**Customs and Traditions in Britain**

Some British customs and traditions are famousall over the world and a lot of them have very long histories. First I will tellyou about British customs during the year. In January, there is a festival, calledUp-Helly-Aa.In the ninth century, men from Norway came to the Shetlands. The Shetlands areislands near Scotland. These men were theVikings. They came to Britain in shipsand carried away animals, gold, and sometimes women and children, too. Now, 1000 years later, people in the Shetlands remember the Vikings with a festival.They call the festival "Up-Helly-Aa". Every winter the people of Lerwick, thisis a town in the Shetlands, make a model of a ship. Itґs a Viking"longship", with the head of a dragon at the front. Then, on Up-Helly-Aa nightin January, the Shetlanders dress inViking clothes, carry the ship through thetown to the sea and there they burn it. They do this because the Vikings puttheir dead men in the ship and burned them. It goes without saying that therearenґt any men in the modern ships. Now the festival is a party for thepeople of the Shetland Islands. Like our traditions there is also in BritainSt ValentineґsDay in February andApril FoolґsDay on April1st. In May there is also a tradition with a longhistory. May 1st was an important day in the Middle Ages. In the veryearly morning, young girls went to the fields and washed their faces with dew.They belived this made themvery beautiful for a year after that. Also onMayDay the young men of each village tried towin prizes with their bows and arrows, and people danced around the maypole.Many English villages still have a maypole, and on May 1st, thevillagers dance round it. MidsummerґsDay is on June 24th. This isthe longest day of the year. On that day you can see a very old custom atStonehenge in Wiltshire. Stonehenge is one of Europeґs biggest stonecircles, a lot of the stones are ten or twelve metres high. Itґs also veryold, the earliest part of Stonehenge is nearly 5 000 years old. The Druids, theywere the priests in Britain 2 000 years ago, used it for a calendar. They usedthe sun and the stones at Stonehenge to know the start of months and seasons.There are Druids in Britain today, too and every June 24th a lot ofthem go to Stonehenge, because on that morning the sun shines on one famousstone-the Heel stone. For the druids this is a very important moment in theyear. In October is Halloween. Halloween is an oldword for "Hallows Evening", the night bevor "All Saintsґ Day". On that onenight of the year, ghosts and witches are free. A long time ago people wereafraid and stayed at home on Halloweґen. But now in Britain itґs atime for fun. There are always a lot of parties on October 31st . Atthese parties people wear masks and they dress as ghosts and witches, or asDracula or Frankensteinґs monster. And some peoples make special Halloweenlamps from pumpkins. November 5th isGuy FawkesґDay in Britain. All over the countrypeople build wood fires or "bonefires", in their gardens. On top of each bonfireis a guy. Thatґs a figure of Guy Fawkes. People make guys with straw, oldclothes and newspapers. The British remember Guy Fawkes on November5th, because on this day in the year 1605, he tried to kill KingJames I. He and a group of friends put a bomb under the Houses of Parliament inLondon. But the Kingґs men found the bomb and found Guy Fawkes, too. Theytook him to the Tower of London and there the Kingґs men cut off hishead. In December there are lots of Christmas and NewYear traditionsin Britain. Before Christmas, groups of singers go fromhouse to house. They collect money and sing traditional Christmas songs orcarols. There are a lot of very popular BritishChristmasCarols. Three famous ones are: "Good KingWenceslas", "The Holly and The Ivy" and "We Three Kings". OnChristmasEve thatґs on December24th, British children donґt open their presents. FatherChristmas brings their presents inthe night and then they open them on themorning of the 25th. In Britain the most important meal on December25th is Christmas dinner. Nearly all Christmas food is traditional,but a lot of the traditionsare not very old. For example, there were no turkeysin Britain before 1800. And even in the nineteenth century, goose was thetraditional meat at Christmas, but not now. A twentieth- century BritishChristmas dinner is roast turkey with carrots, potatoes, peas, Brussels sproutsand gravy, but there are sausages and bacon, too. Then, after the turkey, thereis Christmas pudding. Crackers are also usual at Christmas dinner. These came toBritain from China in the nineteenth century. Two people pull a cracker andusually thereґs a small toy in the middle and often thereґs a joke ona piece of paper, too. December 26th isBoxingDay. Traditionally boys from the shops ineach town asked for money at Christmas. They went from house to house onDecember 26th and took boxes made of wood with them. At each housepeople gave them money and this was their Christmas present. So the name ofDecember 26th doesnґt come frome the sport of boxing, it comesfrom the boysґ wooden boxes. Now, Boxing Day is an extra holiday afterChristmas Day. In Scotland there is a tradition, calledFirstFooting. The name for New Yearґs Evein Scotland isHogmanay. After midnight people visit their friends and they takea piece of coal as a present, because traditionally the first visitor of theyear must carry coal into the house. This is first footing and it brings goodluck. It also helps to make fire in the middle of winter. In Britain there are many RoyalTraditions. For example thetrooping of thecolour: The Queen is the only person in Britain with twobirthdays. Her real birthday is on April 21st , but she has an"official" birthday on the second Saturday in June, too. And on the Queenґsofficial birthday, there is a traditional ceremony called the Trooping of theColour. Itґs a big parade with brass bands and hundreds of soldiers atHorse Guardsґ Parade in London. A "regiment" of the Queenґs soldiers,the Guards, march in front of her and at the front of the parade is theregimentґs яag or "colour", which the guards are trooping. Thousands ofLondoners and visitors watch in Horse Guardsґ Parade and millions of peopleat home watch it on television. The changing of theguard is an another royaltradition: This happens every day at Buckingham Palace, theQueenґs home in London. Soldiers stand in front of the palace. Each morningthese soldiers (the "guard") change. One group leaves and another arrives. Insummer and winter tourists stand outside the palace at 11.30 every morning andwatch the Changing of the Guard.

MaundyMoney:

Maundy Thursday is the day before Good Friday,at Easter. On that day the Queen gives Maundy money to a group of old people.This tradition is over 1,000 years old. At one time the king or queen washed thefeet of poor, old people on Maundy Thursday, but that stopped in1754.

SwanUpping:

Hereґs a very different royal tradition. Onthe River Thames thereare hundredґs of swans and a lot of these beautifulwhite birds belong, traditionally, to the king of queen. In July the young swanson the Thames are about two months old. Then the Queenґs swan keeper goes,in a boat, from LondonBridge to Henley. He looks at all the young swans andmarks the royal ones. The name of this strange but interesting custom is SwanUpping.

The QueenґsTelegramm:

This custom is not very old, but itґs forvery old people. On his or her one hundreth birthday, a British person gets atelegram from the Queen. The Birthday Honours list andthe new yearґs honours list: Twice a year at Buckingham Palace, the Queengives titles or "honours", once in January and once in June. There are a lot ofdifferent honours. Here are a few: C.B.E. - Companion of the BritishEmpire O.B.E. - Order of the BritishEmpire M.B.E. - Member of the BritishEmpire These honours began inthe nineteenth century,because then Britain had an empire. Knighthood - a knight has "Sir" before his name.A new knight kneels in front of the Queen. She touches first his right shoulder,then his left shoulder with a sword. Then she says "Arise, Sir...and his firstname, and the knight stands. Peerage - a peer is a lord. Peers sit in theHouse of Lords, which is one part of the Houses of Parliament. The other part isthe House of Commons. Dame/Baroness - these are two of the highesthonours for a woman. The State opening ofParliament: The parliament, not the Royal Familiy, controlsmodern Britain. But traditionally the Queen opens Parliamentevery autumn. She travels from BuckinghamPalace to the Houses of Parliament ina gold carriage - the Irish State Coach. At the Houses of Parliament the Queensits on a "throne" in the House of Lords. Then she reads the "QueenґsSpeech". At the State Opening of Parliament the Queen wears a crown and shewears other jewels from the Crown Jewels, too. The Order of the GarterCeremony: The order of the Garter ceremony has a longhistory. King Edward III started the Order in the fourteenth century. At thattime, the people in the Order were the twenty-four bravest knights in England.Now the knights of the Order arenґt all soldiers. Theyґre members ofthe House of Lords, church leaders or politicans and there are some foreignknights, too. For example, the King of Norway, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg andthe Emperor of Japan. Theyґre called Extra Knights of the Garter.The Queenis the Sovereign of the Order of the Garter. But she isnґt the only royalperson in the Order.Prince Charles and Prince Philip are Royal Knights, and theQueen Mother is a Lady of the Garter.In June the Order has a trditionalceremony at Windsor Castle. This is the Queenґs favourite castle anditґs also the home of the Order of the Garter. All the knights walk fromthe castle to St Georgeґs Chapel, the royal church at Windsor. They wearthe traditional clothes or "robes" of the Order. These robes are very heavy.In fact King EdwardVIII once called them "ridiculous". But theyґre animportant part of one of Britainґs oldest traditions. The Queenґs ChristmasSpeech: Now hereґs a modern royal custom. OnChristmas Day at3.00 in the afternoon, the Queen makes a speech on radio andTV. Itґs ten minutes long and in it she talks to the people of the UnitedKingdom and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is a large group of countries. Inthe past they were all in the British Empire. Australia, India, Canada and NewZealand are among the 49 members. The B.B.C. (the British BroadcastingCorporation) sends the Queenґs speech to everyCommonwealth Country. In her speech the Queen talks about thepast year. Traditionally in speeches, kings or queens say "we", not "I". QueenElizabeth II doesnґt do this. She says "My husband and I", or just"I".

British Food and Drink:

First, theEnglishBreakfast: In a real English breakfast you have fried eggs,bacon, sausage, tomato and mushrooms. Then thereґs toast andmarmalade.

Pancakes:

British peopleeat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday inFebruary or March. For pancakes you need яour, eggs and milk, then you eat themwith sugar and lemon. In some parts of Britain there are pancake races on ShroveTuesday.People race with a frying pan in one hand. They have to toss thepancake, throw it in the air and catch it again in the fryingpan.

Haggis:

Haggis is a traditional food from Scotland. Youmake it with meat, onions, яour, salt and pepper. Then you boil it in the skinfrom a sheepґs stomach. In Scotland, people eat haggis on Burns Night.Robert Burns was a Scottish poet in the eighteen century, so every year Scotspeople all over the world remember him and read his poem.

Tea:

Tea is Britainґs favourite drink anditґs also a meal in the afternoon. You can drink tea at home or in hotel.Tea at the Ritz hotel in London is very good. Youcan drink Indian or Chinatea.

EnglishPubs:

Pubs are an important part of British life.People talk, eat, drink, meet their friends and relax there. The peoplesdonґt go in pubs to drink a lot, but rather just to meet their friends.They are open at lunchtime and again in the evening, but they close at 11oґclock. The word pub is short for public house. There are are thousands inBritain, and they all sell pub lunches. One of these isa PloughmanґsLunch, a very simple meal of bread and cheese. Pubs also sell beer. Thetraditional kind is called "real ale". Thatґs a very strong beer from anold recipe. In the pubs in south-west England thereґs another traditionaldrink, which is called scrumpy. You make this drink with apples, but itґsnot a simple fruit juice. Itґs very strong. Pub names often have a longtradition. Some come from the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Every pub has aname and has a sign above its door. The sign shows a picture of the pubґsname.

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