

# Revealing Identity

Explorations of identity from the late nineteenth century often emerged as political movements, artistic creations or literary publications. The transfer of an imagined Ireland into reality was perhaps most triumphantly expressed in Feis na nGleann (Glens Feis) at Glenariff in June 1904.

## Revealing community

The idea for a feis to celebrate Gaelic culture emerged from the enthusiasm of people from across the community. Chief amongst them was F J Bigger, whose fascination with the Gaelic past was combined with an ability to motivate others and carry projects to fruition.

The background of the organisers was varied: Rose Young of Galgorm Castle, Ballymena, came from a unionist background, as did Ada McNeill of Cushendun and Margaret Dobbs of Cushendall. Roger Casement, the prominent nationalist who had family links to Ballycastle and Ballymena, was also heavily involved in the organisation of the Feis and its events.

People from diverse backgrounds and all walks of life mingled at the Feis, celebrating the talents shown in the many activities on display.



Opening procession from Cushendall to Glenariff at the first Glens Feis, 1904.  
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Glens Feis, 1906.  
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Costume designed by John Campbell for the first Glens Feis, 1904.  
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Celebratory gatherings such as the Feis were internationally popular by the early twentieth century. Fairs and exhibitions encouraged native industry and rewarded skills in craftsmanship.

## Revealing talent



Fourteen framed samples of Irish crochet produced by The Irish Home Industries Workshop, Ballycastle.  
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Artist John Campbell provided remarkable designs for the Feis programme and banners. He and his brother Joseph were both active in the Feis.

There were numerous competitions for music and dancing, as well as recitation and literature contests.

The local industries section had displays and competitions for crochet and embroidery, woodcarving, spinning and weaving, baking, agricultural produce and much more.



Design for the 1904 Feis as ribbon programme by John Campbell and Joseph MacCathmhail.  
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Banner carried in the opening procession of the first Glens Feis at 1904 and top row of a set designed by John Campbell and Joseph MacCathmhail.  
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Glens Feis, 1904.  
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Toy making was promoted as a craft industry, and examples of Russian toys were shown at the Feis. An Tuirne Beag (The Little Spinning Wheel) shop in Ballycastle opened in 1904 selling locally produced toys. It subsequently thrived under instructor Stephen Clarke. Barbara MacDonnell, first president of the Feis, also established a toy factory in Cushendall.

Gaelic speaking competitions emphasised the importance of the Irish language at the Feis. Both nationalist and unionist newspapers reported favourably on the events.



Scale model of a reel or wheel, made by the Irish Home Industries Workshop, Ballycastle.  
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Wooden Chinese puzzle, attributed to Stephen Clarke, Irish Home Industries Workshop, Ballycastle.  
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Scale model of a spinning wheel attributed to Stephen Clarke, Irish Home Industries Workshop, Ballycastle.  
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Background image: Glens Feis, 1904.  
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