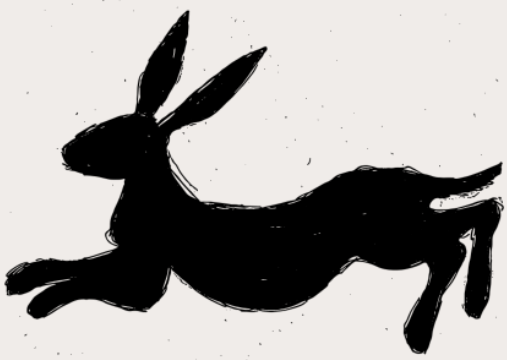
RE-WEIRDING THE ARCHIVE

folk and our phones

by Lily Bichard-Collins



Written and designed by Lily Bichard-Collins.
Drawings and photographs are by me unless stated otherwise, taken on my iPhone and Canon film cameras.

This zine has been made using dataIcollected as part of my MSc dissertation at the University of Glasgow in the summer of 2024. My research work often centres on digital communities and as someone with a lifelong affinity for the folkish it felt natural to blend these two fields together culminating in this project with its essay and adjoining zine.

I had the opportunity to speak to folklorists and researchers whose work I love. Without their insight this research would not have been possible, so thank you again to them and for allowing me to use their data in this zine.

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Introduction

'Folk' has been having a bit of a moment recently. If you look around a booksellers nowadays, you will inevitably find a shelf or two stocked with nature writing, seasonal foraging guides, social histories and maybe a handful books on the occult all sat together.

Films like Enys Men, Starve Acre, and the newest Robert Eggers pictures have been gathering loyal audiences at independent cinemas across this land. Small collectives like Weird Walk, and the Stone Club have been instrumental and perhaps galvanising in capturing this interest and creating a space for community growth and support for those making folkloreque pursuits.

DIY presses have always been a spot for niche cultural fandoms, and the artistic and visual nature of folk culture and its very essence of being a 'DIY' genre makes it the perfect subject for zines and self-made media.

While my project isn't by any means ahead of the curve in calling this uptick in folk cultural interest to attention, as a folk enthusiast myself I was keen to use my research background of digital culture studies to take a deeper dive into the communication processes and motivations of this 'revival'.

The British Isles has a longstanding history of folk revivals, but the unmistakable feature that differentiates today's interest from the revivals of the 1970s, 1920s, 1800s (etc. etc.), is the technology we all hold now just a trouser pocket's length away.

In many ways, the use of the digital defines this renaissance in contrast to past revivals, as it offers a spontaneous way to document living culture and share these materials without the need for institutional intervention or membership. This way, the narrative thread that weaves these cultural materials together is one controlled by the community itself and not by a heritage organisation.

This zine explores this communication between the old and the new, in terms of the culture and modes of cultural documentation, and the 'spontaneous archive'.

In this zine, 'the archive' describes the collection of multi-platform, digitally published works documenting folk culture or media inspired by folk culture, including but not limited to images, video and audio forms. This definition is informed by the authors in Garde-Henson (2009), that posting content to a digital platform creates an archival entry, whether that is the goal of the creator or not.

I began this study by carrying out a brief exploration of the digital landscape. I documented the styles and contents of a handful of producers in the folk space, including podcasters and Instagram accounts. This helped me develop some themes to inform my questions.

I then conducted some interviews with a number of creators in the folk space. This included the artist Ben Edge, the broadcaster and researcher Zakia Sewell, the founding editor of Hellebore press Maria J. Pérez Cuervo , the Scottish storyteller and social media creator Eileen Budd and Ashleagh, the host of the Folkways podcast.

These interviews make up the majority of the body of this work, and were both enlightening and hugely enjoyable. The content of these interviews has been organised into a discussion of themes as a way to more easily navigate the many nuances and details of our discussions.

The themes are analysed throughout this zine with interjections of my own thoughts and connections I make to academic literature. This work was originally written as a thesis essay but I am trying my hand at zine-making as an exercise in making research available to wider audiences.
I hope you'll find it engaging, and not judge my illustrations too harshly (I am not an artist!), and maybe feel inspired to make your own zine.

Interviewees

Ben Edge-

Ben is a painter and filmmaker whose work is inspired by folklore and folk customs. His recently published book 'Folklore Rising' contains his works that spotlight the weird and wonderful folk traditions across this Isle. You can find his documentary film 'Frontline Folklore' on his website available for free.

Eileen Budd-

Eileen is a Scottish storyteller, author and artist specialising in Scottish folktales. Eileen hosts the Scottish Folk podcast and makes short-form videos on social media. She also does live storytelling events, has published illustrated books like 'Ossian Warrior Poet' and has worked with museums in Scotland.

Zakia Sewell-

Zakia is a broadcaster, writer and researcher. Her fantastic Radio 4 series 'My Albion' (2020) is still available on BBC Sounds and covers British folk culture and creation myth folklore. She is currently working on an upcoming book covering the same themes.

Ashleagh-

Ashleagh hosts the Folkways podcast which beautifully tells folk stories from across Britain and Ireland as well as monthly 'Almanac' episodes discussing lunar cycles, seasonal foraging and upcoming folk traditions.

Maria Perez Cuervo-

Maria is the founding editor of Hellebore, a small press devoted to folk horror and the occult in Britain. Aswell as 13 issues of the magazine, they have published a travel guide (The Hellebore Guide to Occult Britain), a card game (The Magical Card Battle of England) and two Yuletide Hauntings specials

Who Are The Folk?

'The Folk' are a slippery group, really. They are you, and me, maybe. They're the peasants, soily toilers, pastoral proletariat, charming villagers and the 'disempowered populace' (Niven, 2011) . They are uncouth, authentic, quaint? A figment of historic imagination, or the everyman turning the the cogs of the grassy mechanism of Britain's utopian heyday. Maybe the folk are the members of the early 2010s indie folk band Mumford and Sons?
If you asked me in 2007, 'who are these folk?', me and 12 other children would be obliged to shout back 'we are the Woodcraft Folk, from Liverpooooooolll'.
For the sake of this piece of work, I will label the folk in much less romantic terms, as those who are not in positions of institutional, or governmental power. The local community at large... So what is folk culture?

A definition I like comes from the Festival of American Folklife, who describe folk culture as:
'traditions [that] can be generally defined as community-based forms of knowledge, skill and expression learned through informal relationships and exhibiting intergenerational continuity. [...]Forms of folk culture are traditional to the extent that they maintain standards or values which have continuity with, and are informed by, past practice. They are living traditions to the extent that they are practiced, are socially integrated within community life and speak to its cognitive, normative, affective and aesthetic concerns."

A concept that I also find useful is 'heritage from below', which you can read about in a book by Iain Robertson of the same name. Heritage from below is the idea of a cultural heritage and inheritance that comes from the collective (or 'folk') themselves, as opposed to a top-down Culture Industry or nationally accepted narrative. This could be held in opposition or alongside the heritage narratives created by cultural institutions, or 'heritage from above' or 'authorised heritage discourses' (Smith, 2006).

As part of my interviews, I asked everyone to give me their own definition/understanding of what folk culture is. Definitions varied but contained the same essence of being a non-institutional, or even anti-institutional cultural form, and a sense of 'naturalness', culture without pretension. Ashleagh defined it simply as *"informally transmitted traditional culture"* but 'traditional' can be a bit of a tricky term.

Zakia touches on this unclear history in her definition. *"cultural forms, traditions, stories and songs that have been historically connected or imagined to have been historically connected to the rural working classes"* and that it is *"homegrown and organic and has some sort of sense of a longer history. But of course, there's a lot of imagination and fantasy involved in folk culture, and that doesn't always turn out to be the case"*.

This element of imagination is key to much of the engagement with historical forms, especially when there is little first- hand documentation, as is the case with folk culture. Indeed any interaction with nostalgia of any kind inherantly involves imagination or fantasy work, as well as a lot of cherry-picking, but we might touch on that a bit more later.

This can make folk culture today seem like a bit of a simulation of a simulation to call upon Baudrillard. But this fantasy aspect doesn't seem to affect the view that it still contains valuable information about our past, as Eileen explains. Folk culture is a *"huge resource of information on our past selves and how we got here and our identities and it's all wrapped up in it"*.

Folk culture here tells the story of how the ordinary people of British Isles came to be.
I think it's important that none of these definitions describe folk culture as a *national* experience rather that: "*when I think of folk culture, I think of regional culture, it's the little differences that we find across the world in little communities, from villages to towns, even cities"* (Ben).

Rather than one single experience or practice of a cultural form, folk culture is defined by its many idiosyncratic occurrences.

We can combine the responses from the interviewees into a working definition that folk culture is:
regionally specific cultural forms, including stories, crafts, music and rituals, informally transmitted among (often rural, often working-class) communities, often changing but thought to be connected with or inspired by 'traditional' or historic practises.

Folk as Fantasy

During my research for this project, I became interested in the contruction of nostalgia, myth and fantasy during the process of 'remembering'. This page expands on this issue of the imaginary aspects of 'the folk' as mentioned by Zakia. Authenticity has been a topic of anthropological discourse for a long time. If you would like to delve deeper you might want to find a copy of *'In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies'* by Regina Bendix and for a less folk specific source, you can read '*The Authenticity Hoax*' by Andrew Potter.

In Shaw and Chase's (1989) *'The Imagined Past'* the authors describe participation in 'the past' as a *"projection of our present anxieties and fantasies"* (ibid, p.4) since we must pick and choose which aspects of the past to bring forward. For this reason folk culture, which is inherantly tied to a construction of the past, can and has often been used to fulfill ideological goals. This practice is sometimes referred to as 'folklorismus'.

This is evident in past folk revivals, like the Nazi *Volk* movement but also in the 1800s English folk music and dance revival's vision of 'Merrie England'. Georgina Boyes in *'The Imagined Village'* offers an exploration of the socio-politics of English folk dance and music revivals. She documents Cecil Sharp and Vaughan Williams 19th century 'rescue' of folk music as a response to industrialisation and a '*cultural crisis of confidence*' (p.viii). The book discusses and evaluates the appropriation of folk dance and music, both by conservatives and socialists, and how folk culture intrigue reflects the prevailing ideology of the folklorist.

Of course, any cultural form is inherently the result of political processes wherein various parties have some stake in its creation and dispersion. Boyes discusses the bowdlerised vision of 'Merrie England', a sort of atemporal Arcadia, an 'Imagined Village' of rolling hills, bucolic greenery and idyllic agrarian communities, an England that never existed.

It is a narrative tool that was utilised by conservatives of the day and to an extent is still used by conservatives (big C and small c in England today), to evoke feelings of national pride.

This nostalgia also cements that there was a period of English history which will forever be referred to as 'the good old days'. A classic example of this is Jacob Rees Mogg evoking Churchill when claiming that *'sunlit uplands'* await us after leaving the EU.

Of course, if there ever was a Merrie England it was only merry for the Lords, and much of the Conservative romanticism of bucolia is thinly veiled fear of urban multiculturalism. Here, the folk can be invoked as a shorthand for smiling white peasant faces dancing in the village green, happily submitting to their feudal lords.

Matthew Cheeseman (2023) writes about ideas of indigeneity tied to folk horror or folk inspired media and the problems we face when creating this idealised, or glorified Albionic folk figure; the Folk Horror enthusiast's platonic ideal of a peasant.

One who practices paganism and who carries themselves as anti-Christ. This is as equally ahistoric and atemporal as the smiling peasants on the sunlit uplands.

In the folk horror frame, this peasant is empathised with, and the violent poverty and toil of their life is a source of humour, maybe reverance or fetishism (at the very least it is spectated on). All the while the violent poverty and inequality that characterised Medieval life continues to exist in our current time.

Obviously a big element of folk culture is folklore. Folklore is inherantly mythic and magical, full of impossible creatures, talking animals, stories of tragedy and love. They often tell stories of our creation, how people, ideas and nations came to be.

Some say that the ancestors descended from the Fairy Folk of Newgrange as depicted in pre-Raphaelite artist John Duncan's paintings. Or maybe we are all the children of Albina, who landed here after her banishment from Greece. Do folklorists today truly believe any of this mythology? I have yet to meet one. But the *truth* of the folklore is not important, the story is.

In '*The Authenticty Hoax*', Potter recalls the story of an archivist, Iris Häussler, who staged an exhibition in 2006 Toronto inside an apartment containing an archive of an unknown artist's work found after his death at that same residence. The pieces shocked and saddened people that this man could have hidden his work away never to be seen or sold during his time on earth.
On learning that the whole thing was actually a conceptual art exhibit created by Häussler, a journalist wrote *"I want to believe there are things going on in Toronto that defy explanation and have escaped commodification"*. I'd like to believe this too, or whatever Fox Mulder said.

I think maybe the desire to believe the narratives of our choosing can often outweigh the knowledge that we know something may be false, or 'inauthentic', much like narratives can be used by individuals who *know* their provenance to be false.
My own research concerns truth and narrative in digital communities and it is not without irony that I see parallels drawn between the two. Folklore, mythology or scientific misinformation is only as true or false, authentic or inauthentic, as its consumers want it to be. What matters in a way, is only how it makes its believers feel.

Folk Art

A ramble through the digital folk landscape will show you an appreciation of folk art. The internet has become more and more a visual medium, so it makes sense that the eye-catching nature of folk art would be well-received on platforms like Instagram.
But, if I were to put my sociologist goggles on (which I like to keep close at hand), I would say that this is more interesting than scrollers simply enjoying the bright colours of a Morris side's costumes.

Again, we always have to start with defining things because it's good to be specific. If you're wondering what exaclty folk art is, Ben likens it to *Art Brut* or 'outsider art'. He says it is "*art that grows out the ground, and it's not art that grows out of society and [...] more of an educational system. It's more, shall we say, instinctual to human beings".*

This reads similar to French folklorist Andre Varagnac's (1938) description of folklore as *"collective beliefs without doctrine, collective practices without theory".*

The language of 'growing out of the ground' speaks both to this idea that folk culture is *natural* but also links to the concept of *heritage from below,* it is bottom-up cultural production.

The sharing of both archival images of folk art, and of public art made by non-professionals, be it a children's mural on the side of a hospital, or photos from the Stithian's scarecrow festival, highlights this appetite for culture disseminated from places other than commercial or institutional art organisations.

When I asked Eileen about why she thinks people are drawn to sharing folk art online, she talked about a feeling of a growing division in the form of an acceptance or rejection of technological developments like AI. Folk art, with its tactility, natural materials, and its link to our ancestors, and their believed 'simpler' way of life, is seen as the antidote.

She says that: "more and more, people are realising this [division], and they're looking for something that's real, something that's authentic I do see a resurgence in people wanting to learn knitting, wanting to learn handicrafts and basket weaving, wood chopping".

This could be interpreted as folklorists being Luddites, but the community in question utilise and congregate online, so this doesn't quite ring true. To put this into some historical context, this process mirrors the 19th and 20th century folk revivals which are often described as reactionary cultural movements, responding to British industrialisation (Boyes, 2010).

In the chaos and confusion of the new, we may want to search for a connection to the past to create a feeling of continuity in a changing world. What are folk cultural practices like the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance but a dramatisation of continuity?

This yearning for the past through practicing folk arts as Eileen mentions could be seen as atavistic. Revivals of the past have been used as a way to create nostalgia for socially regressive purposes as mentioned. But, a revival inherently offers both regression and change. The direction of this change relies on the motivations behind the movement.

Nothing encapsulates this paradox of the old and new more than the digital community of folklorists. This is not totally unique to the folk community. When thinking about digital cultural communities that look to the past for inspiration you might think of the tradwife influencer. Indeed, both camps have an imagined view of history, possibly in reaction to cultural changes, and use the digital space to share this. But while 'tradwives' are inherantly idividualistic and conservatively or economically motivated, folklorists are motivated through ***"a reaction against that [monoculture through capitalism]. It's bringing back these folk practises, folk traditions, craft-based things. It really claims creativity but also ensures that we keep this diversity that makes the world an exciting place"*** (Ben).

In the 60s, playwrite Arnold Wesker, with the support of the Trade Union's Congress, set up Centre 42, an organisation that aimed to create ties between the labour union movement and artists to make art more accessible to the everyday worker. Although this was not a completely successful endeavour, I think it is worth noting that Centre 42 felt that folk music was an important part of this democratisation of art, and their travelling festival discovered one of England's most influential folk singers, Anne Briggs.

We can see then that traditional crafts are used as an escape from the commodification and flattening for marketability's sake that affects so many aspects of culture today. Folk art is seen as an antidote to the Culture Industry's homogenisation, highlighting self-made media's ability to offer a mode of artistic creation free from the contraints of traditional schools and by virtue of its nature as non-elite, fosters a vibrant community around it.
In this way, I see a link between folklorists and other utopian artistic movements like Afrofuturism.

In terms of the archive, the work of folklorists documenting aspects such as new costume styles allows researchers, folklorists, artists or dancers to compare (the sparse) archival photographs or illustrations to what is being made today. Folk culture is inherently ever-changing. By tracking some of these changes we may also follow the change of outside influences. As we see more AI 'slop' creeping into every corner of the internet, which is art with no context, no influence and no inspiration and no feeling other than what has been fed into its prompts, it is refreshing to look at art that, while it may not be perfect and shiny, has a great amount of feeling and vast inspirations motivating its creation.

Folk craft is often created to fulfil a purpose (think knitting or basketry) and for the enjoyment of the motion of creating something with your hands. It can be practiced as an incredibly tangible creative outlet to be enjoyed by yourself and the community, with no monetry gain; art without pretence. It is art often made with humour, informed by stories much bigger than our current economic system, and flies in the face of the cultural homogenisation which aims to make us more ideal consumers.

Maybe that sounds a bit dreamy, but if you sit in a field with friends or your children or even strangers and make lanterns or masks with sticks and bright colours you will feel that there is a life outside of the endless scroll. It makes you feel like there was a time that existed when people did this in a world that looked very different- "*you feel like you are part of a big thing, you are part of the world that is turning with you*" (Eileen).

Today we can get any object we want for pennies, shipped from the other side of the world, made by exploited labourers in poor living conditions. By making objects ourselves, in a slow and deliberate way, we gain respect for the history of each item we own and who made it. It can perhaps connect us to people working in factories in Bangladesh or China who make our clothes, as well as our ancestors who had no choice but to knit their own socks. Everything is made by someone's hand, even if it happens in another continent and I think that developing an appreciation for crafting can help re-contextualise the objects that fill our lives and how we might take them for granted.

Our lives are often lacking in whimsy and creativity for creativity's sake as we age, and the digital realm can sometimes feel antithetical to a pursuit of whimsy, but the digital is no longer a seperate realm, and hasn't been for a while, it is fully integrated into everyday life. It seems to me that we may as well turn the digital into a space to enshrine these creative pursuits and remember why we thought it could be a great thing to begin with.
By doing so, by giving folk art this space to shine, uplifting it into our digital galleries we can honour it and give it a respect that it has historically not been afforded by arisocratic or elite art institutions.

Paradise Lost

Another prominent theme of these interviews was a discussion about connections to the natural world. In the online content I looked at, I found a lot of posts referencing Pagan/Neo-Pagan or Druid-esque magic or spirituality, usually involving a reverance of nature through charms or ceremonies using certain plants.
However, there was almost no reference to any Pagan gods bar some tongue in cheek captions here and there.

In reference to this spirituality Ben explained- *"We need ritual behaviour. We need to marvel at the unknown. We need to worship nature."* This describes a new element of motivation behind a draw to folk culture; a search for spirituality, without spirits.

Religion is a way of communing with each other and with God/s. But here, the community shows a way of communing with each other and the natural world without formal organisation. Traditional archive displays of land and culture in folk museums often focus on rural life (such as Beel et al. 2015), often resulting in museums containing pieces of anachronistic farming equipment. While important and interesting (do visit places that do this well like Beamish and the Highland Folk Museum!), this may not be engaging to those from urban environments.

However, this archive's suggestion that you can and should leave your home and go for a walk to experience local wildlife for yourself is a recurring theme. Being in tune with nature such as watching the seasons change and the days lengthening and shortening throughout the year also evokes this idea of continuity. The content here isn't just images and a caption about its history, but active encouragement to followers to take part themselves.

Certainly, the sun has been rising and setting since the beginning of time, and this universality is appealing. It is something that Stone Age humans celebrated, as do many cultures today. This idea of the Earth and universality is explored by Zakia who explained that British folk customs are: ***"always in communication with and connected to customs and cultures across the world, in that they're often about the land, the season, the cycles of nature and about our experience as human beings living on a living planet and honouring that. And I think that's where folk culture has the capacity to extend out from something that's quite parochial to something global and universal and that's to me, where I see the power of folk culture."***

Seasons and cycles are a big part of the content I saw onlinein the folk space. Posts marked yearly occurances like St Brigid's day, solstices, and full moons, or botanical seasons (like 'now is the season for foraging elderflower'). This structuring of the year offers us an alternative way to mark the passing of time in our busy lives that are otherwise marked by work deadlines, or maybe go unmarked by the continuous monotony of our everyday lives.

When we can walk into supermarkets and buy avocados and strawberries in the dead of winter, we can become detatched from the natural cycles of local plantlife. But participating in yearly folk rituals like May Day means *"you're starting to plug yourself back into the seasons"* (Ben).
The word 'back' here is particularly telling. A stark feeling of loss pervaded the talks about nature, with a notion that we have been led astray from what is natural to the human condition, that is "*in our bones*" or "*in our DNA"* (Ashleagh and Ben).
Indeed, not only 'connection' but 'reconnection' with nature were terms used throughout interviews, implying a bond that once existed, but is no longer present. This desire, or even yearning to live not on but with the land is seen to be a reaction to the climate crisis and global industrialisation, but has existed in the human mind for centuries. The expulsion from the Garden of Eden comes to mind, a clawing back to a 'paradise lost', but theologians could likely give many more examples (Bendix, 2009, p.28).

Of course again this is not a new experience, the Volk, the Victorian, the Inter-War 'Merrie England' folk movements were all interested in this 'return to nature' for differing ideological ends. What makes the current era different Maria explains is: *"The current revival is concerned with issues that are very much about our relationship with landscape and nature—late-stage capitalism, housing, climate change, and so forth".*
This broadly encompasses the factors of dissatisfaction felt by urban populations today. The ever-worsening climate crisis, which actively threatens the continuity of the natural world and disrupts the botanical calendar is a focus for folkorists who sense the urgency. *"now perhaps it's more [...] urgent to do it, try to resurrect some kind of lost folk culture that will help us live more sustainably and in connection with the land"- "I feel that also you have the Right to Roam movement which is about land access [...] there's a lot of things that have led us to where we are and I feel that we're now trying to follow the string, to lead back to where it all originated" (Ben).*

The context of the current crisis offers new meaning, that was not present in previous folk revivals. Although interviewees made vague atemporal comments about the past, it is true that Anthropogenic climate change is a new development. A desire to obtain wisdom from a time before climate breakdown is quite different from a fear of the urban (Boyes, 2010) or an exoticisation of white indigeneity (Cheeseman, 2023).
Ben's comments about Right to Roam also made me think about Shaw and Chase's (1989) discussion of nostalgia as a loss of *Gemeinschaft* (a German term to describe community life, including shared beliefs and shared public spaces) and a retreat to the private. Not only do we spiritually feel disconnected to the land, but we often can't even legally access it. Land ownership laws in the UK create such a distance between citizens and the (now dwindling) wild spaces where we can observe the seasons. Our best option is often over- manicured, homogenous parkland with few native or wild plant species. The only thing to harvest there are Lime bikes.
Multiple interviewees talked about another crisis, a discontent with British housing, and feelings of being '*filed away'* (Eileen) into tenements or apartments. This is another cause of an overarching sentiment of alienation, from others and from the land we have built on.

I think we can see this alienation from nature in another aspect of modern folk culture, that of the growing film and literary genre of folk horror. Many stories in this genre show nature and the 'old ways' seeking revenge on humans or cityfolk to a grisly but possibly cathartic endgame, the moral being that this is what happens when we stop revering the Earth and its gods and instead start revering Capital. This all ties in to the psychogeography and hauntology of how we view the actual land and soil of the British Isles today.

Prof. Roger Luckhurst's fantastic article '*Brexitland's Dark Ecologies'* encapsulates the reactionary nature of folk horror as a response to nationalism, and climate change. He describes the earth as being 'haunted' by the climate crisis but that ***"the land will never lie back and think of England but instead seek revenge"*** *(*2020, p.723*).*
Folk horror may offer some kind of wish fulfillment in that, while we may not be empowered to take back the land into public ownership, we can revel in a fantasy where the land reclaims itself.

Being in the natural wild now seems almost extreme, while being in cities, under constant surveillance is the norm. Luckhurst, writing about folk culture today says that it *"promises a re-weirding of England, not a re-wilding"* (p.727). I enjoyed this phrasing so much I used it as the title of this zine. The themes of reactionism and climate are unambiguously addressed (without prompting) in many interviews.
These views can be best summed up by Ben's descriptions of folk culture as: *"a radical act in the face of climate change"*. If climate change haunts the earth then does folk ritual offer us a way to exorcise of the ghosts of late-stage Capitalism? Perhaps I have taken the metaphor too far.

To bring this back to the level of the archive, technology is in fact not seen as the narrative foil to the natural world. The need to document and archive current folk practices, is evidently vital to its participants. It shows researchers that today's folk revival is more than a fringe fad to be forgotten, but a window into a deep sense of disillusionment and an ever-present fear of loosing not only our local land, but the Earth in its entirety.

Although I would not call the folk culture community a 'subculture', perhaps a form of loose *communitas*, I am still reminded of '*Resistance Through Rituals'* a sociological text edited by Stuart Hall (1976). It describes how subcultural groups often use in-group styles, rituals or music to resist against a dominant and oppressive culture. Of course, the community of folk culture enthusiasts is not oppressed or persecuted, but the feeling of resistance remains present amongst its practioners, as the tools and settings of its cultural forms are threatened.

Through archive creation, individuals engage with this fear in a way that provides some remedy and agency against alienation via celebrating the practices of their region's historical working-classes. Of course, another remedy is to put it all down and engage with the world and each other in a truly sensorial connection. But when that isn't availble to us, this archive offers us a glimpse into an alternative future, by conjuring up ideas from the past (whether they are true or not), before any of *this* happened. By builidng that archive ourselves, we can shape it into a community-led cause celebre, and a gathering space for movements like Right to Roam. The recent success of the campaign to protect wild camping in Dartmoor shows that change can be made by the mobilisation of a community who values the Earth and the land which some may call sacred, rather than a building opportunity.

“I hate the term revival [...] I see it as a way of containing it into something that will come and go. It's like cheapening it.

So these people and young people that are putting their heart and souls and sweat and tears into it with a vision of creating a better world, these other people are just saying ‘oh it’s a revival, don't worry, your efforts will just sink back into the distance’, you know, I don't like that.

I'm calling it a Renaissance, a kind of folk Renaissance, a rising of culture. And that's why I wrote my Folklore Activist Manifesto because with the urban environments it's not on your doorstep, so it's a form of activism to actively seek out these things, to go along.

And then to see what psychological shift it has on you. You know, watching the sunrise at Stonehenge is a powerful experience, watching the ‘Obby ‘Oss dancing Mayday morning, you're starting to plug yourself back into the seasons that the farmers had to do.

And that definitely makes you think about the land and the different relationship to it psychologically. And I think that that can only be a good thing in an urban environment. It will inspire you to get involved in more sustainable practises”

Ben Edge

A Sense of Place

"...searching for 'survivals', be they menhirs or Morris dancers-is a way of exploring identity and nationality without taking to the flag, either by choice or inclination" (Cheeseman, 2023, p.413)

Many folk traditions exist as an idiosyncracy of a very specific locale. They are deeply tied to the history of the place where they happen, and for this reason a theme in my interviews was localism, and somewhat conversely, nationalism.

Posts I observed online were often concerned with highlighting specific sites, lithic monuments, geographical sites like lakes that appear in folklore, or celebrate hyper-local traditions and festivals. You could give a bad-faith reading that this celebration of the hyperlocal shows a social myopia, or exclusionism. But it's clear from going to such traditions, and speaking to really anyone in the folk space, that this is so not the case.

My interviews made it clear that this platforming of the parochial offers a way for residents and folklorists to feel a sense of pride in where they're from without it being tied to a *national* heritage story. Zakia explains how as a mixed-race Caribbean British woman she was drawn to folk culture when searching for *"cultural forms and cultural symbols that actually were connected to other communities who've been marginalised or oppressed in this country"* – as a way of understanding her own British identity through heritage stories that do not celebrate Empire. She characterises folklorists as wanting the same- *"I think that the thing a lot of people are searching for is identity and [the] kind of aspects of Britishness that they can kind of be proud of that aren't to do with all the toxic, nasty stuff."*

Many folk traditions are void of reference to the National, and sites like Stonehenge or Bryn Celli Ddu offer a way to celebrate life in the British Isles before colonialism. The quote I've put at the top of this page from Matthew Cheeseman, who leads the Folklore Without Borders research group, is extremely pertinent. The quote also captures the same feelings that brought Ben into the folk space.

He told me that his journey into folk culture started as a rebellious teenager who felt that *"there was something about this idea of a British or English national identity that was quite repulsive to me because of this whole baggage of Empire and hierarchical class and an oppression of ordinary people that they once described as peasants"*.

Maria characterised the community of Hellebore readers and the wider folk/occult community as *"open-minded, progressive, with an interest in counterculture"*. This diversion or rejection of mainstream British cultural narratives is a big draw for many, and it goes hand in hand with an embrace and love for the strange and odd parts of our Isle's history.

It is in this space that we are able to create our own myths, the stranger and more fantastical, and weird to behold, the better, but always with a hint of realism. The folk space and the word 'Weird' have become inseperable recently.

Ashleagh refers to these strange, local stories or customs, which may appear very odd to the unitiated as the *"the peculiarity of the parish"*. It's my opinion that, as well as folk culture being historically devalued for its associations with the working-class, it is probably also likely that many such customs, like the Burry Man of South Queensferry which features on an earlier page, is simply so strange and otherworldly in appearance that they are resistant to any inclusion in broad-sweeping narratives about a concrete British culture.

In Mark Fisher's '*The Weird and The Eerie'*, he defined weird as akin to Freud's '*unheimlich'*- a mashup of the familiar and *'that which does not belong'* (Fisher, 2016, p.10). This speaks to the the chronological and societal separation we have to these rituals. They now seem so completely anachronistic that many cannot imagine the world they were created in. Yet the 'weird' also intrinsically possesses a pleasure or fascination (ibid. p.13), which could explain their longevity.

A celebration of these weird and wonderful aspects of culture responds to *"our need for re-enchantment"* (Maria). The answer here is to create a new vision of England, of Albion, that brings back the strange, forgotten, creative and anachronistic aspects of our cultural heritages. To use Luckhurst's quote again, it "promises a re-weirding of England" (Luckhurst, 2022, p.727) and re-weirding promises a form of pride in place at odds with conservatism. It showcases forms of culture not useful for nation building, or too weird to include in a national narrative.

This idea of folk culture offering us a new creation myth is explored in Zakia's *My Albion* brilliantly but I think this whole point is perfectly summed up by a quote from Edward Said that it deserves its own page.

Folk myths, and projections about the peoples of historic Albion and what remains of them may be just another way to construct our identies today in relation to our own values. But by creating this story about our national or local heritage and making folk culture a more progressive and diverse space, we lengthen the lifespan of these traditions and ensure the creation of new folk cultural materials.

“The search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history, for a new pantheon of heroes and (occasionally) heroines, myths, and religions-these too are made possible by a sense of the land reappropriated by its people”.

(Edward Said, 1993,p. 226).

Eileen described folklore as a ‘cultural memory bank’ and explains that– *“it’s no good if it’s a cultural memory bank and it just stays stagnant and doesn’t have interesting additions from future generations”*. Adaptability and a ‘progressive edge’ (Maria) is fundamental to preservation to ensure continuous engagement with archives, even when those pre-existing archives are themselves not progressive.

Zakia described accessing and navigating archival folk material and encountering racist content. Finding ways to navigate the archives and the historical contexts they sit in does present a challenge.

While folklorists could be seen as ignoring Britain’s real history in favour of the more engaging mythic ‘Albion’, its participants emphasise that: ***“it’s a radical act to re-fall in love with where you live, to not to not give the country away[****…], to find what’s good in it and to also confront what’s bad about it. But to sit with it rather than to turn your back on it”* (Ben) and that by *“reconnecting to our older customs and traditions and stories might help us to refresh our sense of identity as a nation”* (Zakia).

Zakia does make the necessary caveat that “*if you ask someone who’s been Morris dancing for 40 years if they think it’s a radical practise, whether they would say that or anyone who is involved in The Abbott’s Bromley Horn dance, whether they’ll see that as a political, radical act? I think it’s something that we usually do on the outside, perhaps to give meaning.”* But it appears to be at least one reason why new, younger folklorists are joining the growing community and starting their own traditions.

Zakia did explain though that “in the context of the folk customs and traditions of my ancestors in the Caribbean, absolutely survival, persistence, is a radical act in the face of oppression, in the face of a hostile system that doesn't really care whether you exist or not. So, in that sense, I think I think there is something radical.”

It’s telling that Eileen spoke about her online audience as consisting in part of Americans of Scottish ancestry who are searching “for this link to their authentic native culture”. As Eileen explained to me, there is a history of emmigration from Scotland to the Americas, both by choice but also through transportation.

She said *“high number of Scottish people being made to feel ashamed for their culture and languages. This shame was certainly exported with emmigrants when they were forced to leave here for Canada, Australia, etc. A shame that caused people to deliberately forget their history, culture and languages in some cases and its because of that shame that generations of Americans and others overseas are now trying to rediscover those things that were lost.”*

If we are searching for our origin, there is nothing that ties us to the past more than visiting sites created or written about by the ancestors. Ashleagh’s beautiful podcast Folkways tells folk stories that are usually location specific.

When I asked her which stories she felt resonated the most with listeners she talked about the Lady of the Lake folklore. The draw she explains is *“you can go and stand on the shores of Llyn y Fan Fach, and that’s very appealing, isn’t it? To be able to actually stare down and see your face. Looking back, [it’s a] nice feeling, isn’t it? And you can also connect different versions of the story to loads of other different lakes in Wales.”*

It’s a reminder that in an ever-changing world, there are some things that are still the same. The magic that once brought people to the lake can still be felt now.
These stories help us to see parts of our locale as unique, and as containing a rich history handed down to us, the current tenants of the land. It can inject some magic into a piece of scenery that might seem otherwise unremarkable. As Ben talked about falling back in love with where we are from, folklore can act as a conduit for us to do so.

In a study of community-led cultural archiving in Portsoy, Aberdeenshire (Beel et al., 2010), the researchers described that the residents’ desire to create a way of archiving traditional practices was in relation to the effects of globalisation on the community.

They described cultural resilience not in terms of an ability to bounce back from cultural changes, but as the ability to develop in relation to impacts or influences.
They saw community-led digital archives as essential to resilience efforts.
This way the old and new can be held together. This could be seen as a re-localisation practice.

The globalisation of cultural homogeneity caused by colonialism, and increased at turbo-speed under neoliberalist economic policy , is fed by modernity’s need for delocalisation.

But if everywhere becomes the same we lose some of our ability to feel pride in the little things that make our neighbourhood’s unique, and all there is left is a trade conglomerate we might call a ‘nation’. We might be able to repel this with attempts at ‘re- localisation’ (Luckhurst, 2023) or ‘reappropriation’ as Said wrote.

FINDING COMMUNITY

I have grown up going to folk festivals and Ceilidhs (my mum is an excellent Ceilidh caller) and I remember the kinds of people I saw at these events in my childhood. Although I might now brag that I have always been a folk enthusiast, I probably had my fair share of tantrums at being dragged by my parents to watch an old man play a melodian in a church hall.

The folkies of my youth were often maybe eccentric or new agey, often white and often old. I remember long grey beards and brightly coloured patchwork outfits and a man who came to the same folk festival as we did every year who always had a bottlecap stuck to the middle of his forehead (those are the types of things children remember). These people carry the torch and are now passing it onto a growing number of young people who are joining the folk community.

When I asked my interviewees whether they felt that the digital foot-traffic has caused a change in the demographics or size of the folk communtiy, there was a resounding... 'not really'.
There was agreement that the digital is *not* the catalyst for community creation, as folk culture enthusiasm has always existed. But, everyone expressed the feeling that this community has grown exponentially in the last five or so years (*"it's kind of gone boom"*-Ben) and that has been *aided* by the use of digital platforms.

Having recognisable promotors like Stone Club and Weird Walk can make folk festivals or other in-person folk events feel more accessible to those looking to explore a new interest. Zakia cites that the digital can lead to *"more connectivity across different regions across different backgrounds and in that sense that encourages a greater diversity because you don't have to be somewhere where there's a big folk tradition that's very prominent in your local area."* Many of the folk traditions that continue today are in rural settings, and the lack of ethnic diversity (or indeed even lack of transport links) in much of rural Britain could be a barrier to access for some.

There is hope that the digital archive's ability to disseminate cultural materials remotely may welcome in more diverse audiences, where previously they would be publicised via a village noticeboard or leaflet on a pub wall. Ashleagh specifically remarked on the algorithm's ability to connect folk creators into a larger online network. Indeed, a major factor in the changing face of the British folk community lies in how the digital can afford easy communication with folklorists from around the world.

Here, we can see connections forming with the discourse in Sense of Place. Pointing out why places are unique, and highlighting what makes one village different from another are a proud folk tradition. Sharing art and stories helps us find the similarities between the folk culture of the British Isles and folk cultures from around the world, and this community is increasingly becoming a global village.

Eileen explained *"one of the wonderful things about that is that I've got people in Hawaii, and First Nations people, and you've got all these different cultures and they're saying 'this is really like our story, next time I tell this story I'm going to say there's a Scottish version of it', like great well next time I'm going to say there's a Cherokee version of it."* These sharing practices can also be a way to fight against any nationalistic narratives attached to folk culture, as it disregards maplines, and meets us at a point of common humanity.

When I asked my interviewees to characterise their audiences, they all answered that it was a pretty mixed bag of people with different reasons for enjoying their outputs. Maria characterised the Hellebore reader as *"open-minded, progressive, with an interest in counterculture"*.

While the face of folk is changing, it is changing slowly. On the folk culture community, Zakia told me *"I still don't think it's very diverse, but there are definitely new perspectives being fed in, in this current wave that we're seeing*", but that she hopes it will continue to grow. Again, if you'd like to hear more about the experience of being a person of colour in the folkspace, I would recommend My Albion.

Discourse about diversity within the community is vital, particularly in terms of archive creation. Archivists know that the people who make the archive are as important as its contents, because one directly affects the other. Active discussions about diversity and inclusion show promise for the future of building resilient archives that engage outsiders who may be dipping their toes in, not just those already fluent in those spaces.

All interviewees exuberated about the connections they have made, often venturing from online to attending in person folk events. And all agreed that having more enthusiasm for folk archives is beneficial for accessibility, heritage preservation, and for the support of archiving projects, such as a donation campaign to digitise prolific folklorist Doc Rowe's archive.

The Archive

This project started as a discussion about the digital archiving of folk culture, but it grew to become more of an exploration of the motivations behind the creators and audiences of folk cultural digtial materials. To bring things back from whence they came, this section will cover two different conversation points about archiving.

Before my interviews, I had carried out a small-scale analysis of a handful of social media accounts in the folk space over a period of a few months. What I found was that only 26.5% of the posts I had logged came from archival material, which was maybe unexpected for me. What this emphasised is that this is very much a living archive.
The secondary sources were usually competently cited from institutional archives or occasionally from obscure regional history blogs with 00s style webpages. I wondered whether my interviewees firstly even saw themselves as archivists in the first place, or if this is a title I have thrust upon them.

I also wanted to know about their experience of accessing traditional archives, which is of course where most researchers and enthusiasts source their information to share. I then go into conversation about the concept of 'the Aura' and auratic translation to the digital, so I will break up these two conversations into different sections.

I began these discussions by asking my interviewees their own motivations for making this cultural output, specifically online. It's clear that a large factor was gap-finding and then filling.
Ben, Ashleagh and Eileen described how they began their work after failing to find the archival or media materials they searched for, and so created it for themselves.

The interviewees also all described their feeling of duty to preserve folk culture from potential loss. Eileen categorised stories in a way I really enjoyed -
"you essentially have three groups of stories, you've got religious ones which I don't really have anything to do with, you've got the castle ones those are your government stories, you know the big institutions the governing bodies, and then you have the stories of the village you know the ones we would tell, of our everyday life. And it's always the village stories that were much more interesting to me. And I noticed that they were lacking. Because you're going to these institutions, and you're only getting this top-down information you're not getting these stories from the village"

This same sentiment was expressed by Ben when I asked his motivations for making Frontline Folklore available for free online-
"There's so much stuff about the Kings, the Queen's, you have to dig deeper to find out what the ordinary people's history is [...] a lot of folk culture is something you really have to search for. It's not there. It's not in the public archives as much".

Of course, historically the folk participating in these traditions would not have the means to document and disseminate materials about these traditions themselves as it was only until the late 19th century that most of the population in the UK were literate.
The book *'Save As...digtial memories'* (Gerde- Hensen et al., 2009) which collects interdisciplinary essays on digital archiving originally got me interested in this topic. One author writes *"how, what and why individuals and societies remember and forget is being shaped by technological, political, social, and cultural shifts that interpenetrate memory and memories, their makers, deniers and their […] 'repositories'*." (Hoskins, 2009, p.27).

So much of the information we do have in the archive relies on the accounts of outsiders. Ben lamented that *"the earliest accounts are often written by tourists or visiting aristocrat types that have got into studying rural customs. And when you read any account from someone that perhaps may look at themselves as a superior class or superior race or whatever, they always write it with this same kind of almost tongue in cheek [way]. Like they're witnessing a savage occurrence". This new archive is being made by those taking part, or at least have more of a respect for the traditions and the community.*

Zakia likened the lack of governmental interest in folk culture preservation to that of other working-class and alternative cultures, like Black British Soundsystem culture. She evidences this with the British government's decision not to ratify the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Convention until 2024.

The issue of *who* remembers and *what* is remembered is political and can reinforce class disparities, racism and misogyny in the archive, and therefore in the stories we tell about ourselves. Archives have the ability to create origin myths that are accepted as truth and which then become integrated into the public memory.

When I asked how folklorists find the experience of accessing archival materials most said they don't have issues as researchers, but that the layperson who might not be used to archive-digging might find the information difficult to navigate, or simply *"not very engaging"* (Eileen).

The barrier to access in the form of racist content as has been mentioned, but there are also barriers inherent to physical archives like Cecil Sharp House, the Angus Archives, or Kresen Kernow, as material is only accessed at the physical location.
Apart from the obvious geographical barrier, it could potentially be an intimidating experience to visit these archives in person as a hobbyist (although I'm sure staff would be very helpful and welcoming!).

Folklorists felt their efforts were helping to improve accessibility for the layperson by bringing archival images and stories into spaces that media consumers already frequent- ***"You know the term folklore. It's for the people. I don't like the idea of it being just in these dusty shelves that only a few initiated get to look at"*** (Ashleagh).

Perhaps we could see the move to the digital like re-sizing great-grandma's gold ring; although it has been altered it will now be given the chance to be worn rather than kept in the trinket box, and contains much of the same essence as before. Yet, it is also clear that digital dissemination has its own challenges.

There is the spectre of 'fakelore' (Dorson, 1976). Folklorists mentioned the need to be discerning when accessing information online, and that inaccuracies can spread quickly. Audiences must *"separate the wheat from the chaff"* (Ashleagh). Applying false provenance or stories that are not connected to a known history is seen as a breach of the 'authentic'.

However, the level of authenticity of the known oral histories or folk tales themselves is not seen as an issue. Seemingly tradition or time creates authenticity, that is exactly how folklore is created. Verification of folklore is tricky, some stories do indeed have a true provenance for example Eileen told me a story about how each fisherman had their own *gansey* (knitted jumper pattern) so that they could be identified in case of drowing. She said she had received an accusation that this was not a true story, which was then disproven by someone in the audience with family history involving this topic.
Yet, other folklore stories such as Black Shuck the devil dog of East Anglia, or the history of events like the Burry Man's day, the 'veracity' of the matter is not important. Yet it is still *authentic* because the story has lived on in the minds of the folk for so long.

Indeed 'fakelore' and its many other terms is a topic that plagues internet discourse across the board, the interviewees stressed their own research diligence and the duty of care they take.

Another challenge is that of a lack of ontological discipline that would be present in an institutional archive today. I did ask the folklorists if they think about their own positioning in what they choose to share. All answered that this was not something they thought about.

An oversight on my part was not questioning the ephemerality and lack of ownership that looms over any content posted to platforms like Instagram, YouTube or Vimeo and how this might be reckoned with. This topic brings up fears around a 'digital dark age' and how we might preserve digital data for the future. The obvious issue with digital archives over physical is the need to update material as technology changes, projects like the digitisation of Doc Row's film archives is costly and time consuming. What would be much worse is if content was not stored in multiple places, Facebook could choose to shut its servers down tomorrow and anything unsaved could be lost in seconds.

The Aura

'The Aura' is a concept developed by German philospher and media critic Walter Benjamin, first published in his book *'Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'*. He theorised that a work of art has a sort of unique presence or a sort of *vibe* that can only be experienced when the work is viewed first hand.

Therefore, when a piece of art is mechanically reproduced, you cannot experience that work's 'aura'. Imagine a paper print of Van Gogh's Starry Night bought from B&M compared to standing in front of the real thing in the MoMA. The reason I bring this up is because folk stories, and folk customs are such a sensorial experience that I was curious if the folklorists felt their work's aura was lost through the translation to the digital medium.

Ben felt this was a non-issue as he stressed that his goal is to encourage in-person participation. He explained that archives exist as a reference point, extremely important for preservation purposes, but that they should act as a 'taste' of the real event- *"if you're comparing archive material to a real experience, then you're kind of missing the point".*

Both Ashleagh and Eileen who work in storytelling lamented the lack of 'buzz' or 'atmosphere' when listening to a story remotely but they agreed that this is a trade-off worth suffering to ensure the preservation of the story.

Ashleagh also talked about how the experience of listening to a folklore podcast is dependent on the level of connection you make. If you listen to it on a bench in the woods, or if you listen to it whilst folding laundry and checking your emails it will create a totally different experience.

Eileen explained that the disembodiment of digitally accessing stories does not allow for the *"soft skills"* exercised at in-person storytelling events. This means that some personal or sensitive stories can be appropriately told in-person, but wouldn't feel right to share online. This is not a challenge I had previously considered.

Ben likened storytelling via social media to a local pub- *"people would meet locally in pubs, and they'd tell stories about the things they've seen. And you'd always tell the funniest thing you've seen, or the maddest thing you've seen. And so, I think online's become a new version of storytelling."*

I think this is where I sit with this. Our lives today are so intertwined with the digital that it can feel almost impossible to log off, indeed we don't log off, we simply look away for a short while. We carry the internet around with us in our pockets and can share a photograph of what's in front of us instantaneously to potentially millions of people. It makes sense that our personal interests would find their niche here, and that others would gather around them this has been one of the main uses of the internet since the early days of weblogs. While I may, more often than not, hate the feeling of being on my phone, I am also immensly grateful for the time others spend in creating things for me to view on it. They can show me things I would never have come across, in places I've never been to, and I can feel something because of that. (cont...)

But if we don't use that to create something in our own lives (with both people and the environment), and enjoy it so much that we forget we even have a phone (if only for a moment), then what is the point? The photograph is taken because we made something worth remembering.

The spontaneous grassroots archive create a democratised process of cultural preservation and affords anyone with a smartphone, the ability to add to this loose collection of stories. This in turn expands how we view what folk culture means today. Moreover, this archive is easily accessible, it offers a chance to view and engage with folk culture without the constraints of a physical archive, or making a pilgrimage to sites of folk cultural tradition. Archives can expand the scope of those who might engage with folk culture more passively and brings more people into the folk community from environments or backgrounds where they would not naturally encounter it. This accessibility expands across the world, allowing connections between global folk cultures. Comparing similarities and creating links internationally offers an expansion of knowledge between folklorists and a diversity of voices and experiences in the archive. It also highlights the repression that many folk traditions experience during and post colonialism and in the current processes of neoliberal globalisation and cultural homogenisation.

Epilogue

Through the course of reading this zine you've been able to hear from a few folklorists and creators from across Britain, with interjections from myself. I hope that you are now persuaded on the existence of a folk cultural rennaisance even if it only exists to those in the know. Maybe you are even intrigued enough to search out your local folk traditions and visit some sites of folkloric interest.

If you look closely you'll likely find these everywhere, I was able to go to a Wassailing celebration at my local park in South East London after seeing a poster on a lamp post. Being there made me feel in community with my neighbours and think about who lived here before the trains and buildings were built.

This rennaisance spans the gamut of folklore and folk stories, folk art and traditional crafts, folk customs, rituals, ceremonies and traditions, and folk-inspired media like folk horror cinema, books and television. You might even go to a local trad folk night in a pub, hear some funny names mentioned, and go on an internet rabbithole about who John Barleycorn is. While you're there, you might take a recording of the players (maybe ask their permission), and compare this to how people across the country and throughout history have played this song. You can note down when it was taken and where, and a bit of info about the talented musicians, and then you have your own piece of archived folk history! By the people, for the people.

I think it could definitely sound hyperbolic to talk about revolutions, activism or antihegemonic practices in relation to this something as culturally niche as folk culture is in the 21st century. But I really do think it is worth taking note of how the people's history of our country has been treated, and how we might seek to reverse that.

While we cannot go back in time, we can create new traditions by honouring the old ones even if in a fantastical way, and protect what we have from the past. People like Doc Rowe have been instrumental in this, and his documentary work is unparalleled. The efforts that are being made to digitise his archive are very uplifiting.

Thinking ahead I would love to see these materials collected in an independent space. The grassroots nature of this archive is what makes it so powerful, but no one online can be truly empowered when we are chained to platforms created and controlled by the Silicon Valley oligarchy. I am writing all of this as an outsider; I am not an expert in folk nor am I an expert in archiving, you could call me a dilettante. But I am interested in how our analogue world transfers to digital spaces and how that affects our practices, what that means for social movements and the sharing of community knowledge. And as many are, I am fearful of the future of our planet.

I would like to conclude this zine with a quote from Zakia.

"[There's a] clear signal from the government and from the powers that be that this these traditions are not worth preserving. So when you have a governmental lack of interest like that, then in the face of that, to preserve and to promote is kind of radical and is kind of anti-establishment by its nature.[...]

And of course, historically the folk songs and these traditions, what they do is actually they record a history of a marginal history of people who have not been given a voice or who have not had a voice in higher forms of culture. And so just through existing and continuing to exist, there is something, there's definitely an element of resistance and there's definitely something radical in that.[...]

But I think, especially when I think of it in the context of the folk customs and traditions of my ancestors in the Caribbean absolutely, survival, persistence, is a radical act in the face of oppression in the face of a hostile system that doesn't really care whether you exist or not. So, in that sense, I think there is something radical.

Is it radical enough to change anything? I don't know. I mean, I hope so, I hope that it can go beyond just surviving and actually do something to change the way people think. But I think it kind of needs a bit of help to do that."

Going forward I think this study should not detract from the fact that institutional archives are important, of course they are. But we should perhaps persuade them to offer more support to community-led preservation efforts to ensure the longevity of the type of digital materials shared in this archive.
This goes for all unique British cultural traditions, not just folk culture. It is more common to find museums that are full of stolen artefacts from colonised countries than to find artefacts from the everyday people of this land, which leads visitors to believe that the only thing to feel proud of this country for is the racist and Imperialist conquests and thievery of its leaders.

Institutions should listen to and include the diversity of voices present in the folk community to follow the progression of folk culture and allow its archives to reflect this progression. Also you know, maybe the government and arts institutions could give more funding to working-class artists to support current day working-class cultural outputs as well as our historic ones? But maybe that is going too far.

A Year in a Field- Interview with Chris Morris

A Year in a Field, is a meditative, stripped-back archiving of a year in the life of Boscawen-Ros, a solitary menhir and the field it stands guard to.
Filmed, directed and narrated poetically by Chris Morris, he tells the story of human's intervention in the planet's natural life, and its resulting impacts through this stone idol. The film gives audiences space to reflect upon where we came from, how we got here, and how we might change that. It is both striking and humble in its visuals and message.
His micro-shots of the field's gentle ecosystem reminded me to always take an extra moment to gaze into the hedgerow.

The themes of the documentary mirror many of the topics of this zine and speaks to the power of the how a camera phone and a platform can create archival material for future generations. I am pleased I was able to ask Chris some questions.

Your film 'A Year in a Field' has been celebrated and shared amongst those in the 'folk culture' community, I heard about the film from the Stone Club film club. While the narration of the film tells the story of human's impact on the natural world around the field through Anthropogenic climate change, it doesn't delve into discussion of any folklore about the standing stone or the land itself. Why do you think this community has adopted your film into the folk world?

I think that there are plenty of folk elements contained in the film - references to folklore concerning the elder tree, the presence of the elder mother singing at the end, folk songs in the score and folk tales in the narration - however I was also wary of taking the long stone itself into the folk realm. I tried to keep the stone within the realm of fact. I think I say in the narration that the stone was built by an alien people not from outer space but outer time - and that why it was placed or what it was for, is with any certainty unknowable. I think that if I had spun too much speculative ideas around the stone it would detract from the urgent present message of climate collapse. It was better the stone remained enigmatic and unknowable.

I'm interested in the Instagram you set up a few years prior to making the film, where you documented pictures of the standing stone, creating a small and very specific archive. What made you want to create this collection and share this on an online platform?

The documentation of the standing stone in still images began in 2015. I was working full time at Falmouth university and had little time for a creative output - so I began to create an archive of images of the stone in the field. I set myself rules - a square format, the stone must always be in shot, never repeat imagery - always find a new idea or angle. The idea was to take images for one year. 5 years later I was still taking images - and it eventually led to the idea of moving images - which in turn led to the film.

What drew you to this standing stone in particular, and why do you think so many people feel a fascination towards Menhirs and their lore?

I found Boscawen Ros by chance. There are no sign posts and all the tourists head for the wonderful Merry Maidens, of which this stone is an outlier. I was drawn to it instantly - and I can't say really why. I think the fact that I found it, no one really visits it - sort of made a deep impression on me. Its siting with the sea in the background is very dramatic.

I think that people are drawn to these sites for the simple reason that they hold mystery like a cup holds water. To us they are unknowable - and therefore hint at possible pasts, possible peoples and for me - and the reason for the film possible futures. They are sentinels to what humans do.

Being from Wales and now living in Cornwall, two places with a very rich folk tradition, do you think this has affected or inspired your filmmaking in any way, or simply coincidental?

Wales and Cornwall are Celtic cousins. The languages (along with Breton) are all connected. I also think our outlook and world viewpoints are similar. We are western peoples. In Wales I lived below an iron age fort, in Cornwall its standing stones. I think my up bringing in Wales and the last decade in Cornwall have without doubt fuelled and underpinned my work - but there is no doubt since moving to the West Penwith peninsula, which seemingly has more stones, circles, burial chambers etc per square inch, crammed into a tiny strip of land - these ideas have been supercharged.

What, if any, are the takeaways you'd like audiences to have after seeing A Year in a Field?

I made the film thinking that it might be seen by a few people then be put away and rediscovered in the future. So in a way I made it for a future audience - to describe to them what was happening in 2021 - the inaction, the sense of things not being done, the way we lived our lives. The fact that it was picked up and caught audiences right now is unexpected but heartening. The film is not designed for takeaways. There are no solutions offered in the film. Everyone comes to it with their own experiences and will leave with their own thoughts - and that's how it should be. I mostly wonder how audiences of the future - if this film is shown in 50 years will react. What will they think of us?

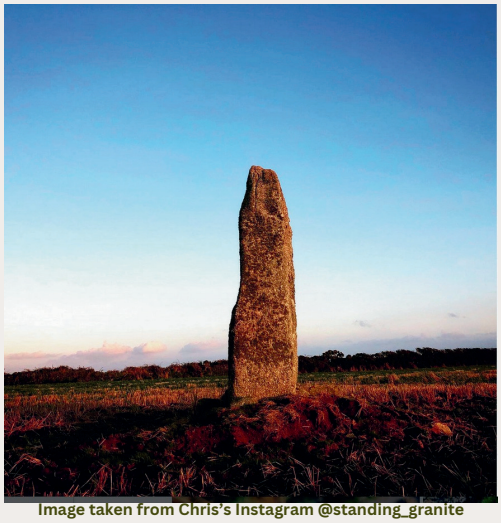

Image taken from Chris's Instagram @standing_granite

"As I got closer and closer to the field, my view grew wider and wider, until finally, looking at the same small field, I began to see the universe."
You can find A Year in a Field on Curzon Home Cinema, AppleTV, or maybe ask your local cinema to put on a screening!

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Picture References

Page 4- A photo taken at the Burry Man's parade inSouth Queensferry Scotland

Page 7- A photo of the 'Burning of the Cork' on Sma' ShotDay in Paisley,Scotland

Page 10 - John Duncan's painting 'Riders of the Sidhe'

Page 12- (Top to bottom)

- a St Brigid's cross drawn onto a toilet door at a pub in East London
- a mural made by children on the side of a building in Homerton, East London (taken
- by my friend Danny),
  the Blythe Hill Field Wassail
- A poster of the Padstow 'Obby 'Oss parade, found in the Falmouth folklore museum

Page 20- The Hilly Fields stone circle, built in 2000 by the local community to mark the millenium

Page 22- The National Monument of Scotland on Calton Hill, Edinburgh during Beltane

Page 24

- the Clava Cairns near Inverness
- a wall of the Shell Grotto in Margate,
- the Oak King procession at Edinburgh Beltane Fire Festival,

A local Menhir to me, although archeologists believe it originates from Languedoc, it has been theorised to have been brought over and lain in South East London by the Lidlites of ancient Albion, in a ceremony they have called the ‘Weekly Specials’