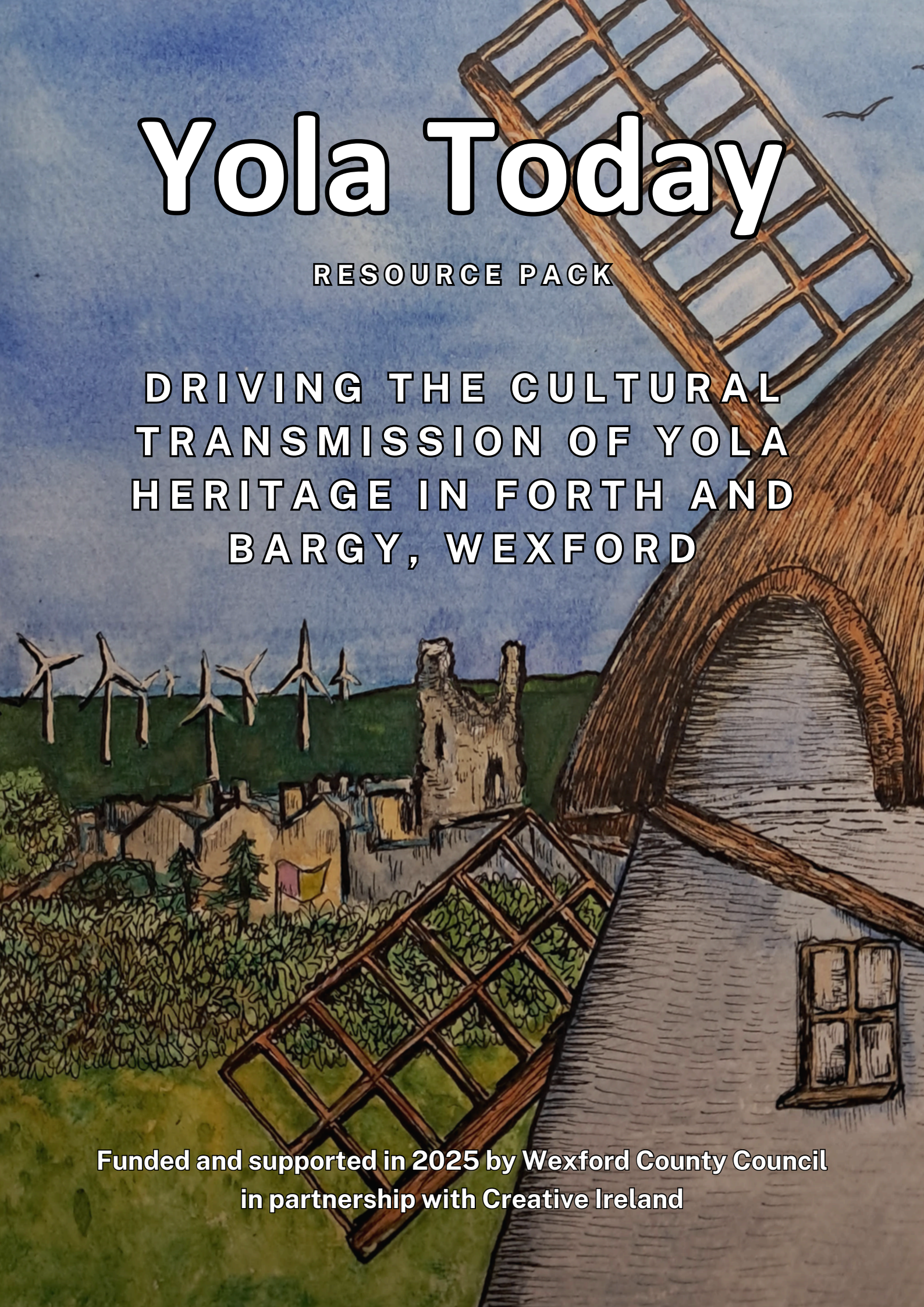


Yola Today

The background of the cover is a stylized illustration. It depicts a traditional Yola boat, a long narrow wooden boat with a thatched roof, floating on a river. The boat is shown from a side-on perspective, moving towards the right. In the background, there is a large, multi-story stone building, possibly a castle or a large house, with a prominent tower. To the left of the boat, there is a small, simple house with a thatched roof. The sky is blue with a few birds flying. The overall style is that of a hand-drawn illustration.

RESOURCE PACK

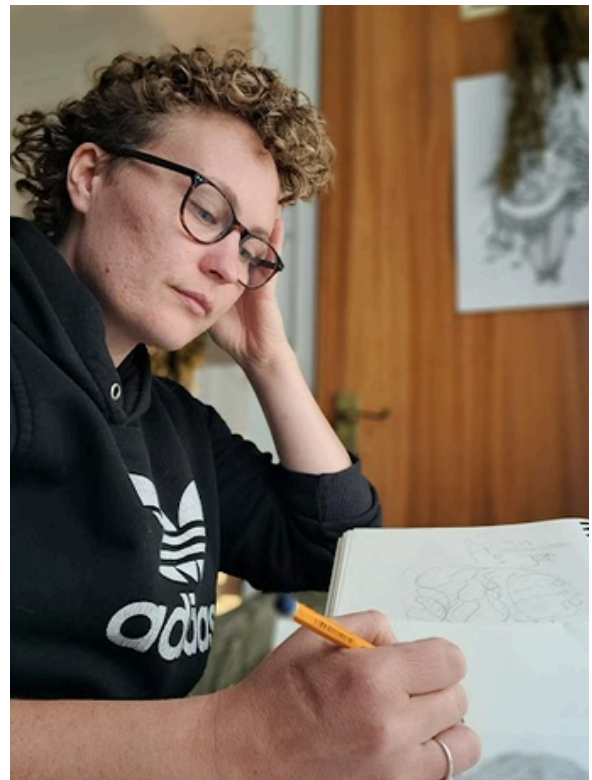
DRIVING THE CULTURAL
TRANSMISSION OF YOLA
HERITAGE IN FORTH AND
BARGY, WEXFORD

Funded and supported in 2025 by Wexford County Council
in partnership with Creative Ireland



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Saorla Wright (ILLUSTRATOR) is a visual artist from Ireland whose work explores folklore, mythology, and music. Based in the UK, Saorla also works as an actor and musician.



This resource pack is dedicated to the people living today in South County Wexford, whose enthusiasm, openness and generosity made Yola Today possible.

A writer named Sinnott reported in 1684 that the people of Wexford are “honest and candid with strangers”, and, as a stranger in 2025, I can only agree.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The project was funded and supported by Wexford County Council in partnership with Creative Ireland, and I'd like to thank everyone in those organisations for their time and support, with special thanks to Elizabeth Howard. Thanks also to Rosslare Municipal District and Cathaoirleach Ger Carthy; the team at Culture Night; Lady's Island Community Hall; Wexford Library; the volunteers and children at Yola Farm, Tagoat, and in particular Paul O'Keefe; St. Mary's National School in Tagoat; Kilrane National School in Rosslare; the staff and families of the Rosslare Harbour Accommodation Centre; Piercetown Girl Guides; Bridgetown School; Breda Hayes; Fintan Murphy; Aodhán Power; Suzanne Walsh; Olive Moran; Trisha Crosbie; Sascha Santschi-Cooney; James Maloney; Liam O'Neill; Ben Barnes; James Ó Muirthe; Quaker Historical Library in Dublin; Liam Bates; Gráinne Bates; the Kilmore Carol Singers; Saorla Wright; Niall Martin; Trisha O'Callaghan; Gareth Jones; Larry Dunne.

Thank you everyone who has supported this project by taking a workshop, giving an interview, sharing a poem or a rumour, organising lifts, playing games, and speaking up.

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COUNTY OF
WEXFORD

English Miles

Railways Roads Canals

Baronies thus GOREY

Revised by P.W. JOYCE, LL.D. M.R.I.A.



YOLA IS...

"...a dialect of the West Germanic branch of languages (which includes English, German and Dutch), formerly spoken in the two-south eastern baronies of Wexford called Forth and Bargy... Yola is a mixture of multiple languages and dialects, mainly Anglo-Saxon ([or] Old English), Irish, Anglo-Norman and Old French."

Sascha Santschi-Cooney

"...mingle-mangle, or gallmaulfrey of both the languages [of English and Irish. These languages are] in such medley or checkerwise so crabbedly jumbled both togyther..."

Richard Stanihurst

INTRODUCTION: “WHY YOLA TODAY?”

“Yoyo? Yoda? YOLO?”

“No, Yola. With an A.”

“What’s that?”

Most of my conversations about Yola began that way. It seemed strange to many of my friends, family, colleagues in theatre, and strangers I chatted to on the train that I would be working on this obscure aspect of the local heritage of a place I’m not even from. I wondered myself sometimes, why (as a theatre director) did I apply to “Drive the Cultural Transmission of the Yola Language and its Heritage”? And why today?

My professional reason was that I wanted to explore a new way of making theatre. So much of my work had been in Dublin or other cities in Europe, often assisting a director or writing my own plays. I’d begun to feel disillusioned with this kind of theatre. Who is it for? Who really needs it? So much theatre in Ireland today is expensive, inaccessible, or irrelevant to young people. It often has nothing to say to us either politically or culturally in 2025. I wanted to try to make theatre which could change people’s ways of thinking - especially young people’s – and I wanted to do that where I was living, outside of Dublin.

Specifically, I wanted to explore an approach to making theatre called Theatre of the Oppressed. This had been developed in the 1960s by the Brazilian director, Augusto Boal.

Boal’s ambition was that there should be no divide between the stage and the audience, between the actor and the spectator. He wanted to create “spect-actors”. He used theatre to allow people to publicly articulate and act out their political circumstances, and - more important than that - to *change* those circumstances. Boal said in his famous book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* that **“[Artists] should be creators and should also teach the public how to be creators, how to make art, so that we may all use that art together.”** I wanted, in my own small way, to explore that philosophy of making theatre, and the Yola Today project offered direct engagement with different “non-actor” communities.

Elizabeth Howard, Creative Ireland’s Creative Communities Engagement Officer (who herself has a background in theatre) was very supportive of this approach. I always asserted that the emphasis of this project was not simply on “Yola”, but on “Yola *today*”.

So, I made a plan: research Yola and Boal; do a series of workshops with people of different ages; and out of those workshops, write and direct a community-led “Forum Theatre” show in the style of Boal. This would be simply designed, include live music, and be bilingual in the style of Moonfish Theatre Company, for example.

It should be adaptable, able to tour to schools or community halls. Another inspiration here was John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil* (1973), a boisterous agitprop indictment of the exploitation of the Scottish Highlands.

Brimming with these high artistic ambitions, I began a nine-month journey of research and theatre-making. It did not go exactly according to plan - no artistic project does or maybe should - but, for me personally, it was an invaluable experience. It brought me into contact with some very special people, all of whom met the project with such generosity and openness. I was blessed in 2025 to spend summer days with poets and musicians in Kilmore Quay, or playing drama games with children in Rosslare, or interviewing researchers in Dublin, or speaking over tea in Tagoat with volunteers making real changes in their local communities. Though I was learning about a dialect that hadn't been spoken in two centuries or so, the project felt very alive to me.

The following resource pack contains extracts from my diary of the Yola Today project. It gives an insight into the workshops I did, as well as additional materials that were generated throughout the project. My hope for this resource pack is that it will not sit in a library as the final word on a dead dialect, but as an inspiration and tool to others who might want to explore Yola, theatre, or the profound power of speaking with your own words.

Chris Moran
Wexford Town, October 2025

“Enteet’ [napping] season commenced on the day the first gosling hatched (early spring) and ceased when the first sheaf of corn was brought into Tomhaggard (September).

Not only people had an enteet. Colonel Solomon Richards mentions that the cattle did so too, and the ducks and geese went into the yard and the cocks and hens went to roost at that time, and all exactly at the hour.”

Sascha Santschi-Cooney



DIARY: RESEARCH

5th March 2025

Had the first meeting in Wexford. It was meant to be in Kilmore Quay but because of the lateness of the Expressway Bus, when I arrived at Redmond Square Elizabeth decided we should stay in Wexford Town. Forth and Bargy are not only “historically isolated”, in the words of Sascha Santschi-Cooney, but they are hard to get to without a car *today*!

We arrived at the office and had a chat with Colm Moriarty, the Heritage Officer. He and Elizabeth warned me not to bite off more than I could chew.

Annette Dupuy, the Healthy County Co-Ordinator, came in. She is a native of Tomhaggard and gave a long, incredibly helpful list of people to contact.

The more we spoke, the more I realised that my job would be essentially facilitation first and theatre direction second. There was a wealth of talent and hard work already in the two baronies. The goal of this project, then, is making connections, providing a little spark that lights up conversations – rather than me becoming some expert on Yola.

We made a callout. Based on the response, I’ll know my next steps. Wexford Library has a couple of books on Yola. I spent some time in the afternoon reading these. I decided to go up again next week to spend a dedicated day on the research.

15th May

It turns out a “dedicated day” wasn’t enough! So much to learn about this. Two books have been invaluable in my research of Yola the last few weeks.

Aidan Sullivan’s *Yola and the Yoles* (2018) is a fascinating collection of history, sociology, vocabulary and anecdotes which attempts to paint a picture of life in Forth and Bargy. As Sullivan himself admits, “this is not a scholarly book”, but it was useful for me as I tried to get a sense of the real people who used Yola in their day-to-day lives.

***The Forth and Bargy Dialect* (2019) by Sascha Santschi-Cooney**, is the best recent scholarly compilation of all existing Yola words available to the public. Incredibly, Sascha wrote it when he was still a secondary school student, in collaboration with James Maloney of Ballyhitt!

I called Sascha. I asked him if he could connect me with James – and Sascha said “He’s here beside me!” This conversation introduced me to dozens of directions the research could go – the work of Diarmaid Ó Muirthe, the origins of mumming, Tower Houses, the Fingal dialect connection, Billy Colfer, the “Smuggler’s Field” at Carne, the Flemish influence, and windmills, windmills, windmills.

The conversation also directed me away from some red herrings: for example, there was never a people who described themselves as the “Yoles”, that was a name others gave to them. Were they even a separate people? James Maloney insisted that there is very much a physical difference in the people who live in Forth and Bargo!

Sascha told me that Yola was never a written language. But in the early 19th century, Jacob Poole, a local farmer and antiquarian, collected a glossary of 1700 words. This little book was miraculously published 40 years after Poole's death in Dublin and London in 1876.

What this conversation taught me, early on, is that I would never find “the” Yola expert. Neither Sascha nor James know how the language is pronounced, for example. Sascha told me that it would not be possible to historically recreate the lives of Yola-speakers from study of the Yola language. It would only ever be a lot of guesswork. Yola and the lives of the people who spoke it have, sadly, already been lost to time.

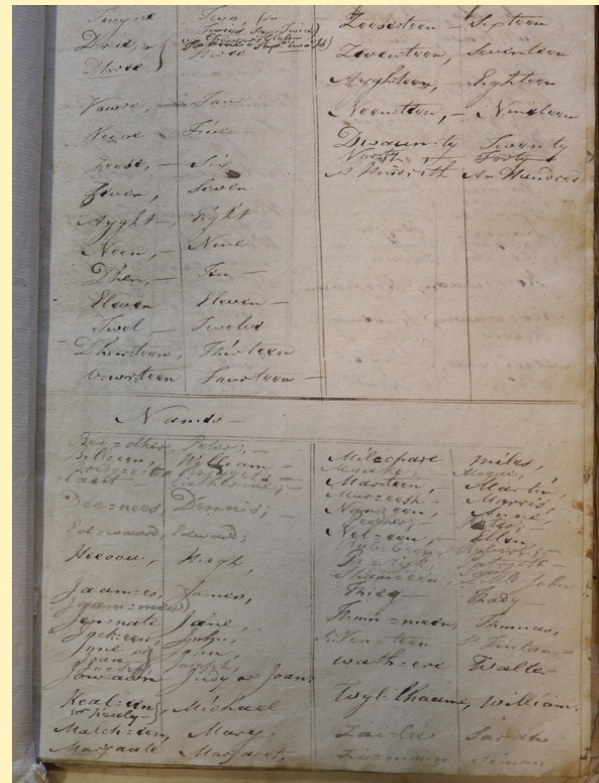
But, at the end of the call, James asked me about my surname. “Are you by any chance related to the Morans from Rosslare?” “No,” I said instinctively. “Wait...” My surname, Moran, was taken by my Dad from his adoptive mother, who took the name from her late husband, John Moran. Dad never met John, but has his name, and now I do too. And John Moran was from Rosslare. “Yes, actually, I suppose I would be related to them.”

Heritage is made of these glancing connections. You might pass someone on the street in a foreign country who knew your father, or who went to school with your teacher, or whose life was determined by something your ancestor did two hundred years ago. It's invisible, but it's there. I got a sense of Yola, then, not as an unbroken line of history since the Norman Invasion, but as thousands of sparks, lighting up places and people all across Forth and Bargo, and beyond.

Some books which may be useful to any future Yola researchers. These can be borrowed from Wexford Library



GLOSSARY (1876) BY JACOB POOLE



This is the original Ms. of Jacob Poole's Glossary, of North and Bargo Dialect, the only medium through which an effective record of that ancient speech, which died out about 1850, has been preserved. Through my Father's Medium (his signature below) it was printed in 1867.

My Father was deeply attached to his uncle, Jacob Poole (b. 1774 d. 1827). Overleaf I copy a poem written by my Father in 1836, presumably referring to this uncle.

AM 66, 12-7-1908.

Richard D. Webb
1761 Great Brunswick Street
Dublin

27. 1866

Members of the public can request to view the manuscript of *Poole's Glossary* and other relevant Yola documents by contacting Quaker House in Dublin.

Courtesy of Quaker Historical Library, Dublin



It's thought Yola came to Ireland with the Norman Invasion in the 12th Century.

INTERVIEW WITH SASCHA SANTSCHI-COONEY (TRANSCRIBED AND ABRIDGED), SEPTEMBER 2025

What is Yola, for anyone who doesn't know?

Yola was a variant of Middle English which was spoken in the two southeastern baronies of Forth and Bargo. Together, these two baronies form a triangle of land between Wexford Town and Carnsore Point, the southeastern corner of Wexford County (and indeed of Ireland as well). There is some evidence that Yola survived in other areas directly outside of Forth and Bargo, but research is ongoing in this regard. Basically, it's an extinct variant of Middle English.

You're saying a "variant". Does that mean it was a dialect, or could you say it was a language?

Yola was a dialect of Middle English. It was essentially a dialect of Old Hiberno-English which happened to survive in a small area of Ireland, while the Irish language held onto its status as the community language in other parts of Ireland during the Late Medieval and Early Modern period. Just on a side note, this doesn't mean that the Irish language died out in Forth and Bargo; it survived here, very much so - and possibly survived even longer than Yola did.

Now, that being said, there's no clear distinction between a "language" and a "dialect". That really has to do with politics, what measure a specific country or geographic area uses to distinguish language variants.

Would someone who spoke Yola back then understand English and vice versa?

Possibly. We don't know. The best modern day comparison is, for example, between German and Dutch, or even German and Swiss German. Someone on the German border with Switzerland might be used to hearing that accent or dialect and be able to understand it, but someone from Berlin who speaks German might not be able to understand Swiss German at all. This concept is called "mutual intelligibility", whereby speakers of language variants are able to understand each other with relative ease.

You spoke about people speaking Irish in the baronies as well. What would have been the divide in population between people speaking Yola and people speaking Irish?

We don't know at all how many people spoke Yola. We might have an idea of how many of these people spoke Irish. The best source for that is Robbie Sinnott, who did his PhD on the people who spoke Irish in Wexford. Irish might have been spoken in this pocket here, and Yola here – or they might have been spoken by the same people in different contexts.

So it might have been, say, that people would have been using Irish for trade and Yola for conversations in the home?

Possibly. And Yola speakers could almost certainly speak modern English. Most of them could, I'd say, especially those who went to Wexford Town to buy and sell. It was said that in the 1780s, 1790s, "all things are bought and sold in Wexford Town in the modern English dialect."

What would Yola have sounded like?

Yola was relatively conservative in its grammar and its pronunciation. Its sound system was quite different from Modern English. Now, overall, we do not know what it sounded like because unfortunately it didn't survive long enough to be recorded by audio recording. We can only make guesses as to how a lot of the words in the collected word lists may have sounded.

It is remarkable how much it sounds (when we guess at the sound) like a cross between English and Irish, with some Germans thrown in there as well.

A lot of people say it sounds like Dutch because of the "V" sound. An argument used to be made for the Flemish influence on Yola, but actually a lot of the regional dialects of the South of England have that phonological feature as well. So, it's more likely that it came from there, than coming from Flemish.

I know the area here was called "Little Flanders" on account of the flatness of the land and windmills. But there wouldn't have been much trade with Flanders or anything at the time, would there?

Not that I know of. There were strong trade ties with Bristol - maybe Liverpool as well. Not with Flanders.

Let's talk about how it came to Ireland. It came with the Normans. Would it have been spoken by all of the Normans?

We have no evidence of how it started. It's generally accepted that it came to Ireland as a result of the Norman Invasion and the coming of English. Not all the Normans would have spoken it. Most of those who came would have spoken what's called "Early Middle English" – so they'd transitioned from Old English to Early Middle English. Yola that we know today has gone through quite a few changes, especially sound changes, since then.

But how it survived here is a different story. The traditional narrative until now has been that Forth and Bargoyle are geographically isolated from the rest of the country, allowing Yola to survive untouched by modern English. However, this theory has its flaws. That theory aimed to create an exoticizing image of a strange people with a strange tongue and strange customs who had no knowledge of the world outside their two baronies! But there is ample evidence that they had knowledge of the world outside. First off, Forth and Bargoyle was close to three major urban centres during the Late Medieval period. This part of the country had very strong trading ties with towns such as Bristol and Dublin.

There is also ample evidence that the Yola dialect underwent some of the same linguistic changes as mainstream or Modern English did, such as the great vowel shift, which suggests also that Forth and Bargy were not nearly as isolated as was once claimed.

So why did Yola survive here, then?

I think it's more feasible to suggest that Yola survived due to favourable systems of settlement. After the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the Late 12th Century, many of the Irish were forced to move to the mountainous and wooded areas in the north of the county (although many of them did stay in stay in South Wexford), while the English settlers were able to remain in the coastal lowlands and the river valleys.

Can you talk about the families living here?

So, families can of course be traced in terms of the continuity of surnames. It's in the south and particularly the southeastern part of Wexford that we see the highest concentration of both Old English surnames.

A lot of the Yola words that I've come across, and that you collect in your book, are agricultural – riding horses, etc, which would lead me to believe that it was a pretty much totally agricultural society. Is that so?

The common folk spoke Yola. The earliest documentary evidence, from 1577, we have mention that it was spoken by the “meaner sort”; “meaner” back then didn’t mean “nasty” or anything, like we’d use today. It just meant ordinary people. Even Jacob Poole confirms that as well.

And it wasn't a written language, so it must have been that the majority of people were illiterate then. It was kind of is left up to people outside of the community to record it.

Exactly. Antiquarians, landlords, people interested in the whole antiquarian world: ruins and different dialects and things like that.

I suppose the problem with that is it becomes outsiders inflecting the record with their own prejudices or their own misconceptions. Jacob Poole wasn't even the same religion as the Yola speakers that he was recording, right? He was a Quaker, and they would have been Catholic.

Yeah, very much so. Jacob Poole did actually donate money to the Catholics to build a church. I don't know if you know the story. Poole was riding one day, probably on his land. It was wintertime, cold, and he saw a group of people praying on their knees on the hard ground. So he went to the local Catholic priest few days later and he offered money, and he offered for them to build their church on his land, free of charge. The ruins of it are still there – one of the walls of it is actually used as a handball alley!

I'd like to ask you about Yola dying out. By the 1820s, when Poole was collecting his glossary, people would have been using it less and less. If I'm right, it had about 30 years left of being used? Can you tell us how it died out?

As a community dialect, it is very probable that Yola died out sometime in the mid-18th century. But it probably clung on longer in certain areas, and also possibly within certain families. And it clung on in the speech of individuals for another century or so. Richard Webb, who was writing in 1867, said that 40 years ago (so in 1827), Yola was the mother tongue of those aged 70 and upwards, living on the southern seaboard of the Barony of Forth. This suggests that those born after 1827 did not learn Yola as their mother tongue. This indicates the predominance of modern Hiberno-English being the spoken language for at least circa 1760 onwards. If we assume the average age of a parent during this period is to be 25 years, we can argue that those born between about 1720 and 1745 were the cohort of people who abandoned Yola as the community dialect.

When you say "a community dialect", what's that?

For example, a family might still speak Yola within the home. Maybe they were more traditionally-minded, or maybe there was an emotional sense towards using Yola. But when they went outside the home, most of the people around them were speaking modern English. So they spoke English in the community.

The storyteller in me wants a really dramatic ending of, you know, railway lines scarring the farmland in a puff of steam – or a great storm that washes away the last village or something. Until now, I thought that the introduction of the railway or the education system were important factors in the death of Yola, but you're saying it died out as a community language much earlier than that. What actually caused its death?

There are lots of factors but I'm sure the Cromwellian settlers had a large role. Cromwell invaded us and would have brought settlers who spoke a more modern form of English, more similar to what we speak today than Yola. But, again, we don't know how Yola died away.

You might not have an answer to this, but I have a theory that Yola doesn't survive in the vocabulary anymore, but that it survives in the roundness of the Wexford accent, the flatness of the vowel sounds – not too dissimilar to my own Arklow accent. I don't know how you can measure that! I'm sure there's some science to do it.

Short answer, no. The English they speak in South Wexford – not that I have a very thick South Wexford accent –

I have to disagree with you there!

Ah well, I've a bit of a mix of my Da's accent and what I picked up in school! But, frankly, you won't hear any remnants of Yola at all in modern speech. Not anymore. Only rarely would you hear a word in the speech of older generations, and a lot of those are actually Irish words to begin with that found their way into Yola.

And words such as “quare” may or may not have come from Yola; they may have entered local speech through other dialects of English.

That’s disappointing. But it’s the nature, I suppose, of studying a language that wasn’t written down that died before audio recording. It’s just all very fragile. Finally, what do you hope for Yola? Do you have any ideas of what the next stage of your work on the dialect might be?

I would hope for more rigorous academic research into the dialect. Where it came from, why and how it survived. More linguistic research into its possible pronunciation, its grammar, rather than focus only on its words. I’ve started doing that myself in the last few years. If I was redoing my book, there are sections I’d change completely. That’s why I’m not reprinting it. There are ideas and theories that are not sitting right in my head anymore, and that’s why I’m not putting them out into the public anymore.

Well, that book has been, you know - in whatever state it might be in - it’s been invaluable for me. It’s been a keystone for this project, and I couldn’t have worked on Yola Today without your research. So hopefully, in return, my project will spur people’s interest in Yola - and hopefully help your academic research in the future.



"It has come to my notice that a blackguard mummering set has risen in our midst, contrary to the law of the Church, with a variety of foolish tricks and silly manoeuvrings, in order to obtain food, drink and money, by false purposes."

Canon Mortimer Sullivan (1843-1931)



DIARY: JUST PLAY

28th April

Elizabeth and I drove down to Tagoat to visit Yola Farm. We met Joanna, a volunteer in their community garden. Joanna said the kids were on their way from the school: "You'll hear them before you see them." And we did. They were led by Paul, a teacher at Tagoat school and leader of the volunteers at Yola Farm.

We went into a small, shady room, "The Forge", and I introduced myself. I asked, "Do you know what Yola is?" The kids responded, "The farm?" "The youth club?" Eventually, one kid hazarded "...a language?" Yes, a language - in fact, your language! I told them that although they didn't know it, Yola was their heritage! Blank stares. I offered them a couple of Yola words - "Quare", "foostering", "vanged". Blanker stares: I'll need to rethink my pitch. They responded more enthusiastically when Paul told them to grab shovels and head to the agrotunnel.

The Farm is made of ramshackle, crumbling cottages, a large courtyard, a thriving community garden and beehives. One building is from the 18th century but the rest are reconstructions. Yola Farm hosts a myriad of activities from football to Ireland's second largest indoor skatepark. It is a heritage site which, at some point, for some reason, stopped receiving consistent funding but it is being revived by Paul and a team of volunteers. Paul, when I asked what his goal was, said, "Just play".

Paul took us up to a reconstruction of a windmill from Yola times - now in disrepair. It's the thing," he said, "that breaks everyone's heart". They would love to get this reconstruction working again, with its sprung fans and rotatable roof to catch the wind.

How fragile cultural preservation is, I thought. One windless day and the windmill stops spinning. One blip in funding, or dip in interest, and what do you lose? A thousand years of heritage? What can you lose in a year, in a week, in an afternoon? What can you lose if you are in a bad mood, or offend the wrong person, or clam up? How much responsibility on Yola Today, and on what Paul is doing, and on us here now to preserve that nearly-lost heritage.





20th May

Down for my first workshop at Yola Farm. Unfortunately, due to a mixup at the school, we had only three kids. Not an auspicious start for the revival of Yola, four of us in a large hall, me clutching my little yellow folder of research and drama prompts.

But Augusto Boal says, **“It is more important to achieve a good debate than a good solution”**. With those three kids, I led a game called Agreement/Disagreement: I made a statement, and if the kids agreed 100% they ran to the left, if they disagreed 100% they ran to the right. If they were unsure (or didn’t care) they stood somewhere in the middle. The game’s purpose is to try to convince others to move their position towards yours.

My first prompt was, “There’s no point learning a dead language!” And the kids ran (well, walked) to both sides. One child was in the middle of the room. Did she not care about the game? When she spoke, what she said was one of the most important insights of this whole project:

“You’re obviously getting us to compare Irish to Yola,” she said, “but Irish was taken from us by force. Yola just died out naturally, so they are not the same.” She’s right, isn’t she? Speaking Yola in 2025 is not an act of resistance, is it? There couldn’t be a Yola Kneecap, could there? What even is the Yola for “kneecap”? What, I thought, was I doing here at Yola Farm?

Reflecting on the workshop over lunch, I realised I needed to give people more opportunities to express themselves if I was to find dramatic conflict - the basis of all good theatre. I decided to allow the adults to provide their own prompts, anonymously, on Yola or on the farm or cultural funding or this project. Paul at one point argued that language always comes from and refers to a place. It gives us words and descriptions inherently tied up with the land. Yola, therefore, must contain words which describe this part of the world “uniquely” - so it is valuable to learn, for us. But, another volunteer said, Yola was recorded by antiquarians outside of the Yola community itself. So what local knowledge was lost in that process? Could anyone, today, do an authentic Yola Walking Tour? Could anyone make authentic Yola roadsigns? This, I thought, was a “good debate”.



26th May

Today was a three workshop day: Kilrane National School (kids), St. Mary's National School Tagoat (teachers) and Rosslare Harbour Accommodation Centre (kids).

Boal says that **“working with images [...] can be more democratic, as it does not privilege verbally articulate people.”** To put this into practice with the kids, I reimagined Boal's “Image Theatre” game as “Huggy Bear”. In Huggy Bear, I called out a number (in Yola!) and the kids made a group of that number. Then I called out a prompt, and they had to respond by making an image with their bodies. For example, “Dhree! Wexford!”

“Wexford” as a prompt produced a wide variety of images: the Opera House, strawberries, a worm eating the strawberries, hurling, the Heritage Park. We had fortresses, arrows, shipwrecks, oysters. We had, like in real life, towerhouse ruins stacked up in front of modern wind turbines.

In Agree/Disagree, I noticed sometimes the kids' point was simply to re-express an opinion that another child had had. For example, when asked “Can art change the world?”, three or four kids offered the same opinion that certain arts like film or painting are more effective than, say, theatre.



But I encouraged this: for a child of eight or nine, the act of public speaking itself, of articulating a thought for the first time in front of a room of listening people - and seeing what change that brings - is valuable.

8th June

With the Girl Guides in Piercetown, I played a new game called Yola Charades. Here, the kids formed four teams of ten and lined up. The first four girls were invited forward and I whispered a Yola prompt to them. For example: **“Pa cawl” which means “On the horse”**. The girls had to shout “Pa cawl”, the teams had to repeat it, and then the girls mimed what it was: riding on a horse. The teams then had to guess what “Pa cawl” meant and whoever guessed first won a point. Then the next group of four came forward. There was much shouting and guessing and shushing, hands in the air, running around. **“Booleying” – to move briskly. “Theene a dheer” – shut the door. “In a right dole” – in trouble. “Haven’t a juuge of wind” – out of breath.** I thought how special it was to have forty young people shouting these Yola words in 2025, shouting these words with more energy than probably they’ve been spoken in two hundred years. After a while, they needed their **“enteet”** – or siesta.

Whether these workshops made a lasting contribution to the kids' understanding of Yola and its heritage, or was simply a moment of fun, didn't matter to anyone in the room while we were doing them. Our ambition, like Paul's, was to "just play". But I suspect that when they hear "**quare**", or "**foostering**", they might think of that workshop and remember they spoke up, or an image they made. I felt my job was, in Boal's words, "**simply to try and ensure that those who know a little get the chance to explain it, and that those who dare a little, dare a little more.**"

Unfortunately, the "Spirit of the Brigín" Day would be the last workshop of the summer. Many amateur dramatic groups were on breaks, other groups were preparing for their summer festivals. My original pitch for the project had been to do workshops which built into a rehearsal phase of a small play which we'd present during Heritage Week (16th – 24th August). On top of that, frankly, I was uncertain how to turn my experiences into a play.

Of course, you can make a play about Yola – and people should! – but my own interest as a theatre-maker is in approaching contemporary cultural problems. And a good play is essentially a conflict: one person wants one thing, someone else wants the opposite. In order to write a play about Yola Today I would need to take from discussions I'd had with the volunteers who came to my workshops. That felt unfair to me. People had been so generous in sharing their problems with me, so I did not feel ready to make drama out of their experiences. In the end, writing and staging a play for Heritage Week was too ambitious for this project. Elizabeth at Creative Ireland had warned me of this back in February – but, still, this felt like a failure to me at the midpoint of the project.



Yola charades
on the
"Spirit of the
Brigín" Day



"Someone has to be responsible for the practices... That's how it keeps going from year to year."

Pat Bates

DIARY: A LEARNING PROCESS

9th August

Today, got up at six o'clock and I bussed down to Wexford Town for the Fleadh Ceoil. I had had a sense that this would be an important event not to miss. The Kilmore Carol Singers were performing at Saint Iberius' Church and they represented one of the last living links to Yola. These men are preserving a tradition of singing which has existed unbroken in Kilmore Quay for 300 years. The carols are now performed in English but at some point over the last century they were performed in Yola. Jack Devereux, a late carol singer, had been an important figure in Kilmore and one of the last experts on Yola.

Saint Iberius' Church was full but I squeezed in at a corner and listened. Outside you could hear the fiddles and tin whistles, children's shouting, drunken laughter – but inside the Church was quiet and respectful. The six men stood in white shirts, black slacks, holding red songbooks.

Their singing was odd to my modern ears: dour, legato, not at all as you'd imagine a Christmas carol. All six sang the melody. It would be difficult to describe the music as beautiful, but listening to it, I realised that I was being offered an opportunity to step back in time. The host of this event, Liam Bates, spoke about his feeling that the music fills the room with the ghosts of eleven past generations: dozens of men, fathers and sons and uncles and nephews, all who knew the same melodies and words. It is rare in modern life we get the chance to experience performance which has travelled down to us, nearly unchanged, through generations.

Afterwards, I introduced myself to the men and asked if I could interview them. Stepping back out into the festivities of the Fleadh, I felt that I did not need to "raise pride" in culture here in Wexford – there was so much already to be proud of.





Front row: Jim Moore, Pat Bates, Jim Keilthy
Back row: Bobby Devereux, Jimmy Shiel and
PJ Boxwell

INTERVIEW WITH KILMORE CAROL SINGERS (TRANSCRIBED AND ABRIDGED), AUGUST 2025

Jim, you're the "junior" of the choir. Can you tell me a little about why you decided to join the choir?

JIM MOORE: Well, before I joined, I had been hearing them sing over the years at Christmastime. So, there's almost this kind of responsibility to try and help preserve that part of our heritage. That's the way I see it.

But even though you'd heard [the songs], you still had to learn them, right? Can you tell me about that process?

JIM MOORE: Well, we go sing and, as the lads will tell you, we practise in each [singer's] home. Pat and Jimmy have been familiar with that, going back through the years. That's the practice [we do] every Christmas.

JIMMY SHIEL: It'll take you between six to ten years, really, to get used to them. To sing them in the right airs and know when to come in –

JIM KEILTHY: To be confident.

JIMMY SHIEL: To be confident, yeah. They're not an ordinary hymn. Up and down, up and down.

No, the melody is very unpredictable.

JIMMY SHIEL: Yeah and long words you have to stress. It's a learning process.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: And you have short words extended out.

Do you learn them by ear, or –

ALL: By ear, oh yeah, by ear.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: When I was starting I was handed a cassette so I could learn it off that. I was recording in Jack Devereux's kitchen back in the 70s. You push two buttons; it's a manual recording. Going back the following week, I said "Lads, I can sing the carol, but you'll have to do something about the budgie – I can't do that as well!" You could hear him in the back of it all. You'd be listening to "Darkest Midnight" or something like that and hear him going on in the background!

And do you have a conductor or do you all chip in?

PAT BATES: We all go together. One person starts it and then –

PJ BOXWELL: It's important we start on the right note, because if you start too high...

Your voice will crack?

ALL: Oh yeah.

I find that quite interesting – not having a conductor. I used to play in a brass band, and it's really hard to know when to start or end, even with eye contact.

JIMMY SHIEL: Well, when we're practicing we all come close together and everyone is listening to each other's voices. That's the learning process.

PAT BATES: Years ago when we used to sing it was Jimmy's father who was the leader. And when he passed away it came over to me. And it'll go to another one when it's my day. Someone has to be responsible for the practices and all that. That's how it keeps going from year to year.

LIAM BATES: That reminds me: with a choir, you get the note from a piano before you sing. But watching them rehearse, it's like watching my aunt bake cakes. "How much of that do you use?" And she'd say, "Oh I don't know! You just put it in!"

JIMMY SHIEL: That's why it's a learning process, like.

PAT BATES: It's a practice.

JIMMY SHIEL: A practice, yeah.

PAT BATES: We used to practice three and three. So three men from Kilmore village and three from outside, and they used to practice separately. They'd meet during the year coming up to Christmas and say, "Well, are ye practicing yet?" There was a competition between them and that kept it going [here] for years.

JIM MOORE: We're at an advantage now with technology. You said before you learnt it off a cassette, but now we have a CD or online; we have that facility. But back in the day you had to learn orally.

JIMMY SHIEL: That's why I said – going back to the Fleadh – [Bobby's] father [Jack Devereux] sang them in the 1950s. The reason he was brought in was, there was six men singing, then one dropped out but the five men couldn't start. They didn't know the airs. But he knew them. He'd been listening to his father. And he was able to start it then.

And they had six weeks to learn everything back then?

JIMMY SHIEL: That time, they used to sing them out in the field, pulling corn. They sang them all the time.

PAT BATES: The first note of every carol, there's no one note on it. There's two or three on some of them.

It sounds kind of dangerous!

LIAM BATES: It feels really scary to me. If I were ever in the choir, I'd find that really scary.

PJ BOXWELL: The only advantage is, we're the only ones who'd know if we're doing it wrong!

BOBBY DEVEREUX: There was a story me Da told me about. There was a sergeant came here. In that time, there was a balcony up there [at the back of the church; nowadays the singers sing from the front two pews]. The sergeant came in and sat at the front, and when they started singing the carols, he jumped up. He thought it was six drunken men who'd come in after the night before!

I mean, I came to the Fleadh to listen to you because otherwise I'd have to wait until Christmas, after the Yola Project ended. But they are...quite shocking, really! They're very different to what you'd expect Christmas carols to be.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: Ah well there's a lot of confusion about where the melodies come from. They come from flamenco Spanish, or from the West of Ireland, they come from here, they come from there, no one really knows. Everyone has their own speculation.

I was wondering because of a lot of the Yola connection comes from England. I know in Ireland there aren't similar traditions, but in England are there?

BOBBY SHIEL: Well, "Jerusalem" actually is an English song that was brought in. The rest of them are written by Fr. William Devereux.

PAT BATES: There was a parish priest here who wanted to get rid of them.

BOBBY SHIEL: 1956, '57. His argument was that because they weren't being sung in Latin

—

LIAM BATES: Which they never were —

BOBBY SHIEL: Never were. They shouldn't be performed in church. Even though he preached in English from the altar. But our Lord had better intentions: he passed away in November!

I won't say a word against them. And where do you perform now, at the altar?

JIM MOORE: No, here in these pews. With our backs to the audience.

PAT BATES: Three and three.

And you get a good crowd?

ALL: Oh yes, from all over the country, yes.

JIMMY SHIEL: We get most people after Christmas, coming into the new year. We'd have a lot of people coming down from the West of Ireland.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: Before Covid there was a couple from the West who used to meet up with a lady from Wicklow and they'd all come down.

And I remember the first year they came, I looked across at him once and he was sitting here and there were tears in his eyes. My Dad seen him as well. Talking to him afterwards, he said it reminds him of his own father and his grandfather singing similar airs in the West of Ireland.

JIMMY SHIEL: Not this kind of carol but there was probably something like that done. We had it in six, seven parishes around here. And it died off everywhere except here.

In the past, these carols would have been sung in Yola. I know they aren't now, but are there still some Yola words? Can you think of any from any carols?

JIMMY SHIEL: I can't, no.

And, Bobby, your father Jack Devereux was known as a Yola expert. But was that something that he brought into the choir or was it kept separate?

JIMMY SHIEL: No, no, it was in the carols from the time of [Jack's] father or grandfather.

So he used to sing in Yola? And it's died out since then?

JIMMY SHIEL: It died away yeah. There probably were different words in them that we never knew.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: The carols have actually got shorter too.

LIAM BATES: In your books, have you got the complete verses even if you don't sing them. So are there words there which might be Yola?

BOBBY DEVEREUX: Probably, if you went through everything.

PJ BOXWELL: Some of them have twenty eight verses! It would be sung instead of a mass.

JIMMY SHIEL: You see, at that time [the singing] was a substitute for mass in some places.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: And plus, the priest wouldn't trust just anyone with the [collection] box. So he'd come out, and the lads'd be singing, and when he got enough, he'd give the lads a nod and they'd shut up.

PJ BOXWELL: When priests couldn't [celebrate mass] back in 1700s, 1800s, the carols were sung instead of a mass.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: The words all come from the Bible.

JIM MOORE: It's storytelling.

JIMMY SHIEL: It is a story – a carol is always a story of something.

PAT BATES: I remember one man, when I was a kid, and the others had a book, but he had them off by heart.

And how long would that take? If you're singing carols with 28 verses...? Were there four hour masses or...?

PJ BOXWELL: Sure if you did that, you'd be singing to an empty church!

JIMMY SHIEL: Ah no, they'd split it up, you see. They'd sing a bit at the beginning, they might do a bit at communion, and then they'd do a bit at the end of the mass like. We don't know how much or what they'd be singing way back then. The way it's gone now, we don't sing all the time here ourselves. Sure there's no mass here on Christmas morning. You have to go down to Tomhaggard on Christmas morning. We used to sing every carol here, but now... We have to spread it around now.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: It was the only church we ever sang in, unless we were invited.

JIM MOORE: There are four curacies in this parish, and every curacy has a church.

What's a curacy?

JIM MOORE: For example, this [St. Peter's] is the parish church but it looks after Kilmore area. There's a church in Tomhaggard. There's one in Mulrankin. So what's happened, as Bobby says, is now we go to all of the churches in the parish. There's a shortage of masses and so the whole structure has changed.

Ah, OK. I thought that what you said at the Fleadh, that you perform for different services in the area, that you were trying to get more people involved. But it sounds like a necessity; it sounds like the carols are getting kind of squeezed out.

PJ BOXWELL: Well, we have to try and sing as many carols as we can.

JIMMY SHIEL: If we didn't, we'd only sing like three or four carols.

So it's kind of like what you, Jim, were saying about responsibility. It's you saying we must get more out there.

ALL: Yeah. Yes, that's right. Keep going.

PAT BATES: Every mass we sing is a different carol.

JIMMY SHIEL: We sing a carol to represent the different feast days.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: Or the closest.

LIAM BATES: So do you sing twelve carols, for the twelve days of Christmas?

JIMMY SHIEL: No, not now.

PAT BATES: Long ago it would have been.

So are there other things you're doing to try to preserve the tradition outside of that?

PJ BOXWELL: I suppose we are putting out there more than have been in a long time. The Fleadh, like - that wouldn't have been done years ago. We're working at it. We've started in the last couple of years now, singing at the Mass Rock in Tomhaggard. Have you heard of it?

Just it was mentioned at the Fleadh. It's where priests celebrated mass outside because it was forbidden in Church? And a priest got murdered there?

LIAM BATES: When?

BOBBY DEVEREAUX: Just after Cromwell came here, 1600s.

PJ BOXWELL: It's really fitting down there now. It's an experience with the sun rising.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: Yeah, it's an experience when you're there [for mass]. Actually the Bishop was there last time. The first year I was there it was weird. You know, it was the first time at a mass I could hear mud squelching under my feet, anyway.

PAT BATE: Yeah, but that mass, where the priest got murdered... There was an old woman, Mrs. Fitzgerald was her name, and the chalice - it was only a small one - she hid it in her clothes and she threw it into a manhole, underwater. And it was retrieved a couple of years after. In 1999 Fr. McDonald started using it again.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: It was usually kept in the bank in Wexford, but it was always brought out for the last days of the Novena.

PJ BOXWELL: There's a huge turnout always at that mass.

Yeah, there was a huge turnout for the Fleadh event as well. You spoke very movingly on the day about that responsibility to the past. And you all feel it. There's this special quality the carols have, which you're well aware of yourselves, it's like you're touching the past. So are there recordings of it being made, or plans for more dissemination of the carols in the future? You know, a nationwide tour?

PAT BATES: There definitely are a couple of recordings from over the years.

You were talking about Radio na Gaeltachta came?

ALL: Yes.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: And we were on [RTÉ] *Nationwide* there one year.

JIM MOORE: Last Christmas we had a visit from a producer at RTÉ at Pat's house.

And about the Irish Traditional Music Archive? Have they ever been in touch?

ALL: No, no, not recently.

JIM MOORE: Another exponent of the Yola would have been Liz Jeffers. She was on *The Late Late Show* with Gay Byrne. Herself and Jack Devereux were probably the two people named locally as experts on Yola.

Your performance is the last living link to Yola. I'm thinking about how flexible [the choir] could be. Could young people be involved? Could there be seven singers? Could there be women singers? Are these conversations you have?

PAT BATES: Some of the women tried to get in alright a few years ago!

JIMMY SHIEL: It's just about preserving the tradition as it was. You don't change nothing: that was bred into me and Pat anyway. We sing it the way they sang it. And that's all we're trying to do. I mean, it's very hard to get men to [join the choir]. When you start doing this, you don't go away at Christmas. You made a commitment you were going to be here. Now, going back years ago it wasn't too bad, people never went away much for Christmas. But now...

Does it need to be six?

JIMMY SHIEL: In the 1960s there's a photo of seven of them, but I suppose they were only practicing.

PAT BATES: Liam's brother was going to go to England...

JIMMY SHIEL: Yeah, Eddie. But no, it's always six singers.

And the outfit. Who came up with that?

JIMMY SHIEL: Well, I remember my father and them, they were always dressed in their suits. But that died away!

PAT BATES: They'll come in their shorts next!

It's none of my business, but these are religious songs. Is it a requirement to be religious to be part of the choir or is it more about the singing itself?

PAT BATES: It's about the singing of the carols.

BOBBY DEVEREUX: It's just to keep them going.

JIM MOORE: That's the big challenge. The world has shifted. The place of the church in everyday life has shifted, but yet all of these carols are about the Bible. So the question is, what's going to happen when there's no parish priest or there's a shared parish priest.

You must still get a lot of community support. Can you tell me about that?

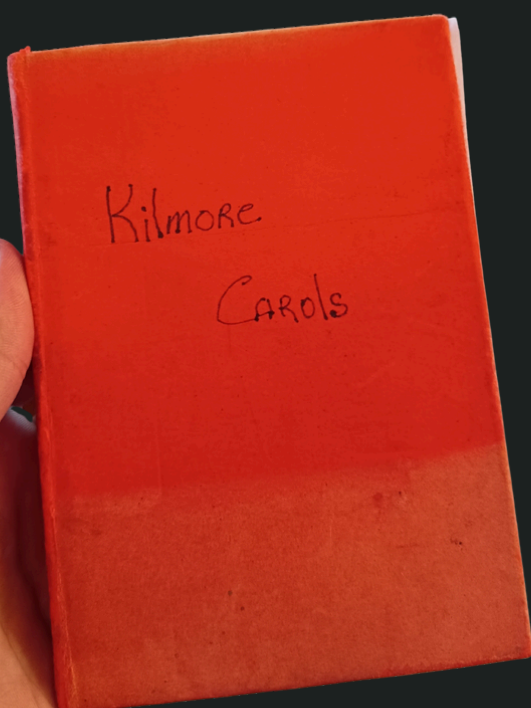
PJ BOXWELL: They'd always come up to us after a mass. Say well done. It's just a tradition here and everyone likes to see it carry on.

LIAM BATES: It's funny actually. You know, you could become complacent about it; it's there every Christmas. But you talk to people and they really cherish it. It's the jewel of the parish in many ways. But I think, maybe what we did at the Fleadh should -

PJ BOXWELL: Well, the Fleadh performance gave people an insight into it.

PAT BATES: Ian Russell from Scotland used to come over and he'd record some of the songs. He used to do that every year until Covid...

JIM MOORE: Some of them you can find on Spotify!



CULTURE NIGHT 2025



The end of the Yola Today project was meant to be Culture Night. I was going to present the Resource Pack and say my Yola Goodbyes: **"Gun romh maith agat and God zpeed"**.

However, in the two weeks before the event, Elizabeth Howard had made a press release which – for whatever reason – attracted lots of attention. There was a sudden surge of interest in this project: emails from linguists, folklorists, local historians, Medieval historians, schoolteachers, puppeteers - and RTÉ *Nationwide*. It seemed a shame to cut the project off on Culture Night, when there was so still much more to explore.

So, instead of a final presentation, I presented Culture Night as a sort of midpoint in the revival of interest in Yola. I felt it was an opportunity to share in one room the different ways that Yola exists in our lives today.

I was worried we would have a small crowd on the 19th September: it was a wet night, and we'd had a venue change, and Lady's Island Community Centre is not easily accessible for those without a car. But, as 5pm came, around 50-60 people arrived. Some had been involved in the project so far, some were curious locals, some had their own ambitions to create Yola projects.

I had organised the event to include the Kilmore Carol Singers, but also commissioned Liam Bates to write a new melody to an existing Yola song. I had invited Liam O'Neill over from Galway to present his poem, "Yola". We invited Councillor Ger Carthy, the Cathaoirleach of Rosslare Municipal District, to speak. We organised with Niall Martin of RTÉ's *Nationwide* to record the event. I read some of my diary entries to give a flavour of the upcoming Resource Pack. I also presented the illustrations done by Saorla Wright, who I'd commissioned for the project.

But most special for me was *after* the Culture Night event proper. I'd finished on a drama game to get people talking. Then, dozens of people came up to me with stories, words, snatches of memory, or recommendations of people to talk to. It honestly took me an hour to get from the stage to the coffee table, but I could have spent the whole night listening, so exciting was the crowd's enthusiasm. **The best legacy to "Yola Today" would be more conversations like we had that night, so that the future researchers and artists will have an easier time making projects about Yola.**

"Gob daw" (n.): a chatty person
Image credit: Larry Dunne



RESOURCES: YOLA TOMORROW



The cross bush outside Kilmore cemetery, a tradition from Yola times still practiced today.

RESOURCE I: WORKSHOP PLAN

Six workshops took place during the Yola Today project. They were at Yola Farm (kids); Yola Farm (Volunteers); St. Mary's School Tagoat (Teachers); Kilrane National School; Piercetown Girl Guides; Rosslare Accommodation Centre. With this guide, adapted from Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, you can do your own workshops - in school, in your drama group, or other communities. The workshop is adaptable for adults and kids, lasting one hour. Dozens of Yola words which you can use as prompts are available online, or in Poole's Glossary or the books of Aidan Sullivan and Sascha Santschi-Cooney, or throughout this Resource Pack.

WARM UP

In a circle - always a circle! - I like to shake out arms, legs, gently turn necks, hips, taking 8 seconds to do it. Count aloud together.

Afterwards, hold out one arm and gently tap it with your other hand, and hum gently... Increase intensity until you are smacking your arm and shouting. Do this all over your body. Don't hurt yourself - but you'll definitely wake up!

GAME I: IMAGE THEATRE/HUGGY BEAR

To play this game, everyone walks around the room. The workshop leader shouts a number, like this: "Huggy Bear - three!" Everyone must then get into groups of three - and hug. (You can "eliminate" the stragglers, but try playing without eliminating at first.) For added difficulty, try calling the numbers in Yola!

Then the workshop leader calls a prompt. This can be anything: "A shipwreck!" "Wexford!" "Heritage!" I used Yola-related prompts, mixing silly ones like "Donkey derby" with abstract ones like "Tradition".

The groups must then make an image of the prompt. Extra points for not copying anyone else's group. This should be done fast, with as little talking as possible. The point here is to use your instincts and your bodies.

You can, once the group images are made, ask everyone what they're doing - but I suggest that the joy of this game is *not* talking. Trust the image.

GAME II: AGREE/DISAGREE

The workshop leader calls out a statement. "Art can change the world!" for example. The participants must run to the left wall if they agree, and the right wall if they disagree. The rest of the space becomes shades of agreement: you might be 75% towards one side of the room.

The game, then, is to try to get everyone else to your position. By putting hands up, everyone gets the chance to speak. After someone speaks, vote with your feet.

Remember when playing this game that most people aren't comfortable speaking in public, let alone arguing about something in public. There are no right or wrong opinions.

You should prepare your prompts with deliberately provocative language. “Tagoat is a unique place”, for example, caused a lot of consternation - what does “unique” mean? Is it the same as “special”?

GAME III: YOLA CHARADES

Divide the room into teams. Give each team a name (ideally Yola-inspired). The teams line up in rows. This, you must tell them, is a *competition*.

The first of each team steps forward. The workshop leader whispers a Yola word into their ears. For example, “vanged” (hurt or sprained). Everyone in the room must repeat the word, then the first of each team must act it out. They can only repeat the word while acting it out - no English! Whoever guesses the charade’s meaning first, their team gets a point.

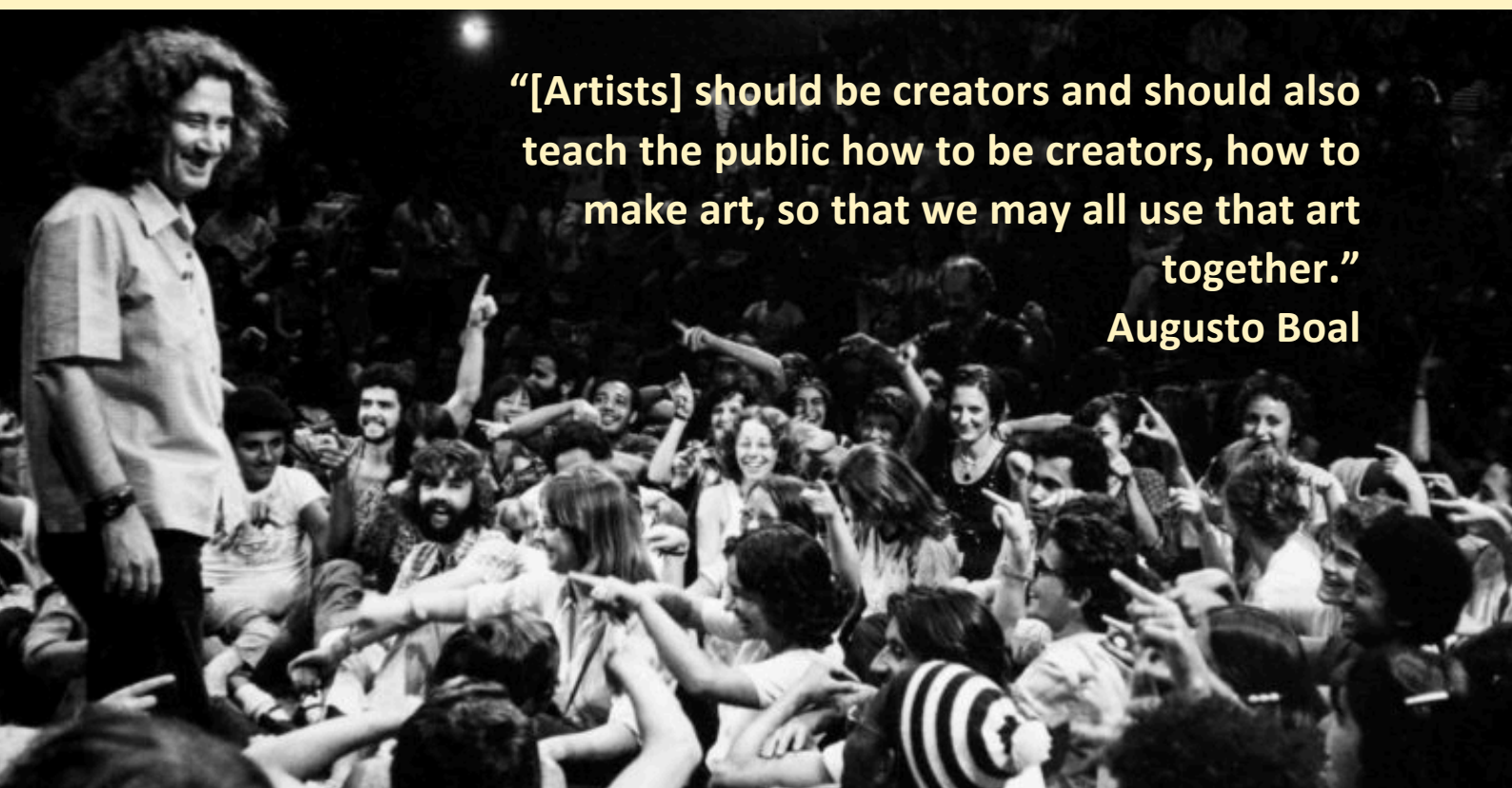
Then move onto the next second of each team. New word, and so on.

GAME IV: DEVISING

This is better done with older children or adults - but it works too with young children. Divide the room into groups. Each group needs at least 3 people.

As if picking a card in a magic trick, each group must pick from a stack of prompt cards. On each prompt card is written a fact about Yola or an intriguing quote or an image. For example, “Windmills in Forth and Bargy were often used to aid smuggling on the coastline”. Each group must take a second prompt card, from another stack, which contains a Yola word. It likely will be unrelated to the first card.

The groups must then perform a 1 minute sketch combining both bits of information. You can do more than one minute, but this works best as quick-fire fun. If doing it with a confident group, add the element of sound, or of costume, or of lighting, makeup, etc.



“[Artists] should be creators and should also teach the public how to be creators, how to make art, so that we may all use that art together.”

Augusto Boal

YOLA

WORKSHOP

PROMPTS FOR “AGREE/DISAGREE”

Of course, you should come up with your own prompts corresponding to the needs and ages of the group you’re working with. But if you need some inspiration, here are what we used during “Yola Today”:

- The future of Yola is bright
- “The price of a culture is measured in gold” (quoting John McGrath)
- Wexford people are hardworking
- Taggart is a unique place
- Art/theatre can change the world
- We have a responsibility NOW to learn Yola
- I’m proud of my people/community
- The past is more important than the future
- There’s no point learning a dead language
- Theatre is the best way to revive Yola
- Yola Farm should be an example of surviving without money
- I feel close to history
- Learning Yola will change people’s lives
- Culture needs enthusiasm more than money
- Heritage is the same as culture

PROMPTS FOR IMAGE THEATRE/HUGGY BEAR

- Shipwreck
- Wexford Town
- Fortress Wexford
- Windmill
- Norman Invasion
- Tower House
- Mummers
- Farm
- Wedding
- Carol Singers
- History
- Dialect
- Community
- Mingle-mangle
- Smugglers
- “Enteet”
- Crossbush

RESOURCE II: “DHREE YOLA MYTHENS(THREE OLD MAIDENS)” BY LIAM BATES AND FR. DEVEREUX

“Dhree Yola Mythens” was written by Fr. Devereux in the 19th Century, the same priest who wrote some of the Kilmore Carols. It is about three old ladies who lament that they have no man to take them to the fair on Lady’s Island. It references Chower Hill, which you can see from Lady’s Island Community Hall.

As part of the Yola Today project, I commissioned a new song to the words of “Dhree Yola Mythens” by composer Liam Bates. It is, to my knowledge, the first original commission in the Yola language in several decades.

Liam is an award-winning composer, arranger, and conductor whose work spans contemporary concert music, ballet and contemporary dance, film and television, and musical theatre. He has collaborated in performance and recording with renowned artists such as Luciano Pavarotti, Pete Townshend, Bon Jovi, Meat Loaf, Bryan Adams, Dave Stewart, Michael Kamen, and Elliot Goldenthal.

It was performed, for the first time, by Liam and Gráinne Bates - no relation. Grainne is a 23 year old singer-songwriter. A native of Wexford, she had just finished her music studies in Finland.



“Dhree Yola Mythens”
is available to
listen on the Wexford
County Council YouTube
channel under the title:
**VIDEO “Dhree Yola
Mythens Three Old
Maids”**, or at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH35LyZyn4M>

DHREE YOLA MYTHENS

(Three Old Maids)

Music by
LIAM BATES

Lyrics from a song by
Fr WILLIAM DEVEREUX

YOLA

Haar wee bee dhree yola mydes,
Fo naar had looke var to be brides,
Vo no own caars fadere betides
Dhree yola mythens.

Wu canna baar to gow aveel,
But zit ad hime wi vlaxen wheel,
An vish aal vellas wi a deel.
Dhree yola mythens.

Wu canna gow to Ilone vaar,
Thaar's no own aal to taak uz thaar
Or i a vaarin gees a shaar,
Dhree yola mythens.

Wu canna gow bee chapaal gaat,
But aal a bys do leigh an praat,
Zyin "Thaar gows Peg an Moll an Kaat."
Dhree yola mythens.

Wu'll gow our wys to Chour Hill,
An thaar zit down an yux our vill,
An eachy tear ud shule a mill
Dhree yola mythens.

CONTEMPORARY

Here we are three old maids,
Who never had luck to be brides,
Whom no one cares what betides,
Three old maidens.

We cannot bear to go abroad,
But sit at home with flaxen wheel,
And wish all men with the devil,
Three old maidens.

We cannot go to the Island fair,
There's no one at all to take us there,
Or of the fairing give us a share,
Three old maidens.

We cannot go to the chapel gate
But all the boys do laugh and prate,
Saying "There goes Peg and Moll and Kate,
Three old maidens."

We'll go our ways to Chour Hill,
And there sit down and sob our fill,
And every tear would turn a mill,
Three old maidens.

DHREE YOLA MYTHENS (THREE OLD MAIDS)

Lyrics
FR DEVEREUX

Music by
LIAM BATES

$\text{♩} = 100$

C F C F C F

Haar wee bee,____ dhree yo - la my

7 Am D F Em Dm⁷

- thens,____ fo naar had loo-ke var to____ be brides.____

12 F C F Am D F

Haar wee bee,____ dhree yo - la my - thens,____ vo no own caars fad

18 Em Dm⁷ F C F C

- dere be - tides.____ Dhree yo - la my - thens.____

24 F C F Am D

Wu can-na baar____ to gow a - veel,____ but

29 F Em Dm⁷ F C

zit ad hime wi vlax - en wheel.____ Wu can-na baar____

34 F Am D F Em Dm⁷

to gow a - veel,____ an vish aal vel-las wi____ a deel.____

40 F C F C F

Dhree yo - la my - thens.____

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45 Am D F⁹

Wu'll gow our wys to Chou - er Hill an thaar zit down an

51 C Am D F⁹

yux our vill, an each-y tear ud shule a mill. Ah

58 D⁹

Dhree yo - la my - thens,

65 C F C F C F Am

Wu can-na go to il-lone vaar,

72 D F Em Dm⁷ F

thaar's no own aal to taak uz thaar, Wu can-na go

77 C F Am D F

to il-lone vaar, or i a vaa - rin gees

82 Em Dm⁷ F C F C

a shaar, Dhree yo - la my - thens,

88 Am D F⁹

Wu'll gow our wys to Chou - er Hill an thaar zit down an

94 C Am D F⁹

yux our vill, an each-y tear ud shule a mill. Ah

101 D⁹

Dhree yo - la my - then.

107 F C F Am D F

Wu can-na gow bee cha-paal gaat, but aal a bys do

113 Em Dm⁷ F C F Am

leigh an praat. Wu can-na go be cha-paal gaat,

119 D **Slow** F Em Dm⁷ F **A tempo** C

Zyin "Thaar gows Peg, an Moll and Kaat. Dhree yo - la my - then.

125 F C F C F C F C

RESOURCE III: “YOLA” BY LIAM O’NEILL, INTERVIEW WITH THE POET, AND TWO MODERN POEMS IN YOLA

Ich loove ee mýdhe wee ee ribbonè blúe,
At coome to ee faaythè éarchee arichè too.
My father's father was a Yola Man,
born on the border of the baronies of Forth and
Bargy,
in that great land of County Wexford,
or **Weisforthe** as it was called, in the Yola tongue.
In the summers of the 70s, my father took us to
Forth
to visit his pater, who, by then, was an elderly man.
And our father's father spoke to us in strange vowels
and drawls and unusual placement of stress and
emphasis.
'Quare hot day', he'd say, and the **'Zin be shinin' a
heighe'**,
and then warning us of **'Them been in the treen'**,
Meaning **'take care of the nest of bees in the trees'**.
It was words of Yola – the former mother tongue; a
Middle English variant.
Brought, it is said, by Wessexmen; once 'settled'
Normans
from the Shires of Somerset and Devon,
to the sunny southeast of Ireland,
then churned and stirred in a pot with Gaelic,
Flemish and Manx.
He'd puff his pipe, then pause and open his mouth
to recite,
parts he remembered of old Yola poem and song;

Ich loove ee mýdhe wee ee ribbonè blue,
I love the maid with the ribbons blue,
At coome to ee faaythè éarchee arichè too,
That comes to the fair every morning too.
The old Yola man told stories of the Bargy people
who put **stuckeen** and **bhlock shoone** over their **toan**
and then on with their **cooat** and **garbe**
when marching off to chourch for **Zindei mass**.
And then, after taking leave of their holies, these Bargy
people
ate **breed** and **caakes** topped off with **maate, baanes and
bakoon**.
I always believed these words of Yola died with my
father's father;
when his mouth closed for the last time
his lips sealed a tomb on a language
on a culture that was mortally wounded many
generations before.
Now, older and capable of digging a little deeper, I see,
That some of the rural people of **Weisforthe**
still go, **wee sprong to the yole meadow in the glade**,
and
sometimes **ate maate and baanes and say 'How are ye?'**
and though the life and lexicon of a mother tongue is
gone,
somehow, some words and their vowels, still struggle on.

“Yola” was published in *The Irish Times*, April 2018. It was read by Liam O’Neill on Culture Night,
19th September 2025, as part of the Yola Today event at Lady’s Island Community Centre.

Liam O'Neill is a writer and Building Surveyor in the Buildings and Estates Department of the University of Galway. His poems can be found in a variety of places: ***Anthology of Working Class Irish Poetry*** published by Culture Matters, ***'Ropes'*** published by University of Galway, ***The Recusant*** and ***Extinction Rebellion*** online poetry E-zines, ***The Ken Saro Wi-wa Poetry Anthology*** published by Maynooth University, ***Poetry Ireland Review*** and ***The Irish Times***. Liam was shortlisted for the Bread & Roses Poetry Competition in the UK in 2023 and the Hennessey emerging poet prize 2018.

Tell us about your visits to Wexford in the 1970s? Who was your grandfather?

As a family, we normally took our summer holidays in and around Wexford, Rosslare, Carnsore, Tacumshane, Kilmore Quay and Fethard-on-Sea. Usually we visited our relatives in Tagoat on the way. I was always taken with my Granduncle, John Power who was a local famer, and the way he spoke with a strong Wexford accent. I heard him speak to other neighbours and friends and I thought the words and language were really unique and magical, even though I came from County Kilkenny which is not too far away in geographic terms. Later on, when I was much older I heard about the Yola dialect and culture and thought that there must be a connection between the two, and the accent around Forth and Bargy was a remanent of a language that died out. In the Yola Poem that was selected for the Hennessey Prize I used some poetic licence; instead of Granduncle I used Grandfather, and while I heard my Granduncle use some of the words, I added some extra Yola phrases in order to create more substance in the story-poem.

Tell us about the process of working on a Yola play. What challenges have there been?

After I had a little bit of success with publishing the Yola poem in the Irish Times, I was curious to see if there was enough of documented Yola for me to write poems in the dialect. So I began writing some short poems using Yola phrases from Jacob Poole's Glossary (the main source for the dialect), and some of these were published in print and online. Then I thought about writing a small book or pamphlet of Yola poems. Some of my friends thought I was a little crazy and said as much. It's hard enough to get people to read poems written in English, let alone poems written in a long dead language.

Anyway, as I was researching the Yola poems, I discovered around 20 original Yola poems, prayers, jokes and short pieces of dialogue; from Poole's Glossary and elsewhere online. Most of these poems were funny stories, accidents, superstitions sporting events and weddings, and I thought it might be interesting, if I tried to incorporate all of the exiting Yola texts together into a story – preferably a play, where the songs could be sung and acted out. I looked at the existing material and there were two main, funny poem-songs about weddings, so I thought I would have a wedding event as the main plot of the Play.

Then I set about arranging the other 20 pieces throughout the play, as structural pillars or destinations in the plot, which would be true to the original poems-songs.

In the gaps between these songs, I had to weave together elements of new Yola dialogue, or English where appropriate to carry the story along. As Yola was an English dialect – I thought it appropriate to use English words where there were gaps in the Yola Dictionary. Overall, I was trying to achieve 60-70% of the play in Yola - as true to Poole's Glossary as I could. Some of my friends have noted how challenging a play in Yola would be for an audience, but I thought, well, people often go to see one of Shakespeare's plays in Early Modern English, not knowing all the words, so why not the same for Yola? Also, I was really trying to get a 'sense' of the dialect itself and the people who spoke it - not a 100% completely accurate representation of a long-disappeared dialect, which would be impossible to do in the first place.

When the play was finished (Called ***Tha Wedeen av Ballymore*** - after a traditional poem) I sent the completed manuscript (with translation) to Ben Barnes of Four Rivers Theatre Company, and he currently trying to source funding from various sources in order to have a reading of the play, hopefully sometime in 2026. The logistics of how to do it properly have to be thought out. There might be scope to have a translation appearing on stage, as happens sometimes in opera. Anyway, we are a little while off that yet!

Do you know of anyone else working creatively on Yola?

I came across Sascha Santschi-Cooney's work on Yola, after I'd written the Play, and it is interesting as he was a schoolboy when he wrote it, and has gone on to study linguistics. Also, I came across some websites that had started about Yola but were later abandoned. My main source for the play and poems is Poole's Glossary.

I've also been looking up Map Carta online, which is a great resource as it lists actual fields and places in and around South Wexford, giving some of them their Yola names.

Any hopes for Yola in the future?

Well, I mentioned earlier I hope to develop the Yola play I wrote, and hopefully that gets some traction next year. I put every scrap of information I could find about Yola into it so I regard it as almost a 'living museum' of Yola culture and dialect. I have about 30 poems written in Yola so far, and after another 10/20 or so poems I should have enough to publish. As it is a bit of a niche hobby I may just publish them online myself. Some of the poems are Yola translations of Middle-English and Early Modern English poems, written at the time Yola was spoken. With about 400 million native English speakers in the world, and a million if not more, artists writing in English, writing in Yola gives me a less contested and congested space. As the phrase goes – he's a farmer outstanding in his own field.

Yola rede* voer lief

Dinna thar th'dug,
Dinna varpareen.
Dinna mell wi' hoorenta –
an wi' eeny blaukeen mopes.
Dinna mell wi' mounde,
an wi' all hoate broan.
Almostly though,
nare, ere,
thar thee-zil.

**'Rede' being a middle-English word for advice/council.*

Aar's Dhurth A Heighe (An Gleezom Aloghe)

Huck nigher, huck nigher,
lidge w'ouse hi, near th'vire
aar's sneow apa greoune,
aar's dhurth an heighe.
Huck nigher, huck nigher,
an theene a dher,
thou liest well a rent,
caules will na wulow to-die.
Lidge w'ouse hi, near th'vire
wou'll leigh out th dey.
Th' valler w'speen 'ere,
th'lass ing th loan.
a chy o'usbaugh,
a chy o'breed,
an hele an greve apa thee,
tell th'zin, idh goes t'glade.

Yola advice for life

Don't tease the dog,
don't be boastful.
Don't mess with the bull –
and all bawling fools.
Don't mess with a crowd,
or with any angry people.
Mostly though,
never, ever,
tease yourself.

Bad Weather Above (And Joy Down Below)

Come near, come near,
lie with us, by the fire,
there's snow on the ground,
there's bad weather above.
Come near, come near
and close the door
for you know very well
the horses will not tumble today.
Lie with us by the fire,
we'll idle out the day,
the more time spent here,
the less in the fields.
A little bit of whiskey,
a little bit of bread,
and health and wealth to you,
until the sun, goes over the glade.

"Yola Advice for Life", was published in New Galway Writing, *Galway Advertiser*, June 16th 2022.
"Aar's Dhurth A Heighe (Bad Weather Above)", was published online by Wexford Community Writing Project, website supported by Creative Ireland and Wexford County Council, 2022.

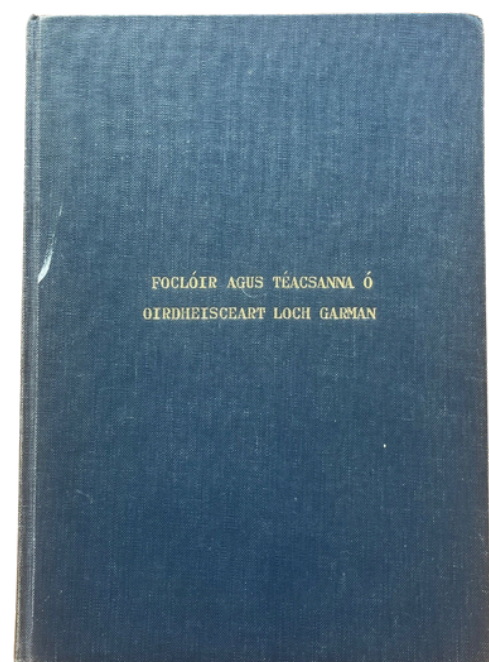
RESOURCE IV: “A HISTORY OF THE YOLA DIALECT”, M.LITT OF DIARMAID Ó MUIRITHE (1975). TRANSLATION OF INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER BY JAMES Ó MUIRITHE (2025)

In August 2025, I received a message from James Ó Muirithe. James is the grandson of Diarmaid Ó Muirithe, a distinguished scholar from New Ross. Though James’ relationship with Yola is only beginning, he is carrying on his grandfather’s work by completing a Joint Honours BA in Béaloideas (Folklore) and History of Art at University College Cork. James is currently undertaking an MRes in Folklore. James very generously sent me his own translation from the Irish of Diarmaid’s 1975 dissertation on Yola, a short excerpt of which I include here.

Terra incognita is what John O’Donovan referred to as this area of Forth and Bargy, of which this dissertation relates. What he meant by this, is that he had a better sense of way-out places in Tír Chonaill and West Kerry than he did of southeast Wexford, even though he grew up in an area only two score miles from this Norman and Flemish barony [...] The collection of words I have made myself is proof that the richness of the old language, Yola, is still to be found in the mouths of the people of south-east Wexford. [...] I don't think I would get too many of them if I returned in thirty years. My collections are only grains from the shell, but I think it would be worth collecting these words, some of which are used in Forth and Bargy from the very ancestors of the people from whom it was brought to Ireland in the year 1169.”

Described by the poet Seamus Heaney as ‘the keeper of Ireland’s word-hoard’ Diarmaid Ó Muirithe (1935-2014) was an Irish scholar, broadcaster, writer and lecturer celebrated for his deep love of language and words.

*Born in New Ross, County Wexford, he studied both Irish and English at Trinity College Dublin, completing an MLitt on the words and texts of the Forth and Bargy barony. He later earned a PhD under Tomás de Bhaldraithe, and published work including **The Dialects of Forth and Bargy** (1996) alongside T.P. Dolan. Ó Muirithe was particularly known for his long-running column “The Words We Use” in The Irish Times where he explored etymology, dialects, and the rich linguistic heritage of Ireland.*





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