

Why do Brexiteers feel British identity is under assault?

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Progress on Brexit has been at best painful over the past three years. Since I last authored a blog for CBS however, the drama seems to have reached boiling point. A Brexit Party insurgency, a Liberal spring, and increasing levels of self-mutilation within both Conservative and Labour parties. This all came to a head at the end of May (no pun intended) with the resignation of our dogged but pedestrian PM.

The commentary industry, an endlessly bloating cadaver rotting alongside post-2016 politics, formed a melee desperate to gain first-responder advantage with stinging *bons mots* summing up 'Mother' Theresa's failed premiership. I, on the other hand, adroitly avoided the whole kerfuffle from a vantage point overlooking Ullswater in the Lake District. The remaining limitations of the 3G network in such a rural idyll allowed me to enjoy a well-earned week free of what I generally, albeit crudely, summarise these days as 'Brexit bullshit'.

As I took a short respite from walking, over a cup of tea and slice of Lakeland plum bread, something relating to Brexit disturbed me. One of the key clarion calls in the referendum campaign was figures like Boris Johnson stating they were sick of people putting Britain down. That leaving the EU was tantamount to an unfettering of British traditions those pesky European bureaucrats had sought to slowly suffocate. My issue here is this is by no means a fair representation of the UK I have seen evolve.

As the inferiority complex of the Brexit classes multiplied at a rate which would envy most zombie apocalypses, my overriding observation of the past 20 years has been anything but a decline in British culture and identity. Instead, growth and liberalisation in the travel industry alongside the blending of traditional products and methods with a renewed entrepreneurial orientation has seen a radicalisation in parts of British industry. Let's consider here the Lake District.

Talking to a local farmer over a Scafell Blonde ale, he recounted just how much the tourist industry had impacted the Lakes. Previously more confined to the Windermere area, over 20 years he had seen it expand north to incorporate Ullswater and Derwentwater. Whilst bringing certain negative impacts – from soil erosion on key walkways to quite serious traffic congestion during peak season – this had offered him both opportunity for income stream diversification and increased demand for a core product.

The popularity of the Lake District has seen local business respond to this demand through collectively reinforcing a ‘brand’. In place of the aforementioned geographic area, it has simply become ‘The Lakes’, a name concomitant with commodities we aspire for in an increasingly hectic, connected and urbanised century. It is authentic, organic, peaceful, still. Business has even evolved to supplement what Wordsworth referred to as ‘spots of time’ – those tranquil moments we store in such places for future reference – by exporting the Lakes phenomenon in its jams, cakes, bread, cheese and ales.

This phenomenon however extends far beyond simply the Lakes. Let’s take something to which I am quite partial; the great British Afternoon Tea. Demand for and interest in this tradition has seen notable growth recently; between 2016 and 2018 alone demand went up 54%[\[1\]](#). It has also seen growing innovation and novelty to compete in a congested market seeking experiences rather than simply products or services.

But despite this experimentation, at the heart the experience indicates renewed interest in and valuing of something quintessentially British. And for all the playing with convention, demand for the ‘real thing’ remains strong, as anyone who has queued outside of Betty’s Tearooms will attest.

With small batch breweries and gin distilleries, artisan cheesemakers and bakers, organic butchers and charcuterie using rare breeds, the range and quality of British food has made enormous leaps in the past 20 years. Similarly has the quality of British restaurants. Long gone are the days when a fancy dessert was a Knickerbocker Glory and your standard starter selection was melon, garlic mushrooms, or orange juice.

In its place we see even the most affordable restaurants being creative with fine British fare. This is in no small part due to a continued assault from the media promoting more than just food. 20 years ago, the evangelising of British food traditions was in the sole custody of Rick Stein. Now you can't get past a 'celebrity' chef without hearing the words 'local' or 'seasonal'.

Add to this a succession of programmes reinvigorating interest in traditions and techniques: the Great British Bake-Off, Sewing Bee, and Pottery Throwdown – broadcast out of Middleport in the heart of Brexit central – just a handful of examples. Such British cultural propaganda is ironically the commissioning brainchild of those liberal traitors at the BBC.

Now, I have fixated here mostly on food and tourism. But we could identify several other areas where British culture and tradition has seen a renaissance. Rebranding of British music has moved beyond the rather superficial notions of 1997's 'cool Britannia' to stimulate renewed interest in traditional British folk music.

Previously seen as detached from the figurative coal-face of British life, novels by the likes of Ben Myers, Kirsty Gunn and Fiona Mozley have reconnected literature with its role of documenting the stories of people and traditions. UK crafts businesses saw an increase in exports of 25% between 2010 and 2016, illustrating demand for and interest in traditional artisan skills and products^[ii]. And whilst the death of manufacturing in the UK is oft cited by Brexiteers, the extent of its automotive presence was demonstrated back in 2013 in a parade organised by (again) the BBC's Top Gear verging on the jingoistic^[iii].

That British culture and traditions are not only alive but thriving in 21st Century Britain seems quite evident. Can anyone then explain why Brexiteers' fixation with the decline of British identity?

^[i] <https://www.cateringtoday.co.uk/comment/features/the-growing-popularity-of-afternoon-tea/>

^[iii] <https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/industries/craft/facts-figures>

<https://www.smmmt.co.uk/2013/08/bbc-top-gear-celebrates-the-uk-automotive-industry/>