the effects which national competitions have had on traditional Gaelic song in Scotland. He also delivered a stimulating lecture on the nature of the sean-nós tradition which drew parallels with developments in Scotland and Ireland.

The Centre provides a unique resource for students of Irish Studies in Britain. Its holdings include materials relating to the main areas of Irish Studies such as linguistics, literature, history, sociology and traditional song. Substantial donations have been received and promised from institutions, publishers, public agencies and individuals. This resource will provide the stimulus for the development of Irish-related courses and research within the University of Edinburgh and will, it is hoped, ultimately lead to the availability of an interdisciplinary course or degree in Irish Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

The Centre is located and managed from within the Celtic Department. An Advisory Committee reflecting the various disciplinary and cultural interests of the Centre advises on general matters and on the future development of its activities.

ROIBEARD Ó MAOLALAIGH

Society's Bairns

At the south-west corner of Edinburgh's Chambers Street there is the new Museum of Scotland, scheduled for opening on St Andrews Day, 1998. Most people will remember the site as a small garden, which it was over the last decade of its vacant period. Prior to that, in the 1940s and 1950s, it was a bustling community of inter-related families in which as a child I gained a grounding in children's lore and the custom and belief of urban ethnology.

The layout of Society Buildings, as the site was formerly called, gave an insularity which added to its sense of community. It was a squarish area enclosed on all four sides by buildings. There were two entrances to the square, one a stone cobbled hill leading in from Chambers Street, and a more commonly used pend situated between the 'Territorial' and 'The Hole in the Wa' public houses in Lindsay Place. The entry from Chambers Street was dominated by a large unimpressive and unoccupied Victorian building which locals referred to as Brown's School. It was so large that it obscured the property and activities behind, and it had a large open basement area which to the minds of children was a moat, a dumping place and a playground. After periods of heavy rain the 'moat' retained water which lay stagnant until it weathered

dry to reveal a variety of mosses, lichens and moulds. The local name for this place was 'the plaguey'.

The only part of the square which was rightfully named Society Buildings was the residential accommodation on the south side which backed onto Bristo Port. This was a mixture of eighteenth and nineteenth century tenements built beside the site of Scotland's first limited capital company, the Society of Distillers and Brewers, established around 1640. Three hundred years later the brewery was gone and had been replaced by a bakehouse belonging to 'Strachans the Bakers' in Lindsay Place.

Opposite the housing was the plaguey wall which was approximately eight feet high by the pathway but plunged to twenty-five feet on the moat side. To the side of the plaguey was a flat area of derelict grassless land which acted as a general play area. In the early 1940s a concrete bomb shelter with wooden slatted bunkbeds was built on the land but as the population of Society Buildings feared no German bombers it was soon converted into a variety of uses but mostly a convenient lavatory.

The only other populated part of the square was an isolated stair, adjacent to Brown's School, which was the last remaining section of Brown Square, one of the early developments in Edinburgh's eighteenth century expansion. The building actually had two stairways but these were divided by an iron railing and one side was officially named Chambers Street. The Chambers Street stair was the home of Scotland's first Chinese restaurant. As no young people lived in either of these entries they were of limited interest to Society's urchins except for games of 'rattle and run' by which they would annoy residents into chasing them. In the early 1950s it was revealed that the Chinese premises contained an opium house.

Windows were an important part of 'Society' society. Regardless of weather or time of day there was generally an adult hanging out of a window observing what was happening. Headsquared or turban-headed women would call to each other from their windows to engage in conversations and in good weather there were multiple conversations all over the front of the buildings. This, however, meant that the children were seldom out of adult observation.

Like most Edinburgh children, the ones from Society played chase or hide games such as tig, hide and seek, kick the can, allevoy, etc., but the location of the plaguey wall added risk to participation. In any game, such as tig, where physical contact was demanded, the children would take to the wall which they could manoeuvre on like mountain ibexes, giving the sure-footed an advantage over the others. Strangely enough adults never interfered with running the plaguey wall and accepted a possible fall as part of the hazards of childhood.

In the event of a game requiring a temporary halt it was done by licking the balls of our thumbs, and holding them upright and outright while calling 'barleys'. A more permanent halt could be brought about by calling 'the game's up the pole' and often a day's activities was brought to an end with the cry 'come oot, come oot where ever ye are the game's up the pole'.

Many games were seasonal and were arranged to fit into either long or short daylight hours and favourable climatic conditions. Girls and younger boys played peevers (hopscotch) at times when their chalked beds would last for days without being rained on.

Guiders and girds were two activities that were encouraged by adults to be played somewhere other than in Society because of the noise involved. The fashion in guider wheels was for ball-bearinged rollers which made a racket on cobblestones. Girds, which were generally metal hoops taken from whisky casks, were almost as noisy.

Gang hut season was a most important time of the year and fell during the eight week summer holiday from school. Affiliations were made among the children and huts built according to groups. Construction was basically of wood knocked together with any nails that could be found, stolen or straightened. The outside covering was mainly sacking or bits of linoleum. Roofs tended to be either of linoleum or old carpets, but if there was a jutting bit of building it would be utilised. In the plaguey there was a basement door below an internal stair that provided excellent cover for a hut, but attachment to permanent structures made the huts a danger.

Once a hut was constructed, lighting and heating were installed in the forms of candles stuck into bottle necks and wood fires inside tins. This made the fear of fire ever-present and something that was taken very seriously by the Fire Brigade who made occasional visits and knocked all huts flat. But the huts were important to the children as private places where they were out of view of adults. There they could share scraps of information on sexuality, examine physical differences between boys and girls, and contemplate the purpose and activities of visiting District Nurses. They were also places to smoke broken up 'fag-ends' in clay pipes bought from White's sweetie shop in Chambers Street.

On excursions outside Society Square anything of value that was found lying around, whether lost or not, was immediately given the incantation 'finders keepers, losers greeters' which established ownership onto the finder. This however clashed with the custom of 'halfers' and 'quarters' which if said quickly enough entitled the sayer to a portion of the find. Consequently a finder would attempt to deny this right by shouting 'finders keepers, nae halfers, nae quarters' and so claim full ownership of the find.

Another finding ritual was 'God before the Devil', which was used when finding foodstuffs such as a sucked sweet, chewed chewing gum, an apple core or half eaten pie. By calling 'God before the Devil' the food was cleansed and made suitable for eating. Once again the 'halfers' convention could be applied and if used wisely meant that the user got access to a sweet or gum after the outside dirt had been sucked away.

During pigeon keeping season most of the elder boys located their hutches on a ledge inside the plaguey wall, about twenty feet up, which could only be reached from above. There they would caress their fantails and blow down their beaks to make them puff out their chests. Gathering pigeons entailed climbing church spires and other such lofty places to lift them from their nests, bring them back to the ledge and incarcerate them until they became 'homers'. The whole objective in keeping pigeons

was to capture, and later sell, other peoples' birds by luring them into your hutch in pursuit of some particularly attractive bird of your own. An obvious drawback in the system was a constant stream of irate bird fanciers demanding their pigeons back and offering violence if they were not returned.

There were almost as many girls as boys in 'Society' but for much of the time they were involved in separate activities: girls with their skipping and ball games and boys with the manufacture of guiders or gang huts. On occasions boys were required to purchase goods from the girl's 'shops' using buttons as money, for which they received a week's rations of stones wrapped in newspaper. In return girls were required to act as judges in the boy's 'best falls' competitions when they plunged to dramatic 'deaths' from the Museum wall. Shared games such as tig and rounders were mostly evening activities.

On cold evenings both boys and girls sometimes resorted to Paw's arrey (area) which was a cellar workshop underneath the houses. As the only natural light which penetrated this room filtered in through wooden shuttered windows there were usually a couple of oil lamps in operation. The quality of light, especially when there was a fire in the grate, was almost supernatural as it highlighted aspects of curiously shaped tools and the junk collection of a man who never threw anything away. Paw was at least seventy years old and was the natural grandfather of more than half of the Society children. He acted as shoe repairer and general handyman for the area while he told stories of people who lived in the locality past and present including ones of 'dummy doctors' who prowled the area collecting bodies for the university.

Bonfire days were times of great activity. There were two bonfire days in the year, Victoria Day and Guy Fawkes Day, but preparation for them started weeks in advance with the boys searching the city for combustible material that could be 'liberated' and carried back to Society. Unfortunately all other areas were also collecting fuel for their fires and when different groups met there was instant confrontation. Boys were generally prepared for combat and carried a variety of wooden cudgels. The closer to bonfire day the more frequent became the attacks of gangs desperate to steal each other's wood to make their own fires the best in Central Edinburgh. To avoid this, Society hid its wood in a disused cellar where a chimney sweep had abandoned a lifetime's collection of soot, but even then it was often plundered.

Society even possessed its own 'boney' collecting song;

> We are Society heroes, we fight bravely to victory.
> When we are in the thick of a fight we fight with all of our might to victory.
> Ello, ello bonfire wid, ello, ello bonfire wid.

This of course was an adaptation of that other well known song of Saturday morning matinees:

> We are the Mystery Riders, the tuppenny sliders, the penny cones.

Bonfire night itself was usually a disappointment with the bigger boys assuming command although they had contributed very little to wood collecting. Parents brought squibs (fireworks), but demanded rights of supervision. Firemen invariably turned up saying the fire was a danger to an overhead power line and extinguished it. In spite of this the next bonfire day would be approached with equal enthusiasm and commitment for the pleasure lay within the ritual.

Confrontation played a large part with Society childhood but it was mainly a method of self-assertion and establishing position within the group. Seldom did it develop into actual violence. There was even a convention called 'the gully' which allowed status to be established without having to resort to a 'square go'. When there was a dispute between two apparent equals, the one who considered himself dominant would offer the 'gully' by placing his left hand on the other's right shoulder and saying 'there's the gully', the right hand was then placed on the other's left shoulder with the words 'there's the knife', this was finished by saying 'I can do ye a' yer life' followed by a light slap on the left cheek. There was no great disgrace in accepting 'the gully' and it certainly did not last a lifetime as the words would suggest but only carried over until the other felt confident enough to make a reciprocal challenge. Confrontations that looked as though they could become serious were quickly nipped in the bud by the ever watchful eyes and interventions of adults.

OWEN F. HAND

A Danish Analogue to 'Wandering Willie's Tale'

The origin of 'Wandering Willie's Tale' in *Redgauntlet* is debatable. Was it based upon an oral story known to Scott in his youth, as his notes to the 1832 edition of *Redgauntlet* claim? Or upon a literary version in Joseph Train's *Strains of the Mountain Muse* (Train 1814, 191–5), a book which he certainly knew? If the latter, was Train himself drawing on a story 'current in Nithsdale', as Alexander Fergusson thought? (Fergusson 1886, 216–17).

Without venturing to express an opinion on the Scottish aspects of this question, I would like to draw attention to a Danish analogue which I recently came upon by accident. It was collected by the indefatigable Evald Tang Kristensen, and appeared in the massive 'New Series' of his *Danske Sagn*, in the fifth volume, posthumously published in 1934. The exact date of collection is not given, but most of the material for this