



JOHN  
MCKEOWN

# BRITAIN IN A BRIEFCASE



# Britain in a Briefcase

John McKeown

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**Map of Great Britain** (*showing most places mentioned in the book - on the inside cover*)

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## Britain in a Briefcase

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# INTRODUCTION

England has a long history of independence, of the love of liberty, of free thought, of the right of the individual to live according to his own vision. Of course, England is not the only country to have such a libertarian tradition. It has been a characteristic of Europe as a whole. But England's geographic isolation, and the fact that apart from the period when it was part of the Roman Empire, England has never been under the control of any Europe-wide or world-wide Empire, has sharpened such feelings.

But which is it? England or Britain? In the broader world these two names are often used interchangeably. 'Britain' usually refers to England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, or the 'United Kingdom' to give it its political title. But, as England has been the dominant part of the Kingdom for so long, many British people still think of 'England' in terms of the whole United Kingdom, although this attitude seems to be changing very rapidly.

The Republic of Ireland is geographically part of the British Isles but it is a completely different political entity, a different nation-state, having achieved independence

from the rest of Britain in 1921.

'Britain' then is a combination of four different but politically united countries and, historically, of two different races, the Anglo-Saxons and the Celts.



SEVEN SISTERS CLIFFS, SUSSEX

# 1. The English Character

## Sense of humour

Most people who go to live in Britain tend to adopt<sup>1</sup> the 'British way of life' which, along with a love of independence, we can also characterise as<sup>2</sup> one of tolerance for difference, respect for others' privacy,<sup>3</sup> patience, and, although it is very hard to define, the British 'sense of humour'.

Comedy is one of Britain's most thriving<sup>4</sup> industries, and one of its greatest exports. Every country has its own unique<sup>5</sup> sense of humour, uniquely hard to define, but the British one is probably blacker, drier, zanier,<sup>6</sup> and more self-mocking,<sup>7</sup> more purely inventive<sup>8</sup> than that of other countries. Probably most of the world is familiar with the antics<sup>9</sup> of the Monty Python team, but hardly a week passes in Britain without some new, and even more outrageous comedy show appearing on television.<sup>10</sup> *The League of Gentlemen*, a series that hilariously<sup>11</sup> portrays the darker side of the typical 'goings-on'<sup>12</sup> in a typical



ROWAN ATKINSON IN THE FILM *JOHNY ENGLISH*

English village, has been very successful over the past couple of years.

This is not to say that if you travel around Britain you will find most people laughing their heads off;<sup>13</sup> in fact, one gets the opposite impression.<sup>14</sup> The British, like the Czechs, do not like to be interfered<sup>15</sup> with, or bothered<sup>16</sup> (or hassled) as they go about in public,<sup>17</sup> and you might think that they look like a really miserable<sup>18</sup> bunch of people. Like the Czechs, the British are not very demonstrative,<sup>19</sup> preferring to go about their business quietly and unobtrusively.<sup>20</sup> Of course, in Britain, as everywhere else, American attitudes are making themselves felt. You may hear, in what appears to be a typically British restaurant or shop, the expression: 'Have a nice day!' But Britain is still a long way from America and, on being told blandly<sup>21</sup> to 'Have a nice day!' the British response might well be: 'Which one? Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday?' Or the more sardonic: 'It'll be much nicer the minute I get out of here.'

## Mental exercise

So what else defines the British character? The British are a very energetic people, not just in the obvious<sup>22</sup> sense of engaging<sup>23</sup> in sports like football, rugby, and athletics, but in being active mentally. In different ways, and across all age<sup>24</sup> groups, the British are always 'exercising their grey matter'.<sup>25</sup> Whether it's doing a crossword while waiting for the train, joining a book group, appearing on a TV quiz show, or writing a letter of complaint<sup>26</sup> to the *Daily Mail*, the British are always testing their knowledge or trying to improve it in some way. There is hardly a single magazine or newspaper in Britain that doesn't have a crossword.

## Literary world

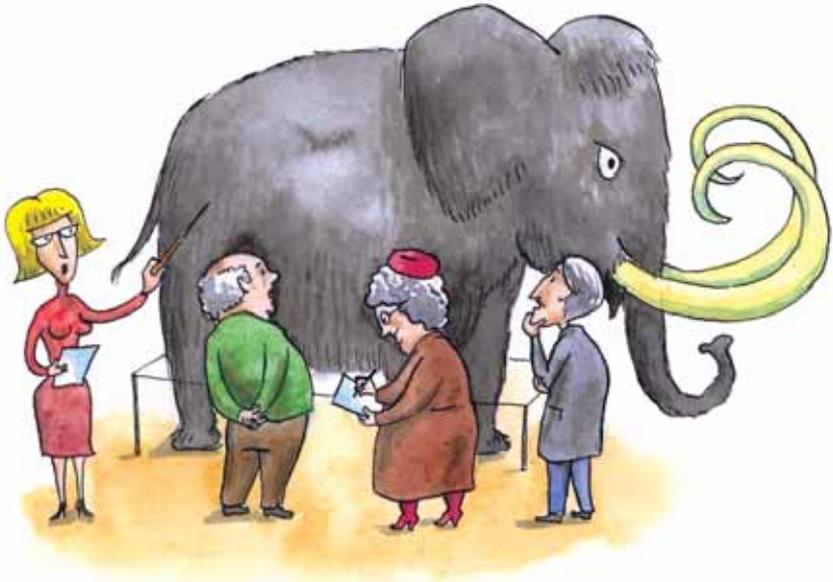
The English love words and they love language, although as a general rule, they aren't very good at learning other languages. They love English and are proud of the great writers and artists the country has produced down the centuries.<sup>27</sup> Shakespeare is an obvious example, but in modern times

there are people like Harold Pinter\*, Alan Ayckbourne\*, and Sir Tom Stoppard\* (actually a Czech, who has lived in Britain since the 1960s) whose plays are regarded as classics.

Poetry is very popular in Britain and most large towns would have at least one poetry group or 'poetry workshop' where people meet to develop their understanding of the craft of poetry, and read their work together. What are called 'poetry slams' have become very popular, particularly with young people, in the past few years. The 'slam' can take different forms, but often a poet is expected to 'improvise' or invent a poem on the spot<sup>28</sup> (and usually in front of a microphone) from a word or idea suggested by somebody in the audience. There may be a time limit of five or ten minutes, with poets competing against each other to come up with<sup>29</sup> the most inventive and entertaining poem, and the winner winning a prize, or going on to compete in the next level of the competition.

'Book groups' are a much quieter and, as the 'oldies' might say, a much more serious form of literary activity. The Book Group is a group of people who meet regularly to discuss a particular book, usually something recently published, which might not sound too exciting – a bit like school really – but the discussions can be quite heated<sup>30</sup> and argumentative.<sup>31</sup> There was recently a comedy series on British TV that looked at the funny side of the activities of a book group. According to this series, the book group is really an excuse<sup>32</sup> for the group to get involved in a whole range of non-literary activities.

Adult education is taken very seriously in Britain, and with more people living maybe twenty or thirty years after their retirement age<sup>33</sup> (currently 60 for women and 65 for men) studying is seen as a way of keeping mentally alert<sup>34</sup> and making up for<sup>35</sup> educational opportunities missed during earlier life. The subjects studied can include a whole range of things from Archaeology to Zoology, and most colleges run adult education courses. There are even examples of people in their seventies and older successfully completing degree courses, and becoming specialists in their chosen subject.



## Drinking habits

'Going down the pub' is one of the social activities that unites all Britons, regardless of<sup>36</sup> age or class. Originating as resting places for travellers (hostelries) and coaching inns (places where passengers on horse-drawn coaches would stop for sleep and refreshment), pubs have outlasted<sup>37</sup> the church and marketplace as the focal point<sup>38</sup> of local communities, and at their best they can be as welcoming as their name (pub is short for 'public house') suggests. British pubs come in many varieties: in the larger market towns you'll find huge oak-beamed inns with open fires and polished brass fittings;<sup>39</sup> in the remoter upland<sup>40</sup> villages there are stone-built pubs no bigger than a cottage; and in the industrial towns and cities rather basic pubs with one area, where the men can talk about football and how drunk they were last night: the 'public bar', and another area where courting couples can be romantic and single people can sit and wonder why they are still single: the 'saloon bar'.

Opening hours of most pubs are from 11 am to 11 pm, with 'last orders' called by the bar staff<sup>41</sup> about twenty minutes before closing time. When you do go to Britain, and if you are old enough to buy a drink, you may well hear 'last orders' being called. Traditionally, this involves the phrase: "Time, gentlemen, please!" being shouted by the barman or landlord, or screamed by the barmaid; should you hear this, you are not being asked the time,<sup>42</sup> you are being asked to leave. If you don't leave, you will probably hear the second phase of the operation: "Haven't you got any homes to go to!" Then it gets really serious. They start cleaning the tables and piling<sup>43</sup> the chairs violently. Should you still be there they start piling the furniture on your head.





A LONDON PUB

British beer can be very tasty, if it is brewed by one of the many small local breweries producing 'real ales' to traditional recipes, rather than the fizzy, electronically-pumped stuff<sup>44</sup> that the big breweries call 'beer'. The 'Campaign For Real Ale' (CAMRA) has been very successful over the last couple of decades in keeping traditional ales alive in Britain, and if you see a CAMRA sticker<sup>45</sup> on the window of a pub, you will probably find a good pint\* of beer inside. Beer is still served in traditional 'pint glasses', and people talk of 'going for a pint', by which of course they mean four or five. 'Binge drinking' is a national speciality of British youth – or at least a certain type of British youth – which involves drinking vast amounts of alcohol (any form of alcohol) in as little time as possible. You may have observed this typically British pastime on the news, when gangs of youths are arrested and thrown in jail in the resort towns of Greece, Spain, and Italy.

# 2. Work and Play

## Working hard

What do people in England actually do when they aren't finishing the crossword or discussing the latest Jeffrey Archer\* epic? Though they complain about it continuously, the British spend most of their day at work, with the average working day being about eight hours, from 9 am to 5 pm, although this classic '9 to 5' situation is changing, with people, particularly those in highly paid office jobs working much longer, even at weekends. Although the Germans are traditionally supposed to be the hard-working types it is actually the British who fulfil<sup>1</sup> this stereotype; as any hard-working statistician will tell you, working hours in Britain are now the longest in Europe.

The type of work the British do has changed quite dramatically over the past decades. Whereas<sup>2</sup> in the 1950s around 40 percent of the labour force was involved in<sup>3</sup> the manufacturing industry – Britain tended to export many more manufactured goods than she\* does now – in the year 2000 it was only 14 per cent of the workforce. Today, 44 percent of the working population (29.5 million people) work in what is called the 'service industry' (i.e. distributing goods and operating various services). This means working in a hotel or a supermarket, as a waiter or waitress, a hairdresser or barber,<sup>4</sup> a launder<sup>5</sup> or laundress, a computer operator, petrol-pump attendant, a barman or barmaid.

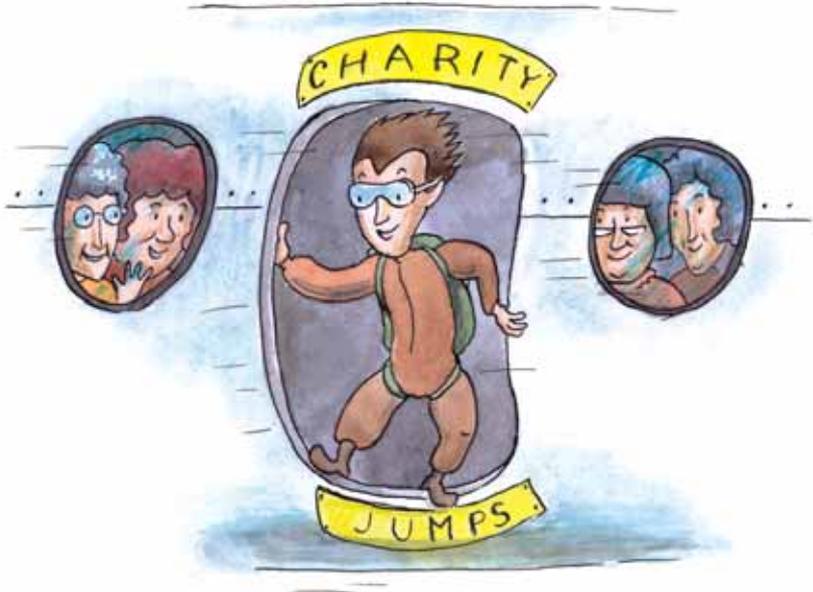
This is not to say that there aren't more 'high-profile' jobs available,<sup>6</sup> such as a management consultant, a stock broker,<sup>7</sup> an investment analyst, a solicitor,<sup>8</sup> a public relations consultant, or a police commissioner,<sup>9</sup> but these kinds of jobs often depend on going to the right school and university rather than on ability and aptitude.<sup>10</sup>

While you could say that the French or Italians work to live, the British live in order to work. 'Keeping up with the Jones'' – making sure you have everything that the people next door have, and preferably a bit more – is the objective<sup>11</sup> of the average Briton's life. If Mr Jones has a car (and you can

see it gleaming in the driveway<sup>12</sup>), you should have two cars, or at least a better model; if Mrs. Jones has a wide-screen<sup>13</sup> TV (which she has: you watched the delivery men delivering it from behind your curtains) yours should be a few inches wider, and get more channels. Rather than greed,<sup>14</sup> the British call this 'improving one's lifestyle', and British wide-screen TVs are full of programmes on self-improvement,<sup>15</sup> home-improvement, garden-improvement, financial improvement, and spouse<sup>16</sup>-improvement.

## Taking a break

But even the British recognize that 'all work and no play make Jack a dull boy' and they tend to play just as hard, sometimes harder, than they work. Rather than taking it easy, people will jump out of airplanes, do dangerous or bizarre things for charitable organisations (almost anything is forgivable as long as 'its for charity') or go snow-boarding down the mountains of Wales and Scotland.



There are still, of course, the more traditional British pursuits<sup>17</sup> and obsessions.<sup>18</sup> Football, cricket and gardening are just as popular as ever. The old-fashioned game of cricket is changing, with a new, much quicker form of contest recently introduced, taking about two hours rather than<sup>19</sup> five whole days, and some spectators<sup>20</sup> say, making it much more exciting.

Festivals are a good way to see the English at play. Many of these are the rituals associated with the British ruling class<sup>21</sup>, from the courtly pageant<sup>22</sup> of 'The Trooping of the Colour'\* in London, to the annual rowing race<sup>23</sup> on the Thames between Oxford and Cambridge Universities. London's large-scale<sup>24</sup> festivals range from the riotous street-party of 'The Notting Hill Carnival' to 'The Promenade'\* (the 'Proms') concerts, one of Europe's biggest classical music events.

Every major town in Britain has its own local arts, or other festival, at least once a year. The small town of Hay-on-Wye holds a 'Festival of Literature' in late May which attracts not only the London 'literati' but internationally-acclaimed<sup>25</sup> authors, such as Ivan Klíma. In early August there is the 'Sidmouth Folk Festival' which hosts folk and performers from all around the world, while the 'Reading Festival' in Berkshire is a three-day event for lovers of hard rock.

Some of the festivals in Britain date back hundreds of years, or even longer, and to non-locals, and even to locals themselves, these can be very puzzling, if not completely weird.<sup>26</sup> On the last Monday in May, for example, in Brockworth, Gloucestershire,\* they chase giant cheeses down a steep<sup>27</sup> hill, at Willaston. In Cheshire,\* they host the 'Worm-Charming' championships, at Abbots Bromley in Staffordshire they have a 'Horn Dance' in which the whole village dresses up in medieval costume for a kind of pagan 'Saturday Night Fever'. There are many more of these weird and wonderful events in the corners of Britain, which indicate that however up-to-date and hi-tech the British might be,<sup>28</sup> they, like most Czech people, are still very much in love with the old habits and traditions.



THE DANCE FESTIVAL IN THE ISLE OF MAN

# 3. Young people

## Music fever

Although there are many more old people in Britain than there used to be, the country isn't quite one big geriatric ward.<sup>1</sup> It is good to be young in Britain, especially if you have your own money, or generous parents; but even if you don't, there are still opportunities for developing<sup>2</sup> any talents or interests you might have. As in other countries, music, particularly types of rock music, is very popular with British youth.

These days, even very small towns have at least one night club which will often play different kinds of music on different weekday nights. The minimum age for getting into a club varies, but is usually around sixteen or seventeen, though people can always find good ways to get past the 'bouncers'<sup>3</sup> – the tough guys who guard the entrance – and into the club; and it definitely helps if you are female rather than male. The 'drinking age' in Britain is eighteen, and it is an offence for anyone under that age to be served alcohol, though of course, British youth can be at its most inventive and adventurous in finding ways around this legal limit<sup>4</sup> to their fun.

What kind of music do young people in Britain listen to today? Grunge\* is still very popular. The founder of the movement, Kurt Cobain, is still something of a cultural icon, and the newer groups such as *Live*, *Ash*, *Korn* sell millions of CD's every year. 'Brit-Pop' is now rather old-fashioned, although the bands originally associated with it<sup>5</sup> – *Blur*, *Oasis* and *Pulp* – are still very big. This home-grown, uniquely British form of pop continues to evolve<sup>6</sup> through such bands as *Radiohead* and Richard Ashcroft, the former lead-singer with *The Verve*.

Jungle, Drum and Bass, and Ambient are probably the types of music you will hear most in a British nightclub. 'Ambient' is much softer and less energetic than Jungle or Drum and Bass, drum machine and pulsing synthesisers are used to create a more relaxing and atmospheric kind of

sound. The most popular ambient groups are probably *Black Dog*, *Plaid*, and *Future Sound of London*.

Unfortunately boy bands and girl bands are still a major part of the British music scene. Rather than a group of musicians perfecting their songs and musical skills in small clubs and concert halls over a period of years, these groups are completely manufactured – put together like the parts of a machine – to achieve instant overnight chart success<sup>7</sup> and make millions of pounds for the group, and more importantly, the manager and record company. These bands are cynically designed to appeal to<sup>8</sup> the very youngest age group – children as young as five or six. Once they've made enough money, they split up,<sup>9</sup> usually to the emotional distress of their juvenile fans.<sup>10</sup> When *Take That* (Robbie Williams' group) split up in 1996, a Samaritans Hotline (The Samaritans is an organization people in Britain can ring if they are having severe<sup>11</sup> emotional or mental problems) was set up specially to help the fans deal with this catastrophe.



RADIOHEAD IN CONCERT

## School time

Although you can leave school at 16 and find yourself a job (not necessarily an easy thing to do) you can stay on at school and do A levels\* until the age of 18, when many people choose to leave home and go to University (assuming they pass<sup>12</sup> their A levels) in another town or city. You can either live in dormitories or at the college or university, or find your own accommodation in the town. What many students do is to live in the college for their first year and, after they have found suitable friends<sup>13</sup>, share rooms or a flat with them in town. Although students are independent (ie free of parental control) they can find it difficult financially. Tuition fees – currently £1,125 per year – were recently introduced by the Blair Government, and from 2006, universities will be allowed to increase these charges up to £3,000 a year. Not all students have to pay the full cost of studying, it depends on how much their parents earn, and there is a Student Loan System, under which students agree to pay back the loan when they get their first job. But still, many students get into serious debt<sup>14</sup>, which can interfere with their studies.

Most BA (Bachelor of Arts) or BSc (Bachelor of Science) degree courses last for three years (sometimes four), so most students who begin their studies at age 18 graduate at the age of 21 and, with a little luck, can be earning a good graduate salary. Degree studies in Britain are also much less tough than they are in the Czech Republic. In Britain you don't have to pass exams at the end of every semester to be able to carry on with your studies, but you do have to complete a number of essays or projects; so there is less pressure in Britain's universities. It is even possible to 'take a year out' or take a 'gap year', i.e. have a break from your studies for a year in order to go abroad and work, or go abroad and party. This usually happens between school and university.



UNDERGRADUATES ON THEIR WAY TO THE SENATE HOUSE IN CAMBRIDGE TO ACCEPT THEIR DEGREES

# 4. Travelling round England

## London

Although relatively small, England is a very diverse<sup>1</sup> place, with a range of scenery, and differing quality of life, reflecting its long and varied history.

The southern half, with beautiful and historic cities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Bath, Stratford and Norwich, is dominated by the capital, London. With a population of just under 8 million, London is Europe's largest city, spreading across<sup>2</sup> an area of more than 620 square miles from its centre on the river Thames. Ethnically, it's also one of the continent's most diverse, with around two hundred different languages, and more than 30 per cent of the population



PICCADILLY CIRCUS IN CENTRAL LONDON IS A JUNCTION, WELL-KNOWN FOR ITS BRIGHTLY LIT NEON ADVERTISEMENTS AT NIGHT AND THE MEMORIAL POPULARLY KNOWN AS EROS

made up of first- second- and third-generation immigrants, many from Asia (particularly in the east end of the city). London is where the country's news and money is made, it's where the central government is based and, as far as Londoners are concerned,<sup>3</sup> everything beyond the city's surrounding motorway system<sup>4</sup> is 'the provinces'; and they find it difficult – just as Pražans do – to imagine that there is any real life in the smaller towns and countryside.

It's true that London can be a thrilling place. Millions of pounds have been spent on renovating, rebuilding, and funding new projects across the city. The Tate Modern is a world-famous modern art gallery, while the London Eye is Europe's largest ferris wheel (135 metres high), slowly rotating to give incredible views across the whole panorama of the city. There is also the 'Millennium Bridge' a new pedestrian bridge across the Thames, the first built for a hundred years, linking the Tate with the steps of St Paul's Cathedral and the City, the financial heart of London.

## Liverpool

Although Londoners might disagree, London is not the only worthwhile<sup>5</sup> city in England; on the north-west coast there is Liverpool, once the second city of the British Empire. Liverpool suffered serious economic decline<sup>6</sup> after the Second World War, but the last few years have seen some improvement, with much renovation of the city centre and the docks<sup>7</sup> area. It has just been voted European City of Culture.

'Scousers', the slang word for people from Liverpool – 'scouse' is a kind of Irish stew<sup>8</sup> – are also famous for their wit,<sup>9</sup> producing many famous comedians, and their loyalty to one or other of the city's two football teams, Liverpool and Everton. Liverpool of course is home to the *Beatles*, and the group is celebrated in the city, though mostly for touristic reasons. Indeed, many people in Liverpool are as sick of tourists asking about the *Beatles* as Pražans are of Franz Kafka,\* or Dubliners of James Joyce.\* Although, should you ask anyone for information, you will always be treated with courtesy.<sup>10</sup>

## The Lakes

England may not be as 'green and pleasant' as it used to be – but it still has some beautiful and spectacular<sup>11</sup> countryside not yet buried under car-parks and motorways. The Lake District (within an hour's drive of Liverpool), with England's highest mountain peaks and its biggest collection of fresh-water lakes, carved out by glaciers<sup>12</sup> during the ice age, is the nation's most popular walking and hiking area. The largest of the lakes is Windermere, and because it is the easiest to reach, is the most crowded in summer. It is popular with water-skiers, swimmers, and boating enthusiasts.



THERE ARE MANY BEAUTIFUL FRESH-WATER LAKES IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

The area was the birthplace of the great English poet William Wordsworth,\* and his home, Dove Cottage, in the village of Grasmere, is open to the public. Thomas De Quincey,\* the critic and author of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* was another famous resident.

The centre of the northern lakes is a town called Keswick (pronounced Kez-ick), situated on a very beautiful lake called Derwentwater. Although it is beautiful, like many beautiful things it can be dangerous. Mists<sup>13</sup> and fog can cover it very quickly, particularly during an autumn night, and it's easy to get lost on the waters in a boat – as this author once did. For fans of the supernatural there is also something called the 'Derwentwater Demon' which is a playful spirit responsible for drowning several people<sup>14</sup> on the lake over the years. After several hours of rowing through thick fog<sup>15</sup> on Derwentwater, I can assure you it's possible to believe any such story.

From Keswick it's possible to hike up Latrigg Fell, which takes about two hours, or up the highest mountain in the area, Skiddaw, which takes about five hours. To get a real taste of pre-history it's advisable to visit the Castlerigg Stone Circle,\* just on the edge of the town, which is far more beautifully located than Stonehenge, and better still, is not fenced-off,<sup>16</sup> nor do you have to approach it through<sup>17</sup> a visitor's centre, at least not yet.

## Dartmoor

Dartmoor is one of the country's most beautiful areas. This is an area of wild uplands 75 miles south-west of Bristol (south-west England), home to wild ponies and dotted with 'tors': strange, wind-eroded pillars of granite.<sup>18</sup> The most untamed parts of the moor, around its highest points of High Willhays and Yes Tor, are above the market town of Okehampton, which can be reached by bus from Plymouth and Exeter. Unfortunately, despite the wild beauty of the terrain here, it is used as a firing range<sup>19</sup> by the Ministry of Defence, so you should check with the tourist office in Okehampton the times when it is safe to walk, if you want to avoid going home in a 'body-bag'.<sup>20</sup>

## Cornwall

Cornwall, England's westernmost county,<sup>21</sup> has some of the most beautiful stretches of coastline.<sup>22</sup> Largely a rocky, rugged<sup>23</sup> area, the Cornish coast – parts of which are called the 'English Riviera' – has beautiful sandy beaches, making it a very busy seaside destination, when, of course, it isn't raining. And there is Land's End – the southern geographical extremity of the country. Although there is stunning<sup>24</sup> and dramatic scenery here, there is also an obtrusive<sup>25</sup> 'visitor centre and theme park' which you just have to ignore. Thankfully, there are many coastal and cliff-top walks one can take to escape the commercialisation of the area and enjoy the sun setting<sup>26</sup> over the Atlantic Ocean.



THE EDEN PROJECT IN CORNWALL IS A SERIES OF VERY LARGE CLIMATICALLY CONTROLLED HIGH TECH DOMES TO REPRESENT DIFFERENT WORLD BIOMES

# 5. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

## Wales

The relationship between England and Wales (Cymru in Welsh) has never been entirely easy.<sup>1</sup> Constant disputes<sup>2</sup> over the border between the two countries led the 8th century Saxon King Offa to build a dyke<sup>3</sup> to separate them. Today, a long-distance footpath follows its route, from Chepstow in the south to Prestatyn in the north, still marking the old border. During Edward I's reign the last native Welsh prince, Llewellyn, was killed, and Wales passed uneasily under English rule. Trouble flared again<sup>4</sup> with the rebellion of Owen Glendower in the fifteenth century, but the Welsh prince Henry Tudor's defeat of Richard III at the 'Battle of Bosworth' made him Henry VII of England, and this led to the 1536 Act of Union, which joined the two countries in the restless<sup>5</sup> partnership which has lasted until today.

Contact with England has weakened the native Welsh culture; bricked-up, decaying chapels<sup>6</sup> are a reminder of<sup>7</sup> how important Sunday services and chapel choirs were to community life. The 'Eisteddfod' festivals of Welsh music, poetry, and dance, still take place throughout the country in summer – July's international music 'Eisteddfod' in Llangollen is the best-known example – but other native traditions survive only as part of the tourist industry. Still, the Welsh language is enjoying a revival, and can be seen on bilingual road signs all over the country, although it is mostly spoken in the north and mid-Wales.

Wales is a superb place to visit, particularly in the summer. The best places to head for sunbathing<sup>8</sup> and swimming are the Gower peninsula, the Pembrokeshire coast, the Llyn peninsula, and the southwest coast of Anglesey. The southwest-facing beaches of Wales have the best conditions for surfing and windsurfing, especially at Rhossili, and Whitesands Bay near St David's.



CAERNARVON CASTLE IN WALES

With its three national parks, Wales is also great walking country. Particularly Snowdonia in the north-west, which has a dozen of the country's highest peaks separated by dramatic glaciated valleys<sup>9</sup> and laced with<sup>10</sup> hundreds of miles of ridge and moorland paths<sup>11</sup>. The area is also a favourite with rock climbers.

If you prefer something less strenuous, Wales is famous for its castles, having some of the best examples in the British Isles, particularly in the north. There are two very impressive examples close together, Conway and Caernarvon, the latter is where every Prince of Wales since 1301 has been crowned, including Prince Charles, in 1969.

## Scotland

Scotland is a good example of how a smaller nation can keep its identity within a larger one. Unlike the Welsh, the Scots managed to fight off<sup>12</sup> the repeated invasions of the English, and when the old enemies did finally form a political union in 1603 it was because King James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne (ruling both countries as James I), though the parliaments of the two countries were not united until<sup>13</sup> 1707. But even after the union, Scotland kept many of its own institutions, particularly its own legal and institutional systems, and in 1997 the Scots voted to re-establish their own parliament. It's hard to say whether this will lead to Scotland breaking away from<sup>14</sup> the United Kingdom completely, but in the meantime the country seems to be full of new energy and optimism.

Scotland has several major cities, each with its own special flavour.<sup>15</sup> Edinburgh, the capital, is a cosmopolitan and cultured place which regularly comes top of the polls<sup>16</sup> for the best place to live in Britain. With its high stone-built houses and monuments it is visually stunning: the castle, balanced on the summit of an extinct volcano, looks over the rooftops towards Arthur's Seat, an ancient hill with breathtaking views of the surrounding country.

An estimated one million people visit the city for the Edinburgh Festival, the biggest arts event in Europe. Founded in 1947, it attracts artists of all kinds for three weeks in August and September. The Festival is actually a number of different festivals, an official programme of the classical arts, and the more contemporary 'Fringe Festival' – run by a separate organisation – offering just about everything you can imagine, and a lot of things you can't, in the field of performing and visual arts.

Edinburgh apart, it's probably the Scottish Highlands that most people think of when they imagine Scotland. The dramatic landscapes (you might remember them from the film *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*) are made more dramatic by the extremely changeable climate, producing a breathtaking variety of moods and colours, ideal for painters and poets. Some of the last true wildernesses in

Europe can be found in the Highlands, though even the highest mountain, Ben Nevis, is not too difficult to climb, and much of the best scenery – such as the famous Loch Lomond and Loch Ness (with its famous monster), and the islands of the Hebrides – can be enjoyed without too much effort.

## Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland, despite the ongoing<sup>17</sup> political problems, is also a worthwhile place to visit, though the capital, Belfast, does not have the charm of Edinburgh, and is much quieter than the hectic city of Dublin, south, in the Irish Republic. The coastline, particularly the Giant's Causeway, a stretch of ancient weathered basalt rocks<sup>18</sup> and cliffs, is quite beautiful, as are the many islands which blend into<sup>19</sup> the Hebridean islands of Scotland.



THERE ARE STILL ONGOING POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The United Kingdom then, is a very diverse place, both geographically, culturally, and racially. The Scots, Welsh, and English all have different identities, and each enjoys poking fun at the other.

The English regard the Scots as being mean with money. The Scots like to think of the English as being snobbish, while both regard the Welsh as being gloomy and introverted; though the Welsh see themselves as romantics, and as the last remnant of the original British race (the Welsh are the descendents of the Celtic tribes who were pushed into Wales by the invading Germanic tribes during the 'dark ages'). Of course, these three peoples have more things that unite them than separate them: a shared (and bloody) history, an intermixing of culture, a common religion (today's Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, is a Welshman) and no matter how disunited, politically, the United Kingdom becomes in future, they will each be identifiably British.



# Notes

1.

**HAROLD PINTER** (born 1930) – one of the most famous British playwrights. One of his famous plays is *The Caretaker*. He is also a spokesman on political issues.



**ALAN AYCKBOURNE** (born 1939) – a famous British playwright. His plays observe studies of English middle class life and society. One of his best ones is *Absurd Person Singular*.

**SIR TOM STOPPARD** (born 1937) – a playwright famous for the original subjects of his plays and for the clever handling of his dialogues (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*).



**PINT** – 'A pint of beer please' is one of the most essential English phrases. A pint is a liquid measure (0.568 l), served in a pint-glass.

2.

**JEFFREY ARCHER** (born 1940) – popular novelist and former Tory Member of Parliament, recently freed from jail for perjury (lying in court) or fraud.

**PERSONIFICATION** – "Britain tended to export many more manufactured goods

than she does now" (p.10) – people in Britain always refer to UK as the 'mother country'. It is not used except in a literary way (or in traditional songs) but they often reduce this idea to 'she' in the right context. (In the dictionary it says 'the country of one's birth, the country from which a group of settlers in another part of the world originally came from. Some Australians still think of Britain as their mother country although their family has been there for several generations.)

**THE TROOPING OF THE COLOUR IN LONDON** – this ceremony takes place in June each year to celebrate the Official Birthday of the Sovereign on Horse Guards Parade in London, when personal regiments of the Guards Division and the Household Cavalry parade ("troop") the regimental flag ("colour") before the sovereign.



**THE PROMENADE** – the Proms takes place in Covent Garden.

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE CHASING CHEESES AND WORM CHARMING FESTIVALS** – they have very obscure beginnings, back in the Middle Ages. Basically, they chase cheeses down hill. It's quite silly, and also an excuse for getting drunk. Worm Charming is another obscure practice, luring worms out of the ground by various means, even hypnotism. This latter practice is a bit of a laugh.

3.

**GRUNGE** – the type of music pioneered by Nirvana etc. Punk is only a bit slower.

**A LEVELS** (A=Advanced) – the exams English youth take in order to get into University.

4.

**FRANZ KAFKA**  
(1883–1924)

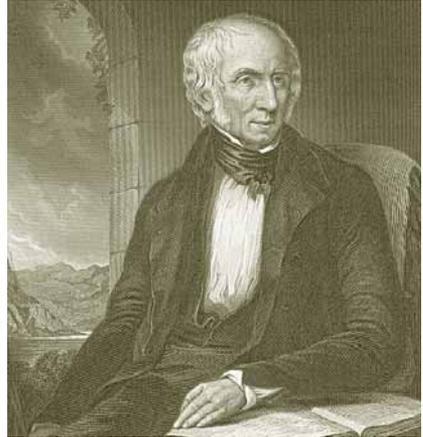
a famous German-speaking Jewish novelist, born in Prague. His work mainly portrays an enigmatic reality where the individual is seen as lonely and threatened (*The Trial*, *America*, *The Castle*, etc.)



**JAMES JOYCE** (1882–1941) – probably the most celebrated Irish author (*Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, etc). Disliked Ireland intensely, spent most of his adult life in Trieste, Paris, or other parts of Europe.



**WILLIAM WORDSWORTH** (1770–1850) – British poet who witnessed the French Revolution. He became Poet Laureate (highest honour for a poet in Britain).



**THOMAS DE QUINCEY** (1785–1859) – despite drug addiction, lived quite long and was a successful art/literary critic. *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* – is his autobiography mostly about his addiction to opium.

**CASTLERIGG STONE CIRCLE** – ancient from the late Neolithic/Bronze Age. Just outside Keswick. Smaller than Stonehenge, but the location is intensely beautiful.



# (vocabulary)

## 1

- 1 **tend to adopt** – mají tendenci přijmout
- 2 **characterise as** – označit jako
- 3 **privacy** – soukromí
- 4 **thriving** – velice úspěšný (vzkvétající)
- 5 **its own unique** – svůj vlastní specifický
- 6 **zany** – bláznivý, komický
- 7 **self-mocking** – sebezesměšňující
- 8 **purely inventive** – naprosto smyšlený
- 9 **most of the world is familiar with the antics** – většina lidí zná šprýmy
- 10 **hardly a week passes in Britain without some new and even more outrageous comedy show appearing on television** – v Británii uplyne sotva jeden týden, bez toho aniž by se v televizi neobjevil nějaký nový a i bláznivější komediální pořad
- 11 **hilariously** – legračně
- 12 **goings-on** – události (rejdy)
- 13 **laughing their heads off** – říci smíchy
- 14 **one gets the opposite impression** – člověk má opačný pocit
- 15 **interfered with** – vyrušovat
- 16 **bothered** – otravování
- 17 **go about in public** – když jsou na veřejnosti
- 18 **miserable** – nabručený
- 19 **demonstrative** – otevřený
- 20 **go about their business quietly and unobtrusively** – si v klidu a nenápadně dělat svojí práci
- 21 **on being told blandly** – po jemném sdělení
- 22 **obvious** – jasný
- 23 **engage** – zapojit se
- 24 **across all age** – napříč všemi věkovými
- 25 **grey matter** – šedou kůru mozkovou
- 26 **complaining letter** – dopis se stížností
- 27 **down the centuries** – po staletí
- 28 **on the spot** – namístě
- 29 **come up with** – vymyslet
- 30 **heated** – vášnivý (diskuse)
- 31 **argumentative** – hádavý
- 32 **excuse** – záminka
- 33 **retirement age** – důchodcovský věk
- 34 **mentally alert** – duševně čilý
- 35 **make up for** – dohnat, vynahradit
- 36 **regardless of** – bez ohledu na
- 37 **outlast** – přežít
- 38 **focal point** – střed dění
- 39 **brass fittings** – mosazné doplňky
- 40 **upland** – v horách
- 41 **bar staff** – obsluha baru
- 42 **being asked the time** – dotazován kolik je hodin
- 43 **pile** – vršit, naskládat
- 44 **fizzy, electronically-pumped stuff** – šumicí elektronicky načerpaný patok
- 45 **sticker** – nálepka

## 2

- 1 **it is actually the British who fulfil** – jsou to vlastně Britové, kteří splňují
- 2 **whereas** – zatímco
- 3 **around 40 per cent of the labour force would be involved in** – přibližně 40 procent pracovní síly představovalo
- 4 **barber** – holič, pánský kadeřník
- 5 **launder** – pracovnik v prádelně
- 6 **more high-profile jobs available** – více atraktivních zaměstnání k dispozici
- 7 **stock broker** – obchodník s akciemi
- 8 **solicitor** – právní zástupce
- 9 **police commissioner** – policejní komisař
- 10 **aptitude** – vloha, nadání
- 11 **objective** – cíl
- 12 **and you can see it gleaming in the driveway** – a vidíte ho, jak se blýská před domem (na příjezdové cestě)
- 13 **wide-screen** – širokoúhlý
- 14 **greed** – chtivost
- 15 **self-improvement** – sebezdokonalování
- 16 **spouse** – cho
- 17 **pursuit** – koníček, zábava
- 18 **obsession** – mánie
- 19 **talking about two hours rather than** – které trvají kolem dvou hodin, spíše než
- 20 **spectator** – divák
- 21 **ruling class** – vládnoucí třída
- 22 **courtly pageant** – elegantní podiváná
- 23 **rowing race** – závod ve veslování
- 24 **large-scale** – rozsáhlý
- 25 **acclaimed** – uznávaný
- 26 **weird** – podivný, zvláštní
- 27 **steep** – příkrý
- 28 **which indicate that however up-to-date and hi-tech the British might be** – což naznačuje, že, jakkoli pokrokoví a supermoderní Britové mohou být

### 3

- 1 the country isn't quite one big geriatric ward** – tato země není tak úplně jedno velké oddělení “domova důchodců”
- 2 there are still opportunities for developing** – stále existují možnosti pro rozvíjení
- 3 ways to get past the bouncers** – způsoby, jak obejít vyhazovače
- 4 youth can be at its most inventive and adventurous in finding ways around this legal limit** – mládež dokáže být obrovsky vynalézavá a riskovat při hledání způsobů, jak obejít tuto zákonnou hranici
- 5 originally associated with it** – s tím byly původně spojovány
- 6 continues to evolve** – se nadále vyvíjí
- 7 to achieve instant overnight chart success** – aby dosáhly okamžitého úspěchu v žebříčku hitparád ze dne na den
- 8 to appeal to** – aby měly ohlas, aby se zamlouvaly
- 9 they split up** – rozpadnou se
- 10 to the emotional distress of their juvenile fans** – za citového strádání jejich dětských fanoušků
- 11 severe** – vážný
- 12 assuming they pass** – za předpokladu, že složí
- 13 suitable friends** – vyhovující přátelé
- 14 get into serious debt** – se vážně zadluží

### 4

- 1 diverse** – rozmanitý
- 2 spreading across** – rozléhající se
- 3 as far as Londoners are concerned** – pokud se týče Londýňanů
- 4 everything beyond the city's surrounding motorway system** – vše za sítí dálnic kolem města
- 5 worthwhile** – stojící za to
- 6 decline** – pokles
- 7 dock** – přístavní dok
- 8 stew** – dušená směs masa se zeleninou
- 9 wit** – důvtip, zdravý rozum
- 10 you will always be treated with courtesy** – dostane se vám vždy laskavého jednání
- 11 spectacular** – působivý
- 12 carved out by glaciers** – které vznikly z ledovců
- 13 mist** – mlžný opar
- 14 playful spirit responsible for drowning several people** – rozpustilý duch, který má na svědomí utonutí několika osob

- 15 rowing through thick fog** – veslování hustou mlhou
- 16 and, better still, is not fenced-off** – a ještě stále není našťestí obehnan plotem
- 17 nor do you have to approach it through** – ani k němu nemusíte chodit přes
- 18 dotted with tors, strange, wind-eroded pillars of granite** – poset skalnatými vrchy – podivnými žulovými, větrem vymletými sloupy
- 19 as a firing range** – jako odpalovací základna
- 20 body-bag** – obal na mrtvolu
- 21 westernmost county** – nejzápadnější hrabství
- 22 stretches of coastline** – úseků pobřeží
- 23 rugged** – drsný, nerovný
- 24 stunning** – nádherný
- 25 obtrusive** – nevkusný
- 26 sun setting** – zapadající slunce

### 5

- 1 has never been entirely easy** – nebyl nikdy zcela jednoduchý
- 2 constant disputes** – neustálé spory
- 3 dyke** – násep
- 4 troubles flared again** – potíže opětně vypukly
- 5 restless** – neklidný
- 6 bricked-up, decaying chapels** – zazděné, chátrající kaple
- 7 are a reminder of** – připomínají
- 8 the best places to head for sunbathing** – máte-li namířeno k vodě, jsou nejlepšími místy na slunění
- 9 glaciated valleys** – zaledněnými údolními
- 10 laced with** – protkané
- 11 ridge and moorland paths** – stezkami po horských hřebenech a vřesovištích
- 12 the Scots managed to fight off** – Skotům se podařilo odrazit
- 13 were not united until** – nebyly sjednoceny až do
- 14 whether this will lead to Scotland breaking away from** – zda-li to povede k odtržení Skotska
- 15 flavour** – charakter
- 16 which regularly comes top of the polls** – který pravidelně vítězí v průzkumu veřejného mínění
- 17 despite the ongoing** – navzdory pokračujícím
- 18 weathered basalt rocks** – větrem ošlehaných čedičových kamenů
- 19 blend into** – se spojují do

## Summary of the Five Chapters Easy English

1.

The English character is made up of tolerance, independence, respect for others and a characteristic sense of humour. The British love to do crosswords and quizzes, and many older people are members of book groups or poetry groups. Adult education is taken very seriously in Britain and retired people study to keep their minds agile.

2.

Work in Britain takes up a lot of time in people's lives but they still have time for relaxation. Life style and home improvements are very popular. When not working for themselves, many people work for charitable causes. Sport, particularly football, is very popular and most people are spectators rather than players. Traditional sports and festivals still exist all over the country.

3.

Like most young people, British youth are very keen on music and there are many different types to listen to in clubs and discos. In school, students can take courses after they are 16 and go to university, by taking A levels. Most students go to a university away from their home and live with friends or in hostel accommodation. Going to university can be very expensive, and many students finish their course in debt.

4.

In the South of England, London is the most well known of British cities. It has a very rich mix of different ethnic groups. Many Londoners come from immigrant families of several generations. London is the largest of Europe's cities and is the British capital. There are many other interesting and beautiful cities in Britain and areas of varied scenery that are still largely unspoilt.

5.

Apart from England there are three other countries that make up the United Kingdom. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have very different historical associations with England and have very different characters. Not all the contacts between England and these countries have been happy ones and there is still a legacy of problems, particularly in Northern Ireland. All three countries have beautiful scenery and coastlines and are well worth a visit.