

THE GAELIC REVIVAL

The turn of the 19th century saw the Gaelic Revival. In the north of Ireland both Unionists and Nationalists came together in an effort to preserve the Irish language. This coincided with the Arts and Crafts Revival across Europe. Against this background of cultural renaissance Feis na nGleann ('The Glens Feis') was founded in 1904, as the first Gaelic cultural festival in east Ulster.

Led by a group of leading 'Big House' figures in the locality, among them Miss Rose Young of Galgorm Castle, a member of a leading Ballymena Unionist dynasty, Miss Ada McNeill of Cushendun and Miss Margaret Dobbs of Cushendall, an inaugural Feis Committee was formed. Joining their ranks was Sir Roger Casement, then a recent convert to Irish nationalism, Eoin MacNeill, Glensman and language revivalist, Francis Joseph Bigger, lawyer and antiquarian, John "Benmore" Clarke and Joseph Campbell, the Belfast poet who wrote the haunting *Blue Hills of Antrim*.

The Feis took place in Glenariffe on Thursday 30th June 1904 and included music, dancing, language, local industries and games. Hurling, where teams competed for the Shield of the Heroes - a copper shield specially commissioned by Francis Joseph Bigger, was won by Carey Faughs.



One of the banners representing the Nine Glens of Antrim, carried in the Feis na nGleann
Courtesy of Ballycastle Museum



BELUM.Y10060 Crossroads Dancing (1906)
F. J. Bigger © National Museums NI
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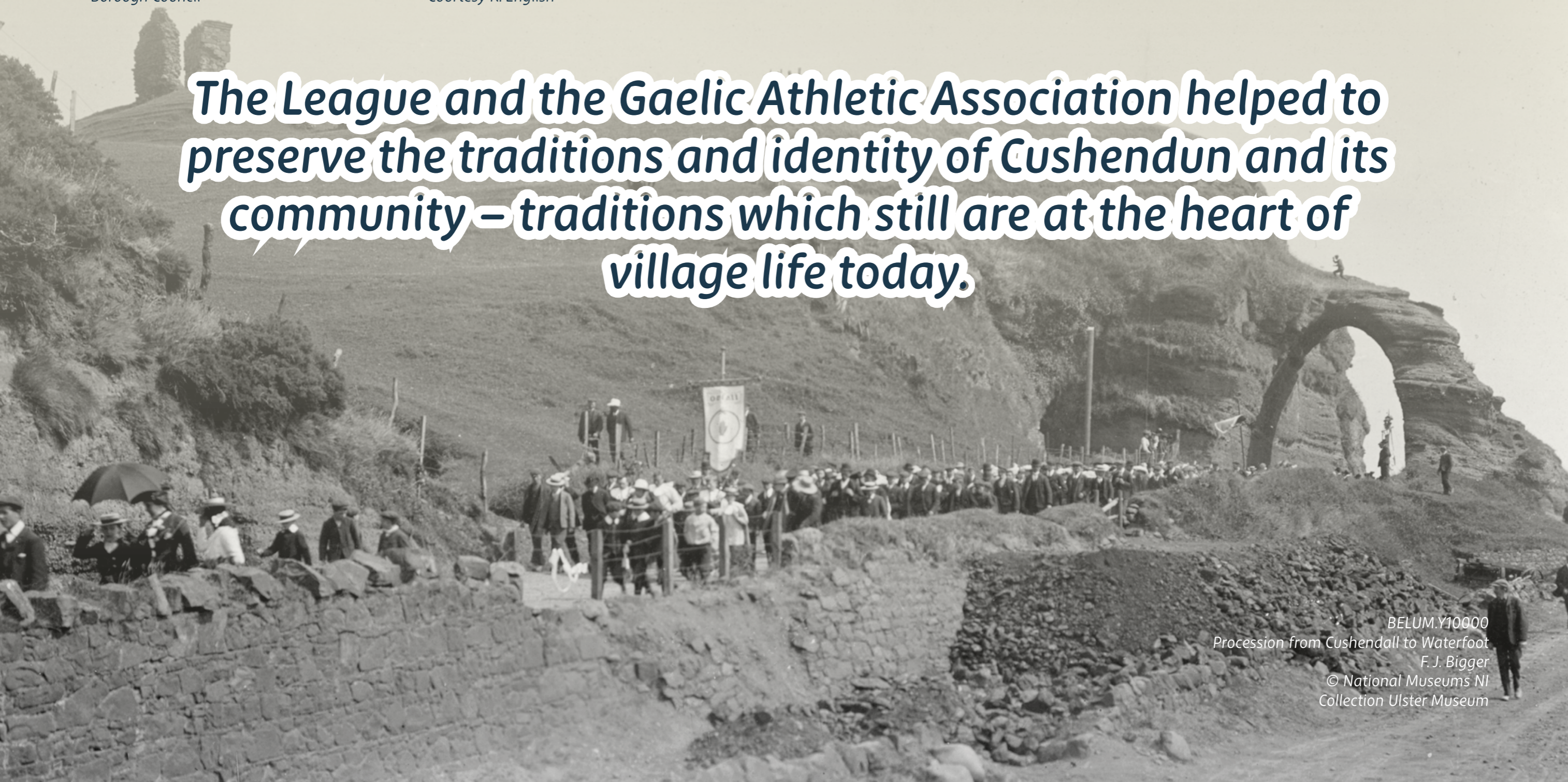
Courtesy of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council



Ada McNeill
Courtesy K. English

With the aim of preserving Irish as a spoken language, the Gaelic League was founded in 1893 by Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill. The Belfast branch (1895) grew out of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club. An early member of the Gaelic League, Miss Ada McNeill, was proactive in the cultivation of the Irish language, including involvement with the Irish College on Rathlin Island. She was secretary to the organising committee of Colaiste Uladh, founded in 1906, that brought together all creeds and classes to study Irish.

The League and the Gaelic Athletic Association helped to preserve the traditions and identity of Cushendun and its community – traditions which still are at the heart of village life today.



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Procession from Cushendall to Waterfoot
F. J. Bigger
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