



# MAY DAY

Traditional May Day Customs in Ireland



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Clodagh Doyle is a Keeper of the Irish Folklife Division at the National Museum of Ireland. Watch the video together as a class and complete the follow up activities.





# MAY DAY

**Task:** Read the following text and fill in the blanks using the keywords.

May Day or La Bealtaine has been celebrated in Ireland since pagan times and in latter times as \_\_\_\_\_ day.

May Day festivities embraced the \_\_\_\_\_, bidding farewell to the dark winter half of the year. Flowers, dancing, and bonfires featured strongly in the festivities.

There are many \_\_\_\_\_ associated with May Day. These customs were practiced over a long period by many people and passed down from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Most of the May day customs centred on \_\_\_\_\_ the family, the home, the herd, the churn and the dairy from mythical forces, fairies and the \_\_\_\_\_.

## Keywords:

Customs

Generation

Evil Eye

Protecting

summer

Mary's



# MAY DAY

**Task:** Can you describe how each of the following terms were linked to the May Day festivities?

May Flowers	
May Bush	
May Queen	
The Evil Eye	
Gale Day	
May Bough	





# MAY FLOWERS

- May Flowers were picked on the evening before May Day.
- The flowers were placed on the doorsteps of houses and on windowsills.
- They were believed to offer luck to the house and offer protection from mystical forces.
- Neighbours would wish their neighbours well by leaving flowers on each others doorsteps.





# MAY BUSH

- The May Bush was a decorated bush.
- The bush was often of hawthorn.
- The decoration usually consisted of ribbons, cloth streamers and perhaps tinsel.





# MAY BOUGH

- The May Bough was a larger version of the May Bush.
- It was often carried from house to house.
- It was similarly decorated to the May Bush.
- It was a sign of summer starting and to kept evil spirits away from the house.







# MAY QUEEN

- The May Queen was a young girl crowned with flowers.
- She was paraded through the streets to welcome the summer.
- Some places had a May King and even a May baby.
- The May Queen symbolised our youth, our summer and our future.







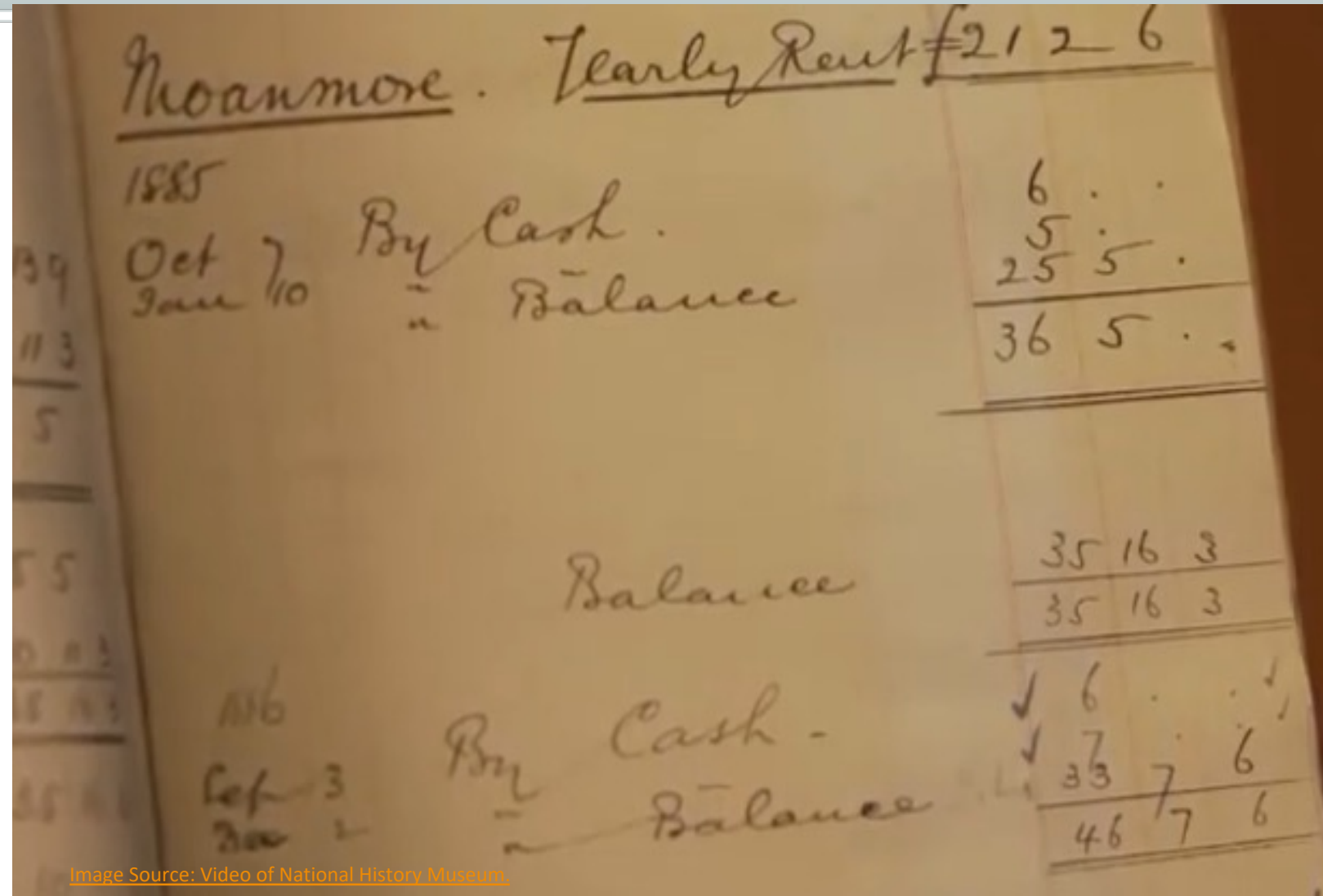
# THE EVIL EYE

- The Evil Eye was a really strong belief in Ireland and people tried to protect themselves from the evil eye.
- The evil eye was an envy/evil look from someone that could result in your crops failing, a cow dying or your churn wouldn't produce butter.




# GALE DAY

- The first of May was a traditional date on which tenant farmers paid the rent to their landlords.







Ask your relatives about May Day traditions and customs. Write the traditions and customs down and discuss them with your class tomorrow.

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