

# England and it's Odd Traditions



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"Dwyle Flunkers" of Lewes playing in the street outside the  
Lewes Arms.

The game of Dwyle Flunking consists of two teams of twelve players who spin and dance around a bucket of ale, under the care of the non-dancing team's 'Flunker'. The aim is to hit any members of the dancing team with a beer soaked cloth or "dwyle".

The dwyle is thrown with a 'driveller' and the points are scored depending on which part of the body is hit. A 'wanton', 'marther' and 'ripple' are worth three, two and one points respectively for hits on the head, body or leg.

When the Flonker misses his target or 'gets a swadger', the dancing team form a line and drink the contents of a chamber pot filled with ale. If the dwyle is passed down the line to the chant of "pot, pot, pot!" before the flonker finishes the ale, the flonking team loses three points.

The teams play two innings and swap when all members have flonked. The nature of the pub game demands a lack of sporting prowess and a stomach for copious amounts of drink so the winner is usually the team that remains upright.



Members of the Waveney Valley Dwyle Flonking Team enjoy many a pint before the game commences.

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# Dwyle Flonking

The origins of the game are disputed, although most likely a game played by those working the harvest in the East of England. The etymology of "dwyle" is based on the dutch word 'dweil' meaning mop, and 'flonk' an abstraction of fling, and it is this link to the Dutch that encourages the thought that the game arrived with migrant workers.

The Waveney Dwyle Flonking Society was also credited with the invention of the game when researchers couldn't find any information on the history of the game, and accusations circled that the society had falsified the lineage of the game.





The "Old" 'Obby 'Oss in the streets of Padstow

The Padstow 'Obby 'Oss is a tradition that starts on the midnight before May Day and continues into the next day. The celebration starts with a song for the landlord of the Golden Lion Inn and singing through the night. Even by the early morning, the town is covered in greenery and foliage, and the may day song is played to a procession of local schoolchildren in their 'Obby 'Oss costume.

There are pair of 'Oss' that leave the stables at 10am and parade the streets followed by music and song, and meet in the square at midday for the main celebration. There are two additional parades later in the day. The Old 'Oss is an older costume and returns to the stables at the Golden Lion earlier than the Blue Ribbon 'Oss.

The Blue Ribbon 'Oss finds and catches the maidens of the town and under the guidance of its teasers.



The celebration taking place on May Day 1944

## 'Obby 'Oss

Specifically regarding the Padstow 'Obby 'Oss, the origins of the custom are documented no sooner than 1803 (Hutton) although there is reference to a costume horse in a 1504 Cornish language play, *Beunans Meriasek*. The custom has been embraced as a Pagan or pre-Christian festival in more recent years, but there is a lineage on local comment that shows the increased adoption of this idea introduced by folklorist Thursten Peter in 1913.

There are other iterations of hobby horse traditions, most notably those of Minehead and Banbury, and those further afield such as the Tarasque of Provençál traditon.



Dancers ready for a performance in Exeter 1994

Mummer's Dancing is an inclusive term for local amateur performance, often in costume. Also referred to as 'rhymers' or 'tipteerers', the traditions often take place on winter holidays, Christmas or New Year, although are often incorporated into other village celebration.

The plays follow the format of a play fight where the loser is revived by a character similar to a doctor or matron. The groups are often tied to sword dances and Morris groups .

Local tradition dictates the specifics of the play and themes include ties to English mythology often Saint George but more likely Robin Hood in the Cotswolds. There are representations of virtues in the characters, touching on humour, insanity, or evil; Beelzebub and Old Father Christmas appear as additional characters.

The play's direction is narrated by the characters in the form of rhyming couplets or limerick, and its original intent was as fodder for cadging.

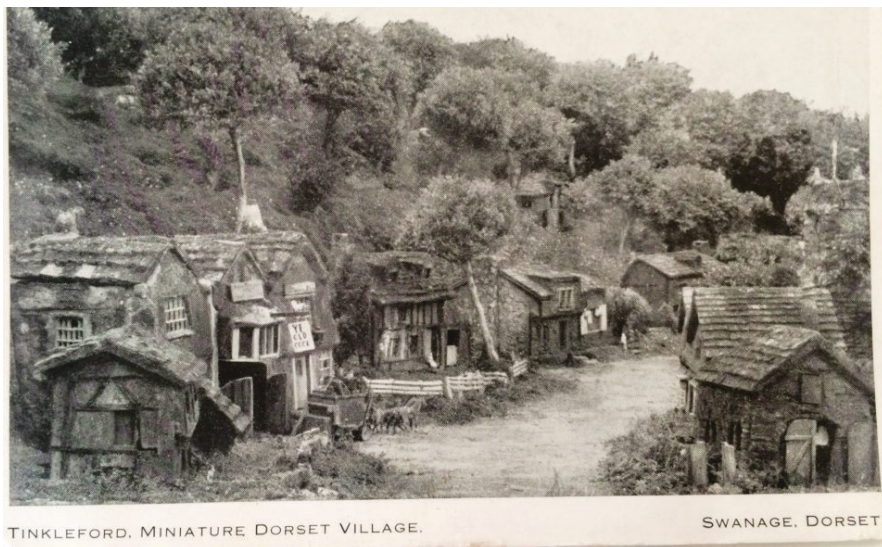


Longparish Mummers' Dancers performing outside Tudor Cottage in 2013 after a revival of the tradition for the St Nicholas Pageant. (Top)

# Mummer's Dancing

'Mumming' and its practice is understood as a derivative of 'Momerie', a 14th century practice of masked parties and event, with 'mommo' being the greek word for mask. Sussex etymology could also place the name as a reference to travelling gypsies in the area who performed plays for money. There are iterations of the play in many former english colonies, with a continued practice in Canada and some of the Antilles Isles. As the plays were adopted in abroad, so too was the narrative surrounding its pagan origins, encouraged by Sir James Frazer and his portrayal of local traditions in "The Golden Bough". The tradition in England is kept by many villages in Sussex and Kent, although examples are seen regularly in traditional communities.





A 1950's postcard of Tinkleford Miniature Model Village (Deceased): Top  
 Polperro Miniature Model Village; Below Left  
 Southsea Miniature Model Village; Below Right





Wimborne Model Village holds an exact replica of the Minster

## Model Village

The Model Village is a tradition found worldwide, although it seems fitting to involve it as an English custom for the sheer number of attractions found in England, and that the first model village in the world is found in Buckinghamshire. Perhaps the model village is English as it plays to the sentiment of a seen but passing world too.

Although perhaps seeming a little redundant as an attraction, it is interesting to note that the idea of the constructed village was adopted by large companies as a means of housing employees in safer and healthier conditions. The notion of creating for change out of nothing is eternally relevant, and good examples are seen in New Bolsover and East Tilbury (originally part of the Bata Company, slogans: "We are not afraid of the future" and "Work Collectively, live Individually")





The local men of Allendale carry the Tar Barrels in age old costume.

The Allendale Tar Barrels (local dialect 'Bahl') is an event held on New Years Eve to mark the coming of the new year. The Northumbrian tradition involves the male villagers of Allendale, carrying flaming tar in coopered barrels on their heads.

The format of the tradition is that of an informal race, from the town square by St.Cuthberts Church to the Wesleyan Chapel in a loop around the town. The participants gather back in the square for a large bonfire lit with the flaming

tar from every barrel. The bonfire is lit to the chant of 'be damned to he that throws last'.

The event is accompanied by music and singing, traditionally supported by a brass band that leads the procession. The spectacle is enhanced by 'Guising', or dressing up, and many of the costumes have been in families for years.

The barrels are cut into thirds, with either end used as a vessel and the middle third used as kindling to maintain the tar fire.





The lighting of the midnight bonfire with the tar from the barrels

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## Allendale Tar Barrels

The history of the event resides in a reflection of the habits of locals in the mid 19th Century. As the mining industry thrived and structured roads were being laid, one profession was surfacing. An account from local Dorothy Collier recalls that barrels began to be 'lost' in high frequency come November, only to reappear on the heads of those who 'found' the barrels to light the bonfires on New Years Eve. The event proceeds 'first-footing', a wider tradition that involves welcoming a guest into the home for a years good-luck.

The costumes of a lady named Vesta Peart, participating in the 50's and 60's, were considered so elaborate that she was extended an invite to participate, still the only female to have done so.

For more Odd English Traditions please see the other volumes. Included are these traditions:

Haxey Hood

Burly Man

Hurling the Silver Ball

Royal Shrovetide Football

Abbot's Bromley Horn Dance

Hare Pie Scrambling

Morris Dancing

Mayor of Ock Street

Weighing the Mayor

Swan Upping

Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling

Kiplingcotes Derby

Esk Valley Quoits

Hunting the Earl of Rone

Whittlesea Straw Bear

