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Icons of Englishness

As St George's Day approaches, Northumbria University historians will grapple with what it means to be English in a series of public talks.

While St Andrew's Day and St Patrick's Day are openly and proudly celebrated by the Scottish and Irish, there has been a perception that the English are uncomfortable about defining and celebrating English culture.

This month a series of three talks led by Northumbria historians will explore the issues around the subject of English identity.

The events, which are open to the public, are part of a three year project entitled 'Locating the Hidden Diaspora'. The project, led by Professor Don MacRaild, Dr Tanja Buelmann and Dr David Gleeson aims to explore why 'Englishness' has been overlooked historically while other ethnic groups are celebrated and well-known.

Dr Gleeson, Reader in History, said: "Last year Ed Miliband delivered a speech on what it means to be English. He mentioned that traditionally 'we had been too nervous to talk of English pride and English character' because 'for some it was connected to a kind of nationalism that left us ill at ease.'

"Nonetheless, he believed that for the benefit of the whole United Kingdom, 'Englishness' needed to be redefined in more positive ways and celebrated.

"Some commentators believe, however, that in a multicultural society facing tough economic times, Englishness is too difficult to define beyond cheering for the football time in the World Cup and enjoying a good cup of tea! Yet, the Scots, for example, despite their own economic and political divisions, seem to have no problem seeing Burns Night or Hogmanay as celebrations for all Scots both at home and abroad."

Throughout April the Northumbria University historians, in conjunction with the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle, will examine concepts of Englishness expressed both at home and abroad in a lecture series, entitled Icons of Englishness.

Through their research into the commemoration of Englishness in the past among English immigrants in North America, the speakers will make a significant contribution to contemporary definitions of English identity and culture.

The Icons of Englishness talks will take place at the Lit and Phil on Westgate Road, Newcastle, at 6pm on Tuesdays April 9 and 16, culminating, on St George's Day, Tuesday April 23.

All sessions are free to the public. For more information about the lectures and the research visit: www.englishdiaspora.co.uk or www.locatingthehiddendiaspora.co.uk

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