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1 From pre-modern rituals to modern events

Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing

People nowadays often bemoan the disappearance of festivals. It was the same in the eighteenth century ... we should hesitate before speaking, in the singular, of 'the traditional festival'. If it is at all possible to do so, it is only because all festivals were the object of general disapproval. The traditional festival conjured up a repellent image.

(Ozouf 1976: 1)

Introduction

In pre-modern times, rituals and events were major elements of everyday life. Whether agricultural or hunter-gatherer, communities needed traditional ceremonies to mark the important dates in the seasonal calendar, pay homage to their deities, formalise rites of passage and reinforce local identities. In more complex societies where there were small urban and military elites, ritualised events both cemented hierarchies and reassured community members of the social exchange of surplus production for protection. Survival in uncertain times required people to band together, forming tight-knit parochial groups based on trust and personal connectedness. Events and their rituals held a dual role in creating identities. They brought people together, reinforcing their connections and obligations; but they also distinguished other groups as different and potentially hostile. All around the globe, the social roles of events followed similar patterns, even if there were marked variations in form.

With the advent of industrialisation and urbanisation, communal societies rapidly evolved into much larger and more complex nation states. As Benedict Anderson (1983) has argued, modern times saw the rise of *imagined communities*. Instead of knowing everybody in the group, people were now connected to thousands, if not millions, of others whom they could never personally interact with. For such national societies to work, new institutions, symbols and ceremonies needed to develop to convince people that they now shared in this much larger national identity.

Accordingly, as nation states developed, new events, rituals and traditions were created. These had the purpose of affirming national identities and the authority of rulers and governments. Often these were organised and promoted

by governments with the quite deliberate intention of encouraging loyalty and disseminating a national story that everybody could feel part of. For example, in our recent work *Commemorative Events: Memory, identities, conflict* (Frost and Laing 2013), we examined how state-sponsored events had proliferated in modern times, utilising commemorations of important historical events and national days to keep large and sometimes diverse societies glued together. Similarly, mega-events, despite their international format, are typically used by the governments of host nations as a means to stimulate national pride and solidarity.

However, despite the changing roles of events related to the rise of nation states, traditional rituals and events remain with us in the modern world. This is quite a puzzle. If they originally developed in response to the needs of traditional societies that were insular and geographically limited, why should they persist? The local customs and conditions that drove their evolution have now been replaced by globalisation, urbanisation and mass media. The features and constraints of the modern world have created new types of events – such as mega-events like the Olympics, World Cups and World Fairs – but they have not blotted out the traditional. Indeed, far from disappearing, there are many traditional rituals and events that remain popular and continue to be enthusiastically staged. And this phenomenon is global.

The aim of this book is to explore the role of traditional events and rituals in the modern world. The 16 chapters cover a range of case studies of the performance of ritual through events, including their historical antecedents and development over time, as well as their role in society, link with identities both seemingly fixed and fluid and their continued relevance. The cases examined are not museum pieces, but rather vibrant festivals and events that continue to persist. Drawing on the power of history and cultural tradition, they are manifestations of heritage, existing in three temporalities: celebrating the past, occurring in the present and aiming to continue into and influence the future.

Many events have evolved over centuries, drawing on local customs and conditions. However, as the world becomes increasingly globalised, traditional events and the identities they support are increasingly being challenged and rituals may be lost. Reacting against this trend towards homogeneity, some communities strive to preserve and even recreate their traditional events. Globalisation and modernity thus occupy important spaces in the staging and development of events. On the one hand, they may be viewed as *challenges*, encouraging homogeneity and threatening the continuation of tradition. However, on the other hand, they may also be viewed as *drivers*, stimulating a reaction whereby people and societies place greater value on maintaining their heritage. The latter concept is widely acknowledged within heritage studies (see, for examples, Laing and Frost 2012; Lowenthal 1998), but is more commonly applied to tangible buildings rather than the intangibility of events.

The processes are complex and varied, but four major patterns of the continu-

- *Preservation.* Rituals and traditional events are staged continually, with organisers and participants placing great value on maintaining the format and components as closely as possible to how they were in the past. The resultant event is promoted as preserving traditions against modernity and globalisation and claims high levels of *authenticity* and *provenance*.
- *Adaption.* The event evolves over time, incorporating new elements, but still maintaining some customary rituals. The authenticity of these remnants is highly valued and may be juxtaposed with modern components to promote an appealing mix.
- *Appropriation.* Events take rituals and customs from elsewhere and incorporate them into their staging. These may be from other events, or from other parts of customary life. The Maori Haka, for example, is performed by teams from New Zealand and other Pacific Ocean nations at sporting events, whereas it originated as a warrior's challenge. Furthermore, it is performed by team-mates from both Maori and European heritage. In 2006, players in an indigenous Australian junior football team were so impressed by a Haka performed by their Papua New Guinean opponents that they developed their own ritual. Since then, this has been performed by other indigenous teams (for example, versus Ireland in 2013), though it is presented as a 'Challenge', with no reference to the Haka.
- *Invention.* This concept, made famous by historian Eric Hobsbawm, refers to the process of the creation of rituals and symbols that quickly take on the appearance and reputation of being traditional (see the next section for a more detailed exploration). An example of this is the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games, where athletes of all countries parade together – in contrast to the opening where they march as national teams. This was suggested in 1956 by a Melbourne schoolboy and taken up by organisers who wished to defuse tensions arising from the deterioration of the Cold War.

Some key theories

Two particular theories are often invoked to explain the significance and resilience of traditional rituals and events. These are Falassi's *Ritual Structure* and Hobsbawm's *Invention of Tradition*. Interestingly, both of these were published in the 1980s, well before the rise of events studies. Accordingly, their application to events studies has been somewhat uneven; mainly being utilised by those taking a social sciences or humanities perspective and often noticeably lacking from those following a business paradigm. In the case studies that constitute this book, most authors refer to one or both, reflecting their importance to the general study of traditional events.

Falassi (1987) introduced an anthology of writings on events by arguing that most follow a *ritual structure*, that is a series of common rites or components. He argued that this structure was rarely deliberately planned by organisers, but rather grew organically or subconsciously as a response to our basic human needs and beliefs. In essence, these represented a series of underlying meanings

that underpinned most events and their significance to societies. Particularly apparent in traditional events that had evolved over centuries, Falassi argued that they were still apparent in recently constructed events. Other researchers, for example Seal (2004), have found Falassi's ritual structure a valuable framework for explaining modern events and their meanings.

According to Falassi, the chief rites commonly found in events are:

- *Valorisation*. Time and space are claimed for the event through an opening ceremony. The event is now marked as symbolically different from normal time and space.
- *Purification*. There are ceremonies to cleanse and safeguard the festival and its participants.
- *Passage*. Rituals that mark transition from one stage of life to another, particularly for young people.
- *Reversal*. Normal behaviours and roles are reversed. The illicit may be respectable. A common form is the coronation of a 'fool' as the king of the festival.
- *Conspicuous display*. The most valued objects are displayed, for example, religious relics are paraded.
- *Conspicuous consumption*. Abundant, even wasteful, consumption, particularly of food and drink.
- *Dramas*. Treasured stories are told through dramatic or musical performances.
- *Exchange*. Symbolic exchanges of money, valuables or tokens. The wealthy might distribute gifts and money to the poor.
- *Competition*. Typically games and sporting contests, often between rival groups. Such games may be a substitute for armed conflict.
- *Devalorisation*. A closing ceremony marks the return to normal time and space, perhaps with a promise of a future repeat of the festival.

As with Falassi, Hobsbawm (1983) set out his theory in an introductory essay to an edited collection. His thesis was that 'traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented' (1983: 1). A specialist in modern history, he observed that this tendency towards invention was a characteristic of modern society, being particularly apparent in Western Europe during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here was a major paradox in modernity. In a period of increasing change, many old traditions, rituals and festivals were disappearing at a rapid rate. However, at the same time, societies were creating new traditions. This propensity to invent, Hobsbawm reasoned, was a product of the stresses of modernity and accelerating change. These new traditions were purposefully functioning to maintain social cohesion and support changing institutions. Published in the same year as Hobsbawm's work, Anderson (1983) had argued that the development of nation states demanded that there be symbolic events reinforcing loyalty and inclusiveness. Hobsbawm took this a step further in arguing that these would have to be specifically created. Most

importantly, Hobsbawm demonstrated that it only takes a short space of time for new rituals to be widely accepted as traditional and venerable.

A historical overview of traditional events and rituals

To better understand the role of traditional events in the modern world, it is valuable to consider how they originally functioned and developed in pre-modern societies. Due to constraints of space, we can only do this in a limited way. Rather than a comprehensive examination of traditional events and rituals, the following sections serve only as an introduction. Furthermore, our choices are highly subjective, reflecting our interests and knowledge – in many ways Anglo-centric. Instead of attempting to cover a wide range of societies and cultures, our focus is on a small group of case studies. These are merely intended as examples and their purpose is to provide a general historical foundation to the events and rituals covered in the later chapters. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that historical cases and description have a key role in examining and analysing the evolution of events. As historian David Cannadine argued:

Like all cultural forms which may be treated as texts, or all texts which may be treated as cultural forms, 'thick' rather than 'thin' description is required ... in order to rediscover the 'meaning' of ... ritual during the modern period, it is necessary to relate it to the specific social, political, economic and cultural milieu within which it was actually performed. With ceremonial, as with political theory, the very act of locating the occasion or the text in its appropriate context is not merely to provide the historical background, but actually to begin the process of interpretation.

(1983: 105)

Prehistoric events

In a general sense, prehistoric signifies before recorded history – before societies developed writing. This immediately raises problems of evidence. How do we know what events and rituals were like in such traditional communities? How do we interpret their meanings and significance? What we have is only fragmentary. In some instances, archaeology has unearthed artefacts, though these are skewed towards certain materials. Stones, for example, may survive; whereas iron may rust and wood, skins and other organic materials will decay. Occasionally, material finds will be complemented by folklore, though this raises further problems of veracity. Stonehenge in England illustrates this well. Built around 4,000 years ago, its structure and fabric are still well intact. Archaeological research has identified the source of the stones, how they were raised and even how they have been periodically rearranged. There is a consensus that Stonehenge was constructed as an important ceremonial site. However, there is substantial disagreement as to what those rituals were and most importantly what their purpose was. Furthermore, recent years have seen the highly controversial invention of

Druidic rituals, particularly around the midsummer solstice. It is a fascinating and provocative example of the difficulties of interpreting a heritage site that still has significance and appeal, but where the original meanings are lost or disputed.

Archaeology has pushed back the beginning of human rituals well beyond Stonehenge. Cave paintings around the world are linked to hunting, religious, possibly even astrological ceremonies. For example, the famous cave paintings of prehistoric wildlife at Lascaux in France (approximately 17,000 years old) are often seen as being created for rituals before a hunt. Like Stonehenge, there are also alternative theories, the only agreement being that they are for ritual purposes. In Outback Australia, Mungo Woman, excavated in the Willandra Lakes, is dated to between 20,000 to 25,000 years ago. She is evidence of

The world's oldest known cremation ... Her body was burnt and the bones collected, broken and buried in a small pit. This shows that complex rites could accompany death, including the death of a woman, and is a very similar ritual to that accorded to the dead in traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal society, which may have retained an extremely ancient custom which was originally more widespread.

(Flood 1990: 250)

In recent years, archaeologists and anthropologists have become more speculative about prehistoric rituals and ceremonies. Applying a comparative approach, underpinned by a premise of the universality of human experience, they have complemented material finds with more recent ethnography of prehistoric peoples. Further underpinning this is the concept that our ancestors were essentially rational and that their rituals evolved primarily to help their societies survive and flourish.

An intriguing example of this paradigm is the propensity of some prehistoric societies to engage in building massive monumental works. Examples include Stonehenge and Avebury in England, New Grange in Ireland, Inca, Mayan and Aztec temples, the moundbuilders of the Mississippi Valley and the *Moai* (statue) of Easter Island. In the past, these ceremonial sites have tended to be seen as wasteful, illustrative of traditional priest-dominated societies expending nearly all of their surplus resources on religious practices. However, a new interpretation sees such *cultural elaboration* as monument building as a rational rather than wasteful strategy. As archaeologists Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo explained: 'any form of cultural elaboration requires an investment of time and energy in activities that do not have a clear or direct role in enhancing survival or enabling reproduction'. Building monuments and burying grave goods use resources that could, in the short term, support higher populations. Expending resources on rituals rather than children is a form of *bet-hedging* (i.e. balancing risks over the longer term), so that, 'where we find unpredictability in resources, those who have fewer offspring in any one generation tend to have more descendants overall' (Hunt and Lipo 2011: 136).

Such decision making was probably not conscious, as prehistoric peoples 'often engage in customs that happen to have evolutionary benefits, but without ever thinking about them in that way' and 'those reaping the benefits of any given practice need not understand why it contributes to their survival'. Indeed, all that is needed is that society flourishes, demonstrating that ceremonial expenditure was justified in propitiating the gods. Focusing specifically on Easter Island (Rapanui), Hunt and Lipo argued:

we are not saying the islanders consciously decided to spend more time making and moving statues in efforts to take time and resources away from reproduction ... [but doing this] didn't threaten Rapanui survival, and indeed probably help to sustain it.

(Hunt and Lipo 2011: 136)

Following this new interpretation, Easter Island is seen not as an example of feckless wastage of limited resources, but rather of the importance of ceremonies in ensuring a stable society.

For prehistoric hunter-gatherers, ceremonial feasting developed as a reaction to inconsistent food supplies. Periodically there would be massive surpluses of food, far more than small groups could consume and with little prospect of preserving for future years. Sometimes seasonal, but unpredictable in their scale and reliability, such bounty was the cause of joyous celebration. In prehistoric Australia, the two most notable were summer swarms of Bogong moths in the high country around modern Canberra and the harvesting of bunya nuts (*araucaria bidwillii*) in south-eastern Queensland. While the latter fruited each year, it was generally at three-year intervals that there were massive harvests. Both instances provided fat-rich feasting. While these events brought communities together, they also had the highly important effect of facilitating contact with other tribes and clans, often from hundreds of kilometres away. Sharing the bounty with others allowed for trade, settling disputes and encouraging cross-tribal marriages (Flood 1990; Lourandos 1997). Just as important as feasting, many societies developed rituals of fasting and consumption taboos; again this may be rationalised as a response to inconsistency in food supply.

Inter-tribal contact and exchange required the development of standardised rituals signifying peaceful intentions and friendship. First contact was particularly problematic and open to misunderstandings. Here, the evidence of rituals has often come from Western explorers and accordingly may be misinterpreted.

In concluding this brief overview of prehistoric rituals, it is worth noting how these changed in intent with the incursion of European colonial powers. One by-product of the Age of Enlightenment was a major Western fascination with *the Other*, often manifested through anthropological interest in studying and recording these ceremonies (Bell *et al.* 2013; Catlin 1841; Griffiths 1996). This paralleled European antiquarianism and folklore studies at home and was closely linked to a growth in ethnographic museums and displays. As they did with rare fauna and flora, European colonials were keen to record, classify and dissect cultures and traditions before they died out in the face of modernity.

Such interest generated a commodification of traditional rituals. In Australia, Aboriginals quickly realised there was a market for performing modified versions of their rituals, particularly the *corroboree*. Even as missionaries and officials sought to forbid indigenous religious ceremonies, there was a trend towards performance for payment, often with the reassurance that these were secular dances and stories. William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines in the Melbourne area in the 1840s, attended many ceremonies and recorded them in his diary. While he thought some had no religious elements, at other times he was puzzled, recording of an initiation ritual: 'I think there may be more in the meaning of this than I am acquainted with' (quoted in Ellender and Christiansen 2001: 52). At almost exactly the same time, the painter George Catlin was recording ceremonies and costumes among Native American tribes along the Missouri River. Acutely aware that these traditions could be soon lost, he noted:

The Mandans, like all other tribes, lead lives of idleness and leisure: and of course, devote a great deal of time to their sports and amusements, of which they have a great variety ... to the eye of the traveller who knows not their meaning or importance, they are an uncouth and frightful display of starts, and jumps, and yelps ... but when one ... has been lucky enough to be initiated into their mysterious meaning, they become a subject of the most intense and exciting interest.

(Catlin 1841: 128)

As European contact increased, some indigenous people gained a certain measure of status in the new transitional society through performing and mediating their traditional rituals. The most prominent of these in Melbourne was Barak, who through to the 1890s drew pictures of traditional corroborees for visitors. His works are now seen as of the highest significance and held in art collections around the world (Sayers 1994). Similarly, in Vanuatu the ritual of land-diving was discouraged by missionaries and colonial authorities. However, late in the twentieth century, it became very popular with tourists, especially after it was performed during a royal tour. In a society in transition from traditional to modern, the revenue from land-diving was important for the local economy (Cheer *et al.* 2013).

The classical world

The development of new political, social and economic institutions created new types of events. In the popular imagination, the two events most associated with the classical world were the Olympics and the arena contests of Rome. In both scale and style, these established strong ideas of what major events should be like and the impact they could have on society and leisure. It is particularly notable that many modern events and venues have looked backwards to the classical period for inspiration

The ancient Olympics are usually dated as beginning in 776 BCE. This is also the date that is often used as marking the beginning of history for the Greeks. Before then we have myths and archaeological evidence, but no firm history. Homer probably composed the *Iliad* in the eighth century BCE. Placing the birth of the Olympics at approximately the same time is based on the calculations of Hippias, who wrote in around 400 BCE. There were probably earlier games and contests, but the 776 date gives the Olympics a special resonance of marking the *birth* of Greek culture and history (Lane Fox 2008).

Similarly, the foundation of Rome by Romulus and Remus was later specifically dated to provide a festival. Like the Olympics, the auspicious date was situated by scholars around the middle of the eighth century BCE, a convenient bridge between the semi-mythical past and recorded history. As the Romans developed a calendar that had the same dates re-occurring each year, the opportunity presented itself for a specific foundation day. This was decided as 21 April and became the basis for the Parilla, a commemorative and celebratory festival (Feeney 2008). In 1925, Mussolini revived this anniversary as the Natale di Roma (Birth of Rome) and it continues as a carnivalesque celebration of ancient Rome (Frost and Laing 2013).

What evolved among the ancient Greeks was the idea of combining festivals, rituals and religious significance. This is probably what occurred at many prehistoric events, but with the Olympics and other festivals, the details were now recorded and preserved. The Olympics were held to honour Zeus, with the appropriate religious ceremonies matched by athletic games. As classicist Lionel Casson argued, it provided

In one unique package the spectrum of attractions that have drawn tourists in all times and places: the feeling of being part of a great event and of enjoying a special experience; a gay festive mood punctuated by exalted religious moments; elaborate pageantry; the excitement of contests between performers of the highest calibre – and, on top of this, a chance to wander among famous buildings and works of art. Imagine the modern Olympics taking place at Easter in Rome, with the religious services held at St Peter's. (1974: 76–77)

While the Olympics highlighted athletics, other events had different ways of honouring the gods. The Pythian Games, dedicated to Apollo, featured song and dance. In Athens, an annual festival for Dionysus focused on music and drama and is credited as the birthplace of theatre. All of these functioned as early versions of hallmark events, branding particular towns and cities with their distinctive festival, attracting large numbers of visitors and stimulating the local economy. As had occurred with many prehistoric events, there was a strong tradition of keeping the peace and being tolerant of strangers through the course of these festivals (Casson 1974).

Highly urbanised Rome is strongly associated with the spectacle of arena events – including gladiatorial contests and chariot races. In the modern imagination, this has been strongly reinforced through film, including *Quo Vadis*

(1951), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Gladiator* (2000) and the Italian *Peplum* (or *sword and sandal*) movies of the 1950s and 1960s. In many Roman cities and towns, arenas were constructed on a massive scale and many survive today. The best known is the Colosseum in Rome. Constructed between 70 and 80 CE, it was commissioned by the Emperor Vespasian as a means of rebuilding faith in imperial rule following the disastrous reign of Nero. With free entry and daily events, it provided one-half of the *bread and circuses* recipe for stable rule. In providing this focus on events, the Romans combined the reinforcement of the authority of their imperial state, allowed for the inclusion of subject peoples within their culture and distracted potential dissenters (Korstanje 2009).

With the collapse of the Western Empire, what remained to influence European societies were the relics of rituals and ceremonies. The festival of Saturnalia—held towards the close of the year and featuring the gifting of presents—evolved gradually into Christmas. The resilience of the Eastern Empire provided a continuing exemplar of imperial excellence, continuing to diffuse westwards through trade, Varangian mercenaries, Orthodox missionaries and ultimately the Crusades (Herrin 2007). However, for most medieval societies, the glories of Rome remained only as a shadowy and legendary influence, perhaps best exemplified by the persistence and eventual revival of Arthurian romance.

Romanticising the medieval

The Dark Ages were characterised by a decline in centralised power, cities and trade. The chief exception was Byzantium, where magnificent pageantry and rituals still captured the imagination of visitors from the periphery. Elsewhere across Europe, there was a return to agriculture and insularity. Social life became centred on villages, autarky and variants of feudalism. Inward-looking communities developed rituals and customs that heavily emphasised agricultural production, promoting fertility and attempting to ward off natural disasters. As Christianity spread across Europe, there was a tendency for missionaries to incorporate old folkways and mythology—particularly those connected with seasonal cycles—into the Christian canon. Such hybridised rituals would remain well into the modern era.

It is the rituals of the medieval period that are most popularly associated with traditional festivals and events. Even more than that, these are the ceremonies and customs that are lauded and romanticised (and form a significant part of this book). The fascination with the medieval is a paradoxical, yet common, feature of modernity. For over 200 years, the urbanised societies of the West have looked backwards at the medieval and imagined a romanticised Golden Age of chivalry and legend that runs to the core of modern identities (Laing and Frost 2012; Wood 1999). This hyper-real heritage draws on fact and fiction, combining *The Canterbury Tales*, the Crusades, *The Court Jester*, Robin Hood, *Indiana Jones*, *Lord of the Rings* and *El Cid*. Central to this imaginary world are carnivalesque images of traditional rituals, albeit mediated by Hollywood. In popular consciousness, the medieval is characterised by feasting, maypoles, jousting,

tournaments, masked balls, festivals and processions. Furthermore, modern trends—such as slow food and foraging—draw on their medieval heritage for authenticity.

Medieval European agricultural communities and their rituals

In a predominantly agricultural world, societies were organised around villages with strongly communal structures for support, defence and production. Rituals and festivals brought people together, reinforcing these bonds through the celebration of the local community and marking of seasonal milestones. Not surprisingly, given the emphasis on agriculture, most ceremonies were centred on tasks such as planting and harvesting. These were highly symbolic and ritualised, and even after the spread of Christianity, contained echoes of earlier animism and paganism. According to archaeologist Yosef Garfinkel (2003), the shift from hunting and collecting to agriculture required people to group together in sedentary societies. Collective ceremonies were necessary to encourage bonding and Garfinkel nominated ritualised dancing as paramount for defining identities. To this we would add a wider range of experiences that were staged as a group, including singing, music, initiations, decision making, worship, feasting and brewing.

Many rituals were designed to capture or encourage natural powers of fertility and closely followed a seasonal calendar. At the beginning of spring, the birch was the first tree to sprout leaves and so was viewed as a harbinger of new life. Young trees were uprooted or cut and carried in a procession through the village. They then became the centrepiece for dancing and festivities, before being torn up and scattered to return energy to the soil. Young unmarried girls, viewed as filled with potential fertility, were involved in this dancing and rituals (Barber 2013).

According to linguist and archaeologist Elizabeth Barber, in such traditional communities rituals were constructed on the basis of analogy. Girls and birch trees were symbolic of fecundity and they were central to rituals to ensure sufficient rainfall and ward off droughts and storms. While festive, at their core such rituals were about survival: ‘one must invite—indeed coax—the spring to arrive. If one simply waited, Spring (being wilful) might not *choose* to come, and then, with last year’s food bins already almost empty, one could not survive’ (Barber 2013: 41).

Here we see differences in the interpretation of medieval agrarian rituals. The mythologist Joseph Campbell was adamant that it was wrong to see these as attempts to control or influence nature. Rather, ‘the wonderful cycle of the year, with its hardships and periods of joy, is celebrated’ and these ‘rites all prepare the community to endure’ (Campbell 1949: 384). While such a rational interpretation seems convincing to twenty-first century researchers, it is also clear that medieval peoples sought to literally change nature through the appropriate use of rituals.

As the year progressed, there was a burst of feasting and merrymaking just prior to Lent:

For days people gorged themselves – the ‘Christian’ reason being to eat up the remaining stores that the church would not allow during Lenten fasting, but the pre-Christian reason being that much food on the table at the end of winter would by analogical magic produce copious food in the next agricultural cycle.

(Barber 2013: 43)

The analogical slaying and defeat of Winter occurred across Europe. In Russia, there were mock funerals and burnings of an effigy and

In parts of Germany, two men arrayed as Summer and Winter would fight, with Summer invariably trouncing Winter. In other areas in Germany, Poland, France, and the Basque country, people burned, stoned, clubbed, shredded, or drowned a straw doll representing Winter or Death, while the Swiss of Zurich incinerated a huge cotton ‘snowman.’ As in Russia, the residual magical energies were often buried or strewn about the fields where the seeds of the new crops awaited the returning warmth to rise again.

(Barber 2013: 44)

Midsummer was a time of great festivity, as it remains in much of Europe today (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). The longest day of the year was marked with bonfires, singing and dancing. Many cultures constructed symbolic effigies made out of straw. These were burnt with laughter and mock mourning, again a way of returning the life force to the soil to ensure future fertility. There was also a practical element in the burning off of potentially hazardous vegetation. The autumn harvest was a celebration of success and the end of the year’s farmwork (American relics include Thanksgiving and the Hoe-Down – literally a dance to celebrate putting farm implements away). By harvest, symbolism was less important, the key rituals had been performed earlier and would soon be commenced again.

Medieval towns

As towns redeveloped after the Dark Ages, they too evolved their own rituals and events. In contrast to the natural cycles of the surrounding countryside, these developments were often more about identity, trade and independence; though worries about dangerous magic were just below the surface. Another interesting contrast was that urban traditions were more likely to be recorded by contemporary chroniclers and officials.

For many towns, events and rituals grew up around their semi-mythical origins. Such traditions were important in demonstrating how historically the town had been created as a special place with rights and privileges worthy of preservation. These examples are worth noting. The first is Reims in France. In 406 its Bishop

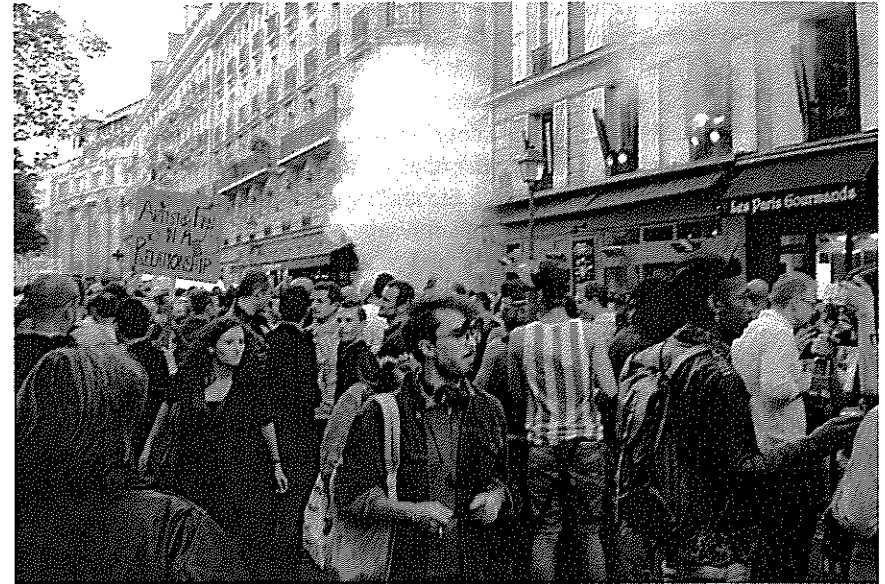


Figure 1.1 Midsummer festival in the Marais district, Paris (source: W. Frost).



Figure 1.2 Hungarian folk dancers taking part in the Szentendre Summer Festival, Hungary (source: J. Laing).

Remy had baptised Clovis, King of the Franks. From then to the nineteenth century, its cathedral was where French kings were traditionally crowned and its economy was centred on associated royal production and events. The second is Coventry, whose origins were traced to the establishment of a monastery and market town by the eleventh-century Lord Leofric and Lady Godiva. By the thirteenth century, an elaborate myth had developed about Godiva and her special role as protector of the welfare of the townspeople and this gradually evolved into an annual festival. The third is the Palio in Siena (Italy), a horse race marking the end of the festival to celebrate Mary as the patron saint of the town. In medieval times, many Italian cities and towns staged such events, though Siena's is now the only one to have run continuously. Symbolically, it is staged in the very centre of the city (the Campo), bringing together all the districts or factions to compete, but also stress their identity and unity in terms of their special relationship with the town's patron saint (Dundes and Falassi 1975).

Many medieval urban festivals combined religion and rites of reversal, often leading to carnivalesque excesses. For example, in fourteenth-century France,

In the annual Feast of Fools at Christmastime, every rite and article of the Church no matter how sacred was celebrated in mockery. A *dominus festi*, or lord of the revels, was elected from the inferior clergy ... whose day it was to turn everything topsy-turvy. They installed their lord as Pope or Bishop or Abbot of Fools in a ceremony of head-shaving accompanied by bawdy talk and lewd acts; dressed him in vestments turned inside out; played dice on the altar and ate black puddings and sausages while mass was celebrated in nonsensical gibberish ... wearing beast masks and dressed as women or minstrels ... [then] all rush violently from the church to parade through the town, drawing the *dominus* in a cart from which he issues mock indulgences while his followers hiss, cackle, jeer, and gesticulate ... Naked men haul carts of manure which they throw at the populace. Drinking bouts and dances accompany the procession.

(Tuchman 1978: 32–33)

In analysing the works of Rabelais, literary researcher Mikhail Bakhtin recognised the profound importance of ritual spectacles in towns. These 'took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked serious rituals such as the tribute rendered to the victors at tournaments, the transfer of feudal rights, or the initiation of a knight' (1965: 5). Immersion in such parody, mimicry and general tomfoolery 'offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; [and] ... built a second world in which all medieval people participated' (1965: 6). Furthermore, these festivals were all-encompassing for the towns and their people, with essentially no barriers between performers and audience, nor between a stage and public space.

In medieval Paris, Midsummer was converted to St John's Day. As in the surrounding countryside, the highpoint was an enormous bonfire symbolising

purification. Customarily it was lit by a person of high office who on this day came down and mingled with the masses. In 1648, it was King Louis XIV himself, lighting the fire and dancing while crowned with a wreath of roses. The concept of purification by fire was taken to the extreme with the burning of a barrel or sack of live cats, a ritual that persisted in Paris until well into the eighteenth century (Goudsblom 1992).

Town festivals often developed elaborate sporting competitions. Symbolic of warfare, they involved different districts within towns, but also served to unite those within its boundaries. Many were linked to religious holidays, forging that uneasy relationship between authority and chaos that characterised many urban traditional festivals. The Palio of Siena is a prime example. Another persists at Ashbourne in Derbyshire (UK), where an annual football match was played in the streets on Shrove Tuesday (McCabe 2006). With few rules and hundreds of players, it was anarchic and dangerous, though sanctified by its connection to a holy day. Like the Palio, such folk football competitions were once widespread, but now only continue in a few places.

While much of the research into medieval festivals has emphasised their role in bringing communities together, there is a counter-argument. Some historians have argued that there were also patterns of divisiveness, that many of these festivals privileged certain groups – typically the elites – and excluded or marginalised others. Accordingly, they argue, festivals were distinguished by ongoing tensions, as various groups battled for control and prominence (Hanawalt and Reyerson 1994).

The decline of traditional rituals

For Hobsbawm (1983), nineteenth-century modernity, characterised by increased connectivity through steam trains, telegraph and newspapers, sounded the death-knell for insular traditions. While these also encouraged new traditions, what was invented – according to Hobsbawm – was still far less than what disappeared. Compelling as this explanation seems, it is important to understand that the processes of decline and replacement were occurring far earlier in the modern era.

In Western Europe, the economic and social development of the early modern period (early 1500s to late 1700s) was the catalyst for the decline of many traditional rituals. Religious turmoil, the growth of commerce and nascent beginnings of industrialisation, the collapse of feudalism and acceleration of the drift to the cities all combined to create a new world where past customary practices were anachronistic.

In England, state support for the Reformation (and abject fear of the Counter-Reformation) created the need for new festivals and commemorations to promote unity and loyalty. Most prominent of these was Guy Fawkes or Bonfire Night, commemorating the defeat of an attempt to blow up parliament. In creating a new tradition to reinforce their legitimacy, the authorities intended that this

Unequivocally Protestant celebration on 5 November therefore provided a handy replacement for what was now regarded as a redundant Catholic holy day, and also filled All Saints' Day's role as a festival marking the onset of winter, with celebratory bonfires defying the November darkness ... Bonfire Night had replaced Hallowe'en.

(Sharpe 2005: 85; see also Cressy 1994; Frost and Laing 2013)

As religious fundamentalism took a stronger and stronger grip on sixteenth-century England, the Puritans focused their wrath on age-old rituals:

Most Catholic rites were regarded as thinly concealed mutations of earlier pagan ceremonies ... much energy was spent in demonstrating that holy water was the Roman *aqua lustralis*, that wakes were the *Bacchanalia*, [and] Shrove Tuesday celebrations *Saturnalia* ... ecclesiastical injunctions prohibited the entry into the church or churchyard of Rush-bearing processions, Lords of Misrule and Summer Lords and Ladies ... the Puritans wanted the abolition of all remaining holy days, a ban on maypoles ... the bagpipes and fiddlers who accompanied the bridal couple to the church and to the throwing of corn (the sixteenth-century equivalent of confetti) ... [and] the custom of giving New Year's gifts ... the custom of drinking healths was also seen as a heathen survival.

(Thomas 1971: 74–76)

However, civic authorities in the growing towns were concerned about these new developments. Replacing medieval carnivalesque with sectarian violence threatened social stability and the new economic order. Events needed to be carefully staged – allowing people to blow off steam, but with no lasting damage. With Guy Fawkes Night, 'the trick was to maintain a solemn Protestant commemoration without inspiring too much anti-Catholic enthusiasm' (Cressy 1994: 70). Even then, it remained (and remains today) on the edge of disorder. At Lewes in south-east England, late-nineteenth-century Guy Fawkes Night was characterised by riots and property damage directed at merchants; provocative clashes between tradition and the new civic order of municipal corporations and town police forces (Sharpe 2005). It is not surprising that Guy Fawkes – reversed now into a hero – has emerged as the symbolic face of protest groups like Anonymous (Frost and Laing 2013).

The reining in of traditional events was not confined to the Protestant world. In France, the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment encouraged a view that the *Ancien Régime* was distinguished by too many festivals and religious holidays. These were seen as entrenching insularity, conservatism and ignorance and restricting economic production. While there was resistance, French aspirations to be the major European power required embracing modernity (Ozouf 1976).

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, our aim has been to set the scene for the later case studies through a general discussion of the changing nature of traditional events and rituals. While we have only been able to touch lightly on various periods of history, patterns are apparent. Two are worth highlighting.

First, interest in the role of events in society is spread across a broad academic spectrum. Rather than being a narrow domain, events – as seen in this chapter – are central to research in archaeology, history, classics, literature, sociology, folklore and cultural studies. With such a breadth of perspectives, a wide range of theories are being proposed, tested, contested and debated. For those of us in events studies, it is important that we engage with and understand these relevant disciplines.

Second, the persistence of traditional rituals and events into the modern world is complex. As events serve to satisfy contemporary needs in society, a rapidly changing world – it might be thought – demands that events and rituals also be constantly changing. Following this logic, much of what was staged in the past is now anachronistic and should wither away. However, what we see occurring – and which requires explanation and understanding – is quite different. Even in the face of modernity and globalisation, there are traditional events that are retained and treasured. Some are even growing in popularity. Furthermore, there are trends towards invention based on romanticised views of the past and appropriation and adaptation of other culture's rituals and customs. Traditions, and how we use them, lie at the very foundation of many of our contemporary events. To understand events better, we need to examine and analyse this relationship.

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