story ‘about the priest throwing a bottle over the house’ but who, disappointingly, ‘refuses to tell it on tape’. Flicking through the volumes throws up fascinating material, such as the account of how to cure the gums of a horse which were ‘higher than its teeth’, so that it could not eat: ‘The blacksmith heated a hot iron and rubbed it across the gums, then got a horse nail and gave two prods up in the gums to bring the blood down. That horse healed up alright.’

This is a very sketchy account of what is a huge and original collection. Such a unique resource ought to be valued more highly, and given what it needs to make it more accessible to the large numbers of students and academicians, from all over the world, who are interested in Irish folklore.

Indexing my life
Tom Norton

For the past ten years I have been honorary indexer for the County Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal, which has been published every two years since 1986. While indexing the latest volume, and adding it to the cumulated index (1986–2000), several of the entries jumped off the page and triggered off personal memories, in a sort of ‘story of my early life’ chronicle.

Claw Inch Island, memoir 7.79–80
Norton, Tom, ‘Claw Inch Island: A Memoir’ 7.79–80

I lived on Claw Inch island in Lough Ree for five years from 1944 to 1949, in a single-story three-roomed house. Lough Ree, an inland sea in the River Shannon in the centre of Ireland, is about 15 miles long and 7 miles wide, at most. When I came to write this memoir, I began to wonder what exactly I remembered of that time and how accurate it was. I was reminded of the danger of false and incomplete memories when I read Dermot Healy’s memoir of his Westmeath childhood, The Bend for Home, in which he explores the obduracy of memory and the vagaries of recollection: ‘memory is always incomplete, like a map with places missing’. At the centre of the book is a diary the author kept as a child, in which he explores the obduracy of memory and the vagaries of recollection: ‘memory is always incomplete, like a map with places missing’. 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At the centre of the book is a diary the author kept as a child, in which he explores the obduracy of memory and the vagaries of recollection: ‘memory is always incomplete, like a map with places missing'.

Next door to Claw Inch is the much larger Quaker Island (so called because a Quaker by the name of Fairbrother lived there for a time), which I remember seeing every day of my time on Claw Inch, though I never visited it until 1995. The oldest name for the island is ‘Inis Clothran’, Clothra being the name of the semi-legendary Queen Maeve’s sister. It is said that Queen Maeve was killed on the island by a stone thrown from Cu Culainn’s sling from the Longford shore three miles away, and the said stone can still be seen on the south-east tip of the island.

The island’s Christian associations are embodied in yet another name, ‘Seven Church Island’, and there is evidence of active religious life on the island from the 6th to the 15th century. All of the churches are now ruined. One of them was founded by St Diarmuid, who built a monastery on the island in about AD540, and another, at six feet by six feet, was one of the smallest ever built. The Bell Tower and Church referred to in the index entry were built in the 12th century, and such a combination is a rarity in Ireland. Maeve’s sun bower and grave are represented by ruins, though it must be said that other places lay claim to Maeve’s grave, including Knocknarea in County Sligo. As Yeats (1994) put it:

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea and thrown the thunder on the stones for all that Maeve can say.

The grave slab referred to in the index, and others, were stolen from the island in 1991 and offered for sale in America for $1 million. But following an FBI ‘sting’ opera-

References

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tion they were returned to Ireland, though not to Quaker Island. They are now in a museum.

According to Micheál O’Callaghan’s *For Ireland and freedom*, the island and others on Lough Ree were used for the treatment and recuperation of wounded volunteers during the independence war of 1917–21. Like Claw Inch, there are no longer any families living on the Quaker Island, and only the historic monuments and derelict houses testify that there was once life there.

boys, wearing skirts, photograph 4.13
skirts, on boys, photograph 4.13

This entry refers to a photograph of three young boys and a girl, all wearing skirts, and reminds me of a rather embarrassing photo of me, aged 5, similarly dressed. The explanation for boys wearing skirts is that in past times the mortality rate for boys was much higher than for girls at time of birth or when very young. The fairies were often blamed for this, and so young boys were dressed like girls to confuse the fairies, as it seems they would not take girls. Or maybe it just made sense for poor families to recycle unisex clothes.

Irish language articles
“An Chruiceog Chiuin” (poem) 2.36
“Duthaigh Thásmar mar a raibh Ceáinín” 2.36
“Eastá Chill Ronain Aimsir an Ghorta Mhoir” 1.23–4
“Focal on Easpag” 2.3

The first two issues of the *Journal* carried a few items in Irish but, sadly, there have been none in recent issues. Is it because no one is any longer capable of writing articles in Irish or no one would be capable of reading them? I have very vivid memories of being taught Irish in primary school. As in many primary schools, the teachers were nuns and in their classes slackness was not an option. If you failed to memorize a word or committed other errors you received a hearty whack on the knuckles with a stick. This tended to encourage learning. I don’t suppose such pedagogic methods are permitted in Ireland today, but it did ensure that I have not forgotten a single word or phrase of the Irish I was taught at the time, and it was a good basis when I voluntarily started to learn Irish again as an adult.

Knockcroghery
burning by Black and Tans
description 3.28
photos 4.10

My late father, a native of Roscommon Town like me, often used to recount the burning of Knockcroghery Village by the Black and Tans (British auxiliaries) in 1919, which he witnessed. The burning was apparently based on faulty information by British Intelligence, following the assassination of a British general. It was wrongly believed that the assassins had come from Knockcroghery and thus reprisals were taken against the village. Compensation for rebuilding the village was paid under the terms of the 1921 Treaty. The photos show a ‘before’ and ‘after’ view of the main street. My father was only six at the time; it was a brutal but exciting time for a young boy to be alive.

Note

References
*County Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal*, published every two years, 1986 to date. Copies of the cumulated index for vols 1–8 (1986–2000) are available free on request, in electronic form, from the author at:
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