

Реферат на тему:

Traditions customs and holidays of Great Britain

Every nation and every country has its own traditions and customs. Traditions make a nation special. Some of them are old-fashioned and many people remember them, others are part of people's life. Some British customs and traditions are known all the world.

From Scotland to Cornwall, Britain is full of customs and traditions. A lot of them have very long histories. Some are funny and some are strange. But they are all interesting. There is the long menu of traditional British food. There are many royal occasions. There are songs, saying and superstitions. They are all part of the British way of life.

You cannot really imagine Britain without all its traditions, this integral feature of social and private life of the people living on the British Isles that has always been an important part of their life and work.

English traditions can be classified into several groups: traditions concerning the Englishmen's private life (child's birth, wedding, marriage, wedding anniversary); which are connected with families incomes; state traditions; national holidays, religious holidays, public festival, traditional ceremonies.

What about royal traditions? There are numerous royal traditions in Britain, some are ancient, others are modern.

The Queen is the only person in Britain with two birthdays. Her real birthday is on April 21st, but she has an "official" birthday, too. That is on the second Saturday in June. And on the Queen's official birthday, there is a traditional ceremony called the Trooping of the Colour. It is a big parade with brass bands and hundreds of soldiers at Horse Guard's Parade in London. A "regiment" of the Queen's soldiers, the Guards, march in front of her. At the front of the parade there is the regiment's flag or "colour". Thousands of Londoners and visitors watch in Horse Guards' Parade. And millions of people at home watch it on television. This custom is not very old, but it is for very old people. On his or her one hundredth birthday, a British person gets a telegram with congratulations from the Queen.

In Britain as in other countries costumes and uniforms have a long history.

One is the uniform of the Beefeaters at the tower of London. This came first from France. Another is the uniform of the Horse Guards at Horse Guard's Parade, not far from Buckingham Palace. Thousands of visitors take photographs of the Horse Guards.

Britannia is a symbol of Britain. And she wears traditional clothes, too. But she is not a real person.

Lots of ordinary clothes have a long tradition. The famous bowler hat, for example. A man called Beaulieu made the first one in 1850.

One of the British soldiers, Wellington, gave his name to a pair of boots. They have a shorter name today - "Wellies".

There is a very special royal tradition. On the River Thames there are hundreds of swans. A lot of these beautiful white birds belong, traditionally, to the king or queen. In July the young swans on the Thames are about two months old. Then the Queen's swan keeper goes, in a boat, from London Bridge to Henley. He looks at all the young swans and marks the royal ones. The name of this strange but interesting custom is Swan Upping.

There are only six public holidays a year in Great Britain, that is days on which people need not go in to work. They are: Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Spring Bank Holiday and Late Summer Bank Holiday, Boxing Day.

So the most popular holiday in Britain is Christmas. Christmas has been celebrated from the earliest days of recorded history, and each era and race has pasted a colourful sheet of new customs and traditions over the old.

On the Sunday before Christmas many churches hold a carol service where special hymns are sung. Sometimes carol singers can be heard in the streets as they collect money for charity. There are a lot of very popular British Christmas carols. Three famous ones are: "Good King Wenceslas", "The Holly and The Ivy" and "We Three Kings".

Each year, hundreds of thousands of people all over the world send and receive Christmas cards. Most of people think that exchanging cards at Christmas is a very ancient custom but it is not right. In fact it is barely 100 years old. The idea of exchanging illustrated greeting and presents is, however, ancient. So the first commercial Christmas card was produced in Britain in 1843 by Henry Cole, founder of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The handcoloured print was inscribed with the words 'A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year to you'. It was horizontally rectangular in shape, printed on stout cardboard by lithography.

A traditional feature of Christmas in Britain is the Christmas tree. Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, brought the German tradition (he was German) to Britain. He and the Queen had a Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in 1841. A few years after, nearly every house in Britain had one. Traditionally people decorate their trees on Christmas Eve - that's December 24th. They take down the decorations twelve days later, on Twelfth Night (January 5th).

An older tradition is Christmas mistletoe. People put a piece of this green plant with its white berries over a door. Mistletoe brings good luck, people say. Also, at Christmas British people kiss their friends and family under the mistletoe.

Those who live away try to get back home because Christmas is a family celebration and it is the biggest holiday of the year. As Christmas comes nearer, everyone is buying presents for relatives

and friends. At Christmas people try to give their children everything they want. And the children count the weeks, than the days, to Christmas. They are wondering what presents on December 24th. Father Christmas brings their presents in the night. Then they open them on the morning of the 25th.

There is another name for Father Christmas

in Britain - Santa Claus. That comes from the European name for him - Saint Nicholas. In the traditional story he lives at the North Pole. But now he lives in big shops in towns and cities all over Britain. Well, that's where children see him in November and December. Then on Christmas Eve he visits every house. He climbs down the chimney and leaves lots of presents.

In Britain the most important meal on December 25th is Christmas dinner. Nearly all Christmas food is traditional, but a lot of the traditions are not very old. For example, there were no turkeys in Britain before 1800. And even in the nineteenth century, goose was the traditional meat at Christmas. But not now.

A twentieth-century British Christmas dinner is roast turkey with carrots, potatoes, peas, Brussels sprouts and gravy. There are sausages and bacon, too. Then, after the turkey, there's Christmas pudding. Some people make this pudding months before Christmas. A lot of families have their own Christmas pudding recipes. Some, for example, use a lot of brandy. Others put in a lot of fruit or add a silver coin for good luck. Real Christmas puddings always have a piece of holly on the top. Holly bushes and trees have red berries at Christmas time, and so people use holly to decorate their houses for Christmas. The holly on the pudding is part of the decoration. Crackers are also usual at Christmas dinner. These came to Britain from China in the nineteenth century.

December 26th is Boxing Day. Traditionally boys from the shops in each town asked for money at Christmas. They went from house to house on December 26th and took boxes made of wood with them. At each house people gave them money. This was a Christmas present. So the name of December 26th doesn't come from the sport of boxing - it comes from the boys' wooden boxes. Now, Boxing Day is an extra holiday after Christmas Day.

Traditionally Boxing Day Hunts is a day for foxhunting. The huntsmen and huntswomen ride horses. They use dogs, too. The dogs (fox hounds) follow the smell of the fox. Then the huntsmen and huntswomen follow the hounds. Before a Boxing Day hunt, the huntsmen and huntswomen drink not wine. But the tradition of the December 26th hunt is changing. Now, some people want to stop Boxing Day Hunts (and other hunts, too). They don't like foxhunting. For them it's not a sport - it is cruel.

In England people celebrate the New Year. But it is not as widely or as enthusiastically observed as Christmas. Some people ignore it completely and go to bed at the same time as usual on New Year's Eve. Many others, however, do celebrate it in one way or another, the type of celebration varying very much according to the local custom, family tradition and personal taste.

The most common type of celebration is a New Year party, either a family party or one arranged by a group of young people. And another popular way of celebrating the New Year is to go to a New

Year's dance.

The most famous celebration is in London round the statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus where crowds gather and sing and welcome the New Year. In Trafalgar Square there is also a big crowd and someone usually falls into the fountain.

Every Year the people of Norway give the city of London a present. It's a big Christmas tree and it stands in Trafalgar Square. Also in central London, Oxford Street and Regent Street always have beautiful decorations at the New Year and Christmas. Thousands of people come to look at them.

In Britain a lot of people make New Year Resolutions on the evening of December 31st. For example, "I'll get up early every morning next year", or "I'll clean, my shoes every day". But there is a problem. Most people forget their New Year Resolutions on January 2nd.

But New Year's Eve is a more important festival in Scotland than it is in England, and it even has a special name. It is not clear where the 'Hogmanay' comes from, but it is connected with the provision of food and drink for all visitors to your home on 31st December.

There is a Scottish song that is sung all over the world at midnight on New Year's Eve. It was written by Robert Burns, the famous Scottish poet, and you may find some of the traditional words a bit difficult to understand, but that's the way it's always sung - even by English people!

It was believed that the first person to visit one's house on New Year's Day could bring good or bad luck. Therefore, people tried to arrange for the person of their own choice to be standing outside their houses ready to be let in the moment midnight had come.

Usually a dark-complexioned man was chosen, and never a woman, for she would bring bad luck. The first footer was required to carry three articles: a piece of coal to wish warmth, a piece of bread to wish food, and a silver coin to wish wealth. In some parts of northern England this pleasing custom is still observed. So this interesting tradition called "First Footing".

On Bank holiday the townsfolk usually flock into the country and to the coast. If the weather is fine many families take a picnic - lunch or tea with them and enjoy their meal in the open. Seaside towns near London, such as Southend, are invaded by thousands of trippers who come in cars and coaches, trains and bicycles. Great amusement parks like Southend Kursaal do a roaring trade with their scenic railways, shooting galleries, water-shoots, Crazy houses and so on. Trippers will wear comic paper hats with slogans, and they will eat and drink the weirdest mixture of stuff you can imagine, sea food like cockles, mussels, whelks, fish and chips, candy floss, tea, fizzy drinks, everything you can imagine.

Bank holiday is also an occasion for big sports meetings at places like the White City Stadium, mainly all kinds of athletics. There are also horse race meetings all over the country, and most traditional of all, there are large fairs with swings, roundabouts, a Punch and Judy show, hoop-la stalls and every kind of side-show including, in recent, bingo. There is also much boating activity on the Thames.

Although the Christian religion gave the world Easter as we know it today, the celebration owes its name and many of its customs and symbols to a pagan festival called Eostre. Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of springtime and sunrise, got her name from the word east, where the sun rises.

Many modern Easter symbols come from pagan times. The egg, for instance, was a fertility symbol long before the Christian era. The ancient Persians, Greeks and Chinese exchanged eggs at their spring festivals. In Christian times the egg took on a new meaning symbolizing the tomb from which Christ rose. The ancient custom of dyeing eggs at Easter time is still very popular.

The Easter bunny also originated in pre-Christian fertility lore. The rabbit was the most fertile animal our ancestors knew, so they selected it as a symbol of new life. Today, children enjoy eating candy bunnies and listening to stories about the Easter bunny, who supposedly brings Easter eggs in a fancy basket.

Also there is a spectacular parade on Easter. It is a truly spectacular Easter Parade in Battersea Park. It is sponsored by the London Tourist Board and is usually planned around a central theme related to the history and attractions of London. The great procession, or parade, begins at 3 p.m. but it is advisable to find a vantage-point well before that hour.

On October 31st British people celebrate Halloween. It is undoubtedly the most colourful and exciting holiday of the year. Though it is not a public holiday, it is very dear to those who celebrate it, especially to children and teenagers. This day was originally called All Hallows' Eve because it fell on the eve of All Saints' Day. The name was later shortened to Halloween. According to old beliefs, Halloween is the time, when the veil between the living and the dead is partially lifted, and witches, ghosts and other supernatural beings are about. Now children celebrate Halloween in unusual costumes and masks. It is a festival of merrymaking, superstitions, spells, fortunetelling, traditional games and pranks. Halloween is a time for fun.

Few holidays tell us much of the past as Halloween. Its origins date back to a time, when people believed in devils, witches and ghosts. Many Halloween customs are based on beliefs of the ancient Celts, who lived more than 2,000 years ago in what is now Great Britain, Ireland, and northern France.

Every year the Celts celebrated the Druid festival of Samhain, Lord of the Dead and Prince of Darkness. It fell on October 31, the eve of the Druid new year. The date marked the end of summer, or the time when the sun retreated before the powers of darkness and the reign of the Lord of Death began. The Dun god took part in the holiday and received thanks for the year's harvest.

It was believed that evil spirits sometimes played tricks on October 31. They could also do all kinds of damage to property. Some people tried to ward off the witches by painting magic signs on their barns. Others tried to frighten them away by nailing a piece of iron, such as a horseshoe, over the door.

Many fears and superstitions grew up about this day. An old Scotch superstition was that witches - those who had sold their souls to the devil - left in their beds on Halloween night a stick made by

magic to look like themselves. Then they would fly up the chimney attended by a black cat.

In Ireland, and some other parts of Great Britain, it was believed, that fairies spirited away young wives, whom they returned dazed and amnesic 366 days later.

When Halloween night fell, people in some places dressed up and tried to resemble the souls of the dead. They hoped that the ghosts would leave peacefully before midnight. They carried food to the edge of town or village and left it for the spirits.

In Wales, they believed that the devil appeared in the shape of a pig, a horse, or a dog. On that night, every person marked a stone and put it in a bonfire. If a person's stone was missing the next morning, he or she would die within a year.

Much later, when Christianity came to Great Britain and Ireland, the Church wisely let the people keep their old feast. But it gave it a new association when in the 9th century a festival in honour of all saints (All Hallows) was fixed on November 1. In the 11th century November 2 became All Souls' Day to honour the souls of the dead, particularly those who died during the year.

Christian tradition included the lighting of bonfires and carrying blazing torches all around the fields. In some places masses of flaming straw were flung into the air.

Halloween customs today follow many of the ancient traditions, though their significance has long since disappeared.

A favourite Halloween custom is to make a jack-o'-lantern. Children take out the middle of the pumpkin, cut hole holes for the eyes, nose and mouth in its side and, finally, they put a candle inside the pumpkin to scare their friends. The candle burning inside makes the orange face visible from far away on a dark night - and the pulp makes a delicious pumpkin-pie.

People in England and Ireland once carved out beets, potatoes, and turnips to make jack-o'-lanterns on Halloween. When the Scots and Irish came to the United States, they brought their customs with them. But they began to carve faces on pumpkins because they were more plentiful in autumn than turnips. Nowadays, British carve faces on pumpkins, too.

According to an Irish legend, jack-o'-lanterns were named for a man called Jack who was notorious for his drunkenness and being stingy. One evening at the local pub, the Devil appeared to take his soul. Clever Jack persuaded the Devil to "have one drink together before we go". To pay for his drink the Devil turned himself into a sixpence. Jack immediately put it into his wallet. The Devil couldn't escape from it because it had a catch in the form of a cross. Jack released the Devil only when the latter promised to leave him in peace for another year. Twelve months later, Jack played another practical joke on the Devil, letting him down from a tree only on the promise that he would never pursue him again. Finally, Jack's body wore out. He could not enter heaven because he was a miser. He could not enter hell either, because he played jokes on the Devil. Jack was in despair. He begged the Devil for a live coal to light his way out of the dark. He put it into a turnip and, as the story goes, is still wandering around the earth with his lantern.

In big cities Halloween celebrations often include special decorating contests. Young people are invited to soap shop-windows, and they get prizes for the best soap-drawings.

In old times, practical jokes were even more elaborate. It was quite normal to steal gates, block house doors, and cover chimneys with turf so that smoke could not escape. Blame for resulting chaos was naturally placed on the "spirits".

At Halloween parties the guests wear every kind of costume. Some people dress up like supernatural creatures, other prefers historical or political figures. You can also meet pirates, princesses, Draculas, Cinderellas, or even Frankenstein's monsters at a Halloween festival.

At Halloween parties children play traditional games. Many games date back to the harvest festivals of very ancient times. One of the most popular is called bobbing for apples. One child at a time has to get apples from a tub of water without using hands. But how to do this? By sinking his or her face into the water and biting the apple.

And no Halloween party is complete without at least one scary story. It helps too create an air of mystery.

Certain fortunetelling methods began in Europe hundreds of years ago and became an important part of Halloween. For example, such object as a coin, a ring, and a thimble were baked into a cake or other food. It was believed that the person who found the coin in the cake would become wealthy. The one who found the ring would marry soon, but the person who got the thimble would never get married.

Unfortunately now most people do not believe in evil spirits. They know that evil spirits do not break steps, spill garbage or pull down fences. If property is damaged, they blame naughty boys and girls. Today, Halloween is still a bad night for the police...

March 1st is a very important day for Welsh people. It's St. David's Day. He's the "patron" or national saint of Wales. On March 1st, the Welsh celebrate St. Davids Day and wear daffodils in the buttonholes of their coats or jackets.

On February 14th it's Saint Valentine's Day in Britain. It is not a national holiday. Banks and offices do not close, but it is a happy little festival in honour of St. Valentine. On this day, people send Valentine cards to their husbands, wives, girlfriends and boyfriends. You can also send a card to a person you do not know. But traditionally you must never write your name on it. Some British newspapers have got a page for Valentine's Day messages on February 14th.

This lovely day is widely celebrated among people of all ages by the exchanging of "valentines". Saint Valentine was a martyr but this feast goes back to pagan times and the Roman feast of Lupercalia. The names of young unmarried girls were put into a vase. The young men each picked a name, and discovered the identity of their brides.

Midsummer's Day, June 24th, is the longest day of the year. On that day you can see a very old custom at Stonehenge, in Wiltshire, England. Stonehenge is one of Europe's biggest stone circles. A lot of the stones are ten or twelve metres high. It is also very old. The earliest part of Stonehenge is nearly 5,000 years old. But what was Stonehenge? A holy place? A market? Or was it a kind of calendar? Many people think that the Druids used it for a calendar. The Druids were the priests in Britain 2,000 years ago. They used the 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 of them go to Stonehenge. On that morning the sun shines on one famous stone - the Heel stone. For the Druids this is a very important moment in the year. But for a lot of British people it is just a strange old custom.

April 1st is April Fool's Day in Britain. This is a very old tradition from the Middle Ages (between the fifth and fifteenth centuries). At that time the servants were masters for one day of the year. They gave orders to their masters, and their masters had to obey. Now April Fool's Day is different. It is a day for jokes and tricks.

An annual British tradition, which captures the imagination of the whole nation is the London to Brighton Car Rally in which a fleet of ancient cars indulges in a lighthearted race from the Capital to the Coast.

When the veteran cars set out on the London - Brighton run each November, they are celebrating one of the great landmarks in the history of motoring in Britain - the abolition of the rule that every "horseless carriage" had to be preceded along the road by a pedestrian. This extremely irksome restriction, imposed by the Locomotives on Highways Act, was withdrawn in 1896, and on November of that year there was a rally of motor-cars on the London - Brighton highway to celebrate the first day of freedom - Emancipation Day, as it has known by motorists ever since.

Emancipation is still on the first Sunday of the month, but nowadays there is an important condition of entry - every car taking part must be at least 60 years old.

The Run is not a race. Entrants are limited to a maximum average speed of 20 miles per hour. The great thing is not speed but quality of performance, and the dedicated enthusiasts have a conversation all their own.

The Highland Games - this sporting tradition is Scottish. In the Highlands (the mountains of Scotland) families, or "clans", started the Games hundreds of years ago.

Some of the sports at the Games are international: the high jump and the long jump, for example. But other sports happen only at the Highland Games. One is tossing the caber. "Tossing" means throwing, and a "caber" is a long, heavy piece of wood. In tossing the caber you lift the caber (it can be five or six metres tall). Then you throw it in front of you.

At the Highland Games a lot of men wear kilts. These are traditional Scottish skirts for men. But they are not all the same. Each clan has a different "tartan". That is the name for the pattern on the kilt. So at the Highland Games there are traditional sports and traditional instrument - the bagpipes.

The bagpipes are very loud. They say Scots soldier played them before a battle. The noise frightened the soldiers on other side.

There are some British traditions and customs concerning their private life. The British are considered to be the world's greatest tea drinkers. And so tea is Britain's favourite drink. The English know how to make tea and what it does for you. In England people say jokingly: 'The test of good tea is simple. If a spoon stands up in it, then it is strong enough; if the spoon starts to wobble, it is a feeble makeshift'.

Every country has its drinking habits, some of which are general and obvious, others most peculiar. Most countries also have a national drink. In England the national is beer, and the pub "pub", where people talk, eat, drink, meet their friends and relax.

The word "pub" is short for "public house". Pubs sell beer. (British beer is always warm). An important custom in pubs is "buying a round". In a group, one person buys all the others a drink. This is a "round". Then one by one all the people buy rounds, too. If they are with friends, British people sometimes lift their glasses before they drink and say: "Cheers". This means "Good luck".

In the pubs in south-west England there is another traditional drink-scrumpy.

Pub names often have a long tradition. Some come from the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Every pub has a name and every pub has a sign above its door. The sign shows a picture of the pub's name.

And as you know, the British talk about the weather a lot. They talk about the weather because it changes so often. Wind, rain, sun, cloud, snow - they can all happen in a British winter - or a British summer.

I have chosen the topic British customs traditions because I enjoy learning the English language and wanted to know more about British ways of life and traditions. Working on this topic I have to conclusion that British people are very conservative. They are proud pf their traditions and carefully keep them up. It was interesting to know that foreigners coming to England are stuck at once by quite a number of customs and peculiarities.

So I think of Britain as a place a lot of different types of people who observe their traditions.

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