FACES

of

BRITAIN

ELIZABETH LAIRD
CHAPTER ONE

Who are the British?

What makes a nation? What brings together old and young, rich and poor, men and women, to make a culture we can all recognize?

A nation is born from its land, its history, its art and its institutions. These things work together to make us that we are. But above all, a nation is made up of people, and although there are things they all share, all of those people are different.

In this first chapter, we are going to look at some of the differences between British people. How important are those differences? Is there still a “British nation”? And in what way is Britain changing?

British society

A changing world

In the old days, it was easy to talk about British society. There was the working class, the middle class and the upper class. There were factory workers and farmers, northerners and southerners. But these days it is harder to describe the British. The old differences are still there, but people are divided in many new ways as well.

One difference is the change in age groups. More people are living longer than seventy or eighty years, so the number of old people is growing. (Fifteen percent of the population is now over sixty-five). At the same time, fewer babies are being born (the average British family has two children). This means that the population in Britain is getting older all the time. Also, fewer people live with or near their families. This means that many old people live on their own, or in old people’s homes. And many young people live in bed-sitting rooms or in flats with other people of the same age. Traditions of work are changing too. About three million people have no job. Poor people these days are not only people with badly paid jobs, but people without a job at all.

The four different regions of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) have always had their own ways of life. But now many people from these regions (especially the Welsh and the Scots) have a new interest in their own special culture. Some Welsh people, for example, want to bring back the old Welsh language. Some of the Scots want a government of their own. The people of Northern Ireland often feel that the rest of Britain is not interested in them. They feel that no one understands the “troubles” between Catholic and Protestant that have been going on for so long.

There are now about four million “black” and “brown” Britons, who have come (or whose parents have come) to Britain since the 1950s. Most came from the West Indies, East Africa, India and Pakistan, and live in big cities like London, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. Some found in Britain the life they were looking for. But many did not. Young people, especially from these “ethnic communities” find it hard to get a job or to be accepted.

But somehow, the traditional British way of life still goes on. Old and young, rich and poor, black and white, Londoner and countryman all agree about some things even if they disagree about others. The things they agree about make them British. The things they disagree about make them interesting.

Vigdis Vad Nilsen:

A foreigner’s point of view

Vigdis Vad Nilsen comes from Norway. She is a girl with ideas of her own, who likes to travel, and wants to see the world. She is in England at the moment, like thousands of other young people from all over the world. She has enrolled for an English course in London and has found an English family to live with.

Everyone who travels takes more than just their luggage. They take their own ideas, their own ways of thinking and they own lifestyle as well. Vigdis had heard a lot about Britain before she came.
Some things were as she had expected. She had heard that English people were quite reserved, for example, and she found that that was true. She had to laugh when she went on the “tube” (the London underground railway) and saw everyone sitting reading their newspapers. She couldn’t understand why no one talked or smiled.

But some things were not as she had expected. She had seen beautiful photographs of tourist sites like Piccadilly Circus and Buckingham Palace, but she had not seen pictures of the uglier parts of London. To her surprise, she found that London was a grey, rather dirty city. She found it a bit disappointing.

British people surprised Vigdis, too. She had seen pictures of “city gents” with their rolled umbrellas and their smart suits, but she had not seen pictures of the ordinary people. She had not expected London to be so international, with so many people from different parts of the world. And she had not known there were so many kinds of English pronunciation. She could not understand the Scottish and Irish people she met. She could not always understand the Londoners.

Family life came as another surprise. In Norway, children play outside in the streets and fields, even in the middle of winter. In the London family that Vigdis lived with, the children spent much more time indoors, watching television or playing with their toys. They did not go out alone. Their mother always took them to and from school.

What is your idea of England? What would you expect to see in London? Turn the pages, and meet some British people. Perhaps they will surprise you …

Young people
In work and out of work

Life used to be fun for teenagers. They used to have money to spend, and free time to spend it in. They used to wear teenage clothes, and meet in teenage coffee bars and discos. Some of them still do. But for many young people, life is harder now. Jobs are difficult to find. There’s not so much money around. Things are more expensive, and it’s hard to find a place to live. Teachers say that students work harder than they used to. They are less interested in politics, and more interested in passing exams. They know that good exam results may get them better jobs.

Most young people worry more about money than their parents did twenty years ago. They try to spend less and save more. They want to be able to get homes of their own one day.

For some, the answer to unemployment is to leave home and look for work in one of Britain’s bog cities. Every day hundreds of young people arrive in London from other parts of Britain, looking for jobs. Some find and stay. Others don’t find it and go home again, or join the many unemployed in London.

There used to be one kind of teenage fashion, one style, one top pop group. Then, the girls all wore mini-skirts, and everyone danced to the music of the Beatles and the Rolling stones. But now an eighteen-year-old might be a punk, with green hair and chains round his legs, or a skinhead, with short, short hair and right wing politics, or a “rasta” with long uncombed hair and a love for Africa. There’s a lot of different music around too. There’s reggae, the West Indian sound, there’s rock, there’s heavy metal, country and western, and disco. All these kinds of music are played by different groups and listened to by different fans.

When you read the newspapers and watch the news on television, it’s easy to get the idea that British young people are all unemployed, angry and in trouble. But that’s not true. Three-quarters of them do more or less what their parents did. They do their best at school, find some kind of work and get married. They get on well with their parents and enjoy family life. They eat fish and chips, watch football on TV, go to the pub. After all, if they didn’t, they wouldn’t be British, would they?
Garry Davis
on the way up

Garry’s Dad and Mum worked in a fish and chip shop. “Lucky Garry”, you might think. But Garry would not agree with that. Garry’s Dad made the best chips in Kettering (central England), so the family decided to move to a seaside town and buy their own chip shop. But one by one, the prices of potatoes, oil and fish went sky-high. The family moved again. And again, Garry’s parents worked late every night. It was not a happy time.

Garry left home when he was eighteen. He needed to get away, and start life on his own. He had everything he needed – intelligence, a friendly nature, good looks and ambition. He also needed luck, and he had it. He found a job in the Trustee Savings Bank.

Working in a bank is right for Garry. It offers him just what he wants – a safe future, and the chance of a good training. So far he has done very well indeed. In fact, Garry is a young man on the way to the top. Of course, he has to study hard, and the exams are tough, but he enjoys helping people with their money problems.

The ups and downs of his childhood have left their mark on Garry. He has always wanted a happy home of his own. Now, at the age of twenty-five, Garry is going to get married. He and Juliet have been friends for five years. “Of course, everyone worries about marriage,” he says. “But I believe in getting married for life, and I think you’ve got to work to make your marriage happy. It doesn’t just happen.”

Marriage will bring changes to Garry’s life. No more evenings at the pub with his friends, and fewer coach trips up to Liverpool to watch his favourite football team. The Liverpool team has been part of his life for a long time. “They make me proud to be English,” he says. “They are the only good thing the English have done in five years.” There are a lot of things in England that worry Garry. “The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer,” he says. “People in the rich south don’t know what it’s like for the northerners. It used to make me angry, now it makes me sad.”

But Garry doesn’t feel sad for long. He’s too busy thinking about the flat that he and Juliet will be moving into, after that special Saturday in September.

Men and women
Women’s lib?

We’ve been hearing a lot about “women’s lib” in the last few years. Women, we’ve been told, want more freedom. They want better jobs, more pay, less time at home with their children. They think that women should have the same chances as men. All this has made some men nervous. “There are too many women in charge already,” they say. “And anyway, a woman’s place is in the home.”

Do British women have the same rights as British men? Do they have more freedom and more power than they did ten years ago? Are women getting better jobs and better pay? What are the facts?

In the world of work, things have not changed much in the last ten years. Forty per cent of jobs are done by women, but only twenty-five per cent are done by married women. And the jobs that women do are the worst paid and the least interesting. The average pay for women is much less than the average pay for men.

In public life, too, things are not very different. True, Britain has had a woman Prime-Minister, but only 25 out of 650 Members of Parliament are women. There are very few women in the top business jobs, or in the most important jobs in the civil service. And the few women at the top often have problems with jealous fellow-workers.

On the other hand, some things have been changing. Men seem to be more interested in their homes and their children these days. Perhaps father’s interest starts at birth. Probably ninety-five per cent of British fathers now watch their babies being born. Twenty years ago, most fathers would not push a baby’s pram around the street or change a baby’s clothes. They thought
it was “silly”, or “unmanly”. Now, most fathers are happy to take the baby out, and many will spend much longer playing with and looking after their children.

What about housework? Does the modern British man work in the kitchen, or go round with the vacuum cleaner, or hang up the washing to dry? Not very often, is the answer. Most men are happy to pour out the drinks when guests visit, or sometimes wash up after a meal. But women still do nearly all the work at home, even when they have a full-time job. Men don’t really need to worry about “women’s lib” after all. Not yet, anyway …

**Daphne Crossfield:**

**Women at work**

Twenty years ago Daphne came from Jamaica, the land where she was born. She had always wanted to become a teacher, but for the next ten years, she forgot about her old ambitions. She was working too hard, looking after her four young children. And, like many other young mothers in Britain, she was going out to work. She was helping to earn the money to build up a beautiful home.

Fourteen years later, Daphne’s big chance came. Her local college was offering “TOPS” courses in secretarial studies. “TOPS” (Training Opportunity Schemes) courses were introduced by the government to help people at work to train for better jobs. People doing six-month-long “TOPS” courses are paid while they are studying. Daphne’s “TOPS” course taught her to use the computer, maths, English, and general secretarial and business studies.

Going back to school again after twenty years at work is not an easy thing to do. Daphne could not have done it without her husband, Lam. “He was marvelous”, she said. “He was really wonderful. He did the cooking, he did the cleaning, and he looked after the children beautifully. I didn’t think I could go back to studying again, but Lam made me do it. He really pushed me.”

It was worth all the hard work. Daphne got a job as a secretary in a college. At first she was very nervous. She had never worked in an office before. And the busy teachers were always in a hurry, always asking for impossible things.

“When I started here I had a part-time job,” she said. “Now it’s more than full-time. I have to look after eight teachers on my own. I do their typing, their photocopying – all the secretarial work. It can be very stressful. Sometimes at the end of the day when I walk out of here, I feel I never want to come back again.”

Daphne has come a long way since she arrived in England. Life is not perfect. She’s underpaid, and overworked. But at least her work is interesting. She is not a teacher, but she is working in a college. Many people would feel very proud if they had done as well as Daphne. But she just smiles. “It’s really thanks to Lam,” she says.

**Old people**

**The problem of loneliness**

“Old woman attacked by five boys!” screams a newspaper headline. “An eighty-year-old man living alone was found dead by the postman,” reads the newsman on TV. Stories like these give us a sad, frightening picture of old people. We hear and read about the lonely ones, the poor, sick and helpless ones. Youth seems to have everything. Old age has nothing.

It certainly true that the times are changing for the old. But not all the changes are bad ones. Modern medicine, for example, has made old people healthier than ever before. Many can look after themselves until they are eighty or even ninety years old. Another advantage is that there are many more old people than there used to be. The average British woman lives till she is seventy-five. The average British man lives till he is seventy. This means that old people often have a good social life with their own clubs and organizations. Old people, too, have more money now than their own parents and grandparents had. The “old age pension” is small. But it does mean that old people now have enough food to eat and clothes to wear.

The biggest disadvantage of modern life is loneliness. The young leave home when they grow up and many old people live alone. Families are smaller these days. Fewer old people have brothers and sisters. An old person’s one or two children may have moved to another part of the
country. Even when they live nearby, the young have their own work to do and their children to look after. They have not much time for the old. Problems of loneliness often start when people stop work. Going to work is, for many people, the most important thing in their lives. Work makes people feel useful, and keeps them in touch with their friends. When people retire (men at sixty-five, women at sixty) they often find it difficult to start a new life without their jobs.

The world has changed so much in the past 50 years that it is difficult for old people to understand the problems of the young. When the eighty-year-olds of today were children, there were no computers, iPods or mobile phones. There were no computer games or Internet. It is not surprising that there is a “generation gap” which divides the old from the young. And the world is changing even faster these days than it was fifty years ago. It makes you think, doesn’t it? What will it be like when today’s young people are old?

**Miss Langworthy:**

Old age pensioner

Miss Langworthy was born in 1924. Her eyes are not very good now, and she has a lot of trouble with her heart. But she still jumps quickly to make every visitor a cup of tea.

“It’s been an interesting life,” she says. “I could write quite a lot about it.” Although she was born in London, Miss Langworthy spent most of her childhood on the island of Jersey. Island schools in 1934 were primitive, she says, but they taught the “three Rs” – reading (w)riting, (a)rithmetic, and one more – respect.

Young people were different then, she says. They had to do what they were told. They didn’t have all the things young people have these days. But they showed more respect for the old than they do now. They never put old people into homes then.

Miss Langworthy lives in an old people’s home. She has a small room with her own furniture in it, and she gets all her meals, and everything else she needs. “The staff are very good,” she says. “Frankly speaking, they are not staff. They are my friends. We get tea in bed first thing in the morning, then breakfast, and lunch, then tea and biscuits in the afternoon, then supper, that’s called high tea, then a hot drink at bedtime.”

What about the old age pension? Miss Langworthy smiles. “It’s enough for my needs,” she says, “but not for my wants.” Then she laughs. “It’s a good thing I’m not a smoker or a drinker, isn’t it?”

Miss Langworthy can look back on a lifetime of helping others. She wanted to be a teacher, but her family thought differently, so she left school at fourteen. First she learned dressmaking in a girls’ workroom, but after a year she left to help her mother at home. Years later, when her mother died, she worked in different places as a companion or a housekeeper. But her health was never very good. Now she needs plenty of peace and quiet.

“There’ve been many ups and downs,” she says. “I’ve been through deep waters at times.” What has kept her going? “I put my life into God’s care,” she says. “And he has never let me down. The older I get, the more precious he is to me. That’s all I can say.”

**The class system**

Upper, middle and working

The homeless: No one knows how many thousands of people sleep on the streets every night in British cities. “Shelter” the voluntary organization that tries to help the homeless, that 800,000 new homes are needed. Every year only half of those who need new homes find them. Others stay in bad overcrowded housing, or have nowhere to go.

Henry spends most of his time in the country. He loves animals, especially dogs, and he likes going for long walks, wearing a very old hat. Henry sends his children to boarding school. It’s expensive, but he does not have to spend much money on holidays, because uncle owns a castle in Scotland. Henry prefers old things to new things, and all his furniture is very old. It belonged to his father’s grandfather. Henry likes plain, simple food, and says “hise” instead of “house.” Henry is upper class.
Laura lives in a suburb. She spends a lot of time driving her children to and from their private day school and then to their piano lessons. Laura likes to look fashionable, but she can’t spend much money on clothes because the school costs so much. Her house is quite old, but it’s full of modern gadgets, especially in the kitchen. Laura speaks like the news-readers on TV. She is middle class.

Bill does not own his flat. He rents it from the local council. He used to go to football matches, but now he watches them on TV. Bill’s two children go to the local comprehensive school. They will leave when they are sixteen. Bill has a car. He likes to have chips with sausages or fish, even when he’s on holiday in Spain. He likes to look smart when he goes out with his wife. In fact, he looks cleaner and tidier than Henry most of the time. Bill says “tay” instead of “tea”. He is working class.

People say that the class system in England is breaking down. But it isn’t. The English are snobs. They know a person’s class as soon as he or she says anything. The pronunciation tells all. You are not upper class just because you have money. Some upper-class people are quite poor, and some working-class people (especially pop stars) are quite rich. Your class is a result of your family, your school, your job, your house, and above all, your pronunciation.

The English are very interested in class. They like TV programmes and books about upper-class people and their servants in the old days. But class is not really a laughing matter. Working-class children do not do so well at school. And upper-class children, even the not-so-clever ones, have a much better chance of getting a job. Henry and his friends will arrange that.

The punk. It’s three o’clock in the afternoon and Kevin is sitting in Trafalgar Square, watching the tourists. He has nothing else to do. Kevin left school two years ago. He has tried hard to get a job, but no one will employ him. For a year after he left school, he lived with his parents in their small flat in Yorkshire. But his got tired of him lying in bed all day, and his father shouted at him.

So Kevin came south, to London. Now he lives in a cheap hotel. He gets some money every week from the social services. He has to spend more than half this money on a bed in a shared room, and breakfast. That leaves him very little for food and clothes.

Kevin has lost all hope of finding a job. He did not do well at school, and he has no skills. Now he’s become a punk. Thinking about his clothes and hair gives him something to do. And he meets other punks, who become his friends.

Kevin doesn’t think much about the future. Some of his friends take drugs, and are in trouble with the police. “I won’t do that,” says Kevin. “I hope not, anyway.”

The Duke. No one knows exactly how rich he is, but at the very least he has £500,000,000. His 300-acre estate in central London includes the south side of Oxford Street. He owns thousands of square miles of land in Northern Ireland< Wales, Hawaii, Canada< Australia and America. He lives in a fabulous modern mansion near Chester in the north of England, which is never open to the public. And he flies to work in London by helicopter. He’s good-looking, quiet, well-educated but not especially clever, and he is happily married. His name is Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor and he is the Duke of Westminster.

Gerald Grosvenor is not a playboy. He is the head of his family company, the Grosvenor Trust, and he works hard to make sure that the family money will be there for his children and his children’s children to enjoy. No one would guess that this quiet man is so important in the world of finance. Some time ago a policeman stopped him for driving too fast through Grosvenor Square, part of the Duke’s London estate. “Do you think you own the place?” The policeman asked sternly.

British titles. “Princes” and “princesses” are members of the Royal Family. There are different kids of “lords”, e.g. dukes, earls, and barons. These titles usually go from father to son. The title “sir” for men and “dame” for women are given to people who have given special service to the country.
CHAPTER TWO

At work in the city

Britain is a small island with a large population, and most of her people live in or near cities. Most cities were built in the nineteenth century, and some of them look old and dirty. In every one there are areas where big factories have closed, people are unemployed and houses need repairing.

And yet British cities are full of life. Cafés, pubs and restaurants are busy until late at night. The streets are crowded with traffic. High “double-decker” buses rise above the smaller cars and vans. Sometimes groups of people march together to express political ideas. Cities are always changing. Old shops close and new shops open. Building is always going on.

At the same time the cities, especially the City of London, have a strong feeling for history and tradition. It seems strange that a love of the past and a desire for change should exist side by side. But they do.

The City of London

From morning till night

It’s seven o’clock in the morning in the famous “square mile” of the City of London. All is quiet except a few cleaners still at work in the empty offices. Slowly the City comes to life. The doors of the Stock Exchange and the banks and businesses that make up the great financial center of Britain are opening. Half a million people are rushing out of the stations, on their way to work from their homes in the suburbs.

The clocks strike ten, and the City is full. The London offices of the banks of Japan, the USA, Italy, the Middle East, Hong Kong and everywhere else in the world are at work. The tower of London has opened its ancient gates to the queues of tourists, eager to see the fabulous Crown Jewels. At the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court, an anxious prisoner waits for the judge to speak.

Lunchtime. The cafés and pubs are full of hungry workers. Some of the City’s churches are holding services, lectures or concerts for workers who have escaped from their desks for the lunch hour.

Five o’clock, and the rush hour is at its worst. People are crowding into the underground stations. The streets are becoming quieter, except in the “Barbican”, where new flats have been built to attract residents back into the City.

It’s evening. At the Mansion House, Britain’s business elite, dressed in evening clothes, are stepping out of their Rolls-Royces to dine with the Lord Mayor of London.

It’s late. The City’s financial center is quiet. But in Fleet Street (the “street of ink”) newspapers are rolling off the presses, into waiting vans, and away to the railway stations.

Down by the river, not far away, the Chief Warder is locking the gates of the Tower of London. Tonight’s ceremony is the same as it has been every night for seven hundred years.

“Halt!” says the entry. “Who goes there?”

“The keys,” answers the Chief Warder.

“Whose keys?”

“Queen Elisabeth’s keys. God preserve Queen Elisabeth!”

And the sentry says, “Amen.”

Mr Mowll: the Clerk to the Clothworkers

The Clothworkers Company is one of the most up-to-date property owners in London. But it was founded in 1528, with a history going back centuries before that. Mr Mowll’s job is really managing director, but he is called “The Clerk”. And the business of the Company is not only to make money, but also to give it away. The “Clothworkers” are certainly an unusual company.

City Companies like the Clothworkers were the first trade societies. People in the same industry joined together to protect themselves against outsiders. They trained skilled workmen, and made sure they were properly paid. Members were looked after when they were old or ill. These Companies often built beautiful halls where they could meet, and several of these can still be seen in London today.

In modern times, the land that these companies own has become very valuable, and some of them have a great deal of money to give away. The Clothworkers give to universities, to medical work, to old people, to the blind, to the arts, as well as to technical education. In fact, they helped to start the City and Guilds exams, taken every year by half a million students all over the world.

Mr Mowll spends most of his time at his desk, like any other “city gent”. But he also has a small part to play in the rich ceremonial life of the City of London. When a Clothworker became the Lord Mayor of London, Mr Mowll took part in the Lord Mayor’s Show, wearing his special gown and badge. The day before, he was at the “Silent Ceremony”, in which the new Lord Mayor takes office. It lasts for three-quarters of an hour, and almost no words are spoken.

For Mr Mowll, the procession, the banquets and the old costumes are more than charming traditions. They are an important part of the special kind of business community that works in the City of London.

“The City is like an international village,” he says. “Business is usually done face to face, not by letter or by telephone.” Surprisingly, in these modern times, a spoken agreement is still worth as much as a written one. Perhaps that is why so much business is done over lunches and dinners. It may be a good thing for business, but it’s not so good for the figure. There are no fried chips waiting for Mr Mowll when he gets home to his London suburb at night. Mrs Mowll will have a nice slimmer’s salad on the table.

Building and Builders

Where do British people live? About 80% of British homes are houses. Only 20% are flats. Over 57% of British people own their own homes, 33% rent their homes from the local council, and about 10% rent them privately.

The changing skyline

It’s going on everywhere, in every city and town of Britain – building, building, building. About 1.5 million people work in the building trade, many of them from Ireland. They make up nearly 6 per cent of all Britain’s working people. Every year thousands of new houses are started. Ten years ago the total was nearly 200,000. But still it is not enough. The queue of homeless people grows longer and longer. Every night more and more people have to sleep in the open in the street of Britain’s cities.

Why does Britain need more and more houses? One reason is that many of the cities were built quickly and cheaply in the nineteenth century. Those houses need to be replaced. Another reason is that many homes are in the wrong place. There are empty houses in the north, but there aren’t enough houses in the south and in London where there are more jobs.

In the 1960s architects thought they had all the answers. They built giant “tower blocks”, twenty or thirty stories high. They pulled down large areas of the old cities and put up cheap concrete buildings which they thought were modern and efficient. But often, the results were awful. The buildings of the 1960s are now very unpopular, and the architect is the man everyone dislikes.
There is a new mood now in British architecture. Fewer old buildings are being pulled down. Instead, they are being modernized. London’s old fruit and vegetable market, called “Covent Garden”, is a good example. Town planners wanted to pull down the lovely old buildings and put up modern office blocks. But thousands of ordinary people joined the “Save Covent Garden” campaign, and the planners had to change their minds. Now Covent Garden, with its cafés, small shops and street musicians, is one of the most popular areas in London.

Of course, new building goes on. In fact the old dock area of London is the biggest building site in Europe. But this time there won’t be so many concrete “high rise” blocks. More comfortable, friendly styles are coming back. Wood and bricks are being used again, along with concrete and steel.

There is a long, long way to go. In many of Britain’s biggest cities, like Liverpool and Glasgow, there are areas with terrible housing problems. Cities like these badly need big new building programmes. There should be work for those 1.5 million men for years to come – that is, if the money can be found.

**Paul Shine: builder’s mate**

Summer and winter, Paul Shine (aged twenty-seven) starts work at eight-thirty in the morning. He is a builder’s mate. “Jim and I are a team,” says Paul. “Jim does the skilled work, and I get it ready for him.” Most of Jim and Paul’s work is repairing old houses, both inside and outside. The English weather is their worst enemy. “In the summer it’s too hot,” says Paul, “and in the winter your hands freeze onto the metal.”

Paul’s family comes from Ireland, but his parents moved to England when he was small. His father worked with a big road-making company, and the family travelled around a lot. It was not a happy home. Most of Paul’s school years were spent in Brighton, a seaside town in Sussex to the south of London. Paul didn’t like school work much, but he enjoyed the sport. He joined the Brighton Harriers running club, and ran races for Sussex.

At fifteen, Paul was bored with both home and school and he left. He did small jobs on building sites, but in the summer he spent a lot of time travelling from one pop music festival to another. At these festivals, large numbers of young people meet in the open air for several days at a time. They listen to music and play their own guitars, they sleep in tents, or under the stars, and they make friends. In the beginning pop festivals were small. But by 2000 they were very big indeed. Around 30,000 people went to the last Stonehenge festival.

For a while, pop festivals took up most of Paul’s time. He liked the people, the free atmosphere, and of course, the music. But now he’s settled down. He’s been working full-time for Jim for two years now, and he’s got a steady girlfriend. His working hours are long – from eight-thirty till six every day. But he still finds time to play his guitar and go to the pub. He likes a good football match too. He’s been a Liverpool fan since he was six years old. But it’s too expensive to go to all their matches. “I haven’t got enough money,” says Paul. “I spend it as fast as I get it.”

Don’t we all?

**Self-employment**

**The small business**

The 1970s were a bad time for Britain’s small businessmen. Big companies were growing, and small companies were in trouble. Giant supermarkets, with names like “Tesco”, “Sainsbury” and “Safeway” were opening in the main streets of every town. The small shops on street corners could not sell so cheaply. They had to close.

It was the same story with hotels and pubs. Before the 1970s, there were many small brewers who made different kinds of beer. But the big brewers bought up the small brewers and soon travelers could only choose between two or three kinds of beer, all with the same factory-made taste. The big brewers bought pubs two, and gave them the same style and atmosphere. Many interesting and unusual pubs post their traditional character. Hotels suffered in the same
way. Two big companies, Trusthouse Forte and Grand Metropolitan bought and changed many of the country’s oldest hotels.

Many factories went the same way as the shops, pubs and hotels. At the time, people thought that bigger companies would bring bigger profits. But it didn’t always happen. And the problem was that bigger companies looked for ways of cutting down the number of workers. This made unemployment worse. In some towns everyone worked in the same large factory. If it shut down, as the steelworks did in Corby, Northamptonshire, the results for the whole town were terrible. The sad signs of industrial death can be seen in areas like Toxteth in Liverpool and the old “cotton towns” near Manchester.

Now, small businesses are fighting back. They employ about a quarter of Britain’s workers, and the number is growing. In some places, like St Katharine’s Dock in London, old industrial buildings have been turned into new, small businesses.

In other places, young people who have no chance of finding a job in a bog company make and sell their own handmade goods. Some people who have lost their jobs in a factory have used their final payment to start their own small business. Mr Newton of Nottingham, for example, and always collected flags. When he lost his job, he decided to make them himself. He set up a small workshop, and now he employs three people and sells his flags to several giants of industry. Those giants of industry had better watch out. The popular slogan now is “Small is beautiful”.

**The Conways:**

**self-employed**

_Bang bang! Clatter clatter!_ The machines in the Conways’ small print shop are working fast and noisily. Mrs Conway picks up a pile of papers and takes them over to the photocopying machine.

_Ring ring!_ It’s the telephone. Mrs Conway hurries over to it. “Hello? … Yes… It’ll ne ready by lunchtime … Thank you … Goodbye.” She hurries back to the photocopying machine. A customer comes into the shop. Mr Conway puts down the boxes of cards that he has been unpacking and goes towards her with a smile.

“Good morning. Can I help you?”

“Oh yes, please. I want you to print the invitations for my daughter’s wedding. She’s getting married next month. It’s going to be lovely. Two hundred guests and a big dinner afterwards…” She goes on and on. Mr Conway listens patiently. At last she leaves and Mr Conway hurries back to finish unpacking the cards.

It’s lunchtime, but there is no time to stop. The shop is full of people. A taxi company wants some advertisements printed by tomorrow. A businessman wants some personal cards by tonight. A youth club needs some tickets for their summer disco – by yesterday.

It’s seven o’clock. Mrs Conway looks at her watch. Her teenage children will be waiting for their supper. At eight o’clock the work is finished at last. They lock up the shop and drive home.

Two years ago Mr Conway was the manager of a printing company, employing over a hundred people. But there were endless problems. Business was bad, costs were high, and the trade unions were unhelpful. Mrs Conway was a nurse. She spent all day every day listening to other people’s problems. She was getting more and more tired. The Conways decided to go into business together.

“We didn’t know it would be so much work,” says Mrs Conway, “but we’ve never been happier in our lives.”

“On the day we started, people were banging on the door before we even started,” said Mr Conway. “The business just keep on growing.”
The world of advertising
You can’t be too careful

Drive through the city streets, go down into the underground, buy a newspaper, turn on the television and open your letters in the morning. Advertisements stream at you from all sides. It’s not surprising. More than £3,000,000,000 is spent on advertising every year in Britain, and more than 40,000 people work in the advertising industry.

Advertising is not just a business. It’s an expression of a country’s ideas and feelings. Advertisers spend a lot of time and money studying people’s likes and dislikes so that they can interest and persuade them. Look at British advertisements and you’ll get some idea of what British people like and admire. You’ll see what makes them laugh, and what makes them want to spend their money. British advertisers, for example, often use people’s love of animals, even prehistoric ones, in their advertising campaigns. But sometimes, they get it wrong.

In 1980 an advertising company produced an advertisement of Audi cars. It showed a skeleton of a brontosaurus with the words “Evolution has a sure way of correcting a faulty design.” The advertisement argued that this lovable dinosaur was probably “the worst designed creature of all time. Audi cars, on the other hand, claimed to be extremely well designed.

The advertisement caused an angry storm in museums and universities all over the country. “It’s an absolutely infamous libel!” said Doctor Alan Charig of the British Museum, a world expert on dinosaurs. “Brontosaurs survived for about 140 million years. Everything they did, they did successfully.”

John Man, author of The Day of the Dinosaur, was so angry that he made an official complaint to the company.

It is the job of the Advertising Standards Authority to make sure that advertisements do not offend people. “We would not want the image of the dinosaur to be unfairly represented by advertising,” said a spokesman. “If the advertisement is wrong, we will expect the advertiser to put it right.” In the world of advertising you just can’t be too careful.

Caroline Le Bas: managing director

What do you expect from a girl who was so naughty she was sent away from school? What do you expect from a girl who didn’t go to university, who never finished a course, and who can’t even type? You certainly don’t expect her to become a very successful and well-known businesswoman. But that’s what happened to Caroline Le Bas.

Ms Le Bas is a Londoner. She was born in Chelsea, and has lived in London all her life, except for those two and a half years at boarding school which ended so suddenly. It was in London that she found her first job – working in an office at the London School of Economics. Her stepfather didn’t like women going to university or having interesting jobs. He thought they should spend their time preparing to get married. He obviously didn’t understand his stepdaughter very well. An interesting job was the one thing she wanted.

Caroline soon got bored as a filing clerk, and decided that secretarial work would be more fun. There was only one problem. She couldn’t type. But that didn’t stop Caroline. She told her employer, who imported spices from Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) that she could type very well. He soon found out the sad truth, so once again Caroline was out of work.

It was not long before Caroline found a job in advertising. She liked it. She enjoyed the advertisement, the new ideas and the interesting people. But her first job, as an information officer was not interesting or difficult enough for her. So she started doing a course in marketing and accounting. She never finished it. She was offered a wonderful job before the end of the course, which started her off on her career. Now she is the managing director if her own advertising agency, which is well-known for its exciting, creative campaigns.

It took Caroline only ten years to reach the top in advertising. And one can’t help thinking that she hasn’t stopped yet. She doesn’t see why a person should have only one career, and she
certainly doesn’t plan to spend all her life in advertising. If she hadn’t gone into advertising, she says, she would have like a career in television. So who knows, one day she may surprise us all.

**Local government**

**Mayors and councilors**

The Parliament in Westminster in London is the home of the British government. But in fact, many of the decisions that bring changes to people’s day-to-day lives are not made in Westminster at all. They are made in each town or county district by the many local government “councils”. There are two kinds of council. Large areas of the county are run by “county councils”. They look after the police, the fires service, the roads, the buses, the schools, the libraries and the welfare services. Each large “county” is divided into smaller “districts”. The district councils look after more local matters, such as building and renting houses and flats. They clean and light the street, take away the rubbish and provide car parks.

Local government is an important part of British democracy. The decisions on how local money should be spent are made by “councilors”. These men and women are elected every four years. A new chairperson or “mayor” is elected every year. It is hard work being a local councilor. There are meetings to go to and large piles of papers to read. Mayors also have to go to a large number of lunches, dinners and other social events. But the councilors and mayors are not paid. They do this work for nothing. Usually, they are people who are interested in politics, or who just want to work for the good of their town.

The local councilor’s job is to make decisions on how local services should be organized. These decisions are carried out by 2.5 million local government workers. Nearly half of this big army of people work at schools, which are organized by local governments.

Where does the money come from to pay for all these people? This is the question that the Westminster government is always asking. Some of it comes from local taxes or “rates” on land and houses. The Westminster government has to pay the rest. And as the bills have gone up, the government has been asking more and more questions. There are many fights between Parliament in London and local councils. Parliament wants to spend less money. But local councilors don’t want to stop providing the services that people need. It’s one of those arguments that will probably go on, and on …

**Susan Clarke:**

**the girl from the town hall**

Lancashire, in the north of England, is proud of its many fine old towns, and Bolton is one of the best. Its nineteenth-century town hall is a beautiful reminder of the good old days when Lancashire cotton was famous all over the world. Times have changed, the old town hall stands like a lonely island in a sea of newer buildings. But there is nothing old-fashioned about the people who work inside it. They do a modern job for a modern city. One of these people is Susan Clarke, a clerical assistant, aged eighteen.

Susan began her career with a disappointment. She did not do as well as she had hoped after her end-of-school exams. So when she started work, it was as the office “dogsbody”, doing all the small, boring jobs that no one else wanted to do. She found herself helping with the photocopying, booking rooms for meetings and showing people the way to the right office. She had to run round with messages, checking the letters for the post, and keeping lists of all the office equipment.

Like most office British workers, Susan worked from nine to five with an hour off for lunch. She enjoyed herself. She liked doing a lot of different things, and she liked the friendly atmosphere. But nobody wants to be the office dogsbody for ever. Susan soon saw the chance. She applied for a job in a new community scheme, still inside the town hall, and she got it.

Like other British cities, Bolton has seen many changes since the Second World War. The cotton industry has grown smaller and smaller, and many people have no work. Some parts of the city centre have been rebuilt, but some are old, and falling down. Bolton has all the problems of “inner city decay” which affects so many British cities. It’s the job of local
government officials, who work from the town hall, to try to find answers to Bolton’s many problems.

Susan knows she is lucky to have a good safe job. She’s even luckier because she is getting good training. Every week she has a day off to go to college on a “day release” scheme. So far, she has done courses in accounting, business organization, and social services. One day she wants to work in the social service department. She wants to deal directly with the people whose problems bring them in to ask for help: the old, the sick, the unemployed, and the homeless. “I’ve always wanted to work with people,” says Susan. She’ll have plenty of chances to do that in Bolton town hall.

Proud traditions

“Workers of the world unite!” says the writing on the trade union banner. It comes slowly down the road, held high above the heads of the marchers. The bright red silk, covered in fine painting and gold thread, passes on. There are shouts and songs from the men and women that are marching past. There are shouts from the people watching, too. Some are friendly. Some are not. Another banner comes along. “Out of darkness into light,” it says. People are marching to show their anger. Factories are being closed and jobs are being lost. Some accept it. Others don’t.

Opinions are divided.

The beautiful banners are a special tradition of British trade unions. Some of them go back to the early nineteenth century, and many are real works of art. The banners are examples of the history and spirit of the trade unions. They show the strong local feeling of many of the unions. They carry pictures of working-class heroes. They are living symbols of the struggle of working people a better life for themselves and their family.

Trade unions in Britain have a long history. The union members of the early years fought hard for better pay, shorter working hours and fair working conditions. The memory of their history is one of the strengths of the British unions. It is also one of their weaknesses. Some union members find it difficult to shake off the past and change to modern ways. The new technology is not always accepted. Old-fashioned ideas are still popular.

Recently, Britain has had a bad name for industrial relations. But this is not always deserved. In fact, Britain has no more strikes than many other industrial countries, and has fewer than some. One of the difficulties of the trade unions in Britain is that only the bad things are reported in the newspapers. Bad news is “news”, but good news is not “news”. A strike is always on the front page. But friendly agreements by managers and unions to make important changes are not often reported. Another problem is that newspapers only talk about the big, strong unions, who have power. But there are many smaller, weaker unions with very little power.

The last word on the unions comes from the banner of the Watford Workers’ Union. “United we stand, divided we fall,” it says. This is a slogan with a lot of meaning for Britain’s trade unions.

Colleen Mansfield at Thorn EMI

It was a hot summer day in north London. Inside the television factory at Thorn EMI the heat was growing. The sun beat down onto the glass roof. Usually it was painted green, but the new glass had been put in. It had not been painted and the sun was shining straight down onto the working women below. Several of them had headaches. They went to see the manager. “I’m not interested in your personal problems” he said.

Colleen Mansfield was one of the women. “My God, this can’t be right,” she thought. It was a typical example of the unpleasant conditions that women in industry had to work in. It was the kind of problem that made people like Colleen Mansfield join the trade unions, to work for a better deal.

Colleen was not an ordinary member of the trade union for very long. Soon women that she worked with elected her to be their shop steward. It was now her job to speak for the workers to the management. At first it was very difficult. There was a bad working atmosphere in the
factory. And many people, even other shop stewards, did not like dealing with a woman. But Colleen did not give up. It was soon quit clear to everyone that she was just as determined as any man could be.

Many years of hard work followed. Colleen was lucky. At home her husband (a bus driver) liked what she was doing, and supported her. At work, she found a perfect colleague in Geoff Jarvis, another trade unionist at the factory. Together they went again and again to the management, talking, bargaining, and persuading. Slowly, they built up respect. New managers came. Working conditions began to get better. Now, Thorn EMI is an example of how management and unions can work together to make a good working atmosphere.

What made Colleen care so much about other people’s problems? “I owe it to my Irish mother,” says Colleen. “She was a great lady. We were poor, but we always had books.” Colleen looks round the wonderful new restaurant that the trade unions have fought for, where Thorn EMI managers and workers eat together at last in equal conditions. “She taught me how to care,” she said.

The civil service

The Mandarines of Whitehall

Politicians are famous. Civil servants are not. Politicians speak loudly about everything they have done or are going to do. Civil servants almost never speak in public. Politicians come and go as heir parties rise and fall. Civil servants stay in the same departments for years. People think that politicians are the men and women with the most power. But civil servants can be just as powerful.

The job of the civil servants is to carry out the wishes of the government. But in Britain the government changes every three or four years. One government might ask for a big new road to be built. The next government might try to stop it. The civil servants see all the problems and difficulties of introducing new ideas. They often try to compromise. They sometimes try to make the government change its mind or to delay decisions which they do not like. This can be a good thing. It can stop the country from rushing into hurried changes. It can make sure that governments act sensibly. But it can be a bad thing. It can slow down important reforms.

There are over 63,000 civil servants in Britain. They collect taxes, pay people’s pensions, look after prisons, and give help to industries and farms. They look after the country’s defense and organize hospitals, museums and roads. The cost of this large civil service is very great indeed, and governments are always trying to cut it down.

On the whole, civil servants are not very popular with the British people. Some people are jealous of their safe jobs and good pensions. Some also feel that civil servants are too slow to change, and too blind to the needs of ordinary people. The top people in the civil service are sometimes called the “Mandarines of Whitehall” (Whitehall is the street in London where many big governmental departments are to be found). But the popular idea of the civil service is not always fair. Some departments have plenty of good ideas and can move fast to carry them out. And the top civil servants are some of the most intelligent and best trained people in the country. Civil servants can still be proud of the good service they give in many areas of life. After all with then the country would just come to a stop.

Vivian Brown: civil servant

In the old days civil servants wore black “bowler” hats and dark suits, they carried long umbrellas. But not now.

Take Vivian Brown for example. He has a very good job in the Department of Trade and Industry. He has to make important decisions about the future of British business. He works with the top men in his Department, and he often has discussions with government ministers. But Vivian Brown (aged thirty-nine) rides a bicycle to work, wearing a pair of jeans. True, he changes into a suit when he arrives at the office. But at about six-thirty, when his day’s work is over, he changes back into his jeans and cycles home again.
Vivian Brown could have chosen any kind of job. He did well at school, and very well indeed at Oxford University, where he studied Arabic. But the civil service offered lots of interesting chances. Like many other clever young men and women, Vivian chose to make it his career. When he left Oxford, he took the difficult civil service exam and passed.

For Vivian, the best thing about his job is the variety. He likes changing from one kind of work to another. In the past fifteen years he has worked for Britain’s space programme. He has travelled around Britain, meeting heads of universities, and well-known scientists. He has even travelled abroad. The Department of trade and Industry lent him to the Foreign Office for three and a half years. During that time he and his family lived in Saudi Arabia.

Vivian is not the only successful person in his family. His wife has a very good job too. She is a doctor in a large hospital, with a special interest in very young babies. She works long hours, and is often away from home at night. So who looks after their young children? Like many other middle-class parents, the Browns have an “au pair” girl. “Au pair girls are usually students from European countries who want to live in an English family and learn English. They work for about four or five hours a day, helping in the house and looking after children. In their free time they go to English classes, or go out with friends. At the same time, young Matthew and Oliver Brown can practice their French, Dutch or German. It will be very useful when they grow up, and – who knows? – join the civil service.
CHAPTER THREE

At work in the country

Visitors to Britain are often surprised by how much open, wild countryside they see. In some areas, especially in the hills of Wales and Scotland, there are almost no people at all. Even in the rich farming areas the population is getting smaller. Young people go to the towns to find work and only the old remain. On the other hand, city people love to visit the country. Millions of them drive out of town on every sunny weekend.

In this chapter we will meet some people from different parts of Britain. For most of them, traditional easy of life are still important. Perhaps country people all over the world prefer the old ways to the new. What do you think?

Farms and farmers
A modern industry

Britain is not a large island, but it has very different kinds of countryside, and very different kinds of farm. The hills of Scotland, Wales and northern England are often covered with snow in winter. Only sheep farming is possible in these areas. In southern Scotland and Northern Ireland, the areas with warmer weather and frequent rain are good for growing grass. The cows in these areas produce Britain’s milk and most of her butter and cheese. In central, eastern and southern England, more and more land is being used to grow cereal crops, like wheat. Fruit is also produced in the south especially in Kent, a county southeast of London, known as “the garden of England”.

British people have always had deep, romantic feelings about the land. They like the style of old country houses, and try to copy it even in their homes in town. Many people dream of retiring to the country when they are old. City people think that country life is more healthy and natural. They think of small, picture-book farms with a few cows and pigs, and a farmyard full of ducks and hens. But this picture is no longer correct. Farming in Britain is a big industry these days. Modern ways of farming have brought many changes. The new farmer is more like a businessman, or a factory owner, than the old-fashioned person in the children’s storybooks. More and more food is being produced by fewer and fewer people. In fact, three per cent of Britain’s working people work on farms, but they produce about seventy per cent of Britain’s food, and export a lot as well. This is a big improvement. Twenty-five years ago, British farmers produced less than half the country’s food.

Everyone agrees that British farmers are very good at producing a lot of food cheaply. But there is a high price to pay. There are fewer and fewer jobs to be found in farming. Machines, not men, now works on the land, and the old farm-worker’s cottages stand empty. Hens no longer scratch about in the farmyard they live in long factory buildings and never leave the cages. The nature lovers are unhappy with the farmers too. The poisons they use to kill insects, kill other wind animals as well. The old woods and marshes, full of old flowers, butterflies and birds’ nests are disappearing. The farmers’ big machines are moving in to plant more and more wheat. But the city people keep their romantic dream. “Country cottage” styles of home decoration have never been more popular.

Julie:

farm worker’s child

Young Julie sits under the window and carefully draws a bee. It’s a fine autumn afternoon, but Julie can’t see out of the window. It’s much too high for children of eight ears old to reach.
The school was built a hundred years ago when children had to keep their eyes on their books - and on nothing else.

The village school that Julie goes to has only fifty-four children in it. The local council are always trying to close it. They point to the old wooden floors, the high ceiling and the entrance marked “Girls only” and “Boys only”. “It’s so old-fashioned”, they say. “And anyway, it costs too much to run.”

But up till now the old school has stayed. Some children come on the school bus from farms miles away, but Julie is lucky. She lives in a cottage at the bottom of the village. It’s nearly a mile to walk to school, but there’s always something to see on the way. This morning she stole a couple of beautiful apples from Mr Grinstead’s garden. It’s naughty, but exciting. If Mr Grinstead catches her, he’ll tell her Mum, and she’ll be in trouble.

School is over, and Julie walks home. She is in a hurry today. Her favorite TV show is on at four-thirty. She like children’s pop music shows. Her brother, Ben, likes watching American cartoons on the other channel, but he’ll be out today. He’s gone over to the farm to see Tom Grinstead’s new sheepdog puppy. Ben wants a dog too, but Julie’s Dad says they can’t afford it. They might have to move soon. Dad works on the farm, but Mr Grinstead says he might not need him next year. The Dad will be unemployed, like so many other men in the village.

Julie wants to be an actress when she grows up. She wants to live in the town anyway. There is not much life in the village. There’s no cinema, and not even a toy shop. There aren’t many children here now. Quite a lot of the old cottages have been bought by people who live in London. They come here just for holidays and weekends.

Julie gets home and pushes open the door. Mum’s not back from the shop yet. She turns on the TV and settles down to watch her favourite programme. One day she’d like to live in a beautiful house, just like that lady in the show.

P.C. Summers the village policeman

These days police are often in the news, and the popular ideas about them are changing. Many people still admire them for the work they do, but they are worried that policemen are becoming too powerful and too violent. They are filmed on city streets trying to control angry crowds, fighting gunmen, or racing about in fast cars. Yong people, especially blacks, are often stopped and questioned by the police without a good reason.

But miles away from London, in the eastern village of Suffolk, the world of Police Constable (P.C.) Summers is very different. He lives and works in Sutton village, in the heart of the Suffolk countryside.

P.C. Summers’s day starts at eight o’clock, when he phones his head office in the nearest town to collect any messages. There’s always something new. A dog has bitten a postman in the next village. Children have been stealing pears from a farmer’s fields. Shooting has been heard in a wood during the night. P.C. Summers gets into his car and starts his daily work. A call comes through on his radio. An old woman wants him to go to her neighbour’s house. She can hear a terrible fight going on.

“A lot of my work is just giving advice,” P.C. Summers says. “When there’s a big fight someone calls the police, and then I have to try to quieten things down. I hear all about people’s marriages. Often they just need someone to talk to.”

P.C. Summers likes his job because he can be independent. But even the work of a village policeman is changing. “It was better before he had cars,” he says. “The old village policeman on his bike knew more about the local people. He was closer to village life. Of course, we can get to trouble spots faster now, and call in more men on our raids in a few minutes. But we don’t have the chance to deal with problems on our own.”

P.C. Summers is a countryman at heart. When his work is done he spends his free time growing vegetables in the garden beside his police cottage, or singing in the local male voice choir. And though he works from a car and not from a bicycle, he still knows a lot about what
goes on in the village. “Take my advice,” he says. “Don’t go into the woods near the river tonight. Strange things happen there when the moon is full.”

Tourism

Travelling around Britain

Every year more than eleven million tourists visit Britain. In fact, tourism is an important industry, employing thousands of people. Most visitors come in the summer months, when they expect good weather. In July and August, the streets of London are full of the sound of French, Italian, Japanese, Arabic and German.

Tourists usually spend a few months in London, then go on to some of the other well-known cities. Oxford and Stratford-on-Avon (birthplace of Shakespeare) are visited most often. But Bath in the west, with its Roman ruins and beautiful eighteenth-century streets, is also popular. So is York, the oldest city in the north, and Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland.

The main tourist places are crowded with coaches, and ice-cream sellers. But in the quiet country areas, there are many interesting places that new tourists find. Some, like the old stone village of the Cotswold’s, in central England, have already been “discovered”. But there are beautiful villages in other parts of the country too. In the typical English village the cottages crowd around an old church, which is often full of history. And nearby there might be a big old house, once lived in by the “squire” and his family, now open to the public. There are no coach tours or hotel here. Visitors go to the houses with the “Bed and Breakfast” signs. It’s more fun – and much cheaper – to stay with a British family.

Perhaps the least visited places in Britain are the old industrial towns. But many people think that nineteenth-century cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow, show the real Britain. The greatness of the past is till to be seen in their old streets and squares. But their golden age of industrial wealth is over. They have serious difficulties with unemployment and had housing. Some buildings sand empty, waiting to be pulled down. The cheap, concrete buildings of the 1960s already look old and dirty. But for the adventurous tourist these cities are full of life and colour. Local pop groups play in busy pubs. The plays in their theatres are often as good as those in London. International musicians and entertainers perform in their concert halls and opera houses.

The easiest way to see Britain is to join a coach tour and follow the guide. That way, you’ll see the tourist face of Britain, but there will be many other things you won’t see at all …

The Clive-Pronsonby-Fanes

and their stately home

Most people want the sun to shine during the holiday months of July and August. But Charles and Judy Clive-Pronsonby-Fane are glad when it rains. Fewer people will go to the beach, and more will come to see Brympton d’Eve ry, their beautiful “stately home”.

The oldest part of Brympton d’Eve rcy was built in the thirteenth century, and then for five hundred years it just grew and grew. Not even Charles and Judy know how many windows there are. “About a hundred, I suppose,” Says Charles.

Now the house looks like a part of the land, as if it had been there for ever. Sweet-smelling roses climb up its beautiful yellow stone walls, and the only sound is the quacking of ducks on the pond.

For visitors, Brympton d’Eve rcy offers a wonderful day out. They will take away a memory of big, sunlit rooms full of antique furniture and graceful gardens full of old-fashioned flowers. But for Charles and Judy, Brympton d’Eve rcy is home.

The Fane family have owned Brympton d’Eve rcy since 1731. But when the house came to Charles in 1974, it had been rented to a school for sixteen years. The gardens were full of weeds. Rain was coming in through the roof and every room needed painting. Most people would have tried to sell the house. But Charles decided to make it into a home again, and to help to pay for it by opening it visitors. Suddenly, Charles’s life was very different. He had been working in a gambling machine business, mending broken-down machines in pubs and clubs. Now he was
doing a dozen jobs, including painter, furniture mover, builder and farmer. And just when he
needed her most, Charles met and married Judy, the perfect wife for a stately home owner. She
was soon doing a dozen jobs too, including housekeeping, gardener, decorator and curtain
maker. “I’ve worked out that Judy has made two acres of curtains,” says Charles. “And she looks
after nine acres of gardens.”

Not everyone would choose to live in Brympton d’Evercy. There is no central heating.
Charles and Judy sleep under twelve blankets in their old four poster bed. And there’s no electric
light in the downstairs rooms. But the Fanes love it. Their three children love it too. One day, the
house will go to Edward, their small son.

What is it like, living in a stately home?

“Jolly hard work,” says Judy. “Sorry, I’ve got to go and feed the ducks.”

Scotland
A special way of life

A lot of people think that Scotland is a part of England. But, as many Scotsman would tell
you, it certainly is not. In fact, until the eighteenth century Scotland was an independent country,
with a parliament of its own. The English had tried many times over many centuries to bring
Scotland under their rule. They succeeded at last in 1707, and some Scots have never forgiven
them.

Scotland is, in some ways, a separate state now, though the official head of state of the
country is the Queen of England. It has its own capital city (Edinburgh), its own law. It even has
a language of its own, spoken now by only a few people in the islands.

In some ways Scotland is like England, with its good farmland and low green hills. But in
central and northern Scotland (“the Highlands”) there are high mountains and deep valleys, fast
rivers and cold lakes (called “lochs”). These days, of course, there are good roads and railways
all through Scotland. Aberdeen, the northeast city where the oil from the North Sea comes to
land, is especially easy to reach. But it can still be quite difficult to travel in the winter when the
hills are covered with snow. And it always takes a long time to visit the beautiful far-off islands
on the west coast. One reason why Scotland has stayed so different from England is the wildness
of the land. It has always been difficult to get there.

There are only about 5 million Scots, and most of them live in the southern half of the
country, but they have kept a special culture and way of life of their own. Their own church, the
Church of Scotland, is different from the Church of England. They have their own kind of music
(the traditional “bagpipes”), their own kind of clothes (the colourful Scottish “tartans”), and their
own kind of food and drink, including their famous whisky.

Scotland is a country of incredible natural beauty. It is also very empty. In the Highlands
the population is small, and it is getting smaller all the time. Perhaps that is why visitors always
come back. They enjoy the quiet, empty country after the noise and dirt of the town. They like
fishing in the clean rivers, and skiing on the snow-covered mountains. They like visiting
romantic castles built by warlike chiefs and tragic kings and queens. There is only one problem.
They can never be sure that the sun is going to shine.

Mr Macgregor:
gamekeeper

In Edinburgh, Scotland’s capital city, lawyers hurry to work along the windy eighteenth-
century streets. In Glasgow, Scotland’s largest industrial city, factory workers crowd onto the
buses in the morning. But far out in the country, in a wooded valley near the sea, John
Macgregor lives a very different kind of life.

Like his father and his grandfather before him, Mr Macgregor is the gamekeeper for the
Orr Ewing family. In fact, the Macgregors have worked for the Orr Ewings since 1887. But Mr
Macgregor (now seventy-one years old) is the last gamekeeper in the family. His son works for a
pharmaceutical company in the city. Like so many other old traditions in Scotland, this one is also coming to an end.

Mr Macgregor has lived on the Orr Ewing estate all his life. He is a true country-man. His work changes with the seasons of the year. It is his job to look after the game birds (mainly pheasants) on the estate. He has to protect the baby birds from foxes and other wild animals until they are old enough to live in the woods alone. He also looks after Major Orr Ewing’s nine dogs. And during the shooting season, from October until the end of January, he has to help organize the “shoots”.

Shooting is a very popular sport in Scotland. People will travel a long way and pay quite a lot of money for a day’s shooting. There are usually about twelve shooting days a year in Major Orr Ewing’s woods. Eight or nine “guns” (men with guns) stand at one end of the wood. The beaters start from the other end of the wood, and beat the bushes to make the pheasants fly out. As they fly up into the air, the “guns” shoot them. Each “gun” brings his own dog, which runs into the wood to bring out the dead birds.

Mr Macgregor has seen a lot of changes in his lifetime. When he was a bow, there were sixteen indoor servants in the Orr Ewings’ enormous house, and sixteen men working in the woods and the garden. Now there are two outside workers and one part-time indoor helper. But he has no regrets. “If I had my life again, I wouldn’t change anything,” he says. “You’ll never be wealthy in this job, but I like the feeling of being free.”

Wales

Hills and valleys

The history of Wales, like the history of England, is the story of a small country fighting for its life against a big one. For two thousand years, the people of central and southern Britain have tried to control the small land in the west. In many ways they have won. But the 2.8 millions people of Wales still have a special spirit and life of their own.

Much of Wales, especially in the centre and north, is wild, beautiful, mountainous country. Fifteen hundred years ago, the Romans had left Britain, and Saxons were pushing the country from the east. The Celtic people of Wales, safe in the mountains, fought back. But in the centuries that followed, the kings of England slowly broke the power of Wales. Since 1536, Wales has been governed from England.

Large parts of Wales have empty hills, where only a few people live. But especially in the south, coal mines and factories grew up in the nineteenth century. The cities of Swansea and Cardiff, and the towns along the Rhondda valley, are some of the most important industrial centres of Great Britain.

In both town and country, the people of Wales have always kept their own culture and traditions. Two hundred years ago, many followed John Wesley, the religious leader, away from the Church of England and built their own Methodist chapels. Even today, the chapel plays an important part in the life of Welsh towns and villages. In politics, too, the Welsh have followed their own ideas. From Welsh coal mines and factories came some of the greatest leaders and traditions of the early trade unions.

The Welsh have not forgotten their independent great-great-grandfathers. The old Welsh language still lives on. About a quarter of the population speak it as well as they speak English. There is a strong Welsh nationalist party, who want to keep Welsh culture alive in Wales. They make sure that Welsh programmes appear on TV, and that road signs are written in both English and Welsh.

It’s quite hard work to stop an old language from dying out, but no one has to work to keep music alive in Wales. The Welsh National Opera is well-known internationally. So are the brass bands, and the male voice choirs of the Rhondda. The Welsh seem to make music wherever they go. Just listen to a crowd at a rugby match, singing “Land of our fathers”, you’ll see what I mean.
Ruth Evans:
a girl from the valleys

Llanfair Caereinon is a long Welsh name for a small Welsh town. It’s a lovely place to live, in a valley on the edge of the lonely hills of Powys. But it’s not the best place if you want to find a job. Some young people leave home and look for work in the big cities of England. The ones who stay cannot choose the kind of work they like. They are lucky to find a job at all.

Ruth Evans, aged twenty-one, wanted to be a hairdresser. She left school when she was sixteen, and learned hairdressing at college for two years. But she couldn’t find a job. She went to London, but there was nothing there. She tried farm work, but she didn’t like it. Now she is working at the Laura Ashley factory in Newtown, a beautiful Welsh hill town. There she makes pretty dresses that she loves to wear herself.

Laura Ashley is a big name in British industry. Their clothes, curtains, rugs, wallpapers and furniture sell all over Britain and in other countries too. But unlike many other big companies, the Laura Ashley Company has not moved to a big city. The soft colours and wild flowers printed on their clothes are curtains come straight from the valley of Wales.

Ruth has an industrial job, but she still lives the life of a country girl. Her hours are long: she leaves home at six fifty-five on the factory bus to start work at eight, and she does not finish until five in the evening. But when she is free, she spends her time with horses. She’s lucky. Her uncle is a farmer and he keeps horses, and her boyfriend, who works on a farm, loves riding too.

Ruth shares a flat in Llanfair Caereinon with her friend, Anna, who works at Laura Ashley too. “I go home to see my Mum every day,” Ruth says, “but I couldn’t live at home again. Once I’ve got used to doing everything myself, it’s not easy to change.”

“Home” for Ruth is till very important. Her eight brothers and sisters have all grown up now, and they see each other often, especially at the monthly service in the chapel. Ruth speaks English at home, but her parents always speak Welsh to each other. Ruth can’t speak Welsh, but she understands it. She can tell, for example, that Llanfair Caereinon means “The Church of Mary and the Fort by the River Einion.” Easy, isn’t it?

Northern Ireland
The “troubles”

When people think of Northern Ireland, they usually think of guns, bombs and soldiers. They have heard of the fighting between Catholics and Protestants. They have seen photographs of soldiers in the streets and funerals of the dead on both sides. Sadly, the world is used to stories of violence and death from Northern Ireland. The present “troubles” as the Northern Irish say, have been going on since the 1960s.

What are the reasons for all that? They go far back, of course, into Irish history. For centuries, Ireland was ruled by England, her stronger, richer neighbour. The people of Ireland were Roman Catholics. But most of the farmers from England and Scotland who went to live in Ireland were Protestants. The English and Scots became rich landlords, and the Irish people suffered. They fought for their freedom, and in 1921 they won. Soon after, the Republic of Ireland was born. But in the north of the country, there were more Protestants than Catholics. They did not want to become part of the Republic. So the country was divided. The northeast corner of Ireland became “Northern Ireland”, and stayed with Britain as part of the United Kingdom.

This situation pleased the Protestants (two-thirds of the population of Northern Ireland), but it did not please the Catholics. The Protestants always won the elections. The Catholics had no power, and no way of sharing it. Their anger grew. In the end, it turned to violence. The “troubles” had begun.

When you see news about violent clashes on TV, it is easy to think that everyone is involved in the troubles all the time. But for most of the 1.5 million people, life goes on in the
normal way. They have enough to worry about without thinking about bombs in Belfast. Unemployment is high. The traditional employers were shipbuilders, farmers and cloth makers, but all of these industries need few and few workers.

Much of Northern Ireland is beautiful green farming land, with many forests, lakes and rivers. The coast if especially lovely with sandy beaches in some places, and magnificent views in others. Three-quarters of a million tourists visit Northern Ireland every year to enjoy its natural beauty. When you are fishing in quiet rivers, or sunbathing on the beaches it is easy to feel that the troubles are a long way away.

Mrs Chambers:

Mrs Chambers sits comfortably in her armchair, enjoying a cup of coffee. She has the right to relax. She has had a long and busy life. Mrs Chambers has retired now to a small house in Bangor, a popular seaside town far from Belfast. But for most of her life she lived in the country. Her husband’s farm was on an island in the middle of Strangford Lough (“lough” is the Irish word for “lake”). There, Mrs Chambers baked bread twice a week, made jam every summer, and put her husband’s dinner on the table at twelve o’clock every day.

The island farm had been owned by the Chambers family for many years, passing on from father to son. It was a quiet and beautiful place to live. They grew potatoes and vegetables, and kept hens and cows. When Mr Chambers died, his son took over the farm. Mrs Chambers moved away.

She takes another sip of coffee, and smiles as she remembers people from the past. “The old lady down the road thought she had a ghost in the house,” she says “but it was only old Tom McAleer, frightening her for fun.” The memories came fast. “Twenty men, they had, only ten years ago, to bring in the potato crop. Young Hugh has a machine now. He only needs five.”

It’s time for news on TV. Mrs Chambers wants to see the racing results. She won quite a lot of money last week. Next month she is going down to Tipperary in the Republic of Ireland. The horse racing there is wonderful. She finds it hard to stay away. But before the racing results there is another item of news. A bomb has exploded in Belfast. Several people have been killed. Mrs Chambers shakes her head. “They are all crazy,” she says. “It’s just a few who make all the trouble. The rest of us want to live in peace. We’ve all got life-long friends from both sides. And most of the time we never talk about the troubles.”

The racing results come on. She leans forward to watch. For her, ordinary everyday life is the most important thing.
CHAPTER FOUR

National institutions

From the time when we are born until the time when we die we all come across the great institution of our country. Most of us are born in hospitals. We all go to school. When we are old enough, we vote for the government we want, and some of us join the army. We all read newspapers and watch TV, and when we marry, many of us do so in a religious building.

Our nation’s institutions shape our lives in many very important ways. Sometimes we do not even realize the great effect they have on us. Think of your own life for the moment. You would be a very different person if you had been brought up in a different country. What sort of person would you be if you had always lived in Britain?

Education

Trying to be fair

Before the 1960s there were two main kinds of state secondary schools in Britain: “grammar” schools and “secondary modern” schools. The grammar schools were for the most intelligent children and the secondary modern were for the less intelligent children. Many people felt that this system was unfair. During the 1960s and the 1970s the government decided to join the grammar and the secondary modern schools. The new, bigger schools were called “comprehensives”. More than eight per cent of the state secondary schools in Britain are now comprehensives.

Everyone hoped that comprehensive schools would be the answer to the nation’s education problems. They hoped that children would do better if they chose from many different subjects. They believed that the not-so-clever would learn more when working with the clever. They thought that a more practical education would give the country better scientists and businessmen. But not everyone was pleased with the results. They were big and unfriendly. Some schools soon had a bad name.

By the beginning of the 1980s many comprehensive schools were doing better. Both students and teachers had got used to the new system and were making it work. But the system was still not really fair. In some areas the comprehensive schools were really good. But in other areas, especially in the city centers, there were still serious problems.

As well as the state schools, there are about 500 private schools in Britain. Most of them are boarding schools, where the children actually live in the school. Private schools are very expensive. Some private schools give a very good academic education. Some do not. But nearly all private schools have good social status. The boys and girls who go to them learn to speak with upper-class pronunciation. They make friends with children from families like their own, and they often find it easier to find a job. Many people feel that this is wrong, but the private schools are still growing.

Rachel Blankenhagen

Rachel is fifteen. She goes to Greycourt Comprehensive Schools in a suburb of London. She studies maths, physics, chemistry, biology, English, French, German, Latin, geography, history, religious education, music and cooking.

Once a week, the whole school meets for “assembly”. The headmaster read from the Bible and says prayers. The children all sing a hymn (a religious song).

Rachel is more interested in languages than in science, so she has chosen to study Latin and German as well as French. Many children learn a musical instrument at school. Rachel has a
clarinet lesson once a week. The children have lunch at school. Some bring their own sandwiches, and some have a hot meal cooked in the school kitchen.

Most schools have a “careers” teacher, who advises the children on how to choose a career and find a job when they leave school.

After school there are clubs which children can choose to go to. Rachel does art on Mondays and Woodwork on Wednesdays. At home, Rachel does one or two hours of homework in the evening.

**Thomas O’Malley**

Thomas is fourteen. He goes to Ampleforth, a private school in the north of England. He studies the same subjects as Rachel, but he does not do music, cooking and careers. On the other hand, he does a lot more sport than Rachel — from two to three-thirty every afternoon except Saturdays. He has lessons on Saturday morning, but he is free on Saturday afternoons and evenings. On Sundays he goes to church in the morning, and has games in the afternoon, but he can do what he likes in the evening.

Many private schools have “cadet corps” in which the boys train to be officers in the army, navy or airforce. All the boys at Ampleforth have to belong to the CCF (Combined Cadet Force) for their first two years at school. The boys at Ampleforth do not wear a uniform, but they are not allowed to wear white trousers or white pullovers, and they must wear a suit to church on Sundays. At CCF they wear army uniform.

In the evenings the boys watch TV, do their homework, or do their own hobbies. Thomas is interested in photography, and belongs to the photography club. Some boys spend their free time using computers in the computer room.

Thomas sleeps in a “dormitory” with six other boys.

**Medicine**

**The NHS**

The good news about Britain’s National Health Service (NHS) is that it gives free medical help to everyone who needs it. Sick people don’t have to pay to see a doctor, or to stay at hospital, and they pay only part of the cost of their medicines. The bad news is that the NHS is always running out of money. The British government spends less on health than the American government. And in the USA sick people also have to pay every time they see a doctor.

The NHS has been admired and enjoyed by British people since 1946 when it started. The idea then was to look after people “from the cradle to the grave”. Free medicine was part of the “welfare state” which gave free education to the young, money to the unemployed and pensions to the old.

Slowly, as the years passed, problems have grown up. Governments found that the bills were getting bigger and bigger. In 1982, £14,000 million was spent on health. One reason for this was that there were many more old people than there had been in 1946. Forty per cent of NHS money went on looking after the old.

Some people say that the NHS is a luxury Britain cannot afford. They want to bring back more private medicine, for which people would pay. Free medicine, they say, should be given only to the poor. Other people, including many doctors, disagree. Everyone, they say, has the right to the same medical help. In a two party system, the rich would always get the best. This would not be fair.

People also disagree about how NHS money should be spent. Should £15,000 be spent on each heart transplant operation, when there are not enough beds for thousands of old people in pain? Should abortions be paid for by the NHS? Should more money be spent on the mentally ill? Shouldn’t doctors and nurses be better paid?

These questions go on and on – but so does the NHS. And millions of British people are thankful that it’s there.
**Eastern philosophy and western medicine**

“If you really want to do something,” says Dr Patel, “nothing comes in your way. It doesn’t matter if you are a man or a woman, or a foreigner. You just go on and do it.”

Dr Patel should know. She came to Britain from India as a newly married woman. Her husband was an Indian lawyer from Kenya, and they planned to go back there to live. But the political situation in East Africa changed, and like thousands of others they made their home in London. The young Mrs Patel had always wanted to be a doctor. Now she saw her chance. Although she had a very young baby, she began her training.

Her two children are grown up now, and Dr Patel is busier than ever. She is a GP (“general practitioner”) with the National Health Service. This means that she has 1,500 people in her care. Some patients, especially the old, often come to see her. They call on her for everything, from headaches to heart attacks. She is often called out in the night, or at weekends, to the homes of the seriously ill. Most problems she can deal with herself. But if necessary she sends people to a surgeon or a specialist. “The National Health Service is fantastic,” she says. “I think it’s the finest thing in the country.”

A GP’s life is a very busy one, and some years ago, Dr Patel started to suffer from tiredness and strain. Western medicines did not help, so she turned to Indian ways of healing. The Indian system of “yoga” teaches people how to relax, and to live more peaceful lives. It helped her. So she decided to try teaching yoga to her patients, especially those with heart trouble and high blood pressure. It worked. She wrote about her results in The Lancet, an important medical paper. The result was amazing. She received 1,200 letters from forty different countries. She described her discoveries on radio and TV, and wrote a book about them.

Dr Patel did not find it easy to settle down in Britain. The food, the weather, the city life – everything was different. And British people are not always friendly to foreigners. Now, after many years, she feels that England is home. But it’s a good thing for western medicine that Dr Patel did not forget all her eastern philosophy.

**Houses of Parliament**

There are two chambers in British Parliament: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The members of the House of Commons are elected every four or five years. Members of the House of Lords are not elected. Most “lords” are people with old family titles, but only a few of these spend time in the House. It is the “life peers” (retired politicians, trade unionists or businessmen whose titles do not go to their children) who do most work in the House of Lords.

**Past and present**

The Houses of Parliament were built in the grand style of the nineteenth century. Parts of them were rebuilt in the 1950s, but the tradition did not change. Many of these traditions go back hundreds of years to the early days of parliamentary democracy.

The busy MP, arriving for work, his head full of details on farm prices, or driving laws, goes first to the cloakroom. There is a hook on each coat hanger where the MPs (Members of Parliament) used to hang their swords. Most people use it for their umbrellas now.

Perhaps there is a debate going on in the Commons Chamber. The MP makes his way there. He passes through the “Lobby”, where journalists wait to ask questions and pick up any news. The Chamber itself is quite small, with seats for only 346 out of 650 MPs. The MP cannot sit anywhere he likes. If his party is the government party, he must sit on the right side of the house. If he does not belong to the government party, he must sit opposite, on the left side. And he can only sit on the frond seat (called a “bench”) if he is a minister. All the other members who are not ministers, sit on the back benches, and are called “backbenchers”.

There is a red line in the carpet in front of each “front bench”. The person who is speaking is not allowed to step across it. The lines are to stop MPs fighting each other. Sometimes, when a debate is going on, speakers get angry. If they feel strongly about what they are saying, they
might lose their tempers with the other side, and an argument could become a fight. So two red lines were made on the floor. Speakers must not cross them, or they will come too near the other side.

MPs spend only a small amount of time in the Commons Chamber. Most of their work is done in other parts of the House, in the committee rooms, and the library, and the dining rooms. Some MPs, but not all, are lucky enough to have their own office in the Houses of Parliament. There is a terrible problem of overcrowding. The nineteenth-century building just isn’t big enough for a twentieth-century government. But no one wants to pull down the Houses of Parliament to make way for a more modern building. Some people do not see the reason for all these old traditions. They think they are old-fashioned and a waste of time. But MPs like to be reminded of history. It’s too easy to think only of the present. It’s not a bad thing to remember that you are just a small part of something much bigger and older than yourself.

Mr Kilroy-Silk: Member of Parliament

Of course, it is exciting to be a Member of Parliament. You have the power to make important decisions that can change lives. You meet and work with famous and brilliant people. You are talked about. When you say anything, it is reported in the newspaper. But you pay for it. You work harder than almost anyone else. Most evenings you cannot leave work until ten o’clock at the earliest. You spend little time with your family. You spend hours in planes and trains, going backwards and forwards from London to your “constituency”. And for all this, you are paid less than many civil servants.

Robert Kilroy-Silk is the Member of Parliament for Knowsley North, near Liverpool. This is how he spent one day.

08.00 Breakfast at home. The only time he will see his teenage children today.
09.30 Arrives at Westminster. Goes to his small office (shared with another MP) and reads his post (58 letters).
10.30 A meeting of the committee which checks on the work of the Home Office. Today the meeting is looking at a special problem. People sometimes have to wait for a long time in prison before they appear in court. The committee is talking about how this situation can be improved.
13.00 A working lunch in one of the restaurants or cafés in the House of Commons. Mr Kilroy-Silk and another MP are preparing for a meeting later this afternoon.
14.30 In the Chamber of the House of Commons for “Question Time”, when MPs put questions to the Prime Minister. Mr Kilroy-Silk asks a question about unemployment in Liverpool. He stays to hear the main speakers.
17.00 Tea, and another look at his letters. Then into a meeting with other Labour MPs to discuss the Data Bill.
19.00 A quick supper, then more work in his office.
21.00 Back in the Chamber to vote on the debate that has just finished, then home.

Nearly all an MP’s time is spent in meetings, talking to people, trying to make them change their minds, and explaining your own point of view. As Mr Kilroy-Silk says, “That’s democracy.” But talking to people all the time is very tiring. Perhaps that’s why Mr Kilroy-Silk spends his few free hours a week working in his garden, and looking after the ducks, geese and small parrots he breeds. Parrots can talk, but at least they don’t hold meetings.

The armed forces

Soldiers and sailors

It’s the day of a big ceremony and people are crowding onto the streets waiting to see the men march past. There will be guards in bright red uniform with tall black “bearskins” on their heads. There will be marines in white and blue. There will be Scots in tartan kilts. There will be the sound of horns and trumpets, drums and bagpipes. The crowds will clap and cheer. “Aren’t
they wonderful?” people will say. They will remember the good old days of British power. For an hour or two they will feel brave and patriotic.

The army, the navy and the airforce are popular when they dress up and give a good show. At the same time, the British are proud of having a strong, well-trained, modern army. But when soldiers have to do some real fighting, people are not so sure. Every year, soldiers kill are and killed somewhere. People watch the news programmes on TV, but few understand what the trouble is about. They are not sure what the army is doing there.

In 1982, when the navy sailed off to the South Atlantic, a feeling of great excitement swept across the country. The war was popular. The British felt proud of their “boys”. But in the years that followed, people started asking questions. Had the war been right or wrong? What had it all been for? Why was Britain spending so much money on the armed forces when they were so many unemployed at home?

Soldiers in attractive uniforms will probably always be popular in Britain, but the reality of modern war is another matter. Since the Second World War, Britain has been collecting a huge number of nuclear weapons. In the 1960s few people realized what was happening and protested. But it was not until the late 1970s that many began to understand the dangers of nuclear war. For the first time newspapers and TV were full of the subject. Since then some people have decided that the Government is right to keep nuclear weapons. Many others do not agree.

Trooper Curson of the Lifeguards

Trooper Andrew Curson of the Lifeguards sits on his horse, Edwina, outside the sentry box in Whitehall London. The sun is shining. Trooper Curson is wearing leather trousers and boots, a thick jacket, and a metal helmet and breastplate. He is hot. A tourist bus stops in front of him and everyone takes a photo. “Say, honey, come and look at this,” says an American. Some boys pull Edwina’s ears. She shakes her head. A girl pushes her telephone number into Trooper Curson’s boots. He does not look at her. He is on duty. Anyway, he is getting married in a few weeks’ time.

The Lifeguards are guarding the old palace of St.James. No kings or queens pass through this gate now. But the old tradition still continues. The gate is guarded 365 days a year. The Lifeguards do not spend all their time riding horses in beautiful uniforms. They are also part of modern British army. After about three years with the horses, they usually change their red, white and gold uniforms for the khaki of more modern soldiers. Grey-green tanks take the place of their lovely black horses.

Guard duty looks easier than ordinary army life, but in fact it is hard work. Trooper Curson spends many hours cleaning his uniform and grooming his horse before he goes on duty. Just achieving the wonderful shine on his boots takes up two and a half hours. “When I first started,” he says, “it took even longer. I was sometimes busy until two o’clock in the morning, and we had to be exercising the horses at six.”

The result, of course, is magnificent. You can see your face in Trooper Curson’s boots. And when he and his troop ride out at a royal wedding, or on the Queen’s birthday, the sight of them takes your breath away. “We are just showing off, I suppose,” say Trooper Curson. “Of course, you feel really proud sometimes, especially when you are riding near the Queen. You get a lot of time to think, sitting up there on your horse. Sometimes I think, ‘What am I doing up here?’

Life will be different when Andrew Curson is married. He’ll change the room he shares with two other men for a small flat in the “married quarters”. He might even leave the army in a year or two. “I’d like to join the police,” he says. “Then he pats Edwina’s shiny black neck. “The mount police, of course.”
Religion

Churches and mosques

If you look at a map of world religions, Britain would probably be shown as Christian and Protestant. But that would be only part of the story. The national religion of England is the Protestant Church of England, and the national religion of Scotland is the Protestant Church of Scotland. But there are many other religious groups in Britain as well. These include 5.7 million Roman Catholics, 1.5 million Muslims, and 400,000 Jews as well as Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists.

A visitor to Britain might think that religion is an important part of British life. Although there are churches everywhere you look, many of them seem to be empty and forgotten, especially in the cities. But in fact religion is still important to many British people. Interest in religion is actually growing, as millions of people find that the materialistic world does not give them what they need. For many minority groups it is the thing that keeps them together and keeps their culture alive. Muslim parents, for example, often send their children to Saturday schools to learn Arabic and the Koran. They fear that in the British school system their children will not live a good life and respect their parents. Hindu and Sikh temples are also important meeting places. People from India go to them to see friends and discuss problems, as well as to worship in their own way.

Although there many small religious groups in Britain, most people are still Protestant. Every Sunday, about 1.2 million people go to a service in an Anglican (Church of England) church. And sixty percent of the population think of themselves as church members, even if they go to church only at Christmas, or for weddings. The Church also plays an important part in Britain’s national life. Twenty-six of its bishops are members of the House of Lords. It is present of all the great state occasions, like the Coronation. And when the Archbishop of Canterbury (the senior bishop in the Anglican church) speaks, his words are reported in the newspapers.

The saddest part of religious life in Britain is the war between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. The reason for the war is more political than religious. There are of course fanatical Protestants and Catholics on both sides. But there are many other religious people who want peace.

The Reverend Paul Wright: 

priest

A “job” is something that you do for money. A “career” is your progress from the bottom to the top of your chosen profession. But a “vocation” is a special kind of feeling that leads you to do a special kind of work. The Reverend Paul Wright did not always have a vocation for the church. When he left school he became a policeman. Next he worked for Chase Manhattan Bank. Then he went into local government. While he was there he felt that God was calling him to be a priest of the Church of England.

It is not a simple job. Looking after a church and taking Sunday services is only a part of what Paul Wright has to do. He is a part-time teacher at the local church school. He is a part-time hospital visitor, administrator, and a social worker. The telephone in the Wrights’ small house never stops ringing. Paul’s home life, with his wife and children, often has to wait.

Paul soon found that if you wear a priest’s “dog collar” even total strangers will ask you for help. One evening he was on his way to church to take evening prayer. A man ran out of the hairdresser’s. “Father,” he said, “can I have a word with you? I’ve got a problem.” For half an hour the man talked about his broken marriage, while Paul tried to help and advise him. The man went off, and Paul never saw him again.

There is a common idea that churches are places for old ladies, and that young people are no longer interested in religion. Paul agrees that there is a problem with young people. They are too busy finding out about their own lifestyle, their own bodies, and their own careers to worry about the church. But, says Paul, interest in the church is growing again. There are between ten and fifteen percent more men training to be priests than there were about 50 years ago. More and
more people are realizing that cars and other things are not enough to make them happy. They are looking for more in their lives. He believes that the church is there to give it to them. He hopes that it will be able to.

**Voluntary work**

**Willing helpers**

In the main street of every large town in Britain you will see a rather strange shop. It will sell an unusual collection of objects. There will be old books and pictures, used clothes, and bits and glass and china. The name of the shop might be “Oxfam”, or “Save the Children”, or “Help the Aged”. The shops belong to one of Britain’s many “charities”. People bring to them old things they do not want. These are sold and the money is given to charity.

“Charities” are organizations which collect money for people who need help. There are a large number of charities (also called “voluntary agencies”) in Britain. Some of them are very big. Oxfam, for example, collects and sends more than £15 million a year. Most of its money is spent abroad, in Africa, Asia and South America. The Women’s Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) is another important agency. It does a lot of work with old people and patients in hospitals. Each charity has a special interest and a particular job to do. “Shelter”, for example, tries to find homes for homeless people. “Help the Aged” helps old people. The “Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals” (RSPCA) tries to stop people being cruel to animals. As well as the big charities there are thousands of smaller ones. Every school has a “PTA” (Parent Teacher Association) which raises money for the school. Every town has an organization which collects money for repairs on old buildings.

Nearly a quarter of all the adults in Britain do something each year for a voluntary agency. You can find out what kind of things they do if you look at the week’s programme in a typical church hall. On Saturday afternoon, the Boy Scouts might have a jumble sale. All kind of things will be brought and sold to make money. On Monday, there is a meeting of “Cancerlink”, a group which helps people who have cancer. On Tuesday morning there is a “Playground” for small children. On Wednesday it’s the Red Cross Flag Day. Helpers fetch money boxes from the organizer in the church hall and go round the streets collecting money from people. On Tuesday evening, there might be a lecture about Oxfam’s work in Africa. On Friday night it’s time for some fun. The local school PTA are having their annual party. There is a bar, and a pop group, and a lovely meal cooked by the mothers of the school children. Everyone has paid several pounds for their ticket, but nobody minds. All the money goes to charity, after all.

**Margaret Fletcher**

**of the WRVS**

Margaret Fletcher is a middle-class, middle-aged housewife. She cooks she cleans, she washes, she irons, she shops, she gardens and she decorates. But if you ask her what she does, she says, “Oh nothing. I am a housewife.”

But who is the British housewife? They are all different, of course, but there are some things that many of them share. Most of them, for example, have a lot of useful “gadgets” to help them in the house. They have a washing machine, a vacuum cleaner and a deep freeze. They have a dish washing machine and a sewing machine, and electric food processor and an electric kettle. With so much help in the house, older housewives like Margaret Fletcher, whose children have grown up, have time to spare.

Like Margaret, some people spend their free time on their gardens. Gardening, in fact, is one of Britain’s favourite occupations. Some spend their time on yoga classes, cookery classes, or coffee mornings with friends. But for many, the answer is voluntary work.

Voluntary work is an important part of life for Margaret Fletcher. She is a member of the WRVS. She spends hours every week doing all kinds of jobs to help people who are old, or sick, or poor.
Margaret used to work in a hospital, helping in a busy children’s clinic, but now she is doing “meals on wheels”. This service brings hot meals every day to those who are too old or sick to cook for themselves. Without the service they would have to go to hospitals or special homes. But with the help of meals brought to their own house, they can stay home, where they are usually much happier.

Bringing in a meal is the main reason for Margaret’s visit, but she usually stops for a talk. “Old people often get lonely,” she says. “They look forward to my visit. I couldn’t just hurry away without a friends chat.”

Margaret Fletcher says she is “only a housewife”. But without people like her, Britain would be sadder place.

The media
There are four “channels” on British TV. BBC1, BBC2 are owned by the state. The commercial channels ITV and Channel 4, are paid for by the advertisements they show. The BBC has four home radio and TV stations, as well as the “world service” which can heard and watched in many countries all over the world. The world service has many news programmes, shows, cultural and political discussions, and educational programmes.

Words, words, words
‘WHY I CHOPPED OFF MY WIFE’S HEAD” reads one newspaper headline. “QUEEN ENJOYS ASCOT” reads another. You would never guess that they came out on the same day.

Britain’s newspapers look at life from rather different points of view. The Times, The Financial Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph are known as “quality” newspapers. They have more writing than pictures, and they report in detail on serious news, both in Britain and abroad. The Daily Express, The Daily Mail, The sun and The Daily Mirror have less to say and more to show in pictures. They choose stories with “strong human interest”, and are not so interested in foreign news. Some of them, especially The Daily Express and The Sun spend a lot of time and money trying to get new stories and photographs of the Royal Family. Sometimes they go too far. The Queen has had to ask them several times to give her and he children a bit of peace.

Britain’s newspapers may be different in many ways, but politically most of the major ones are “right wing” (conservative) rather than “left wing” (socialist). Only The Guardian and the Daily Mirror are left of centre.

What about TV and radio? Do they support one political party rather than another? The answer to that question depends on your point of view. “The people on the BBC are all communists!” say right-wingers. “Nonsense!” say left-wingers. “They are all fascists!” In fact, both the BBC (the state television company) and ITV (the commercial television company) are not supposed to take sides. “Whatever we do,” they say, “hundreds of people complain.”

The sad truth is that most radio and television news stories are about Britain, not about the rest of the world. British people often seem to be interested only in themselves. They are, on the whole, not very good at learning foreign languages, and few people seem to know much about what goes on abroad. It is all the fault of that narrow strip of sea that separates England from France. British people can’t forget that they live on an island. Sometimes the rest of the world seems a long, long way away.

Samira Osman:
a career in the BBC

Some children want to be firemen when they grow up. Some want to be ballet dancers, or lorry drivers, or film stars. But Samira Osman always wanted to work for the BBC, and when she grew up, that’s just what she did.

Her career started well. It isn’t easy to get into “Oxbridge” (Oxford or Cambridge university), but Samira did. She studied Modern Languages at Cambridge, and applied for a job
at the BBC as soon as she had finished her degree. They did not accept her. She took a job in advertising, and tried the BBC again and again until, finally, she got in.

Samira has been with the BBC for two years now. In her job, she can never be sure what’s going to happen next. That’s why she likes it. Some people would prefer not to travel abroad, for example, around war-torn Middle East to research a programme on religions. To Samira, it was an adventure. Some people would rather not start working on a news programme at seven o’clock in the morning. Samira loved it. She knew that all these different experiences were giving her a wonderful training.

A year ago, Samira was working on BBC radio’s world service, on an arts programme called “Meridian”. Now she is working on another arts programme, this time on television. It’s fascinating. Her subject this week is Caribbean poet James Berry, and his anthology of British Caribbean poets. The poems are new and exciting, written in English, but with the strong rhythm of Caribbean Creole.

What next for a girl who seems to have done everything? Eventually, Samira wants to make her own films, documentaries about real people and real places. She wants to travel to different parts of the world. Actually she has travelled quite a lot already. She was born in the Sudan (her father was Sudanese and her mother English). She has been to Africa and the Middle East, and she is only twenty-seven …
CHAPTER FIVE

Leisure time

A good way of getting to know people is to watch them having fun. In this last chapter, that is what you will do. You will enter the world of sport, fashions, art, eating out, theatre and music. Some of the people you will meet are famous. Some are not.

What do you do in your leisure time? Are you an animal lover, or a pop music fan? Do you like sport, or the theatre? Do you enjoy yourself in the same kind of way that British people do?

Football

“The greatest game”

Most top British footballers start their careers when they are found by “scouts” from one of the big football clubs. The scout’s job is to visit boy’s clubs and youth teams and look for boys with real promise. They are then invited to train with professional players in the club, and the lucky ones become “apprentices” when they are about sixteen. If they do well, they might get a chance to play for their club a year or two later.

Life at the top can be very enjoyable. Firstly, there is the money. As well as his big salary, a player gets five percent of the transfer money if he is “bought” by another club. With prices sometimes over £1,000,000 the player can do very well indeed when he changes teams. The there is the excitement of the cheering crowds at Wembley, where the finals of the great competitions are held. There is the chance of playing in the England team in international matches abroad. And there is the fun and fame of television interviews and features in the press, and the admiration of fans.

But things are not always easy, even for the most successful. Some find it difficult to play well all the time. Some are injured – knees, ankles cause most of the problems. All footballers must retire young, and for some it isn’t easy to build a new career. There are problems, too, for sport club managers. Violence among a small but noisy group of fans has given some clubs a bad name. More and more people are staying away from the football stadiums. Clubs work with the police to control the violence (stopping the sale of alcohol for example), but the problem won’t go away.

Television, too, has brought unwelcome changes. Many people prefer to watch football on the popular weekend programme “Match of the Day”. They can see the most exciting football in the country in the comfort of their own home. It’s better than standing in a cold and windy stadium to see a second-rate game! Most big clubs can still get the crowds they need to pay their huge costs. But for many smaller clubs in the third and fourth divisions, the crowds are growing smaller, and the money problems bigger.

But for a successful footballer like Glenn Hoddle life is very good. “Football is the greatest game in the world,” he says, and he is not going to change his mind.

Glenn Hoddle

scoring for England

Glenn Hoddle was born in 1957, and he kicked his first football when he was nine months old. He joined a football team at the age of ten, and from then on the game was his life. He was only eleven when he was “discovered” and his name was sent to Tottenham Hotspur (“Spurs”). Three months later he was chosen to be one of the lucky boys who train twice a week with Spurs.

Glenn’s career nearly ended before it had begun, because when he was fourteen he was injured in a football game. He had to have an operation on his knee, but luckily he was soon completely better.
In 1975, Glenn played his first game with the Spurs team. It was a bad time for the club. They were losing matches, and in 1976 they dropped from the first to the second division. But not for long. In 1977 they were back in the first division. In 1978 two Argentinean World Cup winners – Osvaldo Ardiles and Ricardo Villa – joined the team. Like Glenn, they played in the midfield position. Like him, they were great runners, because they had to get forward on the “pitch” (field), and defend as well. At first Glenn was worried. Would the two Argentineans take his place in the team? But soon he realized that his position was safe, and that he could learn from the South Americans. When at last, Spurs won the F.A. (Football Association) Cup, it was a great thrill for Glenn.

In November 1979, Glenn’s big moment came. He made his debut (played his first match) for England at Wembley Stadium – and scored. After that he played many times for England, and was in the World Cup in 1982.

The most exciting matches of Glenn Hoddle’s career were the internationals he played for England. But he always wanted to live and work abroad. (In 1979 he was tempted to join Cologne, one of the best German clubs). He was at Spurs for a long time, and he liked the idea of learning a new language and a new way of life. Even when he reached the top, there were still new challenges to face.

**Animals**

*A national obsession*

The British are crazy about animals. They race them, catch them, train them and breed them. They like to hear stories about them on television and news programmes, and they like reading books about them. Watership Down by Richard Adams was one of the most popular novels ever written by an English writer. It did now have a single human person in it. All the “people” in the story were rabbits.

Many families have a pet animal. It could be a dog, or a cat, a goldfish, or a small furry animal like a hamster. Some lonely old people love their cat or dog as much as a human friend. When animal lovers die, they may leave their money to a “cats’ home”, or a “dogs’ home”, or a “retired horses’ home”. Or they may give it to a charity such as the RSPCA.

Racing animals is another very popular activity. Some people, called “pigeon fanciers”, race pigeons. They keep the birds in their own gardens or on their own balconies and train them to fly home. You do not have to be rich to race your own pigeons, but it is different with horses. Only the very rich can afford to keep and race their own. Racehorse owners can be seen in their best clothes at important races like Royal Ascot, with the Queen and other members of the Royal Family. Few people actually go to the races. But nearly everyone can afford to bet some money on the winners, and many people do. Wherever you are in Britain you will find a “betting shop” not very far away.

Looking after and being kind to animals is only one part of the story. Catching and killing them is another great British hobby. Fishing, for example, is the most popular sport in the country. Millions of people like to spend their Saturday and Sunday sitting quietly beside a lake or a river waiting for a fish to bite. And a few people still enjoy hunting foxes, or shooting deer, or catching rabbits.

Why are the British people so interested in animals? Perhaps it is because they are rather shy and reserved with people. “It’s like this,” says one old lady. “I can say anything I like to my cat, but she never thinks I am silly.”

**Dick: prizewinning champion**

Everyone agrees that Dick has got a wonderful personality. He is gentle, hardworking, patient and clever, and he never forgets his friends. Dick comes from an old family of farm workers. His mother used to work on a chicken farm. It was her job to round up the hens and turkeys and make them go into the henhouse. Dick’s grandfather worked with a sheep farmer. He
used to bring the sheep in from the fields when the farmer wanted them. He was very good at picking out one sheep from a group and bringing it into the farmyard.

Dick himself is not a farm worker. He lives with a large family, and spends his time playing with the children, lying comfortably in front of the fire. But he has not forgotten the kind of work his fathers and grandfathers did for hundreds of years. When he goes out for a walk with the family, he runs round them trying to keep them all together.

Dick’s favourite food is meat. He eats nearly a kilo of meat every day. He also eats rice, cereal, eggs and biscuits. This makes him quite expensive to feed. But cooking for Dick is not very hard work. He only eats one meal a day. And although he never says “Thank you”, anyone can see that he means it.

Dick’s friends think that he is very good-looking. They admire his long legs, and his wonderful thick white fur. But strangers sometimes wonder about his hairstyle. “How can he possible see?” they say. “His hair hangs right over his eyes.”

Dick doesn’t seem to mind. He can see very well. And anyway, his hair is one of his best points. The people that he lives with brush it every day. They want to make sure that he always looks his best. They point with pride to his nine silver cups on the piano. “Good old Dick,” they say. “One of the finest Old English sheepdogs in the country.”

**Fashion**

**Street styles**

Once upon a time, fashion was only for the rich. Paris was the centre of the fashion world, and everyone else tried to copy the top French designers. But now, fashion is a much more international matter. London, like other big European cities, has a large number of its own talented and hard-working young designers.

In any case, many people, especially young people, take no notice of the clothes the designers produce. They wear things which express their ideas and feelings about life. They use fashion like a kind of uniform. Take hairstyle, for example. If a boy has very short, almost shaven hair, people expect him to have right wing politics. But boys with very long hair are thought to have left wing politics. A boy who wears a leather jacket covered in bits of metal will probably ride a motorbike. A girl who wears Laura Ashley dresses will probably have middle-class ideas.

Some young people, of course, have fun with all the latest “street styles”. They cut their hair into strange shapes, wear lots of cheap jewelry, cut their trouser legs to make them shorter, or paint their lips blue. These “street styles” come and go. But a lot of young people try to look as clean and tidy as possible. When you are looking for a job, you want to show possible employers that you will be a good worker. Clothes with sporty look are popular. They make people look healthy and energetic.

Street styles are not created by the big fashion designers. In fact, the fashion designers often use ideas from street fashions when they make their own designs. But some leaders of British fashion have quite enough ideas of their own. One of these is Jean Muir, whose beautiful, classic clothes have made her known as Britain’s first and best designer.

For most British people, fashion is not very important. The British do not think about it very much. Even the richest and the most important people often wear old and untidy clothes. Only a very few can afford clothes by Jean Muir. Most people go down to the nearest shopping street and buy something from a “chain” store. The most popular of these stores, with a shop in every town in the country, is Marks and Spencer. Twenty percent of all the clothes the British buy come form “M and S”. And a quarter of the nation’s underwear carries the well-known Marks and Spencer “St Michael” label.
Elizabeth and David Emanuel: couturiers

They were twenty-eight when it happened – the chance that every dress designer dreams of. The Princess of Wales, still “Lady Diana”, asked them to make her wedding dress. David and Elizabeth Emanuel were famous.

Born in ordinary families, the Emanuels had had to work their way to the top. David, son of a Welsh steel worker, learned to fight and win in a family of nine brothers and one sister. He met Elizabeth, daughter of an English mother and American father, at Harrow College of Art. The two young students liked each other at once, and they liked each other’s work. They started to work together, and they liked the work they did together. Of course, they fell in love.

The next step for the young married couple was the Royal College of Art. The fashion show at the end of the M.A. course is a big chance for young designers. The Emanuels were lucky. Bianca Jagger, ex-wife of Rolling Stones Mick Jagger, saw their work and they made a dress for her. When she wore it in New York, the newspapers said it was made by Dior.

It wasn’t very easy. People took their designs home to study, then had them copied more cheaply. Even the richest people sometimes didn’t pay their bills. The Emanuels had to learn from their mistakes. But then came the royal wedding. For weeks they worked in secret, hiding their designs from the cameras of the many various newspaper men. But when at last they stood in St Paul’s Cathedral and watched the Princess walk down the aisle to marry the Price, they knew they had reached the top.

David and Elizabeth made wonderful clothes, but jeans and T-shirts are good enough for them to wear. And after their six or seven day working week, there is no time to spend at parties with the jet-set. It is more fun to stay at home and play with Oliver and Eloise, their two young children. What makes this ordinary young couple special? As David says, “All we have is a love of romance, colour and delicate detail – and, we hope, a touch of magic too …”

Art and design

The old and the new

Britain has produced few great painters of international fame. In fact, the British have always been more interested in literature than in art. It was not until the 1830s, when Turner began to paint his incredible pictures of sea and sky, that British art produced a genius.

The British have not always been great painters, but they have always been great collectors. Through the centuries, the kings and queens of England have bought some of the finest pictures of their time. The Queen has one of the best art collections in the world. Other rich and noble families did the same, and many wonderful pictures found their way into English country houses. Some of these now belong to the nation. They can be seen at the National Gallery in London, one of the world’s finest art museums. But many priceless works of art still belong to private owners. Slowly they are being sold. Some are bought for the national collections, but many go abroad. Sotheby’s and Christie’s, the two big art dealers, are often in the news when great works of art are sold.

But art is not just a matter for the museums. New ideas in art and design affect almost everything in our daily life. Visit one of Britain’s well-known art colleges (the Royal College of Art, for example), and look at some of the students’ world. Ideas that look new and exciting today will look quite normal next year. Walk down the King’s Road in London on a Saturday morning. Clothes by young designers that look shocking or funny today, might be worn by you and me next season.

Not everyone, of course, likes new ideas in art and design. A lot of people prefer the kind of furniture their grandmothers had. And most British people don’t like their pictures to be too
modern. They prefer a nice painting of a pretty girl, or a beautiful view of the sea when the sun is going down. They might not see anything they want in Sotheby’s of Christie’s. They are more like to find it in the Bayswater Road open-air market on a Sunday morning. But they won’t have to spend over £1,000,000 for the kind of painting they are looking for. £25 should be quite enough.

Terence Conran: the Habitat man

Do you need something for your house? A new bed, perhaps, or a set of knives for the kitchen? Don’t worry, you’ll find it at one of the many Habitat shops that have opened in the main streets of Britain’s towns. Tables, chairs, cups, pots and pans – they are all there.

The styles and designs of Habitat furniture are so popular that you can see them everywhere. The clear, bright colours of Habitat curtains have ever large numbers of British windows. Thousands of British feet enjoy the pleasant feel of Habitat’s Indian cotton rugs. And millions of British breakfasts are eaten at unpainted wooden tables, out of cheerful Habitat china.

Habitat furniture is popular because it looks modern, but friendly at the same time. It is also quite cheap. Young people, especially, like it. It is so quick and simple to furnish a new home from the Habitat catalogue. And the result is fashionable, but comfortable.

Terence Conran, the man behind the Habitat name, is still only in his fifties. He started designing and making furniture when he was only twenty-one. Fame came to Terence Conran early. But money came much later. For years he had to work hard to keep his business going. But there are no money problems now for the Conran family. With his second wife, Caroline, and his five children, Terence can afford the good life, and the delicious food and good wines he enjoys so much. He spends the week in Belgravia, the smartest part of London, and the weekends in his country house in Berkshire. His first wife, Shirley Conran, has no money problems either. Her best-selling novel, Lace, has made her a very rich woman.

Running an enormous furniture business would be enough work for some people, but Terence Conran wants to do even more. Ten year ago he bought the “Mothercare” company, which makes children’s clothes. His little dresses and tiny sweaters can be seen on every washing line.

Terence Conran (“Sir” Terence now) makes our furniture and dresses our children. Whatever will he do for us next?

The food revolution

Spaghetti and chips

Once upon a time British food had a bad name. People seemed to eat nothing but boring, plain meat, and chips with everything. Only the cakes and puddings were good, even if they were fattening.

For some time now things have been changing. British people have become much more interested in food, and are even prepared to be adventurous. They have discovered that eating can be fun. The large number of foreign restaurants in Britain has helped this mini-revolution along. Every town (even every small one) has a Chinese restaurant, and may have Indian, Greek, Italian and French ones as well. The average family still has roast beef on Sunday. But they might have Italian spaghetti on Monday, American hamburgers on Tuesday, chop suey (from the Chinese restaurant) on Wednesday, and tandoori chicken (from the Indian restaurant) on Thursday.

Most people buy their foreign food as “take-away” meals, bought at the restaurant and eaten at home. But more and more people are learning to cook it themselves. Every bookshop has a cookery section, and new books some out each week. One popular new subject is “health food”. People are eating less sugar and meat, and more fruit and vegetables.

There is another change that’s coming to British restaurants. In the past, few families went out to eat together. Restaurants were used mainly by businessmen, travelers, holidaymakers, and young couples. But fast food restaurants, selling cheap, hot, American food, are bringing in the
families. In fact, fast foods now make more than one-third of all meals bought in British restaurants. Not everyone thinks that this change is for the better. Fast foods are not very good for you. Doctors are worried that children, in particular, are eating too much of them.

International food may be coming to Britain, but there are signs that the old favourites are fighting back. A friend of mine went into a café recently and ordered spaghetti.

“With chips?” asked the waitress.

**Dave and Mags**

**At the Marlborough**

Nobody can work harder than Dave and Mags. It just isn’t possible. Their day starts at seven forty-five when the cleaner arrives, and it finishes at eleven-thirty when the evening’s washing-up is done. And it’s the same seven days a week, 365 days a year. Well, that’s not quite true. Last year they found the time to take their children away for a short holiday.

Dave and Mags run a pub. They never meant to get into the pub business. Dave started as a builder in Swansea, his home town in Wales. But the business went bankrupt. He went to London. “I’ll get a job,” he told his wife, Mags, “or I’ll kill myself.” Mags didn’t hear from him for three months.

During that time, Dave saw the worst of London. He walked the streets by day, and slept in a poor hotel at night, sharing a room with six other men. But soon he got a job as a barman in a pub. And a few weeks later, Ind Coope, the company that owned the pub, offered to train him as a pub manager.

When Dave and Mags got their first pub, they had exactly 23p left in their pockets. The people who came to the pub were rough, tough and difficult. So Dave was rough too. He threw out the difficult customers, and slowly changed the pub into a quieter, friendlier place. The company was pleased. They offered Dave and Mags the Marlborough, a large old pub in Richmond, one of London’s most pleasant suburbs. The pub was in a good place, but it needed a lot of work. Mags moved in at four o’clock one afternoon, and moved out again at four-thirty. It was too dirty for a young family to sleep in.

Now, five years later, the beautifully clean bar is full of happy customers. Children play in the colourful garden, where the barbecue is always busy. Dave and Mags are well-known in Richmond. People tell them about their problems, and ask their advice. “The vicar and I were talking about our jobs the other day,” Dave said. “We agreed that they are the same in some ways.” And it’s not only Richmond people who have heard of Dave and Mags. “A man came in here the other day,” said Mags, “who had met a friend in Munich. The friend had said to him, ‘You are going to London, are you? Don’t forget to go to the Marlborough in Richmond and ask the lady to cook you her moussaka.’”

**The theatre**

**Shakespeare and pantomime**

So you are in London for the evening, and you’ve got nothing to do? Why not go to the theatre? Your only problem will be choosing from the huge number of plays. Just look in the newspaper. There are more than eighty plays going on in London all the time. Some of them are serious: the Royal Shakespeare Company might be doing *Julius Caesar*, for example. Some of them are funny: *Noises off* by Michael Frayn has been making London cry with laughter for years. Some plays only last a night or two, and some, like the popular musical *Cats*, seem to go on for ever. The St Martin’s Theatre has been showing *The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie nonstop for more than thirty years.

The British theatre is among the best in the world. About three hundred theatres up and down the country open their doors every night. There are more working actors in Britain than in any other country of its size in the world. And more new plays are being written and produced.

Why is the British theatre so full of life? One reason must be its long tradition. Even before Shakespeare was writing in the sixteenth century, there were several theatres in London. Another reason is that British theatre has an unusually large audience. It is not only for intellectual
people. Everyone goes, especially to the musicals, and to the popular Christmas “pantomimes” (traditional plays based on fairy stories”).

Perhaps another reason for the success of British theatre is the great freedom it enjoys. There is no central “school” which says which kind of play must be shown, or which style the actors must be. New ideas are quickly put into action. New ways of doing things are often tried out. Actors and directors can get to the top surprisingly young – if they have the talent.

Of course, many British theatres are not really successful. They go from one problem to the next, only just managing to stay alive. Money is always a difficulty. (Only 50 out of the 300 theatres get money from the government). Actors have problems too. A lot of them spend most of their time out of work, “resting” as they call it.

But somehow, the theatres stay open. The actors do their best, working long hours for little money, trying, as Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet, “to hold the mirror up to nature”.

Peter Ustinov: actor or writer?

Peter Ustinov is the most international person you could find. He speaks English, German, French, Italian, Spanish and Russian. One of his great-grandfathers was a musician in Venice. Another was a teacher in a village school outside Paris. A third was a Swiss businessman. A fourth was a country gentleman living on the River Volga in Russia. And the fifth was an adventure in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

For most people, Peter Ustinov is a face on the cinema screen. They have seen him as Hercule Poirot in *Death on the Nile*, and in films like *Spartacus*, *Topkapi* and *Memed My Hawk*. He is the man with a hundred faces, old, young, wise, foolish, happy and sad. Probably few people know that Peter Ustinov is one of the eight actors in the world to win more than one Oscar.

Few people also know that writing means more to Peter than acting. He wrote his first successful play (House of Regrets) when he was only nineteen years old. Later plays and films, like *Romanoff and Juliet*, *Private Angelo* and *The Unknown Soldier and his Wife*, have given him a big name as a writer. In 1977 his autobiography, *Dear Me*, was a great success.

The world knows him as an actor and a writer, but Peter Ustinov’s friends say that his greatest work of art is himself. “Nothing he creates is as funny as himself,” says one friend. “One hour of him is better than two hours of his work.” And yet, like many funny men, Peter can be serious even while he laughs. “Peter is a reformer,” says another friend. “He’d like to change the world.” Perhaps that is why he does so much work for the United Nations, especially UNICEF (the United Nations Children’s Fund).

Peter Ustinov’s own life has not been always happy. His first marriage ended in divorce. His four children, grown up now, saw little of their father because of his work. But now he has been happily married for twenty years to a French woman, Helene. They have a house in Switzerland and a flat in Paris, but making films keeps Peter on the move. He has worked in every part of America and in Egypt, Australia, Benin, Israel, Kenya and all over Europe, including St Petersburg, Warsaw and Budapest. After all, what can you expect from a man with such international great-grandfathers?

Hunting for Collector’s pieces

What’s so special about biscuit tins, soldiers’ hats, postcards, buttons, old toys, stamps, matchboxes, bottles, spoons, coins, shells, china dogs and old clocks? Nothing, you might think. But you would be wrong. Someone, somewhere, is sure to be collecting them.

Collecting things is very popular these days. Paintings, works of art and valuable books have, of course, always been collected. But only the rich could make collections of that kind. Less wealthy people collected only stamps, or births’ eggs, or shells.

But now, collecting is open to everyone, and the smallest, most ordinary objects are suddenly found to be valuable “collector’s pieces”. Every week, there are reports of
extraordinary prices being paid for the simplest things. Quite recently, for example, an old photograph of Westminster Abbey was sold for about £10,000.

You can understand a collector who pays £46,000 for a Chinese Ming vase of the fourteenth century. But why did someone pay £36,000 for a small model of a ship? And why did someone else pay £1,500 for an old cigarette lighter?

Collecting things is such an important national interest that quite a big industry has grown up around it. You can buy beautiful wooden cases to keep coin collection in, and special lock-up cupboards for your precious old buttons. For your stamps and postcards, of course, you’ll need albums, and your nineteenth-century toy soldiers will need a special glass case.

How will you build up your collection of African jewelry, or old jugs? That’s easy. In London you’ll go to the famous markets in the Portobello Road, or in Camden Passage, or in Covent Garden. There you will find hundreds of “dealers” with shops full of old things who will be happy to help you find that special object to complete your collection.

All this collecting fever is making people mare careful. They are beginning to wonder if the pile of old rubbish up in the roof is really quite valuable. Perhaps Grandfather’s pipe and Grandmother’s umbrella are collector’s pieces. Who knows? After all, quite recently an old gold ball sold for £1,760.

Bekki:
fan of Duran Duran

Bekki is sixteen. She is also a “Duranie”. That, of course, means that she is a fan of Duran Duran, the well-known pop group. What’s so special about Duran Duran? “They play great music, they are really nice people, and it’s just good fun being a fan of theirs,” says Bekki.

Why does she like their music so much? Bekki thinks for a moment. “Well they’ve got good tunes,” she says. “I just like their style.” She sings a bit from Is there something I should know? “You see what I mean?”

Being a Duranie is not quite a full-time job. (Bekki works hard at school and will soon be taking her exams). But it does take up a lot of time. It can take up quite a lot of money too. Most fans, says Bekki, spend up to £150 a year on CDs, £200 on clothes, £300 on magazines and £800 on concert tickets and travel.

Bekki collects anything and everything that has a Duran Duran name or face on it. “I’ve got some lovely photographs,” she says. “You should see the one of me with Nick Rhodes that my friend Melanie took.” She’s also got magazines, books, posters, badges, concert programmes and, of course, a lot of Duran Duran CDs.

For Bekki, the whole thing is a very enjoyable game. She loves finding out as much as she can about the group’s lives and collecting Duran Duran souvenirs. She reads rock magazines, like Smash Hits, and listens to pop shows. It’s more fun when you are interested in someone special. “I like meeting other fans, too,” says Bekki. “They are nice people. Interesting to talk to.”

Most of the fans are teenage girls like Bekki. They get to know each other inside concert halls and outside studios. They all like the music, of course, but they also like the fun of being fans. They know the most extraordinary details of the group’s daily lives. What does Nick Rhodes like for breakfast? That’s easy. Strawberries and champagne. What car does Roger Taylor drive? No problem A silver Porsche. What is Andy Taylor’s favourite drink? Milk, of course!

Is there anything that Bekki doesn’t know about Duran Duran? She smiles, and sits back in her chair. “You can ask me anything you like,” she says, “and I know I’ll be able to answer.”
**Music**

**From north to south**

If you ever did a musical tour of Britain, you might get some surprises. Electric guitars and pop singers are not the only musicians to be heard. There are many strong local traditions of music still very much alive today.

Let’s start in the north, in Scotland. The national instrument is the Bagpipe. Not everyone likes the sound it makes, but to the Scots, bagpipe music is the most exciting in the world. For centuries, up to the First World War, Scottish pipers led soldiers into battles, played for their royal masters, and at weddings and funerals. The bagpipes are still very popular, and every town has a pipe band.

South of the Border, into the north of England, we come to the land of the brass band. This is the country of factories and coal mines, many of which have their own bands. Some of these are incredibly good. The Grimethorpe Colliery Band, for example, is internationally famous. The bands have an annual competition and Britain’s best classical composers write music especially for them.

Let’s go south again, to central and southern England. Music is always to be found in the village church, where the choir sings the old hymns which every school child learns. Here also, in the oub, you may meet a singer of old folk songs.

But now we must go west, for we will find the best choral music in Wales. The Welsh have always been famous for their singing. Even before the Romans came, 2,000 years ago, their “bards” were known to the ancient world. They still meet every year at the “Eisteddfod”, a Welsh competition. Now their “male voice choirs” are very popular, with their special rich, strong sound.

London, like all the great cities of Britain, has a long tradition of classical music. Every night English and international musicians perform in the concert alls and opera houses. London is one of the great classical music centers of the world.

Our musical tour is over and it’s time to catch our plane home. But in the London underground, on the way to the airport, we’ll pass some young “buskers”, singing or playing a guitar or a flute. They look modern enough, but don’t be mistaken. People like them have been playing in the streets of Britain ever since history began.

**Lizi Boyden**

**of the Bach Choir**

From eight in the morning until six at night, Lizi Boyden works in the office of the British Tourist Authority. But when the office closes, she outs down her files and letters and picks up her music. Sometimes she plays her flute with a group of friends. Sometimes she goes busking in Covent Garden. But on one evening in the week Lizi is always busy. On Monday evenings, from six to eight, she practices with the Bach Choir.

The Bach Choir, now more than 100 years old, is perhaps the best of Britain’s amateur choirs. Few of the 250 members of the choir are full-time musicians. Nearly all of them have other jobs. They are not trained singers, and they are not paid for their singing. But the choir is at the very top of the musical world. They have made many first-class recordings, they have sung with famous orchestras, and they have travelled to many different countries.

“The Bach Choir is a whole way of life,” says Lizi. “You don’t just sing and go home again. After the rehearsals and concerts we all go to the pub together. We make up our own small singing groups as well. I even go on holiday with other members of the choir.”

Lizi joined the Bach Choir more than ten years ago. She had to pass a singing test, and every three years she is tested again. “If your voice goes, they ask you very nicely to retire,” she says. The tests make her nervous. The choir is so important to her that she would have to leave.

The Bach Choir has some famous fans, including Prince Charles. He sometimes sings with them. A few years ago he invited some of them to Windsor Castle to sing Christmas carols with the family.
“It was great fun,” says Lizi. “We were taken into a beautiful state room, and given China tea and cucumber sandwiches. Then the Queen and all the Royal Family came in, and we sang for them. They sang some of the corals with us. They seemed to know all the words. Afterwards we had drinks with them.”

Lizi’s full-time job and her musical activities leave her with very little extra time. Why does she do it? “I just lose myself in the music,” she says. “I love most of all singing beautiful music in beautiful buildings. When you sing in an ancient cathedral you look up at the roof, and you hear the music going up and up. It’s a wonderful feeling.”
The world's largest collection of personalities and faces from the late Middle Ages to the present day, London's National Portrait Gallery is the oldest such institution in the world, founded in 1856 on a strong intellectual base which was a consensual attitude at the time: the 19th-century emphasis on the ways in which individuals influenced, and indeed led the events of history. One of its major supporters was the leading historian Thomas Carlyle, who also was an early trustee. FACES of Britain. Elizabeth Laird. True, Britain has had a woman Prime-Minister, but only 25 out of 650 Members of Parliament are women. There are very few women in the top business jobs, or in the most important jobs in the civil service. And the few women at the top often have problems with jealous fellow-workers. Simon Schama explores the history of British portraiture, revealing the stories behind the most compelling images in British art and examining the ways portraiture is used to make a statement. On iPlayer. Not available. Supporting Content. Face of Britain: The Exhibition. Visit the exhibition website. Timeline: Face of Britain.