

INTERVIEW | MARK ALLEN

What's in a name?

THOMAS ATKINSON
for thelondonpaper

TOMORROW, Great Britain will be 300 years old.

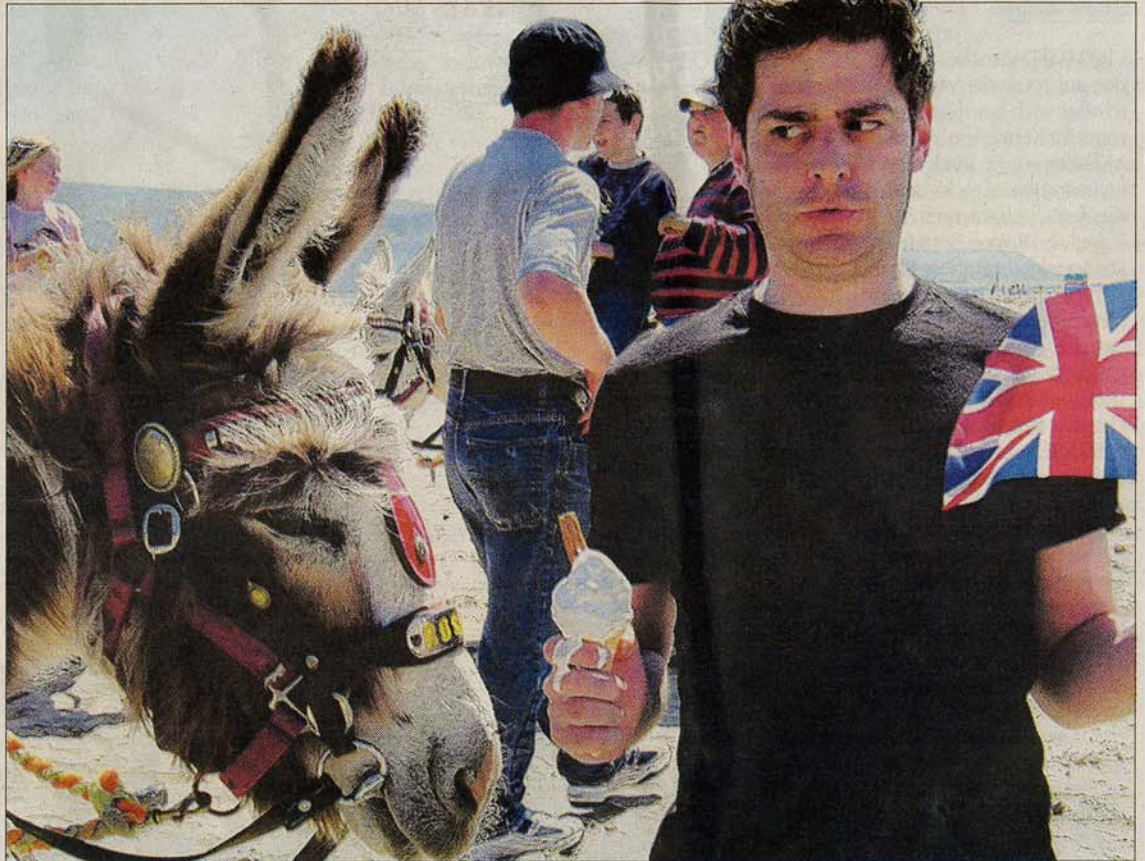
Now you might think that such a landmark would warrant a national holiday, or at the very least a small party, but what we are actually getting has left comedian Mark Allen rather unexcited.

"We are going to be commemorating our 300th anniversary with a £2 coin," he informs me. "What a brilliantly British way of celebrating things. We're only 300 years old, let's not get giddy about it. Let's have a coin. I've yet to find anyone who's seen one - it's all very vague and rubbish."

Allen has decided to take matters into his own hands by performing his *Quite Good Britain* comedy show - a look at what Allen sees as Britain's identity crisis and how we can solve it.

"The whole concept of *Quite Good Britain* is that we need to rebrand Britain," he says. "Great Britain is a bit arrogant - we're the only country in the world with a superlative in their title. Have you ever met anyone from Fantastic Kenya or Excellent Guam? I don't think so. It's just us, which I find mildly embarrassing.

"Also, I don't think it reflects us. Three hundred years ago we were great - we ran things. The British Empire covered a quarter of the globe and we were justifiably great.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY, WANT A COIN? | Mark Allen bemoans the lack of celebration as Great Britain turns 300

But, since then everyone else has caught up and now we're just average. If we keep calling ourselves great, it's going to lead to disappointment. I think if we call ourselves *Quite Good Britain*, we will have a more accurate perception of where we are in the world - just quite good."

It's this obsession with our colonial past that forms a large part of the show, an

dhas been a hit with audiences - even in potentially hostile environments.

"I was aware of being provocative at the Edinburgh festival because there is a bit of antagonism between England and Scotland, mainly because England spent 600 years oppressing the Scots and then tried to pretend it was all fine (with) the Act of Union. I don't think the Scots

feel British but the English try because it was our idea and we have to show willing."

Allen wants a bit more than willing, he wants a change of flag, and above all, a party. "Can you imagine if America reached 300 years old? There's no way they'd keep it quiet, they'd go absolutely mental! We're a lot more low key about these things." So, although his show will be a

riot, Allen remains British, meaning any celebrations will ultimately be muted.

"I have some bunting but I'm restricted by fire safety," he concludes. "I don't want to celebrate too much by setting fire to the venue."

Mark Allen's *Quite Good Britain*, *The Hen and Chickens Theatre*, N1, 020 7704 2001, May 1 to 4, 9.30pm, £6