

Carnival and Other Festivity in Scotland in the Nineteenth Century

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Introduction: Approaches to Carnival

In Medieval Europe carnival was one of the turning points of the year, beginning at the end of the Christmas season and finishing immediately before the self-denial of Lent. In the face of the impending privation, people consumed food and drink in large quantities, and a range of festive activities was enjoyed in public places.

Carnival is a complex phenomenon that varies from place to place and over time, and it has attracted extensive attention from ethnologists and cultural historians. We can set out its central features. First, it was a period for indulgence in food, drink and sex: carnival was a feast of the lower body in contrast to Lent's domination of the upper body and the mind (Bakhtin 1984: 368-436). Next, normal structures of power were inverted and rules were suspended: not only were all equal in the crowd, but for a few hours or days the idea of 'the world turned upside down' was acted out. In the late Middle Ages and Renaissance it was a festival when those in power might be openly criticised (Bristol 1985: 72; Muir 1997: 104-14). The adoption of roles led to the next characteristic, the use of masking and disguise. Finally, the whole thing was carried out in a crowd in which the individual's identity was for a time subsumed in the mass.

The various names of carnival characterise aspects of it. In England, carnival culminated on Shrove Tuesday, the day on which people were shriven, in other words when they made a confession before Lent. The Gaelic *Di-màirt inid* and the Welsh *Dydd Mawrth Ynyd* express the same idea, and the Danish *Hvide tirstag*, white Tuesday, indicates the purity of the shriven. The Czech *masopustní úterý* (maso = meat, úterý = Tuesday) is so named because it is the last day on which meat can be eaten. The German *Fastnacht* and the Scots *Fastern's E'en* indicate the evening before the fast, and *carnival* (English), *carnaval* (several romance languages) and *Karnaval* (German) indicate the giving up of meat. The French *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday, the day on which fat was eaten before Lent), the Italian *Martedì Grasso*, and the Norwegian *fettisdag* (fett = fat) refer to the plenitude of food consumed on the day.

Some writers have given the word *carnival* more specific meanings which detached it from a fixed place in the calendar (Muir 1997: 86-93). The anthropologist Victor Turner, drawing on the ideas of Arnold van Gennep, looked at it as a phase in which reality is suspended, between two normal periods of social life. They both called this phase *liminal*. In van Gennep's conception of the *rite de passage*, it was the period in which change took place; Turner and others have seen the liminal as a period when change might (but might not) happen (Turner 1995: 94-130; Bristol 1985: 36-8). Alternatively, in his book on Rabelais, the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin saw carnival as a free-standing phenomenon entirely separate from everyday existence:

‘carnival is the people’s second life’ (Bakhtin 1984: 8). He saw inversion of all kinds as central to popular laughter.

The purpose of this essay is to suggest a way of looking at carnival, based on the ‘grid / group’ cultural theory of Mary Douglas, first proposed in outline in her book *Natural Symbols* (1970), and elaborated elsewhere (Douglas 1996: 40-9, 67-70, 83-90).¹ The concern of the theory – model might be a better term – is with people who share a particular attitude, or particular ways of looking at an issue, rather than with formally constituted groups (Douglas 1997: 128). It is concerned with how people relate to their social environment at a particular time, and not with amorphous units such as ‘society’ and ‘class’ (Ostrander 1982: 14).

Douglas’s analysis stems from the thought that ‘in all their behaviour persons are continuously engaged in trying to realize an ideal form of community life and trying to persuade one another to make it actual’ (Douglas 1996: 42), or to put it another way, it is all about attitudes to authority and power (Douglas 1996: 68). The two measures according to which she divides cultures are, first, the degree of commitment to the group and, second, the extent and complexity of the rules according to which the culture operates, or its degree of structure. By combining the two, four types of culture can be described and compared with one another, for a key point about Douglas’s model is that each of these cultures tends to be aware of, and often hostile to, the other three: to adopt one is to reject the others, and to some extent each culture articulates its image of the world by laughing at, or abusing, the others. Figure 1 shows them laid out in a diagram.

Figure 1: Diagram of Douglas's four cultures and the types of festivity that correspond to them

<p>Low Group + High Structure</p> <p>Isolationist culture: individuals and small groups withdraw from society</p> <p>Household festivity: Ritual in the domestic setting – perhaps widespread, but enjoyed separately in separate houses. There is no crowd.</p>	<p>High Group + High Structure</p> <p>Hierarchist culture: Strongly hierarchic, in which it is important for individuals to understand their place; it values established institutions and traditions</p> <p>Celebration: Conservative, accepts the existing structure: festivity reinforces hierarchy. There need not be a crowd, but if there is, its role is to approve.</p>
<p>Low Group + Low structure</p> <p>Individualist culture: self-seeking, action-oriented, accepts risk</p> <p>Spectacle: there is something to watch: the members of the crowd are spectators. All are equal in relation to the spectacle, and having made the choice to experience it, are largely powerless to act.</p>	<p>High Group + Low Structure</p> <p>Sect culture: dissidence, equality between members of the group and loathing of the inequalities in hierarchy. Hostility to structure means that simplicity is favoured, rather than formality and elaborate public display.</p> <p>Carnival: all are equal (partly through the use of disguise); and carnival contains the possibility of change. All members of the crowd are participants.</p>

The descriptions of the four cultures are based on Douglas (1996: 40-9). The outlines of the four forms of festivity are discussed in more detail in this essay.

If a culture has a low level of structure and little enthusiasm for the group, it is *individualist*. In it, people are powerful actors who behave as far as possible in their own interest, competing aggressively in a world in which there are few rules. This is the world of the entrepreneur, small or large. The opposite of individualism is a culture that is highly structured and highly aware of the group, a *hierarchy* in which everyone has their distinct place. Laws and orders are very important to its members and it tends to be conservative. Next is the *sect*, which shares with the hierarchy an awareness of the group, but is against complex structures. It believes in equality and simplicity, and is thus hostile to hierarchies and the way in which power is manipulated within them. Finally, there is *isolate* culture, for which the world is highly structured, but its members feel that they are not members of a group: they are detached observers with little or no power, at least in their interaction with the other cultures.²

Some of the ways in which members of a culture reject the others can be illustrated from literature. John Skinner expresses the opposition of the sectist to hierarchy in his song 'Tullochgorm'. All are equal in the whirl of the dance, 'it gars us a' in ane unite', but in contrast he objects to 'dringin dull Italian lays' with 'a' their variorum' – they are too structured, not impulsive enough. He objects also to 'worldly worms' who are in fear of 'double cess' – being taxed twice (McQueen & Scott 1966: 335-6). John Davidson's poem, 'Thirty Bob a Week', imagines the resentment of an underpaid clerk with a wife and family, living in poverty, classic Douglas isolationists. His frustrations are represented by 'A god-almighty devil' inside him:

Who would shout and whistle in the street,
 And squelch the passers flat against the wall;
 If the whole world was a cake he had the power to take,
 He would take it, ask for more, and eat it all. (Davidson 1973: i, 64)

This inner persona is hyper-individualist. In one of his most Nietzschean poems, Davidson tells the story of a young man who relishes living in the modern world, and rebels against his father's Christianity, seeing it as:

The vulture-phoenix that forever tears
 The soul of man in chains of flesh and blood
 Rivetted to the Earth. (Davidson 1973: ii, 297)

The vulture and the phoenix are complex cultural references: hierarchy uses symbolic and other complexity to create an intense net of relationships. 'Forever' is a word characteristic of hierarchy, for hierarchy expects to endure. The father dies, and the son is left in a world without the parent or God.

... men to know,

Women to love are waiting everywhere. (Davidson 1973: ii, 302)

This is the individualist rejecting hierarchy. John Gourlay in *The House with the Green Shutters* by George Douglas Brown is more worldly. At the beginning of the novel we meet him enjoying the impression that his twelve carts make as they go in line up the main street of the country town, enjoying them going slowly up the brae, so that people could see them for longer, 'the event of the day' (Brown 1901: chapter 1). This is classic individualist ostentation. But he 'could never be provost, or bailie either – or even the chairman of the gasworks!' Gourlay is an outsider, unable to join the small-town hierarchy: here the individualist and the hierarch reject one another.

Douglas's approach can be used to create a model of individuals' attitudes in festive situations and enable us to see carnival in distinction to other forms of festivity. *Individualist* festivity is dominated by the entrepreneurs who lay on entertainment for the remainder of the participants. The crowd is transformed into a passive audience whose members are focused on what they see: as individuals they respond in their own ways (Handelman 1982). Examples are a firework display or a play performed in a theatre. Here we will follow Handelman and call it *spectacle*. *Hierarchical* festivity occurs when those in power put on a show, such as a military review (uniforms, ranks, salutes to show relationships, flags). We can call it *celebration*, the celebration of structures of time and power, and of their endurance. Whereas *celebration* elevates and extols the ordinary and the established, *spectacle* is extraordinary or is presented as being extraordinary. *Sect* beliefs are found during the true carnival, particularly in its liminal

phase when the participants feel they are equal. This shows us that carnival can be contrasted with celebration: carnival consists of ‘fructifying chaos, rather than the rituals of status elevation’ (Turner 1977: 44). In *isolate* festivity there are no communal events, for they have retreated indoors to the fireside or the kitchen: it is nothing more than domestic ritual, like dooking for apples on Hallowe’en.

The remainder of this essay will discuss these four categories of festivity, and how they have operated in Lowland Scotland. Though some earlier evidence will be deployed, the essay is centred in the nineteenth century, and the latter part of it focuses on the largest holiday in Scotland, Glasgow Fair.

Fastern’s E’en

In the Middle Ages the Scottish carnival was held on one day, Fastern’s E’en. It was not one of the most important calendar-related festivals. Although the monarchy dined and jousted, it was for the common people less of a holiday than Corpus Christi or May Day (Mill 1927: 60-74).

Some fragments of evidence are available to describe the medieval festival in Scotland. In his account of the taking of Roxburgh Castle by the Douglas on Fastern’s E’en 1314, John Barbour described the garrison:

...dansying
Synging, and other wayis playing,
As apou fastryu evynis

The custom, to mak ioy and blis (Barbour 1894: 255).

There is a reference to a ‘tulye’ at Peebles in 1467, maybe a football match which got out of hand or some form of factional struggle (Chambers 1872: 156); and to ‘the fluring [decorating with flowers] of the tulbuth’ at Lanark in 1490 (Renwick 1893: 7). It was common in north-west Europe to hold contests on Shrove Tuesday— at various times and places tournaments, football matches, cock fights and bull running. At the court of James IV tournaments were held for which payment was made for the ‘dighting’ [cleaning] of swords in 1505 (Paul 1900: 476). One of William Dunbar’s poems is set on Fastern’s E’en but, sophisticated intellectual that he was, it is not a description of the festival but a parody of it. It is in the form of a play, the dance of the seven deadly sins, in which figures of power are lampooned. For example two fiends, ‘Black belly and Bawsy brown’, represent the Dominicans and Franciscans (Dunbar: 1998, i, 150; Ross 1981: 172). The poem ends with a tournament in which chivalry is mocked through a contest between a soutar and a tailor (Dunbar 1998: i, 155).

The annual pattern of festivity in Scotland was completely reshaped in the middle of the sixteenth century by the Protestant Reformation, which suppressed anything that might be associated with Catholic religion and idolatry. The three principal elements of the medieval calendar all disappeared: the Christmas cycle, the Easter cycle, and saints’ days. The repression of public festivity may not have been as severe or rapid as historians once believed, but it was effective in the long term and by 1650 survivals were few (Todd 2000). In Scotland it was the one religious holiday to survive the Reformation, albeit stripped of its religious content and meaning. There is no comparison with Zwingli’s protestant Zürich, where repeated censures did not prevent carnival from continuing on quite a lavish scale (Hugger 1984: 56).

The pleasures of Fastern's E'en, consequently, were secular. Cock fighting continued until about 1830,³ and local football matches were widespread in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and are still played to-day in a few places (Burnett 2000: 87-97). At Musselburgh there was a football match between married and unmarried fishwives (Carlyle 1792: 19), an unusual example of gender inversion in post-Reformation Scotland. This was the sum of its public aspect, for Fastern's E'en had retreated indoors.

Fastern's E'en was not a day for heavy drinking, in contrast with most Scottish holidays. A slightly richer food was eaten, as the names of *Brose Day* and *Bannock Night* indicate (Banks 1937-41, i, 2; Fenton 2007, 168-73, 190-3). The *carcake* of North-East Scotland and the *skairscone* further south were made with eggs and in the nineteenth century with sugar. It was only a faint echo of the lavish consumption of eggs and fatty dishes in other countries. Also in the North-East, a wedding ring and trade symbols were added to the bannock, and those present took pieces and thus discovered who was to be married first, who was to remain single, and women could also find the trade of their future husband (Banks 1937-41: i, 7-10).

In terms of Douglas's cultural theory, the celebration of Fastern's E'en had become *isolationist*. The inclusion of divination rituals points to the acceptance of fate rather than a willingness to seek change. Though football games continued as a public events, shorn of their context they were no more than a way of relishing local identity. Fastern's E'en may have had its origins in carnival, but by the nineteenth century it was a completely different kind of festival.

Fastern's E'en preceded Lent. Lent was not observed as part of the religious calendar in post-Reformation Scotland. However, living a Calvinist life involved the individual in the continual awareness of his or her salvation, the kind of contemplative state which the Catholic church encouraged during Lent. In this sense, the Scots lived in a permanent Lent. There was also a formal Lent. The fasting which the Church had required was continued after the Reformation by annual Acts of Parliament which did not stop until 1654. Only then was there sufficient confidence in the food supply to end the conservation of food stocks which had seemed essential to keeping people alive when the food stored for winter ran low.

The New Year

New Year's Day was 'The chief of gala-days' in Galloway (*Dumfries & Galloway Courier*, 8 January 1833, 4c) and in the Lowlands, including the cities. However, it was not celebrated everywhere before the middle of the nineteenth century. In the east of Scotland Handsel Monday, the first Monday of the year, was instead 'that jubilee-day of the Scottish peasantry' (*Falkirk Herald*, 2 June 1831, 50b). By definition, Handsel Monday could never fall on a Sunday: New Year's Day could do so, in which case the holiday was taken the following day. In the North-East of Scotland *Aul Eel* [Old Yule, or Yule according to the Julian calendar] was still held as a secular festival on 6th January in the new calendar.

The New Year holidays had grown in significance when the Kirk abolished Christmas and the other winter holy days (Mill 1927: 85-96). For the first two centuries after the Reformation there is insufficient evidence to tell us how vigorously it was

celebrated. Then, as Hutton puts it, in the second half of the eighteenth century the New Year escaped from the Kirk Session (Hutton 1996: 32-3): the increasing wealth of the country, and the easy availability of cheap whisky, produced a festival of heavy drinking. Traditional folklore has largely ignored the extremes of drunkenness which characterised Scottish holidays in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the first half of the nineteenth century quite staggering quantities of whisky were consumed – in the 1830s, an average of a pint of dutied spirit a week for every person over the age of 14 (Smout 1986: 133-9, 288). Heavy drinking was the norm on holidays. The historian of Moray remembered that around 1840:

the sternest precisian, the veriest churl, was bound to be jolly on Hogmanay. Even an elder of the Church might get drunk on that occasion without damage to his reputation (Rampini 1897: 326).

There is little evidence for the eating of special food at the New Year, until steak pie was adopted in some areas in the twentieth century. Excessive eating is not linked with any Scottish festival: before the agricultural and industrial revolutions Scotland was a poor country with little surplus food.

We can now outline New Year activities in the nineteenth century. They took place in two places: the home and the street (Hutton 1996: 32-3, 50-2; King 1987: 144-8). In towns there was a gathering at the Tron or in the square at midnight, and subsequent perambulating and drinking in the streets. Members of the town watch of Dumfries were offered refreshment: ‘invited to taste this, that and the other bottle ... some of them were in a better state to be deposited in the salt-box⁴ themselves, than to carry other people there’ (*Dumfries & Galloway Courier*, 6 January 1824, 4b). In the cities the lives of working people (particularly men) were lived in the street, but celebrations took place in the open air in some villages too. At Kennoway (Fife) in 1831 groups strolled the streets during daylight on New Year’s Day, treating one another to drams and holding raffles for a kebbock [cheese] or a pound of snuff (*Fife Herald*, 2 January 1831, 50b).⁵

Misrule was a feature of the medieval Yule and it survived at the New Year in the form of creating disorder (Hutton 1996: 95-111). At Dumfries, New Year’s Day 1829 was unusually quiet and there were none of the usual pranks such as pulling down shop signs, breaking lamps, and dragging carts into the street (*Dumfries & Galloway Courier*, 6 January 1829, 4d). At the fishing village of Burghead (Moray), boats were carried into the street and left upside down, and doors were barricaded from the outside (Jeffrey 1862: 12). This was also done in the North East, where in inland villages groups of young men took ploughs and carts to hide them or place them in awkward places such as in front of doors (Banks 1937-41: ii, 66-7). In Galloway, the practice only died out at the end of the century. In the village of Isle of Whithorn in 1895 it was said that, ‘the usual turnover of every moveable thing about the village’ for once did not take place (*Galloway Advertiser*, 3 January 1895, 3c).

Since the Middle Ages, New Year had been a time for charitable giving. An aristocrat might give food to poor people in the town on her family’s land, as the Duchess of Hamilton did at Hamilton in 1836, having four bullocks slaughtered and oatmeal and 80 cartloads of coal distributed (*Glasgow Herald*, 9 January 1836, 3e). Those of less wealth attended charitable functions such as the New Year concert at Lochwinnoch (Renfrewshire) in aid of the industrious poor (*Glasgow Herald*, 14 January 1820, 2c).

There was also civic charity. On New Year's Day 1846, the Lord Provost of Glasgow and the other magistrates lunched with the inmates of the Town's Hospital, enjoying a tankard of old ale while 'the veterans mumbled their pies and sipped their swats [weak beer]' (*Glasgow Herald*, 2 January 1846, 2e).

Increased sexual freedom was available at the New Year. At Dumfries in 1823 young men were "'prieving" [tasting] the rosy lips of their future spouses', and in 1824 'prein the wee bit mou [mouth]', and three years later it was said that 'Prudes may decry the privileged kiss, which is part and parcel of the privileges of the season' (*Dumfries & Galloway Courier*, 7 January 1823, 4b; 6 January 1824, 4b; 9 January 1827, 4c-d). In Edinburgh in the 1830s, men freely kissed women in the street (Banks 1937-41: ii, 94). A New Year song from Moray, sung by young men when they called on each guidwife, ran:

If meal an' maut be wi' you scant ...

We'll kiss the maidens afore we want. (Rampini 1897: 328)

As for that European phenomenon 'the ritualized mistreatment of poultry' (Hutton 1997: 157), it was in Scotland mostly carried out on Fastern's E'en, though in some places it was moved to the period around the new year. Cock fighting was in the East a pleasure on Handsel Monday (Burnett 2000: 82). Throwing at cocks was rarer: it took place at the New Year at Glasgow, where people were still walking to Govan for it about 1780 (Reid 1851-6: iii, 342-3), but it does not seem to have lasted into the nineteenth century. In North-East Scotland a reformed version of it continued well into the nineteenth century: the target was not a bird but typically a door, and the use of a highly inaccurate firearm turned it into a lottery under the name of *wad* [wager] shooting (Burnett 2000: 82-3).

New Year was a time for drinking, and so it became from the mid-1830s an occasion for teetotal meetings. At Galston (Ayrshire) in 1838 there was a temperance soir e in the schoolroom, with tea served at six o' clock. Each person paid sixpence and was given an orange and an apple tart. They listened to songs, recitations and a glee club from Newmilns (*Ayr Advertiser*, 11 January 1838, 4c). The sense of restraint became stronger in 1861 when the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation was commemorated on the first day of the year. A report from Symington in Ayrshire said that 'instead of the people celebrating the opries of Bacchus, they had set the day apart for fasting and the worship of God' (*Ayr Advertiser*, 3 January 1861, 5d). This established the custom of holding religious services on New Year's Day.

'Festival is often a celebration of the overall unity and integration of cosmic and social order' and so is conservative and closely associated with hierarchy (Handelman 1982: 166). This is a characteristic of the Scottish New Year. New Year rituals in the home are about luck: the preference for a dark man as first foot, cleaning the house, and emptying it of dirty water and ashes so that nothing is taken out on New Year's Day (Banks 1937-41: ii, 27-8). In these rituals, people are working with the cosmic order, and trying to influence it. In other instances we can see nostalgia as a celebration of the time past when the cosmos was correctly ordered. Robert Burns's poem 'The Auld Farmer's New-Year Salutation ...' is concerned with the time when both the farmer and his horse were young (Burns 1968: i, 158). 'Auld Lang Syne' is about ourselves when young, and were all equal: 'We twa' hae paidled [paddled] in the burn' (Burns 1968: i, 443-4). The poem and the song are nostalgic and conformist, accepting the world as it is. Or as

another Ayrshire poet wrote at New Year 1838:

Fond memory spreads her treasures in my view,
 Leading me through the scenes of other days –
 Bidding past years their silent flights renew (Murray 1838).

Whereas the English Christmas was reinvented around 1840 as a celebration of the family (Hutton 1996: 112-23), the emphasis at New Year was largely on the community, and on the individual and collective ability to survive. As Vladimir Propp has argued, the continuation of the community underlies many traditional festivities (Propp 1987). Yet in the nineteenth century the New Year was by far the most complicated holiday in Scotland, and the activities associated with it were diverse both in their nature and origin. The killing of cocks, and the sexual freedom enjoyed by men, both suggest that some practices had been moved from Fastern's E'en. An element of carnival was present, mixed with celebration of a limited form of hierarchy which sought a stable society and a reliable cosmos.

The King's Birthday

If we adopt the test of survival for three generations, the king's birthday was by 1800 a traditional holiday (Whatley 1994). It had become a public event when Charles II's birthday was celebrated in Scots burghs as a demonstration of political loyalty, and his successors were similarly honoured, particularly in Glasgow, which was conspicuously loyal to the House of Hanover. At the end of the eighteenth century, regular soldiers and volunteers marched through the city in the morning, each corps with its own gathering music. The soldiers assembled on Glasgow Green and fired three volleys. They marched to the streets around the Cross, and fired another three. Bells were rung from five o'clock in the evening, and at six the Council appeared in front of the Tolbooth, drank the king's health, and threw their glasses into the crowd (Reid 1851: i, 216-8).⁶ Elsewhere industrial employers supplied drink and food for their men (Whatley 1992: 171-2). One might call this part of the king's birthday a hierarchical celebration, for it is based on, and emphasises, the established structure of society.

After the French Revolution the second half of the day's proceedings developed a vigour that was not paralleled in England, at least in the provinces (Whatley 1994: 91). When the dignitaries retired for further toasting in private, the people stayed on the streets, firing guns and letting off fireworks. The liveliest scenes were in Glasgow (*Inverness Courier*, 23 November 1820, 3a). In the middle of the evening the mob brought tar barrels to the Cross to start a bonfire to which were added carts, loose shutters, signboards, ladders, pieces of scaffolding, and sometimes even a watchman's box (Reid 1851: i, 218-9). The Town Council did not try to stop the festivity, though in 1813 they attempted to set limits to it. The Council placed notices in the newspaper, saying that the violence and outrages of recent years would no longer be tolerated, and warning parents and masters of apprentices to control young men (*Glasgow Herald*, 4 June 1813, 3a). In 1818 the *Herald* said that the mob had 'rather too little regard for the rights of property, when any thing combustible came in the way.' At 11.30 the Magistrates told the fire brigade to dowse the bonfire, and with a jet which reached 40 feet high it was put out, 'the people going home perfectly quiet and somewhat astonished' (*Glasgow Herald*, 5 June 1818, 2d). The Glasgow mob was intensely loyal

to the crown (Whatley 1994: 99): if protest was part of the point of the riot, it was against local masters and perhaps the rioters' own poverty. There was a hint of this in 1819 when some of the new paling round the Green was torn out and added to the fire, as a gesture of resentment at the enclosure of a public space (*Glasgow Herald*, 7 June 1819, 2c-d).

Political change was not the purpose of the riot. As Christopher Whatley points out, the riot was a form of carnival (Whatley 1992: 185), with the people in control of the streets, and equality of dress enforced by knocking off hats. The astonishment of the crowd at the intervention of the fire engine suggests that they knew that the carnival, like all carnivals, had come to the end of its short life. This was expressed clearly in 1819 when youths from the mob helped to douse the fire. That year the bonfire had been particularly large, and the *Herald* suggested that the Council in future should supply coal so there would be less destruction to property. Even though a spirit dealer's premises had been broken into and emptied of cash, whisky and rum, the newspaper said that the mob did not bear ill-will towards any individual, and that 'mischief [had been] merely subservient to amusement' (*Glasgow Herald*, 7 June 1819, 2d). In this period the riots which were genuine protest were very few with the exception of reactions to specific events or problems, such as shortage of meal or the activities of the press gang (Logue 1979).

Fighting and destruction were common at the end of public events all of Europe, in particular at fairs and horse races, and Scotland was no exception. For example, before 1815, each year the final act of Leith Races was a battle in the streets when the merchants' *crames* [booths] were demolished and the people fought among themselves to their own satisfaction: fighting was a pleasure and was the chief content of Fastern's E'en ba' games. In a free fight, all are equal. In looking at the bonfire at Glasgow Cross, we should not focus on the fire but on the destruction of property, another gesture towards equality. The crowd was hostile to both the hierarchy (the Council) and individualism (the spirit merchant) even though it did not usually have a specific grievance. Violence and levelling are characteristic of carnival (Muir 1997: 104-14). So in Douglas's terms the king's birthday was a secular carnival, in which a heavy emphasis was placed upon equality.

Glasgow Fair in the City

Glasgow began to grow rapidly around 1760, and by the 1821 census it had overtaken Edinburgh in size (Maver 2000: 83). Its population was then 147,000, and rapid and continuous growth brought the total to over one million in 1912. In parallel with the city, in the middle of the nineteenth century Glasgow Fair grew to be the largest fair in Scotland. It dated from the twelfth century, when it started eight days after the feasts of St Peter and St Paul (29/30 June), and after the reform of the calendar in 1753 it was held in the middle of July. By 1820 it was in decline as a livestock and hiring fair, but was expanding rapidly as a fair for pleasure: between 1840 and 1860 it was enormous (King 1987: 157-62, Burnett, 2004-5).

By this stage, the Fair was not held in the centre of the city, but at the foot of the Saltmarket, on the edge of Glasgow Green. The Green is a space about a mile long and quarter of a mile wide: the Saltmarket forms its short west side, and the River Clyde the

long south side. In the middle of the Green was the Nelson monument (1806), an obelisk 144 feet high. On the west side of the Saltmarket stood the Judiciary Court, built in 1809-14: in the 1820s it was one of the two or three largest buildings in the city; and with its massive Greek portico visible right across the Green, it was the one with the most impact. The space beside it was Jail Square, the place of public execution where criminals died 'facing the monument'. This was not a neutral space in which to hold a fair: the booths and tents had symbols of power behind them.

During the Fair, the crowd was dense in the street, inside the booths, and in the dances in the public houses in the Saltmarket. The denseness enforced equality:

... the penny admission levels all distinctions. The man well done up in superfine finds himself in a close pack, with a baker in his working coat in front, and a sweep behind, and however agonised at the embrace, he must just wait till a new reel of the crowd relieves him (*Glasgow Herald*, 18 July 1845, 2d).

Once in the concentrated mass of people, the individual experienced 'the uproar caused by several frantic individuals spouting through speaking trumpets, ringing bells, and beating furiously on cymbals and gongs' (*Glasgow Herald*, 19 July 1865, 7a). Inside the menagerie, on any stimulus such as the chatter of a monkey, the roar of a lion, or even just the appearance of a keeper:

visitors seem to reel hither and thither in a mass; females are screaming almost up to the fainting climax, the whole varied by the hearty maledictions of those who have no shoes against those who wear them (*Glasgow Herald*, 18 July 1845, 2d).

This is carnival itself: equality, sexual excitement, lack of control of the body and disorientation caused by the various noises all separated the participants from mundane reality. The visual confusion of the brightly-painted booths intensified the experience, as did the supply of cheap whisky. Nor were the performers mere actors, as was seen in the case of the showman David Prince Miller. He rose to being a manager of a legitimate theatre, but by the Fair of 1847 he was down on his luck, sunk in debt, without his props and still performing the magic tricks he had performed ten years before. The Glasgow people supported him, and if someone raised a critical voice 'he was soon given to understand ... by jostling, bonneting &c., that it was most prudent to keep quiet' (Miller 1849: 141). The player and the people were still close to one another and they shared the experience of the Fair. Indeed, many of the ballad-singers, fiddlers and pipers at Glasgow Fair were working people who for a few days earned coppers in a different way (*Glasgow Herald*, 13 July 1838, 2e).

Around 1840 there were two developments, stemming from the emergence of different kinds of entrepreneurial showmen. First, the drama and other performances were shown to much larger audiences. Second, visitors to shows began to report their experience with disappointment.

The minor shows of the 1820s were driven out by theatres that offered more for the same price – a penny. By 1844 there were four large temporary structures, one of which seated 1500 people (*Glasgow Herald*, 12 July 1844, 2d). The entertainment at Glasgow Fair was becoming more professional and more commercial: in the new theatres there was a greater distance between the crowd and popular-culture professionals. These theatres put on eight to ten performances per day, so each one must have lasted an hour or a little more (*Glasgow Herald*, 14 July 1843, 2d), though Prince Miller said he had

performed *Richard the Third* twenty times in seven hours (Miller 1849: 111). This is the discipline of the sweatshop applied to the fairground. The transformation was brought about by the activity of entrepreneurs, and they were beginning to be active in many forms of popular culture, in this period creating the music hall, professional sport, the popular press and the seaside holiday (Cunningham 1980: 151-78).

The most conspicuous figure in Scottish entertainment in the middle of the nineteenth century was the magician and actor, John Henry Anderson (1814-74), 'The Wizard of the North' (Bayer 1990; King 1987: 155; Maver 2000: 102-4). Anderson had the confidence to invest heavily in handbills and in newspaper advertising, and in illusions for the stage; he was willing to seek new forms of entertainment; and he took huge risks. Having built up his act in Scotland, he first appeared in London in 1840, managing his own show, and with the profits was able to build a theatre in Glasgow. In 1845, without realising what it was doing, the Town Council gave Anderson permission to build a theatre of brick, rather than a temporary wooden one, at one end of the Green. There was a popular outcry: 'A council green the Green hath sold' said a lampoon (*Glasgow Dramatic Review*, 11 June 1845, 162). It was a huge structure with a stage 50 feet deep, and could hold 5000 people. It was said to be the largest theatre in Britain outside London (Pagan 1847: 110-1). It opened on 12 July 1845 – unfinished, but the Fair was about to start – and it burned down four months later, on 19 November. The conflagration drew a crowd of thousands, and there was general satisfaction at the removal of the theatre from a space that the people believed was their own (King 1987: 154-5).

One can interpret this as the conflict between an entrepreneur and the people he is exploiting, first by encroaching on their space, and secondly by charging a higher admission than the other shows. In dozens of towns and cities, the joint action of capitalists and councils was removing public open spaces (Cunningham 1980: 81-3). Deploying Douglas's cultural theory enables us to see Anderson as an individualist, manipulating an inefficient hierarchy; and he produced spectacles. The poor of Glasgow, sectist or equal in their poverty, resented both the power of the individual to shape his own destiny and the bumbling Council that was unable to protect the rights of those at the bottom of the social pyramid.

One of Anderson's rivals was the Calvert family, whose Royal Hibernian Theatre was an ephemeral wooden structure whose size varied from year to year. In 1845 it could hold an audience of three thousand, half of them standing.

Immediately behind the orchestra is a dense mass of ragamuffins, fighting, tearing and screaming for the best places. These generally consist of children from 11 to 15 or 16 years of age ... the raw material, so to speak, of the artful dodgers, thieves, the loose women, and dangerous scum of Glasgow some five years hence ... Behind the youngsters ... are seated ... a very 'scruffy-looking' class, who may be the friends, relations, associates and instructors of the juniors ... Behind these gentry is a miscellaneous company of soldiers, sailors, navies, operatives, &c., who are quiet and orderly, and have no disposition to fraternise with the folks in front; and behind these again, completing the picture, are a few scores of respectable citizens, who have looked in timidly ... (*Glasgow Herald*, 14 July 1848, 2d)

This is not a description of an unstructured audience, but of a series of strata. The undifferentiated mass in the Saltmarket twenty years earlier had been replaced by an audience laid out in social gradations.

At the Fair, the entrepreneurs were in control of events from hour to hour. From year to year, however, the Town Council was in charge, and it exercised its power by controlling space and limiting the leases it granted. It stopped the largest temporary theatres, like Calvert's, from appearing on the Green. By 1864 the Fair was almost exclusively for the poorer classes, and the booths were 'rickety erections of bare fir deals, covered with patched and rotten canvas,' and not brightly painted, as they had been earlier (*Glasgow Herald*, 16 July 1864, 4f). The Fair was last held on the Green in 1870, after which the Council refused to let stances and instead allowed a fair on the eastern edge of the city, at Vinegarhill. The broader picture is that the Council started to be much more active in their management of space and the places where the poor lived: between 1866 and 1876 they caused no less than 6% of the people to Glasgow to move out of the worst slums (Gibb 1983: 143-5).

We can now turn to the content of the shows. Everything was exaggerated, complained one commentator, and nothing lived up to its bill matter (*Glasgow Dramatic Review*, 16 July 1845, 187). One tent was embellished on the outside with a polar scene of icebergs, whales, polar bears, serpents and monsters of the deep eating sailors. Inside was a solitary seal 'about the size of a salmon' (*Glasgow Herald*, 19 July 1865, 7a). A Glaswegian remembered seeing a booth on which was painted a mermaid with an admirable figure, combing her hair. He went in and found a one-eyed seal, so he asked 'her' what she had eaten for breakfast, at which the animal rolled over. 'A penny roll,' said the showman, 'More than I 'ad myself.' The seal-mermaid kissed him: 'Been chewing terbacker,' was the comment (Hammond 1904: 168-9). A feature in 1849 was the 'happy family', a group of animals who might have been expected to chase or eat one another, playing together:

The exhibitor informed us that the reducing of the fox to common sense nearly drove his own senses out of his head. This animal was one year and eight months under training ... [and] on three occasions he eat up the whole contents of the caravan, with the exception of the [62 year-old] duck ... The man positively assured us that the duck had been more than five hundred times in the fox's mouth ... The value of the flesh and fowl that had passed through the fox's stomach during his training, is estimated by his master at the sum of £107 5s 3¼ (*Glasgow Herald*, 13 July 1849, 2d).

The key to understanding this was provided by *Punch*. It printed the following, in which the sceptical Mr Punch is interviewing the unreliable trader who wants to put on his show at Bartholomew Fair; he is also Lord John Russell who was then electioneering:

Punch – You were a promoter of state conjuring and legerdemain tricks on the stage.

Russell – Only a little hanky-panky, my lud. The people likes it; they loves to be cheated before their faces (*Punch*, 1 (1841), 88).

The cheating and the disappointment were part of the show: the surprise was the method or the excuse. The entertainment came from the showman's patter. One kind of minor entrepreneur could minimise his capital outlay at the same time as pretending that that he

had spent lavishly.

The presentation of the shows was also an example of ‘the world turned upside down’ in carnival, an ancient technique for producing laughter. At the Fair, the worlds and pictures showed the wonder and power of nature, but the real animals were tawdry and exploited. The educated journalist experienced only disappointment, but the people must have appreciated the inversion: how else would the showmen have stayed in business? And the sense of inversion was all the greater in the shadow of the Judiciary Court. Thus, despite the fact that the entertainment was provided by showmen and entrepreneurs, there is an element of carnival about the Fair.

Glasgow Fair cannot be interpreted by identifying it with one or two categories in Douglas’s model: it included all four. Spectacle and carnival were on the Green, and they were made safe for the people and the showmen by the surrounding envelope of hierarchy in the form of the police. The isolate was part of the Fair too, hearing it in the distance, seeing the people going eagerly towards it and unsteadily from it. The whole was an intense experience compounded of the different forms of festivity, the stimulation of all of the five senses, and the crush of the crowd.

Glasgow Fair at the Coast

The first recorded trip *doon the watter* – down the River Clyde from Glasgow – at the Fair took place in 1816, when the Trustees of the River Navigation, along with other dignitaries, sailed aboard the *Albion* steamboat to Cumbrae and Toward Point. They completed their one hundred mile journey early the following morning (*Glasgow Herald*, 19 July 1816, 2c). An early example of ordinary folk going down the River occurred in 1833, when the owners of the Caledonian Pottery chartered the *Apollo* to sail from the Broomielaw at 6 o’clock on Fair Saturday, making for Millport and Rothesay. She did not, however, call at either of these places, ‘the object of the pleasure-trip being to draw the workmen from the riot and dissipation of the town.’ On board was a professional quadrille band, two amateur bands and a choir, but no spirits to drink (*Glasgow Herald*, 12 July 1833, 4d). The employer was the hidden force who limited disorderly behaviour, for passengers had freedom if they paid their own fares. These travellers stand at the beginning of the change from Glasgow Fair as a fair in the city, to a holiday period when the crowd left town.

Beyond Greenock the Clyde estuary opens out into a giant drowned landscape of narrow lochs from which hills rise steeply: ‘these form a picture on which even the eye of an ennuyee might hundreds of times gaze, and never become drowsy or tired’ (Fullarton 1842: i, 234). Rothesay and Dunoon, the principal destinations of Fair holidaymakers, were a Highland town and village less than three hours distant from Glasgow by train and steamer. This is what Handelman calls spectacle. The spectacle does not communicate anything other than ‘diffuse wonder or awe’ to which each spectator can respond in his or her own way (Handelman 1982: 180). This is the feeling of being on a Clyde steamer, or at the loch side, experiencing the sea and the landscape. The ship had become an itinerant grandstand.

A large number of people left Glasgow at the Fair. In 1851, when steamers were becoming bigger and the railway network existed in outline, 25,000 travelled from the

city by boat on Fair Saturday and 18,800 by train (*Glasgow Herald*, 21 July 1851, 5b). The city's population was 329,000. By 1868, when the peak of travelling covered Fair Friday and Saturday, 40,000 left the city by boat and at least 75,000 by rail (*Glasgow Herald*, 15 July 1868, 5a). By then, the holiday was spread over ten days, so the total number who travelled was probably around 200,000 out of a population of 460,000. They had to stay somewhere. Rothesay in particular became excessively crowded: from the 1850s those who could not obtain a room slept in the surrounding woods, and this practice continued well into the twentieth century (Durie 2003: 45, 87). In 1913 there were sleepers in billiard rooms, corridors, the woods and the cemetery, and it was said that public and private houses might hold more people if the wallpaper was removed from their walls (*Rothesay Chronicle*, 22 July 1913, 3b and e).

The railway and steamer companies were funded by private capital, but they were not, in Douglas's terms, individualist: each one was a structured hierarchy with timetables, detailed schedules of fares, uniformed employees with ranks and specific roles, and stations on which every function was allocated a space. They enabled working people to have a cheap holiday that they could themselves control, and during which they could make their own choice from the entrepreneurs' offerings (Fiske 1989: 76-7). At the Clyde resorts accommodation, food and entertainment were provided by small operators – families who moved into sheds and let each room of their house, owners of cafés, the proprietors of the shooting ranges, shows, nut barrows and sweetie stands (*Glasgow Herald*, 15 July 1872, 4f). Only at the end of the century did larger capitalists emerge or move in, as at Brighton, Blackpool and elsewhere, though on the Clyde the main investment was in railways and steamers (Cunningham 1980: 162-4; Durie 2003: 47-55).

Over the decades, the railway companies increased their role in Glasgow Fair. Year by year, more powerful locomotives, better operating practices, and more efficient organisation, enabled them to carry larger numbers of people. In the early 1890s they became the dominant steamboat owners on the Firth of Clyde. Although the small operators – the street singers, the rowing boat hirers, the café owners – were still an essential part of the Fair, the transport companies increasingly controlled people's behaviour because they could control their movement. At the coast, as on the Green, hierarchy and individualism can often be found working together, the first providing structure and safety, the second opportunism and flexibility (Burnett, 2004-5). In the years before the First World War, hierarchy in the form of royalty and the armed forces became increasingly important in the provision of entertainment. In 1894 and 1896, yachts belonging to the Kaiser and the Prince of Wales raced one another on the Firth, watched in the latter year by 100,000 spectators (*Glasgow Herald*, 13 July 1896, 6f). The military Volunteers trained at their summer camp, but they also provided entertainment. For example, when the Lanarkshire Engineers arrived at Rothesay, three bands led them up the High Street (*Evening Times*, 21 July 1902, 2e). In 1910 a gunnery range was opened south of Dunoon, with the floating targets pulled by a tugboat, watched from land and sea (*Evening Times*, 21 July 1910, 5d).

Going *doon the watter* was the form of festivity we have identified as *spectacle*. There are significantly different forms of spectacle, depending on whether it is produced by large or by small entrepreneurs. Small ones are flexible, have many faces, no fixed

premises (or use their own homes), and like the urban poor, they may have to work many roles in order to earn a living from month to month and year to year. The small showman is antagonistic to hierarchy because it tries to exploit and control him by issuing licences and making rules. Celebration, the festive form of hierarchy, distracts the people from the showman's booth. Large entrepreneurs, however, are able to manipulate hierarchy, or at least negotiate with it.

Conclusion

The value of an approach to festivity based on Douglas's cultural theory is that it provides a way of analysing how festivities differ on the basis of the way people experienced them. It can be contrasted with the deployment of the concept of social control, which has been used to explain the evolution and extermination of fairs (Cunningham 1977). 'Decisions and arguments about leisure were decisions and arguments about power and control, that is to say they were political' (Cunningham 1980:12). The social control model is based on the direct expression of the power of those at the top of the hierarchy. Douglas's model is more subtle because it enables us to see the several forms of festivity, and also the different ways in which they relate to power and self-interest. For example, it reveals that celebration provides an indirect way for the powerful to amuse and distract the people, at the same time as reinforcing their social values and institutions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This essay was prepared with aid of librarians in Rothesay, Glasgow (the Mitchell Library), and Edinburgh (the National Library of Scotland), and I thank them. I am grateful to an unknown referee, and to Professor Sandy Fenton, for their comments and corrections.

NOTES

¹ The terminology given here is slightly different from Douglas's own, which has itself varied over time: see Fardon 1999: 259. For commentaries on the evolution of Douglas's model, see Fardon 1999: 110-22 and 218-23, and for clarification of its power and limits, Douglas 1982 (particularly Ostrander 1982), and Ellis and Thompson 1997b.

² One might wonder whether *isolate* is an unnecessarily negative word which emphasises the lack of contact this culture has with the rest of the world, leading to the idea that it describes individuals who are disaffected and powerless (Douglas 1996: 46, 69-70). One might alternatively think that it refers to a culture which rejects the manipulation of power hierarchy, the cut-and-thrust of individualism, and the structureless equality of the sect. In that case, it might have its own structure which is different from the other three, in which case the family at home would be an example.

³ When cockfighting is mentioned by earlier authors, it is either seen as an ancient Celtic tradition, or no origin is indicated. In the latter case, it is implied that since Fastern's

E'en is medieval, so its practices must be medieval too. However, the earliest reference given by Mrs Banks dates from 1626, and the earliest Candlemas cockfighting reference is in the middle of the eighteenth century (Banks 1937-41, i, 11; ii: 165-6). Robert Chambers says the sport was introduced from England in the 1690s, and implies that it spread from the burgh schools to country ones (Chambers, 1858-61, iii: 266-69). Perhaps he was right. Charles Rogers, who is not always reliable, said that cock fighting was brought to Scotland by the Duke of York, and was common in the eighteenth century (Rogers 1884-6, ii: 340).

⁴ The 'salt box' is the box-like base of the Mid Steeple in the High Street in Dumfries. It included prison cells.

⁵ The present essay ignores the problem of first footing. In the middle of the nineteenth century newspaper reports from all over the Lowlands said that it was in rapid decline. Yet it was characteristic of the New Year in the twentieth century. Was it revived? Perhaps, but it is more likely that the newspaper reports missed a change in the nature of first footing. Here is a conjecture. The original meaning of *first foot* is the first person met on the way to church by a wedding or christening party. In this sense, the *Scottish National Dictionary* dates its earliest use to 1719, but the connection with the New Year does not start until a quotation from 1792. So perhaps New Year first footing in the nineteenth century was conducted in the open air, with people greeting their neighbours for the first time in the year, and taking a dram with each one in rapid succession. As the historian of Kilmarnock put it:

As soon as the town-clock had numbered twelve, hundreds of persons of both sexes sallied forth from their domiciles to greet their friends and acquaintances, and treat them with intoxicating liquors (Mackay 1864: 112).

The newspapers may have missed the fact that the first footing had gone indoors, and become more static and – comparatively – less alcoholic.

⁶ The account of the king's birthday in Reid's book was written by Dr Mathie Hamilton under the pseudonym 'Aliquis'. He is identified in a letter from John Buchanan of Glasgow to Daniel Wilson, Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 9 July 1851, in the copy of Reid's book in the Library of the National Museums of Scotland.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



- The Jedburgh Fastern's E'en ba', c.1910 [SLA C.10320 (107D2)]



- The business of leisure: the performers at Jooly Fair at Kinross, c.1950 are on a small stage outside their theatre – as at Glasgow Fair, and a hundred other fairs, a hundred years earlier [SLA C.12133 (90B2)]



- Paddle steamer *Vulcan* leaving Keppel Pier, Great Cumbrae, on a hazy summer morning about 1904 [SLA C.17971 (3A1)]