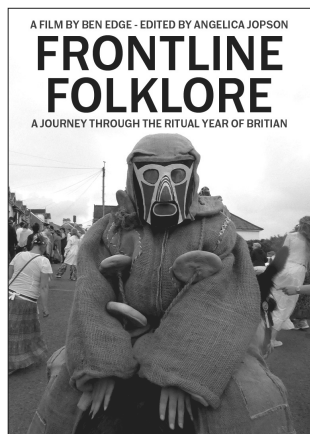




King for a Day

Barbara Santi (director). Documentary Educational Resources, 2022. 60 minutes. <https://barbarasanti.co.uk/portfolio/kfad-trailer>.

Available to rent online <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/kingfordayder>



Frontline Folklore: Twenty Folk Customs of the British Isles

Ben Edge (director). Art 4 Folk, 2021. 1 hour 41 minutes. Free online. <https://vimeo.com/897444792>

Barbara Santi is a Cornwall-based award-winning film-maker. She has filmed in Padstow over a nine-year period to document its May Day 'Obby 'Oss celebrations as *King for a Day*. Ben Edge is a London-based painter, singer-songwriter, and first-time film-maker. His project *Frontline Folklore*, initially exhibited at the St Pancras New

Church Crypt Gallery in collaboration with Simon Costin and the Museum of British Folklore, included a series of twenty of his paintings alongside the film reviewed here.

The folk life of Cornwall constitutes a major strand of Santi's work. She encompasses family life, alongside traditional occupations such as fishing and farming, within a broad conception of habitation and settlement embraced by the Cornish Tre. She recently gained a practice-based PhD from the University of Exeter for her exploration of collaborative film and creative technique, interwoven with ideas of place, identity, and culture, and she is presently engaged with the Padstow People's Autobiography project to digitize, interpret, and share Doc Rowe's Padstow and Mayday collection. Her film *Cunning Woman*, about the Cornish witch Cassandra Lathan-Jones is currently in production.

The publicity material accurately describes a 'poetic, personal insight into a community in transition'. Santi's interest in archive film shines through and apposite material is thoughtfully intercut with new footage to emphasize a powerful sense of the past in the present. Her local collaborators are eloquent and sincere. All evoke a sense of managed nostalgia, pride, realism about Padstow's tricky present, and a powerful possessive joy in the tradition. Participants in the film are unequivocal in matters of oversight and ownership, but are proud to share their 'Osses with outsiders. We occasionally overhear

Santi's questions, but her quiet voice is there to let the respondents speak. Padstow, like many communities, is enduring social and structural change, and Santi's skill lies in letting us sense that through the daily lives of the participants as well as through the heightened and expressive run-up to the actual May Day ceremonies. The credits claim 'a film by Barbara Santi and the people of Padstow'. This is an aspirational statement, which nevertheless rang true for this reviewer. She not only captures the pride and joyous excitement of cultural performance 'in the moment', but also demonstrates her technical touch with some deftly handled reincorporation. As the film unfolds, we see people, some of whom we have already been introduced to, viewing earlier screenings of archive footage and commenting on it. We are gently reminded that the filmic 'present' is already dissolving into the greater volume of the tradition's past. It is a tribute to her work that none of this seems contrived. When combined with discussion of participation as inheritance ('that's my grandfather and father in the photograph') the viewer is reminded that traditional forms have a vital capacity to be both exclusive and resistant even within a welcoming and celebratory ambience. Santi has produced a fine piece of ethnographic film-making, which captures a specific period in the history of Padstow. As the participants reflect on the past and present of their tradition, the viewer is encouraged to reflect on the place of cultural tradition in expressing and negotiating identity and community.

Frontline Folklore contains footage of twenty calendar customs framed by Ben Edge's prologue and epilogue, and concludes with images of the twenty paintings derived from the filmed calendar customs. The film opens with the 2019 Haxey Hood game, then progresses through that year to end in December with a Mari Lywd event at Chepstow. There are visits to see the Bacup Coconut Dancers, the Mayor of Ock Street at Abingdon, Swan Upping on the Thames, the Burryman of South Queensferry, and the Saddleworth Rushcart, among others. Edge also includes the three annual public ceremonies of the Druid Order and two special Church of England services held at St Mary-Le-Bow on Cheapside (Pearly Kings' and Queens' Harvest Festival) and at All Saints in Haggerston (the Grimaldi Memorial, also known as the Clowns' Service). By way of secular contrast, the folkloresque October Plenty event, devised by The Lions Part theatre company, is also included.

Each custom is presented as a self-contained section prefaced with an introductory slide and including direct address by participants discussing their engagement with the tradition. The viewer is not always clear regarding the role of these individuals and those sections that work best (the Earl of Rone standing out in this regard) manage a sense of balance across the commentary. In this example there are four participant commentators: the first offers a relevant local legend, the second a folkloric explanation, the third describes the development of the custom since its re-establishment in 1970, and the fourth shares his pride as a participant who has grown up alongside the tradition.

Edge does not provide a rationale for the selection of customs and those interested in the nuanced interplay of historiography and legend may feel short-changed. In his introduction he suggests there are no ‘historical facts that back up, or research even, that backs up the local beliefs and the passed down stories’. He goes on to say ‘the fact that there isn’t a truth is what makes it so appealing to me as an artist [. . .] you can speculate, and you can lose yourself in this incredible world of imagination and creativity’. Edge’s closing piece to camera also references ‘reconnecting with the seasons’, ‘reconnecting with spirituality’, and ‘looking for sincere ways to reconnect with nature’. These are lofty ideas to engage with on the strength of his vignettes, but having the material collated in this way provides a useful resource to stimulate interest and discussion around the present state of some of the nation’s calendar customs.

Peter Harrop

University of Chester