

# British or English – a Clash of Personalities?

by Robin Das

Most people don't bat an eyelid whenever 'English' or 'British' are used to describe the same place or person, but scratch the surface and these words tell us much more about the identities and history of the folk who inhabit these fair isles.

## Census Statistics

Label an Irish, Welsh or Scottish fella British – or worse English – and they'll likely deck you, such is their ferocious loyalty to their homeland – but how do the English see themselves? It was a question that no one had really bothered to think about or ask, until the UK Government put it to the test in its 2011 ten-year census – a snap-shot of its citizens'

o **a clash of** | zderzenie, sprzeczność

**not bat an eyelid** | nie mrugnąć okiem, nie reagować

**to scratch the surface** | robić coś po łebkach, sphycać temat

**to inhabit** | zamieszkiwać

1 **to label** | określać mianem, zaszufładować

**fella** | *pot.* gość, facet

**to deck sb** | *pot.* powalić kogoś na ziemię

**ferocious** *fə'rəʃjəs* | straszliwy, zaciekły

**not to bother to do sth** | nie zadać sobie trudu, żeby coś zrobić

**until** | aż do

**snapshot of sth** | fotka; *tu:* rzut oka na coś



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wealth, make-up and social status. For the first time white respondents\* were asked whether they felt they were English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or

- 2 **wealth** | majątek, bogactwo  
**make-up** | kompozycja, skład
- 3 **de rigueur** ,də ri'gʊ:(r) | *tu*: modny, na czasie  
**angle** | *tu*: punkt widzenia, spojrzenie  
**clear-cut** | klarowny, jasny  
**to force sb to do sth** | zmusić kogoś do zrobienia czegoś  
**tribe** | plemię, ród  
**blurry** 'blɜ:ri | nieostry, niewyraźny  
**homogeneous** | jednorodny  
**overwhelmingly** | zdecydowanie  
**to reveal that...** | ujawniać, że...  
**as opposed to sth** | w przeciwieństwie do czegoś  
**to tick sth** | odhaczyć coś  
**compared to sth** | w porównaniu do czegoś  
**long shot** | *tu*: mało prawdopodobne przedsięwzięcie, trudne przedsięwzięcie  
**resurgence** ri'sɜ:dʒəns | odrodzenie się, ponowny wzrost  
**notion** | pojęcie, wyobrażenie  
**to dub sth** | nazywać coś  
**bleak** | smętny, ponury  
**chilly** | chłodny, zimny
- 4 **outpost** | bastion  
**speckled** | piegawaty  
**to push off** | zmykać, wycofać się  
**virtually** | w zasadzie  
**free-for-all** | ogólna bijatyka, wolna amerykanka  
**to ensue**  
 ɪn'sju: | następować, wywiązywać się  
**skirmish** | potyczka, utarczka  
**lightning strike** | uderzenie pioruna  
**to derive from sth** | wywodzić się od czegoś  
**to hail from X** | pochodzić z X  
**peninsula** | półwysep  
**subsequently** | później  
**to settle** | osiedlać się  
**to interbreed with sb** | skrzyżować się z kimś  
**indigenous** ɪn'dɪdʒəniəs | autochtoniczny, lokalny  
**aptly** | trafnie  
**scant** | niewielki, skąpy, znikomy  
**tangible** 'tændʒəbl | namacalny, dotykalny

British. While questions about ethnicity have been de rigueur since 1991, this angle was less clear-cut. It forced people to think about whether they saw themselves as one of four distinct UK tribes or part of a more blurry, homogeneous British picture. The English census results overwhelmingly revealed that there was a stronger feeling of an English identity as opposed to Britishness – more than 32 million ticked only the English box, compared to just 10 million who ticked only the British option. With an independent Scotland a long shot this year, could we be seeing a resurgence in the no-tion of Englishness?

### Birth of a Nation

So which came first, Britain or England? It was the Romans who dubbed their bleak, chilly,

northern outpost Britannia, taking the word 'British' from the Celtic word 'brit', meaning light-coloured or speckled. After they pushed off, it was virtually an open-house in Britain, and a bit of a free-for-all ensued, with skirmishes and lightning strikes from Scandinavian neighbours. The name England derives from the Germanic tribe the Angles, who hailed from the Angeln peninsula in the Baltic sea, and who subsequently settled and interbred with the indigenous population. During the shadowy centuries that followed, aptly named the Dark Ages, as there is scant tangible evidence from this period, ►



\* *White respondents were also asked if they considered themselves to be non-UK white, a category that would have included most Polish respondents.*

## Words and phrases that collate or have a connection with either Britain or England in popular culture

Britain/UK	England
Prehistoric	Albion (the mythical name for England)
Union Jack	St. George's Cross
The economy	The Bank of England (it serves the UK)
Colonies	Kings and queens
The British Bulldog	Mad dogs and Englishmen (a song)
Cities	Football
The Olympics (Team GB)	Quintessentially English
Stiff upper lip	Roast beef of olde England (an c18 poem)
The Great British banger	The Church of England
The BBC	

three distinct nations emerged – England, Scotland and Wales. In 1707, the United Kingdom came into being when England and Scotland were, politically speaking, joined at the hip.

### Which Flag to Wave

The Union Jack is an amalgamation of the crosses of the knight Saint George, patron saint of England, Scotland's Saint Andrew and Ireland's Saint Patrick. The 'nineties saw a resurgence in the popularity of St. George's flag, driven by die-hard football supporters when the 1996 Euro Championships arrived in London. Football mania went into overdrive, and the nation collectively draped itself in the cross of St. George, as the English team came

within a whisker of making it into the final when up against arch-footballing foe Germany in the semis. Since then, St. George's flag has been part and parcel of a stadium's backdrop whenever the UK's sporting stars strut their stuff. These heroes range from the mixed-race, Olympic gold medallist sprinter Kelly Holmes romping home in the 800 metres, to scouser Steven Gerrard netting one for the English football team.

At first glance it seems an anomaly that Britain fields a Great Britain Olympic team and tennis players compete under a British banner, yet when it comes to most other sports the old tribal loyalties of English, Scot and Welsh still prevail. Why is this? Most team sports, notably football, rugby and cricket, competed as local associations

in the nineteenth century, which then grouped together under an English, Scottish or Welsh identity, and this has stuck. However, the moniker 'Home Nations' is often used for the English, Welsh and Scottish rugby teams when competing internationally, and this keeps a sense of we're still looking out for our buddies. To some extent, having several teams provides fans with a useful fall-back position should their home side get booted out of a tournament. In 1994, when England failed to qualify for the World Cup and the Republic of Ireland scraped through, overnight the true blue English were sporting shamrocks, and trading bitter for Guinness.

### Is Englishness Only Skin Deep?

So if the census revealed that white people residing in England are more likely to identify themselves as English, how do ethnic minorities see themselves? Interestingly, government bods didn't give non-whites the chance to opt for the English tick-box, but only as a subsection of Black or Asian British. Their assumption that non-whites see themselves first and foremost as British does seem to be borne out by ethnic groups, as they tend to opt for being British over English when defining themselves. Not surprising then, that in the census the places where the majority of people saw themselves as British were in the inner London boroughs, where often more than half the

- 5 **to emerge** | wyłaniać się  
**joined at the hip** | blisko powiązani  
**to wave** | machać  
**amalgamation** | połączenie  
**knight** *nait* | rycerz  
**die-hard** | zagorzały  
**championship** | mistrzostwa  
**to go into overdrive** | wejść na najwyższe obroty  
**to drape sth** | przystrajac coś
- 6 **within a whisker of sth** | o włos od czegoś  
**foe** | wróg  
**part and parcel** | nieodłączna część, istotna część  
**to be a backdrop to/for sth** | stanowić tło dla czegoś

- to strut one's stuff** | pokazać, co się potrafi  
**to romp home** | wygrać z łatwością  
**scouser** | osoba pochodząca z Liverpoolu  
**to net sth** | zgarniać coś (np. główną nagrodę)  
**to compete** | współzawodniczyć  
**yet** | *tu: ale*  
**to prevail** | brać górę
- 7 **moniker** | przydomek, przezwisko  
**to look out for sb/sth** | zwracać uwagę na coś/kogoś  
**buddies** | *pot.* bracia, kolesie  
**to some extent** | do pewnego stopnia  
**fall-back position** | plan awaryjny

- booted out** | wykopany, wyrzucony  
**tournament** | turniej  
**to scrape through** | z trudem dawać sobie radę, ledwie się przepchnąć  
**overnight** | z dnia na dzień  
**shamrock** | koniczyna  
**bitter** | angielskie gorzkie piwo  
**skin deep** | powierzchowny  
**likely** | prawdopodobny  
**bod = body** | *pot.* ciało; *tu:* organ  
**to opt for sth** | wybierać coś  
**borne out** | potwierdzony  
**not surprising** | nic dziwnego  
**borough** | gmina



local population are non-UK white. The area which saw itself as the most English was Canvey Island in Essex, a resolutely, white, working-class stronghold.

'Britishness' suggests an urban grit, and the rough and ready, topsy-turvy world of the inner-cities. Here a vibrant, cosmopolitan blend of cultures and a broad range of tastes happily co-exist, rubbing up against each other. In Britain there's a sense that anyone who rocks up to the table will be able to find their place; broad-minded, tolerant and an anything-goes vibe. Being British is a flexible, catch-all adjective able to accommodate one and all.

On the other hand, Englishness does have connotations with lineage and heritage stretching back over time, the countryside and a pre-industrial era; concepts that, perhaps, post-war, colonial immigrants may not feel so in tune with. The term 'little Englander', has been coined to refer to someone who is anti-European, xenophobic and essentially

## So many names for the same place...

The United Kingdom of Great Britain	The political union of three nations, England, Wales and Scotland
The United Kingdom and Northern Ireland	Refers to the inclusion of Northern Ireland.
England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland	Each refers to the individual nations.
Republic of Ireland	A separate independent nation to the UK
The British Isles	All the geographic isles of the UK, including the Republic of Ireland, offshore islands, such as the Isle of Man, and Scottish isles.

conservative. A 'little Englander' will feel that, when it comes to immigration, 'enough's enough' and our island is being 'overrun' with 'Johnny Foreigner', we need to keep the pound, imperial measures and turn our backs on the EU.

## The Garden of England

The term 'middle England', which has gained ground among politicians, is used as a handy badge for the hard-pressed middle classes who reside in the home counties surrounding London, such as Kent, known as the 'garden of England'. In their genteel, picturesque villages and towns Englishness is alive and kicking – tea on the lawn, warm beer, cricket, the village green and the country pub – quintessential ideas of what England stands for.

At the Olympics opening ceremony it was England's maypole dancing green and pleasant land that Danny Boyle evoked before the Industrial Revolution erupted in the middle of it. In recent years, there's been a grass roots push to celebrate Englishness by making the 23 April, St. George's Day, a national public holiday. This is generally seen as a good idea, as it would reclaim the notion of Englishness as being for everyone who lives in England, regardless of colour or religion.

At the end of the day, just like the Union Jack itself, people are an overlapping, merry blend of more than one identity, and may that always continue to be true of the British. ■

- 8 **resolutely** | zdecydowanie, całkowicie
- stronghold** | bastion
- grit** | *tu*: charakter
- rough and ready** | prosty, niewyszukany
- topsy-turvy** *ˈtɒpsɪ ˈtʃɜːvi* | bez ładu i składu
- to rub up against sb/sth** | ocierać się o kogoś/coś, wpadać na kogoś/coś
- to rock up** | przybyć
- broad-minded** | liberalny, o otwartym umyśle
- anything-goes** | wszystko jest możliwe, wszystko wolno
- vibe** | atmosfera
- to accommodate sth** | *tu*: uwzględnić coś
- connotation** | konotacja

- heritage** | dziedzictwo, spuścizna
- to stretch back** | ciągnąć się przez, sięgać czegoś
- in tune with sth** | przystawać do czegoś
- coined** | ukuty (np. termin)
- to refer to sb/sth** | odnosić się do kogoś/czegoś
- 9 **enough's enough** | dość tego
- overrun** | opanowany
- Johnny Foreigner** | osoba mieszkająca w Wlk. Brytanii, która nie pochodzi z Wlk. Brytanii
- to turn one's back on sb/sth** | odwrócić się od kogoś/czegoś
- to gain ground** | zyskiwać poparcie, zyskiwać na popularności

- handy** | użyteczny, przydatny
- badge** | plakietka, identyfikator
- hard-pressed** | przyparto do muru
- to reside** | mieszkać
- genteel** | nobliwy, szacowny
- alive and kicking** | w doskonałej formie
- to stand for sth** | oznaczać coś
- 10 **maypole** | ozdobny słup, gajk
- to evoke** | przywoływać
- in recent years** | w ostatnich latach
- grass roots** | obywatelski, lokalny
- regardless of sth** | niezależnie od czegoś
- overlapping** | zachodzący na siebie
- merry** | wesoły, radosny
- blend of sth** | mieszanka czegoś