

young annalists workBook

The Irish Annals Project

What Were the Irish Annals?

Long before newspapers, television or the internet (imagine!), people in Ireland were recording what mattered. The Irish Annals are a tradition of recording events in chronological order - a living chronicle built up over centuries.

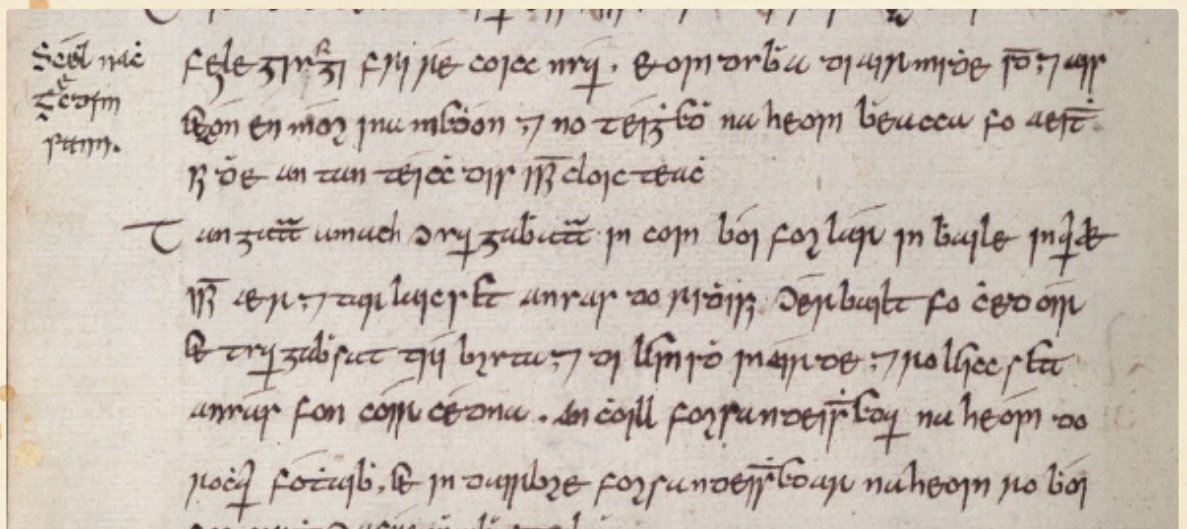
important!

They recorded kings, wars, deaths, famines, weather, strange events, things seen in the sky and just normal everyday life. Some entries are extraordinary; others are wonderfully ordinary. A death, a battle, a storm - sometimes in just a single line.

wow!

A lot of the surviving Annals were written or copied in the north-west of Ireland. The tradition also flourished at places like Clonmacnoise and Iona, where Irish and Scottish events were recorded. Annals such as the *Chronicum Scotorum*, the *Annals of Tigernach*, *Boyle* and *Lecan* all fed into the most famous Annals of them all: the *Four Masters*.

**IRELAND KEPT A DIARY
FOR OVER 1,200 YEARS**



A possible supernova event in the Annals of the Four Masters (Royal Irish Academy)

**Were the Annals
always exciting?**

1. There was snow this year of wonderful greatness that there was in no man's memory such seen, insomuch that the cattle of Ireland for the most part died, after which ensued great and unaccustomed drought in the world.
2. The Rules of Ó Suanagh of Raithean were established in Leath Chuinn, or Conne's Half (of Ireland)
3. There were ships seen in the skies with their men this year.

*did you know about
this incredible piece
of Irish history?!*





History or Myth?

The surviving Irish annal tradition records about 1,200 years, but the chronological world they describe reaches much further back into legendary and historical time.

The Annals belong to a much older tradition of trying to understand and record the passage of time, connecting what was happening in Ireland with the wider world. The records were copied, added to and developed over many centuries by scribes, who wrote them into manuscripts using ink and pigments made from materials found in the natural world, including plants, berries, earth and minerals.

What makes the Annals really interesting is that they contain fragments of history, myth and memory.

Sometimes they record things we can investigate using modern science. At other times they leave us with a mystery: a strange event in the sky, an unusual creature, or a story whose truth we may never know. They are not simply a collection of facts about the past — they are records of what people saw, experienced, believed and thought was worth remembering.

And because someone, at some point, decided that these things were worth writing down, we can still encounter them hundreds of years later.

Strange Things in the Annals

(the weird stuff!)

Science in the Annals

The Exploding Star Mystery

In AD 1054, the Annals of Tigernach recorded a strange sight in the sky:

"A steeple of fire was seen at Ros Ela... for the space of five hours of the day, and innumerable black birds went into it and out of it..."

The entry goes on to describe a great bird, a dog, clothes being carried upwards, falling wood and a great oak shaking to its roots.
Could this possibly have been a supernova?

Myth and reality merge

The Whale with Three Golden Teeth

In AD 744, the Annals of Tigernach recorded a "remarkable wonder" at Boirche:

"A great sea-creature was cast ashore by the sea, with three golden teeth in its head..."

One of the teeth was taken away and remained for a long time on the altar of Bangor.

Why three teeth? Why gold? Why on the altar?

hmm...

Magic & marvels

The Mermaid in the Weir

In AD 1118, the Annals of Ulster recorded another "remarkable tale":

"A mermaid was caught by the fishermen of the weir of Lis Arglinn in Osraige, and another at Port Láirge."

The Annalists simply recorded the story.

What do you think they thought they were recording?

The Irish Annals Project



The Irish Annals Project is reviving the ancient Irish tradition of annal writing and bringing it into the present. Colum and his team are creating a living chronicle of modern Ireland, using the cadence and spirit of the old scribes to record the stories, events, people and places of Ireland today.

The project has begun filling one of the great gaps in the Annals - it has been over 400 years since the last surviving annalistic record. By creating new entries today, the project is beginning to fill that silence and create a record for future generations. The project invites people to become part of this living tradition - to explore their own communities and experiences and ask: what is worth remembering?

The old annalists recorded what they thought was worth remembering, sometimes just a single line. They did not record everything that happened. They chose what to remember.

Now it's your turn.

An annal can be a story about something important, something strange, something funny, something you witnessed yourself, or something that has been passed down to you. You might know exactly what happened or you might have a story that leaves you wondering. Remember: an annalist is not just a storyteller. You are also deciding what details to include, what to leave out, and how the story should be remembered.

Colum's example:

"The night Dan came Home"



"On his death bed in Balloonagh, Tralee, my uncle James told his best story ever. It was not one of his own adventures, but the story of his uncle Dan.

Dan, from Mullinagleeming in County Kerry, had emigrated to the United States with his brothers and was destined to become a policeman in the Chicago Police. The First World War interrupted his career, but he survived the war.

While being shipped back from the war front in France on a mighty, Titanic-sized vessel, the ship met a great storm in the East Atlantic. The captain, with advice from Granduncle Dan, decided to ride it out in Dingle Bay. Dan requested "shore leave" of a sort from his immediate superior officer, which was granted. A dinghy was lowered and Dan rowed for dear life towards Cloosmore or Cloghane - more likely the latter - and then made the three-mile journey home via Cahernaphoooca.

But it was 2am."

"Dan banged on the door and woke his mother and father. They had held his American wake ten years earlier, expecting never to see him again.

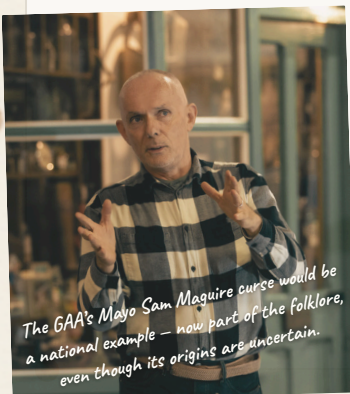
The tea was put on. There was some of Hanora's soda bread in the tin box. The twinkling of the sugar bowl caught Dan's eye in the candlelight. His mother was so happy to see him safe after the war. There was even some jam to hand, perhaps blackberry.

But hardly were they properly awake before Dan had to run back to his dinghy and return to the immense ship. The storm abated, and westward he went.

He never returned to Ireland."

The strange thing about the story is that James had never told it before. His sisters had never heard it, nor had they heard of this nocturnal visit at all. There was no controversy or embarrassment about it. So did it really happen? Or was it one of those stories that somehow survived because someone remembered it?

That is the kind of question an annalist might leave for the future.



The GAA's Mayo Sam Maguire cup would be a national example - now part of the folklore, even though its origins are uncertain.

Now lets write your own Annals

Your teacher will choose a story for the whole class to hear.

Listen carefully. Then, without looking at anyone else's version, write the story as you remember it.

When everyone is finished, compare the entries.

your turn!

Now create your own Annal entry

MUSEUM LABEL

It could be something that happened today, something funny or surprising, something you saw, something that happened in your school or community, or a story you have been told. Remember to include the details that you think a future reader would want to know.

write here

Become a local annalist

Take this activity home. Ask your family for a story they remember. Remember while we're talking about the Irish Annals, they were part of a global tradition - no matter where in the world your family is from - find a story that holds meaning for them.

It might be about a person, a place, an event, a journey, a celebration, a disaster, a strange thing that happened, or simply an ordinary day that stayed in their memory.

Listen carefully. Ask questions. Find out who, what, where and when. Then write the story down and share it with your class.

ask your family



Scribes wrote the old annals
by hand, there was no printing
like what we have today.

Try having a go at
calligraphy and
writing out your
own annals entry!



First have a go at tracing some calligraphy text, then see if
you can copy the alphabet from the example below

example

aA hB cC dD eE fF gG hH iI jJ kK lL mM nN oO
pP qQ rR sS tT uU vV wW xX yY zZ

trace

aA hB cC dD eE fF gG hH iI jJ kK lL mM nN oO
pP qQ rR sS tT uU vV wW xX yY zZ

try for
yourself

aA

Now lets try something else! Pick your favourite story from the write your
own annal section on the previous page and write it own here like the
ancient scribes did.

Don't worry it doesn't have to be perfect! Just give it a go!



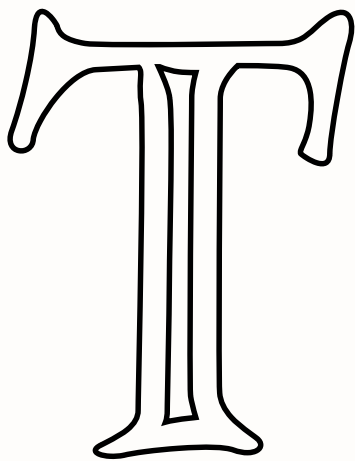
DIY Manuscript

MANUSCRIPT ILLUMINATION

Like the scribes and illustrators of the past annals, our illustrator Leonora works hard to interpret the entries of the modern Irish Annals - her imagery helps us to understand the annals as we read them, but also adds a richness and depth to how they are interpreted.

In the space below, why not have a go at "illuminating" the capital "T" of "the" - then feel free to write in an annal entry, and add any drawing you feel goes with your story - it could be something as simple as a football, or an animal, or a whole scene of a day at the beach. You decide!

give it a go!



he...



*see some examples from our modern
annals book De Réir Book of Moytura*





Young Annalists

The Irish Annals Project

Our revival of the Annals seeks to bridge the gap of lost knowledge from 1591 to the present, documenting the hidden history of Ireland and her diaspora around the world. At times tongue in cheek and often poetic, our modern Irish Annals are a living, collaborative project.

Credits

Director/Writer	Colum Stapleton
Illustrator	Leonora Neary
Calligrapher	Renato Melo
YA Workbook creator	Finn van der Aar

Sources

Images of the ancient Annals used with express permission of the Royal Irish Academy.

All imagery of modern Annals and team by Sophia Harding

Supplementary illustration, design and copy by Finn van der Aar

Thank you to Dr Dan McCarthy for his continued advice on the project

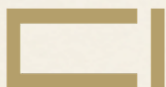
Supported by

thank you!

Creative Ireland

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Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Sligo.