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‘I spent lockdown copying old land records onto a spreadsheet to help other families trace their history’

Paul Hyland

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Kathy Roughan spent much of the Covid lockdown copying local land ownership records, known as ‘cancelled books’, from Clarecastle, which date as far back to the 19th century.

Ms Roughan physically copied thousands of entries into a spreadsheet, which then became part of the permanent digital archive for the Clarecastle Ballyea Heritage archive.



Lorna Elms of iCan and Kathy Roughan

Thanks to her efforts, others can now trace the record of their properties and home in the locality online. Through her research, Ms Roughan said she has learned much about her family history. She is from Clarecastle originally and did a Master's Degree in History at the University of Limerick but now lives in Australia.

"I've been able to log the progress of particularly my grandmother's family who I know very little about. So, for me alone it was worth doing just for that," she said. "I think we've got some great opportunities for local communities with geo-location and digitisation. If local communities go at it, I think it's great to see the development of your locality. I think it's a great opportunity."

A new collaboration is aiming to facilitate the creation of up to 80 digital community archives nationwide over the next six years. The Heritage Council has joined the National Museum of Ireland and participating local authorities in funding the digitisation of Ireland's community archives, through the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN).

Established in 2009, by the National Museum of Ireland, iCAN has already facilitated the creation of 33 digital archives in counties Clare, Cork, Galway, Mayo and Wicklow, while three more are currently in development. The Heritage Council has now joined as a funding partner for the next six years to support the continued expansion of iCAN and the digitisation of community archives around the country.

The online archives are contributory, meaning anyone, anywhere in the world can share their photos, stories, and documents to help build the collections. Many of the archives include oral histories and videos, and valuable resources such as local and rare census documents dating from before the famine or lost family letters. Visitors can access digital and searchable archives that give a unique and valuable insight into family records and history.

Over 180 volunteers are involved in managing and supporting the existing collections, while the iCAN network has been visited 2,244,000 times by visitors from 215 countries, and 16,000 cities, across the world. Cork County Council is the latest local authority to partner with iCAN and its new portal, www.heritagecork.org, will be home to the Bere Island Projects Group, Kilmurry Heritage Group, Kilshannig Heritage Society and Youghal Community Archives.

Members of the iCAN network from around the country gathered in the Brockagh Resource Centre in Laragh, Co Wicklow, on Wednesday, to celebrate the continued expansion of the network and the launch of Heritage Cork.



Hazel Morrison of Moycullen Heritage, Co Galway