

## ***History Ireland* website personal histories project**

### **Dedicated website space for personal histories**

*History Ireland* has set up a portion of its website dedicated to the personal stories of events in the lives of Irish people at home and abroad.

Our aim is to record a sufficiently broad range of contributions to represent a wide spectrum of Irish people's life experience. We would aim to build up a picture of the last 100 years or so, based not on big events but on the minutiae of people's lives.

So far we have recorded and published just a few such histories, but those already show the potential of such a project.

### **Ambition to involve secondary school students in a country-wide push to create a wide data set**

What the project needs now is a major push to increase the volume of contributions and so make the project meaningful.

In the 1930s the Irish Folklore Commission embarked on a programme with National School children to record our national folklore. This proved enormously successful. More recently the GAA has set in motion an oral history project based, I understand, around its games.

Our idea is to ask secondary school students, optimally (but not exclusively) at Transition Year level, to interview parents, relatives and neighbours about events in their lives or their ancestors' lives. These would ideally be centred around single events, typically encompassing themes such as school, religion, family, occupation, gender roles, war, famine, food, clothing, music, past times, etc. Each piece would be up to 800 words long and can be accompanied by a photograph. We will publish all contributions that conform to our criteria; all we ask is a short biography of the author, and no names need be published.

### **How it might work in schools**

This project could run at individual, class, year-group or whole-school level, depending on the interest levels among teachers and in different schools. It might be possible for teachers to select specific time-frames, e.g. family meals in the '70s or clothing in the '60s, or to focus on specific themes like music, school, work, etc. The possibilities are almost endless.

*Basic research skills*

This could be an ice-breaking activity for first years at a very basic level, e.g. a class project after a month or two in first year in which students are asked to use some of the basic research skills they have learned to produce a one-page or one-item 'project' on someone from the past in their family or home place.

#### *Transition Year likely home for project*

Transition Year is a major opportunity for a project like this, though the level of detail that a TY student might be expected to produce would be significantly greater, I think. A lot of the work done in TY historical studies is for a limited period, e.g. a module of nine weeks over just one or two periods per week. A focus on a personal histories project for part of that time could again complement what the TY students had done in third year in Social Change, or could complement local studies etc. in TY itself.

#### *Skill enhancement possibilities*

It could be that the work done on personal history research, e.g. in TY, could enhance the skills set of any Leaving Cert student subsequently. It is also possible that the work initiated on a personal history project could uncover things of sufficient quality or interest to stimulate a Leaving Cert research study in fifth or sixth year.

#### *Publication on the website*

The publication of personal history studies at school level will help to promote the project. Obviously, the *History Ireland* website and perhaps an issue or two could be used to promote the project further, and to publish finished articles. At individual school levels, the possibilities of turning the finished projects into a one-day exhibition, or an on-line exhibition on the school's website, could also be explored, provided that everyone involved is happy to use and publish the material in this way.

#### *Parental involvement*

The project offers great possibilities for engaging parents in their children's education. Interviews with parents/grandparents or perhaps the organisation of some visiting speakers could be considered. In the age in which we live it should not be beyond the bounds of possibility in many schools for audio or video recordings of interviewees to be made, or for students to present their projects via ICT. At optimum level, we could envisage some schools organising parents' nights for viewing such projects, etc. Access to local radio and press could also enhance the publicity side of things considerably. Students will gain as much from this as they would from prizes in their own right.

#### *History Ireland offering publication and a prize scheme*

*History Ireland* would be keen to publish as many of the projects as is feasible on the web, and schools, with teacher approval, could upload completed work onto the site. We intend to offer a prize of a laptop computer for a school based on the quality of its involvement.