

ENGLAND

OUR ENGLAND



A GUIDE FOR VISITORS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

This book is for students and visitors who have come to spend some time living in England; it explains some of our unique celebrations such as *Bonfire Night* and how we celebrate more well-known occasions like *Valentine's Day* and there is also some information about those absolutely fascinating topics – English weather and English food.

It is assumed that the reader is living in London so the book includes a lot of London information. However there are also two excursions; one to Brighton and one to Paris.

The title is taken from *England, Their England*, which is a humorous book written in 1933 by the Scottish writer A G Macdonell. I am an English writer and not particularly humorous, in addition most of the material here has been adapted from another book by me called *Business English in Context*.

Finally, you should probably be aware that all of this book has been written from my memory and my imagination, therefore the facts may be unreliable and the opinions may be biased.



1. ENGLAND



THE ENGLISH FLAG

England, Britain, GB or the UK? It can be a little confusing for visitors so here is a (simple) explanation.

The island of *Great Britain* (GB) has three countries, England is the biggest part, with Scotland in the north and Wales in the west. Ireland is the other island, and it is mostly independent, except for Northern Ireland which joins England, Scotland and Wales as the *United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* (UK). Great Britain and Ireland are both part of the *British Isles* which is a geographical, not a political, region.

By the way, the 'great' in Great Britain doesn't mean wonderful, it just means big, because there is another, little Britain, which is in France.

England occupies about two thirds of the island, and has a majority of the population – out of 66 million in the UK, over 56 million live in England so it is quite common for visitors to say England when they actually mean Britain, obviously this doesn't bother the English, but it does make the Scottish and Welsh people rather angry.

The British flag is commonly called the *Union Jack* and the original version was produced in 1606, although the design has changed a little bit since then. Surprisingly, the Union Jack has no official status in Britain, it is just accepted as the national flag because of the long tradition.

The English also have their own national flag, called the *Cross of Saint George*, which is a simple red cross on a white background. You don't see it very often, but supporters of the England football team like to display it whenever there is an international match (Chapter nine explains a little more about Saint George).

Weights and measurements can also be confusing in England. There was a plan some years ago to transfer everything to the metric system but many people prefer to use the old *imperial measurements* – feet, inches and miles for length, and pounds, ounces and stones for weight.

So, if you asked an English woman for her height and weight, she might answer 'I'm five foot, three and weigh ten stone' (Chapter 33 explains what that is in metric). Milk is still sold in pints and English road signs are still in miles, with car speed measured in miles per hour (mph); the only other country to use this system is the USA.

Now, let's have a quick look around the country. Because it's an island, most people live quite close to the sea, in fact the furthest you can be inland is 70 miles. The south coast has lots of seaside towns which used to be popular for holidays and some of them still attract a lot of visitors (Chapter 16 describes a famous seaside town).

England is divided up into large areas called counties; they are very historic and go back hundreds of years. In the west of England are the counties of Devon and Cornwall, both are very attractive and popular with holiday makers.

To the east of London is the county of Essex, and to the south is Kent, these are two of the *Home Counties* which are those counties closest to London; many of their residents commute into London every day to work.

The middle part of England is called *the Midlands*, in the past it was very industrial and the area around Wolverhampton was so dirty and polluted it was called *the Black Country*; it's still called that, although it's quite clean now.

Another former industrial town in the north-west is Manchester, where the industrial revolution began. Its many factories would weave all the cotton that was being delivered by ships to the nearby port of Liverpool.

Oxford and Cambridge are the two famous university towns, they are both attractive and have important museums and galleries.

If you can drive it's a good idea to hire a car and spend some time driving around England, but do remember to drive on the left hand side of the road if you are from one of those strange countries that normally drive on the right.



THE UNION JACK

2. BANK HOLIDAYS



Public holidays in England are called *bank holidays* because these are days when the banks are allowed to be closed; otherwise banks are required by law to open on every single week day, which means from Monday to Friday.

The Bank Holidays law of 1871 created a number of holidays which, for convenience, were usually on a Monday such as Easter Monday. Some more holidays were added later such as New Year's Day on the first day of January which became an official holiday in 1974.

England now has eight public holidays which is actually fewer than most other countries. These eight days are added to the standard 20 days' holiday entitlement to give a total of 28 days' holiday a year for most people.

Although the banks are closed most shops are open on the bank holiday as it is a popular shopping day; there are frequently sales and special offers to encourage people to go out and spend their money.

Unfortunately the English weather is rather unreliable and bank holidays are usually cold, wet and miserable.

3. WHERE DO YOU LIVE?



Do you live in the City of London? Probably not, because London is actually a small city of just one square mile and it's mostly office buildings. You are more likely to be living in one of the many London suburbs such as Hammersmith, Holborn or Peckham.

The *City of London* is now the financial centre where you can find the *Bank of England* (at Bank station), the *Stock Exchange* and *Lloyd's*, the insurance market. The only part of the City where people actually live are some expensive flats in an area called the Barbican.

But in the past, there were many thousands of rich and poor people living together in the City, and because there was no public transport system, people often lived at their place of work.

So, overcrowding was a big problem and it often brought disease; a cholera epidemic in 1848 killed 54,000 Londoners and convinced more people to move away. For years the rich people had been relocating to the west and some of the poorer people had been moving east, to Whitechapel and Bethnal Green.

It was the introduction of trains and trams that allowed people to move even further out, and into the many new suburbs that were being built around London. There were working class areas such as Tottenham,

Lewisham and Hackney and more expensive middle class suburbs like Kensington, Hampstead and Marylebone.

However, the social status of these areas could change over time. In 1874 the artist, Vincent Van Gogh was living in Brixton which was then a smart, wealthy district; but now it is considered to be poor and deprived.

Notting Hill has also changed, it was extremely smart until the 1950s when its big private houses were turned into cheap rented bedsits, then it became very run down; it has now gone back to being an affluent area.

You may know Seven Dials, an attractive junction just south of New Oxford Street on the edge of Covent Garden, but you would be surprised to know that in the 19th century it was a terrible slum and one of the most dangerous places in London.



SEVEN DIALS

4. SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY



Saint Valentine's Day on 14th February is the day associated with love and romance. In many countries on this day men buy flowers and chocolates for their wives or girlfriends and men and women send each other Valentine's cards.

But Saint Valentine's Day celebrations are not the same all over the world: in Japan, Korea and China 14th February is the day when women give chocolates to men and then one month later, on 14th March men give chocolates and gifts to women.

There is no clear evidence of who Saint Valentine actually was or what he did but most accounts place him in the period of third century Rome, however, his day was not associated with love and romance until much later on.

The modern Saint Valentine's Day is mostly a commercial occasion; millions of cards and tons of flowers are sold around the world together with enormous quantities of confectionary and it is also a profitable day for most restaurants.

But if you do send a Valentine card or gift in England remember that traditionally it is meant to be anonymous. So do not put your name on the card or gift; the person who receives it is meant to guess who sent it!

5. LONDON CLUBS



THE ATHENAEUM CLUB IN PALL MALL

In London there are many grand buildings, especially around Pall Mall and Saint James's Street, that are called clubs. These are private societies where only the club members and their guests are allowed to enter. The members go there to relax and talk or to just sit quietly on their own; either sleeping or reading a newspaper.

In the past most of these clubs were for men only and so they were often referred to as gentlemen's clubs; this name is still sometimes used although many clubs now allow ladies to be members as well.

The London clubs began in the 18th century as coffee houses that were open to anyone, but gradually the regular customers established a membership and closed their doors to outsiders. These new 'clubs' had a bad reputation; they served alcohol instead of coffee and some introduced gambling. Their members were mostly rich aristocrats who often lost huge amounts of money at the club's gambling tables.

In the 19th century the drinking and gambling declined and clubs became much more respectable. They all developed their own individual

characteristics; clubs often supported different political parties and their members were associated with different professions: lawyers went to the Garrick, bishops went to the Athenaeum and army officers went to the Cavalry Club.

Most upper-class men were members of at least one club and to describe a man as being 'clubbable' was a compliment; it suggested a sociable, good natured person who was easy to get along with. The area around Saint James's Street had so many clubs that it was commonly referred to as 'club land'.

But the gentlemen's clubs of London began to decline in the late 20th century as social behaviour changed; clubs were seen as dull, boring places, and very few people were prepared to pay the high price of annual membership.

If you walk from Piccadilly down Saint James's Street and then turn left into Pall Mall you can still see at least a dozen clubs (and many of their elderly members) and the elegant club buildings. They are an interesting part of London's social history but will they continue to survive in the 21st century?



AT A CLUB

6. SNOW



Snow looks very pretty, especially when it has just fallen and has not been walked over or driven through and going out to play in the snow is one of the great delights of childhood; it is even better if you have an unexpected holiday because the schools are closed.

It is not always so popular with adults who are working or travelling because they often have to deal with cancelled flights and trains that fail to appear. Business is always disrupted and this is likely to cost the country a lot of money.

But snow is rather unusual in London; there are many winters when it does not snow at all. However, when the snow occasionally comes people tend to panic; buses may be cancelled or delayed and even the underground trains are often disrupted.

Visitors from countries where it snows heavily every winter are often amazed at the way the English react to a light dusting of snow. But of course countries such as Russia are fully prepared for snow; the normally mild climate in England means that nobody ever expects extreme weather.

And yet extreme weather does come to England now and again. Some winters are particularly cold and then even London freezes along with the rest of the country. Many English people remember the terrible winter of 1962 / 1963 when the snow started just after Christmas and continued through January and February and into March almost without stopping.

The occasional snow falls we see today are very mild by comparison.

7. PANCAKE DAY



Pancake Day in England is the day before Lent starts. Lent is the name for the 40 day period before the celebration of Easter. This celebration is called a moveable feast because the dates change every year, depending on the moon.

The correct name for Pancake Day is *Shrove Tuesday* although in many countries it is also called *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday). This is not supposed to be just a one-day celebration, it actually begins on Epiphany which is the sixth of January and culminates in the final celebrations of Shrove Tuesday.

In England this long period of celebrating and feasting has been completely forgotten so now just the tradition of eating pancakes on the last day is all that remains.

English pancakes are very thin and they are flavoured with fresh lemon juice and sugar. Pancake Day is mostly enjoyed by children, who not only get the opportunity to eat lots of delicious pancakes, but also help to prepare them, by tossing the pancake from the frying pan up into the air.

8. SUMMER TIME



DID YOU REMEMBER TO CHANGE THE CLOCK?

Many countries put their clocks forward in the summer and back in the winter. This biannual time change is called *daylight saving time* and it was first proposed by an English house builder called William Willett in 1905.

Willett liked to get up early in the morning and he always became annoyed at the thought of other people still being asleep; he believed that changing the time would be the best way to force people to rise earlier.

Willet's idea was not put into practice until 1916 when it was introduced by both Britain and Germany.

Daylight saving time is not used everywhere; Japan and Colombia for example do not change their clocks. Those countries which are on, or close to the equator do not have any differences in the length of their days and nights during the year.

From 1968 to 1971 Britain tried an experiment with permanent summer time but it was not a success; most people hated the very dark mornings, particularly in Scotland and the north of England.

In the past a lot of people would get confused after the clocks changed and they would be either too early, or late for appointments; but now everyone checks the time on their smart phone which changes back or forward automatically.

9. SAINT GEORGE'S DAY



SAINT GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

Ask an English person on 23rd April what the day is, and they will say 'it's the twenty-third'. However, they probably won't tell you that it's Saint George's Day; this is because most English people don't actually know (or care) that 23rd April is their national day.

Saint George is the patron saint of England in the same way that Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. But whereas Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated by Irish (and non-Irish) people around the world, Saint George's Day is always forgotten.

The story of George and the dragon is well known by most people, and it is often shown in pictures, on coins and in the name of pubs; but English people, unlike the Scots, Welsh and Irish, are just not interested in celebrating their national day.

Why is this? It could be because English people do not have a sense of national pride in the same way that Scottish people do; or perhaps it is because the English identity is so secure that they do not feel the need of a national celebration.

Whatever the reason is, you are unlikely to see a Saint George's Day celebration in London on 23rd April.

10. EASTER



Easter is called a movable feast which means that the date of the celebration changes every year; although Easter day is always on a Sunday. The Greek and Russian Orthodox churches also have a different date for this festival.

Easter is a very important religious occasion; it comes at the end of *Lent*, which is a period of 40 days fasting (going without food), and so Easter day is also traditionally a day of feasting.

Because England is not a very religious country most people don't bother to fast at Lent, and in England Easter it is more often associated with eating chocolate; you will see the chocolate eggs on sale in the shops from around January.

There are two official Easter holidays: Friday which is a serious religious day called *Good Friday* and then the following Monday which is a day for enjoyment.

Easter day festivities for children may include an Easter egg hunt, which means searching for little chocolate eggs that have been carefully hidden, or there may be an opportunity to decorate a real egg by painting it in bright colours.

The frequent appearance at this time of eggs and rabbits, actually relates to a more ancient (pagan) festival which celebrated the beginning of spring.

11. MAY DAY



The first day of May is called May Day and in many countries it has historically been a day of celebration. In English rural villages, May Day was a traditional day of dancing and feasting to mark the arrival of spring.

These old May Day celebrations still occur in some countries but May Day is now more often associated with International Labour Day.

The idea of having a day to promote international labour came from *The Second International*, a socialist conference set up in Paris in 1889. They chose the date to commemorate a strike which had taken place in Chicago in May 1886 when a number of people had been killed.

Today May Day celebrations all around the world are associated with socialism and the international labour movement.

The day became a public holiday in England in 1978, although it is called the Spring Holiday and it is celebrated on the nearest Monday, however the actual 1st May in England is quite often a day for people to make political protests.

Since 1955 the Catholic Church has celebrated the first day of May as the feast day of Saint Joseph the Worker; this was a deliberate choice by the church to offer an alternative to the International Labour Movement.

12. ELECTIONS



Elections are a regular occurrence in England. People vote to choose the government every four or five years; they also vote for their local government and in London they also vote for the mayor.

Elections are always held on a Thursday and voting is from 7am to 10pm. The voting takes place in local schools and libraries which are turned into polling stations for that one day.

Why do elections in England take place on a Thursday? Because in the past workers were paid on a Friday and so Thursday, *the day before pay day*, was the day when they would have no money and therefore be more likely to go out and vote rather than visit their local pub.

There is no modern technology in English elections; voters are given a ballot paper with a list of the candidates' names and they use a pencil to mark an X next to their choice. The ballot papers are then deposited into a metal box and when the box is full it is taken to a counting station where all the Xs are counted.

In most English elections the winner is whoever gets the most votes; this is called *first past the post*. However, the election for mayor uses a form of proportional representation (PR) in which people make a first and second choice of candidate and all the second choices are also added up.

There is no legal requirement to vote in England and many people do not bother to do it. The number of eligible voters who participate in government elections is usually around 60%.

13. FRIDAY 13TH



Do you feel lucky? Maybe not on this day, because many people think that Friday 13th is a very unlucky day. This is because it is a combination of Friday, which is the unlucky day of the week and 13 which is the unlucky number. Some people avoid travelling (especially flying) on Friday 13th and if anything goes wrong it is likely to be attributed to the day's notorious bad luck.

This is a superstition; an irrational belief that something good or bad will happen if certain actions are either performed or avoided. Superstitions differ around the world and what may be seen as bad luck in one country may be seen as bringing good fortune somewhere else. For example, black cats are thought to bring good luck in England; but they are considered to be bad luck in many other places.

A lot of people say they are not superstitious but nevertheless they still cross their fingers or avoid doing 'unlucky' things such as walking under ladders. These non-superstitious people often admit to owning 'lucky' items, such as a pair of socks which they always wear for job interviews.

The most superstitious people are generally those who have a lot of uncertainty in their daily lives, such as, actors, sportspeople, salespeople and, of course, gamblers; they are often dependent on things which they cannot control and so they believe in superstitions to improve their luck.

So is Friday 13th really an unlucky day? Maybe not; some people actually try to arrange flights on this day because aeroplanes are more likely to be empty and the horror film *Friday 13th* has now had 11 successful sequels.

14. PARIS



Now that you are happily living in London, why not take a weekend trip to Paris? If you are an EU citizen, or if your visa allows you to leave the UK, then a trip to Paris can be an enjoyable experience.

The easiest way is to take the Eurostar train from Saint Pancras station in London to the Gare du Nord in Paris. However the Eurostar is quite expensive so you may prefer to fly with one of the budget airlines.

Paris is a beautiful city; the centre of Paris was almost completely rebuilt during the Second Empire period (1848-1870) under the direction of Baron Haussmann.

If you like art, then you will love being in Paris. The greatest art collection is in the Louvre, a gallery which is so big it takes at least a day to get around. There is also a substantial art collection at the Musée d'Orsay, and you should try to visit the less well-known Musée de l'Orangerie which contains the *Water Lilies* paintings of Claude Monet.

That most iconic image of Paris, the Eiffel Tower was built by Gustave Eiffel in 1889 for the World's Fair. It was only meant to be a temporary structure but it has now become the most recognisable landmark in the world.

And finally, remember that Paris is famous for its fine restaurants and its café society so you should definitely spend some time sitting in one of the celebrated cafes enjoying a citron pressé and watching the world go by.

15. ENGLISH WEATHER



The weather in England is unreliable; you really don't know what is going to happen particularly in the summer time when even the nicest day is quite likely to turn to rain.

Of course it's a good topic for conversation; if English people have to talk to strangers then they always like to talk about the weather, but unreliable weather can also be annoying when your garden party has to be cancelled or your pop festival becomes a sea of mud.

The reason for this changeable weather is really geographic; The British Isles are just a small group of islands stuck on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean and therefore they are exposed to the turbulent Atlantic weather systems.

Fortunately, extreme weather is very rare in England so we don't usually get too hot in the summer or too cold in the winter; the last time we had a drought was in 1976 and the last time we had a hurricane was in 1987.

But because the climate is generally rather mild, most English people don't bother to insulate their houses for the winter or to have air conditioning for the summer. And as a consequence most houses are often a little bit uncomfortable.

16. BRIGHTON



If you get tired of London think about spending a day (or a weekend) by the sea in Brighton; it takes about an hour to get there by train and you will find lots of things to see and do.

There are typical seaside entertainments like the beach, the pier and the aquarium; but Brighton has much more to offer. It is sometimes referred to as 'London by the sea' because it is quite sophisticated, unlike all the other English seaside towns; so you will find some good quality restaurants, bars and even night clubs.

There are some expensive shops in the area called *The Lanes* and some very cheap shops in the area called *North Laine*. You can ride in a small electric train which will take you along the seafront to the *Brighton Marina* which is where the rich people keep their yachts; and if you want to really look around the town Brighton recently constructed the world's tallest, moving observation tower which is their answer to the London Eye.



THE PIER

The most interesting attraction in Brighton is the *Royal Pavilion*. This is a royal palace which was built for King George IV at the beginning of the 19th century. The architect was John Nash and he designed the palace in an Indian style. Visitors to the Pavilion can view the magnificent rooms and extraordinary architecture.

Of course, if it's a hot day you can swim in the sea and Brighton has always been a popular destination for surfers but be careful, the beach is all stones and not at all comfortable to sit or lie on.



THE ROYAL PAVILION

17. THE TERRACED HOUSE



Terraced houses are houses that are joined on both their left and right side to another house. Walk around most English towns and you will see lots of terraced houses which were built in the 18th and 19th centuries. These houses are constructed in a classical style with the windows and doors set out symmetrically. Some of these houses were built for very wealthy people but many others were for families with much less money.

The typical terraced house in London is tall and thin; there may be steps up to the front door and also steps down to a basement area which the servants would use. The kitchen would always be in the basement.





Look at the pavement in front of the house and you may see a round metal plate, this was the *coal hole* where coal would be delivered. The delivery men would remove this plate and pour the coal down directly into the coal cellar of the house. These holes are not used anymore.



Terraced houses usually have sliding *sash windows* and possibly wooden *shutters* on the inside instead of curtains. In London, shutters are not used on the outside of the windows. At the front, at first floor level, many of the larger houses have a balcony and above the front door there might be a decorated semi-circular window called a *fanlight*.

Houses might sometimes be built with a few false windows in order to maintain an interesting and symmetrical appearance. These imaginary windows are called *blind windows*.





MONTAGU SQUARE

Typically there is no garden, but many terraced houses are built around a square which has a communal garden in the centre; this is shared by all the residents of the square. The garden might be open or it might be locked and then only the residents have access to it.

Walk around the back of a large terraced house and you may find a quiet little road with small houses; this is a *mews*. Originally the stables for horses were here.

The wealthy people who lived in the terraced house would keep their own carriage and horses and employ servants called grooms to look after them. The groom would live above the stables.

Mews houses are now extremely popular; they are attractive and centrally located but very quiet. The stables are now used as garages for the residents' cars.



A MEWS

18. THE NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL



A HOUSE IN NOTTING HILL

In England, the last Monday in August is a public holiday; it is also the date of the Notting Hill Carnival.

The area of London called Notting Hill was originally a very wealthy area with big expensive houses but during the 1950s it became run-down and depressed. The big houses were divided into small flats and bedsits which were then rented to poor people.

Many immigrants from the West Indies rented flats in Notting Hill and it was these immigrants who inspired the carnival; in 1959 a 'Caribbean Carnival' was held in London although this event was in a building rather than outside in the street.

The Notting Hill Carnival became an outdoor event in August 1966. It began as a neighbourhood festival to promote cultural unity and it was particularly aimed at the local children. After that the carnival was held each year in August.

Today the Notting Hill Carnival is attended by around a million people making it one of the biggest street festivals in the world. It is usually quite safe although there was a lot of crime and violence at the carnivals in the 1970s.

Most of the carnival events take place on the Sunday and the holiday Monday. Tourists are advised to expect very large crowds and to leave all their valuable items at home.

19. PRET A MANGER



The sandwich is England's most important contribution to international gastronomy; it is a typically English food which was actually 'invented' in the 18th century by an aristocrat called the Earl of Sandwich.

One evening the Earl was playing cards; he was hungry, but didn't want to stop gambling to go for dinner, so he instructed a servant to bring him some meat placed between two pieces of bread. This convenient form of food then became popular with other gamblers and it was given the Earl's name: the sandwich.

Sandwiches are perfect for travelling and picnics and they are also an ideal food for parties. People at work often choose to eat a sandwich at lunchtime because they don't have time for a proper meal.

Years ago there were many sandwich shops in London, especially in the financial area. At that time the typical sandwich shop would have lots of ingredients on display; customers would choose which fillings they wanted and the sandwich would be made for them to take away.

Then in the 1980s a new type of sandwich shop appeared, it was called Pret A Manger. The name means ready to eat, it is based on *pret a porter*, a term used in the clothing business which means ready to wear.

Despite its French name Pret is actually an English business; it is an example of *foreign branding*, when a company chooses a foreign name in order to attract customers. Why choose a French name? Because English people always associate France with eating and drinking.

The original Pret A Manger shop opened in Hampstead in 1984 but it was not a success and it eventually went out of business. Then the Pret name and the business model was bought by two college friends, Julian Metcalfe and Sinclair Beecham, who opened their first shop in 1986 in London's Victoria Street.

This version of Pret A Manger was much more successful; they sold good quality coffee and a selection of ready-made sandwiches and baguettes, produced with natural ingredients. All the sandwiches were made on the premises and sold on the same day that they were made.

Beecham and Metcalfe opened more shops in London and then in other parts of Britain; there are currently around 375 Prets, including some in other countries, but the majority of them are in London, and in addition Julian Metcalfe has now set up *Itsu*, a chain of South-East Asian inspired fast-food restaurants.

The company has achieved dramatically increased profits and record sales; many more shops are planned in Britain, and also in other countries around the world. If this success continues Pret A Manger may soon become as ubiquitous as McDonald's.



20. OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND



INSIDE THE FOREIGN OFFICE

In London, the third weekend in September is called *Open House Weekend*. It is the time when a lot of buildings which are normally closed will open their doors to the general public.

Some of the open buildings are government offices like the *Foreign Office* and the *Treasury* and some are commercial offices, theatres, clubs or gardens. Some of the buildings are open all the year but make a charge for admittance; during the Open House Weekend they are free to enter.

Open House Weekend began in London in 1992 and the idea has spread to many other cities around the world; but the scheme actually originated in France in 1983 when they started a programme called *Historic Monuments Open Door Days*.

You can find out which London buildings are going to be open by looking at the Open House website; there is also a guide book which you can buy, or sometimes get free at your local library.

Unfortunately it is often necessary for visitors to reserve a place on-line if they want to visit the most popular destinations and these can become fully booked long before the weekend starts.

Some Londoners who live in houses that are historically or architecturally interesting also open their doors during this weekend and allow visitors to come in and look around their home.

So if you think that *your* London home might be fascinating for other people to visit perhaps you should contact the Open House organisers and offer to open your doors to the public!

21. MONEY



In the past, people used to talk about *paper money* and *coins*; we still have coins, but the paper money is now more often made of polymer, a kind of plastic material. The first polymer note in England was the five-pound note which was released in 2016. Other countries have been making plastic bank notes for a lot longer; in Australia, for example, they date back to 1988.

Polymer bank notes last a lot longer than paper ones, and this is important now as notes are being used much more frequently; this is because the value of our money is constantly being eroded by inflation. Today, nobody thinks that a pound has much value, it will not even buy a cup of tea in Pret A Manger, but a few years ago one pound was a significant amount of money.

In the 1980s Britain still had a paper one-pound note, but as its value declined the one-pound coin was introduced instead. The lowest value bank note in Britain was worth half a pound; it was called the ten-shilling note but this was withdrawn from circulation in 1970.

At that time Britain had a strange money system called pounds, shillings and pence (£ s d) which was based on 20 shillings in a pound and 12 pennies in a shilling, but this was changed to our present decimal system in 1971.

Before this change there used to be a half penny and even a quarter penny, called a farthing. These old coins disappeared because rising inflation meant that they were no longer worth anything.

Today many people are saying that the penny is worth so little that the smallest coin should now be the five pence piece. This would mean an end to 'copper' coins so only 'silver' coins would exist in England. It would also bring an end to psychological pricing like £9.99.

Another recent change is that some people have completely stopped using cash and just pay for everything with a card or their phone; does this mean the coming of a cashless' society? We will have to wait and see.



OLD TEN SHILLING AND POUND NOTES

22. GREENWICH MEAN TIME



THE ROYAL OBSERVATORY IN GREENWICH

There is a weekend in October when all the clocks go back one hour on Saturday night, which allows everyone to have an extra hour's sleep on Sunday morning. This happens when Britain changes from Summer Time, back to its 'real' time which is called *Greenwich Mean Time* or GMT.

GMT is used internationally as a standard time reference, although now it is more often referred to as UTC or *Coordinated Universal Time*. As there are 24 different time zones around the world, a standard time is very important for organisations such as airlines and also for many internet operations.

Visitors to Greenwich can stand on the Prime Meridian line at the Royal Observatory. A meridian is a vertical line running from the top to the bottom of the earth; these lines are also called lines of longitude.

International time begins in Greenwich which is 0° longitude* and represents the point where east and west meet.

Look at the photograph of the Observatory and you will see a large red ball on the top of the building. This ball was raised up mechanically and then dropped at precisely 13.00 each day; this was done so that the ships waiting in the Thames could set their clocks to Greenwich time.

In the past sailors had to calculate their precise longitude by comparing solar time (when the sun was directly overhead) with GMT; each hour's difference represented one degree of longitude. For this reason it was very important for ships to have some form of accurate timekeeping. The Royal Observatory also has an interesting collection of early clocks and marine chronometers.

*This was decided at the International Meridian Conference in 1884.

23. HALLOWEEN



The evening of 31st October is called *Halloween*; this word is a contraction of *All Hallows' Eve*, which means the night before All Hallows' Day. This day, on 1st November, is traditionally a day for remembering the dead and it can be observed in many different countries; for example the famous Mexican Day of the Dead celebrations.

In Europe and North America Halloween has a long history of being associated with ghosts and scary stories but today it is mostly known for parties and a children's festival from the USA called *trick or treat*.

This US custom of trick or treat actually originated from Irish immigrants who were remembering an ancient Celtic tradition called Samhain; but after a while trick or treating on Halloween became a popular children's festival throughout the USA.

In the past, in England, young people sometimes dressed in scary costumes and went to Halloween parties, but nobody had heard of trick or treat. There was already a widespread English celebration a few days after Halloween on 5th November called *Bonfire Night* which involves making a big fire and letting off fireworks.

But around the end of the 20th Century some English retailers started to promote Halloween celebrations in order to create a demand for chocolate 'treats' and related accessories. English children were encouraged to go out trick or treating and so today Halloween is becoming as popular in England as it is in the USA.

24. ENGLISH FOOD

Of course English food is terrible, we all know that; but is it really true? If you live in London you may think that English people only eat takeaway fast food such as McDonald's and KFC but look around at some of the other types of food on offer.

London has more ethnic restaurants than any other city; there are Japanese, Mexican, Vietnamese and Lebanese restaurants right next to each other. It is quite possible for a Londoner to eat an excitingly different variety of food every day for a year.

Alright, so there are lots of foreign restaurants in London, but what about English food, isn't it awful?

Not all English food is bad. If you want to try the best English cooking then pies are very traditional; meat pies, fish pies and fruit pies are all delicious if they are made properly.



CRUMBLE & CUSTARD

And puddings are also typically English. After dinner you should sample a nice crumble, spotted dick or jam roly-poly, or maybe a tasty bread and butter pudding, all of them served with delicious custard; but be careful, because they are extremely filling!

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day; but it is only in England that you can get a 'proper' cooked breakfast with eggs, bacon, sausages, beans, mushrooms, tomato, toast and marmalade. Actually, the best way to enjoy a perfect English breakfast is sitting quietly on your own with a newspaper and a pot of English breakfast tea.



ENGLISH BREAKFAST

The other famous English meal is afternoon tea. This is always a happy social occasion that takes place sometime between three and five o'clock. As well as a pot of tea to drink there will be small sandwiches, cakes and scones served with jam and clotted cream.

If you order afternoon tea in a good hotel the waiters may bring you extra sandwiches and cakes at no charge!



AFTERNOON TEA

The most traditional of all English meals is called the roast dinner. This is a family meal which is usually eaten at lunch time on a Sunday; there is a roast meat, such as beef or pork, together with vegetables, roast potatoes, gravy and maybe something called Yorkshire pudding.

Many English pubs and hotels serve a Sunday roast but unfortunately the quality can vary.

And finally, what about that great English meal of fish and chips?

This was an early example of fast food; long ago, fish and chips were sold wrapped in newspaper and often they were eaten in the street.

There are only a few proper fish and chip shops left in London now but they are still popular with many people.



FISH AND CHIPS

So is English food really terrible? Well it probably depends on where you eat, and what you eat. But as you can see, there are many examples of fine English cuisine if you know just what to ask for.

25. POPPIES



If you walk around anywhere in Britain or look at the television in early November almost everyone you see will be wearing a little red flower emblem. This is called a poppy; it is usually made of paper (although some people may have metal ones) and they are sold to raise money for a charity.

The charity that sells the poppies is called the Royal British Legion; it was set up in 1921 to provide support for soldiers who had been injured in the First World War (1914-1918).

However the poppy idea is not British; it began in the USA where a lady called Moina Michael was inspired by the poem *In Flanders Fields* which was written by John McCrae, a Canadian soldier.

Monia Michael campaigned to make the poppy an official emblem of remembrance, and her idea was adopted in the US in 1920. Then a French lady called Anna E Guerin started to make poppies in France and she also took them to England where they were produced from 1921.

Now they are sold every year in Britain in late October and early November; the Poppy Appeal ends on the Sunday closest to 11th November which is called *Remembrance Sunday*.

Some people have suggested that it is now time to stop doing the Poppy Appeal; after all, it was originally established to assist soldiers from the First World War and that was over a hundred years ago – do we still need it?

But the Royal British Legion is determined to carry on; they are a successful charity, raising large amounts of money each year and employing many people. So we can probably expect to see the public continuing to wear poppies in November for many years to come.

26. BONFIRE NIGHT



Remember, remember the fifth of November!

In England, the night of the 5th November is still celebrated as *Bonfire Night*. This is traditionally when people build a big fire and let off fireworks.

This is a family occasion and often takes place in the garden at around seven or eight o'clock; with the parents, children and maybe a few friends. There is likely to be traditional bonfire-night food such as, sausages, hot soup and baked potatoes.

Sometimes on the top of the fire is a human-looking figure called a *Guy*. This refers to Guy Fawkes the man responsible for the celebration.

On the 5th November, in the year 1605, Guy Fawkes tried to make an enormous explosion under the parliament buildings in London to kill the king and all the politicians; but his plan failed, and Guy Fawkes was arrested. There was a great public celebration because the King's life had been saved, and the tradition still goes on today.

You may not see any firework parties in central London, although sometimes there is a big public display in a park, but fireworks are very popular with people living in the outer suburbs and surrounding towns.

27. BLACK FRIDAY



Do you know about Black Friday? This is a special retail day when many shops sell expensive items at a big discount.

The idea originated in the USA where every year, the fourth Thursday in November is an important holiday called *Thanksgiving*. Many people in the USA then take an additional holiday on the Friday to give themselves a four-day weekend, and also to do some serious shopping.

Because the shops do so much business at this time of year, the expression Black Friday is said to have originated as an accounting term; signifying the point in the financial year when the shops move out of the red (debt) and into the black (credit).

Black Friday has now become a popular shopping day in England, although this is strange because England does not celebrate Thanksgiving and so there is not a holiday on that Friday. Nevertheless thousands of people will be going out on the fourth Friday in November to look for bargains and many shops plan to extend the discount period over the Saturday and Sunday making it a 'Black Weekend'.

So if you are thinking of buying a new laptop or a flat-screen TV, then Black Friday may be the best time to get it.

28. CHRISTMAS



Christmas celebrations are supposed to start on Christmas eve on the 24th December and continue until The Feast of the Epiphany on the 6th January. In England, however, the celebration starts much earlier and then, for most people, it finishes on Christmas day.

Christmas is a very commercial celebration in England; retailers often take around 60% of their annual turnover over the Christmas period and so merchandise and decorations start appearing in shops around the middle of September. This is when many people start to think about doing their Christmas shopping.

Then the official Christmas decorations are put up in the streets in early November to indicate that the celebration has really begun.

Because the celebration starts so early, it means that by the end of Christmas day on 25th December everybody is bored with the whole business and wants to think about something else. Some people throw out their decorations on Boxing Day, the day after Christmas.

Official decorations, such as the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square, stay in place until Epiphany but they look old and tired and rather pointless.

Although people want to forget about Christmas as soon as the day is over, this does not mean that they are ready to return to work. The holiday period for many people is one week, from Christmas day until New-Year's Day on 1st January and some people take a two-week holiday starting around 21st December.

This is in contrast to many other countries such as the USA where the typical Christmas holiday is just one or two days.

29. DEPARTMENT STORES



SELFRIDGES IN OXFORD STREET

Some people have predicted the end of the department store because of the new popularity of online shopping; however, London still has some elegant and historic stores which are well worth visiting.

Selfridges in Oxford Street was founded by H Gordon Selfridge, a US citizen who came to London at the beginning of the 20th century; he wanted to introduce some new ideas about shopping that he had learned in the USA. At that time, in Britain, customers would go into a shop and tell the shop assistant what they wanted, and then wait while the merchandise was brought to them.

But Selfridge's department store was different; it was the first shop that allowed customers to walk around on their own and examine the merchandise, which was all on open display. Selfridges caused a sensation when it opened in London in 1909, it was extremely popular and thousands of people went to visit it.

Selfridges always tried to feature new products; the very first television was demonstrated there in 1925.

H Gordon Selfridge understood the importance of customer service; the phrase 'the customer is always right' was supposedly invented by him.

Harrods was founded in 1824, it is the largest, and most famous, department store in Britain. It was said that you could buy whatever you wanted there, from a pin to an elephant, so Harrods registered their address as *everything London*.

In 1898 Harrods became the first establishment in London to install an escalator (moving stairs). There is a story that the public were too scared to use this new invention, so Harrods employed a one-legged man to go up and down the escalator to show everyone how easy it was; there was also a nurse waiting at the top with glasses of brandy to revive anyone who felt unwell.



HARRODS IN KNIGHTSBRIDGE

An extremely elegant department store in Piccadilly is Fortnum & Mason. The store was founded in 1707 by William Fortnum, who was a servant to Queen Anne, when he went into business with his landlord Hugh Mason and they began selling groceries. The store became well known for stocking interesting new types of food and in 1886 they became the first British shop to sell tins of baked beans.

Although they sell a wide range of merchandise, including clothes, most people visit Fortnum & Mason for its delightful food hall. They have always provided food for the British Royal Family, and Buckingham Palace still order some of their groceries from Fortnum's.



FORTNUM & MASON IN PICCADILLY

The Liberty building in Great Marlborough Street is very easy to recognise; it was built in the Tudor 'half timbered' style using the wood from two old sailing ships. They specialise in selling fabrics, fashion, homeware and beauty products.

Arthur Liberty began selling fabrics and *objects d'art* in 1875. European trade with Japan had just begun and so Liberty also imported many Japanese products; these created a sensation in London where nobody had ever seen anything from Japan before.

Japanese goods were wrapped in paper which was decorated with traditional designs and this paper became very valuable in Europe; it was eagerly collected by artists like Vincent Van Gogh who wanted to copy the Japanese images.



LIBERTY IN GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET

30. HOME SWEET HOME

A Spanish speaking person might welcome you into their home by saying –

Mi Casa Es Su Casa

This means 'my house is your house' which is another way of saying 'make yourself at home'. In England a common expression is –

AN ENGLISHMAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE

Which is another way of saying 'keep out'.

The truth is that most English people don't like letting a stranger into their house. A stranger in this context means someone who isn't a close relative or someone whom they haven't known all their lives.

But it isn't always like this –

English people like to move away from their parents when they are in their twenties. Then they often move into a shared house or a flat share. This is a friendly and informal arrangement for living together and there are likely to be frequent guests and visitors to the house and occasional parties.

But then people move away from the shared house so that they can live in their own apartments; some also get married and start a family.

This is when the English person becomes less hospitable and they begin to value their privacy. This is one reason why all English people dream of owning a detached house. That is a house that you can walk all the way round; ideally with a garden that separates it from the neighbours.



DETACHED HOUSE

If a detached house is not possible then a semi-detached house (semi) might do, although English people dislike the idea of sharing one wall with their neighbour; it takes a lot of the pleasure away from being a householder.



SEMI-DETACHED HOUSE

In central London the lack of space means that very few people can live in a detached house with a garden so even rich people in London may choose to live in a terraced house. Many of these houses were built in the 18th and 19th centuries and they are often very beautiful; especially if they are built around a garden square.



BEDFORD SQUARE, NEXT TO THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

For many English people the activity of decorating and improving their homes, which is called DIY (do it yourself), is their favourite leisure activity. It begins with a visit at the weekend to a DIY store where they buy all the necessary equipment and then they go back to their house to do some home improvements.

Most English people also love their garden (if they are lucky enough to have one) and so when they aren't working to improve the inside of their house they like to work outside in their garden trying to make it absolutely perfect.



However, it all seems a little bit pointless, because by this time nobody ever comes to visit them.

31. SOME INTERESTING PLACES

Art:

- Courtauld Gallery and Somerset House – the Strand
- Guildhall Art Gallery* – City
- ICA – The Mall
- Leighton House – Holland Park
- National Portrait Gallery* – next to National Gallery
- Newport Street gallery* – SE11 (very modern)
- Saatchi Gallery* – King's Road (very modern)
- Tate Britain* – Millbank
- Tate Modern* – Bankside (wonderful views)
- The Wallace Collection* – Manchester Square

Medical:

- Hunterian Museum* – Lincoln's Inn Fields
- The Old Operating Theatre – London Bridge
- The Wellcome Collection* – Euston Road

Others:

- Bank of England Museum* – City (pick up a gold bar!)
- British Library* – Euston Road (some good exhibitions)
- Clink Museum – Bankside (an early prison)
- Dennis Severs' House – Folgate Street off Brick Lane
- Design Museum* – Kensington High Street
- Freud's House – Hampstead
- Globe Theatre – Bankside
- Greenwich Maritime Museum* and Royal Observatory also the Cutty Sark ship and the Queen's House*
- Museum of London* – City
- Photographers' Gallery – W1
- Royal Botanic Gardens – Kew
- Soane Museum* – Lincoln's Inn Fields
- The Golden Hind – Bankside
(replica of Francis Drake's famous ship)

*free entry

32. FREE TALKS AND LECTURES



INSIDE THE ADAM SMITH INSTITUTE

- *Gresham College*, Barnard's Inn Hall, Holborn – regular lectures on economics, finance, history and various social topics
- *Adam Smith Institute*, 23 Great Smith Street – occasional talks on economics and related topics
- *National Gallery*, Trafalgar Square – frequent guided tours of the gallery and regular talks on art
- *Institute of Economic Affairs*, 2 Lord North Street – occasional talks on economics and related topics
- *London School of Economics* (LSE) – check their website for talks and lectures that are open to the public



OUTSIDE THE ADAM SMITH INSTITUTE

33. VOCABULARY

Affluent – rich

Anonymous – not giving a name

Aquarium – a place to look at different fish

Bedsit – a rented room

Biannual – twice a year

Bonfire – a fire made outside, often to burn garden waste

Budget – low price

Castle – from the past; a large, heavily protected, stone building with a wall around it

Century – a period of 100 years

Cholera – a deadly disease

Classical – the style associated with ancient Greece and Rome

Coal – black rock that is burned as fuel

Consequence – the result

Convenience – making something easier

Contraction – making a word shorter

Credit – to be in credit means having money

Culminate – reach an end

Custom – something that has been done for many years

Debt – to owe money to someone

DIY – home improvements (do it yourself)

Dragon – an unreal creature with wings, possibly breathing fire

Drought – a lack of water

Dull – not exciting or interesting

Employee – a worker

Epidemic – a disease that spreads to many people

Equator – the imaginary line that runs around the earth

Eroded – reduced or taken away

Ethnic – belonging to a particular country

Foot – a measurement of length based on the human foot (0.305 m)
a foot is divided into 12 inches

Gastronomy – the art of food

Horror – something that makes you scared

Hospitable – welcoming people into your home

Hurricane – a very strong wind

Iconic – something that is seen as representative

Inch – a measurement of length (0.0254 m)

Imperial – measuring system used in the UK

Insulate – keep out cold air

Mayor – the political leader in a town

Merchandise – things to buy

Mile – a measurement of length commonly used in UK
and USA (1.609 km)

Miserable – very sad

Objects d'art – beautiful things created by skilled people

Occurrence – something that happens

Ounce – a measurement of weight (28.35g)
16 ounces = one pound

Patron Saint – the saint that is associated with a particular town, country
or occupation

Pier – a platform going out into the sea

Pint – some English liquids are sold by the pint (0.568 litre)

Polling – voting

Pot – a container for holding liquid

Pound – a measurement of weight (written lb) commonly used in UK and USA (0.454 kg) 14lb = one stone

Profitable – making a lot of money

Proposed – suggested

Relocating – moving to a new position

Retail – selling things to the public

Run-down – not in a good condition

Rural – away from the town or city

Scary – frightening

Signifying – showing

Shutters – wooden or metal covers for a window

Slum – an area with a lot of poverty

Solar – from the sun

Stable – a place for horses to live

Stone – a measurement of weight used in UK (6.35kg)

Symmetrical – equal on both left and right sides

Ton – a heavy weight (around 907.19kg)

Tossing – throwing

Tram – a bus running along the streets on rails

Tudor – period in English history around the 16th century

Turbulent – violent change

Turnover – how much money a business takes (turns over) during a particular time period

Ubiquitous – everywhere

Vary – not be the same everywhere

Wrapped – covered in material such as paper or cloth

34. IMPORTANT INFORMATION

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Cupid Kindling the Torch of Hymen sculpted by George Rennie c1831
Photographed at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

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