# Paddington bear faces scrutiny as his role shifts from immigrant icon to establishment figure



Paddington Bear, once a beloved cultural icon symbolising kindness and acceptance, now faces scrutiny for his evolving symbolic role in British society. Originating from Michael Bond's original stories, where Paddington was portrayed as a bashful, bemused immigrant from "darkest Peru," the character gained renewed cultural prominence through the critically acclaimed Paddington films released in 2014 and 2017. These films presented Paddington as a warm, humorous figure embraced by the British public, often cited as an emblem of what Britain could aspire to be—welcoming and open-hearted.

However, recent portrayals and commercial proliferation have altered Paddington's public image. His presence is ubiquitous across UK high streets, on keyrings, pencil cases, billboards, and other merchandise. The imminent debut of a Paddington musical in London’s West End signals continued growth of the Paddington brand, further saturating public spaces.

Significantly, Paddington’s association with establishment figures has sparked debate about his symbolic meaning. In 2022, Paddington appeared having lunch with Queen Elizabeth II in a sketch shown during the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations. This meeting, along with a photograph of the Queen and Paddington depicted together, was later incorporated into Paddington in Peru, the 2023 sequel to Paddington 2. The image of the bear with the Queen seemed to soften his outsider status, recasting him as an establishment figure rather than a subversive presence.

The depiction was followed by an online phenomenon after the Queen’s death in 2022, when illustrations showed Paddington and the Queen walking hand-in-hand, sometimes captioned with references to crossing over to the afterlife. This imagery captured certain public sentiments but also underscored Paddington’s shifting symbolic role.

Michael Bond originally conceived Paddington inspired by wartime immigrant experiences and child evacuees, portraying authority figures as potentially intimidating to immigrants like Paddington. Yet, Paddington’s cosy association with royalty contrasts this earlier narrative, raising questions about his place in contemporary cultural discourse.

The Independent is reporting that Paddington now embodies a form of "milquetoast apoliticism," embracing gentle, symbolic defiance rather than real social or political action. Seen as a symbol of decency and civility—"can't we all get along over tea?"—Paddington appears out of step in today's climate of political and economic frustrations. His image, once a beacon for open arms and inclusivity amid rising anti-immigration rhetoric around Brexit, is now perceived by some as toothless and overly compliant with establishment narratives.

Despite the concerns, Paddington remains a significant cultural brand that resonates widely, appealing to various audiences while occupying a uniquely British space within public life. The upcoming Paddington musical and continued media presence attest to his enduring popularity, even as opinions diverge on what he now represents in the broader social context.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.ft.com/content/fc5f47ab-58fc-453c-9299-3a9f8485a44c> - This article discusses how Paddington Bear has become a national symbol of kindness, tolerance, and acceptance in Britain, reflecting the country's ideal of being welcoming and generous.
* <https://apnews.com/article/e140b66461ee439fc75ec2f14978d2bc> - This report details the vandalism of a Paddington Bear statue by two RAF engineers in Newbury, highlighting the bear's significance as a symbol of compassion and tolerance.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-62968049> - This article covers the creation of an illustration by Eleanor Tomlinson depicting Queen Elizabeth II and Paddington Bear walking hand-in-hand, serving as a tribute to the late monarch.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-humber-61757555> - This piece highlights the widespread response to Eleanor Tomlinson's drawing of Queen Elizabeth II and Paddington Bear, underscoring the bear's role as an unofficial mascot for the Queen.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/queen-jubilee-bbc-adam-lambert-elizabeth-ii-b1004114.html> - This article describes the comic sketch featuring Queen Elizabeth II and Paddington Bear during the BBC’s Platinum Party at the Palace, showcasing their shared love for marmalade sandwiches.
* <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/05/1103147874/paddington-bear-joins-the-queen-for-tea-platinum-jubilee> - This report details the humorous interaction between Queen Elizabeth II and Paddington Bear during the Platinum Jubilee celebrations, highlighting their shared fondness for marmalade sandwiches.
* <https://www.the-independent.com/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/paddington-bear-backlash-musical-b2741520.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data