**BRITISH STUDIES**

**UNIT ONE**

**THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE**

**What exactly is Britain? And who are the British?**

Lying off the north-west coast of Europe, there are two large islands and hundreds of much smaller ones. The largest island is called Great Britain. The other large one is called Ireland. There is no agreement about what to call all of them together.

In this geographical area are two states. One of these governs most of the island of Ireland. This state is called the Republic of Ireland. It is also called ‘Eire’ (its Irish language name).Informally it is referred to as just ‘Ireland’ or the ‘Republic’.

The other state has authority over the rest of the area (the whole of Great Britain, the north-eastern area of Ireland and most of the smaller islands. Its official name is **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.**It is usually known by a shorter name, for instance, it is referred to as ‘the United Kingdom’. In everyday speech, this is often shortened to ‘the UK’ and in internet and email addresses it is ‘.uk’. In other contexts, it is referred to as ‘Great Britain’ or ‘Britain’.

* The adjective ‘great’ in the name Great Britain was first used to distinguish it from the smaller area in France which is called ‘Brittany’ in modern English.
* During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the islands were generally called ‘The British Isles’. But most people in Ireland and some people in Britain regard this name as outdated because it calls to mind the time when Ireland was politically dominated by Britain. The most common tern at present is ‘Great Britain and Ireland’.
* **Albion**is a word used by poets and songwriters to refer to England or Great Britain as a whole. It comes from a Celtic word and was an early Greek and Roman name for Great Britain. The Romans associated Great Britain with Latin word ‘albus’, meaning white. The white chalk cliffs around Dover on the English south coast are the first land formations one sights when crossing the sea from the European mainland. In Britain, Albion is associated with English aspirations and high sentiment.
* **Britannia**is the name that the Romans gave to their southern British province (which covered, approximately, the area of present-day England and Wales). It is also the name given to the embodiment of Britain, always shown wearing a helmet and holding a trident (the symbol of power over the sea). The figure of Britannia has been on the reverse side of many British coins for more than 300 years. The song ‘Rule Britannia’ became a focus for patriotism when sung annually at the Last Night of the Proms summer concert at the Royal Albert Hall.

When Britain first, at heaven’s command,

Arose from out the azure main,

This was the charter of the land,

And guardian angels sung this strain:

‘Rule Britannia, rule the waves;

Britons never will be slaves’.

* **Briton**is a word used in official contexts and in writing to describe a citizen of the United Kingdom.. ‘Ancient Britons’ is the name given to the people who lived in southern Britain before and during the Roman occupation (AD 43-410).
* **Caledonia, Cambria**and**Hibernia**were the Roman names for Scotland, Wales and Ireland respectively.

**THE FOUR NATIONS**

People often refer to Britain by another name. They call it ‘England’, but this is not correct. England is only one of the four nations living there. The others are Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Their political unification was a gradual process that took several hundred years. It was completed in1800 when the Irish parliament was joined with the parliament for England, Scotland, and Wales in Westminster, so that the whole area became a single state – the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. However, in 1922, most of Ireland became a separate state.

At one time, culture and lifestyle varied enormously across the four nations. The dominant culture of people in Ireland, Wales and Highland Scotland was Celtic; that of people in England and Lowland Scotland was Germanic. This difference was reflected in the languages they spoke. People in the Celtic areas spoke Celtic languages; peoples in the Germanic arrears spoke Germanic dialects (including the one which has developed into modern English).

Today, these differences have become blurred, but they have not completely disappeared. Many aspects of government are organized separately (and sometimes differently) in the four parts of the United Kingdom. Moreover, Welsh, Scottish and Irish people feel their identity very strongly.

It cannot be denied that the dominant culture of Britain today is specifically English. The system of politics that is used in all four nations today is of English origin, and English is the main language of all four nations. Many aspects of everyday life are organized according to English custom and practice.

Today, English domination can be detected in the way in which various aspects of British public life are described. For example, the supply of money in Britain is controlled by the Bank of England (there is no such thing as a ‘Bank of Britain’). The common use of the term ‘Anglo’ is a further indication. (The Angles were a Germanic tribe who settled in England in the fifth century. The word England is derived from their name.) When newspapers and the television news talk about ‘Anglo-American relations’, they are talking about relations between the governments of Britain and the USA.

* Another image of cultural and symbolic significance is that of **JohnBull**: a stubborn, kindly and affable but blustering farmer, who is supposed to personify Englishness and certain English virtues. He is like a bulldog in appearance and temperament. John Bull, with his top hat, his comfortable clothes, the substantial stomach, and his substantial balance at the bank, evokes an idyllic rural past.
* **The Union flag,**often known as the ‘Union Jack’, is the national flag of the UK. It is a combination of the cross of St. George, the cross of St. Andrew and the cross of St. Patrick. It can be said that while the Union Jack can be seen flying at international conferences and decorating lapel badges, it is often used today as a design for T-shirts, a pattern for dyed hair. In other words, along with other traditional symbols of England and Britain, such as John Bull, Albion and Britannia, it is used as a sigh of solidarity against others. Britons have always defined themselves as an island people whose singularity and separateness is illustrated by the channel of water dividing them from the Continent.
* *Other tokens of national identity:***Surnames**and**First names**
  + - The prefix ‘Mac’ or ‘Mc’ (such as McCall, MacCarty, MacDonald) is Scottish or Irish. The prefix ‘O’ (as in O’Brien, O’Connor) is Irish. A large number of surnames (for example, Evans, Jones, Morgan, Price, Williams) suggest Welsh origin. The most common surname in both England and Scotland is ‘Smith’.
    - The Scottish of ‘John’ is Ian and its Irish form is ‘Sean’, although all three names are common throughout of Britain.
    - **Clothes.**The kilt, a skirt with a tartan pattern worn by men, is a very well-known symbol of Scottishness (though it is hardly ever worn in everyday life).
    - **Musical instruments.**The harp is an emblem of both Wales and Ireland. Bagpipes are regarded as distinctively Scottish, although a smaller type is also used in traditional Irish music.

There are certain stereotypes of national character which are well known in Britain. For instance, the Irish are supposed to be great talkers, the Scots have a reputation for being careful with money and the Welsh are renowned for their singing ability. These are, of course, only caricatures and not reliable descriptions of individual people from these countries. Nevertheless, they indicated some slight differences in the value attached to certain kinds of behaviour in these countries.

***A HOLIDAY IN GREAT BRITAIN***

*A man was spending his holidays in England and one day he was invited for tea with an English family. He found that his tea was not sweet enough, and he told the hostess about it. The latter pointed to the sugar bowl and said – “Help yourself”.*

*Then the man went to Wales. He happened to be at a tea party with a Welsh family and found his tea was not sweet enough. When he remarked on this to the hostess she thought for a moment and then said – “Could you please pass me your cup and I’ll sweeten it for you.”*

*Towards the end of his holiday the fellow went to Scotland and one day he happened to be having tea at the house of a Scottish friend of his, and, what a funny coincidence! Again his tea was not sweet enough. He addressed Mrs Mc Something-or-other in the following way –“Excuse me, my tea isn’t sweet enough”. – The hostess looked at him suspiciously and asked – “Are you sure you’ve stirred your tea properly?”*

About one in nine people identified themselves as something other than ‘white British’. The largest category is ‘white other’, these people are from a variety of places and they do not form a single identifiable community. By far the largest recognizable ethnic grouping was formed by people whose ethnic roots are in the Indian subcontinent (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), together they made up more then two million people. The other established, recognizable ethnic group in Britain is black Caribbeans (a little over half a million people). In the years 2004-2007 between three quarters of a million and one million people came to Britain from Eastern Europe (especially Poland). Their numbers represent the largest single wave of immigration to Britain in more than 300 years.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the names the country is referred to?
2. People of what nations are living on the islands?
3. What are the symbols and tokens of the nationalities, living in Britain?
4. What stereotypes of national character are known in Britain?
5. What culture is dominant in Britain?
6. What are some of the differences in culture and lifestyle across Britain? What is their origin?

**UNIT TWO**

**GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE**

It has been claimed that the British love of compromise is the result of the country’s physical geography. This may or may not be true, but it is certainly true that the land and climate in Britain have a notable lack of extremes. Britain has mountains, but none of them are very high; it also has flat land, but you cannot travel far without encountering hills; it has no really big rivers; it doesn’t usually get very cold in the winter or very hot in the summer.

The climate in Britain is more or less the same as that of the north-western part of the European mainland. The popular belief that it rains all the time in Britain is simply not true. The image of a wet, foggy land was created two thousand years ago by the invading Romans and was perpetuated in the twentieth century by Hollywood. In fact, London gets no more rain in a year than most other major European cities, and less than some.

Annual total precipitation (rainfall or snow) in some European cities:

Milan - 1000 mm

Rome - 750 mm

Lisbon – 700 mm

Moscow – 650 mm

Madrid – 450 mm

Athens – 400 mm

Why has Britain’s climate got such a bad reputation? Perhaps it is for the same reason that British people always seem to be talking about the weather. That is its changeability. There is a saying that Britain doesn’t have a climate, it only has weather. It may not rain very much altogether, but you can never be sure of a dry day; there can be cool (even cold) days in July and some quite warm days in January.

The lack of extremes is the reason why, on the few occasions when it gets genuinely hot or freezing cold, the country seems to be totally unprepared for it. A bit of snow or a few days of frost and the trains stop working and roads are blocked; if the thermometer goes above 80˚F (27˚C), people behave as if they were in the Sahara and the temperature makes front-page headlines.

On 10 August 2003, a temperature of 37.9˚C (100.2˚F) was recorded at Heathrow airport just outside London. It was the first time in British history that the temperature had passed the 100˚F mark. Since that day, temperatures of more than 100˚F have been recorded several times in several different places in Britain. People have become generally aware of climate change. In Britain there seem to be three trends (1) like the rest of Europe, temperatures are generally rising; (2) the difference between the warmer, drier south-east and the cooler, wetter north-west is becoming more pronounced; (3) extreme weather conditions are becoming more frequent.

Britain has neither towering mountain ranges nor impressive large rivers, plains or forests. What it lacks in grandeur it makes up for in variety. The scenery changes noticeably over quite short distances. Overall, the south and east of the country are comparatively low-lying, consisting of either flat plains or gently rolling hills. Mountainous areas are found only in the north and west.

**HUMAN INFLUENCE**

Human influence has been extensive. The forests that once covered the land have largely disappeared. Britain has a greater proportion of grassland than any other country in Europe except Ireland.

It was in Britain that the word ‘**smog’**(a mixture of smoke and fog) was first used. As the world’s first industrialized country, its cities were the first to suffer this atmospheric condition. In the nineteenth century, London’s pea-soupers’ (thick fogs) became famous through descriptions of them in the works of Charles Dickens and in the Sherlock Homes stories. The situation in London reached its worst point in 1952. At the end of that year a particularly bad smog, which lasted for several days, was estimated to have caused between 4,000 and 8,000 deaths.

Then, during the 1960s and 1970s, laws were passed which forbade the heating of homes with open coal fires and which stopped much of the pollution from factories. At one time, a scene of fog in a Hollywood film was all that was necessary to symbolize London. This image is now out of date, and by the 1970s it was said to be possible to catch fish in the Thames outside Parliament.

Some people worry that Britain’s sovereignty is in danger from the European Union and from Scottish and Welsh independence movements. But what is certainly true is that Britain itself – the island – is in very real danger from the sea. For one thing, global warming means rising sea levels everywhere, so that low-lying coastal areas are threatened. For another, the Atlantic waves which hit Britain’s north, west and south coasts are getting taller. This means they have more energy than before – energy with which to strip sand from beaches, undermine cliffs and damage coastal defences. Finally, the east coast, although safe from those Atlantic waves, is actually sinking anyway. Every year, little bits of it of it vanish into the North Sea. Sometimes the land slips away slowly. But at other times it slips away very dramatically (as when in 1992 the guests of the Holbeck hotel, built of a clifftop near Scarborough, had to leave their rooms in a hurry; the cliff was collapsing into the sea – and so was their hotel).

London is in special danger because it is also vulnerable to flooding through tidal surges along the River Thames. In 1953 a tidal surge killed 300 people in the Thames Estuary to the east of London. Realization of the scale of the disaster that would have been caused if this surge had reached London provoked the construction of the Thames Barrier, completed in 1983. Since then, it has been used to protect London from flooding an average of three times every year. It is widely thought that the barrier will soon be inadequate. New defences are being considered.

**THE LOVE OF NATURE**

Much of the land is used for human habitation. Partly because of their habitual concern for privacy and their love of the countryside, the English and the Welsh don’t like living in blocks of flats in city centres and the proportion of people who do so is lower than in continental European countries. As a result, cities in England and Wales have, wherever possible, been built outwards rather than upwards.

Most of the British live in towns and cities. But they have an idealized vision of the countryside. To the British, the countryside has almost none of the negative associations which it has in some countries, such as poor facilities, lack of educational opportunities, unemployment and poverty. To them, the countryside means peace and quiet, beauty, health, and no crime. Having a house ‘in the country’ carries prestige. Most of them would live in a country village if they thought they could find a way of earning a living there. Ideally, this village would consist of thatched cottages built around an area known as the ‘village green’. Nearby there would be a pond with ducks on it. Nowadays, such a village is not actually very common, but it is a stereotypical picture that is well-known to the British.

Britain was the first country in the world to appoint a government-sponsored conservation body (the Nature Conservancy, in 1949) and it was in Britain that the first large green pressure group was founded (the World Wildlife Fund in 1961, now the Worldwide Fund for Nature).

Large areas of the country are official ‘national parks’ where almost no building is allowed. There is an organization called the Ramblers’ Association to which more than a hundred thousand enthusiastic country walkers belong. Maps can be bought which mark the routes of all public footpaths in the country.

A notable indication of the British reverence for both the countryside and the past is the strength of the National Trust. This is an officially recognized charity whose aim is to preserve as much of Britain’s countryside and as many of its historic buildings as possible by acquiring them ‘for the nation’. With more than three million member, it is the largest landowner in Britain (after the crown and the Forestry Commission). Included in its property is more than 600 miles of the coastline. The importance of its work has been supported by several laws, among which is one which does not allow even the government to take over any of its land without the approval of Parliament.

**SOUTHERN ENGLAND**

The area surrounding the outer suburbs of London has the reputation of being ‘commuter land’. This is the most densely populated area in the UK. Millions of its inhabitants travel into London to work every day.

Employment in the south-east of England has always been mainly in trade, the provision of services and light manufacturing. There was never much heavy industry. It therefore did not suffer the slow economic decline that many other parts of England experienced during the twentieth century.

**THE MIDLANDS OF ENGLAND**

During the Industrial Revolution, Birmingham (Britain’s second largest city) and the area to its north and west developed into the country’s major engineering centre. Despite the decline of heavy industry in the twentieth century, factories there still convert iron and steel into a vast variety of goods.

Although the Midlands do not have many positive associations in the minds of British people, tourism has flourished in ‘Shakespeare country’ (centred on Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare’s birthplace), and Nottingham has successful capitalized on the legend of Robin Hood.

**NORTHERN ENGLAND**

The Pennine mountains run up the middle of northern England like a spine. On either side, the large deposits of coal (used to provide power) and iron ore (used to make machinery) enabled these areas to lead the Industrial Revolution. On the western side, the Manchester area (connected to the port of Liverpool by canal) became, in the nineteenth century, the world’s leading producer of cotton goods; on the eastern side, towns such as Bradford and Leeds became the world’s leading producers of woolen good. Further south, Sheffield became a centre for the production of steel good. Further north, around Newcastle, shipbuilding was the major industry.

Further away from the main industrial areas, the north of England is sparsely populated. In the north-western corner of the country is the Lake District. The Romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey (the ‘Lake Poets’) lived here and wrote about its beauty. It is the favourite destination of people who enjoy walking holidays and the whole are is classified as a National Park (the largest in England).

**QUESTIONS**

1. What can be said about Britain’s landscape?
2. What is the stereotypical image of British weather? What accounts for that?
3. How is the climate changing? How will the global climate changes affect Britain?
4. How big is human influence on the environment?
5. What was the cause of ‘smog’ in London? How has the situation changed?
6. What kind of danger can Britain face?
7. What is London vulnerable to?
8. What is the attitude of the British to nature?
9. What are the main characteristic features of Southern England, the Midlands of England and Northern England?

**UNIT THREE**

**LONDON AND OTHER CITIES OF BRITAIN**

London (the largest city in western Europe) dominates Britain. It is home to the headquarters of all government departments, the country’s parliament, its major legal institutions, and the monarch. It is the country’s business and banking centre and the centre of its transport network. It contains the headquarters of the national television networks and all the national newspapers. It is about seven times larger than any other city in the country. About a fifth of the total population of the UK lives in the wider London area.

The original walled city of London was quite small. (It is known colloquially today as ‘the square mile’.) It did not contain Parliament or the royal court, since this would have interfered with the autonomy of the merchants and traders who lived and worked there. It was in Westminster, another ‘city’ outside London’s wall, where these national institutions met. Today, both ‘cities’ are just two areas of central London. The square mile (also know simply as ‘the **City’**) is home to the country’s main financial organizations. During the daytime, more than a quarter of a million people work there, but fewer than 10,000 people actually live there.

The other well-known areas of London are the **WestEnd**and the**EastEnd**. The former is known for its many theatres, cinemas and expensive shops. The latter is known as the poorer residential area of central London. It is the traditional home of the Cockney and for centuries it has been home to successive waves of immigrant groups.

* Traditionally, a true **Cockney**is anybody born within the sound of Bow bells of the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow in the city of London). In fact, the term is commonly used to denote people who come from a wider area of the innermost eastern suburbs of London and also as adjoining are south of the Thames. ‘Cockney’ is also used to describe a strong London accent and, like any such local accent, is associated with working-class origins. Some rhyming slang has passed into general informal British usage: for example, ‘use your loaf’ meaning ‘think’ (from ‘loaf of bread’ meaning ‘head’).

The majority of ‘Londoners’ live in its suburbs, millions of them travelling into the centre each day to work. Because of its sprawling suburbs of small houses with gardens, Greater London stretches for 25 miles (40 km) from one side to the other. It is a thriving cultural capital not only because it is home to some of the most exciting music, theatre and art in Europe, but also because of the enriching contribution of its many ethnic minority communities which form a crucial part of London’s hybrid vibrancy. Furthermore, London has all the architectural splendour of a once imperial capital. And it is rich, with the Economy the size of Saudi Arabia. The City, London’s finance centre, employs over 8000,000 people, more than the population of Frankfurt. Yet 7 out its 32 boroughs are among the poorest 10 boroughs in the whole of Britain. London is in some ways untypical of the rest of the country in that it is so cosmopolitan. Although all of Britain’s cities have some degree of cultural and racial variety, the variety is by far the greatest in London. More than 300 languages are spoken there, nearly a third of the people in London were born outside Britain.

**THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE**

England is often talked about in terms of a north-south divide which is cultural, economic and political (the Labour Party has more support in the north and the Conservative Party in the south). This was accentuated in the 1980s by differences in unemployment levels, crime rates, house prices and standards of living, all of which were worse in the north. “North-south divide’ has been part of English folklore since the middle of the nineteenth century. It denotes a supposed big difference between the poor north and the rich south. Historically, there is much truth in this generalization. The south has almost always had lower rates of unemployment and more expensive houses. This is especially true of the south-eastern area surrounding London. (This area is sometimes referred to as ‘the **HomeCounties’**, an indication of London’s domination of public life.)

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the decline of heavy industry, which was mostly confined to the north, caused large-scale migration of well-qualified workers from north to south, so that the north-south divide seemed to be getting even wider. However, the picture now is not that simple. Some of the poorest areas in the country are actually in London.

* In Britain, like in every country, there are regional differences and people living in one region makes jokes about the characteristics (real or imagined) of people living in another. In Britain there are many jokes which begin ‘There was and Englishman, an Irishman, a Scotsman and a Welshman, and …’. In England itself there are myths about every region, but the broadest differences are those between the North and the South. There real geographical and economic variations; the North can be characterized as more industrial, cooler, hillier and more working-class, the South as middle-class, more suburban, flatter and wealthier. There are also the often irrational things the English say about each other. Several people were asked to comment on the differences.
* What some Northerners say:
  + - ‘You know the old saying …people in the North earn money, people in the South count it.’
    - ‘As you go North, the beer gets better.’
    - ‘They think they’re better than us – just because they talk posh. They’re a load of snobs.’
    - ‘I was born in Manchester, but I live in the South. You know, I think things are better in the South for women. Northern men seem to want to get down the pub on their own and avoid women. Men in the South help more in the home – that’s a statistic. Northern men are more … more macho.’
    - ‘The North may be dirtier – don’t forget “where there’s much there’s brass”.’ (i.e. where there’s dirt, there’s money.)
* What some Southerners say:
  + - ‘The North? A load of men with heavy colds, standing round in pubs wearing cloth caps, swilling bee and playing darts.’
    - ‘They say we “talk posh” – we just speak better English, that’s all.’
    - ‘There’s more equality of the sexes in the south. Northerners treat women like doormats.’
    - ‘They’ve got a massive inferiority complex. They imagine that we’re all either stockbrokers, or country bumpkins with straw in our mouths. The prejudice comes more from them. They don’t see that we’re just like them.’
    - ‘They live on sticky buns, tripe and black pudding. The food’s much more varied down her.’

**SCOTLAND**

It is in the central plain and the strip of east coast that more than 80% of the population of Scotland lives. In the late twentieth century, this region had many of the same difficulties as the industrial north of England, although the North sea oil industry helped to keep unemployment down.

Further north, there are the Highlands, consisting of mountains and deep valleys and including numerous small islands off the west coast. Tourism is important in the local economy, and so is the production of whisky.

Scotland’s two major cities have very different reputations. Glasgow, the larger of the two, is associated with heavy industry and some of the worst housing conditions in Britain.. However this image is one-sided. Glasgow has a strong artistic heritage.

Edinburgh, which is smaller than Glasgow, has a comparatively middle-class image . It is the capital of Scotland and the seat of its parliament. It is associated with scholarship, the law, and administration. The annual Edinburg Festival of Art is internationally famous.

**WALES**

As in Scotland, most people in Wales live in one small part of if, in the south-east. British people would locate the prototype factory of the industrial revolution in the north of England, and they would locate its prototype coal mine in south Wales. Despite its industry, no really large cities have emerged in this area (Cardiff, the capital of Wales, has a population of about a third of a million). It is the only part of Britain with a high proportion of industrial villages. Coal mining in south Wales has now almost entirely ceased and, as elsewhere, the transition to other forms of employment has been slow and painful.

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

With the exception of Belfast, which is famous for the manufacture of linen (and is still a shipbuilding city), this region is, like the rest of Ireland, largely agricultural.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What is London? What are its main parts?
2. What is the oldest part of London?
3. What is said about modern London?
4. What are Cockneys?
5. Why is England often talked about in terms of a north-south divide?
6. What do people say about the differences between the North and the South?
7. What are the characteristic features of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

**UNIT FOUR**

**HISTORY**

**PREHISTORY**

Two thousand years ago there was an Iron Age Celtic culture throughout the north-west European island. It seems that the Celts had intermingled with the peoples who were there already; we know that religious sites that had been built long before their arrival continued to be used in Celtic times.

For people in Britain today, the chief significance of the prehistoric period is its sense of mystery. This sense finds its focus most easily in the astonishing monumental architecture of this period, the remains of which exist throughout the country. Stonehenge is the most spectacular one.

* **Stonehenge**was built on Salisbury Plain some time between 5,000 and 4,300 years ago. It is one of the most famous and mysterious archeological sites in the world. One of its mysteries is how it was ever built at all with the technologies of the time (some of the stones come from over 200 miles away in Wales). Another is its purpose. It appears to function as a kind of astronomical clock and we know it was used by the Druids (i.e. Celtic priestly caste) for ceremonies marking the passing of the seasons. It has always exerted a fascination on the British imagination.

**THE ROMAN PERIOD (43 -410)**

The Roman province of Britannia covered most of present-day England and Wales, where the Romans imposed their own way of life and culture, making use of the existing Celtic aristocracy to govern and encouraging them to adopt Roman dress and the Latin language. They never went to Ireland and exerted an influence, without actually governing there, over only the southern part of Scotland. It was during this time that a Celtic tribe called the Scots migrated from Ireland to Scotland, where along with another tribe, the Picts, they became opponents of the Romans. This division of the Celts into those who experienced Roman rule (the Britons in England and Wales) and those who did not (the Gaels in Ireland and Scotland) may help to explain the emergence of two distinct branches of the Celtic group of languages.

The remarkable thing about the Romans is that, despite their long occupation of Britain, they left very little behind. Most of their villas, baths and temples, their impressive network of roads, and the cities they founded, including Londinium (London), were soon destroyed or fell into disrepair.

* 55BC - The Roman general Julius Caesar lands in Britain with an expeditionary force, wins a battle and leaves. The first ‘date’ in popular British history.
* 61 AD – Queen Boudicca (or Boadicea) of the Iceni tribe leads a bloody revolt against the Roman occupation. It is suppressed. There is a statue of Boadicea, made in the nineteenth century, outside the Houses of Parliament, which has helped to keep her memory alive.
* Hadrian’s Wall was built by the Romans in the second century across the northern border of their province of Britannia (which is nearly the same as the present English-Scottish border) in order to protect it from attacks by the Scots and the Picts.

**THE GERMANIC INVASIONS (410 – 1066)**

The Roman occupation had been a matter of colonial control rather than large-scale settlement. But during the fifth century, a number of tribes from the European mainland invaded and settled in large numbers. Two of these tribes were the Angles and the Saxons. These **Anglo**-**Saxons**soon had the south-east of the country in their grasp. In the west, their advance was temporarily halted by an army of (Celtic) Britons under the command of the legendary King Arthur. Nevertheless, by the end of the sixth century, they and their way of life predominated in nearly all of present-day England. Celtic culture and language survived only in present-day Scotland, Wales and Cornwall.

* **KingArthur**is a wonderful example of the distortions of popular history. In folklore and myth (and on film), he is a great English hero, and he and his Knights of the Round Table are regarded as the perfect example of medieval nobility and chivalry. In fact, he lived long before medieval times and was Romanized Celt trying to hold back the advances of the Anglo-Saxons – the very people who became ‘the English’!

When they came to Britain, the Anglo-Saxons were pagan. During the sixth and seventh centuries, Christianity spread throughout Britain from two different directions. By the time it was introduced into the south of England by the Roman missionary St. Augustine, it had already been introduced into Scotland and Northern England from Ireland, which had become Christian more than 150 years earlier.

Britain experienced another wave of Germanic invasions in the eighth century. The invaders, known as **Vikings**,**Norsemen**or**Danes**, came from Scandinavia. In the ninth century the conquered and settled the islands around Scotland and some coastal regions of Ireland. Their conquest of England was halted when they were defeated by King Alfred of the Saxon kingdom of Wessex. As a result, their settlement was confined mostly to the north and east of the country.

* **KingAlfred**was not only an able warrior but also a dedicated scholar (the only English monarch for a long time afterwards who was able to read and write) and a wise ruler. He is known as ‘Alfred the Great’ – the only monarch in English history to be given this title. He is also popularly known for the story of the burning of the cakes. While he was wandering around his country organizing resistance to the Danish invaders, Alfred travelled in disguise. On one occasion, he stopped at a woman’s house. The woman asked him to watch some cakes that were cooking to see that they did not burn, while she went off to get food. Alfred became lost in thought and the cakes burned. When the woman returned, she shouted angrily at Alfred and sent him away. Alfred never told her that he was her king.

However, the cultural differences between Anglo-Saxons and Danes were comparatively small. They led roughly the same way of life and spoke different varieties of the same Germanic tongue. These similarities made political unification easier, and by the end of the tenth century, England was a united kingdom with a Germanic culture throughout. Most of Scotland was also united by this time, at least in name, in a (Celtic) Gaelic kingdom.

**THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD (1066 – 1458)**

**1066**– This is the most famous date in English history. On 14 October of this year, an invading army from Normandy defeated the English at the battle of Hastings. At the end of it, most of the best warriors of England were dead, including their leader, King Harold. On Christmas day that year the Norman leader, Duke William of Normandy, was crowned king of England. He is known in popular history as ‘**WilliamtheConqueror’**and the date is remembered as the last time that England was successfully invaded.

The successful Norman invasion of England brought Britain into the mainstream of western European culture. Previously, most links had been with Scandinavia. Throughout this period, the English kings also owned land on the continent and were often at war with the French kings.

Unlike the Germanic invasions, the Norman invasion was small-scale. There was no such thing as a Norman area of settlement. Instead, the Norman soldiers who had invaded were given the ownership of land – and of the people living on it. A strict feudal system was imposed. The peasants were the English-speaking Saxons. The lords and the barons were the French-speaking Normans. This was the start of the English class system.

* As an example of the class distinctions introduced into society after the Norman invasion, people often point to the fact that modern English has two words for the larger farm animals: one for the living animal (cow, pig, swine, sheep) and another for the animal you eat (beef, pork, mutton). The former set comes from Anglo-Saxon, the latter from French that the Normans brought to England. Only the Normans normally ate meat; the poor Anglo-Saxon peasants did not.
* In the 250 years after the Norman Conquest, it was a Germanic language, **MiddleEnglish**, and not the Norman (French) language, which had become the dominant one in all classes of society in England. Furthermore, it was the Anglo-Saxon concept of common law, and not Roman law, which formed the basis of the legal system.
* It was in this period that **Parliament**began its gradual evolution into the democratic body which it is today. The word ‘parliament’, which comes from the French word ‘parler’ (to speak), was first used in England in the thirteenth century to describe an assembly of nobles called together by the king.
* In 1215 an alliance of aristocracy, church and merchants force King John to agree to the **MagnaCarta**(Latin meaning ‘Great Charter’), a document in which the king agrees to follow certain rules of government. It restricted the kink’s power and gave new rights to the barons and the people. Some of these rights are basic to modern British law, e.g. the right to have a trial before being put in prison.
* **RobinHood**is a legendary folk hero. King Richard I (1189-99) spent most of his reign fighting in the ‘crusades’ (the wars between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East). Meanwhile, England was governed by his brother John, who was unpopular because of all the taxes he imposed. According to legend, Robin Hood lived with his bank of ‘merry men’ in Sherwood Forest outside Nottingham, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. He was constantly hunted by the local sheriff (the royal representative) but was never captured.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the attitude of the people in Britain to the prehistoric period in its history?
2. How great was the Roman influence on England?
3. What Germanic invasions took place in the fifth and the eighth centuries? What changes did they bring?
4. What roles did King Arthur and King Alfred play in the history of the country?
5. Why is the year 1066 the most famous date in English history?
6. What was the impact of the Norman invasion?
7. What language became the dominant one in England?
8. What was the Magna Carta?
9. When did Parliament start to evolve?
10. Who was Robin Hood?

**UNIT FIVE**

**HISTORY (continued)**

**THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY**

In its first outbreak in the middle of the fourteenth century, bubonic plague (known in England as the **Black Death**) killed about a third of the population of Great Britain. The shortage of labour which it caused, and the increasing importance of trade and towns, weakened the traditional ties between lord and peasant. Moreover, the power of the barons was greatly weakened by the**War of the Roses**.

* During the fifteenth century, the nobles were divided into two groups, one supporting the House of Lancaster, whose symbol was a red rose, the either the House of York, whose symbol was a white rose. Three decades of almost continual war ended in1485, when Henry Tudor (Lancastrian) defeated and killed Richard III (Yorkist) at the Battle of Bosworth Field.

Both these developments allowed English monarchs to increase their power. The Tudor dynasty (1485 -1603) established a system of government departments staffed by professionals who depended for their position on the monarch. The feudal aristocracy was no longer needed for implementing government policy. Of the traditional two “Houses” of Parliament, the Lords and the Commons, it was now more important for monarchs to get the agreement of the Commons for their policies because that was where the newly powerful merchants and landowners were represented.

The country had finally lost any realistic claim to lands in France, thus becoming more consciously a distinct **‘island nation’**.

It was in the last quarter of this century that **Shakespeare**began writing his famous plays, giving voice to the modern form of English.

* **Henry VIII**(1491 – 1547) is on of the most well-known monarchs in English history, chiefly because he took six wives during his life. As a young man he was known for his love of hunting, sport and music, but he didn’t rule well. He was a natural leader but not really interested in the day-to-day running of government and this encouraged the beginnings of a professional bureaucracy. It was during his reign that the reformation took place. In the 1530s, Henry used Parliament to pass laws which swept away the power of the Roman Church in England. However, his quarrel with Rome was nothing to do with the doctrine. It was because he wanted to be free of his wife Catherine of Aragon, who gave him only a daughter, later Mary I, but could not give him a son. But the Pope refused to give him the necessary permission for this, so Henry took England out of the Roman Catholic Church and made himself head of the Church in England. All church lands came under his control and gave him a large source of income. Henry divorced Catherine of Aragon and married Anne Boleyn in 1533. They had a daughter, later Elizabeth I.
* **Elizabeth I**(1533 – 1603), was the first of three long-reigning queens (1588 – 1603) in British history (the other two are Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II). During her reign the country’s economy grew very strong. The arts were very active, And England became firmly protestant and confident in the world affairs. However Elizabeth is often seen as a very lonely figure and is known as the ‘Virgin Queen’ because she never married, although she is know to have had relationships with the Earl of Leicester and, later in life with the Earl of Essex.
* The **Spanish Armada**, a fleet of 129 ships sent by Spain to attack England in 1588, is defeated by the English navy (with the help of a violent storm). The word ‘armada’ is now often used to mean any large group of ships.

**THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

In the seventeenth century, Parliament established its supremacy over the monarchy. Anger grew in the country at the way the Stuart monarchs raised money without, as tradition prescribed, getting the agreement of the House of Commons first. In addition, ideological Protestantism, especially Puritanism, had grown in England. Puritans regarded the luxurious lifestyle of the king and his followers as immortal.

This conflict led to the **Civil War,**which ended with complete victory for the parliamentary forces. Charles I became the first monarch in Europe to be executed after a formal trial for crimes against his people. The leader of the parliamentary army,**Oliver Cromwell**, became ‘Lord Protector’ of a republic with a military government which effectively encompassed all of Britain and Ireland.

By the Cromwell died, he, his system of government, and the puritan ethics that went with it (theatres and other forms of entertainment had been banned) had become so unpopular that the executed king’s son was asked to return and become King Charles II.

However, the conflict between the monarch and Parliament soon re-emerged in the reign of Charles II’s brother, James II. James tried to give full rights to Catholics, and to promote them in his government. The **‘Glorious Revolution”**(‘glorious’ because it was bloodless) followed, in which Prince William of Orange, ruler of the Netherlands, and his Stuart wife Mary accepted Parliament’s invitation to become king and queen. Parliament immediately drew up a Bill of Rights, which limited some of the monarch’s power.

**THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

In 1707, the Act of Union was passed. Under this agreement the two kingdoms of England and Scotland became one ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain’.

Politically, the eighteenth century was stable. Within Parliament, the bitter divisions of the previous century were echoed in the formation of two vaguely opposed, loose collections of allies. One group, **the Whigs**, were the political ‘descendants’ of the parliamentarians. They supported the Protestant values of hard word and thrift, believed in government by monarch and aristocracy together. The other group,**the Tories,**had a greater respect for the idea of monarchy and the importance of the Anglican Church. This was the beginning of the party system in Britain.

The monarchs of the eighteenth century were Hanoverian Germans with interests on the European continent. The first of them, George I, could not even speak English. Perhaps this situation encouraged the habit whereby the monarch appointed one principal, or ‘prime’, minister from the ranks of Parliament to head his government. It was also during this century that the system of an annual budget drawn up by the monarch’s Treasury officials for the approval of Parliament was established.

It was cultural change that was most marked in this century. Britain gradually acquired an empire in the Americas, along the west African coast and in India. The greatly increased trade that this allowed was one factor which led to **the Industrial Revolution**. Other factors were the many technical innovations in manufacture and transport.

In England, the growth of the industrial mode of production, together with advances in agriculture, caused the greatest upheaval in the pattern of everyday life. Areas of common land, which had been used by everybody in a village for the grazing of animals, disappeared as landowners incorporated them into their increasingly large and more efficient farms. (There remain some pieces of common land in Britain today, used mainly as parks. They are often called ‘the common’.) Millions moved from rural areas into new towns and cities. Most of these were in the north of England, where the raw materials for industry were available. In this way, the north of the country, which had previously been economically backward, became the industrial heartland of the country. In the south of England, London came to dominate, not as an industrial centre, but as a business and trading centre.

**THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Not long before this century began, Britain lost its most important colonies (north American ones) in a war of independence. But nevertheless, it controlled the biggest empire the world had ever seen.

One section of this empire was Ireland. Another part of the empire was made up of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where British settlers had become the majority population. Another was India, an enormous country with a culture more ancient than Britain’s. Tens of thousands of British civil servants and troops were used to govern it. Large parts of Africa also belonged to the empire. Except for South Africa, where there was some British settlement, most of Britain’s African colonies started as trading bases on the coast, and were only incorporated into the empire at the end of the century. As well as these areas, the empire included numerous smaller areas and islands. Some, such as those in the Caribbean, were the result of earlier British settlement, but most were included because of their strategic position along trading routes.

The growth of the empire was encouraged by a change in attitude during the century. Previously, colonization had been a matter of settlement, commerce, or military strategy. The aim was simply to possess territory, but not necessarily to govern it. By the end of the century, colonization was seen as a matter of destiny. During the century, Britain became the world’s foremost economic power. This, together with long years of political stability unequalled anywhere else in Europe, gave the British a sense of supreme confidence, even arrogance, about their culture and civilization. The British came to see themselves as having a duty to spread this culture and civilization around the world. Being the rulers of an empire was therefore a matter of moral obligation.

* **The White Man’s Burden**. Here are some lines from the poem of this title by Rudyard Kipling 1865 – 1936).

*Take up the White Man’s Burden –*

*Send forth the best ye breed –*

*Go, bind your sons to exile*

*To serve tour captives’ need;*

*To wait in heavy harness*

*On fluttered folk and wild –*

*Your new-caught, sullen peoples,*

*Half-devil and half-child.*

Other races, the poem says, are ‘wild’ and have a ‘need’ to be civilized. The white man’s duty is to ‘serve’ in this role.

There were great changes in social structure. Most people lived in towns and cities. The owners of industries and the growing middle class of tradespeople and professionals held the real power in the country. Along with their power went a set of values which emphasized hard work, thrift, religious observance, the family, and awareness of one’s duty, absolute honesty in public life, and extreme respectability in sexual matters. This is a set of **values**which are now called**Victorian.**

* **Queen Victoria**reigned from 1837-1901. During her reign, altogether the modern powerlessness of the monarch was confirmed (she was sometimes forced to accept as Prime Minister people, whom she herself personally disliked), she herself became an increasingly popular symbol of Britain’s success in the world. As a hard-working, religious mother of ten children, devoted to her husband, Prince Albert, she was regarded as the personification of contemporary morals. The idea that the monarch should set an example to the people in such matters was unknown before this time and has created problems for the monarchy since then.

Slavery and the laws against people on the basis of religion were abolished, and laws were made to protect workers from some of the worst excesses of the industrial mode of production. Public services such as the post and the police were begun. Despite reform, many people lived and worked in very unpleasant surroundings.

* In 1829 Robert Peel, a government minister, organized the first modern police force. The police are still sometimes known today as ‘bobbies’ (‘Bobby’ is a short form of the name ‘Robert’).
* 1833. The first law regulating factory working conditions limits the number of hours that children are allowed to work.
* 1868. The TUC (Trades Union Congress) is formed.

**THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain ceased to be the world’s richest country. The British Empire reached its greatest extent in 1919. By this time, however, it was already becoming less of an empire and more of a confederation. At international conferences Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa were all represented separately from Britain.

A couple of years later, Britain lost most of its oldest colony, Ireland. In 1920, the British government partitioned the country between the (Catholic) south and the (Protestant) six counties, giving each part some control of its internal affairs. But this was no longer enough for the south. War followed. The eventual result was that in 1922, the south became independent from Britain. The six counties, however, remained within the United Kingdom. They became the British province of Northern Ireland.

The real dismantling of the empire took place in the 25 years following the Second World War. In the same period, it gradually became clear that Britain was no longer a ‘superpower’ in the world.

At the end of the century in 1997, Britain handed Hong Kong back to China, thus losing its last imperial possession of any significance.

It was from the start of the twentieth century that the urban working class finally began to make its voice heard. In Parliament, **the Labourparty**gradually replaced the Liberals (the ‘descendants’ of the Whigs) as the main opposition to**the Conservatives**(the ‘descendants’ of the Tories). In addition, trade unions managed to organize themselves. In 1926, they were powerful enough to hold a General Strike, and from 1930s until the 1980s the Trade Union Congress was probably the single most powerful political force outside the institutions of government and Parliament. Since then, the working class has faded as a political force.

In the 1960s Britain decided to ask for membership of the newly-formed European Communities. There was opposition to the idea from those who argued that Britain was an ‘island nation’ and thus essentially different in outlook from nations in mainland Europe. Finally, ten years after its first application, Britain joined the European Economic Community in 1973.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What helped English monarchs to increase their power?
2. What House of Parliament was more important for the monarchs? Why?
3. What was the role of Henry VIII in English history?
4. What was the role of Elizabeth I in English history?
5. What was the political situation in the seventeenth century be like?
6. What led to the Civil War?
7. What were the results of the Civil War?
8. What happened after Oliver Cromwell’s death?
9. What two parties were formed in Parliament?
10. What cultural and economic change was most marked in the XVII century?
11. How great was the British Empire in the nineteenth century?
12. What was the attitude of the British to the peoples in their colonies?
13. What social changes took place in the XIX century?
14. What was the role of Queen Victoria?
15. What values are now called Victorian?
16. What happened to the British Empire in the XX century?
17. What role did the urban working class play in the middle of the XX century? How important political force was the Trade Union Congress?

**UNIT SIX**

**IDENTITY AND STEREOTYPES**

How do British people identify themselves? Who do they feel they are? Everybody has an image of themselves, but the things that make up this image can vary. For example, in some parts of the world, it is very important that you are a member of a particular family; in other parts of the world, it might be more important that you come from a particular place; in others, that you belong to a certain social class, or are a member of a certain profession, or work for a certain company; in still others, that you belong to a certain political party.

Identity is concerned with how people see themselves, or are seen, in relation to others; as northerners or southerners, football or rugby enthusiasts, opera or blues fans and so on. In short, identity is perhaps two things: who people take themselves to be, and who others take them to be.

Nationality is a matter of allegiance and cultural affiliation. Some people say that your nationality is indicated by where you choose to live or by the team you support at sports event; other say that it is a question of whom you would fight for. It has also been argued that nationality is no longer a powerful force in Britain, that it is a matter of circumstance, and that today it is far less significant than local or global identities: relatives, friends and communities are more important to us and so is transnational culture. Nationality is a question of identity and so is crossed by other kinds of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, age and occupation.

Regional and local identities are extremely strong in Britain and the diversity of beliefs, practices, loyalties and accents is immense. National (‘ethnic’) loyalties can be strong among the people in Britain whose ancestors were not English. For many people living in England who call themselves Scottish, Welsh or Irish, this loyalty is little more than a matter of emotional attachment.

***Scottishness***

For people living in Scotland, there are constant reminders of their distinctiveness. First, several important aspects of public life, such as education and the legal and welfare systems, are organized separately, and differently, from the rest of Britain. Scotland even prints its own banknotes. Second, the Scottish way of speaking English is very distinctive. A modern form of the dialect known as Scots is spoken in everyday life by most of the working classes in the lowlands. Third, there are many symbols of Scottishness, which are well-known throughout Britain.

* On 25 January every year, many Scottish people attend ‘Burns suppers’. At these parties, they read from the work of the eighteenth-century poet Robert Burns (regarded as Scotland’s national poet), wear kilts, sing traditional songs, dance traditional dances (called ‘reels’) and eat haggis (made from sheep’s heart, lungs, and liver).
* “In the eighteenth century, the English practically destroyed Highland Scotland. The normalizing of relations between the two countries was accomplished by a novelist, Sir Walter Scott, whose stories and legends intrigued and excited the English. Under his direction, the whole country reinvented itself. Everyone who could get hold of a bit of tartan wore a kilt, ancient ceremonies were invented. In a few months, a wasteland of dangerous beggarly savages became a nation of noble, brave, exotic warriors. Scott did the best public relations job in history.’ - wrote A.A.Gill in *the Sunday times*on 23 January 1994.

***Welshness***

The people of Wales do not have as many reminders of their Welshness in everyday life. The organization of public life is similar to that of England and there are not so many well-known symbols of Welshness. However, there is one single highly important symbol of Welsh identity – the Welsh language. Everybody in Wales can speak English, but it is not everybody’s first language. For about 20% of the population (that’s more than half a million people), the mother tongue is Welsh. All children in Wales learn it at school, there are many local newspapers in Welsh and a Welsh television channel, and all public notices and signs are written in both languages.

***Englishness***

For the last 200 years, most people who describe themselves as English have made little distinction in their minds between ‘English’ and ‘British’. For example, at international football or rugby matches when the players stand to attention to hear the anthems of the two teams, the Scottish, Irish and Welsh have their own songs, while the English one is just *God Save the Queen*– the same as the British national anthem. However, as part of the growing profile of ethnic identity generally, the ‘English’ part, distinct from ‘British’, is becoming clearer. Not so ago, English supporters at those football or rugby matches used to wave the Union Jack flag; now they wave the cross of St. George. And at the Commonwealth Games, where England and the other parts of Britain compete separately, England has even found its own anthem (*Land of Hope and Glory*).

The English emblem has been the rose since the War of the Roses in the fifteenth century. More recently, as a symbol of both tradition and socialism, the red rose has been adopted as its emblem by the Labour party.

***Other ethnic identities***

The peoples of the four nations have been in contact for centuries. As a result, there is a limit to their significant differences. With minor variations and exceptions, they look the same, eat the same food, have the same religious heritage (Christianity), learn the same language first (English) and have the same attitudes to the roles of men and women.

The situation for the several million people in Britain whose family roots lie elsewhere in the world is different. For one thing, most of them look different. From the point of view of numbers and length of time in Britain, two major groupings may be identified.

The longest-established of these groups are black Caribbeans. The other major grouping consists of those whose cultural roots lie in and around the Indian subcontinent. In Britain, they are known collective as ‘Asians’. Members of these communities stuck closely together when they first came to Britain and now usually marry among themselves so that they have retained in varying degrees, the languages, their (non-Christian) religions, their music, and their dress and food preferences. In recent decades, some young British Muslims have reacted against their immigrant parents’ attempts to assimilate to British culture. They have made a conscious attempt to adhere more strictly to Islamic practices, some interpretations of which can alienate them from mainstream British values.

**STEREOTYPES**

The British, like the people of every country, tend to be attributed with certain characteristics which are supposedly typical. Societies change over time while their reputations lag behind. Many things which are often regarded as typically British derive from books, songs or plays which were written a long time ago and which are no longer representative of modern life.

There are many examples of supposedly typical British habits which are simply not typical any more. For example, the stereotyped image of the London ‘city gent’ includes the wearing of a bowler hat. In fact this type of hat has not been commonly worn for a long time.

Food and drink provide other examples. The traditional ‘English’ breakfast is a large ‘fry-up’ plus cereal with milk and also toast, butter and marmalade, all washed down with tea. In fact, very few people in Britain actually have this sort of breakfast. Most just have the cereal, tea and toast, or even less. What the vast majority of British people have in the mornings is therefore much closer to what they call ‘continental’ (i.e. mainland European) breakfast than it is to a British one. The image of the British as a nation of tea-drinkers is also somewhat outdated. And the tradition of afternoon tea with biscuits, scones, sandwiches, or cake has always been a minority activity, confined to retired people and the leisured upper-middle class (although preserved in tea shops in tourist resorts).

The well-known stereotype that the British are always talking about the weather can be explained in the combination of the demands of both privacy and informality. Unlike many others, this stereotype is actually true to life. But constant remarks about the weather at chance meetings are not the result of polite conventions. They are not obligatory. Rather, they are the result of the fact that, on the one hand, personal questions would be rude while, at the same time, silence would also be rude. The weather is very convenient topic with which to ‘fill the gap’.

The idea of privacy underlines many aspects of British life. It is not just a matter of privacy in your own home. Just as important is the individual’s right to keep personal information private. Despite the increase in informality, it is still seen as rude to ask somebody what are called ‘personal’ questions (for example, about how much money they earn and about their family or sex life) unless you know them very well.

* It is a curious fact that, for a people who value privacy, the British have allowed themselves to become one of the most spied-upon nations in the world. In 2007, there were around four and a half million closed-circuit TV (CCTV) cameras in Britain. That’s one for every 14 people in the country.
* In the twenty-first century, Britain is experiencing record levels of both immigration and emigration. This means that the cultural backgrounds of people living in Britain are changing fast and becoming increasingly varied. This is one reason why ‘multiculturalism’ is a hot topic of debate in Britain these days. In fact, people are often unclear about what is meant when this word is used. Does it suggest a ‘salad bowl’, in which the different ingredients, although mixed together and making an appetizing whole, are still distinct? Or does it suggest a ‘melting pot’, in which the ingredients all blend together, each making the contribution to a single overall taste? The dominant perception seems to be that it is the ‘salad-bowl’ model that has been applied in Britain and there is a growing perception that it has gone too far. Of course, separation leads to lack of understanding, which can lead to hostility. Although overt racism is less common than in many other parts of Europe, there are still thousands of racially or ethnically motivated attacks on people each year.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. How can identity be defined? What factors influence identity?
2. What are characteristic features of Scottishness?
3. What are characteristic features of Welshness?
4. What are characteristic features of Englishness?
5. What the most well-known stereotypes of the British people? Are they true nowadays?
6. Why is multiculturalism a hot topic of debate in Britain?
7. What is the difference between the ‘salad-bowl’ model and the ‘melting pot’ model?

**UNIT SEVEN**

**NATIONAL CHARACTER**

**Continuity and individualism**

Britain is believed to be a ‘land of tradition’. It is a reputation based on what can be seen in public life, on centuries of political continuity and on its attendant ceremonies. The annual ceremony of the state opening of Parliament carefully follows customs which are centuries old. So does the military ceremony of ‘trooping the colour’. Likewise, the changing of the guard outside Buckingham Palace never changes.

However, in their private everyday lives, the British are probably less inclined to follow tradition that the people of most other countries. There are few age-old customs that are followed by the majority of families on certain special occasions. The country has fewer local parades or processions with genuine fool roots than most other countries. The English language has fewer sayings or proverbs in common everyday use than many other languages. The British are too individualistic for these things.

The British may not behave in traditional ways, but they like symbols of tradition. For example, in the early 1990s, London’s famous red buses were privatized. The different bus companies wanted to paint their buses in their own company colours. But many people, fond of the familiar red bus, were against this change and the government ruled that all buses had to stay red, both because this is what the people of London wanted and also because it believed this would be better for the tourist trade.

In general, the British value continuity over modernity for its own sake. They do not consider it especially smart to live in a new house. In fact, there is prestige in living in an obviously old one. They have a general sentimental attachment to older, supposedly safer times. The British like their Christmas cards to depict scenes from past centuries; they like their pubs to look old; they complained bitterly when their system of currency was changed.

**Being different**

The British can be stubbornly conservative about anything which is perceived as a token of Britishness. In these matters, their conservatism can combine with their individualism – they are rather proud of being different. It is, for example, very difficult to imagine that they will change from driving on the left-hand side of the road to driving on the right. It does not matter that nobody can think of any intrinsic advantage of driving on the left. Britain has so far resisted pressure from business people to adopt Central European Time, remaining stubbornly one hour behind; and it continues to start its financial year not, as other countries do, at the beginning of the calendar year but rather at the beginning of April.

Systems of measurement are another example. For decades now, British authorities have been promoting the scales that are used nearly everywhere else in the world (which in Britain are known collectively as the ‘metric system’). But they have had only partial success. It is only in the twenty-first century that people in Britain have become accustomed to buying petrol for their cars in litres or have started to understand the TV weather forecasters when they mention a temperature on the Celsius scale (and many still have to ‘translate’ it into Fahrenheit). British people continue to measure distances and themselves using scales of measurement that are not used anywhere in Europe. British manufacturers are obliged to give the weight of their packaged goods in kilos and grams, but many also give the equivalent in pounds and ounces because they know that the latter are more likely to mean something to people. However, British law stipulates that draught beer must be sold in pints or parts thereof.

* If a British person asks you, how tall you are, your answer ‘one, sixty three’ would probably mean little to him. Instead, you’d better say ‘five foot four’. This means 5 feet and 4 inches.

1 inch = 2.53 cm

12 inches = 1 foot = 30.48 cm

* If you see a road sign saying ‘Oxford 50’, this does not mean that Oxford is 50 kilometres away – it is 50 miles away. All road signs in Britain are shown in miles. Similarly, for shorter distances, most people talk about yards rather then metres.

1 yard = 0.92 m

1760 yards = 1 mile = 1.6 km

* Similarly, it would not help a British person to hear that you weigh 67 kilos. It will be more informative if you say you are ‘ten stone seven’ or ‘ten-and-a-half stone’ – that is, 10 stone and 7 pounds.

1 lb – 0.456 kg

14 lbs = 1 stone = 6.38 kg

**Formality and informality**

There is a difference between observing formalities and being formal in everyday life. Attitudes towards clothes are a good indication of this difference. It all depends on whether a person is playing a public role or a private role. When people are ‘on duty’, they have to obey some quite rigid rules on this matter. A male bank employee, for example is expected to wear a suit and a tie.

On the other hand, when people are not playing a public role there seem to be no rules at all. The British are probably more tolerant of ‘strange’ clothing than people in most countries. What you wear is considered to be your own business. You may find, for example, the same bank employee, on his lunch break in hot weather, walking through the street with his tie round his waist and his collar unbuttoned. He is no longer ‘at work’, so he can look how he likes – and for his employers to criticize him for his appearance would be seen as a gross breach of privacy.

Being friendly in Britain often involves showing that you are not bothering with the formalities. This means not addressing someone by his or her title (Mr, Mrs, Professor, etc.), not dressing smartly when entertaining guests, not shaking hands when meeting and not saying ‘please’ when making a request. When they avoid doing these things with you, the British are not being unfriendly or disrespectful – they are implying that you are in the category ‘friend’, and so all the rules can be ignored. To address someone by their title or to say ‘please’ is to observe formalities and therefore distancing. The same is true about shaking hands. Most people would do it only when being introduced to a stranger or when meeting an acquaintance (but not a close friend) after a long time. While shaking hands is still often taken as a sign of reserve, such behaviour is equally part of a rejection and dislike of formality.

Similarly, most British people do not feel welcomed if, on being invited to somebody’s house, they find the hold in smart clothes and a grand table set for them. They do not feel flattered by this – they feel intimidated. It makes them feel they can’t relax. Buffet-type meals, in which people do not sit down at table to eat, are a common form of hospitality. If you are in a British person’s house and are told to ‘help yourself’ to something, your host is not being rude or suggesting that you are of no importance – he or she is showing that you are completely accepted like ‘one of the family’.

**Reserve**

The British, especially the English, have a reputation for being reserved in their dealings with other people. They are often considered to be withdrawn and reserved. The only emotion habitually displayed in public is laughter. Reserve is not considered to be confined to well-bred members of the upper classes. However, there are signs that this traditional habit of reserve is breaking down. Although it is still not the dominant convention, more and more people now kiss when meeting a friend. The British people are becoming more comfortable with the public display of emotions. They shocked themselves by their very public outpouring of grief following the sudden death of Princess Diana in 1997. It is possible that the everyday behaviour of the British is returning to the more emotional tenor which it had in the centuries before the Victorian ‘stiff upper lip’ became dominant.

**An island race.**

Traditionally, the British have been known as insular and Britain has been described as ‘a tight little right little island’. In the early nineteen century, the poet Byron wrote of ‘the bitter effects of staying at home with all the narrow prejudices of an islander’. Later in the century the tern ‘Little Englanders’ came to mean isolationist who believe in the concept ‘my country right or wrong’. Winston Churchill, Britain’s Prime Minister during the Second World War, used the title ‘The Island Race’ at the start of his history of the English-speaking people.

A story which further illustrates British insularity refers to a new announcement, which said ‘There has been a persistent fog at London airport during the week-end, and the Continent has been cut off for twenty-four hours’. The headline in *the Times*was, as follows: FOG STOPS CROSS-CHANNEL TRAFFIC: CONTINENT ISOLATED.

The British have been considered as an island race partly because of their imperialism, cultural isolation and international policies. Some of this attitude can be explained historically.

**Anti-intellectualism**

Among many people in Britain, there exists a suspicion of education and ‘high culture’. This is manifested in a number of ways. For example, teachers and academic staff, although respected, do not have as high status in society as they do in most other countries. Nobody normally proclaims their academic qualifications or title to the world at large. No professor would expect, or want, to be addressed as ‘professor’ on any but the most formal occasion.

However, the British are passionate about quizzes, which are among the most popular of all TV programmes. Factual knowledge is something to be proud of. But abstract thinking and scholarship is not. Many everyday words and expressions in the English language testify to this anti-intellectual tendency.

* The slang word ‘swot’ was first used in English public schools. It denoted someone who worked hard and did well academically. It was a term of abuse. Swots were not popular.
* School life can still be tough for an academically minded pupil in England. If a student shows a desire to learn, he may be called a ‘teacher’s pet’. If he or she is successful in the attempt, they may be reminded that ‘nobody likes a smartarze’.
* And it doesn’t get much better in adult life. The word ‘clever’ often has negative connotations. It suggests a person who cannot quite be trusted (as in the expression, ‘too clever by half’). And to refer to a person as somebody who ‘gets all their ideas from books’ is to speak of them negatively. It raises the suspicion that they are lacking in ‘common sense’, which is something the English value very highly
* Even the word ‘intellectual’ itself is subject to negative connotations.

**Supporting the underdog**

Some customs of road use illustrate the British tendency to be on the side of ‘the underdog’ (i.e. the weaker side in any competition). On the roads, the underdog is the pedestrian. The law states that if a person has just one foot on a zebra crossing, then vehicles must stop. And they usually do. Conversely, British pedestrians interpret the colour of the human figure at traffic lights as advice, not an instruction. If the figure is red but no cars are approaching, they feel perfectly entitled to cross the road immediately. In Britain, jaywalking (crossing the road by dodging in between cars) has never been illegal.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Why has Britain the reputation of a land of tradition?
2. What is this reputation based on?
3. What do the English value most of all?
4. What is their attitude to changes introduced into their everyday life, especially from abroad?
5. What is their attitude to the past? Why?
6. What is meant by formality and informality?
7. What characteristic features are usually attributed to the British?
8. What are the connotations of such words as ‘clever’, ‘intellectual’?
9. What does it mean to be on the side of ‘the underdog’?

**UNIT EIGHT**

**CLASS AND ACCENT**

**Social class**

Market researchers in the 1950s applied six classes to Britain, and they have tended to be used ever since. The terms still apply today. The kind of work done not only indicates education and how much is earned, but also the kind of social contact that is usual. Most people generally mix socially with the same kind of people as their work colleagues, and usually live in streets or neighbourhoods which reflect that social grouping. Manual workers tend to mix with each other, as do professionals (doctors, lawyers and senior civil servants) and managers.

**A**Upper middle class

(senior civil servants, professionals, senior management and finance)

**B**Middle class

(middle managerial)

**C1**Lower middle class

(junior managerial/clerical, non-manual workers)

**C2**Skilled working class

**D**Semi-skilled /Unskilled working class

**E**Residual

(dependent on state benefit, unemployed, occasional part-time)

Historians say that the class system has survived in Britain because of its flexibility. It has always been possible to buy, marry or work your up, so that your children will belong to a higher social class than you do. But people in Britain regard it as difficult to become friends with somebody from a different ‘background’. It results from the fact that the different classes have different sets of attitudes and daily habits. Typically, they eat different food at different times of day and call the meals by different names, they talk about different topics using different styles and accents of English, they enjoy different pastimes and sports, they have different values about what things in life are most important, and different ideas about the correct way to behave.

However, there is major movement between classes. Many people move from one category to another during their working lives. The working class is rapidly declining. Since the 1950s there has been a massive growth of the middle class. But there has also been the emergence of a sizable ‘underclass’, as Category E is commonly known.

Despite the fluidity, the élite of society, itself a segment of the professional class, takes great care to protect itself. This includes the ‘gentry’ class made up mainly of landowners, and other who move in the most exclusive English social circles. It sends its children to be educated privately at a public school, where its children obtain a better academic education than normally possible in state-funded schools. More importantly they obtain a sense of social superiority through the public schools’ elitist culture.

It is also true that the ‘top’ 1 per cent has enormous influence and control. A handful of outsiders obtain access to this élite. It is sometimes known as ‘**The Establishment**’ and sometimes as ‘The Great and the Good’.

Traditionally, the young men of this élite went into the profession: the Civil Service, the law, medicine, the armed forces or the Church. That was partly the result of the original public school ethic of ‘service’. In the 1980s - 90s this characteristic changed. Increasingly this élite, but also many members of the upper middle class as a whole, has moved from public sector: merchant banks, accountancy, management and financial consultancy. The reason is quite simple. From 1979 private sector salaries soared in the new free market ethos.

**How things have changed at the top of the Britain’s professional ladder**

Ten years ago, *The Economist*looked at how the educational background of the people in 100 top jobs in Britain had changed over 20 years. It was found that almost the same number of people had been to public school (code for the smart private establishments which made up 450 of Britain’s 4,300 secondary schools) and Oxford or Cambridge as in the 1970s. Now the results are rather different.

The drop in the number of public school and Oxbridge alumni is most noticeable in business. Ten years ago, every company chairman on our list (18 most valuable FTSE companies, plus those of the stock exchange and Lloyds) had been to public school and 12 had been to Oxbridge. Of the current list, eight out of 20 went to public school and four to Oxbridge. This is partly because of the arrival of foreigners, but it is also because there are more state-school educated Britons at the top.

Among the political jobs in the survey, a few are held by public-school alumni. Eighteen people didn’t go to university at all – some because they went to military colleges, some because they came up through sports and the arts, and some (such as Michael Martin, speaker of the House of Commons and a former sheet-metal-worker) because they were poor boys made good. Among the things that haven’t changed is the average age of the top people: 57 now, the same as it was in 1992.

(*The Economist)*

**Accent**

An interesting feature of the class structure in Britain is that it is not just, or even mainly, relative wealth or the appearance of it, which determines someone’s class. Of course, wealth is part of it. But it is not possible to guess a person’s class just by looking at his or her clothes, car or bank balance. The most obvious sign comes when a person opens his or her mouth, giving the listener clues to the speaker’s attitudes and interests.

But more indicative than *what*the speaker says if the*way*that he or she says it. The English grammar and vocabulary used in public speaking, radio and television news broadcasts, books, and newspapers is known as ‘standard British English’. Most working-class people, however, use lots of words and grammatical forms in their everyday speech which are regarded as ‘non-standard’.

Nevertheless, nearly everybody in the country is capable of using Standard English or something close to it when the situation demands it. They are taught to do so at school. Therefore, the clearest indication of a person’s class is often his or her accent, which most people do not change to suit the situation. The most prestigious accent in Britain is known by linguist as ‘**Received Pronunciation**’ (**RP**). It is the combination of Standard English spoken with an RP accent that is usually meant when people talk about ‘BBC English’ or ‘the Queen’s English’. RP is not associated with any particular part of the country. The vast majority of people, however, speak with an accent which is geographically limited.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the way that people identify themselves with regard to class changed. The English upper-class accent, as spoken by the Queen or announcers on the BBC World Service, was accepted until twenty years ago as the guide to correct pronunciation for Britain as a whole. A study of British accents during the 1980s found that a posh voice, sounding like a BBC news-reader, usually spoken by a person from the south-east of England, was viewed as the most attractive voice. Most respondents said this accent sounded ‘educated’ and ‘soft’. Now the BBC goes out of its way to use regional accents; in Hollywood, a posh British accent is a cliché for Brutality, arrogance and stupidity. Consumers no longer see it as a sign of trustworthiness and authority. Some call-centers prefer regional accents to RP because of the negative reactions RP arouses.

* **posh**– someone who is posh talks or behaves in a way that is typical of people from a high social class. This word often shows that you do not like people like this. It is normally used with negative connotations. To accuse someone of being posh is to accuse them of being distant and/pretentious.

Because of greater mass communication and some increased mobility, regional variations are more commonly understood throughout Britain than they were in previously ‘closed’ communities. However, if you want to get ahead in Britain, you would be well advised to lose a regional accent.

**Why so many British people are taking elocution lessons**

Now that Britain’s public-school élite is in retreat, is the way it talks disappearing too? Once the confident accent of the ruling class, it is now, supposedly, the dying dialect of an enfeebled tribe, attracting suspicion and contempt rather than deference and respect.

Although there is little solid research, linguists think that RP speakers may have fallen from 5% of the population to less than 3%. And RP has evolved. Today’s version is closer to accents that once would have been termed as plebeian. The Queen mother spoke differently from the way her daughter talks. Princess Diana’s speech was different again – closer to the generalized southern accent sometimes called “Estuary English”.

Yet there is a large and growing demand for ‘better’ speech. Ann Jones, the general secretary of the Society of Teachers of Speech and Drama, estimates that more than 10,000 people take elocution lessons every year. Most people signing up for lessons are not trying to learn classic RP, but to make their verbal skills match their other business tools – such as the visuals on a slide presentation. A typical aim is to soften or dilute regional accents to the point that they will be readily understood by people from elsewhere.

Ms Mann does not necessarily try to eliminate regional accents, she insists, so long as the speaker learns to eliminate ‘lazy’ speech such as slurring, and annoying verbal tics, such as “know what I mean”, “sort of”, or “like”. “You can get away with even quite a marked accent if you are an interesting enough speaker, with pitch and pace and pause in your delivery,” she says.

A survey of company directors by the Aziz Corporation, which calls itself the country’s leading independent spoken communications consultancy, says that 31% reckon that a strong regional accent is a disadvantage in business.

But why the growth in demand? One reason is globalization. Foreigners typically learn RP, or something like it, and are often mystified by Britain’s stronger regional accents. Dealing with them means speaking some sort of standard English.

A second reason is the growing emphasis on presentation skills in business.

A third reason is the erosion of boundaries within companies. Jayne Comins, a speech coach in London notices a big increase in clients with computing background. “A lot of men in IT didn’t start out wanting a job working with people, but when they become successful they often have to talk at board meetings, give presentations and sell their product,” she says.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the main classes in Britain?
2. Why have classes survived until now?
3. What is the Establishment? How do they try to preserve influence and control?
4. How have things changed at the top of Britain’s professional ladder?
5. What is Received Pronunciation? How many people speak it?
6. What can accent tell about a person’s identity?
7. What accents are considered to be most prestigious?
8. What is the attitude to people who talk posh?
9. Why are so many British people take elocution lessons?