



# The Stain on St George's Flag

by Patrick Wright

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YOU CAN walk into any branch of W H Smith and pick up a copy of *This England*. Launched from Grimsby in 1968, this 'quarterly reflection of English Life' has moved to Cheltenham and done well for Roy Faiers, its founder and editor.

The starting impulse was proudly provincial. As the publisher of six county magazines, Faiers reckoned that the time was right to project the same values at a national level. Convinced that parochialism was a virtue, he hoisted the flag of St George in his first issues: 'Instead of politics, we shall bring you the poetry of the English countryside . . . Instead of bigotry, we shall portray the beauty of our towns and villages.'

*This England* had a defiantly posthumous feeling from the start. Its country was full of branch lines, thrashing machines, thatched cottages and traditional English customs. There were nostalgic steam engines too: Roy Faiers once rode the Flying Scotsman and yearned for a time 'when machines needed man'. *This England* paid its respects to English heroes, favouring valiant soldiers, Baden Powell and poets of the landscape like Thomas Hardy (and Patience Strong).

When *This England's* 'green and pleasant land' seemed quite greyed over by modern decline, there was always the post to rely on. The letters pages burgeoned as expatriate readers remembered an England of threepenny bits, hedgerows and simple family pleasures. Sadly, however, *This England* was really lost England all along. Roy Faiers asked his readers to take a look at the English pound note: 'Once you could spend it anywhere in the world and proudly. Now all you get for it is a handful of pesetas and a smile of sympathy.' One modernising reform after another was met with the same riposte: 'It may be clever and modern and progressive. But it's certainly not English.'

Roy Faiers tried to look on the bright side. In 1974, he even struggled to 'put a smile' on the oil crisis, suggesting that at least there would be more bikes on English lanes as the petrol ran out. But as time went by the bunkered defensiveness hardened into rancour and hatred. Faiers took his stand against

the 'long-haired youths' of the early seventies, warning readers: 'Don't get too close and hang on to your wallet'.

He was appalled by the state of England's schools and wondered: 'How can you feel proud in a pair of jeans?' He worried about the creeping 'Sovietisation' of England, likening the trade unions to Hitler and encouraging his readers to join the late Ross McWhirter's National Association of Freedom. The more he railed in this manner, the more the postbag swelled in admiration of his brave stand. One reader urged him to consider going into Parliament; another wrote from Cape Town: 'Rest assured that you have armies and armies behind you, not least of which are in those corners of foreign lands which are forever England'.

By this time something strange was happening to the photographs too. Their evocative quality seemed strangely intensified by what they refused to show. There were no motorways, no industrial cities, no suburbs to interfere with the thatched and royalist idyll filling the pages. The same selectivity was applied to people. The old Dorset shepherd on the cover with his crook and his smock may have had a certain ethnic appeal, but that was the least of Faiers's worries. The problem, as Faiers wrote about immigration in 1976, is that 'the know-alls have opened the flood gates until our cities throb with trouble.' 'England,' he said, 'is *our* home. Heathrow is our front door'.

So the mild English pastorate that smiles down from the 'Country' shelf in W H Smith turns foul. It is not just that nine-tenths of the nation is left out of *This England's* carefully framed view; or that the countryside, and the vital tradition of English country writing, is betrayed by this publication that reduces it to a dead, polemically framed image. There is worse to come.

A few years ago, Faiers started printing articles by Stuart Millson, an ardent young Englishman whose elegaic lamentations quickly won him a regular and prominent column called 'Forever England'. Millson, who likes to ape former contributors like the late historian Sir Arthur Bryant, praised the BBC for sticking to the Proms and not caving in to 'wall-to-wall soap operas'. He lent his voice to *This England's* strident and royalist opposition to Maastricht. He is less sedate over 'feminism and so-called gay rights' and all-but-frantic when it comes to the 'unnatural multi-cultural society' that has been 'imposed upon us'. He tried to galvanise his readers with the prospect of a millennium in which 'our native land, once exclusively our domain, will be a completely multi-racial, multi-cultural society.' He suggested that if the native English don't stand up and fight for their country, they may soon be reduced to 'a serf-like folk, governed,



manipulated and even forced to obey the rules of those who have wrenched ownership of our land from us.'

Roy Faiers may call Stuart Millson a 'man of Kent', but others recognise him as a young fascist. People close to the Anti-Nazi League remember his emergence into student politics at Essex University in the mid-eighties. He is said to have cut quite a figure in his 'Hang Nelson Mandela' T-shirt. The contempt was apparently mutual, or so we might conclude from the student election leaflet in which Millson declared that 'his profound racist beliefs elevate him far above the scum and swarm that constitute the majority of students on this campus.'

The lane that brought Millson to *This England* may be a winding one, but its continuity is more than adequately illuminated by *Searchlight*, the agency that monitors British fascism. It passes through the British National Party and an unusually vile pro-BNP rag called *The Patriot*, in which Millson railed against 'Black and Jew pressure groups'. It curves a little to the left to take in the Monday Club, from which the sacked Millson re-emerged late in 1992 to found a new 'right-wing Monday Club' called Revolutionary Conservative Caucus, which he has committed to 'the monocultural hegemony of the majority', an end to immigration, the restoration of the death penalty, the recriminalisation of male homosexuality, the restriction of women's rights, and the withdrawal of NHS services from black people.

Millson's leafy English lane also takes in Western Goals, a body that has been in some disrepair since its leader, Gregory Lauder-Frost, was jailed for defrauding the NHS, but which aimed to infiltrate fascists into the Conservative Party. In December 1991, Stuart Millson met Jean-Marie Le Pen at a Western Goals dinner. Indeed, he was photographed presenting Le Pen with a copy of *This England*.

Would Mr Faiers have approved of his young columnist's gesture? There is reason to believe that he might well have done. During the last election, Faiers was unusually busy in Cheltenham, supporting Melvyn Rendell of the Anti-Federal Europe Campaign, who stood against John Taylor, the traduced and unsuccessful black Tory candidate. Indeed, he wrote to a local paper, defending Rendell's 'loyal and thoroughly honourable' agent against detractors who had linked his campaign to the National Front. The agent was Stuart Millson.



So there is England's best-selling heritage quarterly: a thatched cottage, a green field, and an open sewer spewing up just where the picture ends. Its claim to have 2 million readers is almost certainly exaggerated, but its unaudited circulation has been estimated at 160,000 copies. Searchlight has encouraged outraged readers to complain to W H Smith, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Director of Public Prosecutions. We may wonder why no action has been taken.

But there is a broader point. *This England* may be a degenerate travesty of English patriotism, and of conservation. But it confirms the argument of Scottish commentators like Tom Nairn and Neal Ascherson who have argued for an increase in the English sense of national identity. The more the English fail to come up with an open and contemporary patriotism, the more room there will be on that shelf of the mind named 'Country/Country Living' for these peddlers of ruin who would have us believe that everyone who ever appreciated a country church, or felt moved on Remembrance Day, saw the world just as they do.

(My thanks to Joanna Bailey with whom I made a short television item on *This England* – details since forgotten)

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