

SIMON ROBERTS

Another Country: British Documentary Photography Since 1945

Thames & Hudson, 2022

Essay by Gerry Badger

Simon Roberts takes a distanced, topographical view of today's Britain. In his first book on the country, *We English* (2009), Roberts explored the interaction of the English with their landscape, exemplified by the places they visit on weekends and Bank Holidays, and how that feeds into our sense of national identity. This of course is in line with a prominent tendency in recent British photography, from Ray-Jones and Parr, but Roberts' method relates back to the 19th century topographical tradition.

The work represents the relationship between tradition and modernity, the pull of culture and myth, but Roberts' methodology works equally well for more contemporary aspects of British society. He photographed the 2010 General Election, 2012 London Olympics, and also the Brexit issue in a series of critical videos. The long view is an artful strategy because it predicates objectivity when that might not be the case at all.

Roberts' image of the burnt-out Grenfell Tower depicts an ongoing issue that has been overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic. But the virus has demonstrated that the traditional pull of the English heritage myth remains, with people rushing out as soon as they can to the seaside and 'beauty spots' in a reckless and thoughtless defiance of safety advice. So Roberts' image of the faithful visiting Willy Lott's Cottage at Flatford Mill in Sussex, a touchstone for the heritage industry and a reference for other artists, like Peter Kennard, remains completely relevant -probably even more so in the light of Brexit and the pandemic.



Willy Lott's House at Flatford, East Bergholt, Suffolk, 20 July 2014



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