

# Photos of grown men acting like babies in 90s England

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Inside the Hush-a-bye-Baby Club, a place where adult men could revert to their premature selves, captured by photographer Polly Borland

Photography **Feature (/feature)**  
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5 days ago

Text **Niall Flynn (user/NiallFlynn)**



“Snuggles at Mummy Hazel’s, 1994-1999”  
Photography Polly Borland



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## Polly Borland’s Adult Babies



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When Polly Borland (<http://www.pollyborland.com/>) was first told about the secret world of [adult babies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraphilic_infantilism) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraphilic\\_infantilism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraphilic_infantilism)), her immediate reaction was to dismiss it as a fabrication. As a photographer who specialised in the offbeat, surreal and fringe, the idea – that there were secret clubs all over the world, in which adult men spent weeks looking and living like babies – was just a bit *too* unfathomable for the pre-reality TV era of the early 90s. “I was like, ‘no, don’t be ridiculous,’” she remembers, chuckling. “That just can’t be true.”

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"Snuggles in Mummy Hazel's garden, 1994-1999"  
Photography Polly Borland

The Australian photographer cites the provocative realism of Diane Arbus and Larry Clark as inspiration and, with *The Babies*, their influence is clear. Much of what makes the images so uncomfortable is the way in which they challenge an acknowledgement of their strange, synchronous beauty. As Sontag notes in her introductory essay, "Close is ugly. And adult is ugly, when compared with the perfection of the recently born." However, in Borland's frame, there's something – aesthetically speaking, at least – inexplicably endearing.

"It's so easy to make judgements on people through fear and ignorance – and, I guess, ego" – Polly Borland

So, why did they do it? Borland puts it down to a fetish, inspired by some kind of alienation. But, ultimately, that isn't really important. "Some of them were baby purists – they believed if you were a baby, it was pre-sexual, pre-language. Some of them (chose the 'baby age' of) two or three-years-old, because they said that was the moment they kind of knew that they weren't getting what they needed from their mothers," she recalls.

"A lot of them had quite a psychological take on it, but I'm sure that was in an effort to understand it themselves. By the end of it, I didn't really think there was a straightforward explanation. In a way, the psychology of it almost wasn't honest. Even more now, we're so bound by psychology – that's a paradigm that I've definitely embraced. But, more and more, I've realised that it's an unknown science. There are things that affect us and environment and childhood are extremely important, but sometimes things just aren't that simple – or that complicated.

"They kind of saw me as a mother figure though, I think."

*The Babies* (<https://miergallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/7-18-17-Mier-PollyBorland8442.jpg>) is displaying at the *Mier Gallery* (<https://miergallery.com/current/>), in its entirety from July 22 – August 19



"Cathy, Julianne, Snuggles and Roberta in Mummy Hazel's garden, 1994-1999"  
Photography Polly Borland

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