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A CIP catalogue record for
this book is available from
the British Library.

ISBN: 1 85418 627 2 / 978-
185418627-0

Thorogood Publishing Ltd
10-12 Rivington Street
London EC2A 3DU

Telephone: 020 7749 4748
Fax: 020 7729 6110
info@thorogoodpublishing.co.uk

www.thorogoodpublishing.co.uk
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Thorogood Publishing Ltd



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www.plumpstate.com
iStockphoto
Nial Harrington
Harrington Moncrieff
www.hmdesignco.com
Printed in the UK by
Henry Ling Ltd
www.henryling.co.uk

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Lucy Miller,
Kathy Crawford, Ronan Conway,
Dudley Whittaker, Sue Parkin
and Marcus Titley
(www.seckfordwines.co.uk)



**River Thames from the top
of Tower Bridge at Southwark
looking towards the skyscrapers
of Docklands**

Contents



1. Identity: the foundations of British culture *p3*

1.1. Geography *p5*

1.1.1. **Britain:** what is it and what does it look like? *p6*

1.2. History *p15*

1.2.1. **Come in, make yourself at home:** Celts, Saxons, Vikings and Normans *p16*

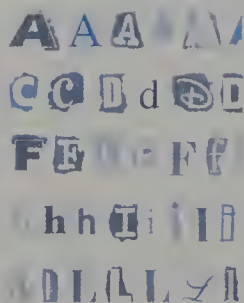
1.2.2. **The split personality takes shape** *p23*

1.2.3. **The modern age:** empire, slavery and sacrifice *p31*

1.3. Language and belonging *p43*

1.3.1. **Language lessons:** how the British talk *p44*

1.3.2. **Being British:** I wish I'd never asked... *p50*



2. Literature and philosophy *p57*

2.1. Literature *p59*

2.1.1. **How important is literature to Britain?** *p60*

2.1.2. **Well versed:** Brit lit in the medieval era *p62*

2.1.3. **From sonnets to novels:** literature grows up *p67*

2.1.4. **The Romantics and the realists** *p75*

2.1.5. **Success stories:** modern British literature *p84*

2.2. Philosophy *p97*

2.2.1. **The greatest hits of British philosophy** *p98*



3. Art, architecture and design *p107*

3.1. Art and design *p109*

3.1.1. **Foreign aid:** the early personnel of painting *p110*

3.1.2. **Morals, mares and mug shots:** British art finally gets serious *p114*

3.1.3. **Constable, Turner and Blake:** the golden age *p117*

3.1.4. **From cubes to dead sharks:** art over the last century *p121*

3.1.5. **Mixed motifs:** the icons of British design *p130*

3.2. Architecture *p135*

3.2.1. **Picking through the ruins:** ancient British buildings *p136*

3.2.2. **Built on faith:** the love of a good church *p138*

3.2.3. **Castles, piles and factories:** the big builds *p144*

3.2.4. **In and out of love with Modernism:** 20th century builds *p151*

3.2.5. **Home truths:** domestic architecture and planning *p155*



4. Performing arts *p159*

4.1. Music *p161*

4.1.1. **Folk stories:** traditional music *p162*

4.1.2. **Flashes of brilliance:** British classical music *p167*

4.1.3. **Rebel forces:** rock, pop, punk and the rest *p173*

4.2. Theatre, dance and comedy *p185*

4.2.1. **Setting the scene for Shakespeare:** how theatre found its golden age *p186*

4.2.2. **Light brigade:** from Restoration Comedy to Gilbert and Sullivan *p194*

4.2.3. **Mirth, musicals and a good portion of angst:** modern theatre *p200*

4.2.4. **Britain on the dancefloor** *p208*

4.2.5. **Laughing gear:** modern British comedy *p213*



5. Cinema, photography and fashion p219

5.1. Cinema p221

5.1.1. **An underdog's story:** the Brits and their films p222

5.1.2. **From dog stars to Hitchcock:** early cinema p224

5.1.3. **Big films and bigger audiences:** the golden age p227

5.1.4. **From bedsits to Bond:** cinema in the 1960s p231

5.1.5. **Let's hear it for the little guy:** modern British cinema p234

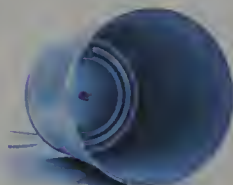
5.2. Photography p241

5.2.1. **Fixing the shadows** p242

5.2.2. **Art, war and glamour:** modern photography p245

5.3. Fashion p249

5.3.1. **Clothes and the British sense of style** p250



6. Media and communications p259

6.1. Media p261

6.1.1. **Reverting to type:** national and regional newspapers p262

6.1.2. **On the rack:** magazines p266

6.1.3. **A love affair with telly** p268

6.1.4. **Waves of radio:** from ITMA to Moyles p272

6.1.5. **New media:** Britain on the Web p275

6.2. Communications p279

6.2.1. **Posting letters and making calls** p280

6.2.2. **The age of the strain:** getting about Britain p282



7. Food and drink p287

7.1. Food p289

7.1.1. **The changing culture of British food** p290

7.1.2. **Stews, bakes, jellies and puds:** the regional menu p294

7.1.3. **The lost art of dining:** eating habits p302

7.2. Drink p307

7.2.1. **Fancy a brew?** Brits and their drinks p308

7.2.2. **Whose round is it?** Drinking habits p315



8. Living culture: the state of modern Britain p319

8.1. **Divided loyalties:** class, race and family p322

8.2. **How Britain takes its religion** p326

8.3. **Unwritten rules:** politics and the system of government p331

8.4. **Cashing in:** the economy, wealth and social security p339

8.5. **Law and order:** courts, prisons and the police p343

8.6. **Testing times:** the education system p347

8.7. **Time out: holidays, festivals and free time** p351

8.8. **Cricket to conkers:** a love affair with sport p356



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First, a word from

the publisher...

This series of books and this book are designed to look at a country's culture – to give readers a real grasp of it and to help them develop and explore that culture.

The world is shrinking – made smaller by commerce, tourism and migration – and yet the importance of national culture, of national identity, seems to grow.

By increasing your cultural knowledge and appreciation of a country, be it your own or a foreign land, you reach a genuine understanding of the people and how they live.

We're talking about culture in all its guises: the creative arts that give a country its spirit as well as the culture of everyday life.

Speak the Culture books sit alongside guidebooks and language courses, serving not only as a companionable good read but also as an invaluable tool for understanding a country's current culture and its heritage.





1.1. Geography p5

1.1.1. **Britain:** what is it and what does it look like? p6

1.2. History p15

1.2.1 **Come in, make yourself at home:** Celts, Saxons, Vikings and Normans p16

1.2.2 **The split personality takes shape** p23

1.2.3 **The modern age:** empire, slavery and sacrifice p31

1.3. Language and belonging p43

1.3.1. **Language lessons:** how the British talk p44

1.3.2. **Being British:** I wish I'd never asked... p50

1 Identity: the foundations of British culture



1.1 Geography

It's the original island nation.

Standing aloof on Europe's western fringe,

battered by some of the world's roughest

seas, Britain has clung to its detachment

for centuries. From outside it looks

homogenous, defiantly separate from

continental Europe in body and soul.

However, step ashore and it dissolves into a

stew of landscapes, people and cultures.

1.1.1 Britain: what is it and what does it look like?

Table for four please

The British state harbours four nations – Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland – each with its own distinct culture. All four nations can be broken down further, into regions where landscape, language and lifestyle vary markedly. And then there’s the dense historical jigsaw, from stone circles to ruined abbeys, each corner of Britain has its story to tell. Surely no other country so modest in scale is so regionally pronounced, so packed with cultural variety, so connected to its past yet steadfastly modern.

So, is it Britain, the United Kingdom or the British Isles?

The term Great Britain, or just Britain (or *Breatainn Mhòr* in Scottish Gaelic and *Prydain Fawr* in Welsh), is usually taken to mean England, Wales and Scotland. The United Kingdom throws Northern Ireland into the mix. The British Isles includes the Republic of Ireland and any island lumps surrounding mainland Britain. Informally – and for most Brits – the term Britain is taken to mean England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and is used as such throughout this book.

Small but beautiful: the lie of the land

Britain squeezes a pleasingly diverse landscape into its modest frame. Emily Brontë’s feral moorland with its ‘bare masses of stone’ might sound a long way from William Blake’s ‘pleasant pastures’, but they coexist closely and comfortably. If we’re looking for a vague rule, the further north and west you travel the lumpier Britain gets. Fertile lowlands in south-eastern England are relieved by soft hills before the West Country breaks out into stretches of moorland. In northern England the Pennine hills form a spine running from the Peak District through the Dales up to the border country with Scotland, while the winsome peaks of the Lake District cover England’s north-west. Much of Wales, to the west of England, and

Scotland, to the north, are mountainous. Scotland harbours the Highlands and Islands, rare in Britain for retaining an element of wilderness. Only these northerly uplands, rugged, boggy and cold, escaped the centuries of farming that tamed Britain's countryside, native deciduous forests included. Across the Irish Sea, west of southern Scotland, lies Northern Ireland, a land of bare, peaty hills encircling Lough Neagh, the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles.

Counting counties

Britain breaks down into a complex map of regions, counties, boroughs, districts, unitary authorities and parishes. Some are historic and familiar but unofficial; others are new and sanctioned by government but rarely used in conversation. Each of the four British nations has been divided into counties (so called because local regions were once controlled by counts (or earls)) for hundreds of years. England has 39 'historic' counties, each with its own cultural identity shaped by customs, accents and sporting teams. However, for the purposes of local government, the old, geographical arrangement of counties has been sliced and diced to accommodate metropolitan counties (urban zones that spread, connected, across the old boundaries) and unitary authorities. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have been similarly affected by modern reshuffling. In Wales the 13 historic counties were reduced to eight in the 1970s and then carved into 22 unitary authorities in 1996. In Northern Ireland the ratio is six old counties – still used in everyday chat by the majority – to 26 new district council areas. Scotland's current set up accommodates 32 council areas, although, again, the map of 34 old counties has more day-to-day resonance for most people.

Dear old Blighty
Blighty, a kindly term for Britain, was used first by soldiers in the Indian Army. It corrupts an Urdu word for 'foreigner', itself derivative of an Arabic term. Blighty entered common usage in the First World War, popularised in music hall songs like *Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty*.

The mother of all ditches

The borderlands between England and Wales are sometimes called the Welsh Marches. The term more often refers to the counties on the English side, namely Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire. Offa's Dyke, the deep physical groove cut between England and Wales by Mercia's king in the eighth century, still runs through much of the Marches.

Iron in the soul

Northern Ireland is sometimes referred to as Ulster, one of the four aged provinces of Ireland (sharing its island with Leinster, Munster and Connacht). Ulster is actually larger than Northern Ireland, with only six of its nine counties falling within the state. 'Norn Iron' is a more informal, affectionate name for the province, a phonetic homeland homage made with a thick Ulster brogue. "We're not Brazil, we're Norn Iron," chant the sagacious football fans at Windsor Park.

Urban legends: British cities

Britain's cities are the product of organic growth, of building, demolition and rejuvenation over the course of centuries. Each has its personality, rapidly recognised through buildings, accents and vistas. London, the most multifaceted city and the biggest by impressive proportions (nearest rival Birmingham is a seventh of the size), is among the most multicultural cities on Earth, a flurry of ethnicities, creeds and nationalities. They're here because, most of the time, Europe's second largest city (Moscow is bigger) is a tolerant, rewarding place. Of course, like anywhere else it has its darker side – London's mixed cultural milieu doesn't translate to some social utopia, and deprivation can be high, often in areas where migrant communities reside in greatest number.

Some British cities – notably Bristol, Liverpool, Glasgow, Cardiff and Belfast – are defined by their waterside location. Built on maritime trade (including the profits of slavery), they've endured years of decline to resurface afresh, and now buzz with cultural life.



Only Belfast lags slightly behind. In the former engine room of industrial Britain, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Newcastle reinvent themselves with gentrification and cultural credibility yet retain something of the atmosphere that first made them great. In the West Midlands, Birmingham and Coventry were torn apart by the Luftwaffe in the Second World War before dour architecture compounded their woe in the 1960s. Money is pouring in to make up for lost charm but it's slow going.

Where do the British live?

Over 80 per cent of Britain's inhabitants live in England. Around a third squeeze themselves into the south-eastern corner of England, and a snug 20 per cent or so live in or around London. As a whole, England has a population density of 984 sq/mile (380 sq/km) (three times the EU average); Scotland's is around 168 sq/mile (65 per sq/km) (one of Europe's lowest); Wales' comes in at 361 sq/mile (140 per sq/km); and Northern Ireland's is 315/sq mile (122 sq/km). Slowly, almost imperceptibly, Britain's

London in five songs

Waterloo Sunset

(1967) The Kinks.

I Don't Want to Go to Chelsea

(1978) Elvis Costello and the Attractions.

Down in the Tube Station at Midnight

(1978) The Jam.

Baker Street

(1978) Gerry Rafferty.

A Rainy Night in Soho

(1986) The Pogues.



predominantly urban population (four out of five people live in towns and cities) is seeping out to rural areas, reversing the migratory trends of the 19th and early to mid 20th centuries.

Cultural differences between town and country remain and mild sniping still occurs: 'townies' are rude and self-important; rural folk are unsophisticated bumpkins (these are the stereotypes). Occasionally the differences get drawn into wider spats. The debate over a ban on fox hunting with dogs (outlawed in 2005) was used by pro-hunt campaigners to shout about urbanites (and Westminster in particular) killing off the 'rural way of life'. Other episodes have brought a more balanced reflection on the urban/rural relationship: the foot and mouth crisis of 2001 found city, town and country folk alike in sympathy with rural communities, and reminded British people of the old, inescapable bonds between rural and urban life.

The island nation's main islands

Britain works to keep its myriad small islands in the fold, from the southerly Isle of Wight (where genuine natives are called Caulkheads) to the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland (closer to the Arctic Circle than London). Two island groups boast significant autonomy, claiming the status of Crown Dependencies, a standing that distinguishes them from overseas territories and colonies, and which allows them to pass their own laws, mint their own coins and to excuse themselves from being in both the UK (but not the British Isles!) and the EU.

The first, the Isle of Man, is an ancient Celtic outpost in the Irish Sea. It has its own parliament, the Tynwald (the longest running in the world) and gave the Bee Gees their first breath. The second, the Channel Islands, comprising Jersey, Guernsey and the rest are just off the coast of Normandy, France. Strange to think that Victor Hugo wrote *Les Misérables* in the British Isles whilst exiled on Guernsey.

What's the weather like?

Britain's climate can be a disappointingly tepid affair. It's often cited as unpredictable, and it is – rain and sun come in quick succession – but it's unpredictable within a rather predictable range. As an island lodged in the Gulf Stream's mild westerly flow, Britain is warmer than its northerly latitude would otherwise allow. It never gets painfully cold (winter temps rarely drop below minus ten Celsius), nor does it become truly hot (anything over 30 degrees is a rarity). In general, the west is wetter than the east, and also milder in winter and cooler in summer, although the differences aren't large. The further south you go the more sun you'll see, although if you get the right June day in northern Scotland you can enjoy a whopping 18 hours of sunshine. Upland areas, as you would expect, are colder and wetter: the very tops of the Scottish Highlands may retain snow throughout the year, although this is increasingly unusual. Snow can fall anywhere in winter but rarely stays for more than a couple of days at lower levels where it inevitably evokes media hysteria and transport chaos. But even while the weather isn't biblical, the British talent for talking about it surely is: it's the default icebreaker in conversation with friends or strangers.

Defoe's tour de storm force
Daniel Defoe's first book, *The Storm* (1704), reflected on the most severe storm ever recorded in Britain. With 120mph winds the Great Storm of November 1703 destroyed 13 Royal Navy ships, killed 8,000 people and deposited cows up trees.

Rivers of crud
The unusually hot summer of 1858 created The Great Stink, when the Thames, then recipient of London's untreated sewage (and the source of its drinking water), became a fetid, faeces-clogged hazard. The House of Commons soaked their curtains in chloride of lime to try and quell the stench. The city's modern sewerage system was duly initiated in the same year.

"THERE ARE TWO SEASONS IN SCOTLAND: JUNE AND WINTER."
Billy Connolly

Britain's vital statistics

Area 94,248 square miles (244,101 sq/km) (about half the size of France).

Length 840 miles (1,350km) from Lands End, Cornwall, to John O'Groats in Scotland.

Width just under 300 miles (480km) (and this is the widest point – you're never more than 77 miles (125km) from the sea).

Coastline 7,723 miles (12,429km).

Highest mountain Ben Nevis (Scotland) at 4,406ft (1,343m).

Population approximately 61 million (roughly 52 million in England, five million in Scotland, three million in Wales and 1.7 million in Northern Ireland).

Life expectancy 76 for men and 81 for women.

Hebrides, Bailey, variable becoming south-westerly three or four... The shipping forecast drifts from the radio four times a day. It serves anyone brave enough to navigate the waters around the British Isles, yet has a mystical appeal that reaches well inland. With only 370 words to play with (including intro), the forecast sounds like a coded incantation (read slowly so that mariners may write it down) with its

outline of wind speed, sea state, weather and visibility (good, moderate, poor and fog). The region names, from Dogger to Lundy to German Bight (there are 31 in all, read in a set order), are strange but familiar to British ears, absorbed on childhood journeys in the back of the car, radio on. Many claim a haunting poetry for the shipping forecast, and its undulating metre has absorbed the great and the good of modern

lyricism, from Seamus Heaney (who wrote a sonnet, *The Shipping Forecast*) to Radiohead (they referenced the forecast on *Kid A*). The day's final reading of the forecast, delivered at 12.48am, is usually preceded by *Sailing By*, a dreamy string piece by Ronald Binge intended as an airwave beacon to sailors in search of the right radio frequency.

Local boys done good: extraordinary folk from ordinary places

Eric Clapton God to some, Slowhand to others and 'Our Eric' to the residents of Ripley, Surrey.

Anthony Minghella The late Oscar-winning director of *The English Patient* grew up above an ice cream shop on the Isle of Wight.

Dudley Moore The comedian, pianist and Hollywood star no doubt found his roots in Dagenham, Essex, useful for the Derek and Clive routines.

Bryan Ferry The Roxy Music frontman is a farmer's son from Washington, Tyne and Wear.

Richard Burton The boy from Pontrhydyfen, South Wales, became Hollywood's highest earner.

Billy Connolly Scotland's biggest comedian was a shipyard welder in his native Glasgow before turning entertainer, initially as a folk singer, in 1965.

Van Morrison The son of a Belfast shipyard worker and a singing tap dancer, George Ivan (van) worked as a window cleaner before climbing fame's ladder.





1.2 History

The saga of British history has it all: raging monarchs, epic battles, weeping pustules, shameful bullying, heroic defence, unforgivable haircuts... The story follows modern British life around like a shadow, its every twist and turn contributing to national identity.

Come in, make yourself at home:

Celts, Saxons, Vikings and Normans

Key dates

6,000BC Britain and its hunter-gatherer types are separated from the European mainland as sea levels rise.

500BC The Celts have settled from Europe and Iron Age culture begins to bloom.

43AD Rome finally gets around to invading Britain but meets stiff resistance in the north.

5th to 8th centuries

As Roman rule crumbles, Anglo-Saxon tribes carve southern Britain into kingdoms, while Scotland and Wales start to take shape.

9th century Viking raids culminate in the establishment of Danelaw, a Norse province in eastern Britain.

11th century Power switches between Saxon and Danish kings before...

1066 The Normans invade, defeat King Harold and duly set up shop in power.

Sticks and stones

The bones of Cheddar Man, Britain's oldest complete skeleton, went cold around 7,150BC, when Britain still adjoined continental Europe by way of a large marsh. A hunter-gatherer, like his ancestors of 30,000 years, 23-year-old Cheddar Man died from a whack on the head, probably in advance of being chopped up for the cooking pot. Despite such barbarity, cultured civilisation was just around the corner and farming, brought in by continental types, was de rigueur by the fourth century BC. At Skara Brae on Orkney, unearthed from the dunes by a vicious 19th century storm, you can see how Neolithic farmers lived. When the Bronze Age took hold 4,000 years ago, the burial mounds and mysterious stone circles that still mark the British landscape began to appear.

Life with the Celts

As the Bronze Age progressed, the Beaker People of western Europe made the crossing to Britain around 2,000BC, ceramic cups clutched to their lips. But another set of migrants, the Celts of central Europe, left a greater impression. They, like the Iron Age, settled over Britain by 500BC. They were relative sophisticates with their farming methods, defensive hill forts (or drystone brochs in Scotland) and trade with Europe (out went tin, in came wine). Learned Druid priests practised a roughly organised polytheistic religion and artisans made swirling jewellery in gold. Britain's virgin forest came up against the iron axe and the neat pattern of fields still found today began to take shape. Celtic culture was traditionally thought to have arrived from Europe, but these days Iron Age Britain is viewed more as a self-made success, the product of home-grown evolution.

Chip off the (very) old block
DNA sampling carried out in 1997 discovered Adrian Targett, a history teacher living less than a mile from Cheddar Gorge, Somerset, to be a direct descendant of Cheddar Man, dead some 9,000 years. "Maybe this explains why he likes his steaks rare," pondered his wife, Catherine.

Albion and Britannia (...no, it's not a building society)
The Celts gave Britain its first name: Albion, derived from a Celtic word for white, which was apparently uttered in wonder on that first fateful encounter with the white cliffs of Dover. Rome chose the name Britannia, but that too may have Celtic origins. It probably came from *pretani*, a Celtic word for painted, referring to their taste for blue woad-based war paint.

The Romans stuck the female figure of Britannia on their coinage, a tradition reinstated by Charles II in the 17th century on the halfpenny and maintained on the 50 pence piece right through to 2008 when the poor old dear was ditched. Somewhere along the way (probably in the Elizabethan era) she acquired a dangerous looking trident and became the nation personified; a symbol of colonial clout no less.

"IT IS ALL TOO TYPICAL OF A GOVERNMENT WITH AN INADEQUATE SENSE OF BRITISH PRIDE AND AN IGNORANCE OF HISTORY TO WANT TO DO AWAY WITH SUCH A SYMBOL." Ex-Tory leader William Hague got hot under the collar when Britannia was removed from the 50 pence piece



Magic circles
Stone circles first appeared in Britain around 3,300BC. Many were 'hengese', a marriage of circular ditch and standing stones or posts. They survive in various windswept spots, from Calanais in the Western Isles and Beaghmore in County Tyrone to the most famous, Stonehenge in Wiltshire. Chin stroking has, as yet, failed to decipher their purpose: most educated guesses talk about rituals and astronomy.

Well this is very civilised... is it underfloor heating? The worldly mod con perks of life among Roman nobility – the plumbing, heating systems and healthcare – that dwindled in the fifth century didn't reappear in Britain for well over a thousand years.

The Romans called the untamed Scots Picti 'the painted' (they smeared themselves in blue battle paint), later anglicised to Picts.

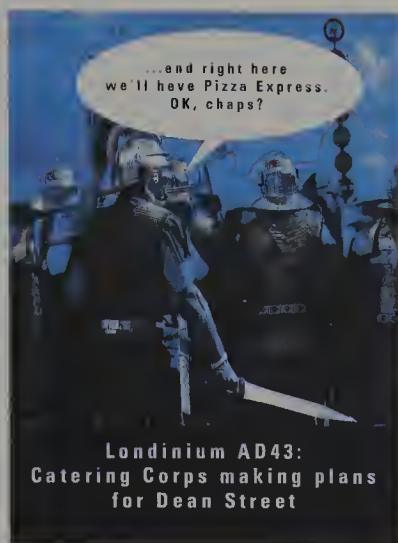


A tricky away fixture for the Romans

After abortive forays by Julius Caesar in the mid first century BC (in part defeated by the weather), Emperor Claudius annexed much of southern Britain a century later. Albion's Celtic tribes didn't present a united front to the Romans. Indeed, some probably called the Latins in to help quash aggressive rivals. Some tribes were more testy than others: Queen Boudicca of the Iceni took the fight to London before her ragbag army was crushed and she drank poison, while the Welsh tribes were crippled but never really gave up. Northern England took 30 years to rein in. The Romans had a go at Scotland but Emperor Hadrian admitted effective defeat in 122AD by building his boundary wall from Newcastle to Carlisle. A turf barrier built further north 20 years later, the Antonine Wall, proved a short-lived frontier and the Romans

resigned themselves to containing rather than conquering Caledonia, as they called the northern lands. There's little archaeological evidence to suggest they attempted taming Ireland.

The Romans stayed for nearly 400 years. Their leaders built classy villas in the country and their garrison towns became thriving settlements. Some towns, St Albans among them, were built on commerce; others, notably Bath, were designed for leisure. Compliant natives were rewarded with local power, becoming Romanised along the way, but indigenous Celtic culture survived, particularly among the peasantry. The Romans gave southern Britain its first sense of collective identity, its first pretensions of 'nationhood'. Inadvertently they did the same for Scotland, uniting its tribes against



successive emperors. They also left behind a network of impressively straight roads and the new religion of choice, Christianity.

Tribes and tribulations: Anglo-Saxon Britain

Rome's finest had sloped off by the fourth century, and the remaining Romano-British culture slowly shrivelled, its requests for help rejected by emperors who had their own problems elsewhere. Southern Britain was being raided by Teutonic tribes from across the North Sea. The Romano-British and the Celts (many of whom retreated to Wales, Scotland and Cornwall) wasted energy fighting each other while the Germanic plunderers, impressed with the land, began to settle. By the late sixth century the Angles and Saxons had established kingdoms throughout the majority of England. Some Celts took it upon themselves to resist, and, who knows, it might have been a mysterious Arthur, a chieftain with a round table, some knights and a magician, that put up the best fight. What we do know is that the kingdom of Northumbria initially lorded it over Anglo-Saxon Britain, followed in the eighth century by Mercia and then, another century on, by Wessex.

Celtic culture remained strong in the upland margins of Anglo-Saxon Britain. In Wales, Celtic settlers found themselves periodically attacked from behind the long dyke dug by Mercian King Offa in the eighth century. By then Wales' tribes were working together, sometimes even referring to themselves as Cymry – 'us' – a word with clear connections to the modern Welsh name for Wales, Cymru. In eastern Scotland the entrenched Picts fought against – and later alongside – the Dalridans from Ireland, whom they dubbed the Scotti. A relatively homogenous region soon formed under Scotland's first king, Kenneth MacAlpin, in the ninth century.

"THE HARRYING
OF THE HEATHEN
MISERABLY
DESTROYED
GOD'S CHURCH
IN LINDISFARNE
BY RAPINE AND
SLAUGHTER."

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded an early Viking attack on Britain, launched in 793.

The great conversion

Britain confirmed its faith during the Anglo-Saxon period. Christianity had arrived with the Romans but the Anglo Saxons, with their many gods, had initially shoved it out to the Celtic fringes. Slowly, between the fifth and eighth centuries, Christianity worked its way back in. Columba came from Ireland, based himself on the Western Isle of Iona and converted the Picts and much of northern England with the Celtic brand of Christianity. One of his monks, Aidan, ran a similar op from Lindisfarne in Northumbria. Rome, anxious at the spread of Celtic Christianity with its variances from their own practice, dispatched Augustine in 597 to push its own agenda. He succeeded, working his way up from Kent converting kings as he went. When the two ends of the Church met at the Whitby Synod in 644, the Roman version won out and Britain fell in step with continental Europe.

The not so Dark Ages

England's modern Brits aren't as remote from their Anglo-Saxon forebears as they might think. Language, place names and elements of British law can all be traced back to the Dark Ages, while the very term 'Anglo-Saxon' is still used, sometimes pejoratively, to describe white English speakers.

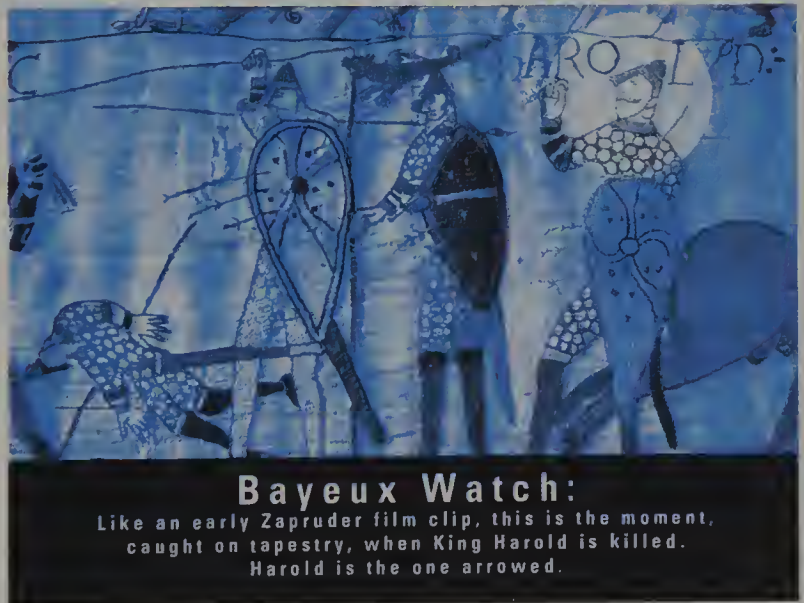
The word 'Sassenachs', a Scottish term for the English and a bastardised Gaelic version of the Latin 'Saxones', usually carries a similarly derogatory tone. Some of the earliest 'British' works of art were produced in the Anglo-Saxon period. *Beowulf*, the epic man-slays-monster poem, was finally written down, while Northumbrian monk Bede set new literary

standards with his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731), a work later translated by King Alfred, the thinking man's monarch who also commissioned the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (890), a Wessex-friendly history of Britain.

Hair raids: here come the Vikings

The Vikings came in two waves in the ninth century: from Norway and from Denmark, the tales of their bloodlust only moderately exaggerated. Raiding soon became settling and by 891 much of eastern England had fallen under the so-called Danelaw territory. Only King Alfred kept them out of his ascendant kingdom, Wessex. Significantly, in London Alfred was labelled Lord of the English (a title that excluded the Danish territories); his grandson, Athelstan, was crowned first king of England in 927, by which time the Danelaw and most of Scotland and Wales were in his pocket.

However, the Vikings hadn't evaporated. The good work of Alfred (posthumously subtitled 'the Great') was undone in the early 11th century when Ethelred the Unready was replaced by Canute, first Danish king of England. But yet again a dynasty faltered, allowed to deteriorate on this occasion by Canute's son and grandson.



The Ulster Viking connection

Local Celtic chieftains ensured neither Anglo-Saxons nor Vikings advanced much beyond the coastal fringes of Ireland, and the region retained the Celtic identity that became diluted elsewhere. The Vikings, however, did leave some impression; the province of Ulster (within which modern day Northern Ireland lies) took its name from Uladztír, a Viking term itself derivative of Ulaidh, Irish name for the region's ancient inhabitants.

By 1066 another Saxon, Harold, the Earl of Wessex distinguished by a bloody campaign to subdue the Welsh, was on the throne. He fell off just nine months later when Britain was invaded and conquered for the last time (to date). The date in question, 1066, chimes in the subconscious of every Brit; a reminder that for most of them the Normans (from northern France but, as the name suggests, descended from Norsemen), led by Duke William to victory against Harold at the Battle of Hastings, will feature somewhere in their family tree.

Ends of the beginning: early towns

Roman

-*chester* (Manchester), -*caster* (Doncaster) or -*cester* (Cirencester).

Anglo-Saxon

-*ford* (Stamford), -*ham* (Chippenham), -*ton* (Luton) and -*wich* (Greenwich).

Viking

-*by* (Derby) and -*thorpe* (Scunthorpe)

North Scots' Norse nous

Ties with the Vikings remain stronger in the far north of Scotland than elsewhere in Britain. Shetland, after all, is as close to Bergen as it is to Edinburgh, let alone London. Orkney and the Western Isles were under Norse control for centuries, and Shetland was ruled

from Bergen as recently as the 15th century, four hundred years after the Vikings had left most of Britain. The language up here still has a bouncing Scandinavian rhythm and festivals like Up Helly Aa, the annual longboat burning in Lerwick, recall the connections.

Englisc heritage

By the time Alfred the Great was on the throne in the ninth century, the people of southern Britain were being called the Englisc, a name taken from the 'Angle' folk that settled in the sixth century.

The split personality takes shape

Do as you're told: life with the Normans

Having defeated Harold, albeit narrowly, William the Conqueror (no doubt relieved to lose his previous epithet, William the Bastard) spent much of the subsequent two decades brutalising England on a bender of burning, murder and famine. Only Hereward the Wake, a Saxon guerrilla hiding out in the marshy Fens around Ely, had much success at resistance. Others succumbed quickly, bullied by Norman and French lords in the sturdy stone fortresses that still stand on the British landscape. The Welsh didn't escape; the Marcher castles (from which the Welsh Marches take their name) kept them in line, while in lowland Scotland King Malcolm III was made compliant. On the mainland only the fierce Highlanders in their remote clans remained untamed as the Norman language, culture and way of life were assimilated into Anglo-Saxon Britain. It took a century for the Normans to make an impression on Ireland, and even then the earls that took land in Ulster tended to absorb more than exude, adopting the Celtic culture as their own.

Ooo, that's a big book

It took William I's scribes less than a year to compile the Domesday Book in 1086; not bad for a work that went through every shire and hundred in England, noting who lived where and owned what livestock. Their job was made easier by existing Saxon records. The book was popularly named 'Domesday' with a degree of derision by the English.

Serf 'n' turf

the feudal system
Life in the late Middle Ages was governed by the feudal system. Serfs were beholden to the local knight, from whom they received a small patch of land and notional protection. In return they gave him an agreed amount of labour. The knights gave military service and allegiance to a layer of barons and bishops, above which hovered the king.

Key dates

1086 The original *Who's Who*, the Domesday Book, is compiled.

1215 King John puts his autograph to the Magna Carta.

1297 William Wallace thrashes the English at Stirling Bridge.

1348 The Black Death kills a third of the population.

1459-71 The Yorks and Lancasters squabble for the throne in the Wars of the Roses.

1536-43 The Acts of Union place Wales under the English parliament.

1620 The Pilgrim Fathers point the Mayflower into the breeze and set sail for America.

1642-49 The Cavaliers and Roundheads fight it out in the English Civil War.

1707 Scotland is brought into the fold with England and Wales in the Act of Union.

1746 The bloody Battle of Culloden ends Scottish attempts to usurp the English crown.

Mr Scotland

William Wallace is *the* Scottish hero. Why? Because he thrashed the English at Stirling Bridge against the odds, before taking the fight to England itself with an informal but fearsome army. His legend was shaped by 19th century Romantics and then bolstered by Mel Gibson's painted turn in the film *Braveheart* (1995). He wasn't the unwashed orphan of the Highlands conjured by Hollywood but rather, more likely, the son of a landowner in south-west Scotland. However, his father was killed by the English and his wife may have been slain by a sheriff whom Wallace then personally chopped into small pieces, earning outlaw status. Apparently he also skinned one of Edward I's officers at Stirling, fashioning the hide into a belt. Quite the little craftsman. In 2002 he topped *The Sunday Mail's* poll of the 100 Greatest Scots.

Murder in the cathedral and the Magna Carta

William's direct heirs withstood two shaky generations on the English throne before the Plantagenet kings took over in 1154.

Henry II did a reasonable job –

introducing trial by jury, keeping a tight grip on the barons – before finding notoriety with the murder of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, clumsily asserting the power of throne over pulpit. Henry's son, Richard I (the Lionheart) spent his decade of kingship crusading in the Middle East, before his weaselly brother, King John, lost the bits of France brought over by William I, had a big row with the Pope and signed the Magna Carta in 1215, granting his pushy barons more power. Some explanations assert (rather ambitiously) that the document set Britain on the long path to parliamentarianism and civil liberty.

Trouble up north

Edward I took more of a grip on power. Wales, in particular, got it in the neck. Until the 1270s the Welsh had their own kings but, after ten years of battle, Edward declared the region a principality and made his son the first Prince of Wales. In Scotland a succession crisis allowed Edward to put his man, John de Balliol, on the throne, only for de Balliol to betray his boss and sign Scotland up with France, creating the Auld Alliance. Edward's retaliation earned him the nickname



Hammer of the Scots and de Balliol was removed. The dashing William Wallace took up the fight and crushed English troops at Stirling Bridge in 1297, but was hung drawn and quartered the following year. And so it fell to Robert the Bruce, self-declared king of Scotland, to batter the English. He did so against Edward II at Bannockburn in 1314.

My advice? Live for the moment

Anyone who made it into their 40s in the 14th century was considered lucky. It was a dismal time. The Plague (or the Black Death) arrived in 1348, not long after the country was recovering from famine. Around a third of the population died. Next up was the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, triggered by new laws to cap wages and the introduction of a poll tax. Alas, the angry, archbishop-murdering mob that marched on London, led by the blacksmith Wat Tyler, was deceived and slyly slain by 14-year-old King Richard II. All this happened in the century when the Hundred Years' War with France kicked off. For a long time the sporadic bouts of fighting went England's way, most famously at Agincourt in 1415 when Henry V's men slaughtered thousands of French and took their crown. But in the end the English, outmanoeuvred when peasant girl Joan of Arc set the French up for a comeback, settled for ownership of Calais. Scotland, which suffered similar bouts of disease and civil strife, sent troops to help France.

House breaking: the Wars of the Roses

By the early 15th century the House of Lancaster (Henrys IV to VI) reigned in England, but was challenged all the way by the House of York. The ensuing blood-soaked round of battles, in which the English crown switched heads six times in 25 years, were later dubbed the Wars of the Roses, a reference to the flowers of

Auld friends

The Auld Alliance between France and Scotland lasted nearly 300 years from 1295. It was a military marriage of convenience aimed at countering English power.

Did he or didn't he?

Richard III and the Princes in the Tower
Edward IV died young amid the Wars of the Roses, leaving the throne to his 12-year-old son, Edward V. Richard, the boy king's uncle, sent young Eddie and his brother, another Richard, to the Tower of London for safekeeping. But somehow safekeeping turned into death. Uncle Richard stepped manfully into the breach and became Richard III. Even today historians disagree on whether Richard was responsible for killing the Princes in the Tower. Current thought seems to say he was. Even so, it appears he wasn't quite the hunchbacked bastard portrayed by Shakespeare; he was actually reasonably popular during his brief reign.

York (white) and Lancaster (red). The Yorks appeared to have come out on top until a distant relative, Henry Tudor, of Welsh (Tewdwr) stock, killed Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. And so Henry VII, the first of the Tudor monarchs, forced his way onto the English throne. Under Henry, relations with the Scots improved, particularly with the marriage of his daughter to James IV of Scotland, thereby linking the Tudor and Stewart (later Gallicised to Stuart) houses.

Anyone for marriage?

In 1509 the Tudors placed their second monarch on the English throne, Henry VIII. Educated, sporty and handsome (a long way from the fat, gout-riddled man that he became), in the end Henry was defined by his attempts to produce a strong male heir. He got through six wives in the effort, but could only manage the sickly Edward VI who died in his teens after six years as king. Henry's divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, created the almighty rift with Rome that bore the Church of England, Henry at its head. For good measure, in the 1530s he dissolved (and plundered) the monasteries of England, Wales and Ireland. Under Henry, the Acts of Union in 1536 and 1543 finally bound England and Wales by the same parliament and law; a boon for the Welsh gentry, as trade prospered, but for the poor majority an attack on their language (Welsh was outlawed) and customs. Scotland, meanwhile, continued to resist English advances. Its sequence of weak child Stewart monarchs was forgotten during the impressive reign of James IV, although he died in battle with the English at Flodden Field in 1513. Under Mary, Queen of Scots the Scottish lowlands were repeatedly battered by Henry VIII as he tried to push English influence northwards. Catholic in an increasingly Protestant land, she was eventually forced into exile in England by rebellion.

"HENRY VIII, OR KING SYPHILIS
GUT BUCKET WIFE MURDERER VIII
AS I PREFER TO CALL HIM,
WAS BORN IN 1491"

Jo Brand

The Virgin Queen

The brief, Protestant-bashing reign of Queen Mary (not the Scottish one, but Henry VIII's daughter by Catherine of Aragon), who lost England's last French possession, Calais, was followed by the 45-year tenure of Elizabeth I. She balanced the religious tensions of the era as a Protestant with no great enthusiasm for persecuting Catholics (if you overlook imprisoning Mary, Queen of Scots for nearly 20 years prior to killing her). In an age when a woman, queen or no, was still considered intellectually deficient, she made England a global power, crushing Spain's Armada in 1588, dispatching Walter Raleigh, Francis Drake et al to claim the spoils of the New World and reigning over a golden literary age in which Shakespeare, Bacon and Marlow were all at work. For all that, historians usually view her as grimly dogged (although undeniably charismatic) rather than heroic. She died, the Virgin Queen, with no strong heir.

Ireland, controlled for so long by Gaelic lords, finally began toeing the English line under the Tudor monarchs. Ulster chieftain Hugh O'Neill put up a stirring final show of resistance in the reign of Elizabeth I but eventually lost in 1607. His defeat changed Ulster from the point of greatest Irish resistance – of strongest Gaelic culture – to the region with closest ties to England. English and Scottish 'planters' arrived and took up land seized from the Catholic earls, establishing the northern region's Protestant bias and setting the scene for long-term divisions.



Bones of contention

In 2008, a mere 421 years after Mary, Queen of Scots was put to death for treason by Elizabeth I, Scottish MP Christine Grahame demanded the Queen's remains, interred at Westminster Abbey, be exhumed and repatriated. "She was an iconic historical Scots figure and ultimately the victim of English plotting," explained Ms Grahame of the French-speaking Mary.

Colonies close to home

- When Ireland fell under English control in the early 17th century, plantations were established on which English and Scottish settlers could take root. County Coleraine in Ulster was given to the City of London for colonisation and its main town went from being Derry to Londonderry.

"SHE IS ONLY A WOMAN, ONLY MISTRESS OF HALF AN ISLAND, AND YET SHE MAKES HERSELF FEARED BY SPAIN, BY FRANCE, BY THE EMPIRE, BY ALL"
Pope Sixtus V ponders the talents of Elizabeth I

Any excuse for a party
The Gunpowder Plot, or Powder Treason as it was called at the time, was led by Robert Catesby, an aristocrat convinced that England should be Catholic. He and a small band of conspirators hoped to blow up Parliament, King James I with it, and install the malleable Princess Elizabeth on the throne as a Catholic monarch. Explosives maestro Guy Fawkes was discovered in the cellars of Parliament, looking shifty beside 36 barrels of gunpowder. Fawkes and the other plotters were hung, drawn and quartered or shot in the process of being caught. Over the centuries, murderous violence has turned to perky tradition, and the celebration of failure (or perhaps anarchy) that is Guy Fawkes Night every 5th November unleashes an evening of fireworks and bonfires with effigies of Fawkes placed on top. A less publicised tradition finds the Yeoman of the Guard (the Queen's official bodyguard) searching the vaults of Parliament, sword and lanterns in hand, before the State Opening each November.

Anglicans, Puritans and Presbyterians: Britain does the Reformation

Although Henry VIII launched the Church of England with a loosely Catholic doctrine, it became increasingly Protestant after he died, caught up in the European Reformation that rejected the supremacy of bishops and focussed on a more direct connection with God, nurtured through scripture. Under Elizabeth I, the English variation on the theme, Anglicanism, took root, although the Puritans felt she didn't go nearly far enough in simplifying the processes of worship. The Reformation went down particularly well in lowland Scotland where the traditional wealth of the Catholic Church was stripped: land, property and cash were appropriated from the bishops and monasteries, and civil war broke out when Mary, Queen of Scots, reared on the Catholic faith as the wife of a French king, took to the throne. The Church (or Kirk) of Scotland that formally broke with Rome in 1560 was Presbyterian, named for 'presbyter', a New Testament word for priest; the Scottish Protestants elected their own. As ever, the Catholic Highlands did their own thing.

Explosive times: Guy Fawkes, Civil War and the Commonwealth

With Elizabeth shunning motherhood, the English throne fell to the nearest in line, king of Scotland, James, the Stuart son of murdered Mary, Queen of Scots. In Scotland he was James VI, in England James I, the first monarch to unite the Scots and English thrones if not the kingdoms themselves – each retained its own parliament. Unlike his mother, James was a Protestant, yet tried to smooth relations with Catholics. His conciliatory efforts foundered when the Catholic Guy Fawkes and co tried to blow up parliament in 1605. The next Stuart, Charles I, was

absolutist and arrogant. When, in 1640, he recalled the parliament he'd dissolved 11 years earlier, hoping they'd support him against the recalcitrant Scottish Kirk, they refused to help. And so the king and his Cavaliers took up arms against Oliver Cromwell's parliamentary Roundheads in the English Civil War. Charles lost and was executed in 1649. Cromwell joylessly ruled the new 'Commonwealth of England' as Lord Protector (while brutally suppressing Scotland and Ireland), but England's dalliance with republicanism didn't last and in 1660, two years after Cromwell died, Parliament reintroduced the monarchy in the shape of Charles II, a move commonly referred to as the Restoration.

A glorious revolution

Charles II, no doubt mindful of what happened to his father, played it cool. He pursued something like religious tolerance and established a balance between Crown and Parliament, recognising that neither could govern without the other. Science and the arts flourished while growing chunks of America and India fell under British rule. On a more personal level, his record of at least 17 illegitimate children by eight or more different mistresses (even while he failed to produce a genuine heir for the throne) suggested he was something of a free spirit. His reign, however, wasn't without crises, notably the Great Plague of 1665 and the Great Fire of London a year later.

James II, Charles' brother, was less shrewd. Openly Catholic, he put prominent Protestants to the sword, tried to sideline Parliament and cosied up to the French. But by now Parliament was too powerful; the Protestant lords ganged up and asked Dutch prince William of Orange to step in. He did so with his queen, Mary (actually James II's daughter) in 1688. The Glorious

Hero or villain:
judging Cromwell
Oliver Cromwell's reputation has always been debated. When he died of malaria in 1658, a vast sum, around £60,000, was spent on the hero's funeral. Yet, three years later, his treasonous body was dug up and his head stuck on a pole at Tyburn. Such swings in posthumous popularity have continued for 350 years. His reputation was resurrected in the 19th century, with his image shaped as that of a great leader. A Cromwell statue was placed aside the Houses of Parliament in 1899. Today the jury remains out; historians argue over the merits and flaws of his character and rule. In England, he's most often seen as dynamic but dictatorial.

Of the 190,000 or so deaths brought about by the English Civil War, more than half were caused by disease.

There may be Troubles ahead

When the forces of William of Orange sailed to Ireland to repel James II, they made landfall at Derry, in Ulster. The city was glad to see them, having been under siege from James' army for 105 days. The efforts of those who stood firm, led by a group of 13 young apprentices, are celebrated in the Loyalist Orange Order's Apprentice Boys march each August. The Orange Order marching season also includes a 12th July commemoration of victory in the Battle of the Boyne, rankling the Catholic population that deem the parades triumphalist. The Apprentice Boys march through the Catholic Bogside district of Derry in 1969 sparked riots that ultimately led to the mobilisation of British troops in Northern Ireland, seen by many as the start of what became known as the Troubles in which 3,500 people would die.

Revolution, as it became known, delivered England a new royal house without the usual puddles of blood. In Scotland the transition was less smooth; here the Campbells, egged on by the English, famously massacred the Jacobite (Stuart supporters – Jacobus being Latin for 'James') MacDonalds in Glencoe in 1692. Meanwhile, having fled to France, James and his Jacobite friends tried to get back in via Ireland, where they were repelled at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. While Britain was now established as a Protestant nation, for Ireland the faith divide was far from sorted.

United in name at least

Queen Anne came after William and Mary in a rule most notable for the 1707 Act of Union gathering Scotland, England and Wales under one parliament (the one in London). The Scots didn't join up with any great enthusiasm, and Highlanders in particular weren't happy. When Queen Anne died, the throne passed to the House of Hanover, George I atop, in accordance with the 1701 Act of Settlement that forbade Catholics from the succession. Two Jacobite rebellions in Scotland pushed the issue, attempting to reinstall the Catholic Stuart line. The first, in 1715, quickly faltered. The second, in 1745, got further – as far as Derby in fact – before the Jacobite pretender, Bonnie Prince Charlie (Charles Stuart) and his Highland supporters retreated and were mercilessly thumped at Culloden, near Inverness, in 1746. This, the last battle fought on mainland Britain, remains etched in the Scottish psyche. Finally, the Highlands were subdued; tartan and bagpipes were outlawed in the 1747 Act of Proscription and the clan system was effectively deconstructed. Meanwhile, in London, power was gradually drifting from Crown to Parliament; and with the Whig MP Robert Walpole Britain got its first Prime Minister in the 1720s.

The modern age:

empire, slavery and sacrifice

Key dates

Ruling the waves

By the mid 18th century Britannia was ruling the waves (James Thomson's poem *Rule Britannia!* was set to music by Thomas Arne in 1740 and was an overnight hit), Georges II and III at the helm. With a refreshing period of peace on home turf, she took the fight to other parts of the globe, building a vast empire. France was usually on the opposing side, notably in the Seven Years War that netted colonies in India and Canada. In 1769 Captain James Cook made it to the Antipodes, bagging further territory. The blip came with defeat in the American War of Independence between 1775 and 1783, but further success wasn't long in coming. Having tiptoed nervously round the French Revolution of 1789, imperial Britain charged on under Messrs Horatio Nelson and Arthur Wellesley (Duke of Wellington) in battles against Napoleon at Trafalgar (1805) and Waterloo (1815). At home, George III was unaware of the triumph: his famed madness gripped hard and he died blind, demented and alone in Windsor Castle in 1820, six decades after being crowned.

The Irish Question

After decades of repression, in 1800 the Catholics in Ireland (always threatening to rebel) were offered 'emancipation' by British Prime Minister William Pitt, but only once they'd agreed to the Act of Union that brought Ireland under British parliamentary rule in a new United Kingdom (previously Ireland was under the British crown but had its own parliament). However, promises weren't met: once the Irish signed up, George III vetoed Catholic freedom. Decades of

c.1765 Scotsman James Watt cracks steam power, key to the Industrial Revolution.

Late 18th century The Highland Clearances force peasants off Scottish land.

1801 Act of Union creates the United Kingdom, with Ireland ruled from Westminster.

1805 and 1815 Decisive British wins at Trafalgar and Waterloo end the Napoleonic Wars.

1853 Britain gets involved in the Crimean War.

1914-18 The First World War against Germany costs nearly a million British lives.

1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty separates Northern Ireland from a new Irish state to the south.

1926 Tough times for your average Brit bring on the General Strike.

1928 Women get the vote after years of Suffragette lobbying.

1939-45 The Second World War pushes Britain into its 'finest hour'.

1982 Britain fights Argentina for the Falkland Islands.

1999 Wales gets an assembly and Scotland a parliament amid devolution.

2005 Islamist extremists kill 52 London commuters.

Kilt coup for King
No British monarch visited Scotland between 1641 (Charles I) and 1822 when George IV turned up on a PR jolly organised by the writer Walter Scott. The King's outfit apparently inspired a revival in tartan kilts.

Hunger pangs that still ache
Ireland's Great Famine, in which the damage done by potato blight was greatly worsened by political and social circumstances, lasted six years from 1845. It affected Ulster less than it did the regions further south, but nevertheless the population fell by an estimated 15 per cent. Overall, Ireland lost as many as two million people, a reduction brought about by starvation, disease and large-scale migration. The British Government's apparent failure to save Ireland from the famine remains a thorny issue 150 years on. Some suggest they wilfully tried to crush Irish culture. Murals painted in the Catholic areas of modern day Belfast still refer to 'Britain's genocide by starvation'.

discord followed. A failed nationalist uprising in 1916 inspired support for independence, launching a guerrilla war against British troops. It ended in 1921 with the Anglo-Irish Treaty and partition. Six counties in the Protestant north remained within the UK as Northern Ireland; the remaining 26 became the Irish Free State, and soon after, the Republic of Ireland.

**Put up your hands and give us your country:
building an empire**

For three centuries Britain stuck its flag in any patch of foreign dirt it could find, even if its empire did grow as much by accident as design. It began with Walter Raleigh's exploration of the North American and Caribbean coast in the late 16th century, where chunks of land were bitten off for England. Initially it was all about trade (tobacco, cotton and fur), but the idea of escaping to North America soon found religious separatists making the move. Elsewhere, the East India Trading Company established a strong British presence in Asia. A second wave of empire building began after the loss of America to independence in 1776. Victory against Napoleon soon opened up the world to Britain; it controlled trade and conquered vast areas of territory, building a congregation of more than 400 million souls by the early 20th century. India, Burma, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Caribbean, a line of dependencies running through Africa from Egypt down to the Cape: the Empire covered a quarter of the globe. In the second half of the 20th century the Empire ebbed away, cutting the apron strings from Britain whilst the motherland recovered from world war. Among the last to fly the nest was Hong Kong, returned to China in 1997.

Britain was one of the worst offenders in the slave trade that grew with colonial expansion. West Africans were snatched on a grand scale, transported to North America and the Caribbean and forced to work on tobacco, sugar and cotton plantations. The abolition of the slave trade eventually came in 1807 and slavery itself was made illegal in 1833.

Final Straw for colonies

In 2002 the then Home Secretary Jack Straw blamed contemporary troubles in Israel, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Iraq on Britain's messy withdrawal from its Empire in the 20th century.

Britain goes industrial

In the century after 1750, the British population trebled to more than 16 million. By 1901 it had doubled again. An agricultural revolution stopped them all going hungry, although improved technology actually reduced the agrarian workforce (by 1850 Britain had fewer workers on the land (less than a quarter of the workforce) than any other country in the world), and freed up labour for a much more celebrated transformation.

The Industrial Revolution began with cloth and the mechanised textile mills in Lancashire and Derbyshire, before the arrival of steam power in the late 19th century quickened the pace of change dramatically. Factories producing metalwork and textiles mushroomed, built close to coal supplies in South Wales, the North and the Midlands. People migrated en masse to the new industrial cities: Manchester and Sheffield quadrupled in size in the first 50 years of the 19th century. In Glasgow and Belfast, where the shipyards began to boom, the growth was even greater. By the 1840s the railways were being laid, upping the pace of change again, and a few years later the telegraph revolutionised communications. Political reform took a while to catch up. Riots and discontent, led by the Chartist movement, rumbled for a decade

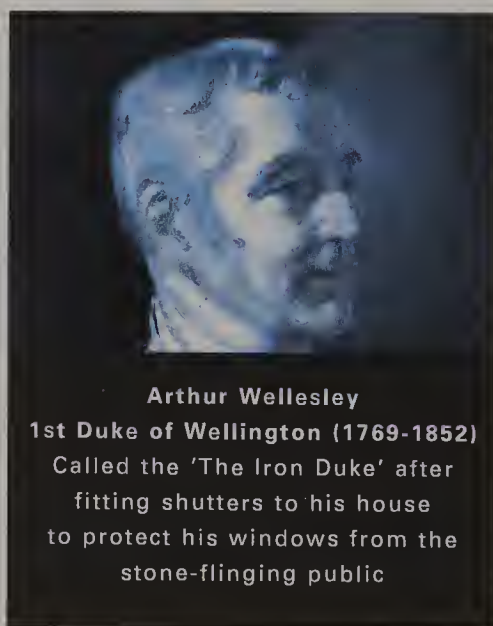
Just a matter of time
Before the Industrial Revolution, Britain operated on various time zones. In Bristol, for example, with the sun rising later than London, the clocks ran ten minutes behind the capital. This brought various timetabling problems in the age of the train, so most of the rail companies adopted Greenwich Mean Time by 1848. GMT was legally set throughout Britain in 1880. Five years later some bright spark invented the clocking-on machine.

In 1812 Spencer Perceval distinguished himself by becoming the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated (so far), when he was shot through the heart at close range by a madman.

before the Reform Act of 1832 initiated the sedate journey to popular representation. Social reform was even slower. Industrialisation often brought wretched living conditions, only partially relieved by measures like the amended Poor Law of 1834 that passed 'care' for the destitute over to workhouses.

Get off my land: the Highland Clearances

The migration of people from countryside to city occurred ahead of schedule in northern Scotland. Landlords kicked peasants out of their homes in the Highland Clearances in the late 18th century, replacing them with more profitable tenants, sheep. Thousands of Highlanders fled to North America and Australia, others moved to new industrial cities. Those that remained, pushed into a subsistence life of weaving or fishing on whatever wild margin of land they could get, were known as crofters. It only took 50 years for the Highlands to become one of the most sparsely peopled regions of Europe.



"IT WILL ONLY ENCOURAGE THE LOWER CLASSES TO MOVE ABOUT"

The Duke of Wellington on the coming of the railways (and they still named a railway station after his success at Waterloo).

Victorian values

When the gluttonous fop that was George IV waddled into the grave he was succeeded first by his brother William IV and then by his niece, Victoria. She came to the throne in 1837, aged just 18. Under Victoria, Britain enjoyed naval supremacy and duly dominated trade, while the manufacturing bonanza of the Industrial Revolution revved up and engineers like Isambard Kingdom Brunel dazzled with railways, bridges and behemoth steam ships.

A newly moneyed middle class enthusiastically spent its cash on seaside holidays, material goods and opium. Most people, however, were more concerned with simple survival, often living in the squalid, overcrowded cities that grew with the industrial age. Parliament began to work intermittently on their behalf, notably in the late 19th century under two distinctive Prime Ministers, Benjamin Disraeli (Conservative) and William Gladstone (Liberal). Despite Britain's dominance overseas, the wars continued. The Crimean War (shambolic work of slaughter in which pushy Florence Nightingale, pioneer of modern nursing, starred), Indian Mutiny and Boer War all kicked off during Victoria's reign.



Phwoar, look at the leg on that table

Contrary to popular myth the Victorians didn't dissolve at the sight of an uncovered table leg, flustered by such an overt display of sexuality. In fact, in 19th century Britain, pornography found its first mass market in the shape of Lady Pokingham literature and explicit daguerreotype photographs.

The big shoot up in Flanders
In 1916 you could stroll into Harrods in Knightsbridge and buy 'A Welcome Present for Friends at the Front'. The pack contained cocaine, morphine and syringes. Alternatively, you could treat your Tommy of choice to a gel pack of heroin. Anti-drug laws were rapidly passed following reports of drug-crazed soldiers at the front.

War in the industrial age

Edward VII's ten-year reign at the start of the 21st century turned out to be a genteel lull before the brusque arrival of the modern era. When Germany invaded Belgium on its way to France in 1914, Britain honoured its new Entente Cordiale with the old enemy and declared war on the Germans. Britain's new working class signed up to fight in their millions, and this, the first big conflict of the mechanised era, the first big war in the age of national identity, killed 700,000 of them, most mown down by machine gun fire in northern France where trench fighting yielded a four-year stalemate. Virtually every village in Britain counted its casualties; some lost a whole generation of young men. The First World War ended with Germany's surrender in November 1918.

How Britain remembers

In 1919 George V set 11th November aside as Remembrance Day. Today, Britain (and much of the Commonwealth) still stops – in offices, schools and supermarkets – for two minutes' silence at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month, the moment the guns stopped firing on the Western Front. At the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London, a solemn ceremony marks the occasion, with royals and political leaders laying wreaths. *Nimrod* from Elgar's *Enigma Variations* (see section 4.1.2. for more on Elgar) brings the marching veterans to a reflective halt. Brits buy and wear paper poppies in the run up to Remembrance Day, sold by the Royal British Legion to raise funds for ex-servicemen and their families. Poppies bloomed in the churned fields of Flanders when the fighting stopped. When Channel Four newsreader Jon Snow was criticised for not wearing a poppy on air in 2006 he talked about a "rather unpleasant breed of poppy fascism."

Going to the polls between the wars

The divisions in British society had always been obvious, but prior to the First World War most people simply accepted their place in the pecking order. However, the gulf between the elite, often behind the lines giving orders, and the largely disenfranchised multitude, doing the dying up at the front, became glaring during the conflict. No doubt mindful of what was happening in Russia with its revolution, the Government acted in 1918 and gave all men over 21 and women over 30 the vote. The Suffragette movement had been demanding universal voting rights since the turn of the century and finally won all adult women the vote in 1928. Victoria was the last monarch to really meddle in state affairs and Parliament was now running the country, its lower chamber composed largely of Tories, Liberals and new boys Labour, born of the unions' thirst for representation in 1900 and first in power under Ramsay MacDonald in 1924. The gaiety of the Roaring Twenties roared right past most of the country; they were too busy coping with economic hardship. Spiralling unemployment caused the General Strike of 1926 and the Great Depression of 1929 made things worse: a significant number of Brits gave up and moved to the New World.

Shrewd move George
In 1917, amid fervent anti-German feeling in Britain, George V changed the family name from Saxe-Coburg und Gotha to Windsor.

The Dunkirk Spirit

The Second World War did much to mould the British psyche. Churchill's bulldog spirit wasn't quickly forgotten (even if he was voted out of office two months after Germany surrendered) and certain episodes of British resistance became engrained in the mind of every citizen: the escape from Dunkirk in 1940, when every available boat sailed to evacuate 330,000 troops (Brits still talk of a belligerent 'Dunkirk Spirit' when faced with adversity), the airborne Battle of Britain that punctured Hitler's invasion plans in 1940, and the Blitz that hammered Coventry, the East End of London, Glasgow and other areas, and in which Britons clung to their resolve. Such events are still readily trumpeted when Britain talks about its character in positive terms.

England vs. Germany: the second leg

Preoccupied with putting food on the table, Britain paid little attention when Germany began rearming under Adolf Hitler in the 1930s. Even when he teamed up with Mussolini and began sabre rattling, British MP Neville Chamberlain famously pursued appeasement with the Munich Agreement in 1938. A year later, Britain was at war. Winston Churchill replaced Chamberlain in 1940 when Poland, France, Holland, Belgium and Norway had already fallen to the Nazis, and manoeuvred Britain through the Second World War, mobilising the country mentally and physically, helping it deal with large civilian losses as the major towns and cities were bombed in the Blitz, and pushing it on, in alliance with the USA and Russia, to victory in 1945. A quarter of a million Brits died in the fighting and over 40,000 in the bombing raids. London, in particular, suffered: the Blitz of 1940 to 1941 killed more than 30,000 civilians in the capital.

"I'M GLAD IT MAKES ME FEEL I
CAN LOOK THE EAST END IN THE FACE"

The Queen Mother's comment after
Buckingham Palace was hit during the Blitz.

From austerity to flares

The Second World War exhausted Britain. As the country slowly rebuilt, austerity reigned with food and basic goods rationed. The Empire slipped away, most of it opting for self-governance. India went in 1947, Malaya in 1957 and Kenya in 1963. The empire was replaced by the Commonwealth of Nations, under which ties with the old territories were maintained. Back home, Britain began looking after its own like never before. The 'Welfare State' of 1948 brought a free National Health Service and dole payments while the nationalisation of railways, coalmines and steelworks helped millions into a job. In the 1950s the colonial legacy came good in the shape of people, as West Indian migrants made Britain their home. The wave continued in subsequent decades – migrants from the Indian subcontinent began arriving in the 1960s and 70s – establishing Britain as the multicultural state it remains today. By the late 1950s Britain was prospering again; by the 1960s it was swinging. Bands like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones gave a familiar face to the cultural and social revolution that loosened attitudes to sex, fashion and class. Legislation followed, notably relaxing the laws on homosexuality and abortion.

**Come and have
a go: three
modern riots**

Poll Tax

On 31st March 1990, the biggest riot in London for a century began as a fairly peaceful protest against the Poll Tax. By the time the violence in Trafalgar Square had calmed, buildings and cars were smouldering, 113 people had been injured and 340 arrested.

May Day

In 2000, anti-globalisation demonstrations in Parliament Square turned ugly. It kicked off with the destruction of a McDonalds in Whitehall and ended with pitched battles against riot police.

Race riots

Riots in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley in Summer 2001 saw white and Asian youths attacking each other and anything nearby. The subsequent inquiry mentioned ethnically divided communities, where race issues were exacerbated by 'grinding poverty' and exploited by white racists.

Meltdown, Maggie and the miners

The 1970s were a struggle. Membership of the European Economic Community and decimalisation early in the decade couldn't assuage soaring inflation later on. In 1979 the Winter of Discontent brought everyone from nurses to bin men and gravediggers out on strike. The discovery of oil and gas off the coast of Scotland gave fresh voice to those seeking Scottish independence, but also resentment when English firms walked off with a significant share of the proceeds. Ultimately, the 1970s strife served Britain with its first handbag-wielding Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Some loved her – she served three terms and the middle classes never had it better; but many hated her – the coal pit closures that led to a bitter miners' strike in the early 1980s ruined communities in South Wales and northern England. War with Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982 got a similarly mixed response, despite the jingoistic flag waving of the time. Meanwhile, an IRA bombing campaign, aimed at kicking the British out of Northern Ireland, was getting bloodier by the year, both in Northern Ireland and Britain. The introduction of a wildly unpopular poll tax finally did for Thatcher in 1990.

"I THINK, HISTORICALLY, THE TERM
'THATCHERISM' WILL BE SEEN AS A COMPLIMENT"
Margaret Thatcher considers her legacy.



Tony Blair.
Good sketch material,
as you can see

Tony keeps smiling

The 1990s were less turbulent, with Britain experiencing a period of economic growth (some said reaping the benefit of Thatcher's tenure).

Finally, in 1997, the electorate deemed Labour – or New Labour as they were calling

themselves – worthy of power and 18 years of Tory government came to an end. Tony Blair strode, grinning, into Downing Street and stayed for the next decade.

Devolution in the late 1990s brought change for Scotland with its parliament and Wales with its assembly, if not vast constitutional powers. Finally, after several false dawns, Northern Ireland appeared to be on the road to lasting peace when a National Assembly, first conceived in the 1998 Belfast Agreement (or the Good Friday Agreement as it's more commonly known), reconvened in 2007 led by a power sharing executive that featured both Nationalists and Unionists. The British army, on the streets of Northern Ireland for 38 years, left soon after.

When Gordon Brown replaced Blair as Labour PM in 2007, Britain was still soul searching about the merits or otherwise of following the USA into war in the Middle East: the London bombings of July 2005, linked to Islamic militants, had brought the 'War against Terror' closer to home with the death of 52 commuters. Only the biting economic downturn of 2008 drew the front pages away from the debate on national security and foreign policy. The monarchy clung, perhaps unexpectedly, to a degree of popularity, having coped with various modern crises, most notably the death of Diana, Princess of Wales.



1.3 Language and belonging

GB wrestles with its psyche, determined to define 'Britishness' with a perky little statement. It fails, of course – there are 60 million different theories to contend with. And yet certain common characteristics – not least the thriving, evolving language – do generate some fuzzy sense of national character and identity.

Language lessons: how the British talk

Text matches

Old English

Beowulf

Middle English

Chaucer's

Canterbury Tales

Early Modern English

King James Bible

Shakespeare

Word counts

As many as 4,300 words of modern English derive from Old English, 1,000 are from Old Norse and 10,000 are from Norman French.

Where does English come from?

Like most strands of British culture, the national tongue has twisted this way and that across the centuries. The Romans didn't establish the English language. For that we look to the Angles and Saxons of north-west Germany. From the fifth century they deposited Old English, which, while largely unrecognisable compared to the modern version, established the fundamental bits of the language: *moon, woman, think* – that kind of stuff. Not many Old English words survive but those that do are the most used in the modern language. Subsequent centuries saw the tongue added to and adapted with Old Norse (thank you Vikings), Latin (good work missionary folk) and, in greatest measure, Old French (Normans take a bow). By the 12th century, this mangle of words had become Middle English. Three hundred years later the language changed again, this time moved by the 'Great Vowel Shift'. It began in the south east of England, where vowel sounds evolved and standardised, spread north and created the sounds of modern English. The shift may have been caused by a mass migration of people trying to flee the plague, modifying their accents as they went in order to be understood. It's worth remembering that while much of this was going on, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Cornwall stuck to their ancient Celtic languages.

The four Celtic tongues of Britain

As English dug its claws into the lump of land that would become Britain, so the region's elderly Celtic languages were pushed to the margins. Four variants have just about survived to modern times, although the speakers of each are also fluent in English.

Welsh (Cymraeg)

Once spoken across the whole of southern Britain, today it claims about half a million speakers, two thirds of whom speak Welsh on a daily basis: admirable stats considering how rapidly the language declined in the 20th century. The farther north or west you go in Wales, the more Welsh speakers you find. Dialects change with location, with a rough divide between north and south. Welsh occupies a mandatory slot on the national curriculum and bilingual road signs are proudly erected nationwide; measures pushed forward by the Welsh Language Act of 1993 that gave Welsh home-turf parity with English for the first time in 450 years.

Scottish Gaelic (Gàdhlig)

Largely confined to the Highlands and Islands (particularly the Western Isles), where it's spoken by around 60,000 people, Scottish Gaelic is the remnant voice of a language that blanketed Scotland until the 12th century. Despite the Scottish Parliament's official recognition of the language in the Gaelic Language Act of 2005 and the use of bilingual road signs, Scottish Gaelic's long decline is starting to look terminal.

A nod to the Mod

Scottish Gaelic speakers let their hair down each October at the Royal National Mod (or Am Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail), a competitive festival of native music, dance, art and literature.

Saying goodbye to good day

In 2007 Vale of Glamorgan Council barred its telephone operators from answering the blower with a chirpy *bore da* (good morning). Union officials decided that making the largely English speaking telephonists use Welsh was straining their vocal chords and thus contravening health and safety regs.

Patagonian patter

Around 1,500 people in the Chubut Province of Patagonia in southern Argentina speak Welsh; They are the descendants of 153 migrants who made the crossing west in 1865 to establish a Welsh state with the Argentine Government's consent.

Cornish (Kernewek)

The plucky 3,000 or so West Country folk who bang the drum for Cornish have artificially resurrected the language – it hasn't been a working 'native' language since the 18th century. Only around 400 of the revivalists are fluent. In 2002 the British Government formally recognised Cornish as a minority language.

Irish (Gaeilge)

The Republic of Ireland has clung more successfully to the Gaelic Irish language than Northern Ireland, although survival in the north has been ensured by its symbolism, by its connection to a unified Ireland (Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams apparently learned Irish whilst in prison). The Good Friday Agreement gave the language official status in Northern Ireland and initiated measures to promote it. Around ten per cent of the population now have some knowledge of Irish, specifically its strong Ulster dialect.



The great dialect divide

Given Britain's modest scale, and the fluidity with which its people move around, regional accents and dialects remain impressively diverse. Perhaps the biggest variation comes in England's north/south split. Conjure a rough dividing line north of London, reaching up to the Wash and down to the Severn Estuary, and either side of it the vowels diverge. To the north they're kept short; to the south, usually, they're longer. However, variations in local accents can be noticeable within a distance of ten miles.

Ah dinnae unnerstaun ye: Scots dialect

Scots, or Lallans (meaning 'Lowlands'), contains bits of Gaelic but derives largely from English. While Lallans reflects the old vernacular language of the Scottish lowlands, its evolution has been partly synthetic. Poets like Robert Burns, and later Hugh MacDiarmid in the Scottish Renaissance of the early 20th century, attempted to 'clean up' the Scottish tongue, establishing Scots. It's written as it sounds: words like out become 'oot' and work becomes 'wark'. Few people actually speak Lallans; today it's more of a literary form. Confusingly, much of mainland Scotland speaks Scottish Standard English, in theory closer to English than Lallans. However, get up to Aberdeen, where proximity to the Norse ports across the water has given the local accent a dense Scandinavian burr, and you'll do well to understand anything they're saying at all.

Talking Scots in Ulster

Alongside English and Irish, both official languages, Northern Ireland also harbours the Ulster Scots language (also called Ullans, Scots-Irish or simply Scots among

the local population). It's an Ulster-twang'd variation on the Lowland Scots language, as carried over to Ireland by plantation settlers from Scotland in the 17th century. It has around 30,000 speakers in

Northern Ireland, although the recently established (and Government funded) Ulster Scots Agency is working to extend its reach.

Mersey melting pot

The Scouse accent of Merseyside evolved in the late 19th century, born of Liverpool's dockside blur of Irish, Welsh, Scots and Lancastrian visitors. The word Scouse derives from lobscouse, a traditional Merseyside sailors' dish of stewed lamb and hardtack (a dry biscuit-related affair).

Dairy dialect

In 2006, language specialists identified regional differences in the way cows around the UK mooed, in particular noting the distinctive West Country drawl of Devon's bovine beauties. Similar claims have been made about frogs and birds.

Exporting English

300 to 400 million people around the world speak English as a first language (over a billion have basic English).

The biggest chunk of first language English speakers, about 215 million, live in the USA.

English is an official language in more than 50 countries.

Talking in class

Britain's inky linguistic pool is clouded further by class. You can go pretty much anywhere and discover a well-heeled 'local' coughing up Received Pronunciation (RP) ('received' meaning accepted or approved). RP began as a regional accent of the south Midlands, but was in the right place at the right time when its patrons moved south to London in the late medieval period and grew wealthy. By the 19th century, the accent had become the oral hallmark of Britain's upper classes. RP is also sometimes referred to as Queen's English; go back 20 years and it was also called BBC English, a term no longer appropriate at the linguistically egalitarian Beeb. The changes on television reflect a wider shift in accents in the south-east of England, where the growth of Estuary English, in which the twang of Cockney meets the airs of RP, gives the burgeoning middle classes the feel of workaday credibility. Tony Blair, the common man, would occasionally slip into Estuary English (perhaps subconsciously) during his time as PM. Some analysts suggest that even the Queen has shifted toward the Estuary in recent years.

Begged, borrowed and stolen: the evolving language

The English language in Britain evolves constantly. Foreign words have long been de rigueur (pilfered most notably from the French), and today they're absorbed from all over the place. In 2007, for example, the word wiki found its way into the Oxford English Dictionary, derived from a Hawaiian word meaning quick but now applied to a certain type of Internet site. The words irritainment (annoying TV) and bimbette (an attractive but intellectually-challenged young woman) were included among the same batch of new additions.

Metaphor and simile are equally prone to rapid evolution. The British love new, glib phrases (it's a country where pretty much anything can go 'pear-shaped', particularly when it's 'cheap as chips'), repeated interminably for a couple of years until some intangible social code decides they're 'past their sell-by date'. Slang offers even greater linguistic opportunity. Informal words come and go, sometimes limited to certain regions, but some stalwarts of universal slang, from skint (moneyless) to cakehole (mouth) to blower (telephone), persist. Urban Britain is particularly inventive, its multicultural streets generating a new tongue for the 21st century with the unstoppable rise of Jafaican. Despite the name, experts claim it's not actually an affectation but a shift in language born of multicultural mingling in post-war Britain, most notably with the mix of Jamaican, West African and Bangladeshi cultures. Such has been Jafaican's growth that today you'll find youngsters from Tower Hamlets to Torquay calling each other 'blud' and discussing whether those 'skets' is 'butters'. *Daily Mail* readers are no doubt aquiver.

The great British identity crisis

In England the terms 'British' and 'English' are virtually interchangeable. Venture into Wales or Scotland, however, and any notion of British identity is soon shot down. Here they're Welsh or Scots, rarely British. Mistakenly calling someone English will induce a weary sigh, or worse. The old English hegemony over Celtic neighbours has fostered a strong sense of identity in the smaller nations. They happily display the Welsh dragon or the Scottish saltire, and the rest of the world admires their national pride. Doing the same in England with the cross of St George – or even the Union Jack with its whiff of old colonialism and, from the 1980s, its association with right-wing groups – can bring accusations of jingoism. In England, if pushed to consider their collective identity, people are perhaps as likely to think of a region as a nation. Cornwall, Yorkshire, the North East and the North West all have strong personalities, while the wider north/south split cuts a distinct, usually amicable divide. Urban Britain – London especially – can feel like a different country to pastoral areas, and some still define themselves in terms of 'town or country'.

The complexities of national identity deepen across the water in Northern Ireland. Ask a local their nationality and you'll get one of three answers: British, Irish or Northern Irish. The 'British' will almost certainly be Protestant (and therefore Unionist), the 'Irish' will probably be Catholic (Nationalist) and the small but growing minority that answer 'Northern Irish' may be either or neither faith but will, in the context of this part of the UK, be considered moderates and will probably be from younger generations.

There are exceptions. Some Catholics are Unionists, although far fewer than before the Troubles began in the 1960s; the violence and hatred of that period nailed ideas about national identity (of being Unionist or Nationalist) strongly to faith. Today, the violence has subsided, but the divisions haven't simply melted away. The issues of faith – and their strong connection to nationality – still dictate where people live, go to school or socialise, despite 'cross-community' initiatives. It's also worth noting that background and allegiances in Northern Ireland are sensed more than discussed; divined from names, clothing, school attended, football team supported. The question of faith, of which side of the fence you're on, isn't asked directly. (See section 8.2. for more on the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland.)

The grass is greener...
Anyone born in Northern Ireland is entitled to take joint Republic of Ireland citizenship if they so desire.

Our song's better than yours

No one is quite sure who wrote *God Save the Queen*, the dirgeful (and still unofficial) British national anthem, although many point to Dr Henry Carey for the words and Thomas Arne for the tune. Scholars even suggest the music has French origins. First performed in 1745, there are six (often varying) verses in all. Few Brits can recite beyond the first, although Scots will happily direct you to the final (optional) couplet containing the "Rebellious Scots to crush" line. The Queen must be sick of it – it plays on royal occasions and when England (and in the Olympics, Britain) takes to the sports field. The Scots and the Welsh have their own anthems for most

events: *Flower of Scotland*, by contemporary folk singer Roy Williamson, and *The Land of My Fathers* (*Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*), written in 1856 by Evan James and his son James James, are usually sung with more gusto than their English equivalent. In Northern Ireland, the choice of anthem is unsurprisingly contentious. State and sporting events use *God Save the Queen*, unless the team is playing one of the other home nations, when *A Londonderry Air* (also known as *Danny Boy*) is called upon. The united national rugby side has its own rousing, specially written song, *Ireland's Call*, but sometimes gets *Amhrán na bhFiann*, the Irish anthem, as well.

"IT'S TOLERANCE, DECENCY AND DETERMINATION TO TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER ON ALL OCCASIONS AND A TENDENCY, WHEN A STRANGER STANDS ON ONE'S FOOT, TO APOLOGISE."

Martin Bell, former BBC reporter and MP, on being British

Superiority complex

Regional and national differences acknowledged, where does Britain, as a country, see itself in the global order? High up, is the short answer. It may lack the territorial reach of old, and the days of industrial supremacy are long gone, but Britain still considers itself a world power. It's in the G8, is one of only five permanent members of the UN Security Council, positions itself as the USA's prime ally (some say lapdog), still spends an awful lot on its armed forces and retains its nuclear weapons. The average Brit is aware of this primacy from childhood; they're raised with a fuzzy, underlying awareness that being born 'British' is a fortunate state of affairs. Today, the mild British sense of national superiority, of independence at best and insularity at worst, emerges in a reluctance to fully join the European party: to give up its currency or 'give in to Brussels'.

What are the Brits actually like?

Of course there is no archetypal British personality, no set character to which they all conform. The media is convinced that there used to be, and discusses the collapse of British values at length: boozed up, greedy, oversexed, rude and thuggish – the country's going to the dogs. Obviously, they exaggerate: the quiet majority slip under the radar and the loud minority are mistaken for the norm. While there is no consensus on character, most Brits share some common ground. Tolerance remains a key ingredient.

The multi-dimensional nature of British society, with its mix of ethnicity, race and religion, speaks of its open-mindedness, as does the proportion (over three quarters) of first generation immigrants and their children who define themselves as 'British'.

In a similar vein, the British won't tolerate queue jumping, argue for hours about why they, not their companion, should pay for a round of drinks and have a weakness for the underdog. This sense of democracy, a quiet dignity (the old stiff upper lip) and the intolerance of corruption are perhaps best summed up by the rather woolly sense of 'fair play'. For all that, it's worth noting that open-mindedness, particularly where race is concerned, may ebb somewhat behind closed doors – public persona and private opinion in Britain (like anywhere else) don't always tally. Most Brits are still embarrassed by self-promotion (although bashfulness seems to subside as you travel north) and overt displays of emotion, hiding instead behind a cynical and self-depreciatory, yet rather smug, brand of humour. However, the stereotype of the uptight, repressed Brit no longer seems that valid; attitudes to sex and sexuality are liberal even while the intimate details are rarely discussed.

Jack and the dragon

The British flag, the Union Flag (or more commonly the Union Jack), its current design dating from 1801, represents the grouping of nations in the United Kingdom. Its 'Jack' name is thought to be nautical, ascribed to its positioning as a 'jack' flag on the bow of a ship. At present it features the crosses of St George (England), St Andrew (Scotland) and St Patrick (Ireland). But where's the Welsh dragon? In 2007, Wrexham MP Ian Lucas launched a campaign to cut Wales a piece of the action. "Let the debate begin," he called. "Let the rest of the world know that the iconic symbol of the United Kingdom may change and that the reason that it will change is that we have a new constitutional settlement that affords Wales its true place in the Union." "We'll think about it", was roughly the response.

An island of two halves

Britain has had a north/south identity split since the Industrial Revolution. It runs from somewhere near the Humber estuary across central England in a rough, disputed line down to the Bristol Channel. Wales, despite its southerly reaches, is 'northern'. On an obvious level the divide is about wealth: the south, with London as its guiding light, has always been richer than the north and its large industrial cities. But there's much more to it than that. The split is about culture, psychology and language; it's about politics, drinking habits and humour; about southern fairies and northern monkeys. The north beams with pride at its working-class credibility, the south seems embarrassed by its easy ride. They're friendlier up north, more reserved in the south, or so the stereotypes say. These days the differences are usually played out with humour, through the intentionally patronising images of flat caps and whippets (north) or flash convertibles and cappuccinos (south).

Colourful characters: three British eccentrics

William Cavendish-Scott-Bentinck A reclusive 19th century English aristocrat who did everything he could to stop people looking at him. Eccentricities included keeping a room full of green boxes, each containing a single brown wig, and constructing a 15-mile long maze of tunnels and rooms under his Nottinghamshire estate.

Quentin Crisp Self-proclaimed Stately Homo of Britain who worked as a nude model, book designer and prostitute before finding late-life fame as an author in the 1970s. He would wander the streets of his adoptive home, New York, in mauve hair and a cravat. Once described England as a "merciless place".

Francis Henry Egerton The 18th century Earl of Bridgewater, who did much to champion natural theology, was a patron of the arts and a member of the Royal Society, is also remembered as the man who threw dinner parties for his pet dogs. He dressed them up for the role, miniature shoes included.



Literature and philosophy

2.1. Literature p59

2.1.1. How important is literature to Britain? p60

2.1.2. Well versed: Brit lit in the medieval era p62

2.1.3. From sonnets to novels: literature grows up p67

2.1.4. The Romantics and the realists p75

2.1.5. Success stories: modern British literature p84

2.2. Philosophy p97

2.2.1. The greatest hits of British philosophy p98



Robert Burns

Scotland's favourite son
(1759 - 1796)

2.1 Literature

If you're looking for the high achievers of British culture, the library shelves are a good place to start. Few nations boast such a rich literary tradition; an inheritance that runs from Chaucer through Dickens and on to McEwan, and which grows, taken as read, every year.

How important is literature to Britain?

English lit dropouts

A 2007 Teletext poll concluded that *Vernon God Little* (2003), a blackly comic Booker winner by Australian author DBC Pierre, was the work of fiction that British readers were least likely to finish. One in three gave up on it before the end. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) came second; James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) was the third.

Best of British

Of all the arts, none has contributed more to Britain's cultural identity than literature. The last 200 years have been particularly bounteous. The novel, still relatively young as a literary device, relentlessly breeds great British writers. Scott, Austen, Dickens, Woolf, Orwell, McEwan: the list is long and rich. Of course, the roots of British literature lie much further back, in a poetic tradition that reaches from Chaucer through Milton and Burns and on to Motion, with language and style shaped by different eras. These days, verse has a limited audience, even while a number of excellent poets continue to publish. Consistently, throughout its journey, British literature has drawn on wide, exotic influences, from the Scandinavian lore of Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* to the Caribbean thread of V.S. Naipaul's 20th century novels.



What do the British read?

Despite the best efforts of TV and the pummelling schedules of modern life, Brits still regularly find time to reach for a good book. Perhaps a certain gulf remains between more 'literary' fiction and the popular novel; the former, while not stigmatised, finds fewer readers, although classic authors like Austen continue to sell well. Above all, the modern British reader is a creature of crime fiction and the homicide detective, from forensic scientist Kay Scarpetta, the creation of American author Patricia Cornwell, to Ian Rankin's hardboiled Scottish DI, John Rebus. Science fiction, fantasy and romance also move many, but nothing seems to rival the clamour for a good murder mystery. However, while the novel remains hugely popular, and the *Harry Potter* series outsold everything else in the first years of the 21st century, non-fiction usually sells in greater quantities. Autobiographies and cookbooks, both driven by celebrity 'authors', claim the biggest market share.



In the club

Bookworms have always gathered in literary circles, eager to pass criticism on any given title. However, the recent growth of book groups has been unprecedented. Hundreds of thousands of Brits now regularly gather in small clubs to dissect and appraise the latest novel. Chat show hosts Richard and Judy have been acknowledged as contributing to the boom, and their TV book club has had an undeniable impact on the bestsellers lists. Bookstore chains and even supermarket giants have tried to mirror the initiative, promoting certain titles in their own 'clubs'. Critics grumble about the homogenisation of literature, about readers being directed, unwitting, by corporations.

Reading habits: some stats

Today, two-thirds of British adults read books; three decades ago only half did.

Around half the population reads a minimum of five books a year.
One in five read 20 or more.

Males aged between 16 and 24 are the least likely sector of society to read books.

A BBC RaW (Reading and Writing) survey in 2006 found that 69 percent of respondents considered reading a more important activity than sex.

Half of all Brits have a library card.

Cult following

Bede's Anglo-Saxon audience would have been tiny; clerics were about the only people who could read.

Caedmon follows his dreams

You might have heard how Paul McCartney dreamed *Yesterday*: he just woke up one day and there it was in his head. Something similar happened to Caedmon, the illiterate seventh century Whitby cowherd. He woke reciting the *Hymn of Creation*, an ode to God sung not in Latin but in the Englisc vernacular of the common Anglo-Saxons. It wasn't a one-off either; Caedmon gushed sacred verse until his death in 680. He's the first Old English poet whose work has made it to modern day. Most of the surviving literature from the Anglo-Saxon period was written instead in the missionaries' Latin. And the most famous Latin scribe – indeed, the one who devoted a whole chapter to Caedmon – was Bede, or the 'Venerable Bede' as he's known to generations of British schoolchildren. The most famous of Bede's 60 or so books, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*) (731), was an engaging, humanised – albeit Anglo-Saxon-centric – account of British history up to 730.

Beowulf: an Old English epic

Old English was rarely committed to parchment, but brought to life instead by the great oral tradition, by bards who learned stories by rote. The poems, usually devoid of rhyme but packed with alliteration, were didactic affairs about heroic individuals, biting tragedy, faith and the vagaries of fate. The longest, most rewarding survivor is *Beowulf*. Set on the Baltic coast in the sixth century, it's an epic tale of monsters and dynasties, a violent introduction to the Scandinavian folk that would sail west and take up residence in Britain. Beowulf, the heroic, virtuous king of the Geats kills the monster Grendel and its mother, and later lays down his own life to quell a fire-breathing dragon. Whoever wrote it down in the tenth century had a remarkable talent for plot development, elegiac atmosphere and stirring tone.

"THEY HAVE SEEN
MY STRENGTH FOR
THEMSELVES, HAVE
WATCHED ME RISE
FROM THE DARKNESS
OF WAR, DRIPPING
WITH MY ENEMIES'
BLOOD."

Beowulf

Stirring stuff from Ulster

Across the Irish Sea, the storytellers of Ulster had their own epic. The *Ulaid Cycle* (or *Ulster Cycle*) told of Irish legends from the time of Christ. Recorded in Old and Middle Irish between the eighth and 11th centuries (and, unlike *Beowulf*, written largely in prose), the sagas swirled mystically around King Conchobar mac Nessa whose court in County Armagh rapidly filled with the body parts of defeated enemies. His nephew, Cú Chulainn, a bit like Achilles but without the heel issues or the suntan, provided the heroics. The *Ulaid Cycle* was greedily mined by Irish writers eager to establish a pre-British folklore for Ireland in the Gaelic Revival of the late 19th century. In particular, W.B. Yeats wrote plays and poems based on the legends, most famously for the cycle's great love tragedy, *Derdriu*.

Early Welsh war correspondents

Y Cynfeirdd, as early Welsh poetry is known, evolved from the seventh century onwards. As per the coverage of the Welsh language in the Anglo-Saxon period, the verse comes from northern England and southern Scotland as well as Wales. The Celts had similar literary preoccupations to the Anglo-Saxons – mysticism, loyalty and battles. Taliesin, a sixth century poet who used his verse to praise various kings, is a name that survives. Another is Aneirin, author of *Y Gododdin*, an epic recount of the Battle of Catraeth, a showdown between Celtic Britons and Anglo-Saxons.

In English please: literature in the Middle Ages

After the Normans arrived in Britain, their thriving literature usurped the Old English variety. As the language of intellect, French was used in poetry and prose, with Latin reserved for law-making, religion and the like. However, English fought back, resurfacing a

Dirge anyone?

Elegies were important to early English poetry. *The Exeter Book*, a manuscript of poetry copied in about 940, contains some of the best, most famously *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, both short, mournful laments on the fleeting nature of life. The elegy would become a trusted friend to British poets in later centuries. W.H. Auden was directly inspired by *The Wanderer*, offering his own version in 1930. American Ezra Pound did the same for *The Seafarer* in 1912.

Old English, the new Latin
King Alfred was important to the emergence of Old English as a literary language. He steered the translation of historic Latin texts into English, notably Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, even doing some of the translating himself. He also wrote poetry in the heroic tradition and oversaw the start of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a record of English history maintained right through to the 12th century.

Geoffrey, maker of myths
Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote the impressively inaccurate *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain) (c.1138). Completed in Latin, it became the major inspiration for the Arthurian legends that did the literary rounds of Europe over subsequent centuries.

couple of centuries later as Middle English, tinged with French and Latin. With it came the first literature that modern day Brits can just about read. The so-called *romans*, French medieval love poems, found their Middle English variant, often shaped around Arthurian legend, while the traditions of heroic poetry found new subject matter as the Crusades set forth. Hagiographic literature was also produced in large quantities, as were biblical stories retold. The 14th century saw a revival of the alliterative poetry common to bards of the Old English era. John Gower took things forward in lengthy, moralising poems that played with syllables and couplets (octosyllabic couplets no less) in English, French and Latin; he often used morally corrupt characters to get his message across, as in *Confessio Amantis* (c.1386-93). His good friend Geoffrey Chaucer borrowed the technique for *The Canterbury Tales* (c.1387-1400). It's worth mentioning that the only people able to read all this literature moved in courtly circles; the masses didn't learn to read for another 500 years.

Five big literary works of Middle English

Piers Plowman (1367-70). William Langland's alliterative dreamy poem espoused piety, offering social commentary on the side.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (late 14th century). Influenced by the French *romans*, this anonymously penned Arthurian poem sees Gawain manfully battling temptations of the flesh and a virescent knight.

Pearl (c.1370). Pearl is all heavenly visions. The unknown author, distraught at the death of his two-year-old daughter, Pearl, decides to join her in Paradise.

The Canterbury Tales (c.1387-1400). More storytelling, but Chaucer's ragbag of characters broke new ground in characterisation and subtlety. For many, the founding work of modern English literature.

Le Morte d'Arthur (1470). Arthurian legend resurrected once more along French models but written in fine Middle English prose by Sir Thomas Malory.

The first great author of English lit

Geoffrey Chaucer was the first author to show how much the English language could achieve with literature. He wrote of love and its agonies in *Troilus and Criseyde* (c.1385), using the characterisation and scene-setting that later jumped off the pages of *The Canterbury Tales*. By the time he died in 1400, he'd been writing the unfinished *Tales* for 13 years. The stories, interrelated and written in rhyming couplets, drew on the London of Chaucer's era. Characters, backpacking dutifully from Southwark on their way to adulate Becket at Canterbury, were examined not simply for their piety (or lack of it) but also for their place in 14th century society. The tales – of the miller, the prioress, the knight and 21 others – would speak to contemporary readers with their habits, beliefs and earthy pleasures. Some were even painted with irony, even while moral judgements are left to the reader.



Chaucer hits the barrel

Edward III clearly liked Chaucer; he granted the poet a gallon of wine per day for life in reward of some unrecorded feat.

Press release

William Caxton introduced the printing press to Britain in 1476. He printed Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and helped speed the growth of English prose.

Three female authors of Middle English

Marie de France. She was French (it's in the name see) but lived most of her life in England, writing rhyming couplets in Anglo-Norman. Her major work was *Lais* (late 12th century), 12 Breton tales of courtly love.

Julian of Norwich. Julian was dying, aged 30, when a miraculous vision intervened and inspired a profound, perceptive volley on faith and, in particular, sin; *Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love* (c.1393) gathered her near-deathbed visions.

Margery Kempe. The wandering King's Lynn housewife (she travelled to Jerusalem, Rome and Poland) dictated her thoughts on life (she was illiterate), notably childbirth (she went through it 14 times) and wild lust. Read all about it in the *Book of Margery Kempe* (late 1430s). Some have called it the first autobiography in English.

"A! FREDOME IS
A NOBLE THING!"
From John Barbour's
The Brus

Scottish makars and the Welsh Shakespeare

There's a paucity of surviving medieval text from Scotland. John Barbour's *The Brus* (1375), a long verse about King Robert Bruce, is the first major work. A similar effort on William Wallace (*The Actes and Deidis of the Illustre and Vallyeant Campioun Schir William Wallace*) (c.1460) came from the quill of Harry the Minstrel a century later. A group of professional poets in the royal Scottish court began writing in Scots in the second half of the 15th century, apparently inspired by *Kingis Quair* (c.1424), an allegorical *romans* poem sometimes ascribed to James I. In Scotland the court poets are known as the *makars*, in England as the Scottish Chaucerians. The term *makar* lives on in Scotland, given to the national poet as appointed by the Scottish Parliament.

In Wales the *Beirdd y Tywysogion* or Poets of the Princes wrote in the 12th and 13th centuries, gathered in a guild that performed for (and gushingly praised) the Welsh nobility. When the English Crown absorbed Welsh kingdoms in 1282, bards wrote instead for their lords, praising their military prowess, breeding and all round greatness, but also branching out into love and satire. They became known as the Poets of the Nobility or *Cywyddwyr* poets, named for the *cywydd* meter in their work. Dafydd ap Gwilym was the best. No doubt inspired by the French *romans*, he wrote about love, the natural world and the general stuff of mid 14th century life. He placed himself at the centre of his verse. In *Cywydd y Gal*, for example, he waxed lyrical about the properties of his own penis. The Welsh still regard him as their very own forerunner to Shakespeare.

2.13 From sonnets to novels: literature grows up

Britain chews on the Renaissance

Britain's Renaissance began a century after Italy's, and literature, not the visual arts, was the main beneficiary. The Reformation was key: as man's relationship with God evolved, creativity explored the changes. Writers pondered their own place in the grand scheme of things, weaving in the expressive humanism that was reviving the spirit of Antiquity on the Continent. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) explored these ideas in prose but the greatest literary advances came in poetry. Poets took up Chaucer's mantle using the sonnet, a 14-line verse form pioneered by early Italian Renaissance word mogul, Petrarch. English writers mimicked Petrarch's idealised love poetry and, as the 16th century grew old, wrapped classical allusions and contemporary concerns in increasingly innovative language. Sonnet writing in the Elizabethan and Jacobean era wasn't the preserve of 'authors' – writing poetry was evidence of your Renaissance Man/Woman credentials, so the likes of Walter Raleigh and even Queen Elizabeth herself had a go, while Shakespeare saw poems, not plays, as his path to acceptance among the literati.

Sir Thomas Wyatt, suspected lover of Anne Boleyn, introduced the Petrarchan sonnet to England in the early 16th century.

Super sonnet: three masters of the 14-liner

Philip Sydney. The exemplar Renaissance Man (knows his Classics, and loves, fights and dies heroically) wrote the first great home-grown sequence of Petrarchan sonnets, *Astrophel and Stella* (1580s), packed with imagery for the telling of unhappy love.

Edmund Spenser. Spenser's unfinished *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), the most significant piece of Elizabethan poetry, mixed mysticism and a classical awareness with contemporary issues like religion, sexuality and politics. The title alluded to Elizabeth I.

William Shakespeare. His 154 sonnets exploring power and love used both the Petrarchan mode and a new verse arrangement introduced by Sydney. Shakespeare also wrote longer poems like *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594).

Prose in the Renaissance

While Renaissance prose was overshadowed by poetry, a few notables did emerge. They used the classical spirit of the era. John Lyly wrote *Euphues, The Anatomy of English Wit* (1578) a florid romantic treatise-cum-novel that gave England its first encounter with 'euphemism'. However, Francis Bacon was the major contributor. His thoroughly readable *Essays* (1597) chewed on the day's gristle, from revenge to gardening, forever questioning the established order. (See section 2.2. for more on Bacon.) Other Renaissance prose included 'behaviour' manuals for the aspiring gentleman, satirical pamphlets lampooning the clergy or conjuring low-life colour (so-called coney-catchers) and travel literature about the great explorers. The *King James Bible* (1611) was also significant as a triumph of translation and linguistic dexterity, finally confirming English, not Latin, as the language of British literature. The spread of English and the lack of a Lallans translation of the Bible stunted the spread of Scots as a literary language.

Not the Donne thing
Donne's poetry fell from favour within 30 years of his death in 1631, derided as uncouth. He remained neglected until the early 20th century when T.S. Eliot led a reappraisal of his talents. Some now view him as the most expressive of British pre-Romantic poets.

Name games
The metaphysical poets were labelled so by Samuel Johnson, a good century after most of them were dead. He intended the term as an insult.

"NO MAN IS AN
ISLAND, INTIRE
OF IT SELFE"
John Donne,
*Devotions upon
Emergent Occasions*
(1623)

Brilliant conceits: the metaphysical poets

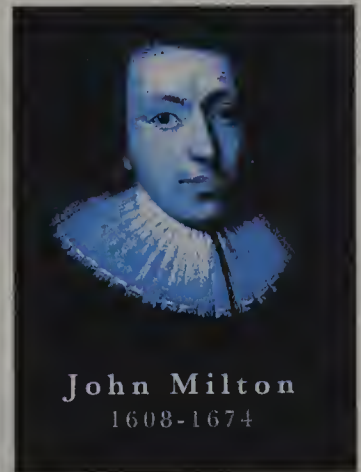
The sonnet was joined by something more challenging in the early 17th century when the metaphysical poets jumped in with a wordy, witty formula of elaborate imagery, using unconventional metaphor (the *conceit*, as it's known) to jolt the reader into some new, vivid realisation on man and his place in the world. The soul could be compared to a drop of dew, while the two legs of a compass are like husband and wife, sometimes separate but always joined. It didn't always make for easy reading, particularly when they messed around with rhythm. John Donne was the main man, employing the *conceit* to great effect in *Songs and Sonnets* (early 17th century), a collection of sensorial love poems that jarred with the conformity of most Elizabethan verse. Donne, who ended his years as dean of St Paul's Cathedral, also wrote emotive religious verse and amassed an influential collection of sermons. George Herbert, whose *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633) revealed a talent for clever metaphor if not poem titles, was another metaphysical poet.

The King's men

By the time Charles I was king, poets were reining themselves in, reacting against the luxuriance of the Elizabethan bards and the intricacies of the metaphysical poets. In the royal court a small group of Cavalier Poets emerged, taking a restrained, classical but light approach to love and honour, as pioneered by the Jacobean playwright and poet, Ben Jonson. Robert Herrick, a vicar, was the prime mover among the Cavalier Poets, writing about the political strife of his time (Civil War was raging). "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may", he urged in *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time* (1648).

The human touch: John Milton

England's Renaissance closed with the greatest poet of them all, John Milton. An unconventional Puritan, he wrote pamphlets slating the high clergy during the Commonwealth years and, most famously, *Areopagitica* (1644), an attack on censorship. He worked for Cromwell for a while, and even wrote about the import of beheading Charles I; choices that saw him briefly imprisoned after the Restoration. His poetry carried the humanist touch of an extensive Classical education. *Paradise Lost* (1667), all 12 books of it, was his masterpiece. As the name suggests, it explores Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden and Satan's part (almost heroic under Milton's pen) in the whole sorry affair. Like Milton's subsequent poems, *Paradise Regained* (1671) and *Samson Agonistes* (1671), the work was written in blank verse. Milton's poetry was hugely influential, particularly among early 19th century Romantics; William Wordsworth exalted his talents while Mary Shelley kicked *Frankenstein* off with a quote from *Paradise Lost*.



Milton went blind in 1654. He dictated *Paradise Lost* to his third wife (the previous two died).

Classical restraint: literature in the Augustan Age

Milton was among the last to champion Renaissance values. Other writers in the Restoration period followed the neo-Classical spirit of restraint drifting over from France, replacing the free flamboyance of Donne and Spencer with moderation, rationale and taste along Greek and Latin lines. Observers drew parallels between Charles II and Emperor Augustus, basking in post-Republican calm, and duly dubbed it the start of Britain's Augustan Age, now deemed to stretch, with its appreciation of Ovid, Virgil and other Augustan writers, into the mid 18th century. It wasn't a golden literary age – drama shone brighter.

The three Restoration writers you should know about

John Dryden. Charles II's Poet Laureate was also a playwright and critic. He dived headlong into the satire of the Augustan Age, scything away at politicians or the Catholic Church with a clarity that few contemporaries matched. The allegorical *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), commenting on Charles II's dealings with an errant son, was his best. The Restoration period has been called the Age of Dryden.

John Bunyan. Preacher man Bunyan wrote most of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (published in two parts, in 1678 and 84) in prison, serving time for bible thumping without a licence. It's a moral allegory about the path to heaven, the dreamy tale of Christian, a pilgrim who leaves his family in the City of Destruction and travels through Vanity Fair, the Valley of the Shadow of Death and other tourist hotspots on his way to the Celestial City. Written in a simple prose at odds with the Augustan Age, it was enormously popular. Its language and characters became part of the English lexicon.

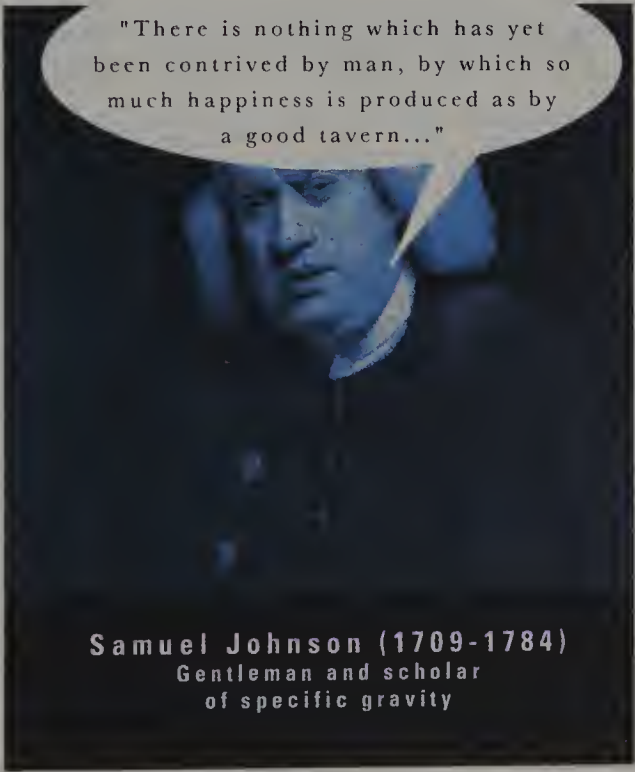
John Wilmot. Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, was like the Anti-Bunyan. His poetry drew on the metaphysicals, the Cavaliers and the Augustans, cooking them up in sexually liberated satire. He lampooned the social and moral stricture of the post-Renaissance age with impressive wit. Wilmot was sacked as a court poet when he wrote about the King's obsession with sex in *A Satyr on Charles II*. Partisan biographers said Wilmot was drunk for five years solid and discussed his religious conversion on a syphilitic deathbed, aged 33.

On good form: Pope and Johnson

The Augustan spirit reached its height in the first half of the 18th century led by poet Alexander Pope. Like Dryden a generation before, Pope translated the Greek classics, and then pushed the limits of poetry with technical skill. The *Rape of the Lock* (1712-14) fell into the mock-heroic genre, its verse about a chopped lock of hair expertly satirising the bumptious world of the drawing room. His critiques were perhaps more entertaining than his poems: *An Essay on Man* (1732-34) revealed a caustic wit. Literature's conservative, neo-Classical phase continued into the later 18th century under the guidance of Samuel Johnson – that's Dr Johnson to you. He fought the rising tide of Romanticism with Pope-like poetry but is best remembered for his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

Bard boy Wilmot on film
The 2005 film *The Libertine* was based on the life of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Johnny Depp stepped into the breeches. 'He didn't resist temptation. He pursued it', read the poster blurb.

Sam's log
Samuel Pepys, Clerk of the King's Ships, wasn't a literary figure as such but has become known for his *Diary*, kept between 1660 and 1669. The codified content was only deciphered in 1825. In the age of the Great Fire and the Great Plague he recorded the details of London life, from the streets to the royal court.





Robbie the playboy
bard of farming
Scotland's Favourite Son,
the Bard of Ayrshire,
the Heaven-Taught
Ploughman or just plain
old Rabbie, was a bad
farmer turned good poet.
His first anthology of
poetry, *Poems, Chiefly in
the Scottish Dialect*
(1786), would, he hoped,
pay for emigration to
Jamaica. It made him a
star overnight and he
stayed put, although
his farm went out of
business and he took a
job instead as a taxman.
Burns was a bit of a
looker by all accounts
(one of which was
written by Walter Scott)
and had a string of
relationships that bore
15 children, only nine of
whom were by his wife.
His wicked humour and
disdain for authority
were well documented.
He died in 1796, aged
37, from rheumatic heart
disease.

Keeping it rural: the Scottish poets

While England enjoyed its Augustan Age, Scottish writers carved a tradition of pastoral poetry that revived vernacular Scots literature in the mid 18th century. Allan Ramsay wrote poems and plays and gathered collections of old Scots verse, and later Robert Fergusson created poetry in the rustic mode, all excited about farming and, later, the street life of Edinburgh in *Auld Reekie* (1773). He committed suicide, aged 24, but Fergusson's pastoral style had done enough to have a profound effect on Robert Burns, usually recognised as Scotland's national poet.

Burns wrote in both Lallans Scots (see section 1.3.1.) and English (often within the same poem), bringing sublime imagery and a rare lyrical touch to his rural verse. He explored the grit of Scottish life in a way that Augustan sensibilities seemed to proscribe south of the border, while still enjoying the neo-Classical taste for satire. *Tam o' Shanter* (1791) told of a drunk Ayrshire farmer's encounter with a witches' coven, while *To a Mountain Daisy* (1786) laments a flower crushed beneath his plough. Burns also reworked old Scottish songs and ballads, most famously rejuvenating *Auld Lang Syne*. In Ulster they had their own Burns, a poet called James Orr. One of the Weaver Poets, a group of textile workers writing in the Ulster Scots language,

JD Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* took its title from a line by Robert Burns.

"THE BEST LAID SCHEMES O'MICE AN' MEN,
GANG AFT AGLEY,"
wrote Burns in *To a Mouse* (1785), fed up about
destroying a field mousenest while out ploughing.

Orr wrote of rural life in his native Ballycarry but also produced verse on the failed Irish Rebellion of 1798. He fled to America, fearing punishment for his own role in the uprising.

A first tryst with the novel

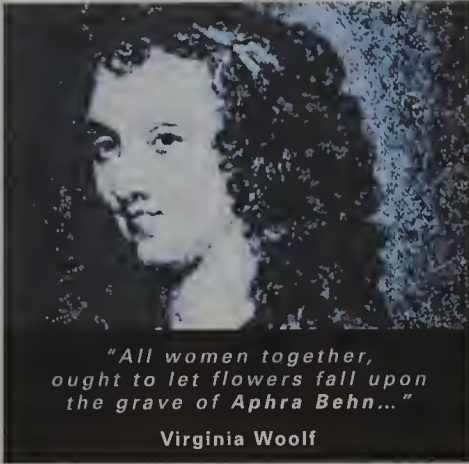
In the 18th century a growing upper middle class, in particular its female portion, declared its preferred literature to be the novel. Critics sneered. Only the explosion of the Romantic novel a century later brought prose fiction credibility among the literary old guard. The content of those early novels was sometimes exotic, but more often dealt with behavioural stuff, with a polite, urbane society that would have been readily recognised by readers and was befitting of Augustan Age protocol.

The three 18th century novels you should read

Robinson Crusoe (1719) Daniel Defoe. The eponymous traveller survives a shipwreck while transporting slaves and spends 28 years on a tropical island.

Clarissa (1747-48) Samuel Richardson. Richardson's disturbing epistolary novel on the duping of its heroine by a malevolent suitor explored the roles of the sexes.

The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749) Henry Fielding. The picaresque tale of a cheeky, philandering young man in search of his true inheritance has a moral, neo-Classical conclusion.



Early British novels

Early British novels were enlivened by a raft of very good female authors. Aphra Behn, a former royal spy stationed in the Netherlands, wrote *Oroonoko* (1688), a daring indictment of the slave trade and the Christian colonisers, a good three decades before Defoe allegedly wrote the first English novel. She faced frequent accusations of immorality in relation to her writings for the theatre,

charges related more to her sex and political leanings than any actual lewdness. Delarivière Manley faced similar prejudice. She wrote *The New Atlantis* (1709), a racy *roman à clef* that ripped into various high profile figures, most of them Whigs. Manley's bigamous marriage to her cousin probably didn't help limit the backlash, although the book sold very well. Later in the 18th century Fanny Burney scored a huge, initially anonymous hit with *Evelina* (1778), an epistolary novel of manners of the type that Jane Austen later made her own.

Enlightened time in Scotland

Scotland took a more active role in the 18th century Enlightenment than England. Indeed, the Scottish Enlightenment carries its own distinct identity. It was more about philosophy than literature (see section 2.2. for more), but a few notable tomes emerged, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1768-71) among them. Novelist Walter Scott caught the tail end of the Scottish Enlightenment but became more associated with the Romantic era (see section 2.1.4). The Enlightenment also bore Scotland's first big name novelist, Tobias Smollett, author of *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771), a picaresque satire on the Union with England. Smollett would prove a big influence on Charles Dickens. Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) was another important early Scottish novel.

234 The Romantics and the realists

Emotional lives: the Romantic Age

If the Augustan Age discussed order, refinement and progress in muted tones, the Romantic Age cried out for disobedience. Literature, poetry especially, turned on the emotion, looking for the inconsistencies of individual expression that were getting lost in Britain's newly mechanised society. Writers saw the human soul represented in the natural world, questioned society and spoke for the common man. The 40 years from 1790 duly turned into a lustrous period for British literature.

ALL THINGS THAT
IN THE HUMAN
IMAGINATION
LIVE

William Blake

Two schools of thought. Romantic poets

The Romantic poets came in two waves. Both were initially inspired by the French Revolution and its implications for personal freedom, but soon became disenchanted with the realities of regime change across the Channel. The first wave cherished the individual, blurred reality, enjoyed the exotic and mystical and lauded the elemental, natural world. Some used the language of everyday life. The second generation were angrier, more cynical about the hierarchies that limited individual expression. And yet they also voiced great hope for the human soul and its capacity for love.

Romantic poets: the first wave

William Blake wrote illuminated poetry, brilliant in its symbolism. A first volume of verse, *Songs of Innocence* (1789), explored the joys of nature; a second, *Songs of Experience* (1794), returned darkly to the same poems (the French Revolution had just gone sour). Longer poems condemned tyranny, instead touting a mystical freedom of the human spirit. Blake, son of a stocking maker, eulogised today, wasn't appreciated in his own time, and scraped a living as an engraver.



Two for the price of one
Lyrical Ballads (1798)
collected some of the
best early work by
Wordsworth and
Coleridge. Initially
ridiculed, today the
volume is seen as the
landmark early work of
British Romanticism.

The punk poet
Samuel Taylor
Coleridge's best poems
were done and dusted in
three years, the period
when he was closest to
William Wordsworth.
A clergyman's son, he
dropped out of Jesus
College, Cambridge, and
joined the army to pay
off drinking debts. As a
young man he planned
to found Pantisocracy,
a utopian society in
Pennsylvania, but it
never happened.
By his late 20s he was
addicted to opium and
his best poetry was
behind him.

William Wordsworth was more interested in the simple beauty of life. He drew a nebulous connection between the natural world and the human spirit. The path to understanding your own mind lay in the beauty of the world, from the clouds to the flowers. Everyday language and a focus on lowlife characters in poems like *The Old Cumberland Beggar* (1800) severed Wordsworth from the Augustan Age.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Where Wordsworth explored English beauty, his close friend Coleridge used more otherworldly settings. He didn't write much, but what he did was vivid and dreamlike. Early on he wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), a supernatural tale about an old sea dog who kills an albatross and suffers the consequent karma.

Romantic poets: the second wave

George Gordon, Lord Byron. The quintessential Romantic in word and deed, Byron raged against society's failings. The solitary heroes of his verse drifted moodily through the fractured world, weighed with guilt about some undisclosed misdeed. Childe Harold was the first, appearing in a series of *Pilgrimage* poems (1812-18). The unfinished *Don Juan* (1823) was Byron's best work, jabbing at hypocrisy and greed with its portrayal of the famous rake. Byron's influence was huge: Continental readers, in particular, relished his work.

Cutting louche

By the standards of any age, the sixth Lord Byron was a charismatic devil. He was always in the midst of some torrid affair, from the Greek boy of an early Mediterranean trip to the married women that caught his eye later on. He had a child by his wife, but soon tired of marriage and pursued a series of affairs. One spurned lover, Lady Caroline Lamb, who famously described Byron as "mad, bad and dangerous to know,"

accused him of incest with his half sister. The scandal forced Byron to flee Britain in 1816 and he never returned. He joined the Greek struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire, spending £4,000 of his own cash on refitting their navy, but died before he had the chance to fight.

I know what you did last summer
Byron, Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (soon to be Shelley's

wife) and another writer, John Polidori, spent the summer of 1816 together at the Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva. The creative vibes, encouraged by sullen weather and by Byron's suggestion that they all write a ghost story, bore Mary's *Frankenstein* and Polidori's *The Vampyre*, the first English portrayal of the naughty bloodsucker.

**Live fast,
die young**

Keats died from tuberculosis in 1821, aged just 25, while living in a house next to Rome's Spanish Steps.

Shelley drowned when his schooner, *Don Juan*, sank in a storm off the Italian coast in 1822, aged 29. Conspiracy theories abound.

When **Byron** died from a fever, aged 36, in 1824, Westminster Abbey refused to inter the remains of a man with such a scandalous reputation.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was the most politicised of the later Romantic poets. Brilliantly attuned to the tensions of the age, he was a rebel with multiple causes. Family, faith, monarchy and meat (he was a veggie): it all stirred Shelley's bile. He was kicked out of Oxford for championing atheism. *Queen Mab* (1813) hammered the clergy and the *Mask of Anarchy* (1819) called the working class to revolution after the Peterloo Massacre of 1819.

John Keats. The most sensuous of the Romantic poets wrote long narrative verse, rich with imagery. He used the perceived romance of medieval and classical times to explore love and beauty. Keats' *Odes* talked of transience and contrasts – of how love emerges from pain, life from death and sadness from joy. *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819) and *Hyperion* (1818-19) were among the highlights of a tragically short career.

Read all about me
Autobiographies – or salacious personal accounts at least – became popular in the later Romantic period. The psychologically engrossing *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* by Thomas De Quincey, one of the best, did exactly what it said on the cover.

Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley's mother, wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, often seen as the first great treatise of feminism.

Novelists in the Romantic era

Novelists in the early 19th century weren't as distinctively Romantic as the poets. Walter Scott packed his stories with conflict and heroism and carried aspects of Romanticism but was more significant for his huge popularity than his involvement in the genre. The period also nurtured Gothic Romantic prose. Ann Radcliffe established the appeal of psychological dread in novels like *The Italian* (1797), and Mary Shelley took it to new heights with *Frankenstein* (1818).



Jane and Walter: the novel's first superstars

In many ways Jane Austen clashed with the prevailing Romantic spirit. She usually avoided the big issues of the day – war in Europe, the rights of man and all that – and observed, instead, the minutiae of life in a narrow band of rural society. Expert at characterisation and the psychology of relationships, she conveyed emotions that readers could (and still can) identify with. A young woman was always at the heart of the story. It began with *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and ended with *Northanger Abbey* (1817), published posthumously.

Sir Walter Scott's novels came after a successful career writing narrative Romantic poetry. Unlike Austen, he didn't comment on contemporary society; he found his turmoil in the past, establishing the historical novel with his series of Waverley books, named after the first, *Waverley* (1814), about a turncoat English soldier in the Jacobite Rebellion. Scott also chose the Norman era (*Ivanhoe* (1819)) and the Edinburgh riots of 1736 (*The Heart of Midlothian* (1818)) for settings. His heroes were worldly wise, aware that life wasn't simply about trouncing the opposition and that big events impacted on small lives. Scott's novels made him the first living international star of literature.

Social services: Victorian literature

The flamboyance of Romantic literature was tempered by realism in the Victorian age, by the urge to deal more directly with the social issues of the day. With the novel in huge demand, authors turned their sights on the working classes. As the Victorian period wore on, the novel, echoing the timbre of the times, got darker, preoccupied increasingly with the seamier side of life and moral and social decay. Fiction became phenomenally popular. Novels, both good and bad, were devoured by the newly literate middle classes.

Books in bits

Victorian novels were often first published in monthly instalments, a trend started by Dickens. Serialisation made new work more affordable to more people.

Five(ish) Victorian novelists you should be reading

Charles Dickens. The pre-eminent Victorian novelist wove satire and caricature around serpentine plots. His 15 novels began with *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) and finished with *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), his style growing more sober and complex with age. Dickens picked at society's festering sores – in the workhouses, asylums and factories – tugging away at public scruples, but his prime talent was for characterisation. From the grotesque Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (1838) to the loveable Joe Gargery of *Great Expectations* (1861), his creations leap off the page, even now, 150 years on.

William Makepeace Thackeray. In Thackeray, Dickens had his closest rival. He too explored a form of realism and he too caricatured the upper middle class. Thackeray's writing also got darker as it matured. However, he highlighted social strife using a historical rather than contemporary setting, most famously in *Vanity Fair* (1847-48), set amid the Napoleonic Wars.

"OF ALL MY BOOKS, I LIKE THIS THE BEST"

Dickens on *David Copperfield* (1850), usually taken to be autobiographical

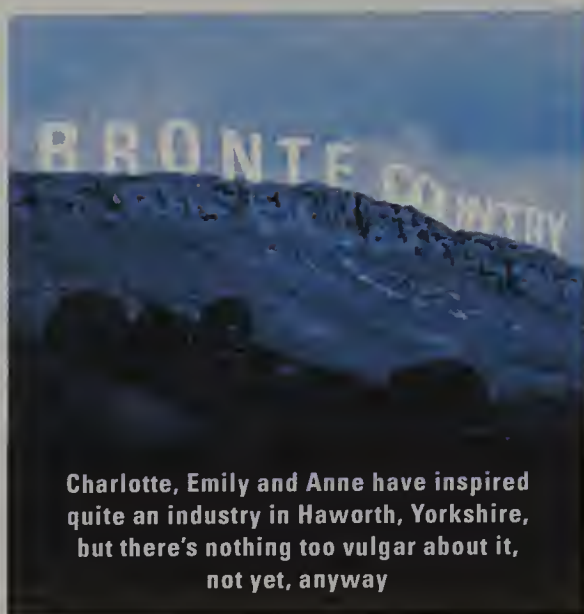
Dickens character falls short

Not everyone loved the way Dickens drew his characters from life. He received legal complaint from Mrs Seymour Hill, an employee of his wife, for whom Miss Mowcher, the dwarf chiropodist in *David Copperfield*, proved a little too familiar.

The Brontë sisters.

Dickens and Thackeray had a stab at the female psyche, but the sisters from Yorkshire really opened it up, even if they did have to

adopt male pseudonyms to secure publication. Each of their best novels – *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte (1847)), *Wuthering Heights* (Emily (1847)) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Anne (1848)) – recalled the Romantic tradition, with their love and despair, yet each also examined the realities of life.



George Eliot. No author picked the Victorian psyche apart quite like George Eliot (real name Mary Ann Evans). She wrote of provincial life, pushing realism forward with a rare grasp of human nature. *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1871-72) all pitted the individual, their strengths, failings and hopes, against the expectations and actualities of society.

Thomas Hardy. The Dorset novelist came later in the Victorian era, bringing a new degree of naturalism to the novel. His starkly sketched characters, fighting the fickleness of class, gender and bad weather in deepest Wessex, were hostages to fate. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) was Hardy distilled, its heartfelt study of an agrarian labourer enough to put anyone off love or farming for life. He gave up novels after critics called *Jude the Obscure* (1895) blasphemous and obscene, so damning was it of Victorian convention.

Dickens' voice of experience

Dickens was put to work in a London boot-blackening factory aged 12, pressed into service by his parents' dire financial straits. It didn't stop his father (whose spirit lived on as Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield*) being jailed for debt. Such beginnings informed Dickens' writing, although he apparently hated discussing his childhood. As a young man he worked as a journalist, submitting social sketches to *The Evening Chronicle* under the pseudonym Boz. From there he graduated to serialised stories. He and his wife, Catherine Hogarth, were never well suited, although they yielded ten children before going their separate ways. A mistress, the actress Ellen Ternan, took up the slack. Dickens cheated death in the Staplehurst rail crash of 1865, his being the only first-class carriage not to plunge off a bridge. He died of a stroke five years later. Dickens' appeal in his own lifetime eclipsed that of any previous author. And so it remains today; he's still regarded as the most popular of Britain's novelists.

They call him the Irish Dickens Ulsterman William Carleton picked through even grimmer subject matter than Dickens, relaying the details of rural life in 19th century Ireland, including the horrors of the Great Famine. Like Dickens, Carleton explored the human character to its dreadful depths and joyous heights. *The Black Prophet* (1847), published at the famine's height, was amongst his best.

First class Trollope
Novelist Anthony Trollope wrote around 3,000 words before breakfast each day and then went off to work for the Post Office. A man of many talents, he's credited with introducing the pillar box to Great Britain.

Victorian wonderland

While many Victorian authors tapped into society others did their best to avoid it, writing fantasy or adventure stories. Lewis Carroll was the most successful. The maths lecturer, real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, wrote

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), ostensibly for children but carrying enough satire and verbal wit for the adult. They were John Lennon's favourite books.

Ten Victorian novels to get your teeth into

Vanity Fair (1847-48) William Makepeace Thackeray. Orphan girl Becky Sharp pulls herself up the social ladder in Thackeray's satire on early 19th century England.

Wuthering Heights (1847) Emily Brontë. The most emotive of Victorian novels was an expertly structured maelstrom of love, anger and death. Stirring stuff.

Jane Eyre (1847) Charlotte Brontë. Jane negotiates a series of setbacks – fire, a mad wife locked in the attic and much more – to secure happiness with the dubious Mr Rochester.

Chronicles of Barsetshire (1855-1867) Anthony Trollope. A series of six novels set in the West Country with recurrent characters; the first great novel sequence of English lit.

Woman in White (1860) Wilkie Collins. Victorian Gothic horror par excellence, tinged with psychological realism and truly unpleasant baddies.

Great Expectations (1861) Charles Dickens. Humble Pip goes off to be a gentleman, but money and love aren't all he'd hoped for in one of Dickens' most twisting, didactic novels.

Middlemarch (1871-72) George Eliot. Multiple plots in a provincial Midlands town, linked by matrimonial strife and the constraints of class.

The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886) Robert Louis Stevenson. The dichotomy of good and evil masterfully coined in one hideous character.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891) Thomas Hardy. The best of Hardy's rural realism: a clever but poor woman is wronged and marginalised by various sanctimonious men.

Dracula (1897) Bram Stoker. Irishman Stoker wrote bits of the chilling epistolary tale in Whitby, setting for the appalling Count's arrival in Britain in a box.

Mythology, depression and some gentle whipping: Victorian poetry

Victorian verse was a motley affair. Much of it fed off Romanticism, still pursuing that emotive, highly subjective worldview. But there was social conscience in there too, its lugubrious voice seeking out the real world more directly than the Romantics ever did. Other Victorian poets, notably Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, wrote nonsense to great acclaim. Many of the era's prose authors got involved in poetry, Emily Brontë and Robert Louis Stevenson to name two.

Five Victorian poets you should have heard of

Alfred, Lord Tennyson. The titan of Victorian poetry played with the rhythm and sounds of words, creating dreamy, smooth verse. He borrowed the Romantics' imagery in long mournful monologues dealing with classical mythology and Arthurian legend, as in the *Idylls of the King* (1859-85). Tennyson's reputation nosedived after his death, although all agreed on the beauty of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1849), a haunting elegy to a dead friend.

"TIS BETTER TO
HAVE LOVED AND
LOST, THAN NEVER
TO HAVE LOVED
AT ALL"

In Memoriam A.H.H.,
Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Robert Browning. Browning took Tennyson's dramatic monologue to new intellectual heights. Using a range of characters (or 'masks'), Browning explored the darker side of human nature and society. *My Last Duchess* (1842), about a wife-murdering diplomat, was greedily received. Browning's style was deliberately clunky in comparison to the smooth intonation of Tennyson.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Better regarded by Victorians than her husband, Robert, Elizabeth poeticised the issues of the day and, particularly, how they affected women, but, like Mr B, used characters to mask her own voice. Her verse was often long; *Aurora Leigh* (1857), about a female author, has novel proportions. *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) chronicled her love for Robert.



Elizabeth Barrett Browning
Rome. February. 1859

Matthew Arnold. Arnold has been seen as the bridge between Romanticism and Modernism. He took the disillusionment of the later Victorian age to new depths, notably in the beguiling *Dover Beach* (1867), a harsh reflection on the state of modern life, relieved only by his hope for love. Part of it was written on his honeymoon.

Algernon Swinburne. Caught up in the Aesthetic movement and learning from the French Symbolists, Swinburne gave late Victorian poetry a sensuality and verve that embraced sadomasochism, death and atheism, all wrapped in eloquent rhyme. The critics weren't happy. *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) was his first big success.

In praise of Kipling

In 1907 poet, novelist and short story writer Rudyard Kipling became the first English language writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. He remains the youngest man to take the prize – he was 41. Kipling later rejected a knighthood and the Poet Laureate job.

In search of the new: Modernism

Writers in the early 1900s responded to the changing world. The old certainties of the universe seemed to have slipped: Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) was questioning the Old Testament, the cast-iron layers of society appeared suddenly fluid and Freud was poking around in the subconscious. It all contributed to the growth of Modernism and, in literature, to tireless innovation. British literature continued to flourish but most writers followed their own path, rarely beholden to any wider movement. Increasingly they turned inward, losing that confident, structured sense of the external world and dealing instead with the more personal experiences and emotions of the individual.

Five early 20th century novelists that stick in the memory

Rudyard Kipling. An Englishman born in Bombay, Kipling set his books during the Raj. Some have condemned his accounts of India under British rule as racist; others suggest he was being satirical. Most, however, are agreed on Kipling's gift for narrative. *The Jungle Books* (1894 and 95) and *Kim* (1901) were his best novels.

E.M. Forster. Forster's fluid prose framed England's failure to create colonial utopia in *A Passage to India* (1924). His earlier novels, *A Room with a View* (1908) and *Howards End* (1910), detailed clashes of a different kind, between protocol and abandon, materialism and spirituality.

Joseph Conrad. A Polish émigré who took British citizenship, Conrad brought his experiences of travel to the novel, exploring how the individual copes (or doesn't) with pressure. *Nostromo* (1904) and the novella, *Heart of Darkness* (1902), its dark jungle mirroring the soul, were thoroughly Modernist.

D.H. Lawrence. Tired of modern life and its materialism, Lawrence, like Forster, sought out the elemental. Human relationships, snubbing the codes of class and gender, filled his best novels, *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1921) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928).

Virginia Woolf. Woolf traded events and settings for the realm of the individual. She developed the avant-garde stream of consciousness technique: characters poured out inner thoughts (sometimes random, sometimes progressive) and generated a storyline of multiple parts. Sublime imagery bolstered novels like *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

'What a shining discourse on class'.

Oh, just read us the sexy bits...

Lady Chatterley's Lover, with its four-letter words and candid description of love between the aristocratic Constance and a lowly gamekeeper, was banned on publication in 1928. A well publicised trial in 1960 – E.M. Forster appeared as a witness for the defence – lifted the ban and the book was finally sent out to the shops. It sold out immediately, shifting 200,000 copies in one day. Within a year it had sold two million, outperforming the Bible.



The horror The horror
Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* follows a European sailor journeying into the African jungle to find the barbarised Mr Kurtz. The novella inspired Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam War film, *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

1. Introduction

Woking's favourite ex-resident (his Martians landed near town in *The War of the Worlds*), H.G. Wells, wrote his science fiction novels at the tail end of the 19th century but their Modernist slant was more at home in the early decades of the 20th. *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898) – not bad for three years' work – were, of course, imaginative chunks of science fiction, but they also pre-empted the Modernists' urge to rip up the old order, visualising new worlds, however bleak.

WHAT PASSING-BELLS FOR THESE WHO DIE AS CATTLE? ONLY THE MONSTROUS ANGER OF THE GUNS"

Anthem for Doomed Youth (1917),
Wilfred Owen



"There shall be in that rich earth a richer dust concealed..."
The Soldier by Rupert Brooke

The First World War poets

The First World War was sharply chronicled in poetry. It began well enough, with Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier* (1915) patriotically calling men to arms, but the mood blackened when Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen began writing about life in the trenches. Sassoon satirised the officers blithely sending thousands over the top in *The General* (1917), before Wilfred Owen, writing under Sassoon's tutelage in hospital, considered the wider futility of war in *Dulce et decorum est* (1917). Owen died in battle a week before the war's end.

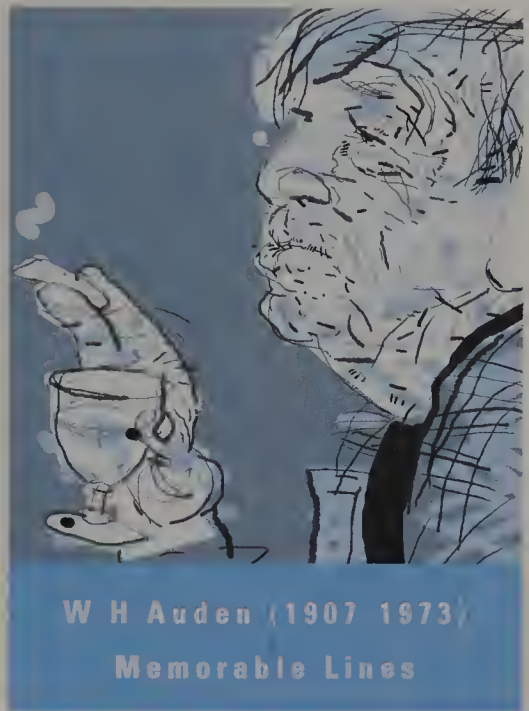
Turn left at the 1930s: the Auden Group of poets American-turned-Englishman T.S. Eliot dominated Modernism in early 20th century poetry. He expressed distaste for the industrialised world in *The Waste Land* (1922), using the symbolism of mythology in a hugely influential 'fragmented' poem that leapt wildly between settings and timeframes. A new generation of poets took Eliot's disenchantment forward in the 1930s, even if they didn't adopt his radical styling. The Great Depression and the rise of fascism gave them plenty to write about. Four (who earned the group nickname MacSpaunday) stood out:

W.H. Auden. He asked his audience to contemplate the times in which they lived; *Spain* (1937) pointed them in the direction of the Spanish Civil War, its implications and deeper questions of good and evil. In later life Auden took American citizenship and his elegant, fluid poetry swapped politics for religion.

Stephen Spender. Spender drew attention to the labour movement during the fiscal meltdown of the 1930s. In *Vienna* (1934) he threw the spotlight on a socialist uprising; in *The Pylons* (1933) he tries to comprehend the march of electricity across the landscape.

Cecil Day-Lewis. Lewis, a Communist through parts of the 1930s (MI5 kept a file), began with calls for greater social conscience before turning to more traditional themes. He wrote crime novels under the pseudonym of Nicholas Blake to fund his poetry. Much later, in 1968, he was made Poet Laureate. His son, Daniel, would win two Oscars for acting.

Louis MacNeice. Socially aware yet the least politically defined of the 30s poets, MacNeice was born and raised in Northern Ireland. His poetry was witty, his gift lying in the meld of childhood images and a sense of foreboding. The short but lyrical *Snow* (1935) was his most popular poem. He also wrote radio plays for the BBC.



Perry Howard, 2010

The Ilkley Literature Festival in Yorkshire has been going strong since 1973, when aging W.H. Auden was star speaker at the inaugural event. Auden didn't put on a stellar performance. Discovered in a cupboard clutching an empty bottle of whisky just before going on stage, he then read very quietly, refusing requests to speak up. Once the applause had died down at the reading's end he finally raised his voice to say: 'And now you can all fuck off'. With that he wandered off into the rainy night, apparently only stopping to tell a schoolboy with an autograph book to 'piss off'.

The great escapes

The Big Read survey conducted by the BBC in 2003 revealed J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as the 'Nation's Best-loved Novel'. Third place fell to another, albeit more recent, fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) by Philip Pullman. Terry Pratchett, another contemporary author in the fantasy genre, has sold over 50 million books, the bulk of which have been in the amusing, satirical Discworld series. When Pratchett was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease in 2007 he described the news as 'an embuggerance'.

Mid century mixed bag for the novel

Modernism never held a truly firm grip on the British novel. Instead, the mid 20th century (and the decades since) supported a wash of styles and themes. Some authors tackled political and social concerns, most plainly the rise of authoritarianism. Others, however, escaped to fantastical new worlds, like J.R.R. Tolkien in his sprawling trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55). Belfast-born C.S. Lewis (the C.S. lengthens out to Clive Staples but he was known to friends as Jack) spent most of his time writing books on theology (he was an Oxford don), but found fame with a science fiction trilogy based around the travels of an English linguist to Mars and Venus. Lewis confirmed his renown with the *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-56), a series of seven fantasy books, ostensibly ripping yarns for kids but containing a strong element of Christian allegory (which Lewis always claimed was secondary to the entertainment factor). Other writers followed the Victorian tradition and hoped merely to keep the pages turning; *Whisky Galore* (1947) by Scottish author Compton Mackenzie was a highpoint for popular literature. Daphne du Maurier (*Rebecca* (1938)), L.P. Hartley (*The Go-Between* (1953)) and P.G. Wodehouse (the *Jeeves* series (1919-74)) are all still widely read.

The three most influential novelists
of the mid 20th century

Evelyn Waugh. Waugh was deeply influenced by his conversion to Catholicism in 1930. Prior to that he ridiculed high society and public school life expertly in *Decline and Fall* (1928); afterwards the posh, decadent Catholics of *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) were endearingly human and redemptive. In both periods his work pulsed with satire. Waugh also wrote war novels like *Men at Arms* (1952), inspired by his Second World War commando days.

George Orwell. No author communicated post-war paranoia better than the man born Eric Blair in India in 1903. The allegorical *Animal Farm* (1946) pondered the pitfalls of Stalinism using a clique of power hungry pigs, while *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) commented more overtly on totalitarianism with its expertly coloured story of life with Big Brother and Newspeak.

Graham Greene. A Catholic like Waugh, Greene stuffed his novels with ethical paradoxes. His anti-heroes often seem close to salvation despite their flimsy morals; the first, Pinkie, central to Greene's formative novel, *Brighton Rock* (1938), was downright evil. Greene followed up with a series of thinking man's thrillers, each with its anxious, seedy setting and each with its stressed, morally lightweight protagonist. *The Power and the Glory* (1940) and *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) were amongst the best.

"IT WAS A BRIGHT COLD DAY IN APRIL, AND
THE CLOCKS WERE STRIKING THIRTEEN"

Opening line of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell

The writer, the whirlpool
and the one legged man
George Orwell wrote
Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949)
on Jura, an isle in the
Inner Hebrides. He nearly
died when his boat capsized
crossing the island's
treacherous Gulf of
Corryvreckan, famous for its
whirlpool. Orwell's brother-
in-law, Bill Dunn, a farmer
with one leg, smothered
himself in sheep fat and
became the first (and only)
person to successfully swim
the gulf...in 1984.



Waugh feels the burn
Evelyn Waugh's first big
publishing success, *Decline
and Fall*, recalled a short,
unhappy career in teaching.
He was sacked from one
teaching job for trying to
have his way with the school
matron, while another
posting pushed him to
attempt suicide. Waugh's
autobiography recorded how
he swam out to sea in a bid
to end it all but turned back
after being stung by a
jellyfish.

Philip Larkin

A 2003 survey by the Poetry Book Society named Philip Larkin as the nation's favourite poet. It also revealed Larkin's *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) as Britain's favourite poem.

Post-war poetry

UNIVERSITY
WELSHMAN
WELSHMAN A
OR IN A
THINK I AM A
LOVER OF THE
HUMAN RACE
ESTABLISHED
WOMEN

Straight talking from
Dylan Thomas

Booze in the past

Dylan Thomas regularly boasted of his capacity for ingesting booze.

Apparently he was an alcoholic from his teens and a regular, not always pleasant drunk presence in Swansea's pubs. He liked the notional lifestyle of the romantic, plastered poet. Alcohol is usually blamed for his death, aged 39, in New York, in the midst of a reading tour. However, one recent biography concluded that Thomas died not from the drink but from a physician's failure to diagnose pneumonia, instead prescribing a lethal dose of morphine to combat the DTs. Whatever the truth, the official cause of death was given as chronic alcohol poisoning.

Post-war poetry fights back

British poetry isn't the force it once was. In fact verse, the original voice of literature, has been steadily declining in popularity for the last century. Blame has been apportioned: the inaccessibility of Modernist poetry in the early part of the century and the unstoppable rise of the novel. However, a clutch of post-war poets have achieved greatness:

Dylan Thomas was the first. After the experimental Eliot and politicised Auden, Welshman Thomas expressed the joy and sorrow of life and the natural world with flamboyant metaphor. Lost innocence was often a theme, his inspiration drawn from childhood. Sometimes complex, almost surreal, but often pleasingly simple, his verse struck a chord. *Do not go gentle into that good night* (1951), written as his father lay dying, was among his finest poems. (See section 4.2.3. for more on Thomas.)

Philip Larkin, part of The Movement, a poetic collective bored with highbrow lit, reacted against Dylan and was dubbed anti-Romantic. Heavy with irony, his verse offered a down-to-earth appraisal of modern life in colloquial language but also tackled the big life issues, namely love. *The Less Deceived* (1955), Larkin's second collection of verse, cemented his reputation.

John Betjeman, at work from the 1930s to the 80s, was almost as popular as Larkin. Like Larkin he brought wit as well as an innate sorrow to nostalgic, accessible poetry about the everyday stuff of life.

Ted Hughes, who succeeded Betjeman as Poet Laureate in 1985, was less cosy. Collections like *Hawk in the Rain* (1957) were about wild, unsentimental

nature, selfish in its savagery. Later work, particularly the *Birthday Letters* (1988) that addressed his relationship with wife Sylvia Plath, whose suicide in 1963 many had blamed on Hughes, reached a wide audience.

Seamus Heaney, still writing today, is the most prestigious contemporary poet in the British Isles (from Northern Ireland, he became an Irish citizen in 1972). He began with rural Irish life in the collection *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) but moved on to write about the Troubles, albeit shot through with a mystical, Gaelic heritage, in the likes of *North* (1975). More recently, Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* (1999) was a bestseller. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

and six modern British poets you should know about

Roger McGough, one of the Liverpoolian 'pop poets' of the 1960s, remains popular for light, socially aware verse, even if highbrow critics are less moved.

Carol Ann Duffy writes of contemporary society with wit and accessibility. A recent collection, *Rapture* (2005), explores the progression of a love affair. Duffy's *Prayer* (1993) was recently voted the nation's second favourite poem.

Andrew Motion, the current Poet Laureate, is renowned for articulating destruction and loss. *Regime Change* (2003) voiced displeasure at the invasion of Iraq.

Paul Muldoon, from County Armagh, won a Pulitzer for *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002), typical in its experiments with metre, its puns and visions of his homeland.

THE POET LAUREATE
ONE PART OF BRITAIN'S
CULTURAL IDENTITY

Benjamin Zephaniah, of Jamaican descent, told *The Guardian* newspaper about being honoured by the 'Empire'

The national poet

English monarchs have always had their appointed minstrels but Charles II was the first to officially install a Poet Laureate. The latest incumbent, Andrew Motion, is the first to have a set term of office, ten years, instead of a job for life. The Welsh created a similar post in 2005. The National Poet for Wales holds the job for one year; Gwyneth Lewis was the first, and made her mark with the massive inscription on the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff. In Scotland they have the Scots Makar, a term drawn from court poets of yore and applied since 2004 to the national poet, appointed for three years by the Scottish Parliament. Scotland's foremost contemporary poet, Edwin Morgan, was a shoo-in for a first go at the job.

A 'BLOODY DISASTER'

Doris Lessing on winning
the Nobel Prize for
Literature in 2007

Dividing lines

Northern Irish novelists
in the later 20th century
were drawn inevitably –
but not exclusively –
to the themes of
sectarianism. Bernard
MacLaverty enjoyed
acclaim for books like
Cal (1983), a haunting
love story pushed and
pulled by the Troubles.
Before MacLaverty,
Brian Moore, a Belfast-
born novelist who spent
most of his adult life in
North America, dealt
with religious division
and alcoholism in *The
Lonely Passion of Judith
Hearne* (1955). But
Moore's oeuvre was
rangy; he also wrote the
screenplay for Alfred
Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain*,
an experience he hated,
likening it to 'washing
floors'.

Wendy Cope's witty observational verse has seen her
mentioned alongside Larkin and Betjeman. A debut
collection, *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis* (1986),
sold bucketloads.

Benjamin Zephaniah. A poet, novelist, singer and friend
to Nelson Mandela, Zephaniah has chronicled the life of a
black man in modern Britain with great insight and humour.

Post-war fiction: the ten writers to read first

Diversity has been the watchword of the post-war British
novel. Amongst the deluge of fiction unleashed over the
last 60 years much, of course, has fused itself to the
concerns of its era. So, *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) by
Martin Amis speaks of 1980s greed and Irvine Welsh's
Trainspotting of 1990s drug culture. However varied, any
half decent précis of later 20th century British fiction should
feature the following ten writers:

Kingsley Amis. Amis was associated with a movement of
sorts: the Angry Young Men that criticised post-war society.
His 'campus novel' (a genre set in universities) *Lucky Jim*
(1954) unveiled a caustic talent for satire. Later, his
treatment of a pensionable bunch of South Wales booze
hounds, *The Old Devils* (1986), won the Booker Prize.

William Golding. For Golding it was all about human
nature. Marooned kids in *Lord of the Flies* (1954) provided
searing allegory for man's darker traits. He too won the
Booker, for *Close Quarters* (1980), but also added the
Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983.

Muriel Spark. Spark spent 50 years picking at society,
darkly, wittily exploring good and evil. *The Prime of Miss
Jean Brodie* (1953), about an eccentric Scottish
schoolmistress, was disturbing and hugely popular.

Doris Lessing. She broke through with *The Golden Notebook* (1962), innovatively structured and hailed a feminist classic, and later wrote science fiction, a move that bore the *Canopus in Argos* series (1979-83). Nobel came knocking in 2007.

Iris Murdoch. Murdoch, a philosophy lecturer, brought rigorous intellect to novels exploring love, morality and tragedy amid everyday life. *Under the Net* (1952), about a struggling author, was her first; *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) won the Booker.

John Le Carré. Britain's leading spy writer, real name David Cornwell, has intrigued with complex, flawed characters since his first big success, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1963). *The Constant Gardener* (2001), a thriller, confirmed he still had 'it' four decades later.

Beryl Bainbridge. Early on she mixed morbidity with humour in *The Bottle Factory Outing* (1974), based on her own early adulthood, and later turned to historical fiction with *The Birthday Boys* (1991), based on Scott's trip to Antarctica.

Anthony Burgess. Burgess went on a creative bender when he hit 40, generating everything from literary criticism to symphonies. *Earthly Powers* (1980), reading like a review of the 20th century, may have been his best novel but *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) became more famous after Kubrick's film.

V.S. Naipaul. Born in Trinidad of Indian origin and resident in Britain since the early 1950s, Naipaul is noted for technically brilliant outspoken novels on colonialism. *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), about an anglicised Indian in the West Indies is considered his best. Has been knighted, Bookered and Nobelled.

Martin Amis. Kingsley's son, and heir to his brutal mockery, is loved and loathed in roughly equal measure. Martin broke through with *The Rachel Papers* (1973); *London Fields* (1989), set in a London faced with nuclear annihilation, also went down well.

**Murder matters:
five classics by
women crime
writers**

Dorothy L. Sayers

The Nine Tailors
(1934)

Agatha Christie

Death on the Nile
(1937)

PD James

Cover her Face
(1962)

Ruth Rendell

A Judgement in Stone
(1977)

Val McDermid

The Mermaids Singing
(1995)

Agatha Christie has sold roughly two billion (yes, two billion!) books. Only the Bible has clocked up more sales.

The magic of...

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels have sold more than 400 million copies. Late in 2007, a handwritten Rowling book, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, sold at auction for £1.95 million.

What's the latest for the novel?

British fiction has maintained its variety into the 21st century. Drug culture, ethnicity, science fiction, fantasy, religion, crime, history: whatever your bag, someone will be writing it and writing it well. For sheer weight of books sold, no one of late has come close to J.K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* series that held children and adults alike rapt until their conclusion in 2007 with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Other publishing success stories have burned more slowly; witness Louis de Bernières' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (1993), which showed how 'literature' could still find a wide, popular audience. Any list of great contemporary British writers will also feature (may even be topped by) Ian McEwan. He describes shocking life-changing incidents before dissecting the fallout in eloquent prose. Scottish author Iain Banks has carved a similarly peerless niche with imaginative, satirical anti-heroes, while countryman Irvine Welsh has waded through Scottish social murk in the likes of *Trainspotting* (1993). Zadie Smith (*White Teeth* (2000) and Monica Ali (*Brick Lane* (2003)) both explored multicultural London with brilliant, human stories. Others have poked around in history for their humanity: Pat Barker (*Regeneration Trilogy* (1991-95)) and Sebastian Faulks (*Birdsong* (1993)) used the First World War, while Sarah Waters plundered a seamy Victorian London for the crime novel *Fingersmith* (2002), connecting with a huge readership.



Three great
British book
prizes

The Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Britain's top book award includes authors from the UK, the Commonwealth and Ireland. Even getting on the shortlist will boost sales. The winner gets £50,000.

The Somerset Maugham Award. Initiated by Maugham in 1947, and awarded to an author under 35. The winner receives £6,000 to spend on foreign travel. Kingsley Amis (*Lucky Jim*) and John le Carré (*The Spy Who came in from the Cold*) both won it.

The Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction. Given solely to female authors since 1996; Helen Dunmore and Zadie Smith have both felt the benefit of the £30,000 cash award.

Five excellent 21st century novels

The Amber Spyglass (2000) Philip Pullman. Pullman's final instalment of *His Dark Materials*, the fantasy trilogy with an enormous popular following.

Atonement (2001) Ian McEwan. A teenage crush kick-starts a contemporary classic spanning seven decades.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time (2004) Mark Haddon. The narrator, a child with Asperger's syndrome, investigates a canine homicide.

On Beauty (2005) Zadie Smith. Race, class and infidelity through the eyes of two conflicting families, written, Smith said, in homage to Forster's *Howards End*.

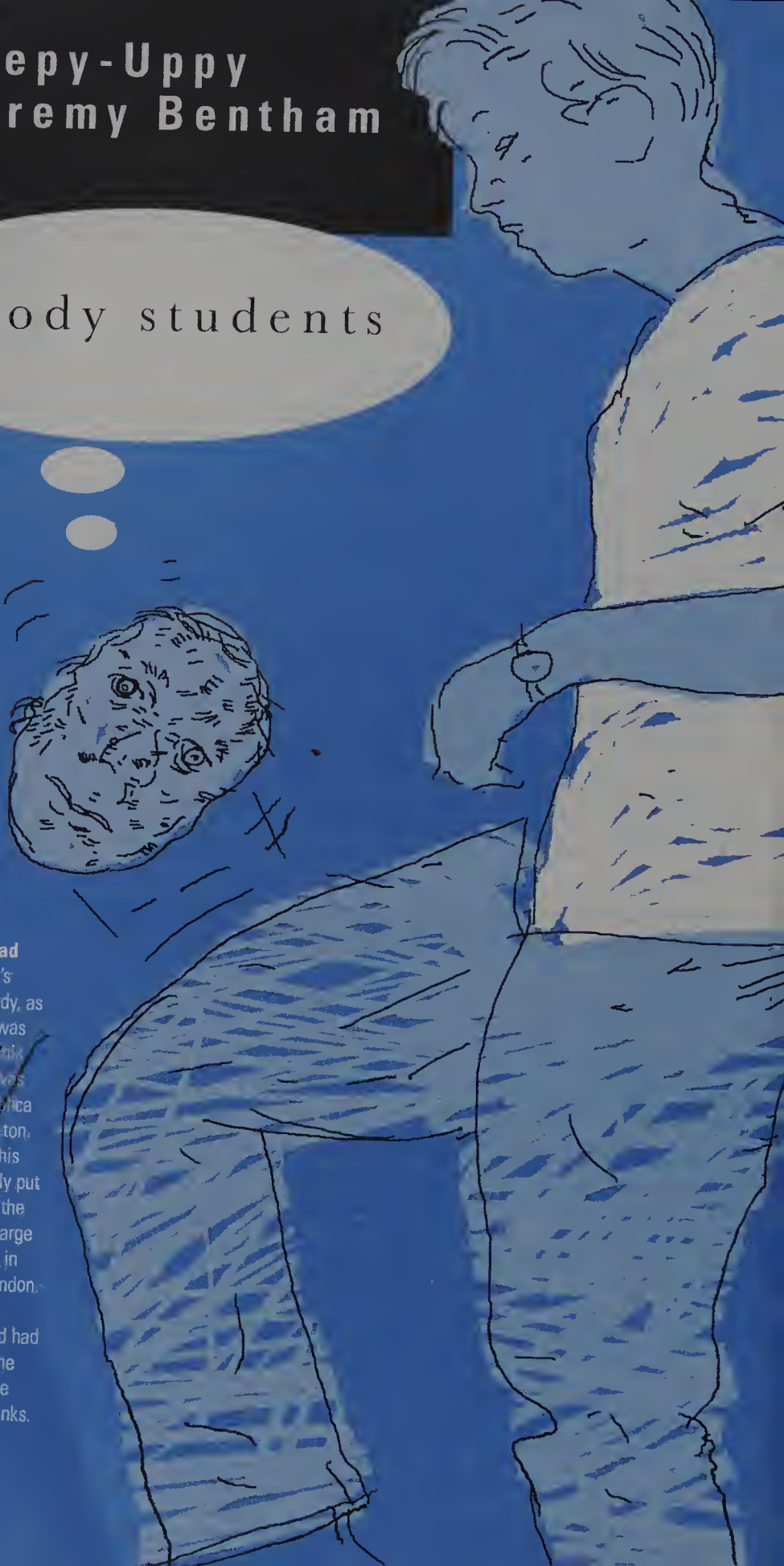
Labyrinth (2005) Kate Mosse. An adventure story that divides its time between modern day and Middle Ages France.

Keepy-Uppy with Jeremy Bentham

Bloody students

Bentham gets ahead

On Jeremy Bentham's death in 1832 his body, as dictated in his will, was dissected in front of his students. The head was shrunk and a wax replica placed atop his skeleton. This was dressed in his clothes and eventually put on display alongside the preserved head in a large glass-fronted cabinet in University College London. And there it remains, although his real head had to be removed from the cabinet because of the inevitable student pranks.



2.2 Philosophy

**Did you even know that Britain had
a back catalogue of great thinkers?**

**The likes of Hume, Bentham and Russell
are strangers in most British households.**

**Perhaps the French philosophers' guile
with self-promotion has obscured the
British talent for musing. It's a shame
because there's much to ponder.**

2.2.1 The greatest hits of British philosophy

Prime cuts: the Francis Bacon story
Francis Bacon entered Trinity College, Cambridge, aged 12 and was a regular in Queen Elizabeth's court by 15. He was knighted by James I in 1603 and had worked his way up to Lord Chancellor by 1615. Frequently in debt, despite his stature, Bacon was disgraced in 1621 after admitting to corruption and spent the rest of his life in the lonely pursuit of study. He didn't marry until well into his 40s, tying the knot with 14-year-old Alice Barnham after a three-year engagement. Bacon died of pneumonia in 1626, aged 65, apparently taken ill while stuffing a chicken full of snow, keen to investigate the preservative effects of cold.

The average Briton shows little appetite for abstract thought. The concept of 'philosophy' itself is remote to most – it feels irrelevant to real life, the preserve of dusty academics. Philosophy just isn't sexy. Perhaps the lack of strong British figures in contemporary philosophy is to blame. Yet there's much for the Brit to be proud of: go back over the last 500 years and you find the nation has produced cerebral giants, figures who shaped the Enlightenment, brought social reform and pushed civil liberties.

Science? Isn't that the devil's work?

If the French bow to Descartes as their paternal sage then Britain tugs the forelock for Francis Bacon. He was the first thinker to look much beyond the deductive Aristotle, turning instead to the inductive, empirical style that would become a consistent thread of British philosophy in the following centuries. Bacon demanded a methodical, scientific approach to life in an age when many still considered science heretical. He studied the world, working to establish a set of natural laws. And so Bacon's importance lay as much in devising a methodology for philosophy as for pushing any particular brand of thought. Indeed, he's often seen him as a key figure in the scientific revolution that shaped the modern era. His best work turned up in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *Novum Organum* (1620).

Hobbes' choice: do you want a punch-up or a dictator?
Like Bacon, his one-time personal secretary Thomas Hobbes questioned religion. He pushed determinism, suggesting that man has the freedom to do as he pleases; that he determines his own fate, even if God,

ultimately, is responsible for his creation. From this he inferred that all behaviour is based on self-interest, on survival. And this, he concluded, leads to interminable conflict (he was writing during the English Civil War period) unless we resign ourselves to the governance of some autocratic, unaccountable ruler (a compromise sometimes called Social Contract Theory). Hobbes duly proffered a secular state, dismissing the concept of rule by divine right. It all gushed forth in his major work of literature, *Leviathan* (1651), a book that saw him labelled the father of political philosophy.

Hobbes on tour

Hobbes went on several 'Grand Tours' around Europe in the early 17th century, meeting Galileo, René Descartes and Pierre Gassendi along the way.

You live and learn: Locke and the Empiricists

Bacon's inductive approach unfurled amid the wider growth of science – not least Isaac Newton's articulation of laws on gravity and motion – influencing the next generation of British philosophers in the 17th and 18th centuries. They became known as the Empiricists. Englishman John Locke was their first hero. Where Bacon, Hobbes and Newton envisaged laws of society and nature, Locke saw laws of knowledge. He proposed that everything we know, our 'ideas', aren't innate. Instead, they're acquired through experience, and that experience begins as sensory (what we see, touch etc) but is nurtured by reflection (what we come up with in our heads). This (in simplified form) is empiricism. Locke explained all in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). He also wrote anonymously but brilliantly on political theory, contradicting Hobbes with a progressive package of reason and tolerance, adding fuel to early Enlightenment fires and inspiring the likes of Swiss thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Northern lights: the Scottish Enlightenment

While England had Newton and Locke, Scotland had its own intelligentsia, an 18th century middle-class elite that featured writers (Robert Burns and Tobias Smollett), engineers (James Watt) and even geologists (James Hutton). The Scottish Enlightenment, as it became known, is also remembered for its philosophers. They were inspired by Francis Hutcheson, an Ulsterman working in Scotland, who was persuasive with his brand of moral philosophy, convinced that man could find the right path using an innate moral compass. The work of Hutcheson's disciples, squeezed into five decades from the 1740s, would have global repercussions, influencing the likes of Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx.

Three thinkers from the Scottish Enlightenment

"BEAUTY IS NO
QUALITY IN THINGS
THEMSELVES: IT
EXISTS MERELY IN
THE MIND WHICH
CONTEMPLATES
THEM."

David Hume

David Hume A generation after Locke came Edinburgh-born David Hume, posthumously recognised as the leading British philosopher of the 18th century, perhaps ever. He echoed Locke's Empiricist footfall, using the principles of empirical thought to open up the human mind. But for Hume, knowledge born of experience was unreliable. Habitual experiences and sensations lead us to predict or rationalise, to build 'causation', but genuine knowledge of what will actually occur in life is impossible. Hume conceded that we have to live by what we know of cause and effect (of what will probably happen), but a scepticism about the ability to actually prove anything underlay his philosophy. His moral philosophy talked a lot about perception: people are only as good or as evil as the individual perceives, and, taken to the extreme, the idea of the self (your own identity), the external world and God are subjective constructs.

He laid most of it down in the three heavy volumes of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), published to general disinterest in Britain but revisited later when Hume found fame in France as a key figure of the Enlightenment.

Adam Smith Smith was a polymath, better remembered today as an economist than as a philosopher. However, he was a close friend and ally to Hume, and began his progressive work with moral philosophy. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) he suggested people are guided in morality by an internal 'sympathy' for the emotions of others. He went on to write *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), a first recognition of the free market economy, fuel to Marxist fires and, many have said, the foundation of modern economics.

Thomas Reid Reid, a minister's son from Aberdeen, agreed with Hume that our ideas about life, self and the world are assumptive, based on reasoning that we can't actually prove. However, in conflict with Hume, his Common Sense school of thought decided that while we can't prove it through causation, the external world must exist as a concrete entity. It's there isn't it? We can see it, feel it and smell it. He made statements about the nature of life based on common sense: I am a conscious being; I have some control over my actions; nature follows certain predictable patterns. Read all about it in *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, published in 1764, the year he succeeded Adam Smith as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University.

Revolution of words

While the French took up arms with their Revolution at the end of the 18th century, in Britain the forces of social and political change chose pen over sword. They bore some landmark texts, most notably Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Wollstonecraft's husband, William Godwin, came up with the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793).

Morality and Utilitarianism

David Hume's later moral philosophy explored utility, the idea that actions are useful if they serve the greater good and happiness of society. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries the Utilitarian movement pushed the principle. Two Englishmen, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, got most involved. Bentham felt the pleasure of the individual to be dependent on the general happiness of society; so the best course of action in politics, economics or social reform is usually whatever pleases most people. In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) he suggested that pleasures should be quantified, weighed up before the right action could be taken. Mill diverged from Bentham slightly. He decided that it was the type of pleasure, rather than the quantity, that should determine decisions. Many of the Utilitarian movement also fell within the bounds of the Philosophical Radicals, a group led by Bentham that successfully pushed for social and economic reform in Parliament.

It's all in the mind: the Brits do Idealism

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries British philosophy was strongly swayed by Idealism, the thought mode that proved so potent in Europe a century before, directed by the Germans Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel. Idealism held that objects, places and time only exist when they're perceived. If you're not thinking about them, do they continue to exist? The name Idealism stems from this primacy for 'ideas' over physical realities. To some it sounded irrational, ungodly even, but it's a very hard philosophy to actually disprove. The British variant rejected,

among other things, Utilitarianism. F.H. Bradley was the big noise. Like Hegel, he placed mind over matter, asserting that we can only be certain of reality and everything that comprises it – what he called the Absolute – if it is known to the mind; independently, reality, or any part of it, doesn't exist. *Appearance and Reality* (1893) explained all. J.M.E. McTaggart was more extreme in *The Nature of Experience* (1927), suggesting that the mind alone exists. Everything else – time, space, cheesecake – isn't real.

Analytical philosophy and the mighty atoms

British Idealism faltered in the first decades of the 20th century. Reputations, most notably Bradley's, were crushed by an emergent generation of analytical thinkers. A reappraisal and renewed understanding of language was central to their work and, they felt, crucial to the development of thought. Be very careful about how you express your thoughts, they said, because the simple grammar used can have a huge bearing on what you're actually saying, making it ambiguous or imprecise. Bertrand Russell led the pack, dismissing metaphysics in favour of a philosophy that reduced everything down to its simplest components. In *Principia Mathematica* (1910-13) he attempted (but didn't quite manage) to show how all mathematics could be expressed in formal, logical terms. Russell also pursued logical atomism, suggesting that the world can be broken down into a series of basic facts, or 'atoms', from which everything can be constructed. G.E. Moore was another British analytical philosopher of the same era, keen on promoting common sense in the methodology of philosophy.

THE ANALYTICAL
PHILOSOPHY
OF
BERTRAND
RUSSELL
AND
G.E. MOORE
Bertrand Russell

My husband spent his
last years in prison
for his beliefs.
Bertrand Russell didn't lock himself away in academia. He got stuck into the 20th century, using his platform as a respected thinker and mathematician to lobby on humanitarian issues. In 1916 he was fined £110 and stripped of his Trinity College Fellowship for pacifism, but refused to pipe down and earned a six-month stretch in Brixton Prison two years later. Russell returned to prison for a week in 1961, aged 89, for stirring up the public at an anti-nuclear protest. He was soon back on his hobby horse, fulminating against the US role in the Vietnam War, Israeli aggression in the Middle East and human rights abuses in the Eastern Bloc. Other life achievements included meeting Lenin in 1920 (he wasn't overly impressed), winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950 and surviving a plane crash that killed half the passengers on a flight to Norway in 1948.

When the philosopher met the boxer

In 1987 the elderly, flimsily framed A.J. Ayer met Mike Tyson at a party. The story goes that the boxer was behaving deplorably toward a young model, Naomi Campbell, when Ayer stepped in and told him to desist. "Do you know who the fuck I am? I'm the heavyweight champion of the world," offered Tyson. "And I," responded Ayer, "am the former Wykeham Professor of Logic. We are both pre-eminent in our field. I suggest we talk about this like rational men." And apparently they did.

Three 20th century philosophers to chew on

A.J. Ayer Bertrand Russell's analytic philosophy travelled abroad, shaped the so-called Vienna Circle of thinkers and then returned to Britain in the shape of logical positivism under the guidance of A.J. Ayer. He published *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) at the age of 26, exploring the idea that philosophical problems are only meaningful if they can be solved by logical analysis. And so he attacked entire genres of thought like metaphysics and theology, and continued to do so through much of the 20th century.

Karl Popper An Austrian who took British nationality after fleeing the Nazis, Popper pushed his falsification theory. Preoccupied particularly with science, he argued that hypotheses could and should be falsified by simple observation; it only takes one contradiction to prove something wrong, but infinite agreements to prove it right. He was also renowned for work criticising totalitarianism, voiced in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945).

Isaiah Berlin Berlin, a Latvian Jew, came to London with his family as a child in 1921. Friend and rival to A.J. Ayer, he became known for his *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1959), a theory that revived British political philosophy with its distinction between negative and positive liberty. He pursued myriad lines of enquiry like a good pluralist, but the call for tolerance, for liberty, was a common factor, always coloured by the tumultuous century in which he lived. Later Berlin developed value pluralism, the concept that different values can conflict with each other yet still have equal validity.



3 Art, architecture and design

3.1. Art and design
p109

3.1.1. Foreign aid:
the early personnel of
painting *p110*

**3.1.2. Morals, mares
and mug shots:**
British art finally not-
serious *p111*

**3.1.3. Constable,
Turner and Blake:**
the golden age *p117*

**3.1.4. From cubes to
dead sharks:** art over
the last century *p121*

3.1.5. Mixed motifs:
the icons of British
design *p130*

3.2. Architecture
p135

**3.2.1. Picking through
the ruins:** ancient
British buildings *p136*

3.2.2. Built on faith:
the love of a good
church *p138*

**3.2.3. Castles, piles
and factories:**
the big builds *p144*

**3.2.4. In and out of
love with Modernism:**
20th century builds
p151

3.2.5. Home truths:
domestic architecture
and planning *p155*



Francis Bacon
1909-1992

**"CHAMPAGNE FOR MY REAL FRIENDS,
REAL PAIN FOR MY SHAM FRIENDS"**

3.1 Art and design

British art has often been undervalued,

labelled as conservative or imitative.

True, it was a slow starter, but talk of

underachievement, about isolated,

solitary artists, is exaggerated. In Turner

and Constable we find the first modern

artists no less, while contemporary

British art, with its knack for

conceptualisation, is in fine fettle.

3.1.1 Foreign aid: the early personnel of painting

British art: the key dates

1395 The Wilton Diptych shows how great British religious art was before Henry VIII got involved.

1632 Anthony van Dyck arrives in Britain and paints the aristocracy very well indeed.

1732 The first great British name of art, William Hogarth, creates *A Rake's Progress*.

1768 Portraitist Joshua Reynolds is the first president of the Royal Academy of Arts.

1821 The first great age of British art finds John Constable painting *The Hay Wain*.

1834 J.M.W. Turner paints the Houses of Parliament as they burn. Was it the birth of modern art?

1848 The pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of Painters set up their easels.

1945 Francis Bacon makes the first of his distinctive animalistic paintings.

1992 Damien Hirst's dead shark steals the Young British Artists' first show.

The primitives

They might not have hung it over the fireplace in a frame, but the Bronze Age Beaker People nevertheless made some of the first British art. They decorated ceramics and made ornaments from gold, silver and copper, rendering simple designs of horizontal bands. Often they buried their best work with the dead. Celtic art, produced around Britain from 500BC, was more sophisticated; its swirling curvaceous patterns in stone and metal were abstract – even cryptic – rather than figurative. Celtic art remained an important strand of British culture throughout the Middle Ages, particularly in Scotland and Ireland, making the transition to illuminated manuscripts in the seventh century and accruing elements of Christianity and Scandinavian design along the way. Texts like the *Lindisfarne Gospels* (c.715) established a tradition of Insular Art, a post-Roman style that blended Anglo-Saxon colour and animal forms with Celtic (in particular Irish) motifs in a manner largely unique to the British Isles. As for the Romans, they brought their figurative Classicism but little survives in Britain bar the odd bust and mosaic.

Begged, borrowed and stolen: medieval art

Little of the above can be described as truly native. Celts, Romans, Saxons – they all brought their skills from abroad, even if designs took new directions in Britain. The borrowing continued with the Normans. Romanesque (12th century) and then Gothic (13th and 14th centuries) both originated across the Channel. When religious art collided with Anglo-Saxon forms a recognisable English Romanesque style emerged, all thick black lines, blocks of solid colour and exaggerated, abstract figures. Monasteries did all the

hard work. Teams of professional artists worked on illuminated manuscripts with richly coloured 'carpet' pages, while carved ivory and sculptural detail on the grand churches of the age offered artists greater room for expression.

Floored genius.
Classical art found its way into Britain in mosaics. Cheaper patterns could actually be bought off the peg from mosaic shops; wealthier clients went for bespoke designs.

Gothic evolved from Romanesque, advancing the role of naturalism in art; the figures looked increasingly like real people, their gowns like real cloth. The highpoint of English Gothic art has traditionally been seen as the Wilton Diptych (c.1395-99). As per the International Style of later Gothic painting, this two-piece marvel was daubed in tempera on wooden panels, painted as a mobile altar piece. Delicate and colourful, the panels' beauty is undimmed six centuries on. King Richard II kneels humbly before Paradise with its insouciant, strawberry blond angels. An English masterpiece no doubt, although experts now concede it may have been painted by a French artist. Today it hangs in the National Gallery.

Oh Henry, what have you gone and done?

When Henry VIII fell out with the Catholic Church and pulled the plug on the monasteries, he sabotaged the driving monetary and spiritual forces of British art. Popish idolatry was now strictly off the menu, and the royal court took over from the Church as the prime creative arena. The distant European Renaissance remained just that – distant – and for the next 200 years native art struggled for direction. The important painters working in Britain were foreigners, many pushed across the Channel by the Reformation in Europe. Each inspired a clique of British hopefuls, none of whom quite matched their masters' verve.

Well the ears are definitely van Dyck
 By the time Antonis van Dyck had become Sir Anthony van Dyck, ennobled by Charles I, he was a very busy man. The commissions flooded in from the English aristocracy, eager to mine the artist's talent for painting a sitter with stately dignity. He took on a number of assistants who would paint the less crucial parts of a portrait from dressed dummies. He didn't even always paint all of the head. Many have argued that he cheapened the portraitist's art in the process, particularly as subsequent artists followed his example.

Two foreign giants of early modern British art...
 and their flunkies

Hans Holbein the Younger.

He came to England from Basel on the Rhine and stayed for more than a decade, becoming court painter to Henry VIII in 1536. Besides supplying portraits of prospective brides for Henry, Holbein generated the thick-necked image of the King that made it through to modern times, although his portrait of the stubbly, bob-haired chancellor Thomas More

(1527) is perhaps better known. Holbein was lauded for his detailed, muted rendering of personality, greatly influencing the first really important English painter, Nicholas Hilliard. Hilliard painted Elizabeth I and her clique from the 1570s, specialising in the miniature portrait. Hilliard's pupil, Isaac Oliver maintained the fine English miniature tradition into the early 17th century.



Anthony van Dyck. Portraiture remained the art of choice under the Stuarts, but was shaken up by Flemish artist van Dyck. His portraits were expressive, suggestive of personality even when their mood seemed slightly glum. His work shimmers in a manner not dissimilar to that of his great teacher, Peter Paul Rubens. Van Dyck became court painter to Charles I in 1632 and his style, so good at flattering royalty, inevitably faltered under Cromwell. Sir Peter Lely, a Dutchman, carried van Dyck's legacy after the Restoration, developing the master's style with a rich texture as court painter to Charles II. Lely's series of listless ladies, the *Windsor Beauties* (early to mid 1660s), were typical.

Early modern sculpture

Like painting, sculpture in Britain relied on foreigners for most of its excitement before the 18th century. Anonymous British artists had been sculpting tombs since the Middle Ages, but their work bore little invention. Florentine Pietro Torrigiano was the first big foreign name, although his rich golden sarcophagus for Henry VII (1512), still in Westminster Abbey, failed to push its Renaissance style out to the rest of British art. Grinling Gibbons, an exceptionally gifted woodcarver employed by Sir Christopher Wren to work on St Paul's Cathedral in the 17th century, had an English father but was actually Dutch. By the 18th century, a Frenchman, Louis François Roubiliac, was stealing the show with dramatic Baroque busts that turned up in various English churches, not least Westminster Abbey.

Pietro packs a punch
Pietro Torrigiano, perhaps the most skilled sculptor working in 16th century Britain, was famous back in Italy for breaking Michelangelo's nose in an art school bust up.

Small wonders
The painter of miniatures, or limner, was in great demand in the Elizabethan period. It was a tradition that drifted over from the Low Countries but in England produced its own master, Nicolas Hilliard. Another Brit, Samuel Cooper, took over his mantle in the Stuart era. The miniatures were often commissioned by ruff-wearing dandies, who would have themselves painted full length, tights and all, looking all moody and lovelorn. They would then send the results to the lucky object of their affection; in the manner of a really egotistical, needy Valentine's Card.



3.1.2 Morals, mares and mug shots:

British art finally gets serious

World, this is Britain calling. Look at my lovely painting. Finally, in the 18th century, British art began growing its own. Collectors were used to paying out on work by the foreign artists of the day, but in the mid 18th century they began to buy British (it was still much cheaper), encouraged by the appearance of homegrown art in public spaces and the founding of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768, which finally gave artists a classical training of the sort taken for granted in France and Italy. Momentum grew, initially in portraiture and later in the new favourite genre, landscape. As Gainsborough, Turner, Constable and others emerged, the world began paying attention to British art.



Hogarth on the offensive

William Hogarth was the first really big name. A law unto himself, he ignored the prevailing appetite for portraiture. Instead, he engraved and then painted edifying scenes of political corruption and social strife. His most famous were *A Rake's Progress* (1732-33), a series of paintings framing the unhappy fate of a morally bankrupt merchant's son. The artist convinced himself that this was what a British audience would respond to, what they would buy: they needed art with a moral message. Hogarth, who also painted more standard portraits and family scenes, packed his work with colour and character yet, pigeonholed as an engraver, failed to earn the respect of his peers.

Face value: the golden years of British portrait painting

The century after 1750 was the great age of British portraiture. England and Scotland both produced a number of significant practitioners, most following the mode set by the leading portraitist of the age, Joshua Reynolds. The timing was just right, with Britain's growing upper class clamouring for the kudos that a stately portrait stirs. As for the artists, most would probably have preferred painting something more interesting, but the money in portraiture wasn't half bad. By the time the last great portrait painter of the age, Thomas Lawrence, put down his brush in 1830, British artists were beginning to impress in Europe.

The big three portrait painters of the 18th century

Joshua Reynolds, the genteel Devonian, travelled to Italy as a young man in 1749 and the Renaissance rubbed off. He began painting sitters in a dramatic, almost mythological light, echoing the lofty 'Grand Manner' of Raphael, Titian et al. At odds with the scruffier style of Hogarth a generation before, it set the trend for 18th century British portraiture. He tried to capture something of the sitter's character, their interests or their career through setting, expression or the objects at hand (from dogs to archery bows). It's this rendering of personality, rather than a knockout talent with the brush, which impresses with Reynolds. He retired in 1789, aged 66, when he went blind in one eye.

Thomas Gainsborough was Reynolds' great rival. While Reynolds' portraits were stage managed for drama, Gainsborough's were light, graceful and real. Largely self-taught, he was a natural, expertly

The man of a thousand horses

George Stubbs occupies his own niche in British art history, renowned as the artist who painted horses. He made hay out of the fact that getting a horse in your own portrait attested to wealth in the later 18th century, although also managed to produce a number of oils with equine content alone. Stubbs spent much of his early adulthood dissecting animals, eventually publishing *The Anatomy of the Horse* (1766) to wide acclaim. His horses were painted out hunting, mingling with their owners or being devoured by lions; in short, if it neighed, out came the easel. In the likes of *Whistlejacket* (1762) he painted champion racehorses.

rendering flesh and cloth with animated brushstrokes. Landscapes crept into his portraits revealing a joy at painting nature. And while painting faces paid the bills, when he got the chance Gainsborough sketched elegantly composed (and, in truth, rather unrealistic) rural scenes.

Allan Ramsay predated Reynolds and Gainsborough by a decade, one of various talented artists wrapped up in the Scottish Enlightenment. More in the Reynolds mould, he too travelled to Italy and painted with similarly grand solidity, although like Gainsborough he had a knack for shimmering cloth. Appointed Royal Painter by George III in 1761, Ramsay gave up painting for writing in 1773 after he fell off a ladder and hurt his right arm.

A brush with the classics
Scottish painter Gavin Hamilton was the leading British artist of neo-Classicism, a genre that left most British art cold whilst it was being received with rapture in early 19th century France. Yorkshireman John Flaxman was another neo-Classicalist; an Academy man through and through, he was best known as a sculptor. Both artists perfected their craft in Rome.

And the award for the best painting of a bird in an air pump goes to...
Joseph Wright of Derby was an important 18th century portraitist, recording the great Midlands industrialists of his era. But he did much more than just faces. In the 1760s he began painting his 'Candlelit Pictures', naturalistic interior scenes brilliant in their use of chiaroscuro.

His best effort was *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (1768), subject matter that also betrayed Wright's fascination with the scientific advances of the Enlightenment. Later, after a fruitful trip to Italy (Vesuvius obligingly erupted while he sketched), Wright set about painting landscapes.

Constable, Turner and Blake: the golden age

The Romantic British masters

As the 19th century dawned the attendant Romantic spirit, so bountiful in literature, dished up a creative windfall for landscape artists. Painting a rural scene hadn't been deemed credible art before but the elemental mood of Romanticism legitimised the study of nature. Watercolour, a relatively new medium quickly completed in situ, lent the genre a hand. Through landscape, for the first time the viewer really got to see what the British artist was feeling as much as seeing. In short, it was the beginning of modern art. A Welshman, Richard Wilson, was the first Brit to concentrate on landscape, although he approached the subject in a precise, rather emotionless way. However, he had some influence on the two artists that would dominate the period. Both, variously, have been called the most important painter in British history:

John Constable wanted to paint his native Dedham Vale with truth, to convey how changes of light, weather or season affected the view. An inheritance from his father, a wealthy mill owner, allowed him to do so without ever actually selling a landscape painting. He sketched in summer and then spent winters in London, completing large, studied oils from those freer, impressionistic prelims. Today his paintings might bring docile pastoral bliss to mind but in their day, with their dabs and flecks and their modest subject made grand, they were radical. In Britain his loose brushstrokes got a mixed reception; it was the French who really went for Constable, and who, via the art of Eugène Delacroix and later the Impressionists, secured his posthumous fame.

Big in France

The Hay Wain (1821), a watery Suffolk scene like most of his best paintings, won Constable the Gold Medal when it was shown at the 1824 Paris Salon. The artist himself never actually made it across the Channel.

Constable referred to the flecks of white that covered his canvases in his later career as 'my snow', used to express movement, light and feeling.

Turner's twin

Later in life, hounded by scathing critics, Turner invented an alter ego, an identity into which he could escape in life and paint. His concocted conjoined twin, Admiral Puggy Booth, was free to work as outlandishly as his name might demand. Turner spent his final years as Booth, living incognito in Chelsea.

Blighty's best
Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839), the old warship backed by a glassy sunset, was voted the Greatest Painting in Britain in a 2005 public poll by BBC Radio 4 and the National Gallery. Constable's *The Hay Wain* came second.

Landscaping goes flat
East Anglia's placid scenery seduced the early landscapists. Gainsborough was born in Suffolk and returned in adulthood, incorporating the gentle terrain into his portrait paintings. Constable came from East Bergholt on the Essex/Suffolk border, and would paint the landscape for the rest of his life, even in absentia. In the first decade of the 19th century the Norwich School grew up in Norfolk around the watercolourists John Crome and John Sell Cotman, its painters absorbed by landscapes both foreign and local.

Joseph Mallord William Turner, wigmaker's son, was born a year before Constable in 1775. He walked the wilder side of the Romantic spirit, painting violent storms, churning seas and ghostly sunsets in oils and watercolours. Early on he was exact, joining Constable in a faithful, classical rendition of landscape for the likes of *Tintern Abbey* (1795). However, later paintings bore emotive swirls of paint, blurring water, land and sky to convey the drama of a storm or the heat of fire. Some of it verged on abstraction. *Stormy Sea with Blazing Wreck* (1835-40), its flashes of light and dark only suggestive of the subject within, was typical. The Academy loved most of his work (while largely indifferent to Constable's) but critics struggled with the raw, imprecise nature of his later paintings. Turner's remarkable grasp of light and shade would influence the French Impressionists a generation on.



Angels in Peckham? Of course Mr Blake...
just step this way please .

William Blake was the great visionary of the Romantic world. He didn't paint from life, relying instead on imagination in an era when artists weren't recognised for self-expression. Tigers, angels and dragons all poured out onto the canvas. They were born, said Blake, of regularly experienced visions. He'd been seeing unusual stuff since boyhood when he encountered a tree filled with angels on Peckham Rye. Blake used the strong lines of medieval art but also borrowed from the Renaissance, exaggerating mystical figures with the Mannerism of Michelangelo. He was anti-authoritarian, experimental and solitary in his work and he got short shrift as a result. The world wasn't ready for Blake – many called him mad – and his professional output was limited to book engraving. Many of his illustrations were created to accompany his own poetry (see section 2.1.4. for more on Blake's verse). Blake was working on a series of plates to illustrate Dante's *Divine Comedy* when he died in 1827. His reputation only gathered momentum 50 years later, and today Blake is considered a pivotal contributor to British art.

In the raw talent
William Blake and his wife Catherine moved to Lambeth in 1790. They clearly felt relaxed in their new homestead: a visiting friend found the pair naked in the garden reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*. "It's only Adam and Eve, you know," commented Blake.

Dadd does for dad
Richard Dadd became much admired for his paintings of fairies in the Victorian era. However, he found true fame when he went mad in his mid 20s and stabbed his father to death. After 20 years in Bedlam hospital, Dadd eventually ended up in Broadmoor, the 'criminal lunatic asylum', where he produced much of his best work.

Proceed with caution: art under the Victorians

While French painters fed on the expressive work by Constable and Turner in the mid 19th century, British artists looked away. William Powell Frith, the big name painter of the time, was typical with his conservative, detailed studies of an ordered society behaving like it bloody well should from the drawing room to the racecourse. The social change and grit of industrialising Britain barely featured on the canvas. Instead, paintings tended to moralise, instructing the new middle classes on what their aspirations should be.

Family man Frith

William Powell Frith, master of the Victorian crowd scene, had quite a crowd of his own. He lived in Bayswater with his wife Isabelle and their 12 children, but also kept a mistress, Mary, and seven supplementary kids about a mile down the road. Isabelle only became aware of William's duplicity when she saw him posting a letter near their house one day when he was supposed to be on holiday in Brighton.

Turning back the clock with the Pre-Raphaelites

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of painters formed in 1848 as a clandestine association under Dante Gabriel Rossetti, son of an Italian refugee. As the name intimated, the school looked back to early Renaissance art and the medieval period, to the time before Raphael, an artist popular with 19th century neo-Classicists. They tuned in to a Victorian nostalgia for the pre-industrial age and the Aesthetic Movement that felt beauty alone was adequate motivation for art. In technique, artists like Rossetti, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt aimed for a crisp realism, while subject matter drew on religious, Arthurian and medieval themes, often inspired by some work of literature. But their efforts to resurrect the pre-Raphael world, to manufacture naivety, haven't withstood modern criticism, and the Brotherhood's art has often been dismissed as sentimental and artificial.

In its own era, the Pre-Raphaelite taste for somnolent scenes of women and nature suffocated anything more radical in British art for the rest of the 19th century. However, Rossetti's friend William Morris took the idealised medieval aesthetic into the design world in the 1880s with the Arts and Crafts Movement. Morris, a committed socialist, shared his wife with Rossetti.

New beginnings

At the end of the 19th century a small group of British artists embraced the new. Inspired by the French Impressionists and reacting against the conservatism of the Royal Academy, they formed the New English Art Club in 1886. The Americans John Singer Sargent and James McNeill Whistler were both involved, but the most radical painters were English. Walter Sickert and Wilson Steer came closest to mirroring the loose style of Impressionism. Alas, the Club quickly factionalised and the impetus stuttered, even while their annual exhibitions continue right up to this day. One dissident faction, the so-called Glasgow Boys, flourished, bringing a touch of social realism to rural Scottish scenes throughout the 1890s. James Guthrie and John Lavery were among the head Boys.

3.1.4 From cubes to dead sharks:

art over the last century

Conservative club: Edwardian art

A few cliques flicked paint at the British art establishment in the early 20th century, most conjuring some slant on the Post-Impressionism flourishing in France. Of the more significant collectives, the Camden Town Group earned most attention. Led by Walter Sickert, he of the New English Art Club, the subscribers exhibited their mix of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and Cubist work in the three years before the First World War. The Bloomsbury Group, featuring Scottish painter Duncan Grant and his sometime lover, textile artist Vanessa Bell, also had a stab at the avant-garde of the Post-Impressionists, Matisse in particular. Similarly, the prosaic landscapes of Northern Irish painter Paul Henry were forward-thinking in their veracity. However, they swam against the general current of British art in the Edwardian period which, led by the Americans James McNeill Whistler and John Singer Sargent, idled in pleasing but unchallenging portraiture.

The Vorticists stir things up... a bit

One small group of British artists did generate something genuinely avant-garde in the years before the First World War. The Vorticists formed in London in 1914, gathered by painter, writer and all-round agitator Wyndham Lewis. He printed a magazine-cum-manifesto, *Blast*, which ripped into the mannered tastes of early 20th century British art, and an exhibition of artwork followed. Vorticist paintings took the angular lines of Cubism (developing in France) and used them to frame modern, mechanised Britain.

Throw in Mrs Lavery and it's a deal
Portraitist John Lavery, son of a failed Belfast publican, was perhaps the first nationally significant artist to emerge from the north of Ireland. He became a respected pillar of the Royal Academy and was knighted in 1918. Yet the society painter maintained a keen interest in the cause of Irish independence, even loaning his London house to the Irish delegation that negotiated the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 and included first leader of the Irish Free State and IRA man, Michael Collins. The Irish government showed their gratitude by placing Lavery's portrait of his second wife, Hazel, on the Irish pound note. Historians have pondered whether Michael Collins showed his by having an affair with the painter's wife.

Hues who: the Scottish Colourists
The Scottish Colourists took their inspiration from Paris, from the Post-Impressionists and in particular the Fauvist style of Matisse, imitating his vibrant colours. Four painters were involved: Samuel Peploe, John Duncan Fergusson, Leslie Hunter and Francis Cadell. The quartet produced still life and landscape paintings, charmed in particular by the western isle of Iona. The Scottish Colourists went almost unnoticed when they exhibited in the 1920s and 30s but today their importance in the history of British art – theirs being a rare native take on Modernism – is often noted.

French fry
Painter and critic Roger Fry staged two exhibitions of French Post-Impressionist painting in London, in 1910 and 1912. The art establishment guffawed and most of the public who visited left bemused, but for circles like the Bloomsbury Group, Fry became a hero of the avant-garde.

Parallels also existed with the Italian Futurist movement although Lewis claimed originality for his merry band. Vorticism was radical and exciting but it didn't last. The First World War soon called the main protagonists away, and once the fighting was done few wanted to linger over the machine age celebrated in Vorticist paintings. Some have suggested the brief movement was as close as Britain got to the avant-garde in the 20th century.

Lone masters: art between the wars

British art seemed timid after the First World War, worried perhaps by a sense of triviality in the wake of such a conflict. While Continentals picked up Modernism once more, Britain remained hesitant. Significant innovators did emerge over the subsequent four decades but they tended to work in isolation. For many, the human figure, however distorted, provided an ongoing obsession. A few kindred spirits did pool their creativity: Picasso's abstract expressionism found English patronage in the Unit One group of artists in St Ives, Cornwall, while painters like Stanley Spencer, Augustus John and Lucien Freud gently twisted the conventions of figurative art. Francis Bacon did most to corrupt tradition with his grotesque portraits. Unit One disciple and war artist Paul Nash later gave a British landscapist's perspective on surrealism, while a neo-Romantic style emerged with John Piper, another war artist, playing with drama and colour in landscape.

The five British artists of the mid 20th century you should know about

Stanley Spencer set biblical episodes amid the cosy village life of his own interwar Britain, shocking contemporary audiences. In the Second World War he painted industrial toil in shipyards on the Clyde, while his

later work grew increasingly erotic. Nude paintings of his second wife roused the Royal Academy president to prosecute for obscenity. Whatever the subject, his figurative style was dependably accurate.

Henry Moore was the pre-eminent British sculptor of the 20th century. Having explored early South American art in the 1920s, Yorkshireman Moore turned to abstraction a decade later. Picasso gave him a starting point and he progressed from indeterminate shapes to bulging, smooth female forms that directed his work right into the 1980s. His huge reclining forms were, he said, born of nature and they duly felt at home placed in the landscape.

Moore's friend **Barbara Hepworth** also bought into abstract modes, but used them to express landscape more than figures. Working in metal, wood and stone, she made smooth, tactile sculpture. Hepworth's shapes became distinguished by their use of holes, or what she called 'abstract negative spaces', carved smoothly into the sculpture. Her best known work is probably *Single Form* (1963), resident at the United Nations building in New York. She died in a fire at her St Ives studio in 1975.

Francis Bacon was the most important British painter of the 20th century. He had no formal art training but toured the galleries of Paris, Berlin and London in early adulthood, inspired particularly by Picasso. In 1945, aged 36, he submitted *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944), an unnerving meld of human and animal forms, for display in London. It brought overnight fame. He was a figurative painter but his portraits disturbed with their visceral, torn shapes, their figures 'deformed and then reformed' as

"WHEN I'M DEAD, PUT ME IN A PLASTIC BAG AND THROW ME IN THE GUTTER."

Francis Bacon instructs the barman at The Colony Room club

Live fast, die old:

Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon was born to English parents in Dublin in 1909. It wasn't a happy childhood; he was kicked out of the familial home in his early teens after being discovered dressed in his mother's underwear. Bacon destroyed most of his early paintings, made in the 1930s while working in London as an interior designer. When the Second World War broke out, invalided out of service by asthma he went into the Civil Defence Corps. Bacon drank and gambled through much of his life and cultivated a debauched reputation, particularly at his favourite drinking haunt, The Colony Room in Soho. His sex life, pursued predominantly with men, also became the stuff of legend. He once professed a sexual attraction to his father, and apparently slept with the uncle that chaperoned a trip to swinging Berlin in the late 1920s. By the 1960s he'd taken to crawling Soho's bars in fishnets, a leather overcoat and make up. He died in 1992, laid out by a heart attack while visiting friends in Madrid.

Freud's Queen

In 2001 Lucien Freud painted an eyebags 'n' all portrait of Queen Elizabeth II. *The Times* newspaper described it as "brave" and "honest", while *The Sun* suggested "Freud should be locked in the Tower".

Matchstick men man

Laurence Stephen Lowry became one of the most popular artists of the 20th century. He painted the industrial landscape of his native Manchester from the 1920s to the 60s, his style instantly recognisable with its matchstick men, smokestacks and blackened mills. Critics were never too kind to Lowry; many dismissed him as naïve, as a 'Sunday painter'. He never did relinquish a day job collecting rent, painting late at night after his mother had gone to bed (Lowry never married). Lowry holds the record for the most honours declined: an OBE, CBE, knighthood and two Orders of the Companions of Honour.

Bacon once said. Some paintings perverted the classics, notably his screaming rendition of Velazquez' unbending Pope Innocent X. Open, wailing mouths were a recurring theme. Bacon was also in the habit of painting faces near lumps of meat, hinting at the physiological similarities.

Lucian Freud, grandson of Sigmund, migrated to Britain from Nazi Germany as a boy. Taking much from the style of Stanley Spencer, he developed a realist, prosaic approach to the human figure, daubed with thick strokes. The older he got, the more human his figures became; their lumps and bumps offered up without much charity. They sat, impassive, usually naked, in increasingly grubby, unglamorous rooms. Widely acknowledged as a highly accomplished artist, Freud continued to paint in the 21st century. In 2008 his portrait of a sleeping, naked Jobcentre supervisor became the most expensive piece of art by a living painter, selling at auction for £17.2 million.

Pop goes the easel

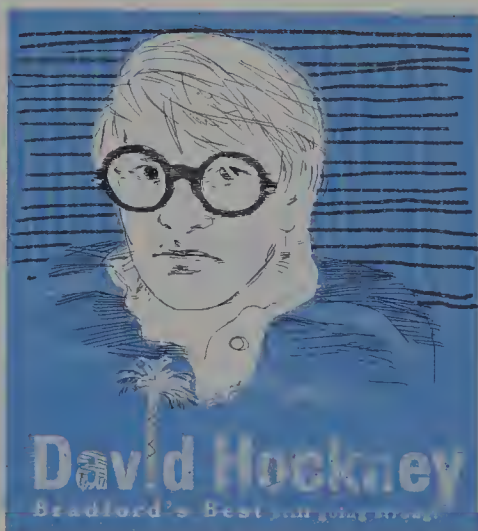
Britain flirted with Pop Art in the 1960s, its artists rebelling against the inaccessibility of abstract expressionism with something more resonant of reality. Richard Hamilton was the first Brit to sign up. In fact, Hamilton was the first Pop Artist anywhere, his photo collage *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Home So Different, So Appealing?* (1956), with its bodybuilder and stripper ensconced in their consumerist living room, was typical of the humour and everyday references that Pop Art would strive for. Peter Blake was another who placed consumer products in his art, mixing them with celebrity images, stripes and target shapes. He's best known for the cover of The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). Scotsman Eduardo Paolozzi was the significant sculptor of Pop Art, although he went on to create abstract and then more figurative work. But David Hockney is the artist that

did most after graduating from Pop Art, ultimately becoming the prime painter of late 20th century Britain.

Bridget deceives the eye
Bridget Riley developed wavy abstract patterns in the 1960s, creating illusions of light and movement. It was christened Op Art and given a niche of its own.

From radical to national treasure: David Hockney

Bradford's famous son dabbled with abstract expressionism in the late 1950s before turning to Pop Art briefly in the early 60s. In 1963 he was profoundly influenced by a visit to California and began producing more realist work; the images of serene swimming pools and bronzed figures were reminiscent of snapshot photos. By the 1970s his paintings had grown in their naturalism. *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy* (1970-71), a rather stilted domestic scene of married couple and cat, was typical and popular. Hockney's work has often been concerned with his own sexuality, from crudely drawn figures aside bites of text like 'queer' and 'unorthodox lover' to the sculptured male physiques of his Californian paintings. More recently he has turned to landscape, producing an enormous painting of Yorkshire, *Bigger Trees Near Watter* (2008), for the Tate Britain gallery.



Love it or loathe it but don't ignore it: contemporary British art

Contemporary British art has no defining style. Conceptual art has been important since the 1970s, but can turn the public off with its emphasis on ideas over aesthetics. Critics claim British artists are too concerned with the avant-garde and with personal motifs; that their art serves a very narrow audience. In this, it differs much from the conservative spirit of a century ago but little from contemporary art anywhere else in the world. And yet Britain has working artists that have become household names, and the discussion of art spreads well beyond the slim bounds of its own community.

"FOR 1,000 YEARS ART HAS BEEN ONE OF OUR GREAT CIVILISING FORCES. TODAY, PICKLED SHEEP AND SOILED BEDS THREATEN TO MAKE BARBARIANS OF US ALL."

The *Daily Mail* offers an opinion on Britart

The Academy loses its head

In 2006, artist David Hensel visited the Royal Academy to see his sculpture, *One Day Closer to Paradise* – a laughing head on a flat slate base, on display. All he found was the base it was supposed to stand on, no sculpture. A judging panel had assumed the two pieces were separate (they were delivered in two bits) and decided the plinth was better. "The base was thought to have merit and accepted; it is currently on display. The head has been safely stored ready to be collected by the artist," explained an Academy spokeswoman.

The rise of the Young British Artists (YBAs) in the 1990s did much to raise the profile of contemporary art. Often referred to as Britart, theirs wasn't a specific school; instead they shared exhibition spaces, an interest in conceptual art and a talent for self-publicity. Damien Hirst cooked up the YBA's signature dish, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), or 'that dead shark in a tank of formaldehyde' as most people called it. By 1997 the Royal Academy was showing their work. Not everyone loved it. Critics, tabloids and the public often took issue, convinced they were being conned by the likes of Tracey Emin's *My Bed* (1999) installation (the exhibit was Emin's unmade bed). In 1999, Stuckism evolved in reaction to the YBAs, placing the emphasis back on figurative art. In 2003 they displayed an exhibit entitled *A Dead Shark isn't Art* at their Shoreditch gallery. Whatever the reaction, it's hard to deny that the YBAs have given modern British art an energy that it maintains today. Beyond the conceptual art of the YBAs, the most popular British artist of recent years has been Jack Vettriano, a miner's son from Fife dismissed by critics but popular with the public for paintings with a thick, noir-like feel. Vettriano's *Singing Butler* (1992) print sells more postcards and posters than any other work by a British artist.

The Turner Prize

Britain's most famous contemporary art award is the Turner Prize, given to artists aged under 50. Named after the 19th century landscapist, the prize is famously controversial. Recent recipients have included Martin Creed, whose 2001 exhibit featured a room in

which the light went on and off, and Simon Starling, the 2005 winner who converted a shed into a boat, sailed it down the Rhine and then converted it back into a shed and displayed it as a work entitled *Shedboatshed*. Good or bad, the Turner Prize always provokes debate on the state of British art.

Five big artists of contemporary British art

Damien Hirst He began with suspended and dissected dead animals – shark, sheep, cow and pig – intended, Hirst explained, to discuss mortality rather like Francis Bacon did, not to shock. He moved on to paintings of coloured spots, one of which went to Mars in 2003, daubed on the side of the Beagle 2 probe. More recently *For the Love of God* (2007) was a platinum skull adorned with more than 8,000 diamonds. It sold for £50 million. Hirst uses a number of assistants in ‘factory’ workshops to create his art; the concept rather than the execution, he insists, is the creative part.

Rachel Whiteread Another of the YBAs, Whiteread raised interest with the Turner-winning *House* (1993), in which she cast the entire inside space of an East End terraced house in situ as a work of art. Much of her portfolio has involved such casts, comprising ‘negative space’ like the inside of a room or a box.

Gilbert and George The inseparable duo, whose appearance as suited gents belies a renegade approach to art, started with performance art, creating *The Singing Sculpture* (1970) for which they coated themselves in gold paint and mimed to a Flanagan and Allen song. These days they’re better known for giant, colourful canvases, frequently featuring photos of the boys themselves and often ‘enlightening’ with the use of nudity, bodily fluids and provocative titles like *Naked Shit Pictures* (1995). Despite their persistent strangeness the ‘national treasures’ tag doesn’t seem inappropriate.

Basin instinct
Loutish behaviour on
booze and drugs used to
gain Damien Hirst as
much attention as his
art. He received much
coverage, for instance,
for urinating in the sink
of a Soho club.

Open or wrapped?
Damien Hirst created his
shark in a tank of
formaldehyde for art
patron Charles Saatchi,
who offered to buy
whatever the artist
wanted to make. He paid
£50,000 for it in 1991.
(A *Sun* newspaper
headline at the time read
‘£50,000 for fish without
chips’.) Saatchi sold the
piece in 2004, apparently
for around £6.5 million.

“EACH OF OUR
PICTURES IS A
VISUAL LOVE
LETTER FROM US
TO THE VIEWER,”
George Passmore (of
Gilbert and George)

The drugs do work

Damien Hirst became the world's most expensive living artist in 2007 when *Lullaby Spring* (2002), a stainless steel medicine chest containing brightly coloured pills, sold for £9.65million. Sotheby's, the auctioneer, referred to the work "tackling the intrinsic frailty and vulnerability of life". Later in the year *For the Love of God*, his diamond encrusted skull, sold for five times that amount.



Tracey Emin The *enfant terrible* of contemporary British art (even in her 40s), another of the YBA gang, Emin brings a strong autobiographical thread to work in multimedia. *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With, 1963-1995* (1995) was true to its title, comprising a tent embroidered with a roll call of folk who'd

shared her bed. More recently Emin's work has featured ambiguous slogans, writ large in neon or scrawled on bed sheets. In 2007 she daubed 'One Secret is to Save Everything' against a backdrop of swimming sperm on a large flag displayed in London's Jubilee Gardens.

Anthony Gormley The prime sculptor of 21st century Britain deposits human forms in public spaces. He talks about trying to represent the space occupied by the body rather than the body itself. *Angel of the North* (1998), a rusty 20-metre high figure with a 54-metre wingspan stands overlooking the A1 in north-east England, while a series of 100 faceless life-size figures, *Another Place* (1997), recently took up permanent residence on Crosby Beach on Merseyside. Like many of Gormley's sculptures, *Another Place* was made from moulds of his own body.



Laughing all the way to the Banksy

Some call Banksy the most exciting contemporary painter in Britain. A graffiti artist, he sprays subversive wit on public and private walls, using a distinctive stencilled style. He's the master of the visual one liner: here two policemen enjoying a snog, there the Mona Lisa pointing a bazooka or children saluting a Tesco bag up a flagpole. A key to Banksy's success has been his anonymity. The continued mystery over his identity (despite the best efforts of the tabloids) has generated a sizeable Banksy myth. He made his name in London and his home city, Bristol, but in recent years Banksy has gone international. He went to Venice Beach, Los Angeles, and wrote 'Fat Lane' on the sidewalk, and painted windows in Israel's West Bank barrier. He's even had a gallery show and released a coffee table book, somehow maintaining anonymity. Today, you can pay six figures for a genuine Banksy, even while London councils still scrub his work off their walls.

Culture / Can't get enough of it

An *Art Newspaper* survey revealed recently that seven of the top 30 most visited galleries and museums around the world were British. They attracted 22.5 million visitors in 2007, significantly more than their French or American equivalents. Tate Modern got twice as many visitors as the MoMA in New York, while the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow pulled in more punters than the Uffizi in Florence.

"IF YOU'RE GOING TO DAMAGE SOMEONE'S PROPERTY, IT'S GOOD TO SHOW A BIT OF DEDICATION TO IT. JUST SLAPPING IT UP SEEMS A BIT RUDE"

Banksy

3.1.5 Mixed motifs: the icons of British design

HAVE NOTHING IN YOUR HOUSES THAT YOU DO NOT KNOW TO BE USEFUL OR BELIEVE TO BE BEAUTIFUL."

William Morris

Glasgow spooks out Scotland's late 19th century creative vibe bore the Glasgow Four, an arty quartet blending elements of Celtic, Japanese and Art Nouveau design in stylised motifs. They were an intimate bunch, comprising architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh; his wife-to-be, the painter and glass engraver Margaret MacDonald; her sister Frances, skilled in textiles, metalwork and graphics; and Frances' husband-to-be, James Herbert McNair, a skilled painter and furniture designer. Not everyone loved the Four; they were also dubbed the Spook School after a fondness for Celtic hobgoblins and the like.

From Chippendale to Arts and Crafts:

great moments in early British design

Peer back beyond the modern era and you find a few standout moments of British design; occasions when functionality colluded with form and elevated everyday objects beyond the norm. There's always been what you'd call craftsmen. The 18th century had a selection: from the 'big three' furniture designers, Thomas Chippendale, Thomas Sheraton and George Hepplewhite, to the 'father of English potters', Josiah Wedgewood, and Scottish interior designer-cum-architect Robert Adam. But the relationship between beauty and utility found new vigour, perhaps surprisingly, in the industrial age of mass production. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a landmark event, not simply for Joseph Paxton's stunning Crystal Palace but also for the objects, from clocks to coffee roasters, exhibited within its vast glass and cast iron body.

A decade later the Arts and Crafts Movement emerged, inspired by the motifs of nature and a rather idealised notion of craftsmanship. The anti-utilitarian theory of John Ruskin and the Gothic throwback architecture of Augustus Pugin played their part, even while the furniture makers, architects and decorative artists of Arts and Crafts often employed mechanisation in their methods. Leading light William Morris comes closest to fulfilling our image of the 'designer'. Morris & Co produced furniture, wallpapers, fabrics and tapestries, many with the twisting, organic patterns that are still in print today. The Arts and Crafts Movement stretched into the early 20th century, strongly influencing Art Nouveau and carrying figures like Charles Rennie Mackintosh, architect, interior designer and decorative artist, and Charles Robert Ashbee, founder of the Guild of Handicraft, within its broad ranks.

Ooh Pearl, I do like your sofa...does it come in Bakelite?

Britain was something of a bystander to the avant-garde modernism that swept Europe and the USA in the 1920s and 30s. And yet its influence rippled, much dissipated, into British homes in the shape of sleek furniture, curvaceous radios and rectangular fireplaces. Syrie Maugham became a big, early British name in top-end interior design, working for the likes of Noël Coward and Wallis Simpson. She was fixated with white (furniture, fabric, walls, books), occasionally mixing in bits of colour to dramatic effect. Syrie picked up the surname in a short-lived marriage to the largely homosexual writer Somerset Maugham; her maiden name was Barnardo, passed from her father Thomas John Barnardo, founder of the Barnardo's charity for destitute children. The streamlined shapes of modernism infiltrated homes further in the 1930s, with Bakelite telephones, geometric three-piece suites, veneer sideboards and chrome lighting. All such items have become highly collectable in the 21st century as the desire for true antiques has waned.

Conran leads Britain into the light

As post-war austerity lightened, the 1951 Festival of Britain played a role in normalising modern design for the average Brit. They began to appreciate that chairs, bins, lights and other functional objects were suitable targets for style, that they were integral to the new consumer society. Design, its reach extending into numerous aspects of life – industry, interiors, advertising – became an accepted wing of creativity. On the home front, one man in particular knocked on the front door to offer guidance. Terence Conran, designer and entrepreneur, opened the first Habitat shop on London's Fulham Road in 1964, selling a 'lifestyle' that mixed Scandinavian simplicity, ethnic roughage, repro classics and pop art – shoppers could buy everything from duvets to bean bags

to the chicken brick. Conran has been an important figure in British design ever since; the one designer, perhaps, that most Brits could actually name. In the 1980s and 90s, Conran was also credited with sparking Britain's modern day revolution in restaurant dining.

Five icons of British design

London Tube map. Humble Harry Beck's 1931 map, inspired by electrical circuit diagrams, rejected scale and geographical accuracy for clarity. He got five guineas for his trouble.

Telephone box. The red variety, with its crown insignia, multiple windows and domed roof was designed by Giles Gilbert Scott in the 1930s. It seems destined to live on, in spite of lamentable redesigns and the rise of the mobile.

Anglepoise lamp. A modest marvel designed by George Carwardine in 1933 to mimic the movement and balance of the human arm. Its simple functionality has since acquired an 'industrial' chic.

Concorde. Alright, it was a joint effort with the French, but the pointy nosed, triangular star of supersonic travel won its place in British hearts in the 1960s. Retired in 2003, Concorde still topped a BBC poll of design icons three years later.

The Mini. Alec Issigonis' aptly named car first hit the road in 1959, dreamt up as a petrol saver after the Suez Crisis hit. It became a key ingredient of swinging 60s Britain; the Beatles bought one each.

Who are the important contemporary British designers? Is 21st century Britain as 'design aware' as, say, France or Italy? Probably not. But it's not far behind. Stores like Habitat, interior design magazines, TV shows and Swedish style goliath IKEA have spoon-fed Britain's burgeoning middle classes a dose of style, even if it is rarely avant-garde. Perhaps James Dyson is the most radical designer of recent years, although his is very much a function-led approach. His bagless vacuum cleaner, finally put into production by Dyson himself in 1993 after 5,000 prototypes and numerous rejections from the major vacuum manufacturers, has become both iconic and lucrative – Dyson is a billionaire. His more recent successes include the Airblade hand dryer, worthy of mention not least because it does actually dry your hands. Perhaps of more aesthetic interest are the likes of Jonathan Ive, the principal designer at Apple Inc. lauded for his involvement in the iMac and the iPod. Another, Tom Dixon, former design director at Habitat, began welding his own furniture in the 1980s when an Italian manufacturer took up his waif-like S-bend chair. Dixon only entered the design world after a motorcycle accident in his early 20s forced him to quit art school. The Mirror Ball light is another of his successes. Jasper Morrison has also produced some memorably simple, unobtrusive furniture, while also designing mobile phones, bus stops and more. He calls his style 'utilism'.

"I JUST THINK
THINGS SHOULD
WORK PROPERLY."
James Dyson



3.2 Architecture

Britain has a rich trove of architecture.

Even after Hitler and the post-war

planners had done their worst, the

Saxon churches, Gothic cathedrals,

Tudor palaces, Georgian squares and

Victorian stations still singled Britain

out for special praise. Even some of

the modern stuff is breathtaking.

321 Picking through the ruins:

ancient British buildings

Do those curtains
come in stone?

Furniture in the stone
houses of Skara Brae
was made, like the
walls, of stone. Beds,
dressers and even
watertight tanks where
inhabitants stored fishing
bait all utilised the local
rock. The prime source
of their meagre wood
supply was the Atlantic
Ocean, which coughed
up driftwood from North
America.

The largest lump of
Roman Britain

The largest single
surviving piece of
freestanding Roman
architecture in Britain
belongs to Viroconium,
a ruined Roman town
that thrived in Shropshire.
It's a wall with a hole in
it, once part of the cold
pool in a complex of
baths.

Set in stone: prehistoric architecture

Poke around in 'British' architecture before the
Norman invasion and you find crumbling lumps.
Farthest back are the mysterious chunks of rock
that make up Britain's 900 surviving megalithic stone
circles, dating from around 3,000BC. Dolmens, piles
of earth and lineal standing stones also characterise
Britain's prehistoric landscape. The earliest recognisable
dwellings date from the same era. Skara Brae,
Orkney's squat beachside village, is by far the best-
preserved Neolithic settlement in Europe.

Empire building: the Romans in Britain

There isn't much Roman architecture left in Britain
even though they built forts, aqueducts, baths and
entire towns. Today we're left with chunks of brick,
stone and cement – don't expect soaring Corinthian
columns. However, the passing of years and walls
hasn't dimmed the impressiveness of floor mosaics
in the Roman palace at Fishbourne, near Chichester,
a site that was once similar in scale to Buckingham
Palace. Aside from the hot and cold tubs of Roman
Bath (sections of which remain), most of the rest of
Roman Britain comprises broken walls, notably
at the Roman town of Silchester, in Berkshire, the
amphitheatre in Chester and, most spectacularly, in
the surviving stretches of Hadrian's Wall in northern
England, a structure dating to 120AD. The symmetry
and order of the Romans' architecture wouldn't be
seen in Britain again for another 600 years after their
departure.

A knack for Angles

For all we know the Anglo-Saxons built towering gherkin-shaped office blocks. Unfortunately, if they did, they built them with wood and the Vikings burned them down. We do know they introduced the open hall house to the British landscape in the fifth century, its wooden structure comprising one large room open to the rafters, fire burning in the middle. The design would find continued use in Britain for a thousand years. And we also know that here, in the newly Christianised kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon Britain, the first native ecclesiastical architecture grew up. Their taste for roughly hewn stone churches lives on in over 50 extant buildings in modern day England. They're all pretty small; the Normans flattened or rebuilt anything of a decent size.

Towering over the Vikings

While large swathes of mainland Britain rolled over and let the Vikings have it their way, over in Ulster the monasteries built soaring round towers to keep the longhairs at bay. Many of the surviving examples date to the 10th century – the 28-metre-tall cone-topped beauty in Antrim is probably the best.

The five best bits of pre-Norman architecture in Britain

Skara Brae The 5,000-year-old stone-slabbed affair dramatised by Orkney weather was mothballed by a sand dune for centuries and only revealed in 1850.

Hadrian's Wall. The Emperor's second century 73-mile long boundary with the Scots once stood six metres tall. Today its best bits are a third of that height, abutted by fragments of the forts that once regulated the border.

The Roman baths of Bath The best British remnant of Roman leisure time is found in Bath. The original stuff – the columns and heating system – only survives below knee height, but faithful recreation of the rest gives a good idea of what the Romans had.

Church of St Peter-on-the-Wall Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex. This simple stone box is 1,300 years old. A windswept perch overlooking the North Sea lends stirring atmosphere.

St Andrew's Church Greensted, Essex. The only surviving wooden Anglo-Saxon church (the oldest wooden building in Europe no less) was restored in the 19th century, gaining dormer windows in the process.



Bathtime 60-400 AD

3.22 Built on faith: the love of a good church

Towering ambition
the master masons
Medieval churches didn't
have architects in the
modern sense. Instead
there were master
masons who developed
and shared their styles
and techniques, some
achieving significant
prestige. Labourers were
often unskilled, plucked
from the local community
and sometimes put to
work unpaid as a
condition of serfdom.
They worked high up
on scaffolding and
accidents were no doubt
common. The master
mason building
Canterbury Cathedral,
William of Sens, was
replaced in 1178 when
he fell from scaffolding.

Britain is strewn with churches. Most of the country's oldest buildings were constructed for worship, and tens of thousands still stand despite the vagaries of religious taste. From the modesty of the medieval village church to the pomp of St Paul's Cathedral, Britain simply wouldn't be Britain without its ecclesiastical architecture.

Look, I've got a massive Romanesque church,
I'm clearly very important

William the Conqueror wanted to wipe the Saxon slate clean. Churches and abbeys, in the most, were replaced or reshaped with a Norman variant of Romanesque, the solid style of rounded arches, stout walls and barrelled vaults popular on the Continent. The British version, usually referred to as Norman rather than Romanesque, drifted over the Channel before William arrived. A wave of building in the 11th and 12th centuries bore monumental cathedrals. They weren't simple expressions of faith; these buildings reflected the political power of bishops, abbots and the new Norman overlords. Chevrons, waves and animal heads, all carved in stone, were common design motifs. In the 12th century the Norman style spread west to Ireland and north to Scotland, although its finest hour came just short of the border, at Durham. Perched on a sizeable rock, side by side with its Norman castle, Durham's cathedral is the most spectacular in England with its patterned piers and soaring ribbed ceiling.

Points of interest: the magnificence of Gothic

Norman architecture shone for a century before progressing to something more delicate, more technically astute: Gothic. It too came from mainland Europe, where rounded Romanesque arches became pointed and fat walls and piers lost weight, their girth reduced by the innovation of flying buttresses and ribbed vaults that directed weight to the ground more efficiently. But while the French and Germans built their cathedrals high, in Britain the master masons (under strict orders from the priests) went for length, building extended naves. Gothic stretched from the end of the 12th century to the start of the 16th, evolving as it went. Britain's Gothic adventure is usually carved into three sequential styles, each of which can often be found, jumbled, within the construction of a single church:

Early English (late 12th to 13th centuries). Pilfered from France despite the name, Early English was all about the pointed arch and tall, undecorated lancet windows that swapped Romanesque's gloom for heavenly light. Solid pillars were replaced with thin stone shafts, clustered around columns. Salisbury Cathedral brought it all together brilliantly.

Decorated (first half 14th century). The brief Decorated period lived up to its name. Windows gained tracery, their frames delicately carved and bisected by thin vertical bands of stone and topped with trefoils. Carved and painted wall designs appeared while structural innovation reached stunning new heights. Decorated Gothic was often tagged onto existing churches in bits and pieces; Ely and Exeter cathedrals fared particularly well.

Perpendicular (late 14th to mid 16th centuries). Perpendicular's prime style concern was vertical lines. It quietened the flamboyance of the Decorated period with huge pointed windows and lithe stone piers. Tracery became increasingly delicate. The most staggering achievement was the fanned vault, which allowed for flatter roofs and wowed



Medieval paint jobs

It's hard to imagine it these days, confronted by the sombre stone of Britain's medieval churches and monasteries, but back in the day they were brightly painted inside and out. Statues were coloured with lifelike shades, murals were daubed inside and entire walls were painted outside. The Reformation, Victorian sensibilities and the British weather have removed most of the medieval colour from Britain's churches.

visually with geometric tendrils of stone. The 530-year-old fanned ceiling at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, still guarantees a stiff neck and slackened jaw.

In smaller churches, Perpendicular introduced fine wooden roofs.

Boxing clever: Renaissance churches

By the time the Tudors were on the throne, the great age of British church building had passed. The new Church of England adopted or destroyed the buildings of pre-Reformation faith but rarely replaced them. A small clutch of churches absorbed the Renaissance spirit in the 17th century, sharing the continental taste for Classicism. The church of St Paul in Covent Garden is the finest example. Begun in 1631 by Inigo Jones (named architects were on the scene by that time, and Jones was the first of great significance), St Paul's Church introduced Britain to the Tuscan portico with its no-nonsense columns and recalled Romanesque with round arched windows. Jones travelled to Italy, absorbed the tenets of classical design – it was all about getting things in proportion – and aligned them in England with changing modes of worship. People needed to focus on the preacher, and the boxed shapes of Roman architecture served the purpose well.

Wren's church building binge

Inigo Jones didn't build much but he was highly influential. Cromwell and co kept up the lean years for ecclesiastical architecture during the Commonwealth, but once they'd gone Jones' classical designs spurred the first decent wave of church building since the Reformation. London's calamitous 1666 fire helped out, creating the opportunity for major redevelopment. One architect, Christopher Wren, dominated the rebuild. By the time he was at work in the 1670s, the style of pillars and domes, copied reverently from Rome and then elaborated and exaggerated, had been dubbed Baroque. Wren is usually credited with 52 London churches in the later 17th century, although he had considerable help from assistants. Around half survived the Blitz in the Second World War. St Stephen's in Walbrook is the most elaborate. It's got the dome that would later loom large in Wren's masterpiece, St Paul's Cathedral. Built between 1675 and 1710 to a commission from Charles II, the cathedral has a medieval floor plan but is dominated by that large Classical hemisphere. The pillars, porticos and statues add up to Britain's finest Baroque church.

"READER, IF YOU REQUIRE A MEMORIAL,
LOOK AROUND YOU."

Inscription on Christopher Wren's tomb in St Paul's Cathedral

Congratulations have a moon

Christopher Wren only became an architect in his 30s. Before that he was a highly esteemed scientist, counted among the founders of the Royal Society and admired by

Isaac Newton for work that included the first injection of a substance into the bloodstream (the lucky patient was a dog). When Charles II was restored to the throne, Wren presented the King with a large-scale model of the moon.

The church shaped like a house

In post-Reformation England the Church was content to revamp Roman Catholic buildings for Protestant services but in Scotland and Ireland the Presbyterians, more extreme in their taste for simple services and a good Bible reading, built new structures for the job. Many, like St Columba's in Burntisland, Scotland, built in 1592, resembled a large square house with a tower. The idea that a church should be shaped like a meeting hall has persisted with minority denominations in Scotland, Ireland, England and Wales ever since. Baptists, Unitarians, Methodists and Quakers have built churches that reflect the architectural foibles of their period, from the soft early Georgian elegance of John Wesley's Methodist New Room in Bristol to the Victorian mock Baroque of David Bryce's Unitarian Church in Edinburgh.

Christopher Wren's Baroque cathedral of St Paul's is the fifth church to stand on its London site.

Pugin the mad god of Gothic revival
He was always going to be interesting with a name like Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, and it's true that the architect of the Gothic revival, born in 1812, stuffed a lot into his 25-year career. He began with furniture design, churning out chairs for George IV at Windsor at the age of 15, went on to interior design, political writing and then architecture. His work was guided by conversion to Catholicism, aged 23. Pugin looked to restore Britain's faith in its own architecture, and specifically the Gothic style that had built medieval Catholic cathedrals across the country. His talent didn't forestall a brief stay in prison for debt. A first wife died, and a second and third bore children that would follow in his professional footsteps. In 1851 Pugin was taken to Bedlam, an asylum for the insane, possibly poisoned by the mercury he was prescribed for an eye problem. He died a year later, aged 40.

Taking the mock: Georgian and Victorian churches
The Georgians didn't build any great cathedrals. Instead they assembled a few neo-Classical parish churches, some Baroque, others born of the Palladian style that took hold of grand house building in the early 18th century (see section 3.2.3 for more). The Victorians maintained the fondness for things past but reacted against the formality of neo-Classicism with neo-Gothic churches. They built loads, working hard to ensure Britain's rapidly expanding industrial towns were kept in check with religious instruction of all denominations. A few cathedrals went up. In Truro, Cornwall, the darkly Gothic affair was the first Anglican cathedral since Wren's St Paul's. Augustus Pugin was the prime church architect of the Victorian age. He did most to reinvigorate the medieval spirit of Gothic church building with soaring spires and pointed windows, although he's more famous today for co-designing the Palace of Westminster with Charles Barry.

Mixing medieval and modern: 20th century churches

New churches in the early 20th century plodded on with the medieval revival, driven in particular by Scottish architect Ninian Comper with his weakness for Perpendicular Gothic. A few pursued other trends, notably William Lethaby in 1902 when he built an idiosyncratic Arts and Crafts church in Brockhampton, Herefordshire, complete with thatched roof and concrete vaults. A couple of late 20th century cathedrals braved Modernism, notably at Coventry where Basil Spence used blocky shapes and modern materials to recreate the feel of a tall Gothic structure alongside the ruins of the medieval church blown up by the German air force in the Second World War. Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral was less concerned with continuity, taking a radical circular design. Some said it was an architectural response to the city's other cathedral, the mighty sandstone neo-Gothic Anglican effort (the largest in Britain), designed by 22-year-old Giles Gilbert Scott and begun in 1904. Others called it Paddy's Wigwam, referring to the tent-like structure and its large Irish Catholic congregation.

"TO WALK FROM THE RUINS OF THE OLD CATHEDRAL INTO THE SPLENDOUR OF THE NEW IS TO WALK FROM GOOD FRIDAY TO EASTER, FROM THE RAVAGES OF HUMAN SELF-DESTRUCTION TO THE GLORIOUS HOPE OF RESURRECTION."

John Irvine, Dean of Coventry Cathedral

3.2.3 Castles, piles and factories: the big builds

Key styles and periods

Mid 11th to early

13th century:

Normans build 'motte and bailey' and stone castles.

13th to early

14th century:

concentric castles.

16th century:

Tudor palaces and prodigy houses.

Late 17th to

early 18th century:

Baroque.

Mid 18th century:

Palladianism.

Late 18th century:

neo-Classicism.

Early 19th century:

Regency and Scottish Baronial.

Mid 19th century:

the height of Gothic Revival.

Late 19th century:

Queen Anne and the Domestic Revival.

Here for keeps: early Norman castles

If you see a large, grassy mound in the middle of an English or Welsh town, looking rather forlorn round the back of Burton's, it's probably a motte, an earthwork built up by the Normans to support a wooden castle. The wooden topping will be long gone but these structures were crucial to securing the Normans a foothold in Britain. Their job done, they were soon replaced with stone structures. William the Conqueror dished out land to local lords who protected their patch with these chunky stone behemoths, at the heart of which was the keep, a fortified central tower. There were two main types: the shell keep, essentially a protective wall enclosing wooden buildings; and the hall keep, a multi-storied building with defence downstairs and a great hall, living quarters and chapel somewhere on the floors above. A century after William conquered, Britain had around 2,000 such castles.

Four imposing Norman castles

The White Tower. The formerly whitewashed hall keep at the heart of the Tower of London was built on William's orders and finished in 1097. Rudolf Hess, Adolf Hitler's deputy, was the last person to be imprisoned in the Tower, incarcerated there for four days in 1941.

Orford, Suffolk. Only the hall keep of the 1160s remains but it's a beaut, with 18 sides, a 90ft (27m) high view out to the North Sea and its very own merman legend.

Cardiff. A shell keep with 12 sides constructed circa 1200 as one of the mighty Marcher castles built by Anglo-Norman lords trying to control Wales.

Carrickfergus. The most intact Norman castle in Northern Ireland, surrounded on three sides by Belfast Lough, only gave up its role as a garrison in 1928.

The great castle building age

Britain's castle building bonanza peaked in the late 13th century. Beleaguered by recalcitrant tribes, Edward I recruited French castle design maestro, James of St George, to reinforce his authority. Edward's castles were built in the new concentric style, a design probably picked up on Crusade in the Holy Land: two or three walls were better than one, arranged in ever decreasing rings around central buildings. The first, begun in 1268, was a grey giant in Caerphilly, South Wales, still pleasingly intact today and second only to Windsor as Britain's largest castle. The best appeared in disputed border regions. Northumberland and Scotland bore dozens but the finest appeared in North Wales. With much of England and Wales subdued to the Crown, the great age of castle building was over by the 14th century. Only the fractious Scottish border regions and unruly Ireland kept up the building work. In Scotland they had pele towers, in Ireland tower houses, both of them with living quarters arranged above a defensive ground floor.

Old castles never die.

Not all of England's Norman castles were emasculated by the relative peace that descended over the country some time in the 14th century. Many were put to service again in the 17th century as strategic strongholds in the Civil War (the pounding they took explains why so many are in ruins). Dover's Norman castle saw action in the Napoleonic Wars with troops housed in barracks tunnelled underneath the 12th century structure. The same tunnels were put to service again in the Second World War, converted to use as a command centre and underground hospital. The evacuation of British and French troops from Dunkirk was masterminded from within the warren.

Three medieval castles built to last

Caerlaverock. A rare triangular affair in Dumfries and Galloway actually built c.1277 by the Scots to resist Edward I. It didn't quite do the job.

Beaumaris. The last, biggest and best of Edward I's castles in North Wales is still staggering. Considered the apogee of British medieval military architecture.

Smailholm Tower. A pele tower built in the Scottish Borders by the Pringle family in the 15th century. Locals would huddle inside when the English came calling.

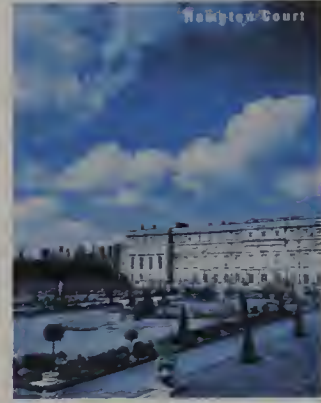
On the defensive: the Welsh bastides
 When James of St George built Edward's stock of north Welsh castles he often incorporated bastides. These fortified towns had their origin in Gascony, France, where the English king had considerable 13th century influence. In Conwy much of the old bastide wall remains, interspersed with 21 towers. They were built not for the Welsh, but for English settlers in need of protection from understandably grouchy locals.

"HARDWICK HALL, MORE GLASS THAN WALL."

Early 17th century rhyming couplet

Pile drive: the time of great houses

Large decorative houses replaced castles in Tudor England. No one really needed ten-foot thick stone walls anymore. And as builders turned to brick and Henry VIII gave Church cash to the favoured few, a secular building boom ensued. Designs were often eclectic: Gothic, Renaissance and Flemish motifs could all appear in one building, but, in common, new builds rarely kowtowed to prevailing European trends. Henry VIII built his own collection of sumptuous palaces characterised by tall redbrick gatehouses and twisting chimneystacks. The palaces of Hampton Court and St James are the best preserved. Elizabeth I had a different impact. She didn't build her own palaces but she did ensure that anyone who might put her up for the night would do so properly. Palatial houses were assembled simply on the off chance that she might visit, and some lay unused when she never showed. They became known as prodigy houses. Burghley House, begun in 1555, in Lincolnshire, was better than most, its uncoordinated pale



stone mash of castellation, cupola and balustrade undeniably dazzling. While houses built toward the end of Elizabeth's reign, Burghley included, maintained this mismatch of styles, they did begin playing with the symmetry of Classical design. Longleat in Wiltshire and Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, both designed by Robert Smythson, got the ancient proportions just right.

Scotland does the Renaissance

Scotland's pugnacious clans ensured that defence remained pertinent to castle design longer there than in England, and the tower house (the lanky, defensive child of the pele tower) remained popular into the 17th century. However, Scotland was also more tuned into the Renaissance than England. Under the Stuarts, particularly James V with his preference for French wives, grand Scottish houses picked up elements of French Renaissance design in the 16th century. Stirling Castle, with its sumptuous façade, is usually considered the finest example of Renaissance architecture in Britain.

Back to the Classics

Inigo Jones and Christopher Wren warmed Britain up for Classicism in the 17th century, and while architects couldn't quite leave Gothic alone, they spent much of the next 200 years plugging away at the Ancients, going through three phases:

Baroque (1660-1720). Two men dominated the sensual curves, straight lines and overblown decoration of secular Baroque. Nicholas Hawksmoor was trained by Christopher Wren and put his education to good use at Easton Neston, an idiosyncratic Northants country house begun in 1695. Hawksmoor also collaborated with the other great British Baroque architect, John Vanbrugh. The pair worked on Castle Howard in Yorkshire, and Blenheim Palace, the finest Baroque pile in Britain.

Palladianism (1720-60). Association with the Tories, the deposed Stuarts and their despised French friends sullied Baroque's good name, and the Georgian era dawned with a new generation of architects. It was the age of the Grand Tour, the ritual European jolly that introduced Britain's young nobs to the Classical 'correctness' of Roman building. Architects looked back to Inigo Jones and in doing so found the 16th century buildings of Andrea Palladio. Palladianism dominated British architecture for 50 years, depositing correct, classically-proportioned and somewhat stiff buildings. Facades were generally flat save for the odd portico, but inside the buildings were more ebullient. Holkham Hall in Norfolk, begun by William Kent in 1734, is the apotheosis of Palladianism. The style also found approval in Ireland, where it kept a purer form than in England but added fancier, rococo style interiors. Castle Coole in County Fermanagh was a high point.

Neo-Classicism (1760-90). Eschewing the rules of Palladianism, neo-Classicism was more decorative, more concerned with Classical motifs than with exact proportions. Scotsman Robert Adam was the chief architect and Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire, the high point of his

Britain's first Classical building
The Queen's House in Greenwich was Britain's first wilfully Classical building (others like Burghley and Longleat merely bore elements of Classicism). It was built by Inigo Jones in the early 17th century for two successive queens of England. Inspired by Andrea Palladio's use of Classical proportion, Jones came up with the 'double cube' shape.

Robbie and Will:
the klepto kids

The two giants of neo-Classicism, Robert Adam and William Chambers, didn't limit themselves to a pastiche of ancient Rome. They took liberally from other periods and locations too. Chambers designed the ten-storey Chinoiserie Pagoda in Kew Gardens, while Adam converted a rambling house at Culzean in Ayrshire into a romantic, medieval style castle with battlements and turrets.

achievements. He tended to remodel rather than build from scratch. A master of interiors, Adam drew on first-hand experience of domestic architecture in Pompeii and Herculaneum. The south front of Kedleston was modelled on the Arch of Constantine in Rome.

Commentators said he brought 'movement' to buildings, drawing out columns and pushing back niches to enliven the flat, monumental feel of Palladianism. The other great British neo-Classicalist was William Chambers, another Scot, responsible for Somerset House in London in 1776.

It's just like being in Athens (no, really):

Regency architecture

Politically, the Regency period lasted from 1811 to 1820, the years when Prince George played proxy king for mad dad George III. However, in architectural terms, Regency expands to include the first 30 years of the 19th century, a period when elegant neo-Classicism spilled from the grand residences into town houses and even town planning (see section 3.2.5 for more). Neo-Classicism also twisted toward ancient Greece. Wealthy Brits began digging around in Greece and absconding back to Britain with whatever ancient remains they unearthed, inspiring a cultural fascination with all things Greek. Appropriately enough, the British Museum, custodian of the Elgin Marbles, is the most arresting structure of the Greek Revival. Designed by Robert Smirke in the 1820s, the façade with its regimental Ionic order of columns was typical of the movement's measured pomp. The popularity of the Greek Revival in Scotland, at home amid the Scottish Enlightenment, brought Edinburgh its 'Athens of the North' subheading. William Henry Playfair was the prime architect, writing Hellenistic elegance into the likes of the Royal Scottish Academy.

However, Regency wasn't all about Classicism. Elsewhere George IV's love of frippery unleashed a 'cult of styles'. The exotic eastern flavour of Chambers' Pagoda at Kew reached an incongruous zenith in the King's Royal Pavilion in Brighton. Built over seven years from 1815 by John Nash, the onion domes and latticework outside speak of Indian and Islamic design while the opulent interior has a strong oriental flavour.



A palace made of glass
Joseph Paxton's epic Crystal Palace was built for the Great Exhibition of 1851, assembled in Hyde Park in just six months. Constructed from wrought and cast iron and 25 acres of glass, the mile-long structure was a triumph of Victorian innovation. Dismantled and moved to Sydenham after the exhibition, the Crystal Palace burned down in 1936 – the sound of the roof crashing down could be heard five miles away.

Past masters: Victorian architecture

Regency's style clash grew into the pastiche parade of Victorian architecture. Gothic eventually overshadowed Classical in the battle of the revivals but was often used in tandem with other styles – neo-Classical, Elizabethan and the Renaissance modes of France, Venice and Italy – in the space of one building. The grandiose styles of the past encountered the new wealth of the present, conveyed in magnificent warehouses, railways stations and arcades. Even factories began to acquire elaborate Greek, Gothic or Italianate facades. John Marshall hid his Leeds linen

Scotland gets grander
Scotland picked up the revivalist Victorian mood and built large decorative castles in the Baronial Style. 'Stick a cone on it' seemed to be a key philosophy: porches, turrets and even bay windows were adorned with 'candlesnuffers'. The style reached a climax at Balmoral Castle, Queen Victoria's Deeside hideout.

mill behind an Egyptian Revival frontage in 1838. We can only guess whether the workers putting in 72-hour weeks appreciated the interpretation of Edfu's Temple of Horus. Despite the stylistic bunfight, Victorian architecture can be hewn roughly into three periods:

Early Victorian (1830-50). Gothic – deemed the only genuine English style – was in the ascendancy. A backlash against industrialisation led by the critic John Ruskin directed an obsession with the aesthetics of an idealised medieval Britain. Messrs Barry and Pugin (see section 3.2.2 for more) captured the pointy, rather heavy Gothic style in the Houses of Parliament. Thomas Cubitt and Prince Albert proved, however, that eclecticism still reigned with the Italianate Osborne House, built on the Isle of Wight in the 1840s.

High Victorian (1850-70). The overblown ornamentation of Gothic reached its height with architect George Gilbert Scott at the helm. The neo-Gothic St Pancras Station Hotel in London was one of his finest buildings. The station itself, opened in 1868, was also stunning, its patterned bricks and latticed ironwork typical of the pride and grandeur the Victorians brought to public buildings. It recently emerged, beaming, from a lengthy revamp to take on the role of London's Eurostar terminal.

Late Victorian (1870-1900). Gothic was losing out to a more homely, domestic style by the 1870s. The Arts and Crafts movement, itself born of that Victorian yearning for a simplified past, provided the inspiration. Architecturally, Arts and Crafts evolved into the Queen Anne or Domestic Revival style, a light mix of red brick, gables and floral motifs that had little to do with the actual Queen Anne of the 18th century.

In and out of love with Modernism:

20th century builds

One step forward, two steps back

The rustic whiff of Arts and Crafts lingered into the 20th century. Among its progeny, the Domestic Revival's unchallenging vernacular style of traditional methods and roughcast render would end up plastered along suburban avenues for decades to come. Charles Voysey and Edwin Lutyens were the key vernacular architects, although Lutyens soon turned from domesticity to Classicism, sparking an Edwardian neo-Baroque movement dubbed the Wrenaissance: while the Continent swooned over Art Nouveau, under Lutyen, Britain regressed 200 years. One rare work of innovation did slip through the conservative net, it too owing some debt to Arts and Crafts. Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art mixed the organic curves of Art Nouveau with Scottish tower house vernacular and functional, geometric style. It was a pioneering British take on the Modernism that would shape 20th century European architecture.

I've had better holidays...

In 1914 Charles Rennie Mackintosh rented a house in Walberswick, drawn to the Suffolk coastal village as a watercolourist (he was more than just an architect) in search of the light. However, locals called in the army when they became suspicious of the way he would walk with a lantern along the shore in the evening. When Mackintosh began ranting in a thick Glaswegian brogue he was arrested on suspicion of being a German spy. He spent a week in prison before the confusion was cleared up and he fled sunny Suffolk.



Reluctant Modernists

While Le Corbusier and Gropius followed Mackintosh's functionalist lead abroad, in 1930s Britain little could dent the prevailing Classicism dominated by Lutyens. The location of Britain's most progressive interwar efforts speak of Modernism's perceived worth: the Penguin Pool and Gorilla House at London Zoo were both designed by Russian émigré Berthold Lubetkin in the early 1930s.

Great Scott

In 1929 Elisabeth Scott won a competition to design the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. Her cuboid Modernist structure was among the first significant buildings by a female architect in Britain.

Penguins' Lubetkin critique

Lubetkin's Penguin Pool at London Zoo has Grade 1 listed status. In 2004 the inhabitants were removed and replaced with Chinese alligators. Apparently the penguins were suffering from aching joints caused by walking on concrete. They couldn't burrow either, an essential part of the penguin love ritual. The zoo has admitted problems in adapting its 13 listed buildings, including a few Brutalist structures, to the modern demands of animal care.

"IN MY EXPERIENCE, IF YOU HAVE TO KEEP THE LAVATORY DOOR SHUT BY EXTENDING YOUR LEFT LEG, IT'S MODERN ARCHITECTURE." Nancy Banks-Smith, critic

Lubetkin went on to explore the social function of architecture with Highpoint One, a seminal north London apartment block that pursued the Modernist love of a straight line and reinforced concrete. Art Deco, the more decorative side of Modernism, found its best British form in the lidos and cinemas that latched on to a 1930s thirst for public leisure.

Concrete bungle: the New Brutalists

Modernism broke through in the 1950s, even while it was rarely mind blowing. The 1951 Festival of Britain showcased modern architecture with radical, temporary builds on London's bombed out South Bank. One still remains, Leslie Martin's Festival Hall, a first British brush with large-scale Modernist architecture. The public grew to accept (if not love) its angular concrete and glass body. Cityscapes across Britain grew tall concrete blocks in the following 20 years but few stirred much admiration. Modernism's unforgiving corners were pushed further by the New Brutalist school, convinced they could find social harmony with raw, blocky structures. Peter and Alison Smithson led the mode that generated shopping centres, public buildings and flats. The public struggled to swallow that much concrete, and many such builds have since been torn down. However, recent reappraisal has found something to love in the New Brutalist style.

Some buildings, like Ernö Goldfinger's 1972 landmark Trellick Tower (once described as 'Colditz in the sky') in west London, have even gained listed status, while contemporary British architects have returned to bare concrete.



The High-Tech Rogers and Foster show

Bare concrete was out of fashion by the 1980s. For many, whatever the perceived social merit, the Le Corbusier style just didn't work with an overcoat of British drizzle. Architects of the later 20th century turned instead to glass and steel. Richard Rogers and Norman Foster, knights and household names both, are the world-famous trailblazers of the High-Tech style. Rogers made his name incorporating the mechanics of a building – pipes, elevators and girders – into its external aesthetics. His 'inside out' Lloyd's Building in London has been lauded since its 1986 inception. Foster has also been concerned with transparency, using recurring plate glass segments and exposed metal beams. His first major triumph was the amorphous Willis Faber and Dumas building in Ipswich, radical on its 1975 initiation for a tinted glass shell, inscrutable in daylight but revealing at night. The lurching glass beehive of the Greater London Authority building beside the Thames (once referred to as the 'glass testicle' by then mayor Ken Livingstone) has seen the Foster style develop into the 21st century.

"BRITAIN GETS THE ARCHITECTURE IT DESERVES. WE DON'T VALUE ARCHITECTURE, WE DON'T TAKE IT SERIOUSLY, WE DON'T WANT TO PAY FOR IT AND THE ARCHITECT ISN'T TRUSTED."

David Chipperfield, winner of the prestigious Stirling Prize for architecture in 2007, gives his opinion to *The Times*

Rebuilding the Baltic
Norman Foster's Swiss Re Building, or 'the Gherkin', was built on the site of the Baltic Exchange, an Edwardian masterpiece all but destroyed by an IRA bomb in 1992. What remained of the Exchange was boxed up and bought for £800,000 in 2006 by two Estonian businessmen intent on reconstructing the century-old building in the middle of Tallinn.

Protection racket: listed buildings

The British listed building scheme protects anything of significant architectural interest – on the grounds of age, decoration or historic importance – from destruction or unsympathetic alteration. There are three Grades (I, II* and II) covering the 500,000 or so listed properties in Britain (Scotland has an A, B and C system). Almost everything built before 1700 gets automatic listing, as do most buildings constructed between 1700 and 1840.



What do the British people think of their modern architecture?

In 1984 Prince Charles stood in front of RIBA (the Royal Association of British Architects) and talked about how modern architects "consistently ignored the feelings and wishes of the mass of ordinary people in this country". The appalled black-tied

audience dismissed HRH as an ill-informed amateur, but he articulated what a lot of ordinary Brits felt: that modern architecture was self-indulgent, unattractive and poorly planned. Things have changed somewhat in the past two decades, thanks largely to the renunciation of gaunt concrete structures. A number of successful builds, from Foster's Gherkin to Herzog and de Meuron's reinvigoration of Bankside Power Station as the Tate Modern, have acclimatised the public to more radical architecture. After a perfunctory period of ridicule, most new landmark buildings acquire a nickname and a place in public affections.

Five great buildings of contemporary Britain

Eden Project by Nicholas Grimshaw. The most futuristic build in Britain sits like giant frogspawn in a former Cornish quarry.

Maggie's Centre Kirkcaldy by Zaha Hadid. Black and pointy outside, light and curvy inside; from the Baghdad-born British architect.

Swiss Re Building by Norman Foster. Britain's most popular piece of recent architecture rises 180 metres above the City of London like a cosmic vegetable.

Gateshead Millennium Bridge by Wilkinson Eyre. The lithe double arcs on the Tyne move, appearing to wink as the ships pass underneath.

National Assembly for Wales by Richard Rogers. Cardiff Bay's parliament is transparent and ecologically conscientious. And it's got a wonderfully wavy wooden roof.

Rural vernacular architecture

Rural vernacular architecture before the 20th century was dictated by the local climate, building materials and agriculture. Each region had its own style.

In modern housing, such nuances have all but gone, replaced with a homogenous new-build format across the country. Thankfully, plenty of the older stuff survives outside the main urban areas.

Stone cottages

Britain's stone houses were built mainly in the north and west. Yorkshire has its granite, Cumbria, Wales and Cornwall their slate, the Cotswolds its honey-coloured limestone and Northumberland a red sandstone. Further east, flint and clunch (a chalky rock) are both used in East Anglia. Roofs were sometimes built of stone too, although thatch was more likely. Upland areas had longhouses, two storey affairs with people at one end and their animals and crops at the other. Scottish, Irish and Welsh crofts had a similar partition but were reduced to one long, low storey with a room at either end.

Timber-framed houses

Where there was no local stone, medieval Britons built timber-framed properties, filling the gaps with cob (mud and straw). Box-shaped hall houses were at the grander end of timber-framing, their central hall flanked by two-storeyed living quarters. They're found all over southern England, East Anglia and the Midlands. Cheaper versions just had the hall. Cruck houses were simpler, constructed from two curved timbers propped up to support both walls and roof.

Green ambitions

In 2006 the Government announced it wanted all new homes to be 'zero carbon' within a decade. Two years later, a six-star rating system for environmental performance was introduced. Architects and developers have called Parliament's aims unrealistic.

"A TOTAL OF THREE MILLION NEW HOMES FOR FAMILIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY BY 2020."

Or so pledged Prime Minister Gordon Brown in 2007

Urban vernacular architecture

The Victorians

Lured from the countryside in their millions, the new working class of the industrial revolution took up residence in the brick terraces of burgeoning factory towns from Belfast to Birmingham. A fireplace in each room, rudimentary plumbing, sash windows and a small yard were typical features. In Wales, long ribbons of terracing appeared in the coal mining Valleys. The Scots saw the worst side of Victorian urban living: they built up as well as along, creating multi-storied tenement flats with communal stairways and yards. The tenements rapidly turned into overcrowded slums. Large amounts of Britain's Victorian terracing was flattened in the 1950s and 60s to make way for wider roads and high-rise blocks of flats.

Out in the burbs

When town centres became overcrowded in the early 20th century and housing crept out to new suburbs, domestic architecture was led by the Victorian Arts and Crafts movement. Semi-detached replaced terrace and nostalgia set in with mock beams (the so-called Tudorbethan style) and pebbledashed render. Modernist builds in the 1960s and 70s spawned featureless housing estates on the edges of towns and high-rise blocks in the centres. A decade later, the half-hearted modernism was gone, replaced by a confused pastiche. The Tudorbethan style refuses to die; faux beams still find their way onto modern housing estates, although a scaled down Regency style reigned on mass new builds through the 1990s. With a chronic housing shortage looming, local authorities are now turning to lowish-rise flats, for which a tentative modernism is being employed. Ecological concerns are making a painfully slow impact on new developments in the 21st century.

Best laid plans

The random pattern of most British town centres, still guided by medieval street plans, belies a modern preoccupation with planning, with presenting domestic architecture in communal, ordered ways. The Georgians were the first to plan large clusters of housing, and planners and architects have been collaborating ever since, setting out terraces, squares and whole towns. In a more general sense, attempts by planners to accommodate the motorcar ruined historic town and city centres in the later 20th century. Innumerable medieval buildings were simply knocked down in the quest to make town centres more profitable; replaced with shopping precincts and car parks that removed any aspect of local charm.

"YOU HAVE TO GIVE THIS MUCH TO THE LUFTWAFFE: WHEN IT KNOCKED DOWN OUR BUILDINGS IT DID NOT REPLACE THEM WITH ANYTHING MORE OFFENSIVE THAN RUBBLE. WE DID THAT."
Prince Charles

Four memorable plans

Georgian: Bath. Transformed from village to grandiose spa town in the early 18th century by John Wood and his son. The Circus and Royal Crescent remain inspiring.

Victorian: Saltaire. Built around a Yorkshire textile mill in 1853 by enlightened industrialist Titus Salt, Saltaire had neat gritstone terraces, bathouses and a hospital.

Arts and Crafts: Hampstead Garden Suburb. Created a century ago as a model village on the fringe of soot-shrouded London. Other 'garden suburbs' followed suit.

Modern: Alton Estate. A New Brutalist mix of high-rise blocks, maisonettes, parkland and social strife on the edge of London; one of many concrete complexes built to remedy the post-war housing shortage of the 1950s.



4 Performing arts

4.1. Music *p161*

4.1.1. **Folk stories:**
traditional music *p162*

4.1.2. **Flashes of
brilliance:** British
classical music *p167*

4.1.3. **Rebel forces:**
rock, pop, punk and
the rest *p173*

4.2. Theatre, dance and comedy *p185*

4.2.1. **Setting the
scene for
Shakespeare:**
how theatre found its
golden age *p186*

4.2.2. **Light brigade:**
from Restoration
Comedy to Gilbert and
Sullivan *p194*

4.2.3. **Mirth, musicals
and a good portion of
angst:** modern theatre
p200

4.2.4. **Britain on the
dancefloor** *p208*

4.2.5. **Laughing gear:**
modern British comedy
p213



4.1 Music

Music is the precocious talent of contemporary British culture, and has been since the 1960s. Multicultural, global, cool – is there a better advert for the modern nation? But there's much more to British music than backbeats, iconic riffs and the Winehouse beehive; it also harbours a rich folk and classical repertoire.

Folk stories: traditional music

Don't point that
thing at me

In the Jacobite Rising of 1745, pipers accompanied the Highland armies into battle, their deafening noise striking fear into English hearts – a response it can still induce today. Following the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden in 1746, the playing of the Great Highland Bagpipe was effectively outlawed. One piper, James Reid, was hanged because his bagpipe was deemed 'an instrument of war'.

Mention 'folk' music to many Brits and they'll groan, turn and run. The modern variant suffers from an image problem, as famous for weird beards and chunky knits as for its distinctive sound. But those in the know are appreciative of Britain's folk heritage, and while modern folk has been around since the 1950s, the traditional sort traces its roots back beyond the Middle Ages. This was the music of the common people; the love songs, work songs, lullabies and dance tunes of the peasantry, passed from generation to generation. The songs and tunes evolved and mutated over time, and those that survive are impossible to attribute or date, which, of course, is part of their charm. Scotland, Wales and England each have their own styles and traditions.

Scotland

Britain's northern territories have a proud folk music tradition, from the Gaelic waulking songs sung by tweed makers and puirt a beul (improvised nonsensical 'mouth music') of the Highlands and Islands to the ballads of the Lowlands and Borders, all accompanied by the fiddle, bagpipe, whistle and clarsach (small Celtic harp). Scotland has always been big on piping: the Great Highland Bagpipe has become emblematic and piobaireachd, the classical music of the bagpipe, instantly recognisable. The Scottish tradition evolves still, pursued in the local mods (festivals of Gaelic music) and by groups like the Tannahill Weavers and the Battlefield Band.

Northern Ireland

The old counties of Ulster share in the wider Irish rituals of Gaelic music. Here, more than anywhere else in the UK, traditional music remains a regular feature of life, even while the legendary pub sessions featuring guitar, fiddle, bodhrán (shallow goatskin drum), squeezebox and flute actually began with Irish expats in English pubs. The most prominent Gaelic folk band from the north in recent years has been Altan. In Northern Ireland specifically, the Scots and English plantation settlers of the 17th century brought ballads that remain part of the folk repertoire. The Ulster Scots

tradition of marching bands, featuring pipe (or flute) and giant lambeg drum, also remains strong. World conquering flautist James Galway blew his first flute in a Belfast band.

Wales

The self-proclaimed 'Land of Song' is famed worldwide for the male voice choirs that live on in the former mining communities of South Wales; the ruddy-faced gents of the Treorchy and the Morriston Orpheus choirs are considered masters of the craft. To the north and west of Wales, instruments like the crwth (six-stringed lyre) and the pibgorn (wooden pipe), and the performing of simple, vernacular penillion songs can be traced back to the 12th century, to the first eisteddfods, the spirited contests of music and poetry. Penillion were sung to the accompaniment of the Welsh triple harp (a harp with three rows of strings), the instrument most commonly associated with Wales. The traditions live on: Robin Huw Bowen and Llio Rhydderch are internationally acclaimed Welsh triple harp players and the annual National Eisteddfod of Wales is a major cultural event.

Competitive culture

The eisteddfod has become an important element of resurgent Welsh identity. Apparently, the tradition dates back to 1176 when Lord Rhys held a musical showdown in his Cardigan castle, although the current Welsh language format seems to have emerged in a 19th century revival. The biggest is the International Eisteddfod, held annually in Llangollen, North Wales.

England

Pre-Christian festivals and ceremonies, like the Furry Dance in Cornwall, the Nutter Dance in Lancashire (both spring things) and apple tree wassailing in Somerset, often provided the initial inspiration for English folk music. From the 16th century, popular songs detailing the exploits of heroes and villains were printed on sheets known as broadsides and sold on the streets. One of the earliest recorded 'broadsides' is *A Lytel Geste of Robyne Hood* (c.1506). Traditional English instruments include the fiddle, concertina and Northumbrian pipes (a bagpipe blown with bellows), of which Kathryn Tickell is a well-known modern-day exponent. England also harbours a strong tradition of sea shanties, the sailors' work songs. Some are still performed, notably by the Fisherman's Friends of Port Isaac, Cornwall.

Three traditional British songs that stood the test of time

Sumer is Icumen in. An English secular round (a single melody for multiple voices each starting at a different point) discovered in Reading Abbey and dating from around 1240. It features in the cult movie *The Wicker Man* (1973).

Scarborough Fair. The song has existed in many forms over the centuries. In it, a former lover is asked to perform a set of impossible tasks in order to be taken back. Simon & Garfunkel's arrangement featured in Mike Nichols' film *The Graduate* (1967).

Suo Gan. A traditional Welsh lullaby of uncertain date, *Suo Gan* remains in regular performance today, and appeared in the Steven Spielberg film *Empire of the Sun* (1987).

English folk: the giant panda of music

By the end of the 19th century, the English folk song was an endangered species, lost in the new urban sprawl and shoved aside by music hall. But folk had its protectors: Cecil Sharp and a small group of enthusiasts from the Folk Song Society set about collecting, transcribing and cataloguing folk songs from around the country. Sharp, a composer and music teacher, gathered thousands of songs, often adding his own clumsy piano parts. Significantly, he encouraged others to join in, most notably the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, whose work would bear a large debt to the English folk song.

In post-war Britain, the English folk song needed rescuing again. A second revival occurred in the 1950s and '60s, instigated almost single-handedly by Ewan MacColl (real name Jimmie Miller), a communist, playwright and singer/songwriter. He founded London's Ballads and Blues Club and, in reaction to the rise of

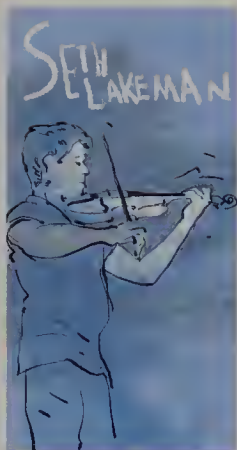
American folk, introduced a draconian policy demanding that performers only play songs from their own country. Suddenly, folk clubs were popular; for a few years they were even considered cool. Peggy Seegar, an American who became MacColl's third wife, and for whom he wrote his masterpiece *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* (1957), Shirley Collins, and Martin Carthy were also instrumental to the revival. By the 1960s folk was fusing with rock 'n' roll. *Folk Roots, New Routes* (1964) by Shirley Collins and Davey Graham is usually considered the landmark album, while Steeleye Span, the jazz-influenced Pentangle, Fairport Convention and The Incredible String Band, a psychedelic Scottish outfit, were also important. Alas, the boom was short-lived – by the mid 1970's, folk rock had become regularly self-indulgent and unwittingly ridiculous.

Maybe this time: contemporary folk

In 1981 folk music changed its name. The International Folk Music Council was reborn as the International Council for Traditional Music, perhaps because the very mention of the word 'folk' conjured that image of a beard, a jumper and an ear with a finger in it. Yet while the Scots, Irish and Welsh now appear to cherish their traditional folk music, in England the negative stereotypes persist. However, there is some hope. In recent years, English folk music has undergone a revival (yes, another one) with young musicians like Seth Lakeman and Kate Rusby, neither of whom has a beard, playing traditional English music with energy, confidence and pride.

Dirty secrets

Ewan MacColl's *Dirty Old Town* (1949) is still a jukebox regular, usually in versions recorded by The Dubliners and The Pogues. Many mistakenly assume it's an Irish song, but the town in question was actually Salford, MacColl's birthplace. Salford City Council (it's not actually a town) objected to the indictment of their ward yet subsequently knocked much of the place down and started again. As for MacColl, he led an eventful life. MI5 kept a file on his communist activities in the 1930s and leaned on the BBC in an effort to suppress his work. He deserted the army in 1940 and didn't resurface until after the war when he mysteriously escaped prosecution. He was married three times and fathered five children, one of whom, Kirsty MacColl, was a successful songwriter herself until she was killed in a scuba diving accident in 2000.



Five contemporary folk artists worth a listen

Eliza Carthy. The daughter of folk musicians Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson is an acclaimed singer and fiddle player. *Anglicana* (2002) was a highpoint.

Seth Lakeman. Dynamic singer, songwriter and fiddle player from Devon who mixes traditional folk with the occasional modern beat. *Kitty Jay* (2004) and *Freedom Fields* (2006) were both critically acclaimed albums.

Kate Rusby. A singer/songwriter known as 'The Barnsley Nightingale', Rusby plays traditional and original folk songs. Had a top ten single with *All Over Again* (2006), a duet with Ronan Keating.

Show of Hands. Singer/songwriter Steve Knightly and multi-instrumentalist Phil Beer (they do have beards) play mainly original folk material. *Lie of the Land* (1995) was hailed a masterpiece.

Laura Marling. Another singer/songwriter, this one more in the American folk tradition of Joni Mitchell and Neil Young. The debut album *Alas I Cannot Swim* (2008) won a coveted Mercury Music Prize nomination.



A G O D O F S M A L L T H I N G S
Yorkshire's own Jake Thackray (1938-2002)
 Possibly the most underrated
 person ever to pick up a guitar
 and write a song...

Flashes of brilliance: British classical music

Britain has never been able to boast a Mozart, Beethoven or Bach, and in any list of legendary classical composers only one Brit, at most, will make an occasional appearance in the top ten – and that's usually the one who was really a German. But don't tune out just yet; classical music has played its part in shaping modern British culture and a number of composers merit closer inspection.

The early years

First things first, where did British classical music come from? The origins lie in the monophonic (single melodic line) liturgical plainsong and Gregorian chant of the early Middle Ages, which, with the later organum and motet (both polyphonic – having more than one part), dominated medieval music. It all informed the work of John Dunstable (or Dunstaple), the first great British composer, in the early 15th century. Most of Dunstable's manuscripts, an important musical link between the medieval and Renaissance eras, were torched in the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and much of the surviving repertoire was pieced together from fragments discovered in Europe. His best-known work is a motet – *Veni Sancte Spiritus – Veni Creator* (15th century).

Mad for the madrigal

Polyphonic music continued its development in the Renaissance era, aided by the appearance of new instruments like the viol and the virginals (an early harpsichord). Henry VIII's almighty rift with Rome upped the importance of royal patronage and, while most music remained religious in nature, there was a growing demand for more secular stuff. The major composers of the 16th and early 17th centuries included John Taverner, Orlando Gibbons and William Byrd, but perhaps the most

Three reasons why
Henry Purcell is not dull

His *Music for the
Funeral of Queen Mary*
(1695) was used as the
title music for the
Stanley Kubrick film
A Clockwork Orange
(1971).

His music was a major
influence on The Who's
legendary guitarist, Pete
Townshend.

He may have died of
chocolate poisoning
(although TB seems
more likely).

important was Thomas Tallis whose *Spem in alium*
(c.1570), a forty-part motet, is considered a
masterpiece. By the later 16th century, the English
madrigal was all the rage. They were light, melodic,
secular songs, usually for three to six unaccompanied
voices, and any composer worth their keep had a few
up their sleeve. Few did better than Thomas Morley,
although today his *Now is the Month of Maying* (1595)
actually reads like a prime example of just how banal
the English madrigal could be:

*"Now is the month of maying,
When merry lads are playing,
Fa lá la la la.
Each with his bonny lass,
Upon the greeny grass,
Fa la la la la."*

Finally, someone really good: the Purcell years
When the political turmoil of Civil War and the
Protectorate finally ebbed, music in the late 17th
century was illuminated by the brief brilliance of Henry
Purcell, considered by many to be the greatest of all
British composers. Purcell was an exceptional organist
and, as a composer, his sheer inventiveness and
mastery of the Baroque form commanded the
admiration of all his contemporaries. He produced a
great body of work including music for the church,
the theatre and royalty. He died at the age of 36 and
was buried in Westminster Abbey next to the organ.
Purcell's one opera, *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), featuring
the famous *Dido's Lament*, is considered his best
work.

He might be German, but he's our German:
the age of Handel

The leading figure of 18th century British music was undoubtedly George Frideric Handel. Born in Germany, with his name spelled slightly differently, he moved to London in 1712, aged 27, and later became a British subject. Influenced by Purcell and Italian composers like Corelli, Handel's many operas and oratorios displayed a deceptive simplicity, bringing great fame, wealth and popularity during his lifetime. Mozart, Beethoven and Bach all apparently admired his work. Little is known of Handel's private life except that he ate and drank to excess and had a very, very bad temper. The fact that he never married has drawn speculation about his sexual orientation. He's best remembered for his *Water Music* (1717) and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (1749), orchestral works written for Kings George I and George II (also both German) respectively, and for his supreme achievement, *Messiah* (1741), the oratorio with which his name will always be associated. Another notable composer of the period was Thomas Arne whose *Masque of Alfred* (1740) featured the ever popular song *Rule, Britannia!*

"HANDEL IS THE ONLY PERSON I WOULD WISH TO BE, WERE I NOT BACH."

A remark attributed to J.S. Bach

Flags at the ready

The Proms, founded in 1895, is an eight-week classical music festival held every year at the Royal Albert Hall. The highlight is the last night – a more informal evening with lots of flag waving and stirring tunes like *Jerusalem* and *Land of Hope and Glory*.

Mr Holst, Mr Holst

Gustav Holst hated signing autographs. The story goes that, when asked, he would hand out a typed statement reading: "I do not give out autographs."

The land without music?

In the title of a 1904 book, Oscar Adolf Hermann Schmitz, a German critic, described Britain as *Das Land Ohne Musik* (The Land Without Music). He may have had a point. Since Handel's death in 1759, Britain's contribution to classical music had been negligible. However, Schmitz's condemnation was ill timed: the 20th century saw a renaissance in British music that incorporated a new nationalist style. It also bore four great British composers:

Edward Elgar

Despite having no formal training in composition, Elgar progressed from a job as bandmaster at Worcester and County Lunatic Asylum to being the first British-born composer in 200 years to achieve international recognition. He came to prominence with his first major orchestral work, *Enigma Variations* (1899) – the enigma being that the fourteen variations are on an original theme that is never heard. Elgar's greatness, some say his Englishness, lies in a use of bold melodic themes set against a brooding, nostalgic melancholy. An oratorio, *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900), is considered his finest work and his *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1* (1901), otherwise known as *Land of Hope and Glory*, brings the house down every year at the Proms.

Gustav Holst

Born in England of Swedish extraction, Holst was a highly original composer, the master of orchestration who drew on influences as disparate as English folk songs and madrigals, Hindu mysticism and the avant-garde sounds of Stravinsky and Schoenberg. He was also fascinated by astrology, the study of which provided the inspiration for his most famous work (although he never considered it his best), *The Planets* (1914-16), a seven-movement orchestral suite.

Vaughan Williams

Ralph (weirdly rhymes with 'safe') Vaughan Williams is considered to be the most characteristically English of composers. He rejected most foreign influences, infusing his music instead with the moods and rhythms of native folk songs and the work of 16th century English composers. His rich, plaintive style evoked the essence of the English countryside, so much so that Stravinsky said his *Pastoral Symphony* (1921) was "like staring at a cow for a long time" – a little kinder perhaps than fellow composer Elisabeth Lutyens who christened it "cow pat music". Williams is best known for *A Sea Symphony* (1910) and *A London Symphony* (1913), and for his concerto *The Lark Ascending* (1914) featuring that famous, ethereal solo violin.

Benjamin Britten

Britten was, to date, the last of the great British composers. His dexterity and inventiveness, particularly as a vocal composer, brought him international fame on a par with Elgar. He's best remembered for the opera *Peter Grimes* (1945), the orchestral work *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1946), and *War Requiem* (1961), a large scale orchestral and choral work featuring the poetry of Wilfred Owen. He wasn't a fan of the 'Englishness' of the previous generation of composers, although he did arrange folk songs for his partner, the tenor Peter Pears. Throughout his life, Britten's homosexuality and his pacifism were well known. However, few were aware of his obsessive, though innocent, relationships with a procession of 13-year-old boys.

"IT IS CRUEL, YOU KNOW, THAT MUSIC SHOULD BE SO BEAUTIFUL IT HAS THE BEAUTY OF LONELINESS AND OF PAIN OF STRENGTH AND FREEDOM. THE BEAUTY OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND NEVER SATISFIED LOVE THE CRUEL BEAUTY OF NATURE, AND EVERLASTING BEAUTY OF MONOTONY."

Benjamin Britten on cheerful form

And did those feet
Hubert Parry isn't among the best-known composers but he is held responsible for the 20th century renaissance of British classical music. A choral composer of some repute, he was also Director of the Royal College of Music where he tutored Holst and Vaughan Williams. He's notable for composing the choral song *Jerusalem* (1916), viewed by some as preferable to *God Save the Queen* as an English national anthem. Parry set William Blake's poem to music at the request of Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate, to inspire the troops during the First World War.

**Five pieces of
British classical
music you can
probably hum**

**Jupiter – The Planets
4th Movement** (1914-16)
by Gustav Holst.

**Nimrod – Enigma
Variations No.9** (1899)
by Edward Elgar.

**Alla Hornpipe –
Water Music
Suite No. 2** (1717)
by George Frideric Handel.

Jerusalem (1916)
by Hubert Parry.

**Land of Hope and
Glory – Pomp and
Circumstance
March No. 1** (1901)
by Edward Elgar.

Minority rule: British classical music in the 21st century
Ever since Britten was buried in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, in 1976 (Peter Pears joined him ten years later), British classical music has struggled to live up to its invigorated reputation. John Taverner, a direct descendant of the 16th composer of the same name, and Peter Maxwell Davies have produced well-received works, but nothing of any real magnitude has emerged. Classical music does have its place in modern British culture, but perhaps not in the way its advocates would hope. It's used in TV commercials and at various sporting events, and the average Brit may well watch the Last Night of the Proms on television (if there's nothing else on), but, in truth, it remains a minority, largely middle-class affair – respectable music for respectable people.

Three British orchestras

The Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, gaining royal patronage a century later.

The Hallé. Britain's oldest surviving symphony orchestra, founded in Manchester by Sir Charles Hallé in 1858.

London Symphony Orchestra. The LSO was founded in 1904. The esteemed Hans Richter and Edward Elgar were the first two principal conductors.

Ever since rock 'n' roll first swaggered ashore in the 1950s, cockily trailing a comb through its lustrous quiff and setting dull post-war Britain alight, music has been an intrinsic element of popular British culture. It's up there with the great daily topics for discussion: counted alongside the weather, the government, sport or sex as worthy of idle prattle. Perhaps it's the one thing Brits know for sure that they do as well as anyone else in the world.

It came from over the water

When Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Buddy Holly seduced British youth in the 1950s, the native music industry was quick to try and cash in on that American sound. Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard both ran on the 'Britain's answer to Elvis' ticket, but for all their moody posturing and the excellence of Cliff's first single, *Move It* (1958), they were soon exposed as pale imitations of the real thing. Perhaps of greater significance was the skiffle boom that arose at the same time. Lonnie Donegan was the figurehead and his single *Rock Island Line* (1955) typified the form: skiffle was fast, basic, country-tinged rock 'n' roll played with acoustic guitars, washboards and the odd homemade tea chest bass. Skiffle's simplicity, and the fact that most of the instruments could be found in the kitchen, encouraged teenagers to form their own bands. A few of them would, in the next decade, change the history of popular music.

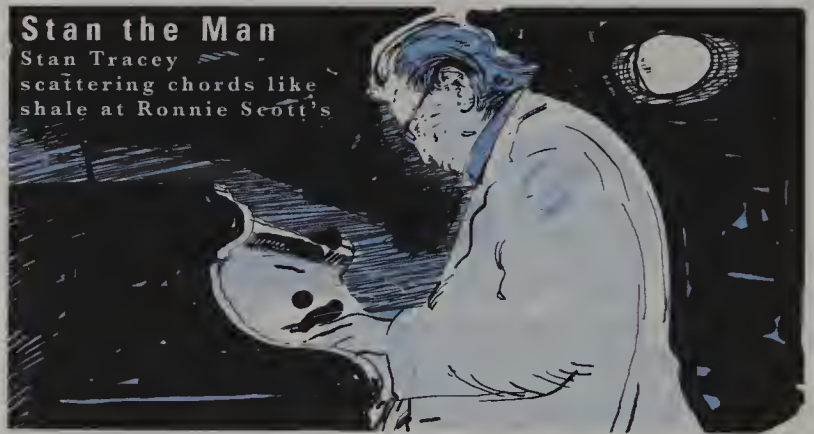
"GUITAR GROUPS ARE ON THE WAY OUT, MR. EPSTEIN." Decca Records executive Dick Rowe to Brian Epstein as he turns down The Beatles in 1961. Oops...

Jazz banned

It's a bitter irony that the organisation set up to care for British musicians, the Musicians Union, played no small role in stunting the growth of homegrown jazz. In a misguided attempt to protect its members' jobs, the union effectively banned American musicians from performing in Britain from the mid 1930s until 1956. Some argue that watching Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie playing in the flesh and in their prime would have given British audiences more of a passion for jazz.

All what jazz

It may have its devotees and the odd dedicated venue here and there – Ronnie Scott's in London stands out – but modern jazz has only ever drawn a minority interest in Britain. However, while home-grown talent hasn't been abundant, a few noteworthy figures have graced the jazz stage: saxophonist Johnny Dankworth and pianist Stan Tracey are veterans of the jazz scene and have always commanded respect – Tracey's album *Under Milk Wood* (1965) is regarded a highlight of British jazz; the 1970s brought the acclaimed avant-garde music of pianist Keith Tippett and saxophonist Evan Parker; and in recent years saxophonist Courtney Pine has come to the fore, fusing jazz with modern elements like drum 'n' bass.



Mop top gets crop

When Ringo Starr admitted in 2008, with some degree of honesty (or naivety), that he missed nothing about his home city of Liverpool, the angry local response came soon after: the city woke to find its foliage sculpture of The Beatles missing Ringo's head.

It was the 60s, man

The union of rock 'n' roll, skiffle, drugs, 45rpm singles, sex, class consciousness and moptopped baby boomers launched a seismic cultural movement in the early 1960s. Britain owes its lofty place in the pecking order of modern music to this period, an era when British guitar bands, crooners and starlets sold the verse/chorus/middle eight format to the world and, in particular, to the United States. Of course, some bands were more important than others...

The Beatles

Liverpudlian skiffle band The Quarrymen changed their name to The Beatles in 1960 and went on to sell over a billion records. After the band were signed to Parlophone records in 1962 by George Martin, the producer with whom they formed a lasting relationship, the singles *Love Me Do* (1962) and *Please Please Me* (1963) soon followed and 'Beatlemania', with its screaming, clawing girls and ringing record shop tills, swept Britain. What made The Beatles so great? They were inventive and rebellious (although their 'long' hair looks quite short in retrospect), but, above all, in John Lennon and Paul McCartney they had a songwriting duo par excellence. When music entered its psychedelic phase in the mid 60s, the influence of drugs and Indian spiritualism became more evident in The Beatles' sound. Recording techniques became more innovative, while their songwriting grew increasingly sophisticated, producing some of their finest work on the albums *Revolver* (1966) and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). Internal friction split the band up on 10th April 1970, with McCartney apparently the first to walk. He and Lennon went on to have successful solo careers, although neither could eclipse the achievements of The Beatles, acknowledged 40 years on as the world's most successful group.

... and The Stones

The only songwriting partnership to rival Lennon and McCartney in the 1960s belonged to Dartford boys Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. The pair had both briefly played skiffle but The Rolling Stones formed in 1962 with their roots firmly in rhythm and blues.



So The Beatles were quite good then?

The Beatles had 17 No.1 singles in Britain, enjoying a total of 69 weeks at the top spot. *Please Please Me* (1963) was the first; *The Ballad of John and Yoko* (1969) the last. In the States they managed 20 chart toppers. In April 1964 they held all five top positions in the Billboard Hot 100, and a remarkable 12 positions in all. And they've clearly still got it, 40 years after their demise: *The Beatles 1*, an album featuring all their chart topping singles, made the No.1 spot itself in Britain for nine weeks in 2000.

The real Delia

The cake on the cover of The Rolling Stones 1969 album *Let it Bleed* was baked by the then unknown Delia Smith.

The Beatles and The Stones

It's difficult to overstate the musical and cultural impact of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. Their fans – in Britain and around the world – dressed like they did, wore their hair the same and took the same drugs. Their music has been an influence – direct or not – on almost every band since.

The songs are still heard everywhere you go; their greatest hits on every pub jukebox. Even today, those of a certain vintage (and some younger) will still define themselves by allegiance to either. The Beatles or The Stones. And the ripples spread a long way from home. The 'British Invasion' of the mid 1960s that saw The Beatles, The Stones and other British bands like The Yardbirds and The Animals dominate the American Billboard charts was surely the apogee of 20th century British cultural clout.

Early releases covered American R&B songs, but by 1965 they were writing their own material, developing a distinctive style with the raw energy of Richards' guitar and an arrogantly lazy rhythm section. Success followed, with the singles *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* (1965), *Get Off My Cloud* (1965) and *Paint it Black* (1966) all hitting No.1 on both sides of the Atlantic. With Jagger's snarling vocals and menacing persona, The Stones were seen as dangerous; the dark to The Beatles' light. Later songs like *Sympathy for the Devil* (1968) simply stirred parental anxiety. The band maintained their status and record sales throughout the 1970s, achieving eight consecutive No.1 albums in the USA. The albums *Let it Bleed* (1969) and *Exile on Main Street* (1972) are considered their best. Somewhat implausibly, The Rolling Stones are still going: playing sell-out stadium gigs over 45 years after they formed.

Two other important 60s bands

The Who. Following early hits *I Can't Explain* (1965) and *My Generation* (1965), The Who became famed for their dynamic, often destructive live performances, with the frenzied drums of Keith Moon and the trademark 'windmill' guitar-playing of Pete Townshend (a trademark that regularly made his right hand bleed). The epic single *Won't Get Fooled Again* (1971) and *Tommy* (1969), the first rock opera, featuring the single *Pinball Wizard*, were Who highlights.

The Kinks. The Kinks came to prominence with the No.1 single *You Really Got Me* (1964). The song's distorted guitar riff would be echoed in the heavy rock and punk bands to come. Singer Ray Davies was perhaps the most distinctly English writer of his generation; songs like *Waterloo Sunset* (1967) would inspire many future British bands, most notably Blur.

Does that sequinned blouse come in electric blue?

How do you follow the 1960s then? With sequin-spangled trousers, five-inch platform heels and men in make-up, as if you even have to ask. The glam rock of the early 1970s was polished, Stones-like guitar music played by an eclectic range of artists, from the pouting, slinky T-Rex to the progressive, arty Roxy Music – their albums, *Electric Warrior* (1971) and *Roxy Music* (1972) respectively, are highly regarded. The most significant figure to emerge from glam rock was David Bowie.



Bowie added a sense of theatre to music, paving the way for the spectacular live shows gig-goers have come to expect from

contemporary bands. The albums *Hunky Dory* (1971) and *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972) make required listening. While Bowie and co wowed as much with aesthetics as tunes, at the other end of the spectrum Van Morrison was all about the music. Northern Ireland's savoured favoured son found critical solo success at the end of the 1960s with the wandering folky mysteriousness of *Astral Weeks* (1968), and remains lauded for his incomparable vocals: the lungs may be from Belfast but the voice box resides somewhere in the Mississippi Delta.

Car wash

There is a famous rock myth that The Who's eccentric drummer, Keith Moon, drove a Rolls Royce into the swimming pool of the Holiday Inn in Flint, Michigan in 1967. Moon always strongly refuted the story – claiming the car was a Lincoln Continental.

A day in the life

John Lennon was assassinated at 11pm on 8th December 1980 at the entrance to the Dakota building (where he'd lived with Yoko Ono for seven years) in New York by Mark David Chapman, a crazed fan who shot him in the back four times. Chapman, who'd asked Lennon for an autograph earlier in the day, was carrying a copy of J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) at the time of the shooting. He'd written "This is my statement" inside.

YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THAT IT'S NOT A WOMAN'S DRESS. IT'S A MAN'S DRESS"

David Bowie explains away a challenging outfit

Fishy stories

The saga of British rock music is strewn with (mostly) apocryphal stories involving groupies, hotel rooms, drugs and the like. Have you heard the one about Mick Jagger, Marianne Faithfull and a Mars Bar; or Led Zeppelin, a young groupie... and a mud shark? Perhaps it's best not to ask. Other tall tales include Keith Richards' claim that he had his blood replaced in a Swiss clinic, the one about Mama Cass choking to death on a ham sandwich in her London flat (she actually died from a heart attack, although it *was* in the same room where, four years later, The Who drummer Keith Moon would die after taking too many prescription pills) and the story of how The Beatles enjoyed a sly spliff in the Buckingham Palace toilets before collecting their MBEs.

Elton, Freddie and friends: the other types of 1970s rock

While glam rock was camping its way up the singles chart, its less effeminate cousins were selling albums by the bucket load. Hard rock bands like Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin played heavy, blues-influenced rock music and introduced the world to the now obligatory long guitar solo, tight jeans and screaming lead vocal. The Led Zep albums *Led Zeppelin IV* (1971) and *Physical Graffiti* (1975) were monumentally successful; the former featured *Stairway to Heaven* (1971) – frequently cited as a 'best rock song ever' contender.

Progressive (prog) rock was perhaps more intricate, inventive and conscious of its own artistic depth, with keyboards a major feature of bands like Yes, Genesis, and Pink Floyd. They showed off their musical talents in epic songs strewn with time and key changes. Genesis' *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* (1974) moved many, while Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) is one of the most successful records of all time, having sold 40 million copies worldwide. Another hugely popular group of the mid 1970s, Queen, were a mixture of heavy, glam and prog rock. *A Night at the Opera* (1975) is considered their finest album, and not just because it featured Britain's third best-selling single of all time, *Bohemian Rhapsody*. The band maintained their commercial success until singer Freddie Mercury's death from AIDS in 1991. Finally, Reginald Kenneth Dwight (or Sir Elton Hercules John as he's also known... or the Winner from Pinner (take your pick)) found his form in the 1970s with expertly crafted piano rock. So far, he's sold over 200 million records; the best of which has to be the album *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* (1973).

Anarchy in the UK: the rise and fall of punk

Punk exploded out of the urban decay of mid-1970s Britain, rebelling against the bloated music industry of the day and against society as a whole. With The Sex Pistols and The Clash at the fore, punk was rock music stripped of all sophistication. It was angry and anarchic, and was played very fast, very loudly and usually very badly. Following the release of The Sex Pistols' single *Anarchy in the UK* (1976), punk blazed a controversial trail across Britain. Its anti-establishment, 'do-it-yourself' philosophy inspired a disaffected generation to form their own bands. A few were successful but most disappeared without a trace. Punk found a particularly receptive crowd in Northern Ireland, where bands like The Undertones and Stiff Little Fingers gave the province its most fruitful period of modern music. By the time The Sex Pistols' bass player, Sid Vicious, died of a heroin overdose in 1979, punk had burnt itself out. But its spirit permeated British culture, influencing hairstyles, fashion and music – as bands like The Libertines and Arctic Monkeys proved – well into the 21st century.

I swear I was there
On June 4th 1976, The Sex Pistols played at the Lesser Free Trade Hall in Manchester in one of the most influential gigs of all time. Thousands of people claim they were there, even while the audience numbered about 35. Among those who actually did attend were The Buzzcocks; members of what would become Joy Division, The Fall and The Smiths; and, so he says, Mick Hucknall of Simply Red.

Five important punk bands

The Sex Pistols. Fronted by Johnny Rotten, they courted scandal at every opportunity. An infamous television interview in 1976 prompted *The Daily Mirror* headline: "THE FILTH AND THE FURY!"

The Clash. The most political of the early punk bands. Their first single, *White Riot* (1977), called on the white working class to take to the streets.

The Damned. The band have the distinction of releasing the first British punk single, *New Rose*, on October 22nd, 1976.

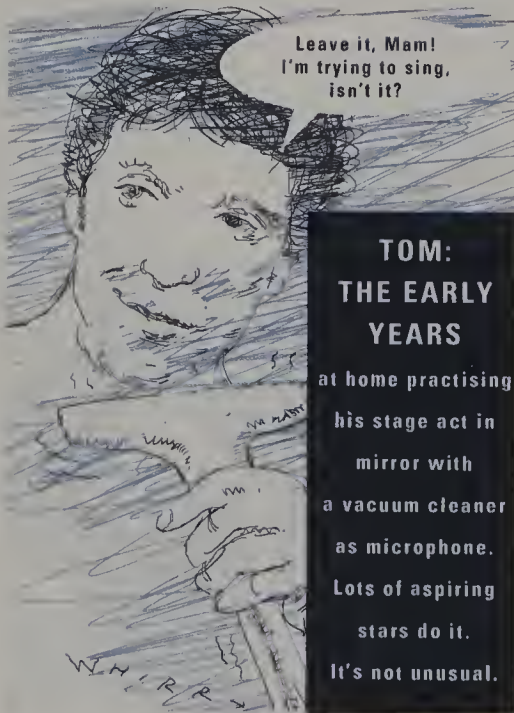
The Buzzcocks. The *Spiral Scratch* EP (1977), released on their own New Hormones label, included the punk anthem *Boredom*.

Siouxsie and the Banshees. In true punk style, they performed their first gig despite having no songs to play.



The 80s scene

2 Tone, named after the Coventry record label responsible for most of the releases, combined Jamaican ska music (calypso-tinged rhythm and blues) with an urban punk sensibility for uplifting, insistent dance music. The Specials, Madness and The Beat were the big names, and The Specials' *Ghost Town* (1981) was probably the stand out track. Another clique, the New Romantics, appeared in the early 1980s wearing outlandish clothes and laughable make-up. The music was synthesiser-driven, heavily influenced by Bowie and shamelessly pretentious. Spandau Ballet and Duran Duran were the main protagonists. Other 80s bands weren't so easily categorised. The Police emerged out of the punk scene, but weren't really a part of it. *Synchronicity* (1983) is considered the best among their albums, which have sold more than 50 million worldwide. Dire Straits weren't part of any scene either but their presence is hard to ignore. The album *Brothers in Arms* (1985) was staggeringly successful. The Jam, a modish blend of anger and sharp suits, were another important band in the late 1970s and early 80s. Frontman Paul Weller is still making well-received music today.



Tom and Shirley – didn't they do well
By 2007 Tom Jones had amassed £190 million, while fellow Welsh singer Shirley Bassey had sold 135 million records. Not bad for a miner's son from Pontypridd and a Tiger Bay teenage mum. Neither had an easy start in life. Bassey's father, a Nigerian sailor, walked out when she was two, and she grew

up with six older siblings in the notorious dockside district of Cardiff. By 17 she was pregnant and working as a waitress. As for old snake hips, as a child in Ponty he was confined to bed by tuberculosis for a year. He left school aged 15 with no qualifications and worked variously as a labourer and door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman before fame came knocking.

Northern souls: the Manchester scene

Manchester became a focal point for British music in the latter half of the 1980s. The Smiths' simple, naked musical style, and their name itself, was a reaction against the pomposity of the New Romantic trend. Their sound relied heavily on the inspired, jangling guitar of Johnny Marr and on the talent of singer Morrissey whose lyrics had their own unique blend of maudlin wit and emotional depth – the album *The Queen is Dead* (1986) stands out. The Stone Roses and Happy Mondays arose from the drug-fuelled, all-night rave culture of the 'Madchester' scene in the late 1980s to produce some of the most important music of the period. Albums like The Stone Roses' eponymous 1989 debut and the Mondays' *Pills 'n' Thrills and Bellyaches* (1990) introduced psychedelic and dance elements to the basic rock format – both have stood the test of time.

The wizard of Moz
Former Smiths singer Morrissey, a solo artist since 1987, is in danger of graduating from 'enigma' to 'national treasure': in 2006 he came second in a BBC poll of top living British icons, ahead of Paul McCartney and David Bowie.

"THE SMITHS
HAPPENED
BECAUSE I HAD
WALKED HOME IN
THE RAIN ONCE
TOO OFTEN."
Morrissey

Top one, nice one, get sorted: the dance revolution

Whatever your pleasure – house, acid house, techno, jungle, trance, garage – electronic dance music and the attendant club scene have been potent forces in British culture since the late 1980s. From underground beginnings, each scene has had its influence on mainstream pop and rock music with its use of computer-based recording and sampling techniques. The nature of clubland music, its tunes spliced into one continuous stream of music, made stars of club DJs like Pete Tong, Sasha and Danny Rampling. Perhaps the most significant artists emerged from the Bristol trip hop scene. Trip hop used the breakbeats and samples of electronic dance but slowed them right down; anyone trying to dance to it was in trouble. The down-tempo moodiness of the genre is best experienced on Massive Attack's *Blue Lines* (1991) and Portishead's *Dummy* (1994).

**Ten British
albums that
should be on
your iPod**

***Sgt. Pepper's Lonely
Hearts Club Band***

(1967) The Beatles.

Let it Bleed

(1969) The Rolling Stones.

Led Zeppelin IV

(1971) Led Zeppelin.

***The Rise and Fall
of Ziggy Stardust
and the Spiders
from Mars***

(1972) David Bowie.

***The Dark Side
of the Moon***

(1973) Pink Floyd.

***Never Mind the
Bollocks, Here's
The Sex Pistols***

(1977) The Sex Pistols.

The Stone Roses

(1989) The Stone Roses.

Blue Lines

(1991) Massive Attack.

Definitely Maybe

(1994) Oasis.

OK Computer

(1997) Radiohead.

The Britpop years

Looking back, it feels like the dominant trend in 1990s popular music was Britpop, even while British music had become a hugely varied beast. The Britpop tag was applied to a number of bands, notably Oasis, Blur and Pulp, who took their influences (sometimes very obviously so) from British bands of the 1960s and 1970s, sang about life in modern Britain and wrapped it all up in a Union Jack (Cool Britannia crowed the newspapers). Oasis' *(What's the Story) Morning Glory?* (1995), *Park Life* (1994) by Blur and *Different Class* (1995) by Pulp are among the classic albums of the era.



Big noises in the contemporary music scene

British music proceeds through the new century as it did through the last. It's diverse, daring, inventive – all the things that have made it such a global cultural force. Fads come and go with alarming speed – new rave, emo, electropop, dance punk – just read the *NME* for whatever's new. Good old guitar bands remain a key part of the story: Coldplay are among the glitterati of world rock, even if they haven't broken much new ground since their debut album *Parachutes* (2000). Other bands like Franz Ferdinand, Snow Patrol, The Libertines and the punk-influenced Arctic Monkeys have made an important impact, and Radiohead remain out front in terms of innovation.

**A flavour of the
21st century:
five albums**

Parachutes

(2000) Coldplay.

Up the Bracket

(2002) The Libertines.

**A Grand Don't
Come For Free**

(2004) The Streets.

**Whatever People
Say I Am, That's
What I'm Not**

(2006) Arctic Monkeys.

Back to Black

(2006) Amy Winehouse.

Boys and girls

The 1990s witnessed the rise and, hankies at the ready, the fall of the boy band and the girl group. With irritatingly catchy hits like *Back For Good* (1995) and a young Robbie Williams in their ranks, Take That became pin-ups for prepubescent girls nationwide (not to mention their sizeable gay following) while The Spice Girls sold an unbelievable 55 million records worldwide after hitting the big time with their debut single *Wannabe* (1996).

Hip hop has made inroads into the charts in recent years, led by American artists but restyled by British acts like Dizzee Rascal and Kano, who also draw rap, dancehall, garage and other elements of urban music – a vital force in modern British culture – into their work. Perhaps the unexpected revelation of the later Noughties has been the rise of the female singer/songwriter. Amy Winehouse, Adele and Duffy have reshaped listening habits with smoky, soulful vocals that, however derivative, repeatedly impress. Both Winehouse and Adele attended the Brit School, a performing arts college which, along with reality TV shows like *Pop Idol*, *Popstars: The Rivals* and *The X-Factor* (which generously coughed up Girls Aloud, Leona Lewis (another Brit School graduate) and Will Young), perhaps proves that modern pop stars are made not born. The Brit-led reality TV talent show format has been sold around the world, a source of national pride or shame depending on your outlook.

Five British music festivals

Glastonbury

Held most years in June, in Somerset, it is the world's largest performing arts festival. Set in 900 acres of farmland, or mud, depending on the weather.

Aldeburgh

A programme of predominantly classical music unfurls on the Suffolk coast each June. Most of the action actually happens in the converted maltings at Snape.

Creamfields

Dance music reigns in Cheshire each August, in the festival baby of Liverpool superclub, Cream.

WOMAD

Festival of world music that's been going on in the West Country each July since 1982. Spin-off WOMAD fests now occur around the world.

Edinburgh Jazz and Blues

The biggest such fest in Britain usually starts swinging at the end of July.



STAGE
DOOR

4.2 Theatre, dance and comedy

A playwright for all eras, William

Shakespeare still looms large in British

theatre a good 400 years after he was

at work. However, the late 20th century

brought a new golden age, a time when

Pinter, Stoppard, Hare, Bennett and

others reinvigorated the British stage.

Now, if only they could get more people

to actually visit the theatre...

421 Setting the scene for Shakespeare: how theatre found its golden age

Pete, you can play third shepherd.

Perhaps the origins of British theatre lie around the fire, with some hammy minstrel giving his all to the drama of *Beowulf*. But who knows – maybe they just delivered it deadpan instead. Liturgical dramas, played out from the tenth century onward, offer more solid evidence for theatre. Monks turned ritual into theatre, aware that the people were more likely to grasp scripture when it was acted out. The Passion (at Easter), Magi (Christmas) and Annunciation (March) were all regularly performed. Liturgical drama in church became commonplace in the Norman era, shaped increasingly into structured plays. Guilds began taking over the acting duties, the laymen working with the Church to get the narrative right. The lives of saints also made for popular drama, although the Reformation left few extant saints' plays. While Christianity loomed large in early medieval theatre, it didn't monopolise completely: often, the old pagan rituals were woven into biblical stories. You couldn't, for example, guarantee that a priest wouldn't process down the village street carrying a large (fake) phallus, incorporating an old pagan fertility rite into the Easter pageant.

Theatre, the new rock 'n' roll

By the 15th century, drama was an important part of British cultural life (even while staging was still a relatively ad hoc affair) with performances delivered in everyday spaces rather than dedicated theatres. Venues might include the village church, a market place or patch of open ground. Northern England was particularly fond of processional theatre in the summer, with the action carried or wheeled through town on a series of mini stages. In winter, theatre moved indoors, sometimes staged in the local manor house where the gentry would be seated at a high table at one end of the hall and the plebs sat and stood at the other. In all instances, the drama was less 'them and us' than today; the audience would often become involved in the play, and local figures were frequently characterised on stage.

Play list: the key genres of medieval drama

Mystery plays. Full-blown biblical epics told from Creation to Last Judgement and often run over days. Towns in England had their own mystery play 'cycles': versions from York (comprising 48 pageants), Chester and Wakefield survive almost intact. Guilds of craftsmen acted out the different parts, the parable often relating to their trade – so, for example, the shipwrights would take charge of Noah and the Flood. This association with the guilds engendered the 'mystery' name, derived from *mysterium*, a Latin word meaning handicraft.

Morality plays. The didactic child of mystery plays, they pitched vice against virtue (personified with different characters) and made sure that morality romped home with the mortal soul. *Everyman*, dating to the late 15th century, is the most famous example.

Interludes. Performed as a *digestif* between courses at a banquet, or within the acts of a larger play, interludes were usually secular skits; amusing, sometimes farcical diversions that often satirised local public figures. Others followed the morality format.

Folk Plays. By the late 15th century, the green tights of Robin Hood were a standard fixture of the theatre wardrobe. Tied in to pagan spring celebrations, the outlaw story made for popular drama, touring around England and Scotland to the accompaniment of morris dancing and archery competitions. Henry VIII took part in Robin Hood plays as a young man, before the story of subversion against the Crown began to rankle and the genre was suppressed and superseded by the story of St George.

Stage presence: the dawn of the theatre

British drama mushroomed in the 16th century, rapidly evolving from the didactic morality/mystery mode of old into the secular, professional and terrifically creative strand of British culture that rose to a crescendo with William Shakespeare. The impetus for staging drama moved from the Church to the nobility, a transition spearheaded by Henry VII with his small troupe of court actors. Wealthy lords followed his lead, retaining their own

Jobs for the boys

In English Renaissance theatre, all parts were played by men and boys – even in the era of the Virgin Queen, women were proscribed from acting. Women weren't even allowed to write for the stage. The ban was finally overturned in 1660 by restored monarch, Charles II, who soon developed a taste for young actresses, Nell Gwynn included.

players or employing the troupes-for-hire that travelled the country. Outside noble circles, drama moved into innyards (courtyards attached to inns), before finally, in 1576, Britain acquired its first purpose built theatre since Roman times, constructed by actor James Burbage in Shoreditch under the instruction of the Earl of Leicester. Leicester called it, perhaps under pressure for a decision, The Theatre. Others soon followed, reaching stylish heights in 1599 when Burbage's sons built The Globe, an octagonal three-tiered marvel in Southwark.

Prelude to a golden age

With the stage set, drama progressed to fit the new venues. Classical themes dribbled in from the Renaissance and the medieval format of interludes and folk plays fed a new secular style. At the same time, the mystery cycles slowly declined, their demise hastened by association with Catholicism in the Reformation. Professional playwrights emerged, writing for similarly professional companies of actors. The earliest memorable play (that survives) was a comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister* (c.1553), written by Nicholas Udall in the style of Roman playwright Terence and performed by his pupils at Eton College. The first tragedy came soon after: *Gorboduc* (1562) was written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, and its story about succession strife probably didn't impress the young Elizabeth I, for whom it was first performed. *Gorboduc* was also the first British play in blank verse, a novelty that freed actors from the constraints of rhyming couplets. These, the first true British plays, were shown up for their lack of sophistication by what came next – the golden age of British theatre, or British Renaissance theatre as it's sometimes called.

Shakespeare: was he really that good?

William Shakespeare began his career in theatre as an actor, playing alongside Richard Burbage in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of a handful of professional companies. As a writer he found early success with poetry but turned, in his mid 20s, to concentrate on writing plays. The *Henry VI* trilogy were probably the first, written between 1590 and 92. Over the subsequent 20-year period Shakespeare wrote 37 plays. The first decade, the 1600s, bore history plays, consumed with the lives of *Henry V* (1599), *Richard III* (1591) and the rest, thoughtful comedies like *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598) and the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* (c.1594). Some say his later work was shaded by the deaths of his son, his father and the Queen, and the second decade was certainly defined by the solemn, self-destructive giants of *Macbeth* (c.1606), *Hamlet* (c.1600), *Othello* (1602-03) and *King Lear* (c.1605), although ended with tragicomedy in his final solo play, *The Tempest* (1610).

Shakespeare's supreme talent was for psychology, for shaping believable characters with strengths and flaws, with the love, hate and ambition that we recognise as immutably human traits. Such was their universality that Lady Macbeth's guilt and Hamlet's complex melancholy still resonate clearly today. Shakespeare brought these emotions to

Villain of the piece
Early English playwright Nicholas Udall, headmaster at Eton, was hauled up before the college council in 1541, accused of stealing college silverware. He denied the charge but unexpectedly confessed instead to sodomising two of his pupils. Less prestigious figures would have hung but Udall was given a year in prison. Six years later he embarked on a new career as a vicar.



**Phrases
first found in
Shakespeare**

Bated breath

(The Merchant of Venice)

Green-eyed monster

(Othello)

Wild-goose chase

(Romeo and Juliet)

Milk of human kindness

(Macbeth)

Pound of flesh

(The Merchant of Venice)

What the dickens

*(The Merry Wives
of Windsor)*

THE REMARKABLE
THING ABOUT
SHAKESPEARE IS
THAT HE IS REALLY
VERY GOOD, IN SPITE
OF ALL THE PEOPLE
WHO SAY HE IS VERY
GOOD."

Robert Graves

life with his use of language, manipulating the blank verse or spinning out the metaphor to enhance a character or situation. Throw in the twisting plots, made navigable by those strong, distinct protagonists, and a talent for both comedy and deep tragedy, and you have the secrets of Shakespeare's enduring popularity. It took a century for the posthumous reputation to gather pace, to rise significantly above his contemporaries, but today there is no higher deity in the pantheon of British culture. No one has been quoted more or performed more on stage, the inspiration for composers, artists and writers; a direct influence on everyone from Charles Dickens to Giuseppe Verdi and Sigmund Freud.

Dramatis personae: Shakespeare, the man

We know little of Shakespeare's religion, politics or true sexual leanings; a few public certificates are all that survive to comment on his life. There aren't even contemporary portraits. We do know that he was born to a Stratford-upon-Avon glovemaker and his wife in 1564, the third of eight children. By the age of 18 he was married to Anne Hathaway, the 26-year-old farmer's daughter carrying his child. Twins added to their Stratford brood two years later, in 1585, but by 1592 it seems William was living in London, earning his money from the theatre. He wasn't chasing publication – any plays that did find print did so without his participation, and the first folio of his work only appeared in 1623, seven years after his death. He made his money (which amounted to quite a bit) not from royalties or commissions but from his shares in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (elevated to the King's Men when James I came to the throne) and their theatres, The Globe and The Blackfriars. Shakespeare retired to Stratford sometime around 1613 and died from who knows what three years later, famously leaving his

'second best bed' to his wife in the will. By 1670 the Shakespeare lineage had died out, but the name lives on in his hometown today in museums, on tea towels ('Out Damned Spot!' they read) and in the Royal Shakespeare Company.

If you only see five Shakespeare plays, see these

Hamlet. The prince wrestles with love, hate, guilt and more as he moves to avenge his father's death. Many call it Shakespeare's finest four hours.

Romeo and Juliet. Young lovers torn apart by old family grievances.

Macbeth. Dastardly but human, Shakespeare's murderous Scottish king descends into madness.

A Midsummer Night's Dream. A comedy of interwoven plots that blur real and fantasy worlds but remain concerned with love.

Henry V. The finest of his history plays lauds the King's stirring military success.

Playboys: two of Shakespeare's contemporaries

British theatre flourished in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. Inn yards and the new purpose-built theatres, capable of holding as many as 3,000 people, were packed with audiences drawn from all sectors of society.

The ravenous appetite for drama was sated by a raft of playwrights (all of them poorly paid for their work) that worked alongside Shakespeare. Two writers among the many have stuck in the collective memory:

Christopher Marlowe. Born in the same year as Shakespeare but at work earlier, Cambridge-educated Marlowe was a tragedian, the author of emotional, often bombastic plays who pioneered the use of blank verse as an expressive tool of drama. Passionate, amoral



"ALL THEY THAT
LOVE NOT TOBACCO
AND BOYS ARE
FOOLS."

Christopher Marlowe

Jonson cheats
death... twice

In 1598 Ben Jonson
killed actor Gabriel
Spencer during a duel
over some unrecorded
quarrel. Tried at the
Old Bailey for murder,
Jonson escaped the
gallows by pleading
'benefit of clergy', a
get-out usually granted
to clerics but extended
to Jonson because he
could read Latin. He
served a short prison
sentence, had his
possessions seized and
was branded on the
thumb.

heroes, doomed to fail by over-ambition, drove all six
of his plays. *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*
(c.1590) was his best work, while *Edward II* (c.1591)
was a big influence on Shakespeare's history plays.
Marlowe, although popular as a writer, was adjudged a
rake in his own time and was denounced variously as
a heretic and a homosexual. Historians have enjoyed
claiming him a government spy, employed to snitch
on Catholics even though he seems to have been an
atheist. Marlowe died fighting over a bill in a Deptford
tavern, aged 29.

Ben Jonson. Born a decade after Shakespeare, his
friend and rival, Jonson is remembered best as the
author of darkly satirical drama. *Volpone* (1606), a story
of greed and misogyny in Venice, cemented his
reputation as a comedic writer but *Bartholomew Fair*
(1614) is of as much interest today with its amusing
snapshot of Jacobean London. Beyond writing for
commercial theatre, Jonson created witty masques
(a masked mix of poetry, music and dance) for James
I's court. Unlike Marlowe and Shakespeare he stuck
quite firmly to the classical precepts of playwriting.



Theatre in the blood

English Renaissance theatre didn't simply fizzle out in the generation after Shakespeare and Jonson. Instead John Webster, a late contemporary, fed a Jacobean taste for tragedy with his talent for bloody revenge drama. His disturbing masterpiece *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), in which the titular Italian toff is murdered by her own brothers, is still regularly performed today. The other standout work of early 17th century theatre is John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633), another Italian-set sequence of heinousness, with incest the prime sin. And then the curtain fell on British theatre's golden age. Puritans began fulminating against the immorality of drama and when Civil War broke out, the theatres were closed and remained so for almost 20 years. The Puritans also banned Christmas and maypole dancing, the cheery old sods.

Acting up

The political tensions of Elizabethan England leaked into the theatre, the authorities fearful that new plays could rouse large theatre audiences to rebellion. And so each new play had to go before the Master of the Revels who ensured the work wasn't too morally or politically provocative. Any writer deemed to have crossed the line could end up in prison. Ben Jonson was incarcerated in 1597 after *The Isle of Dogs*, a play he co-authored with Thomas Nashe, appeared on stage. Alas the play, and any hint at what made it so naughty, hasn't survived, but it must have been pretty bad – the Privy Council banned all other theatre for most of that year.

Big bad company

Some theatre companies roamed the country in Elizabethan and Jacobean England; others performed in their own London theatres, where two particular troupes ruled the roost. The Admiral's Men were owned by early theatre mogul Philip Henslowe, resided at the Rose Theatre in Southwark and became associated with the plays of Christopher Marlowe. Their leading man, Edward Alleyn, was the best paid actor of the era – he retired to a

£10,000 plot in Dulwich. At The Globe theatre the Lord Chamberlain's Men employed the services of Shakespeare as an in-house writer. Richard Burbage, the first man to take the leads in *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *King Lear*, was the primo thespian. The leading comic actor of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, William Kempe, is better remembered today for morris dancing from London to Norwich on an epic 'Nine Days' Wonder'.

2.2 Light brigade: from Restoration

Comedy to Gilbert and Sullivan

Restorative powers: drama bounces back

Charles II lifted the Commonwealth ban on theatre in 1660. Companies called initially on the Renaissance repertoire but new work soon appeared, generating the Restoration drama that would stretch beyond Charles' reign into the early 18th century. It began with tragedy, the restrained classical variant inspired by French dramatist Corneille, at its most effective in British hands with Thomas Otway, who brought a powerful pathos to an often stiff genre with *The Orphan* (1680) and *Venice Preserv'd* (1682) before apparently choking on a lump of bread and dying wretchedly poor, aged 33. John Dryden, poster boy for the Augustan Age, is actually better remembered than Otway, celebrated for Restoration tragedies like *All for Love* (1678) even while his withering poetry was probably more accomplished (see section 2.1.3. for more on Dryden).

Well mannered: Restoration Comedy

So much for tragedy; Restoration drama found its true form in comedy. It too was inspired by Continental theatre, notably French playwright Molière, but added a wry British humour. The comedy of manners, as the prevailing genre was called, played up to theatre's new, predominantly well-heeled audience with intricate plots woven around some social or sexual scandal among the genteel set. The outlandish characters and witty, frequently crude dialogue were often as important to the comedy of manners as the layering of plot and subplot. A typical example might involve a sharp, irrepressibly randy London rake enjoying carnal knowledge (just offstage but conveyed via heavy double entendre) with the eager-to-experiment wife of some repressive aristocratic idiot. Subplots, including the rake's genuine affections for a virtuous young maiden, fill in the gaps. It might all sound rather vapid but the depiction of fashionable high society, its sexual mores recently liberated from Puritan control, would have struck a chord with the late 17th century smart set.

The Restoration Comedy playwrights

George Etherege. Proffered a reputation with *She Would if She Could* (1664), the first Restoration comedy, and confirmed it with *The Man of the Mode* (1676), based on real London characters like the rake John Wilmot (see 2.1.3. for more on him).

William Congreve. Restoration theatre's best playwright wrote *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700) before giving up, aged 30, when tastes turned against licentious comedy.

William Wycherley. Few picked apart the codes of marriage and sexual morality like Wycherley. The sharpest of the Restoration comedy satirists, his best play was *The Country-Wife* (1675), in which a rake feigns impotence in order to bed rich adulterous women.

George Farquhar. The Londonderry man gave up acting after stabbing a colleague with what he thought was a pretend sword; his move into writing bore plays that sparkled with verbal dexterity and humour. *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1708) were his best.

"HEAVEN HAS NO
RAGE LIKE LOVE TO
HATRED TURNED,
NOR HELL A FURY
LIKE A WOMAN
SCORNE"

From William Congreve's
The Mourning Bride
(1697)

The stage door opens to women

When theatre revived in 1660, it lost the broad audience of the Shakespearean era. Theatregoers were drawn almost solely from the upper classes, who used the new proscenium-style theatre (with its protruding stage, pit, gallery and boxes) for illicit liaisons and parading as much as watching drama. The paucity of venues precluded most people from attending, with the dozen or so pre-Civil War London theatres replaced by only two. More encouragingly, British theatre finally allowed women on stage. Former orange seller, probable prostitute and bit on the side to Charles II, Nell Gwynn, was the most famous, but Elizabeth Barry is usually deemed more accomplished. Women also began to emerge as playwrights. The superior female dramatist of the Restoration period was Aphra Behn, lauded for *The Rover* (1677), a comedy of manners.



Betting on Barry

In an era when audiences were rapt at the sight of females on stage, Elizabeth Barry stood out with passionate, forceful performances, often played opposite the leading male actor of the day, Thomas Betterton. He wrote that Barry brought “success to plays that would disgust the most patient reader”. She did comedy – notably as Mrs Loveit in Etherege’s *The Man of the Mode* – but was at her best in Thomas Otway tragedies, bringing a genuine psychological depth to the roles. No doubt she drew on her own life experiences as the mistress of John Wilmot, the libertine Earl of Rochester. Sources suggest it was Rochester who trained her for the stage, taking on the job for a bet.

“AN INSPIRED IDIOT”

Politician and writer Horace Walpole on Oliver Goldsmith

Under the Irish influence: 18th century theatre

When the ribald laughs of Restoration Comedy slipped from fashion in the early 1700s (hastened by moralising pamphleteers), British theatre entered a subdued century. Some advances were made: London theatres increased in number and playhouses in towns like Lancaster, Bristol and Ipswich pushed drama out to the provinces; and in David Garrick, Britain found its most famous star (apparently the first to whom the word was applied) of the stage, the first actor to pursue naturalism over elaborate declamation. But it wasn’t a golden era. Audiences were as likely to watch Italian opera as they were a British play. Indeed Italian opera helped generate one of the period’s favourite genres, the ‘ballad opera’ of popular songs and satire that peaked with John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728).

Scotland produced a rare, notable playwright in John Home, whose *Douglas* (1756) was a popular tragedy, but the finest drama on British stages in the later 18th century belonged to a couple of Irishmen. Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan reacted to the so-called ‘sentimental’ comedy of the mid 18th century and revived the comedy of manners, albeit minus the Restoration rude stuff. Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), still in repertoire today, is a class-clash farce set over the course of a single day. Sheridan, perhaps the greater playwright, is also still regularly performed. He immersed himself in London’s West End, taking a stake in the Drury Lane Theatre where, aged 23, he produced his memorable romcom muddle, *The Rivals* (1775). For all its sophistication, the drama of Sheridan et al was less pivotal in upping audience figures than pantomime and farce. By the end of the 19th century the masses were back, and Britain’s burgeoning theatres were seating more than 2,000 at a time.

Two 18th century acting legends

David Garrick. Sometimes credited with single-handedly reviving Shakespeare's reputation, Garrick shone as Richard III and Hamlet. An occasional, average playwright himself, Garrick was also instrumental in bringing realistic scenery, lighting and costume to British theatre. For the role of Hamlet he designed a stunt wig that, aided by string, stood magically erect in response to the ghost of Hamlet's father. However, his legacy remains grounded in a talent for intensity, naturalism and timing on stage. The Garrick Theatre in London's West End bears his name.

Sarah Siddons. The eldest of 12 Kemble children, celebrated as a great acting dynasty, the prime British actress of the 18th century was a dab hand at tragedy (she never played comedy). Siddons honed her craft on the Yorkshire theatre circuit before moving to Drury Lane and astonishing audiences with the way she 'became' a character. They were particularly keen on her Lady Macbeth.

Who threw that?

Edmund Kean was the like the Brando of the early 19th century, electrifying audiences as Shylock, Othello and Hamlet, and even travelling to New York for the role of Richard III. "By God he is a soul," said Byron. But it all started going wrong for Kean, something of an unstable megalomaniac, when he was cited for adultery in a divorce case and compelled to pay damages of £800. The public turned on the actor and audiences began booing and lobbing fruit. He took to drink and drugs, collapsed on Covent Garden stage in 1833 and died soon after, aged 44.

Age of excess: melodrama and farce in the 19th century

As theatre audiences broadened in the 19th century, serious drama struggled for attention. Instead, the crowds that poured into new 'illegitimate' theatres (unsanctioned by the state) opted for melodrama, derivative of gothic tragedy and the stormy moods of Romanticism. With dramatic music, elaborate scenery and the new (smelly and dangerous) marvel of gas lighting, it was quite a show. Melodrama dominated the 19th century stage with its stock cast of two-dimensional characters – hero, villain, old crones and comedy figures – caught up in some violent excitement, be it a shipwreck or a killing spree. *A Tale of Mystery* (1802) by Thomas Holcroft, adapted from a French play, was among the first and most famous, but an Irishman, Dion Boucicault, produced the best (and least overwrought) efforts for the British stage. The high drama spotlighted the contribution of actors and theatre managers as much as

his great absolute farce

Once Brandon Thomas' *Charley's Aunt* got on stage in the 1890s it refused to budge, breaking all records for longevity with a run of 1,466 performances.

Dame academy

Pantomime attached itself resolutely to British theatre in the Victorian era. Advances in stage machinery, lighting and costume brought new colour to old folk stories like *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Dick Whittington*. The shows could be enormous; Drury Lane impresario Augustus Harris put over 500 on stage for an 1882 performance of *Sinbad the Sailor*. Popular at Christmas, the panto – in contrast to melodrama and music hall – has survived to the modern era.

playwrights, and Edmund Kean was star turn, remembered for scaring audiences witless with his Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Farce, not unconnected to the histrionics of melodrama, had been part of British drama for centuries but reached a peak in late Victorian theatre with *Charley's Aunt* (1892), Brandon Thomas' ludicrous story of Oxford undergraduates, mistaken identities and gentle transvestism.

The Irish influence returns

A handful of writers bucked the 19th century trend for melodrama and farce. Scottish playwright Joanna Baillie wrote intimate, psychological drama at odds with the taste for grand spectacle, while others clutched at the realist style popular on the Continent. Thomas Robertson was the trailblazer, writing and producing social comedies with prosaic conversational dialogue and everyday characters. Such was the attention to detail, to naturalism, in plays like *Society* (1865) and *Caste* (1867) that Robertson's heirs talked of 'cup and saucer' drama. Followers included Arthur Wing Pinero, with 'problem plays' like *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893), a work sympathetic to the Victorian woman's lot. Pinero and co are rarely revisited today but they paved the way for George Bernard Shaw, the Irishman who mixed comedy with campaigning on the British stage, shedding light on issues like prostitution (*Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893)) and religious hypocrisy (*Major Barbara* (1905)). He had trouble with the censors but was crucial in wresting British theatre away from more frothy Victorian fare. *Pygmalion* (1913), about a London flower girl plucked from the gutter, became Shaw's best-known work, thanks in part to a 1950s Broadway (and later, Hollywood) revamp as *My Fair Lady*. Another Irishman, Oscar Wilde, shared Shaw's talent for humour in plays like *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), a briskly witty satire on late Victorian society still regularly performed in Britain today.

We're 'avin a knees up: music hall

The Victorian love of spectacle launched theatre's unpretentious cousin, music hall – the leap from ballad opera, burlesque and melodrama to a genre that combined song, comedy and novelty acts wasn't huge. The music halls themselves, found predominantly in London, evolved from pubs with sideshows into purpose-built venues. London got its first, The Canterbury, in 1852. Each show would feature a dozen or more acts, from Jules Léotard, swinging around on a trapeze in his stretchy all-in-one, to Harry Champion singing *Boiled Beef and Carrots* or Kaufmann's Cycle Beauties, a group of swimsuited lovelies with a talent for formation bike riding. Music hall was riotously popular for half a century but declined after the First World War, outlived by the revue, a more refined cabaret-style show.



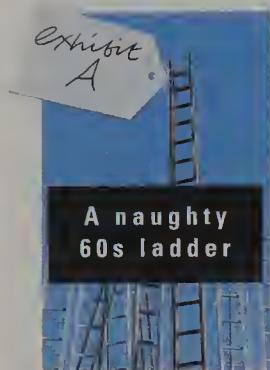
"WHY, IF I WAS TO TRY AND SING HIGHLY MORAL SONGS THEY WOULD FIRE GINGER BEER BOTTLES AND BEER MUGS AT ME. THEY DON'T PAY THEIR SIXPENCES AND SHILLINGS AT A MUSIC HALL TO HEAR THE SALVATION ARMY." Singer Marie Lloyd, renowned for a nudge, a wink and a double entendre

Opera with laughs: Gilbert and Sullivan

Opera, ballad opera and the tradition of the 'extravaganza' (elaborately staged fairy tales popularised by prolific playwright James Planché) all contributed to the Victorian operetta. And nobody did a Victorian operetta quite like Gilbert and Sullivan. Librettist W.S. Gilbert and composer Arthur Sullivan were fairly ordinary in isolation but together they wrote 14 immensely popular comic operettas between 1871 and 1896. Around half are still in regular performance even while the political and social issues that Gilbert satirised are often alien to the modern audience. You can pretty much guarantee that somewhere in Britain tonight an audience will be watching a G&S operetta: *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), *HMS Pinafore* (1878) and *The Mikado* (1885) are the most likely candidates.

Mirth, musicals and a good portion

of angst: modern theatre



It's not how big your ladder is, it's how you carry it
You Won't Always Be on Top, a building site comedy by Henry Chapman, fell foul of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship policy in 1959 for, amongst other things, using a workman's ladder at a 'suggestive angle'.

Coward goes for the jocular

Britain laboured with the naturalism moving through European theatre in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Audiences found the plays of Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov hard work and, despite the best efforts of Pinero and Shaw, theatregoers fell instead under the spell of light comedy and farce. Composer, actor and writer Noël Coward, dressing-gowned to the nines, struck the right note after the First World War, reviving the comedy of manners with a dose of moral decadence. Conceived one sleepless night and written in four days, *Private Lives* (1930) was perhaps his finest comedy; its tale of a divorced couple reunited inadvertently on respective honeymoons rich with Coward's droll dialogue. Novelist Somerset Maugham also succeeded with the comedy of manners, while Ben Travers churned out the Aldwych farces of the 1920s: humorous, astutely arranged plays named for the theatre in which they debuted. Of the few writers that produced something more serious, J.B. Priestley stood out, messing with time frames in *Dangerous Corner* (1932) and *Time and the Conways* (1937).

Private lives:
Noël Coward

Noël Coward, a piano tuner's son from Teddington, was the Midas of pre-1950s showbiz. Musicals, plays, screenplays, songs, skits – he wrote the lot, but also acted, sang, directed and danced on stage and screen. Coward never openly confessed his

homosexuality, although many of his plays offered clue enough. An affair with the married Prince George, Duke of Kent (fourth son of George V), lasted two decades. He squirmed while his extravagant lifestyle was criticised during the Second World War, unable to reveal that he was in fact in the employ of MI5.

Coward counted Winston Churchill, Laurence Olivier and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother among his friends but could be notoriously bitchy, and his fragile ego splintered in the 1950s when critics roasted his later work. Coward also wrote some of the most popular songs of the interwar period.

His now oft-parodied baritone singing is perhaps best remembered in *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* (1932), a satire on the British colonial stereotype, a title only eclipsed by *Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans* (1943), a piece of wartime satire that backfired and was banned by the BBC.

Working-class heroes

Public funding helped establish the National Theatre (a more English than British affair) after the Second World War and also strengthened the provision of playhouses and companies outside London, exploiting a deep pool of native writing and acting talent. The first playwrights to break with convention were dubbed the Angry Young Men. In 1956, John Osborne wrote *Look Back in Anger*, and its protagonist Jimmy Porter became the first in a line of disillusioned working-class figures in British theatre, the alienated heroes of what was dubbed 'kitchen sink' drama. Playwrights like Bernard Kops, Arnold Wesker and Shelagh Delaney, with the intense *A Taste of Honey* (1958), joined Osborne in criticising the establishment and the social inequalities inherent in British society. The kitchen sink writers were a varied bunch, most of whom rejected the Angry Young Man tag (or 'Woman' for Delaney). Even while they worked, more traditional theatre limped on under the pen of Terrence Rattigan, whose *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952), written in the 'well made' style that conformed to strict technical principles, was a genuine highlight of post-war theatre.

Worthy of an encore: modern British theatre

The Angry Young Men didn't bequeath an abundance of great plays but they did open the door to something new. Activism, improvisation, feminism, surrealism: each had its time on the British stage in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, a period when experimentation and healthy funding drove a renaissance in British theatre. Drama finally became less London-centric as the new Arts Council pushed cash out to regional repertory companies, built new theatres or resurrected old playhouses. Scotland, for so long marginalised when it came to drama, also found a voice; the crucial play was John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973), which, although written by an English playwright, told the story of an exploited Scotland, from the Highland Clearances to the closure of Clyde shipyards.

Fluctuations in funding – cut in the 1980s but boosted in the 1990s – may have dimmed the good times somewhat, but British theatre remains in comparatively good health. Indeed, when judged against theatre in much of the world, the British variant thrives. London's West End declaims its

In celebration
of bugger all

Dylan Thomas expended most of his talent on poetry but left perhaps his greatest legacy in the shape of a radio play. *Under Milk Wood* (1953) is set in Llareggub (read it backwards), a seaside Welsh village that, while fictitious, was probably based on Laugharne in Carmarthenshire, where Thomas lived in the early 50s. It begins while the inhabitants are asleep; we learn about the dreamed passions and obsessions of Captain Cat, Organ Morgan, Dai Bread and others. When they wake, the audience watches each go about the daily routine in the knowledge of their concealed, intimate imaginings. Thomas submitted the play to the BBC in 1953, apparently unfinished, but died before they aired it the following year. *Under Milk Wood* moved later to both stage and screen, although Richard Burton's narration for BBC radio in 1963 is the most memorable version.

role as a global hub for drama old and new (nowhere debuts more new shows each year), regional audiences are growing and British stage actors, from Ian McKellen to Judi Dench, Maggie Smith and Ewan McGregor, are still the benchmark of thespian quality. Only the occasional negative voice suggests that West End theatre relies too heavily on such stars to draw the punters. Beyond the West End, generous funding has boosted regional theatre over the last decade.

The big three playwrights of post-war British theatre

Harold Pinter. Influenced by Absurdist Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, Pinter emerged in the late 1950s. His plays were preoccupied with memory, shocking with their portrayal of lost idylls and use of prosaic settings. Typically, a Pinter play has an undercurrent of menace; this and the subtle, plausible use of language – with pauses and gaps conveying more than dialogue itself – have generated their own genre, 'Pinteresque'. *The Caretaker* (1960), *The Homecoming* (1965) and *Betrayal* (1978) were among his best. Pinter also acted and directed. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005, and the top French accolade, the Légion d'honneur, in 2007 (the French seemed particularly appreciative of his appetite for politicised debate) a year before his death.

Tom Stoppard. The intelligent but accessible talent of modern British playwriting chips away at metaphysical and ethical themes without ever growing stodgy. His breakthrough play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967), established the mix of humour, surrealism, humanity and philosophy: its leading duo

buffoon their way through life, stumbling periodically on some existential truth, while the Shakespeare play from which they're drawn (and ultimately by which they're bound), *Hamlet*, unravels in the background. Typically for Stoppard, the characters come to life amid the disorder of colliding worlds. Later work became more politicised, concerned particularly with human rights in the old Eastern Bloc, although *The Real Thing* (1982), one of his best, deals with love, art and life in general. Stoppard also works on screenplays, notably *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007).



Tom Stoppard

Tom Fun: When Harold Pinter was lobbying to have London's Comedy Theatre renamed the Pinter Theatre,

Stoppard wrote back: "Have you thought, instead, of changing your name to Harold Comedy?"

Alan Ayckbourn. The most prolific, consistently popular writer of modern British theatre has been picking Middle England apart since the 1960s. A 'serious humour' lies at the heart of plays that turn on the failure of human relationships and, in particular, on the foibles and miserable black humour of life in the suburbs. Some of it's farce, although Ayckbourn's work appears to darken as he ages. His first big success came with *Relatively Speaking* (1967), establishing the blueprint of mistaken identities, extramarital treachery and comedy. He's written over 70 plays, many of which had their opening night in his Scarborough theatre, marched on to the West End (and Broadway) and then toured the country in perpetuity.

"I WANT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT I CAN MAKE SERIOUS POINTS BY FLINGING A CUSTARD PIE AROUND THE STAGE FOR A COUPLE OF HOURS."

Tom Stoppard

Best of the rest: the other modern British playwrights you should know about

Joe Orton. Wrote subversive black comedies about sex and death in the 1960s, of which *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (1964) and *Loot* (1965) stood out. Orton was murdered, aged 34, with a hammer by his long-term lover Kenneth Halliwell.

Caryl Churchill. Has written socially conscious plays about women, sexual politics and greed since the late 1950s. *Top Girls* (1982), about women compromising to win power in two male dominated worlds, is among her best.

David Hare. Another social commentator, Hare has set his plays in contemporary Britain, relaying a satirical dismay at post-war failings in *Slag* (1970) and *Pravda* (1985), a stab at domineering media barons.

Brian Friel. The most successful Northern Irish playwright of the 20th century set much of his work in rural Ireland. Plays like *Translations* (1979) and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) explore identity through the tensions of change and British rule.

Peter Shaffer. Wide-ranging playwright who moved from *Five-Finger Exercise* (1960), a neat slice of domestic meltdown, to *Equus* (1973), a psychological piece about a teenager who blinds half a dozen horses.

Michael Frayn. Journalist and novelist who first impressed in drama with *Noises Off* (1982), a farce within a farce: like much of his work, it spoke of man's failed but unbending efforts to impose order on the world.

Alan Bennett. A distinct, playful voice in British theatre for 40 years, Bennett reveals his own dark humour in a variety of settings, from the royal court in *The Madness of George III* (1991) to a Yorkshire school in *The History Boys* (2004).

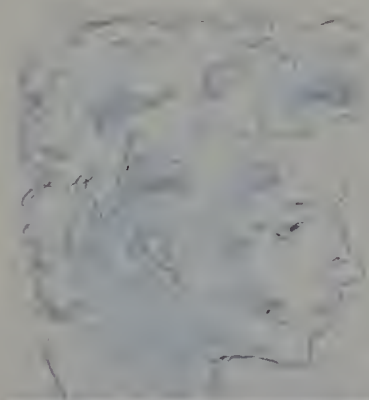
The rise of the directors

Directors are deemed as important to modern British theatre as writers and actors. They gather the components of a play – lighting, costumes, approach to the script, cast, direction and so on – but are seen as auteurs as much as co-ordinators. Peter Brook led the post-World War Two charge, directing the Royal Opera House by the time he was 22, and was followed by the likes of Joan Littlewood, renowned for left-wing theatre in the 1950s and 60s, and Peter Hall, the most influential figure of recent years. Hall founded the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1960 and went on to direct the National Theatre. Younger directors of note include Sam Mendes and Nicholas Hytner.

Three knights and two dames: the best of British stage talent

Laurence Olivier. He had a reputation for hamming it up but Olivier remains the giant of 20th century theatre, best remembered for his physical, highly technical approach to the great Shakespearean roles.

John Gielgud. Another master of Shakespeare, Gielgud's style – and in particular his versatile voice – was light and graceful compared to Olivier's. He also took on modern roles by the likes of Pinter.



Peggy Ashcroft

(from a sketch by Mervyn Peake in 1937) won an Oscar for *A Passage to India* at 77 years of age

Ralph Richardson. As accomplished in modern roles as in the Shakespearean staples. He worked alongside his good friend Gielgud on many occasions.

Peggy Ashcroft. The leading British actress of the 20th century stage found stardom opposite Olivier and Gielgud in *Romeo and Juliet* in 1934. A rare outing in film 50 years later, in *A Passage to India*, bagged an Oscar.

Judi Dench. A generation younger than the rest, Dench has served much of her time on stage with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Her turn as Lady Macbeth in a minimalist production of 1976 left critics agog.

The beauty of Bennett

Alan Bennett has probably considered scribbling 'National Treasure' as a sobriquet on his passport: as an actor, author, playwright (for stage, radio and television) and screenwriter he's almost universally loved: a totem for modern British culture no less. A butcher's son from Leeds, Bennett began as the understated player in *Beyond the Fringe*, a funny stage revue, but has gone on to reach a wider audience than his comedy troupe colleagues. It's often said that Bennett himself looms large in his work, with its dry voice, heavy with irony and burdened by some inner disappointment. He's probably best known for two series of *Talking Heads* (1988 and 1998), the poignant television monologues from unassuming characters with murky but typically human depths. But a radio play, *The Lady in the Van* (1990), based on the itinerant woman who took up residence in Bennett's driveway for 15 years, perhaps speaks best of the idiosyncratic, humane, funny and humdrum blend that shapes his work.

Saved from the censor Edward Bond's play about a group of South London thugs, *Saved* (1965), turned on the scene where a baby is stoned to death. It ended up on stage at the Royal Court Theatre despite an interdict from the censor. The subsequent prosecution ultimately brought an end to the Lord Chamberlain's long-standing and outmoded powers of censorship over British theatre.

As the beast wakes Belfast playwright Gary Mitchell has carved a successful career writing plays about his home city, and in particular the working-class Loyalist neighbourhood of Rathcoole. However, his portrayal of local colour in the likes of *As the Beast Sleeps* (1998) stirred the ire of local Loyalist paramilitaries who threatened his family, blew up his car and, eventually, told the entire Mitchell clan they had four hours to leave their homes or be killed. Today, Mitchell lives in hiding somewhere in Northern Ireland.

Three contemporary playwrights worth watching

Patrick Marber. Found fame initially as a comedian but shines today as a playwright, notably as the author of *Closer* (1997), a modern tragedy of intimacy and betrayal. He also won plaudits for the screen adaptation in 2004.

Georgia Fitch. Acclaimed on arrival with *adrenalin... heart* (2002) and then praised more recently for *I Like Mine with a Kiss* (2007), the witty story of two friends who both fall pregnant on the cusp of 40.

Roy Williams. Slang, urban patois and familiar situations bring a fresh reality to Williams' gritty drama. The brilliant *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads* (2002), found xenophobia and racism in a London pub on the day of an England-Germany football match.

Emerging traditions: modern theatre in Scotland and Wales
After a century or so of deliberation, Scotland launched its National Theatre in 2006. As yet it doesn't have a building, but the associated company has already worked on more than 50 new productions for the Scottish stage, with Iraq War drama *Black Watch* (2006) deemed the most successful by merit of its transition to theatres outside Scotland. The National Theatre is the latest achievement for an emerging Scottish theatre tradition, a mode of intense contemporary drama that counts writers Liz Lochhead, David Harrower and David Greig among its leading lights. Harrower's *Knives in Hens* (1995), the disturbing story of a rural murder, is a particularly standout example of modern drama from a Scottish playwright. Alas, Wales doesn't yet have an equivalent tradition – they're still debating the merits of a National Theatre. However, in Sherman Cymru is does have a progressive company that pushes new work in both Welsh and English.

In tune with the public: the rise of musicals

It may have the Shakespearean tradition, the finest stage actors in the world and progressive playwrights, but the most successful wing of modern British theatre is the musical. Composer Ivor Novello succeeded Gilbert and Sullivan in the early 20th century, leading a golden age of West End operettas and musicals with shows like *The Dancing Years* (1939), in which he also starred, before Rodgers and Hammerstein, Bernstein et al dragged everyone's attention away to Broadway. But the West End struck back in the 1970s and 80s, led by Andrew Lloyd Webber's big budget musicals. It began with *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* (1968) and has continued with *Cats* (1981), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986) and others. Critics suggest Lloyd Webber has regressed musical theatre, enslaving characterisation and plot to catchy tunes. His productions have also been sniffily dismissed as too global, as unidentifiable with 'British' theatre. Perhaps it depends on your measure of success – no doubt the stats for *The Phantom of the Opera*, having played in 25 countries to over 100 million people and with box office takings of nearly £2billion, will be success enough for Lloyd Webber.

Who goes to the theatre today?

Theatre attendance in Britain is relatively healthy. Audience levels have remained consistent for the last 20 years, with about one in four people going to see a play each year. However, it's an aging audience: the under 40s don't flock to the theatre in any great number. If they do, it's more likely for stand-up comedy or a musical – spurred on by reality TV shows that pick the leads in new shows – than plays. 'True' theatre still suffers somewhat with an image problem – many erroneously assume that the genuine article will be 'difficult'.

Edinburgh's big fest

The biggest event on the Scottish theatre calendar, the Edinburgh Festival, staged in August, is actually various different festivals combined. The International Festival of Music and Drama, at its heart, does what its name suggests, while the misleadingly named Fringe turns out to be the largest arts festival in the world.

Playing the fuel: Ivor Novello

Ivor Novello spent four weeks in prison during the Second World War, jailed for fraudulently acquiring petrol coupons for his Rolls Royce. An attempt to bribe the officer delivering the summons didn't help his cause. Years before, Novello had been something of a matinee idol on both stage and screen, as well as the

composer of songs forever associated with the 'lost generation' of the First World War: *Keep the Home Fires Burning* (1914) is the best remembered. These days Brits are more likely to associate Ivor Novello with the song writing awards that bear his name, won by everyone from Eric Clapton to Amy Winehouse and Iron Maiden.

It says here that you put your left leg in...

In 1651, John Playford published *The English Dancing Master*, a 'how to' guide to more than 100 traditional English dances. The manual enjoyed regular reprints over the next 75 years. Cecil Sharp gave it another print run in the early 20th century.

In step with tradition

'Traditional' British dance is a rather woolly genre; its bounds drawn without much discrimination and inclusive of folk dancing, the ceilidh, country dancing and pretty much anything pre-20th century that didn't involve a tutu. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their 'traditions' and each, in turn, has its own regional specialities, from the Welsh border morris men with their blackened faces, to the clog stompers of Lancashire.

England

Dance was popular with the masses in medieval England, and individual routines like the *Sir Roger de Coverley* and the *Jenny Pluck Pears* would have been known to most. They, like the broad range of styles, from morris to country to square, are now usually grouped under the 'folk' banner. The dances fell from fashion in the industrial age and would have been lost but for the efforts of composer Cecil Sharp in the early 20th century. He travelled around recording (and prudishly doctoring) the music and moves of dances that were all but extinct, initiating a revival that continues into the 21st century. The nearest most English people get to participating in traditional dance these days is at a barn dance, a hoedown of choreographed moves led by a caller and their band.

The old routine: three traditional English dances

Abbots Bromley Horn Dance. Staffordshire folk balance deer antlers on their shoulders while dancing. First recorded in the 13th century.

Rapper Sword Dance. Specific to Northumberland and County Durham: take five miners, give each a two-handed sword and watch them bob and weave. Dates back about 200 years.

Maypole Dance. Young maidens cavort around a large wooden pole (it's a fertility rite) on May Day, weaving ribbons into a pretty pattern. Probably has Pagan origins.

Scotland

The ceilidh (say 'kay-lee', despite the spelling) is a Celtic evening of music and dance. The band strikes up with fiddle, accordion and bodhrán, a caller shouts the moves and the group, usually paired up in a line but sometimes arranged in a ring, follow the energetic steps. Dances once varied between Highlands and Lowlands, although the modern era uses a fairly universal repertoire featuring *The Gay Gordons* and others. Scottish country dancing is ceilidh's refined, slightly earnest cousin. Its roots are less folksy, grounded instead in the studied moves of the Renaissance court. Reels, jigs – both skippy, fast-paced dances – and strathspeys – a more sedate affair (thetune to *Auld Lang Syne* is used for one) – are the main variants. A third Scottish discipline, Highland dancing, usually performed solo in competition at Highland games, may be the oldest of all Britain's native routines. It's a fast, complex blur of skips and steps, more in tune with ballet than ceilidh or Scottish country dancing. *The Highland Fling*, originally performed on a shield by victorious warriors, is the most famous sequence.

Northern Ireland

Sharing Scotland's Celtic heritage, traditional dancing in the north of Ireland centres on the ceilidh (or céilí as it may be written in Ireland). But the region also pursues step dancing (*Sean-nós* in Irish Gaelic (this actually translates as 'old style' and also refers to a type of singing)). Usually performed solo, it's the famously up-tempo form that finds the feet going hell-for-leather while the upper body remains largely impassive. In Northern Ireland, the Irish heritage of *Sean-nós* has the inevitable sectarian connotations and it remains a predominantly Nationalist pastime. Scottish Country Dancing is also popular in Northern Ireland, carried along by the Ulster Scots connection.

Culture with bells on
Even in 21st century
England and Wales,
morris dancing remains
an iconic, idiosyncratic
and frequently mocked
branch of national
culture. Morris men are
still regularly sighted at
village fetes or outside
pubs in summer. Most
draw on regionally
specific styles of dance,
from the Border (that's
the England/Wales
border) to the Cotswold
to the Molly (East
Anglian). In common,
the dances tend to be
all-male affairs, and
usually incorporate bells
on trousers, flailing
handkerchiefs, whooping
and some form of prop –
from sticks to antlers
and swords. As for the
origins of 'morris',
it's usually taken as
a bastardisation of
'Moorish', an association
with North Africa that
remains unexplained.

"...DANCING IS
PRACTICED TO
REVEAL WHETHER
LOVERS ARE IN
GOOD HEALTH AND
SOUND OF LIMB..."
Thoinot Arbeau,
writing in 1588

Wales

Like England, Wales lost most of its folk dances in the industrial age: the strong non-conformist chapels did their best to stamp out anything so depraved. The surviving routines are often hybrid affairs comprised of remnants of Welsh dance and elements of the morris and other styles. They're usually watched at the local eisteddfod rather than joined, performed rather formally in the 18th century dress of petticoat, apron, shawl and even tall stovepipe hat – all cherished as symbols of Wales' renewed national identity. Only one Welsh dance tradition appears undiluted (even while other nations have their equivalents) – clog dancing. The Welsh variant evolved among farmers and quarry workers, its complicated steps and tricks (some of them like the high kicks of the Cossack) pursued solo in competition.

Movers and shakers

While everyone from ditch-dwellers to lords loved to boogie back in medieval times, moves were nevertheless indicative of social standing. The early modern multitude got their kicks from traditional folk dances with pagan roots, but in royal circles they called on a more refined repertoire. The Elizabethan period saw processional dances imported from the Continent; decorous routines like the pavane, a

slow stately affair, became popular on ceremonial occasions and at posh parties. Only the volt, in which the man hoists his lady high in the air, authorised any degree of grappling with an opposite number. Queen Elizabeth led by example, using dance for daily exercise. She apparently danced the gaillard, a lively mix of leaps and bounds, six or seven times each morning.

An understudy's story: British ballet

Englishman John Weaver played a role in ballet's formative years. His London *ballet d'action* in the early 18th century explored how the moves of classical ballet could portray emotion. But the innovation was short lived. British ballet went off the boil, and for 200 years simply borrowed from the Continent with its composers, choreographers and dancers. Only in the early 20th century did the foreign imports finally inspire native success when two former Ballet Russes dancers, Marie Rambert (Polish) and Ninette de Valois (Irish – her real name was Edris Stannus), established the companies that would become, respectively, Ballet Rambert and the Royal Ballet. Frederick Ashton was the big British choreographer of the 20th century, his best work emerging during a long tenure at the Royal Ballet. In 1963 he created *Marguerite and Armand* for Margot Fonteyn, Britain's prima ballerina, and Rudolf Nureyev – the first night inspired 21 curtain calls. Fonteyn (born Margaret Hookham) only retired from the Royal Ballet in 1979, aged 60. Only Darcey Bussell, herself recently retired, has achieved anything like the same level of interest in the years since.

Matthew Bourne, famous for an all-male *Swan Lake* (1995) and a ballet adaptation of the film *Edward Scissorhands* (2005), is the current big noise in choreography. Today, ballet struggles somewhat with public image. It suffers accusations of elitism, while the difficulty in actually doing it precludes the enjoyment of participation that popularises other dance forms. The film *Billy Elliot* (2000) stirred popular interest in ballet and no doubt got more children dancing, but it's going to take more than a movie to get the masses through the theatre doors. For all that, the Royal Ballet, based at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, remains internationally celebrated.

Brits cutting rug

In 2006 the National Campaign for the Arts produced *The Dance Manifesto*, claiming dance as the fastest growing art form in Britain. Their figures had one in ten Brits attending dance performances, and nearly five million participating themselves. The popularity of television shows like *Strictly Come Dancing*, and the attendant growth in ballroom participation, would seem to support the claims.

Movement for change: modern dance

Modern dance thrives in Britain. It's lively, uninhibited and varied, featuring elements of tap, ballet, hip-hop, ballroom, Latin and the rest – there is no distinct 'national' style. The foundations were laid in the 1960s and 70s, guided by the London Contemporary Dance Theatre that produced choreographers like Richard Alston and Siobhan Davies, both of whom went on to form their own progressive companies. The growth has continued over the last 20 years, with a number of interesting choreographers and companies at work. Among them, Lea Anderson has built a reputation for converting everyday movement into dance, and Akram Khan is eulogised for blending Western contemporary dance with the Kathak dance form of south Asia. Khan has his own company, one of various progressive outfits that keep Britain at the forefront of the contemporary scene. Random Dance, resident company at Sadler's Wells, London, led by choreographer Wayne McGregor, has done much to strengthen the cause with emotive, beguiling moves that look as painful as they do radical. The Rambert Dance Company is another important force, its ballet origins redirected toward modern dance in the 1980s. Wales has its own national contemporary dance company, Diversions, resident at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff (or the Armadillo as locals call it).

Laughing gear: modern British comedy

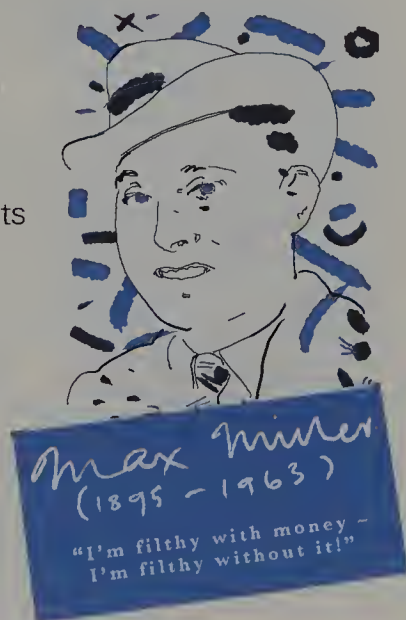
The great tradition of larking about

Britain's comic preferences are well rooted – class, sex, scatology, politics and vanity have all been used to raise a laugh for centuries. General buffoonery was big back in medieval days, the slapstick, juggling and riddling of actors and jesters unfurling in market squares, halls and the royal court. Shakespeare featured the fools in his plays, although relied on irony, ridicule and the odd bit of smut for the actual humour in his work. Class generated much of the mirth in the Restoration comedy of manners, a genre that chuckled on into the 20th century, while the 19th century music hall tradition gave birth to stand-up comedy, the medium against which British comics still test their mettle; the successful usually funnel on into sitcoms, sketch shows and films. Modern comedy is an integral part of the British cultural jigsaw and its stars, the equal of any in the world, generate a public profile to rank alongside actors and musicians. If you can't regurgitate a *Little Britain* catchphrase, discuss what happened in last night's *Gavin and Stacey* or do *that* David Brent dance then you might as well just look at the floor.

Jonson in good humour
17th century playwright Ben Jonson took a scientific approach to comedy. Renaissance thought recognised the four 'humours' of the human character, controlled by the levels of blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile present within the body. An imbalance of the humours exaggerated certain personality traits, created caricature and, therefore, comedy in Jonson's characters. Aside from this 'comedy of humours', Jonson also mastered satire with aplomb.

Have you heard the one about British stand-up?

For a century British comedians have learned to swim (or sink) in the perilous waters of stand-up. Variety and music hall established the pre-Second World War mode of 'cheeky chappie'-style routines peddled by George Formby and Max Miller, their acts a mix of double entendres, songs and bad outfits. When music hall died in the 1960s, the gagmen moved to working men's clubs, and Les Dawson and, later, Lenny Henry, plied mother-in-law jokes, impersonations and wry observation. The seamier end of the club circuit supported acts like Bernard Manning, notorious for his mix of smut and racism. Meanwhile, Peter Cook's Establishment Club in Soho stood in sharp contrast with its politicised satire.



"I LIKE MY COFFEE
LIKE I LIKE MY
WOMEN. IN A
PLASTIC CUP."
Eddie Izzard



An alternative stand-up scene emerged in the folk clubs of the 1970s where Billy Connolly and Jasper Carrott mixed funny songs with observational gags, but the real revolution in British stand-up came in the 1980s. The first dedicated comedy clubs gave vent to a new generation of alternative, politicised (Thatcher was PM), punkish and irreverent acts who fancied themselves the children of American comic Lenny Bruce. Alexei Sayle, Dawn French, Jo Brand, Ben Elton and Rik Mayall were all among the new crowd. And British stand-up has built on this alternative tradition ever since; most cities and large towns have some form of comedy venue and the majority of British comedians pass through the stand-up school of hard knocks on their way to success. The blunt political stuff of the 1980s has lost its edge, replaced by a post-PC mode that draws more on traditional gag-led comedy (albeit with a heavy dose of irony). Eddie Izzard (a surreal, gifted rambler), Peter Kay (old school observational stuff) and Russell Brand (articulate and wide-ranging) rank high amongst the 21st century generation of stand-ups.

Instant classics: sketch shows and sitcoms

They might cut their teeth in stand-up, but most British comedians reach their audience through the small screen or radio. The sketch show has always been popular: after *The Goon Show* got things rolling on radio in the 1950s, the genre enjoyed a 60s and 70s telly heyday when *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, *The Two Ronnies* and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* were all in their prime. *The Catherine Tate Show* and *Little Britain* keep the medium going today by caricaturing everyday folk, from the only gay in a small Welsh village to a potty-mouthed granny. Sitcoms reach even more viewers. Depressive genius Tony Hancock set the bar in the 1950s with *Hancock's Half Hour*, a Galton and Simpson-penned radio – and then TV –

show set around the daily disappointments of its priggish antihero. The same writing duo created *Steptoe and Son*, a TV long-runner in the 1960s and similar to *Hancock* in its fatalism.

The skewed domestic setting has been a sitcom staple ever since, from the mainstream farce of *Terry and June* (1980s) to the dysfunction of *Fawlty Towers* (1970s) and *Absolutely Fabulous* (1990s) and sofa-based subtlety of *The Royle Family* (late 1990s). Class played its hand in others: *The Good Life* (1970s) had a bourgeois pleasantness and *Whatever Happened to The Likely Lads* a working-class pathos (1970s), while *Only Fools and Horses* (1980s and 90s) won hearts with its dreaming market trader. More recently, Ricky Gervais twisted the sitcom into a fly-on-the-wall mockumentary with his toe-curling turn as David Brent in *The Office* (2002-03), an instant classic.



"I WENT TO BUY SOME CAMOUFLAGE TROUSERS THE OTHER DAY BUT I COULDN'T FIND ANY."

Tommy Cooper

Wiley old Barker *The Two Ronnies* – that's Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett – made popular, mainstream, punchline-led comedy for 20 years. A number of their sketches were supplied through the post by the elusive writer Gerald Wiley. The 'fork handles' sketch, recently voted amongst the funniest on British TV, was one of his. In the early 1970s the reclusive Wiley called everyone connected to the show to a Chinese restaurant where his identity would be revealed – when Ronnie Barker stood up and confessed, they thought he was joking. But eventually the penny dropped. Fearful of foisting his material on Corbett, Barker had chosen to write anonymously instead.

Three sketch shows you should have seen

Monty Python's Flying Circus (1969-74). Five Oxbridge graduates and an American created farcical, surreal comedy that did away with punchlines in favour of segued sketches and abrupt endings. Old ladies, Nazis, Spanish Inquisitors: the Pythons took on many guises.

The Morecambe and Wise Show (1961-83). Tall, bespectacled funnyman Eric Morecambe and his short, hairy-legged straightman Ernie Wise were the most popular double act Britain has produced. Their 1977 Christmas show drew 28 million viewers.

Not the Nine O'Clock News (1979-82). The sketch show variant of the 1980s alternative comedy scene mixed observation and satire. The stars, Griff Rhys Jones, Rowan Atkinson, Mel Smith and others, became the prime cast of British comedy for the next decade.

Taking the peace

The most popular home-grown comedy on Northern Irish TV sets in recent years was *Give my Head Peace*, a sitcom that satirised the sectarian divide and the paramilitaries via the members of two comically dysfunctional families. A pilot episode, *Two Ceasefires and a Wedding*, lampooning the hackneyed 'love across the divide' story, hinted at the style. The show ran for ten years before ending in 2008. Detractors wondered whether it simply reinforced the negative stereotypes, but most people just laughed along.

Five sitcoms worth the licence fee

Dad's Army (1968-77). That rare thing – a sitcom generally agreed to have stood the test of time with its portrayal of a bungling, elderly Home Guard unit in the Second World War.

Yes, Minister (1980-88). Satire on the machinations and doubletalk of modern politics, with Paul Eddington's MP (and later PM) controlled by Nigel Hawthorne's Machiavellian permanent secretary. It was Margaret Thatcher's favourite show.

Blackadder (1983-89). Rowan Atkinson's sardonic historical figure, sketched by writers Ben Elton and Richard Curtis, ran for four series, each set in a different century.

Only Fools and Horses (1981-2003). Wheeling, dealing but never quite achieving, Del Boy and Rodney Trotter shaped the show that was voted Britain's best ever sitcom.

Phoenix Nights (2001-). Peter Kay is Brian Potter, wheelchair-bound impresario of a Bolton working men's club: the perfect introduction to a distinctly northern brand of humour.

A talent for satire

Britain has always had a pleasingly irreverent approach to the great and the good, and satire – with its irony, exaggeration and wit – has been a mandatory strand of humour since the days of Dryden and Hogarth. Modern satire really got going with the satire boom of the early 1960s. *Private Eye*, a fortnightly magazine that still seems to delight in its libel court jollies, began downsizing political and celebrity ego, while its one time editor Peter Cook did something similar on stage in *Beyond the Fringe*, joined by Dudley Moore, Alan Bennett and Jonathan Miller. Cook's audacious impersonation of a maladroit Prime Minister Harold Macmillan garnered particular notoriety. *That was the Week that Was* (also known as *TW3*), fronted by David Frost and scripted by everyone from John Cleese to

Peter Cook (1937-1995)
Dudley Moore (1935-2002)

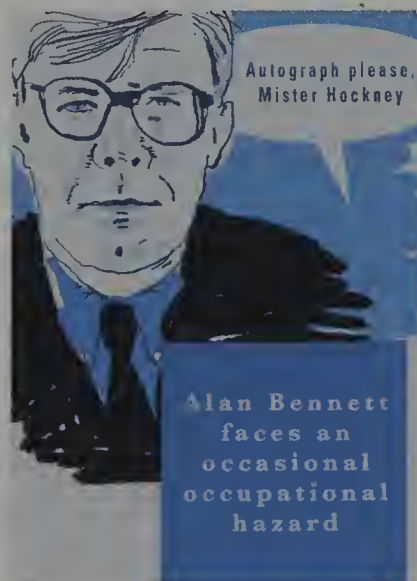


Dennis Potter and John Betjeman, also featured in the 60s satire boom. A second wave emerged in the 1990s, with TV panel show *Have I Got News For You* the leading light; its wry analysis of the week's news representing a softer approach than the acerbic putdown-via-puppet methods of

The comedians
 comedian

If you're searching for the Maharishi of modern British comedy, perhaps you should focus on Peter Cook. He began writing and performing for the Footlights, the Cambridge student troupe, before leading the satire boom of the early 1960s, but is perhaps more famous for his partnership with Dudley Moore in *Not Only But Also*. When Cook slipped from the heights in the 1970s, his life was directed increasingly by alcoholism, and his death, aged 57, in 1995, was attributed largely to a drink problem. Many said he'd wasted his talent, but Cook's influence has been immense, cited as a guiding light by everyone from *Monty Python* to *The Young Ones* and Chris Morris. Stephen Fry, perhaps the sharpest wit of contemporary Britain, called Cook "the funniest man who ever drew breath". A 2005 Channel 4 poll of comics judged him the top 'Comedians' Comedian', ahead of Groucho Marx and Eric Morecambe.

1980s show, *Spitting Image*. It's a short leap from the wit of satire to the skewed imitation of parody, a genre that found intelligent, often surreal life in the 1990s with *The Day Today*, a spoof news show with Chris Morris' intense anchorman, and *Knowing Me, Knowing You...With Alan Partridge*, Steve Coogan's chat show send up. *Da Ali G Show*, the Sacha Baron Cohen effort that also featured a certain Borat, and *Bo Selecta!*, both TV productions, have fed the British hunger for mockery in the 21st century.





5.1. Cinema p221

5.1.1. **An underdog's story:** the Brits and their films p222

5.1.2. **From dog stars to Hitchcock:** early cinema p224

5.1.3. **Big films and bigger audiences:** the golden age p227

5.1.4. **From bedsits to Bond:** cinema in the 1960s p231

5.1.5. **Let's hear it for the little guy:** modern British cinema p234

5.2. Photography p241

5.2.1. **Fixing the shadows** p242

5.2.2. **Art, war and glamour:** modern photography p245

5.3. Fashion p249

5.3.1. **Clothes and the British sense of style** p250

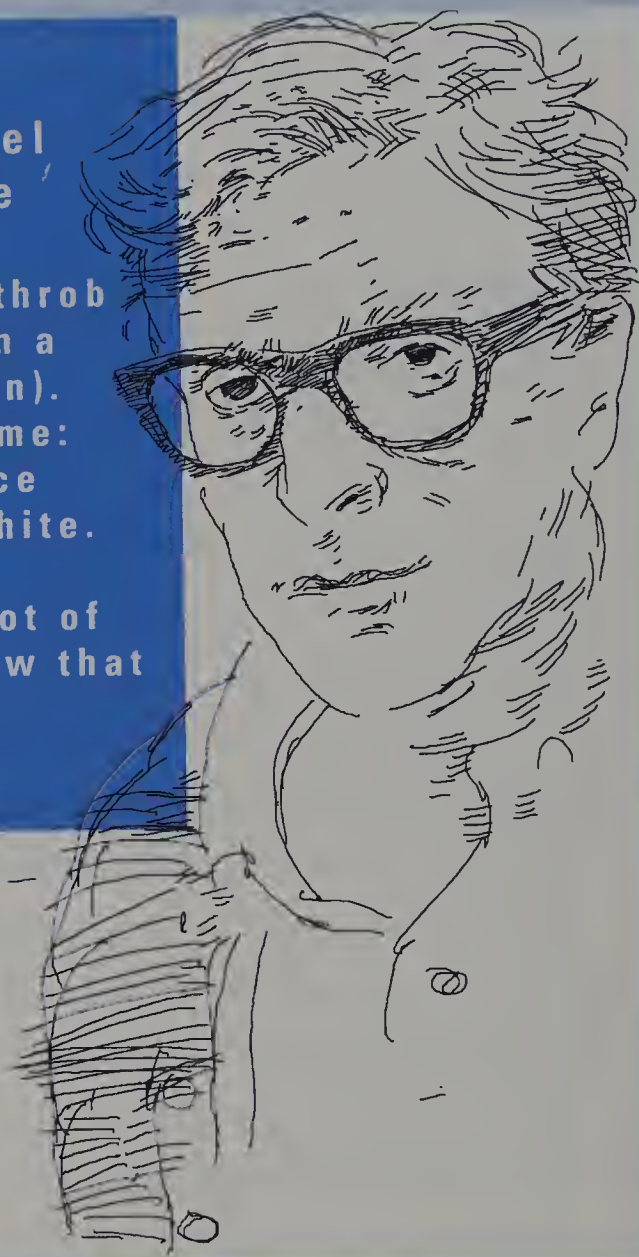
5 Cinema, photography and fashion

**Michael
Caine**

**60s heartthrob
(even in a
cardigan).**

**Real name:
Maurice
Micklewhite.**

**Quite a lot of
people know that**



5.1 Cinema

British cinema has been a mixed affair.

Korda and Hitchcock shone in the 1930s,

David Lean oversaw a golden age and

New Wave directors later established

social realism as a fine perennial genre.

However, elsewhere, British cinema has

relied on individual gems, films that are

hailed as epochal but later revealed as

isolated treasures.

5.1.1 An underdog's story: the Brits and their films

Talent unmasked:
the BAFTAs

The BAFTA Film Awards are Britain's answer to the Oscars, dished out each February to the high achievers of cinema from all nationalities. BAFTA itself is the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, established in 1947 (the telly part was actually added later and has its own awards ceremony) by a pool of directorial talent that included David Lean, Alexander Korda and Carol Reed. Reed himself directed the Best British Film in the first three years of the awards. The iconic golden masks that serve as BAFTA gongs were designed in 1955 by US sculptor Mitzi Cunliffe.

British cinema has travelled a rocky road. Periods of success, triumph even, have been curtly followed by years in the doldrums. The 1930s nurtured Alfred Hitchcock and Alexander Korda, and a golden age came a decade later, packing out cinemas with David Lean epics and Ealing comedies. In the 1960s, the New Wave directors established social realism as a perennial, praiseworthy strand of British film. But either side of such spurts, homegrown cinema has relied on individual gems, films that are hailed as epochal but usually revealed in retrospect as isolated treasures. We shouldn't be surprised at the mixed fortunes. English language cinema is dominated by the star-driven industry in Hollywood, and Britain's ensemble affairs struggle to compete with America's cultural and economic might. However, despite the hard luck stories, films like *Nil by Mouth*, *The Full Monty* and *Atonement* have played a crucial role in shaping the cultural landscape of modern Britain. They present a diverse cinematic tradition that while distinctly 'British' has no overriding style. From Mike Leigh's realism to the escapism of Bond, the suspense of *The Third Man* or the culture-clash gay romance of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, British cinema is nothing if not eclectic.

Who goes to the cinema and what do they watch? Cinema audiences have steadily increased in Britain over the last 20 years, creeping up from a 1984 nadir when only 54 million tickets were sold all year. These days the figures have levelled out at around 160 million admissions a year. Ten times that number went to the

movies in 1946, before television became so distracting. Around half the British cinema-going public is aged under 25, although this statistic is falling, with the over 45s taking an increasing share of seats. Perhaps these demographics help to explain why Brits are far more likely to watch a Hollywood film than anything native. The number of British films in the cinemas varies, but usually equates to around one in five on show. Some years are better than others; for example, in 2006, a bumper year for British film, a third of all box office receipts came from homegrown cinema. Even while a third of films released in Britain are in a foreign language, the greatest number in Hindi, they account for little over three per cent of total box office revenue.

Five film festivals

London Film Festival

The oldest show in town has been running each October since the 1950s.

Raindance Film Festival

Britain's biggest independent film fest showcases movies from around the world in the West End each autumn.

Dead by Dawn

Edinburgh drinks down a bloody brew of horror movies every April.

Viva! Spanish and Latin American Film Festival

Hispanic movies every March in Manchester.

Black International Film Festival

An October mix of film, music and live arts in Birmingham.

Mighty Blighty: recent British Oscar winners

Sam Mendes.

Best Director for
American Beauty
in 2000.

Julian Fellowes.

Best Original Screenplay
for *Gosford Park* in 2002.

Wallace & Gromit: *the Curse of the Were-Rabbit*.

Best Animated Feature
Film in 2006.

Helen Mirren.

Best Actress for
The Queen in 2007.

Daniel Day-Lewis.

Best Actor for *There
Will Be Blood* in 2008.

Kate Winslet.

Best Actress for
The Reader in 2009.

Danny Boyle.

Best Director for
Slumdog Millionaire
in 2009.

Greene's heroic failure

There was a tragicomic air to William Friese-Greene's life. He took out more than 70 patents on inventions that were forward thinking but often technically inept. A cigarette card photo printing machine and his involvement in early X-ray were rare triumphs. He claimed to have sent details of his failed 'Biophantascope' to Thomas Edison, later credited with the invention of the film camera, but Edison denied all knowledge. His enthusiasm as an inventive dabbler brought periodic financial strife, including a spell in prison for borrowing while bankrupt. William would no doubt have enjoyed *The Magic Box* (1951) a biopic that wildly exaggerated his role in the birth of film: an all-star cast including Laurence Olivier and Richard Attenborough couldn't stop the film foundering at the box office. Friese-Greene died while speaking at a meeting of film moguls in 1921.

William, it was really nothing

Everyone remembers the Lumière Brothers and their flickering projection of a train, but did the Englishman William Friese-Greene beat them to the first moving image? If he did, unfortunately he was the only person who saw it. His 'Biophantascope' machine, patented in 1889 (six years before the Lumières' first film), took four or five photos per second, captured on film rolling behind the shutter. Alas there's no concrete record to suggest that he could successfully project the results, and the genuine invention of cinematography probably happened elsewhere. Whatever its origins, when film got going Britain was mesmerised. Audiences in the early 20th century were rapt by the work of foreign film companies, particularly the French Pathe and Gaumont studios that were churning out newsreels and silent movies.

Britain's first big film-makers

Britain began building its own studios in the Edwardian era, led by an influx of American technicians and actors. Will Barker and Cecil Hepworth were the first major homegrown figures. From his Ealing studio, Barker made silent historical epics; and they were epics – *Jane Shore* (1916) used 5,000 extras. By contrast Hepworth's films were modest. One of his earliest filmic projects recorded Queen Victoria's funeral in 1901, but he really made his mark with *Rescued by Rover* (1905). It cost £7/13/6 to make (the cheapest British film ever according to *The Guinness Book of Records*), involved various members of Hepworth's family and featured a child being rescued by the star, Rover, a collie. Believe it or not, the use of cinematic narrative by Hepworth and co-director Lewin Fitzhamon, conveying drama through edited shots rather than a procession of staged acts, proved revolutionary. The public lapped it up and Rover returned for a sequel. Hepworth made films into the 1920s, by which time his radical style had become old hat.

Talkies and quickies

Britain's early film industry struggled through the 1920s, stifled by the economic and creative dominance of Hollywood. In 1927, Parliament passed the Cinematograph Films Act demanding that cinemas show a set quota of British films. Initially it was 7.5 per cent of output, raised to 20 per cent by the mid 1930s. However, instead of fostering an industry of self-sufficient Hollywood-style studios, the act created a glut of 'quota quickies', uninspiring films produced to make up the numbers. Against the odds, two highly celebrated directors emerged in the 1930s:

Alfred Hitchcock delivered the first British talkie, *Blackmail* (1929), a crime thriller with the provocative mix of fear, violence and blond heroines that would recur throughout his long directorial career. Another Hitchcock effort, *The 39 Steps* (1935), developed the motifs brilliantly with the story of an innocent man on the run in Scotland. Hitchcock left for Hollywood in 1939 although he would periodically return to Britain, using it as a backdrop for his American films.

Alexander Korda, a Hungarian émigré, was initially signed by Paramount to produce quota quickies but did much more, establishing his own London Film Productions to produce and direct *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933). The elegantly made film was a global success and its star, Charles Laughton, bagged an Oscar.

First on the scene

Ealing Studios stake a claim as the world's oldest still in use, originally unveiled as a four-acre plot by William Barker in 1902. In more recent times *The Cruel Sea* (1953), *The Ladykillers* (1955) and *Shaun of the Dead* (2007) were all shot there.

"THERE WAS NOTHING OF COURAGE IN WHAT I DID. IT WAS ALWAYS JUST A LARK FOR ME. ... I WAS SUCKLED ON AMYL ACETATE AND REARED ON CELLULOID."
Cecil Hepworth

Hepworth hits hard times
The fledgling film industry was a precarious business. Even Britain's first true filmic maverick Cecil Hepworth found his studio in receivership by 1924. The original negatives of Hepworth's films were melted down for their silver content.

Fighting the filth

In 1916 the British Board of Film Classification compiled a list of things that wouldn't be tolerated in film. It included such depravity as:

- The unnecessary exhibition of under-clothing
- Excessively passionate love scenes
- The exhibition of profuse bleeding

"BLONDES MAKE THE BEST VICTIMS. THEY'RE LIKE VIRGIN SNOW THAT SHOWS UP THE BLOODY FOOTPRINTS."

Alfred Hitchcock

Hitchcock: the boy that made the man Alfred Hitchcock, Hollywood giant, was born a chicken dealer's son in Leytonstone, East London. Biographers have noted how childhood events influenced his filmmaking style. A ten-minute spell in a local police cell, apparently arranged by his father after some wrongdoing, is used to explain his later fascination with falsely accused characters. As for his preoccupation with controlling mothers, famously realised in Mrs Bates of *Psycho* (1960), look no further than his own mum: she made Alfred stand at the foot of her bed each night, recounting the events of the day.

Welsh grit

The first Welsh talkie was Ifan ab Owen Edwards' *Y Chwarelwr* (*The Quarryman*) (1935), the rather romanticised story of life in a slate-mining community.

A string of Korda hits followed, admired as much for production quality as narrative, and he put the likes of Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh on screen.

Despite the best efforts of Hitchcock, Korda and co, the British film industry was dogged by financial gaffes and poor production standards in the 1930s. The American studios moved in and began running things, producing 'British' classics like *Goodbye Mr Chips!* (1939) with its kindly retired teacher in the mood for a flashback.

The five early British films you should watch

The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog (1926) Alfred Hitchcock.

If you're going to watch a silent British film, watch this one, young Hitchcock's serial killer story starring Ivor Novello.

The Private Life of Henry VIII (1933) Alexander Korda.

Korda's brilliant dissection of the big bearded one is among the most commercially successful British films ever made.

Nell Gwyn (1934) Herbert Wilcox.

Leading pre-war actress Anna Neagle stars as the Cockney girl with the ear (and other bits) of the King.

The 39 Steps (1935) Alfred Hitchcock.

The best of Hitchcock's pre-Hollywood films starred Robert Donat, caught up with a dangerous blonde.

Pygmalion (1938) Anthony Asquith

and Leslie Howard. Can you make a lady from a 'heap of stuffed cabbage leaves'? Leading man Leslie Howard attempted to find out.

513 Big films and bigger audiences: the golden age

Reality bites: the wartime experience

British cinema took an unexpected turn during the Second World War: it improved significantly. The 'make do' mantra of the war years dispatched 1930s extravagance, but while manpower and facilities were reduced quality climbed as a more realist style of film-making developed. It originated in documentary, a mode developed in the 1930s by John Grierson, famous for his work on *Night Mail* (1936), in which a chugging score by Benjamin Britten and W.H Auden's monotone verse enlivened the journey of a Royal Mail train from London to Scotland. When documentary passed realism onto film, the wartime current inevitably created gentle propaganda. Some of it was highly watchable; in *Went the Day Well?* (1942), a British village was overrun by German troops, eventually repelled by fierce housewives. Other realist films had more humdrum content. *This Happy Breed* (1944), adapted from a Noël Coward play and directed by David Lean, studied the 'ordinary' interwar lives of a squabbling family in Clapham. The war years also saw the first pairing of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, known collectively as 'The Archers'. Theirs would become a director/writer partnership responsible for 19 British films. One of the earliest, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), established their 'difference'. Its unflattering appraisal of the British character – romantic but stunted – was set in contrast with a likeable German officer. Winston Churchill decided the film was unpatriotic and tried to halt production.

How Welsh

was my valley?

The film version of Richard Llewellyn's book *How Green Was My Valley* was released in 1941. America enjoyed the movie's recollection of a Welsh pit village childhood, awarding five Oscars, including Best Picture. But perhaps that was because the film was Hollywood made. The characters were actually played by a mix of English, American and Irish actors and the movie was shot in Malibu Canyon, California. Even so, to many it's still *the* 'Welsh' film.

"THEY RENOUNCED
THE WORLD OF
MEN, BUT FOUND
THAT THE WORLD
WAS NOT TO BE
DENIED."

From the trailer for
Black Narcissus

Big days at the box office

Once cinemas learned to operate around the disturbances of German air raids, film became a welcome relief in the lives of wartime Brits. Audience figures in the 1940s reached an all-time high. In 1946, 1.6 billion tickets were sold at 4,709 cinemas. From this era, *Spring in Park Lane* (1948), a class-clash romcom starring Anna Neagle, remains the most watched British film of all time with 20.5 million tickets sold.

Nothing lean about the Lean years

Film's wartime maturation initiated a golden age of British cinema that lasted into the 1950s. Eclecticism ruled with a roll call of historical, contemporary and comedic movies. David Lean was the shining directorial force. His *Brief Encounter* (1945), written by Noël Coward and starring Trevor Howard, is a classic, even while the clipped accents and stiff upper lips raise a smile today. Another Lean effort, *Great Expectations* (1946), starring John Mills, is arguably the best film adaptation of Dickens yet. Carol Reed challenged Lean's supremacy with *The Third Man* (1949), a slice of British *noir* from the pen of Graham Greene that saw Orson Welles skulking around war-torn Vienna. If the polls are to be believed then *The Third Man* stands out as the golden age film most appreciated by a modern audience. Powell and Pressburger were prolific in their own enjoyably experimental field. The dark psychology of *Black Narcissus* (1946), set in a remote Himalayan convent (but filmed in London), produced something that few other golden age flicks managed, eroticism. In the early 1950s the fresh memories of war were mined for material, producing a series of epic movies like *The Cruel Sea* (1953) and *The Dam Busters* (1955).



The Ealing comedies

The series of comedies produced by Ealing Studios in the decade after the Second World War were peculiarly native affairs; a blend of self-mockery, cynicism, black humour and blokes in frocks. *Passport to Pimlico* (1949), about a London street that declares independence, was one of the first, typical in its gentle subversion, followed rapidly by the likes of *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949), in which one

man sets about murdering an entire, disparate family to acquire a dukedom. *The Ladykillers* (1955) was a final triumph, its gang of ruthless criminals brilliantly incongruous in the confines of a small English lodging house. Its star, a goofy-toothed Alec Guinness, became the leading Ealing comedy light. In *Kind Hearts and Coronets* he played all eight members of the ill-fated d'Ascoyne family, and later took on the impossibly nice, utterly British bank robber of *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951).

"WE ALWAYS WERE ENGLISH AND WE ALWAYS WILL BE ENGLISH, AND IT'S JUST BECAUSE WE ARE ENGLISH THAT WE'RE STICKING UP FOR OUR RIGHT TO BE BURGUNDIANS!"
Connie Pemberton,
Passport to Pimlico

If you only watch ten golden age films, watch these

Henry V (1944) Laurence Olivier. Agincourt and all that; Olivier starred, produced and directed in a thinly camouflaged but stirring slice of wartime propaganda.

Brief Encounter (1945) David Lean. Golly gosh, they're both married but can't keep their hands off each other. Fatal attractions consume Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard.

Great Expectations (1946) David Lean. A young John Mills plays Pip in Lean's magnificently murky mix of Gothic mansions and graveyards.

A Matter of Life and Death (1946) Powell and Pressburger. RAF pilot David Niven hovers between life/earth and death/heaven after bailing out; bizarre but brilliant.

Brighton Rock (1947) John Boulting. Ominous adaptation of Graham Greene's crime thriller that cast Richard Attenborough as edgy gang leader Pinkie.

Black Narcissus (1947) Powell and Pressburger. Anglican nuns set up shop on a remote Himalayan hilltop and grapple with repressed desire and madness. Brilliantly creepy.

Whisky Galore (1949) Alexander Mackendrick. Hebridean Islanders battle to stash a cache of shipwrecked whisky in an early Ealing comedy.

The Third Man (1949) Carol Reed. An American writer played by Orson Welles searches for a fixer in Vienna, encountering a famous twangy musical motif every time he finds him.

The Cruel Sea (1952) Charles Frend. The Royal Navy fight back German U-boats in a classic British war movie, filmed documentary style.

The Ladykillers (1955) Alexander Mackendrick. A little-old lady unwittingly outmanoeuvres Alec Guinness' blackly funny criminal gang.



Come hither
with your zither
Director Carol Reed
apparently heard zither
player Anton Karas
strumming away in a
Viennese pub and
recruited him to score
the music for *The Third
Man*. One particular
section became known
as *The Harry Lime
Theme* (after Orson
Welles' character) and
spent 11 weeks at the
top of the US Billboard
charts in 1950.

Three great British actors of the golden age

Laurence Olivier. Brought his Shakespearean stage talents to the screen in *Henry V* and *Hamlet* (1948), for which he won best actor, director and picture gongs at the Oscars.

Deborah Kerr. Scottish rose who cut her teeth on the likes of *Black Narcissus* before moving on to conquer Hollywood, writhing memorably on the beach with a damp Burt Lancaster in *From Here to Eternity* (1953).

Alec Guinness. The versatile giant of the Ealing comedies won his Best Actor Oscar for a role in *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). However, he would become best known, to his clear disappointment, as Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars* in the 1970s.



5.1.1 From bedsits to Bond: cinema in the 1960s

Life stories: Free Cinema

As the big studios struggled in the mid 1950s a new, independent strain of film-making gathered pace.

A group of young documentary makers established Free Cinema, a movement that held six programmes between 1956 and 1959. Like the Angry Young Men writing for theatre, the figures of Free Cinema were irreverent toward the Establishment and bored with the old social and sexual mores. Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz were the key film-makers, but Free Cinema also showed work by the likes of Roman Polanski and French New Wavers François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol. In common, their work documented the stuff of everyday life, free (they felt) from the orthodoxies of traditional film-making. Shooting on location using hand-held 16mm cameras, they made documentaries like *We are the Lambeth Boys* (1957), a Karel Reisz film that followed a group of south London teens.

"THESE FILMS WERE NOT MADE TOGETHER; NOR WITH THE IDEA OF SHOWING THEM TOGETHER. BUT WHEN THEY CAME TOGETHER, WE FELT THEY HAD AN ATTITUDE IN COMMON. IMPLICIT IN THIS ATTITUDE IS A BELIEF IN FREEDOM, IN THE IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE AND IN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVERYDAY."

Free Cinema film programme, 1956.

Sinking feeling: New Wave cinema

Free Cinema led directly to the New Wave of British film in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It took the social realism of those documentaries and made drama from it, cutting into the marrow of workin-class life. The warts and all subject matter saw the genre christened 'kitchen sink'. Anderson and Reisz both went across from Free Cinema to New Wave, joined by another director, Tony Richardson, graduate of the playwright's school, who had a hand in more New Wave films than most. There was a continuity of technicians too, notably with cameraman Walter Lassally. *Room at the Top* (1958), directed by Jack Clayton, lifted the veil first when working-class Joe was torn between clawing his way up the social ladder and cosying up to the French woman he falls in love with. Its popularity paved the way for a rash of kitchen

Bond breaks boundaries

Hard to believe now perhaps but *Dr No*, the first James Bond film, was radical when it was released. The level of violence was shocking for 1962, while the fast-paced editing and title sequence style were deemed pioneering. And of course Ursula Andress' white bikini offered far less coverage than the norm for the early 1960s; the offending two-piece sold at auction for £35,000 in 2001.

Yeah baby, yeah!

The cultural vigour of mid 60s Britain attracted foreign film-makers. Italian Michelangelo Antonioni had a stab at capturing 'Swinging London' in *Blow-Up* (1966), with its sexy fashion shoot and an appearance by the band The Yardbirds. American director Richard Lester did a good job of committing Beatlemania to celluloid in *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965) before compatriot Stanley Kubrick brought something more challenging in the shape of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), filmed at Shepperton Studios.

sink dramas dealing with 'real' issues like abortion (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and delinquency (*The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962)). New Wave had fizzled by 1964 but the trend for liberalism was set and social realism would reappear over the coming decades, as would the likes of Albert Finney, Alan Bates and Rita Tushingham, the new breed of British actors that got their break in the kitchen sink.

Sex and spooks: cinema in the 1960s

New Wave's progressive spirit lingered through the 1960s but tended as much toward sexual as social freedom. *Alfie* (1966) was popular but very much of its time; its woman-chasing wideboy, played with aplomb by Michael Caine, soon felt a feminist backlash. The permissive mood found its way into period pieces too, notably in Ken Russell's *Women in Love* (1969) – as famous for its nude fireside wrestling between Alan Bates and Oliver Reed (for which both actors apparently got drunk) as for its quality. Kitchen sink grit returned toward the end of the decade, realised in the directorial work of Ken Loach whose *Kes* (1969) dealt brilliantly with the struggles of a working-class Barnsley boy.

Britain also cultivated cinematic genres in the 1960s that were destined to run for years. The James Bond leviathan took its first step with *Dr No* (1960) and broke into a run with *Goldfinger* (1964), Sean Connery taking charge of the outrageous baddies and trite one-liners. A subtler spy genre adapted the novels of Len Deighton, with Michael Caine starring in *The Ipcress File* (1965). Hammer Films maintained a prolific series of mannered horror flicks, begun in the late 1950s and strung out into the 60s with sequels that invariably

starred Peter Cushing (as Baron Frankenstein) or Christopher Lee (as Dracula). And then there were the *Carry On!* films, ribald low budget comedies with little in the way of narrative but a continuity of actors and lowbrow jokes. They stretched to a run of 29 films between 1958 and 1978. Critics grimaced but the public were enthusiastic; *Carry on Camping* was the top earning film in Britain in 1969.

Ten 1960s films you need to watch

Peeping Tom (1960) Michael Powell. Disturbing serial killer film initially condemned but later lauded as unique in style and content.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960) Karel Reisz. 'Don't let the bastards grind you down' said kitchen sinker Albert Finney. A fine New Wave effort.

Lawrence of Arabia (1962) David Lean. An enigmatic Peter O'Toole impressed in Lean's visually stunning desert drama. It won seven Oscars.

Billy Liar (1963) John Schlesinger. Kitchen sink does comedy as lowly Tom Courtenay fantasises about a grander role in life.

Tom Jones (1963) Tony Richardson. A period drama with its mind in the permissive 60s; led enjoyably by Albert Finney as the titular rogue.

Goldfinger (1964) Guy Hamilton. The third Bond film set the format: choreographed fights, sardonic wit, M, Moneypenny, Q and girls like Pussy Galore.

Alfie (1966) Lewis Gilbert. Michael Caine's philanderer loves 'n' leaves his way toward a flimsy moral comeuppance. It was a big hit on release.

If... (1968) Lindsay Anderson. Free Cinema graduate Anderson peeled back the layers of the British public school and found hypocrisy, rebellion and violence.

The Italian Job (1969) Peter Collinson. An unchallenging but popular classic; Michael Caine pulls off an audacious heist in Turin under the cover of a football crowd.

Kes (1969) Ken Loach. Yorkshire lad Billy Casper finds escape from his dry working-class life via kestrel fancying. Not as sentimental as it sounds.

"HAVE LOVE
WITHOUT MEANING,
HAVE MUROER
WITHOUT GUILT,
HAVE THE DAZZLE
AND THE MAONESS
OF LONOON
TOOAY..."

From the trailer for
Blow-Up

"YOU WERE ONLY
SUPPOSED TO
BLOW THE BLOOY
DOORS OFF."

Michael Caine,
The Italian Job (Brits
recently voted it their
favourite film one-liner)

5.1.5 Let's hear it for the little guy:

modern British cinema

British film has lurched from peak to trough throughout the last four decades. While cinema is in reasonable health at present, overall the bad times seem to outstretch the good. There's no shortage of British talent: in front of the camera Ewan McGregor, Keira Knightley and co are global stars, while behind it, directors like Paul Greengrass and Ridley Scott have flown the flag in Hollywood. But funding – or the lack of it – is a consistent bugbear, exacerbated by the marketing and distribution shortfalls that can prevent good films from actually reaching an audience.

Sex, drugs and the knights who say 'ni': 1970s cinema
British cinema endured some lean years in the 1970s. A Hollywood recession rippled out across the Atlantic, collaborating with Government funding cuts to stifle the industry. The rare good films that did surface were dogged by notoriety. Nicholas Roeg's *Performance* (1971) blurred thriller and psychedelia with Mick Jagger in the lead role. It raised eyebrows with its three-in-a-bath activities but has been acknowledged more recently as complex and brilliant. Violence and misogyny were the prime offenders in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Get Carter* (1971). In Scotland Bill Douglas laboured away on a trilogy of absorbing socially real films based on his own life in the coalmining town of Newcraighall; *My Childhood* (1972) was the first. The Monty Python crew began making films with *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), a work that wears well in comparison with the lame sex comedies of the era, notably the *Confessions* series that shone fame's torchlight on Robin Askwith's buttocks.

"THE MOST TRAGIC EPISODE IN BRITISH CINEMA, BUT ALSO, WEIRDLY, THE MOST MEMORABLE... IT WAS TEN YEARS BEFORE THE BRITISH AUDIENCE WOKE UP AND REALISED THAT SEX COMEDIES WERE ABSOLUTE SHIT"
The Guardian

Set to slow-mo: film in the 1980s

The cinematic drought lingered through the 1980s. TV had stolen much of cinema's audience, as well as most of its studios. 1981 was a low point; only 24 British films were made, fewer than in any year since 1914. Despite the gloom, the decade produced a few sporadic gems. Richard Attenborough directed his way to an Oscar with the saint-in-sandals epic, *Gandhi* (1983), and the Academy also threw plaudits at *Chariots of Fire* (1981), the stirring Olympic period piece that today, with its interminable slo-mo, feels a bit daft. While it wasn't a golden era the 1980s did nurture a stock of interesting directors, names that would hang around for the next 20 years. Stephen Frears impressed with *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) with its race, sexuality and class issues. For Bill Forsyth, the big break came with amusing adolescent angst in *Gregory's Girl* (1981); for the offbeat Derek Jarman it was with a deft biopic of *Caravaggio* (1986) complete with typewriters and calculators in the artist's 17th century world. Peter Greenaway roused interest with a succession of image conscious films, notably the flesh and food fest *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989).

Other British directors made more of a mark in Hollywood. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* (1988) were two of the more memorable Brit-directed American affairs; both directors had started out making adverts for television. While funding crises, TV tussles and the temptation of Hollywood weakened British film in the 70s and 80s, one genre weathered the storm: James Bond continued to perform at the box office, even when the title role passed to Roger Moore and the mood drifted toward self-parody.

"THE OLD FASHIONED IDEA OF THE NARRATIVE, SIT IN THE DARK, HOLLYWOOD CENTRED, BOOKSHOP CINEMA IS FINISHED: IT DIED ON THE 31ST SEPTEMBER 1983 WHEN THE REMOTE CONTROL WAS INTRODUCED TO THE LIVING ROOMS OF THE WORLD."

Director Peter Greenaway

Going to the movies in Welsh

A handful of excellent films shot in the Welsh language have emerged in recent years, in line with a resurgence of the national tongue. *Hedd Wyn* (1992) is the best, accruing an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film with its moving story of a poet sucked into the savagery of the First World War. *Solomon and Gaenor* (1998), a pit village love story set in the same era, was also well received.

The 1990s revival

The sporadic triumphs of British cinema grew in number in the 1990s. Period pieces performed well at the box office led by Merchant Ivory Productions (American James Ivory directed and Indian Ismail Merchant produced) with the likes of *Howards End* (1992) and *The Remains of the Day* (1993). Jane Austen's middle-class machinations also transferred well to screen, with Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) making a sizeable profit worldwide. But for financial success nothing beat *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), with Mike Newell directing Hugh Grant's bumbling Englishman: it cost \$5 million to make and recouped about \$245 million.

A mini wave of self-deprecatory comedies followed, with engaging if predictable films like *Brassed Off* (1996) and *The Full Monty* (1997) underscoring their colloquial humour with a sense of social desperation.

Director Danny Boyle painted his own plucky underclass in the likes of *Trainspotting* (1996), a stand out, funny and occasionally surreal adaptation of Irvine Welsh's novel about Edinburgh junkies. And then there were the culture clash gems of *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and *East is East* (1999), both exploring second generation migrant lives with poignant humour.

Keeping it real: social grit at the cinema

Films like *Trainspotting* and *The Full Monty* represent the popular, palatable fringe of the social realism that still gnaws at British cinema. The genre lay dormant for a decade or so after the successes of New Wave, reliant on television to keep it alive, before returning to the big screen in the 1980s under the direction of Mike Leigh. Leigh's character-led films chart moral and social decline, heavy with the discord of post-war Britain. His working methods – incorporating improvisation and the actors' own life experiences – heighten the realism and emotional depth when they come off. *Secrets and Lies* (1996), in which a woman goes in search of her birth mother and finds a dysfunctional familial mess, and *Vera Drake* (2004), about a 1950s back street abortionist, are among Leigh's best. Ken Loach has returned periodically to social realism after the success of *Kes* in the 1960s, notably

in *Riff Raff* (1990) and *Sweet Sixteen* (2002). Like Leigh, he rarely presents an actor with a completed script, hoping to heighten the spontaneity with genuine surprise. Gary Oldman, better known as a Hollywood actor, wrote and directed *Nil By Mouth* (1997) based on his own childhood in a south London council house, while Shane Meadows has developed the everyday story tradition in more recent years, impressing with *This is England* (2006), about a boy struggling for identity after his father dies in the Falklands War.

"WE'VE GONE
ON HOLIDAY
BY MISTAKE"
Withnail
(*Withnail and I*)

1970-2000: ten films you need to watch

Don't Look Now (1973) Nicholas Roeg. But I can't help it. Chilling, beguiling tale of a couple in Venice trying to forget about the murder of their daughter.

The Long Good Friday (1979) John MacKenzie. Classy example of the overworked British gangster genre with Bob Hoskins playing the gangland boss.

Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979) Terry Jones. 'He's not the messiah, he's a very naughty boy'. The best effort in the Python cinematic canon.

Gandhi (1982) Richard Attenborough. Ambitious but well worth a look for the cinematography and for Ben Kingsley's excellent lookylikey.

Withnail and I (1986) Bruce Robinson. Two out-of-work actors in the 1960s leave Camden for a holiday in the Lakes; witty, well scripted and peerless.

Four Weddings and a Funeral (1993) Mike Newell. Hugh Grant bumbles his way into Andie MacDowell's drawers. Funny, touching and worthy of its acclaim.

Secrets and Lies (1995) Mike Leigh. A family unpicked, with its drinking, white, working-class mum confronted by the black daughter she gave up for adoption.

Trainspotting (1996) Danny Boyle. Ewan McGregor battles heroin addiction in a dark, funny gem of a film, the best British effort of the 1990s.

The Full Monty (1997) Peter Cattaneo. Redundant Sheffield steel workers decide the path to self-respect lies with male stripping; unexpectedly warming.

Shakespeare in Love (1998) John Madden. A refreshing break from the usual costume drama with Tom Stoppard's modern, funny script. Made with American cash, it won seven Oscars.

Best of British: contemporary cinema

Today, British film is enjoying one of its periodic booms, thanks in part to increased funding (not least from the National Lottery) and generous tax breaks on production costs. Many ostensibly British productions, the *Harry Potter* series among them, are actually joint efforts, incorporating foreign cash but using British talent in front of and behind the camera. The current variety of work is impressive, and the reliance on romcoms, costume dramas and geezer gangster flicks seems to have passed. Stand out films like *The Constant Gardener* (2005), a joint effort with the US, Germany and Canada that adapted John le Carré's novel about an ethically suspect pharmaceutical company at work in Africa, and *Atonement* (2007), have won recognition from the movie arbiters in Hollywood. There wasn't a dry palm in the house for *Touching the Void* (2003), a Bafta-winning documentary about two men's mountaineering grief. Its director, Kevin Macdonald, then turned to feature films and excited with *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), featuring a characterisation of Idi Amin that was, by turns, charming and raging.

Trainspotting director Danny Boyle continues to make interesting films; *28 Days Later* (2002) brought zombie horror back from the dead with a stylish, disturbing vision of apocalyptic London, and *Slumdog Millionaire* cleaned up at the 2009 Oscars, winning eight awards including Best Picture and Best Director. Michael Winterbottom is another directorial force, his prolific, eclectic turnover of movies including the likes of *24 Hour Party People* (2002), a pleasingly eccentric biopic

of Tony Wilson and the Manchester music scene. The older boys have also found more mainstream success; Stephen Frears won Oscar nominations with *The Queen* (2007), and Ken Loach the Palme d'Or at Cannes with *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006). Even James Bond basks in the positive glow of 21st century British cinema, smartly reinvented with Daniel Craig in the role for *Casino Royale* (2006).

Instant classics: five great 21st century British films

Enduring Love (2004) Roger Michell. Subtle, disturbing vision of Ian McEwan's novel about a man whose life crumbles after witnessing a ballooning accident.

Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit (2005) Nick Park. The most popular film ever made about one (plasticine) man, his dog and a giant vegetable competition.

This is England (2006) Shane Meadows. A 12-year-old boy has to choose between good skinhead and bad skinhead, and finds himself in a violent, confused world.

Hunger (2008) Steve McQueen. The stark, true story of Bobby Sands and the IRA hunger strikes of 1981 retold with a certain restraint and some stunning acting.

Slumdog Millionaire (2008) Danny Boyle. A poor Mumbai teen is arrested on suspicion of cheating his way through *Who wants to be a Millionaire*. Gripping stuff.



5.2 Photography

Photography has helped shape the world view of Britain since the 1960s when David Bailey shot the beautiful people and Tony Ray-Jones snapped seashiders sipping a cuppa. But the nation's role in photography goes back much further, right back to the days when assiduous Victorians tinkered about in sheds with tubs of acid.

5.2.1 Fixing the shadows

Let there be light (oh, and a bit of dark too...)

Britain was right there at the dawn of photography, at the forefront of 'fixing the shadows' as they called it. In 1839 Henry Fox Talbot took the age-old camera obscura trick, threw in some new chemicals and produced the first paper negative, of an oriel window in Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire (a location used more recently for filming the *Harry Potter* series). His hobby developed with images of nature and architecture (haystacks, doorways and the like). Photographic technology improved rapidly in the Victorian era, while the medium was seen increasingly as an art form. Cameras were faster by the 1870s, and available to the multitude by the end of the century thanks to the push-button innovations of Kodak.

Five(ish) famous Victorian photographers

David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. The Scottish duo (Hill the artist; Adamson the scientist) chose the calotype for portraits of famous Scotsfolk, but also snapped Edinburgh cityscapes and the prosaic fishing communities nearby.

Oscar Gustave Rejlander. The Swede who found his way to Wolverhampton in the 1850s was the first great art photographer. He spliced multiple images to create large, allegorical scenes.

Lewis Carroll. Better known today as an author, Carroll was fascinated by photography, taking thousands of images of people, including loads of young Alice Liddell, inspiration for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Julia Margaret Cameron. One of the first to capture character (rather than dead pan portraiture) using soft focus, theatrical settings and the like. Famous sitters including Charles Darwin and Alfred, Lord Tennyson felt the benefit.

Peter Henry Emerson. Emerson eschewed the contrived snaps of contemporaries and talked up photography as documentation, fond in particular of capturing rural Norfolk in the 1880s. He later changed tack completely and advocated photo manipulation.

Have camera will travel

It didn't take long for travel photography to develop. Roger Fenton was one of the first practitioners, although his images of British soldierly life (minus the dying – he was employed as a propagandist by the Government) in the Crimea in the 1850s have more often seen him labelled the first photojournalist. Others journeyed simply to record the exotic. Samuel Bourne took some memorable shots of India and the Himalayas in the 1860s; who knows what Brits back home would have made of his photos of the Taj Mahal. Scotsman John Thomson went to the Far East in the same decade, snapping Sumatran villagers, Siamese royalty and the jungle smothered temple of Angkor Wat. Later he took up residence in Brixton and photographed London's poor, one of the first to document British penury with a camera. But perhaps the most famous adventuring Victorian snapper was Francis Frith. He photographed Egypt and the Middle East in the 1850s, before returning to England to establish a photo factory that churned out millions of prints of virtually every town in Britain. They were sold to the masses as postcards, many of which you can still buy today. And then there's Linnaeus Tripe, an army officer who photographed India and Burma in the 1850s, worthy of mention on name alone.

If it's good enough
for the Queen...

When Oscar Gustave Rejlander first displayed *The Two Ways of Life* (1857), a large print comprising 32 merged photos, some slated the work as indecent. The allegorical image featured one man looking to a life of virtue, with its religion and charity, and another surveying topless women and other symbols of vice. Exhibitors at the Edinburgh Photographic Society apparently covered the naughty half when it went on show. However, any negative opinions were largely rearranged when Queen Victoria bought a copy for her beloved Albert.

Corpse values

Today it's hard to imagine how radically the humble portrait impacted on Victorian life, but we can get some idea from the post-mortem portrait genre. It was quite common for people to commission photographs of their recently dearly departed, rendered as lifelike as possible in their Sunday best. In an era of high infant mortality, the memory of lost children was maintained through photos that, while creepy to modern eyes, would become family keepsakes.

"PHOTOGRAPHY
IS NOT A SPORT.
IT HAS NO RULES.
EVERYTHING MUST
BE DARED AND
TRIED."

Bill Brandt

Picture imperfect: the British talent for photojournalism

The adoption of photography by the media industry in the early 20th century spurred its role as a documentary tool. Photojournalism came to the fore, pushed forward by smaller, easy to use cameras, and in Britain *Picture Post* magazine printed the new visual narrative for a massive audience. First published in 1938, within a couple of months it was selling well over a million a week. Some notable photographers shot for *Picture Post*. Bert Hardy covered the Blitz with his trusty Leica and went on to capture the Allies' advance across Western Europe, from D-Day to the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. Bill Brandt, the best-known British photographer of the interwar years, also contributed to *Picture Post*. Born in Germany to a British father, Brandt too covered the Second World War, although concentrated as much on society as soldiers. Before the conflict he'd shot the poor and the rich of London; after it he photographed brooding landscapes and stretched, sculptural nudes.

His portraits featured everyone from Ezra Pound (1928) to Peter Sellers (1963). A third *Picture Post* man, Humphrey Spender (brother of poet Stephen), confirmed Britain's mid century prowess for photojournalism. Surreptitiously he captured life in the industrial north, working for the Mass Observation project, an anthropological study of working-class England. Spender did everything he could to ensure spontaneity, even hiding a camera in his rain mac. His photos of 'Worktown' (actually Bolton disguised) were seminal in their ordinariness.

5.2.2 Art, war and glamour: modern photography

Fashions and faces. Beaton, Bailey and Rankin

As Britain pursued its passion for photojournalism in the mid 20th century a more affected genre of photography also evolved, set to explode in the 1960s. It embraced fashion, advertising and high society (in short, the beautiful people) and found its outlet in magazines like *Vanity Fair*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*. Cecil Beaton bore the torch with staged, glamorous images of Marlene Dietrich, Audrey Hepburn and the royals from the 1920s through to the 60s.

"I NEVER CARED FOR FASHION MUCH, AMUSING LITTLE SEAMS AND WITTY LITTLE PLEATS: IT WAS THE GIRLS I LIKED."

David Bailey, former partner of Jean Shrimpton, Catherine Deneuve, Marie Helvin...

After a post-war lull, Beaton's influence emerged in the 1960s with a group of photographers that distilled the spirit of swinging Britain. East End boys David Bailey and Terence Donovan led the pack, moving in the same circles as the musicians, actors and socialites they photographed. Bailey shot The Beatles, the Kray Twins and model Jean Shrimpton in a style that, while mindful of Beaton's, was edgier; its situations minimalist and less contrived. Like Bailey, Donovan worked primarily in monochrome and shot a similar array of 60s faces. Both moved from fashion and portraiture to advertising campaigns and filming TV commercials. Others like Lewis Morley (his shot of Christine Keeler, naked on a chair, became iconic), Norman Parkinson and Lord Lichfield (who had a way with royals) operated in the same milieu in the 1960s and 70s. Fashion/portrait/society photography still thrives in Britain today. Nick Knight and Corinne Day have been the big names in fashion in recent years, involved in editorial shoots for the likes of *Vogue* and *i-D Magazine*, as well as framing some memorable ad campaigns. In the 1990s, Day was accused of fostering 'heroin chic' by shooting pallid models in drab locales. In portraiture, Rankin has become internationally famous, perhaps the best-known British photographer of modern times – the Bailey of his generation if you like. His polished, commercial portfolio features everyone from Kate Moss to the Queen, usually shot against a white backdrop.

"I DON'T DO
PHOTOJOURNALISM
ANY MORE BECAUSE,
FRANKLY, NOBODY
REALLY WANTS IT,"
Don McCullin

Occupational hazard
When Don McCullin
was covering the war in
Cambodia in 1970 his
Nikon camera stopped the
bullet from an AK-47,
probably saving his life.

Record makers: the modern crop of photojournalists
Even while *Picture Post* bowed out of publication in
1957, Fleet Street flourished and the documentary
genre continued to produce excellent British
photographers throughout the later 20th century.
Some stuck with the social truths of urban Britain, as
pioneered by the likes of Humphrey Spender; others
looked to rural communities or followed in Bert Hardy's
footsteps and went overseas for their real life stories.

Five important documentary
photographers of recent times

Tony Ray-Jones. Little referenced these days but
hugely important for recording the customs and habits
of 1960s Britain. With cups of tea by the seaside and
the like, Ray-Jones represented the other side of the
60s coin to Bailey and Donovan. He died of leukaemia,
aged 31, in 1972.

Martin Parr. Followed the Ray-Jones format but
threw in satire, tapping the values, clichés and
disappointments of everyday English life, from ill-fitting
outfits at a wedding reception to a series of 'bored
couples'. More recently he's worked for Magnum
Photos, world leaders in photojournalism.

Fay Godwin. Godwin recorded human relationships
with landscape. She photographed the traditions of
rural life and how they were changing in the 1970s and
80s, passing visual comment on environmental abuses
and the limits on public access to the land.

Don McCullin. Perhaps the greatest British war
photographer of the later 20th century. He began with
a north London street gang, his own, in 1958, moved
on to the war in Vietnam and then documented the

troubles in Northern Ireland. The honesty of his photos convinced the British Government to refuse him entry to the Falklands in 1982.

Chris Killip. Shooting in monochrome in the 1980s, Killip eloquently caught the downsides of Thatcherism, particularly in the mining communities of the North East. He also turned his hand to landscape, not least that of his native Isle of Man. These days he lectures at Harvard.

What and who: modern art photography

The distinctions between documentary, fashion and portraiture on one hand and 'art photography' on the other can be fuzzy. All photography is art, right? And the work of Rankin and Nick Knight, who often manipulates his images in the manner of a modern day Rejlander (he would have loved the digital age), is sometimes referred to as fine art photography, as are the landscapes of James Ravilious. The cultural powers-that-be recognise the connections: Richard Billingham took photographs of places he'd visited as a child, most of them waste ground, and won a Turner Prize nomination in 2001. There are, however, contemporary British photographers who work overtly in the manner of the artist, contriving and staging the subject for record as a piece of art. Helen Chadwick made use of animal parts, food, fluids and her own image in the 1980s, and exhibited *Opal* (1996), photos of dead human embryos, shortly before dying prematurely from a viral infection. Matt Collishaw, often lumped together with the Young British Artists (see section 3.1.5. for more on the YBAs), creates collages of flowers, humans and fairies, but came to fame in 1997 with a large close-up of a fresh bullet hole in someone's head. Another YBA and Turner prize nominee, Sam Taylor-Wood, shot *Crying Men*, portraits of actors in tears. Daniel Craig, Jude Law and Steve Buscemi all turned on the waterworks.

Snap judgements
In 2008 the Metropolitan Police launched a poster campaign urging the public to watch out for terrorists with cameras. 'Thousands of people take photos every day. What if one of them seems odd?' read the text. Civil liberties campaigners weren't impressed.



5.3 Fashion

Fashion plays a weighty part in the story of contemporary British culture.

Open-minded and unbound by proscriptive tradition, it's an absorbing blend of eccentricity and formality.

Sharp tailoring, a venerable textiles industry and innovative fashion designers have all contributed.

5.3.1 Clothes and the British sense of style

National costumes

There are certain subtleties of style between the regions of 21st century Britain. Some observers point to a north/south fashion divide for women: generalisations are usually a mistake, but Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle are said to have a more dressy, glam style than London and the south with their casual femininity. In the realms of traditional costume you're on safer ground: certain conventions demand acknowledgement:

Scotland

The callow traveller might assume that every man north of the border goes about his daily business in a kilt. They don't. But they will don the national dress of kilt, waistcoat, sporran (the small furry pouch hung around the waist) and brogues at the slightest ceremonial excuse. The humble wraparound (which evolved 200 years ago from the 'great plaid', a shoulder-draped affair) has played its part on the catwalk, notably in Vivienne Westwood's 1993 collection, *Anglomani*a, with its mini-kilt. The Lochcarron Textile Mill in Scotland created a special tartan for Westwood, named the 'McAndreas' after her third husband. Military regulation famously dictates the kilt an underwear-free zone (the true origin of the phrase 'going commando' perhaps?).

Wales

The Welsh national costume is a rather faux affair. Fearing the loss of Welsh national identity in the 19th century, not without justification, Lady Llanover led the drive to create a national dress. Based on the countrywear of the time it features a flannel petticoat worn under an open-fronted bed gown, an apron, a red shawl and a kerchief or cap. The tall 'chimney' hat was added later, in the 1840s. The ensemble only really appears at public events; people don't slip it on for a trip to the supermarket. The practice of carrying babies in a shawl is a genuine Welsh tradition.

England

By contrast, England has no national dress, pre-fabricated or otherwise. There are, however, certain recognisably English uniforms, from the Beefeater's costume – the scarlet and gold suit, stockings and round

brimmed black hat worn by the keepers of the Tower of London (and an English Miss World contestant) – to the red tunics and bearskins of the Queen's Foot Guard and the white shirts and knee breaches of morris men.

Fashion history: greatest hits

The **Elizabethan** era, with its brocades, jewels and elaborate hats, was a sucker for style. Rich men wore ruffs, breeches, doublets, cloaks and an occasional codpiece, while women endured the corset, farthingale (hooped petticoat) and brocaded gown. Dress was governed by social standing, and fashion faux pas were even criminalised. In 1574 the Queen set dress codes in law: only royal garb could be trimmed with ermine; lesser nobles had to make do with fox or otter. Anyone violating the Sumptuary Clothing Laws could face fines and the loss of property, title and even life. The masses had a go at imitating the styles of court but used much cheaper materials.

In the **Regency** period women wore neo-classical, high-waisted 'empire silhouette' dresses that allowed for a low, square neckline and short puff sleeves. For men, breeches were tight as hell, coats had tails, waistcoats were double breasted and linen shirts were finished off with an elaborate cravat, playing right into the hands of the new fashion victim, the dandy.

Fashion was still bowing to social convention in **Victorian** Britain. Well-to-do women found their rears enlarged by steel-framed bustles and their waists reduced by brutal corsetry. Legs were sensed not seen; even bathing costumes covered the entire body. Men's clothing sobered after its Regency jaunt, governed now by dark colours and sharply cut frock

Look out, it's the fashion police

A sumptuary law of 1571 dictated that everyone over the age of six wear a woollen cap on Sunday and holy days, all in an effort to boost the English wool industry. In 1795 Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger introduced a tax on wig powder. The well-to-do and their servants, among whom the wig (short for 'periwig') was an 18th century fashion essential, paid a guinea a year for their whitening powder. The tax hastened the wig's demise. These days they're still worn by barristers, judges and some governmental dignitaries – a hairy hangover from the days when they needed a disguise to ensure safety.

Victorian fashion victims

Women in the 19th century laboured with the latest trends. Ideally, waist sizes matched age: so a 17-year-old had their midriff squeezed by a 17-inch corset, sometimes damaging internal organs. And then there was the weight of numerous petticoats, enough to damage the pelvis. Popular tales from the era described women being blown off cliffs, unable to resist once the wind hit their skirts.

coats. Umbrellas offered a useful key to social status; the wealthy owned a brolly, while the majority rented one in wet weather or simply did without. Eyeglasses were used as fashion accessories rather than visual aids; often they didn't even have lenses. The Victorian age also saw the advent of haute couture, in which fragile gauze dresses decorated with flowers and ribbons were worn once or twice and then cast aside because they soiled and crushed so easily. Of course, little of this style troubled the masses, who wore rough but restrictively formal clothes for the daily routine.

Trendsetters: phases of 20th century fashion

Fashions changed rapidly throughout the 20th century. Sewing machines, synthetic fibres and youth culture all played a part in the century that democratised

modes of dress. Today, certain decades are remembered for a particular look, while the derivative, recycling mode of modern fashion means that each period has its cultural resonance for the average Brit. Certain fads and phases live longer in the memory than others:

Edwardian Lady. A final fling for old school elegance initiated the S-bend silhouette, achieved with a corset that forced hips back and busts forward, and the long, tight and aptly named hobble skirt. Fancy blouses were de rigueur; the less wealthy used appliqué, lace, faggoting and pin tucks to emulate detailed high couture. The Edwardian blouse returned with vigour in the first decade of the 21st century. Merry Widow hats, of wide brim and feathered trim, were named after the popular Edwardian operetta.

Flapper Girl. Sporting short hair (the bob), shortish shift dresses, snug cloche hats and flat chests (often bandaged into submission), the flapper girls strove for a boyish look in the 1920s. A cigarette in a long holder usually completed the ensemble. The uncomplicated construction of the flapper dress led women to make their own, narrowing the disparities of fashion between classes.

Make do and mend. In wartime Britain pillowcases became shorts or blouses, and leather soles were replaced with cork. Siren Suits and Kangaroo Coats could be zipped in a hurry, their roomy pockets quickly filled with essentials on the way to the air raid shelter. In 1941 the government introduced Utility Clothing, taking charge of production and outlawing anything too fancy – pockets and turn-ups were both restricted in an effort to save material. The CC41 label attached to the mass-produced designs gained an ironic, collectable fame.

Teddy Boys. Take a long jacket with a velvet collar, some drainpipe trousers, a narrow tie, a duck's arse quiff (as the tall hairstyle was called) and a pair of brothel creepers (thick-soled suede shoes) and you've got the first real uniform of youth rebellion. Teddy boys emerged in the 1950s and kickstarted the fashion revolution of the following decade with its mods, rockers and hippies. As for the name, it derives from a taste for Edwardian ('Teddy') jackets.

Biba, Mary Quant and the miniskirt. Despite the egalitarian mien of the early 1960s, designer fashion remained restricted to the wealthy. Biba changed all that in 1964. It was a London fashion boutique that sold the latest European looks at a fraction of designer prices. The Biba brand became hugely successful, and other, similar ventures followed, including Miss Selfridge, a groovy spin-off from the Oxford Street department store. Meanwhile Mary Quant lopped inches off hemlines, introducing every British girl to the miniskirt (even while it was actually invented by André Courrèges). Quant herself became a fashion icon, sporting a sharp Vidal Sassoon 'five-point' haircut. Trousers began to flare late in the decade.

1970s. The most vibrant decade of recent British fashion had an anything goes feel. Early on, hippies popularised kaftans, Macramé bags and Afghan coats. The flares of the late 1960s widened out to bell-bottom proportions before high-waisted straight trousers and platform soles stepped into view. It was only a short leap to the lycra trousers and stretch sequin tube tops of disco. Even blokes got involved, suddenly (and briefly) comfortable with outrageous sideburns and tightly crotched trousers. By the end of the decade, punk was reining in the flare,

Quantifying Quant

By the end of the 1960s, an estimated seven million women owned a Mary Quant garment.

Costume king

Photographer and designer Cecil Beaton won Oscars for his costume design on *Gigi* (1958) and *My Fair Lady* (1964). Similar efforts on Broadway secured four Tonys.

customising jackets and causing offence with rude t-shirts. Punk's influence would be long ranging.

Mohican haircuts, spikes and ripped fabric shocked initially but were later adopted by the mainstream.

Fashion coming up from the streets

Savile Row. Mayfair road with a mystical place in men's fashion. It's the bastion of bespoke tailoring, a London street where everyone from Jude Law to Napoleon III has bought a sharp suit. Regency dandy Beau Brummell was the area's first high profile customer.

King's Road. Charles II's private road through Chelsea became a hippy hang out in the 1960s and a hotbed of punk in the 70s, led by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood with a boutique called Sex. Today it's all painfully respectable.

Carnaby Street. The Soho street set the trends for Swinging London in the 1960s with boutiques that shaped the 'mod' style. The cutting edge went blunt years ago, although the area retains a number of independent clothes shops alongside the high street giants.

The major British designers of 20th century fashion Look back to 1857 and it turns out that an Englishman, Charles Worth, initiated haute couture. He opened the first Parisian shop offering set dress designs based on four annual fashion shows; previously, the wealthy had simply suggested designs to anonymous seamstresses. Back in Britain, Norman Hartnell was an important 20th century name, dressing the likes of Noel Coward and Marlene Dietrich in his London salon, before creating the Queen's coronation dress in 1953. A new wave of designers mixed nonconformism with slick tailoring in the 1960s, drawing their inspiration from street fashion and establishing London as a sartorial hub. They were led by Mary Quant and Zandra Rhodes, who set up her own London boutique in 1969 selling radical print designs and who would develop

punk fashion with reversed seams and jewelled safety pins. Vivienne Westwood was the other grande dame of punk clothing (and now an actual dame). She's been shocking and entertaining in equal measure since the early 1970s. With slogan t-shirts (one showed a swastika), underwear as outerwear, penis cufflinks and vertiginous platforms, few have challenged fashion precepts as often or as successfully. The 1980s was the decade of Katherine Hamnett, who flogged the t-shirt slogan for years (remember Choose Life or Frankie Says Relax?), and Bruce Oldfield, Barnardo's boy turned celebrity couture hero, dressing everyone from Princess Di to Diana Ross. Paul Smith also cultivated a glowing reputation, taking the classic men's suit and throwing in splashes of colour – he calls it 'Savile Row meets Mr Bean'. Smith, like Oldfield, Hamnett, Westwood and Rhodes, is still making clothes.

"I'M NOT TRYING
TO DO SOMETHING
DIFFERENT, I'M
TRYING TO DO THE
SAME THING BUT IN
A DIFFERENT WAY."
Vivienne Westwood

The assault on Paris: contemporary designers

British designers have been chipping away at the Parisian fashion fortress for years, building up London as a comparative force, but they've taken a more invasive approach of late, invited in by the famous couture houses. John Galliano (actually a Gibraltarian) was the first, taking up the head designer's role at Givenchy in 1995 and then at Christian Dior a year later. His designs often have a theatrical, fantastical quality. East End taxi driver's son Alexander McQueen crossed the Channel a year later, succeeding Galliano at Givenchy. He later joined Gucci, broadening a reputation for shocking, subversive statements carried along on exemplary tailoring (he learned the trade on Savile Row). One of his earliest catwalk collections, Highland Rape, offered comment on British involvement in Scottish history. The third Brit in Paris was Stella McCartney, daughter of a certain Beatle, who worked for fashion house Chloé, pursuing a talent for femininity and sharp tailoring. These days she's got her own label. A lifelong vegetarian, McCartney refuses to use leather or fur in her designs. Back on home turf, Matthew Williamson (bright, kaleidoscopic dresses), Giles Deacon (powerful glamour) and Scotsman Christopher Kane (wildly eclectic – he said a 2007 collection was based on elements of Scarlett O'Hara and Rambo) are all important contemporary designers.

Very British fashions born of very British weather

The Macintosh. After 20 years of experimentation with softened rubber and wool, Charles Macintosh's Glaswegian firm finally manufactured their first waterproof coat in 1824.

The Burberry Gabardine coat. A closely woven waterproof twill created predominantly for Hampshire farmers by Thomas Burberry in 1879; the Burberry style – with its beige and red check – has become world famous.

The Barbour jacket. So durable that disciples often bash it against a wall to soften up the initial stiffness. Ever present in the Sloane Ranger's 1980s wardrobe, they remain popular with the country set.

The cardigan. The pullover with perks, made fashionable by James Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan, while fighting in the Crimea. He led the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, after which the woollen headgear is named. If only he'd been as good at war as he was at knitwear.

Wellington boots. The cobbler to the first Duke of Wellington played around with the Hessian boot, and bravo, a soft calfskin star was born – hard wearing in battle, comfy for the drawing room and great for wanging (it's a sport). The vulcanised rubber variant arrived in the mid 19th century.

Modern uniforms: fashion stereotypes

Sloane Ranger (Sloanes). Ex-public school types, named for Sloane Square in Chelsea. Male variant sometimes called Hooray Henrys.

Uniform: look for tracksuit bottoms tucked into Ugg boots, scruffy ponytails, upturned collars and pashminas on girls, and loafers with jeans, an open collar shirt and maybe even a tweed jacket thrown in for males. Tan shoes, boating-jackets and sleeveless puffers straddle the gender divide.

Brands: Barbour, Jack Wills, Abercrombie & Fitch.

Ambassadors: William and Harry Windsor.

Chav. Derogatory term for 21st century youth of low socio-economic class, blamed for many of society's ills.

Uniform: gold jewellery (hooped earrings, thick neck chains), white trainers (in 'prison white', so clean they look new), clothes with prominent logos, hooded tops (or hoodies) and baseball caps. Look out for the 'council-house facelift' on girls – gelled hair pulled back in a tight bun.

Brands: Burberry, Yves Saint Laurent bags, sports brands (particularly Kappa, Reebok and Adidas).

Ambassadors: footballers, WAGs (footballers' 'wives and girlfriends') and rappers.

East London Cool. Hard-to-define clique who, despite appearances of casualness and the thrift store/fancy dress chic, sport a highly calculated look.

Uniform: constantly changing, but likely to sit comfortably on the border between ugly and cool. Skinny jeans, plimsoll-type trainers and scruffy hair usually a given.

Ambassadors: Brit pack musicians, fashion students, London It girls, Russell Brand, Bob Geldof's children.

Five British style icons

Twiggy. That's Lesley Hornby to her parents. Epitomised 1960s style with a waif silhouette, long lashes, bug eyes and modish bob.

Kate Moss. She gets dressed (skinny jeans, waistcoats etc) and the rest of Britain copies, as they have done for nearly 20 years despite drug scandals and wayward lovers.

Princess Diana. Dressed by various British designers, Diana morphed from Sloane Ranger to elegant icon, influencing women's fashion in the 1980s and 90s.

David Beckham. The footballer has been a rare male fashion icon for years; for a while his haircuts were front page news.

Bryan Ferry. The Roxy Music frontman, renowned for a sharp suit, helped lead British men from the sartorial dark ages back in the 1970s and 80s.

6.1. Media *p261*

6.1.1. Reverting to type: national and regional newspapers *p262*

6.1.2. On the rack: magazines *p266*

6.1.3. A love affair with telly *p268*

6.1.4. Waves of radio: from ITMA to Moyles *p272*

6.1.5. New media: Britain on the Web *p275*

6.2. Communications *p279*

6.2.1. Posting letters and making calls *p280*

6.2.2. The age of the strain: getting about Britain *p282*



6 Media and communications



6.1 Media

Britain has a love-hate relationship with its media. Press, TV, radio – the public slurps them all up greedily, yet each has its image problems and none is exempt from mistrust or even contempt.



Reverting to type: national and regional newspapers

Whilst the newspaper industry in Britain hasn't been unaffected by the rapid growth of the Internet, relatively speaking it thrives. The biggest selling paper, *The Sun*, still shifts over three million copies a day; more than any other in the English-speaking world. The industry is lively and competitive and supports a wide range of titles, representing all but the most extreme political views and obscure interest groups.

The British press: key dates

1549 First British 'news letter', *Requests of the Devonshyre and Cornyshe Rebelles*.

1621 *Courant*, the first recognisable English newspaper, rolls off the presses.

1690 *The Worcester Postman* becomes the first regularly published paper (it's still going today).

1702 *The Daily Courant*, a single page of two printed columns, launched as the first British daily.

1785 *The Daily Universal Register* is born, changing its name three years later to *The Times*.

1855 The abolition of the tax (or 'stamp') on newspapers makes them affordable to the man in the street. *The Daily Telegraph* becomes the first penny national.

1904 Alfred Harmsworth reinvents the *Daily Mirror*, launching the tabloid format in the process. The 'red top' tabloids really take off in the 1940s.

1980s The nationals leave Fleet Street, spiritual home of British newspapers, for east London amid bitter conflict with trade unions.

1994 *The Daily Telegraph* becomes the first national British newspaper to make daily content available online.

The nationals: you are what you read

Each national newspaper in Britain has its mores, has a culture and identity that reflects and reinforces what the reader considers their place in British society to be. Size still matters in this respect: there's a general split between broadsheets and tabloids. When people talk about the 'tabloids', it's usually shorthand for a newspaper blending big headlines, lurid photos and sensational, conjectural stories. The 'red tops' (*The Sun*, *Daily Star* et al) are the most extreme. Broadsheets (*The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph* etc), double the size, are more restrained, valued for their measured political and financial news. Confusingly, most of the broadsheets now publish a 'compact' edition, similar in proportion to a tabloid. If they can't see the size but can see the title, the casual British observer can make some reasonably educated guesses about a person based on whether they're carrying a copy of *The Guardian* or the *Daily Mail* (see below for more). But, beyond the perceived connotations of class, education, wealth and so on, perhaps the most important thing about the national press in Britain is its relative freedom – even if it is, on occasion, the freedom to print absolute cobbles.

You can't fool all the people all the time
In 2007 a BBC World Service poll revealed that only 29 per cent of Britons felt their media were doing a good job of reporting news accurately.

Best of the press: Britain's big newspapers

The Sun/News Of The World

A pair of tabloids owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International that dwarf their nearest rivals. Traditionally right-leaning, both nevertheless supported Tony Blair and New Labour. Political bias aside, they're best known for scantily clad women, strong opinions and high profile news 'scoops'.

"ALIENS
TURNED OUR
SON INTO A
FISH FINGER"
Headline from the
Sunday Sport
newspaper

Daily Mail/Mail On Sunday

Part of Associated Newspapers, these titles are the prim, proper and generally indignant face of tabloid journalism. More reserved than *The Sun* or *Daily Mirror*, they take a conservative standpoint on the news and are more likely to feature the royals than a bikini model.

Daily Mirror/Sunday Mirror

Claims to be the original tabloid are disputed, but this left-leaning newspaper was definitely one of the forerunners and the dominant force in the field until overtaken by *The Sun* in the 1970s.

The Times/The Sunday Times

The Sunday edition of this famous broadsheet actually outsells the daily version by around two to one. Another one owned by News International, *The Times* features well-informed news coverage and, at the weekend, a range of quality supplements.

The Daily Telegraph

The biggest selling daily broadsheet positions itself to the right of the political centre, presenting British and world news in fairly sober fashion.

The Guardian/The Observer

The reputation of *The Guardian* and its Sunday sister paper belies their relatively low sales figures. These are the leading left-of-centre broadsheets and the term '*Guardian* reader' has become shorthand for describing middle-class, liberal 'media types'.

Financial Times

The only daily paper in Britain to carry a blow-by-blow account of the world markets has been a ubiquitous, salmon-pink-paged part of the city gent's uniform for a century. Also the only British newspaper to sell more copies abroad than on home turf.

Ragtime: the regional press

No single regional newspaper in Britain competes with the nationals. Scotland's *Daily Record* and *Sunday Post*, if they can be classed as regional, sell slightly under 400,000 copies each and London's *Evening Standard* offloads around 300,000, but beyond these there's a steep drop off in circulation figures. Even *The Western Mail*, which bills itself as 'the national newspaper of Wales', dips below sales of 40,000; *The Scotsman*, in its role as Scotland's 'thinking newspaper', sells around 50,000. In Northern Ireland *The Belfast Telegraph*, the biggest daily, claims a readership of about 75,000. It's a mildly Unionist affair, countered in the province by the lightly Nationalist (and less tabloidy) *Irish News*, which sells just under 50,000 a day. While there are no regional giants in Britain, most cities and large towns will have one, if not two, daily papers. At the very least a district will be covered by a weekly title. The leading regional papers, such as the *Kent Messenger* or the *Express & Star* in the West Midlands, sell around 140,000 copies of each edition.

But it's there in
black and white

The Press Complaints Commission, a board of 17 members drawn from the major publishers, investigates complaints made against Britain's newspapers, although it has no legal powers – the industry is expected to self-regulate. In more extreme cases, the courts get involved. The most notorious abuse of press freedom in recent years related to the reporting of Madeleine McCann's disappearance in Portugal – almost a dozen papers, the *Daily Express*, *Daily Star*, *Evening Standard* and *News of the World* included, paid out thousands in damages after publishing a series of false stories.

"THE *DAILY MIRROR* IS READ BY PEOPLE
WHO THINK THEY RUN THE COUNTRY
THE *GUARDIAN* IS READ BY PEOPLE
WHO THINK THEY OUGHT TO RUN THE COUNTRY.
THE *TIMES* IS READ BY PEOPLE
WHO ACTUALLY DO RUN THE COUNTRY.
THE *DAILY MAIL* IS READ BY THE WIVES OF PEOPLE
WHO RUN THE COUNTRY.
THE *FINANCIAL TIMES* IS READ BY PEOPLE
WHO OWN THE COUNTRY

AND *SUN* READERS DON'T CARE WHO RUNS
THE COUNTRY AS LONG AS SHE'S GOT BIG TITS."

from TV sitcom *Yes Prime Minister*

6.1.2 On the rack: magazines

The Gentleman's
Johnson

Not only was *The Gentleman's Magazine* a publishing first in its own right; in 1738 it also provided Samuel Johnson with his first proper writing job. Doctor Johnson penned semi-fictional reports from Parliament called '*Debates in the Senate of Magna Lilliputia*'. It was illegal to report from Parliament verbatim so Johnson used his own dialogue to present the political issues of the day. (See section 2.1.3 for more on Johnson.)

Knowledge stores: the early magazines

As a publishing term, 'magazine' occurred first in Britain in 1731 with the inaugural edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, an amalgamation of pretty much anything Edward Cave, the publisher, thought might interest educated folk. Previously, the word 'magazine' had referred to a place where goods were stored; hence Cave deemed it appropriate for his ragbag digest. Earlier publications with a similar, albeit less developed, format had always been referred to as 'journals'. As magazines developed in the 19th century, the range of titles became increasingly diverse even while most remained true to the 'magazine' name with a wide range of subject matter; some, like *The Spectator* and *The Economist* remain in print. Charles Dickens published 19 editions of his own magazine, *Household Words*, between 1850 and 1859, overseeing every aspect of production. It featured the serialisation of his own novels, notably *Hard Times*, but also included work by other authors, including Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. Later in the 19th century, magazines like George Newnes' *Tit-Bits* and *Answers to Correspondents*, its rival and imitator from Alfred Harmsworth, capitalised on improved literacy standards.

Shelf life: modern British mags

The top selling magazines of 21st century Britain can't compete with newspapers for circulation, but what they lack in bulk they make up for in diversity. The market is dominated by a few major publishers, including Bauer, IPC Media, Northern & Shell and The National Magazine Company, but the breadth of titles is still huge. The dominant sector by far is television listings – Brits are buying the likes of *TV Choice*, *What's On TV* and the *Radio Times* in vast quantities. Large international titles like *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, *Time* and *National Geographic*

all sell fairly well, but are dwarfed by the nation's thirst for televisual guidance. The second most influential group, positioned a long way below the TV guides in sales figures, are women's lifestyle magazines. At the top end of the scale, titles like *Take A Break* and *OK!* cover a mix of celebrity and human interest in varying ratios. *Heat*, *Closer* and *Grazia* are also worth noting: aimed at younger women they focus more heavily on celebrity gossip (*Heat* in particular will think nothing of devoting four pages to celebrity cellulite). With a notoriety that far outweighs sales figures come the 'Lads Mags'. These include monthlies like *Loaded* and *FHM*, and weeklies *Nuts* and *Zoo*, with their mildly varying quotas of semi-naked female celebs, glamour models and other laddish fare.

Long runners: venerable Brit mags

Tit-Bits Originally titled *Tit-Bits from all the Most Interesting Books, Periodicals and Contributors in the World*, it was a cheap magazine of human interest stories and jokes. Founded in 1881, the title survives as the adult magazine *Titbits International*.

The Spectator Established in 1828, *The Spectator* has close links to both *The Daily Telegraph* and the Conservative Party. Indeed, several former editors have gone on to ministerial roles in Conservative cabinets.

Punch The humorous, satirical magazine *Punch* was founded in 1841, before fading away in 1992. In 1996 it was relaunched by Mohamed Al Fayed, the Egyptian owner of Harrods, but ceased publication once more in 2002.

The Economist It may call itself a newspaper, but this liberal-leaning publication, founded in 1843 to campaign for free trade, looks and feels very much like a magazine.

Tatler Focused on the ins and outs of upper-class British society, *Tatler* was established in 1901 but has its roots in a much earlier publication that ran from 1709 to 1711 and featured contributions from Jonathan Swift.

5.1.3 A love affair with telly

From Baird to worse
Not all of John Logie
Baird's inventions took
off as well as television.
He's also credited with
inventing, amongst other
things, glass razors
(which shattered and
lacerated in equal
measure) and pneumatic
shoes (which burst).
He also once managed
to short out the entire
electricity system of
Glasgow while trying to
create diamonds by
super-heating graphite.

Reception committee: a Scottish affair

Scotland had a major influence on the emerging television industry in the early 20th century. John Logie Baird is generally credited with creating the first working television set, even while his machine, which he dubbed the Televisor, was quickly superseded. It was another Scot, John Reith, who really shaped the course of the industry. From the moment he joined the fledgling British Broadcasting Company as General Manager in 1922 he stuck to a three-word guiding principle: educate, inform and entertain – an epithet that remains in the BBC mission statement. The most notable watershed event of Reith's tenure at the BBC (there were many) was to push it from privately owned Company to publicly owned and funded Corporation.

Licence to bill

The BBC still looms large in modern Britain as a strangely anthropomorphic cultural force. Britons regard 'the Beeb' in much the same way as they might a favoured elderly relative: much loved, perhaps not cut out for the modern world, but still capable of inspiration. Indeed, another colloquial term for the BBC is 'Auntie'. However, the warm glow comes at a price. You can't own a television set in Britain – even if it's tucked away in a cupboard or hooked up to a subscription only service – without also purchasing a TV licence. The licence fee goes to fund all of the BBC's television, Internet and radio services, which remain entirely free of advertising. But the BBC doesn't monopolise airtime in the way it once did. When the Television Act passed into law in 1954 it allowed for an independent commercial television station, and ITV (Independent Television), a network of regional broadcasters aiming to compete both against the BBC and one another, took up the new role.

Channel 4 were awarded a licence in 1982 with a remit to provide more educational and regional programming, spawning the likes of S4C (Sianel Pedwar Cymru or Channel 4 Wales), broadcasting in both Welsh and English. Channel Five added to the terrestrial TV picture in 1997.

Square-eyed monsters and the digital age

The Brits are avid viewers, up there with the most square-eyed in Europe – your average citizen spends a good two and a half hours a day in front of the old idiot box. But viewing habits are changing, if only to adapt to the increasing number of available channels. The digital age is shaking up the established order. The interloper-in-chief is BSkyB, owned in part by News Corporation (parent company of News International, behind *The Times* and *The Sun* newspapers). Sky TV, as it's simply known to most, operates nearly all of the major subscription services, based largely around Premiership football, major US imports and blockbuster movies. Many other digital services are available via the Freeview system, which aims to replace the traditional analogue service by 2012.

Trust issues

The BBC's reputation for impartiality and independence took a knock in 2004 after the publication of *The Hutton Report*, an independent enquiry into the suicide of Dr David Kelly. Kelly, a UN weapons inspector, was caught in the row between the BBC and the British Government over allegations that a key Government dossier had been doctored to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The BBC was severely criticised, the Director General resigned and the role of the Board of Governors (now abolished) was reviewed.

What's on the box?

BBC One The original British channel and still the most watched carries much of the BBC's flagship news, current affairs and entertainment programming, not least its biggest draw, *EastEnders*. It also gets all the sporting events that the Corporation can afford.

BBC Two A less mainstream version of BBC1. Here you're more likely to find arts programming, new comedy and documentary series.

**Reality bites:
three crowd
pleasers**

Big Brother

The popularity of watching egotists with restricted freedom is finally waning after a decade.

The X Factor

The latest and most enduring version of the reality singing show format has manufactured a few genuine stars, most notably Leona Lewis.

The Apprentice

Gravelly-voiced entrepreneur Alan Sugar hires and fires the hopefuls; each series is received as something of a televisual event.

ITV Primetime ITV hosts popular soaps and entertainment shows like *The X Factor* and its principal soaps, *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*. Off peak you are more likely to find a mix of syndicated and regional programming.

Channel 4 Broadcasts a wide range of programmes – a mix of US imports, hard-hitting documentaries and reality TV – but tends to be more ‘youth’ orientated than the others.

Sky One The flagship channel from BSkyB. Prime time programming consists largely of big budget US imports like *The Simpsons* and *Lost*.

Prescribed programming

In a TV-obsessed nation, these are the shows you should have seen:

Fawlty Towers The iconic, anarchic 1970s sitcom from John Cleese topped a British Film Institute poll to find the 100 best examples of British TV.

Blue Peter This children’s magazine show has been running since 1958, shaping more than a few generations of Britons.

Life On Earth Sir David Attenborough and his brushes with nature are a British institution. This 13-parter was a landmark series in 1979 but for a more recent example try *Planet Earth*.

Play For Today/The Wednesday Play One-off dramas from the 1960s and 70s. The best examples were *Cathy Come Home* and *Abigail’s Party*, which helped launch the careers of Ken Loach and Mike Leigh respectively.

Monty Python’s Flying Circus Seminal, by turns hilarious and surreal, and a huge international success from the early 1970s.



They don't make 'em like that any more

British TV seems to have mislaid its talent for challenging drama. In 2007 just over a quarter of peak time drama on British TV comprised soap operas; police dramas took more than a third of dramatic airtime. Go back ten or 20 years and it was a different story – if you find any of the following three on a thrift store VHS shelf, it's worth making the investment:

Boys from the Blackstuff (1982). Alan Bleasdale set the five-parter about unemployed roadmenders in his home city, Liverpool. For many it offered a jarring indictment of Thatcher's Britain; for others, simply gripping drama.

The Singing Detective (1986). From Dennis Potter, master of the sarcastic, surreal musical mini-series, came the story of a mystery writer confined to a hospital bed and his imagination by a severe skin disease of the same sort that afflicted Potter himself.

Our Friends in the North (1996). Adapted from Peter Flannery's play, the story of four Newcastle friends roamed from the 1960s to the 90s, weaving real political and social stories within.

"CAN'T WE GET YOU ON
MASTERMIND SYBIL?
NEXT CONTESTANT –
SYBIL FAWLTY FROM
TORQUAY, SPECIAL
SUBJECT THE BLEEDIN'
OBVIOUS."
Basil Fawlty,
Fawlty Towers

6.1.4 Waves of radio: from ITMA to Moyles

Treacherous
occupation

The Lord Haw Haw
name is usually
associated with
William Joyce,
although it was used
by several presenters
as part of Nazi
Germany's wartime
radio propaganda.
Joyce, born in New
York and raised in
Ireland, was caught
by allied troops in
Germany and executed
for treason by the
British in 1946.

"I JUST WANT TO
HEAR SOMETHING
I HAVEN'T HEARD
BEFORE."
John Peel

Britain tunes in: highs and lows of radio

His claim to be the inventor of radio is disputed, but Guglielmo Marconi (an Italian at work in Britain) certainly made some giant leaps forward in the field. By 1897 he was transmitting Morse code signals across Salisbury Plain and in 1901, at Poldhu in Cornwall, he received the first transatlantic radio signal. By 1922 Britain was broadcasting bona fide radio to her public. Although the BBC was the only licence holder, competition soon arrived from stations such as Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandy, beaming in from the Continent. Radio played a key role in the Second World War, employed by both sides for propaganda and morale purposes.

It's That Man Again, or *ITMA* as it was more commonly known, a comedy programme broadcast during WWII, is said to have helped maintain domestic morale.

'Lord Haw Haw' was less helpful, broadcasting Nazi propaganda into Britain from the Germany Calling station.

Pirate radio stations including Radio London and Radio Caroline began drawing listeners in the 1950s and 60s. The stations were young and vibrant, based on offshore ships from where they played the new pop music of the time. The BBC reacted by launching Radio 1, employing former pirate DJs like Tony Blackburn and John Peel. Peel went on to become a venerated figure, championing a broad range of new music up to his early death in 2004. These days Terry Wogan, intermittent host of Radio 2's breakfast show since 1972, is the great star of the airwaves, even while Chris Moyles, his early morning counterpart on Radio 1, attracts almost as many listeners.

Listening habits and podcasts

Today 90 per cent of Britons regularly listen to the radio, tuning in for an average of three hours a day. There are eight national analogue broadcasters – five from the BBC and three independents – as well as a host of national digital stations. Additionally, every region has its own BBC analogue service, as well as one or more commercial analogue stations. Whilst nominally independent, local radio is dominated by a few large media groups, resulting in a fairly uniform sound around the country. Increasingly, Britons are accessing their radio via podcasts, the downloadable digital files. Licensing laws make it prohibitively expensive for podcasts to include music, so radio shows are edited after broadcast and then made available for users. The lack of musical content means that the most downloaded shows are comedy-based offerings from BBC Radio 4 and some of the digital stations.

Britain's eight national radio stations

BBC Radio 1 By day it's big name DJs playing chart music; of an evening the playlists get more eclectic.

BBC Radio 2 Plays a range of popular music from the 1960s to the present day. Efforts to capture a younger audience went awry in 2008 when presenters Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross were suspended for making lewd comments.

BBC Radio 3 Classical music, jazz, opera and the occasional bit of Shakespeare; average listener age of 57.

BBC Radio 4 A mixture of current affairs, magazine shows, comedy, drama and discussion.

BBC Radio 5 Live Predominantly sports coverage but also broadcasting news and phone-in shows.

Classic FM The name's a giveaway: classical music with an accessible approach. It became Britain's first national commercial radio station when it launched back in 1992.

Virgin Radio Has a rather blokey feel, aiming at people in their 20s and 30s by broadcasting a mix of old and new rock.

talkSPORT Similar to Radio 5 Live in programming but even heavier on the sport.

Goon down in history
Spike Milligan's *Goon Show* left a dazzling legacy. Cited by everyone from the *Monty Python* boys to The Beatles and Prince Charles as an influence, it also bestowed new words upon the English language, not least 'lurgi', coined by Milligan in 1954 to mean an unpleasant but unspecified illness.

Panic stations!
In the event of a national emergency, when radio services are limited, BBC Radio 4 (formerly the BBC Home Service) is the only one that will continue broadcasting.

The ten shows that made British radio

The Archers The gentle rural radio soap has been running since 1950 and is still the most popular show on Radio 4.

Desert Island Discs Features a guest talking about the eight pieces of music they would take to a desert island. First broadcast in 1942, making it the world's longest running radio show.

The Goon Show Spike Milligan's surreal comedy show ran from 1951-1960 and is credited with inspiring bits of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

Hancock's Half Hour Tony Hancock's hugely influential comedy found a vehicle on radio before it made the transfer to TV in 1960.

I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again Popular comedy show of the 60s and 70s, which provided talent for *Monty Python* and *The Goodies* and led to *I'm Sorry, I Haven't A Clue*, which is still going today.

It's That Man Again Starred Liverpoolian comic Tommy Handley, who played the Minister of Aggravation and Mysteries. The title referred to a common newspaper introduction for Adolf Hitler.

Just a Minute A panel show that's been going since 1967, in which contestants try to talk for one minute on a given subject without 'repetition, hesitation or deviation'.

Letter From America Alistair Cooke's weekly reflection on all things American lasted an amazing 58 years, from 1946 to 2004.

The Today Programme An influential Radio 4 news and current affairs programme for early weekday risers. A British institution since 1957.

Woman's Hour A popular Radio 4 magazine show that has been discussing women's interests since 1946.

5.1.5 New media: Britain on the Web

Ta-da! The World Wide Web

A British man gave us the World Wide Web as we know it today. Although the Internet evolved through decades of research and collaboration, it was the work of Sir Tim Berners-Lee that first got it working in synchrony with browsers, servers and websites, or in his words: "I just had to take the hypertext idea and connect it to the Transmission Control Protocol and domain name system ideas and – ta-da! – the World Wide Web." Sir Tim topped a recent list of 'Greatest Living Geniuses' compiled by *The Daily Telegraph*.

Net gains

As a nation, Britain is fairly switched on to the Web. In 2008 the Office for National Statistics confirmed that 16.46 million homes had some form of access to the Internet, which equates to 65 per cent of the total. Over 85 per cent of this access was via broadband. There is, however, a degree of regional disparity, with around 70 per cent of London and the South West online but only 60 per cent of Yorkshire and the Midlands. Two out of every three Brits use the Internet every day. Age also plays a part – 70 per cent of over 65-year-olds confessed to never having been online. Perhaps most interestingly, Internet use seems to be an all or nothing pursuit: a quarter of all Brits said they'd never used it.

Browsing habits

So, when they're online, what are the Brits doing? It seems that searching for information about goods and services and sending and receiving emails are the prime activities. Two-thirds of users also research and book travel on the Net, while around half utilise Internet banking services. Google, Facebook, Windows Live, YouTube and Yahoo generally feature in the top five

Crunch and crumble

As the credit crunch began to bite in 2008, Google reported a 40 per cent surge in the number of people searching out recipes for apple crumble, apparently desperate for comfort food and the frugality of home cooking.

e-democracy in action

In late 2006 Downing Street launched an e-petition website, enabling web users to put their name to a favoured cause. Unsurprisingly, the range of petitions has been broad: one demanded all retired Gurkha soldiers be given British citizenship; another suggested the Government replace the national anthem with the Spandau Ballet song *Gold*.

websites, even while their positioning may vary. When it comes to spending money online, Amazon and eBay dominate. Wikipedia, the collaborative encyclopaedia, is another site usually ranked in the top ten. More people get their news and sport from the BBC's web service than anywhere else. Social networking is very popular amongst the 16 to 35 age group; Facebook is out ahead as the prime portal, but MySpace and Bebo are also significant players. Second Life, the interactive virtual world for which devotees create an alter ego (or 'avatar'), is also popular.

Offbeat online: three quirky sites

holymoly.co.uk A mishmash of celebrity gossip, entertainment news, wit and bile. The site is based around a weekly mail-out and user-generated content such as 'The Rules Of Modern Life'. Not for the easily offended.

nicecupofteaandasitdown.com A celebration of that great British experience: tea, biscuits and a nice sit down. Features 'biscuit of the week' and has branched out, somewhat controversially, to cover cakes.

rathergood.com A window into the surreal side of the British sense of humour. It's a repository for musical parody and animation, featuring such cult classics as The Spongmonkeys and The Viking Kittens.



**Blog on: five weblogs
worth reading**

Belle de Jour The long running, apparently true-life blog from a working London call girl has won various awards, been turned into books and spawned a TV series: *belledejour-uk.blogspot.com*

Guido Fawkes From a political 'insider' who treats all aspects of British party politics with equal measures of dislike and mistrust. A good, well-informed place to get the gossip from Parliament: *order-order.com*

LinkMachineGo A simple idea done well: this regularly updated page of popular culture blog links is a great place to start if you're at a loose end online: *timemachinego.com/linkmachinego*

Scary Duck A witty and personable blog featuring irreverent comment on anything that catches the writer's eye. Example topics, such as shed-related blasphemy and 'Zombie Dave' the office cleaner should give you an idea of what to expect: *scaryduck.blogspot.com*

spEak You're bRanes A response to the ignorance, racism and poor English that some members of the British public impart in the comment or reaction sections of news websites: *ifyoulikeitsomuchwhydontyougolivethere.com*

MIND THE GAS

6.2 Communications

By 'communications' we don't mean the coded, 'turned out nice again' nuances of British chitchat. We're talking about the postal service, the roads, the rails, the airports... in fact, all those things the Brits love to beef about when (as is often the case) they haven't 'turned out nice again'.

5.2.1 Posting letters and making calls

British postal service: key dates

1516 Henry VIII appoints the first Master of the Posts, a role that eventually morphs into the office of Postmaster General.

1635 Charles I makes the postal service available to the public.

1660 Charles II establishes the General Post Office (GPO).

1840 A letter can be sent anywhere in Britain using a standard rate Uniform Penny Post, and the first stamp, the Penny Black, comes into circulation.

2006 Royal Mail loses its monopoly on the postal industry and competition starts to emerge.

Dispatching tradition: the postal service

The postal service in Britain is going through a period of significant change. In 2006, after more than 350 years, the Royal Mail lost its monopoly on postal services. At present you'll still be hard pushed to post a letter without their help, but this may not be the case for much longer. Some sort of privatisation for the Royal Mail itself seems inevitable. Today the Royal Mail Group Ltd, transmuted descendant of Charles I's 17th century postal service, is split into three sections: Royal Mail delivers the letters, Parcelforce delivers the parcels and the Post Office runs the network of post offices around the country. The post offices serve as multipurpose retail outlets, often comprising the only local shop in rural areas. Alas, small rural post offices are, by and large, losing money and many are closing down despite the protestations of local users. As a rule the postal service in Britain is good, with around 85 per cent of first-class domestic letters arriving the next day. Over 99 per cent of mail arrives safely: not bad considering the Royal Mail delivers 79 million letters a day.



The stamp with no name

Because Britain was the first country in the world to publish stamps, it's the only one that doesn't have to print its name on them.

Late post

The bafflingly named (but well intentioned) Deceased Preference

Service came up with an interesting statistic in 2008: 59 million items of junk mail are being sent to dead people each year. The problem is apparently much worse in the north of England, with recently deceased Hull residents receiving more mail post-mortem than anyone else.

Britain on the blower

Britain has been enamoured with electronic chitchat ever since Scots-born Alexander Graham Bell moved to North America and set about inventing the telephone in the 1870s. By the 1930s Brits were gabbling away happily in cast iron kiosks, and by the 1960s most homes had their own phone. The dominant force in the British telecommunications industry has traditionally been BT. Formerly part of the Post Office, it was rebranded as British Telecom in 1981 and privatised in 1984. BT's monopoly was actually first broken in 1982, but it still controls the vast majority of the fixed line telephone market in Britain. Although BT is a private company, it's required by law to provide a phone line to all addresses in the UK and to provide public phone boxes. However, the iconic red telephone boxes may soon be a thing of the past. They were already under threat, replaced by more modern glass affairs with wireless Internet access, before the growth of mobile phones accelerated their demise. Between 2002 and 2008, around 30 per cent of all phone boxes were removed and of those that remained, 60 per cent were unprofitable. Of course, these days the mobile phone rules supreme. In fact, 115 per cent of Brits own a mobile phone (i.e. they've got more than one each), compared with 94 per cent across the rest of the EU and 77 per cent in the USA. The five big mobile service providers are Vodafone, O2, T-Mobile, Orange and 3. Vodafone, a British-based company, is the largest mobile phone service company in the world, worth an estimated £75 billion.

Drama by numbers

In each major area code, groups of numbers are reserved for use in films and television shows to prevent any real numbers from being accidentally quoted on screen.

No, really, it's me. it's Gordie

In 2008 it was revealed that Prime Minister Gordon Brown periodically telephoned members of the public who wrote to the Government voicing concerns over the state of the nation. "The PM takes a great interest in correspondence that comes in. He likes to keep in touch with voters who take the trouble to contact him," explained a Downing Street spokesman. The revelation emerged as Labour popularity slumped to a 25-year low.

Calls of nature

A recent survey estimated that the average Briton spends ten months of their adult life on the mobile phone. The same survey revealed that a quarter of Brits will take a call while sitting on the toilet.

6.2.2 The age of the strain: getting about Britain

Hope you like jammin' too. on the roads

In Britain the car is king. Private vehicle ownership is high – there were 22 million cars in the country at last count – and the roads, particularly in the South East, are amongst the most congested in Europe. While the road network is extensive and largely free, getting stuck in a traffic jam has become part of British life. In recent years, Government efforts to tackle congestion have reoriented from building wider roads (which only seems to generate more traffic) to road pricing for drivers. The Congestion Charge Zone introduced to central London in 2003 is the first such big move in the effort to reduce congestion and pollution in British cities. It remains to be seen whether the required investment in public transport will now be made to provide motorists with an efficient, affordable alternative to the car. At present, the high price of fuel at the petrol pumps (higher here than almost anywhere else in the world) is doing more than anything to change British driving habits. When they're not parked in a jam, the British, on the whole, drive much as stereotypes would suggest. Politeness and respect for other road users are expected and anything seen as rude behaviour can, paradoxically, provoke a touch of road rage. Serious road rage is rare, although the media attention given to high profile cases of violent attack may suggest otherwise. Drink driving has become a big social taboo and the associated penalties are severe.

On and off the rails

Before it was sold off in the mid 1990s British Rail, the national rail company, rivalled the weather as a popular topic of gripe for the public. Nothing much has changed since, although these days the moaning is divided between various separate companies (who run the trains) and Network Rail (who maintain the rails).

In fairness to the train companies, the British rail network has been undergoing an extensive programme of repairs and upgrades since the Hatfield rail crash of 2000 exposed a number of flaws. However, trains remain overcrowded and expensive, although punctuality could be worse. In 2008 the Department of Transport acknowledged that rail commuters in Britain sometimes endure carriage conditions which EU law deems unacceptable for sheep, goats, calves and chickens.

Doctor's orders

During the early 1960s the rail network was drastically reduced by the actions of Richard Beeching, then Chairman of British Railways. Popularly known as Doctor Beeching (he had a PhD), his report, *The Reshaping of Britain's Railways* (often referred to as 'The Beeching Axe'), initiated the closure of 7,500 miles of branch line and a third of railway stations.

"BEECHING
IS A PRAT!"
"NO, I'M NOT."

Dr Beeching responded with his own pen to a piece of graffiti he found in a station toilet

Giving out the wrong signals

The worst rail crash in British history happened at Quintinshill on the Scottish West Coast Main Line in 1915. A dozy signalman forgot where he'd parked a train and 227 people died in the resulting collision of five (yes, five) trains. Most of the dead were soldiers.

The dishevelled troops that survived were mistaken for foreign prisoners of war and stoned by the locals on their journey back to barracks. Because the crash happened during the First World War the censorship measures in place ensured that it went unreported.

Welcome to hell

In the week that Heathrow's much anticipated £4 billion Terminal 5 building opened in March 2008, hundreds of British Airways flights had to be cancelled. The massive new facility went into meltdown, with some 28,000 items of luggage led astray by glitches in the new baggage handling system and inadequate staff training. Escalators wouldn't work and staff couldn't find anywhere to park. "Welcome to hell" read the quickly improvised toilet graffiti. For some it was all too much: supermodel Naomi Campbell was removed kicking, screaming and spitting from a flight after being informed that her bag wouldn't be travelling on the same plane.

"I DID NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THE DREAD TERM 'TERMINAL ILLNESS' UNTIL I SAW HEATHROW FOR MYSELF."
Dennis Potter

Up in the air

Britain is well served by airports and flight routes, even while the international airports are somewhat concentrated in the London area. Heathrow and Gatwick are major international hubs, with Heathrow the busiest passenger airport in the world. London Stansted and London Luton specialise in low-cost flights to destinations around the UK and Europe. Budget flights have mushroomed in recent years, with EasyJet and Ryanair vying for the biggest share of the market by offering flights at little cost above the basic taxes and fees. However, as fuel prices and green taxes rise, the golden era of budget air travel may be coming to an end. Manchester and Edinburgh are the major northern airports, although limited international flights are available at airports across the country.



Underground, overground

Most towns and cities in the UK have a bus network, and even the most rural of areas will have some form of bus service, however infrequent and unreliable. Several towns and cities, including Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Croydon and Blackpool, have a tram system. Of these, only Blackpool is a long-running traditional tramway, all the others having been resurrected in the last 20 years. The London Underground, which opened to the public in 1863, is the oldest subway train system in the world. Known by Londoners as the 'Tube', it has 268 stations and over

250 miles of track, less than half of which is actually under ground. Another notable British subway, Glasgow's, is the third oldest in the world (Budapest is second oldest, in case you were wondering).





7.1. Food *p289*

7.1.1. The changing culture of British food
p290

7.1.2. Stews, bakes, jellies and puds:
the regional menu
p294

7.1.3. The lost art of dining: eating habits
p302

7.2. Drink *p307*

7.2.1. Fancy a brew?
Brits and their drinks
p308

7.2.2. Whose round is it? Drinking habits
p315

7 Food and Drink

MAKERS TO
T.M. THE
KING & QUEEN

FIVE

MAKERS TO
H.R.H. THE
PRINCE OF WALES



DESPERATION PACIFICATION EXPECTATION ACCLAMATION REALIZATION
"IT'S DELIA"

TOP CHIEFS

7.1 Food

Don't sneer, give it a chance.

British food has emerged from its

darkest hours and moves forward with

an admirable confidence, rediscovering

a wealth of traditional produce and

ingredients whilst also taking notes

and inspiration from Britain's post-war

migrant communities.

The changing culture of British food

Top nosh

Of late, Britain has consistently been voted third in the world league tables of fine dining. The San Pellegrino World's Best Restaurants list named six British establishments in their 2008 top 50. Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck restaurant in Berkshire was voted second best in the world for the third year running.

Past his sell-by date

Former French President Jacques Chirac joked in 2005 that English food was the second worst in Europe (he gave Finland top spot). "You can't trust people who cook as badly as that," he reportedly added. Many in France still refer to British people as 'le rosbif'.

Big day for brown stuff

A recent poll found Worcestershire sauce to be the British foodstuff with the greatest global impact. The brown, runny, fishy, vinegar-based delicacy, produced by Lea and Perrins in the same Worcester factory for a hundred years, isn't really British at all – Lord Sandys, Governor of Bengal, brought the recipe home to England from India in the early 19th century.

All hail the gastro revolution

My how the tables have turned. British cuisine, mocked for so long by foreigners, now ranks among the best on Earth. The last 20 years have transformed the way Brits see their food. Restaurant-goers spend more, are more demanding and more appreciative; aware that their options extend beyond meat and two overcooked veg. The fusion of traditional British food with foreign influences, from Indian to French, Thai to Italian, has been central to its renaissance. But let's not get carried away. Granted, Britain has some of the best restaurants in the world, people are more knowledgeable about cuisine and food has become a key part of national culture, but have attitudes really changed that much? Can we say that British people live and breathe food like the Italians or the French? Do they construct their days around lengthy mealtimes? In truth, probably not. Not yet.

Great moments in British food

1586 Francis Drake brings the humble potato back from the Americas.

1762 John Montagu invents the sandwich.

1847 Joseph Fry mixes cocoa butter and cocoa powder and comes up with the chocolate bar.

1861 *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* is published. Boil your cabbage for 45 minutes she urged.

1890 Frenchman Auguste Escoffier arrives to cook at the Savoy Hotel and introduces the 'brigade de cuisine' system, a structure still used in all the top restaurants today.

1950 Elizabeth David writes *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, introducing olive oil, garlic and other treats to the British diet.

1954 14 years of food rationing comes to an end.

1967 The Roux brothers open Le Gavroche; it became Britain's first Michelin three-starred restaurant in 1982.

2007 Clare Smyth becomes the first (and only) female chef in Britain to run a restaurant with three Michelin stars (Gordon Ramsay at Royal Hospital Road).

Begged, stolen and borrowed:
the story of 'British' flavours

For centuries the British diet was directed by invading Europeans. The Romans introduced asparagus, cucumber, peas, pheasant and viniculture, embraced seafood and built the extensive road network that moved food around the country. The Saxons' farming expertise served up wild game and fertile land on which to grow a variety of foods – they were particularly good at herbs. The art of drying and preserving fish was handed down from the Vikings and Danes, and smoked fish and shellfish still taste best in the old Norse heartland of the North East. Having colonised Sicily shortly before appropriating England, the Normans brought spices and recipes from southern Italy and Africa. Crusaders had their first taste of oranges and lemons in the same era, and cinnamon, cloves and ginger, considered suggestive of wealth, appeared in a range of savoury and sweet dishes.

When Britain itself turned colonial overlord, the flavours of foreign lands were assimilated once more, brought back by explorers and traders. Coffee, cocoa, potatoes and tea poured in. Dishes like kedgeree (rice, lentils, onions and egg) and mulligatawny (spicy meat or chicken soup) found an appreciative British audience in the days of the Raj, before complete cuisines from the Indian subcontinent, East Asia and the Caribbean were absorbed into the culture of British food in the 20th century. Ethnic food and ingredients are now readily available in shops, and thousands of international restaurants reflect the diverse British palate.



We're going to need a bigger oven. Elizabeth David's revolutionary 1950s tome *A Book of Mediterranean Food* included guidance on stuffing a whole sheep.

"CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA IS NOW BRITAIN'S TRUE NATIONAL DISH, NOT ONLY BECAUSE IT IS THE MOST POPULAR, BUT BECAUSE IT IS A PERFECT ILLUSTRATION OF THE WAY BRITAIN ABSORBS AND ADAPTS EXTERNAL INFLUENCES." Or so said Robin Cook during his tenure as Foreign Secretary



A great British dish (from Spain and Belgium)

Fish and chips appeared first in Britain in the 19th century. Jewish immigrant Joseph Malin opened the earliest recorded chip shop in Bow, East London, in 1860, although Dickens wrote of a 'fried fish warehouse' in *Oliver Twist* 30 years earlier (there was no mention of chips). Of course, they're not really British at all: the Spanish were the first to fry fish, and chips were apparently born in Belgium.

Knowing your onions: the food provenance factor

The path from field to plate isn't as simple as it might be. There's been a gulf between genuine wholesome produce and what the masses actually eat since the days of the Industrial Revolution when processed food first filled British bellies. But the situation is slowly changing. Food health scares, the emergence of an organic market, animal welfare issues and the carping of celebrity chefs have all encouraged consumers to investigate the origins of their food, in essence to return to the values of regional cuisine. And European legislation is helping out – in 1992 the European Union created classifications designed to protect and promote regionally important food products. A Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) standard recognises food that is produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using a recognised skill. A Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) offers proof of a link between the foodstuff and a specific region in at least one of the stages of production or preparation. Clotted cream, Orkney beef and Cornish Yarg cheese are classified PDO; Dorset Blue cheese and Welsh lamb are PGI.

Name that foodstuff

The sandwich The gambling habits of the 11th Earl of Sandwich, John Montagu, bore one of the greatest snack foods ever. Unwilling to leave the card table, he instructed a servant to prepare some meat between two slices of bread so that he could eat one-handed.

HP sauce. A brown sauce that blends malt vinegar with fruits and spices; created by a chef at the Houses of Parliament in the late 19th century.

Victoria sandwich. Actually a sponge cake with a jam and cream filling, created as an afternoon pick-me-up for Queen Victoria.



Marguerite Patten OBE
"More squirrel, dear?"
Our first (1947) telly chef

Waiter, there's a squirrel in my soup

Marguerite Patten was the culinary doyenne of the 1940s and 50s. She was lauded for the resourcefulness of recipes like rook pie and squirrel tail soup. Don't laugh – she's sold 17 million books. In 2007 Marguerite, then aged 94, was presented with a Woman of the Year award.

Five great British cheeses

Caerphilly. Wales' best-known cheese is a mild, white and crumbly affair first made in 1831 in the town of the same name.

Stilton. Blue veined with a soft white texture, believed to have been made first in 1710 at Quenby Hall in Leicestershire.

Stinking Bishop. A soft Gloucestershire cheese, its rind washed in a bitter perry (pear juice), made in the modern age since 1972 but with aged monastic origins. The smell can clear a room.

West Country Farmhouse Cheddar. The only one of the Cheddar range (it comes in many variations) to earn PDO status is made in Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall.

Crowdie. A soft, fresh Scottish cheese made since the days of the Viking occupation. Crafted from the whey that separates naturally from souring milk.

TV dinners

What is it about Britain and TV chefs? Nowhere in Europe devotes more telly time to cooking than the UK. Fanny Craddock (born Phyllis Primrose-Pechey) was among the first, a genuine 'personality' from the 1950s to the 70s. She dressed like Princess Margaret, could swing abruptly from tenderness to wrath and was roundly loved for her fancy French recipes. The recent revelation about her fondness for amphetamines could go some way to explaining the quirky personality. Next came Graham Kerr, the first TV chef with a global reach whose 'Galloping Gourmet' sobriquet revealed him as an entertainer. And the small screen foodies have come in a steady stream ever since. Delia Smith shot to fame in the 1970s and changed the way Brits cook and talk: the 'Delia Effect' brought sales stampedes on everything from prunes to omelette pans while 'Doing a Delia' entered the dictionary. Today, the likes of Jamie Oliver, Nigella Lawson and Gordon Ramsey hold TV audiences rapt across the English-speaking world.

In 1901, 3,500lbs of cheese was despatched from the village of Cheddar to Captain Scott's ship *Discovery*, which was embarking on an expedition to the Antarctic.

"IT IS CALLED OUR ENGLISH PARMESAN AND BROUGHT TO THE TABLE WITH THE MITES SO THICK AROUND IT THAT THEY BRING A SPOON FOR YOU TO EAT THE MITES WITH, AS YOU DO THE CHEESE."

Daniel Defoe writing about Stilton cheese in the early 18th century.

7.1.2 Stews, bakes, jellies and puds:

the regional menu

British food has become rather homogenised in the modern era. Travel from Cornwall to Caithness and you'll find similar stuff served up in restaurants, pubs and homes. However, there will be variations based on the local catch of the day – it is an island nation after all – and, if you know where to look, you'll also find the traditional dishes that once directed local diets. In common, the regional foods of Britain are rarely dainty; instead, the damp, tepid climate reared a range of filling, dependable meals. And, as food provenance, food miles (how far your food has travelled to the shop) and organic farming grow in stature, so the humble traditions of good local produce are being revisited.



i. Northern England

Food in the north of England is warming stuff, a solid mix of bakes and stews. Oatcakes, parkin (a gingery Yorkshire cake), stottie cake (a flat round loaf from the North East) and curd tarts are all baking staples. Lancashire is home to treacle toffee but more famous for its hotpot, a layered casserole of lamb, potatoes and onions cooked in a glazed terracotta pot. Pickled red cabbage is the traditional hotpot accompaniment. Lancashire, and the town of Bury in particular, also claims black pudding, the fat sausage blend of ox blood, oatmeal, onions and spices, as its own. Yorkshire pudding, a muffin-shaped piece of light batter, has become a nationwide staple, to be served up with roast beef and gravy. Elsewhere, Northumberland still cures its Craster kippers (smoked) the way it did a century ago; coiled Cumberland sausages, flavoured with black and white pepper, remain best married with a buttery mash and rich onion gravy; and the potted shrimps of Morecambe Bay (small brown characters) are about as unpretentious as gourmet grub gets, unless you're into mushy peas (soaked and then simmered with sugar and salt).

A Glasse act

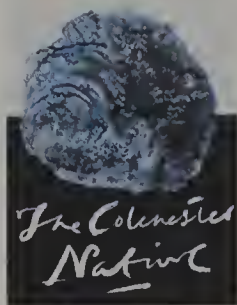
Yorkshire puddings were known as dripping puddings until food writer Hannah Glasse suggested the new name in her 1747 book *The Art of Cookery*. It used to be served with gravy as a first course, but Yorkshire pud is more commonly served alongside roast beef today.

Three great northern foods

Cumberland rum butter. Made in the Lake District since the 19th century, the alcoholic properties also find it referred to as 'hard sauce'.

Eccles cake. A small pocket of pastry filled with currants, named after its Lancashire hometown.

Pease pudding. The dried pea purée was a nationwide staple of old but is now limited predominantly to the North East; usually served with boiled bacon.



Return of the Native
Perhaps the Romans made Colchester, or Camulodunum, their first British colony because they adored the oysters that grow nearby – the so-called Colchester Native. Indeed, Pliny the Elder declared oysters to be Britain's sole attribute. After the Romans left in the fifth century so too did the taste for oysters, which came to be seen as a poor man's alternative to meat. These days the Colchester Native thrives again, served up in some of the world's best restaurants.

Keen as.
East Anglia is also associated with English mustard, enjoyed (or endured – it's a hot one) in one form or another since Roman times. Today, the Colman's name is synonymous with the yellow condiment but it was the Keen family who first began making mustard on a commercial basis in 1742. Then, in 1903, Jeremiah Colman began milling mustard at Stoke Holy Cross, just outside Norwich, with mustard seeds grown in the East Anglian fens.

ii. Eastern and South East England

The dark soils of Lincolnshire produce one-fifth of the country's food, while East Anglia rears much of the nation's meat and poultry. The east of England is, therefore, perhaps better known for its foodstuffs than its dishes. Grimsby and Lowestoft are the main fishing ports, and if you follow the East Anglian coastline clockwise you encounter Stiffkey Blues (cockles), Cromer crabs, Yarmouth bloaters (herring), Colchester oysters and Southend whitebait; delicacies the lot. The East Anglian saltmarshes also harbour samphire (sea asparagus), picked at low tide from June to September. Inland, vast orchards grow soft fruits, while villages like Tiptree, in Essex, still mash up the produce for fine jam. Roast Norfolk Black turkeys, introduced to England in the early 1500s, Suffolk cured ham and Newmarket sausages are three meaty specialities. Further south, at Whitstable in Kent, the Dredgerman's Breakfast is a gut-busting plate of streaky bacon, shelled oysters and thick bread. On Kent's southern fringe the grazed salty marshes at Romney produce a flavoursome lamb, while sweet southern teeth are sated by the Sussex pond pudding (a steamed buttery blob hiding an entire lemon), Isle of Wight doughnuts and Richmond Maids of Honour (small round cheesecakes).

Three great eastern foods

Cromer crab. A north Norfolk legend renowned for its high proportion of white meat. Enjoyed in various recipes but at its best simply boiled and dressed in the shell.

Haslet. A long loaf of seasoned, chopped and cured pork that probably has its origins in Lincolnshire. Usually sliced and served cold.

Melton Mowbray pork pie. More Midlands than eastern perhaps; either way, the combo of chopped pork filling, jelly layer and coat of brown pastry has become a national treasure.

iii. South West England

Sitting in a pub overlooking the spectacular Cornish coast eating the local catch, with its lobster, crabs and mackerel, is one of life's great culinary experiences. Inland, Cornwall and Devon's green pastures are grazed by the Friesians that produce some of Britain's finest dairy products, clotted cream included. And it would be remiss not to mention the Cornish pasty: the reputation of the semicircular folded pie has suffered by many a poor imitation, but when executed well the pasty is a wonderful combination of crisp pastry and moist meaty interior. The West Country can also lay claim to the Cornish saffron cake, Oldbury tart (gooseberry pie) and West Country cream tea. In recent years the region has become a key player in Britain's renewed relationship with organic farming, offering up a vast range of foodstuffs, from apples to Gloucester Old Spot pork.



Cream tea etiquette

In Cornwall put the jam on the scone, followed by the cream; in Devon do the reverse.

Pocket-shaped genius

The Cornish pasty originated as a working man's meal, enjoyed as a convenient way of eating hot meat with the fingers. Sometimes meat was put at one end and a sweet filling at the other – a complete meal all in one.

Three great south-western foods

Clotted cream. Milk is slowly heated, cooled and plundered of its cream, which is then heated again until a golden crust forms. In Cornwall they dump it on bread, cover with syrup or black treacle and call it Thunder and Lightning.

Bath chaps. Take a pig's cheek or lower jaw, brine and boil it before coating with breadcrumbs. Eat cold like ham.

Colston bun. A ring-shaped Bristol bun flavoured with dried fruit; named after the local merchant who made a packet trading in the West Indies (slaves included) in the early 18th century.

iv. London

London is the foodie capital of Britain. If you can eat it – and this is food from anywhere in the world – you’ll probably find it on sale here somewhere. For native produce, markets like Billingsgate (fish) and Smithfield (meat) have been the largest such trading centres in Britain for centuries. The East End was once known for its jellied eels and meat pies; some of the Eel Pie and Mash houses, dating to the 18th century, have survived, and could be deemed to serve up the most ‘authentic’ London food. If pie and mash are representative of traditional working-class Londoner grub, then Fortnum & Mason in Piccadilly and Harrods Food Hall in Knightsbridge have ritually catered for the social antipode. Both retain an impeccable pedigree, drawing in the best food from around Britain. But the capital’s modern cuisine is defined by its eclecticism. Chinese, Lebanese, Italian, Indian, Polish, Sudanese – the variety of food reflects the diversity of the population.

Three great London dishes of yore

Bubble and squeak. Thrifty dish using leftover cabbage and potato that was once a winter favourite with Londoners. The name derives from the sound it makes during cooking.

Boodle’s orange fool. Akin to a trifle (a cold desert layered with sponge cake, fruit, custard, jelly and cream), the fool was a speciality of Boodle’s, a gentleman’s club founded in 1762.

London Particular. A thick soup made with peas and bacon stock, named after the capital’s famous ‘pea-souper’ fogs.

v. Wales

There's a reason why Wales is famed for its leeks and cabbages – they're among the few veg able to flourish in the harsh Welsh landscape. Both can crop up in *cawl*, a rich broth of vegetables, lamb and bacon that has its regional variations. Pork continues to be a mainstay of the diet and lamb, once considered a luxury, is among the country's most famous exports. Shoals of herring and mackerel swim off the west coast, while across the Gower cockles are gathered, by hand, as they have been since Roman times. Laverbread, or *bara lawr*, a purple seaweed that turns dark green when cooked, is a distinctly Welsh staple, traditionally served alongside Welsh cured bacon, cockles and oatmeal for a man-sized breakfast. Afternoon tea serves up a number of Welsh choices: *bara brith* (a rich fruit loaf), Welsh cakes (a flat scone cooked on a griddle), *teisen carawe* (caraway seed cake) and *teisen mel* (honey cake).

Cheap shots from the English
Ask most Brits to name a dish from Wales and they'll come up with Welsh rarebit (or 'rabbit'), a concoction of stout, cheese, Worcestershire sauce and eggs, usually smeared over toast. However, most Brits would be wrong: the dish seems more likely to be of English origin, the name given as a slight to the Welsh because it contained cheap ingredients.

Three great Welsh foods

Braised faggot. Found in various parts of Britain but thought to have Welsh roots, a faggot is pig offal wrapped in caul fat, the stomach lining.

Glamorgan sausage. Not a tube of meat but a vegetarian effort made with Caerphilly cheese, leeks and breadcrumbs.

Crempog geirch. One of many pancake variants found in Wales, the geirch is made with oatmeal, milk, salt, eggs and butter.

Auld dining companions

The rest of Britain doesn't always appreciate Scotland's edible treasure trove; much of the country's seafood, notably lobster, langoustines and razor clams, is exported to France.

Host your own Burns

Supper in five stages

1. Chairman invites 'the company' to receive the haggis, and out it comes, carried aloft, quivering, on a platter and chaperoned by a bagpiper.

2. Chairman then recites Burns' *Address to a Haggis*. When he reaches the line "an' cut you up wi' ready slight" he thrusts at the undefended haggis with a dirk (dagger); everyone applauds and swigs a tot of whisky.

3. And so the feasting begins: cock-a-leekie soup (chicken and leek) for starters, then the haggis with neeps (swede) and tatties (mashed potato), followed by tipsy laird (sherry trifle).

4. Just as the whisky's starting to work someone stands and gives the Immortal Memory speech, eulogising the great Rabbie.

5. Finally, stand – if you can – and join hands to sing *Auld Lang Syne*.

"FAIR FA' YOUR
HONEST, SONNIE
FACE, GREAT
CHIEFTAIN O' THE
PUDDIN-RACE!"

Robert Burns' *Address to a Haggis* (1786)

vi. Scotland

The Scottish diet has always been robust. Warming broths were made with porridge, lentils and barley, and the national dish, haggis, immortalised by poet Robert Burns, was guaranteed to fill empty stomachs. Consisting of sheep or calf offal mixed with suet and oatmeal, squeezed into an animal stomach and then boiled, haggis inevitably tastes better than it sounds. The larder north of the border continues to harbour some fine produce. Salmon and trout are found in the clean, cold waters and the Highlands and forests are rich with a variety of game including partridge, grouse, and deer. Aberdeen Angus, a hornless breed of black cow that can be traced back to the 12th century, is world-famous for its beef, while the long-haired Highland cattle also produce good meat. The ostriches that have begun appearing on the moors, farmed for their meat, have a shorter Highland pedigree. Scottish delicacies include Cullen skink (a soup of smoked haddock and potatoes), Arbroath smokies (salted and smoked haddock), grouse stuffed with rowanberries and Aberdeen Angus steak with a whisky sauce. Cranachan, a mixture of toasted oatmeal, whisky, cream and raspberries, is a traditional dessert.



Three great Scottish foods

Mealie pudding. More like a sausage actually: a cream-coloured affair filled with oatmeal, onions and suet.

Cloutie dumpling. A bit like the haggis' sweeter cousin: a ball of beef suet, flour, breadcrumbs and dried fruit wrapped in a cloth (or *clout*) and simmered for hours on end.

Scotch broth. The traditional versions tended to feature mutton and pearl barley, simmered at length with various herbs, veg and whatever else was to hand.

vii. Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland kitchen doesn't do delicate. Potatoes and bread have been staples for centuries, mingled with the meat, dairy and seafood that come naturally to the region's fecund landscape. It says much about the cuisine that the province's signature dish remains the Ulster Fry, a heart-stopping plate of bacon, eggs, sausages, black pudding and mushrooms. The Fry is distinguished from its Full English cousin (see section 7.1.3.) by the addition of soda bread farls (a fried, flattened version of the famous Irish bread that mixes flour, baking soda and buttermilk) and potato farls (a similar bread stocked with spuds). Like the rest of Ireland the northern region has a stew of meat, potatoes, carrots and onions, although the choice of meat – steak – distinguishes it from the stew to the south that prefers lamb. One other local speciality, beef sausages, has been drawing southerners across the border for years.

Late riser
Irish soda bread isn't as ancient as you might imagine. Ireland's 'soft' flour – a product of the local climate – had always struggled to rise to the occasion when mixed with the usual yeast, and so bicarbonate of soda was introduced to the mix in the 1840s to beef up Ireland's bread.

Three great foods from Northern Ireland

- Champ.** Mashed potato featuring chopped scallions (spring onions) and a generous dollop of butter.
- Dulse.** A red seaweed, air-dried and eaten as a snack or sometimes included in the mix for soda bread.
- Yellowman.** A dense, chewy honeycomb toffee. Like dulse, it's long associated with the annual Auld Lammas Fair in County Antrim.

7.1.3 The lost art of dining: eating habits

"THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN BRITISH HISTORY THAT WE HAVE A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO CANNOT COOK."

Jamie Oliver, chef

Getting into bad habits

The British diet has been deteriorating for years. One of the longest working weeks in Europe has fuelled the demand for quick and easily prepared food, and so Britain consumes more junk food and ready-made meals than anywhere else in Europe. For many the 'ready meal culture' has become ingrained; the evening meal reduced to a supermarket-prepared dish shoved in the microwave for five minutes. Even while Britain may be working harder, employment and lifestyle are actually becoming more sedentary. The consequences are all too apparent: 60 per cent of adults are overweight and 25 per cent are obese. Scotland has the worst figures by some margin; folks north of the border are second only to the Americans in the obesity tables. In schools across Britain, nutrition and basic cooking techniques have been re-emphasised as part of the national curriculum in a bid to get future generations eating more healthily.

Table talk

Some parenting experts in Britain have forecast a race of 'feral TV dinner toddlers', unable to use a knife and fork and who take their meals from freezer to microwave to bedroom. In a recent National Family Mealtime Survey, only 20 per cent of those polled sat down to dinner together once a week. Of the families that made a habit of eating together regularly, 75 per cent did so while watching TV. Under Tony Blair, the Labour Government pushed its 'Respect' agenda, citing the decline in communal eating as a factor in the breakdown of family life and encouraging families to eat together.

Feast foods

Shrove Tuesday (40 days before Easter). Get out your frying pan and tuck into pancakes sprinkled with caster sugar and lemon.

Mothering Sunday (4th Sunday in Lent). A day to indulge in simnel cake, a rich fruitcake with a layer of marzipan in the middle. In medieval times they ate a light biscuit-like bread that was boiled and then baked.

Easter (March/April). Warm, delicately spiced hot cross buns at the breakfast table on Good Friday, and then lamb as the featured meat on Easter Sunday. Chocolate eggs and bunnies are given to children.

Christmas Day (25th December). Serves up roast goose or turkey accompanied by bread sauce, cranberry sauce, roast potatoes, gravy and vegetables (at least one should be Brussels sprouts, although they were recently voted the most hated vegetable in Britain). Finish with Christmas pudding, a steamed rich and fruity mix, decorated with holly, doused in brandy and then set alight at the table to ward off evil spirits and keep your drunk uncle amused. A silver charm or coin is hidden inside the pudding.

British mealtimes

Breakfast: taken between 7am and 9am during the working week.

Elevenuses: 11am, a mid morning pick-me-up with coffee or tea and a biscuit.

Lunch (also called dinner in the north): snatched (more often than lingered over) sometime between noon and 1.30pm. On Sundays the traditional roast will replace the more common weekday snack.

Afternoon tea: not many people do it these days, but the 4pm tray of tea, dainty sandwiches, scones and cake was all the rage in high society up to the later 20th century.

Dinner (more likely to be called tea in the north): the main meal of the day usually happens between 6pm and 8pm.

Habits that come
hut once a year
Popular history
suggests that Henry
VIII was the first
king to eat turkey
on Christmas Day,
eschewing the
traditional goose in
favour of a Norfolk
Black. The practice
soon caught on.
A glass of Christmas
cheer (sherry in
England, whisky in
Scotland) is usually
left out for Santa on
Christmas Eve. Animal
lovers might also leave
something carrot-like
for the reindeer.

Sunday best

The Sunday roast may trace its origins back to the medieval serfs who worked a six-day week. On Sundays they went to church and then gathered to practise fighting, honing their battle skills in case the lord's land should need defending. The squire rewarded them with ale and a meal of spit-roast oxen.

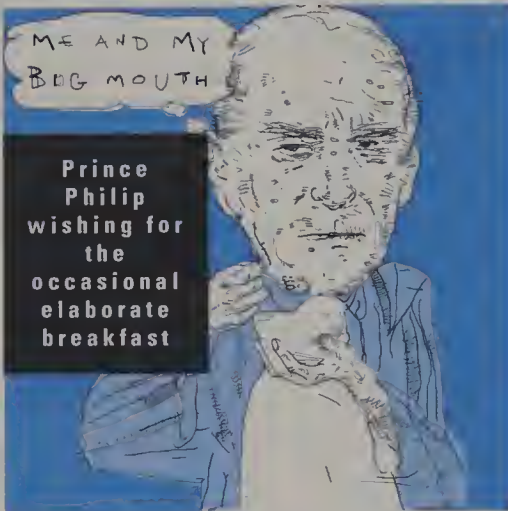
The most important meal of the day

"I never see any home cooking. All I get is fancy stuff."

The words of Prince Philip quoted back in 1962.

However, when a tabloid journalist went undercover in Buckingham Palace he revealed that, like most modern British folk, HM's breakfast table features cereal and

toast. While weekends, birthdays and hotel stays may still demand the traditional 'Full English' of bacon, eggs, sausage, tomato, mushrooms, toast, marmalade, tea and coffee, perhaps with a sensory-smacking smoked kipper on the side, these days breakfast is normally a briefer affair. In Scotland the breakfast of choice for centuries was porridge, traditionally eaten while walking in order to prevent being stabbed by an enemy whilst sleepy (or so the tourist blurb reports).



How do the British shop for their food?

Large supermarkets continue to pull the public with long opening hours and one-stop shopping, but a growing concern for food provenance is slowly pushing Britons back toward specialist shops and delis. Farmers' markets are popular throughout towns and cities (however urban), providing shoppers with the chance to meet and support local producers. Farm shops are also growing in number. The growth of organic produce is pushed along by increased public awareness on issues like health, food provenance and the environmental impact of consumption choices – supermarkets are increasingly questioned about ethics, animal welfare and

quality when, for instance, they start selling whole chickens for £1.99; the goods aren't simply bought without conscience. Some supermarkets are amending their practices (albeit slowly) to mirror changing public attitudes.

What's with the fork you big girl? In 1608 'Grand Tourist' Thomas Coryate introduced the fork to England from Italy. Deemed too effeminate (surely the fingers were better for eating food?), they were ridiculed but did eventually catch on. Coryate also got Britain acquainted with the umbrella.

Market forces: four London legends

Billingsgate. A medieval market that began concentrating solely on fish in 1699. It left a grand arcaded riverside Victorian home (now an exhibition space) on Lower Thames Street for the current residence on the Isle of Dogs in 1982.

Borough. Foodies have been visiting the market south of the River Thames for 250 years. Has a reputation built on fruit and veg, but sells much more.

Smithfield. The best-known meat market in Britain has been trading in one form or another just north of the City of London for at least 800 years. Its current accommodation, dating to the Victorian era, has undergone recent restoration. A good place to rub shoulders with restaurateurs, caterers, and butchers.

Covent Garden. For 350 years Covent Garden supported a fruit, veg and flower market (where the Eliza Doolittle character scratched a living in *Pygmalion*); in 1974 the neo-Classical piazza was turned over to shops, eateries and entertainers, and Britain's largest fresh produce market, New Covent Garden, opened just south of the river in Nine Elms.



Ooh, what's she like?
The indispensable fork, unbelievably ridiculed in the 17th Century as a bit of an un-masculine eating iron.



7.2 Drink

The subtleties of artisanal ale, the gently impressive rise of native wine, an enduring tenderness for the dear old cup of tea – there's more to drinking in Britain than a rare talent for simply getting pie-eyed. Although that too has its own deep-seated role in national culture...

7.2.1 Fancy a brew? Brits and their drinks

"CIDER ON BEER,
NEVER FEAR;
BEER UPON CIDER,
MAKES A BAD
RIDER"

English proverb

Builders' Tea



British drinking culture has always been led by beer. Ale has been plentiful (on tap you might say) for centuries, and the traditions of the pub have fostered its enduring popularity. While wine has a similarly venerable relationship with the nation, the masses have really only been quaffing since the 1950s. These days Britain imports more wine (by value) than anywhere else in the world (partly because it still struggles to produce its own) and you're almost as likely to see it consumed in homes and pubs as beer. Away from the demon drink, Britain cuddles the teapot like a life support system, resorting to a cuppa at the merest excuse.

Bittersweet: a love affair with beer

The Romans probably introduced brewing to Britain but it was the Middle Age monks that monopolised early beer production. They added hops to the mix, developing the taste that diverges from the norm in most beer-drinking countries. Brits brew bitter; they haven't traditionally made much lager (even while the effervescent amber stuff, brewed in Britain with foreign recipes and names, is consumed with relish). Bitter uses the same basic ingredients as lager, albeit with darker malts, but is fermented at a higher temperature using different yeasts. Varying quantities of hops are added to modify the flavour. The common bitter of today, usually served flat and at cellar temperature, is a descendant of pale ale, a light version of the old strong British beer, created in the 19th century to keep colonial types cool in the Raj. Scottish bitter drinkers still sometimes ask for a pint of 'heavy', a term of old used to distinguish from a pint of 'light' (mild). In Northern Ireland, Guinness, as you might expect, is more popular than elsewhere in the UK; although the dry stout isn't brewed in the province itself but to the south, in Dublin.

Know your ales

Bitter. The most common ale type is highly hopped and of variable strength (from light 'session' beers below 4% abv to strong beers over 5% abv).

Mild. Less hoppy than bitter, mild is rarely poured in modern British pubs.

Porter. A dark, slightly sweet hoppy ale. Again, not much found in pubs today.

Stout. The dark strong version of the porter, with a thick creamy head and a grainy taste.

Small beer

Since 1971 CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale) has banged the drum for real ale – that's the sort kept in a cask and pumped by hand. With four-fifths of British beer brewing controlled by six companies they've had an uphill task, and yet the volunteer organisation has successfully pushed the cause of so-called microbreweries and traditional methods with beer festivals, books and newsletters. Real ale pubs around the country now serve up guest beers from the smallest of brewers. It means you can sup the likes of Cripple Dick, Dog's Bollocks and Bishops Finger till you fall off your stool.



A bloke down the pub said that...

In medieval Britain drinking beer was safer than drinking water. And so they drank it with breakfast, in the fields, at lunch...

Henry VIII apparently refused to drink beer with hops in it because the hop was a Protestant plant.

Ale used to be ordered in pints and quarts. An unruly drinker would be told to mind his Ps and Qs (pints and quarts), a phrase still in use.

Black times for beardies

A highly worthy study carried out by Guinness confirmed what beard wearers have always feared – that a significant amount of the black stuff is deflected by interfering facial hair. They even came up with a stat: Britain's 92,370 moustachioed Guinness drinkers are collectively losing up to 162,719 pints a year.

Wine stats

Less than one per cent of all wine sold in Britain is made on home turf.

The largest exporter of wine to Britain is Australia, followed by France and the USA.

Around 15 per cent of all English and Welsh wine is sparkling.

Read before you quaff

If you're going to go native with the wine in Britain, make sure you study the label carefully. You need it to say English or Welsh wine (the Welsh have about 15 vineyards). Anything labelled 'British Wine' is fermented from imported grape juice, rather than made from home-grown vines.

Defining quality

In 1992 the Quality Wine Scheme, creating a strict criteria for cultivation, region, yield and taste, was set up as an English and Welsh equivalent to the AOC system in France. There are three labels: English (or Welsh) Vineyard Quality Wine, produced in a specific region, English (or Welsh) Regional Wine and UK Table Wine.

French bred: the Brits and their wine

Wine drinking has been part of British culture for centuries. Romans and monks maintained a home-grown industry but the good stuff was always imported from France. Henry II's marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152 established a trade route from Bordeaux that saw Britain become the main beneficiary of claret for the next 300 years. When the Hundred Years War and high taxes severed relations, taste buds were retrained toward Iberian sherry, Madeira and port. The taste for European wines re-emerged in the 19th century but was confined predominantly to the middle or upper classes until the later 20th century when French, German, Italian and, in the 1990s, unpretentious New World wines found their way into bars, pubs and supermarkets. Britain's similarly long relationship with champagne is also in rude health; more is imported today (about 40 million bottles a year) than ever before. Only the French drink more.

On the home front, English and Welsh wine (Scotland and Northern Ireland don't get involved) was something of a joke 20 years ago. However, while the climate remains a shade too damp and cold to have a sizeable wine industry, the native talent for producing light, aromatic whites has improved significantly. Vineyards are scattered throughout southern England, with the highest concentration in Kent and Sussex. There are more than 350 making saleable wine: the largest, Denbies Wine Estate on the Surrey Downs, has over 250 acres under vine but most average a couple of acres at most. In common they tend to grow Müller-Thurgau, Seyval Blanc, Bacchus or Reichensteiner grapes. English Wine Week at the end of May celebrates the growing tradition.

Still waters: whisky

Uisge beatha, the 'water of life' as the Gaels call it, has been made in the Scottish Highlands and Ulster since at least the 15th century. These days sales at home and abroad are huge, with Scotch whisky contributing some £100 million to the Exchequer each year. Of the two main varieties, single malts come from a specific distillery and are made solely with malted barley, while blended whisky is created from a mixture of single malt and grain whisky (produced using malted and unmalted cereals) and may come from more than one distillery. Various factors determine a whisky's character: the quality of the water, type of malted barley, amount of peat used in drying the grain, type of wooden barrel used for maturation, length of maturation – all will affect the taste and 'nose', which can range from deep, pungent and smoky to light, gentle and sweet. Scotland harbours over a hundred distilleries, almost half secreted in the Speyside whisky heartland of the north east. Elsewhere in Scotland Islay, Orkney and the Campbeltown peninsula also produce distinguished malts. Northern Ireland retains only one distillery, Bushmills, but it does claim to be the oldest in the world, having received its licence from King James I in 1608.

A taste for gin

British troops fell for a juniper-flavoured spirit while fighting in the Netherlands in the 1580s and brought 'Dutch courage' back to England where it was put on sale in chemists. By 1720 a quarter of households in London were distilling their own gin and drunkenness, particularly amongst the poor, had become a serious problem. 'Drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two pence' said the engraving above a gin

Give me a Welsh on the rocks

In 2000 Wales got its first whisky distillery in a hundred years. The Welsh Whisky Company produces two barrels of Penderyn single malt a day using water from a local natural spring. When the first 4,000 bottles went on sale on St David's Day in 2004 they sold out in less than four hours. England joined in the fun a couple of years later and opened its first whisky distillery in a century, in Norfolk, close to the source of much of Scotland's malt.

Honey, I drunk the mead
Meadhing, the process of fermenting honey, water and various spices, has been around since Celtic times, and the resultant drink, mead, has several variations. Metheglin, a Cornish version made with root ginger, is one of the few that anyone in Britain might have heard of. Most meads are of a similar strength to wine. An old Norse tradition prescribed mead for fertility in the first month of marriage; hence 'honeymoon'. Few actually imbibe it these days.

Top up ma'am?

After the Queen Mother's death in 2002, her equerry revealed a daily drinking routine that began at noon with a gin and Dubonnet. Apparently she would hide bottles of gin in hatboxes when she travelled.

High times on the high seas

For over 300 years the Royal Navy supplied its sailors with a daily tot of dark rum. Prior to 1740 the ration was a half pint a day (alternative choices included a pint of wine or a gallon of beer). The practice came to an end in 1970 when the Admiralty Board concluded that "in a highly sophisticated navy no risk or margin for error which might be attributable to rum could be allowed".

The original summer sup

Drinking in Britain can be a distinctly seasonal sport. Spiced ales and mulled wine both have their associations with the short, cold days of winter but in summer reach for the Pimm's and lemonade. It's the work of a Kentish farmer's son, James Pimm. In 1823 he served the dark reddish mix of gin, quinine and herbs (the full recipe remains closely guarded) at his oyster bar in London, hoping it would aid digestion.

store in Hogarth's print, *Gin Lane* (1751). Others called it 'mother's ruin'. One cattle drover reputedly sold his 11-year-old daughter for a gallon of the bad stuff, while 'gin palaces' amounted to furniture-less drinking factories. Gin's reputation climbed in the mid 1800s with the introduction of a less rough version, dry gin. It later became known as London Dry, named by association with the capital. British gin tends to be higher proof than European or American versions and has the distinction of dried lemon and citrus peel in its mix of botanicals.



Spirit levels

Beyond the native tipples of whisky and gin, Britons may also reach for foreign-made spirits. French brandy – Cognac, Armagnac or Calvados – sometimes appears after an evening meal, although you'll probably be in a high social setting if it does. Bar staff are more likely to field requests for bourbon, rum and vodka, each usually chosen with a soft drink mixer, probably Coca Cola.

Mellow fruitfulness: cider and perry

England, notably its southern, East Anglian and West Country patches, has been making cider since Roman times. Medieval monasteries kept their coffers stocked by selling spiced cider to a thirsty public and by the mid 17th century almost every farm had its own orchard and cider press. Farm labourers would even receive part of their wages in cider. In the later 20th century cider production became a more industrial affair, generating the gassy, clear, concentrate version sold in pubs around Britain. However, traditional cider – the flat, cloudy sort to which varying apple varieties and blends bring subtly different flavours – is enjoying a revival. Today, no one drinks more cider per head than the British. Perry is the pale gold coloured pear cousin of cider, made in the South West for centuries using a similar method to cider, albeit with the addition of a secondary fermentation.

In-cider information

Mix with the real cider aficionados in the West Country of England and you might hear them referring to the amber liquid as scrumpy, probably from 'scrump', slang for a withered apple.

Can I get a wassail at the back?

The pagan art of wassailing, pursued annually between Christmas Eve and Twelfth Night, was all about paying tribute to the humble apple tree. Farmers and labourers would carry jugs of mulled cider into the orchard and drink a toast to the trees in anticipation of next year's harvest. They still wassail down in Somerset, hub of English cider production.

The stuff of legend
Earl Grey tea, a black
tea flavoured with
bergamot oil, was
apparently named after
the Prime Minister for
whom it was brewed in
the 1830s. If the fable
is to be believed, the
PM had just saved a
Chinaman's life; the
grateful man duly put
the kettle on and named
his tea in Grey's honour.

Tea tattle

Some Brits call their tea
'char', from a Mandarin
Chinese word for tea.
'Builder's tea' refers to a
strong, long-brewed cup
of tea with milk, usually
fortified with a couple of
sugars: as enjoyed by
the construction worker
on a tea break.

Stimulating stuff: tea and coffee

The common cup of tea (a basic black tea) is a British
institution – a daily, often hourly, ritual for millions.
Taken with a splash of milk, it's the nation's favourite
drink. The Chinese have been knocking the stuff back
for 5,000 years but tea didn't hit British shores until
the mid 17th century, made fashionable by Catherine of
Braganza, the tea-mad Portuguese wife of Charles II.
The drink really took off when the East India Company
began importing tea from China, before Britain
introduced tea cultivation to India, Ceylon and Kenya
in the 1830s. Coffee appeared in Britain at a similar time
to tea but its fortunes have been less consistent. Like
tea, coffee carries its own social and cultural weight,
even while it is, perhaps, silently adjudged less 'British'
than tea because of its popularity in the rest of Europe.
The first coffee house opened in Oxford in 1650 and
the coffee shop or bar has been an important social
unifier ever since, somehow more bohemian than the
humble tearoom. In recent years the unstoppable rise
of international coffee house chains has – depending
on your worldview – broadened or narrowed choice.
Today Brits drink about twice as much tea (165 million
cups a day) as they do coffee, although the gap
narrows every year.

7.22 Whose round is it? Drinking habits

When and where do the British drink?

Most Brits come round to the smell of tea or coffee in the morning, a caffeine crutch that continues to provide support to millions throughout the day, although many office workers will reach as readily for the water bottle as for the mug these days. A glass of wine isn't unusual as an accompaniment to food in the evening but most Brits still save their alcohol consumption for dedicated drinking 'sessions' in the pub or, less often, at home. Friday and Saturday nights are still the main contenders for a pub visit.

I'm going down the pub...

When Brits socialise they often do so with an alcoholic drink in hand – chit-chat over an evening coffee is rarely the British way. Such habits begat the public house, integral to popular British culture for centuries. The nation's 60,000 pubs, declining in number each

Morning mouthful

Such is the attachment to the early morning cuppa that the Teasmade, a peculiarly British combination of automated tea-maker and alarm clock, was the height of sophistication in the mid 20th century. All concerned were no doubt relieved when the Apparatus Whereby a Cup of Tea or Coffee is Automatically Made, patented by Birmingham gunsmith Frank Clarke in 1902, was shortened in name.

Pub trivia

Around 15 million people go to British pubs at least once a week.

The most common pub name in Britain is The Red Lion, of which there are more than 750.

Around two-thirds of British pubs are owned by breweries. The rest, 'freehouses' (free to choose which beers they sell), are in private hands.

"I HAVE TAKEN MORE OUT OF ALCOHOL THAN ALCOHOL HAS TAKEN OUT OF ME."
Winston Churchill



A good old Pompey (Portsmouth) pub
The Country House in Commercial Road. Served its last pint in 1982.

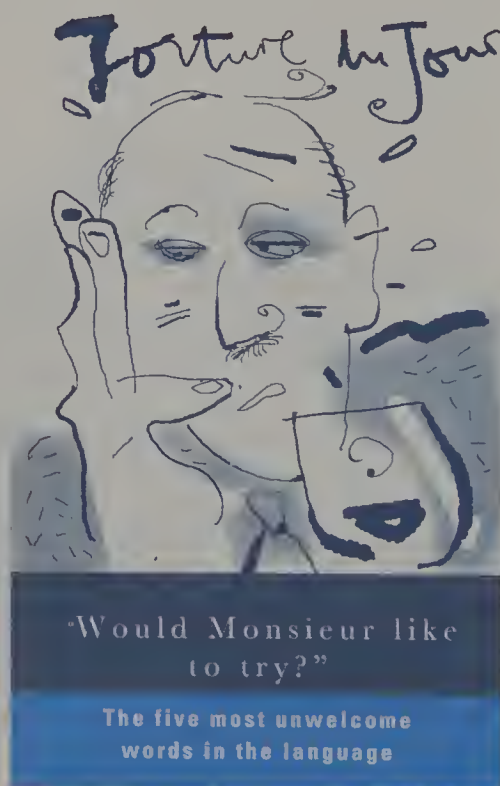
Budgetary tipple

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is allowed to drink alcohol during Budget speeches, the only MP granted such a privilege in the House of Commons. Of recent incumbents, Gordon Brown and John Major didn't take up the opportunity, preferring instead to drink water, but the glasses of Kenneth Clarke and Nigel Lawson were filled with whisky. Winston Churchill apparently opted for brandy during his time as Chancellor.

year (by the rate of 36 a week at the last count), provide a place to meet after work, to catch up with friends or to enjoy a meal with the family. They still account for two-thirds of all beer consumed in the UK, although drinking at home is increasingly popular – the number of pints pulled in pubs dropped nearly a fifth between 2005 and 2008. Most pubs outside built-up areas are now reliant on food sales to make ends meet. Reputations are built on the quality of food served, and the addition of beer gardens, live music and pub quizzes all keep the punters coming – despite an indoor smoking ban, in force since 2007. Licensing hours were revamped in 2005 to accommodate 24-hour drinking yet most pubs still open at 11am and close not long after 11pm.

Still getting to grips with wine


Despite enjoying a glass or two, the British still have a few hang-ups about wine. Wine snobbery, or the idea that wine knowledge is indicative of social status or intellect, can still rear its head. A recent poll revealed that over three-quarters of diners feel awkward when asked to taste the wine in a restaurant. A similar number are dissuaded from ordering a wine they can't pronounce, and nearly half admitted that the price of a bottle was the prime factor in choosing wine.



Drinking for Britain: boozy culture

In the eighth century Saint Boniface wrote to Cuthbert, Archbishop of Canterbury, and mentioned “the vice of drunkenness” in English parishes. Not much has changed. Rarely does a week in modern Britain pass without the media crowing about the ‘new’ British disease, binge drinking. Press hysteria aside, it’s a problem. British women aged 18 to 24 consume more alcohol than any of their European counterparts, getting through around 200 litres each a year (the European average is just over 100 litres), and young adult males are similarly fond of episodic heavy drinking. Promotions for cheap drinks by pubs, brewers and supermarkets are usually blamed for binge drinking, even while the roots of the problem are surely cultural. Ongoing Government initiatives to reduce consumption seem unlikely to reverse the age-old British taste for excess drinking and all its associated ills, from liver disease to lager louts and kebab shop brawls.





8.1 **Divided loyalties:**
class, race and family
p322

8.2 **How Britain takes
its religion** *p326*

8.3 **Unwritten rules:**
politics and the system
of government *p331*

8.4 **Cashing in:** the
economy, wealth and
social security *p339*

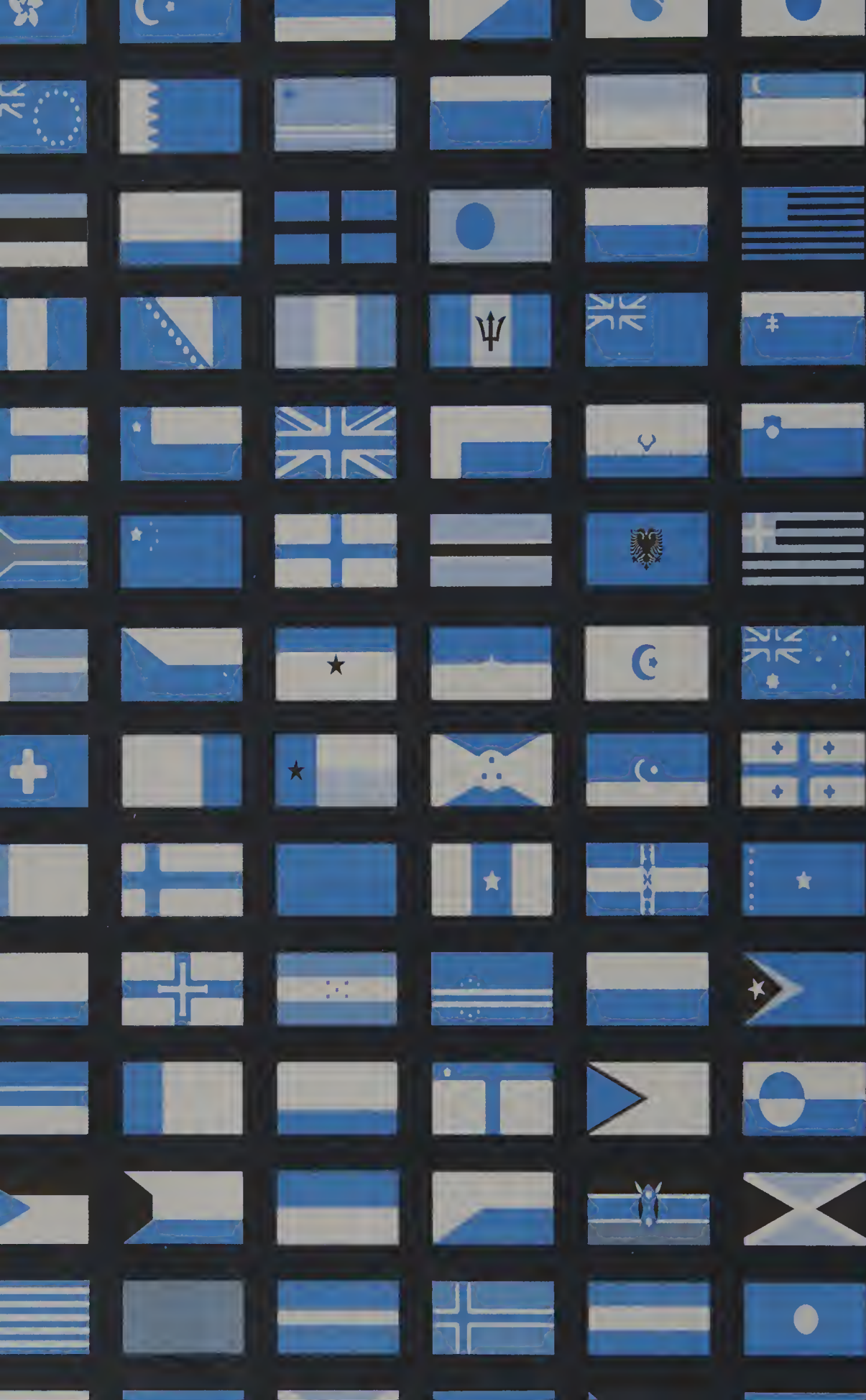
8.5 **Law and order:**
courts, prisons and
the police *p343*

8.6 **Testing times:** the
education system *p347*

8.7 **Time out:**
**holidays, festivals and
free time** *p351*

8.8 **Cricket to
conkers:** a love affair
with sport *p356*

8 Living culture: the state of modern Britain



It's all about diversity.

**Different classes, creeds, races,
nationalities, languages, politics –
perhaps we should marvel that Britain
doesn't tear itself apart on a daily
basis. So how does it all work: how
do so many varied lifestyles coexist
and contribute to such a thoroughly
modern nation?**

8.1 Divided loyalties: class, race and family

"A CLASS-FREE SOCIETY... IN BRITAIN CAN BECOME A REALITY."

Gordon Brown, addressing the Labour party conference in 2007

Know your place: social mobility and the wealth gap

The gap between rich and poor in Britain is wider now than it has been in 50 years, and social mobility looks plodding compared to other developed nations. The richest ten per cent of the population earn nine times more than the poorest ten per cent. A recent poll found two-thirds of parents unhappy about the prime role their own wealth (or lack of it) would play in determining their children's chances of climbing the ladder.

Old habits die hard: the class structure

Half a century ago people knew their place.

The working class, a majority defined by its manual jobs, shoulder chips and lack of a car, were distinct from the 'professional' middle classes and from the top sliver of society, the upper class with its inherited wealth, status and sense of superiority. Movement between the stations was rare. Ostensibly it was all about economics, but social, political and behavioural factors, set over generations, were equally important. Today, if analysts are to be believed, the large majority of Brits are middle class; a claim usually based on level of income.

If we do take earnings as the foundation of the current class structure, one generalisation from the many seems vaguely apt: the upper classes will never need a mortgage, the lower classes will never get one and everyone in between is essentially middle class. This might be neat but it ignores the infinite nuances of social status in 21st century Britain. To be well educated is to belong to the middle class, even while your earnings might fit the working class model. Conversely, you can own a £300,000 house yet still be judged as inherently working class based on your taste in curtains. The anomalies are endless: the young family staying in a tent on an English campsite will invariably be middle class, while the middle-aged couple in the caravan on an adjoining (more expensive) plot, would probably call themselves working-class. Culture, ethics, politics, consumption, dress, accent – each has its associations with class (for more on accent and class see Section 1.3.1.). The British acknowledge these markers intuitively, often subconsciously, on a daily basis.

Keeping it in the family...or not

Like class, the family structure has changed significantly since the Second World War. Find a mate, get married, have children; she gives up work, he earns the bread: so went the pre-war blueprint for family life. It seemed to work, and the familial hub – typically of three tight-knit generations – was a cornerstone of British life, even while the timeless issues of adultery, domestic violence and sex before marriage weren't absent, simply gagged. Divorce, birth control and abortion all became considerably easier in the 1960s (apart from in Northern Ireland, where abortion is still illegal) and, by the end of the century, co-habitation was viewed by most as a legitimate living arrangement. So, fewer people are getting married today than ever before, and of those that do, 45 per cent are likely to divorce. The number of lone parent families (and that's overwhelmingly lone mothers) has risen steadily to comprise around a quarter of all families with children, 40 per cent of children are now born out of wedlock and the average couple now have 1.8 children, down from two in 1970. Perhaps the most telling statistic of all is the one that reveals a third of all people now live alone. Some blame the changing structure of the nuclear family for wider social problems, even though polls consistently show the British place as much value on the family unit as they ever did.

Abortion in

Northern Ireland

The political factions in Northern Ireland, notably Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party, don't agree on much, but they do agree on the issue of abortion. Both sides are opposed to legalisation in Northern Ireland, even while the rest of the UK has allowed abortion for more than 40 years. Around 1,500 women travel from Northern Ireland to mainland Britain each year to have an abortion; others procure illegal terminations at home.

Two per cent of British marriages are interracial, on a par with the USA despite Britain's much higher proportion of white residents.

Almost a gay wedding... but not quite

Since 2005 Britain has allowed civil partnerships between same-sex couples. This affords most of the legal niceties of a mixed-sex marriage, but doesn't actually constitute a 'marriage' as such, something that gay and lesbian groups still campaign for. The Civil Partnership Act forbids any religious aspect to the attendant ceremony.

Could do better

The Race Relations Act of 1976 (amended in 2000) sought to engender tolerance toward Britain's ethnic minorities in employment, housing, training, education and so on. Huge progress has been made, but there's much still to achieve. For example, even in the early 21st century, members of the ethnic minorities in Britain are twice as likely to be unemployed and living in poverty as white people. Any progress in the realm of public acceptance is harder to quantify. Britain's long-term relationship with racial diversity has generated a widely tolerant society, yet prejudice is far from dead.

Mergers and margins: multicultural Britain

Ethnic minorities make up more than seven per cent of the British population. Around half of them were born in Britain. Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, Chinese, Turkish, Eastern European and other migrant groups are integral to modern Britain; each contributes key elements to the national culture. London is among the most multi-racial cities on Earth: around a third of inhabitants were born outside Britain, it resonates with the sound of 300 different languages and harbours 50 non-indigenous communities with populations of 10,000 or more. Traditionally, inner London has supported a large Afro-Caribbean population, while the suburbs are more likely to support Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani settlers. Towns and cities in the Midlands are home to a large British Indian population, and Pakistanis form the largest ethnic populations in the North West of England, Yorkshire and Scotland. Only Chinese settlers, it seems, are spread relatively evenly throughout Britain. Northern Ireland is the least ethnically diverse part of the UK, with only 14,000 'non-white' residents recorded in the last census (from a population of nearly 1.7 million). Perhaps correspondingly, the level of racially motivated attacks is far higher in Northern Ireland than elsewhere.

But does all the talk of multiculturalism, of ethnic identity, cause more problems than it solves? Does it marginalise rather than integrate? It's fair to say that most Britons' knowledge of migrant culture extends little beyond their favourite choice of takeaway food. In the arts, especially, there's still much to achieve;

only music seems to have pushed ethnic minority culture into the mainstream. Race riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001 revealed how some communities have become divided along lines of ethnicity. The spectre of Islamic extremism on British soil, rightly or wrongly, is regularly touted as a consequence of this segregation.

Migration to Britain: some key dates

3rd century: an African division of the Roman army was stationed at Hadrian's Wall.

1565: Oliver Cromwell allowed Jewish settlers to enter England; Edward I had expelled Jews in 1290. However, Jewish migrants didn't arrive in any great number until the late 19th century when they fled the Russian empire.

Late 17th century: Huguenots arrived in their thousands, fleeing religious persecution in France.

18th century: Lascars, Muslim sailors, serving on British merchant ships settled in port cities.

1948: the SS Empire Windrush docked in Tilbury, Essex, with 500 Jamaicans onboard, and a large Afro-Caribbean migration began, initiated to resolve a British post-war labour shortage.

1950s and 60s: Settlers from former colonies in South Asia arrive, eventually forming Britain's largest ethnic minority groups.

2004: Migrant workers arrive in Britain en masse as a clutch of Eastern European countries join the EU.

2031: A further seven million migrants are forecast to arrive in the UK by the third decade of the 21st century.

The UK Border Agency removes one 'immigration offender' from the country every eight minutes, according to a 2008 Home Office report.

They came from the East

In the four years after 2004, one million migrant workers arrived in Britain from the ten Eastern European countries newly signed up to the EU. Around half a million of these were Poles. Their contribution to the British economy was hotly debated – they were willing to work for less and for longer than the average Brit, but weren't they taking British jobs? By 2008 about half of the Eastern visitors had returned to their native countries and the number of migrant workers arriving in Britain had tailed off significantly.

8.2 How Britain takes its religion

"I SWEAR BY
ALMIGHTY GOD
THAT I WILL BE
FAITHFUL AND
BEAR TRUE
ALLEGIANCE TO
HER MAJESTY
QUEEN ELIZABETH,
HER HEIRS AND
SUCCESSORS,
ACCORDING TO
LAW. SO HELP
ME GOD."

Oath sworn by all
Members of Parliament

Living on a prayer

The Church of England may still be tied to the apparatus of state but it doesn't receive public funding. Three quarters of the £1 billion required each year to finance 13,000 parishes and 43 cathedrals comes from worshippers; much of the rest is generated by the Church's £4.8 billion worth of assets.

A Protestant land

Britain has been a largely Christian land since the seventh century when St Augustine, on a mission from the Vatican, won out over Celtic modes of worship. The major flux of the intervening years came with the Reformation that pushed Britain away from Rome and toward the Protestant tradition that remains dominant today. In fact, but for Henry VIII's wife-swap strategy, Britain might still be a Catholic country today (see section 1.2 for more on all of this). While the monarch, the Supreme Governor, is still head of the Church of England, the true, spiritual leader is the Archbishop of Canterbury. He (or perhaps one day, she) also heads up the Anglican Communion, the collection of bodies and Churches around the world (such as the Episcopal Church in the USA) that calls the Church of England papa. The Church in Wales, established as an Anglican body in 1920, has its own archbishop and HQ in Cardiff although beliefs mirror the Church of England's. However, the dominant denominations in recent Welsh history have been nonconformist – still Protestant but independent from the Anglican Church. The nonconformist chapels that became a focus for life in every Welsh village and town from the mid 18th century were mostly Methodist.

The Church of Scotland isn't Anglican. Instead, it flourished on the Calvinist principles of the 16th century and, in particular, the Reformation led by Scottish clergyman John Knox. By 1690 the Church of Scotland had become Presbyterian, administered not by the monarch or by bishops but by ministers and elected elders. Scripture, sermons and singing take precedence over festivals and prayer for the Presbyterians. The smaller Scottish Episcopal Church is the Anglican Communion's church in Scotland.

It's also worth noting that Catholicism never really left Britain. Instead, it hid, finally resurfacing in the mid 19th century when the restrictions on Catholic worship were relaxed. Emancipation coincided with the sizeable migration of Irish Catholics to mainland Britain (fleeing the famine in Ireland), boosting the revival in England, Scotland and Wales.

A special case: religion in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has a story of its own. The province is split largely between Catholics and Protestants (the last census counted 53 per cent of Protestant background and 44 per cent of Catholic). Gradually, over the last 40 years, the proportion of Catholics has grown as the share of Protestants has shrunk. The state of Northern Ireland itself was created along religious lines, its attachment to the UK born of a Protestant leaning that dates back to the plantations of the 16th century (see section 1.2.2. for more), even while it always retained a sizeable Catholic minority. So, religion, politics and daily life have always been inseparable. Even today, after a rare period of prolonged peace, lives are dictated by sectarianism. It affects where people live (by neighbourhood in urban areas or by village or region in rural parts), where children go to school, who marries who, which football team they support – all remain governed to a significant degree by religious background. As for the denominations in Northern Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church shares the stage with two large Protestant bodies: the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, which took its lead from Scottish settlers in the 17th century, and the Church of Ireland, an Anglican body.

Fighting over the women

In 1994 the Church of England ordained female priests for the first time. By 2007 more women (244) were being ordained than men (234). Women now comprise a quarter of the Anglican clergy. The divisive issue of female bishops (as yet unsanctioned) rumbles on, but their eventual ordination seems inevitable.

The Church of Scotland has been ordaining female ministers and elders since 1968.

"CAN IT HARM
NONE, DO WHAT
YE WILL"

From the *Wiccan Rede*,
the doctrinal verse by
which many of Britain's
neo-Pagans live

Ducking the insults

The name Baptist was
initially coined as an
insult by opponents of
the movement that
immerses new converts
fully in water. It only
became accepted by the
Baptists themselves in
the 19th century.

Christian names: know your denominations

Methodist. Initiated by John Wesley and his brother Charles in the mid 18th century. Popular with the new working class, Methodism emphasised the individual's relationship with God, social welfare and a pared down style of worship. Over 300,000 British faithful.

Salvation Army. Charity founded in 1865 by William Booth along quasi-military lines, intent on caring for the disadvantaged. The evangelical services are led by an 'officer', male or female. Salvation Army brass bands never fail to impress. 60,000 regulars.

Baptist. Probably began life with the 17th century Puritans. Big emphasis on scripture, baptism for those capable of expressing their faith (i.e. not infants) and governance by congregation rather than hierarchy. Around 150,000 British members.

Pentecostal. Emphasising the role of the Holy Spirit and the power of God within the individual, sometimes realised by speaking in tongues, prophecy and the ability to heal. Fastest-growing Christian faith in Britain: currently a million strong.

Where have all the followers gone?

Is modern British society as secularised as it seems?

A recent survey concluded that just over half of Britain considers itself Christian. A further six per cent aligned themselves with other faiths, while almost 40 per cent claimed no religion. However, the same survey confirmed what ministers have known for decades; that congregations have shrunk alarmingly. Half the population might be Christian but only one in ten people actually go to church on a regular basis.

Two thirds of Brits have no physical connection with the church at all, despite their belief (ingrained in childhood for many). It seems that many who claim some Christian belief are choosing a 'Christian' approach to life rather than allegiance to a congregation. 'Believing without belonging' is the glib media-friendly evaluation; 'Apathetic' is another. Middle-aged Brits are more inclined to talk about 'spiritual' feelings than a direct allegiance to any faith. Worryingly for organised religion, youngsters are the least likely to express any belief at all.

Only Northern Ireland remains widely enthusiastic about its Christianity: even while the numbers are slowly falling here too, almost half the population still regularly attend church. Catholics in Northern Ireland are more likely to express their faith with a church visit than Protestants.

Non-Christian religions in Britain buck the trend for decline. Ethnic minorities in Britain are far more likely to attend a church than people of British descent. Islam has become Britain's second religion with around 1.5 million followers, the vast majority of them Sunnis. Around half regularly practise their faith. In contrast with Christians, their numbers grow consistently, as do British followers of Hinduism and Sikhism.

"IF THERE IS ONE THING I LONG FOR ABOVE ALL ELSE, IT IS THAT THE YEARS TO COME MAY SEE CHRISTIANITY IN THIS COUNTRY ABLE AGAIN TO CAPTURE THE IMAGINATION OF OUR CULTURE, TO DRAW THE STRONGEST ENERGIES OF OUR THINKING AND FEELING."

Dr Rowan Williams,
Archbishop of Canterbury

Faith and footie:

Scotland's sectarian divide

Roman Catholicism in Britain made significant strides in the later 20th century. The Pope paid a historic visit in 1982 and in 1995 the Queen even set foot inside Westminster Cathedral, invited by the progressive Cardinal Basil Hume. Scotland, however, dragged its heels. In parts of western Scotland, Glasgow in particular, the Sectarian divide remains. Both elements have their allegiances with Northern Ireland, with Republican and Loyalist factions. 'Old Firm' football matches between Glasgow rivals Celtic (traditionally Catholic) and Rangers (Protestant) provide the greatest flashpoint for verbal and, sometimes, physical attack.

Taking tolerance for granted

Britain has had its shameful episodes of organised bigotry – Edward I expelled Jews in 1290; Queen Elizabeth tried the same with blacks in 1596 – but, comparatively, it enjoys a reputation for tolerance. The Protestant-Catholic divide never quite evoked the burning ire that afflicted the Continent, and the two sides peacefully coexist – interact even – today outside occasional sectarian outbursts in Scotland and the Troubles across the Irish Sea. Similarly, the relaxed, long-held attitudes to nonconformist religions reflect an admirable tolerance. In 2006 the Racial and Religious Hatred Act finally outlawed religious enmity. However, as non-Christian religions continue to grow in Britain, and with them the calls for the disestablishment of the Church of England, a sizeable minority might have to work harder at their liberalism. Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, caused uproar when he said the adoption of moderate, civil elements of Sharia Law would be 'unavoidable' in Britain as its Muslim population grew. Much of the bile that flew Dr Williams' way came from senior, conservative elements in the Anglican Church.

8.3 Unwritten rules: politics and the system of government

British political history is strewn with power struggles, the biggest being the transition of authority from monarchy and clergy to Parliament. Yet Britain has, in the main, avoided the bloodshed that characterised the emergence of other democracies. Instead, the processes of government derive from centuries of evolutionary adjustment. And so the constitution is uncoded: there is no single document to explain the balance of power, the roles of each branch of government or even the rights and liberties of a British citizen.

How does government in Britain work?

Britain is a liberal democracy. The monarch remains as head of state but the Prime Minister (PM) and other members of government hold the reins of power. So we can talk about a 'parliamentary sovereignty', whereby Parliament has the power to make or curtail laws. The legislative role is fulfilled by the bicameral Parliament, comprising the House of Commons and the House of Lords:

The **House of Commons'** 646 Members of Parliament (MPs), nearly all of whom belong to a political party, are elected by their local constituents in a general election at least once every five years. The party with the most constituency seats is invited to form a government, with party leader as Prime Minister (PM). As per the adversarial nature of British politics, the second placed party forms the Opposition. The PM forms the Cabinet, an executive of ministers to head up the various governmental departments, which meets weekly at Number 10 Downing Street, the

Proto parliament

The first English congress may have been the Model Parliament called by Edward I in 1295. Inclusive of bishops, abbots, earls, barons and the representatives of townspeople and shires alike, its primary function was raising taxes to fund war, although it did offer a forum for griping to the king.

"A BODY OF FIVE
HUNDRED MEN
CHOSEN AT
RANDOM FROM
AMONGST THE
UNEMPLOYED"

David Lloyd George on
the House of Lords.

The winner takes it all
To be elected to public
office in Britain a
candidate must simply
secure more votes than
their nearest rival – the
so-called First Past
The Post (FPTP) system.
They don't need an
overall majority of the
total votes cast.

First amongst equals
The role of Prime
Minister has evolved
over time. Traditionally
seen as *primus inter
pares* or 'first amongst
equals' – in other words,
no more senior than
other MPs – many
would concede that the
Prime Ministerial
persona is becoming
increasingly presidential.

Prime Minister's official residence. Periodically the
Prime Minister 'reshuffles' the Cabinet, sacking,
promoting or moving ministers. The Opposition,
meanwhile, form a Shadow Cabinet.

The **House of Lords**, around 750 strong, checks and
revises the laws proposed in the House of Commons.
Usually deemed more independent than the Commons
(peers (lords) are more inclined to ignore the party
whip; many aren't even aligned to a political party),
its members have a wider expertise. Although they
can delay legislation – possibly long enough to get it
withdrawn by the Government – peers don't have
the power of veto on proposed laws and they can't
approve Government taxation or spending. The House
of Commons, its Labour contingent in particular, has
pushed to modernise the House of Lords (and in some
votes, abolish it entirely – because most peers are
appointed rather than elected) throughout the last
century.

Bully boys

Each party in the Commons appoints
a **Chief Whip**, with the status of a
senior minister, and assistant whips.
They're charged with ensuring a
Government majority in House votes.
MPs are instructed by whips on when
to attend; a 'three-line whip' means
attendance is essential. Errant MPs

may have the whip withdrawn – the
equivalent of being expelled from the
party. The **Speaker** chairs the House of
Commons, deciding which MPs speak
when and ensuring the rules are
followed. The Speaker is chosen by
fellow MPs at the start of each new
Parliament or when a previous Speaker
retires or dies.

Prime Ministers you should have heard of

Robert Walpole (1721-42 Whig). Became Britain's first de facto Prime Minister, despite a brief spell in prison for corruption.

Benjamin Disraeli (1868 and 1874-80 Conservative). Britain's only Jewish PM was a close friend of Queen Victoria. Also wrote romantic novels.

William Ewart Gladstone (1868-74, 1880-85, 1886 and 1892-94 Liberal). Queen Victoria called Disraeli's bitter rival a "half-mad firebrand". He campaigned for social reform, Irish Home Rule and an ethical foreign policy.

David Lloyd George (1916-22 Liberal). The only Welsh PM thus far won his spurs as Chancellor, proposing a large tax hike for the landed classes to fund higher social spending.

Winston Churchill (1940-45 and 1951-5 Conservative). Voted 'Greatest Ever Briton' in a recent BBC poll, Churchill masterminded victory against Nazi Germany in the Second World War.

Margaret Thatcher (1979-90 Conservative). The 'Iron Lady', the first woman to lead Government, was the longest serving PM for 150 years. The grocer's daughter from Grantham privatised state industry, lowered taxes and reduced social spending.

"IF BRITAIN — ITS ECCENTRICITY, ITS BIG HEARTEDNESS, ITS STRENGTH OF CHARACTER — HAS TO BE SUMMED UP IN ONE PERSON, IT HAS TO BE WINSTON CHURCHILL"

Mo Mowlam MP

Bill hits the pavement
Even while serving as Prime Minister in the 1840s, William Gladstone would walk the streets of London trying to convince prostitutes to give up their work.



"IT WILL BE YEARS BEFORE A WOMAN EITHER LEADS THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OR BECOMES PRIME MINISTER. I DON'T SEE IT HAPPENING IN MY TIME."

Margaret Thatcher speaking in 1970

Nothing but outlaws and rebels

The Tories (who evolved into the Conservative party in the 1830s) first appeared in the 17th century as a group supporting James II's succession claim on the English throne. The word Tory probably derives from an Irish term for 'outlaw' (*toraidhe*), re-hashed and fired pejoratively at James and his Catholic cronies. In contrast, the Whigs (became the Liberal party in the 19th century) first formed in support of the lords and merchants who argued for Parliament in the face of royal dominance. They too probably took their name from a derisive term: *whiggamore*, a Scots word for 'rebel'.

Political parties: the big three

Labour. Established to represent the newly enfranchised working class in 1900, Labour remained the third party until 1945 when it won its first overall majority. After winning power in 1997, led by Tony Blair, New Labour dragged the party increasingly from the left to the centre.

Conservatives. Right-of-centre party that evolved from the Tories in 1834 when Robert Peel became leader. Thatcherism gave the party a clear, modern ideology based on free enterprise and private ownership, but they were blighted by scandal in the 1990s. David Cameron finally brought some semblance of unity to the party in the early 21st century.

Liberal Democrats. Born by merger of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Liberals (the old Whig party) in 1988. As the name suggests, a liberal party concerned with social justice and personal freedom. The only one of the big three to oppose war in Iraq, they're also the most pro-European. Consistently third in the political race.

Political parties: the other options

Scottish National Party (SNP). Founded in 1934 to press for an independent Scotland, and usually defined as moderately left of centre. They hold the biggest share of seats in the Scottish Parliament.

Plaid Cymru. Founded in 1925 to champion Welsh cultural and linguistic identity, not least by demanding independence. A historical link with the Green Party places the environment high on the Plaid Cymru agenda.

Green Party. First identifiable in 1973 and first known as the Green Party in 1985. Committed to environmental issues and the decentralisation of power but struggling to win seats in Parliament.

UK Independence Party (UKIP). Founded in 1993 on a campaign to withdraw Britain from the EU. Did well in the 2004 European elections but has since faltered, not least after a leadership debacle starring TV talkshow host Robert Kilroy-Silk.

British National Party. Far right, whites-only party. They took less than one per cent of the vote in the 2005 election, but usually fair better in local elections. Reviled by mainstream politicians, most of the press and a good proportion of the public.

Commons knowledge

The MP with the longest unbroken service in the House of Commons is referred to as 'Father of the House', or presumably 'Mother' should the situation ever arise.

The 2005 General Election placed 520 male and 126 female MPs in the House of Commons.

The average age of an MP after the last election was 50.6 years.

15 of the 646 MPs elected in the 2005 General Election came from ethnic minorities

Cornwall smells freedom
Some in Kernow
(Cornwall's Celtic name)
want autonomy. They've
got their own political
party, Mebyon Kernow
(Sons of Cornwall in
Cornish), pushing for
a Cornish assembly,
hoping to secure
recognition for their
region as a distinct
nation within the United
Kingdom. The flag of
Saint Piran, a white
cross on a black
background, plays a
highly visual role in the
push for independence.

Britain devolved

The Scottish Parliament

Almost 75 per cent of voters in Scotland said 'yes' to a national parliament in the 1997 referendum. The body, Scotland's first in 290 years, has significant law-making powers, controlling health, education and justice, although certain matters, notably foreign policy, are still governed by Westminster. The assembly features 129 members (MSPs), comprising 73 constituency members (all but two are also MPs in Westminster and therefore elected using the FPTP system) and 56 regional members (elected using the Additional Member System (AMS) of proportional representation). SNP members took most seats in the Parliament's formative years.



The Welsh Assembly

Wales voted for its own legislative body in 1997 with far less conviction than Scotland: only half the population turned out, and only 50.3 per cent of them voted 'yes'. It was deemed enough of a mandate to create the National Assembly for Wales. After a rather toothless start, in 2006 the Assembly gained legislative powers on devolved matters like health, education, social services and local government. The Assembly has 60 members, comprising 40 constituency representatives and 20 members of regional seats, the latter being elected like their Scottish equivalents through AMS. The first Welsh Assembly was dismissed after a vote of no confidence in February 2000, and its early years seem dogged by voter apathy.

The Northern Ireland Assembly

Northern Ireland gained a measure of autonomy much earlier on; the act of 1920 that established the province also made provision for a two-house legislature in Belfast. It stumbled to a final collapse in 1972 when the violence of the Troubles brought rule direct from Westminster under a Northern Ireland Secretary. All attempts to restore devolved government failed until 1998, when the Good Friday Agreement – endorsed by 70 per cent of the Northern Irish population via referendum – attempted to establish a power sharing assembly that would work for both Unionists and Nationalists. A false start or two later, the 108 member assembly now tentatively governs the province; the historic power sharing agreement between Sinn Féin (Nationalist) and the Democratic Unionist Party (Unionist) in 2007 (when previously they refused to even meet one another) has brought the chance of success.

The growth of green politics

After years in the shadows, environmental issues finally burn bright in British politics. The leaders of all three main parties now crow about their green credentials, while new policy is scrutinised for its environmental concern and legislation is adapted to the changing mood. So, 'gas guzzling' cars will be taxed more than small cars, while industry, commerce and the public sector are subject to the Climate Change levy, taxing their use of energy. Finding alternative energy sources has become a key issue; wind farms are being built and argued over (Britain still only produces two per cent of its total energy from renewable sources) but the biggest area of debate concerns nuclear power. In 2008 the Labour Government set the goal of an 80 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 (based on 1990 levels).

Do the British public actually care about politics?

The British don't vote as much as they used to – election turnout has been sliding for decades. In 2005 only 61 per cent of the voting population visited the polls in the General Election. But while there is an undeniable apathy for politics among the public, there is also considerable criticism when politicians fail to deliver. Occasionally, the involvement goes beyond simply grumbling on the sofa. Over a million people marched peacefully through London in 2003, urging then PM Tony Blair not to lead Britain into a war against Iraq. The fact that he did anyway and was re-elected just two years later (albeit with a greatly reduced majority), even after the fabled weapons of mass destruction failed to materialise and post-war Iraq descended into bloody chaos, hints at the primacy of home over foreign policy for most Brits, and also perhaps the weakness of the then Opposition.

Long since overtaken as the world's leading economy, and destined to be outpaced by the BRIMC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, Mexico and China) in the 21st century, the British economy, nevertheless, still punches well above its weight. Britain harbours less than one per cent of the world's population, yet remains sixth in the world rich list (measured by GDP at purchasing power parities) and accounts for over three per cent of world output. As individuals, the Brits are less well off. The heady days of the 1860s, when they had more money in their pockets than anyone else, are long gone; in 2007 the International Monetary Fund ranked Britain 28th for GDP per head.

How Britain grew wealthy

The Industrial Revolution made Britain rich, fed by the captive markets of a sprawling Empire and a large, new labour force at home. By the mid 19th century, Britain was by far the world's biggest producer of consumer goods and capital equipment. The major cities mushroomed around particular industries: Glasgow and Belfast had their shipbuilding; Newcastle its coal; Sheffield its steel; and, later, Birmingham and Coventry their automotive industries. The products were shipped around the globe from vast docks in London, Liverpool and Bristol. When manufacturing declined in the 20th century, the attendant industrial cities declined with it. Their reinvention in recent decades has enjoyed mixed success. Leeds and Manchester, former centres of the textile industry, have become a leading financial centre and mass provider of higher education respectively. Other cities, like Glasgow, Newcastle and Liverpool rely on heritage and culture for much of their modern verve.

Bully for Belfast

By the late 19th century Belfast was producing more linen than any other city in the world; people called it Linenopolis. It also had the largest shipyard anywhere, responsible for building giants like the Titanic. In addition, the city became the world's prime manufacturer of rope and oversaw the birth of air conditioning.

"SELLING OFF THE FAMILY SILVER"

Former PM
Harold Macmillan
describes the
privatisation
programme of the
1980s

The key institutions of the British economy

HM Treasury. The economic and financial arm of the British Government, presided over by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Bank of England (also referred to as the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street). Britain's central bank issues banknotes, sets the base interest rate and rescues troubled banks like Northern Rock.

The London Stock Exchange. Where shares are traded in Britain's largest companies. Dismissed by pre-eminent economist J.M. Keynes as a 'casino'.

Lloyd's of London. The major British insurance market, individual members of which are known as 'Names'.

Here to serve: the modern economy

It's well over a century since Britain was 'the workshop of the world'. A history of under investment and poor industrial relations (the 'British disease') has contributed to manufacturing's parlous long-term state. The slow decline of industry quickened in the Thatcherite 'service economy' revolution of the 1980s, establishing a distinctly post-industrial nation. Today, service industries employ 78 per cent of the British workforce and manufacturing 20 per cent; only two per cent now work in the primary sector. The modern powerhouses of the British economy are financial services, telecommunications, high-tech manufacturing, retail and a range of property-related services. Turn-of-the-21st century Britain enjoyed a sustained period of stability and growth, led by the property market where house prices tripled in a decade. However, the expansion began to falter in 2008 amid fall out from the US sub-prime market crisis and the subsequent global credit crunch. As Britain slumped into recession, commentators said the bust, after such a large, often reckless boom, was inevitable. As stock markets tumbled, confidence withered and lending fizzled out, the British banking system teetered on the edge of collapse: the Treasury responded with an unprecedented £500 billion rescue plan.

Filthy lucre

The British hold complex attitudes to wealth. Chasing money was deemed unwholesome until the 1980s, when entrepreneurship was encouraged and the nouveau riche grew¹; rich lists appeared in newspapers for the first time. But the line between admiration and scorn was, and still is, fine. Comedian Harry Enfield's Loadsamoney character successfully parodied the small businessman's lust for cash, while overt displays of wealth invoked hostility, however hard-earned the spoils. More recently, media glee as the dot.com bubble burst in 2000 reflected a rather British kind of envy. Public perception can be everything. If, like Richard Branson or Tom Hunter, you're adjudged a self-made success, most will admire your achievements, private jet and all. But if you're the director of a large, formerly nationalised company, you can expect to be called a 'fat cat' and generally loathed, however hard you've grafted.

The great divide

"It's grim up north," the saying goes. And while Harrogate, Chester, Edinburgh and other smart northern towns and cities contradict the cliché, northern England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have, nonetheless, been hit hardest by the decline of manufacturing. There are noticeable disparities of income between the four nations. English household incomes hover around two per cent above the average for Britain as a whole; Scotland's are around 5 per cent below, while incomes in Wales and Northern Ireland are up to 12 per cent beneath the average. The north-south divide in England provides sharper contrasts. The average disposable household income in London is almost 50 per cent higher than its northern equivalent. An even greater gulf exists in property prices: in 2008 the average property price in

The mogul model

Britain and the USA are home to the 'Anglo-Saxon model', in which markets and individuals play a greater role in the economy than governments. The entrepreneur is central to the model. The British Government has worked hard to cultivate an 'enterprise culture' in recent years, while TV shows like *Dragons' Den* have tapped into the get-rich-quick mentality. In reality, an inventor who also possesses business skills – in the mould of James Dyson (see more on Dyson in section 3.1.6) – is something of a rarity. Britain has a comparatively poor record of profiting from invention, and Richard Branson remains the only entrepreneur most Britons could name who also heads up a large organisation (Virgin). Managers rather than entrepreneurs run the vast majority of companies.

Haves and have nots

Britain is apparently now home to some half a million 'dollar millionaires'. Meanwhile, around one in five Brits are thought to live below the poverty line (in households where earnings are 60 per cent or less of the national average).

Tough choices

The NHS spends around £7 billion a year on treating the consequences of obesity and over £3 billion year on diseases caused by smoking and alcohol consumption. Debate rumbles about the morality of barring smokers and drinkers, and even the elderly, from certain treatments.

London was two and a half times that in the north. However, London traditionally has the highest level of unemployment in Britain, much higher than in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But again, the greatest disparities are within England, where the proportion of jobless is twice as high in the North East as in the South East.

Pensions, dole and healthcare: the welfare state

Britain faces the conundrum of an aging population: as the number of pensioners grows, the working folk supporting them shrinks. In response, an older pensionable age of 68 will be phased in over the next

three decades (up from 60 for women and 65 for men). Successive schemes, from personal equity plans to stakeholder pensions, have been introduced in a bid to wean Britons off their state pensions and onto private provision instead. However, deficits on many employers' pension funds and the mis-selling of endowment policies haven't convinced a sceptical public. Government attempts at reducing unemployment in recent years have been more successful, with the jobless halved from their mid 1980s high of three million. Redirecting unemployment benefit, or the Dole as it's commonly known, toward those genuinely looking for work has no doubt helped the figures. In 2008, Government plans to make the long-term unemployed work for their benefits were leaked.

Work and Pensions is the biggest spending Government department, but Health runs it a close second. The National Health Service (NHS), established in 1948, is a Soviet-style planned economy-within-an-economy, setting prices and rationing healthcare. It's vast, with over a million employees and an annual budget that exceeds £100 billion; a spend that matches the EU average of between nine and ten per cent of GDP. Some view the NHS as the crowning achievement of post-war Britain, others as an archaic monolith ripe for reform. 'Marketisation' has been attempted by contracting out support services and introducing consumer choice, self-governing trusts and 'foundation' super-hospitals. The NHS still accounts for over 90 per cent of healthcare provision, which is generally free at the point of use to everyone in the country. Both dental and optical care have largely opted out of the NHS.

8.5 Law and order: courts, prisons and the police

Legal differences: systems of law

England and Wales have a different legal system to Scotland. They employ a form of common law (referred to as 'English law' despite the shared status with Wales), controlled by judges and based on case precedent, whereby a ruling on one initial case sets the standard for subsequent trials. In Scotland, swayed by the Auld Alliance with France, a civil system operates – the laws are defined first and then applied to each case as appropriate. Even while the processes vary, the bulk of the law in Scotland, England and Wales is the same. Both make the same distinction between criminal cases (where an individual is prosecuted by the Government) and civil cases (in which one individual or organisation prosecutes another). Northern Ireland law uses a common law system very much like England's, albeit with a few procedural differences born of the region's unique political situation.

ASBOlutely fabulous

The ASBO (Anti-social Behaviour Order) was introduced in 1998 to deal with anyone disrupting neighbourhood calm with noise, vandalism and the like. It's a civil court injunction, each one tailored to the individual offender with a series of rules and restrictions. Breaching these terms amounts to a criminal offence. Critics have suggested that youngsters collect ASBOs like trophies. The term itself, ASBO, has become an oft-used piece of popular language.

Court orders

England, Wales and Northern Ireland:

Magistrates' Court. The lowest criminal court; for small offences and the initial hearing of larger crimes.

County Court. For civil cases like debt and divorce.

Crown Court. Criminal cases are tried by a judge and a jury of 12.

The High Court. Used for bigger civil cases and for hearing appeals from lower courts.

Court of Appeal. For appeals on judgments passed down in Crown, County or High Courts.

The House of Lords. The highest court in the country; presided over by the Lord Chancellor.

The worst kind of tree London used to hang its crims from the Tyburn Tree (not actually a tree but a three-legged gallows that allowed for mass hangings) every Monday. Over the centuries (the last death was in 1783), between 40,000 and 60,000 people were executed, roughly on the spot where Marble Arch stands today.

Court orders

Scotland:

District Court. Handles minor criminal offences, such as drunkenness.

Sheriff Court. Covers civil and criminal cases, tried either by a lone Sheriff or with a jury of 15.

Court of Session. The top level of civil court.

High Court of Justiciary. The top level criminal court.

The House of Lords. The last say goes to the Lord Chancellor and the Law Lords once more.

Don't believe the hype

If the statisticians are to be believed, overall crime in Britain has been falling steadily for more than a decade. You're less likely to be a victim than ever before. And yet, two-thirds of Brits actually think crime is rising on a national level (even while they feel it's falling locally). Youth crime and anti-social behaviour are perceived as particular problems. Media attention on gang culture and knife crime in inner city hotspots – where the stats do buck the national trend – instils a general (many would say, ungrounded) sense of panic. Confusion from the top down over how crime is recorded and how the figures are presented does little to encourage public confidence. In 2008 it emerged that several police forces had been recording crimes in the wrong categories, most notably under-recording the most serious violent crime. Out on the streets, the police find their fiercest critics in those inner city areas where crime is worst; in broader terms they remain relatively well regarded by the public. However, concerns persist about the authorities' failure to cope with a minority of young repeat offenders.

Jail debate

The British prison system is full to bursting. Back in 1993, there were 42,000 inmates; in 2008 the number hit 82,068 – that's 96 prisoners over the Prison Service's 'operational capacity'. Various long and short-term measures have been announced to combat the problem, from the temporary use of police cells for prisoners to encouraging foreign inmates to leave the country. Campaigners blame the growing prison population on politicians and their clamour to appear tough on crime.

Top of the cops

Aside from the regular bobbies on the beat, Britain also has:

British Transport Police. Responsible for the rail network (not to be confused with the traffic division of the regular police).

CID (Criminal Investigation Department). Plain clothes detectives with a responsibility for major criminal investigations.

Special Branch. Responsible for issues of national security.

Special Constabulary. The volunteer section of the regular police force.

Off the straight and narrow: five antiquated laws (that everyone ignores)

A pregnant woman is allowed to relieve herself anywhere she wants.

All swans belong to the Queen.

All males over the age of 14 must undertake two hours of longbow practice each week (to be supervised by a member of the local clergy).

It is illegal to be drunk in a pub.

Black cabs in London have to carry a bale of hay and a shovel (a vestige from their days as horse drawn carriages).

Crime time

The Great Train Robbery (1963). A London to Glasgow mail train was stopped and relieved of £2.6 million, much of which was never recovered. Gang members like Ronnie Biggs became household names.

The Moors Murders (1963-65). Five young people from the Manchester area, aged between ten and 17, were abducted, tortured and murdered; four were buried in shallow graves on Saddleworth Moor. The culprits, Ian Brady (still alive) and Myra Hindley (died in 2002), remain vilified.

The Yorkshire Ripper (1975-80). After killing 13 women and horrifically injuring several others, Peter Sutcliffe gave rise to the largest manhunt in British history. Eventually caught after he was stopped for displaying false car number plates, Sutcliffe claimed that God ordered the murders.

The House of Horror (1967-87). In 1994, police found a number of bodies buried in the garden and cellar of 25 Cromwell Street, Gloucester. Fred West was convicted of 12 counts of murder and his wife, Rose, of ten. The true death toll at the house is still unclear; witnesses relayed a disturbing story of prostitution, incest, rape and paedophilia.

Doctor Death (c.1974-98). Although Dr Harold Shipman, a GP from Hyde, Greater Manchester, was convicted of 15 murders, he may have killed as many as 250 patients. His 'MO' was to give a patient a lethal overdose, sign the death certificate and then edit medical records to show ill health.

0.6 Testing times: the education system

The education pages of the British broadsheets make for depressing reading. Chronic teacher shortages, catchment lotteries, exam board blunders, strikes, interminable testing, league table rows – education appears to lurch from one crisis to the next. The stats seem to back up the editorial: Britain is slipping down the international league tables in the key areas of maths, science and literacy. But are things really that bad? The pass rates for GCSE and A-levels rise every year ('dumbing down' cry critics; 'better teaching' respond teachers), class sizes are shrinking, school standards appear to have slowly risen in the last decade and Britain retains an enviable reputation for higher education. Above all, perhaps, the right to a free and full education remains a positive cornerstone of British life.

How are British children schooled?

Every child in Britain must brave full-time education between the ages of five and 16. Nine out of ten do so in the state school system; the remainder are educated at fee-paying schools or at home. Their experiences differ based on location and on whether they pass through 'maintained' or private education. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, state schools employ a broadly similar system based around the National Curriculum that aims for a balanced, consistent mode of learning across the board. A state school career is divided into four Key Stages (five if it runs into further education). Students are tested at the end of each Key Stage. The exams taken at seven and 11 are National Tests, or SATs (Standard Assessment Tasks) as they're commonly known (SATs tests for 14-year-olds were scrapped in 2008); at the end of the fourth Key Stage, usually aged 16, students sit GCSE exams (General Certificate of Secondary Education).

Are British children depressed?

In 2007 a United Nations Children's Fund report concluded that British school children were the unhappiest in the Western world. They cited a decline in social cohesion as the cause. Others pointed to the rigid system of targets and testing in British schools; they said it stressed kids out and contributed to anti-social behaviour.

Public perceptions

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, public schools, private schools and independent schools amount to the same thing: they're all privately funded. Technically, the term 'public school' only refers to the group of schools named in the Public Schools Act of 1868, but most British people couldn't tell you that. The confusing name dates from a time when new public schools offered the first alternative to private tutoring. In Scotland, as in the rest of the world, the terminology is reversed: a public school is a state-funded institution.

" THIS HOPELESSLY CUMBERSOME AND MONOLITHIC NATIONAL TESTING REGIME NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED TO THE SCRAP HEAP."

The National Association of Head Teachers on SAT tests

Timetables

The British school year, running from early September to mid July, is traditionally split into three terms, although some local authorities now operate six terms in order to achieve equity of term lengths. Students receive a two-week break at Christmas and at Easter, and a one-week 'half term' break in the middle of each term. The average school day runs from 8.30am to 3.30pm, although many schools vary their schedule to suit.

Then follows, at Key Stage Five, the option of A-levels in three to five subjects (studied in the sixth form – an extension of secondary school or a dedicated college), or more vocational forms of further education such as the GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification). In 2008 the Government introduced 15 diploma courses to further education, intended as an equivalent (and eventual replacement) to A-levels.

The National Curriculum doesn't apply in Scotland, where the distinction from English education has been maintained since the 1707 Act of Union. Instead, local authorities and headteachers, furnished with certain guidelines by the Scottish Executive's Education Department, take responsibility for the syllabus. At 16, pupils sit their Standard Grades, the equivalent of English and Welsh GCSEs, and then have the option of studying for Highers and Advanced Highers (equivalent to A-levels) between 16 and 18.

Britain's 2,000 or so fee-paying independent schools are free to set their own curriculum and their own rules. They can admit whomever they like and turn away whomever they don't. The Common Entrance Examination (CEE), taken at preparatory school (junior school) around the age of 13, decides who makes it into senior school. In common with the state system, most independent schools will test their 16-year-olds using GCSEs in England and Standard Grades in Scotland, although many are moving over to International GCSEs, considered more academically challenging. Some public schools, and even a few state schools, are testing their 18-year-olds using the International Baccalaureate (IB) system rather than A-levels.

How the schooling system breaks down

Nursery Freely available, non-compulsory pre-school education for three and four-year-olds.

Primary School The most common path through the state school system starts here, which takes pupils from four to 11.

Secondary School Secondary schools all teach children up to age 16. Some also provide further education.

Sixth Form College Teaching pupils between the ages of 16 and 18, but not found in Scotland.

Which school did you go to?

Education in Britain has an enduring duality. The gulf between the state and private sectors in terms of academic achievement (the latter routinely attains better grades), social makeup and cultural identity is wide. Chris Parry, chief executive of the Independent Schools Council, spoke recently in terms of a "sectarian divide". If you're British, the type of school you attended can carry a relevance throughout adulthood; prepare to be prejudged based on whether you attended the local comprehensive or boarded at Eton. The seven per cent of children attending an independent school are far more likely to attend university than their state school counterparts – Oxbridge still derives 40 per cent of its intake from private schools. Similarly, they'll find better paid jobs and achieve a higher standard of living. Although the 'old boys network' isn't as dominant in the upper echelons of British industry as it once was, there is still a sense that attending the right school can be very beneficial. On the downside, a certain cultural stigma – an inverted snobbery perhaps – can await the private school pupil out in the wider world.

The school inspectors State schools have experienced an unprecedented level of Government intervention over the last 30 years. The initiative which has had the greatest impact is probably the Ofsted visit. Every school in England receives a periodic Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) inspection. The resultant report helps determine a school's popularity, offering parents a measure of standards. A failing school can end up in 'special measures', whereby the local authority focuses resources on improvement. If that doesn't work, the school may close. Wales (Estyn), Scotland (HMIe) and Northern Ireland (ETI) have their own inspection bodies carrying out similar work.

We would if we could
A 2008 opinion poll revealed that 57 per cent of parents would choose to send their children to an independent school if they could afford to. The prime motivation was, as it always has been, 'a better standard of education'. However, the expectation of 'better discipline' was also a key motivation.

Breaking down language barriers
After years of underachievement, the Government is trying to improve the approach to modern languages in schools. Traditionally, few children were taught a second language at primary school but the proportion had leapt to 70 per cent by 2007. Alas, modern languages remain optional from the age of 14, and with 50 per cent of students opting out, the system appears in disarray. In Wales, Welsh language lessons are compulsory throughout the school system at all ages. At primary level, a quarter of all Welsh schools use the native language as the sole or prime mode of instruction.

Doing the honours: university education

Britain has some of the most prestigious universities in the world. Oxford and Cambridge in England and St Andrew's in Scotland are, in that order, the three oldest in the English-speaking world. They fall among the elite clique of 'Ancient' universities. Another group, the 'Redbricks' were built in the Victorian era, with Manchester and Birmingham among their number; and a third, the 'Plateglass' universities, including York, Lancaster and East Anglia, date from the 1960s. In truth, such terms are rarely applied today. A fourth group were originally called polytechnics but gained university status in 1992 amid the late 20th century drive toward mass higher education. Gradually, the mild stigma attached to attending an old 'poly' rather than a traditional university is fading.

A little under half of A-level and Highers students go on to attend university. Initially they study for a Bachelor's degree (with the option of adding 'honours'), graded as first class, upper second class (2:1), lower second class (2:2), third class or fail. Debate has been rumbling for some time about whether or not to scrap this 220-year-old classification system, and a radical revamp looks inevitable. Scottish honours degrees usually run over four years, and those in England and Wales over three. Students at Scottish universities who attended a Scottish secondary school are exempt from the tuition fees which, at up to £3,000 per year, see students at English, Welsh and Northern Irish universities graduate (or drop out) laden with debt.

8.7 Time out: holidays, festivals and free time

On holiday with the Brits

The cherished, annual week in the sun has become a birthright for most Brits. Today, the most popular destination is Spain; Britons made the trip 17 million times in 2007. France comes next. Alas, the great British seaside holiday isn't what it was. Or perhaps, more accurately, it's exactly what it was, which is why most tourists have moved on. The gushing migration to Southend-on-Sea, Blackpool, Bognor, Scarborough and the other historic seaside resorts each summer has slowed to a trickle. The practice lasted a century, initiated in the Victorian era by the growth of the railways offering factory workers an escape on their days off. Piers, pleasure beaches, donkey rides, Punch and Judy, fish and chips: it became a very formulaic cultural experience.

In 1936, entrepreneur Billy Butlin opened his first holiday camp in Skegness, cutting the template of prefab chalets, knobbly knee competitions and variety acts that would host so many post-war working-class summers. And so it went until the 1960s when holidaymakers swapped Britain for the Med, lured by cheap package deals. Air travel has pushed British holidaymakers around the globe and the recent budget flights boom has made the Continent as popular as ever. However, as fuel prices and environmental awareness grow, so do the optimistic calls for reviving the English seaside resort. In truth, Britons are more likely to venture into the native countryside – to the Lake District, the Mourne Mountains and the Scottish Highlands.

What goes on tour stays on tour... apart from the architecture
Back in the 17th and 18th centuries, any young aristocrat worth their stockings would take a year or two out for the Grand Tour. It was a cultural safari; a trip that took in the architecture and art treasures of Paris, Venice and Rome. Some made it as far as the Balkans and Germany. They drank, gambled and philandered, but essentially they were there for intellectual stimulation. Indeed, the knowledge acquired on the Tour circuit is often credited with improving British art and architecture, notably in its taste for classical design. The French Revolution and the arrival of the railways sounded the death knell.

Away days

The statutory minimum leave in Britain is 24 days a year for full-timers, although many get more. An additional eight days (nine in Scotland and ten in Northern Ireland) are set aside for public holidays: six of them are 'bank holidays', two (Christmas Day and Good Friday) are known as

Drink and disorderly

Most foreign destinations welcome British tourists with their deep pockets and taste for foreign culture. However, some Mediterranean resorts like Corfu, Ibiza and Cyprus are getting fed up with a certain type of Brit – the boozed-up type. In essence, it's the mood of the British high street on a Saturday night, played out in a warmer climate, nightly, till five in the morning. In 2007, one in 4,000 British tourists in Cyprus was arrested; compared to one in 100,000 in France and Italy. Abusive, drunken behaviour was usually the cause. On stag and hen parties the malaise creeps east. The authorities in Prague, in particular, report a disproportionate number of British visitors getting arrested, being hospitalised or losing their passport.

'BUGGER BOGNOR'

The last words of King George V, who was advised by his physician to recuperate at the seaside resort

'common law' holidays. Some employers insist on their faithful absorbing bank holidays into annual leave. It was a banker, Sir John Lubbock, also an MP, who successfully put the bill for bank holidays to Parliament in 1871. They were so called because bills of exchange due for payment on the days in question, when the banks closed, could be delayed till the following business day. Today, the banks are about the only things guaranteed to close – shops, restaurants, stately homes and so on usually work on through. British public holidays don't all – as they do elsewhere in the world – celebrate national heroes or crushing military victories. Instead, they're a somewhat haphazard mix:

New Year's Day (or in lieu of 1st Jan). Because everyone needs a day to recover from New Year's Eve.

2nd January (or in lieu of 2nd Jan). In Scotland only: they need two days to recover.

St Patrick's Day. Northern Ireland alone enjoys a day off on 17th March.

Good Friday. The Friday before Easter Sunday, marking the Crucifixion.

Easter Monday. The day after Easter Sunday, in Wales and England only.

May Day: Of confused Pagan and Labour Day origin, taken on the first Monday in May.

Spring bank holiday. The last Monday in May lost its Whit Monday label in 1971.

Orangemen's Day. On 12th July Northern Ireland gets another day off, this one marking a win for William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

Summer bank holiday. Falls on the first Monday in August in Scotland, and on the last in England.

St Andrew's Day. In Scotland only: their patron saint has only afforded the 30th November off work since 2007.

Christmas Day (or in lieu of 25th Dec). Pubs serve lunch and petrol station tills still ring, but nearly everyone else has the day off.

Boxing Day (or in lieu of 26th Dec). Named for the (now defunct) tradition of giving presents to the poor.

Organised fun: fetes and festivals

The likelihood of persistent drizzle doesn't stop Britain stuffing a raft of outdoor festivals into the calendar. At their heart lies the humble village fete, the colourful jamboree of cake stalls, tombolas (the mildest of gambling in which contestants vie for tinned carrots, alcopops and so on), coconut shies and morris dancers that pulls Britain back to the 1950s, to an allegedly simpler time. In truth, the multicultural madness of the Notting Hill Carnival or loud revelry of Edinburgh's New Year Hogmanay celebrations are more representative of modern British culture. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all acknowledge their national saints: St Andrew (30th November – shared with Russia, Romania, Greece and Sicily), St David (1st March – shared with vegetarians and poets) and St Patrick (17th March – shared with Nigerians and engineers) respectively, with festivals. Scotland celebrates with music, dance and a wee dram or two; in Wales they hold parades, sing and wear a daffodil or leek (both national emblems) on the lapel; and in Northern Ireland the parades in honour of St Patrick reach their height in Downpatrick, where some think the saint was buried (clue's in the name). England's saint, St George (shared with Catalonia, Portugal, Georgia, Serbia, Lebanon and others), enjoys little in the way of an organised party on his national day, 23rd April, despite a vigorous campaign lobbying for some kind of recognition. These days the English are more likely to raise a glass to St Patrick.

Banks cash in their holiday
The Bank of England used to close on around 40 saints' days and anniversaries each year. In 1830 the number was reduced to 18, and then, four years later, was slashed to just four: Good Friday, May Day, 1st November and Christmas Day.

For the love of David, just give us the day off
A 2006 poll revealed that two-thirds of Welsh people would sacrifice an established bank holiday if St David's Day were declared a national day off. A year later, Tony Blair rebuffed a petition demanding as much.

I'm not desperate but...

As the clock struck midnight on 29th November, heralding St Andrew's Day, lassies in Scotland traditionally began praying for a husband. Various practices were used to heighten their chances of bagging a bloke. Some would throw a shoe at a door; if the toe pointed toward the exit, she'd be married and out of the parent's home within a year. Others threw apple peel over the shoulder, looking to see if the peel formed a letter, hinting at the name of their future mate.

Victory for the village fete

When Yvonne Cole fell in a hole left by a maypole after a village fete in East Sussex, she lodged a £150,000 damages claim against the charity that organised the event. But her claim was dismissed on appeal. One judge expressed concern that if claims like Ms Cole's were successful, "There would be no fetes, no maypole dancing and no activities that have come to be a part of the English village green for fear of what might go wrong."

Only in Britain...

Cheese Rolling Race. Brockworth (Gloucestershire); May.

Man versus Horse Marathon. Llanwrtyd Wells (Mid Wales); June.

World Snail Racing Championships. Congham (Norfolk); July.

Bognor Regis International Birdman Competition. Bognor (Sussex); July.

Biggest Liar in the World Competition. Stanton Bridge (Cumbria); November.

Killing time before the pub opens

The weird public and private habits of the average Brit, from trainspotting to taxidermy, are well documented. However, the truth about spare time is usually less offbeat. The most popular leisure activity in Britain is watching TV or listening to music, consuming around two and a half hours daily, double the 'quality time' spent with family and friends. But don't write the Brits off as sofa slobs; they're equally at home sabotaging domestic decor with bouts of DIY (do it yourself) or pottering around in the garden. Walking, cycling and trips to the gym get the British blood pumping, but the most popular leisure activity outside the home is a trip to the pub.

Common cause: days when British people will be doing the same things

Christmas. Celebrated on the 25th December, with a week's build up and fallout either side. The one time of the year pretty much guaranteed to generate a family gathering. Most swap presents in the morning, some go to church and nearly all enjoy an epic dinner.

New Year's Eve. Almost universally celebrated with a party leading to the countdown at midnight on 31st January, when the inebriated form a circle and sing *Auld Lang Syne*, the song whose Scots ancestry hints at the import of New Year (Hogmanay) north of the border.

St Valentine's Day. As elsewhere, a day of romance on 14th February, when cards are sent to woo, sometimes anonymously. With flowers, chocolates and fancy underwear involved, St Valentine's Day breaks free of the typical British reserve.

Shrove Tuesday. The final day before Lent allows for a blow out on pancakes, traditionally consumed to use up staple foodstuffs like egg, milk and sugar. Villagers run through the streets with frying pan in hand for pancake races. A few towns still play Shrove Tuesday Football, a fairly lawless, mob version of the beautiful game dating to the 12th century.

Easter. Perhaps the most enduringly reverent date in the British calendar. Children receive chocolate eggs on Easter Sunday – the origins of which probably lie in Pagan spring rites – and bakers cook up hot cross buns.

Halloween. Originally a Celtic rite marking the start of winter, the eve of All Saints' Day, 31st October, used to bring the dead back to life. These days it brings children in batman outfits to the door demanding sweets (derived from the British 'Mischief Night' not, as many suppose, from American traditions).

Bonfire Night. Fires are lit, fireworks let off and toffee chewed in celebration of the Catholic Guido Fawkes and his attempt to blow up Parliament on November 5th 1605. Alas, the tradition of making a straw-filled 'Guy' dressed in your dad's best cheesecloth shirt, and dragging it around the neighbourhood to the call of 'Penny for the Guy' seems to be fading. For obvious reasons, the Guy Fawkes tradition gets less attention in Northern Ireland.

Burning issues

Bonfire Night and Halloween have become clearly defined in modern Britain – one's about warding off evil spirits the other's about a Catholic plot to blow up Parliament. But both, it seems, share ancient Pagan origins tied to the Celtic festival of Samhain, an event that traditionally marked the start of winter. Evil spirits were sent packing with bonfires, ghoulish masks and the occasional human sacrifice.

'PING PONG IS
COMING HOME'
London Mayor Boris
Johnson looks forward
to the London 2012
Olympics

What role does sport play in British life?

Sport has been a key ingredient of British life for generations. It's enjoyed as a rare, indiscriminating mode of mass entertainment – a 'great leveller' in the words of any pundit worth their keep. Everyone from labourer to lord is likely to have an opinion on, for example, Chelsea's title hopes this year. For the British male, in particular, it's the default conversation starter, while sporting success – from a rare Ashes victory in the cricket to Andy Murray reaching the latter stages of Wimbledon – will knock 'real' news off the front page. The fact that many of the major global sports (football, rugby, rowing, baseball, tennis etc) were first played or codified on British soil no doubt helped establish the passion, even while the rest of the world now repeatedly beats the British at their own games. Wearing 'your' team colours has become important as an expression of allegiance and identity. In many sports, notably football and rugby, it brings the chance for English, Scots, Northern Irish and Welsh fans to assert their national pride; to recall the differences that once caused bloodshed. Any call for the national football teams to merge into a single British side – in the way that other sports do for the Olympics – always meets howls of protest.

As for participation, around half the British regularly undertake some form of exercise, from tennis to hang-gliding to fencing and jogging. The other half causes concern as obesity levels rise, particularly amongst children. As the average British lifestyle enjoys ever closer ties with the sofa, booze and bad food, and the NHS groans under the strain of the related health issues, exercise and sport are climbing up the political agenda after years of neglect. National Lottery funding is helping the drive toward better 'grass roots' facilities, although the 2012 London Olympics have commandeered sizeable chunks of the available cash.

Compulsive viewing: the main British sports

Football. The rules of Association Football (always call it football, never 'soccer', if you want to be taken seriously), the national sport of England and Scotland, were invented in Cambridge. Today, England and Wales share four tiers of professional football. The top flight, the English Premier League, is the richest – and some claim the best – league in the world. The 'Big Four' clubs of the 20 involved – Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool and Manchester United – are global brands whose players can earn over £150,000 a week. The Championship, League One and League Two, comprise the other divisions (collectively called the Football League) between which promotion and relegation occurs at the end of each season. The gulf in form, money and crowd sizes between the top of the Premier League and the foot of League Two is huge and, to the consternation of many, grows annually. Scotland, with a similar four division set up, has an even greater cleft between top and bottom. The FA Cup is the top club competition in England; Scotland has its equivalent.

Rugby. Named after Rugby School, Warwickshire, where the original game was probably invented, rugby is split into two codes: league and union. The latter is Wales' national sport, and also widely popular in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. At club level, England has its Premiership, while Scottish, Welsh and Irish clubs play each other in a Celtic league. Club rugby union has grown in strength since turning professional in 1995, but for many fans the season's focus lands on the Six Nations tournament, played out during February and March between the home nations (Ireland comprises players from both Northern Ireland and the Republic), France and Italy. England enjoyed a rare national sporting success with their victory in the 2003 Rugby Union World Cup. Rugby league, union's breakaway cousin,

An end to the English disease?
British football fans had a nasty reputation in the 1970s and 80s. Hooliganism (or the 'English disease' as pundits so often said) was endemic, and the big clubs each had their 'firm' of bad lads. Two events brought the situation to a head. When Liverpool hooligans charged opposing supporters in the 1985 European Cup final at Heysel Stadium in Brussels, a wall collapsed killing 39 Juventus fans. Four years later, 96 Liverpool fans died, crushed against a high fence built to combat crowd trouble. Their deaths sparked the Taylor Report that ultimately introduced all-seating stadia to English football and helped bring the bad times to an end. Today, in its top tiers at least, British football has become a family game with an inclusive, anti-racist ethos. Some, no doubt nostalgic for the terraces, complain that it's gone too far toward a sanitised, 'corporate' experience.

Where eagles dare
The British love an underdog. When Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards, a plasterer from Cheltenham, entered the ski-jumping contest at the 1988 Winter Olympics he became a legend overnight. Britain's self-funded sole entrant weighed in some 9kg heavier than any other competitor; the Italian media called him a 'ski-dropper'. He enjoyed brief global stardom, despite finishing last, even enjoying a short career as a Finnish-language pop sensation.

finds most of its clubs and supporters in northern England. League teams are comprised of 13 players, two less than union.

Cricket. Unfathomable to many, Brits included, cricket is a complex game played out over a brief, rain-affected summer season. The first-class domestic game features 18 county sides (17 English and one Welsh) split into two divisions. It has its diehard fans but most county cricket is poorly attended, eclipsed by the five-day Test matches that see England play throughout much of the summer against former British colonies including Australia, India and the West Indies. One day cricket and, more recently, Twenty20 cricket (in which each side bats for 20 overs) have brought new fans to the game.

The great events of British sport

The FA Cup Final. The finale of the most famous (and longest running) domestic cup in the footballing world takes place in May at Wembley Stadium, London.

The Grand National. The one day of the year when most Brits take an interest in horse racing. Aintree, near Liverpool, stages the richest National Hunt race in the world in early April.

The Boat Race. The rowing clubs of Oxford and Cambridge Universities have raced each other along the Thames each spring since 1829.

The Ashes. Biennial cricket test series between England and Australia, named after Australia won on English soil for the first time in 1882 and a newspaper announced the death of English cricket: "the body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia".

London Marathon. Held in the capital in April since 1981, the course starts in Blackheath and finishes on The Mall. Around 35,000 runners take the pain.

Wimbledon. The most prestigious fortnight in world tennis unfurls in early summer in south-west London at the All England Club. If only Britain could produce a winner...

The Open. Britain's premier golf tournament, held in July, moves around nine links courses in England and Scotland. St Andrews, home of golf, is the most regularly visited.

Five sporting legends

Gareth Edwards. The greatest Welsh rugby union player, and among the best the sport has ever seen, played at scrum half for Cardiff during the 1960s and 70s and won 53 international caps. In 1973 he scored what many regard as the greatest try of all time in a Barbarians match against New Zealand.

Jim Clark. Not the best-known Brit to drive a Formula One car but surely the most talented. Clark, of Scottish farming stock, won a third of the 75 Grands Prix he contested in the 1960s and took the Driver's World Championship twice. Died on the Hockenheimring, aged 32.

Stephen Redgrave. Britain's greatest Olympian won a gold medal in rowing at five consecutive Olympic games (1984-2000), a feat only equalled by four other athletes and bettered by just one. Steve was knighted for his trouble.

Bobby Moore. Captained England to their first (and only) football World Cup win in 1966, and with 108 appearances still holds the record for most caps by an outfield player. Moore spent most of his career at West Ham United, playing in the centre of defence.

Ian Botham. The best all-rounder of modern English cricket beat the Aussies virtually single-handed in 1981 – duly dubbed 'Botham's Ashes' – and went on to become the nation's leading wicket taker. The Botham fable was fuelled by an off field irreverence; he was briefly banned from the game for smoking marijuana.

Logs, nuts and pants: the alternative Brit sports

Tossing the caber.

The best-known event in the Highland Games, the regular festivals of sport, dance and bagpipery held in Scotland, involves throwing a slender pine tree trunk in the air. It's not about how far you toss but how close your pole lands to the 12 o'clock position.

Cumbrian wrestling.

Practiced by burly men in saggy pants, stockings and a vest in England's north-western corner. You begin with your chin on the opponent's shoulder, hands clasped around their back, and try to finish by flinging them to the floor. Has its equivalents in Scotland, Lancashire and the West Country.

Conkers. A conker (horse chestnut) is pierced and threaded with a lace, and then swung at an opponent's similarly prepped nut with the intent of smashing it. The World Conker Championships are held in Ashton, a Northamptonshire village, each October. Soaking in vinegar or baking in the oven for added durability is simply bad form.

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