**English traditions**

One of the most peculiar features of life in England which immediately strikes any visitor to this country is the cherishing and preserving of many traditions, sometimes very archaic as they may seem. In England traditions play a very important part in the life of the people. Englishmen are proud of their traditions and have kept them up for hundreds of years. For instance, on Sundays theatres and shops are closed, people do not get letters and newspapers. Very few trams and buses run in the streets of London on Sundays. Uniforms are not particularly characteristic of this fact. However, when one sees the warders at the Tower of London with their funny flat hats, their trousers bound at the knee, and the royal monogram on their breast, one feels carried back to the age of Queen Elisabeth I.

And should you chance to see the Lord Mayor of London riding through the streets of the city with the black robe and gold chain, his medieval carriage, and all sheriffs, councillors and other members of the suit, you have a picture of living history.

Tourists visiting London are usually eager to see **Buckingham Palace,** the official London residence of the Queen and the King. The house was bought by George III from the Duke of Buckingham, from whom it takes the name.

Queen Victoria was the first to make the Palace the official residence of the Sovereign. The colourful ceremony of the Changing of the Quard before the Palace is of great interest for a newcomer. The Quardsmen in their red coats and bearskin caps march behind the Drum Mayor and the Band. Whenever the Irish Quards are responsible for the quard duties at Buckingham Palace an Irish wolfhound appears on regimental ceremonial parades and marches at the head of the band.

A number of other ceremonies are of a similarly formal character, such as the King’s or Queen’s receptions and the State Opening of Parliament.

There are other customs of a similar peculiar character, such as the searching of the cellars underneath the Houses of Parliament by half a dozen “Beefeaters” before the opening of Parliament, in memory of Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot in 1605.

English people tend to be rather conservative. The conservative attitude consists of an acceptance of things which are familiar. All the same, several symbols of conservatism are being abandoned. The metric system came into general use in 1975. The twenty-four-hour clock was at last adopted for railway timetables in the 1960s-though not for most other timetables, such as radio programs. The decimal money was introduced, but the pound sterling as the basic unit was kept, one-hundredth part of it being a new penny. Temperatures have been measured in Centigrade as well as Fahrengrade for a number of years, tend to use Fahrengrade for general purpose.

**The veteran car run.** There is a new tradition in England now. Every year a large number of veteran cars drive from London to Brighton. Veteran cars are those which are made before 1904. The run takes place on the first Sunday in November. In November, 1896, a law was published. It said that a man with a red flag must walk in front of every car when it moved in the streets. In those days people were afraid of the cars.

The run begins at 8 o’clock in the morning from Hyde Park. Some cars look very funny. The drivers are dressed in the clothes of those times. The oldest cars move in front. The run is not a competition but a demonstration. Some cars reach Brighton, which is about a hundred kilometers from London, only late in the evening, others don’t get there, they have to stop on the way.

**The Stone of Destiny.** In Westminster Abbey in London there is a large stone which has an interesting history. Many hundreds of years ago it was a seat on which the kings of Scotland sat when they were crowned. When Scotland became part of Britain, the English king brought this stone to London. A large chair was made and the Stone of Destiny was put into the seat of the chair. Since that time the English kings sit on that chair when they are crowned.

**The Theatre Royal.** The Theatre Royal in Drury Lane of the oldest theatres in London. It was opened in 1663. The king was present at the performance, that is why it was called the Theatre Royal. Today most people call it Drury Lane by the name of the street in which it stands. The theatre has many traditions. One of them is the Badely cake, which began in the 18 century.

Robert Badely was a pastry-cook who became an actor and joined the Theatre Royal. He was a good actor, and the plays in which he acted were always a great success with the people of London. When R. Badely was very old, he left some money to the theatre. Robert Badely asked to buy cake and offer a piece of it to each actor and actress of the theatre on Twelfth Night every year. Twelfth Night is the 6th of January, the 12th Night after Christmas.

So, after the evening performance on Twelfth Night, the actors and actresses cone down into the hall in their stage clothes and eat the Badely cake.

**Races in England.** In England there is a day for pancakes. It is usually in March. At homes families have pancakes for dinner. At school children and teachers have pancakes for school dinner. You know that pancakes are very good for eat, but do you know that in England people race with pancakes, fight for them?

In some villages and towns in England there is **a pancake race** every year. Mothers of families run these races. First they must make the pancake and then run 4 hundred meters with the pancake on the frying-pan in their hands. When they are running this race they must throw the pancake up 3 times and catch it on the frying-pan. They must not drop it. The fathers and the children watch the mothers and call out to them: “Run, mum, run quickly!” At some universities and colleges students run pancake races too. They run with their pancakes on the frying-pans and throw them up. If the university or college is near the sea there are swimming pancake races. The students take their frying-pans with the pancakes into the cold water and swim with them. They hold the frying-pan in one hand. They must also throw the pancake up and catch it on the pan.

**At Westminster School in London** the boys have pancakes for dinner one day in March. But before dinner is **the pancake fight**. The school cook makes a very large pancake. Then he comes out of the kitten into the hall with the frying-pan and throws the pancake high up. The boys (one from each form) try to catch the pancake. They fight for it. The winner of the fight is the boy who gets the biggest piece of pancake.

In England there is also **an egg-and-spoon race.** People who run this race, men and women, boys and girls, must carry an egg in a spoon. They must not let it fall down. If the egg falls and breaks, they must pick it up with the spoon, not with their fingers. Usually there are not many winners in the egg-and-spoon race.

In **the three-legged-race** boys and girls run in pairs, with the right leg of one boy or girl tied to the left leg of the other. They do not run very quickly, because they do not want to fall. The people who watch the egg-and-spoon race and the three-legged-race always laugh very much.

holiday festival queen

**Holidays in Great Britain**

There are fewer public holidays in Great Britain than in other European countries. They are: Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year’s Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, May Day, Spring Bank Holiday and Summer Bank Holiday.

Public Holidays in Britain are called bank holidays, because the banks as well as most of the offices and shops are closed.

They go to the seaside or to one of the big parks. Many families take a basket and put their lunch or tea in it. They will sit on the grass under a tree, have their meal in the open air. Good weather is very important. A wet Bank Holiday gives very little pleasure.

Londoners often visit the Zoo where they can see many interesting animals from different countries. But many of them go with their families to Hampstead Heath. This is a large piece of open land near London where there is a fair on some of the Bank Holidays. There are a lot of interesting things for children and young people at these fairs – merry-go-rounds, swings and many little shops which sell paper hats with the words “Kiss Me Quick”, coloured balloons, cakes and sweets. An important moment at the fair is the coming of the Pearly Kings and Queens. These are men and women who have sewed pearl buttons all over their dresses and suits. And their hats also have many pearl buttons over them. Those people who have the most beautiful costumes are named Pearly King and Queen for one year.

The most favourite holiday is **Christmas.** Every year the people of Norway give the city of London a present. It is a big Christmas tree and it stands in the Trafalgar Square.

Before Christmas, groups of singers go from house to house. They collect money for charities and sing carols, traditional Christmas songs. Many churches hold a service on Sunday before Christmas.

The fun starts the night before, **on the 24th of December.** Traditionally this is the day when people decorate their trees. Children hang stockings at their beds, hoping that Father Christmas will come down the chimney during the night and fill them with toys and sweets.

No one knows for sure who decorated **the first Christmas tree**. The custom if bringing an evergreen tree indoors and decorating it at Christmas started in Germany. One legend says that **Martin Luther** started the practice. Luther was an important Christian leader. According to the story, he noticed the starlit sky as he walked home one Christmas Eve about the year 1513. He thought the stars looked as if they were shining on the branches. When he arrived home, Martin Luther placed a small fir tree inside his house. He decorated it with lighted candles. Decorating Christmas trees became popular in Germany. Prince Albert of Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha, the German husband of Queen Victoria, took the tradition to England. Both German and England people brought it to America. And now nearly every family in Great Britain and the USA has a Christmas tree. The biggest Christmas tree in Britain is put up in Trafalgar Square in London. The people of Norway still give this tree every year to the British people to thank them for helping Norway against Hitler in the Second World War.

**Christmas** is a family holiday. All the family usually meet for the big Christmas dinner of turkey and Christmas pudding. And everyone gives and receive presents. The 26th of December, Boxing Day is an extra holiday after Christmas. It is the time to visit friends and relatives. This day postmen and servants receive their presents in the boxes.

**New Year’s Day** is less favourite in Britain than Christmas. It is true in the southern and eastern parts of the country. However, even there, the welcoming of the New Year is growing in popularity, particularly among young people who prefer to spend Christmas with kin, but New Year with friends. New Year’s parties go all night through. The most famous places of festivities are Piccadily Circus and Trafalgar Square in London where crowds of people greet the New Year with the linked- arm singing of “Old Lang Syne’, kissing total strangers, blowing whistles and automobile horns and shooting firecrackers. Someone usually falls into the fountain in Trafalgar Square. Unfortunately for all these midnight celebrators, January 1st is not a public holiday in England.

In Wales, the back door releases the Old Year at the first stroke of midnight: it is then locked “who keep the luck in” and at the last stroke the New Year is let in at the front.

But in **Scotland Hogmanay, New Years Eve** is the biggest festival of the Year. Nobody, however, can successfully explain where this word comes from. The 1st of January is a national holiday. People do not work on that day, and children do not go to school. After midnight people visit their friends. They carry cakes and spices ale to wish their hosts a good year. They have a good dinner on that day. After dinner there are apples, nuts and different sweet things to eat. All the members of the family and friends begin to play games and dance. The first visitor, or **the first footer,** must bring a special present – a piece of coal – to wish good luck and warmth to the house. This is an old Scottish custom. The first footer may also bring a loaf of white bread and a bottle of whisky. On entering he must place the coal on the fire, put the loaf on the table and pour a glass for the head of the house, all normally without speaking or being spoken to until he wishes everyone “A happy New Year”. He may also carry a silver coin to wish wealth. New Years Eve is the biggest festival of the Year Before 12 o’clock at night many people in the towns go out into the streets to dance and to sing Scottish songs.

When the town clocks begin to strike 12, the people come together. They cross their arms, join hands and sing the famous Scottish song “Auld Lang Syne”. It is about the old days and friendship between the people. The author of the song is **Robert Burns, Scotland’s national poet.** The music of the song is also Scottish.

Besides public holidays, there are some special festivals in Great Britain. One of them takes place on the 5th of November. On that day, in 1605, Guy Fawkes tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament and kill King James I. He did not succeed. The King’s men found the bomb, took Guy Fawkes to the Tower and cut off his head.

Since that day the British celebrate the 5th of November. They burn a dummy, made of straw and old clothes, in a bonfire and let off fireworks. This dummy is called a “guy” (like Guy Fawkes). **Bonfire Night.** It is a very interesting night for English boys and girls. On that evening they make bonfires and have fireworks. Some days before bonfire night they make the guy.

They make them of sticks and straw and then put men’s old clothes on him. They put an old hat on his head and old gloves on the sticks that are his hands. When the bonfire is ready, children or their parents put the guy on the bonfire an then light it.

**Mother’s day in Britain.** In Britain there is a holiday which people call Mother’s Day. On the old days many girls from working-class families in towns and cities and from farmers’ families in the country worked in rich houses. They had to do all the housework and their working day was usually very long, they often worked on Sundays too.

Once a year, it was usually one Sunday in March, they could visit their mothers. They went home on that day and brought presents for their mothers and for other members of the families. They could stay at home only one day, and then they went back to their work. People called that day Mothering Day or Mothering

Sunday. Later workers at the factories and girls who worked in houses of rich families received one free day a week, and Mothering Day became Mother’s Day. It is the last Sunday in March.

On that day sons and daughters visit theirs mothers and bring them flowers and little presents. The elder son must bring his mother a good cake. If sons or daughters cannot be with their mothers on that day, they usually send her presents. Mother’s Day must be a day of rest for the mother of the family, so her daughters cook dinner on that day and lay the table and the sons help to wash the plates and dishes after dinner.

Every country has its traditions. They play a very important role in the life of the people. One such tradition is **Easter**. Easter is a festival that occurs on the first Sunday after the full moon in spring. Easter marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring. People buy new clothes to wear on Easter Sunday. There is a popular belief that wearing three new things at Easter will bring good luck in the year. After church services many people like to take walks down the streets in their new clothes. This colourful procession of people dressed in bright new spring clothes is called the Easter Parade. The word “Easter” comes from the Anglo-Saxon goddess of the dawn whose spring was celebrated in April. Before the arrival of Christianity, people believed that the sun died in winter and was born again in spring, on the day of the spring equinox (день весеннего равноденствия) they would sing and dance as the sun rose in the sky. Although it is a Christian festival the customs and legends of Easter celebrations are pagan (языческий) in origin. Easter is the religious holiday celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the son of God. It is at the end of Lent during which children all over the world give up sweets and make other sacrifices in preparation for the highest festival of the church year. What are Easter symbols? They are: **the Cross.** It has a special meaning to Christians. It represents Christ’s victory over death. It is a significant Easter symbol. The next symbol are **eggs**. Long ago some people believed that the earth appeared from a gigantic egg. On Easter Sunday families and friends exchange chocolate eggs. This custom dates back to ancient times when Egyptians and Persians used to paint eggs in bright colours to represent the sunlight of spring and give them to friends as a symbol of new life. The third symbol are Easter Rabbits. It is true that in ancient Egypt the rabbit symbolized the moon, new life and birth. All around the world, many children believe that the Easter rabbit brings eggs and hides them for children on Easter morning. There are many different legends but here is a popular one.

Long ago in Germany there lived an old woman who loved children. Each year she gave children presents to celebrate spring. But one year she had nothing to give because it was a bad year and she had become very poor. All she had were some eggs. So she coloured the eggs and hid them in the grass. When the children arrived, she told them to run into the yard to find their presents there. Just as one of the children uncovered the eggs, a large rabbit hopped away. So the children thought that the rabbit had left the eggs for them. And ever since children have searched for the eggs left by Easter rabbit on Easter morning.

It is called **the Easter Egg Hunt**. Eggs are the important part of Easter Sports. The Romans celebrated the Easter season by running races on an oval track and giving eggs as prizes. One of the traditional Easter egg games is the Easter Egg Roll. The rules of the Easter Egg Roll are to see who can roll an egg the greatest distance down a grassy hillside without breaking it.

**The Robin Hood Dance.** In a little village in Staffordshire a very old dance is performed in September every year. Six men in Robin Hood costumes carry deer’s horns set in wooden deer’s heads. They walk together with a number of other characters from the Robin Hood legends: Maid Marian, the girl whom Robin Hood loved and married, a knight on a wooden horse, a boy in the traditional costume of a jester, another boy with a bow and many musicians. The dance begins at 9 o’clock in the morning near the house where the costumes, the horns and all the other things are kept during the winter. The dancers walk through the wood and visit many farms where they eat, drink and dance. In the afternoon they get back through the village and dance in the streets. The dance ends in the middle of the night in the market-place. Very many people take part in the dance.

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