

**“Here comes the chopper to chop off your head” -
traditional folk customs and folk horror narrative**

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“Here Comes the Chopper to Chop off your Head”
Traditional Folk Customs and Folk Horror Narrative

a paper by Andrew Robinson

Abstract

Many examples of British Folk Horror in film and media, reference, appropriate or at times plagiarise British folk tradition and calendar customs to enrich visual appearance, provide narrative; convey a sense of authenticity; and/or inspire costume, set design or props. Such borrowings can in turn be seen as authentic representations of folk custom and at times create their own mythologies. At the same time, alongside their generally friendly and welcoming character, the original customs and events themselves can contain genuine moments of violence, horror, or the disturbingly eerie and weird. This paper will explore the visual representation of folkloric events and motifs within classic and contemporary folk horror through a comparison with British calendar customs and traditions.

Discussion will be illustrated with clips from a wide range of folk horror films and television productions - including for example: the Unholy Trinity; Robin Redbreast (1970); Penda's Fen (1974); Kill List (2011); and A Field in England (2013) - alongside photographic representations of calendar customs by a selection of folklorists and photographers from the last 120 years (including Sir Benjamin Stone¹, Doc Rowe, Homer Sykes², Sara Hannant³ and the authors own work on this theme⁴), this investigation will touch on aspects of ritual, English and British identity, class division, myths and storytelling, paganism and ancient survivals.

The Paper was delivered as a special *Centre for Contemporary Legend* at Sheffield Hallam University panel presentation alongside a paper by Diane Rodgers (see - <https://contemporarylegend.co.uk/>)

Andrew Robinson is a Photographer, Artist and Senior Lecturer in Photography at Sheffield Hallam University, England. Andrew's photographic practice investigates notions of individual and communal identity through a visual anthropology of people, place and trace applying creative strategies that integrate still and moving imagery along with text, audio and found materials. Andrew is a founder member of the Centre for Contemporary Legend, the Walking Arts Research Group and the Northern Light Research Group all at Sheffield Hallam University and is the creator and curator of the online photobook resource Photobibliophile.

¹ Sir Benjamin Stone's Pictures, Records of National Life and History: Volume 1: Festivals, Ceremonies, and Customs, Stone, Benjamin, Pub: Cassell and Company, Ltd, London, 1906.

² Once a Year: Some Traditional British Customs, Sykes Homer, Pub: Gordon Fraser, London, 1977 (ISBN 10: 0900406682)

³ Mummers, Maypoles and Milkmaids: A Journey Through the English Ritual Year, Sara Hannant, Merrell Publishers Ltd, 2011 (ISBN-10: 9781858945590)

⁴ Another England - http://anthology.co.uk/photos_archive_customs_spring.html