

The Sunday Times (Scotland) September 10, 2006

Barra 'the most Scottish place'

Tara Womersley and Robert Winnett

THE Isle of Barra describes itself as “the most beautiful little island in Britain”, but now it has another claim to fame — it is also the most Scottish place in Scotland.

A higher proportion of Scots live in the Hebridean island than in any other part of the country. More than 85% of residents have names considered to be historically Scottish, compared with 39% in Coatbridge, the least Scottish town in Scotland.

The information has been provided by a new “melting pot” analysis of Britain which reveals that Armenian immigrants and their descendants are the most successful ethnic group in the country.

They are followed by the Japanese, Dutch and Greek Cypriots among the groups who are economically and socially most successful. Bangladeshi Muslims and migrants from Sierra Leone and Syria have fared worst.

The new analysis places the 42.2m adults registered to vote in mainland Britain in 200 ethnic groups — on the basis of a person’s surname and first name.

The information is linked to a marketing database to rank the socio-economic status of each group. The system, Origins Info, is used by hospitals, retailers and charities to tailor their services to individual ethnic groups.

Its developers claim that it is reliable even though most married women adopt their husband’s name and many immigrants may have changed their surname to avoid discrimination.

The system can also be used to identify where different ethnic groups live and the ethnic composition of the professions.

It reveals that Ripley in Derbyshire is the “most English” place in England with 88.58% of residents having an English ethnic background. The most diverse area is South Tottenham, in north London, which is home to 113 ethnic groups from Bretons to Vietnamese.

West Linton, in the Borders, is the most English town in Scotland with almost half its inhabitants having surnames that originate south of the border.

Berwick-upon-Tweed was the town in England with the greatest concentration of Scottish names, followed by Wooler, in Northumberland, and Corby in Northamptonshire which is largely populated with the descendants of former Scottish steel workers. Many in the town continue to speak with a Scottish accent and it hosts an annual Highland games.

Coatbridge, Port Glasgow and Clydebank had Scotland’s highest levels of Irish names, notably because of the number of Irish immigrants. More than 28% of adults in Coatbridge had names with Irish origins.

Plockton, in the northwest Highlands, was one of the areas in the UK with the highest concentration of Dutch names, along with South Kensington and Earls Court in London and Llanwrtyd Wells in Powys.

“We have certainly found an increasing number of Dutch settling in Scotland,” said a spokeswoman for the Dutch consulate in Edinburgh.

“These include entrepreneurs, those who are running caravan parks and hotels and several woodwork artisans, as well as vets. I also know of someone who is running a fish farm.

“Many who come over here like the remote areas and the wilderness of Scotland as well as the Scottish people.”

Campbells were found to be most common in Barra, considering population size, while Stewarts congregated in Invergarry and those with the surname Ross were most likely to be found in Tain.

Angus MacNeil, the Nationalist MP for the Outer Hebrides who lives on the Isle of Barra, said the island’s geographical location helped it to retain a strong Scottish identity.

“The MacNeils, a truly Scottish name, have been here since before the Norman conquest,” he said.

“We may also be in the phone book for Denver, Colorado but we still retain our mark in Scotland. As well as many Scottish names here, we are also very strong when it comes to the Gaelic language.

“But despite our strong Scottish identity, we always welcome people who move to the Isle of Barra from elsewhere. It is after all a question of judging people not on the ‘Mac’ in their name but more by the conduct of their character.”

Neil Calvert, councillor for West Linton, said that while the town may have the greatest proportion of English names, it did not reduce the Scottishness of those who lived there.

“My surname is probably a combination of English or French but I am certainly Scottish,” he said.

“Obviously, because we are in the Scottish Borders, there is an English influence. We do have a lot of English who live and work here as well as those who come and visit.

“But I like to think that it is not so much that the English are coming up to take over but that they want to be converted to our way of life.”

Richard Webber, a professor of spatial analysis at University College, London who developed Origins Info, said: “The patterns that this analysis have uncovered are very striking. There is a statistical relationship between ethnic groups, [geographical] areas and different socio-economic groups. We are hoping it will prove a valuable tool for government and business.”