



Celebrating Britain: Mark Allen has filled his show with fascinating facts about the UK

Union gives us the blues

COMEDY

Mark Allen's Quite Good Britain

Did you know that tomorrow marks the 300th anniversary of the Acts Of Union that merged England and Wales with Scotland – thus forming the Kingdom Of Great Britain? Nope, neither did comedian Mark Allen – until last year, that is. And when he found out, he went on a mission to discover what was going to be done to celebrate.

'I e-mailed the Department for Culture, and they didn't respond,' he begins. 'Then I contacted Gordon Brown, who was doing a speech about British identity at the time, and he didn't respond,' he continues, noting the irony of this silence from a Government that insists on citizenship tests.

After more ferreting, he discovered those three centuries would be acknowledged – with a commemorative £2 coin. 'How pathetic is that? It's inherent in our nature not to celebrate our past. If the US had something that was marking its 300th anniversary, they'd shout about it. But the British are so surrounded by history, they've just got

complacent.' That birthday and Britain's cultural identity forms the nub of Allen's cheerily informative show *Quite Good Britain*. And it's packed with nuggets from the same place he discovered that birthday gem – Norman Davies's doorstep of a book *The Isles: A History*. 'I read it because I just don't know enough about British history,' confesses Allen, who grew up in Nuneaton, lived in Norwich while studying English and drama at university (he's since dabbled in acting) and now lives in London. 'I thought it was absolutely

How s*** would you have to be?'

His show concludes that, inevitably, Britain isn't great ('saying we're great sounds arrogant – we're the only country with a superlative in the title. You could never imagine there being a *Fantastic Guam*'). But it does have its good points: 'We're one of the most multicultural societies in the world – and all the great things come from immigrants. Our national dish is chicken tikka masala, for example. I love that – it's very important to the make-up of Britain.'

► **Charles I was beheaded for treason. How can you be guilty of trying to overthrow yourself? How s*** must you be?** ◀

fascinating... I did history A-level and completely forgot that I really enjoyed it. In that book there were so many random facts, I thought it would amount to comedic negligence not to do material on them.'

One of the facts that tickled him was that William The Conqueror was christened William The Bastard. But there were plenty more: 'Charles I was beheaded for treason... how can you be found guilty of trying to overthrow yourself?'

And as for that celebration? Well, he's got something much grander in mind than a mere couple of quid: 'I would like the Queen to have a big house party at Buckingham Palace,' he declares with a grin. 'If everyone had an invite, it would be brilliant.'

Sharon Lougher

Tomorrow until Fri, *Hen & Chickens Theatre*, 109 St Paul's Road N1, 9.30pm, £6. Tel: 020 7704 2001. Tube: Highbury & Islington