

# THE BUTTER MUSEUM *SCHOOLS PROJECT*

PROGRESS REPORT, APRIL 2025







Ardfield Class outside the Butter Museum

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project is to connect primary school children with the origins of their food, in this case butter.

It is a pilot project intended to create a set of learning activities using the resources and expertise of the Butter Museum. The learning activities are based initially in the classroom and, later, at the Butter Museum. The activities are intended for 4th, 5th, 6th class.

The project lead is Dr Danielle O'Donovan.

The intended learning outcomes are that

- Children will know how butter is made
- Children become aware of the rich history and material culture of dairy farming and butter making in Ireland
- Children understand the work of historians and the role of the museums in collecting and sharing their history, in this case of dairying and butter making in Ireland

Two rural national schools, Ardfield and Barryroe, both in West Cork, and one Cork city school, North Presentation, are participating in the project.

There are 21 pupils in 5th and 6th class in Ardfield (all in one combined class). There are 19 pupils in 5th class and 16 in 6th class at Barryroe. Numbers for North Pres are still to be confirmed.

The Ardfield and Barryroe classes are piloting the activities for 5th and 6th class. The North Presentation will help us test and hone the lessons learnt from the first two schools while also making adaptations for the for 4th class pupils. Ardfield and Barryroe have both done the classroom activities and the Butter Museum visit.



Barryroe Class outside the Butter Museum

## Welcome to the Butter Museum

### Your Worksheet 7: Cattle and Milk in Early Ireland

#### Fill in the Blanks:

Cows had a very special \_\_\_\_\_ in early Irish society.

Most bull calves were \_\_\_\_\_ at birth.

Butter, cheese, and milk mixed with honey were known as \_\_\_\_\_ foods.

In early Ireland, people's wealth was measured by the number of \_\_\_\_\_ they owned.

Saints and noble children were sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ in milk instead of water.

**Let's think!** Why do you think cows were so valuable in early Ireland? Note some ideas here.

**Be ready to report what you've found out.** Write three sentences about the role of cattle raids in early Ireland raids to share with the whole class ...

Page from the Butter Museum worksheet. Note the bottom panel where pupils are expected to report their findings to their class.

## METHODOLOGY

The design of this project and the activities which we are piloting are underpinned by rigorous educational theory.

Learning with objects is a recognized learning methodology which can be very impactful. School textbooks are far removed from 'the real thing' and so it is very powerful for pupils to touch history by handling actual objects from the past.

It is also widely acknowledged that pupils who have undertaken activities related to their museum visit prior to their museum visit will be more engaged and learn more when they go to the museum. Follow up activities then help to reinforce what pupils have learned at the museum.

## PREPARATORY WORK

Danielle O'Donovan met with the school teachers and discussed with them the kinds of activities that could be realistically undertaken in the classroom, how long the activities should take and what would make the activities impactful for the pupils.

In the light of those conversations, the learning resources already created by the Butter Museum were audited for their suitability for the present project. It was decided to create a new set of worksheets for the Butter Museum visit.

Butter Museum director Peter Foyne and Danielle O'Donovan made a selection of museum objects to bring to classrooms, along with some documents which gave an insight into the heritage of local creameries (butter boxes, butter wrappers, milk delivery accounts).

We also acquired items for use during butter making – scotch hands and simple butter stamps as well as white gloves for handling the objects and A5 clip boards for the art activities. It was thought that the white gloves and clipboards would add a layer of authenticity to the pupils' experience.



Local dairy farmer, Tim Feen, showing the testing gun from the separating station in Ardfield to Donogh Hegarty at Ardfield National School



Danielle O'Donovan sharing photographs of Ardfield creamery long ago at Ardfield National School.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

As noted above, the school activities which we created are based on hands on/real life activities and learning with objects. In the first instance the students make butter by shaking cream in a jar, and use traditional tools 'scotch hands' and a 'butter stamp' to shape and brand their butter. They then get to taste the butter and bring it home. The butter making activity begins with a brainstorm of the process – where does the milk come from? How do you get the cream? How do you churn the cream? We can support these activities for schools across the country, posting any equipment needed and including a stamped addressed envelope to return it – the equipment is really impactful for the children as it differentiates the activity from the 'everyday'.

The second classroom activity is based upon a box of 'handling objects' – having learned about the process of making butter the children are broken into teams and given white gloves. They then get to handle a range of Butter Museum collection objects related to the butter making process and brainstorm what they are used for. Virtual objects too fragile to bring to the classroom are also shown via the whiteboard. The objects can be rotated around the classroom and the groups can share their ideas of what each thing is for. This activity can certainly be rolled out to local schools but we are investigating finding 'Heritage in Schools' practitioners who might be able to help facilitate this 'handling box' activity in other counties or create a 'virtual handling box' composed of our 3D models.

For the Ardfield and Barryroe pupils, a local farmer visited the school and talked to the pupils about their local creamery and farming life. (For the city children we have found some older people who can talk to the pupils in the museum about what it was like to live on a farm when they were younger).



## MUSEUM VISITS

At the Butter Museum the pupils were first given a 'whistle stop' tour of the museum to orientate them (this was introduced after the first school visit based upon student feedback).



Barryroe students explaining their researches

They were then divided into teams and given a worksheet that scaffolds their investigation of one theme based on a single museum panel ('Cattle Raiding in Early Ireland', 'Bog Butter', 'Butter Roads' etc.) they must find out about the topic and be ready to share it with the rest of the class. By each group presenting their findings pupils get a second 'overview' of the story that the Butter Museum tells.

The new worksheets are intended to give the pupils an active rather than passive motivational set – when you have to understand information in

order to explain it to others you gain a deeper understanding and memory of it then when you just seek it out to write it down (as in just completing the worksheet or sitting and exam).

The children were also given a clip board and a drawing booklet to go and make drawings of museum artefacts they found interesting. They had to say, in front of their peers, what the object is for and why they chose it, (this is optional, again making sure not to put undue pressure on shy or neurodiverse pupils).

The second activity at the Butter Museum is about free choice and creativity, allowing space for pupils who have different 'learning styles' and express themselves better through drawing than writing and speaking.

## NEXT PHASES

The immediate next phase is to engage with the 4th class pupils in the North Presentation School. This phase will incorporate insights acquired to date, such as the necessity of an initial orientation tour.

We have already asked the pupils for feedback after each phase of the pilot and have implemented their suggestions between phases, making the project as agile as possible and seeking to build success.

We will also be asking the teachers for their considered opinions on the project.

Having now carried out the pre visit activities with Ardfield and Barryroe and trialed the worksheets, we are now going to revise the worksheets for 4th class pupils, making them simpler and giving further scaffolding with less of an expectation for 'free writing' than was given to 5th and 6th class.



## FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

Follow up visits to help support their 'enquiry' activities will take place the week after Easter.

The follow up activities have yet to be decided but the idea is that the Butter Museum 'curates' resources for the pupils do a project rooted in 'enquiry-based learning' – the Butter Museum will likely build up a suite of these over time based on online research resources that are readily available. For example, Ardfield were very interested in cattle raiding in early Ireland and wanted to know more about early medieval Ardfield. In order to support an enquiry here we will introduce the pupils to the first Ordnance Survey map which records many now lost ringforts in Ardfield and also scan in some resources about the local 'Tuatha' who lived in Ardfield in the early Middle Ages. Barryroe would like to know more about their own family members who lived in the area and were farmers. We will scaffold a classroom-based activity for the pupils based upon the 1901 and 1911 census coupled with online OS maps to help them look at their area over 100 years ago and what people's lives were like (it is possible via the census to look at how many rooms were in houses, how many outbuildings farms had, etc.)

We are yet to find out what North Pres might like to conduct an enquiry about but will endeavor to curate resources for them to allow them to undertake some kind of investigation. As we work with more schools, we will continue to create resources to support different enquiries which means we will build up a collection from which schools can make a choice of what they are interested in.





## LONGER TERM

We intend to create 'how to' videos for teachers on how to make butter in the classroom. We will also investigate 'Heritage in the Classroom' practitioners who may be able to help us deliver the handling box activity nationwide. In lieu of the handling box, we are scoping the idea of creating a 'virtual handling box' by using the excellent 3D models that the Butter Museum has already created. We will trial this activity with North Pres should technology allow (this only really works if the pupils can share an iPad or SurfaceGo between 2).

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