folk Theatre Plan

A plan for a National Folk Theatre, based in Tralee, was announced recently in a sixty two page report called 'A Plan for fostering the growth of Traditional Irish Folk Culture' which was prepared by Fr. Pat Ahern, the devisor and producer of the folk pageant Siamsa, and Patrick O'Sullivan and Partners, Architects. (See Full Report on Page three)



This scene from Siamsa combines the practical trade of thatching with the mystique of the straw boys— it well illustrates the superstition that is such an integral part of our Folk Culture.



"The wren, the wren,
The king of all birds,
St. Stephen's Day
Was caught in the furze;
Although he is little,
His family is great,
So rise up, (landlady)
And give us a treat!"

This wren boy group was taken by Raymond Piper the Belfast Artist in the North Kerry Village of Brosna on St. Stephen's Day 1968. The wren in the cage, the pig's bladder that distinguishes the oinseach, the king in regal colours and the obvious festivity will again be in evidence this year particularly in North Kerry. It is a fitting picture to accompany our wish to all. Nollaig fé shona agus fé mhaise dhaoibh go léir.

Songs of Kerry

SONGS OF KERRY was a pictorial presentation of 150 songs on a chart almost fifty feet long. The work was done by seventy girls from Listowel. Their leader SISTER CONSOLATA (back to camera in photo with girls) writes about the work on the project and what she and the group hope will happen as a result of it).

"SONGS OF KERRY" was the title given by a group of First Year Pupils in the Presentation Convent, Listowel, to a project they did for the Full-Life-for Youth Scheme under the patronage of Bishop Casey.

When F.L.Y. was first mooted we decided to develop an idea that we had in mind for some time—the present urgent need for Education of leisure. Music plays so large a part in the lives of people that we felt this was also an opportunity to direct attention to the Songs of Kerry. In the process a love of native county might be instilled and to give a chance to enjoy one aspect of our own culture. We hope too, to rescue from oblivion a few of the Songs of Kerry which enshrine the county's beauty and history.

When work began we had no idea of what the end product would be—we just played it by ear. At first the girls got songs locally, from parents,

grandparents and neighbours. Gradually their scope broadened—one contact led to another, and eventually spread out over the whole county. The girls showed tremendous enthusiasm—many of them walked miles, going back again and again following up on a particular song. Most people co-operated and showed great interest in the work. As well as lending precious copies of words, many people put songs on tape for us.

A new awareness opened for the girls and myself as we grouped the various songs. We saw how much of our history and beauty is incorporated in these songs, so we decided to link the project with tourism. The girls displayed the various songs with suitable scenes. As an incentive and to create greater interest, we formed a school band. The girls then set about learning the words and music of some of the collected songs.



The girls who did the "SONGS OF KERRY" project under the direction of Sr. M. Consolata.

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THE TRAVELLING PEOPLE

—by Dr. Bryan McMahon

A recent issue, (Vol. LXXX. No. 10, December 1971) of *Natural History*, The Journal of the American Museum of Natural History, New York and as such considered one of the foremost magazines in the world, contained an important article on the Irish Travelling people by Dr. Bryan MacMahon of Listowel (who incidentally has been associated with Muckross House since it first opened its doors to the public as a centre of Irish Folk Life).

Dr. MacMahon's article created an international stir and when copies of the issue were sold, hundreds of 'pulls' of the article had to be run off to satisfy requests from universities the world over who evinced the keenest possible interest, especially on a biological level, as to how the Irish tinkers had survived all these years in the face of almost insuperable odds. Bryan MacMahon has written on their lives "from the inside" in his novel and plays—"The Honey Spike" as a novel and play being an example that comes readily to mind.

The photos accompanying the article in *Natural History* were by Mathias Oppersdorff and have mated beautifully with the text. This issue of ROS considers that this article merits an extended review since it deals with a most important aspect of Irish folk life.

In the article Dr. MacMahon begins with a word portrait of the father of the tinker family: "As he scans his world, he sees a crude camping place; sees his children, as often as not, cold, smoke-blinded, ill clad, hungry and deprived. The man is a tinker one of the seven and a half thousand such wanderers on the Irish highways who now find themselves at the cross roads of their existence".

MacMahon explains why this is such an important time for the travelling people: "Caught up in their last fight for the right to a nomadic way of life, one that has been theirs for centuries, these people are torn between the old traditions and the urge to educate their children in a manner free from the hazards and hardships of the road".

Health and education are two of the main forces for change. "As a tinker gropes to interpret, in terms of his own family, the frightening statistics of death among his people's young his own illiteracy is ironically made apparent to him by his inability to read the notice hanging on the fence beside him — TEMPORARY DWELLINGS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. (This in effect, means TINKERS KEEP OUT).



"It is formal education that provides the greatest hope for these youngsters"

DEATH AND ILLITERACY

"A harsh winter brings terrifying problems and, on occasions, distress in its most acute form. Really cold weather, although rare, is hard on the wanderers. But more deadly is the dampness of the Irish climate, which begets respiratory afflictions of all sorts. This accounts most for the high mortality rate among tinkers. (The infant mortality rate is unusually high, since many young couples start their married life with no better dwelling than a tent. A 1960 census noted that

of 1,124 children born alive in the preceding ten-year-period, 85 died in the first year of life. In recent years this rate has been somewhat reduced but it is still far above the national average).

"I shall long remember the blast of fetid air that hit my nostrils when I opened up a caravan in which seven or eight children, the eldest a girl of about nine, had been shut up for a period of weeks during an unusually harsh period of frosty weather. Both parents were ill in hospital. The floor boards of the caravan were coated with stiffened diarrhoea and glossy with frozen urine".

Speaking on education MacMahon says: "These children are neither more nor less intelligent than the average child of settled parents—with the single proviso that, since environment plays a major part in the development of a child's motivation, their lack of an environment favourable to formal education is somewhat of a handicap. But they are considerably more self-reliant, resilient and adaptable than the child of fixed residence."

"It is heartwarming to see a boy of nine read the newspapers (the court cases especially) to illiterate parents wholly entranced at the scholarship of their son".

TINKER TONGUE

One doesn't expect to find an illiterate section of people within a nation having a language of their own. Dr. MacMahon was so intrigued by this that at one stage in his life he "joined campfires—pretending that I was a tinker who had made good by "flogging waxy" (selling linoleum)". On these visits he brought along an old wire recorder that was a source of mystification to all. "The secret language called Shelta I found to be mostly jumble Gaelic or Irish with variants of considerable semantic and linguistic interest".

"As an example of the derivation of Shelta I offer the common words **Lackeen** (a girl) and **Soobla** (a boy). By rearranging the first and fourth letters of the Irish word **Cailin** (a girl) it becomes **laicín**, which is almost identical in pronunciation to lackeen. Similarly, the word **soobla** is more or less an anagram of the Irish **buachail** with the harsh ch sound softened to s".

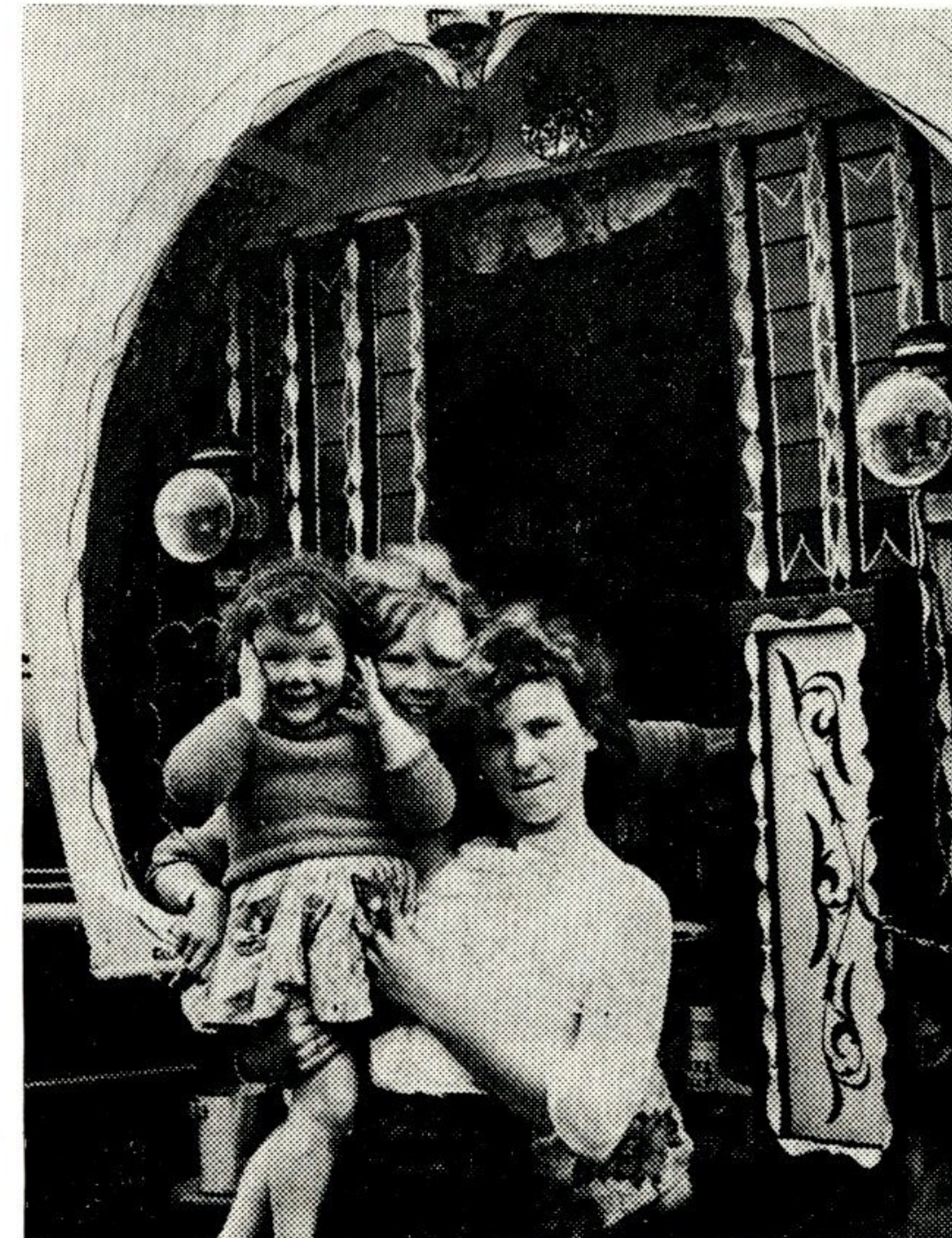
But the tinkers were illiterate. Who could have put the language down on paper? Dr. MacMahon surmises: "The originator was undoubtedly an accomplished letter juggler. It can be shown that the word **scoi-hóp** Shelta for whiskey, was derived by a devious process from **uisce beatha**, Irish for whiskey, although at first glance there is no apparent relationship between the two words".

Later he says: "Some authorities identify the inventor of this cant as one of the dissolute priests or homeless monks who wandered astray in Ireland as a result of England's suppression of the monasteries and enforcement, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of the Anti-Roman Catholic penal laws. If priest he were, this would account for the Latin word **panis** which tinkers use alternatively with **durra** as a cant word for bread. But this is conjecture at its most fertile, even though it is supported by the analogy of such words as "**hocus-pocus**", which is seventeenth-century sham Latin (in Ireland bog Latin). "**Hocus-Pocus**" is insultingly imitative of **Hoc est corpus meum**, the words pronounced by the priest over the bread at the Consecration of the Mass".

DISPOSSESSED CHIEFTAINS

But how did this race apart come to exist in Ireland? "Some historians have cited evidence for the belief that in pre-historic Ireland there were outcasts who lived beyond the circle of the Brehon Laws.—Other authorities advance the theory that the tinkers were native chieftains and their families who, dispossessed in the successive English plantations in Ireland, continued to hide in the neighbourhood of their ancestral lands. With the passing years, instead of regaining what was rightfully theirs, their lot became still more squalid".

"In favour of this latter theory is the undeniable fact that the tinkers of today bear the names of some of the noblest clans in Ireland—McCarthy (or Carty), O'Brien, O'Driscoll, McDonagh, O'Reilly and O'Connors (or Connors)".



"The tinker wife often a girl in her teens

Explaining why he believes that the life of the traveller is at a cross roads Dr. MacMahon says: "The tinker's traditional trade of tinsmith has been hard hit by the widespread use of plastic utensils, the tinker men now tend to engage in a variety of occupations, although the tinsmith is still very much respected. The others collect scrap, car batteries, feathers and horse-hair. They clean chimneys, mend umbrellas, clean the dry latrines of country schools, hawk garish linoleum door to door," and engage in many other activities.

But all of this activity provides uncertain income and a great number of tinkers are very poor, "the lower ranks of tinkers possess little more than a flat cart, a piebald pony, a flashing harness, a hooped tent of green canvas, a ground sheet of sorts, a kettle bar, and a few blackened cooking utensils".

"The tinker wife, often a girl in her teens, carries her baby wrapped in in the crook of her brilliant green and red rug shawl. As alibi for her begging, she carries a wicker basket containing a variety of goods—broadsheet ballads, Sacred Heart badges, camphor balls, and gewgaw brooches. If her baby has not yet arrived, the young wife might carry in her shawl a bundle of clothes to simulate one, thus evoking the passerby's pity.

Here is one area that they are past masters: "Tinkers employ the psychology of begging in all its nicety. A young man chatting with his girl friend is particularly vulnerable, as is a tourist who has never before come face to face with a person possessing such power of wheedling. Tinkers also are quick to spot a priest anxious to live up to the standard of charity implied by his cloth".

In spite of their probable royal ancestry tinkers anxious to settle are rarely welcomed as neighbours: "Trouble sometimes arises when prospective neighbours, who feel socially threatened by the tinkers' proximity, react blindly and with unreasoning hatred. True is the saying 'The outcast's fear of society is exceeded only by society's fear of the outcast'".

MORAL PRINCIPLES

But in spite of what he thought, tinkers have very much to commend them: "Family loyalty is intense. To be present at a tinker funeral (mourners often travel long distances, even from England, to attend) is to see an unrestrained human expression of grief at the loss of a loved one".

And again: "Tinkers have a strict moral code. They tend to marry at the onset of nubility, and courtships are treated with suspicion. The story, probably apocryphal, is told of an old priest leaving an encampment after confessions and murmuring to himself in disbelief, "No fornication!"

"The church wedding itself, often held after one of the great fairs is an ebullient event that can be intensely moving. Sometimes the celebration will spill over into the roadside to include the passerby in a tide of infectious hilarity and joy. When everyone has drunk his fill, the young couple move off in a flat cart loaded with the bare necessities of life to make the first "bed of honour" on a quiet roadside. Thus begins another family on the roads of Ireland".

And here the perennial problem starts again because, as MacMahon points out: "In the view of the Irish social worker, it is formal education that provides the greatest hope for these youngsters. For example, through education, it is possible to convey, completely by inference, to the tinker child that begging is a badge of shame and slavery. If the child somehow transfers this awareness to his parents, the abuse can be brought to an end".

NATURAL HISTORY has well earned its reputation as one of the foremost periodicals of its kind. Dr. Bryan MacMahon's "A Portrait of Tinkers" is brought to life in the most effective way by eleven pages of photographs that accompany the article (eight colour and three black and white) and on which the expressions of the travellers, the poverty, freedom and simplicity are depicted. Combined with the sort of expressive language that we have come to expect from Bryan MacMahon the article became a very valuable document. The drawing together of "us" and "them" in the closing paragraphs should help us to be aware of a valuable page in our folk history and might evoke a more sympathetic handling of the tinker situation today and in the immediate future.

THE EDGE OF LIVING

"As I view the tinker of the Irish roads (I have avoided the word itinerant as much as possible, as I reckon it one of false elegance) he is one of the outer ramparts of individual liberty. He continues to vouch for the wit, the resourcefulness and the versatility of man, since every dawn brings him the problems of accumulating enough food to be alive at sunset. And, just as the writer of fiction at times tests the vaguely defined area on the edges of consciousness and sanity, so also in the life of the tinker there is that which tests the edge of physical living. To some extent this exemplifies what man can endure under conditions of extreme hostility".

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"Tomorrow I want you all to be early because we will have

CLASS IN MUCKROSS HOUSE

"How do you make the winkers?" the ten year old from Ballyhearney national school on Valentia was questioning the harness maker at Muckross House, Killarney.

"First of all you have this pattern. Do you see?" as he placed the piece, roughly the shape of a figure 9 at the side of his face, to show how it would prevent the animal from seeing to the side. "Then you put this down on a piece of leather and mark the leather around the sides of the pattern with a knife or anything" as he marked quickly with a knife Gerry Kelliher was in his element "then you put the pattern on another piece of leather in reverse, and you sow the pieces of leather together".

"Oh, I see", the group of lads chorused together "then you cut the straps with the gauge knife like you showed us and stitch them all together with waxed hemp thread".

I hadn't been there when the boys had begun in the harness makers workshop but I was amazed that they were able to gather so much information so quickly.

Twenty five 10/11 year old boys and girls from the 5th and 6th classes in the Ballyhearney national school, near Chapelton on Valentia Island, had come to Muckross House with their teacher Mrs. J. Gallagher on an education tour. It was the second of more than fifty such tours which will be coming to the House during the coming months.

"For some time now we have realized that we should be offering some sort of educational programme

10.15—Small groups go to a particular craft worker for half an hour. There are now four craft workers in Muckross a weaver, blacksmith, potter and harness maker.

11.00—Small groups study a particular section of the House in more detail e.g. Harvesting, Dairying, farm kitchen, farm implements.

11.35 a.m.—Brief general tour of the House.

12.20 p.m.—Lunch break.

1.00 p.m. General look at folk life in Kerry in the early part of the century with slides and tapes (approx 25 mins.) followed by questions and discussion.

The last part of the suggested programme is variable. As well as the general look at Kerry life there are a further eleven programmes on slides and tapes—basket maker; curragh builder; wheelwright/cartmaker; cooper; spinning and weaving; blacksmith banding wheels; threshing and siogog making; turf; geology of Kerry; Tracking the Celtic Church in Kerry (the last two programmes may be too advanced for national school children).

One of the nature trails in the national park might also be included in the day. A tour of one of the trails would take about forty five minutes to walk and study.

"The weaver uses a loom to weave cloth". James Quinlan, the weaver at Muckross House, had the six young-

"An arch. And arch of a bridge. An arch".

Starting with a straight piece of iron. He put it in the fire and got it red hot. Then started to hammer it. Put it back into the fire until it was red hot again. The clanging, ringing sound of beating metal filled the air. While the metal was being heated the controlled wind of the huge bellows breathed in and out.

They watched very closely. Moving as he moved. Gradually the metal bar was curved. In a short time a horse shoe had been made.

And then through screwplates, threads, vice (What's that in Irish? Casúr).

Then carefully the lads took out their pads and drew an anvil.

POTTER

"After shaping the pot on the table its soft—you see it wobbles—so you leave it for a day". Mary McCullough, the potter at Muckross explains to her all female audience.

They huddle around—obviously everybody wants to be a potter. "The foot of the cup—the bottom—is not dead flat, it goes up slightly. So we have to even it off" They were almost drooling, they craned closer, and forgot the pencils and paper they had clutched in their hands.

After the half an hour with the craft worker of their choice the young people came together and again divided into four groups. This time to go to different parts of the basement of the house to look at the implements used by different rural, manual workers at the beginning of the century—some earlier and some still used.

One group went to the dairy and read about creameries being introduced at the end of the last century and taking nearly fifty years to spread to all parts of the country. They looked at the different kinds of churns and were particularly impressed by the little wheel that was placed in a stream and turned a long handle that passed through the wall of the farm cottage and operated the handle of the churn.

"That stool would be too small for a big person" the little milking stool was dismissed.

Another group went to the Harvest room and saw the life of grain from the breaking of the ground to the baking of the loaf on the open fire—through setting, cutting, thrashing, winnowing, grinding, and baking. The huge horse operated thresher was particularly impressive.

Another group went to a room where there was a variety of farm implements—a number of ploughs, a hay rake, a mangler that was used for cutting up furze—evidently once considered an animal delicacy.

The last group were in the farm kitchen—the ovens, the sinks, the special crushers and mixers for spices, coffee, beans and cream, the first hot

plates that kept their heat by putting hot coals underneath—and this kitchen of the great house contrasts with the kitchen in the little thatched cottage, that has been built in the house—here the open fire and its cooking implements, the settle bed, the dresser filled to over flowing with crockery.

Next there was a quick general tour of the house so that everybody got to see everything—as well as the rooms of the great house of the 19th century and the display of maps and prints.

TEACHER VITAL

Over the quick snack lunch I talked to Mrs. Gallagher, the teacher from Valentia. "For the past week we have spent four or five hours in class going over the literature that Mr. Myers sent us. I explained what we were going to do and got the children to look at different things on Valentia that they were going to see in Muckross".

This advance preparation is vital It sustained the interest of the young people right through the day and gave them an appetite for everything they saw—and more.

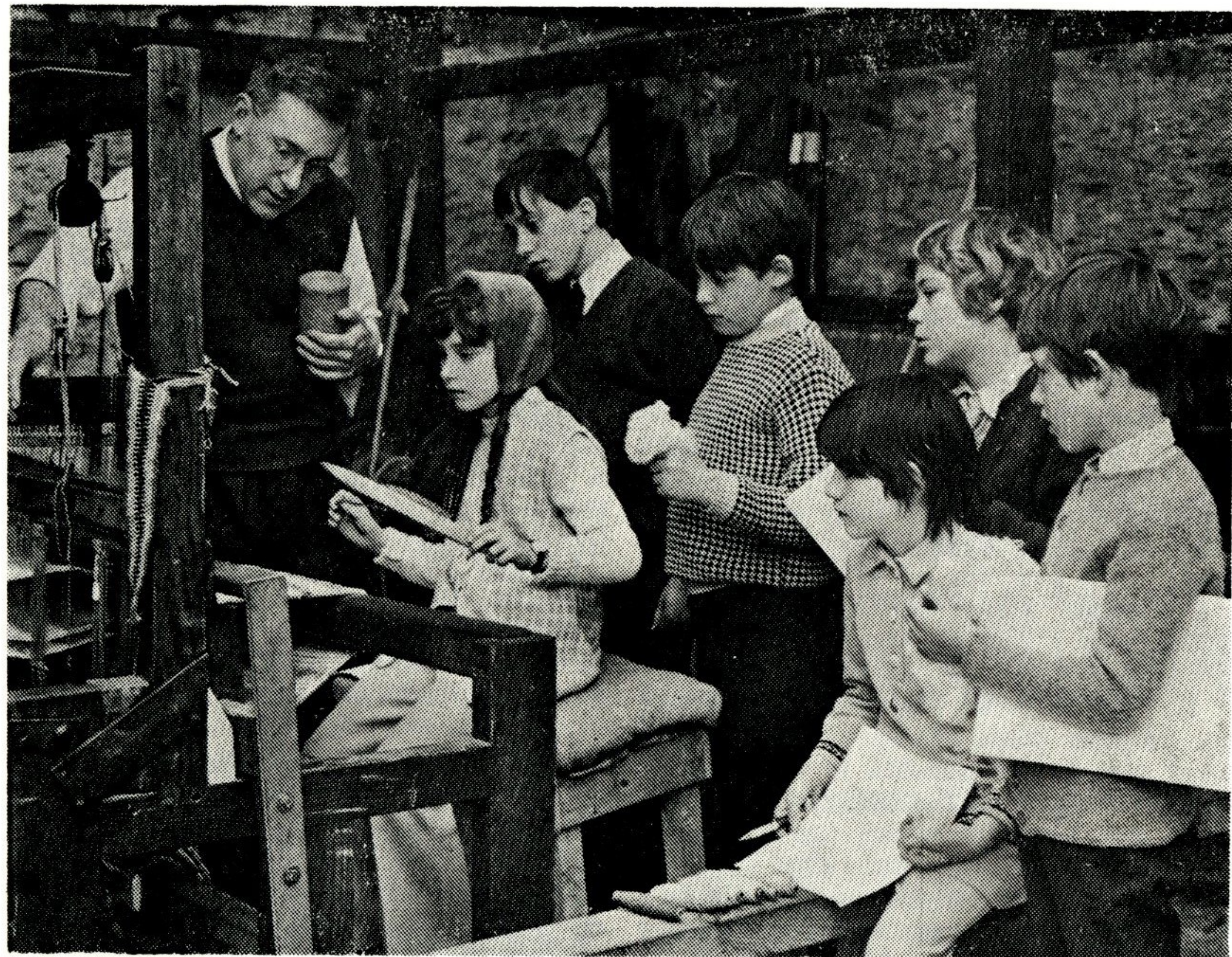
After lunch there was a slide show. Muckross has prepared a number of programmes with integrated slide pictures and a commentary on tape. The principal programme is to look at life in Kerry about the turn of the century—the building, the customs, beliefs, superstitions, the ways people earned their living. This was followed, in the case of the Valentia group, by a presentation on Valentia slate.

THE BELL

Then they asked questions on what they had seen and eventually, reluctantly, at half past two they got ready to go back to their bus to travel back to Valentia. At the door each of them shook hands and clutching their little work-books tightly they ran across the cobbled yard. The notes they had taken, and drawings they had made, would be looked at and discussed for many weeks to come.

BOOKING TOURS

Teachers interested in bringing groups on this educational tour to Muckross should get in touch with Muckross House (Tel. 31440) as soon as possible. At present tours are booked solidly for a month. Teachers will need at least a week's preparation with their students using the special documentation that will be sent out on receipt of booking—if the young people are to get as much as they could from the tour.



Young people from Lissivigeen in the weaver's workshop with weaver, James Quinlan.

which would have more content than the normal school excursions". Ned Myers said, in a letter to all the national schools in Kerry. "We have now organised this fuller programme and it will be available until the middle of March. For the moment it will only be available to national schools".

The programme is designed to take a full school day. If the visit to the house is to be successful the teacher needs to have spent several hours going over the material that is sent out from Muckross a week before the group visits the house. This includes details on the material displayed and the craft workers, reference material, a plan of exactly what the tour will involve and a work book that each young person will be given to fill in.

PROGRAMME

This is the suggested programme for the day—but it can be altered at the discretion of the individual teacher: 10.00 a.m.—Arrival of group, work books given out and days programme explained.

sters crouched along the low wooden structure that acts as a barrier in his workshop. "Can you spell all of those words? Has everybody taken it down? Now two sets of woollen thread are used in cloth". He watched and waited, while they wrote each word. "Before putting the thread on to the loom the weaver mounts it on a warp" he pointed out the 7 feet by 6 feet wooden frame with the numerous pegs, on which the thread is mounted.

Step by step the weaver went through the things he does and intently they followed his actions. They took notes and watched. For his part James watched that they got everything before going on to the next stage.

BLACKSMITH

"Its called after something connected with a bridge?" Blacksmith Martin Cussen made a wide curve with his hand as he tried to get the young lads to guess what the iron implement in his hand was.

They tried eagerly to come up with the name.

The travelling people (contd. from p. 2

Here is MacMahon's final word: "Mankind has as many layers as an onion, and when all of these layers are peeled off, the core is tinker or gypsy; the traveller is in me, in you, in everyman. Yet, compared with the tinker we are lapdogs by the parlour fireside quivering in commingled fear and ecstasy when, through the sound of the the gusting storm outside, we fear the baying of wild dogs running free by the light of the moon".

This article which is an important addition to the literature concerning the Irish Tinker is certain to be published on this side of the Atlantic and should add further to Dr. MacMahon's reputation. We congratulate NATURAL HISTORY on the publication of a fine piece of scholarship and initiative by one of our own writers. Indeed this is not the first time this magazine has turned its attention to Ireland or to Kerry. Some years ago it carried an article on the Dingle Peninsula. Kerry's appearing twice in these illustrious pages is cause for considerable pride—we in ROS note that both contributions are of prime value to the student of Irish folk life.

Songs of Kerry (contd. from page 1

The Trustees of Muckross House have offered to arrange the publication of the collected songs. But first we want to make an appeal through this article. We feel the collection we have made is only the nucleus of the songs available in the county.

There are many songs and ballads relating to ambushes, local events and personalities hidden among our people. We would be very grateful for any help in collecting these songs as they were traditionally composed.

Songs can be sent to Mr. Ned Myers at Muckross House or to us at the Presentation Convent, Listowel. By helping with this, readers will help to preserve many a precious folklore gem and do a service to the county and to posterity.

Letters giving the words of the songs or giving any information will be acknowledged personally.

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National Folk Theatre

—by Frank Lewis

"Our ambition is to take the folk traditions in the local areas and to develop these in such a way that they continue to be a spontaneous, living enjoyable experience" Fr. Pat Ahern explained to me. "Our particular role is to impose a theatrical discipline on our folk culture so that it can be put on display—this will show our cultural individuality to other nations and will give a purpose to retaining and developing our culture".

The plan is concerned with an area that includes South West Clare, West Limerick as far as Abbeyfeale, West Cork as far as Macroom and all of Kerry. Within this area a number of points will have rural centres (called Teach Siamsa) which, quoting the report, "is intended to be a meeting place for the people of the district where the native talents and folk wealth of the district is researched and assembled".

Two centres are dealt with specifically in the report, one at Finuge, near Listowel, where the site has already been bought and outline planning permission obtained, and the second in the Chorca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht. Centres are selected because they are the hub of an area that has "a natural folk asset, or tradition, which seems to assert itself in that district as distinct from others". The plan envisages that a well placed centre would not be more than half-an-hour's car journey away from the furthest part of its catchment area. In the long term centres are envisaged near Ballinskelligs, in East Kerry, in the Beaufort/Killarney area and near Macroom. Further locations are not detailed but centres are obviously intended for Clare, West Limerick and the Beara Peninsula.

Each centre will be in a large cottage, typical of the area it is in, "It will have a design of a traditional nature", Fr. Ahern explained, "it is important that the centre have character and atmosphere. In the context of a folk theatre this is as valid as costumes". The plan feels that these centres will operate best in rural surroundings and one reason they give for this is that the centres should be in a natural setting and should be regarded by the local population in a special way as "a haunt with a difference". All of this, and proximity to the folk cultures, would obviously be that much more difficult to achieve in a town.

RURAL CENTRE STAFF

Each centre will have five members of staff—the skilled members will be expected to cover two centres. These will include a Research Officer whose function will be to sift out and document—by word, picture and recording—the folk material in the district. This will include natural talents, music, dancing, local stories, expressions and actions, local customs, beliefs and practices and the documenting of certain physical features of the people and places. Each centre will have a small folk library where this material will be kept.

The next member of the staff will be an accomplished traditional musician who will act as a music teacher—developing the local talent and bent—instruments like uilleann pipes, fiddle, tin whistle, flute, accordion, bodhran and bones will be included. A dancing teacher will be an accomplished dancer with wide knowledge of the art of traditional dancing. Experimenting in recreating and in building up of the local native dances for theatrical presentation will also be part of his function. Then there will be an artistic director who will shape the material provided by the other staff for theatrical presentation.

In each centre there will also be a part time local manager who will act as caretaker and liaison officer with the local people. Apart from the work of research and training the rural centres will become a focal point of life and activity in the district, a meeting place

for the local people where they can enjoy and take part in exhibitions of music, dancing, story telling, yarn telling and so on. The local manager will be responsible for running these local functions. To facilitate these, and an audience of about sixty, as well as some simple stage settings and lighting, the cottage will need to be large.



Two members of the Siamsa group in one of the scenes from the Folk Pageant. Here they are seen looking after some of their crops.

NATIONAL FOLK THEATRE

But the main outlet for the activity of the centre will be the National Folk Theatre. In choosing a base for the theatre the report is concerned about getting some place that is central for the area to be served, that has a reasonably large local population—but not big enough to make it impossible for the theatre to make any mark on the life of the local community—and some place where the theatre is likely to be patronised. Because of distance Cork and Limerick are ruled out and Listowel, Killarney and Tralee are considered. Tralee is selected for a number of reasons "with a resident population of 13,263, the outlook for winter activity is more favourable". As well, Tralee has the advantage of having housed Siamsa since it started in 1968 and because of this "it is the only one which has already proved that it is a centre where folk theatre is successful".

The plans for the theatre envisage a 286-seater which would have the simplest acceptable professional requirements and some exhibition area for folk displays. While the main feed through here would be from the centres there would of course be need for a resident company—an artistic director, a manager, six permanent performers, ten part time performers would be the basis of the company.

In explaining the function of the theatre the report says "... the activities will not be confined to the normal presentations of conventional theatre. A wide variety of presentations, ranging from, say, the Siamsa performance to a dynamic exhibition of folk art, calls for a theatre building with special facilities".

It is intended that the Irish National Folk Theatre Company would spend sometime touring abroad and that foreign companies would come here "... the theatre is also to be an inlet for other folk cultures, an international centre where the folk cultures of other countries are exhibited on an exchange basis. This contact with others is an important influence in the enhancement and enrichment of the home product. It reinforces the cultural 're-education' of our own people".

All of this is very laudable and very well worth while but it also involves a considerable amount of money—the envisaged capital cost of the theatre is £152,876 and it will need a nett annual grant of £15,790 the capital cost of each rural centre will be in the region of £6,875 and the running costs would be about £5,400. This means that commitments for considerable capital expenditure and for a regular subvention must be negotiated. Plans have now been presented to the major national bodies who have an interest in this area and negotiations are taking place.

In October 1971 Siamsa went on tour in Germany. The enthusiastic reception given to our folk culture by audiences who were completely unfamiliar—reasonably large local population—if justification is needed—for the full implementation of this plan. A theatre critic in the German newspaper Munchner Abendzeitung in October 1971 wrote:

"In Ireland everything appears to have remained original just as the Celts had left it and spread it to the East. Therefore, despite all its national colouring, Siamsa revealed surprisingly much that is akin to the Alpine and Eastern folklore; . . . That is what has made the Irish the haven of cultural life in America and the spice of European society".

This is the kind of recommendation and individuality that a small nation on the threshold of Europe needs.

Irish journalists, and Irish and international audiences over the past five years, have all spoken of Siamsa in superlative terms.

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"Our plan concerns itself with this part of the country because we know it can work here". Fr. Pat Ahern told me, "Siamsa has worked in Tralee so it seems likely that the national folk theatre would work there. The inland farming theme of Siamsa comes from North Kerry so it appears obvious that the first Teach Siamsa should be based around this group in North Kerry. The personnel of Siamsoiri na Riochta come from North Kerry. All of this has been made possible because of the activity of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann—many of the members of Siamsa came from C.C.E. and continue to be active C.C.E. members—I hope that we will be able to work closely together in the future as well".

"If this folk theatre plan works here, then we can give the blue print to other areas and eventually one would hope that there would be a network of rural centres around the country". This is obviously a plan that Fr. Ahern has had in his mind for a long time "We might be able to supervise, or at least advise, on the total development. Each area would have its folk theatre outlet—in Galway, in Cork, in Dublin and so on—and all of these areas would visit one another's theatres".

An Lair Bhan no an "Hubby Horse"

—le Séan C. O'Suilleabháin

Leis na comórtais go léir a bhíonn ar cíul ag féilte agus fleánna an tam atá anois ann, is dócha gur beagán daoine sa chontae nach bhfuil eolas éigin acu ar an sean nós a bhaineann le buachaillí an dreoilín.

Baineann an nós le Lá 'le Stiofáin agus ba ghnáth uair amháin tóir a chur ar an dreoilín maidin an lae sin agus breith air beo nó marbh. In a dhiaidh sin bhí sé de nós ag gasraí, buachaillí agus fir óga (níos déanaí bhíodh cailíní ins na gasraí) dul ó thigh to tigh ag seinm ceoil ar ghléasanna éagsúla agus bhíodh ceol, amhráin agus rince acu i ngach tigh ar a thugaidís cuairt. Bhíodh airgead nó bronntanais éigin á lorg acu chun cabhrú leo an dreoilín a chur sa chré. Bhíodh corp dreoilín nó a mhacasamhail á iompar acu i lár tor coille nó dreoilín beo i mbosca beag a bhíodh déanta do'n gnó. De ghnáth bhíodh an tor nó an bosca maisithe le ribíní agus páipéar daite. Freisin, bhíodh na daoine san grúpa gléasta le haghaidheanna fidil agus le héadaí aite. Taobh amuigh de chuid de Chúige Uladh agus cuid de Cho. Luí, dealraítear go raibh an nós coitianta mór thimpeall na tíre go léir. Ach tá gné amháin anashuimiúil a bhaineann leis an nós in áiteanna i gCo. Chiarraí agus níl tuairisc ar bith air in áiteanna eile.

B'é an nós ná ba ghnáth i gCorca Dhuibhne, agus is gnáth fos i gCiarraí Thuaidh, capall bréagach ar a tugtar Láir Bhan, no "Hubby Horse" i mBéarla, a bheith ag buachaillí an dreoilín agus é á iompair ag duine amháin. De ghnáth bíonn corp na lárach déanta de fráma adhmaid agus an ceann déanta as bloc adhmaid le dhá chluais leathair agus dhá mhirilín gloine mar shúile ann. Is féidir béal na lárach a oscailt agus a dhúnadh agus an ceann a chasadh timpeall. Bíonn muineál agus corp na lárach clúdaithe le héadach bán agus poll ann sa tslí gur féidir leis an té a bhíonn á hiompar a cheann a chur tré'n éadach aníos. Bíonn sreang ceangailte leis an corán íochtair agus is féidir béal na lárach a oscailt agus a dhúnadh le seo.

Tá tuairiscí ar nósanna in a úsáidtear capaill bhréagacha mar seo iontu ó Oileán Manainn, An Bhreatain Bheag, Sasana, An Spáinn, An Ungáir, An Pholann agus An Rúis, agus b'féidir go bhfuil an cleactadh i bhfad níos leithne ná seo.

Tógadh an grianghraf atá le seo i Lios Tuathail Lá 'le Stiofáin, 1970. Is ag dream fir óga agus cailíní as Baile Uí Thaidhg a bhí an Láir Bhan sin. Is cuid de dhream eile, tincéirí óga, na páistí san grianghraf.

"Dream fir óga agus cailíní ar an dreoilín as Baile Uí Thaidhg i Lios Tuathail, Lá Le Stiofán 1970".

