



Mummers, Maypoles and Milkmaids: A Journey Through the English Ritual Year

Sara Hannant

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In Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire, a man covered from head to toe in straw – the ‘straw bear’ – is paraded through the streets, accompanied by 250 dancers, musicians and performers, while in Ottery St Mary, Devon, a crowd gathers as townspeople hoist barrels of flaming tar on to their shoulders and carry them until they are too hot to handle. Award-winning photographer Sara Hannant has travelled the length and breadth of the country, capturing the seemingly bizarre regional rituals – costumed processions, symbolic dramatizations, traditional dances and fire ceremonies – that mark the changing seasons. Many of these customs claim an ancient origin, and are kept alive today by local communities. Hannant’s vibrant photographs reflect her keen eye for the unexpected, offering a captivating and surprising study of English identity.

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