

## England's villages small group history tours for mature travellers

### Reading List

#### **The Village News: The Truth Behind England's Rural Idyll**

by Tom Fort

We have lived in villages a long time. The village was the first model for communal living. Towns came much later, then cities. Later still came suburbs, neighbourhoods, townships, communes, kibbutzes. But the village has endured. Across England, modernity creeps up to the boundaries of many, breaking the connection the village has with the land. With others, they can be as quiet as the graveyard as their housing is bought up by city 'weekenders', or commuters. The ideal chocolate box image many holidaying to our Sceptred Isle have in their minds eye may be true in some cases, but across the country the heartbeat of the real English village is still beating strongly – if you can find it. To this mission our intrepid historian and travel writer Tom Fort willingly gets on his trusty bicycle and covers the length and breadth of England to discover the essence of village life. His journeys will travel over six thousand years of communal existence for the peoples that eventually became the English. Littered between the historical analysis, will be personal memories from Tom of the village life he remembers and enjoys today in rural Oxfordshire.

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#### **The Making Of The British Landscape: From the Ice Age to the Present**

by Nicholas Crane

The British landscape has been continuously occupied by humans for 12,000 years, from the end of the Ice Age till the twenty-first century. It has been transformed from a European peninsula of glacier and tundra to an island of glittering cities and exquisite countryside.

In this geographical journey through time, we discover the ancient relationship between people and place and the deep-rooted tensions between town and countryside.

The twin drivers of landscape change - climate and population - have arguably wielded as much influence on our habitat as monarchs and politics. From tsunamis and farming to Roman debacles and industrial cataclysms, from henge to high-rise and hamlet to metropolis, this is a book about change and adaptation. As Britain lurches from an exploitative past towards a more sustainable future, this is the story of our age.

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## **Tiny Churches**

by Dixe Wills

While travelling all over Britain on his pushbike, non-flying travel writer Dixe Wills is forever popping into old churches to look around, grab a moment of tranquility or just to shelter from the elements. Extending his love of all things tiny into yet another area, this book is his guide to 60 of the loveliest and most diminutive churches that Britain has to offer, many of which are known only to locals or tourists who are simply lucky enough to stumble across them. Representing a unique slice of British local history and attitudes, tiny churches are the great survivors of the world. Unlike grand cathedrals, they were built to serve more humble ends, but they withstood centuries of religious unrest (and the Victorian 'church improvers') to survive into this most irreligious of centuries. Today, scattered all over Britain, these atmospheric places retain the essence of what they were when the stonemasons, labourers, smiths, carpenters and glaziers were corralled together to build them.

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## **Bread for all**

by Chris Renwick

Today, everybody seems to agree that something has gone badly wrong with the British welfare state. In the midst of economic crisis, politicians and commentators talk about benefits as a lifestyle choice, and of 'skivers' living off hard-working 'strivers' as they debate what a welfare state fit for the twenty-first century might look like.

This major new history tells the story of one the greatest transformations in British intellectual, social and political life: the creation of the welfare state, from the Victorian workhouse, where you had to be destitute to receive help, to a moment just after the Second World War, when government embraced responsibilities for people's housing, education, health and family life, a commitment that was unimaginable just a century earlier. Though these changes were driven by developments in different and sometimes unexpected currents in British life, they were linked by one over-arching idea: that through rational and purposeful intervention, government can remake society. It was an idea that, during the early twentieth century, came to inspire people across the political spectrum.

In exploring this extraordinary transformation, *Bread for All* explores and challenges our assumptions about what the welfare state was originally for, and the kinds of people who were involved in creating it. In doing so, it asks what the idea continues to mean for us today.

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## **The English Village: History and Traditions**

by Martin Wainright

The village remains a quintessential and much-loved treasure of the English countryside. This rural idyll has inspired generations of great poets, novelists and artists including the likes of Constable, Hardy, Wordsworth, as well as providing the picturesque setting for modern TV series such as "Lark Rise to Candleford and Cranford". "The English Village" celebrates all that is unique and loved about a typical village - the pub, the green, the school, the church, the pond, the local shop and more - as well as exploring how the village has changed over the centuries. Also includes fascinating information on the origins of village names - Siddington, for example, means the farm of the valley (sidd: valley, in: belonging to, ton: farmland). Filled with facts, figures, customs and lore, there is a wealth of fascinating information to be discovered in this charming book.

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### **Return To Akenfield: Portrait Of An English Village In The 21st Century**

by Craig Taylor

Ronald Blythe's 1969 book Akenfield - a moving portrait of English country life told in the voices of the farmers and villagers themselves - is a modern classic. In 2004, writer and reporter Craig Taylor returned to the village in Suffolk on which Akenfield was based. Over the course of several months, he sought out locals who had appeared in the original book to see how their lives had changed, he met newcomers to discuss their own views, and he interviewed Ronald Blythe himself, now in his eighties. Young farmers, retired orchardmen and Eastern European migrant workers talk about the nature of farming in an age of computerization and encroaching supermarkets; commuters, weekenders and retirees discuss the realities behind the rural idyll; and the local priest, teacher and more describe the daily pleasures and tribulations of village life. Together, they offer a panoramic and revealing portrait of rural English society at a time of great change.

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### **Medieval Woman: Village Life in the Middle Ages**

by Ann Bauer

A history of peasants in the Middle Ages, the story takes the reader into the life of Marion, the carpenter's wife, and her extended family as they struggle to survive through hardship, featuring a year in their lives at the mercy of the weather and the Lord of the Manor. Existing without soap, paper or glass and only with the most basic of tools, we learn how they survive starvation, sickness, fire and natural disaster in their home on the edge of the Weald.

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**The Last Wolf: The Hidden Springs of Englishness**

by Robert Winder

What sort of a place is England? And who are the English? As the United Kingdom turns away from its European neighbours, and begins to look increasingly disunited at home, it is becoming necessary to ask what England has that is singular and its own.

It is often assumed that the national identity must be a matter of values and ideas. But in Robert Winder's brilliantly-written account it is a land built on a lucky set of natural ingredients: the island setting that made it maritime; the rain that fed the grass that nourished the sheep that provided the wool, and the wheat fields that provided its cakes and ale. Then came the seams of iron and coal that made it an industrial giant.

In *Bloody Foreigners* Robert Winder told the rich story of immigration to Britain. Now, in *The Last Wolf*, he spins an English tale. Travelling the country, he looks for its hidden springs not in royal pageantry or politics, but in landscape and history.

Medieval monks with their flocks of sheep . . . cathedrals built by wool . . . the first shipment of coal to leave Newcastle . . . marital contests on a village green . . . mock-Tudor supermarkets - the story is studded with these and other English things.

And it starts by looking at a very important thing England did not have: wolves.

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