



## CARRY ON THE FLAME

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### Kerb / Kirchweih

The Kirchweihfest is in Hessen an important date in the festival calendar. The occasion of the festival is the anniversary of the consecration of a church - sometimes also another date determined by the bishop or a rather general date as for example at All Saints' Day.

The festival has its greatest significance in rural and small-town areas. Often it is carried by a group of young (mostly unmarried) men, the Kerbburschen. Sometimes the notch is also represented by a single straw figure (notch borsch) wrapped in clothing, which is placed in a clearly visible place during the festival. The celebrations are often presided over by a notch father, who also gives the humorous notch speech at the opening or closing of the celebrations lasting several days. The local associations are usually involved in the design and organization. Larger church festivals sometimes also offer rides such as bumper cars or carousels. The religious origin of the celebration becomes clear above all in the festive Kerbgottesdienst. Visits to notches from neighbouring towns are common and used to represent an important marriage market within the framework of the notch dance.

At the beginning of the festival there is a parade to the Kerbplatz, a symbolic collection of the Kerb or the Kerbborschen or the placement of a Kerbbaum (similar to a May tree). Today, the traditional notch dance has often given way to more modern forms of event culture. A stage program ranging from brass music to rock concerts and disco is characteristic. Places such as Groß-Zimmern attract up to 5000 guests with their programme. For the organization of the celebrations, for example, a separate association has been founded here. Usually each place is convinced of the fact that its Kerb is the best of all notches. This becomes clear in battle shouts like "To whom is the Kerb - Unser!" which are very common in different variants.

With the last hours of the Kerb also the end of the Kerbburschen approaches. In some places the figure is symbolically buried or burned. He thus assumes the role of a scapegoat, who dies as a substitute for the misdemeanours committed during the notch.

In some places there is a regular funeral service. To brass music, the notch borsch is carried through the rows of tables. He is accompanied by a mourning party dressed in black. The guests pull out white handkerchiefs, wave with them and sob. Then the notable father delivers a funeral oration - often seasoned with satirical side blows to the city and local politics. Afterwards he announces the last will of the Kerbborsch: "This is the Kerbborsch's last will - continue celebrating with per mille! The humorous church consecration speeches are held in some places also to the opening and are widespread.