

PRESS RELEASE

MARTHA HALFORD PR

Martha Halford-Fumagalli MCIPR
martha@MH-PR.co.uk
07717 473310

Historian turns detective to uncover British identity

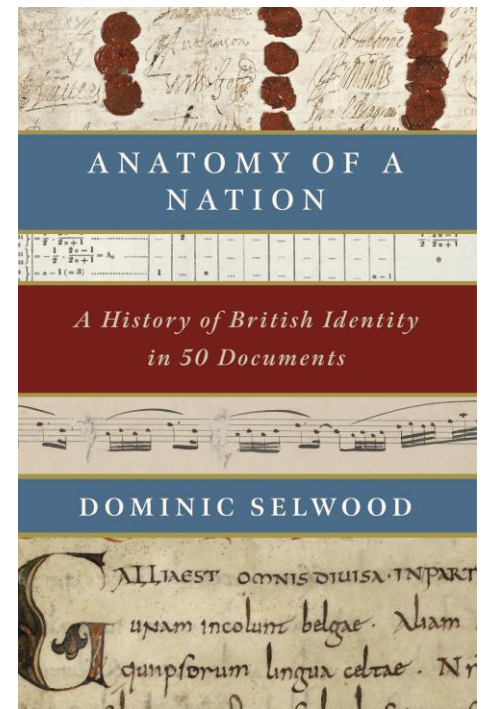
Anatomy of a Nation: A History of British Identity in 50 Documents

HB, £25, approx. 672pp, 160x290mm
ISBN: 9781472131898

The book includes a colour plate section featuring many ‘documents’ such as the Bayeux Tapestry; William Blake’s manuscript of *And Did those Feet in Ancient Time*; and Jamie Reid’s cover for the Sex Pistol’s single *God Save the Queen*.

It also features B/W reproductions of the remaining records explored.

Published by Constable (Little, Brown Book Group)



“To be representative, this book focuses on documents in their broadest sense: carvings, letters, chronicles, charters, stories, songs, poems, paintings, embroideries, death warrants, graffiti, diary entries, log books, newspapers, telegrams, police reports, record sleeve art, menus, books, and many more besides. [...] In charting Britain’s past, therefore, this book does something that is hopefully timely. It divides the nation’s history into 50 segments, and illustrates each with a central document. This allows individual voices to speak for their period, conjure its mood, and bring the reader face-to-face with the people of the age.”

-- Dominic Selwood, historian, from the Introduction to the book, ‘Prelude: Voices from the Past’

WHO are the British people in the 21st Century? Dominic Selwood, historian and barrister, turns detective, investigating a wealth of ‘documents’ testifying to the shaping of British identity down the ages and up to the 21st century. He analyses Tony Blair’s Foreword to the Iraq ‘dodgy dossier’, the Brexit Referendum ballot paper, the Parthenon sculptures – the main subject of the ongoing debate about returning artefacts to their original country – and many others. Moreover, he puts them into the context of ‘culture wars’ and how they have evolved through the centuries, the latest being the angry debates around statues of historical personalities whose deeds offend modern sensitivities.

The author’s lively study of, and musings around, the 50 documents – spanning 950,000 years of British history – read almost like a thriller as we follow the twists and turns of the country’s tumultuous fate.

[/Continued...](#)

The wealth of records Selwood turns his attention to are always a starting point to launch into an exploration of the many influences shaping British history, both from abroad (Romans, Scandinavians, Normans, and all the various waves of immigrants reaching the island's shores) and indigenous peoples. They also lead him to carefully peel back the numerous layers, and follow the varied threads, informing the country's narrative as people and events meet and collide to give rise to new realities. Perhaps this ever-evolving historical landscape is one of the reasons why the British tend to be a traditionalist society with a deep need to feel anchored by customs rooted in the past.

As he looks at various events defining the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st – the Profumo scandal leading to the loss of trust in MPs; the swinging 60s and the revolution rocking the country's traditional values and institutions; the story of the Cambridge spies and how they contributed to the erosion of faith in the Establishment; the Royal family's troubles; the colonial past coming to haunt the land of 'hope and glory' – Selwood shows how *Cool Britannia* is in dire need of redefining its identity in a meaningful way. He concludes by warning readers against the danger of pandering to empty ideologies defining the nation in relation to foreigners and seeing isolationism as the magical solution to all the identity woes.

From the book's 'Afterword: Voices from the Future':

*"But wherever it looks, Britain needs to recapture the passion it once felt for so many different ventures, systems and faiths, and channel that energy into a modern sense of itself, capitalising on its unique gift of the extraordinarily rich, mongrel English language to the planet as its lingua franca. **If the country can wean itself off the morphine of empire and World War Two, adopt a realistic and honest view of its long past, take inspiration from its outstanding heritage of all those who have called the British Isles home, then a twenty-first century identity will emerge.** It will, as it has done in the past, welcome a plurality of beliefs, be multicultural, multiracial, the asylum of nations, and focus on revelling in its unique history to again offer the world the extraordinary, fizzing creativity it has found in every century in so many fields."*

--Ends--

About the author: **Dominic Selwood** is a historian, journalist and barrister. He is a bestselling author and novelist, and frequent contributor to national newspapers, radio and TV including the Telegraph, the Independent, the Spectator, the Catholic Herald, Sky News, and the BBC. He has a doctorate in history from the University of Oxford and a masters from the Sorbonne. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and the Society of Antiquaries. He lives in London with his family. @DominicSelwood



For more information or to ask for a review copy, please don't hesitate to contact Martha Halford,
Martha Halford PR: M. 07717 473310 E. martha@mh-pr.co.uk

Anatomy of a Nation: A History of British Identity in 50 Documents

HB, £25, 672pp, 160x290mm, ISBN: 9781472131898. Published by Constable (Little, Brown Book Group)

The book includes a colour plate section featuring many 'documents', and it also features the B/W reproductions of the remaining records explored.