

England

and it's Odd Traditions

A curation of objects organised by Charles Holloway

for Camberwell School of Art - 2020

An exhibition displaying a selection of objects tied by their representation of what England might, or could, be.

As a nation without its own parliament since the Acts of Union in 1707, the remains of an individual nation exist in narrow and often isolated terms. These leftovers are often portrayed in familiar ways; nationalism and individualism uniting behind the flag, with a group of supporters appearing increasingly out of touch with a progressing world.

In the scraps however, in more intimate circumstances, there is a relevance to traditions ignored that can be increasingly positive especially as a means of human interaction.

Centred around the artefacts and objects, the collation enlightens this past and portrays its forgotten relevance. Tied to these objects are works from makers and artists both named and unnamed from a wide time frame. Some exist as artefacts such as the Hand-stitched Cricket Balls, some exist as physical histories, such as the Kiplingcotes Derby Trophy (the oldest horse race in the country), and some are the works of makers maintaining dying craft practices.

Whilst looking at a spread of objects and artefacts from various anthropocentric histories, a more accurate picture of the English identity is created, one that provides a topic for debate on progress. What should be left behind and what should be carried forward? What should England be?



Village Traditions - Abbie La Rooy



Guernsey Jumper - Guernsey Woollens



Eric Gill, Bastard - Unknown Maker



Blue Fin - John Grayson



Kiplingcotes Derby Trophy - in the care of the
Race Trustees



Silver Ball - made by Colin Rescorla



Wendesbury Woollens - Unknown Maker



Various Works - David Cleverly



Darren - Josie Barnes



Village Industry Bowls - Unknown Maker



Tapestry Map
Charles Holloway



Genii Cucullati - Unknown Maker



Ploughman's - Traditional Origins



Hand-stitched Cricket Balls



Waveney Valley 'Dwile Flonking' Association Shirt
Unknown Maker

Village Traditions - Abbie La Rooy

Working with the Women's Institute, this film is the product of a game devised by combining the stories and tales of local villages and people with a element of unpredictability. Common or regularly occurring words are mix to produce new traditions or rituals.

The process intends to reconnect people with histories long forgotten, whilst enlightening those without insight of the histories behind village traditions to their relevance in creating and enforcing the strength of the local community, Whimsy is a valuable element of the project as a digestible medium for recognising the flaws of village life in a wider context.

Film - 10 minutes

Guernsey Jumper - Guernsey Woolens

(Traditional Pattern)

The Guernsey Jumper is derived from a traditional 17th century pattern for a wool smock. The jumper is made to be symmetrical, making both faces suitable for use as the front of the jumper to avoid continuous wear in the same places. Worsted Wool, which is stronger and finer than looser weave knitting yarn, is able to produce a knit so tight that the fabric has water repellant qualities. Even if soaked, wool maintains its ability to trap heat.

Guernseys are made with less decoration than their Gansey counterparts, although decorative stitches are still used as identification marks for the village or family that the fisherman originated from. When men were found having been lost at sea, it enabled the body to be repatriated. The chosen patterns were often derived from local geography, such as a shingle beach being represented with a 'purl' stitched section.

Eric Gill, Bastard - Unknown Maker

This strange folk carving depicts the face of Eric Gill. Most likely made in the South of England, the area in which Gill lived and worked, the work presumably exists as a response to the perception of Gill as both artist and person. Gill's contribution to the Arts and Crafts Movement was great, with sculpture often reflecting the style of religious and totemic figures often depicted in Roman, Greek and Egyptian theology. His works often referenced the nude form in similar fashion to the post-impressionist of the same years, although his working subject matter was often derived from using and manipulating his wife, Ethel, and his three daughters who were teenage at the time; Petra, Joanna, and Elisabeth. His notebooks reveal practices such as measurements of his daughter's form, next to measurements for the length of his phallus.

Gill has rightly fallen from favour since a revealing 1989 book (Fiona McCarthy)

Blue Fin - John Grayson

John Grayson creates objects that support a dialogue around machine automation and manufacturing process, and Blue Fin made using now defunct processes rooted in previous West Midlands industry. Made from Printed Tin, a process often used in the mass manufacture of children's toys and homeware.

His work is centred on political circumstance, and satirically critiques the response to cultural stimulus and the landscapes it creates. Blue Fin exists as a physical critique of the sterility of mass manufacturing processes, but other works such as 'The Discombobulated Brexiteer' reference a wider society.

Kiplingcotes Derby Trophy - in the care of Trustees of the Race

As an exhibition partly focused on English Traditions, there is perhaps no better example than the Kiplingcotes Derby. Successfully reaching its 500th anniversary in 2019, the horse race has been run according to rules that state it must be run every year or else never again. Events in 1947, 2001, and 2020, meant that a two horses were lead around the course on the third Thursday of March ensuring the race could continue.

The trophy represents the not only the success of the race winner, something that holds genuine importance in the area, but the efforts of those on the Trustee board who work to fundraise and lobby to maintain a threatened tradition, enjoyed by hundreds, sometimes thousands of people.

Silver Ball - Colin Rescorla

Hurling the Silver Ball is a tradition that takes place every year in St. Colomb Major, Cornwall, and has early records in the 16th Century. The game, much like an enormous communal game of rugby with no laws, involves a hand-made Silver Ball that has such importance is is seen on the town crest.

The ball is sterling silver formed around an applewood core, held with an engraved band and is made to approximately 20oz., 23cm circumference. The engraving states

"Town and Country do your best, for in this parish I must rest"

The game finishes with the first goal, and the 'hurler' that scores has the right to keep the ball, although they must pay £1,000 for the new ball if so.

Wendesbury Woollens - Unknown Maker

Found in the South of England, tucked away amongst various items in a farm stable room, The Wendesbury Woollens are one of the finest examples of home weaving from the period of successful Cottage Industry. Three pieces are shown in near perfect form, with few remnants and samples remaining at the location.

The fabrics are woven in a simple 1up, 1down pattern, most likely made on a Warp-Weighted Loom or Rigid Heddle Loom which are found in various worldwide cultures due to their simplicity and ease of use. Fabrics made on such equipment are able to be woven to much greater sizes as the process is scalable. The maker of these pieces has mostly used un-dyed wool, the use of tweeds gave easy to produce variety to the works.

Various Works - David Cleverly

These figures are made with a process similar to 18th and 19th Century Staffordshire wares, although formed by hand instead of press moulded. Made from terracotta, the slabs are joined and shaped to be formed with soft clay. David Cleverly continues thematic archetypes found in early pottery, referring to recognisable iconic figures from history and mythology. These usually interact with animals, but are given a humorous or surreal twist with a sometimes surreal caption.

David Cleverly is based in Haytown, Devon, where he began making domestic earthenware 28 years ago. Having studied at Hastings School of Art and Goldsmiths College, his work touches on the cross-sectional influences reflected in formation of the English identity, both historical and personal.

Darren - Josie Barnes

Josie Barnes won the Hastings Museum and Art Gallery (HMAG) competition in 2019 with her photograph from a socially realist series on Hastings. The South-East is often portrayed as a melting pot of nationalist and insular political identities, reinforced by the electoral success of UKIP in local constituencies and its experience of the problems caused by this ideological reflection in Government policy. Alongside the political debate, the everyday practice of locals in the area continues, with the presence of a struggling and depleted traditional fishing industry that involve those with a feeling of being left behind whilst still being essential as those providing for the public.

"Darren" depicts a fisherman checking and re-tying his nets before a trip, in a rare moment of peace. The escape from the problems of work are shadowed by the continued passion for the job.

Village Industry Bowl - Unknown Maker

This bowl is a remnant of a form of industry found across the countryside in the post-war period. As a consequence of the destruction of homes from bombing and seizure of industrial space by native and allied forces for the production of necessary equipment, crafts-people and makers moved to spaces in nearby countryside, which although crude, were functional in helping to sustain changed village life.

Companies employed people to make anything from paint brushes to kitchen items, and with the help of those with specialised local knowledge, this bowl was found in Compton Parish in West Sussex. Found with another unfinished item, it is assumed that this one of many imperfect discarded objects.

Tapestry Map - Charles Holloway

Depicting the strange traditions of that remain prevalent in England, this hand-stitched Tapestry Map exists as a reflection of the intent to maintain an accurate reflection of English tradition. As a nation state without it's own government, swallowed by the pursuit of a unified kingdom, the ideas and identities that remain tied to England are marginal representations. These loose ties allow for a more flexible environment regarding developing new identities.

English Folk traditions emanate from working-class roots and provide the same platform for community involvement as at their conception. If represented, notions that hooliganism and gentrified villages are the apogee of English culture diminish, to be replaced by something accurate and useful.

Genii Cucullati - Unknown Maker

Genii Cucullati or Hooded Spirits are quasi-religious figures that originate from Romano-Celtic tradition. Often depicted as phallus shaped objects it is understood that the figures are fertility totems, although they are also portrayed in closed robes with scrolls or parchment. Tied to their presence in grave sites, it is generally believed that they exist as guides from birth to death.

This carving is a later homage to the figures, dated from a later period around the 17th Century. Tied to the Bacchanal figure Green Man, the image is most likely carried to this period via Pagan ritual and traditions.

Ploughman's - Traditional Origins

Ties to farming have until recently been the centre of English industry, from large scale centres of local employment to sustenance farming using the small spaces that came with the worker's two up, two down cottage. Using local food-stuffs in season or from cottage industries provided the local economy with a constant source of work.

The Ploughman's in its true form was first recognised in 1394 in Pierce the Ploughman's Crede, following the same form to 1837. John G. Lockhart noted the meal as '2d. worth of bread and cheese, with a half of ale'. Adopted as the main source of fat and protein, the meal was often topped up with various produce aiding vitamin intake.

Waveney Valley 'Dwile Flonking' Shirt - Unknown Maker

A bizarre pub game of indeterminate origins, Dywle Flonking involves two teams of twelve players, a bucket of ale, a 'driveller', and collection of odd terms coined for managing the game. Players join hands and dance around the ale, whilst the 'Flonker' tries to hit the opposing team with the 'dwyle'. Points are scored and two rounds are played.

The game is thought to have origins in Flemish culture, both from the etymology of the terminology used and the locations the game is played in. The farming industry in Suffolk and Kent in the Stuart, Georgian and early Victorian period used workers from Northern Europe, and it is thought the game may have been carried with them. An alternate theory is that the Waveney Valley Association created the game and it's back story as a well intentioned hoax. The game is still played by the Association today.

Hand-stitched Cricket Ball - Unknown Maker

The hand-stitched cricket ball is listed on the Heritage Crafts Extinct Craft List despite being a reliable cottage industry. The skill required to make the standard 5 ½ oz. test ball to specification requires handwork that demands a price players and clubs are unwilling to pay. Made with a 'quilted' core, cork and twine, covered in four pieces of steamed leather, triple stitched around the seam.

Cricket has its origins in the High Weald and the South-East of England. It's first definite reference was in 1597 as part of a land dispute in near Guildford, with a mention of "creckett" being played on the land fifty years prior. Tied to an understanding of the country crafts perhaps more than any other game, the demise of local crafts seems aptly represented by the hand-stitched cricket ball.