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Two fêtes in Edwardian Clonmel

By Nellie Beary-Ó Cléirigh

When there were no motor-cars and no television local entertainers were important to a town like Clonmel. Two such entertainments are well documented, the Knocknagow Bazaar and Fete at the High School in 1906 and the Women's National Health Association Fete held in Marlfield in 1910 in aid of the Shamrock Dining Rooms.

The Knocknagow "Grand Fete and Fancy Fair" was held from 25 to 28 September 1906 to celebrate 60 years of the Christian Brothers schools in the town and to inaugurate the new secondary school, the High School. Here the Advanced Department would prepare students for the University (First and Second Arts), all grades of the Intermediate; science and art in the Agriculture and Technical Department; the Excise and Second Division of the civil service and for bank exams.

The school would also prepare students for the preliminary examinations of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Veterinary College, Apothecaries Hall, and solicitors apprentices. A Technical Department would provide classes in carpentry and joinery, practical mathematics, Experimental Science and Chemistry. The school also had an Art Department and a Commercial Department. It is sad that the Brothers' connection with the High School ends as I write about its opening.

The fete gives a clear picture of the social life of Clonmel at the start of the century. The main patrons were Bishop Sheehan and the Mayor of Clonmel, Alderman Thomas Skehan, one of the leading business men of the town and a shareholder in the *Nationalist* newspaper. Other patrons were the Duchess of St. Alban and the Earl and Countess of Donoughmore; the Count and Mrs. De La Poer; Canon Flavin (of St. Peter and Paul's); Canon Spratt (of St. Mary's) and Alderman T. J. Condon MP.

The executive committee was a cross-section of the town's notables. It included Rev. P. Doocey, C.C., Rev. R. O'Connor, O.F.M., Ald. Thos. Morrissey, Dr. R. R. O'Brien, J.P., James Byrne, J.P., Edward Murphy, James White (of "Clonmel Scrapbook" fame), John Magnier, C. H. O'Keeffe, Charles Fitzgerald, John Russell, John Mulcahy, Brandon (*sic*) J. Long, J. Phelan, M. O'Connell, E. F. Walsh and James Walsh. The secretaries were James White, J. Phelan, J. O'Gorman, P. White, and F. Kneeshaw.

The main attraction of the Fete comprised the twelve Ladies Stalls. Anner Stall, with Mrs. E. Smith and Miss E. Slattery as presidents, seemed to be a raffle stall, as did Clonmel Stall, with Mrs. Stokes, Miss Hackett and the Misses Hackett (Prior Park). The Country Girls Stall, with the Misses Magner as presidents, specialised in catering. A cigarette and coffee divan was also connected with this stall.

The Columbia Stall, whose presidents were Mrs. Power, Mrs. O'Keeffe, two Misses O'Keeffe, Miss Power, Miss Coffey and Miss O'Connell, and the Golden Vale Stall run by Mrs. O'Brien, Mrs. O'Flynn, and Mrs. J. Mulcahy (Abbeyview), had more prizes to offer. The latter also ran the Magician's Cave and the Knocknagow Theatre, and there was a waxworks exhibition.

The Grace Kiely Stall provided half-hour concerts and was an opportunity for the town to show off its musical talent. At this period home musical entertainments were an important part of social life and groups took part in talent competitions like that organised at Ui Breasail in Ballsbridge in Dublin the following year.





Cashel Amateur Dramatic Company in the "Building Fund", as performed at Uí Breasail, 1 June 1911, at Ballsbridge, Dublin. Back row – W. Ryan, K. Moloney, D. Quinn, R. Cantwell. Middle row – Miss M. Cantwell (organiser), Mrs. Costello (Pianist) and Miss K. Ryan. Front row – Miss M. Barry and Miss E. O'Connor.



*At the Tipperary Tea Gardens, 1991 – Photo from *Sláinte*, the Journal of the Women's National Health Association.*

Clonmel could provide two Feis gold medallists, Miss Meehan and someone remembered by my generation, Miss Belinda Cashin. She was the lucky possessor of more than one Gold Medal in different branches of music. The other contributors were Miss McKenna on the harp, Miss May Andrews and Miss Morris, a contralto.

The Honey Vale Stall provided the "Pavilion d'Espagne", with "the great Gipsy Palmist, Madame Carmen Sylvia"! The Knocknagow Stall offered to provide "Laughter-Creating Amusements". Its prizes included a crayon picture of Charles J. Kickham, the author of *Knocknagow*. It was probably provided by Mrs. R. Kickham Murphy, wife of Raymond Murphy, who (with Mrs. E. Murphy, Mrs. Thos. Power, and Mrs. D. J. Clancy) was one of the "lady presidents".

Norah Lahy's Stall offered another raffle, the first prize being a painting, a scene from *Knocknagow*. The picture was donated by Ald. Condon MP. "Lady presidents" at this stall were Mrs. Condon, Mrs. E. Dillon and Miss Condon; their assistants were the Misses Dillon, O'Meara and Condon. Rosegreen Stall offered a wide selection of prizes, including a case of champagne, a gramophone and a set of china. Its presidents were Mrs. C. Fitzgerald, Mrs. D. Cummins, Mrs. Anthony, Mrs. Butler, Miss Cleary, Miss O'Connell, Miss Cahill, Misses Dwyer and Miss Fitzgerald.

Sievenamon Stall offered three prizes. The first was a "Beautiful Portiere, hand-painted in oils ... the gift of Miss Collins ... of Clonmel Central School". The second prize was a silver-mounted biscuiterie, the gift of the Misses Kelleher, Irishtown. Presumably one of these sisters was Fanny Kelleher, later organist in the Friary. The third prize was a case of Old Port, the gift of Miss O'Donnell, Irishtown. The last stall, the Shamrock Stall, offered a handsome marble clock, two engravings and a case of wine. Presidents here were Mrs. Cooney, Mrs. Burke, Mrs. L. Doocey, Miss Maher, Misses O'Donnell (Market St.) and the Misses Cooney.

Apart from the stalls there were other entertainments. The Artane Industrial School band were to play a selection ranging from "A Nation Once Again" to music from "Trovatore". Pipers Amusements provided galloping horses and merry-go-rounds, and there were an aerial railway, a switchback railway, Swiss railway boats, Japanese bell-ringers and dancers, archery, an obstacle race and pole climbing.

The 1910 fete at Marlfield was a different affair. The Women's National Health Association, set up by Lady Aberdeen (wife of the Viceroy) had a branch in Clonmel, which started cheap dinners at 8 Mary St. on March 24 1910. Food supplied included soup, cocoa, tea, coffee, a slice of bread and jam (for one halfpenny), and dinners of meat, green vegetables and potatoes for 4p. To help pay for the expenses a fete was held in Marlfield through the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Bagwell.

The lawns and gardens of Marlfield proved an ideal setting and the weather was kind. To quote the account published in *Slainte*, the magazine of the Women's National Health Association, "the stalls were erected under the spreading branches of the fine old trees, a tennis tournament was in progress and all the courts were occupied, while concerts were held at intervals". Music was supplied by St. Joseph's Industrial School, and in the evening by the band of the Royal Irish Regiment, when the grounds were lit by Chinese lanterns suspended from the trees.

While some of the organisers are the same as those for the High School Fete, this time there was a greater participation by members of the Church of Ireland and Quaker communities, and fewer of the business community seem to have been involved. The organisers and their helpers were listed as Mrs. Bagwell, Mrs. Power O'Shee, the Misses Bagwell, Mrs. M. B. Casey, Mrs. C. H. O'Keefe, Mrs. Rentoul, Miss Ingham, Miss Brown, the Misses Fitzgerald, Mrs. R. Malcomson,





Tipperary Dramatic Society at the Village Hall Entertainments Tableau, 1906 – Con the Shaughran, M. O’Callaghan; Meva, L. Brennock; Sgt. Jones, P. O’Kelly; Robert Ffolliott, T. Walsh; Private Clark, Gerald Fitzgerald; Capt. Molineux, R. L. Knight; Corry Kinchela, J. M. Moloney; Claire Ffolliott, N. Price; Arte O’Neill, M. O’Brien; Harvey Duff, W.J. Heffernan; (John M. Heffernan, U.D.C., P.L.G.)



At the Tipperary Tea Gardens, Dublin 1991.

Miss Williamson, the Misses Malcomson and Power, Miss Orr, Mrs. P. Butler, Miss Brunicardi, Miss L. Hassett, the Misses Clancy, Mrs. Warren, Mrs. B. C. Harvey, Mrs. J. F. O'Brien, Misses Farmer, Miss Warren, Miss M. Brunicardi, Miss Mona Morrissey, Miss Harvey, Miss Lane, Miss Kennedy, Miss Cope, Mrs. Robinson, Suirmount, Miss Morton and Miss Wilson.

Some of these names were still surviving in Clonmel in my childhood; the Misses Warren made delicious sweets! The 1901 Census enabled me to identify some more. Mrs. Harvey must have been the wife of the doctor in charge of the Mental Hospital, and Miss Brunicardi the daughter of the borough surveyor.

The tennis tournament was organised by Mrs. Cleeve, Salisbury, and Captain Farmer; there were so many players that two divisions had to be made. Miss F. Bouchier and Mr. C. Baker were the winners in the first division, and Miss de la Power and Mr. J. Langley in the second.

Here too the concert was an important part of the event. It was organised by Mr. C. S. Craddock, who played the accompaniments. Soloists were Miss Pat Kenny, Miss Nellie Smyth, Miss Warren, Miss Kennedy, and Mr. T. Dwyer, and there was a large chorus. Part songs were given by the children of Marlfield School, under the direction of Miss Skally, one of two sisters who taught my father and later taught me at the same school. The younger Miss Skally did not retire until about 1939.

The concerts early in the day took place in the sunken tennis court, and the last was given on the river, the performers being seated in boats loaned by the rowing club, which were decorated with chinese lanterns. Acetyline lamps, erected on the bank by Mr. Cantwell of the Burke Motor Company, produced limelight effects.

A novel feature was the "Living Whist" – a regular game played by young people wearing costumes to represent cards. The idea originated with Mr. Armstrong Lamb, electrical engineer, Prior Park, and the dresses were provided by Mrs. Warren, Mrs. M'Master, the Misses Warren, Brunicardi, Williamson, Harvey, Heweston, Kenny, K. Smith, M. J. Kennedy, N. Magner, Messrs. Lamb and Fitzgibbon. The gross total takings at the fete amounted to £96, and after expenses were paid a net profit remained for the branch.

The year after the Marlfield Fete Lady Aberdeen was the guiding light behind the "Ui Breasail" Whitsuntide Fete and Health and Industrial Exhibition held at the RDS premises at Ballsbridge, Dublin from May 24 to June 7. This was a national undertaking, very different from the local entertainment in Clonmel. A large hall was devoted entirely to industrial exhibits of Irish manufacture and merchandise.

A complete gallery was devoted to the work of the industrial schools, where the boys and girls gave demonstrations of the trades and industries which they were taught. A dancing hall, ornamental gardens, tea gardens, diningrooms, various entertainments like Tofts amusements, bands, gymnastics, singing and theatricals were included in the programme. A picture exhibition and stalls devoted to cottage industries and a model railway exhibition were also held.

Most important were the Health Exhibits of the Women's National Health Association and the food exhibits. Tipperary was well represented at this venue, as can be seen from the photographs of Cashel Amateur Dramatic Company and the Tipperary Dramatic Society.

