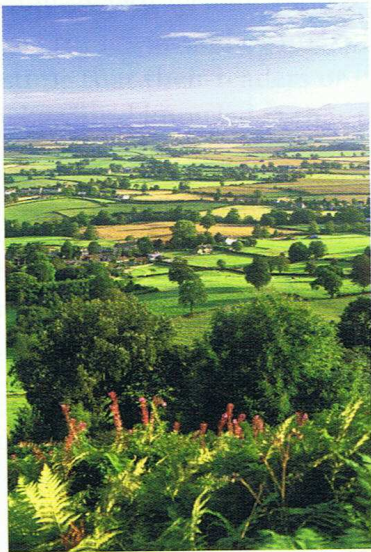


# 01 Country and people

## Why is Britain 'Great'?

The origin of the adjective 'great' in the name Great Britain was not a piece of advertising (although modern politicians sometimes try to use it that way!). It was first used to distinguish it from the smaller area in France which is called 'Brittany' in modern English.



This is a book about Britain. But what exactly is Britain? And who are the British? The table below illustrates the problem. You might think that, in international sport, the situation would be simple – one country, one team. But you can see that this is definitely not the case with Britain. For each of the four sports or sporting events listed in the table, there are a different number of national teams which might be described as 'British'. This chapter describes how this situation has come about and explains the many names that are used when people talk about Britain.

## Geographically speaking

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

## Politically speaking

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

The other state has authority over the rest of the area (the whole of Great Britain, the north-eastern area of Ireland and most of the smaller islands). This is the country that is the main subject of this book. Its official name is The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but this is too long for practical purposes, so it is usually known by a shorter name. At the Eurovision Song Contest, at the United Nations and in the European parliament, for instance, it is referred to as 'the United Kingdom'. In everyday speech, this is often

## National teams in selected sports

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
Olympics	Great Britain				Ireland
Cricket	England and Wales		Scotland	Ireland	
Rugby union	England	Wales	Scotland	Ireland	
Football	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland



shortened to 'the UK' and in internet and email addresses it is '.uk'. In other contexts, it is referred to as 'Great Britain'. This, for example, is the name you hear when a medal winner steps onto the rostrum at the Olympic Games. The abbreviation 'GBP' (Great Britain Pounds) in international bank drafts is another example of the use of this name. In writing and speaking that is not especially formal or informal, the name 'Britain' is used. The normal everyday adjective, when talking about something to do with the UK, is 'British' (Why is Britain 'Great?').

### Great Britain and Ireland



### Looking for a name

It's not easy to keep geography and politics apart. Geographically speaking, it is clear that Great Britain, Ireland and all those smaller islands belong together. So you would think there would be a (single) name for them. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were generally called 'The British Isles'. But most people in Ireland and some people in Britain regard this name as outdated because it calls to mind the time when Ireland was politically dominated by Britain.

So what can we call these islands? Among the names which have been used are 'The north-east Atlantic archipelago', 'The north-west European archipelago', 'IONA' (Islands of the North Atlantic) and simply 'The Isles'. But none of these has become widely accepted.

The most common term at present is 'Great Britain and Ireland'. But even this is not strictly correct. It is not correct geographically because it ignores all the smaller islands. And it is not correct politically because there are two small parts of the area on the maps which have special political arrangements. These are the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, which are 'crown dependencies' and not officially part of the UK. Each has complete internal self-government, including its own parliament and its own tax system. Both are 'ruled' by a Lieutenant Governor appointed by the British government.



## The four nations

People often refer to Britain by another name. They call it 'England'. But this is not correct, and its use can make some people angry. England is only one of 'the four nations' in this part of the world. The others are Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Their political unification was a gradual process that took several hundred years (see chapter 2). It was completed in 1800 when the Irish parliament was joined with the parliament for England, Scotland, and Wales in Westminster, so that the whole area became a single state – the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. However, in 1922, most of Ireland became a separate state (see chapter 12).

At one time, culture and lifestyle varied enormously across the four nations. The dominant culture of people in Ireland, Wales and Highland Scotland was Celtic; that of people in England and Lowland Scotland was Germanic. This difference was reflected in the languages they spoke. People in the Celtic areas spoke Celtic languages; people in the Germanic areas spoke Germanic dialects (including the one which has developed into modern English). The nations also tended to have different economic, social, and legal systems, and they were independent of each other.

### Some historical and poetic names

**Albion** is a word used by poets and songwriters to refer, in different contexts, to England or to Scotland or to Great Britain as a whole. It comes from a Celtic word and was an early Greek and Roman name for Great Britain. The Romans associated Great Britain with the Latin word 'albus', meaning white. The white chalk cliffs around Dover on the English south coast are the first land formations one sights when crossing the sea from the European mainland.

**Britannia** is the name that the Romans gave to their southern British province (which covered, approximately, the area of present-day England and Wales). It is also the name given to the female embodiment of Britain, always shown wearing a helmet and holding a trident (the symbol of power over the sea), hence the patriotic song which begins 'Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves'. The figure of Britannia has been on the reverse side of many British coins for more than 300 years.



### Other signs of national identity

**Briton** is a word used in official contexts and in writing to describe a citizen of the United Kingdom. 'Ancient Britons' is the name given to the people who lived in southern Britain before and during the Roman occupation (AD 43–410). Their heirs are thought to be the Welsh and their language has developed into the modern Welsh language.

**Caledonia, Cambria and Hibernia** were the Roman names for Scotland, Wales and Ireland respectively. The words are commonly used today in scholarly classifications (for example, the type of English used in Ireland is sometimes called 'Hiberno-English' and there is a division of geological time known as 'the Cambrian period') and for the names of organizations (for example, 'Glasgow Caledonian' University).

**Erin** is a poetic name for Ireland. **The Emerald Isle** is another way of referring to Ireland, evoking the lush greenery of its countryside.

**John Bull** (see below) is a fictional character who is supposed to personify Englishness and certain English virtues. (He can be compared to Uncle Sam in the USA.) He appears in hundreds of nineteenth century cartoons. Today, somebody dressed as him often appears at football or rugby matches when England are playing. His appearance is typical of an eighteenth century country gentleman, evoking an idyllic rural past (see chapter 5).





Today, these differences have become blurred, but they have not completely disappeared. Although there is only one government for the whole of Britain, and everybody gets the same passport regardless of where in Britain they live, many aspects of government are organized separately (and sometimes differently) in the four parts of the United Kingdom. Moreover, Welsh, Scottish and Irish people feel their identity very strongly. That is why they have separate teams in many kinds of international sport.

**Other tokens of national identity**

The following are also associated by British people with one or more of the four nations.

**Surnames**

The prefix 'Mac' or 'Mc' (such as McCall, MacCarthy, MacDonald) is Scottish or Irish. The prefix 'O' (as in O'Brien, O'Connor) is Irish. A large number of surnames (for example, Evans, Jones, Morgan, Price, Williams) suggest Welsh origin. The most common surname in both England and Scotland is 'Smith'.

**First names for men**

The Scottish of 'John' is 'Ian' and its Irish form is 'Sean', although all three names are common throughout Britain. Outside their own countries, there are also nicknames for Irish, Scottish and Welsh men. For instance, Scottish men are sometimes known and addressed as 'Jock', Irishmen are called 'Paddy' or 'Mick' and Welshmen as 'Dai' or 'Taffy'. If the person using one of these names is not a friend, and especially if it is used in the plural (e.g. 'Micks'), it can sound insulting.

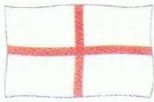






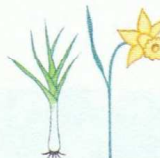
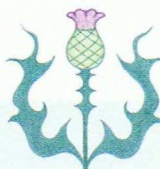





**Clothes**

The kilt, a skirt with a tartan pattern worn by men, is a very well-known symbol of Scottishness (though it is hardly ever worn in everyday life).

**Characteristics**

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

**Identifying symbols of the four nations**

	England	Wales	Scotland	Ireland
<b>Flag</b>	 St. George's Cross	 Dragon of Cadwallader	 St. Andrew's Cross	 St. Patrick's Cross
			 Lion Rampant	 Republic of Ireland
<b>Plant</b>	 rose	 leek/daffodil <sup>1</sup>	 thistle	 shamrock
<b>Colour<sup>2</sup></b>				
<b>Patron saint</b>	St. George	St. David	St. Andrew	St. Patrick
<b>Saint's day</b>	23 April	1 March	30 November	17 March

<sup>1</sup> there is some disagreement among Welsh people as to which is the real national plant, but the leek is the most well-known

<sup>2</sup> as typically worn by sports teams of the different nations



## Populations in 2006



These figures are estimates provided by the Office for National Statistics (England and Wales), the General Register Office for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. In the twenty-first century, the total population of Britain has risen by about a quarter of a million each year.

## The dominance of England

There is, perhaps, an excuse for the people who use the word 'England' when they mean 'Britain'. It cannot be denied that the dominant culture of Britain today is specifically English. The system of politics that is used in all four nations today is of English origin, and English is the main language of all four nations. Many aspects of everyday life are organized according to English custom and practice. But the political unification of Britain was not achieved by mutual agreement. On the contrary, it happened because England was able to assert her economic and military power over the other three nations (see chapter 2).

Today, English domination can be detected in the way in which various aspects of British public life are described. For example, the supply of money in Britain is controlled by the Bank of England (there is no such thing as a 'Bank of Britain'). Another example is the name of the present monarch. She is universally known as 'Elizabeth II', even though Scotland and Northern Ireland have never had an 'Elizabeth I'. (Elizabeth I of England and Wales ruled from 1553 to 1603). The common use of the term 'Anglo' is a further indication. (The Angles were a Germanic tribe who settled in England in the fifth century. The word 'England' is derived from their name.) When newspapers and the television news talk about 'Anglo-American relations', they are talking about relations between the governments of Britain and the USA (and not just England and the USA).

In addition, there is a tendency in the names of publications and organizations to portray England as the norm and other parts of Britain as special cases. Thus there is a specialist newspaper called

## Musical instruments

The harp is an emblem of both Wales and Ireland. Bagpipes are regarded as distinctively Scottish, although a smaller type is also used in traditional Irish music.

(Right) A harp.

(Far right) A Scottish bagpipe.





the *Times Educational Supplement*, but also a version of it called the *Times Educational Supplement (Scotland)*. Similarly, the umbrella organization for employees is called the ‘Trades Union Congress’, but there is also a ‘Scottish Trades Union Congress’. When something pertains to England, this fact is often not specified in its name; when it pertains to Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, it always is. In this way, these parts of Britain are presented as something ‘other’.

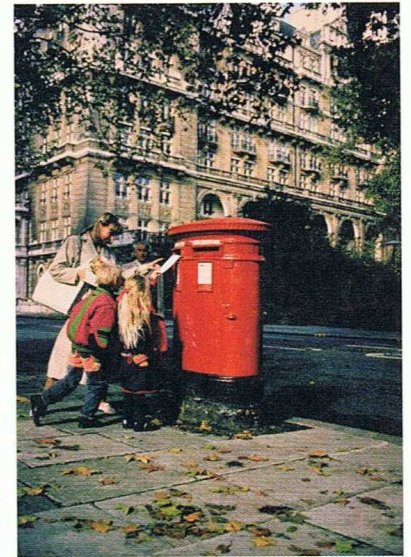
## National loyalties

The dominance of England can also be detected in the way that many English people don’t bother to distinguish between ‘Britain’ and ‘England’. They write ‘English’ next to ‘nationality’ on forms when they are abroad and talk about places like Edinburgh as if it was part of England.

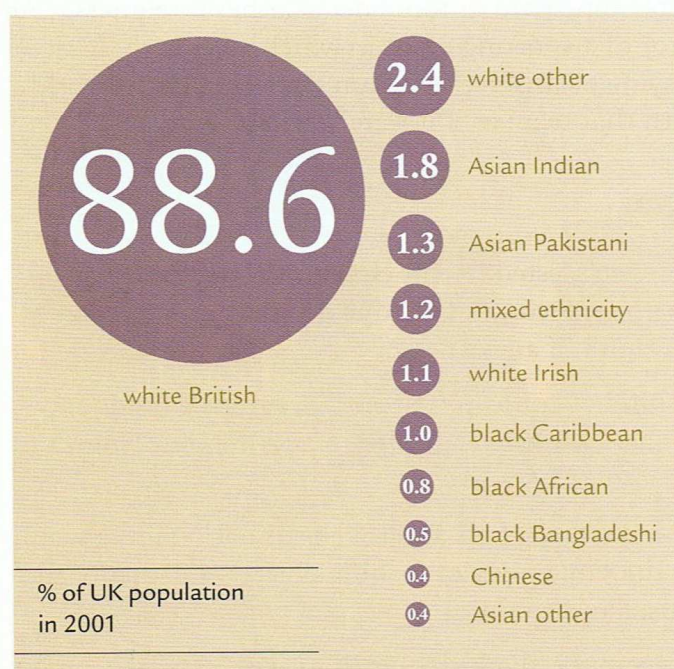
Nevertheless, when you are talking to people from Britain, it is safest to use ‘Britain’ when talking about where they live and ‘British’ as the adjective to describe their nationality. This way you will be less likely to offend anyone. It is, of course, not wrong to talk about ‘people in England’ if that is what you mean – people who live within the geographical boundaries of England. After all, most British people live there (*Populations in 2006*). But it should always be remembered that England does not make up the whole of the UK (*Careful with that address!*).

### Careful with that address!

When you are addressing a letter to somewhere in Britain, do not write anything like ‘Edinburgh, England’ or ‘Cardiff, England’. You should write ‘Edinburgh, Scotland’ and ‘Cardiff, Wales’ – or (if you feel ‘Scotland’ and ‘Wales’ are not recognizable enough) write ‘Great Britain’ or ‘United Kingdom’ instead.



### The people of Britain



One of the questions in the 2001 census of the UK was ‘What is your ethnic group?’ and the categories above were offered as choices. Here are some of the results, listed in order of size.

As you can see, about one in nine people identified themselves as something other than ‘white British’. The largest category was ‘white other’, but these people were from a variety of places and many were only temporarily resident in Britain. As a result, they do not form a single identifiable community. (For these and other reasons, the same is largely true of those in the white Irish and black African categories.) By far the largest recognizable ethnic grouping was formed by people whose ethnic roots are in the Indian subcontinent (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi in the chart); together they made up more than two million people. The other established, recognizable ethnic group in Britain were black Caribbeans (a little over half a million people).

What this chart does not show are all the people who came to Britain from eastern Europe (especially Poland) in the years 2004–2007. Their numbers, estimated between three quarters of a million and one million, represent the largest single wave of immigration to Britain in more than 300 years. However, it is not clear at this time how many will set up home in Britain.

Another point about the people of Britain is worth noting. Since the 1980s, more people immigrate to Britain than emigrate from it every year. A quarter of all babies born in Britain are born to at least one foreign-born parent. At the same time, emigration is also very high. The people of Britain are changing.



There has been a long history of migration from Scotland, Wales and Ireland to England. As a result, there are millions of people who live in England but who would never describe themselves as English (or at least not as only English). They may have lived in England all their lives, but as far as they are concerned they are Scottish or Welsh or Irish – even if, in the last case, they are citizens of Britain and not of Eire. These people support the country of their parents or grandparents rather than England in sporting contests. They would also, given the chance, play for that country rather than England.

The same often holds true for the further millions of British citizens whose family origins lie outside Britain or Ireland. People of Caribbean or south Asian descent, for instance, do not mind being described as ‘British’ (many are proud of it), but many of them would not like to be called ‘English’ (or, again, not only English). And whenever the West Indian, Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi cricket team plays against England, it is usually not England that they support!

There is, in fact, a complicated division of loyalties among many people in Britain, and especially in England. A black person whose family are from the Caribbean will passionately support the West Indies when they play cricket against England. But the same person is quite happy to support England just as passionately in a sport such as football, which the West Indies do not play. A person whose family are from Ireland but who has always lived in England would want Ireland to beat England at football but would want England to beat (for example) Italy just as much.

This crossover of loyalties can work the other way as well. English people do not regard the Scottish, the Welsh or the Irish as ‘foreigners’ (or, at least, not as the same kind of foreigner as other foreigners!). An English commentator of a sporting event in which a Scottish, Irish or Welsh team is playing against a team from elsewhere in the world tends to identify with that team as if it were English.

## QUESTIONS

- 1 Which of the names suggested in this chapter for the group of islands off the north-west coast of Europe do you think would be the best? Can you think of any others?
- 2 Is there the same kind of confusion of and disagreement about names in your country as there is in Britain and Ireland? How does this happen?
- 3 Think of the well-known symbols and tokens of nationality in your country. Are they the same types of real-life objects (e.g. plants and clothes) that are used in Britain?
- 4 In the British government, there are ministers with special responsibility for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but there is no minister for England. Why do you think this is?

### Flag

The Union flag, often known as the ‘Union Jack’, is the national flag of the UK. It is a combination of the cross of St. George, the cross of St. Andrew and the cross of St. Patrick.

