

# Census gives first official gay map

Low numbers suggest fear is still a factor, report  
**Richard Ford and Alexandra Frean**

MORE than a century after Oscar Wilde's beau talked of "the love that dare not speak its name", gay couples still appear reluctant to open up about their relationships.

While the cappuccino classes may proclaim their sexuality proudly in Brighton, Blackpool, Soho and St Paul's, in the former pit villages of the North, and swaths of Middle England, scarcely a whisper can be heard.

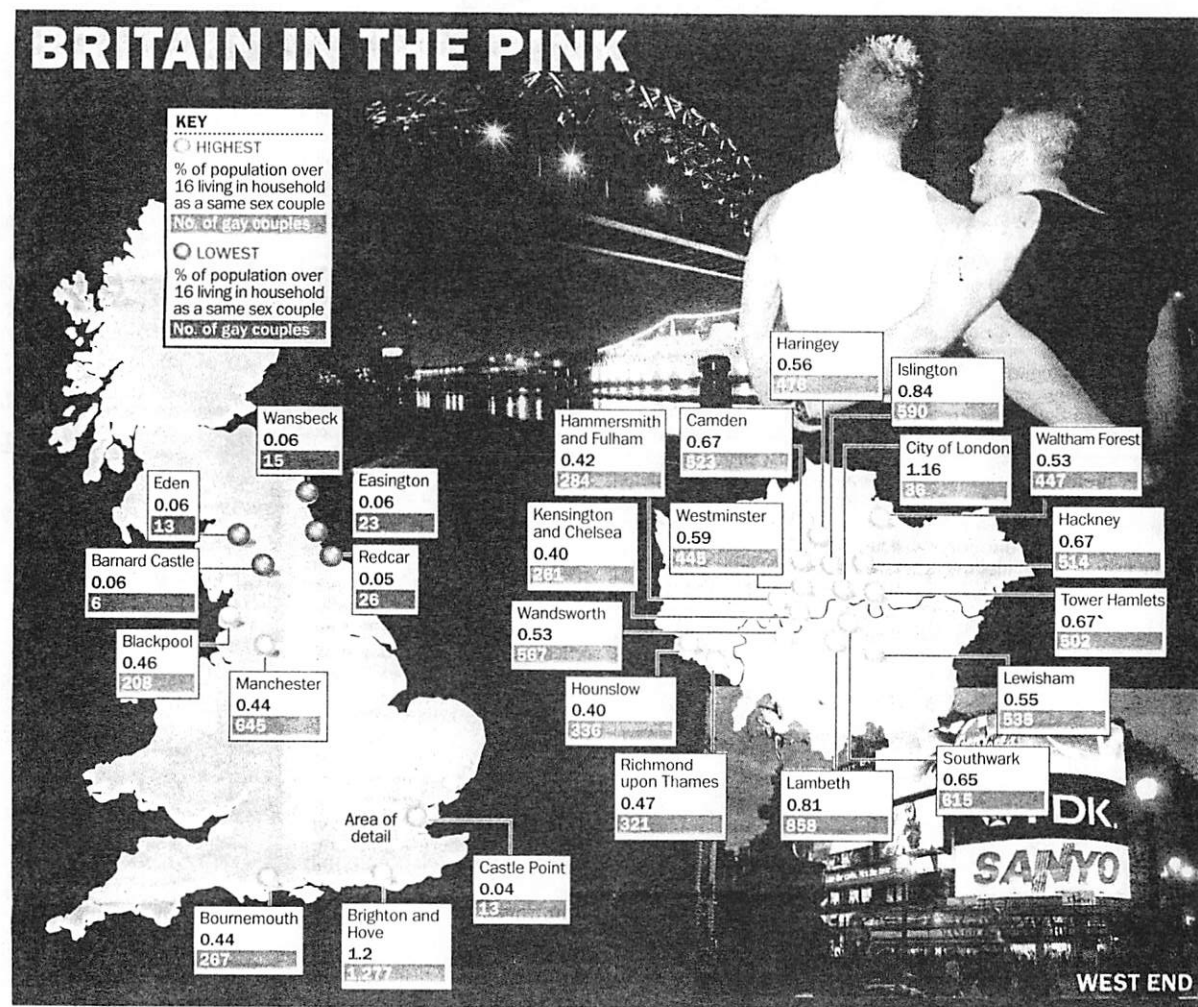
Across England and Wales, just 78,522 individuals identified themselves as living in a gay or lesbian relationship in the 2001 census, according to the first government figures on same-sex couples released yesterday. This is just a tiny fraction of the 20.6 million married people and the four million people living in heterosexual cohabiting relationships in the same census.

It is also well below the unofficial assumption of "6 per cent are gay" used by policy-makers in Britain. It is also lower than the one-in-ten statistic culled from the now largely discredited 1948 Kinsey Report on sexual behaviour in the US.

Brighton is the gay and lesbian capital of England and Wales, according to the figures, which were published by the Office for National Statistics. It is closely followed by 14 London boroughs, led by the City, Islington and Lambeth. Next are Blackpool, Manchester and Bournemouth.

The "straightest" place is the Essex constituency of Castle Point, followed by five Northern districts, including Ashington, Easington and Redcar.

"The statistics reflect the living arrangements that exist in Britain today," a spokesman for the ONS said. "The informa-



Pit town is straight down the middle

By Richard Ford and Alexandra Frean

ALREADY named as the whitest place in England and Wales, the former Co Durham pit town of Easington now has another accolade as one of the "straightest".

The collieries have long closed and the beach been cleaned. But all is not well in the town of 97,800 souls, whose past was dominated by two Labour Party giants — Ramsay MacDonald, the first Labour Prime Minister, and Manny Shinwell, who nationalised the mines in 1946.

Census figures show that 31 per cent of its inhabitants suffer from a limiting long-term illness, higher than anywhere else in the country.

More than 17 per cent of adults in the district describe their health as "not good", second only to Merthyr Tydfil, another former pit town.

Easington also has the highest proportion of people providing full-time, unpaid care for sick, disabled or elderly relatives. It is the whitest place in England and Wales with census figures showing 98.9 per cent of the population is white.

tion enables us to paint an even richer picture of the number and types of households today."

Hesitant to be accused of being either too pro or anti-gay, the ONS designed the census form to "make it easy for people to describe their relationship in a way that was appropriate to them", he added.

Instead of asking homosexual couples outright if they lived with their partner in a gay or lesbian relationship, it asked them to tick a box indicating

whether their relationship to any other adult living in the same household was as a husband or wife, or partner. This was matched against information on gender.

The figures will be used to help inform policymakers about the lifestyles and needs of local populations. Areas with a high concentration of gay couples might not need so many schools, for example.

But there are economic implications too. According to the

highly regarded US economist Professor Richard Florida, there is a direct relationship between a city's prosperity and its potential to attract gay people, ethnic minority groups and inventors. Professor Florida's hypothesis is that the creative, innovative and entrepreneurial activities needed to sustain economic regeneration tend to flourish in the same kinds of places that attract gays and others outside the norm.

It is an idea backed by

Melissa Mean of the think-tank Demos. "The evidence is that the kinds of places that gay people want to live are more tolerant, and also more economically vibrant. This new data on the distribution of gay-couple households in Britain is a useful first step in getting a better understanding of where some of those more tolerant places are," she said.

Stonewall, the gay equality campaign group, agreed that collecting the figures was im-

portant, but expressed astonishment at how low they were.

Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall, said that in future censuses the question about same-sex relationships should be asked much more explicitly. "The census asked it in a roundabout way because, I think, people were very sensitive to the issue," he said. "I am not surprised that in some areas people still feel very, very isolated and unable to identify themselves publicly."