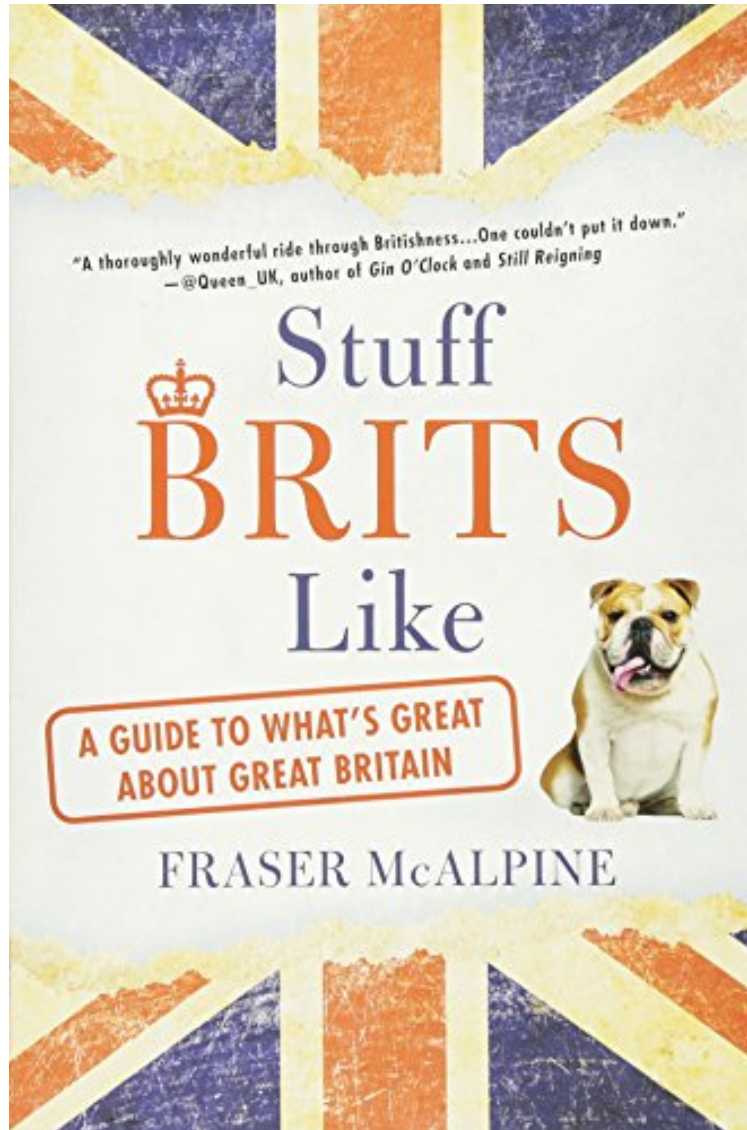


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Stuff Brits Like: A Guide to What's Great About Great Britain

Fraser McAlpine

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Fraser McAlpine : Stuff Brits Like: A Guide to What's Great About Great Britain before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stuff Brits Like: A Guide to What's Great About Great Britain:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great bookBy scott a wallaceGreat book on the little quirks of the English. I was very familiar with a lot of the topics-my Father's family is Brittish, but there was still plenty I didn't know. Many topics in the book with a short story of several pages per subject. Perfect bathroom book. I bought this used from an independent seller and the condition of the book was pristine and the price was dirt cheap. Good job!1 of

1 people found the following review helpful. Amusing and exceptionally well written
By Judith
This book is a collection of humorous essays about life in Britain. It is not intended as a book for Americans wanting to fit-in in the UK, although it would probably help. This isn't a book that tells readers that we say elevator they say lift, they call soccer football, etc. This is more like a British version of *Stuff White People Like*. The author is a terrific writer. I would definitely buy more books by this author. I thought the essay on libraries was worth the price of the book alone. I can't recommend this book enough.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good, but not perfect !
By GUSR19
The classifications for the book aren't really sensible, so I only put in one ! As a Brit I might choose to disagree with some of the things I am supposed to like, but we are not all the same !

If you're looking for the best biscuit to dunk in your tea, the ideal temperature at which to serve real ale or the perfect pasty for your trip to the seaside, you either A) Have been desperately seeking a book exactly like this one or, B) Have secretly become British without realizing it. If you chose A, congratulations, you are an Anglophile! And, if you chose B, don't panic. With the help of *Stuff Brits Like*, you will soon discover the joy of these and many more delightful British peculiarities and can develop an upper lip as stiff as any you've seen on *Downton Abbey*. British native Fraser McAlpine set out to do for his countrymen what *Stuff Parisians Like* did for their neighbors across the channel offering a guide to their particular tastes and eccentricities with all the cheeky wit you might expect from the people who gave you Nol Coward and Eddie Izzard. You may know to say football instead of soccer and crisps instead of chips. You may even know why taking the piss is more fun and less unsanitary than it sounds. But with *Stuff Brits Like*, you'll be ready for the next pub quiz in no time.

A thoroughly wonderful ride through Britishness
One couldn't put it down.
@Queen_UK, author of *Gin O'Clock* and *Still Reigning*
About the Author
Fraser McAlpine is the lead writer for *Anglophobia*, BBC America's blog for American Anglophiles, and consequently spends a good deal of his working life arguing about the finer points of *Doctor Who*, *Sherlock*, *Downton Abbey* and anything with Tom Hiddleston in it. He lives in Cornwall, which is the Florida of the British Isles, except it's far wetter and there's no Disneyworld.
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Introduction
Let us start this preposterous journey in the most British way imaginable: with a series of meandering apologies and caveats. I don't know what it is about a book like this, but it seems you can't make huge, sweeping, lawn-mower generalizations about the likes and loves of an entire nation without slicing up the odd precious and unique orchid here and there, and for that, I am truly sorry. It would probably have been easier to write a book called *Stuff Brits Don't Like*. That would have taken no time to compile and run to several volumes, such is the national zeal for complaining and taking things to task, but it's not as if the Internet is short of people showing their displeasure, so it's probably best to leave them to it. And while we're shutting doors in people's faces, this book can only be a personal journey. It wasn't subject to a public vote and there won't be a chance to suggest subsequent chapters. People born and bred in the British Isles won't always recognize themselves on every page; there will be lots of points along the way where, if this were a blog, the comments section would blaze with outrage and correction (see: *Pedantry*). But that's because one book cannot hope to convey the full range of enthusiasms in a nation as endlessly and joyfully provincial as the United Kingdom. Heck, I can't even get them to agree on a list of favorite movies (excluding *Star Wars*, which is, ah, universal). So I've picked just five popular cinematic experiences, the ones that say something about how British people like to think about themselves. That is, if they would ever settle down and think of themselves as British in the first place. By which I mean we need to get our definitions straight. For the purposes of brevity, if not painstaking accuracy, Britain and the United Kingdom have been used interchangeably to describe the same place (the full title is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). However, the United Kingdom is made up of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and Cornwall, which does not currently have nation status (it's actually a duchy). The Cornish have been identified by the European Union as a recognized minority; they are, in other words, their own people. Then there are the island communities: the Isles of Scilly, the Orkneys, the Shetlands, the Isle of Wight, and so on. On some islands cars are welcome, and on others they are not allowed and the taxis all float. This must make watching *Top Gear* there an entirely different experience from what it is in landlocked Birmingham. So again, sweeping generalizations are hard to pull off. Also, Britain and England are so often conflated that Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish (and Cornish) residents tend to feel left out. Make a list of British things that are principally English things and you're sure to get on someone's nerves. Then again (again), you can't ignore the English either, not least because they made such a fuss about being in charge of everything in the first place. But which England? The north is a very different place from the south. As is the east from the west. And that's before you consider the dividing influence of class still a hugely influential factor in British tastes and the various experiences of people from different ethnic groups too. In fact, the only thing British people will definitely all agree on with regard to this book is that it is hugely flawed in almost every respect. I can only offer sympathy with that view, and my humble apologies. Ideally a balance can be struck between compiling the common clichés of bowler hats and stiff upper lips and writing a huge list of things that everyone likes, delivered as if no one has ever noticed them, like saying, Hey, this oxygen stuff isn't bad, is it? Oh, and while we're on definitions, here's a brief list of potentially

confusing terms: If I say football I mean soccer (see: Football). If I say fags I mean cigarettes. If I say chips I mean fries. If I say crisps I mean chips. If I say biscuits I mean cookies. Everything else, bar an eccentric glossary at the end, is yours to puzzle over and investigate further. Good luck!

FRASER MCALPINE, CORNWALL, 2014

Pedantry Lets be honest, we all knew this was going to be the first chapter. The British have many international reputations to uphold, but the most fondly held is that of the uptight gentleman in an immaculate suit waiting politely for his turn to explain that you've just done something wrong. Even in the act of putting together ideas for a book about things that British people tend to enjoy not a controversial or damning theme I started to worry about the kindly meant corrections, the outrage at having left something out. You know, the pedants revolt. Now I'm fretting that I've put the apostrophe in the wrong place just there. Do I mean it's a revolt of a single pedant or a group of pedants? Does it belong to them? Do people get that the phrase is a pun on the Peasants Revolt of 1381? Should I explain that or does it ruin the joke? It's all very stressful. There's also the fact that the only people who refer to the Brits as the Brits are not Brits. Regional pride runs strong and deep in the United Kingdom, a state of affairs that is only intensified by the fragmented nature of Britain as a combined nation. As there's a certain amount of cultural antagonism between the five nationalities involved or, more accurately, between the other four nationalities and England any reference to British people will draw the Pavlovian response that Britain is not England, that the two terms are not interchangeable. And that's before we've even started to take into account the significant differences between individual counties, districts, and villages, some of which really do not get on well. You can pin this intense desire for subjective accuracy down to a need to create order out of chaos using unimprovably impatient phrases like Why don't you just... or Surely you'd be better off... as a preface but the British and their high standards manage to find chaos everywhere, even in places that look pretty ordered already, thank you very much. By which I mean the Brits won't forgive the rest of the world for driving on the right-hand side of the road, much less America for taking so many letters out of British English words colour, catalogue, axe just to make spellings easier. Naturally the online environment has only intensified this state of affairs. Create any kind of Web list Five Best Tea Shops in Rhyl, Nine Greatest Achievements of Clement Attlee, Seven Greatest Beatles Songs and the first comment afterward will be You forgot Liffys caff or You forgot maintaining government order in a cabinet of strong personalities or You forgot Nowhere Man, as if the omission of one runner-up deprives the whole enterprise of merit. That's largely why people create these online lists, of course to encourage pedants to read, snort, and comment and it's incredibly effective. But there are also blogs and Twitter feeds devoted to the search for spelling mistakes on handwritten signs: patiently explaining why speech marks are not used for emphasis, impatiently yelling at the poor greengrocer and his potatoes, and generally channeling the sadistic English teacher from the writers past who made tiny tears well up every time she read the students homework out loud to the class. And of course those blog posts and tweets will also contain mistakes whether made by fat fingertips on a smartphone screen, autocorrect larking about, or genuine human error and this will provoke more snarky comments, which will also contain basic spelling mistakes or missed punctuation, betraying the glee and speed with which pedantry is applied. To be the second to point out a mistake is an unbearable shame. To have made a mistake while in the act of pointing out someone else's, well, that's grounds for immediate deportation from life itself. Celebrities are invited to join the cause. Stephen Fry, as a fan of discourse and generally bashing words together to see the pretty sparks, is often encouraged to speak out against declining standards in grammar and the rising tide of neologisms. He stoutly refuses to do so, pointing out that language is a fluid thing. English teachers are wonderful, inspiring people, even the scary ones, but they only relay the basic rules of punctuation and grammar as they understand them at the time. To say the English language something the Brits are quietly rather proud of is on the wane because of LOL or text speak is simply to echo the same view expressed in the 1950s with daddy-o and cool, and in the 1960s with groovy and heavy. Shakespeare coined hundreds of new words and expressions, from barefaced to courtship to puking, and you can bet that the first few times they were used, there was an unimpressed puritan within earshot, ready with a withering rebuke. And they had proper puritans in those days. The nation's best-known film critic is Mark Kermode. He's a man of strong passions, very principled in his approach and firm in his point of view. And one of the reasons he is so popular is that he's a terrific pedant. Whether he's picking apart tiny flaws in the films he is reviewing or he's listening to comments from his radio listeners and correcting their grammar, his endless need to correct and improve is symptomatic of a particular outlook, one that is so popular that even when he makes a mistake and let's be entirely honest here, there is no one so sure of their linguistic powers that they are above a little grammatical polish here and there people rush to correct him. The interesting thing is, these corrections still happen even when the perceived error is something that doesn't even really exist as a rule. A lot of people have been taught that sentences should not end with a preposition, for example. So the question Which chair shall I sit on? is a prime target for pedants to leap at and suggest On which chair shall I sit? as the correct alternative. This will then provoke other pedants to point out that the preposition rule is actually a myth, that it gets in the way of conversational speech, and that people should be less persnickety about grammar in general, so long as the meaning is understood. This will then provoke a further point of pedantry, because in Britain the word is persnickety. And that's when everyone realizes there are no more chairs. WHAT TO SAY: And you forgot your manners, sir. WHAT NOT TO SAY: Gah! Your means belonging to you. You're means you are. It's so easy! Talking About the Weather Hooray for Brollywood. Making small talk is hard work. It's bad

enough when a companionable silence has descended between two complete strangers in a lift or in a doctors waiting room, but what if they sort of know each other? What if they've met once or twice, just enough to be aware of the other, but not enough to have shared any personal details that could spur a decent conversation? How, in a nation that prides itself on decorum and social niceties, shall we endure the pain of not knowing what to say? Time to dig out the British cure for all awkwardness: a quick chat about the weather. This is one of the most commonly observed quirks of British social interaction; from Lands End upward, the British are world renowned for striking up conversations that, to external ears, sound worryingly like banal observations about temperature and rainfall. They know this about themselves too and yet, in the absence of a better option, seem powerless to hold back. Where two British people are gathered together, there will be some talk about the weather. And this goes back for years and years. George Formby, the beloved wartime entertainer, with his ribald songs and cheeky wink, had for a catchphrase the opening gambit of most weather-based conversations: turned out nice again. Of course, the reason the Brits are so wedded to meteorological matters is simple: there's a lot of weather in the British Isles, it changes often, and some of the changes are quite subtle. The mist rolls in from the sea, the clouds appear as if by magic, the wind shakes the spiraling keys from the sycamore trees, the sun cooks the clouds away, hailstones pelt down upon pensioners in the bus queue, the rain drenches the topsoil and creates a sudden stream across the zebra crossing, soaking the feet of children on their way to school, who laugh delightedly and jump up and down while their parents huddle under brollies and despair at their sodden socks. There is always something going on, weatherwise. Even overcast days have their own color: a gray sky bleeding the bright greens from the grass and trees, a white sky that lends a forensic sharpness to an autumn morning, even a low and purple sky that demands that everyone get inside before the rain begins. It's all so very noticeable, you can't really blame the people that live in this kaleidoscope climate for paying attention to what is going on. They store up tiny details for later, make microcomparisons between what is happening now and what was happening earlier. So when the opportunity arises, whether in a queue at the supermarket or while matching stride with a fellow dog walker in the park, a summary of recent meteorological changes can be brought to mind right away. These will go in one of two directions: getting better or getting worse. The getting-better conversation goes something like this: Glad that rain stopped, aren't you? Oh, yes, it was miserable out here a couple of hours ago. Hopefully it'll hold off for the weekend. I want to get out in the garden. The getting-worse conversation is more of a lament: What happened to all that sunshine, eh? I know! It was lovely yesterday and now look! I was checking the forecast and they say it's going to be like this for a couple of days. Oh, well, I might just stay under my blanket for the duration. So it's not so much a summary of how things are as a kind of prediction of the future, a way to read significance into signs from on high, but on a beautifully banal and yet entirely practical level. Every nation's people believe they are in some way favored by their creator, and the British like to use the weather as a litmus test to see how acidic (or otherwise) that relationship has become. WHAT TO SAY: Ooh, listen to that rain! WHAT NOT TO SAY: I notice there is a dense layer of cumulonimbus clouds over Salisbury; this means an increased likelihood of precipitation. Keep Calm and Carry On Its a mugs game (etc). There aren't many meme crazes that start with the threat of invasion and death raining from the sky on a nightly basis and end with oven gloves. But then, Keep Calm and Carry On is not like other meme crazes. In spring of 1939, a few months before the outbreak of the Second World War, the British government commissioned a special poster, knowing that dark times were ahead. The slogan Keep Calm and Carry On appeared in white on a regal red background, set in a specially commissioned typeface to prevent forgery and with a Tudor crown above. The intention was to put the posters up in areas where German bombers would do the most damage, in order to encourage the population not to lose heart. But despite printing around two and a half million copies, the British government kept them in storage, caught between a concern that the slogan would be taken as patronizing or even frustratingly obvious and waiting for a moment of sufficiently dire need, such as a full invasion. This never transpired, and so the posters were eventually destroyed, apart from a few exceptions. In 2000, one survivor made its way, in a dusty box of old books, to a magical secondhand bookshop in Alnwick, Northumberland, owned by Stuart and Mary Manley. They framed it and put it behind their till, to the delight and curiosity of their customers, who began to inquire if they could buy a poster like it. Eventually the Manleys decided to print their own copies, and slowly the design and slogan began to spread, that special font proving to be no deterrent whatsoever. Now there are Keep Calm and Carry On mugs and notebooks, coasters and T-shirts in almost every gift shop in Britain, in all the colors of the rainbow and with constant variations to the slogan to serve some marketing need or other. Keep Calm has become an iconic British thing in an astonishingly short space of time. And yet, if you talk to anyone British about it, the most likely response is eye-rolling frustration that it remains quite as popular as it is. They'll bemoan the fact that most of the hilarious phrases don't make sense: Keep Calm and Cupcake, Keep Calm and Swag, and even one that says Keep Calm and Eventually the Keep Calm Epidemic Will Die Out and that you can't walk past a gift shop without seeing that regal branding and the big white letters of officialdom plastered across everything from teapots to toilet seats. But despite becoming a target for sneers, the reason all these items exist is simple: secretly, the British love Keep Calm. There is something quintessential in the way the posters do not say Don't Panic or We Will Prevail or anything about duty, insubordination, or cold, dead hands. They say Keep Calm, and what that means is, We may be suffering something of an invasion at the moment, but that's no reason to start acting in a rash and hot-headed manner. We may be a

subjugated nation temporarily but we are not about to start acting like savages. And what of Carry On? Its a world of subtle insubordination in just two words: The Germans may take over our towns, ruin our cricket pitches, enforce the chilling of the ale in our pubs, put cabbage in with the pickled eggs, but we shall not pay them the slightest mind. As a nation, we have been trained to look past the bad behavior of our rudest guests, especially the uninvited ones, and rather than cause a scene, we shall just go about our daily business as if nothing has happened. Granted, if you take either of these sentiments out of that specific context and apply them to the modern world, they very quickly become meaningless, and if you start mucking about with them to make comedy screen savers, its not surprising that some Brits claim to find the whole affair reductive, witless, and exasperating. But deep down they also love that so much historical information and national identity can be wrung out of five short words and a crown. Its the very model of British reserve, even in the face of total annihilation. WHAT TO SAY: Oh, these things are everywhere, how ghastly. WHAT NOT TO SAY: Wait, Ive got one... Keep Calm and Doughnuts! British History The important thing to realize about the way the British view their history is that while opinions about the significance of various events may be wildly different, the method of justification for having those opinions is exactly the same. When seeking to prove a point, British thought takes the legal view: if you can cite precedence point to a thing that has happened before that suits your argument then youre in the right. And the great thing about the broad buckshot spray of British historical events is that there is almost always a precedent for any opinion, if you go back far enough. Not keen on the royal family? There was a civil war that ended with the execution of Charles I. Keen on the royal family? His son Charles II was eventually restored to the throne. Seeking proof that British women have always been strong enough to hold their own against the oppressive forces of patriarchy? I give you Boudicca, Queen Elizabeth I, Emmeline Pankhurst, Queen Victoria, and Margaret Thatcher. Need to identify an essential pluckiness of British society that binds everyone together for the common good in times of trouble, no matter how bleak things may appear to be? The phrase you want is spirit of the Blitz. Youll find people using the legal-precedent trick for all manner of reasons: to prove their right to call themselves local, to justify their support for a football team that hasnt won a championship in years, and to make fashion decisions based on crazy ideas from the past polka dots, beards, mustache wax (the Brylcreem revival is surely only a few months away). People used to believe Richard III had a deformed spine and a withered hand and was a rotten king, largely because Shakespeare said so and there wasnt enough evidence to disprove him. Then they believed that this was actually Tudor propaganda, designed to bolster the dynastys claim to the throne, and that he was a fairly decent king with a fully working body after all, because that also made sense according to the scant records of the time. And then Richards actual skeleton was found under a car park in Leicester and guess what? He had scoliosis as an adolescent (but his arms were fine), so his back was bent, and this was reported on the national news. Naturally, now people are arguing over whether its really him or not, despite some compelling DNA evidence. Then there are all the ruined castles and former monasteries left lying about the landscape like burst pimples. In parts of Cumbria you can still see the remains of the great wall the Roman emperor Hadrian built to keep the indomitable Scottish out of his face. Can you imagine the kind of psychological mark it leaves upon a nation to have been put on the wrong side of the Roman VIP rope for almost two thousand years? United, ysay? Kingdom? Aye, well, well see about that, pal. Small wonder cultural traditions and regional pride have grown as intertwined as they have, not just in local and eccentric events (see: Weird Traditions) but also in the big statements of national identity. There are the eisteddfods, festivals that celebrate Welsh culture, literature, and music, keeping alive centuries of tradition and maintaining the Welsh language for future generations; there are also the Highland games in Scotland, which do exactly the same thing for Scottish literature and arts (and allow beefy men to throw a big stick in case Nessie wants to play fetch). And as you cant ever separate the cultural from the political in British folk history, its probably worth adding that the Highland games in particular took on their modern form in Victorian times, after a highly unpopular campaign to drive small-time farm holders off the hills, in order to use the land to rear sheep. Nothing fuses communities together like adversity. Then of course there are the commemorative customs, most notably the wearing of a paper poppy in the days preceding the annual Remembrance Day service which takes place on the Sunday nearest to November 11 and observing two minutes of silence at 11.00 A.M. on the day itself. A constant interest remains in those wartime years, particularly the first and the second world wars, because its unthinkable now that such events could ever have happened in so short a space of time. Or that only twenty years passed between V-E Day the heyday of the Andrews Sisters and Glenn Miller and the release of Help!, the Beatles fifth LP. The past is well served by British TV too. Costume dramas are a sure ratings winner, especially if they bring out an all-star cast of highly regarded thespians in nightshirts and starched collars particularly if they are disheveled and a bit damp, like Colin Firth in Pride and Prejudice. And thanks to the work of the National Trust, these dramas are never short of an immaculately kept location for whichever era they are attempting to re-create. Not that all of British history is given equal billing. In fact, if you were to go purely by TV drama alone, the complete history of England would go something like this: Roman times King Arthur times Medieval times Robin Hood times Tudor times Jane Austen times Charles Dickens times Downton Abbey times Charleston times Blitz times Rock n Roll times Yuppie times Pre-Internet times Nowadays. Or if you were hoping to find out what the Scots were up to in all that time, it goes: Pictish times Jacobean times Today. WHAT TO SAY: Is there a historical drama about Welsh times? WHAT NOT TO SAY: Whatever did

happen to those princes in the Tower? Offal These are the only British people to whom one could put the question Do you like offal? and expect an honest response: Vegetarians and vegans People who like offal Everyone else is probably fibbing to a greater or lesser degree, and they probably dont even know it. Put the blanket suggestion that the British love offal to a decent majority of British people and they will almost certainly argue the toss. However, the sheer availability of the unprime cuts of various commonly eaten animals in everyday British meals would seem to suggest otherwise. And this isnt even necessarily a sepia-toned jaunt down memory lane to a time when the Brits regularly ate tripe and sweetbreads bits of cow stomach and various internal glands, respectively although that wasnt as far back as you may like to imagine. It is also not a searing Jamie Oliver style comment on the processes involved in making the average burger or chicken nugget. Lets just say that more than a few British meat dishes make use of the bits of the animal that are not commonly used for a roast dinner. Like sausages, for example. The Brits love a banger. They love them sticking out of mashed potatoes and dripping with gravy (bangers n mash); they love them providing a perimeter wall for the beans in a fry-up (see: The Great British Fry-Up); they love them encased in batter and roasted (toad in the hole); and they love them mineralized black on the outside and raw in the middle, in a badly cut finger-roll at a rainy-day weekend barbecue in August. And while theres a strong market for the kind that are made with only the finest meats, hand ground and delicately spiced, theres also a lot of love out there for the kind that you dont ask too many questions about. Then theres the glorious steak and kidney pie. Its a pie; a delicious pie with steak and onions and gravy in it. And kidneys. So widely adored a combination of flavors that it is also available as a steamed pudding. The classic Melton Mowbray pork pie may contain the very best meat available, hand shaped and baked to perfection, but it is encased in a jelly made from the pigs trotters. And not every pork pie is a Melton Mowbray, if you get my drift. A steak kidney pudding for one. In the Midlands and South Wales, theres a lot of schoolboy fun to be had in the unfortunate but very traditional name of meatballs made of minced pork offal (liver, lungs, and spleen, principally) and served with gravy and peas. Theyre called faggots. They just are. Lets not be childish or offensive about this. To add extra offal value (and keep the balls round), each faggot is wrapped in caul fat, which is the membrane found around the pigs internal organs. Not so funny now, eh? And how about oxtail soup? Youll never, ever guess what oxtail soup is made from. And even if you did, while its safe to assume that the beef tails in soups served by high-end organic restaurants are of the highest quality, just imagine the kind of stringy bovine wagglers that go in the cheaper tins on the supermarket shelves. The dish that probably looms largest in the popular imagination when talking about Britain and offal is haggis, Scotlands culinary masterpiece. People get peculiar about haggis in a way that they never would about sausages although the reaction to black pudding comes close. They harp on about the ingredients the minced heart, liver, lungs, and rolled oats; they gag over the sheep stomach into which the haggis is traditionally encased (although it tends to come wrapped in a sausage skin these days); and they make terrible retching noises without so much as trying a mouthful. Which seems a shame, given that haggis is actually not unlike a peppery meat loaf. Still, youd be hard put to convince a good deal of the Brits who live south of the Scottish border that haggis is a stuff Brits like, but it remains hugely popular in Scotland you can even get it in fish and chip shops, deep-fried in batter and in January, when Hogmanay rolls on toward Burns Night, you can get haggis in supermarkets from Inverness to Penzance, so its clearly more popular than anyone is prepared to admit. Scotland is also home of the fish dish crappit heid (no, really, its food), in which the descaled head of a large cod or haddock is stuffed with a mixture of oats, suet, onion, and fish liver. And while were on fish: jellied eels, anyone? Certain dishes exist in legend only the foods people really dont eat, the ones that Brits who dont work in animal farming arent even aware of anymore, the really out-there foodstuffs, like muggety pie. Muggety pie is just a pie made from entrails; thats all it is. Its a tripe pie, and it used to be popular in the West Country, especially Gloucestershire and Cornwall. And if there are no entrails, theres an alternative recipe that involves the umbilical cords of lambs and/or calves. To the unsqueamish dairy farmer, this dish is a thrifty use of all available protein and one that suddenly makes haggis look like a T-bone from Gods own herd. Another good place to find offal is between two slices of bread. Theres pt, which Brits have only just decided to abandon calling meat paste and feeding almost exclusively to children in their packed school lunches, and then theres tongue most commonly pork or beef, chicken tongue being quite hard to slice. Confusingly, tongue sandwich is also a slang term for a particularly passionate snog, so you should always check what you are being offered before you open your mouth. WHAT TO SAY: I have never eaten that. Can I try some? WHAT NOT TO SAY: They make it from what?! Thats gross! Apologizing Needlessly With so many enormously confident British people in the world, its a shock to think that their international reputation remains that of a wet and eager-to-please race, just because they have the grace and good manners to try to make amends if they have made a social gaffe of some kind. Being quick to apologize is a fine quality, especially if no offense was intended in the first place. Its a mark of a strong character, but only when used sparingly and from the heart. The trouble is, that is not how Brits like to say sorry. They like to apologize before every statement of personal need, whether its a trip to the bathroom or taking their turn in a revolving door. Theyll apologize for falling asleep, apologize for waking up, apologize for being hungry, apologize for being full. And this is driven by awkwardness and panic, because if they dont do it, theres a chance a complete stranger might think the worse of them on even the most spurious of grounds and that would simply never do. Should that person find needless apologies annoying too, well, things are only going to escalate. Here are just some of the many situations for

which British people will find the need to say sorry: When forced to brush past a man on a train who is sitting with his legs far apart, as if his genitals are swollen and potentially explosive. When boiling the kettle in a shared kitchen and finding out there isn't enough water for the person who has only just walked into the room to make tea. Having been smacked in the face by the arm of a tall man who has suddenly pointed at something across the street. Having to interrupt a stranger's day to tell her she has dropped her phone on the floor. Just before hanging up after having been cold-called at home, during an important family meal, by a company selling an unwanted product or service. Having been barged into by someone who is (a) drunk and (b) flailing his arms around and (c) walking backward. When confronting a stranger who has suddenly appeared in the garden. When walking down a narrow corridor and noticing someone at the other end, waiting to let them pass. The apology comes after a brief period of walking with comically exaggerated effort and pretend speed, as if to prove no dawdling is taking place. When waiting patiently at the end of a narrow corridor for the person already walking down it, especially when this has caused the other person to pretend to speed up. When arriving at a reserved airplane, theater, or train seat, only to find someone already sitting in it. When seeing a doctor about a hugely painful or debilitating condition. When arriving last for a meeting or social gathering, even if it has not yet started. When crying while talking to a friend about an upsetting situation. When listening to a friend tearfully talk about an upsetting situation. When paying for a small, inexpensive item with a twenty-pound note. Especially before 10:00 A.M. When telling the stranger who has just asked them for a light that they do not smoke. When walking into an inanimate object, such as a postbox (see: Phone Boxes). When a conversation has finished, to the mutual enjoyment and benefit of both participants, followed some hours later by a slowly rising sense of horror at one throwaway comment that clearly was not offensive at all in context, and yet could still be taken completely the wrong way, necessitating a slightly panicked text message to, apologize for the comment and then, apologize for the apology. Note: None of this means that Brits go out of their way to avoid doing things for which they should be genuinely sorry. Far from it. WHAT TO SAY: That's perfectly all right. Good day to you. WHAT NOT TO SAY: No, it was all my fault. If anything, I should be the one to apologize. Pubs, Inns, Bars, and Taverns Your friendly local (assuming you are from around here). Whether they go there to play darts or catch up with mates, whether it's a stop-off on the way home from work or a night out after a hard week, the British have placed pubs at the center of their cultural existence. It's not a coincidence that all British soaps have a prominent pub where the characters meet. In Coronation Street it's the Rovers Return, in Emmerdale it's the Woolpack, in EastEnders it's the Queen Victoria, and in Hollyoaks it's the Dog in the Pond. A good pub will serve a multiplicity of purposes and yet often look as if it is doing nothing more than providing a respite from the rain and the rushing about outside. Pubs, even pubs in the center of major cities, are community hubs, places for large groups of people to exchange local news, keep up with their neighbors, and celebrate their significant events whether that's a birth, a sporting event, a wedding, or a wake. Lots of tiny villages in remote areas will be able to keep a pub going, sometimes even two, far longer than they can keep a shop. And that's not necessarily because of the inherent drinkiness of British culture (although it certainly isn't because of the inherent sobriety of British culture either); a good pub is a place where time stops. It's a place to hatch plans, a place to gather forces, a place to be among people, and also a place to observe people. The classic British pub is slightly dark and feels like a living room with aspirations to entertain. It's not the sort of place where you want to spend too long examining the carpet if there is one and the toilets are not for loitering in. If you've seen the drinking establishments in the movies *Withnail & I* and *An American Werewolf in London*, those places are definitely pubs. A pub is a very different place from a bar. A bar is like a pub for young people; it's a place to become drunk at speed, not nurse a hangover and read the paper. It will have sharply worded slogans on the wall, and mirrors in strange places, and maybe ceiling fans and chrome trimmings. The beer may be bottled or in jugs, but it won't be stacked up in casks, and there won't be named tankards for regular customers to use. There will, however, be shots: lots and lots (and lots) of shots. Because of this, the British reputation for binge drinking feels a bit more like a bar thing than a pub thing. On the other hand, the British reputation for fights in pub car parks or managing seven out of ten in a pub crawl and waking up facedown in a skip is all pub. Where were we? Oh, yes, interior decor. A pub even a recently refurbished one is saggier than a bar. It's comfy like Granddad's armchair and most often decked out in dark wood. It'll have chrome on the beer taps and mirrors behind the bar (to make the stock look more plentiful), but it's a less zingy place and, in some communities, those pewter tankards hanging over the stacked glasses can go back generations within the same family. Pubs don't strain so hard for your attention while you're talking to your friends or sitting quietly with your pint. Their natural resting atmosphere is more muted, although clearly plenty of singing and shouting take place, given time. People go to pubs to play games: darts, dominoes, snooker, and various tabletop amusements like shove hapenny and skittles or make music; play the gambling machines (perfectly legal in all pubs and motorway service stations); sell dodgy electrical goods, cheap cigarettes, and fake designer clothes from the boot of their car; or just talk. They don't go to watch telly (unless there's a really important football match on). Then there are inns and taverns. An inn is, for all practical purposes, a pub that can provide food and lodging overnight. Now that most pubs also serve food, the differentiation between the two is getting harder to spot. Taverns are indistinguishable from pubs, apart from certain legal statutes that no longer affect the patrons. And it's not uncommon to see places called the Tavern Inn, to add further confusion to affairs. If you see a sign outside saying Free House, that doesn't mean the drinks are being given

away or that you get a free house; its a term used to describe a pub that is unaffiliated to one brewery and is therefore able to sell a range of ales (see: Real Ale). Before smoking was banned in 2007, all pubs had a particular smell: a warm and slightly damp fug of hops and grown-ups and fag-ash and sour aftershave that could have been bottled and sold as the very essence of a British boozier (a term which refers to the pub, not someone drinking inside). Its the kind of smell that takes grown-ups back to being children, waiting on a bench in the garden for two hours with a bottle of Coke, a waxy straw, and a packet of crisps. Now, with the smoke cleared and all the sharp edges restored to the eyes, pubs seem somehow a little colder, even during gasping summer or with a roaring fire in the hearth. And of course every pub now has a small gang of furtive smokers just outside. So you get an early sniff of that pub smell on the way in, and then you walk through it and its gone, like the skipping ghost of childhood. Naturally this is going to recede as a problem over time, and it is certainly not worth reinstating smoking with the attendant health risks just so people can retain a whiff of the old days. Not that this will stop smokers campaigning for the right to spark up indoors again, but its hard to see how to keep everyone happy. Its a smell, after all. The people who nostalgically want it arent the ones who are risking their lives making it, and the people who are making it cant get the benefit of it in the first place, due to all the smoking. And thats before we seek the opinions of the people who neither want it nor make it. So no matter how kindly smokers may offer to throw themselves on their lighters for the common good, that scent is best left where it is, in the past, unless the pub is particularly old and grotty and youve sat down too quickly on the upholstery.

WHAT TO SAY: A pint of the usual, please, Brian. WHAT NOT TO SAY: Do you do cocktails?

The Shipping Forecast Im writing this on a very special day in British broadcasting history. Today is May 30, 2014; the day one of the cornerstones of British life suffered a little wobble. Its the only day in ninety years that there hasnt been a shipping forecast on BBC Radio 4. There has been a technical fault, nothing disastrous in one sense, but still an unsettling shaking of the schedule. This might seem like a melodramatic response to what is surely a minor hiccup in broadcasting, but the shipping forecast occupies a particularly resonant position in the audio landscape of British life. It has been broadcast four times a day 12:48 A.M., 5:20 A.M., 12:01 P.M., and 5:54 P.M. since 1924, with the same calming litany of weather conditions in the offshore areas immediately around the British Isles, incomprehensible to most people, but still utterly bewitching. And its not just a matter of people deriving pleasure from something designed to be a valuable service. BBC Radio 4 is the sole British radio station that would continue to broadcast in the event of a nuclear strike. The shipping forecast is therefore the most trusted broadcast from the most trusted broadcaster in the entire nation, and the fun part of this is that most people listening still have very little idea of what is actually being said. To illustrate this point, this is an extract from a recent forecast. Just imagine it being read slowly and clearly in a stern but not unfriendly voice, as if it were a modernist poem by Dylan Thomas.

North Utsire, South Utsire: Northerly or northwesterly five or six, occasionally seven for a time. Moderate. Fair. Good. West Forties, Cromarty: Variable four, becoming southerly four or five later. Slight. Fog patches. Moderate, occasionally very poor. Forth, Tyne, Southwest Dogger: Southwesterly four or five, becoming variable four. Slight. Fair. Moderate or good. It has a certain something, doesnt it? The endless mild adjectives suggesting either clear waters or potential trouble ahead; the evocative names like Dogger and Cromarty; the sense that this is important information, that those numbers probably mean something that could be the difference between life and death for those traversing the dark seas. Whether you personally know the science behind each word or not is immaterial, and thats the emotive heart of the thing. Its like being at Bletchley Park during the war and hearing coded naval messages without the key, and letting the mind wander as to where they will be received and what sort of condition the ships will be in when they finally arrive. As such, the 12:48 forecast in particular has taken the form of a late-night lullaby for Radio 4 listeners; one that evokes the long seafaring history of an island nation, but delivered with the poetic grace of a magical incantation. Thats why Damon Albarn of Blur, when stuck on his first long and painful American tour, playing empty halls and drunkenly bickering with his bandmates, would tune in to the shipping forecast just to feel the security and pull of home once again. He later translated that dislocated feeling (and a good portion of the magical words from the shipping forecast itself) into This Is a Low, a song that delivers much of the forecasts fathomless magic, floating upon deep and stormy musical waters. And should any other significant events pop up at the same time as the shipping forecast England winning the Ashes in 2011, for example (see: Cricket) the expectation is that they will just have to wait. The last, winning ball actually went unheard by listeners, but the shipping forecast continued, as it always does. Thats what makes the events of this morning so uncommon, to the extent that there have been newspaper stories about the missing transmission. Granted, the fuss is nowhere near as big as that surrounding the 1995 plan to move that midnight bulletin by twelve minutes. That was a colossal hoo-ha that involved petitions, scathing newspaper editorials, and eventually questions being asked in Parliament. In fact, the only similar breach of service in Radio 4s history occurred in 2010, when a forecast was read out that was already twenty-four hours old. And people noticed. Thats the point. The best description of the peculiar charms in this very British institution came courtesy of a 2012 BBC News interview with Zeb Soanes, one of a team of people who read the shipping forecast every day. He described it as vital information first and poetry incidentally. Thats not to suggest that it is not poetry, youll notice, just that it is not trying to be.

WHAT TO SAY: Cromarty, Biscay, Lundy, and Fisher sounds like a 70s folk-rock act. WHAT NOT TO SAY: Dude, that stuffs all on the Internet now, isnt it?

Saucy Seaside Postcards It may seem like a deliberately glib way to crowbar an old song into

a new conversation, but the British honestly really do like to be beside the seaside. Oh, they do like to be beside the sea. And this is because they live on a tall, thin island with sharp edges at every extreme. The sea is never too far away, even at the very middle of the widest part of central England, and there are coastal resorts from the cheap and cheerful to the quiet and refined within easy reach of everyone. And so for most British people, arranging to be beside the seaside (beside the sea) has never involved much more than a short train, coach, or car journey. Consequently a series of common holiday traditions and customs have grown up around the British seaside that perhaps would not exist in coastal regions of other parts of the world. For example, if you're on a beach you'll probably appreciate a shop that sells ice cream and cold drinks, inflatable items of the sort you could take into the water, and some play tools for the children: buckets, spades, and some of those plastic sand-shaping devices that look like little jelly molds. Maybe some knickknacks made from seashells, arranged into the shape of a heart you can hang on the wall, and some cheap flip-flops and expensive sun cream and spare swimming costumes and sunglasses. Or, at a push, a decorative vial of sand. That's the sensible stuff. Quite why anyone would want a long pink stick of mint-flavored candy on a hot day is called rock, although it's not the same as rock candy, being more like a thick, porous candy cane is anyone's guess. It does have the name of the resort running all the way through it, which is a remarkable feat and guarantees sales for people wanting decent (and cheap) homecoming gifts for friends and relatives. But that's not the real reason why sticks of rock have become such a seaside staple. The real reason, I suspect, lies in that other grand old British seaside custom, making lewd and suggestive comments. In among the Kiss Me Quick, Squeeze Me Slow hats and the Keep Calm and Kiss Me Quick T-shirts will be a rack of suspiciously old-fashioned postcards showing red-faced men, rotund matrons, and buxom young ladies wearing next to nothing. There's the newlyweds arriving at a guest house on a cold and rainy night, being greeted by a friendly lady who says to the wife, Do come in, you must be dying to get something hot inside you, my dear, or the young woman watching a strutting Scottish man on a street corner and whispering to her friend, They say that's the reason he wears an extra-long kilt, or the red-faced colonel who meets a bikini-clad and buxom young mother with a young boy hanging off each hand and says, You've got a couple of nice handfuls. Nudist camps feature heavily in seaside postcards too, not least because of the ripe possibility for saucy misunderstandings about things being too small, too big, unsatisfying, hot and spicy, big and fruity, all that stuff. The redheaded man who bends over to light the stove for a cup of tea while his wife clutches a hand to her head and exclaims, Ginger nuts! I knew I'd forgotten something! And that's the old-fashioned stuff. For more modern sexy holiday keepsakes, there are postcards showing mouse and cat faces drawn in make-up upon naked breasts, that kind of thing. Oh, and sweets in the shape of genitals. These are the items British folk traditionally send back home to make people think they're having a proper knees-up, the kind of randy, boozy, hoorah holiday that would make anyone jealous, despite it being apparent to everyone involved that they've spent their time glued to a slot machine (not a euphemism, oddly) in Cleethorpes and it's been raining, again. The curious thing about these postcards is they're looked upon with utter affection, as a harmless and charming relic of a sillier time. There's a collector's market for them; books are devoted to them. Long after the demise of the Punch and Judy tents, the donkey rides, the tuppenny waterfalls, and the deck chair attendants, you'll still be able to find a postcard with a caption like Just married, it sticks out a mile. And the phallic stick of rock fits into this overengorged and giggly mentality like, well, a throbbing prong in a moist crevice.