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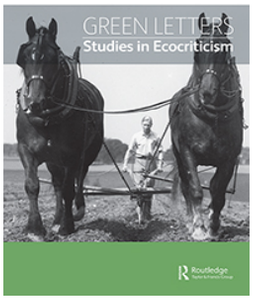

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Can Calendar Customs Engender Stewardship of Our Natural Environment? An Investigation into Real-world and Fictional Calendar Customs in the UK and Their Potential for Environmental Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Many UK communities perform a custom in the same place at the same time every year, and a number of these, such as the Marsden Imbolc Fire Festival in West Yorkshire, The Saddleworth Rushcart in Greater Manchester, and the well-dressing tradition, have a direct connection to the natural world, through the theme that underpins them, the natural resources used and the ways in which they can contribute to a sense of 'place attachment'. As awareness grows in advocating for local, as opposed to global, climate change messaging to increase engagement and action among citizens, could calendar customs offer a previously unexplored opportunity for community engagement in the face of climate crisis? This paper uses qualitative research with the organisers of three calendar customs alongside representations of calendar customs in fiction to interrogate the impact calendar customs could make in their respective communities.

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As we seek to mitigate the harm we do to our planet while adapting to the reality of a changed climate, our personal and collective practices come under scrutiny. Looking inward to our communities, our calendar customs – the ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and games we perform at landmark points in the year – are a stark reminder of our place within seasonal cycles and the societies we develop, and by coming together at these occasions, we have the opportunity to create meaningful experiences on our doorsteps. Fun and frivolity might be the initial intention of such practices, but the togetherness of a community-wide celebration can also promote the sense of identity, of belonging and inclusivity; the key ingredients required for an active, engaged community. This paper seeks to interrogate the relationship between calendar customs and the natural world, and whether this relationship can aid communities in their collective response to the climate crisis by facilitating the emergence of environmental stewards.

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The environmental steward and localised action

Christianity sets out that followers must obey God's command to care for His creation, an individual and collective commitment usually referred to as 'environmental stewardship' (Lin 2016, xiii). However, Johnny Wei-Bing Lin, an evangelical Christian and environmental ethicist, acknowledges that his work to define environmental stewardship and translate God's command into practical action is also of use to secular perspectives. In *The Nature of Environmental Stewardship: Understanding Creation Care Solutions to Environmental Problems*, Lin instructs secular readers, 'wherever I discuss "following God's command", [to] substitute "doing what is moral" or something similar' (xiii). Whether his readers believe that the world was created by God or not is irrelevant to Lin's argument; it is his belief that human beings have a moral duty to care for their environment, regardless of the individual's worldview, that is paramount (xiii).

Whether or not an individual follows a religion or believes in God, Seumas Miller observes that morality, in itself, can be self-motivating (2013, 261). Miller notes that the challenge to understand and tackle the impacts of climate change on a global scale 'is joint epistemic action that involves a collective epistemic end' in which individuals can play an integral part to attain that knowledge and put it in to practice (261). The desired result is not simply how an individual might learn to reduce their personal carbon emissions, but 'the mutual belief that knowledge of how to reduce human-induced, harmful climate change is a collective good [that] can have motivational force' (261).

According to a press release regarding the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, released in August 2021, 'strong and sustained reductions' in greenhouse gases would limit climate change (IPCC 2021). The need to act now, then, is paramount, but there remain challenges in communicating the urgency of climate change and encouraging citizens to become environmental stewards. Political- and eco-theologist Stefan Skrimshire acknowledges that '(a) global resurgence of coordinated popular protests in 2019, most notably those of Extinction Rebellion and the Schools Strike for Climate [sic], have succeeded at the very least in shifting the political rhetoric from talking about "climate change" to that of "climate emergency"' (2019, 519).

But individuals tend to feel powerless to make change and become true environmental stewards. Ruth Irwin observes that an impossibility to 'imagine any other options than "business-as-usual"' (2013, 244) – that is, the status quo where economic and population growth far outstrips our planet's resources with an acceleration of climate change as a result – has led to a reliance on technology (refrigeration, transport, etc.) which further removes us from the sustainable lifestyles our ancestors followed:

> The agricultural technology of the Middle Ages was bound by the natural rhythm of the seasons. When trees were mature, fruit ripened and could be harvested; when fruit ripened the bottling season began; when the calves were born, cows could be milked and cheese could be made. The rate of maturity is not always annual, but production and consumption in these times were dictated by the pace of ecology (247-248).

Now, accustomed to the freedom that modern technology buys us – we can eat cheese all year round, should we desire to – we are unable to behave ethically, both collectively and individually, with lifestyles compatible to the resources our planet provides. We are entrenched: all corners of our society are invested in this rampant, unsustainable economic growth, and there is little true leadership on the issue (2013, 243; 247). In fact, such is our

belief in the power of technology, Irwin notes, that it is often felt that technology will ultimately 'save the day' and bring humanity back from the brink of extinction (243). In other words, we continue to hail new inventions as solutions to our predicament, even as the situation deteriorates, rather than attempt to mitigate or curb these unsustainable practices, a shift that would be deeply unpopular with, for example, voters and the corporate world.

If we detach ourselves from the natural world, and believe humanity to be a separate force, one which can override or be unaffected by nature, then it is easy to understand why an ecological crisis such as human-induced climate change can occur (Murray 2017, 22). Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford (2013) note that communicating climate change, its urgency, and our collective need to act, is challenging because of this disconnect: it is uncertain and ostensibly distant, impacts are predicted and believed to occur in the future, despite IPCC evidence to the contrary, and thus not directly relevant to the individual. 'Why bother to change one's habits and lifestyles for a cause that is outside one's daily sphere?' they ask (62). Our global outlook has also augmented – or distorted – our knowledge. Irwin states that information technology means '(w)e know as much (or as little) about drought and war in Somalia as we do about the countryside less than 100 km from our own dwelling' (2013, 250).

To better communicate the impacts of climate change and encourage individuals and communities to become stewards of their environments, Scannell and Gifford believe that 'effective communication strategies should aim to reduce the gap between climate impacts and personal concerns' (2013, 62).

In their 2013 study, Scannell and Gifford sought to interrogate the effectiveness of local versus global messaging in communicating the effects of climate change, to measure whether '*place attachment*, the formation of emotional and cognitive bonds with a particular place', has any bearing on climate change engagement (66, emphasis in original). They observe that place attachment occurs when an individual feels connected to a specific location due to personal experience such as memory, significance due to cultural or religious reasons, and other 'opportunities for belongingness' (66). The researchers created a comprehensive study to measure this with residents in British Columbia, defining three groups: one which received a global climate change message (global sea levels rising due to melting ice sheets in the polar regions); one which received messages regarding climate change impacts on a local level (pine beetle deforestation in the Kootenays, forest fires in the Okanagan, and rising sea levels on Vancouver Island, selected due to the diversity of impact); and a control group which received no message. Participants were given a questionnaire which sought to understand their propensity to engage with climate change based on the message offered, but also the individuals' engagement and understanding of climate change more generally (70). The study demonstrated that:

> Climate change engagement was greater among those who had received a local message … When climate change messages are employed, locality may improve individuals' receptiveness to the information … Climate change conceptualized in local terms may be more tangible and more comprehensible. (76).

But it seems it is not just how a message is framed that engenders engagement: action on a local level also proves invaluable. In a study of participants in the Watershed Stewards Academies (WSAs) of Maryland in the US, it was found that voluntary

engagement in structured environmental stewardship programmes not only promoted a snowball effect of growing awareness about environmental practices amongst residents in the community, but also made individuals 'more likely to be involved in the public square than the average citizen', bucking the trend of an overall decline in civic engagement (Yagatich, Galli Robertson and Fisher 2018, 441). In this study, participants cited a preference for active engagement, rather than 'the paper-membership model' where supporters contribute money, and viewed themselves 'as part of a larger network of people who could be mobilised to advocate for specific issues' (440). It should be recognised that this study only evaluated their civic intentions and did not go on to monitor the actions of those participants, but this *desire to act* could prove powerful: if ordinary citizens become increasingly aware of the environmental concerns of their community and feel themselves empowered to act, there may be the added value of increased engagement in other civic issues, resulting in stronger, more cohesive, and potentially more representative, local networks – which is crucial if we are to tackle the climate emergency.

The UK's rich calendar of vernacular customs that occur in our communities may, then, have a similar potential: to frame the local messages of climate change that individuals require to feel connected to the issue of the climate emergency, while also providing a physical action that provokes active environmental stewardship.

What is a calendar custom?

'Calendar custom' is a term used by folklorists to describe the seasonal events and traditions that occur in communities, usually performed and organised by members of that same community that 'have been around long enough to have been passed on to successive generations' (Roud 2006, xiii). The UK, and England in particular, has a great number of calendar customs – a cursory glance at the map on CalendarCustoms.com demonstrates this to great effect (Shepherd 2021) – and though many are recent inventions or revivals of traditions that had previously died out, there are those whose origins are uncertain and claim a long and relatively unbroken tradition. For example, the Castleton Garland Ceremony that takes place in Derbyshire annually on 29 May was first recorded in churchwardens' accounts in 1749 (Roud 2006, 278).

The 'calendar' part of the phrase is particularly useful. Ronald Hutton observes that:

> The rhythms of the British year are timeless, and impose certain perpetual patterns upon calendar customs: a yearning for light, greenery, warmth, and joy in midwinter, a propensity to celebrate the spring with symbols of rebirth, an impulse to make merry in the sunlight and open air during the summer, and a tendency for thoughts to turn towards death and the uncanny at the onset of winter (1996, 426).

Calendar customs performed in the UK today remain assigned to significant points in the year. *The English Year* by Steve Roud lists English customs chronologically, beginning with New Year's Day customs such as First Footing and Herefordshire's Burning The Bush, through to New Year's Eve with the Allendale Guisers where wooden barrels are set alight and paraded through the Northumbrian village (2006, 4–5; 572). However, this month-by-month guide also highlights the anomalies, of which there are many: occasional, weekly and even daily customs, such as Ripon's horn blowing (579).

The sheer diversity of these customs – when and how they are performed, to whom, for what purpose (if known), their role within and impact on their communities – makes them a rich source of study. In this paper, however, I will focus on the customs of which I have some experience – either in the real world, or as presented in fiction – and those that have connection to the natural world and could, subsequently, be employed to frame local messages around climate change and even provoke participants into action.

The power of place

Calendar customs may have the ability to connect participants to their community, with the potential for the 'place attachment' that Scannell and Gifford note as being particularly effective in communicating climate change (2013, 66).

Firstly, calendar customs may inspire pride in communities. The Whittlesea Straw Bear festival, for example, which takes place in the small Fenland town of Whittlesey each January, was revived in 1980. Though the custom is carried out over the days following Plough Monday, a statue celebrating the straw bear is situated in the town, an outward expression of the town's year-round pride in its iconic festival, the only one of its kind in Britain (Roud 2006, 25).

The significance of a custom may also enhance an individual or community's connection to a place. Peter Outram, the current chair of the committee that co-ordinates the Castleton Garland Ceremony, speaks of the custom's deep-seated significance to the village's populace, especially those who have lived in Castleton for generations:

> If you've been involved in it most of your life, it's something inside, you know, and people get incredibly emotional about it … I can't describe why it's emotional. It just is. But it's not reflection. Another good thing about a normal Garland Night is that if anybody's going to visit or come back to Castleton, to visit relatives or just 'I lived here', they'll come back on May 29th, knowing that lots of other people will not only come back but all the locals will be out as well (personal communication, 2 June 2021).

Outram's difficulty in articulating why the custom is 'emotional' is explained by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. Whereas the visitor or tourist can express a 'viewpoint' or experience of a place through 'novelty', writes Tuan, '(t)he native, by contrast, has a complex attitude derived from his immersion in the totality of his environment … expressed by him only with difficulty and indirectly through behaviour, local tradition, lore and myth' (1990, 82). For Outram, the custom enables him and his wife, both longstanding village residents, to celebrate the longevity of their attachment to their place:

> Because when people say 'well, what do you know about Castleton?', I can say Ellen and I, together, have lived here 129 years between us. My mother had the Garland committee meeting in our living room (personal communication, 2 June 2021).

Their continuous participation in, and orchestration of, the custom helps them physically display their commitment to their village, and their understanding of its, and thus their own, heritage.

This is not to conclude that all residents in a community which performs a calendar custom are unanimously supportive of it. Outram acknowledges the road closure orders that cause difficulties with local people and re-emerge each year (personal communication 2 June 2021), while David Biggs, one of the organisers of the Saddleworth Rushcart in Greater Manchester understand anecdotally that:

> By and large, the local people, the local population, are proud of [the custom]. They're proud that they've got a morris team and they're proud of the Rushcart. In general, though, we're not everyone's cup of tea. Some people, I'm sure, who live in Uppermill go away for the weekend just so they're not anywhere near it, I'm quite sure about that. Just because of the amount of people that come in (personal communication, 11 January 2021).

For those local people who are 'proud' of their custom – who participate in the event, offer donations to ensure it continues to operate, spectate on the day, profit commercially from the increased footfall – there is the potential for the custom to enhance the individual's attachment to place, invoking local knowledge: people who live in Castleton, for example, may choose to participate in the sub-group that forages the greenery used to form the garlands throughout the day (personal communication, 2 June 2021).

This local knowledge, or lore, can also contribute to the identity of a place and mark it as different to other places. Local lore is a boon to fiction writers seeking to develop a sense of place for their imagined worlds, and calendar customs can be employed as narrative devices to signpost to readers what a place is truly like. Novelist Kate Mosse opens her novel, *The Taxidermist's Daughter* (2015), with a 'strange ceremony' (4), one 'that has long since fallen away in most parts of Sussex, but not here' (3). In Mosse's portrayal of West Sussex village Fishbourne, residents continue to observe the custom of Saint Mark's Eve, a formerly widespread custom performed at the churchyard at midnight on 24 April, when 'Anyone who wanted to know who would die in the parish in the coming year could stand in the church porch at midnight … and they would see a ghostly procession of figures approaching and entering the church' (Roud 2006, 190). Mosse's reader is told that this eerie custom is no longer practised in other parts of the county and this is the writer's method, right at the outset of the novel, of asserting that Fishbourne is different, that its inhabitants cling to their vernacular ways of expression. Ultimately, this, Mosse emphasises, is somewhere special.

Tuan notes that topophilia, or a human's love of place, is 'not the strongest of emotions' when it is limited to appreciation of scenery but grows once the individual is aware of its historical and geographical significance (1990, 93). Individuals who recognise and value a place's calendar custom – which, by its very nature, has historical and geographical relevance, due to its recurrence over time in the same location – may experience a deeper sense of understanding of what it means to live there. And for those individuals connected more deeply with the custom, perhaps accumulating experiences and memories over many years, the custom may provide an additional attachment to the place. Tuan states that local patriotism, as opposed to imperial patriotism, is experience of intimacy with a place compact enough to 'know personally' (101), and I would argue that familiarity with a calendar custom could play a significant part of that understanding.

If a calendar custom offers such potential for enhanced place attachment, it does not seem unfeasible that this might lead to greater civic engagement, particularly on the theme of the climate emergency. If local people care about their custom, they may also experience place attachment and, therefore, be more receptive to local climate emergency messaging and action.

Changing seasons, seasons of change

Though calendar customs are thought to be performed for a wide variety of reasons, seasonal change, particularly the agricultural year, has historically had a profound impact on their development (Roud 2006, xiii–xiv). There are those customs, such as mumming, that are derived from the need for agricultural labourers to boost their income during winter when there was little work to be had, 'regarded as the legitimate perquisites of the labouring classes' (Widdowson 1994, 26). Then there are those customs that celebrate the very fact of the changing of the seasons, and the heralding of easier, warmer and more welcoming times ahead, such as the 'Summer in the Furry Dance' celebrated by the residents of Helston, Cornwall (Hole 1976, 6), a lively day of dance that takes over the town annually on 8 May.

In Marsden, West Yorkshire, the coming of spring is celebrated biannually on the first Saturday of February with the Imbolc Fire Festival. The festival was established in the 1990s by a small group of residents previously engaged in local environmental activities who wanted to entice Marsden people out of their homes during winter, 'supposed to be the most depressing time of year' (personal communication, 25 February 2021). The main event consists of a torch-led procession through the dark streets of the town, inviting spectators to Tunnel End, adjacent to Standedge Tunnel and Visitor Centre, where a pyrotechnic and puppet performance begins: giant Jack Frost and Green Man puppets go to battle, and, on the Green Man's victory, fireworks are released. In the weeks leading up to the event, there are public and school workshops in which local children and families can make lanterns and masks. The decision to hold these workshops was motivated by a desire to enhance local active participation in the event, but also because, as Angela Boycott-Garnett, one of the organisers, remarks, 'I was shocked to find that not all children understood about the seasons. But I think that a lot of them do now' (personal communication, 25 February 2021).

The organisers do not hide the fact that the concept that underpins the event – Jack Frost, representing winter, is defeated by the Green Man, representing spring – is a twentieth century creation, invented purely for the event with no basis in folklore or mythology:

> Originally, it would have been probably the Holly King and Oak King; we wanted iconography that was more accessible to people. A lot of people wouldn't know the pagan stories and things. A lot of people would be more aware of the Green Man and he's pretty obvious because he's all foliage (personal communication, 25 February 2021).

This conscious creation of a concept, however, has not prevented local people from investing in and subscribing to it. One organiser of the festival recalls:

> I remember one festival I was in the crowd . . . and there's this little girl and when the Green Man won, she burst into tears and the reason why she burst into tears because she wanted to go sledging the next weekend, and she thought the snow would be gone (personal communication, 25 February 2021).

Folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi call this phenomenon 'ostension': when an individual understands folkloric meaning as having a possibility of truth and believe something different or behave in a different manner as a direct result (1983). This young person's understanding of the performance has had a profound impact on her comprehension of future events and, coupled with the additional information about the festival she might receive at school as part of a festival-curated workshop, the potential for the festival to engage her with pertinent issues – how climate change in her locality might affect the seasons – could be significant.

The calendar custom that appears in Zoe Gilbert's collection of linked short stories, *Folk* (2019), is also an example of an invented custom that observes the changing of the seasons on the fictional Island of Neverness: 'The door of the day is nearly shut, but this is the hinge of the year itself. Days are shrinking, nights spreading'. (11). This observation takes the form of a calendar custom, gorse running, which has been invented by the writer to introduce the reader to this pre-industrial, agricultural – and brutal – society. The custom is a competition in which the Island's young men must compete to retrieve the arrows fired into the gorse by the Island's young women. Once a monogrammed arrow is caught, the couples are paired off, and this is how the young people's futures, and the Island's families, are decided. The social significance of the event is not to be underestimated, but neither is its environmental connotations: as the gorse tears at the clothes and the skin of the participants, we learn that Neverness society is at the mercy of the natural world. In order to survive, islanders must be environmental stewards; gorse burning is part of life on Gilbert's Island, as it remains today in locations where gorse is prevalent, as gorse is extremely useful for biodiversity and regular burning of old growth can help the germination of new growth (RSPB 2021). By gamifying this land management practice to 'cleanse the air for another season's turning' (Gilbert 2019, 5), attaching further social elements to deepen the significance, the reader understands that this is a society that understands its place. As such, Neverness residents would likely be powerful environmental stewards.

Though Gilbert's Neverness is influenced by the heritage and topography of the Isle of Man, a place she knows well through familial connections, the custom is an invention. She has, however, been told by readers that they recognise the gorse running custom and its overlord, the Gorse Mother, believing it to be true Manx folklore and another example of ostension (personal communication, 23 April 2020). Accentuating the aspects of a new or established calendar custom which relate to the climate emergency, such as the celebration of seasonal change and sustainable land management practices, could frame the local messaging required to inspire action.

Making the natural tangible

The theme or purpose and location of the calendar custom may not be its only link to the natural world: many UK calendar customs utilise natural resources as an integral part of the custom, situating the custom directly in its immediate natural landscape and providing participants with a direct connection to their doorstep natural resources.

Ahead of the Saddleworth Rushcart festival in Greater Manchester, usually held on or around the August bank holiday, the Saddleworth Morris Men cut and collect locally grown rushes to build the rushcart, on which a designated 'jockey' will sit throughout the day.

Cutting the rushes takes place with the permission of the National Trust, on whose land the rushes grow, and it is a gruelling job which must take place regardless of the weather (personal communication, 11 January 2021). As Nigel Reynolds, Saddleworth Morris Man and the next 'jockey', told me:

> It's very rare that there's always enough. You're still cutting while they're building [the rushcart], if that makes sense. It's about two weeks of cutting, a week of building. I'd say more often than not, [during] the week of building, we're still up there cutting and bringing them down yourself. Which is a strange job in itself, cutting rushes, up there on your own sometimes … You can be in there sometimes on your own and you can see people walking and they can't see you, but you can see them (personal communication, 16 August 2021).

Nigel estimated that 2000 bundles of rushes are used to make each cart. This is another example of local knowledge: Nigel was able to describe to me exactly where the rushes grow and how many bundles of rushes are foraged, but because he is not explicitly part of the cart-building team, he was unable to articulate how the cart itself is assembled. The cart-building team, therefore, have their own local knowledge.

Though the cutting of the rushes is extremely hard work, the subsequent unveiling of the cart makes it worthwhile: 'I always believe that when you pull the cart out on Saturday morning … that atmosphere feels better if you've put the work in' (personal communication, 11 January 2021).

Similarly, the summer well dressing custom, made famous by the villages of the Peak District sees materials, traditionally natural ones such as moss, petals and bark that are gathered by participants from their local environment, arranged on clay screens to produce intricate designs (Roud 2006, 312). Once completed, well dressings are put on display, but as time wears on, the displays become ragged, with the natural materials withering away. Crichton Porteous, in his 1949 exploration of Derbyshire well dressings, noted:

> The great pity of this work is that despite all the care taken these pictures and decorations must all fade within a few days, and when petals have lost their glow, and mosses and leaves have died, the pictures look sad, and even have a depressing effect (21).

As the custom comes to an end for another year, this 'depressing effect' is a reminder that the wheel of the year is turning; that though the bounteous natural materials have decayed, they will return again the following year. In my article that explores the well dressing custom in Jon McGregor's 2017 novel, *Reservoir 13*, I observe that this is used by the writer as a powerful visual metaphor to demonstrate that life must go on, integral to his story of a community coming to terms with a missing young girl (Parkes-Nield 2021).

Locally sourced natural materials are also a feature of The Burry Man's Day. Held in South Queensferry, near Edinburgh, on the second Friday of August, the custom features a man dressed in a suit of burdock seeds, or burrs, his features eerily obscured, who is paraded about the town. Like many of our calendar customs, its origins are much debated, though the Burry Man's relationship to the harvest is frequently posited (Hole 1976, 40). Catriona McPherson, a native of South Queensferry who now lives in California, chose the custom as the backdrop to one of her Dandy Gilver period murder mysteries, *The Burry Man's Day* (2007), using the intricacies of the custom to enable key points in the plot: a poisoning, an

identity switch and a getaway. In my interview with McPherson about the writing of the novel and her use of the custom, she described her anguish at her publicist's suggestion of using burdock seeds as decoration at the book's South Queensferry launch:

> Can you imagine if, for the first year, they couldn't find enough burdock seeds to cover The Burryman for Burryman's Day, and it was my fault? For my book? That would be awful. And the people who weren't from Queensferry thought that was quite funny, but we [Queensferry residents] didn't think it was funny at all. I would have been so ashamed . . . if we decorated a table of snacks with burdock seeds and messed up Burryman's Day because of that; I would have been truly ashamed (personal communication, 6 May 2020).

With a vast quantity of burrs required for the suit, McPherson's discomfort, as a former resident of the town, is understandable, and demonstrates the power of her local knowledge: the importance of the custom to local people and the understanding that these seeds have a higher purpose. McPherson did not allow her publicist to go ahead.

Rushes, well-dressing materials and burdock seeds are all resources sourced directly from the landscape local to the custom and integral to the performance of the custom itself. Though there is nothing to suggest that these materials are in short supply, or that the custom could not adapt to use other materials should these become unavailable, the local knowledge involved in the usage of these materials, and the time and effort required to harvest them – Peter Naylor and Lindsey Porter state that well dressing is a 'painstaking and time-consuming process' (2002, 9) – ensure that they are prized and, in McPherson's case at least, protected. This indicates that there is potential for the calendar custom to inform the behaviour of the individual and the community in relation to its immediate landscape and ecological concerns. This is corroborated by Hopper et al. (2019) who concluded that the more 'species-specific cultural heritage information' is disseminated to an individual, in addition to fact-based scientific information within conservation education, the stronger the appreciation of the species (9). In the case of the calendar custom, then, the more individuals understand the importance of a resource to the custom, the more likely they are to appreciate – and, therefore, steward – the local environment from which it is derived.

This was the tactic of grassroots environmental and arts organisation Common Ground when they founded Apple Day in 1990, following their wider project to campaign for the recognition of UK orchards. In contrast to a simple 'awareness day', where an organisation might seek to launch a campaign, '(t)he aspiration was to create a calendar custom, an autumn holiday. The success of Apple Day has shown what the apple means to us and how much we need local celebrations in which, year after year, everyone can be involved' (Common Ground 2021). On Apple Day, 21 October, Common Ground invites organisations to hold apple-themed events across the country to celebrate the 6,000 varieties of apple grown in the UK. This initiative is part of Common Ground's dedication to what co-founder, Sue Clifford, calls 'local distinctiveness': enabling communities to understand, value and cultivate the richness of their own environments (1998, 91).

In Conclusion

Ronald Hutton believes that though the 'emotional demands of daylight hours and climate are still very much in operation', our ritual year has been 'recast' so that the holidays and festivities we choose to celebrate are selected on the basis of 'humanity', the

relationships between each other as friends and family and communities, rather than our relationship with the natural world (1996, 427). However, as the climate emergency intensifies, it is clear that our relationship with the natural world cannot be separated from our relationship with humanity. Ahead of the Glasgow 2021 COP26 climate conference, the UN has stated that global carbon emissions must be reduced by 45% by 2030, yet forecasted global emissions chart a rise in that period (Shukman 2021). 'In matters of climate change', Mairi Dupar from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) states, 'everyone is a stakeholder and everyone is a decision-maker with the power to make a difference' (2019).

Dupar advocates for the Climate and Development Knowledge Network's guide *Communicating climate change* for practitioners working in climate education. This guide stipulates the need for 'climate information that is relevant to [individuals and organisations], and often this means information that is quite localised, which tells them how climate change will affect their local community, town, city or district', in contrast to the large-scale predictions or scenario modelling usually offered in climate change communication (Climate and Development Knowledge Network 2019, 18).

This is where the calendar custom comes in. The magic of the calendar custom is that it is local. Devised, governed and performed by the community, calendar customs begin and are perpetuated in direct response to the lore, need, desire and enthusiasm of local people. If communities see the link between their calendar custom and value the place in which the custom occurs, then the calendar custom could be one small tool with which to foster engaged, active environmental stewards – which is what we will need if we are going to adapt and become resilient in the face of climate change. 'The *fun*, the sheer good-natured enjoyment, the pride in taking part in something absolutely unique', as Brian Shuel puts it (1985, 7), also makes the calendar custom – for some – an attractive method for engagement.

There is already some evidence that folk culture can highlight and strengthen environmental consciousness. For example, Eric L. Ball, in his research into the Cretan folk poet and the performance of the traditional mandinadha, notes that 'Folk authors can promote such care for place by using locally popular genres and traditions as discursive vehicles for fostering or sustaining engagement with local social and ecological issues among fellow inhabitants' (2006, 277). In his observation of renowned mandinadha performer Kritikaros, Ball writes that the poet's own concern for Crete's environment translates into the traditional material he performs, flouting convention for the traditional form, usually given over to romance and relationships, and instead promoting a 'real' relationship between Cretans and their Island; that is, an authentic relationship that eschews nostalgia and promotes contemporary issues such as environmental crisis (290). 'Kritikaros appropriates culture-for-nature', Ball states. 'He activates Cretan identity and Cretan folk traditions to promote an environmental sensibility, suggesting once again the importance of socioecological place awareness and a sense of place' (291).

The calendar custom is a form of 'local tradition as a narrative tradition' (Kõivupuu 2020, 274), a practice associated with a localised story or message. However, I am not advocating the creation of a calendar custom purely to engage local people in environmental stewardship and climate change advocacy. Shuel notes that 'It is almost

impossible to start a custom as such. They need to begin for some other reason, catch on, and then gradually establish custom status without trying' (1985, 13), and Angela Boycott-Garnett, organiser of the Marsden Imbolc Fire Festival, corroborate this, stating:

> The first year we did it, it was more of a show put on for people, without the community involvement. We didn't know at the time – we had no idea it was going to go on for 30 years – but you know, we didn't even know whether we were going to do it the next year (personal communication, 25 February 2021).

The success of the Fire Festival, demonstrated by the increasing footfall from a hundred in the early days through to contemporary audiences of around 5,000 people, is not that the audience has learnt about the seasons but because it is a fun and lively event (personal communication, 25 February 2021), and it is uncertain whether Apple Day has survived beyond 2016, the last time an Apple Day 'pack' was available on the Common Ground website (Common Ground 2021), although autonomous local initiatives may well be taking place without fanfare.

The threat of climate change may not feature highly on the agenda of a custom's organising committee, if at all, and there is not one body to which calendar customs belong through which committees can be entreated to consider engaging their communities on issues of climate change. I am certainly not postulating that there should be: calendar customs should continue to develop their own rules, play up their quirks, their arbitrariness, their contrariness.

But as the climate emergency worsens, our environmental impacts must be considered in every facet of daily life, including our community customs, traditions and celebrations. Ironside and Massie (2020) write of the 'folklore-centric gaze', a subversion of the tourist gaze whereby folklore is used to educate visitors about an area's historical, cultural and environmental heritage, fostering appreciation and, therefore, responsible tourism. Applied to our special places, and governed by residents rather than tourists, the folklore-centric gaze could prove a useful approach in environmental stewardship. Though it would not be possible, nor appropriate, to reach out to every UK calendar custom and systematically encourage environmental stewardship, it would be extremely powerful if calendar custom organisers, when working through their risk assessments or thinking up fundraising strategies to enable the custom to take place next year, realised the potential for climate activism and transformative change that is as localised and genuine as the custom itself.

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