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Cricket and Changing Conceptions of Englishness

If, as has been shown, both the ‘metropolis’ and the colony were deeply affected by the colonial process and if, as we saw in the previous chapter, cricket has played an important role in the generation of postcolonial diaspora consciousness, one would expect that English national identity has also been radically shaped by the experiences of postcolonialism. Yet, as Brubaker (2005: 10) notes, ‘Sophisticated discussions are sensitive to the heterogeneity of diaspora; but they are not always sensitive to the heterogeneity of nation-states.’ Consequently, this chapter examines both the role of cricket in changing conceptions of Englishness in contemporary times, and the multifaceted nature of those who identify with this nation.

Sport, of course, does not exist in a vacuum and the ways in which English people more generally express their identity appear to have undergone rapid and overt change in recent years. Indeed feelings of English national identity were perhaps stronger at the end of the twentieth century than they had ever previously been (Kumar 2003a). There have been increasing calls for St George’s Day to be celebrated more widely and more formally to parallel the celebrations marking the patron saint days of the other home nations. The traditional elision of English and British national identities has to some degree waned. For instance, data from British Social Attitudes surveys indicate that whilst 31 per cent of the population described themselves as English in 1992, in 2003 this figure had risen to 40 per cent.

The strengthening of English national identity is generally attributed to several broader social processes. Commonly cited in this connection are the moves toward greater European integration, globalization and the concomitant growth in the significance of local and regional identities (King 2006; Kumar 2003b; Smith 2006). Such processes explain the more general rise of nationalism in Europe at the end of the twentieth century (Day and Thompson 2004; Spencer and Wollman 2005a). However, a number of UK-specific processes are also believed to be significant in strengthening a sense of Englishness. Debates about migrant labour from within an expanded EU, the increasing number of people seeking asylum in Britain, and the growth of diasporic communities more generally have dispelled the ‘powerful myth of the island fortress’ (Bassnett, cited in British Council 2000) and contributed to a process

by which “their” difference is used to enhance the sense of “us” (Wallman 1979: 3). Scottish and Welsh devolution firstly raised the issue of whether English regional parliaments should be established, and secondly about whether Scottish and Welsh MPs should be excluded from voting on certain issues in the House of Commons (Nairn 2000; Kumar 2003a).

Though clearly more deeply rooted, this changing sense of national identity has been particularly evident in the sports context. A notable trend has been the increased use of the flag of St George and, in particular, the phenomena of car-mounted flags which began during the 2002 FIFA World Cup. A number of writers have commented upon the emergence of this ‘celebratory patriotism’ (for example Perryman 2002: 30). Polley (2003: 18) argues that these developments indicate that ‘English national identity in sport has been shifted to be more inclusive’. While such changes may be largely cosmetic (Crabbe 2004; Garland 2004), and it is debateable whether this changing sense of nationalism easily translates to other spheres of political and social life (King 2006; Abell *et al.* 2007), what is clear is that many people in England either feel the need or simply enjoy expressing their sense of nationalism in ways which they have previously not done.

We saw in Chapter 2 that Englishness and cricket have been closely associated since the early nineteenth century. We have also seen how this ideological connection was fundamental to the diffusion of the game as part of the process of colonization. And using the concept of diaspora, we have explored the processual, contested and fragmented character of (national) identities. In this chapter I want to explore how recent developments show that cricket remains deeply interconnected with the way the English imagine themselves, but also that there are multiple ways in which the English connect with cricket. Through this we can also see that aspects of national identity are subject to continuity and change. Cricket’s enduring relationship with Englishness has been facilitated by a metamorphosis in relation to new sets of interdependencies allied to the continued perception that the game provides a stable reference point in a rapidly changing world.

In structuring my observations of changing conceptions of cricket and Englishness, I draw upon two models of Englishness identified in the work of Edmunds and Turner (2001). *Malign Englishness* is described as closed (e.g. resentful of other nationalisms), insular (e.g. threatened by European identities and multiculturalism), earnest (e.g. seeing national identity as ‘in the blood’ and rejecting the idea that traditions are invented), masculine (e.g. aggressive) and reactive (e.g. defensive of traditional and nostalgic notions of Englishness). *Benign Englishness* is open (e.g. tolerant of other nationalisms), cosmopolitan (e.g. enjoying the co-existence of different cultures and welcoming of multiculturalism), ironic (e.g. aware of the contingent character of national identities), feminine (e.g. pacifist), and creative (e.g. actively seeking to build an identity of openness, liberalism and tolerance). In using these

models it is important not to replicate the false dichotomy of ethnic (malign) and civic (benign) nationalisms (McCrone 1998), or the value judgement distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' nationalisms (Spencer and Wollman 2005b). Moreover, as my previous cautionary note suggests (cf. Crabbe 2004; Garland 2004; King 2006), evidence of benign Englishness does not necessarily mean that personalities have fundamentally altered, merely perhaps a growing reflexivity over how others perceive the English and how the English would want others to view them. Indeed in the next chapter we examine the continuing 'Othering' process to which postcolonial nationalities are subject. However, this typology does provide a useful heuristic device for organizing the empirical evidence of the changing ways in which Englishness and cricket have inter-related in recent years.

This analysis builds upon Chapters 3 to 7 to examine how the experiences of colonialism and postcolonialism impacted upon English conceptions of self. In the first section of this chapter I chart the development of a cultural defensiveness constructed around a romanticized conception of cricket and Englishness. The concept of malign Englishness seems to closely fit the characteristics evident in this form of nationalism. However, this represents only one phase in a broader process. Thus I subsequently argue that: a) epitomized by the establishment of the Barmy Army in 1994/1995; b) popularized through the Ashes victory in 2005; and c) ultimately embodied in Andrew Flintoff, English cricket's most significant twenty-first century celebrity, contemporary cricket has come to express revised versions of English national identity which are closer to a model of benign Englishness than those which dominated English cricket discourses at the end of the twentieth century. Despite elements of change, the veneration of Flintoff illustrates the importance of nostalgia and history in defining Englishness, and the role of cricket in continuing to provide a stable source of distinction for those looking to express their Englishness within the set of social relations unique to the contemporary context.

Malign Englishness

As epitomized in the West Indian example, throughout the twentieth century the cricket playing nations of the former British Empire underwent a process of de-colonization and national self-assertion. Gradually the English lost political control of both the Commonwealth and the game. The Imperial Cricket Conference became the International Cricket Conference in 1965, and the International Cricket Council in 1989. The convention that the Chairman and Secretary of the MCC be appointed ex-officio Chairman and ex-officio Secretary of the ICC respectively was abolished. Although the first elected Chairman was former MCC Chairman Colin Cowdrey, subsequently the post has been held by only one other Briton, David Morgan. In 1993 England and Australia's right to

veto ICC policy changes was withdrawn. With key administrative positions now subject to a vote of the member nations, historically held assumptions about the ownership and control of the game became overtly challenged.

The unilateral right of the English to define the way in which the game should be played also declined. The initial challenge can be traced back to the 'Bodyline' test series in 1932–33 (see Chapter 3) which was the first time anyone 'challenged the imperial tradition that Britain set the standards for civilized behaviour' (Stoddart 1979: 126). Latterly, as we have seen, defeats on the pitch at the hands of the West Indies were viewed as rejections of colonialism's hierarchical relations. Allegations of ball-tampering which accompanied Pakistan's emergence as a playing force in the early 1990s (Williams 2001) can also be seen as a sign of English resistance to their waning power over the game and an increasing sense of insecurity in a politically changing world. Maguire, for instance, charted the contested nature of Anglo-Australian relations in 1992 when Prime Minister Keating's attempts to re-position Australia as politically closer to Pacific Rim nations by questioning the country's links with the United Kingdom were closely followed by England's victory over Australia in the ICC Cricket World Cup. Maguire detected a 'revamped aggressive Englishness' (1993: 314) within a discourse 'dominated by a patronizing "English" tone toward the upstart Aussies who had been firmly put in their place' (1993: 303).

An equally significant challenge to British dominance has been economically driven. Again the initial challenge came from Australia in the form of the Packer cricket series of the 1970s. Even so, such were the relative economic power and infrastructural resources that the first three Cricket World Cups (1975, 1979, 1983) were held in England. There will, however, be a twenty-year gap between the country's staging of the 1999 and 2019 events. These more recent economic changes can be more adequately described as the Indianization of cricket (Gupta 2010; Steen 2010). Twin manifestations of this development include the shift in the economic balance of power towards India and the proliferation of one-day cricket relative to test matches. The emergence of the Indian Premier League's (IPL) Twenty20 competition is perhaps the clearest illustration of this trend (see Mehta *et al.* 2009). Epitomizing this changing landscape of cricket, the ICC relocated from Lord's to Dubai in 2005. Yet (other people's) attempts to commercialize cricket have long met with English objections that the 'spirit of the game' will be damaged or lost (Wright 1993). Suggestions of cheating (for example relating to ball tampering in the England-Pakistan game at the Oval in 2006) and examples of 'fair play' (Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni's decision to 'invite' Ian Bell to resume his innings at Trent Bridge in 2011)¹ have been seized upon by the English media in equal measure. The insertion of a Preamble to the Laws of Cricket on the 'Spirit of the Game' in 2000 and the inauguration of the MCC's Spirit of Cricket Cowdrey Lecture in 2001 can be seen as symbolic swansongs of the right of the English to define the way in which the game 'should' be played.

These changes have impacted upon the expression of Englishness. As discussed in the previous chapter, debates generated by Tebbit and Henderson, the variety of spectatorship styles demonstrated by diasporic peoples and perceptions of racial inequality at the grass roots of the game are illustrative of ‘an inward looking nationalism’, characterized by ‘a preoccupation with “the enemy within”’ (Crabbe and Wagg 2000: 70). Though written with reference to race relations in Britain more broadly, Burdsey’s (2006: 15) words are striking in their applicability to cricket:

Perceptions of a threat to England and ‘Englishness’ have resulted in the emergence of a defensive ‘Little Englander’ mentality. This worldview is constructed around the celebration of quasi-mythical English history and utopian images of suburban/rural life, free from the alleged problems of inner city (and ipso facto minority ethnic) communities. It stresses a perceived common ancestry and homogeneity of English culture and, in the process, constructs a notion of ‘Englishness’ that is palpably monocultural.

Such was the exclusivity and reactive insularity of English cricket at the end of the millennium that some predicted the game’s imminent demise. According to Paul Gilroy (2001: xv):

Men’s cricket is in what appears to be terminal decline as a national spectator sport. Its old imperial logics lost and its civilizing codes increasingly anachronistic and unmoving in a world sharply and permanently divided into the two great camps: a select group of winners and an ever-expanding legion of losers. Few state schools have the time or the facilities to maintain teams. Tall boys want to play basketball rather than bowl and the fundamental idea that a wholly satisfying contest can endure for five days and yet produce no result, increasingly defies comprehension. Meanwhile, the dead weight of a corrosive class culture prevents the decomposing game from re-inventing itself.

Gilroy has, of course, been proved quite wrong, largely because he fails to conceive of Englishness and English national identity with the same fluidity, hybridity and heterogeneity that characterizes his (and others) analysis of diaspora. In the latter years of the twentieth century cricket would not only be re-popularized through re-invention, but re-invented in such a way as to remain the quintessential English game. Cricket became structured around a revised set of core values which re-positioned English national character and formed the basis of a more ‘positive’ sense of national identity. It is to this, and the convergence of both cricketing and broader society-wide social processes, that we now turn.

The Barmy Army and the emergence of benign Englishness²

The first signs of a cultural seachange in the way cricket articulated with notions of Englishness emerged in conjunction with the arrival of the Barmy Army. ‘England’s Barmy Army’ was the name given to a vocal and boisterous

group of England cricket supporters by the *Sydney Morning Herald* during the 1994/95 Ashes series in Australia. The particularly high financial, temporal and emotional commitment required of supporters travelling to watch the Ashes seem to have been the catalyst for the formation of this group, already bonded by common nationality, the camaraderie of a backpacking, hedonistic lifestyle and, not least, a love of cricket. This loosely organized but clearly identifiable group attracted considerable media attention. The Barmy Army organized parties attended by the England players and were allocated specific enclosures at grounds which attracted corporate sponsorship. By the fourth test match in Adelaide the Barmy Army trademark had been registered and by the end of the fifth 3,000 Barmy Army t-shirts had been sold. The Barmy Army have since become a major feature of the English cricket landscape and, most significantly for present purposes, their emergence was both inspired by and has provided a vehicle for revised expressions of the relationship between cricket and Englishness.

Leaders of the Barmy Army *claim* that their membership is 'representative of the full social spectrum' (*Guardian*, 7 February 1998). They have openly espoused an anti-racist and anti-sexist agenda and proudly claim to cut across the traditional divides of class, 'race', age, gender, and regional loyalty. In reality, however, the Barmy Army largely consists of white males aged between twenty and forty. In terms of social class, Vic Marks has argued that most work in 'solicitors' or accountants' offices' (*Observer*, 24 January 1999) while B.C. Pires conversely reported that the Barmy Army members he met in the West Indies 'appeared to be predominantly working-class lads' (*Guardian*, 7 February 1998). More concretely we can say that the Barmy Army's 'leadership' is largely drawn from relatively affluent social backgrounds. The three co-founders or 'party co-ordinators' (a term which signifies the underlying motivations and anti-hierarchical ethos) are Paul Burnham, Gareth Evans and Dave Peacock. When the Barmy Army was formed, Gareth Evans was a chartered surveyor with the supermarket chain *Sainsbury* and ex-public schoolboy Dave Peacock was a manager with *National Power*. Paul Burnham also went to a public school. Previously an 'executive' with *British Airways*, Burnham now works full time for the Barmy Army (Parry and Malcolm 2004; de Lisle 2006).

The most sociologically interesting aspect of the Barmy Army is the contrast between the supportership style and motivations of its members and that which has traditionally characterized English cricket spectators and which has long been taken to be an embodiment of English national identity. Initially the Barmy Army motto was 'To love England, to love cricket, to love the players' (though it was later changed to, 'to make watching and playing cricket more fun and more popular'). As the original motto indicates, three concurrent preoccupations fuelled the formation of the Barmy Army: fun; influence and nationalism. Compared to the tradition of restrained approval and curbed emotion, the

Barmy Army is vocal, self-conscious, partisan and carnivalesque. Many wear fancy dress, carry inflatables and paint their faces. Critics, in particular, have continually identified the drinking culture of Barmy Army members. The Barmy Army sell song sheets – *Barmy Harmonies* – are accompanied by ‘Billy the Trumpeter’ [Cooper] and in Vic Flowers (aka ‘Jimmy’, due to his resemblance to the late Jimmy Saville) provide their own master of ceremonies. The Barmy Army is outward looking in that it expresses a proactive commitment to convert/recruit other spectators at, and to, the game and may well have been influential in contributing to the growing popularity of test cricket in England since the mid 1990s.³

The second preoccupation – influence – also re-defines English cricket spectatorship. The Barmy Army employ various strategies in this regard. Songs and chants are directed at individual players or the England team collectively. In contrast to the traditions and norms of cricket spectatorship irreverent, insulting and even crudely abusive chants are directed at England’s opponents. These have included accusations of paedophilia, homophobic abuse and reference to Australia’s history as a penal colony. In 2005 some questioned the appropriateness of the barracking of Jason Gillespie which rested on a traveller ‘racial’ stereotype. In a further inversion of tradition the Barmy Army vociferously applaud opposing bowlers *only* when they have bowled badly. The use of masochistic and ironic self-depreciation, or ‘gallows humour’, also illustrates the revised sense of the importance of winning as part of this style of support. England players’ public endorsements of the Barmy Army serve as a particular point of pride, especially given the hostility the group initially encountered in the media. In 2005 England captain Michael Vaughan said that the support of the Barmy Army was like having an extra player (de Lisle 2006).

The third major pre-occupation of the Barmy Army is the nationalistic nature of members’ support. On the one hand this is relatively self-evident in that their *raison d’être* is to follow and support the England cricket team. This overt nationalism initially led many commentators to draw parallels between the behaviour of the Barmy Army and English football hooligans. Ian Woolridge, for instance, writing in the *Daily Mail* in December 1994 spoke of, ‘the extreme embarrassment of some 30 or 40 English hooligans ... the detritus of the English national social security system ... those morons seek confrontation with any Australians that will take them on ... this small banal bunch of louts...’. Yet such depictions falsely describe the group’s demographics and belie the hybridity of the Barmy Army supporter style, for it is perhaps more accurate to draw parallels between themselves and the ‘Tartan Army’ and ‘Roligans’ who follow the Scottish and Danish national football teams respectively. Each emphasizes that being a fan abroad involves a responsibility to actively and positively experience foreign cultures, and to socialize with opposing fans. In 1996, for instance, the Barmy Army staged a fundraising match for the development of township cricket in South Africa. Songs and chants may

include aggressive, coded and racialized verbal abuse, but instances of disorder at cricket matches more commonly perceived to have been ‘racially’ motivated (see previous chapter) have not been thought to have involved the Barmy Army. Indeed the Barmy Army show more similarities with Caribbean and South Asian supporter styles (evident both in the respective domestic games and amongst diasporic communities) than with either the relatively aggressive nationalism traditionally associated with English football supporters, or the restrained traditions of spectatorship associated with English cricket.

Thus the Barmy Army’s explicit rejection of pre-existing and contrasting forms of English cricket spectator behaviour indicate the expression of a new variant of English national identity. Just as the Barmy Army can be juxtaposed against ‘traditional’ models of Englishness and cricket spectatorship, so their new and distinctive cultural identity can be seen in marked contrast to the forms of malign Englishness described above. The Barmy Army consisted of a group of English/British people who were not ‘inward looking’ or defensive about either cricket or ‘their’ nation, but were open (relishing their co-existence with similar fan groups), ironic (in their rejection of cricketing traditions and use of humour), creative (promoting liberal values and opposing the ‘establishment’ of English cricket) and cosmopolitan (formed partly through a willingness to experience different cultures).

The social context of the Barmy Army’s emergence

As with the initial emergence of an ideological link between cricket and Englishness in the nineteenth century, these developments can only be understood in the context of a broader social structure in which particular social processes were particularly evident. Specifically society-wide processes, sports-wide processes and cricket-specific processes can be identified. Combined they enabled the Barmy Army to assume considerable prominence both in cricket and society more generally. Moreover, this integration enabled cricket to remain relevant to contemporary English identities.

First, the Barmy Army is a product of globalization. Enabled by the increasing opportunities for international travel and increasing media exposure of different cultural forms (and the subsequent appropriation of these cultural forms), the Barmy Army are illustrative of the interplay between global and local (national) identities whereby the latter are paradoxically strengthened as a consequence of the former (Bairner 2001).

Being something of a male preserve (and as we saw in Chapter 2, national identity is a gendered phenomenon), the Barmy Army also appears to be closely related to changing expressions of masculinity in contemporary Britain, and ‘New Laddism’ in particular. ‘New lad’, through an emphasis on sport, alcohol and sexual divisions, has been seen as a reaction to the

1980s 'New Man' phenomenon (Rutherford 1988), and a partial reversion to 'traditional' masculine, largely working class, values (Edwards 1997). The Barmy Army has been described as the most visible example of 'cricketing Laddism' and a prominent feature of 'New Cricket Culture' which is partly a 'by-product of the sociological New Lad phenomenon' (MacQuillin 1996: 39). Barmy Army guest appearances on the sports comedy quiz *They Think it's all Over* (a prominent manifestation of New Lad culture (Whelehan 2000)) both indicated and reproduced the connection between 'New Laddism' and the Barmy Army. New Laddism's use of irreverent humour to rationalize sexist and coded-racist remarks as 'excusable' (Carrington 1998), is reproduced in the Barmy Army's questioning of opposition players' sexualities while espousing an ethos of social inclusion.

Second, the development of the Barmy Army has been heavily influenced by processes affecting sports spectatorship more widely. The Barmy Army draw on the long-standing tradition amongst football supporter groups to define themselves in terms of being an Army (for example, the aforementioned 'Tartan Army'). Like traditional English working class football support, the Barmy Army congregates in the cheapest areas (like football 'ends'), and attempt to influence the outcome of matches. Such parallels are not accidental. Over sixty different replica football club shirts were evident amongst England fans who 'joined' the Barmy Army at the 1995 Adelaide test match (Parry and Malcolm 2004). Moreover the Barmy Army also share many of the features of the 'fundamental regeneration of football fandom' (Brown 1998: 65) which stemmed from the post-Hillsborough economic transformation of English football. The Barmy Army fulfil many of the same organizational functions as the football supporter groups which emerged around this time. Groups like the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) seek to increase fan influence over the game and promote 'liberal' agendas such as anti-racism. The FSA also establishes 'supporter embassies' during international football tournaments and thus provides similar kinds of traveller support as the Barmy Army does for overseas cricket tours. Like the Barmy Army, football supporter associations tended to promote themselves as representative of a broad social spectrum while being dominated by white, middle-class, males (Nash 2001). Like those who launched the football fanzine movement, the Barmy Army leadership have been accused of economic exploitation of their position.

Finally, the emergence of the Barmy Army needs to be understood in the context of cricket-specific processes and in particular the peculiar economic structure of the English game. Since 1945 attempts have continually been made to increase cricket's popularity and revenue. Significant developments include: the removal of the distinction between professionals and amateurs in 1962; the introduction of sponsored one-day cricket in 1963 (The Gillette Cup); the expansion of one day competitions (the John Player League followed in 1969 and the Benson and Hedges trophy in 1972); and sponsorship of test match cricket from 1977. In each case the resistance of established groups

attempting to 'defend' the traditions of English cricket have been overcome (Sandiford 1985). The wearing of coloured clothing, the musical punctuation of matches, day-night floodlit games and the 2003 launch of Twenty20 cricket are all extensions of this trend. These innovations have enabled the cricketing authorities to further exploit broadcasting rights income. This process significantly developed in 1990 when the (then) financially ailing Sky TV (latterly BSkyB) purchased the rights to broadcast England's tour of the West Indies. For the first time English cricket became part of a commercialized TV package. In 1998 the ECB opened the tender for home test match cricket coverage and the traditional TV broadcaster of cricket, the BBC, could no longer compete financially. The 2005 Ashes series was the last international cricket to be aired live on a terrestrial channel in the UK.

Commercial broadcasters have sought to market the game beyond its traditional audience. An appeal to a new 'football-type' audience, familiar with 'New Laddism', has led the relaxed, understated style of John Arlott, Brian Johnston, Peter West and Tony Lewis to be replaced by more spectacular coverage. Radio coverage and Test Match Special in particular has been subject to similar changes (Watson 2010, 2011). Technology – on-screen scores, slow-motion replays, 'hawkeye', 'snicko', 'hot spot', blogs and Twitter, etc.⁴ – creates a more dynamic package. Broadcasters also attempt to convey to the viewer the atmosphere in the stadium and consequently spectator groups like the Barmy Army assume increased significance as ready-made, animated scenery which can be incorporated into the coverage. Cricket administrators subsequently formulated a strategy of co-option aligning official England merchandise with Barmy Army branded products and using the Barmy Army as a base to popularize the game, particularly amongst a younger audience. Thus, driven by the desire for increased income, English cricket authorities, media groups and advertisers have sought to utilize the presence of the Barmy Army, which in turn has justified the Barmy Army's continued presence, helped legitimize their actions, and increased their profile.

The Barmy Army represents a qualitatively new form of English national identity and, as with the nineteenth century 're-invention' of cricket as the quintessential English game, this has occurred concurrently with a combination of society-wide social processes and cricket-specific developments. With regard to the latter, the peculiar economics of cricket which have seen the English game continually struggle for existence have generated the social conditions in which pronounced change can relatively easily occur. The degree to which a discourse of malign Englishness had increasingly become associated with all things to do with English cricket similarly provided a context which structured the specific variant of Englishness to emerge. Just as malign Englishness was based on an 'othering' of particular social groups, so benign Englishness has stemmed from an 'othering' of the traditions and establishment of cricket. But just as we saw in relation to cricket and diaspora, these processes are not simple binary reactions, but entail a commingling of identities and cultural forms.

2005 Ashes and the popularization of benign Englishness

If the formation of the Barmy Army marked the emergence of benign Englishness, the 2005 Ashes series represented the point in time at which the relationship between cricket and this sense of national identity could be said to have entered a broader public consciousness. Newspapers reported increased sales of between 5 and 10 per cent (*Observer*, 18 September 2005), the *BBC Sport* website had its busiest ever Saturday, 66 per cent of the public said that members of the cricket team were ‘much better role models’ than England’s footballers, and 80 per cent of respondents to a *Radio 5 Live* poll said that they now preferred cricket to football. Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson said that it was the first time in the history of the football Premiership that the start of the season had been overshadowed by Test cricket (*Guardian*, 22 August 2005). For Mike Selvey, the 2005 Ashes victory ‘captured the imagination of the public in a manner that hitherto could only be dreamed of’ (*Guardian*, 23 December 2005). But the style of patriotism with which this victory was celebrated was also inherently linked to the displays of a changing sense of English national identity emergent in the formation of the Barmy Army. To what extent did these celebrations align with Turner and Edmunds’ (2001) model of benign Englishness?

In championing a team which incorporated players from diverse backgrounds, English cricket fans and media commentators implicitly recognized the contingent nature of such sporting/national allegiances. The team contained the Australian-raised, Papua New Guinean wicketkeeper (with a Welsh forename) Geriant Jones. The South African-born Kevin Pietersen, who had qualified to play for England through residency, had become one of the most popular and prominent England players. Andrew Strauss, also South African-born and married to an Australian, qualified to play for England because he had an English mother. Through his educational experience (Radley College and Durham University), he developed many of the characteristics of traditional, upper-class conceptions of Englishness and thus earned the nickname ‘Lord Brocket’. But the contingent nature of national identities has most explicitly been commented upon by Ed Joyce, a Dublin-born cricketer who played for Ireland before subsequently qualifying and choosing to play for England. Reflecting on his shift of national affiliation, in 2007 Joyce stated,

there’s no doubt ... [once] you supported anyone other than England. That’s changing now. I think it’s just time, a new generation. And the England team now have an interesting mix of people. There was Geraint Jones, and there’s Kevin Pietersen and Monty Panesar and Sajid Mahmood. If you look at England and Britain as a whole it is a brilliant mix. I look at the team and see a progressive country here. (*Independent*, 11 March 2007)

Such remarks stand in direct contrast to Henderson’s critique of player motivation a decade earlier.

In addition to both the recognition of the fluidity of national identity, and the embrace of rather than resistance to different identities, the 2005 Ashes series provided evidence to suggest that elements of the cricket community were becoming more 'creative' in their outlook, actively seeking to build an identity of openness, liberalism and tolerance. It was notable in the wake of the 2005 Ashes series victory that, and in sharp contrast to the traditional notions of cricket, the apparent classlessness of the England cricket team was celebrated. BBC correspondent Benjamin Dirs described the victory parade in Trafalgar Square as 'one big coming out party ... this is a very modern England with very modern fans'. The team were depicted as 'normal blokes'; 'these are men that you might like to have a few beers with ... England's footballers are remote by comparison and increasingly difficult to identify with'.⁵ The cricketers were seen as down to earth and non-aspirational in material terms. A reporter in the Scottish *Evening News*, argued that the idea that cricket was 'only for sissies or for toffs from private schools ... is fast going out the window. Cricket is becoming a "normal" game' (20 August 2005). Andrew Collier in the *Scotsman* (15 September 2005) similarly argued that these events had radically altered the image of cricket: 'A piece of traditional England died this week, the notion of cricket as a game for gentlemen.' Centrally, therefore, this discourse portrayed as defunct the social hierarchies which have traditionally underpinned both cricket and Englishness. It was noticeable, moreover, that it was Scottish journalists in particular who stressed the significance of the changing class base of the game. *Pace* Gilroy, popularization *has* stemmed from the weakening of rigid social class boundaries and the increasing sense of democratization within the English cricket.

One could also detect elements of the feminization (similarly identified as a component of benign Englishness) of cricket. Television audiences grew significantly during the summer of 2005, with female viewers being one of the most significant growth areas. On the first morning of the first test only a quarter of viewers were female, but by the final day of the fifth test, that figure had grown to 39 per cent. The actual number of female viewers therefore increased from approximately 500,000 to around 3.25m (*Guardian*, 3 November 2005). Similarly the England women's cricket team, who also defeated their Australian counterparts that summer, were manifestly more integrated with the men's game than perhaps at any time previously. This was enabled by the Women's Cricket Association's merger with the ECB in 1998 (see Malcolm and Velija 2008; Velija and Malcolm 2010). In 2005 the women were included in the Ashes victory parade and both teams were invited to Downing Street to meet Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The response in Scotland to the success of the England cricket team illustrated the sense in which this nationalistic celebration was relatively 'open', more encompassing of, than oppositional to, other nationalisms. In the aftermath of the 2005 Ashes victory, MSP Christine Grahame submitted a motion to

the Scottish Parliament entitled 'It's Simply not Cricket', which 'lamented the overwhelming UK-wide coverage of a sport of only marginal interest in Scotland'. This prompted four retaliatory motions condemning her 'petty and narrow minded nationalism' which was 'an insult to the thousands who play cricket in Scotland' (*Scotsman*, 15 September 2005). The critical voices in the ensuing public debate were largely directed at the London-based media rather than the English cricket establishment or the English *per se*. Many, like columnist Martin Hannan who described himself as a 'Fierce patriot ... cut me and I bleed Saltires', 'confessed' to cheering on England (*Scotland on Sunday*, 11 September 2005). Craig Wright, captain of the Scottish men's cricket team said that England's success had been 'celebrated by people all over Scotland' (*Scotsman*, 15 September 2005). Television viewing figures seemed to support this, for whilst Scotland constitutes just 8.5 per cent of the UK population, viewers in Scotland accounted for 18 per cent of the total Channel 4 audience (*Scotland on Sunday*, 18 September 2005). It could however be argued that for some Scottish viewers this was not a manifestation of support, but borne out of the desire to see England lose).

Thus, some Scots seemed happy to support the England cricket team in a way unthinkable in other sports. Whilst Gordon Brown (a Scot) attracted considerable criticism for declaring his support for England during the 2006 Football World Cup, Scottish support for the England cricket team seems less problematic. Tom English, writing in *Scotland on Sunday* (11 September 2005), could revel in the aftermath of the England football team's defeat to Northern Ireland in September 2005, yet declare himself 'happy for the England cricket team ... because from a distance they seem an altogether agreeable lot. But we draw the line at [England football manager] Sven's men'. Similarly broadcaster and columnist Nicky Campbell noted his (class-based) antipathy toward the England rugby union team—referring to 'Sir Clive [Woodward]'s Smarmy Army'—and asked, 'What's different about Test Cricket?'. Campbell's answer was that, 'We don't play you and, if we are good, we play for you and occasionally captain you' (*Guardian*, 15 September 2005). Thus the relationship between the English and the Scottish appeared to be more open and mutually supportive in cricket than in relation to other sports and built more upon Britain's historical legacy of a blurred patchwork of ethnic identities (see Chapter 6) than the divisions which tend to strongly characterize other sporting contests within the United Kingdom.

Illustrating both their social significance, and their location at the conjunction of these changing conceptions of Englishness, the Barmy Army were provided with a unique presence during the official celebrations and, specifically their own stage in Trafalgar Square, alongside that of the players for the conclusion of the victory parade. During the celebrations Kevin Pietersen beckoned Bill Cooper and Vic Flowers to join the players but they were stopped by security guards. Zimbabwean-born England coach, Duncan Fletcher, intervened to

enable them to join the team (de Lisle 2006). The changing sense of Englishness that the Barmy Army both embodied and fostered was fully and explicitly recognized in the celebrations that brought it to the consciousness of a broader public in 2005.

Flintoff as the embodiment of Englishness

In concluding this analysis of changing conceptions of national identity I want to focus on the pre-eminent English cricketing celebrity of the twenty-first century. The recent boom in the study of celebrity culture stems in part from the social 'functions' celebrities are thought to perform. For instance celebrities are said to help generate cultural identities, provide an integrating function holding society together through common identification, and legitimate the process of capitalist exchange and commodification (Turner 2004). Celebrities may act as 'brands' which give security through familiarity and thus provide stability during times of rapid social change, and may contribute to meritocratic ideologies which underpin contemporary societies (Marshall 1997). One of the key elements of the study of *sports* celebrities is that they inevitably speak to themes of national identity (Andrews and Jackson 2001; Turner 2004). Although the nature of celebrity culture has changed markedly during the twentieth century, many of the changes are a continuation, rather than a disruption, of longer term processes. For instance, we saw earlier how W.G. Grace became an important sporting celebrity in England and Scotland at the end of the Victorian era. Similarly it could be argued that the popularity of Nyren's account of the Hambledon players stemmed from their use in generating an English identity, providing stability at a time of rapid social change, etc. Most interestingly though, the portrayal of Flintoff draws directly on the narratives introduced by Nyren and Pycroft in the nineteenth century. Consequently Flintoff provides an excellent vehicle through which to examine continuity and change in the relationship between cricket and English national identity.

Born in Preston, Lancashire, on 6 December 1977, Andrew 'Freddie' Flintoff's role in England's 2005 Ashes win propelled him to celebrity status, 'a name which, once made by the news, now makes the news itself' (Rein *et al.* 1997: 14). Yet Flintoff's post-2005 performances were as inconsistent as his fitness. He captained England to a 5-0 losing Ashes series in 2006-07 and was later stripped of the England vice-captaincy after the notorious 'Fredalo' incident during the 2007 ICC Cricket World Cup.⁶ The 2009 season started poorly for Flintoff when he missed a pre-series trip to the World War I trenches in Flanders, resurrecting questions about his ill-discipline and relationship with alcohol. But Flintoff's series changed when, on the eve of the second test at Lord's, he announced that he would retire from Test cricket at the end of the Ashes series due to a persistent knee injury. Flintoff went on to take five wickets bowling

unchanged on the final morning of the Lord's test to put England ahead in the series. Flintoff batted well but bowled ineffectually in the rain affected drawn third test before controversially being left out of the fourth, disputing the team management's assessment of his fitness. England suffered a humiliating loss and with the series tied Flintoff was recalled for the final Oval test. Set an improbable 546 to win a partnership of 127 between Australian captain Ricky Ponting and Michael Hussey looked like it might save the game and consequently retain the Ashes for Australia until Flintoff ran out Ponting with a direct hit from mid off. Shortly after England won the game and regained the Ashes. Though Flintoff had scored just twenty-nine runs and taken just one wicket in the match, he was accredited with inspiring victory. The 2009 Ashes would thus become seminal in defining Flintoff the celebrity.

Flintoff's emergence as a celebrity in 2005 firmly located him within the genre of nationalism fundamental to and evident in the development of the Barmy Army. Prominent, for instance, was his drunken behaviour during the Trafalgar Square celebrations and Downing Street reception where he reputedly asked the Prime Minister if he had anything to drink and urinated in the garden. He combined the 'New Laddishness' of these drunken antics (including writing TWAT on a teammate's forehead with an indelible marker pen) with elements of 'New Man' (for example, his devotion to family life). The most iconic image of that test series – a picture of Flintoff consoling Brett Lee mid pitch while the rest of the England team celebrated a narrow victory over Australia – positioned Flintoff as a compassionate man. Although Flintoff has subsequently (and jokingly) claimed that what he actually said to Brett Lee was 'It's 1-1 yer Aussie Bastard', this ultimately serves to highlight his embrace of an ironic humour also championed by the Barmy Army. Flintoff's 'sledging' of the West Indian tailender Tino Best (in telling Best to 'mind the windows' Flintoff induced a rash shot which led to Best's dismissal, much to the amusement of Flintoff and his team mates) and his 'not bad for a fat lad' comment in response to press criticism about his weight when accepting an ODI 'man-of-the-match' award in 2000, provide evidence of the centrality of humour to Flintoff's character. Post-playing Flintoff has become a panellist on the sports-comedy quiz, *A League of their Own* which in many ways is an organic successor to *They Think it's all Over*. But perhaps most significant to Flintoff's celebrity image is the passion with which he played and the manifest pleasure that playing the game brought to him. Flintoff and the Barmy Army were a natural fit due to their shared sense of fun, influence and nationalism. Thus Flintoff emerged as a celebrity at the convergence of the same processes that shaped the emergence of the Barmy Army and narratives of benign Englishness.

But if Flintoff's celebrity status stems from his connection to changing senses of national identity, it is also fundamentally rooted in his resonance with *traditional* conceptions of Englishness. These became particularly evident during the 2009 series. Flintoff was described as 'the embodiment of England'

(*Observer*, 5 July 2009), as 'a symbol of English belligerence ... there is a peculiarly English recklessness about his refusal to acknowledge physical disintegration' (*Guardian*, 21 July 2009). He was described as 'the solid oak of England', a 'big strong patriot who scares foreigners', whose 'exaltation at claiming an Australian wicket expressed large chunks of national character' (*Sun*, 4 August 2009; *Guardian*, 10 July 2009; *Guardian*, 16 July 2009). For Simon Barnes, 'Flintoff's most important role ... [was] as the antidote to fear. That's why he's the talisman. He intimidates' (*The Times*, 10 July 2009). Flintoff was, in many ways, the twenty-first century version of the 'unflinching, uncompromising, independent' Richard Nyren described by his son in 1833 in *The Cricketers of my Time* (Nyren 1833/1948: 18)

During 2009 the press represented Flintoff as a man whose previous ill-discipline had been redeemed through hard work. He was, for instance, prepared to 'run through a brick wall for his side ... he never knows when to give up' (*Sunday Mirror*, 26 July 2009). He had worked 'heroically hard on his fitness' (*Guardian*, 7 July 2009). The England medical team issued a statement praising the 'great determination and selflessness [in] making a conscious decision to push through discomfort in order to help England reclaim the Ashes' (*The Times*, 8 August 2009). Crucially effort was seen as an adjunct of honesty. It was claimed that 'Freddie never operates at anything less than 100 per cent' (*Sun*, 15 July 2009) and that he was 'the least cynical athlete in sport' (*The Times*, 16 July 2009). Former team mates and opponents were fulsome in their praise of Flintoff. In this respect Flintoff was reminiscent of Hambledon's John Wells, 'a creature of a transparent and unflawed integrity – plain, simple, and candid; uncompromising yet courteous; civil and deferential, yet no cringer' (Nyren 1833/1948: 35).

Flintoff's honesty was evident in both the simplicity of his game, and the modesty with which he reacted to his achievements. Again echoing the description of Wells, journalists wrote of, 'A carefree innings from a carefree man ... naturally committed to simple fun' (*Observer*, 23 August 2009). As if familiar with Pycroft's recommendations that conceit and vainglory were the 'enemies' of the cricketer (1851/1948: 67), Flintoff, reflected that he had not 'achieved greatness' on a par with players like Garry Sobers, Ian Botham and Ricky Ponting (*Sun*, 25 August 2009). While journalists sometimes questioned the role of PR advisors in constructing Flintoff's public character, it was thought that 'he never really set out to achieve greatness, doesn't yearn for it in the same way as [team mate] Kevin Pietersen. Flintoff plays for enjoyment, the company of mates' (*The Times* 20 August 2009).

This combination of character traits produced the kind of fundamentally unremarkable persona which traditionalists, since Nyren, have wanted to attribute for the genesis of the game. There was 'no player who enjoys a closer rapport with the fans. They view him as one of their own' (*Sun*, 19 August 2009), 'a player every cricket fan from all sides of the social divide could

associate with' (*Sun*, 16 July 2009). Flintoff himself stated that 'If I wasn't a player I would be sat in the thick of the Barmy Army with a pint, singing away with the best of them' (*The Times*, 25 August 2009). Important in the presentation of Flintoff as 'normal' was the continual reference to his Preston roots, his embrace of northern, working-class culture and his support of the more 'local' Manchester City rather than the 'global' United. Thus 'much of Flintoff's appeal can be linked to this everyman approach' (*The Times*, 7 August 2009); 'a hugely inspirational figure, a man of his time and the undoubted hero of the masses' (*Sun*, 24 August 2009). On retirement Flintoff,

bowed out an ordinary man ... This was understated Fred. This was ordinary Fred, the good lad Fred, bloke next door Fred who wonders what all the fuss is about when really he's just doing something he enjoys and happens to be quite good at ... [he] never betrayed his beliefs on how the game should be played and how the crowd should be entertained. (*Daily Mirror*, 25 August 2009)

Thus just as the nineteenth-century 're-invention' of cricket entailed the obfuscation of the game's elitist, aristocratic roots and the attribution of the game's origins to 'ordinary' English agricultural workers, so Flintoff was used to reiterate the narrative that cricket was a game of the people, embodying the people. Flintoff was both *one* of but also consciously *playing for* 'us' English. Like Hambledon farmer Thomas Brett, who bowled 'very quickly', and was a 'strictly honourable man' (Nyren 1833/1948: 17), Flintoff the sports celebrity was an everyday working man. The portrayal of Flintoff continued the tradition of using cricket as a mirror of social cohesion (Williams 1999).

As Hambledon and its cricketers had two centuries beforehand, Flintoff was positioned as a stable reference point in a changing world. Reflecting on England's victory in the second test, Matthew Syed wrote, 'The Ashes have once again shown us why the oldest rivalry in cricket, an anachronistic contest between a former colonial power and upstart nation, retains its vitality, urgency and relevance' (*The Times*, 22 July 2009). Following the Lord's victory it was claimed that 'cricket had reclaimed its place at the heart of British life' (*Daily Mirror*, 21 July 2009), while a Flintoff-less England at Headingley, 'played like a bunch of kids whose minds have been scrambled by too much internet surfing, cable TV channel hopping and Twenty20 cricket' (*Sunday People*, 9 August 2009). Flintoff had helped save test cricket from the perceived threat posed by the shorter and more commercially successful forms of the game like 'the white knight riding to the rescue' (*Daily Mirror*, 21 August 2009). In helping to return the Ashes to their 'rightful' status he challenged the 'Indianization' of cricket and provided a reminder of the days when England administered world cricket almost unilaterally. Resistance to these contemporary trends could just as easily have been described as counter to the 'march of intellect' as protests against the introduction of round arm bowling had been in the 1830s.

And just as had been evident almost two centuries earlier, the presentation of Flintoff was based upon the strong evocation of nostalgia. The portrayal of Flintoff evoked romanticized and mythologized aspects of the game. Flintoff was thus, 'one of a dying breed ... [and] a victim of the modern cricket calendar' (*Sun*, 16 July 2009). For former Australian cricketer Shane Warne, 'Freddie is a team player through and through ... People will remember him for his runs and his wickets in 2005, but also for how he played. He is one of the good guys, an entertainer who knows about the spirit of the game' (*The Times*, 16 July 2009). Others argued that his commiseration of Brett Lee in 2005 'will be used down the ages when erroneous stories are told about how the modern game is a degenerate version of the past' (*The Times*, 20 August 2009). Ahead of the final Oval test, Vic Marks referred to Flintoff's 'many old-fashioned virtues: generosity, politeness, loyalty, bravery and conviviality' (*Observer*, 16 August 2009). Invoking the transcendental qualities of cricket and religion, the press referred to 'Flintoff ... bonding with the Lord's congregation' (*Guardian* 21 July 2009), of him 'deliver[ing] the kind of sermon everyone around the country wanted to hear' when announcing his determination to overcome injuries (*Daily Mirror*, 21 July 2009). The most explicit and extensive discussion linking Flintoff with nostalgia was written by Richard Williams at the beginning of the final test. He argued that:

the importance of Andrew Flintoff lies in the way he provides a link to founding myths of English cricket ... (he) is as close as today's centrally contracted celebrity cricketers get to the blacksmiths and farmhands among whom the game took shape. His massive build and the apparent lack of science in his play combine to create a sense of cricket as it once was: a simple bucolic game. (*Guardian*, 19 August 2009)

Thus the presentation of Flintoff revolved around a familiar combination of English national character traits. The themes of bravery, commitment, honesty, simplicity and modesty essentially mirror those developed 200 years earlier when cricket was re-invented as the national game (see Chapter 2). Indeed much of what was written about Flintoff had direct parallels to Pycroft's (1851/1948: 62) description of 'The General Character of Cricket' in *The Cricket Field*. While Flintoff clearly was not 'sober and temperate', he possessed 'patience, fortitude, and self-denial ... obedience ... [and] an unruffled temper'. Flintoff demonstrated the virtues of perseverance but he was also amiable and recognized that cricket was a social game which should never, as Pycroft had argued, be over-serious. While Flintoff was projected as representing contemporary forms of masculinity, he also embraced 'the manly spirit that faces danger without shrinking and bears disappointment with good nature' (Pycroft 1951/1948: 69). Flintoff epitomized the view that 'no game is played in better humour – never lost till won – the game's alive till the last ball' (Pycroft 1951/1948: 69). Flintoff's sporting celebrity was based on his quintessential Englishness.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to illustrate something of the fluidity and fragmented character of English national identity. Identity, however, is not a free floating mosaic in which various aspects can be picked at random, but fundamentally rooted in historical interdependencies. The Flintoff celebrity phenomenon epitomizes how contemporary themes are structured within a framework of relatively constant ideas of who the English are. Moreover, we can see that national identities are not monolithic. Newer forms of national identity may rise in conscious opposition to more traditional forms. They continue to be contested as illustrated in 2009 press debates about English cricket spectator behaviour during the Ashes series, and in particular elements of drunkenness and the booing of Australian captain Ricky Ponting. Thus it is important to emphasize that the malign nationalism that characterized English cricket prior to the mid-1990s has not entirely disappeared (or indeed that there was no benign Englishness pre 1994/95), but rather that there has been a shift in the relative prominence of their respective representations. It should also be noted that we cannot infer that there is some kind of direct relationship between the press narratives highlighted and the emotions and actions of self-identifying English individuals. We will return to this point in the Conclusion but for now suffice to say, as in the American case, it is unrealistic to imagine that national character (the character of a whole nation's people) can change quite so quickly. Rather there are some rather obvious attractions to developing the kind of positive self-image of benign Englishness which explains both its promotion to and reception among an English newspaper readership. Consequently, we also need to see how cricket is used as a vehicle for the characterization of other nationalities. It is to this that we turn in the next chapter.