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Signed: David Laskey.............................................. Dated: 16 August 2002 .........................
1. Background and Acknowledgements

This report details the findings from a 2002 Churchill Fellowship to study overseas food and wine festivals with a view to assisting in furthering similar events within Australia. While there are many such festivals of differing types, public events with a consumption aspect were the principal interest of the fellowship.

The recipient currently manages the Taste of Tasmania, arguably this country’s largest food and wine event. The recipient had in the years prior to 2002 attended a number of other consumption based food and wine events within Australia including:

- *Harvest Picnic* at Hanging Rock, Hanging Rock, Victoria
- *Tasting Australia* and *Festival of the Senses*, Botanic Park, Adelaide, South Australia
- *Melbourne Food and Wine Festival* and *Taste of Victoria*, Melbourne, Victoria
- *Festivale*, Launceston, Tasmania.

Specific areas of interest included:

- Event content, specifically consumption based and how that was delivered in varying formats;
- The origin of the events and the management structure;
- Funding for the events and the input from government bodies and community organisations;
- Waste management within the event;
- Entertainment staging and production;
- Impact of the event on the host location and the negatives and positives for the local community.

Study timeframe

It must be accepted that there are many thousands of events that could be considered for inclusion in any itinerary. The events visited were chosen for specific reasons. Two events were included for having a single regional product as the focus Bantry, Ireland and Valeggio in Italy, while the Taste of Chicago was included due to its scale and broad appeal. In addition, a specific focus in attending the Chicago event was to closely observe the operation of its successful voucher system, which has enabled this event to maintain “free” entry but at the same time produce an income for the City.

Support

To be able to travel such a variety of events would not have been possible without the assistance that a Churchill Fellowship bestows and my thanks go to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. In addition I wish to recognise the support shown by the Hobart City Council, Aldermen, work colleagues and the referees who encouraged my application. Lastly I thank my family Morgen, Stella and Grace who coped with my absence and welcomed me home.
2. Executive Summary

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Position: Taste of Tasmania Co-ordinator
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Contact: Ph 03 6238 2701
Email: (work) laskeyd@mailnet.hcc.tas.gov.au (private) dlaskey@tassie.net.au

Fellowship Objective: To study food and wine festivals overseas

Principal Events visited

1. Bantry Mussel Fair, Bantry Bay, Ireland, 9 – 12 May
2. Christchurch Food Fest 3, Christchurch, Dorset, England, 10 - 19 May
3. East Midlands Food and Drink Fayre, Bolsover Castle, Derbyshire, England, 24 & 25 May
4. Gloucester Cheese Rolling, Coopers Hill, Brockworth, Gloucestershire England, 4 June
5. La Festa Del Nodo D’Amore, Ponte Visconteo, Borghetto Di Valeggio, Veneto, Italy, 18 June
6. La fete de la Musique, France, 21 June
7. Fetes du Bassin de la Villette, Du Bassin de Villette, Paris France, 22 & 23 June
8. Taste of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 28 June - 7 July

In addition to the events listed above other attendance was undertaken at several Farmers’ Markets, Fish Markets and traditional Country Markets.

Findings

Consumption based food and wine events and festivals within Australia are now undertaken in every state. While several events have national prominence and international recognition in various areas, such as Tasting Australia with its strong focus on Food and Wine Media, there remains considerable potential, particularly for smaller events, to focus their content and broaden their appeal creatively.

The events visited that could be categorised as most successful contained the following elements, including

- Successfully animating the event site and general environment
- Providing a range of activities not just for adult consumers but having a distinct focus for children and family groups
- Combined strong stakeholder support with integrated community participation
- Provided a range of options and peripheral events for visitors and tourists alike
- Offered some unique attraction that could not be obtained elsewhere
- Successfully utilised regional product to give the event its competitive advantage
- Used the geography/attributes of the chosen event site to best advantage
BACKGROUND

Special events are now recognised as having potentially highly significant impacts on their host environments. While all too often the benefits are viewed as being purely fiscal in nature there are a host of other less tangible positive outcomes that should not be overlooked in the measure of an event’s success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPHERE OF EVENT</th>
<th>POSITIVE IMPACTS</th>
<th>NEGATIVE IMPACTS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and cultural</td>
<td>• Shared experience</td>
<td>• Community alienation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Revitalising traditions</td>
<td>• Manipulation of community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Building community pride</td>
<td>• Negative community image</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Validation of community groups</td>
<td>• Bad behaviour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increased community participation</td>
<td>• Substance abuse</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Introducing new and challenging ideas</td>
<td>• Social dislocation</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Expanding cultural perspectives</td>
<td>• Loss of amenity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and</td>
<td>• Showcasing the environment</td>
<td>• Environmental damage</td>
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<tr>
<td>environmental</td>
<td>• Providing models for best practice</td>
<td>• Pollution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increasing environmental awareness</td>
<td>• Destruction of heritage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Infrastructure legacy</td>
<td>• Noise disturbance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Improved transport and communications</td>
<td>• Traffic congestion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Urban transformation and renewal</td>
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<td>Political</td>
<td>• International prestige</td>
<td>• Risk of event failure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Improved profile</td>
<td>• Misallocation of funds</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Promotion of investment</td>
<td>• Lack of accountability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Social cohesion</td>
<td>• Propagandising</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Development of administrative skills</td>
<td>• Loss of community ownership and control</td>
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<td>• Legitimation of ideology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourism and economic</td>
<td>• Destinational promotion and increased tourist visits</td>
<td>• Community resistance to tourism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Extended length of stay</td>
<td>• Loss of authenticity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Higher yield</td>
<td>• Damage to reputation</td>
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<td>• Increased tax revenue</td>
<td>• Exploitation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Job creation</td>
<td>• Inflated prices</td>
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<td>• Opportunity costs</td>
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(Source: McDonnell, Allen and O’Toole Festival and Special Event Management, John Wiley and Sons)
This brings one to ponder what is really the essence of a successful event, while taking into account all of the above.

Having seen, visited and experienced many events both in and outside Australia I am of the opinion that a successful event is one that

“brings real and sometimes intangible benefits to the broader community and offers experiences that by their very nature are memorable and lasting that cannot be easily experienced elsewhere”

FOOD AND WINE EVENTS IN AUSTRALIA

While Australia has a long history of special events from colonial beginnings, few have lasted till present times. Country Fairs and Rural Shows along with Surf Lifesaving Carnivals are some of the exceptions.

Within the food and wine sector more recent events that have stood the test of time include Victoria’s “Harvest Picnic” (est 1988) the “Taste of Manly” (est 1986) and more recently the high profile Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and Tasting Australia (est 1997) in South Australia. Yet more events are on the way with the inaugural “Gold Coast Food and Wine Festival” held last year and numerous other smaller events on an ever-expanding calendar.

Each of these events will have to compete over time for attention in the growing events market and also increased access to food and wine experiences.

Some differentiate themselves from the outset by recognising the importance of creating an identity or more importantly a point of difference.

Tasting Australia is an example in that it has marked itself from the start with a focus on the media, last year hosting its International Food and Wine Writers Festival in addition to the World Food Media Awards. Industry conferences have been included in its program and both Australian and International bodies have included symposia within the event.

Tasting Australia has clearly established itself in just a few short years to become one of the major icon events on the Australian calendar. However the consumption aspect is minimal being just one piece in a veritable mosaic of activities with a huge range to suit any palate. Distinctly though it is an event toned towards the foodie and unashamedly so.
ENGLAND AND IRELAND

Ireland lacks any long history of recognised gastronomic excellence, however the celtic tiger has certainly become, in the last decade, a country that has recognised the importance and benefits of food/event tourism, and the Bantry Mussel Fair, held on its rugged west coast, exemplifies recognition of this marketing potential. In some 20 years the mussel farming industry has grown from the idea of an enterprising local to become a major export earner (some 300 tonnes are processed daily) for the region and Bantry, some 80 miles from Cork, has clearly stamped itself with the bi-valve badge. While a visit to the festivals website will reveal the program relies more on entertainment than consumption, it shows how a small coastal town can extract real benefits by linking itself with just one product and where the product may just be the excuse for a great deal of socialising. Local Pubs and Restaurants serve mussels free for the 4 day event, which is probably a significant psychological lure, attracting visitors from all over the UK and Europe, it is however the entertainment program and social interaction in the town’s many hotels that is what most marks the event with the consumption of seafood secondary at times to the lure of the Murphys.

Within England few events could possibly trace their origin back further than the 15th century and still claim to have been almost continuously held without interruption. While admitting that during the Second World War and more recently, the outbreaks of foot and mouth there were gaps, cheese rolling still can be observed in some rural hamlets in country England. While conceptually basic it highlights the power of the “spectacle” and cannot only draw large crowds but considerable international media focus.

Rolling disc shaped objects down steep inclines has not however been limited to the English countryside. In Prussia and Switzerland straw wheels were lit and rolled down hills in the belief that if they stayed alight for a long time a good harvest could be expected. In the hamlet of Coopers Hill, Brockworth in Gloucestershire the event can still be witnessed on the spring bank holiday and attracts considerable interest, with a steady stream of British and International media.

While having no merit in its consumption aspects (you only get the cheese if you risk life and limb) it does however retain considerable pulling power for both media and spectators alike and shows the power of the its historical roots and the bizarre act itself.

More recently rural counties have initiated totally new events such as Christchurch’s Food Fest 3 situated in and around the town on England’s south coast in an attempt to ride Britains revived interest in all things culinary. Even though it had a vast array of events from a Mad Hatters Picnic to a Murder Mystery Evening it lacked any central theme or strong regional focus.
The inaugural *East Midlands Food and Drink Fayre* was an attempt to revive the rural produce sector in Derbyshire following the devastating effect of the foot and mouth infection. Significant government funding was allocated to assist in running the 2-day event, and the setting in the grounds of Bolsover Castle was ideal and undoubtedly led to longer visitation. The displays of local product and ability to meet producers with everything from organic bison to asparagus was a highlight, however seed funding for a regional farmers market may well have been a better utilisation of the one-off cash subsidy, as with no visible income lines, future viability would be questionable.

Britain’s strong traditional country and town markets and recent proliferation of farmers’ markets is an attempt to take consumers closer to the source and in many ways represent the most convenient and accessible way for many to experience, and in addition, purchase fresh and innovative products on a regular and convenient basis.

The success of farmers’ markets in Britain, there are now some 400 held on a regular basis, is both encouraging and educative. In essence these are in many cases the most accessible food and beverage experiences that one may come across in a country that more than ever considers itself to have something gastronomically to offer.

The tremendous regional spread of markets across Britain and the attractions sometimes included mean that in essence they are in many cases mini festivals that offer the best access, to not only experience products but meet with producers and talk about your passion with people who live and breath it.
FRANCE AND ITALY

Both countries have a history where often food and wine consumption goes hand and hand with the celebration of religious, sporting and historical events.

While festivals abound, they are often more difficult to find or get specific information about as both countries, as a generalisation, see these celebrations as an integral part of everyday life and the passing of the seasons and not products to be overtly marketed.

The celebration of food or wine and its consumption is as such, a daily activity and integrated into the pattern of life.

Italy has events that are truly passionate such as the simple Sagre del Pesce held in May at Camogli south of Genoa in Liguria where once a year the people of the village fry 2,000 fish in a fry pan almost 6 metres across. It is as much a celebration of cooking as it is about food. The fry pan or skillet is then used the next month in the region of Piedmont in the village of Cavi for another event where seafood from the village of Camogli is served with the famed white wines of the province in another larger event.

The fry pan itself resides on a wall all year, back in Camogli, where it remains as a tourist attraction. While the event has the hallmark of some ancient long established tradition it was begun more recently, allegedly during the Second World War, when the wife of a local fisherman offered fresh fish to the Holy Virgin for protecting her husband during the conflict.

Other festivities have more sinister and ancient origins, the Festa della beata panacea held in May in Piedmont is in memory of a little shepherd girl killed by her mother in 1383.

La festa del nodo D’Amore held outside the village of Valeggio sul Mincio in the Veneto region is quite recent and yet has ancient connections. Held on the 600-year-old Ponte Visconteo it celebrates the strong link the town has nurtured with Tortellini and promotes the town’s growing reputation with this delectable meat filled pasta.

40 local restaurants have banded together for the last 9 years to conduct an evening of medieval entertainment, fireworks and a lavish banquet on a table for some 4,000 picturesquely situated on this majestic bridge.
The local legend dating from the 4\textsuperscript{th} century concerning the origins of this pasta dish, and the romance between a young soldier and a water nymph is woven into the fabric of the evening and visitors are presented with a plate at the end of the night in celebration of the event.

Italian culture is at the heart of all these activities, a strong acceptance of past events, a desire to celebrate even the darker side and recognition of the importance that food and beverage play in everyday life.

France has an equally long tradition of celebrating the best in food and beverage and it takes little time to witness the French passion and interest in good food.

Fetes du Basin de la Villette is a festival event with a difference on the outskirts of Paris. Situated at the Basin de la Villette, essentially a vast open canal waterway surrounded by parkland, it is a true family event mixing simple street food with boating activities, including a Dragon Boat race, and a number of entertainment precincts. While not a true food festival, the simplicity of non-staged acoustic street performers, buskers, vendors selling baguettes and masses of festive balloons and the water borne activities combines for a special mix. A dedicated children’s play area with the most imaginative competitive board games, made it a mecca for families all around Paris.

Simplicity can often bring the best results and allow for direct interaction particularly when it comes to entertainment. Large stages with high levels of production may not offer the flexibility and interaction that should often be the goal of an entertainment programme.
AMERICA AND THE TASTE OF CHICAGO

As the biggest and largest food event in the US the scale of The Taste of Chicago has to be seen to be appreciated. Claiming it attracts over 3 million visitors from all over the US, and regions beyond, is a hefty call anywhere, and one could be excused for believing that someone has been fiddling with the calculator. Nevertheless the visitation is certainly enormous and for 10 days Grant Park on the city’s fringe is a mecca for the ultimate in consumerism and convenience consumption.

The marketing and product development opportunities are there to be had and sponsors such as McDonalds, Pepsi, Dunkin Donuts and a host of others utilise the event to the maximum, marketing everything from oral hygiene care strips, to new fast food concepts and soft drinks on an audience willing and ready.

The chance to build consumer brand loyalty along with merchandising opportunities and corporate hospitality make this the ultimate event in a country that is what it eats.

Begun in 1980 when a group of restaurateurs approached the Mayor of Chicago to have a food festival on the 4th of July it is now, not only, the centrepiece to an array of events but also one of Chicago city’s most successful, producing an income for the city reputedly in the millions.

While your average foodie may not appreciate the gastronomic content, the fiscal nature of the event is a model that many would aspire to.

Few events have the ability to offer free entry, an extensive free international entertainment program (The Four Tops, Midnight Oil, Foreigner and Hootie and the Blowfish were just a selection from this year’s bill) and not incur a devastating loss.

Chicago has for many years developed and successfully used the voucher system to levy an effective income line directly proportional to consumption.

Visitors this year paid $7 for strips of 11 vouchers with a nominal value of 50c, leaving $1.50 for the city to cover “Taste amenities”. Purchases are all made with vouchers including the joy rides on the Ferris Wheel or Water Flume and renders this a cashless event with the obvious advantages. Strips are printed by the city and sold through special ticket booths throughout the site.

The retailing of the tickets and purchasing with them is seamless experience and almost fun to use.
In addition the stallholders do not receive face value on the tickets but a percentage, after deductions by the city. The real work and secret to the success of this system is in the efficient counting and reconciliation of tickets, during and post the event, using a combination of weighing and automated counting systems to quickly assess the value of tickets received and thus draw a cheque in favour of the stall.

All mass public events are currently suffering from increased financial pressure due to legislative compliance issues, insurance costs, risk management and increased general overheads. The likely outcome for the foreseeable future is operational cost increase well above the CPI and subsequently any new funding systems that can assist in producing new income lines while nominally “user pays” are worthy of consideration. Implementation of the systems is the major hurdle and if achieved and accepted has innumerable advantages, however economies of scale would dictate that only the larger consumption events could consider such a move.
CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

The future of the special events industry may well be in for a period of change and have to adapt significantly in the next few years. Very few public events or festivals will escape the progression of these pressures and only those that adapt and plan for them strategically will blossom in the future.

The pressures for food festivals in particular will come from a number of areas and are summarised below

- The massive rise in the number of events through the 1990s will ensure increased competition for event tourists.
- The all too common clustering of events in specific calendar periods will add to the burgeoning number of competing options available to potential visitor markets.
- Increase regulatory pressures such as the Food Safety Standard within the recently introduced Australia and New Zealand Food Standard Code 2001 and other state legislations such as the recent amendments to The Public Health Act (1997) in Tasmania concerning Health and Safety in Public Places and similar legislation in other states.
- The recent upheaval within the insurance sector and subsequent public liability crisis will lead to the demise, or limit financial resources to many events and most adversely affect larger public events where consumption may be a focus.
- Along with the increase in the number of events will come a decrease in the number of opportunities for scarce government and private sector funding.

Yet there remains considerable scope for events that are adept to change and for the birth of new events that strategically take into account these pressures.

Events such as that in Bantry, Ireland where consumption is contained to pre-existing licensed regulated premises will avoid some of these pressures.

Festivals or events that steer clear of large public gatherings and concentrate activities in licensed permanent venues will also be less vulnerable.
Farmers’ markets in the future may represent a most attractive option for food and beverage experiences and allow the sort of interaction that many would see as the core reason for visiting a food event. While not allowing direct consumption as one may normally expect they can still enable

1. direct interaction with producers and growers “meeting the maker”;
2. patrons to experience a number of differing products in one event;
3. tastings of product and the ability to purchase product direct;
4. producers to expose product in a commercially viable environment where they may achieve better margins than through wholesaling;
5. producers to tap into local markets more successfully dealing directly with consumers.

Other important factors would include that they can be held monthly or weekly, are lower in risk than large public events and require low levels of funding and infrastructure.

Many markets now include entertainment and associated partner activities and can replicate the “food festival experience”.

Successful conventional events will need to differentiate themselves from the run of the mill and market their key competitive advantages well, if they are to survive in this new environment.

Many regions in Australia could more strongly identify themselves and their events with single or groupings of like products. A potato festival on Tasmania’s north west for example or a mango festival in the tropical north. However successful events require numerous other assets, such as:

1. attributing the event with a sense of place and the host environment;
2. successfully animating the event environment to denote real change for the period of the event;
3. siting events to take advantage of geographical and topographical features and assets;
4. more closely linking the event with historical events or the introduction of food and beverage product to a region.

In conclusion there is no single answer to the ongoing development of food and beverage events within Australia. It will only be through an expansion of ideas and a wider appreciation of what motivates us to commit our leisure time to such activities that they will continue to develop and flourish.
WEBSITES

The web has become an indispensable tool for those wishing to research and view trends in event management and aspects of event delivery. Many country’s principal tourism sites have specific event information either by region or chronologically. On an international scale the American site [www.festivals.com](http://www.festivals.com) is an excellent global starting point for anyone interested in food festivals with coverage of every continent and excellent hotlinks to each event. In addition listing your event is both simple and free. Australia is in dire need of a comprehensive national database for the event tourist with categorisation by specific areas of interest and links to each festival. Below is a list of the principal sites for each country visited with the addition of several of the more obscure.

**IRELAND AND ENGLAND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bantry Mussel Fair</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bantrysusselfair.ie">www.bantrysusselfair.ie</a></td>
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<td>Hartington Farmers Market and Fair</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hartingtonfarmersmarket.com">www.hartingtonfarmersmarket.com</a></td>
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**FRANCE AND ITALY**

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<tr>
<td>Italian government Tourist Office</td>
<td><a href="http://www.enit.it">www.enit.it</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive private site (Italy)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hostetler.com">www.hostetler.com</a></td>
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**AMERICA**

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**FOOD STANDARDS**

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