INTRODUCTION

And there they raised old England's flag, the emblem of the brave.
Australian National Anthem

Australia is the 'second most English country in the world' – a description which might surprise and even annoy many Australians. New Zealand with its large Polynesian population, Canada with French Québec and polyglot Ontario, and the United States with its major Afro- and Hispanic-American component are all less 'English' in their basic composition. All four English-speaking settler societies are also, of course, multicultural, as is England itself. Yet in both the 1986 and 2001 censuses well over one-third of Australians declared their ancestry to be English, while many who ticked the 'Australian' box were also of predominantly English origin. The largest overseas-born 'ethnic group' is now, and has since 1788 always been, English, most of whom would reserve the word 'ethnic' for others. Only in 1996 did New Zealanders replace the English as the largest single immigrating group – and many of them were also of English origin.

Nor is this surprising. Although the Dutch, and arguably the Portuguese, have good claims to have 'discovered' Australia for Europeans, it was the English who first laid effective claim to its territory. William Dampier, from East Coker, Somerset, first explored the west coast in 1688, a century before the convict colony was set up in Sydney and nineteen years before the amalgamation of England and Scotland into the United Kingdom. James Cook, from the Yorkshire North Riding, claimed the east coast in 1770, thus finally pre-empting any rival claims from the Netherlands or France. He was accompanied by the natural scientist, Sir Joseph Banks, from Lincolnshire. Finalising the English stamp on the continent was the

William Dampier (1652–1715)

arrival in January 1788 of the first convict fleet. Its passengers were overwhelmingly English. Its commander, Arthur Phillip, was born in London, lived in Hampshire and is buried near Bath, though of German origin through his father. In voyages between 1798 and 1802, Matthew Flinders from Lincolnshire found that Tasmania was an island, sailed around the continent, and named the new possessions 'Australia'.

What did 'the English' mean then, and still mean today? The massive work of Norman Davies – *The Isles* – reminds us that subjects of the British Crown in 1788 were of very varied origins. While the English tongue was the official language of government and law, it was not spoken or understood by many living in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. They still used the Celtic languages, replaced in England

Matthew Flinders (1774–1814)

by the Anglo-Saxons over one thousand years before, in which the word for the English is 'Saxon' (*saesneg*). Cornish had just died out, but Manx was still the majority tongue of the Isle of Man and Norman French of the Channel Islands. While Anglicanism was the established church throughout England, Wales and Ireland in 1788, this was not true of Scotland, whose church was Presbyterian. Moreover, while Catholicism had no secure legal status in the United Kingdom until 1829, it was the majority religion of Ireland and of parts of the Scottish Highlands. The rise of Methodism in the late eighteenth century strengthened the Nonconformist element, which already included Baptists and Congregationalists from an earlier century.

The English, defined as living in thirty-seven of the counties of England established after the Norman conquest of 1066, adhering

to the established church set up by Henry VIII in 1536 and speaking the English language derived from varieties of Anglo-Saxon, were the largest identifiable 'nationality' in the United Kingdom in 1788. They were scarcely as dominant as they later became. The legal system of Scotland was quite different, the administrative system of Ireland (and its parliament until 1800) was distinct; the religious adherence of most Irish, Scots and Cornish was not to the established church, and nor was that of many English living in the North, East Anglia and the Southwest. Moreover, the English language had such a variety of dialects that many of the English could not understand each other. The standardisation of English was not effective until the introduction of universal education as late as 1870, which has still not produced the relative uniformity of English-speakers' accents in Australia.

England did, however, have unifying features, and the English had a strong sense of being different from other British people as well as from their neighbours on the continent and non-European British subjects overseas. Varied evidence for this includes many of Shakespeare's works, and especially his historic plays. Every schoolchild and patriot was reminded during the Second World War of John of Gaunt's dying praise of 'this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England' in *Richard II*, written 350 years before.

The rural social system, with its aristocratic and propertied leaders, was reproduced throughout England. The Howards had strong links with royalty, and castles and mansions from Carlisle through Yorkshire to Surrey and Sussex. Unusually, they remained Catholics, and still do. The Dukes of Devonshire owned large parts of central London but had their ancestral mansion in Derbyshire. The Dukes of Bedford also owned London property, but lived in Bedfordshire and owned much of the Fenland agricultural district, which they had drained by Dutch, Belgian and French labour. One part of the framework of England was thus provided by the landed aristocracy and royalty, from the junior ranks of which Australian governors were often drawn. These were not, however, exclusively English; many were Scots, and German inheritance ran through royalty at least until the World War of 1914. Even Jews, Europeans, Americans and, eventually, a tiny number of Indians, were admitted to the upper classes towards the end of the Victorian era.

At the pinnacle of society was the monarchy. But it was unpopular between 1788 and 1837 under George III (who was mad), George IV (who was degenerate) and William IV (a nonentity known

as Silly Billy). Queen Victoria was also unpopular for withdrawing from public life between 1861 and 1874. But from her Golden Jubilee in 1887 the monarchy became increasingly central to English national identity. Republicanism was only briefly popular in the early 1870s and has had little credibilty since. Whatever else the English may not know about their history and culture, they do know from childhood that they live in a monarchy.

Also binding the English together was a system of law which operated throughout England and Wales, using the English language and administered through the rural hierarchies in each county. English law was assumed to operate in Australia from the first landing in 1788. Consequently there were few lawyers among Scottish immigrants, as the Scots system was distinct and still is. Country towns were governed through royal charters granted by the monarchy from London. It was part of the rhetoric of English political life that these well-developed legal and local government systems gave the English exceptional freedoms not enjoyed in Europe or elsewhere. English law was assumed to apply in the English colonies from their annexation and many English laws and precedents are still valid in Australia, where English legal dress is still worn in some jurisdictions. The principle of the common law was that it applied to everyone, and of the rule of law that it placed the law above the government of the day.

The English constitutional system did not, however, give democratic rights in the sense of free elections, freedom of religion, government by representative bodies or freedom of association. Power was held nominally by the monarchy but actually by the rural hierarchies. The right of parliament to control budgets and appointments was still contested by George III in 1788 but was completely accepted after Victoria came to the throne in 1837. National political leadership was concentrated in the House of Lords well into the nineteenth century. The last English peer to be prime minister was Lord Salisbury between 1900 and 1902. But later prime ministers such as Winston Churchill, Arthur Balfour and Harold Macmillan had close aristocratic links, either through marriage or descent. The last peer to become prime minister was the Scottish Earl of Home, who renounced his peerage to sit in the House of Commons in 1963.

The aristocracy in its lower rungs was open to new entrants, who changed its character over time. It was thus less rigid than in many European states and able to modify itself rather than being over-

thrown by revolution as in France and, later, Russia. The English ruling classes were more willing to live in the countryside than was common in Europe, consolidating their local support by a combination of patronage, paternalism, political and legal domination, and mild coercion through their control of the local judiciary. The majority of the first convicts transported to New South Wales were sentenced in the assizes of county towns.

The traditional picture of the English was of a rural and small-town population which was ruled by a benevolent local and national upper class, enjoyed relative personal freedom defined by common law, was Protestant, accepted a social hierarchy, and was consciously English within an insular society superior to all known alternatives. This was the 'Old England' praised in song and story throughout the Victorian period, not only in England but also in Australia. It was embellished and expanded as the British Empire grew into the largest political entity in the history of the world, on which 'the sun never set'. The Empire strengthened feelings of pride based on military conquest rather than quiet rural virtues. But the older tradition remained – and still remains in corners of rural England.

The English were bound together by a common Germanic and Nordic ancestry, by a common language, by institutions and by a capital city whose role pre-dated 1066, by feelings of superiority and by relative internal peace and unchanging borders. The last battle fought on English soil was in 1745, in startling contrast to the experience of most European countries, not to mention Ireland. England has not been effectively invaded since 1066, except from Scotland or by rebellious claimants to the throne such as Henry VII. As Shakespeare proudly proclaims in his *King John*: 'This England never did, nor never shall, live at the proud foot of a conqueror'. So it has remained for a millennium, uniquely in European history.

The English were divided by social class, by dialects, by local loyalties, by education and by urbanisation and industrialisation. These divisions, rather than ethnic or religious schisms, remained dominant in English public life until very recently. By 1788 the English were not markedly religious. The Victorian era changed that, at least for the middle and upper classes. But many English immigrants brought religious indifference to Australia with them. Nor were they fiercely political. Until the 1830s political debate was between small coteries of Whigs and Tories to the exclusion of most of the public. The last English revolution was in 1688 and it created a system of parliamentary government which changed but was never

shattered or overthrown. All of this was grounds for congratulation, and affected attitudes taken to Australia and other parts of the empire. Peace, order and good government was the formula taken around the world by English administrators and lawyers.

Yet all was not well. Millions of the English emigrated over a period of two hundred years, predominantly for economic and social reasons as there was little overt persecution and no enemy occupation or civil war. Until 1840 in New South Wales, 1853 in Tasmania and 1868 in Western Australia, many of those coming to Australia were convicts, the majority being English. English emigrants travelled the world and many preferred the United States to the Empire. But Australia was periodically the target for mass movement, especially in the 1850s, the 1880s, the 1920s and the 1960s. Each of these waves came from different generations, from different circumstances and for different reasons. Each wave was more English – and less British – than its predecessor.

But it was also from a different England and came to a different Australia. I have taken the common sense position that English immigrants did not arrive out of the blue. They brought with them traditions and attitudes which cannot be understood only within the Australian context. Many passed some of their culture on to their children. All this is as true for the English as for any other large intake of immigrants from anywhere. The difference is that because Australia was colonised and developed after 1788 by more settlers from England than from anywhere else, their distinctive characters and experiences have often been overlooked or taken as the norm to which all others must conform.

While it is often artificial to distinguish between the 'English' and the 'British', this was less apparent in the formative years of Australia. Even today the non-English people of the United Kingdom and many of their relatives and descendants in Australia are conscious of these differences. There are more Scottish clan chieftains in Australia than anywhere outside Scotland, and a wide variety of Burns clubs, Scottish dance groups and even football fan clubs for Glasgow Rangers. Few have denied the distinctiveness of the Catholic Irish, who acquired their independence from the United Kingdom in 1921. Scotland and Wales acquired self-governing institutions much later, in 1998, on a more restricted basis but with the support of majorities in referenda. The Isle of Man and the Channel Islands have never been part of the United Kingdom, only delegating foreign affairs and defence to London.

Perhaps more contested is the distinctiveness of the Cornish and the 'Englishness' of those living in or coming from England but not of historic English ancestry. Cornwall has only a county council, fiercely protected against amalgamation with parts of neighbouring Devon. Yet South Australia hosts the largest Cornish festival and the oldest Cornish Association in the world. Cornish emigration to Australia was at its height between 1840 and 1880 when Cornwall was exceptionally homogeneous and culturally distinct. While Cornish Australians were often imperial patriots (as were many Scots and Protestant Irish) they deserve to be treated as a distinct ethnicity at least within the Australian context.

English immigrants of non-English ancestry have not been so organisationally insistent on their origins. Nineteenth century Jews often referred to themselves as 'Englishmen of the Hebrew persuasion' (which is certainly no longer the case). The late Conservative politician Enoch Powell argued that someone of Caribbean or Indian origin could be 'British' but never 'English'. The very large numbers in England who are of Irish birth or descent are sometimes ambivalent about their origins, especially if they are Catholics. But increasingly it has become recognised that ethnicity in a multicultural society can be a matter of choice. Thus some Australians choose to be regarded as 'English' or of 'English ancestry', which does not prevent them from being equally 'Australians' with those of many varied backgrounds. A small but significant number of the English coming to Australia were born in India or elsewhere in the British Empire within official or military families. Among them were Lord Birdwood, commander of the Australian forces in the First World War, and the ancestors of Gough Whitlam.

Writing about the English

My own interest in this topic is based on the fact that I have spent half my life in England and half in Australia. My origins are 'British', in the fairly common amalgamation of English, Scottish and Irish ancestry which still characterises many Australians. Many object to the term 'Anglo-Celtic', but that is what many of us are. The Jupps have humble but undeniably English origins among the agricultural labourers of East Surrey. Perhaps for that reason I have stressed the rural origins of so many English Australians in the past, while not denying their urban origins in the present.

I have sketched the progress of the English from majority settlers in a predominantly British society to a diminishing minority in a

much more multicultural Australia. In doing so I have been anxious to emphasise that the English can be found at all levels of Australian society and are much too varied to be stereotyped in the simplistic terms often used by Australian or English nationalists. Today Australia is a multicultural country resting on an English base, part of a global English-speaking society increasingly dominated by the United States, and located in an Asian-Pacific region from which British imperialism has irrevocably withdrawn. This suggests a more complicated future than the 'new Britannia' or 'England over the water' created by the English, the Irish and the Scots more than a century ago.

Writing about such a large and varied population necessarily involves compression and selection. I have selected individuals as representative of larger groups or as particularly interesting. In doing so I have relied heavily upon the definitive *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*), which is unsurpassed in its scope and accuracy. I have confined the term 'English' to those born in England, while acknowledging that some may have come as adults, some as children and some as temporary residents. Those of English descent are a much larger category. But because of the ease of assimilation it seems reasonable to regard them as unqualified Australians. After all, they are part of a society which has been more strongly influenced from England than from anywhere else. They have 'assimilated' to a variant of themselves.

English influence lessened as Australia moved away from its colonial origins and developed a distinct character, and as the cultural influence of the United States has tended to replace it. The extent to which even English immigrants are still 'English' needs debating, just as much as whether Australia is still 'English' or even 'British' in any meaningful sense. There is a degree of subjectivity in my choice of individuals and social groups. Politics has shaped Australia, and I have dwelt on factors such as religion, sport, language or culture.

The resources for studying the English in Australia are so vast, widespread and generally accessible that it is surprising that there seem to be no books entitled *The English in Australia*. The network of county record offices in England provides invaluable sources which are often not available elsewhere. Those used most extensively included East Sussex (Lewes), Staffordshire (Stafford), Lancashire (Preston), Kent (Maidstone), West Yorkshire (Wakefield), Somerset (Taunton), Oxfordshire (Oxford), Northamptonshire and Metropolitan London. The two great repositories of

nautical studies – the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich) and the Merseyside Maritime Museum (Liverpool) – were invaluable, as was the National Museum of Labour History (Manchester) and local social museums in York, Lincoln, Bury St Edmunds, Beamish (Co. Durham) and elsewhere. The newspaper collection of the British Library at Colindale (North London) is without parallel. Much of this work was done in preparing *The Australian People* (1988, 2001), which includes substantial sections on the English in Australia.

In Australia, the National Library of Australia, the National Archives in Canberra, and the Migration Museums in Adelaide and Melbourne were extremely helpful. It is a matter of some regret that the collections created by the Commonwealth government through the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs have been split up at various stages by decision of the national government. Extensive collections of newspapers and pictures exist in the State Libraries, and considerable use was made of the Mitchell Library (Sydney), the La Trobe Library (Melbourne) and the State Libraries of South Australia and Queensland. The resources of the Australian National University Library are very extensive for census reports and parliamentary papers.

Genealogical (family history) collections in London, Melbourne, Sydney and on-line should not be overlooked. They include extensive collections of census data, shipping lists and official records of births, deaths and marriages, as well as local and family histories. Convict records are quite extensive and the largest resource is at the New South Wales State Archives in Sydney, while State record offices contain details of birth, deaths and marriages. La Trobe University has a major archive of interviews with migrants arriving in the 1960s, organised by Dr James Hammerton.

All statistics used here are from official sources. They distinguish between the 'English-born' and others from the British Isles wherever possible.