

## One Fat Lady in race row over Muslim ghetto' jibe: The Islamic area of Leicester frightened me, says TV chef

- Chef was 'surprised any of the people who might object could read what I wrote as it is written in English'
- She describes visit to the 'ghetto' after getting lost in traffic and found herself 'in an area where all the men were wearing Islamic clothing'
- But she says there's an upside — she's thankful for the large number of Asian restaurants in the city as 'you can eat excellent curry' there
- Her comments were criticised by the Muslim Council of Britain and the city's mayor, who claims her account 'may help sell books but it is cheap'

By [Paul Bentley](#)



Clarissa Dickson Wright said visiting the city made her feel like a pariah and an outcast

She is as renowned for her outspoken views as she is for her cooking.

So when celebrity chef Clarissa Dickson Wright decided to write about her day out in a multi-cultural part of Leicester, she didn't mince her words.

The former star of the BBC's *Two Fat Ladies* claimed a visit to the city, which has a large Muslim population, was 'the most frightening experience of her life'.

Describing parts of Leicester as a 'ghetto', she said seeing so many men in Islamic clothing and women in a burkas left her feeling 'in the middle of my own country, a complete outcast and pariah'.

Yesterday her comments provoked fury from Muslim groups and local leaders.

But Miss Dickson Wright remained defiant, saying: 'I'm surprised any of the people who might object could read what I wrote as it is written in English.'

The 65-year-old, a former barrister who grew up in north London, dedicates a chapter in a new cookery book, *Clarissa's England: A Gamely Gallop Through the English Counties*, to each county, discussing their culinary, cultural and historical merits.

She describes how she accidentally stumbled upon Leicester's city centre, where one in ten of the population is Muslim, after coming off a ring road to escape a traffic jam and getting lost.

She wrote: 'I found myself in an area where all the men were wearing Islamic clothing and all the women were wearing burkas and walking slightly behind them.'

'None of the men would talk to me when I tried to find out where I was and how to get out of there because I was an English female and they don't talk to females they don't know, while if the women could speak English they weren't about to show it by having a word with me.'

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- Two Fat Ladies chef Clarissa Dickson-Wright admits attending hare coursing event at private prosecution

'I have many good acquaintances and even some friends among the Muslim community, yet here I was, in the heart of a city in the middle of my own country, a complete outcast and pariah.'

She said the positive side was the 'very good selection of Asian restaurants' and added: 'If multiculturalism works, which I have always been rather dubious of, surely it must be multicultural and not monocultural.'

'I can only hope that in generations to come there will be a merging of the cultures and not the exclusion zone that is the ghetto.' Ibrahim Mogra, assistant secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, said the chef's description was 'hurtful'.



Clarissa Dickson Wright's description of the town, pictured, has caused outrage. When contacted by a local newspaper, the chef said she was surprised any of the people who might object could read what she wrote as it was written in English



The chef describes coming off the ring road to escape a traffic jam and becoming lost in Leicester, pictured, where she says she found herself in an area where all the men were wearing Islamic clothing

## **WHY LEICESTER IS BRITAIN'S MOST MULTICULTURAL CITY**

Estimates suggest children from white families are now in a minority in the city, making up only 47 per cent of the under-16 population.

Leicester is set to become Britain's first plural city, where no ethnic group will form a majority, by 2019, with Birmingham expected to follow five years later.

At the 2001 census, Indians – made up 26 per cent of the population and whites 63 per cent. By 2011, Leicester had seen the highest growth in population in 10 years after London, Manchester and Milton Keynes.

Between 2001 and 2011, the number of people went up by 47,100 (almost 17 per cent), from 282,800 to 329,900, according to the latest 2011 Census figures.

'It showed a complete lack of appreciation of the fact we are almost two million Muslims in this country, doing our bit for our country.'

'When she says that she was in the centre of a city in the centre of her own country, I take

objection. This is also my country and this is also my city.'

Leicester's mayor Sir Peter Soulsby added: 'That is the sort of thing that makes me very angry – when someone breezes in from outside and paints a picture of Leicester that does not have any foundation in reality. It may help sell books but it is cheap.'

And Councillor Manjula Sood, chairman of Leicester Council of Faiths, said: 'I don't believe that a meeting with one person on one street should mean you can label a whole city.'

When asked to explain herself following the criticism, the chef, who lives in Edinburgh, said: 'When you get to 65, you will think back on this conversation and I think you might find yourself in my frame of mind.'

She said that while she had a lot of Muslim friends, her experience of Leicester was 'unpleasant'.

'It scared me and I am not scared easy,' she said. 'It was part of my country that I was born in and there are a lot of radical Muslim preachers in this country.'

'I was in London when July 7 (2005 bomb attacks) happened and this to me was proof for those people who have been saying we're getting ghettoisation of Muslim areas.'

'I have never believed that political correctness was a reason not to say what I have experienced.'

She added that she had 'done a lot' for Leicestershire, including campaigning for the protected geographical status of Melton pork pies and Stilton.

## 'THE EXCLUSION ZONE THAT IS THE GHETTO'



In her book *Clarissa's England*, the chef describes her visit to Leicester.

'I had one of the most frightening adventures of my life there. I turned off the ring road because there had been a car crash and I wanted to avoid being stuck in traffic, and soon found myself lost. I couldn't tell you where I was but it was not terribly far from the city centre.'

'As we know, Leicester has a very high Asian Muslim population and I found myself in an area where all the men were wearing Islamic clothing and all the women were wearing burkas and walking slightly behind them.'

'None of the men would talk to me when I tried to find out where I was and how to get out of there because I was an English female and they don't talk to females they don't know, while if the women could speak English they weren't about to show it by having a word with me.'

'Eventually I had to stop at a newsagents and the only way I could discover my location was to buy a map of the city. Somebody, very reluctantly, pointed to where I was and then I had to work out the rest for myself.'

'I am not a particular admirer of Islam or indeed, I should add, almost any other religion, but I have many good acquaintances and even some friends among the Muslim community, yet here I was in the heart of city in the middle of my own country a complete outcast and pariah.'

'If multiculturalism works, which I have always been rather dubious of, surely it must be multicultural and not monocultural. I just wanted to relate this to you because I think you ought to be aware of such things.'

'However, everything has an upside and one of the results of this is that Leicester has a very good

selection of Asian restaurants where you can eat excellent curry.

'The city also has a thriving market attended by farmers from the local countryside and quite a number from the Asian community too, who sell not only herbs and spices and Asian vegetables but also delicious ready-made goods.

'So thinking back to the East End of London of my childhood, I can only hope that in generations to come there will be a merging of the cultures and not the exclusion zone that is the ghetto.'

**Clarissa's England: A Gamely Gallop Through the English Counties is published by Hodder & Stoughton and available now in hardback rrp £20**



Two Fat Ladies presenters Clarissa Dickson Wright, left, and the late Jennifer Patterson, who died in 1999