Mike Storry and Peter Childs

BRITISH CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Edited with Notes by

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THE SIGN OF A GOOD BOOK

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'Introduction' and 'Chapter 2'

from

BRITISH CULTURAL IDENTITIES

by

Mike Storry and Peter Childs

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はしがき

本書は，イギリスを主に社会科学の方法を使って分析研究しようとする「ブリティッシュ・スタディーズ」の入門書，*British Cultural Identities* (Routledge, 1997) を，大学のリーディング・クラス用のテキストとして編集したものです．原著の構成は，イギリスの，特にイングランドの，ナショナル・アイデンティティの形成を歴史的に探る「序章」，複雑な民族構成を反映する現代イギリス文化の重層性をさまざまな角度から明らかにする7つの各論，そして結論から成り立っています．

本テキストでは，「序章」と「教育・職業・レジャー」を扱った第2章を採録しました．言及されている事項・人名は第1章に限っても，エリオット，ディケンズ，シェイクスピア，ミスター・ビーン，サッカーのカップ・ファイナルなど，硬軟取り混ぜ実に多様です．本書は，グレート・ブリテン島に住む人々が日々の生活で無意識に行う習慣，一つの社会集団として歴史的に共有されてきた経験，生活していく上で欠かせない観念など，従来普通に考えられていた「芸術文化」という意味の次元を排除しないものの，それを越える，ことばの広義の意味での「文化」を手がかりに，現代イギリスの姿を見ようとするテキストです．

学生諸君は第1章で，イギリス文化のアイデンティティの成り立ちを歴史的に通観し，第2章では，教育制度の歴史と現状，教育がどのように職業と結びついているか，宗教とも関係する職業倫理，脱工業化社会の経済システムで広がる雇用不安（現代の日本にも当てはまるもの），インドアとアウトドアの余暇の過ごし方（パブ，スポーツ，テレビ，映画，読書，宝くじ）について，多くの情報を得ることができます．実際，コンパクトな分量でこれほど多くの事象が巧みに盛られているテキストは他にはないでしょう．全体として本書は，現代イギリス文化を歴史的な膨らみをもたせながら物語るテキストとなっています．ただ，氾濫する情報に溺れてしまわないよう，多量の情報を統括する主体を，学生諸君には期待したいと思います．それには現代日本の状況を見据え，本書が提供するイギリス社会と対照させながら，つまり

比較文化的な視点を持ちながら読まれることをおすすめします．本文を事項解説的な注釈と合わせて精読すれば，現代イギリス文化のありようがかなりの程度得られることでしょう．注釈は努めて詳しく，かつ正確を期したつもりですが，思わぬ誤りや思い違いがあるやも知れません．読者諸兄のご教示をお願いいたします．

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神戸にて
編 注 者

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Chapter 1 The Ghost of Britain Past

Introduction

This is a book about contemporary Britain and British people. On the one hand, Britain is a country with defined boundaries, a recognisable landscape, a long and contentious history, and a position in the various international economic, social and political league tables. On the other hand, British people are much harder to describe. To begin with, some British people do not live in Britain. Furthermore, many people living in Britain do not think of themselves as British. Nationality is a matter of allegiance and cultural affiliation. Some people say that your nationality is indicated by where you choose to live or by the team you support at sports events; others say that it is a question of whom you would fight for. It has also been argued that nationality is no longer a powerful force in Britain, that it is simply a matter of circumstance, and that today it is far less significant than local or global identities: relatives, friends and communities are more important to us and so is transnational culture, such that notions of national identity are both less persuasive and more contentious than they used to be. Above all, nationality is a question of identity and so is crossed by other kinds of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, age and occupation.

This book aims to outline some of the kinds of identity found at those intersections in Britain at the end of the twentieth century. As such, it will implicitly question the difference between British cultural identities and cultural identities in Britain. Forty-five years ago, T.S. Eliot famously said that 'culture' was something which included 'all the characteristic activities and interests of a people'. He thought that this meant for England: 'Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches, and the music of Elgar.' Forty-five years on, conceptions of English and British identity have changed enormously; for example, few people would attribute any significance to 'the twelfth of August', the opening day of the grouse-shooting season.

Contemporary British culture is a mixture of all the cultures of the past that people are influenced by—but certain figures, symbols and narratives exercise particularly strong control over the ways we imagine ourselves to be and to have been. In Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge is shown pleasant and unpleasant edited highlights of his life by 'The Ghost of Christmas Past'. Scrooge recognises the person he has been and understands how events have made him the way he is now, but, after seeing different glimpses of the present and the possible future, he rejoices in the fact that the life to come is only strongly influenced, not determined, by history. Dickens's ghost story, itself a potent narrative in British mythology, is a fable about self-knowledge; it

concerns the importance of understanding the individual's responsibility within society and the significance of history in shaping identity. The figures and images which have shaped ideas of a British identity are the subject of this chapter.

At sporting occasions like the Football Association Cup Final, annual events like the Last Night of the Proms, commemorations like the fiftieth anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) day and public celebrations like a royal wedding, there are signs of a traditional grass-roots national culture, often accompanied by patriotic singing and flag-waving. But, in common with much of the world, Britain's major unifying influence today is the mass media (not all of which is British), and a connection between all of the above events is that they will be shown on television, broadcast on the radio and reported in the press. A recent book on Britain has claimed that 'Television is clearly the basic component of the national culture', but, at Eliot's time of writing, it was not even a part of any local culture. According to a 'TOM Attitudes to Advertising Survey', the topics of conversation which people say they have are listed in Table 1.1 revealing that television, the cost of living, children and sport are arguably the most important subjects to most people.

Regional and local identities are extremely strong in Britain and the diversity of beliefs, practices, loyalties and accents is immense. In George Bernard Shaw's 1913 play, *Pygmalion*, the language specialist Professor Higgins believes he can, just by the sound of an accent pinpoint any Londoner's place of birth to within two or three streets. Shaw's play was written at the start of

Table 1.1 Subjects of conversation between friends and family (1991)

Subject	*Percentage of people who ever talk about subject*
Advertising	2
Big business	2
Bringing up children	26
Clothes and fashion	19
Cost of living	43
Education	20
Gardening	16
Law and order	16
Neighbours or workmates	21
Politicians	8
Religion	6
Sport	25
Television programmes	48
The government	19
Trade unions	1
Newspaper articles	19
Health and welfare services	18
Unemployment	16
Personal health	21
None of above/don't know	3

Source: TOM Attitudes to Advertising Survey

the twentieth century when people were far less likely to move from one area to another, and yet distinct local identities continue to be easily discernible in the 1990s. The UK of the 1990s is enhanced by diversity and difference, and for this reason we must use the plural form and talk of 'identities'; throughout the remainder of this book you will find the multiplicity of British identities emphasised more than traditional single images.

What is the connection between national culture and identity? While culture may be seen as 'lived experience', shared by a community of people who relate to one another through common

interests and influences, identity is concerned with how people see themselves, or are seen, in relation to others: as northerners or southerners, football or rugby enthusiasts, opera or blues fans and so on. In short, identity is perhaps two things: who people take themselves to be, and who others take them to be. As the debate in Britain over whether or not to issue national identity cards has shown, questions of national and personal identity are highly complex and contentious.

At one end of the scale, identity is partly prescribed by what the state considers to be important about people: their physical characteristics, place of birth and area of employment; for example, these details are usually included on passports. At the other end of the scale, many people might consider the most important aspects of their identity to be their emotional life, their aspirations, their sporting or intellectual achievements and so on. So we are also inevitably left with *versions* of identity rather than a single definitive identity for each individual. In May 1995, mocking the official view that 'identity' can be contained on a card, a *Guardian* columnist, Armando Iannucci suggested that children, who have developing personalities, will have to swap identity cards in the playground as they change week by week! This kind of identity expressed on an official form, similar to a gas bill or a birth certificate, is actually understood not as someone's identity but as their 'i.d.'—a kind of statistical identification far removed from any individual's notion of who they are. The lead character in a cult British television series of the 1960s, *The Prisoner*, famously used to say every week, 'I am not a number, I am a free

man'. The British response to 'identity cards' has been similar.

We also have to consider individuals within their community and country. Collective identity and action can supply a focus for pride in a society and enable people to improve their material conditions; however, from another perspective, both patriotism and nationalism are uneasy notions in today's post-colonial world. As long ago as the eighteenth century, patriotism was described by Dr Johnson, compiler of the first authoritative English dictionary, as 'the last refuge of a scoundrel'. Similarly, nationalism, which has been linked so closely to imperialism and the resistance to it over the last two centuries, has unhealthy implications for those who define themselves as 'British'. Since the Second World War, most countries within the British Empire have, through revolt or reform, gained independence. Over the last few decades, perceptions of British expansion overseas have also undergone many changes as the traditional and dominant paternalist attitude adopted by Britain towards its colonies has been reviewed as not benevolence but condescension overlaying economic greed. Comparisons between European fascism and imperialism, reflections on England's hold on Ireland, the only European country to have both an early and a late colonial experience, and disapproval of the blustering patriotism associated with the Falklands War of 1982, have all added to a British reappraisal of its empire.

A famous English novel, *The Go-Between* by L.P. Hartley, begins with the sentence, 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' No matter what view is held of the past, history provides many indications of how a country such as

Britain has traditionally been perceived and the extent to which its people, often accused of living in the past, used to do things differently. In the remainder of this chapter we will look at how British history can serve as a starting point for the idea of a national cultural identity, partly framed by the perception of Britain as seen from overseas. In the next section we will consider past images of England and the UK, and in subsequent sections we will look at the icons and representatives which have portrayed or stood for this traditional Britain.

Traditional Britain

A simple overview of Britain might show the country as passing through a number of historical periods. It might identify them as 'rural', 'industrial', 'imperial', 'suburban', 'tourist', 'multicultural', and these would follow one another in time. In fact, phases such as these are not just in sequence but overlap, though many people like to see Britain as still stuck in one of these stages.

Below there is some historical background information. We will look at those formations of national identity that have held sway and attempted to define and delimit British culture. As we do so, we would like you to remember that 'Britishness' was never a straightforward, uncomplicated term: it is and long has been a diverse, highly contested and varied label. For example, while the monarchy has provided the most famous icons of national identity, for the last millennium English monarchs have usually been foreign. England's figureheads have been Normans

(Plantagenets), Welsh (Tudors), Scots (Stuarts), Dutch (House of Orange) and German (Hanoverians).

The British Isles were invaded by the Romans in the first century AD and settled by Germanic tribes, the Jutes, Angles and Saxons, in the fifth century. (Some of the days of the week are still named after their gods: Tiw, god of War (Tuesday), Woden (Wednesday), Thor (Thursday), Frig, wife of Woden (Friday).) These tribes drove the native Celts to the western parts of Scotland, and to Cornwall, Ireland and Wales.

Life was precarious and, littered throughout the British countryside, there continue to be preserved places of refuge where early Britons could go when being attacked by neighbouring tribes and invaders. This accounts for the large number of Iron Age forts, medieval castles, Piel towers and fortified manor houses which still exist in Britain today. Britain's last invasion from overseas was in 1066, when it was conquered by Normans, Viking settlers from northern France. There followed many centuries of European rivalry and imperial expansion.

The most widely taught period of history in British schools is that of the Tudors (1485–1603). This is often taken to be the start of modern England because it included the revival of classical learning, the discovery of the Americas, the introduction of the printing press, the beginnings of the Church of England and notable military successes such as the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Its figureheads are Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Walter Raleigh and Shakespeare: four figures who to this day appear at the head of a schoolchild's list of important Britons. Thomas

Carlyle, perhaps the greatest influence on British cultural thought in the nineteenth century, referred to the Elizabethan era as 'that strange outbudding of our whole English existence' in his influential book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. The continued prevalence of this view can be seen in the enormously successful recent comedy television series *Blackadder*, which focused on one character's exploits in four stages of Britain's history: medieval Britain, the reign of Elizabeth I, the period of revolutions and Romanticism at the threshold of the nineteenth century and the First World War. Between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century only the Tudor period was represented, omitting such key events as the English Civil War, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the American War of Independence. Literature courses at most levels taught across the country similarly devote little study to the period between Shakespeare and the Romantic poets. This ties in with popular notions of what it means to be 'British' and 'English', conceptions of a national identity which are often rooted in Tudor times but which are more recent in their articulation: products of the eighteenth and particularly the nineteenth centuries. Nationalism is a comparatively new invention, issuing from the formation of modern nation states since such eighteenth-century social upheavals as the French Revolution, and developing from, but often not superseding, identities based on such ideas as tribe, region, religion and class or 'blood'.

Broadly speaking, Britain has a historical heritage of whose gross features everyone is aware: colonised by the Romans; last

invaded in 1066; a rural country up until the eighteenth century; unprecedented industrial growth in the nineteenth century; the largest empire the world has known; postwar decolonisation, and economic decline. Its features have left a notion of Britishness, and more particularly Englishness, that remains today for many people and is prevalent in sections of the media: an island people 'unconquered' for centuries; a largely rural community but the first industrial nation; an imperial leader; a land divided between north and south or London and the rest of the country, and a class-ridden society, from the monarchy through the aristocracy and the middle classes to the working classes. Consequently, in the rest of this section we will look at three traditional ways of understanding Britishness and Englishness, beginning with an examination of the English countryside, followed by consideration of the national character, and then of the British as an island race.

The English countryside

With the growth of London and the Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century, experience for many people in Britain became *urban* as the country entered its accelerated phase of trade and manufacturing. Factories and mills created areas of dense population such as Manchester, Newcastle, Leeds and Sheffield, as people migrated there to work in the textiles, steel and shipbuilding industries. This was the time in which Britain saw itself as 'the workshop of the world', and the stamp 'Made in England' became famous across the globe. However, throughout the In-

dustrial Revolution the underlying idea of Britain didn't change in many respects: it was still thought to be essentially a rural place even for those in the towns and cities, and the wealthiest would build houses away from the metropolitan centres. A 'countryside' outlook can still be found in the 1930s (when rambling and Sunday walks became national occupations). For example, J.B. Priestley in his famous *English Journey* dealt with three types of community: the metropolitan, the urban and the rural. He said England was at heart a rural country which had a countryside ethos. The implication of his model was that the cities, at a time of mass unemployment, financial crisis and widespread poverty, should become more like the rest of Britain. If cities were unsavoury places it was because they had lost touch with the innocence of their agricultural roots.

One can argue that Britain still has the self-image of the rural society (evident in magazines such as *Ideal Home* and *Country Life*). This belief lies behind immensely popular television series like the crime-solving *Inspector Morse* (set in Oxford) or, similarly, *Bergerac* (set in the Channel Islands, which are crown dependencies off Normandy) in which the city or island community must be restored week by week to a 'rightful' tranquillity. Many of the novels of Agatha Christie, Britain's most famous crime writer, are also principally about this restoration of a natural and lawful order of countryside innocence, and many of the most popular novels in British libraries, by writers such as Catherine Cookson, indulge in a supposedly simpler past before the fast-paced and largely irreligious city living of the twentieth century.

A further example of the persisting non-metropolitan idea of Britain is the number of bookmaker's shops, principally for betting on horse races, of which there are many thousands in Britain—a retail industry unknown for example in Germany. Here the country world comes to every British high street. Horse racing, a countryside pastime known as 'the sport of kings', enters the urban environment and links the 'rural' aristocracy and monarchy with the 'urban' working class. So, in many ways, contemporary Britain harks back to a localised and harmonious but essentially feudal way of life.

In city pubs people drink the beer of the countryside. You can sit in London's Leicester Square and drink a bottle of Black Sheep ale or a pint of Shepherd Neame bitter and eat a shepherd's pie or a ploughman's lunch (a recent invention containing bread, cheese, pickles and salad). Why not a coal-miner's pie or a fireman's lunch? Because these industrial or urban professions do not hold the appeal of the jobs of the rural past and they cannot be romanticised in the same way. Such attitudes are by no means recent. There is a long tradition in Britain of 'pastoral' poetry, where sophisticated court dwellers pretended to be simple country folk and wrote one another charming poems of seduction—such as Christopher Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to his Love* ('Come live with me and be my love'). A similar Elizabethan nostalgia for a golden Arcadia is found in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

A final indication of the appeal of the concept of rural England is that when builders sell houses which they have erected on

agricultural land, the new roads are frequently named after what they have just destroyed (for example, Four Acre Coppice, Oak Tree Farm Crescent). Former habitats of birds are commemorated as Wild Herons Way or Tern Crescent. Many people want the difficult combination of urban society and jobs with rural peace and beauty.

Character and accent

Perhaps the most enduring of all the tokens of a dominant traditional Britishness is the 'English character' itself, which is often easily encapsulated and parodied in terms of its accent(s).

Both accent and dialect are very important in British life and the public acceptability of regional accents has changed with a shift of focus from the capital to the regions. The English upper-class accent, as spoken by the Queen or announcers on the BBC World Service, was accepted until twenty years ago as the guide to correct pronunciation for Britain as a whole. Those with regional accents from the industrialised areas of the Midlands and north, let alone Northern Ireland, were not encouraged to apply for jobs as announcers on radio or TV. At one time it was thought that one of the effects of a national radio network would be to eradicate regional accents. This hasn't happened. Instead, regional accents have persisted and in areas of the media there is currently a move to employ more broadcasters and performers with northern or Scottish accents.

Accents and expressions are diverse; but what about the myth of the British 'character'? British people are often considered to

be withdrawn and reserved. Stereotypically, they are supposed to undertake their tasks out of duty, without thought of personal gain. Their aims are understated. They are meant to display characteristic if often deceptive British reserve, as in the stylised images of Hugh Grant or Diana, Princess of Wales. Such reserve is not considered to be confined to well-bred members of the upper classes. A typical story is that when the British soldiers, called 'Tommies' after a music-hall character, finally met the Russian counterparts with whom they had been fighting against the Germans in the First World War, they approached them and shook hands. In a moment of national elation, this would appear to be a very understated action and is taken to indicate two things: first, at that time people practised British reserve, and second, it was displayed not just by those with stiff upper lips, (the upper classes), but equally by working people.

Across all classes, few people shake hands. Handshaking on meeting is today a more widespread practice in much of the rest of the world than it is in the UK. British people do shake hands, not routinely on meeting one another, but usually when they are introduced to a stranger, whether at home or at work. While it is still often taken as a sign of reserve, such behaviour is equally part of a rejection and dislike of formality. This image of reserve also contrasts with that other enduring stereotype of British behaviour: eccentricity. This supposedly denotes a kind of outrageousness that has spanned upper-class eccentrics, the Masons, 1960s fashions, punk rock, and the contemporary artist Damien Hirst or violinist Nigel Kennedy. Such images are most often

reproduced in today's consumer culture as part of an idiosyncratic Britishness that can be successfully marketed and sold abroad. On the one hand, Rowan Atkinson's TV mime character 'Mr Bean' exemplifies this kind of awkward, inquisitive but repressed and easily embarrassed national stereotype. On the other hand, Richard O'Brien's camp reworking of the Gothic Frankenstein story in *The Rocky Horror Show* illustrates well the idea of British peculiarities and closeted sexual flamboyance.

An island race

Britain has been described as 'a tight little right little island'. In the early nineteenth century, the poet Byron wrote of 'the bitter effects of staying at home with all the narrow prejudices of an islander'. Later in the century, critics of Victorian overseas expansion were known as 'Little Englanders', but the term has since come to mean isolationists who believe in the concept 'my country right or wrong'. Winston Churchill, Britain's Prime Minister during the Second World War, used the title 'The Island Race' at the start of his history of the English-speaking people. He also recalls in his memoirs the time he was scheduled in his early career to meet Hitler, until the latter discovered that Churchill had written articles condemning his Jewish policy. The Germans quietly cancelled the meeting and Churchill's conclusion was: 'Thus Hitler missed the only chance he ever had of meeting me.'

A story which further illustrates British insularity refers to a news announcement which said, 'There has been a persistent fog at London airport during the weekend, and the Continent has

been cut off for twenty-four hours.' That this parochialism is still common in the UK despite increased air travel and the Channel Tunnel is illustrated by the politician Norman Lamont who described a united Europe as 'yesterday's idea', and by the fact that according to a recent MORI survey 48 per cent of Britons do not see themselves as Europeans but as having more in common with Americans.

The British have been considered as an island race partly because of their imperialism, cultural isolation and international policies. Some of this attitude can be explained historically, and it has been argued that, compared with most European countries, Britain's ethnic mix did not greatly change between the eleventh and the twentieth centuries, although there were, for example, some 20,000 Africans working in London in the mid-1700s and many Jewish settlers arrived at the end of the nineteenth century, while the oldest Chinese community in Europe was established in Liverpool as early as the eighteenth century. There have also been considerable influences from overseas, particularly from the exploitations of empire, the architectural signs of which are still visible everywhere. For instance, Liverpool, one of England's largest ports, and at one time Europe's major slave port, has sheaves of corn moulded into cornices over the entrances to several of its buildings and the heads of African elephants and slaves carved in the stone of its town hall, while London has a Great Pagoda at Kew Gardens and Moorish designs incorporated into many of its theatres and museums. Up until the early twentieth century there were Egyptian halls in Piccadilly, while Bolton in

Lancashire has Indian motifs cast into the stalls in its market-place and the oriental style of Brighton's Royal Pavilion makes it the town's most famous building. In addition, Britain's language and food reflect its colonial history in India ('verandah' and 'bungalow', tea and pepper), while its Regency furniture adopted Egyptian designs, and Chinese Willow Patterns on its crockery have long been popular.

Today, Britain has sizeable populations from, for instance, Australia, Bangladesh, Poland, Vietnam and West Africa. Particularly in the 1950s there was substantial immigration to Britain from the Caribbean. The other notable influx in the 1950s and 1960s was from both India and Pakistan (and later from Uganda, when Asians were expelled by Idi Amin). Both of these waves were encouraged by the British authorities and by employers such as London Transport, who set up recruitment offices in Jamaica and elsewhere.

Although quite small in relation to Britain's population as a whole (about 4 per cent), these communities form the majority of certain areas of towns like Bradford and Leicester. The cultural tension for children in these communities is often greater than for their parents, who came to Britain with more positive expectations and often did not intend to settle. The second generation in these communities has had a profound effect on British culture but has also been faced with divided loyalties and opposing cultural pulls. Many young people have adopted (and modified) British pop music and clothes and, particularly in the case of Asian communities, have developed more casual attitudes than their parents

towards the opposite sex (a lesser but similar observation of the generation gap could also be made of white British people).

In 1992, a British Social Attitudes survey suggested that for the first time people in Britain were more optimistic than pessimistic about race relations. Facets of the island outlook of the majority population remain, however. Statistics also show that black people are still discriminated against at immigration control, in the courts, by the police, at work and on the streets. Unlike the American 'melting pot' approach, where minority ethnicities have been encouraged to blend into and become assimilated by the local culture, migrants to Britain have often not sought, nor been encouraged, to integrate into British society. In many respects this means that they have been excluded from the dominant culture. Moreover, if ethnic groups do not have a high profile on TV, the major national cultural arena, they are also marginalised in social and political debates. This awareness is behind Welsh-speakers, claims of the importance to their cultural survival of the TV channel S4C and also partly behind other communities' insistence on better and greater representation on television. The remit of Channel 4, the most recent national television station, was framed explicitly to address such issues and is perceived by some to only show 'minority' programmes while others feel it does not have enough cultural variety and still caters for an ethnic mainstream.

The political Left has tended to welcome the influx of other nationals. For the Right, immigration remains a heated subject, hedged around by xenophobic myths and racist fears, based on

the idea of 'our' beautiful island filling up with foreign nationals. For example, the Conservative MP Winston Churchill said in a speech at Bolton in May 1993 that 'Immigration has to be halted to defend the British way of life'. Contrary to the belief of many, it is a fact that more individuals have left Britain each year since 1964 than have entered. Furthermore, white immigration from countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia far outnumbers that from countries such as India, Bangladesh, Ceylon and Jamaica.

Recent debates have added extra significance to the versions of Britishness outlined in this section. On the one hand, some influential critics such as Stuart Hall have begun to explore seriously the possibility of 'New ethnicities' that are black and British—thus redefining old notions of British identity. On the other hand, social commentators such as John Solomos have warned that a new right-wing conception of England as 'the island race', separate from Europe and distinct from minority ethnicities within the UK, is emerging once more.

National identities

The British image has been described repeatedly in terms of certain strong individuals who stand for single aspects of Britain. This doesn't just apply to stock Shakespearean characters like Falstaff, or Henry Fielding's Parson Adams, or Dickens's Mr Pickwick or Sarah Gamp. It applies to single strong figures who somehow stand for or represent the nation as it has been seen at

particular moments. British stereotypes have been created or reinforced by figures with whom you may be familiar from history, politics, sport or films. For example, the following is a list of symbolic individuals who have all been thought to be quintessentially British: Florence Nightingale and the Queen Mother (sturdy, supportive English womanhood), Winston Churchill and Lord Kitchener ('boys of the bulldog breed', from a popular Victorian music-hall song called 'Sons of the Sea, All British Born'), W.G. Grace and Bobby Charlton (gentlemanly sportsmen) and David Niven, Joyce Grenfell or Margot Fonteyn (the well-mannered, charming English performer). Particularly in fiction there are numerous strong characters in whom British readers are invited to invest their hopes and values. These are figures entrusted with fighting for the country (Biggles), or unravelling a mystery (Miss Marple or Sherlock Holmes), exploring the world (Allan Quartermaine in *King Solomon's Mines*), unmasking spies (Richard Hannay in *The Thirty-nine Steps*), redressing social and financial injustice (Robin Hood) or saving Britain, if not the world, from an evil mastermind (James Bond). These are idealised figures who express strong patriotic beliefs but, unlike the icons we will be looking at in this section, do not *personify* the country.

In the section that follows, we will look at a number of figures who offer alternative representative forms of British identity: Britannia, Albion, John Bull, and the heroes of Arthurian mythology and other folk stories. These are foils against which we would like you to try your own views about Britain and the

British: we hope you will register the obvious disparity between appearance and reality, and that these images are not just part of history. They are powerful ideological images which are routinely used to exercise power in contemporary Britain.

Britannia or Albion

An important cultural and symbolic figure is Britannia, a personification of the country with the name by which the Romans called the area of the islands they controlled—roughly equivalent to modern England and Wales (the islands were only named 'Britannia' because Claudius Caesar wrongly thought that the Britanni, a Gaulish tribe from near Boulogne in northern France, had colonised them). Britannia was a mythical figure who came to represent Britain, and she appears throughout the imperial period in engravings and paintings as the woman, often seated in a Roman chariot and accompanied by a lion, spear and shield, to whom colonised peoples make their offerings and show their subservience. A current use of Britannia herself as an offering to represent all-conquering achievement is given to winners of the annual Brit awards or 'Brits'. These are the 'Oscars' of the British music industry, and the trophy is a small Britannia figure complete with helmet, trident and shield. There are numerous other cultural reminders of this heritage, such as the many 'Britannia' inns and the Britannia bridge that spans the Menai straits (between the island of Anglesey and the Welsh mainland). The royal yacht is called Britannia, as is Britain's foremost holiday airline, while the oldest and largest English language

encyclopaedia, first produced in Scotland but now with a heavy American slant, is called the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and is still widely advertised and sold at shopping complexes throughout the country. From the UK's Roman heritage, Britannia has therefore come to be associated to various degrees with learning, royalty, seafaring and the figure of the woman warrior. The importance of the first three is perhaps easy to understand from British history, but what of the last?

This idea of the strong, noble queen is easily invoked in Britain. Ancient familiar images are those of the warrior Boadicea who led the Iceni tribe against the Romans, the Celtic Fairy Queen Mab, and Cathleen, the personification of Ireland. Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria have both repeatedly been represented as such a defiant queen, leader of a warlike nation, for purposes of imperial rule as well as national pride. Margaret Thatcher's success and charisma were arguably associated with this symbolism which is encapsulated in the song 'Rule, Britannia':

> When Britain first, at heaven's command,
> Arose from out the azure main,
> This was the charter of the land,
> And guardian angels sung this strain:
> 'Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
> Britons never will be slaves'.
>
> James Thomson, *Alfred: A Masque* (1740)