

**Raisin Weekend — or Raising Cain?
What Price Tradition in St Andrews?**

Is Raisin Weekend a piece of harmless fun, a worthwhile tradition or the chance for a lot of drunken yobs to take over the town of St Andrews? This is a matter which has been perplexing ‘Town and Gown’ for many years.

Raisin Monday dates back to the early days of the University which was founded in 1410. With the idea of creating an academic family, new students or bejants and bejantines were befriended by older students who became their ‘parents’ and would help them settle into university life. As a ‘thank-you’ for their care, the bejants were expected to give their ‘parents’ a cup of raisins and in return would be given a receipt written in Latin. Failure to produce this receipt when asked would result in the unlucky bejant being doused in the fountain.

Of course this has all been updated to suit modern needs. The cup of raisins has been replaced by a bottle of alcohol, and the fountain dousing by the now traditional foam fight that takes place in St Salvator’s Quadrangle on Raisin Monday before 11am.

This all sounds like a lot of harmless fun but local residents and the emergency services are often left picking up the pieces when things get out of control. It also seems as if the intention of a ‘weekend of hi-jinks’ to get everything out of the students’ collective system has backfired and rather than getting over the desire to ‘party hard’, it seems to inspire an increased desire to binge drink and create havoc on the streets. Just prior to this year’s Raisin Week the following notice was spotted in Greyfriars Garden, ‘The Gig — parental advisory: The Gig claims no responsibility for debauchery, damages, indecent exposure, loud behaviour and excessive consumption of free shots.’ Some local residents were outraged but a University spokesman said: ‘We have not received any complaints or reports about the alleged incident. The University takes a very dim view of such behaviour and invests a great deal in ensuring all our students are aware of their responsibility within the local community.’

Raisin Weekend is seen by many as one long drinking session. A spokesman for the Scottish Ambulance Service said: ‘There is no doubt that we are seeing an increase in the number of calls we get on the 999 service that are directly related to alcohol abuse.’ However, Inspector Andy Edmonston of Fife Police said: ‘There is no evidence to suggest that St Andrews has more or less of an issue with binge drinking than any other similar centres of population.’ He added: ‘During evenings and night-times throughout the year, St Andrews town centre is a vibrant place with a number of licensed premises well attended by local residents, including students and visitors.’

St Andrews University Students’ Association president, Alex Yabroff, admitted that there could be a problem with binge drinking and some successful campaigns had been organised to help prevent it. He was, he said, continually working to promote good relations between the ‘Town and Gown.’ He also stated that there was always

drunken behaviour in the town, even when the students were away and felt they should not be blamed for everything, adding: 'During the Open Championship in July, laws preventing drinking in public were hardly enforced at all,' suggesting that the Police are harder on students than visitors to the town. Mr Yabroff went on to say that the Students' Union was working hard with the University to keep students safe and had produced an advice booklet.

However, a local resident saw things very differently: 'These are drunken yobs. I came down Market Street and City Road last Friday night and there must have been 300–400 people there. We don't get this when the students are away. A lot of older people live in this area and find this very upsetting.'

Another town centre resident said she was fed up with the 'filthy language and moronic behaviour.' She felt this only happened at the start of the university year and added: 'These are drunken hooligans and yobs who must be students. It is too much of a coincidence that the trouble only starts as term begins. Their behaviour is disgusting. When the pubs discharge you see them in the streets and the language, especially from the women, is absolutely filthy. It is giving completely the wrong impression of St Andrews. This isn't just a bit of fun — this is anti-social behaviour.'

So who's to blame? John Barclay, Secretary to the Fife Licensed Trade Association, is quick to lay the blame at the feet of corporate ownership or, as he puts it, 'faceless people at the top of big companies,' who are pushing for bigger and bigger alcohol sales. Mr Barclay, himself a retired hotelier, praised the attitude of private landlords who sell alcohol with a degree of discretion. He went on, 'Unlike private landlords, multiples are not interested in people, only in figures. If a manager doesn't meet his targets for sales, he is fired. To me that is irresponsible.' And he offers a solution: 'By controlling the price you cut consumption by half. Discounting deals encourage alcoholism. It is not these youngsters' fault.' Certainly there have been many reports of hotels and bars offering deals such as five shots for £1.

It would certainly be a great shame if the charming tradition of Raisin Monday was to die out because a few — and for the most part it is only a few — drunken and unruly members of the student body choose to abuse both themselves and the town. St Andrews and the University share a long, fascinating history. It is in the interests of both that they should work at finding a solution to this problem.