Meet the flockers
From Victorian bathing to piano smashing, the photographer Simon Roberts documents the nation's quirkiest group activities.
For more than a decade, the photographer Simon Roberts has turned his camera on some of Britain’s most spectacular and quirky events and gatherings. Competitive shin-kickers, face-painted heavy-metal fans and armour-clad battle re-enactors have become part of his portrait of contemporary Britain — in all its idiosyncratic glory. The project, titled Merrie Albion — Landscape Studies of a Small Island, was released as a book (Dewi Lewis £45) following the Brexit vote; it is also now an exhibition. Roberts explores the question of national identity at a significant moment in history. Merrie Albion — Landscape Studies of a Small Island is at Flowers Gallery, London E2, from Friday to March 10. Visit flowersgallery.com

Previous pages: enthusiasts on the Isle of Thanet, Kent, brave the waves in period bathing suits during the 2008 Broadstairs Dickens Festival, celebrating the life and works of Charles Dickens. The writer frequently visited Broadstairs, calling it “our English watering place.”

DAY STRIPERS

Left: competitors in generic tight band on Westminster Bridge during the men’s marathon at the 2012 Olympics. The Games marked the multiethnic Team GB’s best performance in 104 years, finishing third overall — though a Ugandan, Stephen Kiprotich, won this race.

GHOULS ALLOWED

Top: face-painted fans of Kiss gather ahead of the rock band’s headline set at the Download festival, Donington Park, Leicestershire, 2008. Download launched in 2003, as a follow-up to the similarly ear-splitting Monsters of Rock festival held on the same site in 2012.

CALLED TO THE BAAS

Almost two and four-legged visitors wait in line at England’s biggest celebration of Rural life, the Royal Bath and West Show, Shepton Mallet, Somerset, in 2008. Founded in 1832, it showcases a wide range of rural activities, from floral art to sheep shearing.

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OUTSTANDING IN THEIR FIELD

Below left: the Cotswold Olimpicks, Gloucestershire, dates back to the 1600s. Events have included shin kicking, piano smashing and morris dancing.

Below right: parents and pupils line the banks of the Thames to watch the Procession of Boats, 2016, a celebration held every year by Eton College.

THE SHARP END

Above: a re-enactment of the Battle of Bannockburn, Stirling, 2014, takes place 700 years after Robert the Bruce defeated King Edward II’s army.

LET US SLAY

Below left: more than 15,000 flag-wavers flood Dartmouth Park, West Bromwich, 2010, to participate in England’s largest St George’s Day parade.

BUOYS’ CLUB

Below right: parents and pupils line the banks of the Thames to watch the Procession of Boats, 2016, a celebration held every year by Eton College.

LEST WE FORGET

Above right: a plume of smoke signifies tragedy at Shoreham Airshow, West Sussex, 2007 — a Second World War Hurricane had crashed, killing its pilot.

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