



Jul 15, 2014 00:00 BST

Englishness around the world examined by Northumbria historians

The impact of the English on global culture will be explored at a conference featuring folk music and Morris dancing this week.

The Global English: Historical Perspectives is a two-day conference taking place at Northumbria University, Newcastle from July 17-18, examining the role of the English around the world.

The conference has been organised following a three-year project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, entitled 'Locating the Hidden

Diaspora: The English in North America in Transatlantic Perspective 1760-1950'.

A collaboration between Northumbria historians Dr Tanja Bueltmann and Professor David Gleeson and Professor Don MacRaild, of the University of Ulster, the project explored the vitality of Englishness abroad; recognising the English as a distinct ethnic group, similar to the Irish, Scots and Germans.

Diaspora, from the Greek for 'disperse' and 'scatter', refers to the movement of a people from their homeland. While Irish, Scottish, Italian and German immigrants settling in the US and other countries are recognised as cultural communities and have been the subject of extensive academic research, the English have not.

One of the highlights of this week's conference will be a free public keynote lecture and folk music performance by Professor William Van Vugt, of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Another will be traditional dancing by Hexham Morris, performing 'Dance the Seasons Round'.

Topics to be covered over the course of the two days include the role of the Anglican Church in North America and Canada after the American Revolution; English pastimes and sports overseas, and English music on the American frontier.

Dr Bueltmann said: "While most European diasporas have received considerable attention from scholars, the English diaspora has received virtually none.

"Since 1600, the English have been one of Europe's most migratory peoples. They contributed considerably to the British Empire in values, ideas and personnel, provided core human migrations for the re-peopling of North America and the colonial parts of Africa and Australia, and left a heavy imprint even where they did not colonise, particularly in Asia and the 'informal Empire' elsewhere.

"This conference, the idea for which stems in part from the 'Locating the Hidden Diaspora' project, will explore in more detail the global scope of English culture, examining the activities of the English overseas."

Professor Gleeson added: “This examination of English culture and its celebration in historical contexts around the world provides models for the growing current debate about to how to celebrate Englishness in the 21st century home and away.

“For example, just before Newcastle Gateshead celebrates its Summertyne Americana Festival at the Sage this weekend, Professor William Van Vugt will explain (and sing) the English origins of American folk music.”

Professor Van Vugt’s public lecture ‘English Music on the American Frontier’ will take place in Lipman Building 031 at 5.15pm on Thursday 17 July. This is a free event.

Hexham Morris will perform in the Lipman Theatre from 8pm, also on 17 July. Tickets are £5 and can be purchased on the door on a first come, first served basis.

A full schedule for the Global English: Historical Perspectives conference is available at: <http://www.englishdiaspora.co.uk/conference>

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