

June 30 - July 6 / Derby - Chelmsford Olympic Torch Relay

# Nationality? We're all British now

London 2012 offers proof that patriotism has little to do with ethnicity, **Kaya Burgess** reports



The British are not naturals when it comes to celebrating their achievements. And yet, with the bunting still fresh from the Diamond Jubilee, the journey of the Olympic Torch around the

country is the second great instalment in our nation's chance to get to know itself a little better, come rain or shine (but mainly rain).

On my whistlestop tour of the market towns and cobbled villages of the Midlands, East Anglia and Essex, I discovered a sense of brimming civic pride and patriotism in welcoming an international carnival to pockets of Britain as yet unvisited by global events, national attention or sporting fervour. And it comes in many forms and in many colours.

People I spoke to laughed at the notion, announced by the Home Secretary this week, of testing immigrants to this country on what it means to be British, because it is something we would all struggle to define.

Being British is about something subtle and enigmatic, I have been told. It is about living in a country whose

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wealth is cultural, rather than economic, a country whose pen is mightier than its sword. A country where even yesterday's torrential downpours could not rain on the parade and where the national dish is fish and chips on a windy promenade, such as the one I enjoyed in Cromer, Norfolk.

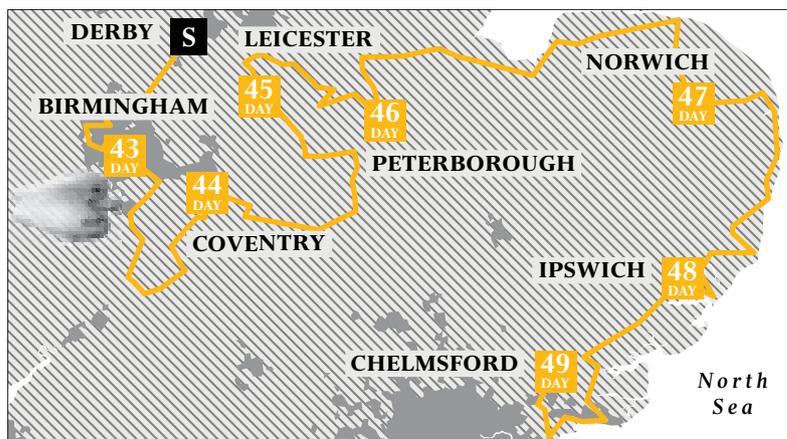
My week chasing the Torch proved that celebrating Britishness and celebrating multiculturalism are inextricably intertwined. "There is a real mix of ethnicities round here and they have all welcomed the Torch," said Leroy Willis, 43, a civil servant from Dudley, as the torch-bearer disembarked from a barge at the Black Country Living Museum to be greeted by a throng of visitors dressed in Victorian costume.

A black face would have been a rare sight in Victorian times, but the colour of Mr Willis's skin makes no difference today and he blends with perfect authenticity into the excited crowd in his flat cap and vintage waistcoat,

**A flag-seller in King's Lynn cheers the Torch's arrival**



Peter Wyatt passes on the Olympic flame to Camilla Hadland in front of Shakespeare's birthplace. Below: Leroy Willis with Joseph and Lily



as do his children, Lily, 3, and Joseph, 12. "We've been debating the point of the Torch at work," Mr Willis said. "It's helping us overcome our cynicism about an event happening so far away in London and it's really being welcomed by people of all backgrounds."

"It helps you feel British. My parents came over from Jamaica in the 1950s and my mum loved the Royal Family and would make us sit down and watch every minute if something royal was on telly and I still do it now. You can't forget your roots and where your parents come from, but you should also remember the country where you live and support it."

As the *Times* photographer Paul Rogers and I set off to join the Torch in the West Midlands, the

results of a survey published in this newspaper revealed that Muslim, Indian, black African, Middle Eastern and Asian people all appear to identify with "Britishness"

more strongly than do their white counterparts.

According to Aaron Patel, 18, this could be down to the special sort of pride people feel in their adopted homeland. "My grandparents were born in India, my parents were born in Kenya and I was born in England," Mr Patel said, in a sing-song Dudley accent. "It is pretty diverse around here. I live in a really Asian part of Dudley but there is still a sense of excitement about the Torch coming and about the Olympics, and there are still British flags hanging up. We all feel a part of it now that the Torch is here and feel it's a chance to show off our country."

On Sunday the Torch arrived in Stratford-upon-Avon, the home, of course, of William Shakespeare. Here, in this Warwickshire town, it was hard to tell the tourists from the locals among the jostling crowds. Utai Culligan, 36, known as Nancy to her friends, has lived in England for eight years since emigrating from Thailand. "Physically, I'm a foreigner — but I'm not a foreigner at heart," she told me. "And I think the Torch helps. Originally I just came here to work, but now I have fallen in love with England and English people and feel like I am one of them. I feel both Thai and British and so a mix of a foreigner

and a local. And I feel like the Torch has become a symbol for the whole country, which makes me very proud. Even the ice creams I am selling today are torch-shaped, being bought by people of so many nationalities here waving British flags."

As we followed the Torch round the midriff of the country this week — sometimes darting ahead to witness the expectation building, sometimes

**“ I just came here to work but now I have fallen in love with England and English people ”**

lagging behind to watch the crowds melt away — the people always followed the same routine. Though they knew the Torch would rush by in a matter of seconds, they arrived hours early, braving the rain to bag the best spots, happy to indulge in some good old-fashioned orderly queuing and even happier to indulge in a good-natured grumble — "So that's that, then" — after the Torch had moved on.

Mark Molina, 32, a chef, was among the throng waiting in the

Leicestershire town of Market Harborough. "I came from the Philippines five years ago and now I live in Britain as a chef of Mexican food," he said. "But I consider my family to be British now. I'll be supporting British athletes in the Olympics as much as those from the Philippines. Market Harborough is quite a posh, white town, but I've never experienced any racism."

Carl Elton, 46, a street trader who has been following the Torch with his father, Stan, and flogging Union Jacks since the relay left Land's End, told me in King's Lynn: "I've come across so many different nationalities that I really wish I was bilingual. I'd have made more money selling European flags than British ones."

The closer the Olympic Torch gets to London, the more you realise that ethnicity or "background" cease to matter. In Peterborough I met Richard Wozniak, 55, a builder who was with his wife in the high street to see the Torch pass by at the end of a long, sunny day. He arrived from Poland seven years ago and his English is still a little sketchy, but he explained: "I am British. We are all British — it does not matter what country we came here from. That is why we are all so happy to see the Torch come."

The Daily Universal Register, page 74

**Week 7 in numbers**

**114**

Villages, towns and cities visited by Torch

**615.14**

Miles covered

**943**

Torchbearers

**400**

Years since Robert Dover founded the Cotswold Olympicks in Chipping Campden, visited by the Torch on Sunday

**155,000**

People saw the Torch in Leicestershire

**30**

People auditioned in the "S-Factor" contest to greet the Torch dressed as Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon

**17**

Seconds Torch spent in the air strapped to Nick Macomber's jet pack in Leicester

**1**

Handover on the water, between boats on Rutland Water

**500**

Miles driven by the flag-seller Stan Elton on a round-trip to stock up in Swansea