

Institution: University of Cambridge
Unit of Assessment: UoA30
Title of case study: The English National Character
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Peter Mandler's <u>The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair</u> (2006) aimed to raise the level of public discourse about 'national identity' and especially 'Englishness'. It has been widely taken up in the media for its authoritative explanations of both the historical specificity of many allegedly eternal understandings of Englishness and the historical processes by which national stereotypes in general are developed.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Mandler joined the Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge as a University Lecturer in 2001, promoted to Reader in 2003 and Professor of Modern Cultural History in 2009. Since the early 1990s his work had focused on the emergence of the idea of national heritage in England since the 18th century and, in the period after he came to Cambridge in 2001, he built on this work to develop wide-ranging conclusions about the modern genesis and adaptations of ideas about national identity. This line of analysis culminated in a series of studies concerned with competing ideas about national identity and especially about the specific identity category – 'national character' – which attributed psychological characteristics to the whole of the English people. This attribution to the whole of the people, 'from duke to dustman', was only possible once a degree of horizontal or even democratic social consciousness was accepted, which contrasts 'national character' to other, more hierarchical forms of national identity such as patriotic allegiance to institutions or leaders. It is also a more intimate, soul-searching concept, because it identifies temperamental, emotional and behavioural commonalities. As such it is both powerful and risky, for it requires individuals to connect their own most personal qualities to great abstractions. 'National character' featured prominently in the process of democratization in Britain from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries, when the prevailing idea of national character revolved around democratic qualities of self-reliance, prudence, enterprise and mutual toleration. After the First World War, the image of the national character was cut down to size to suit a more socially-mixed and inward-looking democracy. Since the Second World War it has lost a good deal of its purchase as modern citizens are more concerned to assert their individuality and less willing to pool their most intimate, individually-defining characteristics with others; alternative forms of national identity have risen up to take its place. Yet public discourse still often harks back nostalgically to ideas about national character forged in the nation-building ('John Bull') or domesticating ('Little Man') periods. Mandler's book on the idea of the English national character and associated articles on the full range of ideas about national identity explain why the idea of national character emerged, why particular qualities were associated with it, and why its appeal has waned while some of those qualities linger in the popular imagination.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>Peter Mandler, <u>The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair</u>. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006</p> <p>Peter Mandler, (editor) <u>Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain</u>. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006</p> <p>Peter Mandler, 'What is National Identity? Definitions and Applications in Modern British Historiography', <u>Modern Intellectual History</u> 3 (2006), 271-97</p> <p>Peter Mandler, 'Problems in Cultural History: A Reply', <u>Cultural and Social History</u> 1 (2004), 327-33</p> <p>Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', <u>Cultural and Social History</u> 1 (2004), 5-28</p> <p>Peter Mandler, <u>History and National Life</u>. London: Profile Books, 2002</p>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Mandler's books on this subject – a short, more popular book on the place of history in national life (History and National Life) and the longer, more academic work (The English National Character) – sold well and were widely noticed in the press on publication for bringing a new level of sophistication to the conceptualization and delineation of national identity. On the day of publication Simon Jenkins celebrated History and National Life in a Times column for establishing a more honest and rigorous relationship between history and national identity in the face of a flood of 'distorted, biased, glamorised and perverted' accounts: 'his instinct is not to slink back to his study. It is to raise the professional flag and check it out. He wants to argue with movie-makers and reporters, with analysts and background writers.'

The English National Character then quickly established itself as the definitive work on its subject – 'a work of high quality, insightful, enlightening' (Dublin Review of Books); 'a superb example of how to write...the history of an idea' (New York Sun); 'the best recent survey I have seen on the subject' (Jeremy Paxman in BBC History Magazine); 'an absorbing study of both the meaning of Englishness and the whole idea of national identity (George Walden on Bloomberg.com); 'tremendously rewarding and instructive' (Dominic Sandbrook in the Daily Telegraph); 'a lively understanding of where a lot of stereotypes about "the English national character" have come from' (Independent). Nearly all reviews recognized that this was a book that brought academic virtues of deep learning and sophisticated analysis to a subject that was normally treated lightly, anecdotally.

The impact of the book in the survey period has been precisely this – it is used as a counterpoint to the more familiar - light-hearted and populist - presentations of ideas about the English national character. A 2008 BBC radio documentary, 'Ideas – The British Version: The Middle Way', used Mandler's book as the background for its discussion of the 'muddling through' stereotype and recorded an interview between Mandler and Tristram Hunt [ref 5A]. (First broadcast on Radio 3 at 9.10pm, 6 July 2008.) A 2011 BBC radio documentary, 'Make Me a National Treasure', used Mandler's work to raise the intellectual level of broadcasts otherwise oriented around celebrities. In putting together the programme, presented by Gyles Brandreth, the producer wrote to Mandler stating that, 'It's aiming to be a light-hearted programme but I would like to include some intellectual substance and I thought it might be interesting to talk to you about the differences between our appreciation of national treasures and heroes and what this tells us about our national character' [5B]. The resulting broadcast alternated celebrity panellists nominating their national treasures with Mandler's recorded commentary on how these choices reflected a longer history of ideas about national character. (First broadcast on Radio 4 at 11am on 28 December 2011.) Another celebrity-led BBC TV programme, 'Ian Hislop's Stiff Upper Lip – An Emotional History of Britain', also used Mandler's book as background to orchestrate a more serious discussion of changing emotional norms in British national life [5C]. (This was a three-part series on BBC2 in October 2012.) Most recently, leading film blogs (The Quietus, Guardian Film Blog) have drawn on Mandler's research to contextualize their understandings of peculiarly 'English' characterizations in British film [5H, 5I]. The English National Character is now often recommended reading for those wishing to understand concepts of English identity, for example on the ESL website UsingEnglish.com [5E] and in adult education at the Marlborough Summer School [5F], and has served as a benchmark for subsequent popular writing on Englishness [5G].

In addition, Mandler's expertise is now regularly drawn on when domestic and foreign media seek analysis of alleged surges of English national feeling (as often happens around royal events, international football tournaments, or political initiatives). Thus Mandler was interviewed extensively about English national identity by Tokyo Shinbun in July 2008; appeared on Irish Radio NewsTalk's 'Talking History' programme in May 2009; was quoted twice in the Times in October 2009 around debates on national iconography (Stephen Poliakoff's films and the 'fourth plinth' in Trafalgar Square); was interviewed by Bayerischer Rundfunk, El Pais, Wall Street Journal, Semana (Colombia), Epoca (Brazil), and LBC/Heart Radio (UK), in 2011 on the significance of the royal wedding; was interviewed by the Guardian, May 2011 on the view of Britain from abroad and by Henriëtte Lakmaker of the Dutch newspaper Trouw on British attitudes as reflected in the media in July 2011 [5D]; was interviewed by TVN Poland (television) and

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Sanlian Life Weekly Magazine (Beijing) (circulation 200,000) on the Diamond Jubilee, February 2012; was interviewed for another programme on the 'stiff upper lip' by CTVC for Radio 4, May 2012 (for which the producer described Mandler's book as 'hugely useful and influential in the development of this programme idea' [5J]); and was interviewed for a globally syndicated TV programme on the royal birth by Associated Press TV in July 2013.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[A] Emails to Peter Mandler from person 1, Radio 3 producer, 2008

[B] Emails to Peter Mandler from person 2, Radio 4 producer, 2011

[C] Thomas Dixon's blog, <http://emotionsblog.history.gmul.ac.uk/?author=2>, on the inspirations for Ian Hislop's 'Stiff Upper Lip'

[D] <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4496/Buitenland/article/detail/2813383/2011/07/21/Kunnen-de-Britten-dan-geen-weekend-zonder-een-beetje-sleazy-.dhtml>

[E] <http://www.usingenglish.com/forum/ask-teacher/59234-idioms-expression-national-character-english.html>

[F] <http://www.mcsummerschool.org.uk/course.asp?course=135>)

[G] Alexandra Harris in the Guardian, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/18/how-england-made-the-english-harry-mount-review>

[H] Ashley Clark, 'The English National Character in Sightseers', in the leading pop-culture webzine The Quietus, 10 Apr. 2013, <http://thequietus.com/articles/11877-sightseers-the-quietus-national-character-ashley-clark>

[I] Guardian Film Blog, 'After Hollywood', 'The World's End is the latest standard-bearer for British bathos', 17 Jul. 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2013/jul/17/after-hollywood-brit-comedy-sci-fi-worlds-end>

[J] Email to Peter Mandler from person 3 (BBC producer), 22 Mar. 2012