

the guide **DAILY**

The best of British



by **DUNCAN HALL**

THINGS have changed since Mark Allen took his debut stand-up comedy show *Quite Good Britain* to the 2006 Edinburgh Festival.

The idea behind the original show was to examine the true identity of a country whose monarchy is German, motto is French and national animal is African – particularly in view of the little-known fact that 2007 marked Great Britain's 300th anniversary.

"Since then, Gordon Brown has become prime minister," says Mark. "I wanted to know if there was any difference in the British identity since we had a Scot as PM."

"And the British National Party has risen in popularity, so I thought it would be an interesting thing to look at their claims to our British identity."

The revised show is now half an hour longer than the original, giving him more time to explore ideas such as why the BNP has decided to adopt the Anglo Saxon identity – themselves a group of immigrants into the UK, albeit more than 1,000 years ago.

Another element in the show is the British love of eccentricity, something Mark experienced firsthand when he travelled to Wimbledon to take part in a mayoral election for a village that no longer exists.

The ceremony was held between 1747 and 1826 to coincide with the General Election, in which only 2% of the populace were allowed to vote.

More than 100,000 disenfranchised would-be voters gathered at the Leather Bottle Inn to vote in their own Mayor Of Garratt, a position with no statutory powers, but which cocked a snook at Parliament.

To mark the pub's 250th anniversary, the mayoral election was launched again in June and Mark stood for the post under the pseudonym Lord Randolph Spraff – winning the contest after a cheer-off and a tie-breaker pint-downing competition.

"I loved the idea of having a mayor for somewhere that doesn't exist," he says.

"It was a chance to be eccentric, which is a big part of the British identity that we should celebrate more."

"The Government is always trying to get us into this artificial identity, but England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland have always been very independent. Our quirks and eccentricities are the one thing that is typically British."



comedy

Mark Allen – *Quite Good Britain*

Komedia, Gardner Street, Brighton, tonight,

8pm, £8/£6, call 0845 2938480

"I'm quite well versed in drinking pints, and it's a good thing to know your mayor can handle his ale. They should do it if you become Prime Minister!"

As well as touring his new show, Mark is beginning the long process of researching his next tour.

Having previously investigated man's relationship with animals, including a sideways glance into the world of the Furies in 2008's *Pet Project*, as well as how people's attitudes change in crowds in 2007's *Mob Logic*, for his next show Mark is looking at mankind's obsession with speed.

"I'm really interested in knowing how stuff works and why we are where we are," he says. "I'm already into lots of heavy research."

"We are constantly getting faster, so I want to know why. I'm interested in the Slow Food Movement, which started in Italy and is about how food should be enjoyed by taking some time eating it."

"I'm also going to have a month without any of the things that speed up my life, so I'm getting rid of my mobile phone and email, and I'm going to handwrite all my letters."

"I want to see how much I annoy society!"

duncan.hall@theargus.co.uk