



George's Combat, 1745, Library of Congress, 2002699083

The English Diaspora Project

Christmas Newsletter, December 2012

Contents



- Welcome & News p. 3
- Upcoming Events p. 4
- Recent Digital Community Stories p. 5
- From the Archive:
The English Christmas pp. 6-7
- Research p. 8
- Contact Us p. 9



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Welcome & News



Welcome to the English Diaspora Christmas Newsletter!

It has been an exciting few months since our last Newsletter, with team members pursuing their research and uncovering many new facets of English life and culture in North America. David Gleeson and Tanja Buelmann gave papers at the British Scholar Society conference (Britain and the World) in Edinburgh in June 2012, and Don MacRaild has been drafting an article on the International Magna Charta Day Association. It has been a productive time.

In June we held our first English Diaspora Advisory Board meeting, welcoming Professor John Belchem (University of Liverpool), Professor Jonathan Clark (Kansas University, USA), and Professor Graeme Morton (University of Guelph, Canada) at Northumbria. The day comprised a full discussion of project progress and presentations by English Diaspora project team members. In the afternoon, we held a colloquium on 'Symbols of Britishness' organised by our colleague Gaby Mahlberg. Papers included:

Glyn Parry: 'Lifting the Norman Yoke: Keeping the Past Useful'

Gaby Mahlberg: 'Making and Breaking the Ancient Constitution in Seventeenth-Century England'

Christopher Machell: 'John Bull, National Identity and Radicalism in the Late-Eighteenth Century'

Matthew Potter: 'Representing British Liberty: History, Politics and Personalities'

Don MacRaild: 'Magna Carta in the British World in the Early Twentieth Century'

Prior to the Advisory Board meeting in July, the Queen's Jubilee celebrations kept us busy. It was also then that we started tweeting. We have found Twitter a good way to keep in touch with people, exchanging stories and ideas. To enhance engagement with those interested in our research, we also launched our own YouTube channel. Our first clip offers a brief overview of the history of St George's societies in North America in global context, explaining their development, activities and charity work.

Finally, we are pleased to report that Professor Brian Ward (Professor in American Studies, Northumbria University) and Dr Sally-Anne Huxtable (Lecturer in Design History, Northumbria University) have joined Dr Sylvia Ellis (Reader in History, Northumbria University) and Professors Paul Ward (Professor in History, University of Huddersfield) and William Van Vugt (Professor in History, Calvin College) as Associated Researchers.

Thank you for your continued interest in the project. We look forward to seeing you soon at one of our events, or meet you virtually on one of our different online platforms. Merry Christmas and all the best for 2013!

The English Diaspora Project Team

Upcoming Events



Icons of Englishness

The Lit & Phil in Newcastle upon Tyne will be holding a series of lectures entitled 'Icons of Englishness' in April 2013. We hope to provide some international perspective on definitions of Englishness by English immigrants and their descendants in North America in these times of devolution and referendums on breaking up the UK.

The series will kick off on 9 April 2013 with a lecture by Dr Joanne Parker (Exeter University) on King Alfred. This will be followed, on 16 April 2013, by Dr Mike Sutton (Visiting Fellow at Northumbria), who will describe the English Morris tradition in transatlantic context. The series will culminate on 23 April 2013, St George's Day, with a joint presentation by Professor Don MacRaild, Dr Tanja Buelmann, and Dr Sally-Anne Huxtable on 'Global St. George.' This talk will include an analysis of the material culture of Englishness abroad. All lectures are free to the public and will begin at 6 pm. For more information contact Dr David Gleeson at david.gleeson@englishdiaspora.co.uk.

Exhibition in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2013

We are currently in the process of planning an exhibition about English migration to North America. The exhibition will focus on the general migration story of the English, but also their club culture. The exhibition will be hosted in the Addlestone Library at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina, and will be opened at the end of May/early June 2013 during the city's Spoleto Festival.

So here's where you could come in and help us! We have a lot of good material, but we are keen on telling a genuine community story. So if, by any chance, you have any material in a box in your basement or up in the attic that might include any colourful additional exhibit for our exhibition, please do get in touch. Perhaps you have an old photograph from your ancestors coming out to North America, an image of their first home, or even their ticket over? Or maybe your ancestors were members of English societies such as St George's societies and you have some memorabilia that you could share with us for the exhibition? Or is there an old bundle of letters? If you feel that you may have items that would be interesting to display, please do get in touch with us.

The exhibition will focus on the period up to 1920 in particular and will come to the UK (Newcastle upon Tyne) in 2014 as part of the end-of-project activities we'll be organising in connection with our research.

Recent Digital Community Stories



5

The English Diaspora Digital Community site is our project's community exchange platform where we post short research stories about our research. Recent stories were:

- December 2012 [Statues of English Kings and Queens in the First Modern Republic](#) When Britain established colonies along the eastern seaboard of what is now the US, many statues of English Kings and Queens were erected. James McConnel explores what happened to them after the American War of Independence.
- November 2012 [Home Rule for England?](#) With Scotland readying itself for an historic national debate on its constitutional future in 2014, there are growing calls from pressure groups and politicians alike for the English people to engage in a similar debate and campaign for a devolved English parliament. The issues being raised at present by those campaigning for English devolution had already been broached over a century ago as members of the upper and middle classes began considering England's constitutional future. Learn more in this story by Lesley Robinson.
- October 2012 [What Magna Charta Means to Americans](#) David Cameron's failure to recall the meaning of the Latin phrase Magna Charta ('Great Charter') received widespread news coverage. One conclusion from the ink spilled was that Americans feel more affinity to Magna Charta than the English or British do. Learn more in this story by English Diaspora PI Don MacRaidl.
- September 2012 [English Liberty, American Emancipation](#) In September 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, changing the course of America's Civil War, making it about ending slavery and not just saving the Union. English immigrants living in the US were sure that it was English precedents, and not just American circumstances, that had refocused their new home's bloodiest conflict on the enslavement of four million African Americans. Learn more in this story by English Diaspora Co-I David Gleeson.
- August 2012 [The Forgotten War? The War of 1812](#) 2012 is not only the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the 200th birthday of Charles Dickens, it is also the bicentenary of the War of 1812. Learn more about this 'forgotten War' in this story by English Diaspora Co-I Tanja Buelmann.

Other stories since the last Newsletter: [The International Magna Charta Day Association](#); [Catching up with Queen Victoria in Worldwide Jubilee Celebrations](#); and [Royal Jubilees and the English Diaspora](#)

From Our Story Archive: The English Christmas



By A.W. (Bill) Purdue

The modern English Christmas owes much to the repackaging of Christmas by the Victorians, who centred the festival on the family and on the indulgence of children, and, indeed, much of our idea of a 'traditional Christmas', with Christmas cards, a Father Christmas bringing presents to children, and, that importation from German traditions, the Christmas tree, date from the nineteenth century. It is to a family Christmas, the humble celebrations of the Cratchit family, that Scrooge, having been converted to benevolence, brings good cheer. But behind this home and family concept of Christmas lie older Christmases, which exert an enduring influence, for the English Christmas is multi-layered.

The medieval Christmas in England represented a synthesis between Christianity and pagan festivals, in which the birth of Christ mingled with residual pagan beliefs in the need to eat, drink and be merry at the darkest and most barren time of the year, with greenery brought indoors and great fires burning in the hope of fertility to come. This Christmas was a gregarious and largely adult affair, held amidst the laden tables of baronial halls, and was imbued with the concept of a time of license and the suspension of the normal rules of society, with the festivities being presided over, not by the usual figures of authority, but by boy-bishops, jesters and, what were known as 'Lords of Misrule', whose name epitomises the anarchic nature of the celebrations, while mummers waited at the gate. Some dignitaries of the Church accepted this Christmas as a necessary release of energy but others condemned its emphasis upon merriment as encouraging pagan and lustful appetites.

The puritans of the Commonwealth attempted to abolish Christmas on the grounds that there was no biblical evidence for the date of the birth of Christ and that the festivities encouraged immorality, but Christmas was popular and was re-established with the monarchy. The Christmas which survived is the one of which an idealised version continues to be printed on many Christmas cards: laden coaches, making their way down snow-covered lanes or stopping at inns with jovial landlords, on their way to rural manor houses, where paternal squires entertain friends and tenants to the twelve days of Christmas, while wives and daughters administer to the needs of the poor and sick. It was this 'Old Christmas', perhaps in its last years in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, that so attracted the American writer, Washington Irving, and is described so fondly in Charles Dickens' depiction of Christmas at Dingley Dell in *Pickwick Papers*. It is ironic, that, if today we feel nostalgia for the Christmas that the Victorians did so much to create, a major strand in the making of the Victorian Christmas was the nostalgia that Dickens and other nineteenth century writers felt for the previous English Christmas. The gap between older versions of a more gregarious and more adult-orientated Christmas and the



more sentimental family Christmas with its emphasis upon home and children is bridged in Dickens's works, for, if the influential *A Christmas Carol* seems overall to contain a very different attitude to Christmas to that of *Pickwick Papers*, it retains a sorrow at the passing of the merrier Christmas past as portrayed by the description of 'Mr Fessiwig's Ball'.

The emergent Victorian Christmas was, no doubt, more suitable for an urban and commercial society and one which valued domesticity but the older spirits of Christmas kept peeping out with kisses under the mistletoe and the sauciness of pantomimes. Vestiges of the 'Lord of Misrule' and the 'world turned upside down', linger today in the office party and the custom of officers waiting on other ranks on Christmas Day. That central figure of the modern Christmas, Father Christmas, is an amalgam of many traditions and he owes much to the poem, *A Visit from St Nicholas*, by the American writer Clement Moore, but the merriment, jollity and good cheer of the plump, rubicund figure with his 'Ho, Ho, Ho!' point to older English Christmas spirits and to Lords of Misrule.



Christmas lights, the candles or electric lights upon trees, the carefully arranged illuminated decorations in high streets, and the more recent enthusiasm for houses to be lit up like ships awaiting review with flickering reindeer prancing upon their roofs, are reminders of the need of earlier generations of humanity in the dark winters of the North, but also in the Roman Empire where the worship of the sun-god, Mithras flourished, to hope for renewal and the return of the fertile sun. That this basic urge was enlisted for commercial purposes by the entrepreneurs of late-nineteenth century shop-keeping and the civic pride of towns, should not blind us to its ancestry amidst the Yule logs and tapers of medieval halls.

In an age of high emigration and of empire, Victorians were fascinated by the concept of Christmas in far way places and of Christmas gatherings in warmer climates and by thoughts of soldiers celebrating the festival amidst hardship and battle. That contradictory and complex institution, the English Christmas, has been exported to every part of the world where the English have settled.

A.W. (Bill) Purdue is a Visiting Professor in History at the Northumbria University and co-author with J.M. Golby of *The Making of the Modern Christmas*.



Research Areas

The overall aim of all project research strands is to challenge the existing historiography of English ethnicity in North America which explicitly dismisses it as weak and denies the relevance of 'diaspora'. Members' research areas are:

- **Don MacRaid** and **Tanja Bueltmann** are working on a history of English associationalism in North America, exploring the development, membership and activities of English ethnic clubs, including St George's societies and the Sons of England. The study will generate significant new knowledge of untapped records relating to the St George's and other societies established by the English in North America, as well as a vast quantity of newspaper reportage on their activities.
- **David Gleeson** is exploring the English Diaspora in North America to better understand concepts of American identity and nationality in the nineteenth-century, especially the interactions between British, US and Canadian political cultures in republican and imperial contexts.
- **Joe Hardwick** is investigating the overseas development of the Church of England and the contribution it made to the development of expatriate civil societies, interrogating the idea that the Church overseas was an 'English' institution.
- **James McConnel's** interest in the English Diaspora stems from his wider research project on the co-commemoration of 5 November in the nineteenth century Anglophone World. His main contribution to the project is research into 5 November in colonial and post-revolutionary America in comparison to commemoration in Canada.
- **Monika Smialkowska** is working on the reception of Shakespeare in America, for instance during the 1916 Shakespeare Tercentenary celebrations, assessing how Shakespeare was adopted for American audiences.
- **Dean Allen** is interested in the English Diaspora because of the profound influence the English have had on the introduction and development of sport and leisure throughout both the British Empire and the modern world.
- **Mike Sutton** is an active member of the Hexham Morris, thus pursuing his interest in English folk culture and music and supporting the project's community outreach activities.
- **Lesley Robinson** is working on English identity in the 'near Diaspora'.
- **Stephen Bowman** is investigating the Pilgrims Society.

Contact Us



There are a number of ways to get in touch with us:

- send an email to mail@englishdiaspora.co.uk
- Twitter: [@englishdiaspora](https://twitter.com/englishdiaspora)
- use our website contact form: <http://www.englishdiaspora.co.uk/contact.html>

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