

particular news

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Summer/Autumn 2003

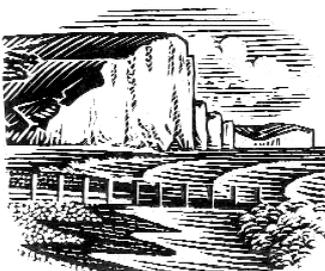
What is England in Particular?

Common Ground invented the words Local Distinctiveness in 1983 and continues to campaign and collaborate in celebrating and promoting variegation in our surroundings.

We are currently writing a book about the rich range of things that make England such a complex place. We know from our projects, for example on Parish Maps, Apple Day and Community Orchards, that attachment to locality needs to be taken seriously. We have created www.england-in-particular.info through which we hope to inform and gather details, stories, examples and to help communities share their particular knowledge.

The book **England in Particular** is to be published in 2005 by Hodder & Stoughton.

With your knowledge and help, we can make this book speak of our moment, inspire others to care for the fine grain of their own place. Please share with us interesting information, observations and stories. For example, local recipes using local ingredients; local varieties of fruit and vegetables; local customs, festivals, fairs; local words for things. What is important to you about the places where birds/animals return to each year? Do the new buildings in your place make any concession to the locality? Are there any books, magazines, museums, societies, people you feel could help us? There are so many cultures represented across England in country and city, some anciently



Chalk Cliffs

The bastions of the White Cliffs of Dover are emblems of England. Continual erosion keeps them glistening, formidable and beautiful. The chalk cliffs in the the east and north at Hunstanton in Norfolk and Flamborough Head in Yorkshire are very different.

Illustrations by Richard Allen

with us, some very new. What impact do they exert in the design of buildings, the words we use, our produce, what we eat, the customs and colours of life?

Local implies neighbourhood or parish. Distinctiveness is about particularity, it is rehearsed in the buildings and land shapes, the brooks and birds, trees and cheeses, places of worship and pieces of literature. It is about continuing history and nature jostling with each other, layers and fragments – old and new. The ephemeral and invisible are important too: customs, dialects, celebrations, names, recipes, spoken history, myths, legends and symbols.

All these things are folded into identity and need reinvigoration by the new. Localities are always open to outside influences, new people, ideas, activities, and just as nature keeps experimenting, they must face the paradox of persistence and change. But change may enrich or it may homogenize and diminish. We all know too many high streets which look the same, housing estates which could be anywhere, fields which have lost both history and birdsong or festivals which have no authenticity.

Often it is the commonplace things, the locally abundant, that we take so for granted that they slip through our fingers. We believe it is important to demand the best of the new so that quality and authenticity adds richness to our surroundings making them convivial to us and to nature.

Pier to-day ... gone tomorrow ... ?

Whether serenely poised delights of craftsmanship or crassly commercial excesses of candy-floss stalls and "amusements", England's piers are a key ingredient of the sea-side holiday.

But what is a pier? The word comes from obscure roots in medieval Latin, and by 1150 was in use as a building term, referring to the 'supports of the spans of a bridge'. In 1814, as the gentry began to flock for the first time to the fashionable new resorts, the first "pleasure pier" was built on the Isle of Wight, at Ryde. Wood was replaced by iron, pragmatism gave way to the elaborately ornate. Yet they had a practical function, as a landing stage for the steam ships which once plied England's coasts laden with holidaymakers.



Clevedon, Somerset

You might still take the occasional pleasure cruise from a pier such as Clevedon in Somerset, but this is fairly untypical. At its peak in the early 1900s Clevedon served four different steamer companies and as late as 1939 was still playing host to at least twenty ships a week. And the same was true of the other piers - nearly sixty in total - dotted along the English coast.

Yet the pier experience evolved, people beginning to enjoy piers regardless of whether they intended to take a boat trip. A dramatic walk out over the waves, a new perspective of the resort and coastline, the healthy sea air - all came together to increase their attraction. When the steamers' popularity waned, and there was no longer any need for a landing station at the pier-head, it became an amusement arcade or a cafeteria, a ballroom or a theatre. Or just somewhere to look longingly out to sea.

Piers were built where city fathers saw a market opportunity to bring more holidaymakers: the famous resorts of Lancashire and the North West, Yorkshire and the East Coast, London's sea-side escapes, and the ever popular South and West.

England was excited by piers like no other country. The National Piers Society's figures show that in the 1860s and 70s, on average, two piers were opening every year. This was the start of the holiday age, when factory shut-downs, bank holidays, an extended railway network and the first glimmerings of disposable income opened up the coast to the workers and the city dwellers. Each new construction tried to outdo its rivals, though few could match Southend on Sea's boast to be the longest: at 7080 feet (2158 metres), it put most others to shame.

From the 1930s, though, decay began to set in. The war years were no time for holidays or for the already struggling steamers. Many piers were breached to prevent their use by potential invaders. Storm, flame and accident were often fatal in the impoverished post-war austerity. To survive, many "moved with the times" and became gaudy money-pits. Others suffered the alternative ignominy of slow erosion. The pier at Clevedon - "the most beautiful in England" in John Betjeman's opinion - collapsed while being load-tested for insurance in 1970,



Hythe, Hampshire

and lay neglected for nearly twenty years. The West Pier at Brighton, designed by pier-engineer par-excellence Eugenius Birch and opened in 1866, was closed in 1975 due to lack of resources. With discussions well advanced for its rebuilding and redevelopment, it was almost destroyed in two suspicious fires earlier this year. This is a multiple



Saltburn, Yorkshire

tragedy as it was much favoured by starlings, who, homeless since the hurricanes of 1987, took to using it as a roost. The pier web-site says that "on certain winter evenings at around sunset, up to half a million birds will flock together in a spectacular murmuration providing a fanstastic aerial display." Where will they go now?

The story is not all gloom. Since the 1960s popular interest has grown, some communities banding together to recover their piers. Clevedon is a good example: the district council applied to demolish it in 1979, but were defeated at public enquiry. The enthusiasm, hard work and fundraising efforts of the Clevedon Pier Preservation Trust saw that it was re-opened within ten years of the application, and by 1995 had already been visited by half a million people.

Other piers also continue to attract investment and custom, notably Blackpool. At least one - Southport - was saved by the fact that the tide stopped coming in far enough to cause it much of a problem. John K Walton described it in 1987 as striding "purposefully across a municipal park." It has recently been extended back into the sea, and the new "startlingly modern" end has been praised by English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).

We might be poised to see a new generation of piers along our coasts. New Southwold Pier in Suffolk opened in 2001, the first pier built in England since the 1950s. In 1987 Walton had feared that the future of the sea-side pier "may belong in the world of the museum, the preservation society and the professional purveyor of nostalgia." Yet little over 15 years later there is a new fascination with piers old and new, and those that survive are regular haunts for all types of resort-goer, not merely the hard-boiled enthusiasts. As world tensions draw people away from foreign holidays and back to home shores, perhaps the revival of the pier as a living and lively focus of popular attention - for holidaymakers and local people alike - is increasingly to be observed and welcomed.



TELL US ABOUT ...

Quarries...

for local use perpetuate specific work and words; they maintain the local building genre and ensure that local lichens and mosses can establish themselves on new buildings and gravestones. Examples of old and new holes and their stories are sought.

Quicksand...

Have you any firsthand experience or stories related to the crossing of Morecambe Bay at low tide? The traditional crossing is walked annually with a guide carefully avoiding the quicksand pools and reaching the distant shore before the galloping tide returns. Are there other places in the Wash or on the Somerset coast where tales of nature's treachery abound??

The Quomps...

at Christchurch in Dorset lies where the Stour and the Avon meet. How did it get it's name? Are there any Qs from elsewhere, such as Quaving Gogs in Swindon. What was it?



is for ...



Quoits In the USA the game of throwing the horseshoe to catch on a pin in the ground is still played. Some argue that the game of Quoits, which persists in England, started from this pastime others argue it has a deeper history emerging from discus throwing, with horseshoes as a vulgar cousin.

In England perhaps for a thousand years around mining communities, metal rings have been thrown down a pitch to encircle a pin or hob embedded in soft clay.

With current rules published in 1881 the Northern Game with an 11 yard pitch persists in Cumbria and Northumbria, with pockets in Durham and Yorkshire.

A version of the Long Game is played in East Anglia especially in pubs in and around Rougham in Suffolk where an 18 yard pitch is used with 11 pound quoits of about 9 inches diameter (nearly twice that of the Northern Game).

Quays To make loading and embarkation easier we construct edges of stone (and now concrete and timber) by sea, river and canal. Sugar Tongue Quay in Whitehaven, Cumbria suggests its common cargo. What names and activities single out the quays or hythes or staiths near you? Are their earlier examples than that by Pudding Lane in London, whose remnants have been dated to the 1st century CE? What of moles, jetties, hards?

These are edited extracts from entries for the Common Ground book "England in Particular", to be published by Hodder and Stoughton in 2005.

Quist, queece, queeze, quest, cushat, cowshoot, cowSORT, cushy ... what are these and where might one find them?

learning to read your locality

A B C

D E F G

H I J K

L M N O

P Q R S

T U V W

X Y Z

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As easy as A B C ...

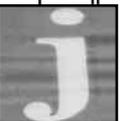
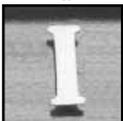
Creating an ABC liberates us from classifying things as rare or beautiful to demonstrate what we care about in the everyday. It is useful in that it levels everything, it reshuffles things and juxtaposes them in ways that surprise and make you think. This can change what we see, disperse our complacency, make things we take for granted seem new to us and encourage us to action.

To get some hints and provocations on how to make an ABC for your place, look at www.England-in-particular.info or contact Common Ground (address overleaf) for a free copy of our colour leaflet (left).

Alley, barton,
close, ginnal,
jitty, ope, tures,
lanes, steps,
twitchel, twitten,
walk, wynd,
yard

Can you comment on any of these?
Where do you find them?
What is your local synonym?

What colour is your soil?
Are there any names for it? Is it significant to the locality?





Diverse Celebrations - Summer and Autumn 2003



Gooseberry Contest, Egton Bridge, N.Yorks. 5th August.
Scarecrow Festival, Kettlewell, Yorks. Early to mid-August.
Saddleworth Rushcart, W Yorks. Saturday and Sunday after 12 August.
Hampshire Water Festival, Winchester, 16 August.
Kite Festival, High Force near Middleton-in-Teesdale, Co. Durham, 16-17 August.
Blaisdon Plum Day, Glos. On the Sunday of the weekend before August Bank Holiday Monday, 2-4.30pm.
St Philibert's Day 22nd August. Traditional beginning of the Kent cobnut season.
St Bartholomew's Day 24th August. Has long been a significant day in the Fairs calendar.
Lee Gap Fair, West Ardsley, near Wakefield, Yorkshire. On St Bartholomew's Day. England's oldest charter fair.
Burning Bartle, West Witton, Wensleydale, Yorkshire. On the Saturday following St Bartholomew's Day.
August Bank Holiday Weekend : **Notting Hill Carnival**, London ... **Plum Day**, Pershore ... **Marldon Apple Pie Fair** - Maldon, Devon (traditionally held on the Sunday of the August Bank Holiday weekend).
Opening of the Oyster Fisheries, Colchester, Essex. At the end of August.
Faversham Hop Festival, Faversham, Kent. The 13th Festival, 29-31 August.
New Forest Pony Drift. Between August and October ponies are rounded up, young stock are branded and catalogued. Their tails are cut in a certain way to locate them to one of the four New Forest districts.



Carnival season in the West Country - September sees the start of these extraordinary travelling illuminated competitions.

St Giles Fair, Oxford. On the Monday and Tuesday following the Sunday following St Giles Day (1st September).

Barnet Horse Fair, London. Near Barnet station and the Great North Road between 4 & 6 September unless one of the days is a Sunday.

Rosh Hashannah, Jewish New Year - AM 5764. 27th September.
Sowerby Bridge Rushbearing, Sowerby Bridge, W. Yorks. On the first weekend in September.

Wakes Monday. The first Monday after the first Sunday after 4th September : **Abbots Bromley Horn Dance**, Abbots Bromley, Staffordshire ... **Widcombe Horse Fair**, Widcombe, Devon.

Latter Lee in a field at West Ardsley (between Wakefield & Dewsbury), Yorkshire. 17th September.

Chinese Mid Autumn Festival day of the full moon September.

Moon Viewing 15-20 September Japanese festival of the most beautiful moon of the year.

Richmond First Fruits, Yorkshire. 20th September in 2003, with a farmers market on the third Saturday of month.

Crabapple Fair - Egremont, Cumbria. Usually on the third Saturday in September.

Clypping Ceremony, St Mary's church, Painswick, Glos. This is held on Feast Sunday, the Sunday after Feast of Nativity of St Mary (19 September).

Pear Day, Canon Hall Museum Park & Gardens, Cawthorne, nr Barnsley, S.Yorks. 28th September in 2003.

Trent Aegir, River Trent, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. This tidal bore occurs throughout the year. In 2003, some of the strongest bores of the year are predicted for September 28th and 29th, and October 26th to 28th.

Autumn Equinox 23 September.

Nottingham Goose Fair Over 700 years old, this fair always lasts three days from noon on first Thursday in October.

Mop Fair, Marlborough, Wilts - The 'Little Mop', held on the Saturday before old Michaelmas (11 October) and the 'Big Mop' a week later. Stratford-on-Avon, Warwicks, also has a **Mop Fair**, 11am-midnight on October 12 unless it is a Sunday in which case it is on the preceding Saturday.

Corby Glen Sheep Fair, Lincs - over 750 years old and the last remaining of the the great sheep fairs once held across England. Sheep Auction first Monday in October after the 3rd, fair weekend preceding.

Tavistock Goozey Fair, Tavistock, Devon. Held on the second Wednesday on October since the early 12th Century.

Dussera Mela. Ancient Hindu festival in mid-October celebrating, across the world, the triumph of good over evil.

World Conker Championship, Ashton, Northants - on the second Sunday in October.

Yarm Fair, Yorkshire, on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of third week in October.

Apple Day 21 October- A celebration of diversity of fruits across the country.

Horse sale, Stow on the Wold, Glos. Two fairs, on the nearest Thursdays to 24th October and 12th May.

Oyster Feast Colchester, Essex - 280 people consume thousands of oysters at a civic feast on the last Friday in October.

Ramadan begins 26/27 October with the sighting of the new moon. It ends with **Eid Al Fittr** on 25th November.

Punkie Night, Hinton St George, nr Ilminster, Somerset on the last Thursday in October.

Halloween - 31st October.

Divali/Diwali Mela October- November includes the day of the new moon.

The Gatherings of Exmoor Ponies between October and November, ponies are taken off the moor, inspected, and young stock branded.

For more information on these events, and others throughout the year, along with contacts and web-links, visit the Calendar Customs pages at www.england-in-particular.info

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Common Ground is recognised for playing a unique role in the arts and environmental fields, distinguished by the linking of nature with culture, focussing upon the positive investment people can make in their own localities, championing popular involvement, and by inspiring celebration as a starting point for action to improve the quality of our everyday places. We offer ideas, information and inspiration through publications and projects such as Apple Day, Field Days, Parish Maps, local Flora Britannica, Community Orchards and the campaign for Local Distinctiveness. We are grateful for the support of Defra, the Tedworth Trust, the Headley Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation and the Lyndhurst Settlement.

