

British Society, Customs and Traditions

It is easy to assume that the population and society in Britain is stable, but it is not correct. At the moment it is 58 million but it is unevenly distributed across the land, and there has been a persistent drift to the south.

The British population is already one of the oldest in Europe, and it is currently getting older. A disproportionate number of the old choose to retire to the south coast and East Anglia, is creating regional imbalances.

Britain is also changing ethnically. Since the 1950s, over two million Afro-Caribbean and Asian people have come to live and work in Britain. They have become 5.7 % of Britain population, but concentrated particularly in London and Leicester (where their density is three times the national average), and in Birmingham, Slough and Bradford (where it is twice the national average).

Despite such changes, broad stereotypical views concerning British society persist. Take, for example, the classic stereotypes concerning English **Homes and Houses**.

Do you remember R. Kipling' famous expression: My home is my castle?

Is an English man's home really his castle? Though both the role and the look of the home are changing, an Englishman's home is as much his castle as it was 100 years ago. The Conservative party has been long encouraging home ownership and now 82% of British families prefer to live in their own houses and only 15% live in flats. Here are some typical houses owned by Britons: “Detached” houses, ones that stand on their own, are the most desirable. “Semi-detached” houses, consisting of two equal halves and there are also “terraced” ones, joined in a row of more than two.





Some typical British homes are the smallest in Europe. The report undertaken by the Centre for Economics & Business Research for Bradford & Bingley reveals British living space per home is 12 percent smaller than the average Spanish home, 14 percent smaller than in Germany and 16 percent smaller than in France.

All of know the love of Britons for gardening. There are small gardens in front and behind their houses.

What is inside such houses? What is on the ground floor and the first floor?
“England has a wealth of grand palaces, castles and country mansions. Many are located in beautiful countryside, some in towns and cities. Castles dating back to the 1300^s, country mansions from the 1600^s and four hundred year old palaces. Most of these properties are no longer privately owned. There are a number of family owned mansions dating back to the 1400^s which open for private groups.



Eighty per cent of the British people live in towns or cities. Most of them would prefer to live in the countryside if it were possible. People are moving out of large cities, some are going to the countryside and small towns. In the middle of the 20th century the pressure to move out of London intensified. There were two main reasons for this. The most important was the steep rise in house prices in London area and the second reason for moving was to have a better quality of life. British whites' are the minority in London for the first time as census of 2011 shows number of UK immigrants has jumped by 3million in 10 years. **Just 44.9% of Londoners are White British,** according to census data. And in general **7.5million residents of England and Wales were foreign-born in 2011**

Another typical feature of English life is a great number of “commuters”, as those people who live now in the province retain their jobs in London and big cities and go to and from work every day sometimes for two hours.

The conservative housing policies contributed to the rising number of homeless people especially in big cities. You can see a lot of people sleeping rough in central London each night. They are called “dossers”. Many of them are young school-leavers who come to London to find jobs but failed because it is extremely difficult to get a job without a home address.

Traditional families in England: two children, a dog and a cat.
Marriage rate dips to record low as fewer than half are hitched.

English Traditions

You cannot really imagine Britain without all her traditions. Some British customs and traditions are known all over the world.

What should one know on coming to England? First – a typical English breakfast different from the continental one, a lunch (from 12 o'clock to 1 o'clock), five-o'clock tea, dinner or supper (6-7 o'clock). There are some traditional dishes such as roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, Cornish pasties and of course pies.

British people spent less time cooking now than they used to do in the past. Even traditional English breakfast is a bit of a myth today. Many people prefer to have a bowl of cornflakes or a cup

of coffee for breakfast. A lot of people unite two meals: breakfast and lunch together (s0-called "brunch"). When British people go out for a meal, they very often go to their local Indian or Chinese, Italian or Turkish restaurant or buy a "takeaway" food. Very many still go to the pubs.

The word "**pub**" is short for "**public house**". **Pubs** are so popular in the UK that there are over 60,000 pubs there (53,000 in England and Wales, 5,200 in Scotland and 1,600 in Northern Ireland). Pubs are an important part of British life. People talk, eat, drink, meet their friends and relax there.

English Customs are reflected in popular British Holidays

Should ever be forgotten.



Guy Fawkes Day - November 5th. "Remember, remember the 5th of November Gunpowder, treason and plot. I see no reason in that gunpowder treason". This popular British rhyme is often spoken on Bonfire Night, in memory of the Gunpowder Plot. Guy Fawkes Day' is also known as 'Bonfire Night' or 'Fireworks Night'.

November 5, 1605, when catholic Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirators (60 in all) attempted to kill King James I and the Members of Parliament. This conspiracy arose as a reaction to the persecution of Catholics under the rule of King James, a Protestant. They hid 36 barrels of gunpowder in the cellars of the Houses of Parliament and were going to blow up the Houses of Parliament. But one of the

plotters betrayed the conspiracy in a letter to his brother-in-law Lord who told the government about the plotter's plans. Fawkes was caught with a box of matches in his pocket. Some conspirators fled but many were killed or arrested. Nine members, including Fawkes, were hung and quartered in January 1606.

Parliament made the 5th November a day of public thanksgiving and ever since then the day has been celebrated with fireworks and bonfires. Today children still make stuffed figures with masks of Guy Fawkes. They call these figures guys and display them in the streets. Some use the traditional formula of "A penny for the guy" when asking for money.

November 5 is also called **the Ringing Day** because it is appointed for church bells to be rung for the whole day.

One of the largest events in the UK is **the Bridgewater Carnival**. The procession is held each year on the Thursday nearest to November 5. It is an illuminated procession that takes about two hours to pass with over 130 entries made by various local carnival clubs

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

In England less emphasis is placed on Christmas Eve than in other countries, much more is made of Christmas Day. Carol singing, midnight church services and going out to the pub are some of the activities that many families enjoy (sometimes all three activities can be combined into one fun night out!).

In 1647, the English parliament passed a law that made Christmas illegal, all festivities were banned by the Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell, who considered feasting on what was supposed to be a holy day to be immoral. The ban was lifted only when Cromwell lost power in 1660.

During Queen Victoria's reign, Christmas became a time for gift giving, and a special season for children.

St Patrick's Day - March 17th. St Patrick (c.389-c.461) is the patron saint of Ireland. He was an ancient Briton living during the time when Britain was a colony of the Roman Empire. When he was sixteen he was captured by pirates from across the Irish Sea and taken to Ireland. While working as a shepherd, he had a great

spiritual experience and decided that he was to serve God in some special way. According to the legend St. Patrick's work in Ireland transformed the country. He drove all the snakes out of Ireland and they all went into the sea and drowned. The snake was a pagan symbol, and perhaps this is a metaphor for the fact that he drove paganism out of Ireland.

In Ireland, March 17th is a public holiday in celebration of his life and death. It is also a day when most people attend church. The feast day of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is celebrated all over the world wherever Irish exiles gather.

St David's Day - March 1st St. David (520-588), or Dewi as he is called in Welsh, is the patron saint of Wales. He founded twelve monasteries across the country and went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Once there he was consecrated a bishop. His life and work made a lasting impression on Wales.

Bank Holidays - public holidays when banks, post offices, shops and some attractions are closed. Bank holidays remain constant each year, i.e. they always occur on Monday (the late Spring Bank Holiday is the last Monday in May).

Midsummer Day - 24th June - ceremonies in honour of the Sun have been held from the earliest times. This day is preceded by Midsummer Night when supernatural beings are said to wander about.

Edinburgh Festival

It began in 1947, with the aim of providing 'a platform for the flowering of the human spirit'. Right from the start people were inspired to put on shows of their own, and these soon grew into **the Edinburgh Festival Fringe**. Since then half a dozen or so festivals have grown up around it in August and early September, and collectively these are often known as 'the Edinburgh Festival'.

The Highland games are events held throughout the year in Scotland as a way of celebrating Scottish and Celtic culture and heritage, especially that of the Scottish Highlands.

During the time of English occupation, the men of Scotland were forbidden to train in an attempt to prevent another Scottish uprising. Scots continued to train

for war during so-called the Highland games. Certain aspects of the games are so well known as to have become emblematic of Scotland, such as the bagpipes, the kilt, and the heavy events, especially the caber toss. While cantered on competitions in piping and drumming, dancing, and Scottish heavy athletics, the games also include entertainment and exhibits related to other aspects of Scottish and Gaelic culture.

Religion

There are two established or state churches in Britain: the Church of England, or Anglican Church and the Church of Scotland or Kirk. There are two things for which Henry is most remembered: [his six marriages](#) and his break with Rome, leading to the [English Reformation](#)

In 1533 the English king, Henry VIII broke away from Rome and declared himself head of the Church in England. Besides his six marriages, Henry VIII is known for his role in the separation of the [Church of England](#) from the pope and the [Roman Catholic Church](#). His struggles with Rome led to the separation of the Church of England from papal authority, the [Dissolution of the Monasteries](#), and his own establishment as the [Supreme Head of the Church of England](#). Yet he remained a believer in core Catholic theological teachings, even after his excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church. Henry oversaw the legal union of [England and Wales](#) with the [Laws in Wales Acts 1535 and 1542](#). He is also well known for a long personal rivalry with both [Francis I of France](#) and the Habsburg monarch [Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire \(King Charles I of Spain\)](#).

Henry VIII

Ever since 1534 the monarch has been Supreme Governor of the Church of England. During the next two centuries the Church of England became more Protestant in belief as well as organization. No one could take the throne who was not a member of the Church of England.

Henry VIII's second daughter Elizabeth I (1533-1603) after the fight with her half-sister Mary finally established English Protestant Church of which she became the Supreme Governor.



Until the mid-19th century, those who did not belong to the Church of England were barred from some public offices.

The established church still plays a powerful role in national life, though today there is complete freedom of religious practice.

At the moment in England only 12% of the adult population goes to the Church of England. But more recently different religious groups were established: Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Muslims. **Census data reveal just 59% now call themselves Christian as a quarter say they have no religion and 5% are Muslim. Muslim community is becoming the most** important of these. There are 1.5 million Muslims and over 1000 mosques and prayer centers. Apart from London, there are Muslim communities in Liverpool, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Most are of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin, but there are also an increasing number of British converts.

Answer the following questions

1. What is a typical British house?
2. Is the expression "My house is my castle" still important for Englishmen?

3. What do you know about British eating habits?
4. Why do so many English people prefer to live in the province?
5. What are “commuters”?
6. Why are pubs so important for Englishmen?
7. Who are “dossers”?
8. When and how is Guy Fawkes Night celebrated?
9. Which Scottish and Irish holidays do you know?
10. What events take place during Scottish Highland Games?
11. What are the main religions in the UK?
12. What is the situation with religions in the UK now?

Translate into Russian:

Persistent drift, imbalances, density, to undertake, to reveal, to date back to, country mansions, to retain, persecution, treason, a plot, conspiracy, to betray, to flee, bonfire, to ban, a holy day, immoral, to lift the ban, pagan, in honour of, caber toss, dissolution, core, to bar from, a convert.

British Culture

Theatre

From its formation in 1707, the United Kingdom has had a vibrant tradition of theatre, much of it inherited from England and Scotland. Theatre was introduced from Europe to England by the Romans and auditoriums were constructed across the country for this purpose. By the medieval period theatre had developed with the mummers' plays, a form of early street theatre associated with the Morris dance, concentrating on themes such as Saint George and the Dragon and Robin Hood. These were folk tales re-telling old stories, and the actors travelled from town to town performing these for their audiences in return for money and hospitality. The medieval mystery plays and morality plays, which dealt with Christian themes, were performed at religious festivals. The reign of Elizabeth I in the late 16th and early 17th century saw a flowering of the drama and all the arts. Perhaps the most famous playwright in the world, William Shakespeare, wrote

around 40 plays that are still performed in theatres across the world to this day. They include tragedies, such as *Hamlet* (1603), *Othello* (1604), and *King Lear* (1605); comedies, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594—96) and *Twelfth Night* (1602); and history plays, such as *Henry IV*, part 1—2. The Elizabethan age is sometimes nicknamed "the age of Shakespeare" for the amount of influence he held over the era. Other important Elizabethan and 17th-century playwrights include Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, and John Webster.

During the Interregnum 1642—1660, English theatres were kept closed by the Puritans for religious and ideological reasons. When the London theatres opened again with the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, they flourished under the personal interest and support of Charles II. Wide and socially mixed audiences were attracted by topical writing and by the introduction of the first professional actresses (in Shakespeare's time, all female roles had been played by boys). New genres of the Restoration were heroic drama, pathetic drama, and Restoration comedy. The Restoration plays that have best retained the interest of producers and audiences today are the comedies, such as William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1676), *The Rover* (1677) by the first professional woman playwright, Aphra Behn, John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696), and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700). Restoration comedy is famous or notorious for its sexual explicitness, a quality encouraged by Charles II (1660–1685) personally and by the rakish aristocratic ethos of his court.

In the 18th century, the highbrow and provocative Restoration comedy lost favour, to be replaced by sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy such as George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731), and by an overwhelming interest in Italian opera. Popular entertainment became more important in this period than ever before, with fair-booth burlesque and mixed forms that are the ancestors of the English music hall. These forms flourished at the expense of legitimate English drama, which went into a long period of decline. By the early 19th century it was no longer represented by stage plays at all, but by the closet drama, plays written to be privately read in a "closet" (a small domestic room).

A change came in the late 19th century with the plays on the London stage by the Irishmen George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde and the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen, all of whom influenced domestic English drama and vitalised it again.

Today the West End of London has a large number of theatres, particularly centred around Shaftesbury Avenue. A prolific composer of the 20th century Andrew Lloyd Webber has dominated the West End for a number of years and his musicals have travelled to Broadway in New York and around the world, as well as being turned into films.

The Royal Shakespeare Company operates out of Shakespeare's birthplace Stratford-upon-Avon in England, producing mainly but not exclusively Shakespeare's plays.

Important modern playwrights include Alan Ayckbourn, John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, and Arnold Wesker.