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The Tarves People's Party: Fire, Planning, and Community

Abstract. The Tarves bonfire in North-East Scotland is a seasonal event tied to the mid-autumn calendar customs of *Samhainn*, Halloween, and Guy Fawkes Night. Established as an outgrowth of these traditions in 1999, it has grown into the biggest such regional event outside large conurbations. As a 'new' traditional event, it is subject to a wide range of regulatory pressures, from the precedents of ancient practice to the concerns of modern civic authorities such as the local council and the police. Drawing on interviews and first-hand experience, this paper looks at a range of internal and external regulatory forces germane to the annual community event.

Keywords: Fire festivals, Halloween, community, civic authority, vernacular calendar custom

Introduction

Most of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites.[1]

Customary practice is driven by a huge range of regulatory influences from the personal to the civic, the 'polar opposites' noted above, and from the innovative and creative to the continuities of tradition and conservation. In this essay, I will explore how the residents of a small village in North-East Scotland negotiate the space between them in the context of an annual autumnal bonfire in the village of Tarves, Aberdeenshire. The fire, revived for the millennium, and based on traditional Halloween and Guy Fawkes Night practices, is put together by a local committee, which gathers together a huge amount of discarded wood and other burnables in a local field, to be set alight in front of a gathering of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of spectators. The evening culminates in a fireworks display, bringing cheer and a communal experience to the darkening evenings, little more than six weeks before the winter solstice.

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[1] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 136.

Inevitably, an event of this scale has both required, and drawn the attention of, regulatory influences that have shaped its growth, practice, and form. We might start by dividing these into passive and active categories. In the first, we could cite tradition and customary practice, those general assumptions, and rules, consciously or unconsciously imposed by individuals and groups on their own behaviour. In the latter category, we find explicit articulations of rules, laws, and practices, often from outside authorities such as the police or local councils, that apply to the practice in question. In the case of a public event, like the Tarves bonfire, these rules usually come into play where public safety is involved, whether with crowds, fire and explosives, or strong drink, or where there is money changing hands, as with taxation on liquor sales, parking permits, and other such revenue-generating activities for local authorities. These 'idiocultures or microcultures' of civil society, as Gary Alan Fine calls them, involve coordination, relationships and associations within the community, place, space, conflict, and control.[2] All are seen in the Tarves bonfire through its clear organic ties to the past and the dynamic interactions with explicit communal and civic forces that influence its shape today.

For this exploration of the regulatory forces that shape the Tarves bonfire, I spoke to two local men, Ian Massie and Paul Johnston, who play different roles in its enactment. But before looking at their experience, and the pertinent frameworks, it is worth placing the event in its historical and social contexts, which continue to be relevant even today.

The origins of the autumn bonfire in Scotland, and further afield in England, Wales, and Ireland, are complicated and deep, a layered mixture of pre-Christian seasonal custom, Christianised pagan practice, and political propaganda, now largely unmoored from all of those origins and firmly solidified into civic events which draw participation from across the communities, and, indeed, because of their scale, from further afield.

The Scottish customary calendar is layered, reflecting pagan and pre-Christian, Christian(ised), post-religious civic, and community input over many centuries. Its associated festival practices are loosely tied to the linear civic calendar, but are more properly thought of as examples of what Clifford Geertz calls 'permutational' time, where the calendar

[2] Gary Alan Fine, *The Hinge: Civil Society, Group Cultures, and the Power of Local Commitments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

cycles, 'don't tell you what time it is; they tell you what kind of time it is',[3] in this case, transitional time marking the turning of the year. Celebrations at this time of year have their origins in the old Scottish Quarter Days — *Samhainn*, *Imbolc*, *Là Bealltainn*, and *Lughnasadh* — the turning points of the Celtic year at which time people would make 'neid fires' to protect against calamity and ensure success for the coming season.[4] Later, these seasonal practices coalesced around *Samhainn* and its Christianised equivalent, Halloween, with the festival retaining its association with fire, while the other Quarter Days did not.[5] Halloween, like Scotland's Hogmanay (New Year), retained its association with fire and with the tradition of extinguishing and relighting fires as a means of purification and renewal.[6]

Into this mix comes Guy Fawkes Night, 5 November, a now-traditional community event celebrated across Britain with bonfires and fireworks, originally commemorating the failure, in 1605, of a Catholic plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in London and re-establish Catholic rule in these isles. Commemoration of the day was made into a national day of thanksgiving by the government in 1606, with the passing of the 'Observance of 5th November Act', institutionalising anti-Catholic sentiment with the power of law, though the aggressively Protestant nature of the event has declined dramatically since the middle of the nineteenth century.[7] With the passing of the law, making cel-

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[3] Clifford Geertz, 'Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali', in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 360–411 (p. 393).

[4] Mary Macleod Banks, *British Calendar Customs: Scotland*, 3 vols (London: Glaisher for the Folklore Society, 1927), vol. 2, p. 21. The quarter days are still significant points in the Scottish calendar, whether in the academic year, or as civic dates of leases commencing, people moving house, etc. For more details on the quarter days, see Emily Lyle, *The Four Quarters of the Scottish Year*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: School of Scottish Studies [University of Edinburgh], 1997).

[5] Banks, 3, p. 111–21.

[6] Banks, 3, p. 111. For more on Halloween, see F. Marian McNeill, *Hallowe'en: Its Origin, Rites and Ceremonies in the Scottish Tradition* (Edinburgh: Albyn Press, [1970]) and *The Silver Bough: A Four Volume Study of the Traditional and Local Festivals of Scotland*, vol. 3, A Calendar of Scottish National Festivals, Hallowe'en to Yule (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1961), pp. 11–30; Jack Santino, *Halloween and other Festivals of Death and Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000) and *The Hallowed Eve: Dimensions of Culture in a Calendar Festival in Northern Ireland*, Irish Literature, History, and Culture (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

[7] The Act itself can be seen on the UK Parliament website ('The Thanksgiving Act'); for more on the plot itself, see Antonia Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot. Terror and Faith in 1605* (London: Arrow Books, 1997) and Brenda Buchanan, *Gunpowder Plots: A Celebration of 400 Years of Bonfire Nights* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

ebration essentially compulsory, the government effectively legislated the creation of a popular tradition.

According to F. Marian McNeill, the burning of the 'guy', originally an effigy of Guy Fawkes himself, connects back to the burning of witches as a means of exorcising evil from a community and an individual.[8] Be that as it may, the tradition of burning a 'guy' has caught on in Scotland, too, with Halloween guisers (disguised revellers[9]) asking for 'a penny for the guy' as they go door to door. The effigy today more often represents contemporary political figures or disgraced celebrities than Guy Fawkes himself.

In Scotland, a troublesome relationship with the English state (before and after the unification of the crowns in 1603 and of the parliaments in 1707) has meant that Guy Fawkes Night never gained as much traction as south of the border. Nevertheless, over the last several decades, Scotland's Halloween bonfires have given way to a burgeoning tradition of community fires lit on 5 November, pulled by the gravitational field of a large, well-established tradition, while the tradition of 'guising' — in its modern form of trick-or-treating — continues to grow.[10]

Ian Massie, a Tarves native, recalls the unregulated vitality of the annual Halloween traditions of his youth.

IM: *Well! It's, fit d'ye say, unorganised chaos! [...] It wis always a big bonfire, but it used to be held up in the football park. There used to be an old tennis court up beside the football fields and that's where they used to be held, when I was a lad.*

Aye. Aye, an it wis jist a free for all, really. I mean, people would just run aboot, put rockets in bottles in the ground. It's amazing; nobody iver got hurt, that I can remember. No. No.

TM: *Would people bring something to put on the fire? Or was that a group of people who got that together?*

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8 McNeill, 3, p. 147, n. 20.

9 Guising in Scotland was traditionally carried out at Hogmanay — the Scottish New Year — but is now associated with Halloween, possibly due to the influence of World War II evacuee children from Glasgow on rural customs (McNeill, *The Silver Bough*, 4, The Local Festivals of Scotland (Glasgow: MacLellan, 1968), p. 212), and, of course, the growing effects of Americanised Halloween traditions being re-imported into Scotland.

10 For a more detailed look at the relationship between Guy Fawkes Night and Halloween, see Jack Santino, 'Light up the Sky: Halloween bonfires and Cultural Hegemony in Northern Ireland', *Western Folklore*, 55.3 (Summer 1996), 213–231.

IM: *Well, fin I was a loon, I suppose, I used to collect timber and wood and anything for a bonfire, yep, aye. I used to ging roon wi a cart an collect stuff. […] That would have been 1965, roon aboot there; I was aboot ten or eleven year old.*

But it used to be a good night, I remember when I was a lad. Well, you was just a boy, everything seemed bigger at that time, you know what I mean?[11]

These semi-formal, collectively initiated fires lasted until the 1990s, after which the communal tradition petered out and the celebration was reduced to little more than a few individual backyard fireworks, centred on Halloween and 'Bonfire Night' (Guy Fawkes), 5 November.

By the time the millennium came around, organic community behaviours could no longer be counted upon bring about a village-wide celebration and it was clear that an organised effort would be required to put on an event of any scale. According to local Councillor, Paul Johnston, there had been 'plenty of smaller bonfires and things', but nothing of any scale. What was needed was something to bring the community together to strengthen the social fabric and build *communitas*. As Palio di Siena participant Paolo Sammicheli noted, many traditional events are really excuses for the community to get together and be together.[12] So, drawing on the 'usable past'[13] central to creating community identity, in this case local bonfire traditions, the Millennium Committee was established by the Boys' Brigade.[14] The event was a great success, says Ian Massie,

IM: *We had a big party in the Square for the millennium. And everything was sorta, there was no licences, you didnae hae to have*

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[11] Ian Massie, 'Interview about the Tarves Bonfire' with Thomas A. McKean, 23 October 2020, Elphinstone Institute Archives, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen. All quoted interview material is transcribed to reflect the speakers' use of the Scots language, using a 'revised verbatim' style. Elisions are noted by […] and 'stage directions' describing non-linguistic features by bracketed italics [*laughs*]. My grateful thanks go to Emma Bennett for her invaluable work on the transcriptions and to Eilidh Whiteford for her proofreading expertise.

[12] Paolo Sammicheli, 2 July 2020, oral seminar contribution to the Société Internationale d'Ethologie et de Folklore Summer School, Siena, 25 June—3 July 2020.

[13] Fine, p. 179.

[14] A Christian organisation whose mission is to give young people 'opportunities to learn, grow and discover in a safe, fun and caring environment which is rooted in the Christian faith' (Boys' Brigade, https://boys-brigade.org.uk/ [accessed 16 January 2021]). As part of their mission, the BBs, as they are commonly known, often engage in civic events designed to build community identity and cohesion.

a licence for everything, it was jist free for all. You could just hold a party anywhere and we'd a huge party on behalf of the village. That was a committee set up for jist the millennium celebrations. We were just called Millennium Group at that time.

The following year, riding high on this success, the group quickly encountered regulatory forces.

IM: *We decided, well, we've got a good thing here, we might as well hae another party. But as it transpired, there wis a lot of restrictions the following year, see, your licences and this and that and the next thing. And we said, wait a minute, ye can't have a free for all one year and then, all of a sudden, ye need a licence for the fire brigade an a licence for the police tae attend. […]*

We managed tae get round it, a wee bit. Then the actual day of it, a local resident complained and the police told us we couldn't have a party. And we says, Well, well OK, we can't have a party, right? We'll jist have a impromptu party in the square [laughs]. The police didn't like that! Right, they would come an arrest the organisers o the party, which was masel and anither five of us. And we said, Well, we dinna fancy bein arrested so how about […] if we just say, Right, it's the people of Tarves that's organised the party. Are you going to come and arrest everybody in Tarves? An we niver heard anither word aboot it!

So we set wirsels up: Tarves People's Party! [laughs] Needless to say, we have conformed to the legal requirements since, bit on that occasion it was a bit of a rebel cause, as you would say. So that's how the People's Party started. […] It wis the Millennium Party fer a start, and then we were havin various parties ever since.[15]

Brought into being by Ian Massie and Colin Taylor, the Tarves People's Party gave collective cover to the individuals involved in that early event, but the participants clearly enjoy the mildly subversive nature of the name and the implication that they might be a radical, grassroots local political movement, in the Gramscian tradition, a fact which has not gone unnoticed by local Councillor, Paul Johnston: 'A bit of that was a bit tongue in cheek. […] I suppose it was a bit of political

[15] The Party has a clear origin story based in community advocacy unlike many communal organisations which 'lack an explicit moment of formation, seeming to slide into structure'; Fine, p. 88.

satire against me and other politicians like me.' In reality, the name is more humorous than serious:

IM: *The People's Party is that group of people that hang about the pub and hang about various other things. […] And it's the Tarves, a bit of Methlick […], 'mafia' of families. You'll know the names as soon as you say [them].*

Through the People's Party, the community has created 'vernacular order'[16] out of disparate players, a focal point for decision making and communal responsibility, which can stand in reaction, sometimes in opposition, to the official order of councils and other civic bodies. Underlying all of the risks, challenges, and the regulatory elements that influence and control the enactment of the Tarves bonfire, lies a strong sense that such practices are 'not at bottom either a badge of pride or an inheritance to display but a job that must be done'[17] and the TPP has constituted itself in order to take on that mantle in the face of diverse regulatory challenges.

Function

A custom's *social function* undoubtedly responds to, and indeed creates, regulatory ramifications. One of the main functions of events such as the bonfire is to bring the community together, whether for spiritual, religious, or social reasons, into a 'collective promotion of connection and mutual engagement'.[18] This effect, regardless of the motivation behind it, has been important for generations, and is ever more so as other forms of collectivity, such as religious worship and communal work traditions, have declined.

IM: *We're lucky in Tarves. Anybody comin in tae the village, they won't maybe come forward, but if you ask them, they'll help ye oot, yeah. An there's other people that will come forward, [...] they dinna domineer the thing, they dinna overtake everywhere, ken? They like tae gauge what's going on, an then voice their opinion, which they're quite entitled to do.*

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16 James Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 30.

17 Noyes, Dorothy, 'Three Traditions', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 46.3 (September/December 2009), 233–268 (p. 248).

18 Fine, p. 52.

Often in village settings, incomers can create a stir, sometimes undermining the very character of the place they have chosen to make their home. So far, according to Paul Johnston, Tarves is coping well with expansion.

PJ: *I've got this idea that most of the communities get to a particular size and then they start to lose that cohesion. [...] You get the impression that those villages, and those communities, which are around about 150 households are the most cohesive. And then they work well. [...] And if you go much above three, four hundred, you're into the territory where people are saying, Well, we don't know everybody in the village, [and] you're losing your sense of community.*

A common question for any human settlement is, Where are you from? Do you belong here? This is reflected in many a Scottish incomer's rueful statement that you need to have been here for at least five hundred years to be considered a local. One of the main reasons for this line of enquiry is to provide a basis for differential power dynamics, usually with regard to whose opinion holds the greater weight, or whose way of doing things is more natural (indigenous, so to speak, with outsiders' ideas and processes often seen to be disruptive to local practice and precedent). Insider-outsider judgements give locals a chance to disregard input, or at least to motivate some kind of engagement as the price of admission, before taking new, or outsider opinions on board.

In Tarves, a new housing development initially created a kind of split, but the community is beginning to find an equilibrium and recohere, thanks in no small part to initiatives like Christmas lights and the bonfire. In 2016, because the Glebe field was planted with crops, the fire was held at the upper end of the village, near the new housing, which undoubtedly would have encouraged cohesion and integration. Fortunately, in Tarves, the sense of community is resilient enough to absorb change, and Ian sees recent arrivals very positively.

IM: *There's one, two, three members come in in the last, maybe five-six years. And I wid say they're an asset tae the village. They've worked, beavered away an [...] bring a lot o good things to the village. [...] It's an ongoin thing, ye know. Ye should niver be stuck in your ways. [...] Ye find people get stuck in their ways, an this is the wey it's been done; this is the way it's aye goin tae be done. Bit, ah no.*

As I have suggested, change in the form of new ideas is essential for the survival of traditions, but so is community continuity. This is not *stasis*, but rather connected and articulated change, the 'creation of the future out of the past',[19] made possible by a fine balance between dynamism and retaining *enough* stability so as not to alter the village's sense of itself too rapidly for acclimatisation and adaptation to take place.

The early folklorists were obsessed with origins (preferably ancient, pre-Christian, 'primitive', and 'savage') and later with magical and ritual functions,[20] ideas which, while fascinating, are not at the top of anyone's mind today as they take part in an Aberdeen City Council-run public event, or a commercially driven Hogmanay event in Edinburgh. Nevertheless, the bonfire today may be more fundamental to human need than we think, absent any supposed ritual origin, or supernatural practice aimed at magical causation.

As darkness falls in the north of Scotland (Tarves is at 57° N), everyone feels it and needs to know that we will make it through. Into the darkness we bring light, both to ease the gloom in a practical way and to assert our ability to counteract it through artificial means. Thus, the bonfire brings simple comfort, answering what is surely one of our most primordial needs, as Paul Johnston suggests.

PJ: *Everyone in this part of the world has probably been burning things around that time of year, […] somewhere halfway between autumn equinox and the solstice, which puts it around about November the 1st to the 5th, somewhere around there. So, I think everyone just likes a good bonfire.*

Whether it be Hanukkah, Diwali, or Christmas, festivals bringing light into our lives at the winter solstice stretch back into the distant past, testifying to a deep human need for light and the hope it brings.

IM: *Oh, I think it jist gives everybody a lift. I think it's jist a fine run in to Christmas, ken? […] We've got the bonfire, then we've Christmas lights, an then it's Christmas, an I think it just gives every-*

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19 Henry Glassie, 'Tradition', in Bert Feintuch, ed., *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), pp. 176–197 (p. 176).

20 For a taste of these perspectives, see Richard Dorson, *Peasant Customs and Savage Myths: Selections from the British Folklorists* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968).

body a wee bit o a, jist a lift, before, ken, the dark nights. It's the first sorta weekend o the dark nights. I think everybody jist looks forward to it.

While we may appreciate these pleasures on a cognitive level, and be reassured that darkness is mutable and that Spring will come, numerous studies of 'Seasonal Affective Disorder' point towards there being a physiological dimension to this desire for light in the midst of winter.

Esoteric Factors

One of the most obvious regulatory mechanisms within the community is the local committee. Most contemporary calendar customs enacted outside the home are run by a group of one sort or another, accomplishing much collectively that no single person could do by themselves.[21] These bodies usually arise out of an individual's or small group's desire to keep something going, or to see something happen in their community. For successful ones, the event takes shape, often expands, and acquires a form and tradition all its own. Most committees, however, end up with aging members and are eventually desperate for new, younger participants. In addition, they are often run by a particularly charismatic individual whose enthusiasm is difficult to replace, and who, it sometimes happens, exerts such influence and control that potential new participants are marginalised.

The Tarves bonfire has, so far, avoided this arc by keeping its organisation as informal as possible, with only six members. For Ian Massie, 'It's nae like runnin a club, you know what I mean? We hinna got premises or nothing like that, so basically, jist to try and keep the thing goin, jist tae keep the tradition goin'. The Tarves People's Party might be considered a kind of anti-committee, so dedicated are they to avoiding formality, regulation, and the oft-resulting ossification that can bring. The Party has a bank account, but that is about the end of it:

IM: *No, no, we're nae really constituted, no, because, [pause] I know there's somebody that wid like us tae have a constitution, I know. He's got method in his madness, he wants us tae be controlled by himself.*

21 See Fine, chapter 3, 'Association', pp. 75–98.

TM: *There's always one.*

IM: *There's always one! [...] So no, I mean, he's nae a member o the committee either. That's right. Yeah, but no no.*

With this informality, as opposed to a constituted committee setup, the Tarves People's Party allows itself the freedom to follow their own agenda: do it the way they want, living up to the subversive nature of their moniker.

One of the advantages of this lack of structure is that the committee really is open to all and is thus more responsive to the wishes and energies of those taking part.

IM: *Anybody can join, yeah. Anybody can join, yup, yup. There's never, we've asked for people tae join, bit there's masel an Colin Taylor, we're sixty-five noo. [laughs] We're lookin for younger members to come onboard to push us out of the way sort of style.*

The organic structure allows participants to rely on everyday social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion to keep the event focused as its founders would wish. The downside, of course, is the perennial founder's dilemma, found in probably every committee of which I have been a part or seen in action: how to keep an event going as one would wish while still handing over responsibility to new people. Each community handles this in a different way, but in my experience, those who find a halfway house of some kind — with formal, understood, but not legally codified procedures — are the most successful, perhaps, in part, because they mimic very long-standing traditions of community organisation, what Emily Lyle has called the Village Pump level of community calendrical practice, based on direct interpersonal relationships between people well known to each other in an almost familial community setting.[22]

For Ian Massie, the Tarves bonfire presents an emic opportunity to control otherwise unregulated aspects of November practice in the village.

[22] Emily Lyle outlines three types — the Deep Well, the Village Pump, and the Grand Spectacular — of increasing scale and decreasing connection to rooted tradition. The Tarves bonfire falls to the middle of these, with obvious links to the Deep Well, but flirtations with the Grand Spectacular.

IM: *Fan we go roon collectin money in the fortnight before the bonfire, ye get people coming to you, Oh, I don't believe in fireworks; I don't believe in the bonfire.*

And I always say to them, Look — I kinda half agree with them — I say, Look, I don't believe in people having fireworks in their own back garden. I says, Would you rather have a twenty-minute display one night o the year or everybody havin fireworks for aboot four or five nights on the trot? In ten different gardens, aa owre the place scarin everybody's animals? […]

So, I mean, so, my attitude is that it's far better jist a twenty-minute fireworks display and that's it finished. Done. No more. […] There's one or two people let fireworks off the night before, but over the years it's virtually nil.

In this year of COVID, as the event was cancelled, Ian suggested that there might be a return to home-based, individual celebration, resulting in more, and more protracted, disturbances for animals and people: 'It could be more this year. It could be worse'. As the dates came and went, living only a few miles away from Tarves, I saw a noticeable upswing in home displays this year, with numerous examples visible from my house in all directions.

As in every community, and with every such event, there are some in the village who are not committed, but their concerns are swept away by a more general enthusiasm.

IM: *I would say out of the grumblers there would be, maybe...four that I know of. [...] Ken fit like. It's always the same ones. [...] Jist like tae grumble, grumble aboot anything, ken? Well that's whit I mean, they grumble about the money, about the amount o money spent. But if they hinna donated, [...] they've no right tae grumble. That's my attitude, ken? If you donate, you can say whit you want, but if you don't donate, dinna grumble.*

In Britain generally, there is a social expectation that organisers and participants will raise money for charity at an event of any size, or for a personal undertaking such as running a marathon or walking the Great Wall of China. Though it feels very contemporary, this pattern actually goes as far back as the mid-fifteenth century, when the urge to keep supernatural forces at bay associated with traditional customs was harnessed in service of fundraising.[23] For organisers today, this is

[23] Ronald Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England: Some Further Reflections', *The English Historical Review*, 120.485 (February 2005), 66–79 (pp. 72–73, 74).

a godsend, as being seen to raise money for a good cause increases social acceptance of, and commitment to, the event. Even those sceptical of the bonfire itself, and, perhaps, of its original purpose and function, are often won around by charitable goals, which give them an undeniably positive framework within which to contribute.

Though not a fundraising organisation, as such, the Tarves People's Party does solicit donations, both as part of its civic duty and as a means of smoothing over potential social frictions.

IM: *No, it's definitely not aboot raisin money, no, no, no. […] But it annoys me, tae a point, when I can see clubs that are doing their best tae survive an there's money awash in the village that's bein used stupidly. […] But well-well. That's my opinion though.*

While the lion's share of bonfire organisation is supported by volunteers, cash is needed for the fireworks, insurance, and facilities like the temporary soup kitchen. For Ian, the event can be harnessed effectively to encourage participation. They begin by visiting local businesses, to raise enough to assure them that, along with donations on the night, they will at least break even. Some suggest that all the money should be spent on the fireworks, while others lament that it might be, so identifying specific charitable beneficiaries provides an ideal basis upon which to limit outlay on the display.

IM: *That's the wey we sort o alleviate the problems, with handin some money out tae local organisations. And that jist keeps a lid on the thing an keeps everybody happy.*

Over the years, the group has raised money for the local pre-school group, a local old-people's home, the bowling club, and the Remembrance Day 'Poppy Appeal' to benefit military veterans. Generally, they pass through the crowd with buckets to accept donations, but with fewer people carrying cash, two card readers have been purchased.

IM: *Okay, it raised aboot a hundred and twenty quid, which is nae a lot oot o two thousand people, but it's still a hundred-and-twenty that we wouldn't've had if we were still askin for cash. [...] But, it proved a point. [...] There's quite a lot o people, I could tell ye their names — I won't — but jist intentionally come tae the bonfire with no cash an they were caught out this year.*

TM: *Ha-ha, yes, no excuses.*

IM: *Yes. No excuses. Yes, aye. There one lad, he says, [...] Oh I'm sorry, no cash, jist got cards, you winna hae a cash machine.*

And I jist says, Oh ere we go, ere's the cash machine. So, give him his due, he gave quite a donation, as well, so that wis nae a problem! Aye, that wis funny; it's a good laugh, as well as having a purpose.

In recent years, with the proliferation of wind turbines in the Aberdeenshire countryside, villages have found a new source of cash: an agreed upon portion of the income from energy generation. This has taken some of the fundraising pressures off local event organisers and enabled turbine-funded committees to support local projects, including schools, pre-schools, and teen clubs, and also seasonal events like the bonfire and the Christmas lights.[24]

While many regulatory forces are plain to be seen in the organisational structures of community interaction, there are others less obvious, sometimes overlooked because of their ubiquity in other and all parts of our lives. Principal among these are gender and geography.

Gender plays an inescapable role in the shaping and practise of Scottish customs, broadly speaking reflecting the roles that society has historically assigned to women. Thus, the most prominent roles in traditional events are assigned to (and, of course, by) men. From the Borders Common Ridings and the Burning of the Clavie in Burghead to Shetland's Up-Helly-Aa, men, and only men, enact the most visible parts of these customs.[25] Key roles are played by women in every instance, for example with hospitality (food and drink), craftwork (clothes and costuming), and support (safety marshalling), but these are invariably areas culturally sanctioned as feminine, a phenomenon noted by Gillian Bennett with regard to belief traditions — the roles assigned are themselves constrained by society's perceptions of what is 'appropriate' or 'acceptable' for women.[26]

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[24] Udny and Pitmedden, two villages neighbouring Tarves, for example, have benefited from substantial annual windfalls from turbine income (see Joanne Warnock, 'Community Turbine Propels Local Projects Forward', *Press and Journal*, 26 May 2017).

[25] One exception to this pattern of male centrality is the Stonehaven Fireballs in which both sexes take part on an equal basis.

[26] Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural* (London and New York: Penguin, 1987), pp. 29–33.

In Tarves, the committee is made up of men, while some of the stewarding on the day — the public face of the event — is more integrated, with women taking part in serving food and charity fundraising. So, while gender is not an organising principle, as it is in the Common Ridings where women are explicitly banned from participating in the rides, cultural patterns inevitably make themselves felt in the development and enactment of the bonfire, perhaps most stereotypically in the fact that men try to make it bigger and better (than anyone else's) and stir up inter-village rivalries, while women fulfil the nurturing roles noted above.[27] In this way, gender roles in the Tarves bonfire casually mirror those of society.

Moving on to geography, communities like Tarves have long enjoyed local sports rivalries and ancient traditions of *blason populaire* and competition, whether in the rule-bound setting of a football game or enduring social interactions. While not explicitly competitive, Ian seems to take a bit of pride in the scale of the current Tarves event, a huge celebration with thousands attending, a substantial fireworks display, and a fire around ten metres across.

IM: *It's fun to do, yes. Some people in the village say, We were better than Methlick; We were better than Ellon. We're nae worried; we're just wintin tae be the best that we can do.*

TM: *So, some people have a slight competitive sort of feel about it.*

IM: *Aye, well, a competitive sort o streak.*

Well, having said that, oor bonfire, the bonfire itself is always bigger than anybody else I've seen! Apart fae Aberdeen an Peterhead maybe. Aye, last year's bonfire was absolutely massive.

So I'm very worried for next year. There's not one this year, so everybody will be storing up aa their rubbish!

TM: *Well, you should have twice your rubbish.*

IM: *Twice the rubbish next year!*

Though this rivalry is very informal, it nevertheless exists, according to Paul Johnston.

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[27] This is not to say that rivalry and competition are exclusively male domains, as Sheila Young explored in her unpublished paper '"Networks of Love": From Community to Competition in Women's Prenuptial Rituals in Northern Scotland', American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Miami, 19–22 October 2016.

PJ: *Yeah, it's a bit a big part of life between each of the villages around here for generations.*

I can remember Arthur Watson saying to me, I'm not a Tarvesian.

I said, Arthur, you were awarded an MBE for your services to this village, for all of the work you've ever done in Tarves. You are Mr. Tarves. Nobody ever thinks you, of anything else.

No, he says, I was born at Burnside, which is Tarves, but just the other side of the river. But unfortunately, [I] went to Methlick School.

And, as he said, after eighty years, he only just felt that he could be accepted as somebody from Tarves. [laughs]

So there is a rivalry. And you always get the little things. And I think it's all to do with just being separate communities. You tend to build a rivalry because you want a rivalry. You want to have a sense of place and things. And that's what I love about the area.

The rivalries emerge in other areas of community life, as well, such as the hotly contested installation of Christmas lights and decorations, gardening competitions, and flower displays, says Paul: 'So out it comes. And, of course, people then rally round and do things'.

Exoteric Factors

Moving outwith the village and its local networks, one authority with considerable influence, albeit mostly in the past, is the church, which has had a long and often oppressive relationship with calendar customs, endlessly attempting to exterminate those it felt were 'heathenish' or 'idolatrous'[28] — adjectives that are really no more than stand ins for 'anti-Christian' or, more correctly, 'anti-church' — in other words, practices that were not under *its* control and therefore undermining of its authority over social organisation, behaviour and, ultimately, loyalty and fealty. The regulatory social power of the institution has greatly diminished over the last few centuries with assimilation chosen over extermination.[29] Thus Christian celebrants bless the wa-

[28] Eighteenth-century references to the Burning of the Clavie at Burghead, Morayshire, Scotland, quoted in Banks, 2, p. 36.

[29] This policy is famously set out in a purported seventh-century letter from Pope Gregory I's to his British Isles emissary, Abbot Mellitus, although the text actually calls only for usurping the buildings and sites associated with pre-Christian worship,

ter at a clootie well,[30] preside over a May Day morning dew face-washing service on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh,[31] or offer a Clavie Service the Sunday before the event.[32] Today, local councils, legislative bodies, and police forces take a leaf from the church's book, working with local organisations, communities, and individuals to mould their practices into relatively recently established regulatory frameworks, rather than simply attempting to end a tradition, which is sometimes centuries old, sometimes relatively new, but in either case emerging from individual and community need and agency, and therefore possessed of meaning and significance for those who practise it.

Even in present-day Tarves, the church has a small hold on the proceedings, with the bonfire being held in the Glebe, land belonging to the Church of Scotland. Every customary practice needs a place and a space, sacred or otherwise, and the Tarves bonfire usually burns in the Glebe, a piece of land owned by the established Church of Scotland.[33]

IM: *Well, there was a wee bit o argument aboot [that]. They were wantin various restrictions puttan on it, an we said, no, no, no. Fit dae ye ca it? It's, eh, aye, jist a wee bittie political gettin.*

The Glebe hid been bein rented oot an the Church o Scotland didn't know it had been rented out. So the kirk in Tarves got a rap

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not the rites, deities, and beliefs. See Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, book 1, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-book1.asp [accessed 22 November 2020]. For a few examples of church authorities attempting to control vernacular culture, see John Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture in Cornwall, 1800–50', in Robert B. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Croom Helm and St Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 48–70.

30 Banks, 1, p. 127.

31 Banks, 2, 222–23; pixyledpublications, 'Custom Survived: May Dew Collection, Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh', 31 May 2017, https://traditionalcustomsandceremonies.wordpress.com/2017/05/31/custom-survived-may-dew-collection-arthurs-seat-edinburgh/ [accessed 22 November 2020].

32 Dan Ralph, 'Interview with Dan Ralph', with Thomas A. McKean and Valentina Bold, 15 June 1998, Elphinstone Institute Archives, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen.

33 The Tarves bonfire has been held elsewhere than the Glebe, however, with the ritual space regulated into being by the practice itself, rather than being contingent on a particular physical space, or an edifice, such as a church; cf. Alan Jones, 'Just a Little Corner of Belfast to Burn, *Fortnight,* 414 (May 2003), 12–13 and Reza Masoudi Nejad, 'Performed Ritual Space: Manifestation of Ritual Space through Flagellation in Mumbai Muharram', *Journal of Ritual Studies,* 31.2 (2017), 1–15 (p. 12).

on the knuckles from 112 George Street [head office of the Church of Scotland] in Edinburgh. [laughing] *[...] They were caught with their pants down, as ye should say, like!*

TM: *Oh, that's brilliant, that's brilliant, so the church gets involved, as well.*

IM: *Aye, well it is the Glebe field, so it's their field, you know. […] Well, we managed to appease them. That's nae a problem.*

In a beguiling turn of events, the Tarves People's Party was able to draw on the church's history of cultural appropriation, specifically the sanctification of *Samhainn* and autumnal fires.

IM: *It was actually James the First of England, James the Sixth of Scotland, saved from Guy Fawkes. […] And apparently the English bishops of that time decreed that there should be beacons lit on the anniversary of the saving of the King. God Save the King! So, it actually is a religious thing. […] So I put that to the kirk this year.*

Three or four centuries ago, few would have dared to go up against the church, given the reverent respect in which it was held and the level of social control it wielded. It is a sign of changed times that Ian and the Party were determined that the bonfire would go ahead on their terms.

IM: *Aye, throw the history back at them. They were niver going tae stop us; they were jist goin tae make life a wee bittie difficult for us. No, no, no. It's nae as though aa the money's goin intae oor pockets, you know what I mean? We're trying to do our best for the village.*

In this way, the Party was able gain support from the church, a reversal of historical power dynamics that speaks of a deeply altered society in which secular authority has taken the place of the religious.

It is fitting that this particular reversal is centred on a practice in the *Samhainn*-Halloween-Guy Fawkes season, traditionally a time of inversion and misrule. What bigger inversion of the natural order of things than a small committee of individuals confronting the might of the church? And while this inversion of authority seems very contemporary, what with the growing cult of the individual, and self-defined communities taking precedence over collective religious authority, the church has always had a rather pragmatic approach to specific dates, such as the birth of Jesus, conveniently placed to overlay older seasonal practices.

One often unseen form of regulatory control is economic, with working life and budgetary considerations affecting the timing of the event. Traditionally and historically, *Samhainn* bonfires, and later Halloween adaptations, would have been on the eve itself, while Guy Fawkes Night was pinned to 5 November for historical reasons. But just as most of the church's regulatory power has ebbed and been taken on by civic bodies and individuals, so too has the authority of tradition — whether practice-based or Christianised — given way to the modern patterns of daily work, which have changed dramatically from a rural model of subsistence agriculture where people worked in and around the home, whenever daylight hours allowed, to one in which many are employed elsewhere, with highly structured working hours.

IM: *We used to have it on a Friday night but then, what with the committee members workin, it took us a whole week to set the bloomin thing up. An ye wis comin home fae yer work at night an it was dark an you wis, ken? So we decidit, 'Right, we'll go for't on a Sunday night'. An that gives us like a Friday afternoon, Saturday, an then Sunday tae set the whole thing up.*

Having the fire on a weekend eases pressure from work, gives more time for the organisers to get everything in place, and, for the same reasons, makes it easier for people from elsewhere to attend as they, too, are off work. There would have been less need for this in the past, of course, as each community would have had its own fire and therefore not needed the time, or transport, to attend someone else's.

Perhaps the regulatory influence most emblematic of the shift from spiritual to 'commercial' comes from the TPP's business partner, Fireworks Scotland, which effectively controls the Tarves bonfire's date for economic reasons.

IM: *Fireworks Scotland always like us to be the last, cause we get all the fireworks that they dinnae use.* [laughs] *We're always the last one for Fireworks Scotland, so we're always the Sunday after the 5th. So we get aa the best fireworks [...] relatively cheap. Well, he just uses them up, sorta style. What he's got left.*

I mean, last year's display, I don't know if you wis at it, bit, oh my god, it wis unbelievable. [...] There's nae words tae describe it. It wis just fantastic, like.

This system has two key advantages: it gives the TPP a reduced price, and it ensures an outstanding display, as Fireworks Scotland bene-

fits from selling off unused merchandise. While this end-of-season economic regulatory element may seem tied to our contemporary cash economy, it is in some ways an echo of former practices, as Paul Johnston suggests: 'And at the end of the season, you['ve] probably got lots of wood chopped down, ready waste. Fire festivals. Perfectly acceptable idea!' In other Scottish customs, the same practical and social pressures can intrude the traditional Shrove Tuesday Ba Games in the Borders villages, for example, which are now held on a range of dates to allow people to take part in their neighbouring communities' events.[34]

Thus, the bonfire's attachment to a particular date and time, originally decreed by ancient custom and embedded religious practice, has loosened. And while the event is still very much about communality, the role of propitiatory behaviours practised to ensure good fortune and bounty, and people's fealty to the church, have radically diminished. In the end, once a seasonal event tied to the turning of the year gets detached from an associated astronomical singularity, the exact calendar date is of little relevance. In this way, events like British autumnal bonfires can easily be co-opted by civic, religious, or political forces. Paul Johnston,

> PJ: *I think it's a ghost of things gone by. Yeah, I mean, it wis about Guy Fawkes (which I always jest about: the only person who entered parliament with honest intentions), but, you know, that was so long ago and it was all about, you know, burning Catholics and stuff like that. […]*
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> *Well, while I accept it was James and it was a Stuart king who was on the throne, or whatever, I would have to say that it [was] probably completely and utterly irrelevant to everyone in this part of the world. […]*
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> *It's winter. People are beginning to go [*gestures, i.e., getting fed up with the cold and darkness*]. And the whole year has always been peppered with fairs, fetes, festivals of one description or another. It's just part of the pattern of life, if you're in a rural area, that would probably be one of the things that you would do. […] Something really quite sort of elemental, earth and fire. Water. These are all things which are important to people. I think this is about ghosts of the past as well.*

[34] Michael Ashkenazi discusses the moving of traditional calendar events due to various social pressures in 'Cultural Tensions as Factors in the Structure of a Festival Parade', *Asian Folklore Studies,* 46.1 (1987), 35–54 (p. 48).

Events with deep traditional origins, functions, and meanings, like the Tarves bonfire now unashamedly exist to serve the community, and enactment is therefore at its will.

Let us turn now to look at civic regulations exoteric to the community itself, which come primarily from Aberdeenshire Council and the law enforcement body, Police Scotland (formerly Grampian Police). For practically any public event, licensing is required specifying who the organisers are, the parameters of the proposed activity (numbers, space used, safety precautions and preparations, traffic planning, etc.), expected numbers, and such like. Tarves's millennium event was effectively spontaneous and so was able to sidestep these formal regulatory strictures, whether through unfamiliarity with the rules or (semi-) wilful disregard. As Ian Massie said, it was a great success and gave the community a taste for more. Thus, when an attempt was made to regulate the following year's event, the original group was affronted, challenged by the codification (and, let's be honest, paperwork) necessary to conform to Council permission procedures. A rural North-East Scotland individualism asserted itself, and the group resisted by suggesting that the public celebration was exactly that, an essentially spontaneous gathering of diverse individuals, 'belonging' to no one, and therefore no one person's regulatory responsibility, rather than an organised event, as such: a party with, for, and by residents collectively, a Tarves people's party.

Today, as long as a few simple rules are followed, the Police and Council authorities are quite happy for the event to go ahead.

IM: *No, we've never hadna really a problem since the second year o the millenium. Aye, nivver been no problems at all. The night of the bonfire we usually hiv 'No Parking' signs up on hot spots in the village, as you would call them, the police are quite happy wi that, there's nae a problem wi that at all. Mud on the road was comin oot o the field, nae a problem, sweep it up and na, na, we tried oor best tae keep on top of everything just sort o keep everything sweet, as you would say.*

Successful though they may have been, one formal regulatory requirement for any event these days is public liability insurance. For most — dances, village fêtes, fairs, whist drives — this is not of great import, but for many calendar customs it can be problematic. Whether it is the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona, or hundreds of people throwing

themselves into a scrum in the Scottish Borders' Shrovetide Ba Games, traditional practices often involve an element of risk, and no more so than with fire festivals, which often involve participants in close proximity to burning materials.

The bonfire tradition is far more hands off than, say, Burghead's Clavie, or Allendale's Tar Barrel Ceremony, but nevertheless brings with it risks associated with fire and, perhaps more importantly, a visceral, deeply instinctive reaction from the authorities about its potential dangers. Over recent decades, such practices have been under increasing pressure to provide fire safety infrastructure and, of course, insurance in an increasingly litigious world.

Traditionally, safety would be in the hands of both practitioner-participants, who know what they are doing through long years of communal experience,[35] and onlookers, who could be counted upon to have an awareness of potential danger and a reasonable sense of self preservation. Nowadays, our safety is often seen to be someone else's responsibility, in this case the police and the regional authority. And so, we find that any event of scale requires insurance, crowd barriers, traffic control, and more, with responsibility shifted from the individual to the institution.

In many cases, this can lead to conflict between the community and the authorities, the reshaping of events to conform with these strictures and, in extreme cases, the demise of events and practices that have been around for decades or centuries.[36] The Tarves bonfire is not such an event, however, and the liability insurance costs, at just £225, are not so onerous as to put the event in any danger of cancellation.

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35 Ronald Hutton suggests that the very origin of these experts, the 'official' practitioners, lies in early authorities' attempts to control chaotic events by limiting participation to sanctioned individuals. Thus, the emic groups of today ultimately derive from the *etic* regulatory pressures of bygone years; see Ronald Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England: Some Further Reflections', *The English Historical Review*, 120.485 (February 2005), 66–79 (pp. 70–71).

36 See, for example, the imposition of crowd barriers and safety marshals at Stonehaven's Hogmanay Fireball Ceremony ('Fireballs', http://www.stonehaventolbooth.co.uk/attachments/article/9/Chap3_Fireballs-_Notes_1page.pdf [accessed 31 October 2020]). The regulations are partly due to media exposure swelling crowd numbers beyond a scale controllable by traditional means. In Ottery St Mary, insurance costs in 2010 skyrocketed 1150% ('Ottery', https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8113814/Centuries-old-Ottery-tar-barrel-race-at-risk-after-insurance-rose-1150-per-cent.html [accessed 12 December 2020]).

IM: *No, it's nae too bad, no. Not for the type o occasion we're havin. […] Last year wis exceptional. It was absolutely fantastic, the crowd that we hid last year. […] It was absolutely massive, the crowd that we hid, for a small village like Tarves.*

Councillor Paul Johnston was involved from the start and the group took advice on safety matters from the neighbouring village's Ellon Rotary and Community Council.

PJ: *It's fairly informal. […] There are sufficient stewards for the police not to be worried. There are sufficient safety margins that have been given, and advice been given from Fireworks Scotland of how far you have to be away to not worry the police […]*

I've been to plenty of bonfires where I have had concerns, but I wouldn't have had any concerns with our one. It seems well organised. People are well back and, apart from coping with mud, there's never really been a problem.[37]

I have long maintained that communities themselves are the best overseers of participant safety, particularly when their practices are celebrated without large numbers of visiting outsiders. As with many public events with numerous variables — fire, weather, crowds, strong drink, traffic — there is a measure of good fortune which ensures success. It could be said, however, that many instances of 'good fortune' are made possible by careful planning, sensible execution, and good-faith behaviour on the part of participants. This last point, in particular, deserves some attention. From the point of view of the authorities, fire festivals are often, perhaps understandably, seen as accidents waiting to happen, whereas the organisers, participants, and attendees have a clear self-interest in not getting hurt, burnt, or killed. These two 'sides' have quite different perspectives on risk — one looking to limit or eliminate it, the other, in particular the organisers, understanding it and having the experience to control it within the context of the event.

Behind the ubiquitous contemporary need for insurance lie the issues of health and safety, which are not just a concern for civic authorities. Communities themselves have a far more vested (and less litigation-driven) interest in the safety of their participants than even the civic authorities, whose concerns are largely regarding liability and

[37] Paul Johnston, 'Interview about the Tarves Bonfire' with Thomas A. McKean, 3 November 2017, Elphinstone Institute Archives, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen.

lawsuits. That is an exaggeration, but it is often seen that way by communities and the general public.

In a traditional context, and by that I mean a long-standing, local, small-scale event without large numbers of incoming tourists, the community is often the best regulator of safety and behaviour. They know what they are doing and have done it successfully for centuries. The participants are their families, relatives and neighbours, the greatest incentive of all to ensure safety. This dynamic changes with 'new' traditions, where local expertise is nascent, and, in the era of the demise of local festivals, the growth of easy transport, and increased leisure time, which has meant that the crowds for spectacular (and dangerous) customs have increased exponentially. Thus, a big fire festival might have a core of local participants who know what they are doing, and a huge parade of followers, many of whom may never have made or even seen a fire, and thus have little idea of its potential danger.

Conclusion — Tradition is a Process

Regulatory pressures are always in flux, their influence, and status relative to each other, varying with society itself. Thus, as the bonfire's direct connection to traditional practices and the overlain religious calendar has diminished, it has changed from being considered an essential activity — vitally important for propitiation, good fortune, and success — to an elective one, part of a long trend of customary practices becoming detached from their foundational supernatural connections.[38] Where a protective or spiritual event, deeply entwined with belief, customary practice, and community fortunes, *compelled* participation, time, and effort, a recreational purpose wields far less regulatory power. The bonfire's status in the social life of the community thus reduced becomes subject to regulatory influences formerly seen as being of lesser importance, its enactment 'directed less toward the transcendent and more toward the sociopolitical realm'; as Jack Santino puts it, 'The transformation that is intended is of one's opinion, one's attitude'.[39]

[38] See, for example, David Vincent, 'The Decline of the Oral Tradition in Popular Culture', in Robert B. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Croom Helm and St Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 20–47.

[39] Jack Santino, 'The Ritualesque: Festival, Politics, and Popular Culture', The Archer Taylor Memorial Lecture 2005, *Western Folklore,* 68.1 (Winter 2009), pp. 9–26 (p. 24).

There is something primal about fire, though, something which compels attention and connects us with, to use Lyle's imagery, a very deep well of human experience.

PJ: *This is a very old land. We live in a very old landscape with the amount of standing stones, hill forts, you know, enclosures, and everything there round about. You must have imagined that there would have been people here, you know, three, four thousand years ago in this landscape. Why wouldn't there have been something as elemental as fire [...] important to life and existence at all times?*

Here, Johnston shows a reflexive awareness of the power of older supernatural practices and associated beliefs, consciously 'folklorising'[40] present day routines though such associations and reinforcing the iterative nature of customary practice. Anchored deeply in the performed past, these elemental associations underpin the idea that our realisation of culture is 'never for the first time', as Richard Schechner puts it, but rather 'for the second to the *n*th time. Performance is "twice-behaved behavior"'.[41]

Communities are thus, over time, subject to a complex layering of regulation and control, which, though seemingly clearly hierarchical, are often held in *equal* esteem by residents, since proximity can magnify authority quite dramatically. In this way, a desire to meet local expectation or avoid local disapproval can sometimes override an outside, relatively distant civic authority even though the latter may technically have actual legal authority to apply strictures. Thus, individuals and communities develop and maintain a matrix of understandings around authority: to whom do I listen and about what, effectively categorising which aspects of life are answerable to which regulatory influences. In the context of a calendar custom, this layered understanding serves as a regulatory framework that allows or generates change, and control its rate and impacts.

The Tarves bonfire functions on many levels, its form in a complex relationship with the diverse regulatory pressures outlined here. Per-

[40] On folklorisation, see John H. McDowell, 'Rethinking Folklorization in Ecuador: Multivocality in the Expressive Contact Zone', *Western Folklore*, 69.2 (Spring 2010), 181–209; and Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, 'Intangible Heritage as a Festival; or, Folklorization Revisited', *Journal of American Folklore*, 131.520 (Spring 2018), 127–149.

[41] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 36.

haps the most compelling conclusion is that tradition and customary practices are, above all, processes rather than products.[42] Without change, traditions lose their topicality and relevance. 'Never be stuck in yer ways,' says Ian, attesting to the human need for constant renewal and regeneration.

This regeneration does not happen spontaneously, but arises instead directly out of the phenomenon of regulation. Competing attempts at control, regulatory forces attempted, successful, and failed, between them create, define, and shape how a custom develops and survives, or ossifies and dies out. Regulation exists as a manifestation of abstract force meeting behaviour or action. One without the other is nothing, but in coming together, patterns and paradigms are shifted and rules acted upon and adopted. As with reception theory,[43] without these two sides, each playing its part, the *meaning* of regulation and control, the real-world effect, amounts to nothing. Both regulator and regulated are needed.

As with most established customs, the sources of regulatory authority are diverse and often obscure. What is immediately clear is that no one individual, or even committee, can establish, control, shape, or eliminate a community custom. Even in our age of Councils, committees, codified civic authority, and, above all, insurance regulations, a social custom such as the Tarves bonfire follows its own organic rules, to an extent. 'The council of village elders does not command anything, it merely declares what has always been,' writes Henry Maine,[44] acknowledging the fact that regulatory bodies are often relegated to playing a catch up role in relation to community practice, much as a descriptive lexicographer is always slightly behind the curve of language change.

Broadly speaking, the control of traditional practices, the sharp end of regulation, can take the form of either recognition, that is acceptance and symbiosis, or prohibition.[45] In the present era, authorities local and

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[42] See Ronald Hutton, 'Modern Pagan Festivals: A Study in the Nature of Tradition', *Folklore*, 119.3 (December 2008), pp. 251–273, where he explores the notion that the formation of a tradition itself is a cultural process (p. 269).

[43] See, for example, Terry Eagleton, 'Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, and Reception Theory', in *Literary Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 47–78.

[44] Henry Sumner Maine, *Village-Communities in the East and West* (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 68.

[45] For a South African example, see Patrick Bannister, 'Regulating "Tradition": South African Izangoma and the Traditional Health Practitioners Act 2004', *Cambridge Anthropology*, 27.1 (2007), 25–61.

national often take the former position, working with communities and individuals to bring public and private practices in line with contemporary public safety regulations, compatible with human rights and other top-tier legislation. This method works in other fields, as well, for example with the social normalisation of the use of St John's Wort for mild depression, such that its potential interactions are addressed in government medical documentation.[46] Either response to a traditional practice — recognition *or* prohibition — recognises the power and influence of these traditions, and their embeddedness in the fabric of society.

All these regulatory negotiations take place within a matrix of society, and that derives from affiliations, both with the self and others, expressing and enacting who we are in the context of regular social interaction. From this, as Gary Alan Fine says, 'Allegiance is constituted in the local worlds in which citizens participate and then extends to allegiance to a world that is more expansive, but perceived as similar in kind. This is the hinge on which society depends.'[47] These hinges, then, are people like Ian Massie and Colin Taylor who, as individuals, and as the small groups they create, regulate society, upwards to the large civic institutions providing infrastructural frameworks for our lives, and downwards to the small, local organisations that give voice to our need for community expression. In effect, then, regulation from above and below *is* tradition, for without its shaping and reshaping influence, customary practices would stabilise, ossify, and lose their relevance in the always rapidly developing world around them.

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[46] National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on St John's Wort, https://bnf.nice.org.uk/drug/st-johns-wort.html [accessed 23 October 2020], and on under-researched dosage, https://www.nice.org.uk/donotdo/although-there-is-evidence-that-st-john-s-wort-may-be-of-benefit-in-mild-or-moderate-depression-practitioners-should-not-prescribe-or-advise-its-use-by-people-with-depression-because-of-uncertainty [accessed 23 October 2020].

[47] Fine, p. 21.

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