

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

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DAY STRIPERS

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”

2012: A PACE ODYSSEY

Left: runners navigate a tight bend 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

CALLED TO THE BAA

Above: 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 1852, it showcases a wide range of rural activities, from floral art to sheep shearing





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



OUTSTANDING IN THEIR FIELD

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

PARK WIFE

Below right: revellers in Hyde Park, London, watch a live feed of Prince William and Kate Middleton, the newlywed Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, 2011

