

Minutes: Big Blether about Samhuinn. 5th July 2018

(Note: I wasn't able to catch all of the names of the people commentating, so where I'm not sure, I've just put Member.)

Tom: Let's get started. For this Blether, which I'm chairing, we're only using the agreement and disagreement hand-waves, no "I'm adding to this point". We're here to get the sentiment of our members to help steer the Board and Blues in light of venue changes. Although we're taking everything into account, the Board could make different decisions to what is discussed today.

Tom: Any extra big discussion points, please mention them now? *(None come up)*.

Tom: Ok, so this year, the Royal Mile is out. It'd mean a £25k extra charge. We can't afford it and security. Too many restrictions.

Tom: We have considered some alternatives -

The Mound, as in 2014, Crushes in the past. Costs a lot.

Princes St Gardens - Council says no.

Divali Festival - We considered Sticklebacking on their event. Too much ground to be covered, and we'd need to be careful of core value misalignment. Maybe possible in future, but not enough time this year.

George Square, Bristo Square - More than 1 agency involved, so extra work.

Tom: So we put in an application for Calton Hill, not turned down yet. How should we do a festival on Calton Hill? The Board feel if Samhuinn Fire Festival not in Edinburgh City Centre then hard to get back to the centre, loss of momentum. Also, there were many problems with the out of town Beltane troublesome. What format should we use? How could it work

Ant: Procession in reverse, end at Acropolis

Daniel T: Is it worth considering what we want to keep, key points, narrative?

Jay: How many groups, how many people?

Tom: Is normal format of whatever comes in terms of groups a core value of Samhuinn? The number of people brings licensing implications.

Member: By location or ticket.

Member: Ticketing allows you to control the numbers

Tom: We'll probably need some sort ticketing or registration

Danielle: Could we make it cheaper? Ticketed, not for profit, but not as big a loss?

John: With extra costs... assuming it's a closed space, with fencing and box office, it'll much higher cost than RM. Still, we could look at subsidising tickets?

Tom: If we can reduce build costs that'd help. A one day build would still cost £15-16k rather than £6k-7k on the Royal Mile though.

Sally: Samhuinn has only one procession. Could we reduce space the space we're using on the hill to reduce costs?

Tom: We pretty much get charged a flat fee for the whole Park, but possible reductions by using less space.

Ken: How is BFF priced? (8 9 pounds)

Tom: 5 pounds for children under 12. Samhuinn is more family friendly.

Daniel T: Less costs, but less line of sight.

Georgia: We could do reverse acropolis staging. Keep it different by having a stage at the back of the Acropolis; where Bower is.

Tom: Is the Cailleach, and the King fight a key part of the festival? (*Assembled agree that it is*)

Danielle: Could a shorter license save us money? Samhuinn is concise, finishes at 11pm.

Tom: The Procession is important, with long straight bit finish at other side.

Daniel T: We could use the extra space to give a more wilderness feeling? Feeling out in the wilds could be good. We could use the "Trig Point" where main fire normally is, as a main seating area with excellent line of site.

Tom: Do we go with a bonfire, as we have the hill?

Ant: Without streetlights, lamination is going to be an important issue for Samhuinn.

Jay: We are a fire festival.

Ant: Because it's Samhuinn, can we have blue flames?

Josh: A Traditional part of Samhuinn is bonfires (indeed, the Neid Fire tradition is from there, and not Beltane). Our stories have adapted to the spaces we use. Samhuinn is based on Galoshin Street Theatre, With the Kings as two fighters and Cailleach as the "Doctor"

who resurrects one of them. A wider space means we can have more fire, but what other possibilities are there now?

Lindsey: On the topic of Samhuinn traditions; I enjoyed the having more than 1 stage at the Grassmarket. There was less crushing, it was more fun, and it gives the witnesses more to look at.

Tom: Two processions is great for story-telling, it gives a clear message to audience - They can see a fight coming. What are people's opinions? Does it come down to the Kings, or the Blues choice what we should do, or should it be the society as a whole?

Danielle: Fuck it, so much room, why not 3 processions?! The main element of the festival is the Cailleach, so why is everyone just talking about the Kings.. Why can't Cailleach have a procession? There's so much room for movement. People watch the kings more because they do more.

Ant: We could start with a big fire, which burns down, with different walks along different paths along the hill, conflicts on the way..

Hannah: I think these decisions need to be made by the Kings and Cailleach

David: Opposing forces approaching each other was fun and powerful before. Samhuinn has to be easy to understand, it has to be clear in purpose. To have the Cailleach resolve it, we need to frame her as the lynch-pin, it needs to weave together coherently.

Rebecca: I've been a bucketeer, people do struggle to understand the story. Progression from to stages would be good to help people understand it.

Daniel C: It's a trade-off, narrative cohesion for us vs clarity for the witnesses. If we splinter off, the audience will see less. We'd need to concentrate high impact bits on where people are.

John: Maybe we could achieve this by having strongholds like castles or caves, with a central castle or battlefield for the big clash. We could use props and locations to emphasise the clash.

Daniel T: For the sake of narrative sense and ritual sense, it's worth maintaining a single big set-piece at start and at the end to focus people's attention. In between there can be more minor acts to draw the witnesses attention in different ways.

Tom: The problem with Trig point, is if the witnesses get in the way, it's hard to see into it.

Daniel: If we have group members holding them off, it'd be easier to see up the hill.

Danille: A big problem for the first 30 mins of Beltane is that only the first four rows can see anything.

Tom: Using the Acropolis reversed would give us a big flat viewing area.

Tom: I don't think the audience **need** to know whole story. Like the randomness of No points etc. I remember a group a couple of years ago who pulled in punters (actually performers) and it looked amazing to audience.

Tom: I should also mention that we're a bit snookered if we don't get Calton Hill, we can't find any more options at this point.

Jay: Is there any info as to whether Parks will accept / reject our offer?

Tom: Parks are very busy with the Festival, but the fact that they haven't bounced it back, is a good sign, I think.

Rebecca: Can we talk about the idea of subsidised tickets rather than completely free?

Brad: Bucketeering gets about 1k in total at a normal Samhuinn

Tom: Do we have any thoughts on costings.

David: How much did Beltane cost?

Tom: Will be more than Samhuinn on the Royal Mile. It costs about 25k to do Beltane on Calton Hill.

Member: The day of week changes number of people attending, but last year, we got 12k witnesses on the Royal Mile on a Tuesday.

Tom: There's always complaining about ticket prices, but our festivals are never free, the BFS pays if the witnesses don't.

Danielle: Perhaps we could be more up front with our audience that we're paying for this, that this is how much work we do. Also, if everyone in the society put in extra effort at the beginning and end then it could be much easier for tech to do the building.

Daniel T: Raising awareness on pricing, if we put a bit into the festival's promotional material, people would find it interesting, and it could bring Witnesses into nuts and bolts of what Beltane Fire Society is about.

Rebecca: Perhaps mention we've outgrown our space? The audience may understand.

Tom: Stewards may face hostility for ticket price. The audience often don't like it, and will complain at them.

Seobhan: Is most of Tech's work before and after the festival?

Tom: It's before, **during**, and after, but before and after are different jobs.

Seobhan: Perhaps we could recruit some witnesses to help us with the build, in exchange for free tickets?

Sally: Samhuinn is normally more family friendly than Beltane, should we preserve that? Calton Hill means we could potentially do more nudity? Would this exclude families?

Tom: We should decide.

Danielle: Stewards intake is smaller at Samhuinn, we need to seriously consider if it's too much for just the volunteers we get.

John: Earlier darkness means we could we have a much earlier festival. Could this help with tech takedown, licensing, family friendliness?

Tom: Probably wouldn't help with licensing, it's the hill for a night.

Lu: A lot of people like to see Samhuinn then go to another Halloween party, so early could be good.

Lindsey: The build normally starts at 9am on the day, as it is, Tech are pushed to be ready for the 5pm inspection. We'd also need to consider that members of the audience have work, so may not be able to make it that early.

Josh: Many of our performers have 9 to 5 jobs, too.

Jay: I have seen a festival where Tech got bled to half numbers. We need to incentivise sign up to these groups. We need them to stick around, it is essential!

Daniel C: What is the situation with us processing to Calton Hill?

Tom: The Council won't let us close Waterloo Place due to bus diversions. Even if they're over by then. The cost of road closure is huge.

Kate: The Police have said processions along streets have been too large in the past, lots of trouble as a result.

Tom: Closing roads is expensive it's why the box office was moved up hill. A street procession could look cool, but it's a lot of work.

Danielle: Calton Hill gives us an opportunity to make the festival more accessible for disabled people. Flatter areas could help more restricted people including performers.

Tom: There are lots of considerations, I hope potential GOs consider the new opportunities Calton Hill gives us.

Tom: What do we think about nudity. Samhuinn is normally warm, but 2014 wasn't!

Ant: How dark do we want SFF to be? As in thematically.

Georgia: My favourite bits of Samhuinn have been watching little kids enjoying it.

Kate: Nature is cruel and harsh, but it's not gory horror, more natural than that. I'd be horrified to see really gory costumes.

David: There's a line between the scary and shocking, we want scary, but not shocking.

John: Are we going to stick to a Roald Dahl horror for kids formula?

Daniel C: We could maximise horror, but in a safe way. It's what night is for.

Hannah: The Summer Fairies literally had their guts ripped out two years back, the crowd loved it, especially the kids!

Danielle: There is Beauty to horrible things.

Georgia: So what about nipples?

Alex: I think it's not a good time to change what we do considerably, people are used to it being family friendly, and we're making a big change already.

Josh: Samhuinn is not a fertility festival, so it's not as important to show nudity.

Georgia: Plus it might be limited by the fact it's just too chilly!

Tom: What about if you come dressed for SFF get a discount?

Josh: Could we make a party on the hill if we end earlier?

John: If we finished earlier we could have a drum club for the crowd for a couple of hours?

Danielle: Or we could have more room for the Cailleach to be the centrepiece. Ella's got cut short last year. We could use extra time to give time to Cailleach.

Tom: Last year's issue was crowd crush, not timing. We needed to make production decisions, and unfortunately, they have to take priority. John's after party is only good experience if weather is nice. Also, residents wouldn't like a second 1am curfew. I think an 11pm curfew is a wise choice as this is new.

Georgia: Let's talk more about key points, what are they? What is really important to us? The Board should know which bits are needed.

Alex: In my opinion, one of the best things about Samhuinn is it's relative flexibility, it's a blank slate each year.

Tom: We could do with better court balance. Need GOs to think about this.

Member: My friend came last year and there wasn't enough summer court, they didn't understand as a result.

Ant: Losing bucketeers would be a shame, because they help tell crowd what's going on.

Hannah: Crowd contact point!

Josh: A lot to be said for having it non-verbal, conflict and resolution are easy things to show.

Danielle: Also, people aren't just interested in the main story, they want to know about the BFS themselves, they like want someone to talk to.

David: Second this, people wanted to talk to Stewards, to finding out specifics. General points can be made visually, but audience want to know specifics about the groups.

Tom: Getting balance is important, I'm hoping that we can rely on the good will of GOs to provide this balance. Missing GO weekend might just not work for this one, it's going to be very important with all the changes.

David: The Wild Hunt, it's important, it needs to happen, it's be sad not to have it, it's a key thematic point. (*Assembled agrees*)

Tom: Wild Hunt and Winter Riders looked amazing the year there were both there.

Danielle: There are middle groups, not Winter or Summer. Or Transitional groups.

Hannah: With more space, it'd be easier to tell a transition story.

Danielle: Not saying we need it but maybe have elements and winter counterparts?

Daniel T: From GO prospective priority: are you Summer, Winter, Transition, Presiding, Observing? We should try to strike balance early. These other types of group can be valuable.

Tom: Some groups can be, but many aren't from past experience

Josh: I think a festival works best when there is a strong core story, and the other groups have a part of that. It's best if people try to find ways of tying in to central story.

Danielle: If everything got wiped clean what's left: Caelliach, Neidfire. Overlooked by a lot of people, it's a tiny little cuddle puddle in Samhuinn unlike the big spectacle in Beltane.

Victoria: Is there a chance of better lighting? Royal Mile has lots, Calton Hill does not.

Rebecca: This Beltane we had fire cans gave lots of light, plus Torchies.

David: Perhaps Winter groups could wear less black?

John: Natural light for Beltane, but Samhuinn would work well with artificial light as part of staging.

Tom: I've seen it done well, and done badly. Installation considerations would be extra work for tech.

Member: To light hill would be an extra expense.

Another Member: Plus, artificial lighting kills night vision.

Ant: Could we use red light on focal points, it doesn't impact night vision much and could help emphasis.

Tom: Can imaging Photopoint hating this, they'd find it hard to get good shots in red light.. However, there are already big lights on Acropolis, we may be able to use them with just a power cable.

Rebecca: Bit darker could be good for Samhuinn

Tom: We could talk to the Candlemakers guild

Alex: Groups could take advantage of the darkness, to do scary things, or weird things with very limited use of light.

Daniel C: Darkness could help get interaction groups get really close to the audience before they notice.

Tom: Well, I was worried that you'd all hate Calton Hill, but it doesn't seem to be happening.

Sally: Is this a good time to start future planning if the BFS get kicked off Calton Hill? Is it worth continuing this chat into the future to establish new places to festival.

Tom: Bristo Square etc. won't answer the phone to September, because they're so busy with festival.

Sally: But it'd, be good to have more options so not in the same position again next year.

Georgia: Princes Street Gardens seems to be changing what it's doing in terms of events.

Tom: A Procession around Princes St Gardens could be amazing!

Rebecca : What about Holyrood Park?

Tom: We have concerns with Historic Scotland and the Crown Estate, getting involved as well as Parks so it'd be difficult. Also, are there any really magical spaces? The Car Park? I don't know if we'd get anywhere near Arthur's Seat itself or anywhere else interesting.

Kate: Also, it's a Site of Special Scientific Interest, so it's protected, and would be hard to persuade them to use the interesting bits.

Tom: They might allow some performers on crags, but we'd probably have to do the main festival on the flat bit. Good for procession options, but not a great place for a festival feel. Besides so much work for the Event Co-ordinator with all those agencies. We can't afford to increase EC Salary.

Tom: Does anybody have any out there venue thoughts?

Daniel T: Parson's Green, Back side of Holyrood? It's a big green space, it's not flat.

Josh: Not central either though.

John: Inverlieth Park?

Tom: Beautiful Park, hard space to manage

John: Musselburgh Racecourse.

Tom: Not exactly magical though.

Karen: We had a huge list, with a number of other places. Braid valley park, Steps. Many other things added to list.

Rebecca: Are we still doing busks to help people know we've moved.

Tom: This is the plan.

Tom: I'd like SFF being ticketed help move us towards a street theatre Imbolc instead. Somewhere like the noted Event Space, the Grassmarket. I think it's important that we do Street Theatre. Perhaps we could take some of the Samhuinn groups onwards?

Kate: Do come and speak to people if you're not sure about how Imbolc relates to Samhuinn.

Tom: Imbolc has lots of flexibility, in the past we've had Cornish traditions, psycho-dramas, big sculptres. If you have ideas, that's great!

Tom: There's a Pre GO Meeting on the, 19th July at Kilderkin. If you're interested, come along. We'll be talking about support given to GOs. In the meantime you can talk to Board or Blues.

Tom: Thanks for coming on this hot evening!