

The people

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THE BRITISH-IRISH ISLES HAVE ATTRACTED settlers, invaders and immigrants throughout their history. The contemporary British are consequently composed of people from worldwide origins and are divided into what became the English, Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish. But these groups often have mixed roots derived from varied settlement, internal migration and assimilation. Such descent patterns are important elements in considering the ethnicities of the British peoples today.

For example, an individual may have an ethnic family background consisting of intermarriage between English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh. A *Guinness* survey in March 2001 reported that 42 per cent of people aged 18–34 in England, Scotland and Wales believed that they had Irish roots. Other polls show that one in four adult Britons claims Irish blood, although experts argue that the true figure is probably one in ten.

There are also immigrant minorities with their own identities who have come to Britain over the centuries and who have sometimes intermarried with the existing populations. Even the English language, which binds most of these people together linguistically, is a blend of Germanic, Romance and other world languages. This historical development has created a contemporary society with multinational and multi-ethnic characteristics. But it also raises controversial questions about the meaning of ‘Britishness’ and national identities.

Early settlement to AD 1066

There is no accurate picture of what the early settlement of the British-Irish Isles was actually like, and there were long periods when the islands were uninhabited. Historians and archaeologists constantly revise traditional theories about the gradual growth of the country as new evidence comes to light.

The earliest human bones found (1994) in Britain are 500,000 years old. The first people were probably Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) nomads from mainland Europe, who were characterized by their use of rudimentary stone implements. They travelled to Britain by land and sea, especially at those times when the country was joined to the European land mass.

Later settlers in the Mesolithic and Neolithic (Middle and New Stone Age) periods between 8300 and 2000 BC had more advanced skills in stone carving. Some came from central Europe and settled in eastern Britain. Others arrived by sea from Iberian (Spanish-Portuguese) areas and populated Cornwall, Ireland, Wales, the Isle of Man and western Scotland. Their descendants live today in the same western parts. Neolithic groups built large wood, soil and stone monuments, such as Stonehenge, and later arrivals (the Beaker Folk) introduced a Bronze Age culture.

Between ca 600 BC and AD 43 there was a movement of Celtic tribes into the islands from mainland Europe, bringing an Iron Age civilization with them. But the Celts possessed at least two main languages and were divided into many different tribes with conflicts between them. Celtic civilization dominated the British-Irish Isles until it was overcome by Belgic tribes (also of Celtic origin) around 200 BC.

The Belgic tribes were then subjected to a series of Roman expeditions from 55 BC. The Roman military occupation of the islands (except for Ireland and most of Scotland) lasted from AD 43 until 409. The term 'Britain' derives from the Greek and Latin names given to England and Wales by the Romans, although it may stem from Celtic originals. It is argued that the Romans did not mix with the existing population and that their lasting influence was slight. But some Christian practices spread throughout the islands and there is still physical evidence of the Roman presence.

After Roman withdrawal, Germanic tribes such as Angles (from which 'England' is derived), Saxons and Jutes from north-western Europe invaded the country. They either mixed with the existing population or pushed it westwards. The country was divided into separate and often warring Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in England (except for Cornwall), with Celtic areas in Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

Many of these regions suffered from Scandinavian (Viking) military invasions in the eighth and ninth centuries, until the Scandinavians were defeated in England, Scotland and Ireland in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The Scandinavian presence, after initial fleeting raids, was reflected in some permanent settlement, assimilation, farming and political institutions.

Early English history was completed when the Anglo-Saxons were defeated by French-Norman invaders at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and England was subjected to their rule. The Norman Conquest was an important watershed in English history and marked the last successful external military invasion of the country. It influenced the English people and their language (since French was the language of the nobility for the next three hundred years) and initiated many of the social, legal and institutional frameworks, such as a feudal system (hierarchical structure from top to bottom of society), which were to characterize future British society.

But Celtic civilizations continued in what are now Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Roman rule did not extend to Scotland, which was inhabited (except for Angles in the south) by the original Picts and the later Scots from Ireland who colonized western Scotland (200–400), giving their name to present-day Scotland. In the tenth and eleventh centuries Ireland and its tribal kingdoms were influenced by Scandinavians.

Different peoples had entered the British-Irish Isles from the south-west, the east and the north by 1066. But settlement was often hindered by climatic and geographical obstacles, particularly in the north and west. Many newcomers tended to concentrate initially in southern England, and settlement patterns were not uniform over all of Britain at the same time. Despite some intermixture between the various settlers, there were ethnic differences between the English and the people of Ireland, Wales and Scotland, as well as varying identities between groups in all regions. It is this mixture, increased by later immigration, which has produced the present ethnic and national diversity in Britain.

The early settlement and invasion movements substantially affected the developing fabric of British life and formed the first foundations of the modern state. The newcomers often imposed their cultures on the existing society, as well as adopting some of the native characteristics. Today there are few British towns which lack any physical evidence of the successive changes. They also profoundly influenced social, legal, economic, political, agricultural and administrative institutions and contributed to the evolving language.

There are no realistic population figures for the early British-Irish Isles. The nomadic lifestyle of groups of up to twenty people gradually ceased and was replaced by more permanent settlements of a few hundred inhabitants. It is estimated that the English population during the Roman occupation was one million. By the Norman period, the eleventh-century

TABLE 2.1 Early settlement to AD 1066

500,000–8300 BC	Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age)
8300 BC	Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age)
4000 BC	Neolithic (New Stone Age)
2000 BC	Beaker Folk (Bronze Age)
ca 600 BC	Celts (Iron Age)
200 BC	Belgic tribes
AD 43	The Romans
AD 410	Germanic tribes (Anglo-Saxons)
8th to 11th centuries	The Scandinavians
AD 1066	The Norman Conquest

Domesday Book showed an increase to 2 million. The *Domesday Book* was the first systematic attempt to evaluate England's wealth and population, mainly for taxation purposes.

Growth and immigration to the twentieth century

England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland had more clearly (if not completely) defined identities and geographical areas by the twelfth century. The British state then gradually developed through colonization and political unification. This process was accompanied by fierce and bloody conflicts between the nations, often resulting in lasting tensions and bitterness.

Political and military attempts were made by England to unite Wales, Scotland and Ireland under the English Crown. English monarchs tried to conquer or ally themselves with these other countries as a protection against threats from within the islands and from continental Europe, as well as for increased power and possessions.

Ireland was invaded by Henry II in 1169. Much of the country was then controlled by Anglo-Norman nobles but little direct authority was initially exercised from England. The later colonization of Ireland by the English and the Scots became a source of conflict between the countries. But it also led to Irish settlements in Scotland, London and west-coast ports such as Liverpool. Ireland later became part of the United Kingdom in 1801 but, after a period of violence and political unrest, was divided in 1921–22 into the independent Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (which is part of the UK).

Wales, after Roman rule, remained a Celtic country, although influenced by Anglo-Norman England. Between 1282 and 1285 Edward I's military campaign brought Wales under English rule, and he built castles and deployed garrisons there. Apart from a period of freedom in 1402–07, Wales was integrated legally and administratively with England by Acts of Union 1536–42.

The English also tried to conquer Scotland by military force, but were repulsed at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Scotland was then to remain independent until the political union between the two countries in 1707, when the creation of Great Britain (England/Wales and Scotland) took place. But Scotland and England had shared a common monarch since 1603 when James VI of Scotland became James I of England.

England, Wales and Scotland had meanwhile become predominantly Protestant in religion as a result of the European Reformation. But Ireland remained Catholic and tried to distance itself from England, thus adding religion to colonialism as a foundation for future problems.

Britain therefore is not a single, ethnically homogeneous country, but rather a recent and potentially unstable union of four old nations. Great Britain is only slightly older than the USA, and the United Kingdom (1801) is younger. Nor did the political unions appreciably alter the relationships between the four nations. The English often treated their Celtic neighbours as colonial subjects rather than equal partners, and Englishness became a dominant strand in concepts of Britishness, because of the role that the English have played in the formation of Britain.

However, despite the tensions and bitterness between the four nations, there was a steady internal migration between them. This mainly involved movements of Irish, Welsh and Scottish people into England. Relatively few English emigrated to Wales and Scotland, although there was English and Scottish settlement in Ireland over the centuries.

Immigration from abroad also continued over the centuries owing to factors such as religious and political persecution, trade, business and employment. Immigrants have had a significant impact on British society. They have contributed to financial institutions, commerce, industry and agriculture, and influenced artistic, cultural and political developments. But immigrant activity and success have resulted in jealousy, discrimination and violence from the native population.

In addition to political integration, Britain's growth was also conditioned first by a series of agricultural changes and second by a number of later industrial revolutions. Agriculture started with Neolithic settlers and continued with the Saxons in England who cleared the forests, cultivated crops and introduced inventions and equipment which remained in use for centuries. Their open-field system of farming (with strips of land being worked by local people) was later replaced by widespread sheep-herding and wool production.

Britain expanded agriculturally and commercially from the eleventh century, and also developed manufacturing industries. Immigration was often characterized by financial and agricultural skills. Jewish money-lenders entered England with the Norman Conquest, to be followed later by Lombard bankers from northern Italy. This commercial expertise helped to create greater wealth and was influenced by the merchants of the German Hansa League, who set up their trading posts in London and on the east coast of England. Around 1330, Dutch and Flemish weavers arrived, who by the end of the fifteenth century had helped to transform England into a major nation of sheep farmers, cloth producers and textile exporters. Fourteenth-century immigration also introduced specialized knowledge in a variety of manufacturing trades.

Some immigrants stayed only for short periods. Others remained and adapted themselves to British society, while preserving their own cultural and ethnic identities. Newcomers were often encouraged to settle in Britain,

and the policy of using immigrant expertise continued in later centuries. But foreign workers had no legal rights, and early immigrants, such as Jews and the Hansa merchants, could be summarily expelled.

Agricultural and commercial developments were reflected in changing population concentrations. From Saxon times to around 1800, Britain had an agriculturally based economy and some 80 per cent of the people lived in villages in the countryside. Settlement was mainly concentrated in the south and east of England, where the rich agricultural regions of East Anglia and Lincolnshire had the greatest population densities. During the fourteenth century, however, the steady increase of people was halted by a series of plagues, and numbers did not start to increase again for another hundred years.

As agricultural production moved into sheep farming and clothing manufactures, larger numbers of people settled around woollen ports, such as Bristol in the west and coastal towns in East Anglia. Others moved to cloth-producing areas in the West Country (south-western parts of England) and the Cotswolds and initiated the growth of market towns. The south midland and eastern English counties had the greatest densities of people, and the population at the end of the seventeenth century is estimated at 5.5 million for England and Wales and 1 million for Scotland.

Other newcomers continued to arrive from overseas, including gypsies, blacks (associated with the slave trade) and a further wave of Jews, who in 1655 created the first permanent Jewish community. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the country attracted a large number of refugees, such as Dutch Protestants and French Huguenots, who were driven from Europe by warfare, political and religious persecution and employment needs. This talented and urbanized immigration contributed considerably to the national economy and added a new dimension to a largely agricultural population. But, from around 1700, there was to be no more large immigration into the country for the next two hundred years. Britain was exporting more people than it received, mainly to North America and the expanding colonies worldwide.

A second central development in British history was a number of industrial revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These transformed Britain from an agricultural economy into an industrial and manufacturing country. Processes based on coal-generated steam power were discovered and exploited. Factories and factory towns were needed to mass-produce new manufactured goods. Villages in the coalfields and industrial areas grew rapidly into manufacturing centres. A drift of population away from the countryside began in the late eighteenth century, as people sought work in urban factories to escape rural poverty and unemployment. They moved, for example, to textile mills in Lancashire and Yorkshire and to heavy industries and pottery factories in the West Midlands.

The earlier agricultural population changed radically in the nineteenth century into an industrialized workforce. The 1801 census (the first modern measurement of population) gave figures of over 8 million for England, Wales half a million, 1.5 million for Scotland and over 5 million for Ireland. But, between 1801 and 1901, the population of England and Wales trebled to 30 million. The numbers in Scotland increased less rapidly, owing to emigration, but in Ireland the population was reduced from 8 to 4 million because of famine, deaths and emigration. The greatest concentrations of people were now in London and industrial areas of the Midlands, south Lancashire, Merseyside, Clydeside, Tyneside, Yorkshire and south Wales.

The industrial revolution reached its height during the early nineteenth century. It did not require foreign labour because there were enough skilled British workers and a ready supply of unskilled labourers from Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the English countryside. Welshmen from north Wales went to the Lancashire textile mills; Highland Scots travelled to the Lowland Clydeside industries; and Irishmen flocked to England and Scotland to work in the manual trades of the industrial infrastructure constructing roads, railways and canals. These migratory movements promoted conflicts but also assimilation.

Industrialization expanded commercial markets, which attracted new immigrants who had the business and financial skills to exploit the industrial wealth. Some newcomers joined City of London financial institutions and the import/export trades, to which they contributed their international



PLATE 2.1 Women at work in a McVitie's food factory (© Karen Robinson/Format)

connections. Other settlers were involved in a wide range of occupations and trades. Immigration to Britain might have been greater in the nineteenth century had it not been for the attraction of North America, which was receiving large numbers of newcomers from all over the world, including Britain.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Britain was the world's leading industrial nation and one of the richest. But it gradually lost its world lead in manufacturing industry, most of which was in native British hands. However, its position in international finance, some of which was under immigrant control, was retained into the twentieth century.

Immigration from 1900

Immigrants historically had relatively free access to Britain. But they could be easily expelled; had no legal rights to protect them; and restrictions were increasingly imposed upon them. But the 1871 census showed that the number of people in Britain born outside the British Empire was only 157,000 out of a population of some 31.5 million.

Despite these low figures, immigration and asylum seekers caused public and political concern, which continued through the twentieth century. In the early years of the century, Jews and Poles escaped persecution in Eastern Europe and settled in the East End of London, which has always been an area of immigrant concentration. Demands for immigration control grew and an anti-foreigner feeling spread, fuelled by the nationalism and spy mania caused by the First World War (1914–18). But laws (such as the Aliens Act of 1905), which were designed to curtail foreign entry, proved ineffective. By 1911 the number of people in Britain born outside the empire was 428,000 or 1 per cent of the population.

Despite legal controls, and partly as a result of the 1930s world recession and the Second World War, refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe and immigrants entered Britain. After the war, Poles, Latvians, Ukrainians and other nationalities chose to stay in Britain. Later in the twentieth century, political refugees arrived, such as Hungarians, Czechs, Chileans, Libyans, East African Asians, Iranians, Vietnamese and other Eastern Europeans, in addition to Italian, French, German, Irish, Turkish, Cypriot, Chinese and Spanish economic immigrants. These groups today form sizeable ethnic minorities and are found throughout the country. Such newcomers have often suffered from discrimination, some more than others, since racism is not a new phenomenon in Britain.

But public and political concern then turned to the issues of race and colour, which were to dominate the immigration debate and focused on non-white Commonwealth immigration. Before the Second World War,

most Commonwealth immigrants to Britain came from the largely white Old Commonwealth countries of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and from South Africa. All Commonwealth citizens were allowed free access and were not treated as aliens.

But from the late 1940s, people from the non-white New Commonwealth nations of India, Pakistan and the West Indies came to Britain (sometimes at the invitation of government agencies) to fill the vacant manual and lower-paid jobs of an expanding economy. West Indians worked in public transport, catering, the Health Service and manual trades in London, Birmingham and other large cities. Indians and Pakistanis later arrived to work in the textile and iron industries of Leeds, Bradford and Leicester (which may be the first British city to have a non-white majority population). By the 1970s, non-white people became a familiar sight in other British towns such as Glasgow, Sheffield, Bristol, Huddersfield, Manchester, Liverpool, Coventry and Nottingham. There was a considerable dispersal of such immigrants throughout Britain, although many tended to settle in the central areas of industrial cities.

These non-white communities have now increased and work in a broad range of occupations. Some, particularly Indian Asians and black Africans, have been successful in economic and professional terms. Others have experienced considerable problems such as low-paid jobs, unemployment, educational disadvantage, decaying housing in the inner cities and racial discrimination. It is argued that Britain possesses a deep-rooted (or institutional) racism based on the legacy of empire and notions of racial superiority, which continues to manifest itself and has hindered the integration of the non-white population into the larger society. Many young non-whites who have been born in Britain feel particularly bitter at their experiences and at their relative lack of educational and employment possibilities and advancement.

So many New Commonwealth immigrants were coming to Britain that from 1962 governments treated most Commonwealth newcomers as aliens and followed a two-strand policy on immigration. This consisted, first, of Immigration Acts to restrict the number of immigrants entering the country and, second, of Race Relations Acts to protect the rights of those immigrants already settled in Britain.

Race Relations Acts make it unlawful to discriminate against persons on grounds of racial, ethnic or national origin in areas such as education, housing, employment, services and advertising. Those who suffer alleged discrimination can appeal to Race Relations Tribunals, and anti-discrimination bodies have also been established, culminating with the Commission for Racial Equality in 1976. This body, which is not without its critics, works for the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity.

There is still criticism of the immigration laws and race-relations organizations. Some people argue that one cannot legislate satisfactorily against discrimination, and others would like stricter controls. The concerns of some white people are made worse by racist speeches; the growth of extreme nationalist parties such as the National Front and the British National Party; and racially inspired violence. Non-white citizens, on the other hand, often feel that they too easily and unfairly became scapegoats for any problems that arise. Some become alienated from British society and reject institutions such as the police, legal system and political structures. Government policies since the 1940s have not always helped to lessen either white or non-white anxieties.

Immigration and race remain problematic. They are complex matters; are exploited for political purposes from both the right and the left; and can be over-dramatized. Many non-white immigrants and their British-born children have slowly adapted to the larger society, whilst retaining their ethnic identities. Britain does have a relatively stable diversity of cultures and the highest rate of intermarriage and mixed-race relationships in Europe, with one in eight children under five having parents from different ethnic backgrounds. But outbreaks of racial tension, violence and harassment do occur, and there are accusations that the police and the courts ignore or underplay race crimes. A central concern for some people is that race problems are not being openly and fairly debated.

In 1999–2000, 93.3 per cent of Britons were classified as white and 6.7 per cent belonged to non-white groups of whom 46 per cent were born in Britain. Non-whites therefore constitute a relatively small proportion of the total British population and 49 per cent of them live in London (as opposed to 10 per cent of the white population) (Table 2.2).

TABLE 2.2 Non-white ethnic minorities in Britain, 1999–2000

Indian	942,000
Pakistani	671,000
Black Caribbean	504,000
Black African	374,000
Bangladeshi	257,000
Black mixed	184,000
Black other (non-mixed)	124,000
Chinese	133,000
Other Asian (non-mixed)	217,000
Others	427,000
Total non-white ethnic minorities	3,832,000

Source: Labour Force Survey/Office for National Statistics, 2001

The non-white population was earlier largely composed of immigrant families or single people. But this structure has changed as more dependants join settled immigrants, as British-born non-whites develop their own family organizations and as more people intermarry. The term 'immigrant' has now lost some of its earlier significance and the emphasis has switched to debates about what constitutes a 'multi-ethnic society'.

Apart from a few categories of people who have a right of abode in Britain and are not subject to immigration control, all others require either entry clearance or permission to enter and remain. Generally speaking, such newcomers (apart from short-term visitors) need a work permit and a guaranteed job if they hope to stay in the country for longer periods of time. But dependants of immigrants already settled in Britain may be granted the right of entry and permanent settlement.

There are also many other ethnic minority communities in Britain, which are usually classified as white. Immigration from the Republic of Ireland continues; the Irish have historically been a large immigrant group; and there are some 800,000 people of primary Irish descent. Movement from the Old Commonwealth countries (such as Australia, Canada and South Africa) has increased slightly, while that of other Commonwealth citizens has dropped following entry restrictions. There has been an increase in immigrants from European Union countries (such as Germany, Spain, Italy and France), who have the right to seek work and reside in Britain, with sizeable numbers from the USA and Middle East.

There are legal distinctions between immigration (a controlled entry system often based on economic factors) into Britain and political asylum (fleeing from persecution). In 2000, 125,000 immigrants were accepted for permanent settlement (more than in previous years). They came from Africa, the Indian subcontinent, the rest of Asia and non-EU Europe, with many being dependants of settled immigrants. This suggests that a significant immigration continues, despite restrictive legislation.

But the Labour government is evaluating the rules for the admission of asylum seekers following public concern and controversy about the increasing numbers entering Britain and suspicions that many are economic migrants rather than being genuinely in humanitarian need. In 2001, the top six countries from which registered asylum seekers came to Britain were Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Iran. However, it is estimated that there may be one million illegal asylum seekers and immigrants in Britain. On the other hand, the country's economy is dependent upon immigrant labour to compensate for a declining birth rate and it is argued that immigration and asylum regulations need to be realistically reformed.

Opinion polls for some years had suggested that race relations, immigration and asylum were of less concern for British people than they were from the 1940s to the 1980s. A MORI poll in 1995 found that 78 per cent

of respondents said that they were not at all prejudiced against people of other races. But a *Guardian* newspaper poll in 2001 said that 70 per cent of its readers thought that race relations were not getting better in Britain. A MORI poll in June 2001 reported that actual worries about immigration and race relations have increased from 3 per cent in 1996 to 19 per cent in 2001.

Acceptance for settlement does not mean automatic citizenship. Naturalization occurs only when certain requirements have been fulfilled, together with a period of residence. New conditions for naturalization and redefinitions of British citizenship are contained in the Nationality Act of 1981. This Act has been criticized by some as providing further restrictions on immigration procedures.

However, it is important that emigration from Britain is considered if the immigration/race debate is to be kept in perspective. Historically, there has usually been a balance of migration, with emigration cancelling out immigration in real terms. But there have been periods of high emigration. Groups left England and Scotland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to become settlers and colonists in Ireland and North America. Millions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries emigrated to New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada, other colonies and the USA. But in 1998, there was a net gain of 181,000 to the population as more people entered the country than left. More entrants were from the Old Commonwealth and the EU than in previous years.

Population movements from 1900

Industrial areas with heavy population densities developed in the nineteenth century. But considerable population shifts occurred in the twentieth century, which were mainly due to economic and employment changes.

There was a drift of people away from industrial Tyneside and South Wales during the 1920s and 1930s trade depressions as coal production, steel manufacture and other heavy industries were badly affected. Since the 1950s there has been little increase in population in industrial areas of the Central Lowlands of Scotland, Tyneside, Merseyside, West Yorkshire, south Wales and Northern Ireland, which have seen a run-down in traditional industries and rises in unemployment. Instead, people moved away from these regions, first to the English Midlands with their diversified industries and then to London and south-east England where employment opportunities (despite fluctuations) and affluence were greater.

The reduction of the rural population and the expansion of urban centres continued into the twentieth century. But, by the middle of the century, there was a movement of people away from the centres of big cities

such as London, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Leeds. This was due to bomb damage during the Second World War, slum clearance and the need to use inner-city land for shops, offices, warehouses and transport utilities. So-called New Towns in rural areas and council housing estates outside the inner cities were specifically created to accommodate the displaced population. Road systems were built with motorways and bypasses to avoid congested areas, and rural locations around some cities were designated as Green Belts, in which no building was permitted.

Many people choose to live some distance from their workplaces, often in a city's suburbs, neighbouring towns (commuter towns) or rural areas. This has contributed to the decline of inner-city populations, and one British person in five now lives in the countryside with the rest in towns and cities. Densities are highest in Greater London and in south-east England and lowest in rural regions of northern Scotland, the Lake District, Wales and Northern Ireland. The latest figures suggest an increasing movement of people to rural areas. This has been accompanied by population losses in and company relocations from large cities, particularly London.

In 1999–2001 the population of the United Kingdom was 59,501,000, which consisted of England with 49,753,000, Wales with 2,937,000, Scotland with 5,119,000 and Northern Ireland with 1,692,000. These figures give a population density for the United Kingdom of some 600 persons per square mile (242 per sq km), well above the European Union average. England has an average density of some 940 persons per square mile (381 per sq km) and this average does not reveal the even higher densities in some areas of the country, such as London, the West Midlands, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Tyne and Wear, Edinburgh and Cardiff. Within Europe, only the Netherlands has a higher population density than England.

The British population grew by only 0.3 per cent between 1971 and 1978, which gave it one of the lowest increases in Western Europe. A similarly low growth rate is forecast in the twenty-first century, with the population expected to be 60.4 million by 2011 and 61.8 million by 2021. But the non-white ethnic minorities are growing fifteen times faster than

TABLE 2.3 Populations of major British cities (estimated 2000)

Greater London	7,187,000	Liverpool	461,000
Birmingham	1,013,000	Edinburgh	450,000
Leeds	727,000	Manchester	422,000
Glasgow	619,000	Bristol	402,000
Sheffield	531,000	Cardiff	320,000
Bradford	483,000	Belfast	279,000

the white population and are also much younger. It is estimated that the counties of southern and central England will have the highest population growth up to 2011 and that the heaviest population losses will occur on Tyneside and Merseyside.

Attitudes to national, regional and local identities

Immigration to Britain has often been seen as a threat to British moral, social and cultural values. Yet the British-Irish Isles have always been culturally and ethnically diverse. There are many differences between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and distinctive ways of life and identities within each nation at national, regional and local levels. The meaning of contemporary 'Britishness' consequently becomes problematic.

The history of the British-Irish Isles before the eighteenth century is not about a single British identity or political entity. It is about four different nations and their peoples, who have often been hostile towards one another. 'Britishness' since the 1707 union between England/Wales and Scotland has been largely identified with representative and centralized state institutions, such as monarchy, Parliament, law and Protestant churches, and their values. Concepts of Britishness were more widely used in the nineteenth century and tied to the Victorian monarchy and Britain's imperial, industrial and military position in the world. These elements have since weakened relative to Britain's decline.

Terms such as 'British' and 'Britain' can seem artificial to many people in the contemporary UK population, who have retained different cultural and national identities. Foreigners often call all British people 'English' and have difficulties in appreciating the distinctions, or the irritation of the non-English population at such labelling. The Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish are regarded largely as Celtic peoples (with admixtures over centuries), while the English are considered to be mainly Anglo-Saxon in origin. It is argued that the 'British' today do not have a strong sense of a 'British' identity. In this view, there needs to be a rethinking of what it means to be British in the contexts of a multinational, multi-ethnic UK and a changing Europe.

There has obviously been ethnic and cultural assimilation in Britain over the centuries, which resulted from adaptation by immigrant groups and internal migration between the four nations. Social, political and institutional standardization and a British awareness were established. However, the British identification is often equated with English norms because of England's historical role: political unification occurred under the English Crown, UK state power is still mainly concentrated in London, and the English dominate numerically.

English nationalism has historically been the most potent of the four nationalisms, and the English had no real problem with the dual national role. But some now seem to be unsure about their identity in a devolved Britain. The Scots and Welsh are more aware of the difference between their nationalism and Britishness; resent the English dominance; see themselves as different from the English; and regard their cultural feelings as crucial. Their sense of identity is conditioned by the tension between their distinctive histories and a history of centralized government from London.

National identity in the four nations was until recently largely cultural and the British political union was generally accepted, except for some people in the minority Catholic population of Northern Ireland. But political nationalism increased in the 1960s and 1970s in Scotland and Wales. Today, following devolution in 1999–2000, calls for full independence in these two nations are not strong, except from the Scottish National Party (SNP) and (arguably) the Welsh National Party (Plaid Cymru). It has been suggested that Scottish and Welsh devolution may spark a resurgence in English nationalism.

The Welsh, English and Scottish seem increasingly to be defining themselves more in terms of their individual nationalities, rather than as British. A *Sunday Times* poll in 2000 found that schoolchildren clearly saw themselves as English (66 per cent), Scottish (82) or Welsh (79). Some 84 per cent of English children regarded England as their home (rather than Britain) and 75 per cent felt that their nationality was important to them. But there was little interest in the creation of regional English assemblies and little desire for a break-up of the United Kingdom.

However, there are also differences on regional and local levels within the four nations themselves. Some English regions such as the north-east and north-west react against London influences and demand decentralized political autonomy. Since the English are a relatively mixed people, their customs, accents and behaviour vary considerably and some regional identifications are still strong. The Cornish, for example, see themselves as a distinctive cultural element in English society and have an affinity with Celtic and similar ethnic groups in Britain and Europe. The northern English have often regarded themselves as superior to the southern English, and vice versa. On a smaller level, English county and local loyalties (often centred on cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Birmingham or London) are still maintained and may be shown in sports, politics, food habits, competitions, cultural activities or a specific way of life.

In Wales, there are cultural and political differences between the industrial south (which supports the Labour Party) and the rest of the mainly rural country; between Welsh-speaking Wales in the north-west and centre (which supports Plaid Cymru) and English-influenced Wales in the



PLATE 2.2 A Scottish fling (*The Hutchison Library*)

east and south-west (where the Conservative Party has some support); and between the cities of Cardiff and Swansea.

Yet Welsh people generally are very conscious of their differences from the English, despite the fact that many Welsh people have mixed English-Welsh ancestry. Their national and cultural identity is grounded in their history; literature; the Welsh language (actively spoken by 19 per cent of the population); sport (such as rugby football); and festivals such as the National Eisteddfod (with its Welsh poetry competitions, dancing and music). It is also echoed in close-knit industrial and agricultural communities and in a tradition of social, political and religious dissent from English norms. Today, many Welsh people feel that they are struggling for their national identity against political power in London and the erosion of their culture and language by English institutions. A limited form of devolution has helped to alleviate these feelings and increase Welsh identity.

Similarly, Scots generally unite in defence of their national identity and distinctiveness because of historical reactions to the English. They are conscious of their traditions, which are reflected in cultural festivals and different legal, religious and educational systems. There has been resentment against the centralization of political power in London and alleged economic neglect of Scotland (although the UK government provides greater economic subsidies per head of population to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland than to England). Devolved government in Edinburgh has removed some of these objections and focused on Scottish identity.

But Scots are divided by three languages (Gaelic, Scots and English, the first of these being spoken by 1.5 per cent of the Scottish population or 70,000 people), different religions, prejudices and regionalisms. Cultural differences separate Lowlanders and Highlanders and deep rivalries exist between the two major cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

In Northern Ireland, the social, cultural and political differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants have long been evident and today are often reflected in geographical ghettos. Groups in both communities feel frustration with the English and hostility towards the British government in London. But the Protestant Unionists are loyal to the Crown; regard themselves as British; and wish to continue the union with Britain. Many Catholic Nationalists feel Irish and would prefer to be united with the Republic of Ireland. Devolution in Northern Ireland has not succeeded in eradicating deep-seated differences between the two communities.

These features suggest that the contemporary British are a very diverse people with varying identities. It is as difficult to find an English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish person who conforms to all or even some of their assumed national stereotypes as it is to find a typical Briton. Within Britain, ethnic minorities (both white and non-white) may use dual or multiple identities



PLATE 2.3 Notting Hill Carnival, a popular annual event in London

(© Jenny Matthews/Format)

and embrace different loyalties. Many call themselves British or more specifically English, Welsh, Irish or Scottish, while still identifying with their countries of origin or descent. Sometimes they employ their ethnic ties to define themselves as Afro-Caribbean, Black British or British Asians. They may also embrace identities which relate to their religion, for example British Muslims or Hindus and British Jews. But a *Sunday Times* survey in November 2001 suggested that 68 per cent of Muslims considered that being Muslim was more important than being British (14 per cent thought the opposite).

Foreigners often have either specific notions of what they think the British are like or, in desperation, seek a unified picture of national character, based sometimes upon stereotypes, quaint traditions or tourist views of Britain. The emphasis in this search should perhaps be more upon an examination of ethnic diversity or pluralism in British life. A *British Council/MORI* poll in 1999 found that overseas respondents felt that Britain is a multicultural society though opinion was divided as to whether or not it is also racially tolerant. It found that the countries that are least willing to believe that UK society is racially tolerant are those that are least aware of its multicultural composition.

But 'multiculturalism' is a strongly debated issue in Britain. Some critics favour the separate development of cultural groups and the preservation of their ethnic identities. Others argue for assimilation. The latter

implies an acceptance of basic common values, including those represented by civic social and political structures, which have primacy over individual cultural identities.

These concerns are central to attempts to define 'Britishness'. Surveys (such as the Springpoint *I? UK – Voices of Our Times*, 1999) suggest there is a popular movement away from the allegedly negative, imperial and English-dominated historical implications of Britishness to a more positive, value-based, inclusive image with which the four nations and their populations can feel comfortable. A Britishness which encompasses opportunity, respect, tolerance, supportiveness, progress and decency is supposed to be attractive to the Celtic nations and ethnic minorities. But these values have to be realized within defining institutional structures.



Exercises

Explain and examine the following terms:

nomads	bypass	Anglo-Saxon	industrialization
Neolithic	East End	Hansa	National Front
density	Celtic	devolution	Hastings
Merseyside	<i>Domesday Book</i>	immigrant	naturalization
racism	Britishness	Iberian	discrimination
census	emigration	Huguenots	Green Belt

Write short essays on the following topics:

- 1 Describe in outline the history of settlement and immigration in Britain.
- 2 Examine the changing patterns of population distribution in Britain.
- 3 Is it correct to describe contemporary Britain as a 'multi-ethnic' and 'multinational' society? If so, why?



Further reading

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Websites



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- Looking into England: www.britishcouncil.org/studies/english
- British Studies Now: www.britishcouncil.org/studies/bsn.htm
- Scotland Office: www.scottishsecretary.gov.uk
- Wales Office: www.wales.gov.uk
- Northern Ireland Office: www.nio.gov.uk