

Appendix 14

Outside the Ring – Comunn na Feinne and its Wider Sphere

Appendix 14(a) Comunn na Feinne and Its Wider Sphere - Education

Education 1 - The 3Rs

The Society's sphere of action extended far beyond its one-day-a-year events, as we have occasionally shown. Comunn na Feinne's wider remit, as a result of the outworking of its Charter aims, included the area of Education. The Society's understanding of 'Education', as we have noted, went far beyond the situation of the pupil in the classroom. Comunn na Feinne's 'vision', and perhaps its foresightedness, dealt with Education as encompassing not just the 3Rs but also the total experience of life. Whether this was for personal advancement or for the advantage of the community, whether it was academic or work-skills and whether it was for personal advancement or for assisting others, the Society's concept of education encapsulated the 'whole of life'. There was no area of life and there was no activity in which individuals engaged that lay outside the Society's understanding of education. It also believed that Education should be available to all, the rich and the poor, the boy and the girl, the child with a family and the orphan or the abandoned child. Even when the State, in 1870, effectively introduced its National scheme where education became compulsory, free and secular, the Society continued to be involved in those areas which the State did not touch –for example, a working-class night school and an organization for social activities and the training of youths to provide them with skills which would make them more employable.

Education 1 - The 3Rs

Comunn na Feinne came to be identified by many with its annual New Year's Day Highland Gathering. Similarly, events such as Burns' Supper, Highland Balls, Scottish Concerts, Haggis Nights, St Andrew's Day and Hogmanay each came to be seen as Comunn na Feinne in action on certain days during the year. However, the Society's role in the community went far beyond holding occasional entertainments three or four times during the year around some Scottish theme or traditional anniversary. In fact, its interaction with many of the institutions making up the community, as shown throughout this book, meant that it was actually active throughout the whole year and worked through a multifarious number of organizations directed neither at maintaining Scottish customs nor necessarily involving Scots at all.

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Support for education in the community at large became a major concern of Comunn na Feinne from its earliest years. In fact, of all the aims promoted by Comunn na Feinne, it was this one especially which it pursued with as much energy as it could. So fully did Comunn na Feinne enter into pursuing its aim of raising the standard of education that within a few years the cost of this part of its overall activities was becoming the main drain on its finances. As we will see, too, its understanding of 'education' came to embrace music (vocal, choral, instrumental) and drama, and occupational training. From its earliest years, the Society staged competitions at the Annual Highland Gatherings which included sections for Firemen with the aim of improving their efficiency and encouraging use of the latest fire-fighting equipment. Comunn na Feinne held competitions, similarly, for the improvement of such things as rifle marksmanship, bayonet skills and sword play, for increasing the skills of those making up the relevant Volunteer military units. It has to be remembered that such agencies as Fire Brigades, Calvary Units and Rifle Brigades relied totally on volunteers to man them and that little, if any, instruction was available from government agencies, either local or state, for training such volunteers.

As well as the academic excellence achieved by some of the students from schools which participated in Comunn na Feinne's education competitions, the Society's championing of education in the arts generally saw the emergence of world class stars as instrumentalists and opera singers, as well as those who pursued careers on the dramatic stage. This is dealt with in a separate section under the theme of Education 2 – the Arts. The Society's 'social vision' was an inclusive one and there was no activity, employment, trade or skill which fell outside of its scope.

The Society's charter, as we have already noted, contained the 'philosophy' which guided Comunn na Feinne and within which it sought to ground all of its activities. This included the belief that education should be available to all and that the vulnerable members in the community should be protected. Access to education and welfare, therefore, should be delivered indiscriminately to the whole community. Within its ability and means Comunn na Feinne saw that there was the need whereby the weak, the orphaned, the untrained, and the delinquent, had to be protected from the dangers of poverty and exploitation and from a poor quality of life. It was necessary that all should have the opportunity of making their way in society and of making the community a harmonious one that would advance

economically, morally and politically. This was simply the Society interpreting in practical terms the outworking of its charter aims. Here was John Knox and Adam Smith, perhaps unwillingly, though not altogether unexpectedly, joined at the hip!

The reality regarding the availability and quality of a school education in the mid-nineteenth century did not, however, live up to the ideal. More or less, anyone could set up a school and advertise for pupils. There was no teachers' registration board in these early years and it could be 'hit or miss' as far as either the quality or the relevance of the teaching on offer at many of these schools. Parents had to pay for their children to attend and often had to take 'pot luck' as far as standards were concerned. Furthermore, it was not compulsory for children to attend school. J.M.'s experiences, shown below, were common for many children at the time where there was constant movement of families due to the bread-winner, especially, chasing employment and also as a result of the disruption of families during the gold rush decade of the 1850s. In an era where good schools were at a premium (and usually church-based), and which were prohibitively expensive for most families, Comunn na Feinne sought to change school culture by setting in motion strategies which would, it was hoped, raise the standard of all schools and all teachers as well as the curriculum being used.

J.M., an early resident of Geelong gives in his reminiscences, printed as a series in the *Geelong Advertiser*, some idea of what a lottery getting a reasonable education at a reasonable school with reasonable teaching at reasonable cost, could be even in the 1850s, let alone the earlier period! His story also demonstrates the effect which the Gold Rushes had on his early education; and this would not have been his experience alone!

My first recollections of Geelong primary schools date back to 1850 when I was sent to Christ Church school in Moorabool Street, taught by Mr Appleby. ... As through the death of my mother, which occurred at that time, I had to follow the fortunes of my uncle and aunt, who had no children and [who] had adopted me [and] it became necessary to remove

to Barrabool Hills. ... As the gold fields broke out suddenly towards the latter end of 1851 we came back to Geelong. I again went to Christ Church school for a while until the men returned from the diggings. In most cases the gold was soon got and the alluvial quickly exhausted.

Of course, during the early period of the gold fever the schools and every branch of industry were very much upset and thrown into confusion for a term. When they eventually settled down, my uncle leased the quarries on Newtown Hill from James Austin. ... I was then sent to a very good school called The Pakington Grammar School, taught by T.W. Spencer. ... Of primary school work, reading, writing, and spelling were taught; arithmetic and grammar very badly, or not at all. The schools were all alike at this time in that respect. Our stock of school books which, by the aid of a good cause or other instrument of fortune, [which] we were compelled to memorise from A to Z, consisted of Butler's spelling book, the Irish National Board Reader and arithmetic [and] Lennie's grammar and copperplate writing. There was no definite programme, and little, or no, class or oral teaching. Blackboards were rarely used. In spite of these defects, however, some good scholars were turned out, as would be the case under any system, but the rank and file, and those of retarded development, suffered. For this instruction, there were fees from 1/- to 2/6 a week to be brought every Monday morning. At this school, I made fair progress until in December 1854, unfortunately for me, my uncle decided to again return to the gold fields and, in that month and year, departed. I thus parted company with the Geelong schools until 1858, when we returned." (J.M.' Reminiscences *Geelong Advertiser*)

On the gold-fields, J.M. found that schooling was also basically a hit and miss affair with some individuals offering private schooling in tents. But the rushes meant that there were no permanent institutions. He also makes mention of some, "kindly, well-educated men" who would come to a digger's tent and give evening tuition to children like himself.

When he eventually returned to Geelong, he did find that things had improved in some ways. This, he wrote, was, "due to the coming of some well-trained teachers such as Andrew Burn, George Morrison, Edward R. Lennan, George Hansen, E.F. Link, J.D. Mowbray and others. Their schools were all under the Denominational Board except Flinders, I think, which was the only National school in Geelong." The fact that the National system and the Denominational system were working side by side meant that there was a great deal of duplication as the different denominations would have their own schools alongside government schools in the same town. There was still, however, a high degree of absenteeism and areas where there was no provision, or very poor provision, of schools and where the instruction of children often depended upon someone, or some organisation, of goodwill in the community. This was particularly true for country areas. Thus, although there was this foregoing need to provide education for all, there was also the pressing need for quality education, for a sound curriculum and for trained teachers.

Methods of teaching in the fifties were very simple. There was no syllabus as existing today, attention being confined to the three Rs – reading, writing and ‘rithmetic. Subjects such as grammar came later. Nor were there many trained teachers in those days. Apparently, the test of what was required for a ‘mastership’ in the very early days was that a man should show some glimpse of having received an education in the homeland. It appears that if a man could not get anything else to do, he simply opened a school and charged in order to obtain a livelihood. I recalled that in the early days some of the teachers were out to be very cruel, using the strap or the cane freely for the slightest offence. [I] remembered (sic) seeing a boy’s hand bruised in a shocking fashion.

It is somewhat amusing nowadays to think of the earlier methods of education. For instance, at St James’ school the desks were hinged to the wall and supported by trestles, the children having their backs to the teaching and facing the wall. No black-boards were used nor were there any illustrations as used today. The master would set a sum on a slate and give it to a boy to work out himself. Rarely any instruction was given as to how the work was to be done, and the boy would have to keep at it, perhaps for hours, to evolve the answer out of his subconsciousness, while the master sat in royal state at his desk. (J.M.’s Reminiscences)

J.M.’s memories were, no doubt, coloured a little with the passing of time as, even in his early days at school in the later 1850s, contrary to what he writes, there were several well established good schools. However, as a general description of the uneven quality of teaching in the early days, it certainly contains accuracies that are confirmed by other reports. Simon Fraser, for example, a Scot who arrived in 1853 and took over a school in Bacchus Marsh, wrote that he found the existing teacher, Mr Ball, “teaching in a most miserable state.” Such was the lack of materials, he wrote that, “I have furnished the School with maps and books.” (*Simon Fraser Diary*. Entry for 25th August, 1853, State Library of Victoria)

The reports of many of the School Inspectors appointed often give a grim picture of the quality of school life for the children. Poor quality teachers, inadequate equipment and a general lack of discipline, either in attendance or in learning, characterised many schools. One pronounced comment commonly made in the Inspectors’ reports was that regarding the content of the teaching. There was no set curriculum for schools to follow and, initially, the government schools offered little more than a basic introduction to the three Rs. Many of the comments stated that children, when tested, may have had a knowledge of countries, rivers, and mountains of some far-off country but were totally ignorant of the geography and history of their own region or of the flora and fauna which existed there.

Without any proper institution for training the teachers, the government had to rely upon, “the

migration of teachers or on men sufficiently desperate or literate to take on the unrewarding job of drilling children.” The poor state of literacy or of basic arithmetical knowledge was rife throughout teachers generally. For example, the H.C.E Childers’ Report, quoted in Don Garden, *The Melbourne Teacher Training Colleges*, Heinemann, Australia, 1982, pp14-16, found that, “of 120 teachers in the 74 Denominational schools, only five had been trained in a Normal School and only 34 had been employed previously in tuition work.”

There was a feeble attempt to establish some sort of teachers’ training body in the late 1850s but the results were poor. For example, Don Garden quotes from the official records that when the National Education Board held its classification examination, out of the 108 teachers who were to present for the examination, “only 59 attended, of whom only 31 were considered suitable to be classified ...” Only two of the actual trainees (out of 52 trainee teachers) were able to pass the examination! Matters improved slightly, but the first attempt at a Teacher-Training institution ended before the close of the 1850s without making much of an impression in reducing the outstanding shortage of teachers or in improving the quality of teaching.

Comunn na Feinne and its role in Education.

In the 1850s and 1860s, therefore, there was a great need for improvement in the quality of the material which the children were being taught. It was to this cause that the Comunn na Feinne was drawn and its activities in education stretched far beyond the boundaries of Geelong and were to be felt in schools of all denominations and sizes in the region.

In terms of religion and education, the Highlanders achieved much beyond what might have been expected of a relatively small proportion of the overall population and from a group, too, who were materially poor settlers in the main. But, wrote J.M., they were driven by a strong desire to see their children educated in the catechism as well as the book of ‘profit and loss’.

It has to be borne in mind that this was a new land and the pioneers at all times availed themselves of all the opportunities for religious and educational training that came their way. What was more, they were prepared to make sacrifices, denying themselves in many instances the comforts of life in order that they would give their children some education at any rate and thus [help] them to set out on their careers.

From the general situation covered above, it can be seen that even where schools did exist, it was only a relative few who could boast teachers with a sufficient level of educational qualification as to effectively impart tuition to the children. Thus, from its founding in 1856, Comunn na Feinne promoted not particular schools themselves so much as ‘education’ in general, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and of the curriculum. In fact, the Society had no official function either with the National or the Denominational School Boards nor did it sponsor any schools of its own. In order to achieve its goals, therefore, it was important that it not be seen to be identified with any single group, whether that be a religious denomination, independent school, schools catering for boys or girls only or any private school. To this end it began what was to become an annual fixture, that of educational competitions. When we consider the details of these competitions, the extent of their influence can be seen. It was through the questions set for the annual examinations that Comunn na Feinne exerted its influence upon the range of subjects being taught and the method of that teaching. Schools from all over the district and from places such as Ballarat, took part. The competitions were interdenominational, open to schools with no church affiliation at all, and to all and any educational establishment.

While Comunn na Feinne did not hide its aim to provide a means of maintaining Highland traditions in terms of games and culture, it saw its important role, too, as being that of building a harmonious community and promoting one of the key foundations of an advancing society, that of education. It is significant, perhaps, that the very first competitions which were held under the auspices of the Society were educational ones. These were held on 20th December 1856 in the Free Church of Scotland building where many of the Gaelic-speaking founders of Comunn na Feinne worshipped. The extent of this first school education competition was quite limited. In its first full year of activities (1857) the President, Archibald Douglas, had announced the Society’s important role in promoting cultural growth and excellence with details of a literary competition. Towards the end of 1857, therefore, Comunn na Feinne expanded on one of its central aims and formalised its means of achieving this, writes the *Advertiser* on 10th December, 1857.

One of the objects of the Comunn na Feinne is the promotion of education established by the Society’s Annual competitive educational examinations, the scope and object of this extension of the Society’s usefulness are by this time well understood. Under its auspices, [it is] open to all classes and denominations of the rising generation attending the schools, or otherwise, in

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the County of Grant. Prizes are to be offered for proficiency in the subjects of plain English, reading, writing, grammar, dictation, composition, arithmetic, geography, English history, Natural Science and Gaelic orthography.

By the following year this list of subject areas had been extended and several areas of Australian studies (absent in the usual school *ad hoc curricula*), including the topography of the colonies and descriptions of their flora and fauna.

However, not everyone in the community was trusting of the Society's motives as expounded in the foregoing newspaper report. In fact, the accusation from an anonymous correspondent to the local press was that Comunn na Feinne, rather than seeking to improve educational standards with selfless motives, was resorting to the 'brainwashing' of the malleable minds of the youth of the district.

Sir, The Comunn Na Feinne must change its name. I am told it is pure Gaelic for 'Communitic Society'. I deeply grieve also that, true to its title, it is assisting in the spread of the obnoxious doctrines, and, in the most insidious way, training up disciples from amongst our youths. What else can I think when I see this theme on one of their examination papers. It bears the number of 8, in the third division of the Grammar Class: Analyse the following: 'That form of Government is most useful to its subjects and most honourable to itself, which provides for the well-being of all classes of the community.' Why, Higginbotham* (sic) himself could say nothing more levelling than this. (quoted in Carmichael's Notes)

*[George Higinbotham (1826-1892) was an Irish lawyer and journalist who emigrated to Victoria in 1854 and was admitted to the Victorian bar in the same year. He entered politics, was deeply involved in journalism and he eventually became Chief Justice of the State. He was considered a political 'radical' at the time, a 'liberal' as he might be called today, but accepted that compromise was inevitable at times to allow things to get done. See Appendix 3 (b) – Short biographies.]

If this were not conspiracy enough, the suspiciously-minded correspondent was also able to rope in the band, the music and even the military, as conspiring in some dastardly revolutionary plot.

Another thing I would draw your attention to. In the band performance at the Botanical gardens last Saturday, was played a tune compounded of Mourie pour La Patrie and the Marsellaise. It was not on the programme; of course not. But it was artfully shoved in just before the Helter Skelter gallop. If this does not mean revolution first, and then a stampede of friends of law and order, I don't know what it can mean. I suppose we must conclude that the Artillerymen generally, are in the plot. (quoted in Carmichael's Notes)

And surely one of the most bizarre criticisms appearing in the *Advertiser's* Correspondence column, was

that signed 'Caution', who saw in the society's name, in its educational programme and even in its music, hidden references to communism, the seduction of the youth and the overthrow of the existing social and political system. (quoted in Carmichael's notes)

Again, Comunn na Feinne showed that it had no intention of being dictated to by those whose only qualification for criticising its name and purpose was that of ignorance.

SIR, Referring to a letter in to-day's issue, signed "Caution", wherein the writer suggests that Comunn Na Feinne must change its name," he having been told "that it is pure Gaelic for Communistic Society." I have no doubt that, notwithstanding his large amount of caution, had he been told that it was pure Dutch, he would in his simplicity have believed it. A little enquiry would, however, have convinced him that Comunn Na Feinne is true to its title, and that it does not, as he says, "in the most insidious way train up disciples from amongst our youth to obnoxious doctrines.

[The *Advertiser's* editor responded, "Caution" will, we trust, have a sound night's sleep after this assurance.]

It was not until the 1870s that Victoria established, by law, that education would be free, compulsory and secular. Before that time schools varied across a wide spectrum of quality and affordability. Country areas were particularly hampered by a scattered population and a lack of qualified teachers with an almost complete absence of schools in some areas. Thus, Comunn na Feinne extended its first efforts and began competitive education examinations for pupils of local and district schools. However, it was careful not to give any impression that it was itself an institution of education and it took careful steps, too, to work within the official educational structures of the time. For example, its school examination competitions were initially prepared, supervised and assessed by official Government educationists or other professionals in the field. Comunn na Feinne, announced, in the *Advertiser* on the 10th December, 1857:

As an extension of the Society's usefulness that it would be holding student competitive examinations on 1st January, 1858 as part of its promotion of educational standards in Geelong and district. Open to all classes and denominations of the rising generation attending schools in the County of Grant. The Society has also resolved to award a silver medal to the best scholar in each of the subjoined branches of learning.

General Arithmetic
Advanced Arithmetic
Mental Arithmetic
English Composition
English Grammar
Geography
Natural Science
Gaelic Orthography (with £2.2.0 added)

The Scholars competing for the prizes to be awarded by the Society, will be examined by A.B. Orlebar, Esq., Inspector of National Schools, and J.S. Miller, Esq., resident Inspector at Geelong [for] Denominational Schools, on Friday morning 1st January, 1858. The exam will take place in the Mechanics' Institute Hall to begin at 9 o'clock a.m.

The fact that Comunn na Feinne used official Government school inspectors demonstrated its intention of working within the existing system of education. The schools taking part in the initial examinations ranged over national schools, denominational schools (including Roman Catholic ones) and the Grammar school. It is interesting that the highest number of awards went to pupils of what was one of the poorest schools in terms of finances and facilities.

The results, showing the successful pupils, their subject areas and their respective schools, for the overall period over which the Comunn na Feinne competitive examinations were held, can be found in the tables on the CD accompanying this book.

As we have noted, formal education was not, until the 1870's, free or compulsory or secular. Victoria's 1851 Constitution had delivered a two-tiered system consisting of Church Denominational Schools and State-run National (ie public) schools. Each of these tiers had a Board of Education and these Boards were responsible for those schools falling under their respective purview. This was a wasteful arrangement in many ways and it perpetuated a system, which exists to the present day, whereby equal access to an education does not mean equal access to those schools with the best facilities, with the widest range of courses on offer or with equal chances of achieving access to higher education. It was, and still is, financially wasteful and discriminatory.

Those schools established under the Denominational System (i.e. those conducted by a particular Religious Denomination), and usually taught by the local church minister, at least ensured that the

teacher had some qualifications and, in the case of Presbyterian Churches, a university education. Apart from what might be termed the 'best' private schools, run much along the lines of those in Britain, denominational schools were generally the only option if the parents could afford the few pennies a day such education cost. Good private schools were, of course, at a premium but, if you were particularly well-to-do, private tutors were always an option. One of the big problems in the early days was the lack of centres of population. The gold rush era was also one where there was a great moving around of the men and, sometimes, their families. Unsettled living also counted against the chances of a proper, uninterrupted period of schooling for the young.

However, as a general description of the uneven quality of teaching in the early days it certainly contains accuracies that are confirmed by other reports and descriptions of school masters who could have been the model for some of Dicken's creations such as Mr Wackford Squeers whose very name seems to describe his cruelty towards his pupils. In Dicken's novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, the character Nicholas goes to work at Wackford Squeers' school, Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire and witnesses the cruelties and ignorance of the headmaster who was based upon a real-life teacher of the time, William Shaw, who was reported as being immensely cruel and whose school Dickens had visited.

Thus, at the time of the formation of the Comunn na Feinne, Education in Victoria was in the hands of the two main Boards, the National and the Denominational, together with the numerous, and usually small, private schools run by individuals. While the number of children having access to a school had improved (moreso in the metropolitan areas), concerns continued to exist in the more rural areas. Ossian MacPherson, for example, one of the initial members of Comunn na Feinne in Geelong, and the Society's official reporter and bard, later went to the country town of Hamilton and engaged in both writing about, as well as taking practical action on behalf of, the educational needs of the children of that district who were poorly served by the existing system.

The fact that the National System and the Denominational System were working side by side meant that there was a great deal of duplication where the different denominations would have their own schools existing alongside the government schools. Education was still not compulsory nor free nor

secular and there was a high degree of absenteeism especially where families shifted around chasing employment. There were also areas where there was no provision, or very poor provision, of schools at all and where the instruction of children often depended upon someone, or some organization, of goodwill in the community or, as 'J.M' describes, on the goldfields. As well as the foregoing need to provide education for all, there was also the pressing need for quality education, with an agreed curriculum, and qualified teachers. The reports of many of the School Inspectors appointed often give a grim picture of the quality of school life for the children. Poor quality teachers, inadequate equipment and a general lack of discipline either in attendance or in learning, characterised many schools.

One pronounced comment commonly made in the Inspectors' reports was that of the poor content of the teaching. Initially, the government schools offered little more than a basic introduction in the '3 Rs'. There was a great need, therefore, for improvement in the quality of the material which the children were being taught. It was to this cause that the Comunn na Feinne was drawn and its activities in education stretched far beyond the boundaries of Geelong and were to be felt in schools of all denominations and sizes in the County of Grant and further afield. The Society had no 'official' role within either the National or the Denominational School Boards but its work in improving educational standards generally was welcomed and recognized by these Government Agencies. In order to achieve its goals, it was important, in fact, that it not be seen as being identified with any single group, whether that be a religious denomination, a Church or Government School Board, schools catering for boys or girls only or any private school. To this end Comunn na Feinne began what was to become an annual fixture in its calendar of events: namely school educational competitions open to all schools, and to pupils privately tutored.

When we consider the details of these competitions, the extent of their influence can be seen. Schools from all over the district and from places such as Ballarat, took part. The competitions were interdenominational and also open to schools with no church affiliation at all. This annual coming together of scholars from all over the region had several effects. An address to the children, who had taken the Comunn na Feinne examination, and which was printed in the *Advertiser* on 2nd January, 1863, identified some of the challenges which had faced them.

The examination to which you have been subjected has been of a very searching character. It was no common school examination – conducted by teachers with whose voice and manner you had become familiar, and who might naturally be inclined to deal tenderly with your errors and deficiencies. The gentlemen examiners were ignorant of who you individually were at the time when they were called to adjudicate upon your respective merits. Nor have your competitors been exclusively classmates of the same school, accustomed to sit with you on the same benches, and whose attainments and intellectual capabilities you have been accustomed to measure. No, competitors have arisen to contest these honours with you from an extended area and from all the schools – from the schools of every sect and denomination in the country.

Comunn na Feinne’s initiation of these annual educational examinations was to have the effect upon schools of widening and improving their teaching methods and, more importantly, it influenced the range of what was being taught. The annual Highland Gathering with its competitions in traditional field sports provided the great spectacle for the spectators but it was made clear from the beginning that there was a greater purpose for Comunn na Feinne’s existence than staging these Games.

Henderson’s remarks were included in the *Advertiser’s* report on 2nd January, 1863. For example, continuing his address to those children who had competed in the educational 1862 examinations (held on 30th November, 1862 and 1st, 2nd and 3rd of December, 1862), at the annual Games on New Year’s Day 1863, Rev James Henderson asked the young participants to consider where the greater achievements lay – in the Gathering’s sporting arena or at the examination desk. The ‘philosophy’ he went on to elaborate in his talk to the students was a distillation of what Comunn na Feinne considered its central aims. The most one could do for one’s community, local and wider, was to become the ‘best’ in whatever role each one was placed. While superiority in athletic sports may bring plaudits, and inspire the immediate spectators, a person with education, while maybe also gaining that person individual praise, has the opportunity of being a leaven within populations of thousands. Here, then, was Comunn na Feinne’s ‘vision’ understood and enunciated by others, with the belief that such ‘vision’ had the power to influence communities and the wider society.

In this respect you, my young friends, occupy a nobler arena than that occupied by even your patrons this day. It is a large and gay assemblage that throngs these enclosures it is true, but the interested spectators of your efforts are not merely those thousands around us, but the whole of the community virtually mark the progress you make, for every thoughtful citizen knows that on the education, the morality and religion of the rising generation, the future progress and well-being of the country mainly depends.

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In the initial years of Comunn na Feinne's educational competitions intermittent criticisms found their way into the press as well as a few petty complaints and charges made by some disgruntled schoolmasters or parents. However, these were generally trivial and did not do any damage given the ridiculous nature of some of them. The general response from both the public and government agencies was that of praise for the Comunn na Feinne initiative and recognition of its influence by the State's Educational Boards and its expansion beyond the County of Grant. More and more schools were perceiving benefits to their pupils, and of course to the schools themselves, from Comunn na Feinne's competitive examinations and there was a growing enthusiasm, too, on the part of the parents, towards the Society's efforts to improve education. Importantly, too, the official Government School Boards were recognizing the beneficial effects of Comunn na Feinne's activities with respect to improving the quality both of the teaching and the subject matter being taught.

The educational examination for the Comunn na Feinne prizes commences on St Andrew's Day November 30, 1861, and will be continued, if necessary, on 2nd and 3rd of December. ... The large number of entries is in a great measure due to the excitation of Harry Augustus Sasse, the inspector of Denominational Schools and Arthur Bedford Orlebar, Inspector of the National Schools. Of course, the Directors and other office-bearers of the Comunn na Feinne have also been doing their best.

In November 1862, the local press once more praised the Society and its role in education. "It must be very pleasing to the Comunn na Feinne to find that its efforts in the cause of education are being appreciated by both the teachers and parents, and that the public shows an increased interest in these examinations."

Similarly, good reports on the effectiveness of this Comunn na Feinne initiative were made by the official Government educational authorities themselves.

In general I can report that ... the progress of instruction in the greater number of schools in the district of Geelong has been satisfactory. In the County of Grant, and more especially in the town of Geelong, the beneficial influence of the Society of the Comunn na Feinne is a great assistance to the efforts of the Government in spreading a sound education. I have found invariably in those schools which send competitors to the yearly examinations, that the work done is good, and that the teachers do not give their attention exclusively to those pupils who, by their greater intelligence, promise success; experience has shown them that the examination of the Society is so contrived that perseverance and assiduity are the most powerful elements for insuring (sic) distinction. In these schools the junior classes are well

attended to and the efforts of the teachers are fairly and honestly distributed among all the scholars.

Late in 1862 a furore arose over possible cheating which provided further evidence of how seriously the general community was taking Comunn na Feinne's educational examinations. The aftermath of what finally emerged as a dispute between two of the Society's members was also substantially to 'professionalize' the Society's enterprise and greatly increase the associated costs involved in staging the competitive education examinations. The correspondence of the two main letter writers ('A' and 'L') is given here in full and, sadly, it demonstrates a case study in how a 'good and worthwhile' intention can be destroyed by unfounded rumours and malicious intent.

There was little evidence in the period running up to the holding of the 1862 Education examinations that problems of distrust and accusations of cheating were about to erupt. These examinations were held over the period of 30th November and the 1st and 2nd of December, 1862. The prizes were awarded at the Gathering on the following 1st January, 1863.

The controversy began slowly with an anonymous letter appearing in the *Geelong Advertiser* on 1st January, 1863, but quickly gained momentum. The letter writer, signed 'A', suggested that changes be made to the manner by which Comunn na Feinne chose the subjects for its annual education competitions. There was, however, just the hint cheating taking place or liable to take place.

Sir, Now that the Comunn na Feinne educational examination is over and all the marks and prizes settled, perhaps a few suggestions may not be out of place, as guides in arranging the plan of a future examination. I have every confidence that the committee will gladly receive and adopt any hints that appear to them likely to advance the object they have so much at heart – the proper education of the rising generation in this town and neighbourhood. I would suggest that the subjects for examination should be chosen by a competent body, of which the examiners should not be members, and that such arrangements should be made, as would render it utterly impossible that any teacher could obtain a hint as to the subjects. As to the choice of examiners, inasmuch as some portion, for example, reading, must be conducted without the intervention of mottoes, it would be better that the selections were made from those who are wholly unacquainted with the persons or the handwriting of the scholars.

The names of the examiners should be made public, for unless the parents and others interested are satisfied both with regard to their capableness and impartiality, little good will result from these annual gatherings.

Some of these suggestions may have been adopted by the Committee of Comunn na Feinne in the present examination, and if so, it is well the public should know such is the case. (I am, etc., 'A' Geelong 29th December, 1862).

Another correspondent, who signed himself 'L', appearing in the *Advertiser* the following day, questioned the hints of cheating brought by 'A', as well as his true motives in writing his letter. Taking a high moral position, 'L' indicated that if trust in the organizers and the examiners is weakened then the annual Comunn na Feinne educational examinations may as well altogether close down.

Sir, In answer to a portion of your correspondent A's rather obscure communication allow me to say that the examination in reading was conducted by T.P. Hill. Esq., Professor of Elocution, and that that gentleman was wholly unacquainted with the persons or the handwriting of the scholars.

As to the suggestion, "that the subjects for examination should be chosen by a competent body of men, of which the examiners should not be members, and that such arrangements should be made, as would render it utterly impossible that any teacher would obtain a hint as to the subjects," I would say concerning it that if 'A' entertains such a base opinion of human nature as to suspect that a gentleman entrusted with such a responsible office as that of preparing questions for the examination, could so far forget his position and dishonour himself by giving hints to teachers; what security could 'A' give that a body of men would not be guilty of the same baseness?

For one, I entertain a better opinion of human nature than 'A' seems so to do, and though I believe that a few mistakes have, inadvertently, been made, yet I feel intimately confident that the utmost fairness has marked the whole of the examination.

With regard to the last suggestion, "that the names of the examiners be known;" I feel with 'A' that this ought to be done, and I have no doubt that Comunn na Feinne will gladly adopt it. (Yours, etc., 'L')

This letter led 'A' to go a step further from inuendo and to suggest that a measure of cheating **had** taken place through one of the local schoolmasters being aware of the content of examination papers ahead of time, to the consequent benefit of his own students who were taking part in the Comunn na Feinne examinations.

Sir, As your correspondent calls into question the propriety of my suggestions, I beg to state for his information that a rumour has been current for some weeks past, to the effect that a schoolmaster in this town was in possession of the questions several days prior to the examination. This rumour has been mentioned to me by four different teachers and more than one expressed his fear that it was possible, if not palpably true. As however it may be merely a

rumour, I did not refer to it in my previous letter, but if it has any further complaint on the score of obscurity, I shall endeavour to make the case still plainer to his comprehension. Such a circumstance may be, and I doubt not will be, regarded [sic] against at any future examination initiated by the *Comunn na Feinne*.
(I am etc., 'A')

A response from 'L' more or less challenged 'A' to 'put up or shut up.'

Sir,- I congratulate myself at having been the means of extracting from your correspondent 'A' the real meaning hidden in the obscurity of his first communication, for it is far better that "rumours" such as that referred to by him should become "current topics", than remain simply rumours, at which state only they can do any harm. I hope that *Comunn na Feinne* will immediately take steps, strong and vigorous, to compel 'A' to speak out, and give up, 1st the names of the four amiable teachers who first spread the "rumour", 2nd the name of the party who communicated the questions. 3rd That of the teacher to whom they were communicated; and, lastly, his own. Failing to do so, 'A' could but be considered in the light of a calumniator. This matter has now assumed a very serious aspect, and it is to be hoped that all parties whom the attack includes will not rest satisfied till it is thoroughly sifted.
(I am etc., 'L')

Comunn na Feinne, too, realising the threat this *contretemps* could pose to its wider educational aims, quickly entered the fray, having a letter printed in the *Advertiser* on 5th January, 1863, assuring all parents and schools that the security of the examination questions had always been a high priority.

Sir,- With reference to a letter which appears in your issue of this morning, signed 'A', regarding the *Comunn na Feinne* Examination questions having been in the possession of a certain schoolmaster several days prior to the competition, I am instructed by the directors to request your correspondent to inform the Society, through your columns, who the teacher was and, also, to give all other information he may be in possession of so that *Comunn na Feinne* may be in a position of investigating the matter, and ascertaining as to the truth of these rumours. From the great care which has all along been taken that these papers should be kept perfectly secret, I am almost positive that these rumours are untrue. But, that justice may be done to all parties concerned, and that no prejudice may remain in the public mind which would have an injurious effect at our future examination, I trust that 'A' will give all assistance and give all the information he can; and it would be very much more satisfactory if, instead of hiding his identity behind an anonymous signature, he would give his proper name in full. I remain your obedient servant.
(William Weddell, Hon. Secretary of *Comunn na Feinne*.)

The gauntlet was laid down and 'A' was challenged in the *Advertiser* on 7th January, 1863 to demonstrate enough courage and decency to pick it up and to reveal the identity of the teacher involved.

Sir, I have called upon your correspondent 'A' to give substance to the shadow of the rumour which I, in common with many, believe he himself originated, and industriously circulated: he has refused to do so under most specious and jesuitical pretences. I now, once more, call upon him in the names of justice and common honesty, to give at least the name of the teacher he has pointed out in his private conversations so as to give that individual a fair opportunity of rebutting publicly the charged preferred against him. I do not sign my name in full for one obvious reason, but if 'A' does not know already who I am, he can have my name by applying at your office and, after that, were 'A' still to refuse to give his own name to the public, I shall, regardless of consequences, feel justified in putting off the mask under which he hides himself, spectacles and all.

(Yours etc., 'L'.)

But 'A,' like most cowards of this type, was hardly willing either to divulge his own identity or that of his fellow rumour-mongers. In fact, he sought to take that high moral ground adopted by self-righteous 'whistleblowers' in general, appearing in print again the next day weakly trying to defend his anonymity as well as that of his so-called 'informant'.

Sir, I am surprised at the audacity of your correspondent 'L' in expecting me to divulge the names of the teachers referred to in my letter of the 2nd inst. Reasons are sufficiently obvious why I should not give up the name of any teacher who has spoken in my presence, what some may call sans reason. It does certainly appear somewhat absurd for an anonymous writer to demand such information; but I may just as well at once state that I should still refuse even if 'L' had attached his full name to his letter. With regard to myself I am willing to throw off my incognito on one condition *viz*, that 'L' prove that I have made an assertion not in accordance with fact. In my previous letter which, by-the-bye, was drawn from me by 'L's' attack, I make no personal charge. I simply point out an undeniable fact, that a certain rumour is afloat and I draw attention to the circumstance that it is only a rumour. Why should 'L' or any other man, take it to himself? But I contend that the mere existence of such a rumour, talked about as it was among various classes, is sufficient to prove that a screw was loose somewhere, and I think instead of arousing the bile of a certain party as it appears to have done, my letter ought to secure me their thanks, provided they feel sure they are the persons meant, for giving them an opportunity of a public denial. With regard to William Waddell's letter, it is idle to pretend ignorance on this subject. I know several members of Comunn na Feinne who were equally aware, with myself, of the existence of this rumour before the appearance of my letter and, if I am not grossly misinformed, names were openly associated with it at the meeting held on Saturday. If such is the case, there can be no occasion for me to take upon me the office of public prosecutor. My aim throughout has been not to attack particular individuals, but to make a few suggestions as to the arrangements of future examinations. 'L' has only himself to thank for anything further that has appeared in my letter."

(I am, yours etc., 'A')

Comunn na Feinne decided to disregard the charges arising from these anonymous letters. This, perhaps, was a position which they should have taken in the first instance. Now, by revealing, with permission, the name of the teacher involved, and giving that teacher an opportunity to defend himself, moral pressure was not put upon 'A' to reveal his own identity.

Sir,- Having learned that E.R. Lennon of the Central Wesleyan School is the teacher referred to in the letters of your correspondent 'A', I was instructed by the directors to communicate with that gentleman informing him of this fact, and the reply received is enclosed for publication, so that the public can now judge as to the truth or otherwise of these rumours. I am instructed to state that, while for the future, no notice will be taken of anonymous communications, the directors will gladly investigate any properly authenticated charges which may be brought against the carrying out of any of the objects of the Society. I am etc. William Waddell Hon. Secretary Comunn na Feinne

[Enclosure for publication]"To the Directors of Comunn na Feinne, Gentlemen,- I am in receipt of your communication of this date informing me that a rumour in circulation has reached you, and that I am named as the schoolmaster to whom the examination papers have been communicated several days before the examination. To this accusation I give a most emphatic denial; and I have no hesitation in pronouncing it to be a most wicked fabrication, and a device of an envious and malevolent individual jealous of the success my school has obtained, but whose name I shall leave nothing undone to ascertain. Gentlemen, the rumour is a falsehood.

(Yours etc., Edward R. Lennon Central Wesleyan School, Geelong)

If 'L' thought that either appeals to manly honesty or the threat of unmasking 'A' would lead to any reasonable explanation of the affair, he was soon to be disabused of that idea. The open letter, too, from Comunn na Feinne appealing to 'A' to come forward and substantiate his claims also failed in its objective. The correspondent 'A' showed that he would not be influenced by appeals to honesty or fairness and his letter, printed on 8th January, 1863, suggests not a little of the desire to 'cut and run' from the affray, and of a degree of disingenuousness.

Sir, The letters published in your paper this morning prove the truth of all that I have asserted. As to the threat held out by your correspondent 'L', I treat it with contempt. At the same time, I deny most emphatically that I was the author or the disseminator of any rumour respecting E.R. Lennon; neither have I been activated in the least degree by personal animosity toward him, indeed, I have not any acquaintance with him whatever, and do not feel the slightest interest either in him or the school over which he presides. As it was never my desire that this should become a personal controversy, I beg to add that this closes my share of the correspondence.

(I am, Sir, yours etc., 'A')

The matter now seemed to be out in the open. Students from Central Wesleyan School, under the headmastership of Edward R. Lennon, had been successful in many of the Comunn na Feinne examination competitions. Such success was now being attributed, not to the talent of the pupils or to the quality of the teaching but, rather, to the base resort to cheating by Lennon having access to the questions ahead of time. A series of letters from the pupils of the Central Wesleyan School drew a close to the public row over this matter. These letters, signed respectively by the Senior Class, the Middle Class and the Junior Class of the school, refute any suggestion of impropriety on the part of their teachers and the pupils saw it, also, as an insult to the hard work they themselves had put in to preparing for the educational competitions.

Sir, It is with feeling of deep indignation and pain that we have read the unjust attack against Mr E.R. Lennon, our teacher, by your correspondent 'A'. We, one and all, competitors at the last Educational Examination, solemnly declare that the rumour is a detestable fabrication, and that we came to the examination without knowing beforehand a single one of the questions placed before us. When there, we did our best, and we consider it a very wicked thing indeed, on the part of any one, to endeavour to deprive us of the credit we have earned for ourselves and our teacher." [Then follows the signatures of all of the pupils of the school who had taken part in the competitions]

Although the row disappeared from the letters' column of the local newspaper, the matter did not quite end there. It became clear that the two correspondents involved in this controversy were each a member of Comunn na Feinne and there were two repercussions from the controversy which affected the Society. The first involved the notice given by Mr Edward R. Lennon, at the annual meeting of the Comunn na Feinne held February 2nd, 1863, relating to the recent spate of letters signed by 'A', that:

He would charge T.C. Hill, as the writer of such letters, with misconduct as a member of the Society, and would move, if he should be found guilty of having written them, that the rule be carried into effect providing for the expulsion of any member guilty of misconduct.

The matter of the charge of misconduct against T.C. Hill was to be held at the meeting on March 3rd 1863. However, although a meeting of Comunn na Feinne was held on that day, according to the *Advertiser* of 4th March, 1863, the only matter discussed relating to educational examinations was that the matter of drawing up the competitive examination papers was to be left in the hands of the Educational Committee.

So, the matter of the charges against T.C. Hill either were not proceeded with or, like a ‘gentlemen’s’ organization, the Society decided that the matter was not for public titillation! However, it must be said that E.R. Lennon was a prolific writer of letters to the newspaper, generally complaining about some imaginary hurt or other, and was never backward in boasting about his school or his mastery of it. Comunn na Feinne may simply have wanted the matter closed and did not feel like giving Mr Lennon any scope for further letters relating to the matter and the *Advertiser Supplement* on 3rd February, 1863 reports that the subject was now closed.

Your directors regret that, though every precaution was taken to ensure secrecy, an anonymous correspondent endeavoured to injure the society by circulating a rumour to the effect that the examination papers were in the hands of a teacher several days prior to the examination: but the directors having investigated the matter have no hesitation in saying that the rumour was without the slightest foundation.

The second repercussion, and one which was to involve the Society in great expense, was the means that now were taken to show that the competitive examinations were totally free from any possibility of cheating. The Society already expended a large amount of time and money upon the preparation of these examinations and in the awarding of the medals, books and other prizes relating to the competition winners and place-getters. The Carmichael notes reveal that the revised system of the preparation of the examination papers substantially was to increase this financial and administrative burdens on the Society.

This year, upon the suggestion of some teachers, and to prevent even the possibility of a whisper of a suspicion being breathed respecting the fairness of the examination, the educational committee determined to adopt a system different to that hitherto pursued, and accordingly a number of gentlemen, chiefly ministers of religion connected with the various denominations, were requested to prepare sets of examination papers and to correct the answers. This was done, and every other precaution that prudence and experience could suggest was adopted by the committee to secure secrecy and fair play.

It must have been with some trepidation that the Comunn na Feinne approached the following year’s annual education competition, wondering if the fall-out from the ‘correspondence war’ would have affected the attitude of the schools in the district or the childrens’ parents. It was with some relief then that the Society’s officers perused the Education Inspector’s Report for the County of Grant for the year ending 1863.

In general I can report that during the year, 1863, the progress of instruction in the greater number of Schools in the District of Geelong has been satisfactory. In the County of Grant, and more especially, in the town of Geelong, the beneficial influence of the Society of the Comunn na Feinne is a great assistance to the efforts of the Government in spreading sound education. I have found invariably in those schools which send competitors to the yearly examinations, that the work done is good, and that the teachers do not give their attention exclusively to those pupils who, by their greater intelligence, promise success; experience has shown them that the examination of the Society is so contrived that perseverance and assiduity are the most powerful elements for ensuring distinction. In these schools the Junior Classes are well attended to and the efforts of the teachers are fairly and honestly distributed among all the scholars.

A letter, appearing in the Melbourne daily, the *Argus* on 30th November, 1863, calling for emulation of the Comunn na Feinne scheme of educational examinations, would also have given great encouragement to the Society to continue with its annual educational examinations.

Sir, As all is so quiet in the educational world at present, and the Board seems disposed to continue its somnambulism, allow me to draw the attention of those interested in common schools to an institution which is doing an immense amount of good in Geelong. It is a Scottish Caledonian Society ... called Comunn na Feinne, literally a contest of giants. Along with the usual contests, they have introduced educational examinations for all children under fourteen years of age in the County of Grant, and give each year £50 or £60 worth of prizes. This would not appear to be doing a large amount of good if giving away these medals and books etc., was all that was done. But when it is remembered that these examinations are attended by nearly 300 children, that the schools they attend are kept on the alert through the year, and that masters are fully alive to the importance of their children standing well in the eyes of the public, it will be at once seen that much good must result from the efforts of this Society ... The examination is also a judicious one, as it does not travel out of the usual school programme. Now, Sir, could nothing of this kind be done for Melbourne? The capital has many advantages which we do not possess, and I have no doubt that a few public-spirited individuals could be found to form a society for the promotion of education – I think throwing the hammer etc., might be dispensed with. One of the reasons why this Society has been enabled to do so much in Geelong is, that the board's inspector, Mr H.A. Sasse, has had the shrewdness to see the powerful effect on the schools and so threw himself heart and soul into the movement. The masters thus seeing the inspector interest himself in the affair, and knowing him to be eminently practical in all that relates to education, began to exert themselves; and I have no doubt that in a very few years, if not at present, the common schools of the County of Grant will be the most efficient in the Colony. But as I have said before, why not Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo and Castlemaine join in this movement and thereby give a great stimulus to education? If we had a Board of Education that had got into working order, and had the confidence of the masters, I should think they would be the proper parties to head this scheme with prizes etc., although then there would be danger of strangulation from red tape, but at present we

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must expect nothing from them. Hoping the powerful aid of your pen will be given to promote this desirable object.
(I am etc., signed 'Barwon', Nov., 28, 1863)

Such praise was an encouragement to the Society whose confidence had been dented by the accusations of cheating which had been made against one of the prominent schools in Geelong. Comunn na Feinne did make changes to the method of preparing the examination questions and also to the personnel involved in drawing up the test papers. This was not because there was any foundation to the charges of cheating but, rather, to assure parents, schools and children alike that steps had been taken to eliminate the likelihood of such a thing occurring, and that everyone could have confidence in the system. By the end of 1864, the costs of the examinations arising out of the extra security for the examination papers were beginning to balloon. For example, at the presentation of the awards following the 1863 competitions, it was noted that the cost of the prizes, "with the incidental expenses" came to the amount of £160. (From the speech by the President of Comunn na Feinne, at the presentation of the Schools Examination Prize-giving, reported in the *Geelong Advertiser* 2nd January, 1864.

The issue of continuing the annual competitive examinations, in the face of rumours still circulating about cheating, was raised at the annual meeting held 8th May, 1865 and appearing in the *Advertiser* on 9th May, 1865.

A lengthened discussion took place in reference to certain rumours which had been circulated relative to the last educational examination Robert de Bruce Johnstone, submitted the following motion – That in the opinion of this meeting it is desirable to continue the annual educational examination competition as carried out under the auspices of Comunn na Feinne for the last eight years, These competitions having greatly tended to the intellectual advancement of the scholars competing. The meeting therefore resolves to continue the same, and further, that a committee be appointed to prepare a programme of the subjects for examination the same to be submitted to the Society at the next meeting; also to solicit the cooperation of the clergy of the several denominations and others to prepare questions for the subjects determined on, and to take such steps as they may deem necessary for carrying out the general details of the examinations ... [seconded and unanimously carried]. An educational committee was then appointed consisting of Robert Shirra, Robert de Bruce Johnstone, and Edmond Sasse. Instructions were given to order the Society's medals.

The news was greeted warmly by a member of the public who pointed to the widely-acknowledged opinion that such competitions had raised the standards not only of pupils and schools but also of the whole “educational establishment” itself. The correspondent, whose letter appeared in the *Advertiser* on 11th May, 1865, also offered his own suggestion of a way to prevent any suspicion of cheating.

To the Editor of the *Geelong Advertiser*,

Sir, The decision which the committee of the Comunn na Fcinne has arrived at, not to discontinue their annual examinations of the pupils of our public schools is certainly a right step. The educational establishments of the colony have during the last few years developed themselves in a remarkable degree. ... Geelong is not in the rear of this movement. ... How much have we to thank the Comunn na Feinne in this matter? I think a great deal more than is generally supposed. The annual examinations have been an incentive to teachers and pupils to work. Nothing without labour is the old copy exercise. I believe much complaint has been made during the past of the interference of masters of Schools at the examinations, much to the annoyance of the Committee who, if they had not the weal of the rising race at heart, would for their own comfort have discontinued their labours long since. Let me offer a suggestion, that during the examinations all teachers be excluded from the platform, and I have no doubt the opportunities for wrongdoing will be greatly removed. The efforts of the committee are unselfish—their exertions are *pro bono publico*, and, as such, are worthy of the continuance and support of the public.

I am, Mr Editor,

Yours &c.,

(X. Y. Z. Mercer-street,)

By 1865, the Comunn na Feinne notes reveal that the importance of the educational events had become central to the planning of the Society in more than one way. Especially noticeable, as a result of the earlier controversy over charges of cheating, and the lingering rumours attached to this, was the great detail which now surrounded the preparation of the examination questions. The *Geelong Advertiser* weighed in, on 4th October, 1865, with its own opinion and its assurances to the public that they could trust the system now in operation.

The usual monthly meeting of the members of the Comunn na Feinne was held last evening at the Mechanics Institute. The most important business that was transacted was the balloting for the questions for the ensuing examination. A report of the system adopted to preserve secrecy appears in another column, and we feel assured that every teacher and parent will agree with us, when we state that everything has been done to keep the questions adopted, a secret to all.

The Secretary then produced the questions which had been forwarded by the examiners, there being two full sets on every subject. The questions, it might be observed, were all enclosed in envelopes and securely sealed.

After some discussion, it was decided to place the lot in the ballot box and draw; the first drawn in every division to be the one recognised by the society. The questions were then drawn out by a gentleman not a member of the Society nor in any way interested. Each ticket was initialled by the chairman, and the lots were then sealed up in a parcel by the secretary, whose next duty will be to forward them to the Government printer, who, when printed, will re-enclose, seal, and forward them to the secretary, and the packages will not be opened until the children have taken their seats for the exercise.

This lengthy and secure process was to add a further heavy financial burden to Comunn na Feinne and one, which it observed, it would rather not have to bear. The secretary, after some calculations on the cost of staging the examination, arrived at the figure of £60. Given that the cost of the medals, books and certificates and related expenses already amounted to £160 (and this was not the full cost), together with the £60 in administrative costs meant that a very large proportion of the Society's income each year was being taken up by this scheme. For example, the gate takings (gross) for 1864 had been just over £170 and costs of at least £220 for the education competition and awards, would have to be met. The average gate-takings over the years were less than this amount and costs continued to grow each year! For example, the total income for the 1864 was £320.14.0 but the expenditure was £285.17.7, which left a credit balance of just £35.0.0. With additional costs now arising from the preparation of an even more secure education competition, the Society appealed for help to meet these expenses.

The secretary pointed out to the meeting that this process of preparing for the examinations had brought an additional financial burden upon the Society and he appealed for all members "to put their shoulders to the wheel" and, along with the public, to "subscribe liberally" to the fund.

The new mode of preparing annual competitive educational examinations obviously did not suit all of the teachers. At the Society's monthly meeting on 30th October, 1865, reported in the *Advertiser* the next day, a "memorial signed by several teachers requested that certain alterations be made to the mode of conducting the forthcoming examination." A lengthy discussion took place and a motion was put forwarded, seconded and carried unanimously, "That the mode as adopted by the

examination committee be adhered to.” The Society was determined to create the situation where there could be no grounds whatsoever for any charge of cheating to be raised!

A final call for teachers to provide, to the Society secretary, the names of the students from the participating schools who would be sitting the next education examination* was made. The *Geelong Advertiser* carried the cut off date which was 16th November, 1865, pointing out that already the number of entrants stood at 277. This was nearly double the entries of the previous year and it may be that the new stringent rules had encouraged more schools to participate. The *Advertiser* commented that the examination committee had got the arrangement just as they wanted it and that the examination should be, “a successful one.”

*[An example of the Educational Areas covered by these examinations can be seen in Appendix 11 included on the accompanying CD.]

Held on St Andrew’s Day, 30th November, 1865, the *Advertiser* wrote, on 1st December, 1865, of its approval noting that, “Comunn na Feinne had been the means of doing much good, but none of its objects are more praiseworthy than the plan they have adopted to create a spirit of emulation among the rising generation.” The report stressed again the safeguards which the Society had put in place against cheating and that these should be sufficient to allay any such suspicion.

The examination of scholars by the above Society was initiated yesterday at the Mechanics’ Institute. The candidature for educational examination and honours was numerous, whilst the superintendence was vigilant even to jealousy. ... The test subjects were selected by lot. The printing even of these forms was kept a secret, as well as the preparation of the subject-matter which was prescribed out of Geelong.

With such precautions enforced, there can be no platform for local jealousy. The principals and tutors of the various educational establishments expressed approbation of the action taken. In the [geography division] ... it is pleasant to see a recognition of the ‘land we live in,’ and an enquiry anent colonial geography.

Always pleasing, too, to Comunn na Feinne, was recognition from participating schools as to their confidence, and that of the pupils, in the fairness and impartial nature of the examinations.

Chilwell Wesleyan School,
December 4th 1865

Robt. Shirra, Esq.

Dear Sir, Kindly do me the favour to convey to those gentlemen who had the carrying out of the Comunn na Feinne arrangements in connection with the late examination, my sincere thanks for the very satisfactory and impartial manner, they performed their arduous duties. My scholars have been much pleased with the kindness and attention shown them, and desire me to express to you and the committee their heartfelt and sincere thanks.

I am, my dear sir,

Yours very truly,

EDWARD S. HARRIS, Head Teacher.

[The above letter will no doubt be followed by numerous others, as from our own observation we know that the examination was carried out with the strictest attention and impartiality. ed. *Geelong Advertiser*, 5th December, 1865.]

While praising Comunn na Feinne for its initiative in establishing the competitive educational examinations and that it had every reason to be proud of its creation, the *Advertiser* suggested that it extend this by turning their attention on technical education. The Society had much to be proud of but there was an area where it could still do “good work” and that was in the area of technical education. In this, the newspaper echoed the Society’s own aims in this regard.

Geelong has not done what it might in this regard or we should not have been crying out for more skilled workmen today, and our sons would have had better chances than they have as “improvers”.

But, despite that caveat, the *Advertiser* added, in a report on 30th November, 1865, that it confidently hoped that, under the benefits accruing from Comunn na Feinne’s work in the area of raising educational standards, Geelong, “as in the past will bear the palm as an educational centre for Primary, Secondary and Technical education.”

The Comunn na Feinne Society has been the means of doing much good, but none of its objects are more praiseworthy than the plan they have adopted to create a spirit of emulation [regarding education] among the rising generation.

The cost of the Gold and Silver medals awarded to the overall winners of the educational examinations, and the increasing financial problems of the Society, led Comunn na Feinne to replace

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them for the awards for 1867. The *Advertiser* reported on 30th September, 1866, that instead of medals, the Society decided to award books:

To each of the schools in Geelong in connection with the Board of Education, including the Orphanages and the Industrial and free schools. These were to be presented to the best scholars, Boy and Girl, at the Society's annual examination, as the prizes of Comunn na Feinne. It is pleasing to know that this Society still continues to offer inducements to the rising generation to exert themselves in the pursuit of knowledge.

Despite what had clearly been announced by the *Advertiser* regarding the Society's decision to award books as prizes instead of medals, there seemed to have arisen a misunderstanding that Comunn na Feinne's decision meant that it was pulling out of holding its competitive education examinations altogether. The Society sought to allay any fears in this regard. Thus, the *Geelong Advertiser* reported that Comunn na Feinne had reiterated at its meeting held on 24th November, 1866, that the education competitions would continue and that the Society would continue to award prizes and this was commended by the *Advertiser* on 25th November, 1866.

It will be learnt with great satisfaction by all anxious for the elevation of the mind of the rising generation, that the Comunn na Feinne Society intend to offer prizes to be contended for by all pupils who show themselves capable taking advantage of the tuition afforded them.

The matter of country schools whose pupils, for whatever reason, were not able to attend the annual competitive educational examinations had also been raised. To address this problem, Robert Shirra, secretary of the Society, was authorized to write to the headmaster of each of these schools regarding the awarding of prizes to their pupils.

Geelong 20th November, 1866

Sir, I have much pleasure in informing you that the directors of Comunn na Feinne have resolved to present to your school two books to be awarded according to your decision (one each to your best school Boy, and the other to the best Girl scholar). The committee hope it will be convenient for the scholars to attend at the Society's grounds on New Year's Day to receive them. Please let me have the average number on your roll for the half year ending December, also the names and ages of the scholars, not later than 22nd December, 1866.
Yours etc., Robert Shirra, Secretary.

The *Advertiser*, which had also raised the matter, gave space to the Society's need for funds to fulfill its intentions, as outlined in Shirra's letters, to these outlying schools.

It is a pity that the scholars in the country schools are shut out from the competition, but this is perhaps an evil that will be remedied by an increase of the funds of the Society

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towards which all are invited to contribute. Similar letters have been sent to the Orphan and Industrial Schools.

According to the *Advertiser* of 30th December, 1866, it appears that the Schools of the district who were unable to send pupils to take part in Comunn na Feinne's annual education competitions, arrived at picking their best Boy and best Girl scholar for the year through a local examination conducted by the Board of Education Inspector, H.A. Sasse.

The New Year's Day Gathering held 1st January, 1867, continued with the now usual inclusion of prize winners in the educational examination being awarded their prizes at the Games. Robert de Bruce Johnstone, Mayor of Geelong and President of the Comunn na Feinne:

[A]fter making a neat and concise speech, distributed a number of prizes to the successful competitors in the educational examination. The two Orphanages and the Ragged and Industrial Schools came in for a fair share of these literary gifts. Every prize taken was loudly cheered, more especially those from the Orphan School. [Following the presentation of the student prizes] "the youngsters gave three hearty cheers for alderman Robert de Bruce Johnstone, and three more for Robert Shirra, the secretary of the Society, gentlemen who have been foremost in promoting the educational advancement of the district.

From 1867, therefore a change took place in Comunn na Feinne's prize arrangements for the annual educational competitive examinations. Rising costs, and the political momentum which saw an Education Bill introduced into State parliament in 1870, and passed in 1872, to render primary education secular, compulsory and free, meant that in a specific sense Comunn na Feinne's 11th Annual Educational Examination in 1867 proved to be among the last of its type.

The government Act led to a new era in the way education was delivered, how teachers were prepared and the development of something long required; a uniformity in the school curriculum. This did not mean that the Society exited altogether the area of education or of education examinations. For example, it continued with various competitions involving poetry (Gaelic and English), essay writing (again in both English and Gaelic) and also in the awarding of book prizes to students nominated by the different schools who held their own examinations. From its beginning, too, Comunn na Feinne had understood education in far wider terms than simply the provision of literacy and numeracy. Becoming an efficient fireman, a more capable volunteer reservist, or a better rifle marksman and so on, involved tuition, a learning process and standards by which

improvements could be measured. The encouragement of such competencies continued, for example, through venues such as the Society's annual Highland Games, Rifle Shooting competitions and Fire Brigade rallies.

A summary of the impact of Comunn na Feinne's competitive educational examinations among the schools in Geelong and district is, perhaps, ably interpreted and contained in the presentation of the annual report of Flinder's National School (headmaster E.R. Lennon) on 20th December, 1872. One of the senior teachers, William Reed, in delivering part of this Report, reminisced about the part Comunn na Feinne annual education competitions played in bringing to the fore some students who went on to illustrious academic studies.

In 1864 and 1865, in the palmy days of the Comunn na Feinne competitive examination you will remember that year after year, the pupils of this school, and amongst the foremost of them the two Allens, John Wilson, William Kemp, Andrew McFarren ... and many others, carried off the Society's Gold and Silver Medals together with such a large proportion of the other prizes ...

The list of scholars, generally, who succeeded in winning medals and other prizes at the annual Comunn na Feinne educational competitions, was extensive. Furthermore, their subsequent careers confirmed the aim of the Society in invoking a spirit of community and service. Some became educationists, engineers, politicians, ministers of religion and school and tertiary teachers. Some were to make an outstanding contribution in the area of academic and practical education. Many of the names of these ex Geelong scholars who participated in the Comunn na Feinne annual competitive examinations, some winning honours, can be found in various dictionaries of biographies of notable Australians.

A brief sketch of the careers of several are included in Appendix 3 (b) – Short Biographies.

Not all medal winners followed an academic or professional career with many others occupied themselves with careers in other areas making their influence felt, demonstrating the extent to which many of Comunn na Feinne's objectives were realized in the various roles in the local community and the wider society.

Comunn na Feinne and Education – Beyond the School System.

The Comunn na Feinne's involvement with education went beyond what might be thought of as traditional schooling to involve an element of social rehabilitation and the provision of the means for re-schooling in practical skills or in rehabilitating delinquents. This wider aim of Comunn na Feinne, and a main reason for its existence, went beyond reaching only those children from what might be regarded as stable families and who were able, ordinarily, to attend one of the town's schools. Some poorer children (the Industrial School children, the Orphanage children, the Ragged school children and so on), were financially cared for by Comunn na Feinne and other organizations and charitable bodies thus ensuring that the poverty of the parents, or the absence of parents altogether, did not exclude these children from having any education at all. As we have noted several times throughout this history, Comunn na Feinne took special care and responsibility by having children from institutions in Geelong participate in its education competitions and be part of its annual Highland Gatherings. Pupils from these institutions competed in the Education competitions and some were to show that poverty did not debar them from performing well enough to be among the prize-winners.

Thus, as well as what we might term the aim of generally improving the education of the young and improving the quality and method of teaching and of widening the curriculum, Comunn na Feinne's goals incorporated a wider definition of education than is ordinarily understood by that term. This definition embraced the notions of community, welfare, tolerance and understanding. It is interesting to note that Geelong was relatively free from the sectarian riots and controversies that plagued Melbourne, especially between the 1840s -1860s. Comunn na Feinne, from its beginning, encouraged the participation of other organizations in Geelong in its activities. Thus, we see the participation, among others, of the St Patrick Society, St Andrew's Lodge, Roman Catholic and Protestant Schools, the Protestant and the Roman Catholic Orphanages, and Aborigines at the Gatherings and other Comunn na Feinne activities. The Society was educating a community in mutual respect and tolerance among all sections of the community. The Protestant-Catholic riots which took part in Melbourne in the period just mentioned, and the bitter political fighting in the streets of Melbourne and in the press during the 1840s and 1850s, were not replicated in Geelong.

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Even during the Conscription Referenda of 1916-17, which, in some centres, led to bitter denominational friction, the Society did not engage in any anti-Roman Catholic rhetoric or behaviour and its relationship with Irish, English and Welsh societies in Geelong remained close.

The Society recognised that it had an important role to play, through a wider, general process of education, in tackling problems which could divide society, which could lead to poverty and crime and which could leave an undercurrent of race, religious and class ferment. Thus, for example, the Geelong Young Men's Association, the Working Boys' School, the Orphanages, the Industrial Schools, the Try Boys organisation and other like bodies, were all supported by Comunn na Feinne. Some of these movements, in fact, were founded, or co-founded, by Comunn na Feinne; some were not. But, whether founded by Comunn na Feinne, or some other body, Comunn na Feinne members and office-bearers were involved in some capacity in each of these organizations, and this involvement was an example of the outworking of the Society's social philosophy. We can catch a glimpse of this in the Society's involvement with the institutions briefly discussed below.

1) Comunn na Feinne and the Industrial Night School

As we have noted, one of the causes closest to the heart of Comunn na Feinne was that of education, in all of its forms. We have looked at the area of education in its most readily understood form i.e. the system established and formalised by government through its public schools and by churches through their private schools and so on. Given the Society's deep commitment to education in general, it should come as no surprise to see so many of its members and supporters making up those organizations supportive of providing an education for the less privileged and the discarded in society.

The issue of the large number of Industrial school children, commented upon by the *Advertiser*, was not a subject which escaped the attention of Comunn na Feinne. This 'class' of children was seen by Comunn na Feinne as having particular need of care. Robert de Bruce Johnstone, the Society's President, worked closely with disadvantaged children and young men including his association as committeeman of the Geelong Orphanage. In this work, he was joined by fellow Comunn na Feinne members such as Robert Shirra and George Wright along with others.

Further evidences that the Comunn na Feinne looked upon its role as improving the condition of education beyond the state system can be seen in its efforts in promoting work among Industrial school children and night-school classes and the Working Boys' School especially for older youths who had, for whatever reason, missed out on an earlier education. This led Comunn na Feinne not only to a widening of its existing commitments, but also to exploring new initiatives whereby children outside of the normal school set-up could be reached. Education, especially for the well-being of the community, did not lie solely in the arena of the three 'R's nor only within the standard State school system.

Perhaps it was the sight of several hundred needy children, guests of Comunn na Feinne, all together at the 1871 annual Highland Gathering, which again captured Johnstone's attention. Whatever the reason, at a Comunn na Feinne special meeting on 2nd July, 1871, reported in the *Advertiser* the following day, the President, Robert de Bruce Johnstone MLA., introduced the reason for which he had convened a special meeting of the Society's Directorate. He gave an important address to the members, stating that there was nothing of greater importance that could be tackled by their Society than the "social progress" of the "working youth of the Colony." The Society had achieved much with its education policy for Geelong and district and this had "encouraged emulation" in other schools. However, "he thought much remained yet to be done", especially for those falling outside of the normal stable home.

The problem of how to deal with the youth of the Colony, those in particular not under parental control, required maturer deliberation, not only by societies, but by every member of the community. It now became [Comunn na Feinne] seriously to engage in this good work taking advantage of the facilities at our command. A movement having now been invited in this direction good cooperation was needed. We, therefore, had no excuse for standing aloof with the means at our disposal for conducting that movement to a successful issue. From the unsettled habits of the colony as well as from the nature of their early training and condition in life, this class of boys was disposed to follow no constrained employment, and, it was thus that an evening school under the conduct of a good man who would study their nature, possessed a powerful stimulus for the good by inducing settled habits, and by moulding their susceptibilities to good impressions into fixed principles, which would be of lasting benefit to the community. He therefore resolved to move the resolution that Comunn na Feinne, always having recognised philanthropy as one of its fundamental principles, do assume the patronage of the working boys' school of this town, and in connection herewith establish a free library,

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such as will inculcate self-reliance, based on moral deportment; and a free registry where employers may obtain reliable information respecting the character and disposition of the youth attending these schools. This resolution, seconded by John Hedrick, was carried unanimously.

(2) Comunn na Feinne and the Working Boys' School

As with the Industrial Night School, for which the Society assumed responsibility, so too had it already become involved, along with other like-minded people, in setting out to do something about 'street children' and with those who were possibly headed for a wasted and, perhaps, a socially destructive life.

Robert de Bruce Johnstone (as well as others from within Comunn na Feinne), was, for many years, also associated with the Working Boys' School. The *Advertiser's* occasional references to this movement identifies the participation of the Society's President. "The lads in attendance at the Working Boys' School received their periodical treat from their patron, Mr Robert de Bruce Johnstone last night." One particular report in the *Geelong Advertiser* 28th January, 1869, referred to him, again, as the 'patron' and as someone who gave freely of his time and finances.

Rev T. McKenzie, a fellow volunteer with the Working Boys' School, praised Johnstone and his relationship with the School saying, "the most noteworthy events in connection with [his] useful and honourable career as Chief Magistrate of this town was, perhaps, his intimate connection with that useful institution."

(3) Comunn na Feinne and the Try Boy's Association

Charles Shannon emigrated from Greenock, Scotland, sailing from Glasgow to Australia in 1865. He had relatives in Melbourne and joined with some of his cousins in business – the wool trade. This business merged with Strachan and Co which led to Shannon becoming a partner in the firm, Strachan, Murray, and Shannon. He also had other business interests including Godfrey Hirst's Woollen Mill. He became President of the Chamber of Commerce in 1890. He was also active in local politics spending 5 years on the Geelong Council before becoming Mayor of Newtown and Chilwell. He was also involved with sporting organisations. More pertinently his identification with Comunn na Feinne (as a member, a Director and, later, a vice-president), undoubtedly strengthened his commitment to the Society's social outreach.

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One of Charles Shannon's social concerns grew out of his appreciation of the gap between rich and poor, and the depression of the 1880's worsened the state of many of the working classes. Children were especially affected and street boys, unemployed and often homeless, were common in Geelong and were often drawn into petty crime and faced a bleak future. The disastrous land boom/bust and the general economic downturn resulted in widespread poverty and unemployment - many people finding it difficult to pay their way. Children suffered badly with hungry, ragged, bare-footed boys roaming the streets. Homeless newsboys were a part of life in many cities during this period. They were a lost generation of forgotten street urchins victimized by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease. Many were arrested for drunkenness and petty crimes. Newsboys in Geelong were no different. Some made a few pennies selling newspapers; many hung around pastry cooks' shops in the hope of scoring leftovers or stale offerings. All of these issues, as we have noted, were general concerns, too, of Comunn na Feinne as, for example, its involvement with the Working Boys' School. Shannon thus found himself among like-minded social activists.

It was a time of horse-drawn vehicles, saddlers and blacksmiths - and streets dotted with wayward children. An editorial in the 28th July, 1897, edition of the *Geelong Advertiser* revealed that more than 80,000 school-age children were absent from the public schools of the colony. On the 8th May, 1897, Shannon, a vice-president of Comunn na Feinne, along with James Wighton, another Comunn na Feinne vice-president, called a meeting of similarly-minded social observers with the aim of forming, "a poor boys club" which was complementary to Johnstone's Working Boys School. This was not only to provide a safe environment where they could socialize and play games but also, where necessary, to find them work. For those without literacy or any basic skills for employment, various classes were offered to provide them with the necessary training suitable for obtaining a job. Classes were held in gymnastics, drill, Indian clubs, wands, dumbbells, roman rings, horizontal and parallel bars, singing, and woodcarving. Many of the boys were not able to read or write so they were encouraged to join the night school and the literacy classes.

Shannon modelled his idea on a 'Try Boys' Society which had been formed in Melbourne in 1884 and which had been very successful. One of the objects, as reported in the *Advertiser* on 9th May,

1897, was to give the boys hope and to show them that if they 'tried' they could succeed. Hence the name, 'Try Boys' Brigade'. Shannon informed those who had gathered for the meeting which had been called that:

He had seen at first hand the excellent work being done by William Mark Forster, a businessman who had founded the Try Boys' Society in Melbourne thirteen years earlier. This organization was going from strength to strength and the successful merging of destitute youths with those from better off families saw no sign of class barrier. A common interest in games, gymnastics, singing, reading and friendship drew the boys together. He told them Forster constantly reassured the boys they could achieve a great deal if they were only prepared to try. This gave rise to the organization's name.

Shannon told the men at this meeting that while he was in Melbourne he had visited the Gordon Institute [Melbourne], the News Boys' Club and the Try-Excelsior Club in Toorak. He had studied their methods, rules and annual reports and realized what "good and useful work was being done." The leaders of these clubs had provided him with detailed information regarding their management methods. He told the meeting he was especially impressed with the Gordon Institute [Melbourne] which Forster had begun after setting up the Try Boys. Assisted by a Melbourne hatter named William Groom, Forster had expanded the activities to the stage where the Institute had become the centre of youth welfare services in Victoria. Shannon said that he believed that he could, with help, emulate this work in Geelong.

Those at the meeting Shannon had called agreed that something had to be done in Geelong and they set about finding premises and equipment and a suitable person to become the leader and manager of the club, a position that would be a paid one. This same group, joined by Dr Kennedy, held its first regular meeting the following month in the Mechanics' Institute classroom. James Wighton also joined the committee and was appointed Honourary Secretary. His legal firm, Wighton and McDonald, handled all of the legal affairs of the club. Charles Shannon and James Wighton, were both Vice-Presidents of Comunn na Feinne, and they carried over into the new organization that Society's social concerns. At this second meeting:

Shannon introduced the committee members to Joseph Yeowart, manager of the Melbourne Try Boys' Society, who had agreed to become leader and manager of their new club on an annual salary of £120 (\$240). Shannon generously guaranteed a sum of £200 (\$400) to fund

the club for its first year. The new society was advertised with the result that 300 attended each week. Records show there were almost 15,000 attendances during this first year which obviously confirmed the need for such an institution.

The Try Boys association's aims were stated and they were to help boys avoid a life, "of pauperism" or landing up in "reformatories" as a result of delinquency. Janette Henderson's *Geelong Try Boys' Brigade: A Centenary History, 1897-1997*, p2, summarises the movement's aims in wider, and more ambitious terms. These were:

To teach them without semblance of coercion; decent behaviour and self-reliance; and to obtain employment for them when they are able to take it. The whole system constitutes a valuable public work, and though necessarily based upon moral and religious principles, this institution is unsectarian (sic).

This organization also conducted a night school which offered instruction, "in the three elementary branches of education." Other classes included singing and gymnastics. The younger boys (under twelve) received education appropriate to their age and for the older boys there was instruction in skills such as wood work. The *Advertiser Supplement* of 1st September, 1897, wrote that it also acted as a sort of employment agency placing the boys where they were able to obtain employment and ensuring their fair treatment.

The Club also attracted boys who were already in employment but who were, "confined during the day to warehouses and factories." Charles Shannon recognized the importance of offering the boys, "whom he noticed roaming about the streets after midnight for want of more congenial surroundings", a place where they could meet and engage in a variety of activities.

The schooling which Try Boys at Geelong provided, through the medium of evening classes, with volunteers carrying out the instruction, reflected Comunn na Feinne's philosophy of improving oneself to improve the community. Many of the boys attending were unable to read or write and, initially, were averse to taking such classes. However, instruction was provided and many of the boys benefited from it and went on to further study. It was also the case that 'practical' subjects were also taught which would make the boys more employable.

From its inception, the committee sought jobs in both town and country for some of the boys. Victorian farmers were quick to respond to the brigade's offer of boys who were eager to work on the land. They signed an agreement to properly feed, house and attend to the

morals of the boys sent. Arrangements were made for the boys' wages to be sent to the Brigade manager and held in trust for them.

Comunn na Feinne believed that education, behaviour and attitudes for the good, on the part of individuals, could eliminate poverty, ignorance, discrimination and disharmony within a community. This was a view, as we have seen, that had been promoted by Comunn na Feinne since the early years of its inception. Of all the noble goals of a society, it was the education and the equipping of the young that was, in the words of the *Advertiser* on 3rd July, 1871, “the most praiseworthy object of any section of the community.”

Comunn na Feinne believed that only when all members of the community, including the poorest child, the most distressed orphan and the most troubled youth, were reached and provided for by way of ‘special’ schooling, beyond what the normal system of education provided, could this ‘vision’ be realized. There were very good schools providing “higher class” education and these were a credit to any society but, it continued, “they do not meet all requirements.” But, thankfully, it continued, there were those who laboured to provide the schools necessary to equip the aforementioned disadvantaged children who were missed by the state system. The *Geelong Advertiser* succinctly reported, on 3rd July, 1871, the motivation behind those - Comunn na Feinne members and others - who championed the movement of what we today might loosely call ‘remedial education’:

Witness the recent and not fruitless exertions to establish ragged schools and reformatories ... Healthy signs of the times they are for they testify that there be some engaged in the good work who are willing to begin at the foundation of the social edifice, believing that only when that is sound, and the poorest as well as the most affluent have the means of education at command, can a people feel that knowledge and power are synonymous.

The Society was not vain enough to take credit for all of the work being done in this direction. The means to a sound society was much debated in the nineteenth century in such organizations as the Mechanics’ Institutes, Working Men’s Clubs, Working Boys’ Clubs and Debating Societies, as well as within radical, liberal and conservative political and economic movements. Common topics of debate revolved around the role of education in bringing about peaceful social reform. Certain Comunn na Feinne members, and other groups and individuals in Geelong, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, were striving to demonstrate that education for the marginalized really did pay a social dividend!

Comunn na Feinne's role in Education, as we have seen, went beyond the standard school system. Its usefulness encompassed the disadvantaged, the troubled and the unschooled in the community. In another sphere of Education, too, Comunn na Feinne was to become prominent. Initially it established a competition promoting dance, music and elocution for the children of Comunn na Feinne members. This was soon to spread its scope to cover the whole range of the arts and also to encompass utilitarian skills to advance the abilities of workers, and it is to these educational activities we now turn.

Comunn na Feinne and Education 2 – The Arts - Eisteddfodau 1912-1929

The Eisteddfod (Singing, Dancing and Elocutionary Competitions)

Speaking at the third of the meetings held to establish Comunn na Feinne in December, 1856, James Rankin, one of the founders, interpreted one of the four pillars of the Society's charter to suggest that the organization was to foster intellectual and practical development in the community at large. (See Chapter 1, p5) Blue-prints for these activities had not been drawn up in these early days, and it was only as the Society itself developed that the ways and means of achieving some of its wider aims became clearer.

In the first decade of the Society's life much of its support and encouragement for education was done through conducting competitive examinations for school-age children. As these competitions grew in size and scope over the years the costs associated with them threatened to prove ruinous. With the coming of the Education Act whereby the State provided education that was free, secular and compulsory, the Society, to a certain extent, disengaged from this aspect of education. It turned its attention, as we have noted, to providing education and training for those children who, for one reason or another, were missed by the State system.

With a new century, Comunn na Feinne began to extend its philosophy of education to other aspects of cultural life. In one sense, the Society, through its provision of competitions in Highland Dance and Solo Bag Piping, had, since its first Highland Gathering, been engaged in music and dance education. The Society was often commended by the expert judges in these areas of culture

for raising the levels of excellence displayed in the performance of traditional music and dance. However, the feature of the Society's education competitions from 1912, as well as including the previously mentioned forms of music and dance, lay in the broad range of events which emerged as these competitions progressed. In the second and third decades of the twentieth century, history was to repeat itself when, what began in 1912 as a small-scale music and elocution competition for the children of Comunn na Feinne members, blossomed into a wide-ranging annual Eisteddfod* that at its peak in 1928-29, was attracting well in excess of 2,000 entries and running over several months. By this time, the demands placed on manpower, venues, and finances had become so burdensome, that Commun na Feinne felt forced to relinquish them, which it did in 1929.

*[The term Eisteddfod was not applied to these competitions until 1916, but for convenience sake we will use this term to describe these competitions from their beginning. The results of the various competitions can be found on the CD enclosed with this book.]

The annual Eisteddfod seems to have grown like Topsy, rather than from any pre-conceived master plan. Members of the Society embraced it because the development of musical (vocal and instrumental) and elocutionary skills could be seen as "practical" attainments, enhancing the cultural life of the whole community. For many years Comunn na Feinne had been encouraging similar creative development – albeit with a more pronounced Scottish flavour – through its piping, dancing, poetry and literary competitions included in the annual Highland Games and through public concerts which it organized. The *Geelong Advertiser*, on 15th June, 1914, in an explanation of the Society's work, indicated that in holding competitions outside of the structure of the Highland Gatherings, the Society saw itself as continuing the tradition of its nineteenth century scholastic examinations. For example, it reported in 1914 that:

In the early history of Comunn na Feinne, educational examinations were held annually, and many prominent citizens of today are proud holders of the prizes then competed for. It is the intention of the Directorate to renew these competitions.

The 'competitions' being renewed were not, of course, the system of school-based competitive educational examinations operated by the Society in its earlier years. To understand what both the Society and the *Geelong Advertiser* meant when they announced the 'renewal' of education

competitions, we need to be reminded just how the term ‘education’ was used and interpreted by the Society. The foregoing quotation, therefore, has to be seen in the context of the Society’s perception of ‘education’. We have already shown how the Society interpreted the term by considering its inclusion of military, fire-fighting, rifle and sword and Tilting the Ring competitions in its Games. While these events provided entertainment, the object was, through competition, to “educate” those taking part so that they would be better equipped to carry out their functions in the community as firemen, militias, horsemen and the like. Comunn na Feinne’s vision of education was, thus, a very wide one. This willingness to view scholastic achievement and the gaining of practical skills in whatever area of utility man was involved, was a unique and non-elitist characteristic of the Society and one which was acknowledged many times in the speeches of dignitaries at the opening or closing of the competitions and at other Society events. For example, at the start of the Society’s 1915 Eisteddfod, the Geelong Mayor, Cr. Brownbill, opened the proceedings by addressing the following words, contained in an *Advertiser Report* of 8th June, 1915, to the audience. He remarked that, “such educational gatherings represented a continuation of the Society’s [C19th] educational policies and were of benefit to Geelong.”

The same sentiments appear again and again when the goals of these musical competitions were addressed and their function as educational ‘tools’ was affirmed. Alderman H. Hitchcock in 1920 reiterated the theme of continuity asserted by Brownbill on 20th August, 1920, regarding the Society’s role in education.

There is no doubt that Comunn na Feinne was living up to its past traditions [i.e. using competition to foster education]. The Society has done much for education and improvement of the young people of this city.

And so it was construed, year after year, with various speakers, whether local or from afar, describing the Eisteddfodau as educative in purpose. That these competitions were evidence of the Society fulfilling relevant areas of its charter was identified, too. It was pointed out, in a re-statement of the Society’s purpose, in the *Advertiser* on 8th June, 1915, that the Competitions, like all of Comunn na Feinne’s activities, were not conducted, “for monetary gain ... but for the good of the community.”

As well as opening up the 1915 competitions to a wider group of competitors, the number of events was increased, and these were staged over three days from 7th to 9th June. Comunn na Feinne's purchase and renovation, in 1914, of what had been St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Yarra Street, Geelong, was the venue for a competition in "Elocution, Dance and Singing" on 14th January 1914. A large audience witnessed more than thirty offspring of various Comunn na Feinne members competing for prizes offered.

Having decided not to suspend its annual Highland Games during WW1, the Society reached the same decision with regard to its fledgling competitions in the performing arts. Within months Comunn na Feinne announced, on 4th March, 1915, that a committee had been set up to provide a Programme for the next Eisteddfod and this, as well as having items for "members and their children" was also to have some 'open' events for all-comers.

Then, as now, competitions of this nature proved attractive to teachers and to some parents because they provided opportunities to showcase the talents of their protégés as well as allowing the students to gain experience in performing before an audience. Thus, it was not long before business opportunities surrounding these competitions were seized upon. For example, Miss Isabel Cox, 'Teacher of Elocution', of St Ives, 13 Yarra Street, Geelong, was soon advertising for pupils and citing the fact that two of her students had gained a first and a second prize, "at the Comunn na Feinne Competitions." Similarly, with Miss Ethel Hughes, a dance teacher in Geelong, who advertised her abilities as a dance teacher by listing the large number of students under her tuition who had won at South Street, Ballarat as well as at the Comunn na Feinne competitions.

In addition to opening up the 1915 competitions to a wider group of competitors, the number of events was increased, and these were staged over three days from 7th to 9th June. The Mayor Cr. Brownbill opened the proceedings. He said he hoped that the scope of the competitions would be widened even more in the future. The judges, in their closing remarks endorsed these sentiments. Comunn na Feinne's "genial" secretary, James Galbraith, responded that, "being a [Scottish Society] the organizers were pursuing a national policy of caution and extending the competitions gradually."

The next Eisteddfod was held over two days, 8th and 9th August 1916, and already it was announced that there had been 30 entries for the Dancing category alone. Galbraith's Scottish 'caution' notwithstanding, by 6th June 1916, as well as the numbers entered for the dancing, there was one hundred entries for the singing and elocution events to be held in August 1916. Further growth, noted the *Advertiser* on 1st July, 1917, had occurred that year, with the events being staged over four days and the categories of event open for competition had been extended to include groups of eight persons, thus paving the way for events such as the future Choir competitions and the performance of plays. Despite the continuation of the War, Comunn na Feinne's Eisteddfod was also held in 1918, as the Society felt that it was important, for morale if for no other reason, that these contests should continue. Categories reflecting, "a patriotic nature" were to be included in the 1918 Competitions, and the items and numbers of entrants continued to grow. For example, the 1918 competitions were intended to be held over four days, from the 8th to the 11th of July. However, such was the number of entries (in excess of 220), the Competitions actually ran from 2nd to the 13th July, 1918. Galbraith's "gradualism" was no more, and he declared, the *Advertiser* said on 29th July, 1918, that the Comunn na Feinne Directors, "hope[d] to increase the items [i.e. the categories contested] and perhaps rival Ballarat's South Street Competition."

The reference, made several times, that Geelong's Competitions would rival those staged at South Street, Geelong, were never given in any spirit of resentful jealousy. Although growing in importance, and second only to South Street, Ballarat, there was the closest relationship between the two towns, Geelong and Ballarat, regarding their respective competitions. For example, the South Street Committee provided its Geelong counterpart with the details of those who had competed at Ballarat the previous year. Furthermore, "the secretary of the Grand National Eisteddfod of Australasia (Ballarat's South Street), had gratuitously forwarded [to Comunn na Feinne] his book containing the names and addresses of some hundreds of competitors" from every State except Western Australia.

James Galbraith, Secretary of Commun na Feinne, opened the 1918 Eisteddfod in place of Senator Plain who had been detained, and for whose absence he apologized. He said that the competitions, "were inaugurated by the Society some six years ago, mainly for the benefit of children, in the hope

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that the enterprise would grow into a useful asset to the Society.” This hope had been borne out, he said, and the large number of entries for the present Eisteddfod ... demonstrated this growing interest.

It was at the 1918 Eisteddfod that the first appearance of a young local baritone, John Donald McKenzie Brownlee,* on the winner’s list, occurred. Brownlee triumphed in the Open Section; “Patriotic Song (Baritone)” and took first prize in the Open Baritone Section. He also competed at the South Street, Ballarat Competitions attracting an Honourable mention in the Solo Contest on 12th October, 1918. Dame Nellie Melba hearing him sing in Melbourne encouraged him to pursue vocal training in Europe. Comunn na Feinne subsequently held a John Brownlee benefit concert to assist his travel to Europe. Never forgetting the assistance he had received from Comunn na Feinne, Brownlee encouraged the careers of several later singers who emerged through, and were financially helped by, Comunn na Feinne’s Eisteddfodau, and rendered them assistance when they first arrived in Europe. Marjorie Lawrence was one of these singers, and she later gave recognition both to Brownlee’s help and that of the Society. John Brownlee went on in his career to have successes in the opera houses of Europe (the Paris Opera, La Scala, Covent Garden) and also, in America, at the Metropolitan in New York.

*[See Appendix 3 (b) - Short Biographies for more details of this singer.]

Comunn na Feinne was also extending the range of material suitable for performance by competitors to include works of Australian composers, poets and writers. Beginning with the Eisteddfod in 1918, the works of local Geelong poets, Allan Fullerton Wilson and Allan McNeilage, were pronounced, along with a wide range of other Australian poets, as suitable for its recitation competitions. Allan Fullerton Wilson wrote mainly in the Scots’ language and was a regular contributor to *The Scot at Home an’ Abroad* as well as to newspapers. Comunn na Feinne at Geelong published a selection of Wilson’s poems following his death entitled, *Poems by an Australian Scot* (M.L. Hutchinson, Melbourne, 1918) The adjudicator, William N. Whidburn, as reported in the *Advertiser* 23rd April, 1924, pointed out that Mr Wilson:

had been a prominent Geelong citizen for many years, and the Directors of Comunn na Feinne were to be highly commended on the way they were immortalizing his name, and keeping his memory fresh by holding competitions annually for the best rendition of his poems. Moreover, the latter were worth the studying for their very beautiful thoughts.

Wilson also contributed to the Eisteddfodau in another way, too. Glad Wilson, A.F. Wilson's daughter, was the accompanist for the Society's vocal competitions and was an accomplished pianist in her own right. She shared the first prize for piano solo recital at South Street, Ballarat competitions in 1925.

In a similar style to Allan Fullarton Wilson, Allan McNeilage wrote in lowland Scots and, following Wilson's death, he became the Comunn na Feinne bard. McNeilage also contributed his work to the monthly journal, *The Scot at Home an' Abroad* (the organ of the Victorian Scottish Union), as well as to newspapers. He was described as, "a kind of Scottish-Australian poet-laureate", and his verse, while mostly humorous, often carried an undertone of sarcasm and satire. He published a book of his verse.

As the number of categories offered at the Eisteddfodau increased so too did the number of competitors entering the events and, by 1919, this number had risen to 320, a figure eclipsed the following year when there were 400 entries in response to an expanded programme which included choral competitions for the first time. "The Hall was well-filled with well-wishers ... supporters of the seven choirs who competed", commented the *Geelong Advertiser* on 20th August, 1920. Initially the choral competition was for Church Choirs (the Methodists triumphing in 1920), but it was soon extended to include Sunday School Choirs in 1921, State School Choirs in 1922, and Industrial Workplace Choirs in 1923. Choral events had the inevitable consequence of increasing the number of contestants and swelling the ranks of the audiences. Choral contests, particularly the ones for schools, attracted Perpetual Shields as prizes, and these were often designed to demonstrate the skills of the local workers and, of course, that of the jewellers who designed and crafted the objects. A description of the J.C. King shield for workplace Industrial Choirs has survived in the *Geelong Advertiser* report of 2nd May, 1923.

A magnificent piece of workmanship in highly polished blackwood is the Alderman J.C. King Shield for the Industrial Choirs Contest, It is unique in that it has the title letters raised. It is surmounted by Comunn na Feinne's Crest, with a factory on one side and a locomotive on the other. On each side are woolpacks and at the bottom a cog wheel and anvil, all these representing Geelong Industries, while music is typified by Harps. The trophy, which is valued at ten guineas, was executed by John Hammerton and Sons, of Little Ryrie Street, Geelong. It has to be won twice to become the property of the winner.

We can get some idea of the range of Choirs attracted to Comunn na Feinne's Eisteddfodau from the tables of contestants included on the CD accompanying this book. While the bare records show little of the human face of these contests, one or two details do survive in a report by the *Geelong Advertiser* on 9th June, 1924. When the Federal Woollen Mills' Choir (Geelong) defeated the Swallow and Ariell Choir (Port Melbourne), and the Lincoln Knitting Choir (Coburg), in the 1924 Industrial Choirs Competition, the Mayor of Geelong remarked that, prior to the formation of the winning Choir, "the Mill staff knew little about music" but, through the Comunn na Feinne competitions, their knowledge and enjoyment of the arts had grown. Now, having triumphed twice in a row they were able to keep the Shield they had won.

Similarly, in 1923 and 1924, the Flinders State School Choir, conducted by L. Walker, had won its event at the Mechanics' Institute Hall, outperforming Choirs from Ashby, Swanston Street and Chilwell in the State School Choirs contest. These Choirs were allowed to consist of thirty-five currently enrolled pupils under the age of fifteen. This would seem to have represented an enormous store of youthful energy to be "cabined, cribbed and confined" in one place! This provided overwhelming evidence of the Society's competitions outgrowing its own premises, and highlighting the need for a dedicated Concert Hall for Geelong. This was further demonstrated in the fact that the afore-mentioned choral competitions had already spilled over into the Mechanics Institute Hall because of the numbers involved!

By this time, it was becoming apparent that Comunn na Feinne may have been replicating another, less welcome feature of its 19th century educational examinations – a strain on its budget. Costs were ballooning as the Eisteddfodau grew. An appeal was made in May 1921 for donations of cash and trophies to support the work. Although a total of £114.90 was raised, £50 of this came from one

individual, the pastoralist and Chief of Comunn na Feinne, Mr Phillip Russell. Thus, it would seem, the pool of donors responding to the appeal was not large and the Geelong Council, which, yearly, praised Comunn na Feinne's Eisteddfod, was decidedly missing when it came to financial backing to support its fine words! For example, the 1924 Eisteddfod was fronted, in the absence of the President of Comunn na Feinne, by William Stewart, the Vice-President. His appeal was on two fronts. Firstly, he looked to the people of Geelong for assistance in maintaining the valuable asset the Eisteddfodau had become and, secondly, to the local government from where, he said, assistance should be coming. The Geelong Mayor, Cr. Robert Purnell, standing in for the Minister of Education, Sir Alexander Peacock, when opening the Eisteddfod in 1924, indulged in the popular political game of 'buck-passing'. As reported by the *Geelong Advertiser* on 24th April, 1924, he neatly side-stepped the claim of local responsibility for these competitions stating that, as "the Society's work is of an educational nature", the responsibility for funding lay at the State level, not the local.

The more fully the State takes up its burden in this respect, the better it will be for the community generally. It is also apparent that these Societies which have promoted eistedfods [sic] on their own initiative are accepted as valuable assets which must be preserved on account of their usefulness.

Apart from the need for more and more funds to stage these annual Competitions, another problem, arising from their success with the public and competitors alike, involved the lack of Hall accommodation in which to stage some of the events. As the enterprise grew, it needed not only more venues, but also larger ones. James Galbraith indicated in January 1922 that the movement, which initially attracted a mere five contestants, was expecting 900 in that year. The Comunn na Feinne Hall was becoming inadequate and, as we have noted, it had already been found necessary to hold some events at the Mechanics' Institute Hall.

Despite the titular role of municipal dignitaries in the formal proceedings of the Eisteddfodau, and their praise for the movement (and for the income it generated from visitors to Geelong), appeals to the local Council for assistance with suitable concert-hall accommodation for the Competitions to be conducted, produced no tangible results. In fact, there were only a series of rebuffs to the increasingly desperate calls from Comunn na Feinne for help. Galbraith's continual request for

financial assistance from the Geelong Council was evidence of the Society's recognition of the growing financial drain on its resources as it continued to stage the annual Eisteddfodau, and its need for assistance as the entries for these competitions were swelling to unmanageable proportions. Sponsorship and the infrequent donations from patrons hardly made much of a dent in the overall cost to the Society arising out of its annual Eisteddfod. Thus, it was to a body which had access to far more resources than the Society that Galbraith appealed. The *Advertiser* of 5th June, 1922, recorded that he besought Alderman W. Brownbill, "to use his influence with the City Council with the object of obtaining financial help."

By 1924, the *Geelong Advertiser*, was adding its 'voice' to assist the Society's enterprise by clearly aligning the Society's goals with those of the State. The *Advertiser* of 24th April, 1924, provided an accurate analysis of the Society's reasons for staging its Eisteddfodau. It identified the connection between the Society's Competitions and its charter aim of education, and the wider connection which was between the foregoing and "the state's educational system."

There is a co-relation of factors between musical and elocutionary competitions and the state's educational system ... so that this legitimate field of influence will not be undermined[sic] ... Few will have the temerity to deny that of all the arts, music in this regard holds the highest place. Who is there – gifted with only a moderate ear for music - that has not felt, when listening to the works of the great masters, as if lifted into another world? The ... highest emotions are awakened ... [and] this experience frequently repeated must have an effect upon the character of the community.

The elocutionary sections of the competitions are also of much interest and importance. If, as the great dramatist says, that the purpose of playing is to hold a mirror up to Nature, to show virtue her own features, scorn her own image and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure, then it follows that from an educational point of view, the stage is an important institution; while, as a means of instructive amusement and entertainment, it holds a high place in the public estimation.

Hand in hand with these emerging difficulties went rapid expansion. Galbraith spoke again of developing an Eisteddfod to rival that of South Street, Ballarat. (renamed the Royal South Street, Ballarat Eisteddfod in 1962) In order to protect and nurture local talent, a local championship was introduced for competitors resident within 20 miles of Geelong.

As each year passed, the Competitions showed no signs of slowing down. Not only were the number of events still expanding, in 1923, the public were called on to suggest possible new events and, as a result, Shorthand and Typing and Instrumental music competitions were added. The latter resulted in 280 entrants in the piano section alone! By January 1924, there were 92 Sections to the Eisteddfod, 1,200 entries had been received (the competitions now spread over three months, from April to June), and the Melbourne Choral Union had written requesting the continuation of Choral competitions so that a regular circuit – Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat – might become established involving competitions for large Choral groups. The *Geelong Advertiser* added its voice to this suggestion encouraging Geelong's Comunn na Feinne to consider making the Choral contests a regular feature. Its close proximity to Melbourne meant that Choral groups from Melbourne could perform at Geelong and return to Melbourne the same day, thereby avoiding overnight accommodation costs. The Society was thus urged, by the newspaper, on 12th January, 1924, to continue with its Choral contest.

A letter has also been received from F.A. Legge, the secretary of the Melbourne Choral Union, champions of Australia, which choir, last year, completed the 'hat trick' under Mr Tippett, by winning its last three contests at Geelong, Melbourne and South Street, Ballarat, stating that several Melbourne Choirs contemplated paying Geelong a visit for competition purposes, if the Committee decides to include a Choral contest again this year. He states that there is a general feeling among Melbourne choirs that the fixture would prove very interesting this year. The writer strongly urges the Society to include the events and puts forth several suggestions for its ultimate success ... two or three other choirs have written in the same strain, and it is known that others will very likely enter.

When the Comunn na Feinne directors met on 19th June 1924 to prepare a "syllabus" for the 1925 Eisteddfod, they again called for "supporters" to put forward suggestions for new competitions to be added, although they must have done this with some trepidation, having faced criticism for not adding all of the previous suggestions to their line-up of events. One competition that was added, one that James Galbraith said, "would stimulate a far greater interest in the vocal side of our Competitions," was for an Operatic Aria*, sponsored by the *Sun* newspaper, with prize money of £30, further augmenting the vocal competitions. The Beacon Trading Company of Geelong also added a twenty-guinea award at the 1925 Eisteddfod. This was to be called the Champion Vocal Solo and it required participants to perform both a ballad and a classical aria. By 5th March 1925, 72

women and 43 men had entered for this event alone.

*[This was the year the *Sun* sponsored ‘aria’ began.]

Comunn na Feinne was always pleased when a ‘local’ achieved success whether it was at its own Eisteddfod or at some other competition. Thus, it proudly announced, on 13th August, 1924, that Mrs Grace Brown had been successful in vocal competitions held at Maryborough. The *Advertiser* showed, on 14th August, 1924, that her Gold Medal award was achieved by performances which earned her 3 firsts and 2 seconds in her chosen events. The Society also announced that Mrs Brown had, “recently won the Melbourne A.N.A. Championship Soprano Solo, and the Championship of the last Geelong Comunn na Feinne Competitions.”

Comunn na Feinne, willing to promote ‘local’ singing teachers, also mentioned that Mrs Brown’s coach, Miss Ida McAulay Wildins L.A.B., I.T.G.L., gave lessons at her home which was located at 43 Wellwood Terrace, Gheringhap Street, Geelong.

Another advertisement, posted in the Comunn na Feinne Hall, dated 4th February, 1927, provides us with a further glimpse of the “training industry” which fed into the Eisteddfodau and which drew validation from the successes of the pupils it entered. Miss Alice Huddleston’s School of Dancing, it informed the reader:

“offered classes in the Society’s Hall for Highland Dancing, Clogs, Jigs, Reels and hornpipes [as well as] Classical Dancing, Acrobatic and Toe Dancing. Pupils especially prepared for Competitions with Bagpipe music.*

Obviously, a versatile lady, thoughtful too. After all, we can’t have children scared by the sound of Bagpipes!

*[How little some things have changed! Today, it is still possible to read similar advertisements from Dancing Academies in the local Geelong newspapers each January.]

As much as the success of ‘locals’ at competitions in Australia was pleasing to the Society, it was even more gratified when that success was achieved on the international stage, as the *Carmichael Notes* reveal. So it was when, on 15th July, 1924, Comunn na Feinne proudly announced that news of

John Brownlee's career overseas had been received, as well as a letter from the singer himself. He was under the instruction of Mons. Ghilly who had pronounced Brownlee as having, "God's best gift, the Voice." A further letter from John Brownlee, dated, 17th September, 1925, gave a few more details of his experiences including the news that he had been, "contracted to sing for seven months at the Paris Opera House. He will make his debut in the principal baritone part in Traviata. He will, of course, sing in French." Brownlee had the further honour of being the first British subject ever to be given a permanent singing post with the Paris Opera. It was not only singers who received financial help to pursue further training abroad. Instrumentalists, also, were given similar encouragement and a financial grant to assist with further studies abroad. For example, Miss Violet Kenyon, a 15 year's old pianist from Geelong, who had shone at the Eisteddfod, drew financial support from the Society. In 1925, Comunn na Feinne staged a benefit concert, featuring soloists from Melbourne as well from Geelong itself, to raise funds for Miss Kenyon to study in London.

The 1925 Eisteddfod ran from 20th April to 6th June and it attracted 1,500 entries and, as these competitions grew in size and importance, so too did the 'rank' of the guests invited to open the proceedings. Arrangements had been made for the Australian Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce (1923-29), to do the honours for the 1925 Competitions but when the time came, Senator G. Pierce, Minister for Home and Territories, had to deputize for him. Also in 1925, the Society began a series of "Pleasant Sunday Afternoon" concerts for the support of local charities such as the Geelong and District Hospital, the Limbless Soldiers' Organization and the Protestant and Roman Catholic orphanages. These concerts were staged during the period covered by the Eisteddfod and frequently had prominent guest speakers from the areas of politics, education and the arts. For instance, Mr R.G. Menzies, a future Prime Minister of Australia, was a guest speaker on 17th June, 1928.

Prior to the closing date for the 1926 competitions there had been 1,350 entries received, including 70 for the Sun Aria contest and 35 for the Champion Vocal Solo. The Eisteddfod was opened by the State Minister for Education, Sir Alexander Peacock. Peacock was another guest to remark on the continuity of purpose between the Society's nineteenth century educational competitions and its

current Eisteddfodau. Education in any form, he said, would bring benefits; in the present context, “the training to [sic] competitors is invaluable to their home and community life.” He summed up his understanding of the Comunn na Feinne philosophy in one short sentence; “We cannot live to ourselves, we must live as citizens in the community” remarking, too, that in the previous year the Society’s Pleasant Sunday Afternoon events had raised £150 for local charities.

The opening of the 1927 competitions was marked by an expression of resentment toward the Town Council for its lack of support. The Mayor, Cr Julius Solomon, officiated, warmly thanked by the Society’s Chieftain, Senator William Plain. (Solomon was a substitute for Harry Lawson, leader of the Victorian Nationalist Party, who was unavailable.) The Mayor expressed the wish that one day Geelong would have a hall suitable for the audiences that the Eisteddfod attracted. He referred to John Brownlee’s success overseas and said, “that the Society was doing its best to bring to light more like John Brownlee. He further hoped that “the time would come when they would have in Geelong a Hall capable of accommodating three or four thousand people.” In thanking the Mayor for his presence, James Galbraith took the opportunity of voicing the mood of the Comunn na Feinne which was that the local civic politicians had failed the Society in several ways in the past and were continuing to do so. He was referring to an earlier ‘official’ approach which had been made by Comunn na Feinne for assistance when the Geelong Council had been lobbied regarding the provision of such a concert Hall to which Cr Solomon alluded. The Society had been rebuffed and was told that the Local Government Act prohibited the Council giving help to this cause. Galbraith had been part of that Comunn na Feinne delegation which had been invited to ‘pitch its case’ before the Geelong Council requesting support for its Eisteddfodau.

In turning down the request, the Council hid behind the blanket excuse, as the *Advertiser* of 20th December, 1922, reported, that, “it had no legal authority to accede to the request.” It also failed to respond to the Galbraith’s gibe that, “the Ballarat City Council assisted by £200 a year [its] South Street, Ballarat competitions”, or to the evidence attested by Galbraith that the Bendigo Council was about to support, annually, that town’s inaugural Musical Competitions. There were two or three Council members who were supportive towards the Comunn na Feinne position and Ald.

Brownbill, “moved that the matter be sent to the Finance Committee for favourable consideration.” This motion was seconded by Cr. Purnell. Alderman Hitchcock urged that the matter be discussed at the present meeting to avoid delay. However, not all were friendly towards the Society’s requests and Cr. Theat posed the question of whether, in fact, the Council, under its constitution, could do what had been moved. The town clerk, Mr Walter, responded that nowhere in the Act (the Local Government Act) was the Council authorized to grant the request, such as put forward by Comunn na Feinne. Cr Hearne was another who spoke against any motion to assist the Society. The Mayor at the time, Ald. King, then ruled, “that the matter was out of order according to the Act [and] the discussion terminated.” And such was the continuing attitude towards requests for assistance.

The foregoing, and the continued rebuffs over the years to the Society’s requests for help, might partly explain why the usually ‘genial’ and unflappable Galbraith, at the opening of the 1927 Eisteddfod, in the face of the Mayor’s reference to the need for a proper concert hall in which to hold the Society’s Competitions, could allow himself a measure of sarcasm. When, for example, the Mayor was asked if, in lieu of providing a Hall, perhaps the Council could at least give some financial support, Galbraith, according to the *Advertiser’s* account on 9th March, 1927, not waiting for Hitchcock’s reply interjected, with a fair degree of sarcasm, that he supposed the Council would not agree to this request either as, “Evidently the Act was against this too”.

It was obvious that the Society felt that the Geelong Council was doing what politicians do best, when it suits them, and that was hiding behind a wall of bureaucratic rules and regulations. No doubt behind the open frustrations, voiced by Galbraith, lay the strain the Society was experiencing in finding the finances and the manpower to stage both its New Year’s Day Games and an annual Eisteddfod within approximately four months of each other. Gate takings at the New Year’s Day Highland Gatherings had been falling in recent years, adding to the difficulties that had to be faced by the Society. The record 2,175 entries received for the 1927 Eisteddfod certainly exacerbated the accommodation difficulties.

Essay writing competitions made their first appearance at the 1927 Eisteddfod, with adults being invited to write on the subject, “A Leading Citizen”, taking as their subject the aforementioned

H.S.W. Lawson, while schoolchildren were invited to address the topic, “How can we best prepare for the future of Geelong?” In addition to these literary competitions, poetry recitations were again on the programme of events. The *Advertiser*, in its issue of 22nd April, 1927, reported that, “the Comunn na Feinne Competitions were advanced a further stage last night, when W.N. Whidburn adjudicated upon the recital.” Recitations included selections from the Poems of Allan Fullarton Wilson and Allan McNeilage, Geelong bards, as well Robert Burns, all of whom had written in the Scots language. The adjudicator, Mr Whidburn, said, “it was pleasing that the Society should keep the memory of one (Mr Wilson), who had done so much for Scottish affairs, and was a resident of our City, Geelong.”

When the following year’s Competitions opened, on 14th March 1928, the *Age* reported the next day that the Society’s Pipe Band had piped the official party into the Hall. The then Minister for Education, John Lemmon, gave the opening address, re-iterating the familiar theme of such speakers each year. Comunn na Feinne had been active in supporting education in the early decades of its existence and, he continued, the Society was, in a different guise, still doing so, and in the process still launching and fostering some significant careers.

Competition, by its very nature, can breed litigiousness and musical rivalry is no exception. One example of dissatisfaction and dispute which arose from results in the 1928 Eisteddfod vocal category, was reported in the *Geelong Advertiser* of 9th April, 1928. The event, ‘Song by an Australian Composer,’ led to a disputed judgment.

A peculiar position has arisen in regard to the song by an Australian Composer. After announcing his first and second awards, the judge Purcell Webb, said that Ernest Wilson, of Geelong, had also sung well, but he would be disqualified on the grounds that he had not chosen a song by an Australian composer. The composer of Ernest Wilson’s song, said the judge, was Alfred Hill, who was a New Zealander, although he was at present in Sydney; therefore, he could not be an Australian. Ernest Wilson replied, “Excuse me, Mr Adjudicator, Alfred Hill’s birth-certificate shows him to be Australian born, [and] he is accepted at South Street, and other competitions, as an Australian. Where am I placed if it is proved that Alfred Hill is Australian born? The Adjudicator replied, if you prove that, you will be placed third with 88 points. If it is not proved, then you will be disqualified.

Ernest Wilson was correct regarding the composer Alfred Hill, and the final result placed him in third position. As can be seen below, Wilson had not finished with his disputing as he then challenged the final results in another category. Following the report in the *Geelong Advertiser* that Miss Marjorie Lawrence had won the 3LO Gold Medal for the highest aggregate of points for vocal events at the 1928 Competitions, a letter appeared in that newspaper from a disgruntled Wilson who challenged the award to Miss Lawrence.

Your report of the Comunn na Feinne's Competitions in yesterday's issue, states that Marjorie Lawrence had been awarded the 3LO gold medal for the highest aggregate in the vocal section. As I have secured the highest aggregate in this section according to the conditions laid down in the schedule, and am followed up by Alice Wells, I am at a loss to know why the prize has been allowed to the competitor who only secured third place. The schedule distinctly states that the aggregate would be allowed to the competitor gaining the greatest number of points in the vocal section No 6-20 inclusive to which was added the men's duet, omitted by mistake from the schedule, to balance the ladies' duet. These sections include both solo and duets. Marjorie Lawrence secured the highest aggregate for solo work only, but not including duets. The conditions for the highest aggregate are the same this year as last year, when I won the 3LO gold medal and I cannot understand why they have now been altered. Yours etc.
Earnest Wilson, Geelong.

The 1928 Eisteddfod was the first time that Miss Marjorie Lawrence had entered the Competitions. John Brownlee has already been mentioned as one of the international operatic voices to have received assistance through Comunn na Feinne's Eisteddfodau. Another of the great 'discoveries' arising from these competitions was this young contralto, Miss Marjorie Lawrence, from Deans Marsh, Winchelsea, outside Geelong. She, too, later achieved a world-wide reputation as an operatic superstar. At the 1928 Eisteddfod, she had won the Sun 'aria' award of £20. She also won the National Song (Scottish), the best Song by an Australian Composer, the Sacred Solo and she had come equal first in the Champion Vocal Solo (Ladies). She also came equal second in the Dame Nellie Melba Gold Medal award. The *Geelong Advertiser* reported that she had been declared the Gold Medal winner in 3LO's prize for the highest vocal aggregate, giving her not only the monetary prize but also a fortnight's engagement with 3LO at £10 per week. Naturally she was also asked to sing at the prize-giving concert which she did along with Norman Menzies, another future international star of the Operatic and Concert stage, who, sadly, died quite young just as his career was taking off.

On the face of it, the Comunn na Feinne competitions were doing extraordinarily well in 1928. This was especially true in relation to past and present singers. John Brownlee, another successful entrant in the Society's Eisteddfodau, as we have noted, had achieved recognition overseas and had written to the Society on 17th September, 1925 giving an update of his progress. The *Advertiser* of 26th September, 1928 covered this, Brownlee's first visit back to Geelong. Brownlee gave a few concerts and expressed his appreciation of the help rendered to him by supporters including Comunn na Feinne.

As a practical appreciation of the Society's work [Brownlee] intimated his intention of presenting a Shield valued at ten guineas to be called the 'John Brownlee Shield', and to be competed for amongst State School Children's Choirs and he considered that his prize would assist towards this end. He had also donated a £5.5.0 Gold Medallion for the winner of the Baritone Section of the Competitions.

John Brownlee, while on this visit back to Geelong, after a request from Ald., Howard Hitchcock, listened to Marjorie Lawrence, the young local singer and urged Comunn na Feinne, and other supporters, to help finance her studies overseas. Brownlee, in addition to leaving instructions as to her journey to Paris to further her studies had, "promised to meet the boat she travels on and personally introduce her to her new sphere." Marjorie Lawrence never forgot his kindness and help and many years later, on Brownlee's death in 1969, offered a moving testimony regarding their friendship and to the help and encouragement which he had given her throughout her career and, especially, in her illness.

Brownlee was also persuaded to hear a young (19 years old) baritone Norman Menzies, also from Geelong, sing and he praised his voice and encouraged the singer to pursue further training. The praise for Menzies' voice also came from other musical sources as well. The *Advertiser* noted that Norman Menzies, "a young Geelong Baritone for whom the adjudicator and others in a position to judge, predict a successful future", had made an impression wherever others heard him sing. Arrangements made by the secretary of Comunn na Feinne, James Galbraith, with William G. James, the well known musical authority, resulted in the appearance of Norman Menzies at Wesley Church, Melbourne, on Sunday, 26th September, 1928. "W.G. James, who is organist at Wesley

Church, Melbourne, allotted Norman Menzies the distinct honour of singing solo for the services. In speaking to James Galbraith on Monday evening, William G. James expressed the opinion that Norman Menzies' voice was full of promise and excellent for one so young. With careful tuition, he thought Norman Menzies would do well." And praise, too, from perhaps the most famous Australian singer of her time, Dame Nellie Melba who, on hearing him sing, was astonished to learn that Menzies was only 19 years of age. She commented that, "his voice sounds to me like John Brownlee's might have sounded when he was 19 years." Menzies was a pupil of Mrs S.M. Black who was, herself, "a former pupil of Dame Nellie Melba."

A farewell benefit concert was held for Marjorie Lawrence in the Mechanics' Institute Hall on 18th October, 1928. On that same morning Dame Nellie Melba, daughter of an early Comunn na Feinne member, David Mitchell, telephoned to say that she would hold a concert in Geelong to aid the studies of Miss Elena Danieli. Miss Danieli was a promising young American soprano whom Melba was assisting. At that concert, on 29th October, 1928, as well as Melba and Miss Danieli, Norman Menzies also sang. On hearing his voice, Melba responded, "Bravo, I like this very much. I like it enormously." She exhorted the citizens of Geelong to set up a fund to enable Menzies and fellow youthful baritone, Thomas Goodall, to study abroad. Subsequently, three social events were held in January and March 1932 to aid Menzies' career. These were organized by Comunn na Feinne and raised the large (for the time) sum of £765. (By contrast Menzies had won the Clarke Scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music in London and this was worth the total of £150 over three years!)

Comunn na Feinne's Eisteddfodau continued to expand in terms of the number of categories offered and in the number of contestants enrolling. Its Hall had been enlarged but it was still proving inadequate to cater for this growing number of entrants. By late 1928, it was clear that all was not well on the organizational front of Comunn na Feinne. It became obvious to the Society that the effort and expense required for this burgeoning endeavour were far exceeding its resources, both financially and also with respect to the number of volunteers needed to organize and conduct the Competitions. By the 13th December of that year, Comunn na Feinne's President, Charles A. Smith, had more or less determined that it was going to finish with its annual Eisteddfod starting in

1929. The Competitions, Smith said, would undergo a name change and would be handled by a committee of prominent townspeople led by two well-known Comunn na Feinne officers. Senator William Plain had been chosen as President, and James Galbraith as Secretary of this new body.

So precious had the Eisteddfodau become to Galbraith, and so disappointed was he at the Society divesting itself of these competitions, that he resigned the Secretary-ship of Comunn na Feinne (which he had held for three decades) over the matter. He took up his new role which was, essentially, organizing, “the new Geelong Competitions”, as the Eisteddfod was now to be known. In essence, the incoming Board of Directors of Comunn na Feinne, acting on a direction from the general meeting of the Society, with a definite push by the Society’s President, Charles A. Smith, had determined, according to the *Advertiser* of 1st February, 1929, that the Society could no longer carry the burden for its Geelong Eisteddfod. It had been decided, therefore, “that the Society could no longer accept the financial responsibility with respect to the Competitions”, and would, starting immediately, relinquish its ‘ownership’ of this event.

Professional judges, covering areas as diverse as business secretarial practice, Shakespeare’s works, modern Australian literature, Opera, Musicals, solo singing in various categories, dance and instrumental playing in areas such as piano, violin and harp, all had to be hired, paid and accommodated. In addition to these expenses, there were the prize lists which, year to year, grew longer and longer. While some monetary prizes, such as for the Sun ‘aria’, were donated, and various businesses sponsored the awarding of Cups, Shields and Medals, it still fell to Comunn na Feinne to take up the slack in any area for which it could not get sponsorship.

As previously noted, Geelong City Council, and other Civic bodies, were large on ‘donating’ praise and encouraging words for Comunn na Feinne’s work in so many areas, but were singularly lacking when it came to matching the fine words with financial backing. In short, the Geelong Council, especially, demonstrated a parsimonious attitude when it came to financially supporting what obviously was a worthwhile cultural festival and one which had the capacity to draw a great deal of attention, not to say visitors, to Geelong. If it was parsimonious in its financial support, it was doubly pusillanimous in

excusing its decision regarding requests to erect a Concert Hall for Geelong! An attitude, sadly, which has not quite disappeared from the halls of our local civic guardians!

The Board of Directors met on 7th May, 1929, the first time since the announcement regarding the Society's relinquishing its annual Eisteddfod. It was reported that the financial position was improving, with more Hall lettings proving to be valuable. It was further reported that the renting out of the Hall for the financial year past had amounted to £213.0.0. This could be expected to rise given the changed situation regarding the Musical competitions. The Society was not only free from the expenses associated with staging its Eisteddfod each year, it could now make money by hiring out the Hall to the new Musical organization as a competition venue! As these competitions were now running over a period of three months or more, it seemed that the Comunn na Feinne could look forward to some long-term bookings!

Although the Society relinquished its Eisteddfodau after the 1928 season, artists who had featured on its prize lists continued to have international success. John Brownlee again returned to Geelong after triumphs in the Opera Houses of Paris, Covent Garden and Monte Carlo, giving a series of concerts in his home town at the Palais Theatre, on 22nd June 1932 and 4th July 1932. He also engaged in a series of tours, including New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania, where he was accompanied by another Comunn na Feinne prize-winner, the soprano Miss Rita Miller, who also enjoyed a successful career in world opera. Lawrence and Miss Miller also performed in New Zealand as part of their concert tour. Norman Menzies, another Comunn na Feinne 'discovery', and his wife, sang at the coronation of George VI in Westminster Abbey and he achieved great success singing in Oratorio. Marjorie Lawrence, conscious of her support and help from Comunn na Feinne, was later to write a moving letter to James Galbraith describing her three years of struggle in Europe before her debut at the Monte Carlo Opera House in January, 1932. Some details from the letter are given below.

Comunn na Feinne, perhaps, had some right to be proud of the achievements of those who had passed through their hands. In the nineteenth century, Comunn na Feinne had fostered competition in order to raise the standard of schooling, to develop the skills of militiamen and fire-fighters, and

to foster physical prowess in fields such as athletics, marksmanship and cycling. In the twentieth century, it was the turn of such areas as vocal, instrumental and elocutionary skills, and in both centuries, some of those taking part in the various competitions achieved great success in academic life and in the field of performing arts, as well as in other areas of social life, after doing well in Comunn na Feinne Competitions.

The *Advertiser* of 14th June, 1932, in a retrospective view of the Society's accomplishments, wrote that, while not taking credit for 'discovering' the youthful talent of John Brownlee, Marjorie Lawrence, Norman Menzies, or any of the long list of other individuals who had succeeded in their chosen field in the arts, sciences, medicine, law, engineering and education, the Society could reasonably and proudly claim, "that they had played a very important part in the shaping of that talent," No matter in what field, all of these men and women had "received much assistance in their competitive work" in the various areas provided by the Society. For example, "it was during that period that Marjorie Lawrence, taking the first steps towards world celebrity, tried her capabilities as a youthful singer in competition with others [in the Comunn na Feinne Competitions]". Not the least of the Society's contribution, especially to those going overseas, lay in the area of funding these singers and musicians which its competitions had helped promote. The *Advertiser* wrote that just as John Brownlee had been assisted, "to further his studies abroad ... Miss Lawrence is realizing the expectations and hopes of those who interested themselves in her welfare three years ago ... by her latest success."

This was not a case of the *Geelong Advertiser* or, indeed, the Society itself, simply exaggerating its part in the early careers of those who had succeeded on a national and on a world stage. John Brownlee, Marjorie Lawrence, Norman Menzies, Rita Miller and others, acknowledged the part that Comunn na Feinne had played in their success. Even with this assistance, however, some of these 'stars' related just how hard it could be to achieve their goal and truthfully painted the picture of hardships which faced those going abroad to further their careers. We can catch a glimpse of the struggles some of the singers and musicians had in establishing themselves in the great Opera and Concert Houses of Europe and elsewhere, from their own experiences. John Brownlee, on a visit back to

Geelong, and in his talk on the local wireless station 3GL, did not hide the hard road ahead for any wishing to succeed overseas.

He advised young singers who were thinking of going abroad to remain where they were unless they were prepared to contend with adverse financial conditions for three or four years. Many Australian artists in Europe were unemployed.

As if to confirm this, and to inform the people of Geelong of the progress of another of Comunn na Feinne's 'discoveries', James Galbraith announced that he had received a letter from Miss Marjorie Lawrence giving some of her experiences, and troubles, while waiting for an opportunity for an engagement with an Opera Company. The Carmichael Notes reproduce some parts of the letter which Galbraith had received from Miss Lawrence on 19th January, 1932, demonstrated that the road she had travelled had not entirely been smooth. Her letter mentioned that she had been working very hard – a little too hard – and noted that, “it is three years since I left Australia, but it seems like ten. I have had rather hard work this week as I have been ill nearly the whole of the time through a nervous breakdown.” However, Galbraith added, she gave the assurance that her voice had not been affected. She continued, “I am just waiting a chance to make my debut in Opera.”

(Carmichael Notes)

But the hope of Comunn na Feinne was always that overall standards in each area of contest would be raised as a result of competition, and that the many would benefit as well as the few. It is a sad irony that history did repeat itself in the Society's two main contributions towards education: in both centuries, the use of competition as the Society's chosen instrument for producing higher achievement resulted in manpower and financial resources becoming overstretched – overstretched to the point of breaking. Without substantial help, either from local or state political institutions, the strain on the Society's resources eventually became too much for this voluntary organization to handle.

In keeping with part of its original goals, Comunn na Feinne had always striven, in whatever it did, to embrace the whole community and to have a positive effect upon it. We witnessed this in its extensive School examination competitions as well as its multifarious activities throughout Geelong

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and district. This ‘vision’ of a unified and harmonious society was, of course, understood as requiring certain pre-requisites not the least of which included equal access to a full formal education irrespective of one’s economic or social circumstances. But equal access to education did not mean equal results from it. It was inevitable that Comunn na Feinne’s system, although open to all, would produce some individuals who would outshine their contemporaries in whatever field was involved. Comunn na Feinne’s commitment was not to producing men and women of an equal level of achievement in terms of abilities or aptitudes. It was proud of those outstanding individuals, from whatever field, who had succeeded. The Society’s definition of ‘Education’ was, as we have seen, a very broad one. This was completely in line with its overall philosophy which was encapsulated in its Gaelic Mottoes and in its charter. These contained commitments to a sense of equality, fair play and justice which would contribute to creating and maintaining a harmonious society where everyone would use their talents to the well-being of the whole community, local or national.

Thus, although outstanding individuals would emerge, the Society’s ‘vision’ was that such people would use their special gifts for the good of the whole community. On more than one occasion, therefore, Comunn na Feinne Directors had pointed out that the Society’s provision of competitions in singing, elocution and music was not a divergence from its purpose but, rather, that this was an upholding, “of the traditions of the Society.” We have seen that its vision was of education which would equip an individual to improve not only himself but the whole of the community. This meant, therefore, viewing ‘education’ as extending far beyond that which was understood by the term the ‘3Rs’.

The Society, as we have also shown, almost from its beginning, had held contests for original poetry and for literary exercises, in Gaelic, Scots and English, in conjunction with its annual New Year’s Day Gatherings. All of these it had sought to nurture through its competitive activities carried out at the annual Gatherings and its other events throughout the year. But the Society also had the aim of nurturing new literary, musical, dance and dramatic talent from within the community. It sought also to promote excellence and harmony between various sections of the community through its industrial and factory Choir festivals and competitions. This, perhaps, came to its logical

development when all of this, and more, led Comunn na Feinne to initiate annual competitions in these foregoing areas, and beyond. The Society's attention turned to 'education' in all of these other spheres including those of classical singing and musicianship. This, in turn, was extended to include all forms of music and singing, instrumentalism, drama and many other areas of the Arts. Included, too, in Comunn na Feinne's vision of what constituted education, were areas dealing specifically with skills useful for working individuals, such as typing and shorthand writing and business studies. And even cooking. There was a great interest shown in these practical events and James Galbraith was deluged with requests for information as to the details of such competitions!

Comunn na Feinne probably had little thought about just how large, in terms of numbers of competitors and variety of events, these competitions would become. Even less, probably, had the organizers anticipated the number of 'stars' that these competitions would bring to the attention of the local, national and international members of the public.

Not every winner at the Society's competitions went on to achieve international fame and fortune – though many did. Others may have had the talent but missed out on the opportunities. In the area of stage-acting a successful competitor at Comunn na Feinne Eisteddfodau, Mr Keith Hall was engaged to tour overseas.

Keith Hall, the well-known Geelong elocutionist, will leave with the Allan Wilkie Shakespearian Company by the SS Manuka today for a tour of New Zealand. [He] was farewelled by the Mayor Cr. Jacobs. The gathering represented councillors of Geelong, leading citizens, including representatives of Comunn na Feinne, of which Mrs Hall, mother of the guest, has been a prominent member for years.

However, other actors and musicians, such as Miss Lucy Ahon and Miss Tui Black, while successful at the Society's Competitions, remained and pursued their careers in Australia. Both also graduated from Melbourne University. Instrumentalists such as Violet Kenyon and singers such as Ernest Wilson and Thomas Goodall, all who had talent to succeed, remained, largely, in Australia and followed their careers in their native country.

It seems appropriate to end this section on Comunn na Feinne's Educational Competitions – Music and the Arts – with Marjorie Lawrence on the brink of becoming the huge international star of

opera that she did. The Carmichael Notes provide further snippets of the news which Miss Lawrence sent to James Galbraith. She wrote, for example, that after a few years of frustration, ill-health and unhappiness, experienced by Miss Marjorie Lawrence, Comunn na Feinne was pleased to announce the news that she had made her debut at the Monte Carlo Opera House where, on opening night, “she wore the Silver Mascot Brooch which, Prince Charles Stuart gave to Flora McDonald.” And the rest, as they say, ‘is history’! *Geelong Advertiser* 30th January, 1932.

APPENDIX 14 (b) - Comunn na Feinne and the Spirit of Volunteerism

Generally speaking, much of the necessary social services work in communities throughout the nineteenth century was carried out through the agency of churches, charitable groups, charitable individuals and volunteers.

During the 19th century, there was nothing in any of the Australian colonies that would be recognised today as government social security. Charitable relief provided by benevolent societies, sometimes with financial help from the authorities, was the dominant mode of support for people unable to provide for themselves. (Department of Social Security)

Although there was a growth in trade unionism in the later nineteenth century, as well as the emergence of a Labor political party, both spurred on somewhat by the economic depression of that time, by the turn of the twentieth century there still did not exist a “social security system” in Australia.

Charitable relief was provided to needy persons by voluntary organisations, in some cases with the assistance of government grants. The main areas of need which attracted charitable assistance were the ‘sick poor’, neglected children, old people who were destitute and women who had been deserted or who had ‘fallen’ pregnant. The unemployed were assisted by grants of wages, or rations, in return for relief work provided by the government.^[1]^[2]^[SEP]

The birth of the new Commonwealth, in January 1901, promised a different and an Australia-wide approach by Federal government to the welfare of those in need, with the Constitution providing it with powers to, “legislate in respect of age and invalid pensions”. However, it was not until 1909 that the Commonwealth government first passed legislation to introduce pensions in these areas of need. *The Year Book Australia, 1988*, Chapter 8, ‘Social Security and Welfare’, in giving the history of social services in Australia, explains the early beginnings of welfare.

[A] means-tested flat rate age pension was introduced in July 1909 with the invalid pension following in December 1910. Men became eligible for the age pension at age 65 years and women at age 60 years. There was a residence qualification of 25 years for the age pension and five years for the invalid pensions. A maternity allowance, beginning in 1912, was paid “to a mother on the birth of a child.

But, as already noted, before Federal Government social welfare departments were established, care of sick, infirm and generally needy people, within communities, fell upon individual or group acts of charity. Where there was a measure of state-funded allowances before federation, these had not come much before the end of the nineteenth century and they were state-based and were limited in what they offered. New South Wales and Victoria had established state supported age pensions in 1900. The Commonwealth government replaced these with a federally funded scheme which was introduced into the states at different times, with New South Wales commencing in July, 1909 and Victoria in December, 1910. This move of the federal government in establishing social services for those in society who previously had to rely on help supplied by charities to survive, meant that, in some circumstances, these people were now the recipients, “of a basic regular income which, although not generous” helped them to survive.

Despite these measures in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the continuing need for voluntary assistance in certain areas meant that charitable work did not cease when the new Commonwealth Government was ushered in. Comunn na Feinne was among those organizations which continued to give help to those in need. In a real sense, it could be argued that Comunn na Feinne was, in its purpose and in its activities, one large charity. If we consider that its ultimate aim was the creation of a more equal and just society, a spirit of harmony and the personal development of the individual to better serve the community, then every action it took to realize this ultimate aim pertained to being a charitable one. Thus, the term ‘charity’, as understood and practiced by Comunn na Feinne, had no narrow, ‘tin rattling’ financial meaning. This was probably nowhere more in evidence than with the officers of the Society who, almost without exception, devoted a considerable part of their own time, energies, and expertise in support of the Society and its many arms of charity.

The extent of financial giving by individual members was rarely quoted or boasted of and when it was made public it was because the amount was of such generosity that newspaper accounts felt obliged to emphasise the fact. A good example of this ‘silent’ giving can be witnessed in the life of Robert de Bruce Johnstone, local and state politician, small- business owner and President of Comunn na Feinne who, upon his sudden death in 1881, left virtually nothing as his estate. The *Advertiser*, a few years earlier, on 28th January, 1869, had written of Johnstone’s philanthropy as witnessed in his generosity throughout his life to various needy causes. More specifically, of course, Comunn na Feinne collectively (and its members individually) engaged in immediate acts of charity. It would become repetitious, and tiresome, to simply provide a list of those occasions even where such acts can be identified. In many cases, although details are not given, we have the comment regarding an individual’s untrumpeted acts of charity. For example, although we are given few specifics we know that members such as Robert de Bruce Johnstone, Robert Shirra, Dr John Small, Mr Phillip Russell, Dr Baylie and many others, were liberal supporters of established charities, as well as *ad hoc* individual needy causes which arose from time to time. What the *Advertiser* of 10th January, 1916, said of Dr Small, that, “Of his charity he gave freely, but unostentatiously ...”, could be said of many of the people named above.

The Society’s volunteer charity work covers a wide range. It could involve, simply, the manning of events at the annual Highland Gathering thereby giving up one’s free hours to Comunn na Feinne activities. It could involve being part of Comunn na Feinne’s Concert Parties which took entertainment to areas outside Geelong itself where the people had no way of attending the Highland Games or any of the other of Comunn na Feinne’s multifarious public activities within the confines of Geelong itself. More often than not, these Concert parties involved directing the takings to a specific charitable cause such as the upkeep of the Orphanages at Geelong or to a charitable cause within the country town in which the concert was being staged. For example, we noted this earlier when the Comunn na Feinne troupe visited Camperdown and donated the concert takings to the fund to erect a library in that town. Local Geelong entertainers, including dancers, singers, musicians, and the obligatory ‘Scots’ comedian, from within the Comunn na Feinne ranks, gave of their time and talents as acts of ‘charity’.

Therefore, greater than their direct financial support, Comunn na Feinne made a widespread contribution to charity through the participation of its many members and supporters within community charitable organisations as office-bearers and members. A good example of Comunn na Feinne involvement in a charity event other than their own, can be seen in the Carniva held l on 18th July, 1915, on behalf of the, “district unemployed and distress fund.” This was organised by others in the community and, according to the *Advertiser’s* report the next day, Comunn na Feinne contributed to the day through providing pipe music and dancers. Comunn na Feinne office-bearer, William Plain M.L.A. also participated. Comunn na Feinne members also manned stalls on behalf of specific causes in Geelong such as that held on 16th March, 1917 in aid of the Geelong Hospital, as recorded in Dr W.R. Lang’s book, *Visions and Realities – A History of the Geelong Infirmary & Benevolent Asylum.*) With this form of participatory charity, therefore, we can catch a glimpse of the breadth of Comunn na Fein’s involvement over many community causes either as the Society as a whole or as individual members.

As previously mentioned, many volunteer groups existed as a result of needs within the community not being funded either by Local, State or Federal governments. For example, in the absence of such things as unemployment payments, child benefits for families, work for the dole schemes and government re-training programmes, it fell to volunteers and charities to fill those roles. There were, therefore, a plethora of charitable organisations throughout communities seeking to cover the needs of the underprivileged, the distressed, children without parents, street children, widows, the sick and the unemployed and such like. These organisations had to be staffed and financed by volunteers. A sample, therefore, of these charitable groups, where they can still be traced, can show the extent to which Comunn na Feinne members and supporters were involved as individuals as well as where Comunn na Feinne collectively was engaged. Of course, not all volunteers were associated with Comunn na Feinne or even motivated by that Society’s ‘vision’ for the community. We may never be sure what motivated different individuals to give of their time, their talents or their finances except to be aware that there was, for some, a strong Christian influence driving their service to others. It may have been a humanitarian impulse or an act of paternalism towards the disadvantaged in the lack of official local, state or federal professional welfare agencies at the time.

Thus, by considering the composition of a sample of the number of charitable groups at different times in Comunn na Feinne's history, especially that period when such groups, in the absence of official schemes, were more numerous than today, we can obtain a glimpse of the spread of Comunn na Feinne members and supporters throughout the community who were engaged with charitable organisations. Not all of these charities were so organised as to have their activities reported or their membership lists made public. Those that did make the newspapers of the day tended only to have their annual meetings or special occasions or fund-raising functions mentioned and even then, there were few details beyond, maybe, the main office-bearers being named. Within these limitations, however, it is still possible to get a reasonable sample of such bodies and some of the names of those who, as an 'act of charity', volunteered their time and energies to this type of activity. We have not considered in our sample those charity appeals which involved 'one-off' situations such as appeals on behalf of someone whose house had burned down, or who had been robbed and so on. Also, movements totally dependent on the need for the charitable donation of the time and energies of volunteers, such as the Fire Brigade and the voluntary Military groups, have been dealt with separately. This initial section on Comunn na Feinne and Charity, therefore, focusses more on what is probably regarded as a traditional understanding of 'acts of charity'.

The committee of the Geelong Protestant Orphanage, for example, included many names of those from Comunn na Feinne ranks as mentioned in the *Geelong Advertiser* of 28th January, 1869. Other members and supporters of Comunn na Feinne, identifiable from various annual reports and activities of charitable organisations, include Robert de Bruce Johnstone, George Wright, J. Angus Laird, James Smith, Robert Shirra, Dougal Rankin, Dr Alexander Thomson, Dr William Higston Baylie and Dr John Small, Church ministers such as Rev. Andrew Love, Rev. T. Mckenzie and politicians such as Alexander Fyfe and William Plain.

The Society held several events during the period of its annual Eisteddfod which it called Pleasant Sunday Afternoons. These were devoted to raising funds for various charities, as well as to providing interesting talks and music. According to the *Advertiser* of 3rd April, 1928, James Galbraith was responsible for the idea of devoting special Sundays during the course of the Eisteddfod each year to fund-raising for the Society's wide range of charitable work

A few years ago, James Galbraith, secretary of the Comunn na Feinne Elocutionary, and Musical Competitions, conceived the idea of utilizing the best of the talent produced from the Competitions on providing Sunday Afternoon concerts for the Geelong public. These, last year, were held at His Majesty's Theatre, and throughout the season they attracted large attendances. As a result, local charities benefited considerably.

The Society, as noted earlier, adopted a non-discriminatory policy regarding the charitable causes with which it became involved. For example, the support for the orphanages in town, Protestant and Roman Catholic, was even-handed. The *Carmichael Notes* provide many examples of this.

Communn na Feinne is deserving of every congratulation for providing Geelong people with such an elevating method of spending a Sabbath afternoon. The idea of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon is not new to Geelong, and the attendance yesterday revealed the pleasure that is derived from it. ... E.E. Wilson, the well-known Geelong Solicitor, was to have delivered an address, but unfortunately, he was called out of town. In his absence, the entertainment was almost entirely vocal, though one of the outstanding items was a recital by Jock Whidburn. The afternoon, as usual, was for charitable purposes, the allocation being in aid of the girls' section of the Protestant Orphanage and St Catherine's Orphanage.

As the Eisteddfod grew so too did the period of time over which it was spread. It went from days to weeks and then weeks to months. From an initial day or two when founded in 1912, Comunn na Feinne's annual musical and elocutionary competitions, by 1930, was extending over three months. The longer duration of the Eisteddfod allowed the Society to stage more Pleasant Sunday Afternoon charity collections and this allowed more funds to be collected and, as a result, to a wider range of charitable causes being benefitted.

During the musical and elocutionary competitions conducted by Comunn na Feinne, a substantial sum has been raised on behalf of the local charities. On several occasions, Pleasant Sunday Afternoons have been arranged, and the Society has taken up collections which have been handed over to the Hospital, Orphanages and the Limbless Soldiers' Association. Yesterday the Society promoted a sacred concert, and took up a collection of £20 for the Geelong Hospital.

Over the period of years when the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon sessions were conducted by Comunn na Feinne, the charities regularly supported included the two Geelong Orphanages, the Geelong and District Hospital, the Limbless Soldiers' Association and many individual cases of distress. Over the period of the Eisteddfod the sums raised could be quite large. For example, according to the

Advertiser of 2nd October 1927, during the period of the 1927 Eisteddfod it was announced that £200 had been raised and would be apportioned between the various charitable causes supported by Comunn na Feinne.

Comunn na Feinne was able to attract some prominent speakers and performers to take part in these affairs and this was highlighted at the 1928 event held in the Palais Royal on 17th June, 1928. For that particular Pleasant Sunday Afternoon gathering the Society had obtained Mr R.G. Menzies, future PM of Australia, as guest speaker, and Marjorie Lawrence as guest singer. The *Advertiser* commented, regarding the programme, that it should be particularly interesting with, Robert G. Menzies, “one of Melbourne’s leading young barristers”, the guest speaker, and Marjorie Lawrence singing, ‘My Heart is Weary’ and ‘In Questa Tomba’. William H. Roberts, violin selections and Pakington Street Methodist Church Choir of 35 voices, will also perform.

Charity and Social Conscience

It is difficult, sometimes, to neatly divide up Comunn na Feinne’s activities into separate boxes. For instance, it could view education in a traditional way but also see ‘education’ as taking delinquent boys or homeless children or working boys without guiding direction for their lives, and providing them with opportunities for life, with vocational training, with friends and with social support and so on. As we have noted with the Society’s wide understanding of the term ‘education’, so too its concept of ‘charity’, was also a broad one, and sometimes more nebulous than that which is measured purely in monetary terms. It was charitable, for example, to use one’s abilities to bring about peace and harmony within a community. It was charitable to work towards an educated people where none was excluded on the basis of background, opportunity or financial status. It was an act of ‘charity’ to educate a community into a consciousness of protection of the weak and powerless, and into service to others, and of tolerance. It was an act of ‘charity’ to recognize injustice and to do something about it. Here, then, was part of the understanding which Comunn na Feinne had of the term ‘charity’ and how this can help explain its involvement in so many social activities; its own and those of other bodies in Geelong.

Social Conscience and the Geelong Aborigines

Comunn na Feinne's involvement with the local Aborigines came much too late for the Society to have helped the survival of the original peoples in the Geelong district. The fatal 'first contacts' between settlers and the original peoples of the country and the many violent clashes which resulted, were mostly part of the past of the 1840s. Unfortunately, the contact between the Europeans and the Aborigines often proved fatal for the survival of the tradition way of life of these original peoples and, in many cases, the decline became part of the Comunn na Feinne 'story' as it relates to Geelong and district. The Society's involvement with the Aborigines was thus largely a caring one as regards sickness and the provision of clothes and food. There was an eager involvement of local Aborigines by their inclusion in the Procession to the grounds, and in the sports, on New Year's Day. The participation in activities designed to show off their own native skills with the spear and with the boomerang was well received by the spectators as was the participation of some (eg Dan dan Nook) in the normal Games, especially running and jumping, at which medals were won by Aborigines good enough to beat their European participants.

Some of the Society's office-bearers came from that class of settler who had obtained large tracks of land both around Geelong and further afield. Such land, of course, would originally have been part of traditional Aboriginal lands but, as far as the personalities such as Phillip Russell, John Bell and the Chirnsides were concerned, there is no story of violent acquisition although those 'owners' from whom the likes of Russell subsequently bought the land, may or may not have been party to the original violent seizure of that land.

There is little doubt that Comunn na Feinne was genuine in its concern for the few remaining Aborigines in and around Geelong, and to describe it as a form of nineteenth century paternalism does not lessen the sincerity of this concern. This in no way excuses what had happened in the past or, misguidedly or not, for the very real, but clumsy, conscientious efforts to care and respect those remaining representatives of the Aboriginal families still surviving. We hope that the few examples we were able to glean from Mr Carmichael's Notes, as well as those from the contemporary newspaper accounts, will have provided the reader with a glimpse, at least, of Comunn na Feinne's 'social conscience' towards the original peoples of Geelong and surrounding areas.

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There is probably a tendency, today, to regard Charity in the form of collection tins being shaken in our face and unsolicited ‘dinner-time’ phone calls from organizations representing every possible ‘good’ cause under the sun! Comunn na Feinne, while it was always sensitive to distressed groups and individuals in society whose care required money donations, sought, more than the act of dropping coins in a tin, to bring about a ‘culture’ of caring. In other words, Comunn na Feinne saw the real solution to the distressed and disadvantaged in society as lying in creating a community whose members would, by their behaviour and attitudes, influence, for the better, every aspect of that community. To fully understand how wide was this concept, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the Society’s vision of a balanced community. While some of this is covered in the section on Comunn na Feinne’s role in formal education, and also below, it is worthwhile, here, to see some of its other ‘liberal’ notions of how society should look and function.

Over the years, the total amount raised by its various official charity fund-raising efforts was considerable. However, we should be aware, and has already been noted, raising funds through its various concerts and other public activities was the least of Comunn na Feinne’s contributions to charity. The Society saw that the true extent of its ‘charitable’ work lay in ‘educating’ individuals to live out, in their lives, the principles which constituted Comunn na Feinne’s grand ‘vision.’ Those who used their positions in all forms of government for the benefit of the whole society, those who did their best at their jobs, those who developed their talents whereby they could be more useful to others and those who worked to ensure that no group in society was neglected or considered worthless; this was the true extent of Comunn na Feinne’s contribution to ‘Charity’.

This narrative of Comunn na Feinne’s history is not intended to give an impression that it was the only organization in Geelong involved with charitable causes. The purpose of the foregoing is simply to demonstrate how Comunn na Feinne, with very few financial resources, was able, through its members and supporters and their participation in the wide range of charitable organizations in the community, to exert so wide an influence and exposure of its ‘vision’. Thus, while money was raised to support the immediate needs of orphans, widows and the distressed, the unemployed and the destitute, Comunn na Feinne saw that the improvement of the individual, and the lasting benefit

this would have upon society, was the greatest contribution it could make. It was this which was encapsulated in Comunn na Feinne's Charter and which was identified in the early sections of this book.

As previously mentioned, Comunn na Feinne sought to avoid any political bias in its activities. State Premiers and members of the State parliament, Federal Prime Ministers and members of Federal parliament, from all sides of political persuasion, were welcomed to the annual Highland Gatherings, the regular Concerts, to the Educational activities, to the Eisteddfodau and to all of the other events staged by the Society. Its members and supporters came from all sides of social and political ranks, and it sought through these individuals, as we have said, to carry into effect its social agenda by acting out in their lives the ideals which characterised the Society.

In considering Comunn na Feinne's wide definition of what it regarded as 'charity,' and the background of many of its leaders, office-bearers, members and supporters, it could be argued that a tension must have existed throughout its history. How to achieve what the Society regarded as a 'harmonious' community may not have produced a consensus 'answer'. Differences between conservative forces and the progressive liberal reformists regarding what constituted a harmonious community, must surely have produced at least some 'sparks'. However, to view Comunn na Feinne in this way is, first of all, to misunderstand the Scottish nature and, secondly, to misinterpret what the Society meant by the terms "usefulness" and "harmony."

While detractors described associations like Comunn na Feinne as existing for nothing more than Celtic puffery or for nostalgic self-indulgence, dreaming of the rivers, the glens and the mountains and toasting the "king o'er the water," which realities had, in fact, formed little of the context out of which the majority of Scots' settlers actually had come, such observations dwelt more in the imagination of the critics than in the actual function and makeup of these associations. Despite caricatures to the contrary, Scots were, and are, a sentimental race able to cry into their drams at the words of some pawky songs such as 'Grannie's Hielan' Hame,' or 'My Ain Folk'. Canny they may be, but they also can be stirred to irrationalism, on occasions, when hearing the words of 'Scots wha hae' or the song, 'Flower of Scotland,' or the music from 'Braveheart,' or when dreaming of

Scotland winning the Football World Cup - preferably beating England in the final! But anyone who imagines that there is nothing more to a Scot than nostalgia and sentiment has not scratched very far into the surface of his character. Dr John Small, was the President of Comunn na Feinne (1902-1916), and in an obituary following his death, it was said of him that: "In several controversial public matters he took a decided stand, but his evident sincerity and genial disposition compelled the respect of those who differed with him ..."

This is the dichotomy apparent in the Scottish character and in the movements which they formed; it is reflected in their actions and in their thinking. Dr Small, it was further reported, "was essentially Scotch, and combined the characteristics of the Scottish temperament in a marked degree; loyalty, determination, dislike of humbug and a keen sense to detect the shallow and superficial. Like a true Scot he possessed a deeply religious nature," although without necessarily having a commitment to any denomination or institutionalized religion. Senator William Plain said, in one of his addresses, that a Scotsman should always expect to experience set-backs and controversy as he would always express his mind whatever the circumstances, whoever the audience and whatever the outcomes. It is this series of apparent contradictions characterising Scots which is reflected in their organizations. Sentimental, but combative, sociable but prickly as a 'Scotch Thistle', 'canny' but a willing subscriber to 'lost causes', and 'religious' but apt to engage in 'splitting hairs' rather than subscribing to any unanimous, dogmatic theological assertion - unless it is his own! A count of the number of presbyterian denominations in every place where Scots have settled in the world attests to the truth of this latter proposition.

From the 1850s, momentum from the exertions of a group of 'radical Scots' spear-headed the reform movement towards a liberal democracy in the Victorian parliament. Political reforms such as universal franchise, secret ballot, representative elections, payment of members and so on were, according to Geoffrey Serle, in *The Golden Age*, his history of the Gold period, significant achievements of the period. Such social and political reforms were the result, largely, of 'group' activity in which, he says, a loose alliance of 'radical Scots' played a leading part. However, Comunn na Feinne's commitment to the creation of a united, a just, an equal and a harmonious community still lay, to some extent, grounded in individual behaviour. Its approach to social problems

continued mainly to lie, as we have shown, in the belief that the necessary social change would derive from the individual effort of members and supporters, imbued with the Society's social philosophy who, using their influence, would bring about such reforms as were needed or would provide the necessary support for the needy cases in the community. However, the Society did not excuse itself from being a part of social change movements and its members could be found in such agitations as that for the 8 Hour Day, Wages disputes, unemployment agitations and the conscription issue. The Society's attitude to social problems, such as long hours or low wages or unemployment, was to consider these as 'unjust' situations and as potentially leading to disparities within the community but which were amenable to change through individuals acting as a sort of 'leaven' in the community.

In its 'charity' work, and its social reformist attitudes, Comunn na Feinne was confronting the 'evils' of capitalism and exploitation while many of its own members, as businessmen and employers, may have been responsible for creating such inequalities. The Society championed the cause of the best education only to create some of the worst examples of elitism in Private Schools, as well as the narrow denominationalism of some Church schools. Those with talent, as with the 'lad o' pairs' in Scottish life, should have had every opportunity of developing that talent and this should have led to a challenge to the exclusive nature of higher education at the time, and since. It did not, of course, and there continues to be a nexus between 'private' (i.e. the "best") schools and entrance to the 'better' universities. There is a huge disparity between the teaching and the presence of facilities available to the students at the 'private' and the more "exclusive" schools, and those of underfunded and poorly equipped state schools, especially those situated in poorer working class suburbs.

In its concern for those boys and girls falling between the cracks and ending up as street children or unemployed youths with delinquent streaks, Comunn na Feinne was targeting the neglect of authorities, both local and state, but ignoring the economic policies of some of the foremost capitalists of the time who were part of the cause of such unemployment and poverty.

The "godly commonwealth" always falls at the first 'hurdle', which is the fact that fallible men and women inhabit it!

Social Conscience and Irish and Highland Distress.

The Society was also willing to turn its attention to areas of need overseas. It had been active, as we have seen, in contributing and raising funds for such causes as the Wallace Monument Fund and the Edinburgh University Gaelic Chair Fund. Such was the case, too, regarding causes relating to the poor social conditions in the Scottish Highlands and Islands and in Ireland. But in these issues, Comunn na Feinne went further than its usual appeal for money, and it entered into criticism of the ‘system’ which allowed such ‘evils’. It recognized that conditions of poverty and hardship were not without their social consequences, no matter where such hardships were being experienced. Thus, Comunn na Feinne did not shrink back from denouncing what it saw as the heartless landowners and their managers in the Scottish Highlands, as well as the land system responsible for much of this distress among their poorer countrymen. The Society had spear-headed charitable movements from the time of its formation and its members, supporters and the general public, had proven to be generous in their financial giving and in their actions in support of such causes. Although its immediate concern was to help alleviate the poverty and distress being suffered by certain populations within Ireland and the Scottish Highlands, it was the loss, too, of those peoples’ sense of community which Comunn na Feinne saw as the greater ‘evil’. The solution, therefore, did not lie solely in fund-raising or with Highland estate holders encouraging (enforcing) indiscriminate emigration from the poverty-stricken areas.

Scots and others in Geelong, through Comunn na Feinne, from its beginning and throughout the nineteenth century and later, had made donations to appeals for the relief of distress in the Highlands. This need became acute at certain times, especially during, and following WW1, as noted in another section. The *Age* of 31st January, 1916, noted that Comunn na Feinne had raised £32, “as a donation towards the fund for the relief of distress in the Highlands caused by heads of families having fallen in the war.” Generally, such charity was done without fanfare or comment.

On certain occasions, however, Comunn na Feinne spoke out, as an organization, against what it regarded as a situation of injustice as the causal factor in poverty among people. Therefore, when it did stray into the area of controversy, it did so, more often than not, as the champion of those

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oppressed with the burdens of poverty, unemployment and hunger, which the Society regarded as ‘evils’ brought about by those with ‘power’ in society. Such was the case, for example, regarding the social conditions in Scotland and Ireland. It was not the first occasion upon which Comunn na Feinne had raised its voice on behalf of the Highlanders and their way of life which was being destroyed by the greed of uncaring landowners and their factors. The Society, on 18th November, 1899, reported on the events involving the McDonald Clan Ranald in Scotland. There is an unmistakable contempt expressed for the land situation, and the land owners, in the Highlands which had displaced so many of their ancestors. The Geelong Advertiser, for example, on 18th November, 1899, provided an example which Comunn na Feinne used to express its outrage at the unjust social and political system which could allow this to take place.

The announcement is made that the change is to be arranged because sheep-farming is unprofitable. This estate has been in the possession of the McDonald Clan Ranald, for 300 years. During the latter part of its occupancy it had been largely given up to sheep farming after the Battle of Culloden, 1746, or as long as sheep farming had been practiced in the Highlands. Now it is to be given up to sport as the only means of producing a revenue. Either the estate must be ill-adapted for sheep or there are rich people in the old country who are willing to pay very rich prices for sport.

A later example of Comunn na Feinne’s protest against the unjust system which allowed this ‘injustice’ to take place was also related to this example of “the Highland Clearances”, but in a contemporary, twentieth century, setting. The news, carried in the British press, had drawn attention to the sale of twenty-three “large Scottish estates.” Comunn na Feinne’s comments were prefaced by what might be described as an over-romantic view of the Highlands under the Clan system. But what was not ‘romantic’ or ‘sentimental,’ was the sense of outrage it expressed, with barely controlled anger, at what it considered was the continuing injustice being visited upon the Highlands and its people, especially by those who would put idle sport above the proper use of the land, the well-being of the people and the survival of community. The *Carmichael Notes* for 1924 manage to capture the Society’s fury at the behavior of the land owners who had no interest in, or knowledge of, the traditional system or of the people themselves who inhabited these areas.

For one who knows several of them in the Highlands, this wholesale disposal of land is productive of many sad thoughts. Estates which only a couple of generations ago were sold by their owners, in whose families they had been for two or more centuries, have since changed

hands more than once; and the purchasers, foreign to the soil, its people, and traditions, now seek to pass them on to others, having lost interest in them, or being unable to maintain them under the altered conditions of society.

Comunn na Feinne's view of the foregoing situation traced the decline of the older system, and the breaking up of social cohesion, as being due to forces outside the control of the Highlanders themselves. The *Carmichael Notes* (1924) provide part of the Society's analysis as to why Highland society broke down. The once strong system of 'chiefs' and 'clans' forming a united front against enemies, had undergone an almost total breakdown following the defeat, at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, of those Highlanders who came out, under the prince, Charles Stewart ('Bonnie Prince Charlie'), in the unsuccessful attempt to regain the throne for his father, James 11. Although the 'clan system' had been weakening for many years, Culloden and its aftermath of vicious Government proscriptions against the Highlands and the Highlanders and their culture, spelled the end of traditional Highland society.

Now there seems to be no cohesion between any group of men except what self-interest or Governmental regulation enforces. Thus, the ownership of land in the Highlands of Scotland represented far more than it does now that land has apparently become merely the playground of the rich, who, as tenants for short periods, have not the least interest in the folk born and dwelling thereon.

In view of Comunn na Feinne's grand 'vision' of establishing and maintaining community harmony, it was the social factor, the breakdown of community cohesion within Highland society, which it regarded as the greatest evil wrought by the breaking up of these Highland estates.

The break-up of so much that cannot and never will be replaced is grievous. It brings hardship upon those whose homes are sold as part and parcel of land to strangers, in whose eyes their interests are of less importance than the wild creatures upon it, the possible slaughter of which is set forth as the principle inducement to purchase. Were such newcomers even to spend their money among these folk, or in the neighbouring towns and villages, much good might result; but when they rely upon London, and even Paris, to provide them with the luxuries they deem indispensable, very little benefit is gained by those amongst whom they have come.

In the end, there was little of substance that could be done by Comunn na Feinne other than be part of the general protest being voiced by Scottish organizations in Australia, including that of the Victorian Scottish Union. This was to lead to movements to bring many of the distressed to

Australia through various immigration schemes. Common na Feinne played its part in some of these projects and individual members acted as sponsors to many of those ‘displaced’ Scots, arranging places for them to stay and for jobs to go to when they arrived in Australia. It is to be regretted that just when the need for such a migrant welfare organisation was at its greatest, Comunn na Feinne was already in a state of decline.

Volunteer Movements as ‘Charity’

All of the foregoing, which we might regard as falling under the heading of ‘direct charity’, took place concomitantly with other Comunn na Feinne voluntary social activities representing the Society’s wider understanding and use of the term ‘charity’.

Although perhaps less taken up in these days, volunteerism is still very much a needed service within our local, and wider, communities. A list of organizations and the services they provide can be found on every community notice board. Such volunteer groups are made up of men and women who give of their time, their energy and, often, of their financial resources, and can be found operating, for example, in Meals on Wheels, School Breakfast Clubs, Youth Groups, Rotary and Lions organizations, reading to the blind, Op Shops and across the whole spectrum of junior sports in such areas as Little Athletics, Netball and Junior Football.

Many of the main functions of society in Australia, involving professionally qualified men and women, are, by necessity, conducted by a virtual multitude of official government bodies in the various States and Territories of Australia. Taxes enable governments (local, state and federal), to finance the relevant utilities and to staff them with professionally qualified and trained men and women. Thus, protection of life and property, the defence of the country, the medical, educational, welfare and social needs, are just a few of the main areas provided by governments that, at one time, were carried out by volunteers. Thus, protection of our country is in the hands of a fully professional army, navy and air force. Fully professional Fire Brigades, Orphanages, and Hospitals, staffed by fully paid ‘professionals’, are also a basic part of our society.

This is not, of course, to discount the roles men and women still play as volunteers in such things as the Citizens Military Force (CMF), rural fire-fighting services, life-saving clubs and the many hospital

and welfare auxiliaries. However, generally speaking, most of the major functions of running and keeping safe the communities in which we live are in the hands of professional bodies and individuals and, ultimately, the government.

But looking back at the period before governments provided most of these local and national needs, we can see how important volunteer welfare and protective groups were for community safety and well-being. This was particularly so in new, immigrant societies, as existed in Victoria in the mid-nineteenth century. Before, and for a long time following the incorporation of new towns and cities, there was a strong reliance on volunteers both to initiate and to man the many community utilities mentioned above. So it was with Geelong and, when we consider the Charters of organizations such as Comunn na Feinne, we can get some understanding of why their members were involved in so many of these community bodies.

Comunn na Feinne at Geelong enjoined its members to live out its Charter in practical ways, and its members and general supporters gradually expanded their efforts. In 1903, at a Society Meeting on 26th June, for example, the retiring President of Comunn na Feinne, Neil Campbell, was commended by the incoming President, Dr John Small, “that it was during [Campbell’s] term as President that the Cameron Charity Movement was instituted.” The extent of Comunn na Feinne’s involvement, and influence, covered nearly every community utility and ‘good cause’ in their town. This ranged as we show below, from what we might call direct charity where money is collected for a ‘cause’, to that of the support and the actual ‘staffing’ of the essential community bodies such as volunteer fire brigades and local volunteer ‘military’ forces, and all the way to town ‘cleaners.’

Concern for the poor, the homeless and the unemployed led to a public meeting on 30th June, 1903 at which discussion was held as to the means of relieving the distress among the needy people of Geelong. Councillor Anderson had his suggestion of a Carnival to raise funds, accepted, and among various participants being suggested, it was apparently taken for granted that, with their past record, Comunn na Feinne would be involved. Cr. Anderson announced, in the *Advertiser* of 1st July, almost as a matter of course that, “the assistance of Comunn na Feinne could be depended upon.”

Important work was carried out, too, in the area of education in all of its forms. Other work, such as support for medical bodies, establishing and financially maintaining orphanages, Aboriginal welfare and virtually every sphere of need involving the distressed and the disadvantaged in the town, and beyond it, were areas where the role of volunteers was essential. Other, and less tangible influences were those which spoke about promoting community harmony.

Comunn na Feinne was probably the body *extraordinaire* at the time of its formation, when it comes to identifying the spirit and philosophy of volunteerism in a society. By generally charting its activities, for example, we can demonstrate that its aim was to encompass the welfare not just of its members, nor even just of those who were Scots but, the whole of the community. Religious denomination, nationality, colour or race did not enter into Comunn na Feinne's deliberations when identifying need and in serving the community. Its core set of benevolent aims can thus be seen, in one form or another, as central to the motivations which precipitated the formation of many of the voluntary bodies throughout Geelong and district.

The wider role, whether educational, charitable, practical and beneficial, which organizations such as Comunn na Feinne would perform was, more often than not, enshrined in their respective constitutions. While we cannot provide the history of the formation and career of all of the Volunteer bodies with which Comunn na Feinne was involved, we can see how the influence of leading personalities, whose activities often pre-dated the formation of Comunn na Feinne itself, is present in the 'philosophy' which determined the shape and purpose of the Geelong Society.

Dr Baylie, for example, entered local politics as a more effective way of raising, and solving, local social concerns. When Geelong was incorporated as a town on 12th March, 1849, a town council was elected the following year, and Dr Baylie was elected one of the councillors. The Council first met on 9th February, 1850. Among the list of 'to do' projects (roads, streets, etc.), a chronicler of Geelong's History, Walter Randolph Brownhill, in his *History of Geelong*, published in 1955, writes Dr Baylie was chiefly responsible for the inclusion of £100,000 for sewers." He referred to "pestilential disease" in Geelong being due to lack of proper drainage and underground sewerage. The presence

of stagnant water in cellars and vaults of shops and other buildings, he argued, was, “a menace to the whole community.”

It was this concern for the well-being of “the whole community” which lay at the heart of Dr Baylie’s activism; and it was this same concern which gave impetus to Comunn na Feinne’s promotion of so many community causes and which made it a natural home for Dr Baylie and many others sharing his vision. It is certainly no coincidence that Dr Baylie, a committee-man of Comunn na Feinne should, in turn, infect the Society with his enthusiasm for many of the projects which he advocated, these, in turn, becoming Comunn na Feinne concerns. Such concerns included the protection of the town from dangerous fires and the defence of the town from enemy forces, as well as the protection of children without parents or family support.

The Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade

Dr Baylie’s enthusiasm towards the well-being of Geelong can clearly be seen in the formation of a Volunteer Fire Brigade for the town. After being elected Mayor, Dr Baylie had called a public meeting to discuss the formation of a Volunteer Fire Brigade. At this meeting, held 3rd March 1854, a Committee was formed of which Baylie was elected Secretary. The *Advertiser* reported the next day that Bailey promoted this project with vigour, so much was fire a present and recurring danger to the town and its businesses, as well as to the population. Baylie went straight to hip pocket sensitivity in pressing the issue. He played on the fears of businessmen on the council by dramatically highlighting the financial risks for these councillors. His point was graphically made and starkly emphasized in the *Advertiser* account which quotes Baylie; “If a fire were to break out in the town, on such a night as the present, how many of you who are in affluence would find themselves paupers in the morning?”

A week later, reported the *Advertiser* of 11th March, a further public meeting was called and a permanent committee was formed. This consisted almost entirely of those men who would become the core of Comunn na Feinne, including Archibald Douglas who was to be its first President.

On the evening of March 10th, 1854, a public meeting was held at the Masonic Hall, to take into consideration the unprotected state of the town in the event of fires breaking out, and to adopt steps to remedy the same, when the following resolutions were adopted:

That a permanent Fire Brigade Committee be established for conducting the correspondence and raising the necessary funds for the purchase of the town engine, for appropriating the same, and generally for facilitating the efficient formation and working of the Fire Brigade, to consist of nine gentlemen, viz., the Mayor, Messrs. A. Fyfe, G. Wright, R. C. Young, W. J. Gilchrist, John Richardson, John Wood, J. L. Bailey, and A. Douglass.

Such was the passion with which Baylie, and other advocates, pressed the matter, reported the *Advertiser* on the 21st March, that enough funds were raised to purchase the necessary apparatus without delay. Those volunteering for the new fire brigade were enthusiastic and none moreso that Dr Baylie himself who, wrote the *Advertiser* for 20th April, 1855, was elected the Brigade's first Foreman (Captain).

Such were the resolutions on which we started; the results, so far as your company are concerned, were as follows: a few days later, another public meeting was held, at which several citizens volunteered to serve as firemen, and signed the roll, and on the evening of April 26th, these gentlemen first met in a company, adopted the designation of Engine Company, No. 1, and elected Mr. J. R. Bailey, as foreman, Mr. George Wright, as deputy foreman, and Mr. John Richardson as secretry.

When Newtown became a separate municipality in 1858, it followed shortly with its own Volunteer Fire Brigade. The Geelong West Voluntary Fre Brigade was formed on 12th August, 1875, shortly after it was raised to a municipality in May of that year.

The close relationship which Comunn na Feinne had with the Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade (and with the others as they were established in the various municipalities), can be witnessed in the provision of the manpower, drawn largely from members of Comunn na Feinne, and the financial support which the Society and its members and supporters gave to such volunteer bodies. But there was another form, too, in which assistance was given to such volunteer utilities by Comunn na Feinne. This grew out of another aspect of the Society's 'philosophy'. This support was in the form of 'education,' in a less specific sense of that term as generally understood when applied to school education.

Thus, for groups such as the Fire Brigade, the aim would be for the volunteer firemen to become more useful to the community which they served by becoming better skilled in fire-fighting. Comunn na Feinne provided means of 'educating' the fire brigade, through competitions and exercises and demonstrations, by which means they could hone their skills. This, in turn, would

render them more efficient and, therefore, of greater service to their respective communities. It is important, when considering Comunn na Feinne's educative role in the community, to realize that it was founded on three important ways of viewing education.

Firstly, it interpreted education in the widest possible sense of that term. Comunn na Feinne delineated 'education' as that which had the aim of improving one's utility to the community. Secondly, it viewed education as a 'practical' exercise no matter in what form that 'education' took place; thus, learning the practical skills of handling a fireman's hose was as much use in a practical sense as learning the basics of grammar within the classroom of a school. It was not the case of one being of a 'higher' order than the other but, rather, the context within which the knowledge was used.

Thirdly, the goal of 'real' education lay not in any selfish benefit the individual derived from it but, rather, that the 'educated' individual become as a leaven in the immediate, and in the wider, community. One was truly 'educated', therefore, when one's utility to the community was fully expressed in whatever role the individual was engaged.

It is also important to see that, although Comunn na Feinne was formed in 1856, the spirit of philanthropy and community building, which characterized its charter, obviously existed before that date. This is clearly seen when we view the actions of many individuals who would join Comunn na Feinne as its foundation members and office-bearers. Many of these men in Geelong, such as Dr Baylie, Mr George Wright, Dr Alexander Thomson, Archibald Douglas, Robert Shirra, Alexander Fyfe and James Harrison, as already noted earlier, had been involved in social activism for some years and when the Society was formed in 1856, they carried this brand of 'activism' with them when they became members. Thus, when we look at the formation of Comunn na Feinne, and when we consider the extensive range of its activities and social activism, it is in knowing the background of those involved as office-bearers and members, and the causes to which they were devoted pre-Comunn na Feinne's founding, that we can understand the 'how' and 'why' of such a movement. They formed, as it were, a 'collective conscience' which helped provide the philosophic underpinning of the wide range of activities, educational, sporting, social, charitable etc., with which the Society became involved.

The Society's three main concepts of how it viewed education determined to a certain extent how it framed its programme for the annual Highland Gathering. Not only did utilities such as fire brigades and volunteer military bodies appear as part of the general entertainment, but they also featured in a series of competitive events. Such events were designed to improve the men and the functions of the relevant body and to 'educate' them into the better use of their equipment and in techniques of operating their machines all for the community's wellbeing.

From the earliest of days, therefore, we can see the evolutionary nature of Comunn na Feinne itself. As it developed, it provided new and more community-oriented events to achieve its purpose. Its membership increasingly played a prominent role in 'manning' voluntary groups and, often, in helping in the formation of these groups. Although such bodies as the Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade and the Geelong Voluntary Rifle Brigade, had been established before the formation of Comunn na Feinne itself, many of those involved in these voluntary community utilities moved effortlessly into Comunn na Feinne. They seamlessly adopted that Society's 'philosophy' and, indeed, it was Comunn na Feinne's selfless attitude towards raising the educational, social and welfare character of the community, through voluntary help, which attracted many to it, such as we saw earlier with James Smith.

A report in the late 1840s that the British Government was intending to send convicts to Port Phillip brought large protests, especially in Melbourne and Geelong. Drs W.H. Baylie and Alexander Thomson were prominent members and spokesmen of the loud local anti-transportation movement opposing such a government proposal. Baylie took a leading part in Geelong in organizing, for example, large protest meetings at the Theatre Royal, Geelong, on 22nd March 1849, which the *Geelong Advertiser* covered in its pages the following day. He was also involved in further demonstrations in 1854 relating to convict labour, when he was Mayor of Geelong. The use of a prison hulk, *Sacramento*, moored in Corio Bay for a time, whose 'prisoners' were used as a work force in the reion, was vigorously opposed. This was interpreted by the Geelong folk as a step towards having convicts transported to their colony. Thus, again, the flag of resistance was raised and 1,200 residents of Geelong gathered in Market Square to discuss ways and means of, "preventing the

influx of criminals.” A huge platform was erected in the middle of Market Square from where Baylie addressed the large crowd. In a pugnacious speech, he said that a fresh attempt was being made to “pour a deluge of convicts from Van Diemen’s Land into Victoria ...”. As well as having an evil effect upon the town and its people, it would also have the effect, if not prevented, “of depriving the working men of earning an honest competency.”

They would follow the normal law-abiding course of action but, if no satisfaction to their protests was forthcoming, said Dr Baylie, “we must look to our own resources, for determined we are to stop the inundation of crime.” To great cheers he continued, saying if the Government did not take action then, loyal as they were, the people of Geelong would take whatever action was necessary, “to save the country from absolute ruin and misery.”

Another speaker, Rev Andrew Love of St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church and, later, an active member of Comunn na Feinne, gave his opinion that the Government’s policy had turned Victoria into a veritable “Sodom and Gomorrah” and though he was loyal to the Crown, this loyalty was half-hearted, “when the social and moral existence of a country was put upon the stake.”

Mr George Wright, who, later, also became a prominent member of Comunn na Feinne, according to the *Geelong Advertiser* of 31st October 1854 went even further in his support of the resolutions condemning the decision to allow so-called ‘reformed’ convicts into their colony. Their decision at this rally to support the anti-convict resolution, he said, passed a judgment on the Downing Street clique in the same way as they would have “assessed a blanket and pronounced it mouldy.” He went further, and incited the Governor, Sir Charles Hotham, to defy the Home Government. The Governor had to realize that the State of Victoria, “had a jury of 200,000 men to a judge him.” Was the voice of such a multitude to be disregarded, and Sir Charles Hotham be seen to bow down, like Nebuchadnezzar of old, to the golden image, and lick the dust of the feet of the magnates of Downing-street. If he acted as he ought to do, he will instantly say that he will carry out no such instructions, but to go to the people in the honesty of their hearts in this question. There is a precedent for his so doing. Mr La Trobe, in 1849, sent away the *Randolph** from their shores when her cargo was one of convicts from the English Governments.”

* [This took place during the great anti-transportation campaign of the 1840s.]

What is relevant here, as far as the history of Comunn na Feinne is concerned, is that most of the main speakers at this meeting, as with other meetings as we have seen above, were later to assume a leading part in Comunn na Feinne. Men such as Dr Baylie, Rev Andrew Love, Mr Alexander Fyfe, Mr George Wright, Mr James Harrison, Mr John Riddoch, Mr Robert Shirra and Mr Archibald Douglas all feature as Members, Office-bearers and supporters of the Society and all had been active in the same social causes. The concern of these activists, for the shaping of society in a particular form, was thus carried with them into Comunn na Feinne. In general terms, their activities might be termed as advocating, ‘a liberal-radical’ approach to social reform, although it must be pointed out that Comunn na Feinne avoided party politicking within its body and it had politicians of every colour as members. However, the foregoing behavior of such foundational members explains that Society’s vision for the community and the practical application of how this could be realized. When we consider Comunn na Feinne’s concept of ‘charity’ some of these ‘practical’ aims will become clearer.

The Geelong Orphanages

Dr Baylie was one social activist who, as already noted regarding a town fire brigade, identified the social causes which Comunn na Feinne later championed. He, and a group of other like-minded local campaigners, wrote the *Advertiser* on 6th May, 1854, had obtained a promise from Victoria’s state government of a grant of land for the purpose of erecting an Orphanage at Geelong. His appeal to the public was stark and poignant. In his role as Magistrate he too often saw the result of the number of deserted children brought before him day after day – “some starving, some found living in sheds covered with filth and vermin”, and it was out of concern for these children that he called upon those from “every class and creed,” to give as their means allowed to support his appeal for the building of an Orphanage, “to save the fatherless and friendless children from want, disease, and crime.”

He headed this campaign, which included some others who, later, also became central to Comunn na Feinne’s social programme. This group appealed to the broader community, but especially those with the means, “to give the movement an initial boost.” (Brownhill, p273)

With the approach to the State government for a grant of land having been successful, Baylie, as the Geelong Mayor, and like-minded reformers, again held a public gathering of townspeople. At this public meeting, on 5th May, 1854, Baylie called “for the adoption of measures for the erection of an Orphanage Asylum on the land granted by the Government.” A subscription list was opened with the promise to report back shortly to assess the amount raised. Within a matter of a few weeks, £4,400 had been raised and the building proceeded, the foundation stone being laid, appropriately, by Baylie on 14th March, 1855.

The concern for the homeless, abused and neglected children, and for their education, was a continuing one for Comunn na Feinne, from its inception. It practiced a policy, in its charitable work, as in its other activities, of non-discrimination. This was clearly seen in its support for both Orphanages (the Protestant one and the Roman Catholic one), and its many acts of kindness to the children of both institutions. It can also be seen in the harmony the Society promoted between it and the St Patrick’s Society as well as with other denominations. It can also be seen in its non-discriminatory attitude to everything it did. Schools of all, and of no denominational affiliation, for example, were included in the Society’s school examination competitions. The Roman Catholic community was welcomed into the Society as competitors, performers and as members. The annual Highland Games, almost from inception, carried Irish events such as dancing, Irish pipes and singing.

It was disappointing, therefore, that in its work regarding the orphaned and deserted children the issue of denominationalism should be raised. Although the Orphanage, as with the Comunn na Feinne itself, was open to all children, regardless of denomination or nationality, the Roman Catholic Church, sadly, refused to allow orphans, and needy children of its denominational persuasion, “on conscientious grounds”, to be part of this refuge. This led, therefore, to the construction, again with the help of the whole community, writes Brownhill, of another Orphanage but, this time reserved for Roman Catholic children alone, and this was opened in 1857. In 1862, to indicate the distinction to those outside, the Geelong Orphan Asylum became known as the Protestant Orphanage, while the Roman Catholic institution was named St Augustine’s.

Thus, we can see from the background of such men as Dr Baylie who were prominent in social causes and who later become members and office-bearers in the Society, that they had already been involved in activity to benefit the community. Such men had “cut their teeth” on important reform and colonial causes in the years preceding the formation of Comunn na Feinne. The Society, therefore, traded to some extent, in certain areas of its concerns and activities, on the legacy of reform and liberal-radical attitudes which such men as those mentioned above represented and brought with them into the Society. In other words, it hit the ground running.

Comunn na Feinne and Voluntaryism 1. Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade

From the beginning of the 1859 Games, it became obvious that among the events staged by the Highland Gathering were several involving Fire Fighting techniques and others which took a military or at least a para-military shape. As well as providing entertainment for the spectators, emphasis by Comunn na Feinne was placed on providing the means whereby such groups through competing exercises could improve their efficiency and their familiarity with their equipment. In this, we see a further evolution of the nature of the Highland Gatherings. However, as we come to see the overall importance and the wide definition of ‘education’ given by Comunn na Feinne, the use of the Highland Gatherings as a means of improving volunteer community utilities becomes a logical outworking of their charter.

One of the early additions to the Highland Games list of events was that of competitions and demonstrations involving the Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade. As we have shown, this utility predated the founding of Comunn na Feinne. It was instigated in 1854-55 by Dr Baylie and other concerned townspeople many of whom, like Dr Baylie himself, became part of Comunn na Feinne following its formation in 1856. The Society had a very close relationship with the Volunteer Fire Brigade, having members serving as Volunteer Firemen, as well as competitions instituted at the Games to improve the efficiency of the performance of the men and the equipment.

Hot on the heels of the celebrations already undertaken throughout January 1859 (which, as we have already noted, included the Burns’ centennial celebration), came the dinner for the Geelong

Volunteer Fire Brigade on the 18th February, 1859. One of the early additions to the Highland Games list of events was that of competitions and demonstrations involving the Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade. As we have shown, although this utility had pre-dated the formation of Comunn na Feinne, it was formed by men who later were to form the backbone of this Society.

The Geelong Volunteer Firemen also took part in wider competitions involving Volunteer Fire Brigades from other population centres who, following the example of Comunn na Feinne at Geelong, had established similar Highland Societies in their own areas and similar Volunteer Fire Brigades. Thus, Ballarat, Buninyong and Clunes could each boast of its own Games and also of its own Volunteer fire brigade. Inter-rural centre cooperation, and friendly competition, led to Annual Volunteer Fire Brigade festivals. These events, while having a social function as well as promoting friendly rivalry, also had the more serious educative aim of improving fire-fighting techniques, disseminating the new technology and producing efficient and more able firemen.

In addition to the various events staged at the New Year's Day Games by the Society involving Geelong's own Volunteer Fire Brigade, there were, quite apart from the New Year's Day Games, inter-town Volunteer Fire Brigade competitions, sporting contests and social get-togethers at different times of the year. For example, just a few weeks after Comunn na Feinne's New Year's Day Gathering, an inter-brigade social dinner was held on 18th February, 1859 and was attended by one hundred guests (including ladies, for the first time!). The dinner itself had been preceded by competitions including English games as well as Gaelic ones. Archibald Douglas, President of Comunn na Feinne, and Alexander Fyfe M.L.A., representative of the Comunn na Feinne, the Geelong Rifle Corps, and members of Geelong and district Volunteer Fire Brigades all distinguished themselves at the various events.

The Ballarat Fire Brigade, which had also taken part in these latest sporting competitions, was toasted and its Captain Burrows hoped that such opportunities would continue whereby Fire Brigades could meet, learn and fraternize. He need not have worried, however, as such competitions had already become a fixed event in Comunn na Feinne's annual calendar of activities as well as inter-town competitions during the year. While this was done to add to the colour and variety of the

day's events, there was also a very practical purpose, as we have shown, in introducing such 'alien sports' to a Highland gathering. The Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade had an extremely good relationship with Geelong's Comunn na Feinne. So close was this association to become, the Fire Brigade, on occasions, became the *de facto* Comunn na Feinne, responsible for staging the New Year's Day Highland Gathering itself which it did in 1868 and in 1870.

On 30th December 1868, the *Advertiser* announced a 'Grand Concert' was to be held in Geelong in aid of the Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade, as well as for the 2nd Geelong Volunteer Artillery. The *Advertiser*, a couple of days later, announced that the Geelong Volunteer Artillery Corps was formed in Geelong by John Bell, a prominent member and office-bearer of Comunn na Feinne. Bell was an enthusiastic supporter of the annual Games. His position as a wealthy owner of various sheep stations enabled him to financially support the Volunteer Artillery Corps as well as many other groups in the community. He donated many valuable cups as prizes for Comunn na Feinne athletes as well as financially supporting the Society. This Concert was to take place on New Year's Day, 1st January, 1869, in the evening, following the customary Highland Games, and was under the patronage of Comunn na Feinne. The *Advertiser* was fully supportive of the causes which were to benefit from the concert, the Volunteer Fire Brigade and the 2nd Geelong Volunteer Artillery.

The community responsibility which Comunn na Feinne shouldered, ranging from such intangibles as improvement in manners, respect, toleration etc., to the very practical utilitarian ones such as education, military defence and fire fighting, led it, quite logically, to become involved with whatever pertained to 'raising' the quality of life of the community and its peoples. The events involving the Volunteer Fire Brigade, therefore, were aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of such a necessary part of the protection of Geelong, its peoples and property.

However, the competitions at the Highland Gatherings were not without criticism. What would life be like without the 'unco guid' whose lofty moral position enables them to find fault in everything and everyone, not least, in some cases, in the behaviour of people towards grass and plants!

Following the 1868 Gathering, which had been conducted by the Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade, a letter to the *Geelong Advertiser* had some harsh words to say, not about the quality of the Fire Brigade,

or the Games in general, but about the damage they had caused, “to the young trees and plants,” growing on the Comunn na Feinne grounds. The Society was also taken to task for so “lightly” granting permission for the Fire Brigade to use its grounds. The letter continued that the “customary bent of destructiveness of boys,” together with the Fire Brigade’s horses, unchecked, “cruelly maltreated” the grounds.

As with the aftermath of the 1868 New Year’s Day Games, which the Geelong Volunteer Fire Brigade had conducted, the Society demonstrated, in 1873, not only its gratitude to that body but, more importantly, its sense of community concern and involvement. It did this, according to the *Advertiser* of 2nd January, 1874, by holding a benefit concert for that Fire Brigade on New Year’s Evening

Perhaps the greatest commendation by Comunn na Feinne of the local Fire Brigades was the staging of a United Fire Brigades’ Demonstration to be held in May 1877. To this end, Comunn na Feinne held a Grand Moonlight Carnival on the night of 1st January, 1877 in Johnstone’s Park. The amount raised by this concert was to form a Fund enabling the United Fire Brigades’ Demonstration to be carried out. This event, wrote the *Advertiser* of 30th December, 1876 was to be the biggest rally of Volunteer Fire Brigades ever staged and was to involve, not only these utilities throughout Australia itself, but also from New Zealand.

Cannily, the Society pointed out that there would be an “immediate advantage, financially,” to Geelong businesses, and to the townsfolk generally, arising from this Demonstration and the people it would attract to Geelong. Comunn na Feinne thus appealed to the public and to businesses to support it. It then released what surely must be one of the most dramatic advertisements for a public entertainment at that time! This Grand Demonstration would include:

“Grand Pyrotechnical Display with Balloon Ascent.

Grand Tableaux – House on Fire!

Grand Fantocini, or the Royal Marionettes (Engaged expressly for this occasion, and will appear Four Times during the evening).

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Richardon's Show

Kangaroo Race, Scotch and Irish Dancing

RIFLE SHOOTING GALLERY

Prize – A Gold Medal will be given to the person making the greatest number of bulls-eyes during the evening.

Four shots for one shilling.”

There followed an extensive Programme of twenty items with the night's entertainment concluding, not inappropriately in a gathering of so many Firemen, with the 'Grand Tableaux' – 'A House on Fire!'

This last event promised, so it advertised, the alarm, the start and the race of rival Brigades to the house on fire. As well, there was promised "Immense Excitement" consisting of:
Arrival at the Fire. Perilous situation of the inmates.

Firemen to the rescue. A Leap for Life!

SAVED! SAVED! SAVED!

The value of the Jumping Sheet in saving life will be fully demonstrated.

After guarantees of spectator safety and easy access and regress from the grounds, the *Advertisement* finished with the plain appeal:

“Support Your Fire Brigade, and protect yourselves!”

All of this excitement, Comunn na Feinne, trumpeted, was to be had for the admission price of just one shilling! It may have just as well added a health warning, after such promises of excitement of the type described, that those of a weak disposition would be advised to stay away!

This, together with Comunn na Feinne's notice of their New Year's Day Gathering, covered six full columns in the *Geelong Advertiser* the next day, and gave every indication of the feast of entertainment and thrills which Geelong folk, along with the anticipated influx of visitors, could expect in the New Year.

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The fundraising Moonlight Concert at Johnstone's Park on the evening of New Year's Day, as we have seen earlier (e.g. see Chapter 4), proved a great success. Contrary to expectations of seasonal hot weather, this evening event was met with a refreshing cool "night air," which was enjoyed by those attending and those promenading "along the various walks in the park." Gas fires lit up the grounds and rotunda from where music was played. Appropriately, perhaps, some of the entertainments were carried out under the watchful eye of members of the Fire Brigade as the people enjoyed a delight now denied to boys and girls, mothers and fathers, in this 'nanny' State of Victoria; fireworks! Whether the Band was aware of it or not, the "rockets, squibs, rainbow and rainbow wheels" were being launched from below the rotunda directly underneath the musicians!

The organizers, perhaps, might have been trusting to good luck a little too much when a fire balloon was launched and, "its path could be seen far away in the distance for nearly twenty minutes the direction taken being apparently across the Bay towards the You Yangs."

No fire bans in operation then; obviously!

The standout finale to the concert was a practice run for one of the spectacular events to take place later in the year in the United Fire Brigades' Grand Moonlight Carnival, as mentioned earlier. This was a mock demonstration of the firemen in action handling a house fire and rescuing occupants from the blazing building and making use of safety equipment. no doubt, also included to whet the appetite of the public for what they could expect at the May Demonstration.

Comunn na Feinne and Voluntaryism 2 -Volunteer Military Units

The aforementioned establishing of a Volunteer Fire Brigade in Geelong, designed to provide a measure of protection from disasters in the community (if not to the flora of the town!), was soon joined by other volunteer Fire Brigades as districts adjoining Geelong were raised to the status of municipalities in their own right, such as Newtown and Chilwell and Geelong West. Bodies designed to meet what might be a more serious threat, that of invasion or attack by the European enemies of Britain, were also soon formed. Europe was engaged in the very bloody Crimean War (1853-56) where Britain, France and a few smaller allies had been pitted against Russia. There was a real fear that Russian forces at sea could harass or even invade Australian territory, especially the coastal

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settlements. This conflict between Britain and her allies against expansionist Russia was avidly followed in Victoria where news of successes in the Crimea was welcomed and where, “impetus” was given to the formation of Volunteer military groups. At Geelong writes Brownhill, “it was important to be a member of the Rifle Corps or some other branch of the military service.”

Therefore, other movements afoot in Geelong in the 1850s, which Comunn na Feinne, later, was to do much to promote and to improve, included Volunteer defence units. Victoria woke up to the fact that they were vulnerable and, largely unprotected, especially from coastal sea attacks. Brownhill records that Dr Baylie, as Mayor at the time, was presented with a petition from the peoples of Geelong requesting him to do something to protect the town and its inhabitants from, “privateers and other armed forces.”

At a meeting called to address the concerns raised in this petition Baylie, wrote the *Advertiser* on 4th February, 1854, was fully informed on the state of the war in Europe and was also conscious of the relative “defenceless” position the coastal areas were in the face of a possible sea attack. Geelong, he said, was ‘protected’ by forty soldiers and a small, local, police force. This obviously was considered insufficient and, therefore, Baylie fully supported the petitioners and their general suggestion that a rifle corps be formed and that official “sanction” and “support” then be sought.

Baylie’s sober assessment, which covered the possible attacks upon the Savings Banks, drew an anxious state of alarm from someone at the meeting, “whose wherewithal was obviously behind Bank vault doors,” and who, in a state of panic, “demanded not one but two defence units!”

With possibly the late ‘rebellion’ on the Ballarat goldfields (1853) still fresh in its mind, the colonial government, perhaps, would have been in no frame of mind to have large bodies of armed civilians scattered around the state! However, it was argued by another petitioner, such volunteer groups as he was suggesting, “to preserve rights and property”, were perfectly “constitutional” and the authorities would have to recognize them. Yet another ‘voice’, with a definite ‘the sky is falling’ outlook on life, gave his nervous, apocalyptic prophecy where, “privateers and vessels carrying letter of marquee (sic)*, went to work summarily; the process would be to get within range of the town –

send in a flag of truce – demand a sum of money – if paid the town might be saved – if refused, the town would be blown to pieces.”

*[A ‘letter of marquee’, was a term meaning a ship which carried a licence (from the government of its country of origin) to fit itself out for battle in order to capture the shipping (or the property) of the enemy. See Appendix 8 for the State Government’s concern of coastal attacks leading to the building of the armoured clad *Cerberus* as an element of defence.]

And so it went. It should be the government’s aim to prevent enemy vessels entering the harbours rather than relying on volunteers armed with rifles, argued another voice at the meeting. However, as yet another pointed out, the meeting was not called to discuss, “fortifying the Heads and Harbours,” which was a matter for governments, but to discuss the question of forming a volunteer rifle corps and that is what they should be concentrating on. The mayor, Dr Baylie agreed and sought some definite proposal based upon his suggestion of a rifle corps. Given the already long duration of the meeting, such a proposal was quickly forthcoming. The *Advertiser’s* comment that, after a rapid seconding and carrying of this resolution, “the meeting evaporated,” told its own story! That nothing immediately happened can be attested by a further notice appearing in the *Geelong Advertiser*, three months later, on 6th May, appealing to the Mayor to call yet another public meeting to address the “scare” that existed. The delay in formally establishing such a Volunteer Rifle Corps was due to the Victorian governing executive in posting the ‘Rules’ which would govern such military groups. This delay had irritated many in Geelong and the Mayor, Dr Baylie, as fed up as the other inhabitants with government dithering, in response to this public request announced that he had no hesitation in calling for such a meeting.

One of the problems for Victoria’s parliament (it was not a fully representative body, elected by secret ballot and equal representation, until the 1856 elections), was the conservative nature of its upper house, the Legislative Council. Its members, many large land occupiers, had some qualms about the setting up of what they envisaged as armed ‘militias’ all over the state.

The formation of such a Volunteer body as was proposed, and its subsequent history, overlaps and intertwines with Comunn na Feinne’s own story, as we will see. As well as an interaction at the level of the annual Highland Games, the presence and influence of Comunn na Feinne can be seen in the linkages which were provided by the involvement of figures, such as Dr Baylie, John Bell, George

Wright, James Harrison, Archibald Douglas and John Riddoch, in both the Volunteer militias and Comunn na Feinne. It has to be borne in mind that Volunteer groups were, by definition, neither staffed nor funded, to any meaningful level, by local or state governments. The common presence of members and officials of Comunn na Feinne within such volunteer groups as the Rifle Corps, Fire Brigades and the Benevolent societies, for example, has more than just the common faces among the volunteers to explain it. The ethos permeating these bodies, that of doing one's best for each other and for the community as a whole, provides the explanation of why these individuals volunteered, and also the 'spirit' with which they carried out their voluntary roles.

A further link between those who later formed or joined or supported Comunn na Feinne, and the involvement of such individuals in voluntary organizations was clearly to be seen in the personnel involved. Given Australia's geographical position relative to Europe, it might seem to have been a groundless fear and unnecessary hysteria on the part of the settlers to demand the formation of Volunteer military units. However, Britain was half a world away and was in no position to be able, quickly, to send either land or naval forces to protect her colonies in the antipodes. This fact, says Brownhill, was recognized both in London and Melbourne and, empowered by a pronouncement from the Home Government, the Parliament of Victoria enacted its own Legislation for the setting up of Volunteer Defence units. Self-help was thus called for and there were many advocates for, "the immediate formation of Cavalry Brigades, Rifle Corps, and Artillery Brigades."

Comunn na Feinne's official Bard, Ossian McPherson, had much to say regarding the situation and urged that practical steps be taken to defend the country in case of attack. He wrote and published a poem entitled "The Warning"* in an effort to stir up some public interest in the potential dangers and, let it be said, to earn himself, ever proverbially poor, a few 'bawbees.' He composed his poem, he said, to wake up the people to the possibility of a Russian sea attack.

Among the verses of this long poem are the following, calling Australia to arm itself.

The full poem can be found in Appendix 5 (a) Poems of Ossian MacPherson.

The Warning

Arm ye, Australia! Sharpen the brand,
Grasp ye the rifle in every hand;

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Tell it with lightning speed over the land
Foes are awake!

Far in the distance the grim fiend of war
Marshals the legions of death to his car,
Ready to swoop 'neath his dark frowning star,
Kingdoms to shake.

.....

And show the invader that, come if he dare,
'Twill not be to meet with the form of despair,
But a young British lion to rouse in his lair,
Majestic and grand.

.....

Arm ye, Australia! Band while ye may;
Prepare for the foemen while yet it is day;
There's danger in backwardness, death in delay.
Mark Freedom's call.

And solemnly pledge we do to heaven a vow,
That e'er to a foreign invader we bow,
The last drop of blood from our bosoms shall flow,
Before we shall fall.
(Ossian McPherson)

*[Ossian Macpherson prefaced this poem with an explanation of how it was motivated. He wrote that, several years ago, "after deeply considering the apathy of the colony, and the prospect of Russian designs upon it, I published a poem in Melbourne entitled, 'The Warning.' Although that poem was freely purchased, almost the only person who entered into my views was Sir Henry Barkly himself, who sent me a complimentary letter by the hands of a mounted orderly."]

Even before the State Parliament's Proclamation regarding Volunteer forces, a notice had appeared in the *Geelong Advertiser* calling attention to a public meeting to discuss the possibility of establishing a Volunteer Regiment at Geelong. The State Parliament's Proclamation regarding the formation of Volunteer forces, did not appear in a notice in the *Geelong Advertiser* until 16th July, 1859, by which time the foregoing local meeting had already been called for a similar purpose. This latter notice

called attention to a public meeting to discuss the possibility of establishing a Volunteer Highland Regiment at Geelong. “Highlandmen, Shoulder to Shoulder” was the bold heading in the *Geelong Advertiser* Editorial for 6th July, 1859. It was a call to Scots, and any others who supported such a cause, to form a Volunteer Highland Regiment of fighting men, “for the purpose of national defence.” Thus, in between calling the Geelong meeting and it actually taking place, the Government had issued its own, “Volunteer Enrolment Proclamation”, and this was even before Queen Victoria’s Proclamation had been enacted. The colony of Victoria (which had taken the Queen’s name), had thus already been agitating for the formation of volunteer defence bodies. The *Advertiser* of 16th July, 1859, for example, had argued this cause under the headline, ‘The Defence of the Colony’

The *Advertiser* commended the Highlanders in its issue of 18th July, for their prompt action and intimated that there was to be an enrolment of volunteers in Geelong at an appointed time. James Harrison, Chairman of the meeting, stated that as their meeting had already been called before the government’s official ‘call’ had been advertised, it should still go ahead. The Government’s Volunteer Proclamation, he said, should not deter them from proceeding to form a Volunteer Regiment as this was what the Proclamation was about anyway and, the Governor, “could accept the services of any Volunteer Regiment.” There followed various resolutions the discussion of which “was of a very spirited nature ...”. However, the *Advertiser* concluded, it was doubtful if anything could be done, “until an answer is received from His Excellency, as to whether he will accept the services of such a Regiment.”

The strong involvement of *Commun na Feinne* in establishing such a regiment, and what followed, demonstrates the practical application of the sort of ‘political philosophy’ enunciated through such events as the Burns’ Centennial celebration as well as that of the campaign for a William Wallace memorial mentioned earlier in this story. While prepared to fight an enemy in defence of their new country, it became clear that any threat to individual liberties by the state political authorities arising out of this would strenuously be resisted. For example, the Proclamation, when it was announced by the Government, stated, among other things, that each man joining the corps would be required to sign an agreement that he would serve for at least a year and,” be subject to such rules and

regulations as shall be promulgated by the Deputy Adjutant.”

This brought an immediate response from the Geelong meeting. Many of these men involved with this meeting had cut their political teeth during the campaigns to resist convict transportation to their colony, to establish a liberal democracy starting first with the 1851 Constitution of Victoria and then with the 1856, and ongoing, struggle to establish a representative parliament with universal franchise and secret ballot. Predictably, they thus found that such a requirement was “utterly repugnant” as far as the “letter and the spirit” of the Act went. This was not what the Act said and Clause Three of that document, as they pointed out, supported their interpretation of it.

It was thus clear, it was argued, that once a Volunteer corps had been set up in the local area, and those enrolled agree to rules and regulations established **by themselves**, that only then are these submitted to the Governor for confirmation. That official merely had the power of veto over the rules but had no power to alter any of the rules and regulations established by the Volunteer body itself. Therefore, those offering themselves as volunteers did not, at the same time, “yield up their civil rights to the Deputy Adjutant-General, or any other functionary.” Any attempt to impose upon volunteers the right of the Deputy Adjutant General, “to promulgate rules and regulations is utterly illegal, and must necessarily be void.”

The Geelong body did not mince its words when it came to pointing out the Governor’s mistake relating to the status of the volunteers. The Governor was regarding them as “militia-men” and not volunteers, it said, and thus they were not under such compulsion as the Governor’s statements would suggest. He had obviously received some bad advice which he should have tested himself. Certainly, in the case of an enemy invasion or attack, then they, as volunteers, “could be brought under other rules and regulations than their own.” However, until such a position existed, the only regulation which they were under obligation to obey was that of being inspected, “every six months’ by a regular Officer. Sorting out this “mistake on the part of His Excellency” did not, therefore, need to hinder their action in forming a corps. James Harrison*, who had been called to the Chair, pointed out that the Volunteer Act, “stated that it was competent for the Governor to accept the services of any volunteer regiment that might be formed, and he had no doubt the services of such a

force as was likely to be formed that evening would be very cordially accepted indeed.”

*[See Appendix 3 (b) for short biography of Harrison.]

George Wright moved the first resolution of the night. He had held, he said, Her Majesty’s commission in a similar body for four years but times were different then and the only enemy they faced were, “the shafts of ridicule.” However, they were now in a time when, “real danger and hardship” could be expected. Given the real threats which existed to their homeland, it was their patriotic duty to seek to defend their country. He called upon them, therefore, to form themselves into a body to be called the Geelong Volunteer Highland Regiment.

This resolution, being adopted unanimously, it was further moved that a committee be formed consisting of John Riddoch, Duncan MacNicol, John Bell, William Tolmie, Archibald Douglas and James Harrison, with power to increase their number and that they carry out the wishes of the meeting. Comunn na Feinne was, again, in the vanguard of a community project with all of these men referred to being part of that Society’s executive, including its President, Archibald Douglass!

To the fear, voiced by one of the members, that the Governor-in-Council might probably seize the regulation of the Corps and have it in his own purvey, the defiant voice, given by the Chair, was, “that it was not for the Governor-in-Council to over-ride an Act of Parliament.” It would seem that the spirit of Wallace, so recently called forth, in the 1856 elections, and the liberal political reforms so far achieved in the first representative parliament elected in that same year, was not to be forgotten, nor relinquished, in the face of what seemed like old world colonial *dictat*, no matter the possibility of a national emergency! Thus, for Harrison, Wright and the others at the meeting, the days of ‘absolute’ rule had gone, it was the ‘voice’ of the people, through their representatives, which was now the authoritative ‘voice’.

Archibald Douglas, President of Comunn na Feinne, and one of the Committee advocating the formation of Volunteer Highland Regiment, who was received with much cheering, was not so sure that the Government would accede to their request as two years earlier the government, “had declined” to accept a similar request on the grounds that it was “undesirable” to promote a single

nationality in this way. However, he felt that they should proceed anyway. John Riddoch then suggested that now was the time for putting into practice what they had discussed and that those who had accepted the invitation to be the committee should set the example and, “go forward and enroll themselves at once. As they put themselves forward as a Scotch Regiment let them, like Scotchmen (sic) put themselves ‘Shoulder to Shoulder’.”

This initial meeting did pass some important resolutions as well as establishing a Committee. Both actions are interesting and relevant. They indicate the independent attitude and the democratic spirit with which these men were imbued. The ‘spirit’ of Wallace, Bruce and Burns would see them ‘shoulder to shoulder’ defending their new homeland, but that same ‘spirit’ would lead them to declare that this would not be at the expense of the peoples’ own freedom. The call was to all those who were present to demonstrate their commitment by enrolling in the new corps. The Committee was also to take the necessary action to carry out the decisions made at the meeting.

As much as could be done to establish themselves as a Voluntary Highland Regiment in Geelong had now been done. However, whether it was the belligerent tone of the submission or the determination to be seen as a free and independent body, permission was not granted by the Governor that Geelong form their own Volunteer ‘Highland’ Regiment.* As with the attempt by the government later in the century to ban the kilt, the argument employed against what had been proposed was that to identify a military unit with an ethnic national group would not be conducive to creating a unified regiment especially if non-Scots joined it. In the discussion and formation of other such volunteer groups in Geelong, members of Comunn na Feinne were well to the fore not only as members but also as leaders of these groups.

*See below.

As already noted, the Geelong volunteers did not know at what day or hour, “the Russians might, however, pop in to levy contributions, if not to do something worse.” The *Advertiser* reported that with such a potential threat facing them, the cause of volunteerism among the young men “has prospered.” A Volunteer Rifle Regiment had already been formed and this, soon after, became the Volunteer Mounted Rifle Corps. On the 10th December, 1860, a meeting was held for the purpose

of attracting the required number to constitute a Corps. William Fraser, Secretary of the Comunn na Feinne, was in the Chair and a full complement of men was soon achieved. The election of a Captain for the Regiment took place the following February at a meeting on the 23rd February, 1861. John Bell, a local sheep station owner with extensive land holdings throughout the State, became the first captain of this unit.

Thus, John Bell, the enthusiastic Comunn na Feinne office-bearer, later President, and, later still, Chief, of the Society, became the equally enthusiastic Captain, later Major, of the Volunteers and lent his considerable energies (and his not inconsiderable financial resources) to the life of the Volunteer movement. Bell was far from being an 'armchair general', however, and he fully participated in the activities of the Regiment and presented his men with a full calendar of Drill Orders as well as mock battles. A sample week can give us some idea of the seriousness with which the men took their responsibilities.

Morning Drill, held Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, 6am at Aberdeen Street.

Afternoon Drill held Monday and Friday, 5pm at Corio Oval.

General Parade held Wednesday (for all members), 5pm at Comunn na Feinne Grounds.

Sword Drill held Tuesday and Thursday, 8pm at the Orderly Rooms.

Their enthusiasm, looking back from our own day of lesser-involvement in volunteer movements, was remarkable. Enthusiasm, however, was to run ahead of real threats at times! The good people of Geelong were, on more than one occasion, wakened in the early hours by false 'alarms, within and without', of invasion threats and with the rapid 'falling in' of the large number (over 150 members) of the Volunteers, complete with their own band, filling the morning darkness with various sounds ranging from clattering hooves to musical signals sounding anything from Reveille to Cock o' the North!

The initial volunteer rifle unit was soon extended to include a second rifle brigade whose skills, noted the *Advertiser* Supplement of 27th October, 1866, were to include also some artillery weapons.

There are now two brigades in the town and suburbs, with contingents at Drysdale. From a mere rifle corps, it has been converted into an artillery force, the men maintaining their efficiency with small arms, while they acquit themselves creditably in the handling of field and

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battery guns. They have acquitted themselves well at every encampment that has been held, and they maintain a band that of itself has become a local institution. There is also a troop of Volunteer Cavalry, the Prince of Wales Light Horse, including in its ranks many of the yeomanry of the country districts.

Although Comunn na Feinne was willing to commend and support similar activities of other societies in Melbourne, Ballarat etc., it could also be quite prickly when credit was given to another group as having initiated a particular event when Comunn na Feinne, itself, considered that it was the originator. For example, William Clarkson, a Comunn na Feinne Director, was quick to point out the error in the *Geelong Advertiser's* report of 20th December, 1860, regarding who first instituted Rifle Shooting competitions, by writing to that paper pointing out its error! He wrote that it was not the Melbourne Caledonian Society which, first, had began such competitions. Comunn na Feinne, Geelong, had initiated them and the Melbourne Society had taken up the idea and, purely because Melbourne Caledonian held its Games on a date earlier than that of the Geelong Gathering, it had staged these competitions before Geelong had done so, “but its origin emanated from Common na Feinne.”

Splitting hairs! Perhaps; but, after all, Scots, whether arguing an obscure theological or a philosophical point, or simply dates on a calendar are, ‘hair splitters’ *par excellence!*

The Society was also quick to defend its competitions from charges of unsportsmanlike behaviour on the part of local participants. Any hint of scandal or poor sportsmanship was taken by Comunn na Feinne as not only a slur on the Geelong contestants but also as something which could upset its aims of promoting harmony. Referring to the Rifle Match which had recently taken place, the Society inserted a disclaimer in the *Advertiser*, dismissing the charge that the “Geelongese” had “hissed” visiting competitors, and demanded that the paper print a retraction. The *Advertiser's* contrition did not come until its report of the following year’s Gathering and, even then, it was disguised. Not normally showing any Geelong bias in its reporting of the Annual Games, the *Advertiser* slipped in a comment praising the Geelong athletes for more than holding their own against Melbourne competitors and, “In casting the stone the champion at the Gathering at Melbourne was beaten; and in the foot race in kilts the same result was achieved by a local man.”

By and large, the *Advertiser* was complimentary in its remarks relating to Volunteer military units in the early days following their formation. Captain John Bell was the senior officer of the Geelong Artillery Brigade and he, and Comunn na Feinne, would have been gratified at the *Advertiser's* remarks relating to the Artillery. The *Advertiser* defended, "the integrity and purpose" of the volunteer Artillery group in the face of some minority public ridicule from, "a few idle and craven-hearted loafers among the crowd." Overall, "the public seemed proud and delighted" with the skill of their men who, in such a short time, "had acquired such proficiency" in the use of "the garrison guns." The departure of Captain John Bell, on 24th May, 1865, for a trip to Scotland and continental Europe left a large gap in the life, not only of the Society but the many other organizations for which he volunteered his time, including the Geelong Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, over which he was commanding officer. Before he left, a farewell, and affectionate, parade in his honour was carried out by the men and officers of that Regiment.

Widespread military games were also staged with Volunteer groups from other areas to hone the skills and the battle tactics of the various Voluntary military bodies around the State. Some large-scale 'mock' battles were fought in the Barrabool Heights, one with the state Governor and entourage present. The Geelong contingent, the local reporters pronounced, did not disgrace themselves by any means. While receiving praise, in general, from the military authorities in Melbourne, the local coverage of the event could, on occasions, be even more effusive. The Governor and his Lady, guest observers of one event, joined the, "10,000 or more other onlookers" when a large scale joint exercise was held at Geelong. The opening lines of the report were calm and sober reflecting a measure of pride mixed with the deadly seriousness of what war, in the final analysis, really encompassed. The references to muzzles and guns and, "the champing of steeds" were made with thoughtful sobriety, albeit without any sense of immediate danger. These men and horses and machines, with their, "death-dealing muzzles of the cannon," willing to expend their bodies, even unto death, fortunately were without the foresight of what we, with our hindsight, now know was to transpire on battlefields in Asia and in Europe decades later. But here, in mock battle, on, "the smiling and friendly banks of the Moorabool River," and playing with "blank cartridge" and charging "an imaginary enemy," war, both for spectators and for the men taking part, said

Brownhill, did not so seem such a serious business.

Comunn na Feinne, ever pursuing its aim to help individuals and groups achieve their best in whatever it was they were undertaking, introduced events at their Gatherings designed to aid this aim. It was not long, for example, before Broad Sword exercises and competitions, along with Rifle matches, joined Fire Brigade demonstrations and competitions and other events aimed at improving horsemanship and lance handling and cavalry skills. The pride, and honour, of winning competitions through demonstrations of excellence in the event were supplemented by the award of donated handsome cups and Comunn na Feinne medals.

That the Society was perfectly well aware of its educative role in the foregoing exercises was made plain from its President's speech at a Rifle Match awards ceremony as recorded in the *Carmichael Notes*. The Society saw clearly the role that it was playing *vis a vis* the community, both locally and more widely. John H. Riddoch, President, identified this role while presenting the awards. He stated that the Society, fully appreciative, "of the value and importance of the Volunteer movement in the Colony, determined recently to encourage, by every means in their power, efficiency in the use of the rifle ...". For this reason, they had instituted these competitions and, continued Riddoch, from the results so far obtained:

[W]e have good reason to believe that the Volunteers in this Colony will ere long number amongst their ranks marksmen equal to any in the world; and seeing the result likely to be attained by these rifle matches, this Society feels proud at having taken the initiatory part for the encouragement of so laudable an object.

Although many of the Voluntary military groups had, for various reasons, all but disappeared by the late nineteenth century, there was a renewed effort, "to organise, in the Colony, a Highland Volunteer Regiment of at least 200 strong, to be composed exclusively of men of Scottish blood and descent." As with Comunn na Feinne's effort to establish such a Regiment in earlier decades, the *Advertiser* of 20th February, 1898, reported that the designation of the military force by a national ethnic name was not considered wise by the politicians. While the relevant Minister for Defence did not dismiss out of hand the proposal submitted on 19th February, 1898, he said:

[T]hat he was not sure whether it was desirable to create national distinctions in this colony where we were properly one nation,” but, he added, once the proposal was properly submitted, it would be fully considered.

While it was Comunn na Feinne which had originally discussed the idea of calling for such a Regiment, it was reported, on 19th February, 1898, that the actual proposal had been put forward by the Scottish Thistle Club (Melbourne) when it discussed such a matter, “with the Minister of Defence”. It was enthusiastically supported by Comunn na Feinne at Geelong, as well as by members of all the major Scottish organisations in Victoria at the time. The numbers required for a Corps, 200, could readily be met and it also reported that these members would pay for their own “kilted uniform.” It was sought that the government, for its part, would provide the weapons and the services of an instructor. On 2nd December 1898, Comunn na Feinne reported on the progress of the Victorian Scottish Regiment and that the numbers required to form a Regiment would soon be met.

Ted Harris in his History of the Victorian Scottish Regiment, Digger History, writes that the Volunteer Victorian Scottish Regiment originally came into being on 29th August, 1898, as:

[A] corps of unpaid volunteers as part of the colonial Victorian Military Forces. It was not well equipped in its early period of existence and did not have a uniform of any kind for the first year of its existence. With Federation, the Regiment became somewhat of a hybrid unit now under Federal control, with the volunteer section becoming “a partially paid militia”. In 1911, the Regiment was redesignated, and voluntary enlistment was restricted to officers and senior non-commissioned officers.

Ever diplomatic in its handling of politics and politicians, Comunn na Feinne did its bit, “to ‘butter up’ the relevant Minister of Defence, respectfully requesting him, “to accept the office as a member of Comunn na Feinne.” From there, it followed its usual practice of making requests of government by going through political ‘contacts’ who made it easier for the Society to meet the ‘right’ people. It soon became apparent that enrolling the Minister of Defence was a means of facilitating requests that the Victorian Scottish Regiment be allowed to take part in the 1900 Highland Games at Geelong. However, Comunn na Feinne directors were aware that the Defence Department would

not permit the Regiment to appear at the Geelong Games purely as a 'side-show attraction'. The Society, therefore, drew up a programme of Military events which it sent to all the Defence Forces in Victoria. Following this, Comunn na Feinne sent it to the Military authorities for their approval. These Military events were to include a competition between Victorian Scottish Regiment and, "a detachment from the various Regiments" of Victoria.

Comunn na Feinne, on 22nd December, 1899, was, subsequently, proud to announce in correspondence between the Society and the Secretary of the Victorian Scottish Regiment, that Major-General Downes had granted permission and that, "the whole of the Victorian Scottish Regiment would be present at the 1900 New Year's Day Highland Gathering." This Regiment was, in fact, to be a regular and welcome attraction at Comunn na Feinne's annual New Year's Day Gatherings over the next fourteen years. It was further announced that the Regiment was also to join the Procession to the grounds and that its members would turn out in "full uniform." The 1900 procession to the grounds was also to include, "the Flinders School Detachment of the Gordon Highlanders, headed by a miniature piper in full dress." Again, with a measure of diplomacy, the Society announced that all members of the Defence Forces participating on the day would be admitted free of charge!

In keeping with what was to be the "military" character of the 1900 Games, the Society had introduced items such as the "Balaclava Melee," and the "Mop Tournament." The *Advertiser* of 23rd December, 1899, reported that, Colonel McVeigh, the commanding officer, stated, "that the Regiment will give an exhibition of Bayonet exercises and manual firing exercises and will march with the rest of the Defence Forces to the grounds.

As already noted, this initial appearance of the Regiment was the beginning of what was to be a long and popular connection between the Volunteer Victorian Scottish Regiment and Comunn na Feinne's annual Highland Gathering. The Regiment and, later, also its Pipe Band and its Brass Band, became regulars at the Games, and its marching, drilling, bayonet exercises and mock battles continued to be, for the spectators, a highlight of the Games. The *Geelong Advertiser* of 2nd January, 1900, led off its report on the first Gathering of the last year of the old century, with a series of

compliments to Comunn na Feinne. Not the least of these was the recognition of the Society's initiative in inviting, and obtaining, the Volunteer Victorian Scottish Regiment to be part of the Games.

Comunn na Feinne's belief in the pulling power of the Scottish Regiment was well grounded. With the arrival of a good part of the Kilted Regiment the activities of the day were signally complimented.

They turned out for the procession in full Highland dress, and naturally formed the centre of attraction, their fine physiques being set off to advantage in their picturesque regimental garb. Pipers were also represented to a larger extent than usual in the procession.

The severe heat of the day (110 degrees) never daunted the men, and the kilted Regiment and the volunteer Fire Brigade completed their march to the grounds in the scorching conditions. The colourful scene also drew many of the crowd lining the route into trying to keep pace with them. Despite the oppressive heat of the day, both spectators and contestant remained enthusiastic throughout, and the Regiment captured the admiration of the crowds as they paraded and demonstrated the skill and discipline of marching patterns. The soldiers staged a series of "bayonet exercises" and "volley firing" and, as a conclusion, "wound up the exhibition of mimic war by storming the grandstand at bayonet point." No doubt the 'ladies', who customarily inhabited the grand stand, had been pre-warned regarding the "mock" attack and had armed themselves with their 'smelling salts,' an essential part of a lady's 'equipment' of the day!

Volunteer military groups from other centres such as Ballarat, also took an eager part in the inter-military events and competitions and the final of the tug of war event was between a Volunteer Scottish Regiment team and one from among the Volunteer Ballarat Infantry. On this occasion, the country cousins proved too good for the Metropolitan-based Scottish Regiment! The *Geelong Advertiser's* reports on the annual Highland Games responded to the new-found enthusiasm shown by the public towards the New Year's Day Gatherings due to the appearance of the Victorian Scottish Regiment.

The new century was met with a Comunn na Feinne Gathering which drew a record crowd. Again, as well as the ever-popular Scottish heavy games, the Scottish Regiment was the big draw and, “the marching evolutions of the kilted soldiers” provided a highlight for the spectators. Over a hundred members of the Regiment paraded and then marched to the Grounds headed by their own Pipe Band which set the pace with some appropriate lively march tunes. Between thirty and forty members of the Regiment had missed the train and no doubt would have had to face the charges which would have arisen out of that military offence! The Regiment had, however, learned its lesson from the previous year when it had worn its best uniform and had sweltered in the 110 plus degree heat, and it presented with a more suitable uniform in 1901 in case of similar scorching weather. The Regiment, guaranteed of a friendly welcome, not to say being ‘well entertained’, gave of their best providing a readiness to be involved in the day’s activities. The *Advertiser* reported on 2nd January, 1901 that various military exercises, including physical drill, bayonet charging and volley firing, was hugely appreciated by the spectators. The playing and marching of the Regiment’s own Pipe Band thrilled the people and the Drum Major, “a perfect artist at his business, was the cynosure of all eyes.”

The attendance at the 1901 Gathering, “was the largest in the experience of the Society, and the extent of the Society’s gratitude was expressed towards Thomas McKenzie Kirkwood for his influence in securing the attendance of the Scottish Regiment under Captain McCurdy.”

The *Advertiser* of 31st December, 1901, wrote that Comunn na Feinne was cheered, once more, to learn that 120 members of the Volunteer Victorian Scottish Regiment, again under the command of Captain McCurdy, and accompanied by the Regiment’s two Bands, would be appearing at the 1902 Highland Gathering at Geelong. This was confirmed late in 1901 when it was reported that the men would parade, “for the first time in their red doublets, in review order. It was also announced that the Scottish Regiment would stage a re-enactment (at the Bayonet point) of the Gordon Highlanders in their, “Famous Charge on the Dargai Heights.”

The inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1st January 1901 meant, among other things, that each State, which before had been responsible for its own defence, gradually gave up this responsibility. In fact, many volunteer military, cavalry and rifle units had already disbanded over the

years since their inception. The failure of any real threat to manifest itself, following the earlier Russian scare, had led to a gradual loss of interest in such movements and, hence, to their disappearance. It was also the case, with Federation of the Australian states in 1901, that the relevant Federal department of defence now assumed the responsibility for defence of all of Australia.

The Volunteer System was abolished in favour of militia in 1902 and then, in 1911 as a result of some years of investigation, the Commonwealth Government introduced a system of Universal Training. This required service by all able-bodied men between certain ages and voluntary enlistment was confined to officers and senior non-commissioned officers.

However, the changeover from State military defence arrangements to that of total Federal control took place gradually over a period of some years, and there was a necessary overlapping of responsibilities for a short time. The records show, for example, that the Victorian Scottish Regiment, as it was now called, continued to be part of the annual New Year's Day Highland Gatherings for several years following Federation. The *Advertiser* of 2nd January, 1912, covering the Highland Games, wrote that the present Highland Gathering may be the last time the Gathering could expect to see the Victorian Volunteer Scottish Regiment as, "a branch of the State defence service." However, that prediction was incorrect and a large detachment of the Victorian Scottish Regiment, under Majors Wanliss and McKirdy, took part in the Comunn na Feinne Gathering in 1913. The Victorian Scottish Regiment was also at the January, 1914 Games but, with the outbreak of WW1 that year, its appearances at Geelong and elsewhere as part of public performances were soon cut short.

Jeffrey Grey's *A Military History of Australia* (Cambridge, 2008, Third Edition), states that the Defence Act of 1903 did not allow conscripts to serve outside of Australia, nor did it allow members from Volunteer Regiments to enlist and serve in the 1914-1918 war. Ted Harris' history of the Victorian Scottish Regiment wrote that, in 1911 the Victorian Scottish Regiment was redesigned and renamed as, "the 52nd Australian Infantry Battalion (Victorian Scottish Regiment) and, [as already noted above], voluntary enlistment was restricted to officers and senior non-commissioned officers." But, with the outbreak of WW1, Harris writes that, "an all-volunteer force, known as the

First Australian Imperial Force” was raised, and one of these units specifically established to fight overseas, “was the 5th Battalion” and many members of the 52nd Australian Infantry Battalion (Victorian Scottish Regiment), joined this unit,” and saw service at Gallipoli and in western Europe. Thus, many members of Volunteer military groups individually did serve in the First World War overseas by enlisting in professional military units. Sadly, a son of Thomas McKenzie Kirkwood, a man who had done so much for Comunn na Feinne in securing the services of the Volunteer Scottish Regiment for the New Year’s Day Gatherings, who had enlisted in the 52nd Infantry Battalion (Victorian Scottish Regiment), was killed at Gallipoli.

As we have noted in another section, members of the Comunn na Feinne Pipe Band, office-bearers and ordinary members enlisted to fight in WW1. In whatever light we view the first World War, from the viewpoint of today the Society’s contribution, like that of Australians as a whole, was outstanding. Nearly all eligible members of the Society enlisted, including its older office-bearers such as Dr Small and Phillip Russell. Those who remained at home continued to offer the general public various entertainments throughout the war which not only raised morale but contributed financially towards the war effort. Dance troupes like that of Ethel Hughes and that of Katherine Gill, raised thousands of pounds. Nellie Melba who staged a concert for Red Cross, in conjunction with Comunn na Feinne, aided greatly to that cause.

The War continued to cast ‘a long shadow’ over Australian society after it had ceased in 1918, and Geelong was no exception. Pipe Bands in general found it difficult for many years in re-forming and smoothly integrating the war veterans with the younger members who had trained to take their places during the war. Pipe Band competitions were slow to get going and the frequent non-appearances of Pipe Bands which had scheduled to compete at Comunn na Feinne Highland Gatherings, gives evidence of the fragility of such Bands. Comunn na Feinne’s own Pipe Band, and its regular fluctuations, from fully operational to inactive, perhaps demonstrates the fate of many of the others throughout Victoria.

The wider effects of the War, too, had an impact on many social activities. The deadly flu which struck as the war ended killed many and weakened ever more. The economic downturn meant less

jobs and less household incomes. Comunn na Feinne found it difficult to regain the levels of membership which they had before the war. The financial problems which beset the Society could, partly, be put down to a measure of incompetence but also to the lack of income deriving from its various activities. Unfortunately, rather than address some of the basic reasons for the financial situation, the President, along with some others in the executive, reacted in a less than reasoned way when the heart of Comunn na Feinne activities, the Highland Gathering, was summarily closed down. The main focus on money-making took Comunn na Feinne well away from its Charter and from its identifying symbols. As we have seen in Chapter 7, closing down the annual Highland Games and chasing the rental from its Hall was neither to solve its problems nor to satisfy its members.

Comunn na Feinne may have survived both wars, as the concept of Highland Games has been shown not to have diminished in communities such as Geelong, if a different policy to the one practiced by its last President had been followed. There were spasmodic attempts post WW2, to hold Highland Games although it is unclear who had organized them. For example, a ‘Highland Gathering and Sports Carnival’ was held on Kardinia Park Oval, on 6th October, 1945. As well as Highland and National Dancing and a Pipe Band competition, other events included Wood Chopping, Bicycle Races (including a Women’s Amateur Cycle Race), and Foot Racing. Five Pipe Bands (Coburg Ladies, Bendigo, Hawthorn, Footscray and Geelong) had enrolled to take part.

Two Highland Gatherings were also held in successive years at Ocean Grove. However, the beginning of the Queens Park Gatherings in 1958, which continue to this day (despite the Geelong Council’s ham-fisted approach to denying it the ideal setting at Queen’s Park), marked the revival of Geelong Highland Games. The 170th anniversary since the first Gathering is marked in the year 2017, and the revival of the Gatherings in 1958, after a slight *hiatus*, demonstrates the continuing viability and public popularity of such activities.