

Searching
for the real

Great
Britain

by Pete Miller



Each country has its own customs and identity. For instance, don't ever think of saying to a Welshman or Scotsman that they come from England! So let us look at each of the countries.

Can you identify the following?



BIG BEN **DEVON** **TOWER BRIDGE** **WINDSOR CASTLE** **STONEHENGE** **BUCKINGHAM PALACE**

England

England is the biggest of the four home countries and perhaps the most well known to foreigners. It is said that the physical geography of the British Isles was shaped by the Ice Age. Britain's world dominance in the 18th and 19th centuries was built on the Industrial Revolution and the introduction of the railways. Coal and iron ore were found in many places, and the race to produce more and more was begun. At first, hundreds of miles of canals were built throughout the country. These were then supplemented and finally overtaken by the

railways. Today the canals are largely used for leisure, an example of how a new need can build on something from the past. As far as industry and manufacturing are concerned, various areas of the country seem to specialise in different industries:

Region	Main Towns	Industry
West Midlands	Birmingham	Manufacturing
	Wolverhampton	Engineering
	Coventry	Automobiles
Lancashire	Manchester	Textiles
	Liverpool	Port
	Birkenhead	Shipbuilding
Yorkshire	Leeds	Textiles
	Bradford	
	Sheffield	Steel
North East	Newcastle	Shipbuilding
	Middlesbrough	
East Midlands	Leicester	Engineering
	Nottingham	Shoemaking
		Textiles



Of course, in recent years many of these industries have changed. New technologies have made some items obsolete; for example, how many people still use an ink filled fountain pen? We all use biros in one form or another. Can you think of other items from history that have been overtaken by new inventions or technology?

In recent years the coal industry has declined as have heavy engineering and shipbuilding. In their place have come service industries, electronics and textiles.



Wales

Wales is a hilly country with a beautiful coastline. The hills are the most important sheep farming area in Europe – there are about 11 million sheep. The hills are also great for walking on. There is quite a contrast between the North Wales region and South Wales. Coal was found in South Wales and formed the basis for an engineering industry. The Welsh language is one of the oldest languages in Europe, and about 20% of the population speak it. Some schools are totally Welsh speaking. Rugby is the national sport, and the leek is Wales' national symbol. Many grand castles were built by the English to keep the Welsh tribes under control. In the north the quarrying of slate for roofing houses was a major industry. Every year there are music and art festivals called Eisteddfods. These have a history going back a thousand years. Singing by men is very popular.

Scotland

Scotland is also a hilly country, and Britain's highest mountain, Ben Nevis, is in the Highland Region. Loch Ness is the supposed home of a monster. Edinburgh has a beautiful castle sitting

on an extinct volcano and is famous for its yearly festival. Although Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland, Glasgow is by far and away the biggest city. Many great ocean – going ships were built in Glasgow during the days when people traveled around the world by ship. The Scots have their own culture, and the bagpipes are an iconic sound of Scotland. During the summer months many of the rural areas hold Highland Games. Tossing the caber is one of the most well-known events. Golf is said to have originated in Scotland, and curling is a popular winter sport that also originated in the country.



Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is physically part of the island of Ireland, but it is politically part of the UK. Belfast was well known in the past for shipbuilding. The Irish love music and dancing. The Giant's Causeway is an amazing volcanic rock formation. It is made up of hundreds of huge, hexagonal pillars of stone.



British Housing



There is a well-known saying that an Englishman's home is his castle. However, recent research has shown that British housing is typically smaller than in other parts of Europe. The average usable floor space in a British home is 76m sq. The Italians lead the way with an average of 92m sq, over a fifth larger than in the UK. Four-fifths of Brits prefer to live in a house, with only 15% living in a flat. This is a huge contrast to Central Europe, where over 50% of the population live in flats. Sixty-nine percent of Brits own their own homes, but despite the right-to-buy initiative of the Thatcher government, Britain still has the highest number of people living in 'social housing' (22%). Compared to continental Europe, the UK has the least-developed rental sector (9%). There are various styles and types of homes. In towns and cities where space was in short supply, terraced homes were built. These have shared walls on both sides. Semi-detached houses are when two homes share one wall. Then there are detached homes – freestanding and usually with larger gardens. Most homes are on two levels, and so it is usual to go up the stairs to bed. Bungalows can be either detached or semi-detached. They obviously need more ground space than the usual detached house. Gardens are also very important and the British love their plants



TERRACED HOUSES



BUNGALOW

and gardens. Not many people grow vegetables at home, unlike this part of Europe. If the weather is nice in the summer, Brits really enjoy having a barbecue in the garden. Basically, the garden is used as a play area for children, so swings and toy houses are common garden furniture. It is said that half of British homes have a pet. Dogs and cats are the most common. Unlike this part of Europe, dogs live in the house.



FISH AND
CHIPS

British Food

I guess you already know quite a bit about typical British food, but what will probably surprise you is that curry is now the most popular meal. Traditional British food is based on beef, lamb, pork, chicken and fish. These are generally served with potatoes and at least one other vegetable. Sandwiches were 'invented' in the UK and are still popular. Fish and chip shops are found in every town. Once a very cheap meal, fish is now quite expensive. The fish stocks

around the coast are depleted, so the fishing boats have to travel much further to catch fish. Pies are also very popular, especially steak and kidney pies, and the Cornish pasty as a main dish and apple pie for desert, are also very popular. It used to be popular to have a roast dinner on Sundays, but this custom has died out. The basic foods of Britain are meat, fish, potatoes, flour, butter and eggs. Many of the traditional dishes are based on these ingredients. Some of our main dishes



TRADITION
CORNISH PASTY,
FILLED WITH
MEAT, ONION
AND POTATO



TRADITIONAL
ENGLISH SUNDAY
ROAST LAMB DINNER
WITH YORKSHIRE
PUDDING, FRESH
GARDEN VEGETABLES
AND GRAVY

To combat the loss of trade in pubs brought about by the police enforcing a no 'drink-and-drive' law, owners began to offer cheap but wholesome food. Eating out has thus become very popular, especially amongst pensioners. In the last few years some people have inherited property, which they have been able to sell. Because of the high property prices this money, together with pension schemes, have meant that some older people are able to live quite well.

have strange names like Spotted-Dick, Toad-in-the-Hole, and Bubble-and-Squeak.

Of course, the many immigrants who have come to Britain have brought their own foods with them; consequently, dishes like curry are now popular. One other factor that must be taken into consideration are the many 'take-aways'. The Chinese began this idea in the UK and were joined by the Indians, Italians and many others.



A STEAK, KIDNEY,
MUSHROOM AND
CARROT PUDDING,
IN A SUET CRUST,
SERVED WITH LETTUCE,
POTATOES, PEAS AND
SWEETCORN

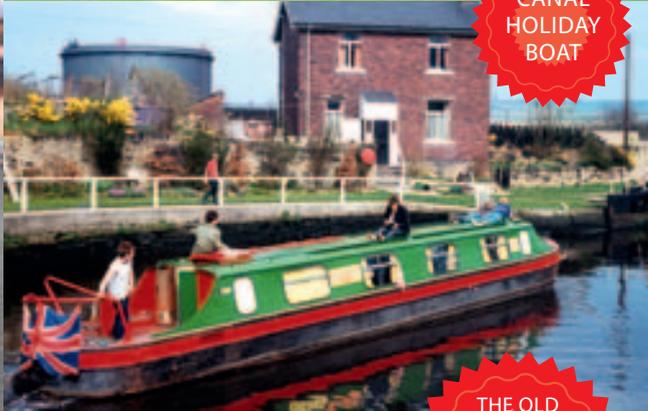
Sport in the UK

When talking about sport, it is amazing how many sports originated in the UK. Sport is therefore important to many, and there are sports clubs catering to all interests. Running and jogging to keep fit are encouraged, and every year there is the famous London Marathon, where thousands of casual runners take part. For the amateur, football and rugby are popular winter sports, and cricket is popular in summer. For example, there are more than 50,000 football clubs in the UK. Those living near rivers and canals can take the opportunity to go rowing or paddle a canoe. Although parts of the UK are very crowded, there are sufficient open areas in the countryside for fell walkers and leisure walkers. Britain is also well known in the world of professional sport. Old Trafford is the home of Manchester United, and Stamford Bridge in London is the home of Chelsea in the football world. Wembley is England's national football stadium. Twickenham in London is home to England's Rugby Union team. Wales play in Cardiff in the new purpose-built Millennium Stadium and Scotland in Murrayfield in Edinburgh. As far as rugby is concerned, Ireland play in Dublin as a united team – there are players from north and south of the border. Rugby union is a 15 player on each side game. Rugby League is another version of rugby played by thirteen players on each side.

Cricket is played all over the world, but to those who have never seen it played, it is quite a mystery. The headquarters of cricket is at Lord's Cricket Ground in London. Games can last from just a few hours to up to five days in the professional game. What always amazes some people is that a game can last for five days and end with a draw or tie. Even if there is no victor, it can still be extremely exciting. Many similes and metaphors in English are taken from the game of cricket.

Tennis players do not seem to have the opportunities that are available in Central Europe. It seems that there are far more tennis courts here. Having said that, Wimbledon is one of the greatest tournaments in the world and the only one of the Grand Slam events that takes place on grass.

The British love messing around in boats, and during the last few Olympic games, have won medals for rowing, sailing and canoeing. The Henley Royal Regatta is a famous rowing event that takes place in June on the River Thames. The Oxford and Cambridge boat race for the two oldest universities takes place on the Thames in London. The Cowes sailing regatta takes place around the Isle of Wight in August. Of course, with the Olympic Games coming to England in 2012, many venues for these minor sports will be shown on TV.



ROWING

CRICKET

RUGBY

LONDON
FLORA
MARATHON

CANAL
HOLIDAY
BOAT

THE OLD
TRAFFORD
STADIUM - HOME
OF MANCHESTER
UNITED FOOTBALL
CLUB



Multi-Cultural Britain

People from all cultures and ethnic backgrounds can be found in every corner of Britain. All have contributed to make Britain the place it is today. About 8% of the total population are from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds or probably almost 5 million people. If you walk down a street in Britain, especially in the bigger cities, you will usually see people with different hair, skin and eye colours. They may have white, brown or black skin,

and blonde, brown-black or red hair. Many of the people you will see will be British, but they all look different because the people of Britain are of mixed races. So not all people in Britain are white. Britain has always been a mixed race society. Early on the Romans invaded, followed by the Saxons, Vikings and Normans. Africans were brought to Britain by force in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as slaves or servants. Britain has also welcomed



THE NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL, LONDON



refugees who have escaped from persecution or famine in their own countries. In the 1950s and 1960s people came to Britain from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan and Hong Kong. They tended to settle in large cities like London, Birmingham and Manchester. People moving to Britain have brought their own cultures and traditions. For example, the Notting Hill Carnival celebrates Caribbean culture. It is held in London at the end of August.



British Customs and Traditions

Britain has many traditions which have been around for hundreds of years. Some of these customs and traditions are famous all over the world. When thinking about Britain, people often think of people drinking tea, eating fish and chips and wearing

a bowler hat. Whilst this is true for some, there is far more to Britain than these few things. We have many traditions of sport, music, food and many royal occasions. There are also songs, sayings and superstitions. I am sure you know about Bonfire Night, which commemorates the unsuccessful attempt by Guy Fawkes to blow up Parliament. But there are many other traditions that help make up British life. We will look at a few examples:

At Lerwick, on the island of Shetland in Scotland, there is the largest fire festival in Europe. It is celebrated on the last Tuesday of January every year. There is a torch-lit procession through the streets of Lerwick, followed by the burning of a full size replica Viking longship. At the other end of the country in St Ives, Cornwall, residents hurl a silver ball on the first Monday after Candlemas. The silver ball is thrown from the wall of the parish church by the mayor to the waiting crowd. The ball is passed from one to another on the beaches and through the streets of the town. The person holding the silver ball at noon takes it to the mayor and receives five shillings (25p).

There is an amusing Moonraking festival in Slaithwaite in Yorkshire. It is based on a village story about two 19th century smugglers who were collecting barrels of illegal liquor from the canal.





MASTER OF CEREMONIES AT THE CHEESE ROLLING

The smugglers hid the barrels and told the police they were trying to rake the moon's reflection out of the canal. Thinking they were fools, the police let the smugglers go. There is a street procession and theatre activity to remember the event.

Every year about forty thousand spectators visit Coopers Hill in the Gloucestershire village of Brockworth to watch the traditional 7lb (15 Kg) Double Gloucester cheese bounce down a steep slope, followed by dozens of running, rolling competitors. There are often injuries, but the fastest runner wins the cheese.

At Abbots Bromley in Staffordshire in early September, the famous horn

dance is performed. Six deer-men wearing reindeer horns dance around a ten-mile course and perform a ritual in 12 different locations.

One of the traditions that I used to particularly enjoy in my home area of Somerset were the carnivals.

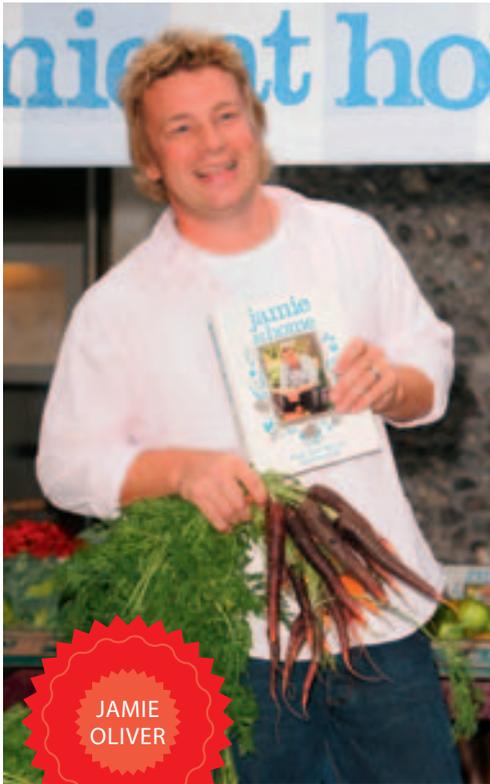
Throughout Somerset towns between September and early November these carnivals are held. The events are old, although the earliest written account is from 1854. Carts were once horse drawn, but are now pulled by tractors. The floats, as they are now called, can be over 35 metres long and over 3 metres wide. They also tow a huge generator to power the many lights that illuminate the float. Clubs design and build the displays throughout the year in the various towns that take part in the carnival season. The best floats from each region of the county are invited to the last carnival of the season which is held at Bridgwater on the Thursday nearest to November 5th. These are just a small sample of the strange customs in Britain.



CARNIVAL

Education

Education is an important part of British life. There are hundreds of schools, colleges and universities, including some of the most famous in the world. Education in state schools is free and compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 – 16. Some children are educated at home rather than in school. A child's education is normally divided into two separate stages. The first



JAMIE OLIVER



SCHOOL UNIFORMS

begins with primary education at age five, which usually lasts until children are eleven. Then they move to secondary school, where they stay until they reach sixteen, seventeen or eighteen. Teachers in primary schools (4 – 11 year olds) are always addressed by their surname by parents and pupils alike, always Mr, Mrs or Miss Jones.... In secondary schools (11 – 16 years), teachers are usually addressed as Miss or Sir.

In British schools, children can usually choose between a hot or cold dinner provided by the school or a packed lunch taken from home. Some children are entitled to a free school dinner, but most children pay for their



meal. Recently, the popular TV chef Jamie Oliver has tried to make school dinners more popular. He has also tried to use fresh fruit and vegetables and get away from so-called 'junk food'. However he has had limited success as most children are very set in their ways and like chips and burgers!

Most schools require children to wear a school uniform, although they are much more informal these days for most students. Boys wear long grey or black trousers, a white shirt, school tie (optional in most primary schools), jumper or sweater with the school logo on it. The school chooses black shoes. Girls dress as above, but they may wear skirts. During the summer term girls often wear summer school dresses. I am often asked why children have to wear a school uniform, and I offer the following thoughts:

- When on a school trip students all look the same, so children can't get lost.
- It stops kids from worrying about what to wear each day.
- Everyone is equal.
- Parents don't have to shop for expensive and varied wardrobes for their children to keep up with or show off to other children.
- Wearing a uniform brings a sense of pride and discipline in students.

British school children attend school for a total of 195 days. The school year is divided into six school terms with the year starting in September and finishing in July the following year. The chart shows a typical year:

Term 1	September to October	7 weeks 2 days
Term 2	November to December	7 weeks
Term 3	January to February	5 weeks 4 days
Term 4	February to March	6 weeks
Term 5	April to May	5 weeks 2 days
Term 6	June to July	7 weeks 2 days



The main summer holiday lasts for six weeks from mid-July to early September. Children also have 2 weeks' holiday at Christmas and Easter, plus a week in late October, mid-February and the end of May. The exact dates vary depending on the educational authority.

Independent Schools

About 7% of children go to independent schools. Independent schools are known as private schools and public schools. Parents pay for their children to attend these schools.

Nursery/Kindergarten 2 to 4 years

Pre-preparatory 3 or 4 to 7 years

Preparatory 7 to 11 or 13 years

Public 11 or 13 to 18 years

A preparatory school is a school that prepares pupils to go to a public (fee-paying) school.

A public school is an independent secondary school. Public schools are not run by the government. The entrance exams used by most public schools are known as Common Entrance exams and are taken at the age of 11 (girls) or 13 (boys). The most famous public schools are Eton, Harrow and Winchester.

Higher Education

Around 30% of 18 – 19 year olds enter full-time higher education. The formal entry requirements for most degree courses are two A- levels at grade E or above. In practice most university courses require qualifications in excess of this.





ROYAL
ALBERT HALL
IN LONDON

GLASTONBURY



Music Festivals

A number of cultural festivals are held in August – the traditional holiday month. One of the most well known is the Edinburgh Festival. It dates from 1947 and is mainly a celebration of the performing arts, with live concerts, plays, ballet, opera and other shows.

The Royal National Eisteddfod, which is also held in August, has a much older tradition. It was revived in the 19th century. It began life as a medieval gathering of poets and minstrels attended by people from all over Wales. It also helps to keep the Welsh language alive, as it celebrates Welsh arts and culture.

London's Notting Hill Carnival is a fairly new event and is held over

the August bank holiday weekend. It features a fantastic and colourful procession. The performers wear elaborate and extravagant costumes and are accompanied by the music of many steel bands. Dating from the mid 1960s, it is a celebration of Afro-Caribbean culture and traditions, and helps keep them alive.

Popular music fans are catered to at the Glastonbury Festival. It has its own special atmosphere and is the largest festival in Britain. It is like a big pseudo-hippy town as the visitors camp on site. The British weather occasionally plays havoc with this festival and two 'must takes' are a good waterproof and a pair of Wellington boots.

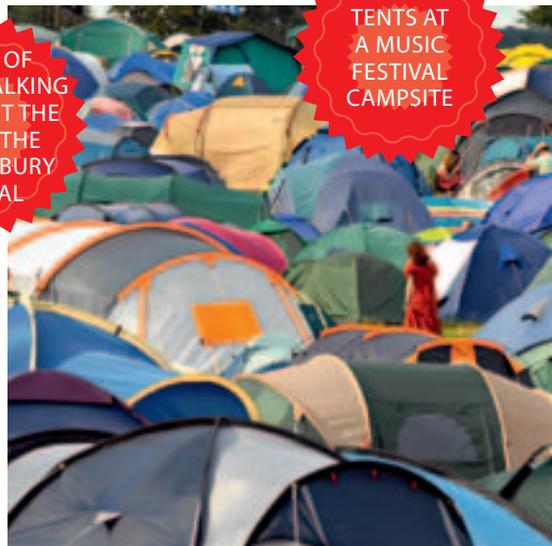


If it is opera you are interested in, then the Glyndebourne Festival is for you. The festival began in May 1934. It was the dream of one man's obsession with the idea of presenting 'not the best we

can do, but the best that can be done anywhere'. John Christie owned the estate at Glyndebourne and felt that opera was not well known in England. He was married to a professional singer, and together they built a theatre for the performances. The festival runs from the end of May until August. Classical music fans will be interested in The Proms, more formally known as The BBC Proms, or The Henry Wood Promenade Concerts. Presented by the BBC, it is an eight-week summer season of daily orchestral classical music concerts mainly held in the Royal Albert Hall in South Kensington, London. They were founded in 1895 and each season consists of nearly 100 concerts. In addition, there are Proms in the Park events held throughout the UK on the last night. The Last Night is traditionally a much lighter event with popular classics being followed by a series of British patriotic pieces in the second half of the concert. Of course, throughout the year there are other festivals and plays, music and dance. This is just a sample of some of the bigger festivals.



A SHOT OF PEOPLE WALKING THROUGH THE MUD AT THE GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL



TENTS AT A MUSIC FESTIVAL CAMPSITE

Historic Towns and Cities





EXETER
CATHEDRAL

Throughout the United Kingdom there are many fine examples of ancient towns and cities. Strong preservation laws have meant that many of the old properties have survived, although the bombing in the Second World War did not help matters. Some towns developed as ports, such as Bristol, Liverpool, and Southampton; others were university and ecclesiastical towns such as, Oxford, Cambridge, Durham and York.

The Georgian towns of Bath, Cheltenham, Harrogate and Tunbridge Wells developed as spa towns. Wealthy people travelled to 'take the waters', so these places developed as fashionable towns to live in. This was probably the beginning of a form of tourism, which really accelerated with the

coming of the railways. Seaside towns like Weston-super-Mare, Torquay, Brighton and Scarborough would welcome thousands of day trippers and weekly guests. Surprisingly, there is also much evidence of the Roman occupation of England. Much of Hadrian's Wall (constructed AD 120 and 73 miles long) can still be seen, and cities such as Exeter, Bath, Chester and St Albans were all Roman outposts

CAMBRIDGE



CITY OF BATH
SOMERSET



OXFORD

with Roman buildings still in evidence. However, we should point out that one of the oldest domestic buildings still in use is in the Jewish medieval quarter of Lincoln. It dates from the 12th century.

Some towns have become famous because of the well-known people associated with them. Shakespeare made the ancient town of Stratford-upon-Avon a one-man tourist attraction. The town contains his birthplace, and many other half-timbered buildings associated with him. The world-famous Royal Shakespeare Theatre is on the bank of the River Avon in the town. Plymouth is an historic port. The Pilgrim Fathers sailed from Plymouth to the New World. But Plymouth is more famous because of its association with Sir Francis Drake.



STRATFORD
UPON
AVON



Stately & Homes and Gardens



THOMAS
HARDY'S
COTTAGE

Britain contains an impressive number of stately homes from all the main architectural periods. Many of these homes are still in private hands, although others are now owned by the National Trust. The homes are filled with the works of the world's greatest artists and craftsmen. Most were built in an age when it was fashionable to show your wealth in your property. People

held parties and social occasions to exhibit their property. This also meant that elaborate formal gardens were designed. Amazing kitchen gardens were also built, where produce was grown to feed the privileged aristocratic family and also the many servants that worked on the estate. Giant glasshouses (greenhouses) were built to protect the more tender plants and encourage early growth.

A photograph of a large, stone building with a prominent tower, surrounded by a formal garden with many flower beds and a large topiary bush. A red starburst graphic in the top left corner contains the text 'LANHYDROCK, BODMIN'.

LANHYDROCK,
BODMIN

Rivers, Canals and Lakes

Britain's abundant rainfall means that there are many rivers and estuaries. In some places there are rushing mountain streams and in others meandering rivers like the River Thames. First, rivers and then canals were used to transport goods around the country. Today the rivers, and especially the canals, are used for leisure pursuits. This can be fishing from a bank or enjoying a leisurely cruise along the canal in a chugging narrow boat. There are many lakes, especially in the North West of England in a region called 'The

Lake District'. There are also many man-made lakes used as feeders for the canal system or the domestic water supply. All provide wonderful habitats for a wide range of wildlife. Crossing all these waterways are a huge variety of bridges – in some cases incredible feats of engineering like the Forth Railway Bridge in Scotland and the Tower Bridge in London. The 19th century Clifton Suspension Bridge over the Avon Gorge at Bristol was created by the great engineer Isambard Brunel. People crossing it still have to pay a toll.



THE WORLD
FAMOUS CLIFTON
SUSPENSION
BRIDGE, SITUATED
IN BRISTOL



FERRY UNDER
THE FORTH
RAIL BRIDGE
AT SOUTH
QUEENSFERRY
SCOTLAND



The Royal Family



A VIEW
OF WINDSOR
CASTLE

The history of the English monarchy is long and eventful.

In the eighth and ninth centuries figures such as Offa and Alfred the Great began to create a centralised form of government.

Following the Norman Conquest the ideas of government developed further and Parliament was born. The Middle Ages saw several fierce contests for the Crown which led to the War of the Roses. This lasted for nearly a hundred years. The troubles finally came to an end with the Tudors. This family line produced some of England's most successful rulers. The Tudor line came to an end with the death of Elizabeth I. It also brought about the Union of Crowns with Scotland.

Until 1603, the English and Scottish thrones were separate. There were, of course, links and some intermarrying. Following the accession of James VI of Scotland (James I of England), a single monarch reigned over the United Kingdom.

Over the years there have been many changes, and the monarchs have lost their executive powers. The monarch is now subject to Parliament, and this has resulted in our current constitutional monarchy. Queen Elizabeth II became Queen following the death of her father on February 6th 1952. She was born in 1926. The



coronation was held on June 2nd 1953, and world leaders gathered in London from around the world. Her eldest son Charles will succeed her when she dies, and following him will be her grandson William, Charles' eldest son. There are many traditions and ceremonies associated with the royal family that always fascinate visitors to the country. One of the most spectacular is Trooping the Colour at Horse Guard's Parade in London. It celebrates the Queen's official birthday and is held in early June. The ceremony includes a display of marching by the regiments of the Brigade of





BAND OF
GUARDSMEN
IN FRONT OF
BUCKINGHAM
PALACE

Guards to the music of massed bands. It should be noted that these soldiers, who are seen in their ceremonial uniforms, are in fact crack fighting troops. Every day at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle the Changing of the Guard ceremonies are held. They are always well attended by tourists.

The official residence of the Queen is Buckingham Palace in London, although she spends more of her time at Windsor Castle. The New Year is spent at Sandringham in Norfolk, a home she inherited from her father, and the summer is spent at Balmoral in Scotland.



BALMORAL
CASTLE
IN SCOTLAND



I hope you have enjoyed this booklet. Since coming to live in Slovakia it has been my pleasure to travel throughout this beautiful country. I have seen some amazing sights and met some wonderful people. I hope you get the opportunity to visit the UK for a similar experience. As you will have read, there are all sorts of strange customs as well as the more well-known events. London is a magnet for most tourists, and I can understand why, but there is much more to the UK,

including some amazing rural scenery. There is a lot to see and do, so do take the chance if it comes your way. It is far easier to travel as a young person rather than with children in tow when you are a little older!!

Searching for the real Great Britain

For learners of English

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