

AL WANTS TO FIND OUT

WHY THE ENGLISH ARE HATED...

Pictures: TIM MERRY



National treasure

FLAGGING UP DIFFERENCES: History buff Al Murray. Below, as the Pub Landlord and on the election trail in 2015

HAD fate dealt him a different hand, Al Murray would now be the Member of Parliament for South Thanet.

The comic stood for that Kent seat, in his comedy Pub Landlord guise, at the 2015 General Election. His opponents included a certain Mr N Farage and he came within a whisker of victory. Well, I say "whisker". The winning Tory candidate polled 18,838 votes. Al received 318. But he did achieve what he'd set out to do.

"I did it for a joke," he reminds us. "Russell Brand had said people shouldn't vote, so I wanted to do a thing that implied you should but do it in a way that made it funny."

Using comedy to counter daft arguments has been Al's top tactic for years now. The Pub Landlord's intentionally barmy bigotry was first unleashed on audiences back in 1994.

But the real Al Murray, who turned 50 in May, has a very different outlook from his comedy alter-ego, as we're about to be reminded by his new History channel series *Why Does Everyone Hate The English?* kicking off tonight.

That's not to say he's one to knock his country. It's just that knee-jerk nationalism makes him deeply uneasy. And not only the Pub Landlord's kind. Al takes issue with entrenched attitudes on all sides.

So while this series delves into the history of anti-English senti-

THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW



Al Murray COMEDIAN & PRESENTER

ment, and acknowledges that "the English state, over the years, has thrown its weight around, often in really terrible ways" there are times he'll dig his heels in, querying why others cling on to the past.

"The Battle of Bannockburn (part of the first war of Scottish independence) was 700 years ago," he points out. "You can't make me apologise for what happened that long ago."

"It wasn't me!" Al would far rather use comedy, where appropriate, to poke fun at what he considers outdated attitudes. Hence in each episode - first he's in France, then Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Germany - he hooks up with a local fellow comic, mostly for some good-natured two-way teasing. Tonight's is ex-Eurotrash host Antoine de Caunes.

"The point is, if we can all laugh at this stuff, we're more likely to be able to go: 'Y'know what? It's better if we all just get

along.' Mind you, publicly poking fun, particularly at rigid political attitudes, can really wind some people up, as Al is regularly reminded. Take that election stunt, for example.

"Some people I met on the street went: 'You shouldn't be doing this. It's too serious for you to come here and p*** about.' They'd missed the point."

There were even conspiracy theories, suggesting his campaign had a darker agenda. "One was that the EU had paid the BBC to pay me to run, because apparently I'm a 'BBC leftie comedian'!"

"I've never even had a job at the BBC and certainly not doing the Pub Landlord. They don't even

like it." Another claimed he was part of a secret Tory plot. "A genealogy website found a link between me and David Cameron because 200 years ago someone in his family married someone in mine."

"We're not blood relatives, and yet if you leave that information to simmer on a message board for long enough it somehow turns into Cameron being my first cousin!"

"Then you start getting these comments in your inbox or on Twitter and you think: 'This is hilarious.'"

"Seriously, if people can read that article and objectively say he and I are related, they're idiots."

"And then I think: 'Oh, God, these people have the vote!'"

Posting political jokes on social media has also proved risky.

"When people really dig their political leader, they take it personally if you take the p*** out of them."

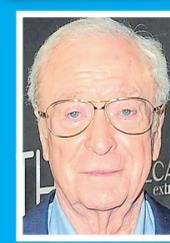
"Three years ago it was the right, now it's the left. People just can't cope with it. With Corbyn, there are some people who like him so much that if you take the p*** they'd clearly be happy to send you to a gulag."

"I made a joke about Labour, and people started going: 'You support the Tories and you support the Windrush scandal!'"

"No, I don't. I'm just making a joke about your lot."

"Get over yourselves."

● *Al Murray: Why Does Everyone Hate The English?* starts tonight on History (Sky 130, Virgin 270, BT and Talk Talk 327) at 9pm.



AL'S FAVOURITES

FILM: *A Bridge Too Far*
BOOK: *Vanity Fair*, by William Makepeace Thackeray (The author was Al's great-great-great-grandfather)
TV SHOW: *The Art Of Drumming* (Sky Arts)
ACTOR: Sir Michael Caine, left
COMEDIAN: Steve Martin

SPORTSPERSON: Alastair Cook
FOOD: Sunday lunch with the family
DRINK: Guinness
CITY: Edinburgh
HOLIDAY DESTINATION: Miami
GADGET: Roland TM-6 Pro Drum Trigger Module
APP: Facebook
ANIMAL: Elephant