

Recollections of School days in Balrothery National School during the 1950's and 60's

My earliest recollection is traveling to school by bus with my friends and paying a fare of two old pence for the journey from Balbriggan.

Miss Griffiths' class was amazing, all the black boards were stored under our desks and the chalk kept in an oxo box, the marla which was distributed at certain times to keep us occupied, produced all kinds of figures. There were no doors or windows in the classroom only signs which were in a strange language doras and fuinneog. 'We practiced relentlessly our writing between blue and red lines with blue ink which was stored in a ceramic container in the desk.

Gravitating up the ranks to second class (Miss O Carroll's) now it was beginning to get serious we were introduced to the bata (a leg of a chair) which was used infrequently to help us to remember our tables (no not the kitchen tables) — maths tables. Lunch was a memorable time where during the winter months we would drink our cocoa with the boiling water being provided by open fires throughout the school.

Having mastered the alphabet and the tables we proceeded to the next phase of our education. The school was provided with a new classroom, a wooden structure built on the hill and affectionately known as the 'hut', here we spent three years in the presence of Mr. Bracken. These were three tough years we now realized we had to sit the 'Primary Examination' at the end of sixth class. New 'sums' were introduced to us Algebra, Geometry, and Mental Arithmetic, which confused us to no end. We loved the month of May which brought milder days and the catechism examination, during this time we were visited regularly by Father O'Brien who would examine us on the catechism and parables and award sweets to the brighter students. We eventually triumphed over our dreaded Primary Exam, and because I was deemed to be too young to proceed into secondary school I had the pleasure of returning to Mr. Maddens seventh class, oh what a year that was — brilliant. Because I had no exams that year I was in a very enviable position. Most days during the winter months I would be in school before nine a.m and commence lighting the fires in the classrooms followed by making the ink and filling all the ink wells in the school. After lunch it was time to collect the papers and uneaten lunches and burn them in a barrel. Some afternoons I would anxiously wait for the call from Mr. Madden (Padraigh faigh rothar) and off I would go into Balbriggan to place a few bets in Jackie Curran's betting office. St Bridget's day was also

one of my favourite days when we would gather 'rushes ' and make crosses. Every day when three o clock arrived it was a rush out of the classroom for the daily race home to Balbriggan. Other activities which abounded in the school were the following, the selling of the Far East Magazine, the collection of silver paper, and the 'mite box collection all proceeds were for the disadvantaged in Africa. I hope this brief summary gives some insight into school days in the 50's and 60's.