GERMANS IN BRITAIN

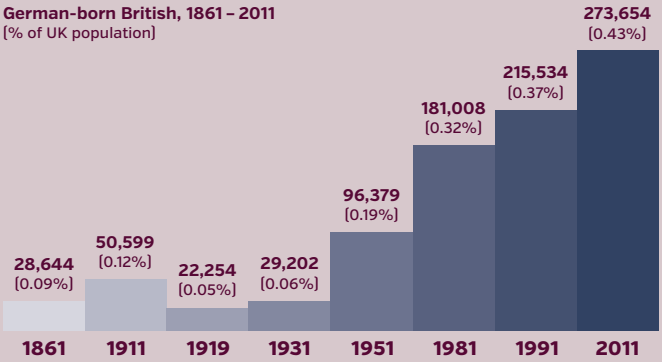
THE GERMAN CONNECTION

The relationship between Britain and Germany is one of the deepest between any two European countries. The two wars that devastated 20th century Europe cast Germany and Britain as foes, but the nations have long been natural allies with intertwined interests and a shared past.

German migration is a fact of British history. People, goods and ideas have moved between Britain and Germany for many thousands of years – a process stretching back to the arrival of the Anglo Saxons and earlier.

The anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War is a good time to reflect on this long shared past. It is a story about Europe and a story about Britain. In getting to know the Germans, the British have got to know themselves.

German-born British, 1861 – 2011
(% of UK population)



Cover image:
Johann Heinrich Schröder (1784 – 1883)
Schröder was the younger brother of a Hamburg merchant already working in London. In 1818 Johann formed his own firm, with branches in London, Hamburg and Liverpool. His advice for business success included: *'take pains to become a sensible human being, acquire good manners, don't dream of Spanish castles in the sky'.*

Kitty Marion, being arrested in 1912
Katerina Shafer was born in Westphalia and came to England aged 15 as a variety actress. As 'Kitty Marion' she became notorious as a militant suffragette. During the First World War she was interned and eventually emigrated to America.

'Germany … supplies us with a large number of musicians, teachers of the German language, servants, merchants, factors, and commercial clerks, watch and clock makers, engine and machine makers, tailors, shoemakers; with many bakers, and a large colony of sugar refiners.'

General Report of the 1861 Census

There was never a single type of German migrant. Many different people made the journey across the North Sea: political exiles, kings, kindergarten children, scientists, Jewish refugees, rich merchants and poor women. Each had their reasons. Some saw Britain as a staging post on their way to America. Others settled for good.

Most of 19th-century Britain's German-born residents lived in London but communities grew in the northern port-cities of Liverpool and Hull; plus the cloth-trading cities of Manchester and Bradford, where an area is still known as 'Little Germany'.

MERCHANTS & ENTREPRENEURS

German merchants were positively encouraged into medieval England. In 1157 Henry II gave traders from Cologne special privileges. By 1300 merchants from Hamburg and Lübeck were operating from several English ports as part of the Hanseatic League. In London the Hansa merchants occupied their own enclave, a virtual micro-state on the banks of the Thames in the City.

Britain continued to offer rich opportunities. By 1800 German merchant houses were found in Manchester and Bradford, close to the textile mills supplying the world with woven cloth. In 1798 Nathan Mayer Rothschild from Frankfurt moved to Manchester, bringing with him his network of European business connections.

Georg Gisze (1497 – 1562)
Gisze was a London-based 'Hansa' merchant from Danzig. He is shown here in 1532. The painter was Augsburg-born Hans Holbein, who painted the work whilst in London.

Frederick Accum, lecturing at the Surrey Institution, 1809
Accum, a chemist, came to London in 1793. By 1800 he had set up as a Professor of Chemistry giving public lectures from his laboratory in Soho.

'My opinion is that England is the place, if anything is to be done.'
William Siemens, 1843

Britain's 19th-century industrial might owes much to German entrepreneurs. In 1873 the chemist Ludwig Mond, together with his Swiss partner John Brunner, built a soda-ash plant at Northwich in Cheshire, the start of what was to become Imperial Chemical Industries.

Earlier in the century two German chemists, Frederick Winzer from Brunswick and Frederick Accum from Buckeburg, had built London's first gas works. Their Gas Light and Coke Company eventually became British Gas. The giant engineering firm Siemens traces its origins to the Siemens brothers from Lenthe, who opened an experimental steel works in Wales in 1868.

MONARCHS & REFUGEES

The ties between Britain and Germany extend to a shared Royal Family. In 1714 the Elector of Hanover and Duke of Brunswick-Lünesborg was invited by the British Parliament to take the British throne. The Elector was 52nd in line: but, crucially, he was a Protestant. He moved his court to London and took the title George I.

The House of Hanover continued to rule over Britain and Hanover until the start of Queen Victoria's reign. Her marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha created a new German connection. The new Royal surname survived until the First World War, when George V thought it prudent to change 'Saxe-Coburg-Gotha' to 'Windsor'.

The House of Hanover left a permanent mark on Britain's maps. Streets or terraces named 'Hanover', 'Brunswick', 'George', 'Frederick' or 'White Horse' are all likely to have been named in honour of Britain's German kings.

A British Grenadier's Cap, 1715 – 1750
The British Grenadiers were an elite group of soldiers within the British Army. Their distinctively shaped cap was embroidered with the white horse, the emblem of the House of Hanover.

Doll brought on the 'Kindertransport', 1939
This doll belonged to Edith Rothschild, who came to Britain in 1938, aged 14, as a child refugee on a 'Kindertransport' train.

The most significant German arrivals in 20th-century Britain were Jewish refugees, forced from their homes by Nazi persecution. Between 1933 and 1945 around 59,000 German nationals were given asylum in Britain. Some moved on to America, others returned to Germany after the war, but many settled here.

Academics began to arrive from 1933 when Nazi legislation forced universities to sack all Jews, however distinguished. Germany's loss was Britain's gain. This group of German scholars-in-exile produced over 16 Nobel Laureates, 70 Fellows of the Royal Society and 35 Fellows of the British Academy.

The refugees that caught the public imagination were the 10,000 unaccompanied Jewish children, brought to Britain through the 'Kinder-transport' rescue-mission. For the children, the relief of escaping was mixed with the pain of leaving parents behind, and the uncertain future ahead.

WAR & STEREOTYPES

The First World War was a dark episode for Britain's German-speakers. Overnight all Germans living in Britain became 'enemy aliens' whose lives were no longer their own. Rich or poor, naturalised or not, all were touched by new harsh laws and public hostility.

In 1914 German nationals were required to register with the police and submit to travel and trading restrictions. Thousands were arrested and interned in camps. By 1916, the government had given itself powers to confiscate German-owned property or take over businesses.

Across Britain, Germans became the scapegoats for angry emotions stirred by war and propaganda. At its peak in 1915, there were calls for 'a vendetta against every German in Britain', anti-German riots raged, children were expelled from schools. Many Germans fled, others were forcibly repatriated. By 1918 Britain's German community had halved in size.

Interment camp souvenir, 1915

This medal was made by Germans interned on the Isle of Man during the First World War. It was presented to Baron Bruno Schröder who contributed to charitable funds for their relief. The image shows the tents at Cunningham Camp, a former holiday camp. The legend says 'A Memento from the War Prison'.

Struwwelhitler: a Nazi Story Book, 1940

The book caricatures Hitler and other Nazi leaders in a way that mirrors the German children's book Struwwelpeter (Shock-Headed Peter). The original was as popular in England as it was in Germany. This satirical version was sold to raise money for the Daily Sketch's War Relief Fund.

Image: Private Collection

'Here in England, public opinion at the beginning of the war was ultra-Prussian. Now it's the opposite. German singers with their 'Watch on the Rhine' are hissed in cafés chantants, while the French singers of the Marsellaise are accompanied in chorus.'

Karl Marx, 1870

British stereotypes about German people have existed in many forms over the centuries. At various times, Germans have been caricatured as bluff soldiers, romantic dreamers, greedy drunkards, gullible farmers, scientists or mystics, rule-breakers or rule-respecters.

During the 20th century these stereotypes were shaped by the experience of war. The easily-caricatured figures of the German leaders – Kaiser Wilhelm and Adolf Hitler – made it easy to personify a whole nation as a race of mad extremists.

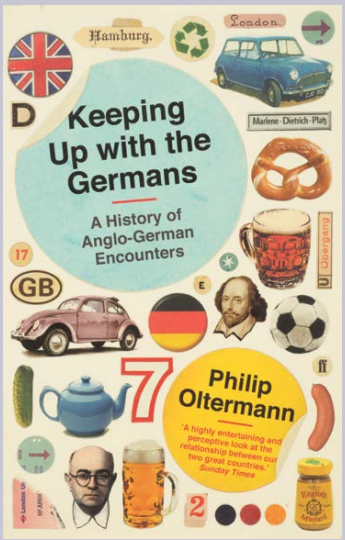
Today, there are more sympathetic ways of characterising German qualities. A reputation for efficiency translates onto the football field. A fondness for romantic dreaming echoes in Germany's reputation for conceptual art. Today, national stereotypes tend to be about humour. But are the days of hostile stereotyping truly over for good?

TODAY

273,654 German-born people were living in Britain in 2011 – more than at any time in the past. The figure reflects today's mobile populations and includes British nationals who happen to have been born in Germany – the children of army families, for example.

How many British nationals, born in Britain, are descended from German migrants? No-one knows, but the number will be in the millions. People with Anglo-German ancestry include the broadcaster Laura Kuenssberg, the comedian Ben Elton, and the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson.

The Germans who live in Britain today are far too diverse to be characterised as one single 'community'. They include ethnic Somalis and Vietnamese alongside ethnic Germans from both sides of the former Iron Curtain. But all share the German language in common.



***Keeping up with the Germans*, by Philip Oltermann, 2013**

This book is a wry reflection on Anglo-German differences. Oltermann is a journalist who moved to England at the age of 16. He is now the *Guardian*'s Berlin correspondent.

FINDING OUT MORE

www.goethe.de/london

The Goethe-Institut London offers a full and lively programme of cultural events, film screenings, language courses and educational services to support schools teaching German. Sign up for the monthly e-news.

www.ghil.ac.uk

The German Historical Institute London (GHIL) promotes independent research on British, German and Colonial history and facilitates communication between German and British historians through its academic library, publications, research grants and its programme of conferences, workshops and public lectures.

www.agfhs.org

The Anglo-German Family History Society website has many resources to help those interested in researching the family history of people from the German-speaking parts of Europe who have emigrated to the United Kingdom.

www.manchester.gov.uk

Manchester Library's website (archives and local history section) has links to some useful resources about the German community in 19th century Manchester.

BOOKS

Rosemary Ashton, *Little Germany: Exile and Asylum in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1986)

Ralf Dahrendorf, *On Britain* (London, 1982)

Philip Oltermann, *Keeping Up with the Germans: a history of Anglo-German Encounters* (London, 2012)

Panikos Panayi, ed., *Germans in Britain since 1500* (London, 1996)

Produced for the touring exhibition **Germans in Britain**, first shown at The German Historical Institute London, 18 September – 24 October 2014.

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