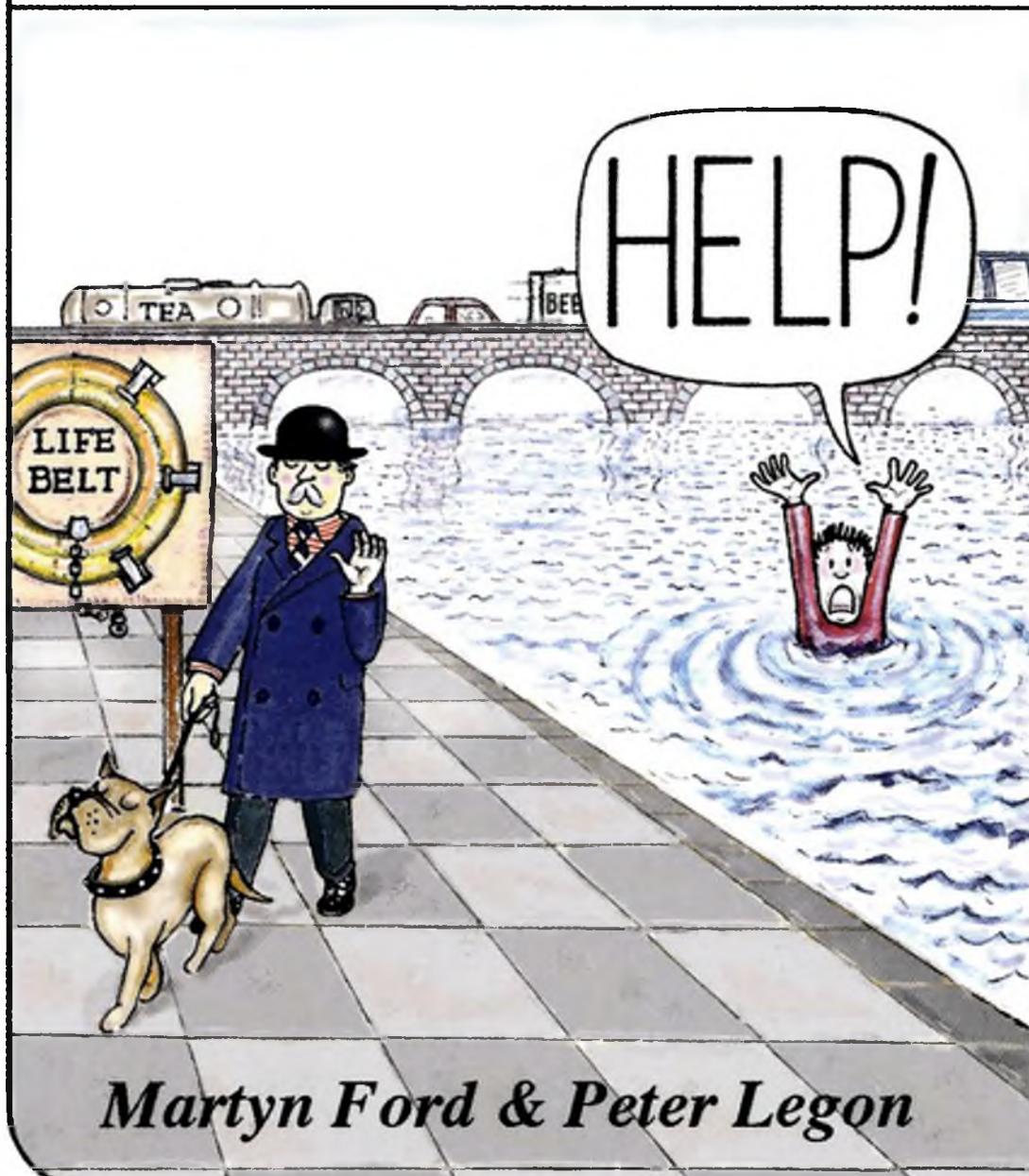


The HOW TO BE BRITISH Collection



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Martyn Ford

Peter Legon



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for Jane and Nigel Taylor

1 *True Brit*

How do you do? Pleased to meet you. If you are a visitor to our country I expect by now you have realized why we call it **Great Britain**: our long and glorious history; the unspoilt beauty of our landscape; the rich variety of our weather, not to mention our unrivalled achievements in cricket and football. Then there are our cherished traditions: afternoon tea at four, roast beef on Sunday, and warm beer until 11pm. And there's us, with our old-world courtesy and tolerance. Oh, and our sense of humour. I mustn't forget that. We *do* like a good laugh!

As for me, well, I'm so many feet and inches tall, and I weigh so many stones, pounds and ounces. My petrol comes in gallons and my milk in pints — from a milkman. I pay for them, of course, in *pounds sterling*. My home is my castle and I 'Do-it-Myself'. I only hope I live to pay off the mortgage on it. My garden is my recreation and a sanctuary to many endangered species, not least of all myself!

Expressions to learn

Well done! *You* deserved to win.

Avoid saying

What is that in metres/kilos/litres?

You can tell I'm British because...



I live in the past



I don't care
what people think



I'm a different person
when the sun's out



I'm not bothered
about a bit of dust



I never refuse a drink



I don't speak a
foreign language



I'm lost without
my dog



I wouldn't live
anywhere else!

2 Arrival

You can see the visitors arriving at British airports, their wide eyes and flushed faces expressing the mingled wonder and apprehension they feel. They've made it! They're actually *here*, in this fairy tale land of knights and wizards, princes and pop idols, the birthplace of the industrial revolution, computers, human rights, pork scratchings, evolution, lawn tennis, parliament and punk. Some of the new arrivals look a bit disorientated and confused, which is only natural as everything here is so different and, well, so much better! But life here can take a bit of getting used to: driving on the left, being ruled by a Queen, pouring gravy or custard over everything and of course *getting around in English* the whole time! One thing the visitor soon discovers: although Brits come in many different shapes and sizes we are united by one very important characteristic: we are all waiting for the weather to 'buck up'.

Expressions to learn

Hello. You must be Big Ben. I've heard a lot about you.

Avoid saying

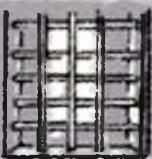
Tell me — why *do* you have a royal family?

Apart from

The
weather



The food



The accommodation



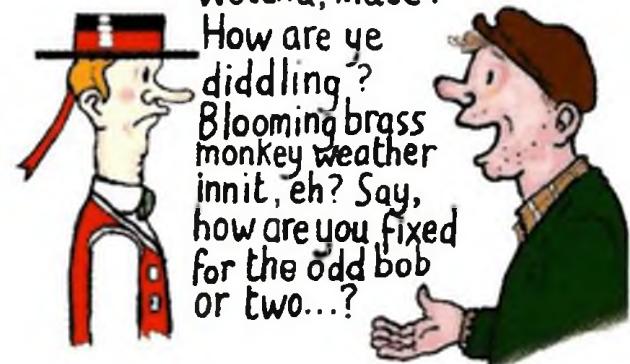
The countryside



The
people



and the
language



I'm having
a great time here!

3 The Telephone Box

Before mobile phones made everything so easy, the public telephone box was an important focus for community life. People of all types and classes would form an orderly queue outside its red iron door, clutching their pennies and waiting patiently for their turn to be linked up to the great wide world. For a shy people like the British it was an opportunity to meet and exchange news and gossip with neighbours and to get some fresh air. And what's more, once you were inside that box everything you said was *private*. Everybody uses mobiles nowadays, but talking loudly in public places with unseen faces, about personal feelings or secret dealings...well it's not something our *true Brit* feels comfortable about! Now there's a new generation of phone boxes which can link you up to the Internet, receive e-mails, take payment by phone card or credit card. Impressive, perhaps, but where is the romance?

Expressions to learn

Just popping out to the phone box — I'll be back tomorrow night.

Avoid saying

It's me. I'm on the train.

In the good old days, the traditional British TELEPHONE BOX was a national symbol, providing a focus for community, a lifeline to the great wide world...



I'm married now, Auntie. That's right. And we've got four children. Yes. Oh and I've been made manager at the bank. But what about you? How is life in Mullum bimby? Oh dear, the pips are going... has anyone got fourpence? Look I'll try to phone you again next year...



whereas
nowadays...

I'm down WIZZO's. Yeah. Do I get Two-For-The-Price of One or Four-For-The-Price-of-Three, or do I buy five and get the ten extra Saver Points? Or if you buy a multi-pack of twenty-five you get 100 free minutes with TALK2U... hang on, my trolley's squeaking, I'll call you back...



4 Dress Sense

A city street in mainland Britain. It's 11.15pm on a cold Friday night in the dead of winter. Two young women in crop tops showing their bare waists and shoulders, and mini skirts with no tights underneath are strolling along arm in arm. "Ello, darling!" they shout, "where you from then?" And they run off down the road screaming with laughter. "Good heavens!" wonders the visitor, "aren't they cold?" This is an example of our famous British *toughness*. On the other hand, in summer the same visitor may observe Brits sitting on the beach wearing jackets and pullovers with long woollen socks under their sandals. The important thing to remember is that the British dress to *please themselves* and to show their independence of fashion, weather, social convention and colour theory. For many foreigners visiting Britain it's a welcome change to be able to dress without having to worry if their clothes are the wrong size, or don't match, or are torn, or inside out, or show off their fat legs.

Expressions to learn

There's no need to dress up.

Oh, it's just an old thing I dug out.

Avoid saying

Orange and purple don't go.

Skirt? What skirt?

Mm. The British are
obviously warmer
people than I thought...

And I say you're *not* properly dressed!

5 Tea

In most countries tea is a very disappointing experience: a teabag dropped into a glass of hot water with the string still attached. In Britain, by contrast, tea is not only a wonderful drink, but also a light but substantial meal of sandwiches, biscuits and cake, *and* an important ceremony of our national life.

It was of course the British who discovered the pleasant and restorative effects of this famous infusion. One day a gentleman called Earl Grey was walking with a friend through India when suddenly, in the middle distance, he noticed a small and undistinguished-looking shrub covered with greenish leaves. The sun was hot and both men were feeling very thirsty. In a moment of visionary inspiration, Earl Grey turned to his companion: “I say, Carstairs — do you see that undistinguished-looking bush or shrub over there? Now *that* would make a nice cup of tea!”

Thus was born the East India Tea Company and the habit of drinking this refreshing beverage in small porcelain cups, which has since spread throughout the world.

Expressions to learn

I'm gasping for a cuppa!

One lump or two?

Avoid saying

Actually, I'd prefer coffee.

*OK, so our trains
may not run
on time,*



*Our National Health
Service is feeling
the pressure,*



*Our schools
don't always
get top marks,*



but at least we still make



The Best Cup of Tea in the World!

6 Complaining

In order to be British, or at any rate to pass unnoticed in British society, the visitor must learn not to *make a fuss*. A fuss is something that the true Brit cannot stand. It is nearly as bad as *a scene*, and in the same category as *drawing attention to yourself*.

A clear example of *fuss* is complaining about poor service, for example in a hotel, shop or restaurant. The true Brit does not do this. “Just think for a moment,” says the Brit, “would *you* like to do their job?” If the receptionist ignores you, or the hairdresser blows smoke in your face, if the soup is cold or the taxi driver overcharges — say nothing. Who knows what disappointments, what secret sadness their lives might contain. You may purse your lips or grit your teeth; you may raise one eyebrow quizzically, but *don't complain*. You can always write to the local newspaper when you get home!

Expressions to learn

Keep your voice down, they'll hear you!

I'm sure they're doing their best, dear.

Avoid saying

I demand to see the manager!

ENGLISH

around
the world

Lesson Sixteen How to Complain



7 Politeness

In order to be a popular guest, and to make a good impression on his British hosts, the foreign visitor needs to learn how to *apologise*. In the street. On the bus. At the hairdresser's. In the bedroom. Going out and coming in. *Sorry* is one of the most important words in the vocabulary of any true Brit. And it's a word which should be always on the lips of any foreigner moving amongst us. *Sorry* prepares a path, excuses faults, calms nerves and wipes the slate clean so that we can all be jolly together and not get upset. Together with 'sorry', the words 'Please' and 'Thank you' are perhaps the most useful in any foreign visitor's lexicon. 'Please' belongs to a family of words that includes *pleasant*, *pleasure* and *pleasing*, which is further proof that it's nice to be polite. 'Thank' comes from the Old English *thonc*, which has the same root as the word *think*. Thus, being polite is the same as being thoughtful!

Expressions to learn

After you.

Allow me.

Avoid saying

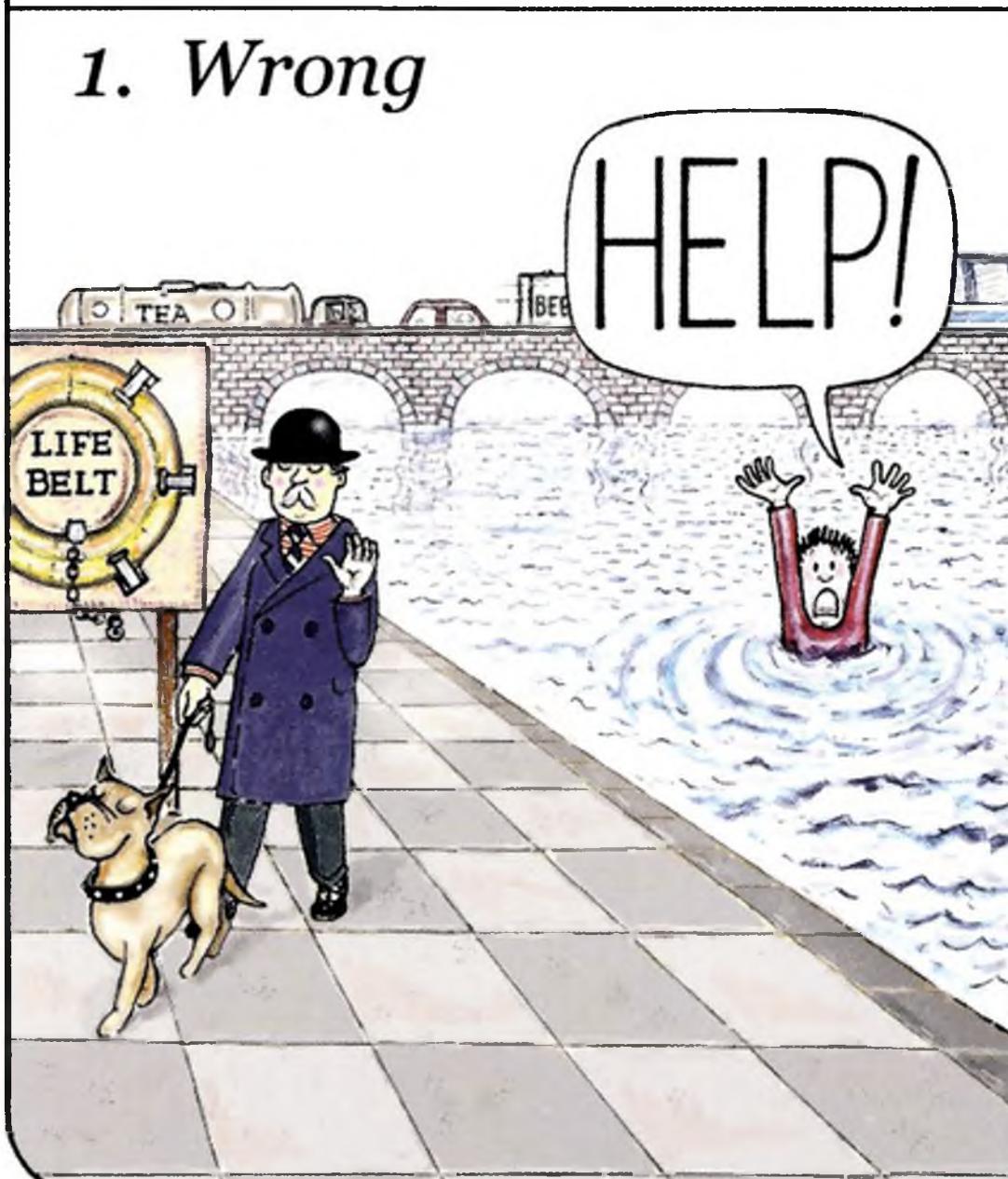
...what you really think.

Get
around in

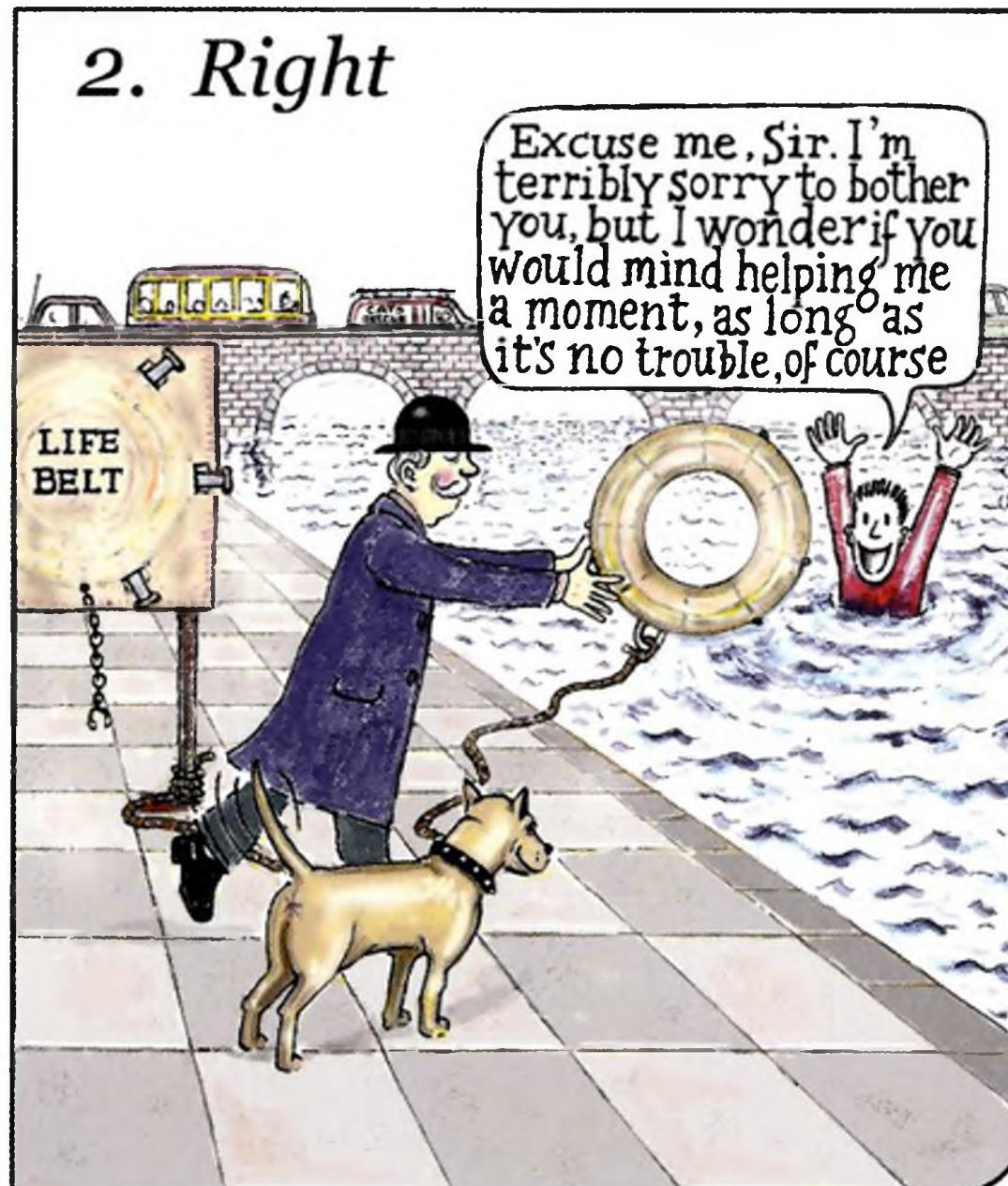
ENGLISH

Lesson Twenty-Five
How to be Polite

1. Wrong



2. Right



8 Speak Slowly

If you find it difficult to follow connected English speech, don't worry. We British are well aware of the complexities of our language and only too happy to simplify our speech for the benefit of the 'challenged' foreign user. Here are some useful phrases to learn. Slip them into the conversation whenever you're in trouble!

Sorry, what did you say?

Could you repeat that, please?

Pardon?

What?

Eh?

Huh?

I'm not with you.

Come again.

I haven't a clue what you're on about.

What language are you speaking?

Could you try drawing a picture?

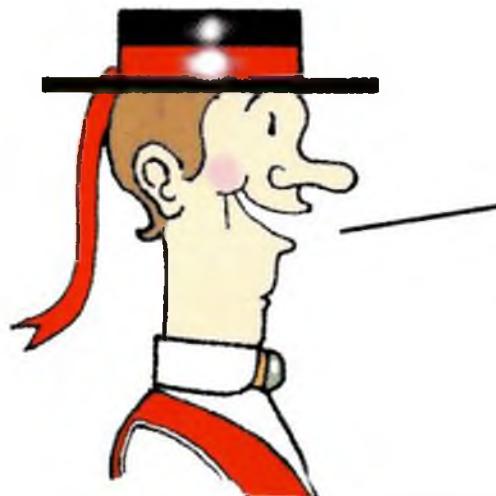
My English When I Arrived Here



Speak slowly,
I don't can
good understand



My English Now (£5000 later)



Speak slowly,
please,
I don't can
good understand!



9 Pronunciation

There's no point having perfect grammar and a vast vocabulary if no one can understand what you're saying. If you are worried about *your* pronunciation, practise these useful sentences at home alone.

Mother and Father left Rotherham last Thursday, wandered hither and thither, then thumbed a lift to Thirsk.

Larry rarely allows Lily and Rory a lift in the lorry, but Laura regularly lets Roland lie languidly on her lilo.

While Archie shimmied with Sheila, Sacha cha cha cha-ed with Shirley.

One windy Wednesday, wealthy widow Wendy Williams went to visit Westminster vet Victoria Vince to view her lovely violets.

Get
around in **ENGLISH**

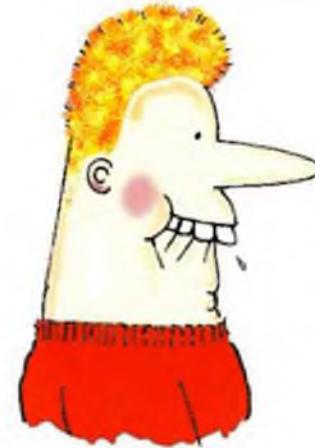
Lesson Seventy-two
How to Pronounce the *th* sound

1.



PLACE TIP OF TONGUE
BEHIND TOP TEETH

2.



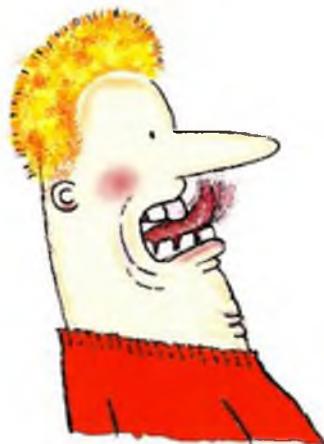
BREATHE OUT

3.



RETRACT TONGUE

4.



VIBRATE AIR BEHIND
TONGUE AND SAY:

5.



*"The Smiths wear thin clothes
throughout the winter months"*

6.



CONSULT DENTIST

10 Top Tongue

Why is English the world's 'dream' language? Well, for one thing our grammar is so sensible, dependable and straightforward. Most languages have two or three forms for *you*, depending on status, intimacy, and so on. English, democratically, has only one. Also English has done away with all that unnecessary fuss over nouns and adjectives: masculine, feminine, singular, plural — not to mention nominative, accusative, dative, and so on. Furthermore, English has the *Present Perfect Tense* which, as its name implies, is quite simply the best tense in the world. English has lots of *prepositions*, and these are a great help in global positioning systems and personal orientation programmes. There are some unfortunate languages in the world that don't have any prepositions at all, which can make it very difficult to find your trousers in the morning.

Another advantage of English is that it has a vast vocabulary. We have lots and lots of *synonyms*. For example, we have over 50 words meaning *mad*, at least 80 which mean *drunk*, and 231 adjectives to describe the weather. What a valuable resource for any civilisation!

Expressions to learn

Is she *in* the toilet or *on* the toilet?

Avoid saying

You don't have a word for it in English.

How do I know if
my English is fluent ?



You can tell you are fluent
when you *dream* in English

* THAT NIGHT...



NEXT DAY...



Guess what — I dreamt
in English last night !

Great!

The only problem is
I didn't understand
a word of it !



11 Sense of Humour

What makes the British laugh? Can a foreigner ever learn to enjoy and to share the British sense of humour? It's not easy and may take some time, but it can be done. The eager visitor should first become acquainted with the following and their place in our national collective consciousness: toilets; trousers (when they fall down); restaurant diners with flies in their soup; little men (usually called Willy) with very large wives; doctors and patients with strange things wrong with them.

Understanding and telling jokes is an important part of social life in this country, and one that can cause frustration and embarrassment to the foreign visitor. Slowly build up your skills in this area. Practise laughing at a few of the best known British jokes; start with very simple examples, and as you gain in confidence, try some even simpler ones. Here is an example to start you off.

PATIENT: Doctor. Every time I have a cup of tea, I get a stabbing pain in my eye.

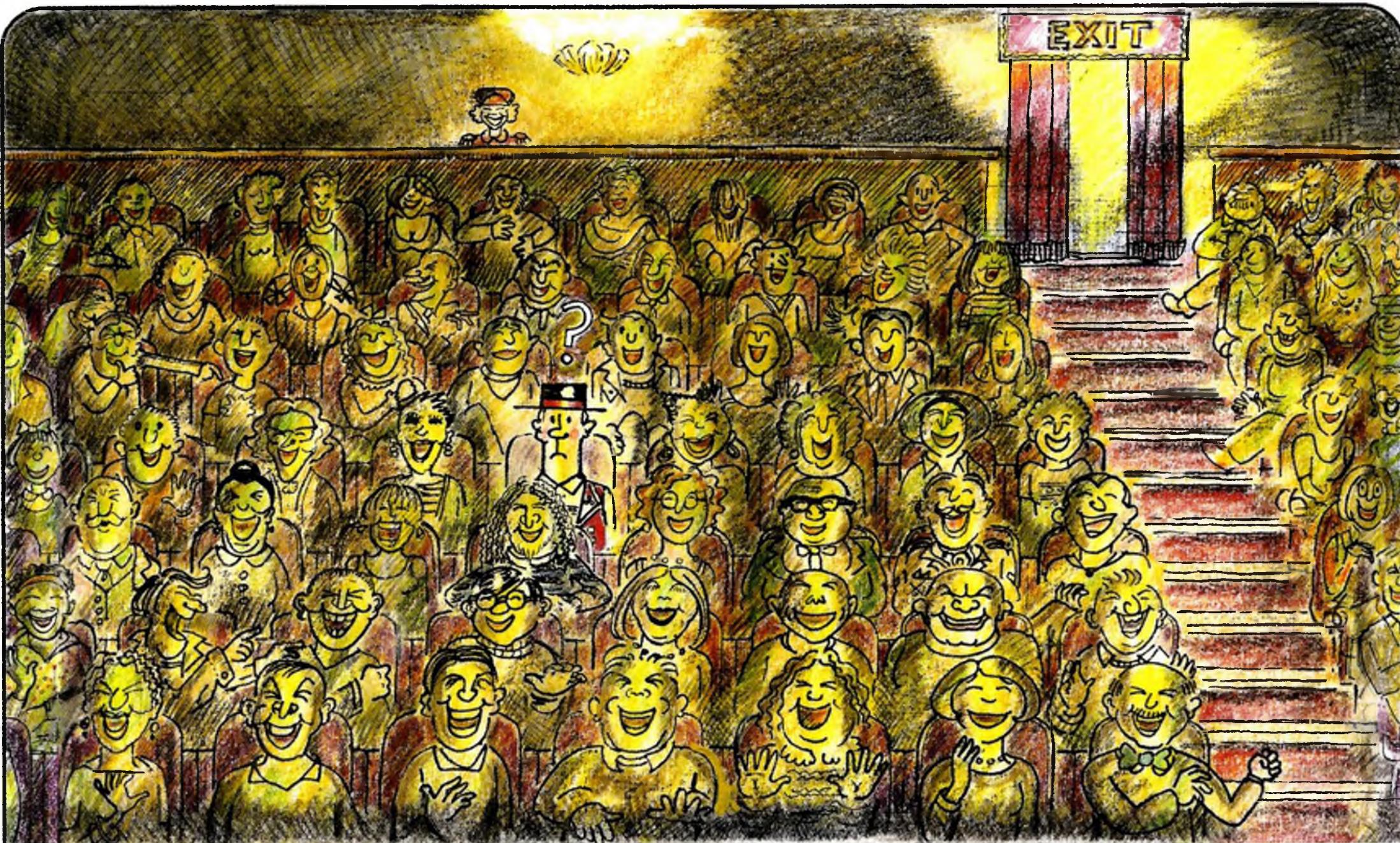
DOCTOR: Well, try taking the spoon out.

Expressions to learn

Have you heard the one about...

Avoid saying

Oh dear — I've forgotten the punchline.



I soon realised my English was not as good as I'd thought...

12 Body Idioms

The true Brit can keep his **head** in a crisis.

He faces doom and disaster with a **stiff upper lip** and **doesn't bat an eyelid**.

He **stands on his own two feet** and earns his living by the **sweat of his brow** (lubricated by a little bit of **elbow grease**).

Although sometimes he would like to **leg it** and live in the **lap of luxury**, he knows it's best to **toe the line, knuckle down** and work hard.

He knows you shouldn't **poke your nose** into other people's business.

So, although he is **warm-hearted** enough, he keeps people **at arm's length**. Sometimes this secrecy gets too much to bear and he makes **a clean breast** of it.

But be careful. When he sounds most serious he may be only **pulling your leg**. He looks **straight-faced**, but take a closer look — his **tongue** is firmly **in his cheek**!

Expressions to learn

I'll foot the bill.

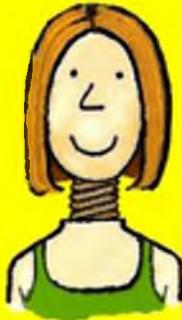
Avoid saying

You're off your head!

Get
around in

ENGLISH

Lesson Ninety-eight
Body Idioms



I've got my head
screwed on,



I'm keeping my
nose clean,



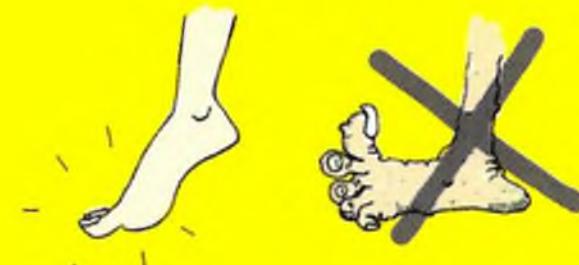
my chin up,



and my shoulder to the wheel,



my heart's in
the right place,



and I'm putting my
best foot forward,

*but it's no use,
I'm still ...*



*BOTTOM of
the class!*

13 Terms of Endearment

The British have a reputation for coolness and formality, so visitors are often surprised at our use of familiar forms of address such as *dear*, *love* and *darling*, even with strangers. The visitor should take note of these ‘terms of endearment’ as they give important clues about how the speaker sees you or the sort of relationship he wishes to establish. You may be called: *Duckey*, *Precious*, *Honeybunch*, *Treasure*, *Bunny*, *Angel*, *Teddy Bear*, *Chu-chi Face*, *Lamb*, *Lambkin*, *Dearest heart*, *Cherub*, *Poppet*, *Handsome*, *Big Boy*, *Star* or *my Little Sausage*. Also, English-speakers enjoy playing with words, so if your name for example is ‘Tommy’ you may find yourself variously called *Tommy*, *Tom-Tom*, *Tommikins*, *Tommy-Wommy* or *Tommy-Poohs*.

A word of warning, however. The best response to such familiarity is a pleasant smile. Foreigners who attempt to respond in kind with their own terms of endearment invariably fall into the ‘literal translation error’, using expressions (*pudding-head*, *doggy*, *wetleg*, *fish-eyes*, *roastbeef*, etc.) which simply do not exist in English. This can cause great offence!

Expressions to learn

Good morning, Sir, Madam.

Avoid saying

Excuse me, but I am not your ‘little sugarplum!’

Get
around
in

ENGLISH

Lesson Sixty-Two
Terms of
Endearment

Lesson Sixty-Two

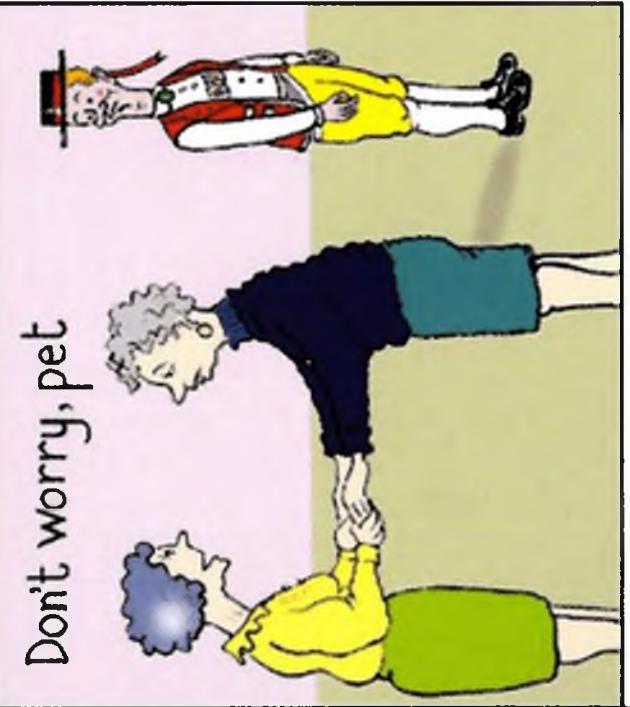
Here you are, love



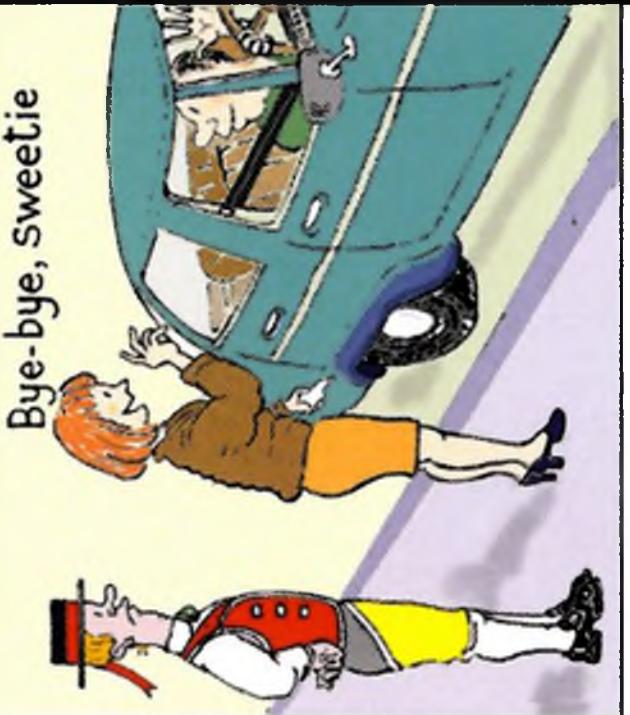
Thanks a lot, duck



Don't worry, pet



Bye-bye, sweetie



Have you got
the time, please,
darling?



Dear me!



14 Learning by Doing

The English Language has a *huge* number of verbs. Take *take*, for example. In other languages you will find one word which means take, and if you're lucky there may be two. But just look at English: there's *clutch*, *clasp*, *cling*, *get*, *grab*, *grasp*, *snatch*, *seize*, *snaffle*, *collar* and *appropriate*, to name just a few.

How can even the most diligent foreign learner of English hope to acquire this vast vocabulary? The only sure way is by having a *British friend* to practise it with. And the best kind of friend to guide you on this journey of linguistic discovery is a *romantic* one. To learn the language side-by-side, hand-in-hand, cheek-to-cheek, heart-to-heart with a *native speaker*. A warning, however: the foreign visitor is advised against pursuing this amorous connection to the point of actually *marrying* a Brit. Married couples in this country do not normally talk to one another, but communicate by glances, frowns, coughs, whistles and the occasional note on the breakfast table — none of which is very useful for the dedicated English language learner.

Expressions to learn

Would you like to come back to my place and practise some irregular verbs?

Avoid Saying

I do.

The best way to improve your English
is to practise with a native speaker...



Learning by doing

15 Pubs

Few experiences can compare with the thrill of a night out at the pub — with bitter beer, ready-salted crisps, pickled onions, a raffle, a quiz, several trips to the loo and an ‘argy-bargy’ on the pavement afterwards. Unfortunately, with the profusion of continental-style cafe-bars these days, it is becoming harder to find an authentic, traditional British pub. Visitors are advised to look for the following signs:

Low doors and ceilings, yellowish brown in colour.

Segregation of the social classes (saloon bar and lounge).

Hand pumps on the bar for ‘real ale’ (at least one of these pumps should be ‘off’).

Pictures on the walls of 18th century gentlemen smoking clay pipes.

A middle-aged lady with dyed blonde hair and a deep voice sitting at the bar.

No children.

Enthusiastic ringing of the bell to signal ‘Time’.

Expressions to learn

Evening Bill, evening Bet, evening Pat, evening Bob.

It's my shout.

Avoid saying

Can I get a big beer, please?

Waiter!

BRITISH BEER

Or

Instant English!



Units

- | | | |
|----------|--------------|---|
| 1 | pint | No change to your English |
| 2 | pints | Your English goes up a level
(but the grammar disappears) |
| 3 | " | You become very fluent, but start mixing
English with your own language |
| 4 | " | You discover you can sing in English,
and are brilliant at karaoke |
| 5 | " | You suddenly know lots of taboo words in English
(fortunately, no-one else seems to understand them) |
| 6 | " | You can't speak English at all
(and also forget your own language) |
| 7 | " | You start speaking American English |
| | | (DANGER ZONE) |

Language Level

16 Meeting and Greeting

When greeting a British person it is wise to keep your distance. Don't be over-familiar, don't assume intimacies you are not prepared to pay for. Some nationalities greet one another by kissing twice or even three times and embracing noisily. Avoid this in Britain: it may be mistaken for amorous advances or for attempted robbery.

The way to greet a Briton for the first time is to offer them your hand — the ends of three fingers is quite sufficient. There should be no more than three shakes up and down. Don't hang on or start squeezing the person's upper arm and patting them on the back — this is not British. The good thing here is that you need never shake hands with that person again or indeed touch any part of them until the time comes for them to leave (providing that they are leaving forever). In that case you may shake the hand again, this time adding a few extra ups and downs to express the deep bond of friendship you have formed.

Kissing is not normally permitted except in the case of elderly ladies. These will incline their heads slightly to signal that such a greeting is expected; you should respond by leaning towards their left side and kissing the air an inch or so above the cheek. Do not actually TOUCH the cheek with your lips.

Use this handy card whenever you want to start a conversation with a British person.* Just look them in the eye and say the conversation starter for your level. It's as easy as that!



Elementary

—

It's a nice day today, isn't it?



Intermediate

—

Bit of a cold wind today, isn't there?
— Looks like we're in for some rain later.



Advanced



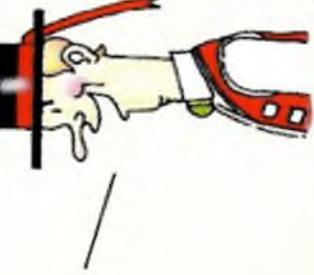
A trough of low pressure is sweeping down from south-east Iceland, bringing fog and frost to low-lying areas, with scattered thunderstorms in the west and a belt of rain, which may fall as sleet or snow over the Pennines, moving across the whole country by tomorrow lunchtime.



*Don't worry if you can't understand their reply — just keep smiling!



Tourists like you are
ruining this place!



Yes, it is, isn't it?

17 Test Your English

Choose the best answer to each question.

1 How do you do?

- a) I'm a lap dancer. And you?
- b) How do I do *what*?
- c) Oh, don't be so formal!

2 What can I get you?

- a) A freshly-squeezed pineapple juice.
- b) A Christmas pudding, please.
- c) Excited.

3 Are you married?

- a) Hold on, I'll ask my husband.
- b) I can't remember.
- c) Not in Britain.

4 Would you like to come back to my flat for English conversation practice?

- a) What is your hourly rate, and does it include photocopied worksheets?
- b) First let me see your diplomas.
- c) All right, but just a quick one.

The Mountain of English: *greetings from the top!*

"But look, the morn, in
russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of
yon high east hill."

Yes it does, doesn't it.



You can understand
SHAKESPEARE



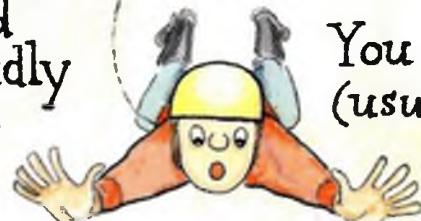
You can understand
Hollywood films



You can understand
the host family canary



You can understand
if people shout loudly
one word at a time



You can say "yes" and "no"
(usually at the right times)



(well, nearly...!)

You can speak
the QUEEN'S ENGLISH



You can successfully
negotiate multi-billion £
business contracts with
top international companies



You can communicate
at the disco

18 *Real English*

The advantage for a language learner of lodging with a real British host family is that he or she will effortlessly acquire what is sometimes called *real English*, a colourful repertoire of idioms, slang, colloquial expressions, and even the occasional taboo word, as used by flesh and blood native speakers. It comes as a surprise to learn that Mrs. Jones is “her indoors”, Mr. Jones is her “other half” and their children are the “nippers”; that the woman next door is “a pain in the neck”, her son sells “dodgy” mobile phones, while her daughter is “as nice as pie”; that Mr. Jones likes to go “down the boozer” whenever he has a chance, which is not very often as Mrs. J. “keeps tabs on him” all the time, maybe because he was a bit of a “Jack the Lad” when he was younger, though he’s “knuckled down” now and they “muddle along pretty well together”; that they’re a bit “hard up” at the moment, which is why the “bit of extra” from the foreign students will “come in handy”...

Expressions to learn

’E nicked it off a lorry and now the coppers ’ave done ’im for it.

Avoid saying

“That’s not correct English, Mrs. Jones — it says so in my Grammar book.

Engelond
Sonday 5ththth

The

Deer Papi,
it's being very nice here.
Weather is wondfull and the
peepul is always kind and
freindly, espeshullly my landlady.
She is a very good cooker. Also
she helps my with my English
In fact, she is stand behind me
now as I rite this lettre for
look if there will be any
mistaks!

wish you are here
wish you would be here
wish you had been here
wish you would have been here
oh buger it!
Bye, Hans
P.S. please send
more money soon



19 *The Bathroom*

Other countries marvel at our advanced sanitary arrangements. Where other nationalities have to manage with a single mixer tap over the sink or washbasin, we British have *two* — one for washing and the other for drinking from. Keeping them separate is both sensible and hygienic. And for those who wish to mix the two to a temperature of their own liking, we invented the *plug*, which fits securely into the basin, conveniently attached to a chain.

Shower attachments can be found in many British bathrooms nowadays, but this is only done out of consideration for the foreign visitor. Showering is not a *British* activity. The true Brit takes a weekly *bath*. This should be a slow, leisurely and solitary activity involving lots of steam, melting bars of soap, toy boats, plastic ducks and broad philosophical reflections. To increase the feeling of cosiness, British bathrooms have carpets and curtains, pictures and plants, in contrast to the cold tiles to be found in most foreign bathrooms.

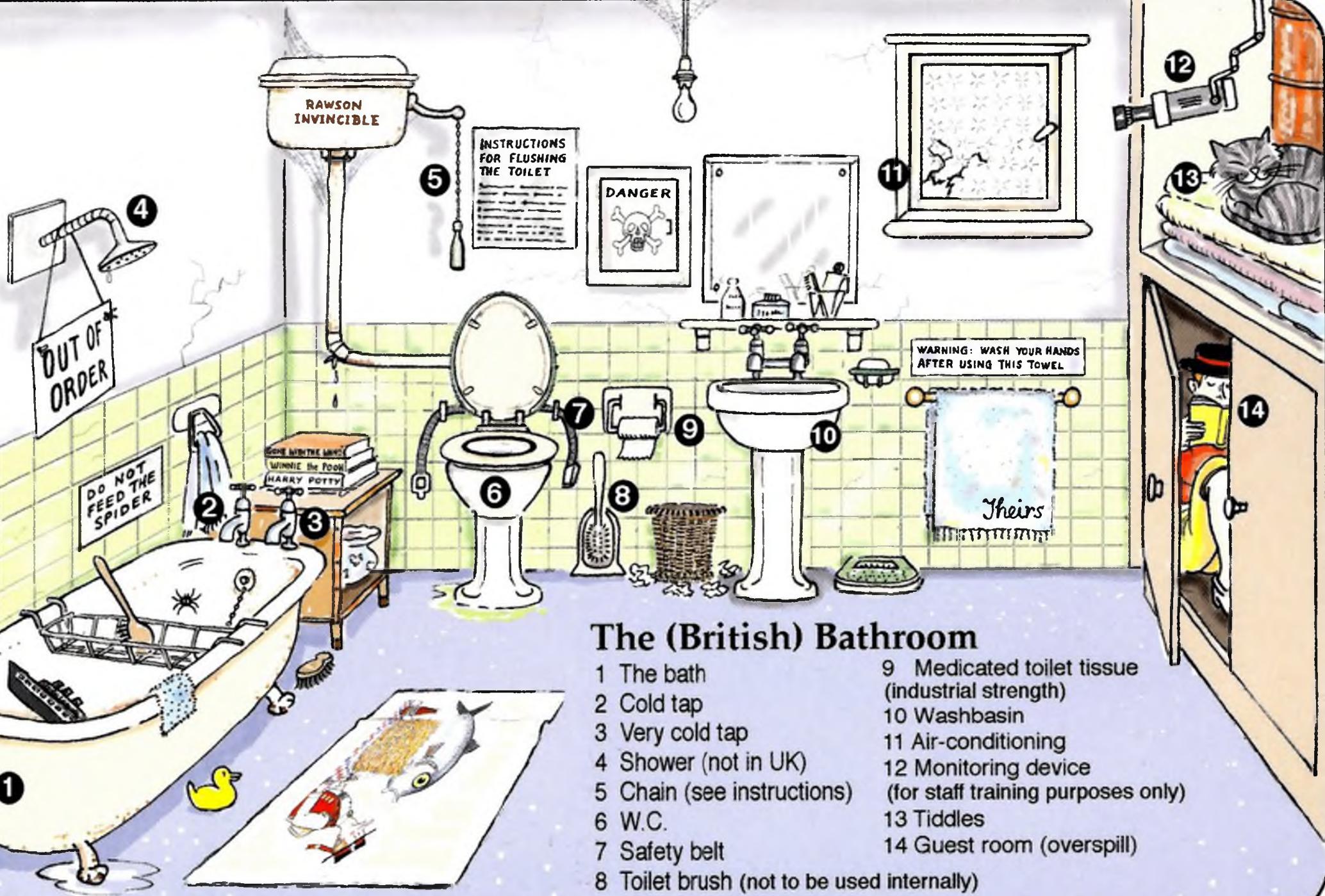
Expressions to learn

I'm just going to spend a penny

How long are you going to be in there? I'm desperate!

Avoid saying

Excuse me, the shower doesn't work.



The (British) Bathroom

- 1 The bath
- 2 Cold tap
- 3 Very cold tap
- 4 Shower (not in UK)
- 5 Chain (see instructions)
- 6 W.C.
- 7 Safety belt
- 8 Toilet brush (not to be used internally)
- 9 Medicated toilet tissue (industrial strength)
- 10 Washbasin
- 11 Air-conditioning
- 12 Monitoring device (for staff training purposes only)
- 13 Tiddles
- 14 Guest room (overspill)

20 Beds

Like the food and the weather, the sleep you get (or don't get) is an important part of your experience of another country.

For an *essential British sleep* you should prepare yourself properly. Before bedtime slip a hotwater bottle into the hollow in the middle of the bed (this bottle should have a knitted woollen 'cosy' around it for extra comfort). Make yourself a hot cup of cocoa, or malted bedtime drink (please note: a True Brit does *not* drink herbal tea!) Dress correctly in striped winceyette pajamas or a brushed nylon nightie (ankle length). Check that you have a bedside table with a lamp, and a suitable English book, such as the Shorter English Dictionary in two volumes or the Works of William Shakespeare.

Make sure the cat is comfortable at the foot of the bed. Pull back the sheets of your four poster/king size /double/ single/sofa or camp bed (under no circumstances accept a futon) and with a deep sigh of relief, *collapse into bed*.

Expressions to learn

Night, night, sleep tight.

Sweet dreams.

Avoid saying

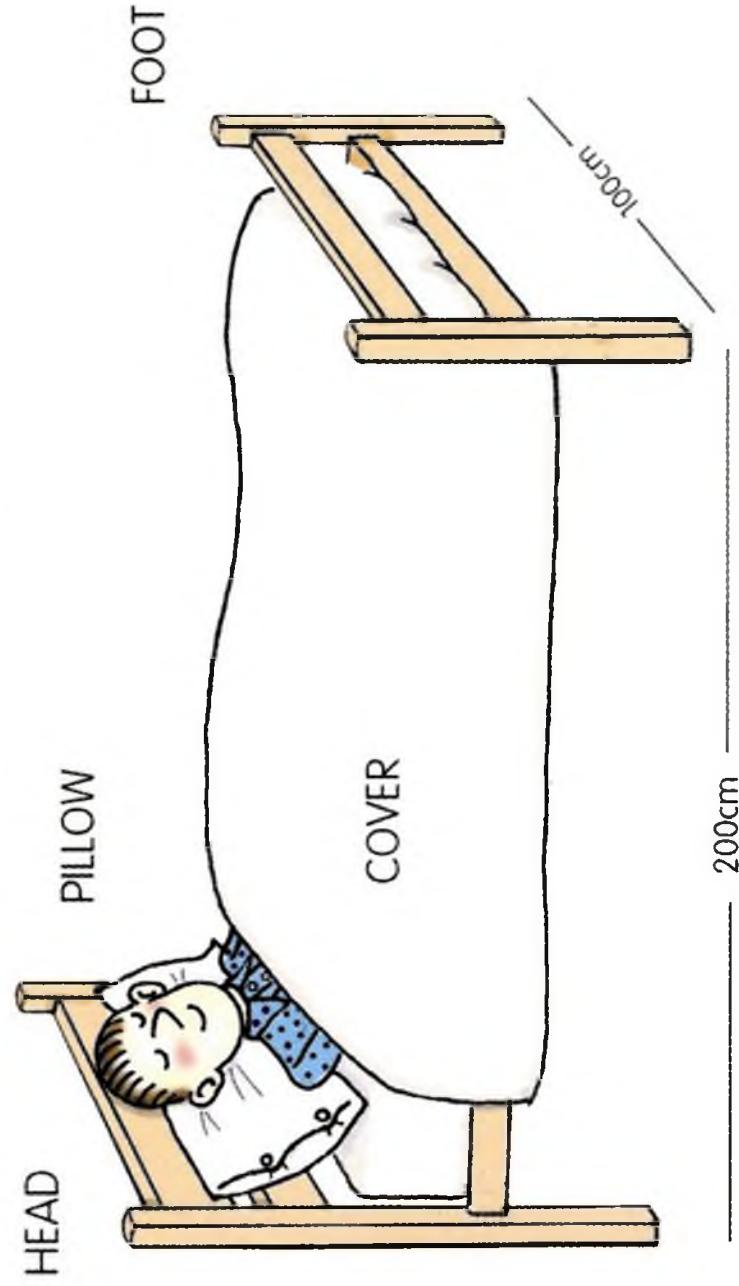
My legs stick out of the end of the bed!

I couldn't sleep a wink last night!

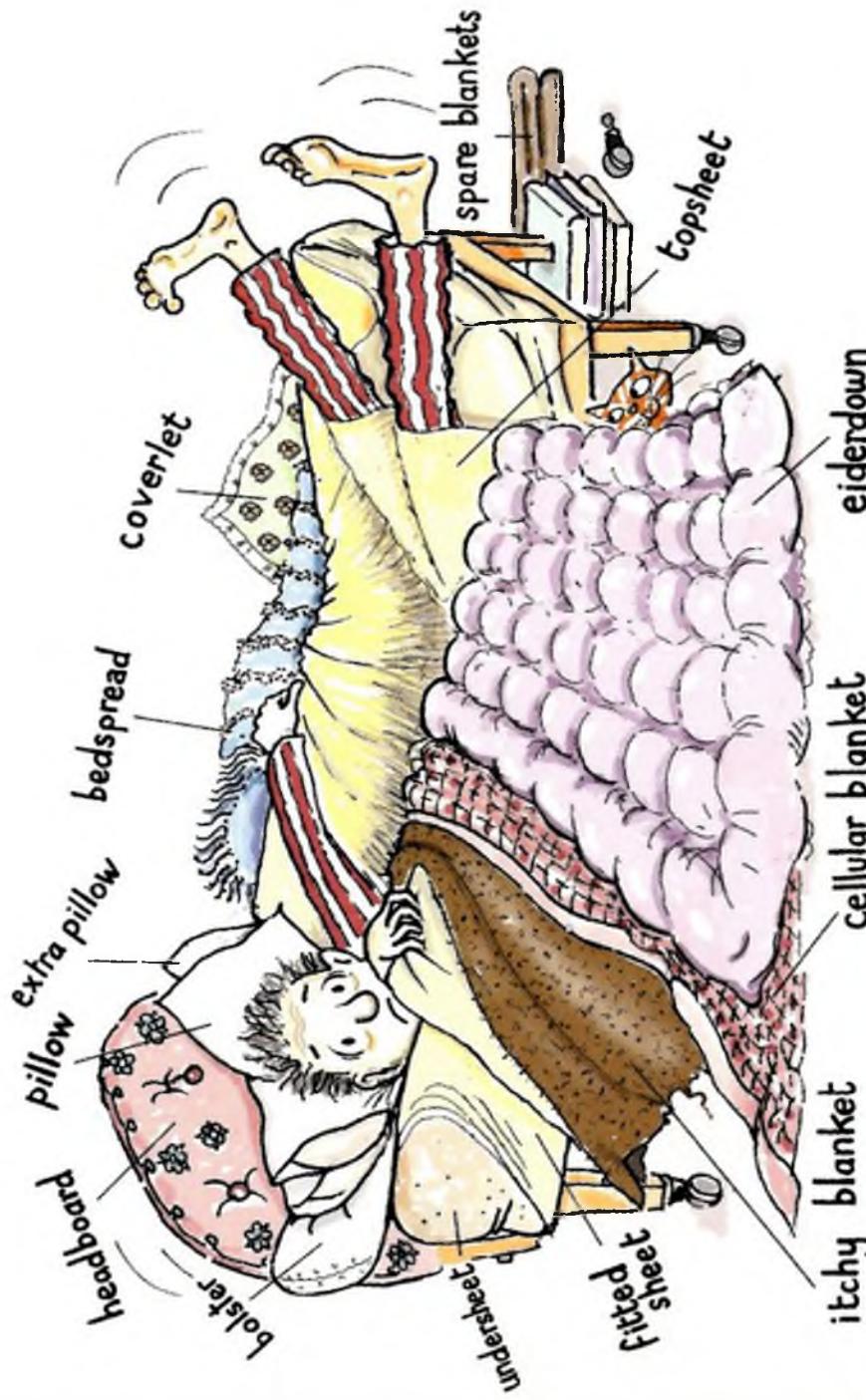
Great Beds of the World

Nos. 51 & 52

THE STANDARD "EURO" As prescribed in E.U. Directive
576B, Article 93: Beds, bunks & bivouacs (iv.72.80)



THE BRITISH TRADITIONAL (or "Big Dipper")



21 Pets

The True Brit knows that her dog, cat, budgerigar, hamster, or even her goldfish, is more likely to prove loyal, affectionate and easy to talk to than the majority of human beings.

In Britain the phrase “It’s a dog’s life” is an expression of envy. Go into any British supermarket and look at the huge selection of mouth-watering foods available for pets, not to mention the doggy chocs, cat treats, scratching posts, woollen coats, jewel-encrusted collars and all the medicines and toiletries with which to care for and pamper your pet.

The unusually privileged position of animals in the British household is exemplified by the following story:

A British woman is describing her family to a foreign visitor. “There’s me. And my husband. And our two cats.”

“No children?” asks the stranger.

“We did have,” comes the reply, “but we had to get rid of them because the cats were allergic to them.”

Expressions to learn

Walkies!

Avoid saying

It’s only an animal!

Pets are an important part
of family life here ...



22 *Heavenly Hosts*

Millions of visitors to Britain have discovered that by far the best way to get inside the host culture, and incidentally to brush up their English Language, is to stay as paying guests with a British family. Hotels may be quieter and more comfortable, but they shield visitors from the realities of life here. It's only by plunging into the hurly burly of family life — the race for the bathroom each morning, the fight for the cornflakes, the struggle for control of the TV remote control, the heated debates over the washing up (with the phone ringing, the dog barking and the milk on the stove boiling over) — that the visitor appreciates us for what we are. So it is that, every year, in search of this real Britain, overseas students come here and “live the language” in a way they never could back home — hoovering the stairs, digging the garden, holding the baby or just sitting round the dinner table discussing the latest episode of *Coronation Street* with their British ‘hostmother’ and ‘hostfather’.

Invariably, the experience leaves a deep impression that remains with them for the rest of their lives!

Expressions to learn

You sit down, Mrs. Jones, *I'll* do the housework today.

Avoid saying

There are no tea and coffee making facilities in my room.

Our landlady treats us like
members of the family...



23 Enjoy Your Meal!

For generations envious foreigners have made fun of our eating habits and our table language (or lack of it). The fact is that Britain has one of the greatest cuisines in the United Kingdom. There's our famous "full" English breakfast of bacon, eggs, sausages, grilled tomatoes, fried mushrooms, fried bread, baked beans, black pudding, kippers and porridge. Furthermore, we boast a wonderful range of national and local specialities, such as Lancashire Hotpot, Yorkshire Pudding, Bubble& Squeak, Shepherd's Pie, Spotted Dick, and Tinned Pears with Evaporated Milk. Sadly, most visitors to this island never try these delicacies but huddle together in continental-style cafes or fast food outlets eating pizza, tapas, kebab, noodles and all kinds of peculiar foreign imports.

It seems silly, doesn't it, to go to another country and not to sample its own native cuisine. (This is why the true Brit sensibly stays at home for his holidays!)

Expressions to learn

Fish fingers — yum!

Don't stint on the gravy!

Avoid saying

Good appetite!

What's in these sausages, then?

WHAT TO SAY BEFORE YOU EAT

A European Cultural Exchange Initiative

France



Bon appetit!

Germany

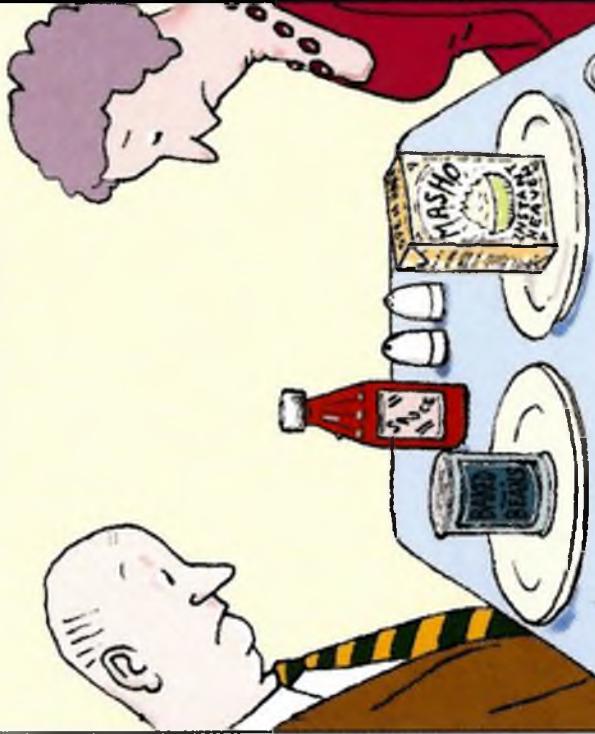


Guten Appetit!

Italy



Buon appetito!



Never mind!

24 Fish and Chips

— or rather, “fish ’n’ chips” — is another *essential* experience for the visitor. Britain is an island and eating fish reminds us of our practical and spiritual dependence on the sea. The chips symbolise our people: no two chips are the same, but we are united because we are all cut from the same bag of potatoes, all deep-fried in the same oil.

A fish and chip supper is the oldest fast food take-away in Britain, perhaps in the world. The visitor should ask for cod or haddock, the fish of choice for any true Brit. (Also he should hurry up as these species are practically extinct.) The fish comes dipped in *batter*, a mixture of flour, egg and milk. When it is dropped into the hot fat the batter acts as a sponge absorbing the maximum amount of fat and so making it nice and juicy. A traditional fish fryer will wrap your order in yesterday’s newspaper. Before wrapping, he will ask: “Salt and vinegar?” to which you should reply “Yes, please!”

This supper should be eaten almost immediately, with the fingers, walking along the street, preferably in the dark, and with a light drizzle falling. Do NOT take the fish ’n’ chips home, empty them onto a plate and eat them with cutlery. This is not the British way.

Expressions to learn

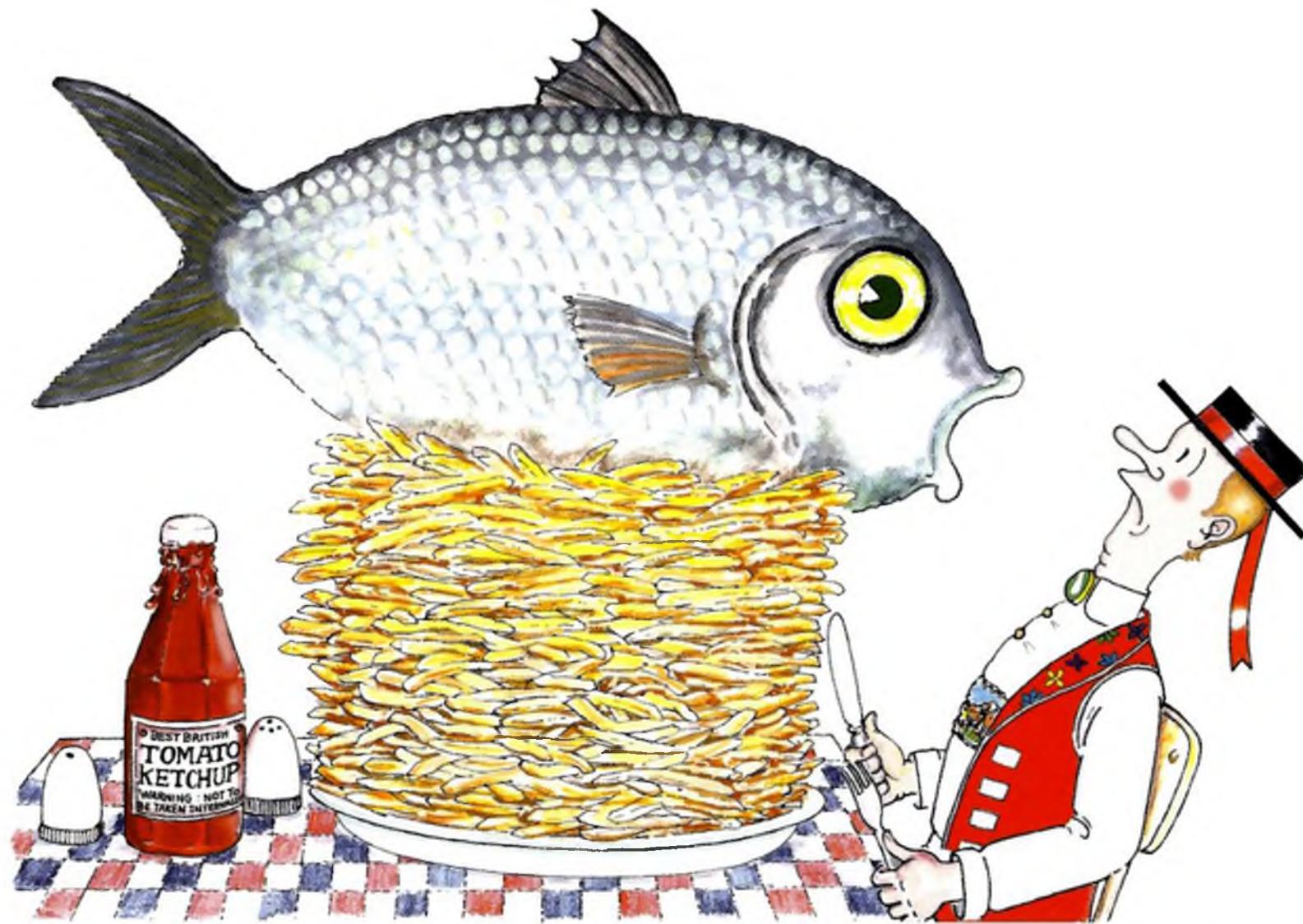
Frying tonight!

Avoid saying

Vinegar? Yuk!

EAT FISH & CHIPS

if it's the last thing you do!



25 *The Mighty Spud*

The cornerstone of our national cuisine is of course the *potato*. A true Brit will have nothing to do with pasta or noodles and will only eat rice if it's in a sweet and creamy rice *pudding*.

It's been said (by other nations, of course) that we Britons resemble our national vegetable in that we are thick-skinned, white-fleshed, cheap, and usually found covered in dirt. Such insults are not even worth refuting. The fact is that most of us would be flattered to be compared to the world's greatest vegetable. Unpretentious, wholesome, versatile and full of goodness. Whether it is chopped and used raw in salads or boiled until it dissolves into the water, cut into chunky pointed chips or eaten baked in its jacket stuffed with cheddar cheese and pickle, the potato never lets you down. Incidentally, recent scientific research has shown that potatoes, if eaten in large quantities, have an *aphrodisiac* effect — which goes some way to explaining our true Brit's reputation as an ardent and tireless lover!

Expressions to learn

Chips, mash or jacket? All three, please!

Avoid saying

Haven't you got *tagliatelle*?

Three days lost in the forest without food,
and the explorers were getting desperate...



Suddenly...



26 Asking the Way

The visitor who is not a native speaker of English may experience difficulty in understanding connected and extended speech especially if spoken in the street with an unfamiliar local accent. Do *not* burst into tears or start waving your arms and saying “Stop! Stop! I don’t understand. Please speak clearly in standard English, without swallowing your words.” Such a reaction may damage international relations. In order not to appear rude (or silly) you should listen attentively to the native speaker with the lively appearance of understanding everything that is being said. The British are mostly very helpful people and they enjoy giving directions to strangers. Because of the complexities of our town planning these directions are not always correct. But as you are unlikely to understand anyway, it doesn’t really matter. The important thing is that you have made contact with a member of the British public!

Expressions to learn

I see. Right. Got it. OK.

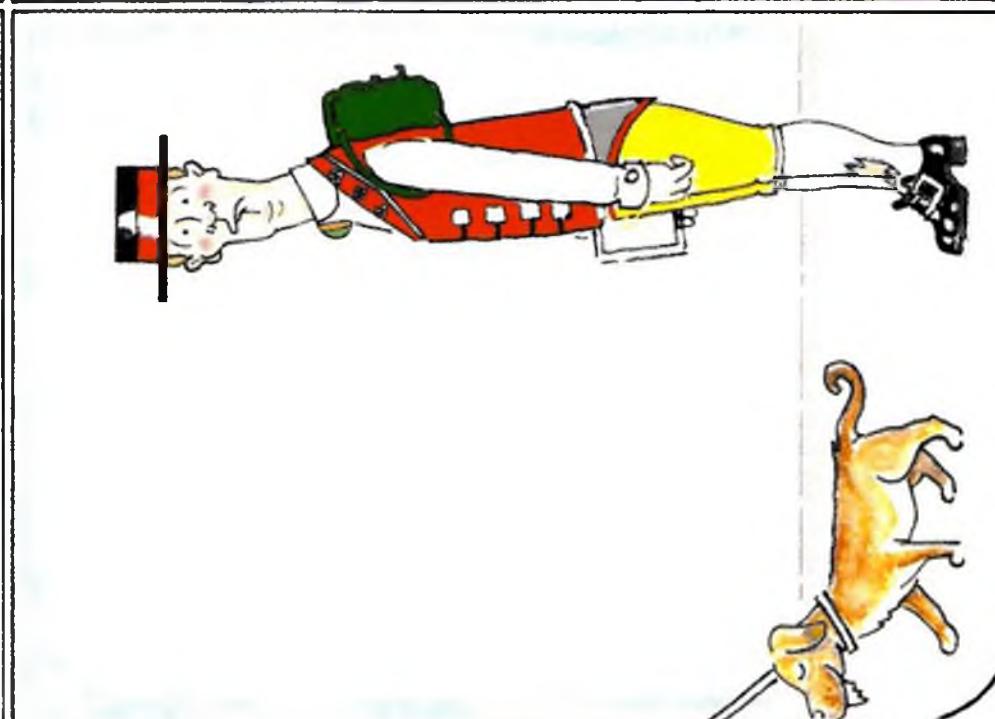
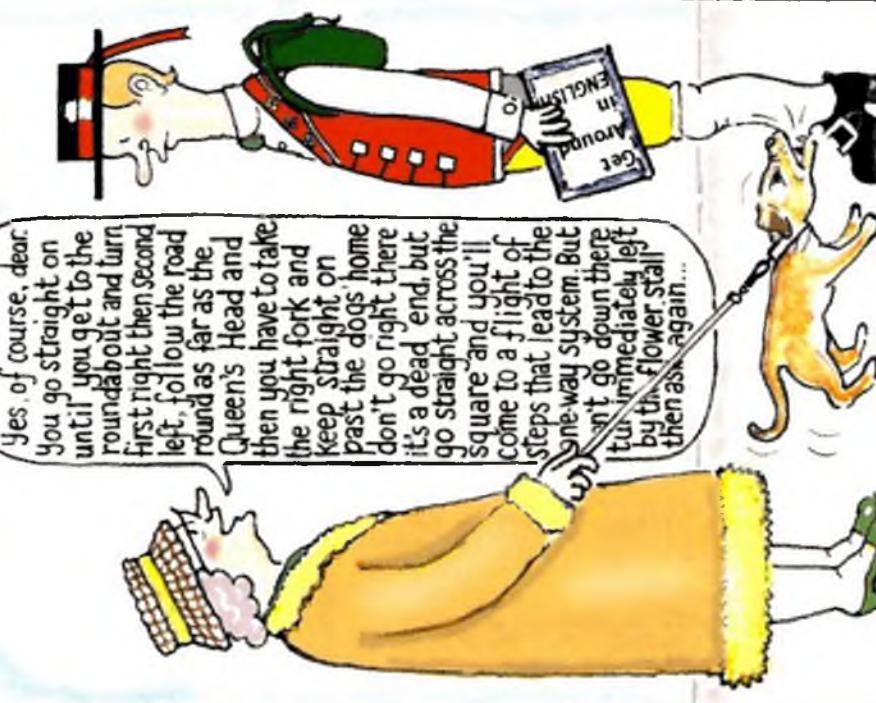
Avoid saying

Come on, admit it — you don’t know where it is!

Get around in

ENGLISH

Lesson Six Asking the Way



27 Driving

At one time the British were known throughout the world as a nation of courteous and careful drivers. We motored quietly along in our Rovers and Rolls Royces, our Minis and our Morrises, stopping occasionally to let an old lady or a flock of sheep cross the road. In recent years standards have fallen and the government has introduced all kinds of measures to encourage better driving, including voucher parking, speed cameras, traffic cones, congestion charges and road rage. The last of these requires motorists to stop their cars and threaten each other with violence if they believe this *olde-worlde courtesy* has been breached in any way. The True Brit still maintains many of the nobler motoring traditions in this country, such as stopping at red lights and giving way to hedgehogs. As for the famous question which “side” are you on? Well, of course, in Britain *right* is wrong and *left* is right. Will we ever change? Not likely! The True Brit would rather abandon his car altogether and walk (which, come to think of it, he’s doing more and more these days).

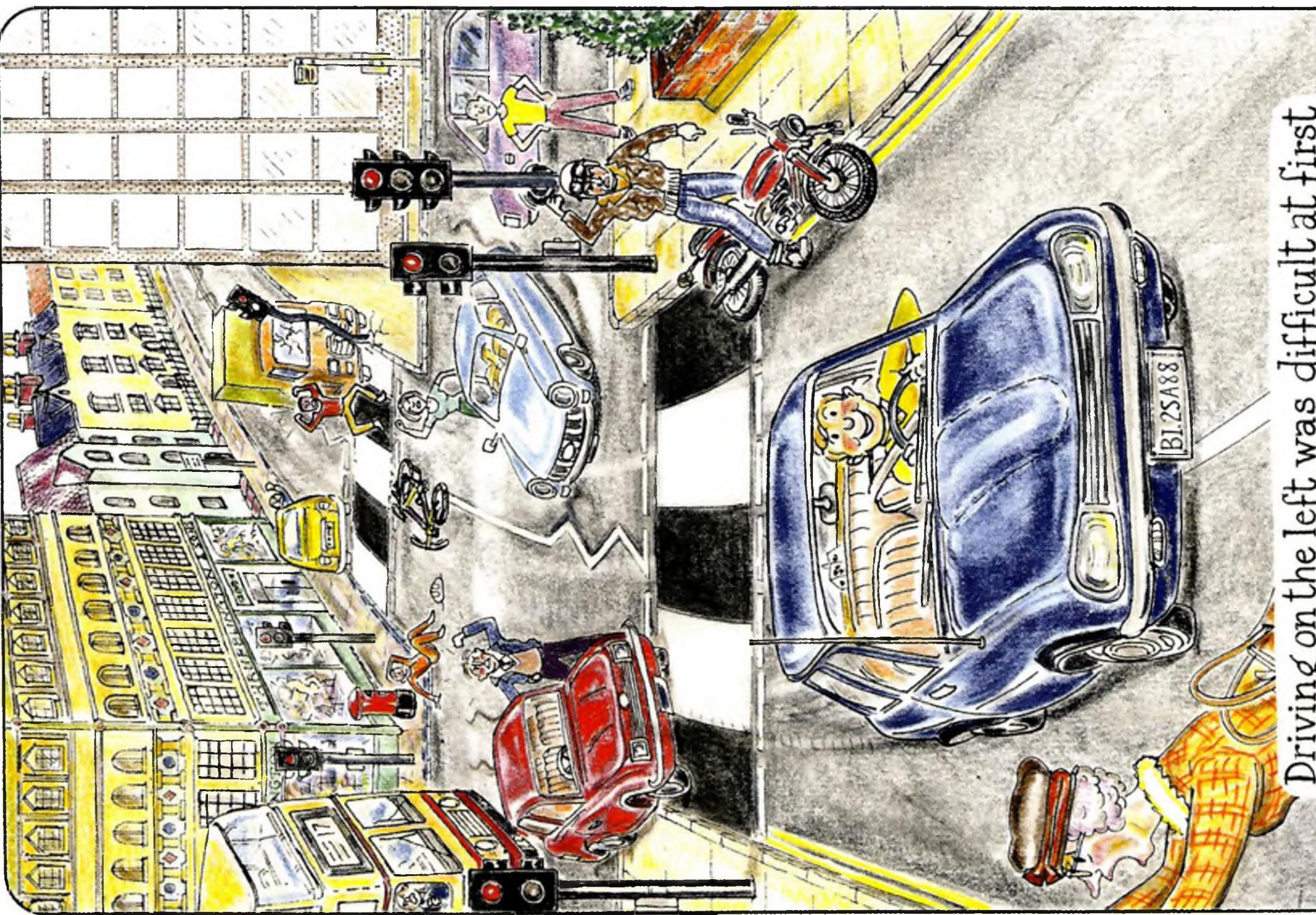
Expressions to learn

She's a good little runner.

Shall I wax polish your bonnet for you?

Avoid saying

Hey, the steering wheel's on the wrong side in this car!



Driving on the left was difficult at first
but I'm gradually getting used to it...

28 Mind the Gap

The London Underground is full of romance: the names of the stations alone evoke the glories of English history and legend: Knightsbridge, Baker Street, Marble Arch, Angel, Temple, Swiss Cottage, Arnos Grove, Turnham Green... Take a deep breath and plunge far below the streets of the capital city by escalator or gleaming lift into the 253 miles of windy tunnels that make up the ‘Tube’. Once aboard a train, the overseas visitor is reminded that silence is compulsory and that loud conversation or laughter may cause the train to come to a sudden stop. As you sit waiting in the dark, your mind will be teeming with questions: “Should I have changed at Gloucester Road? How will I read all the advertisements? How do you pronounce ‘Marylebone’? What if I fall asleep and wake up at Cockfosters?”

Expressions to learn

Is this where I alight for the Brompton Oratory?

I need a southbound Northern Line service, Waterloo branch.

Avoid saying

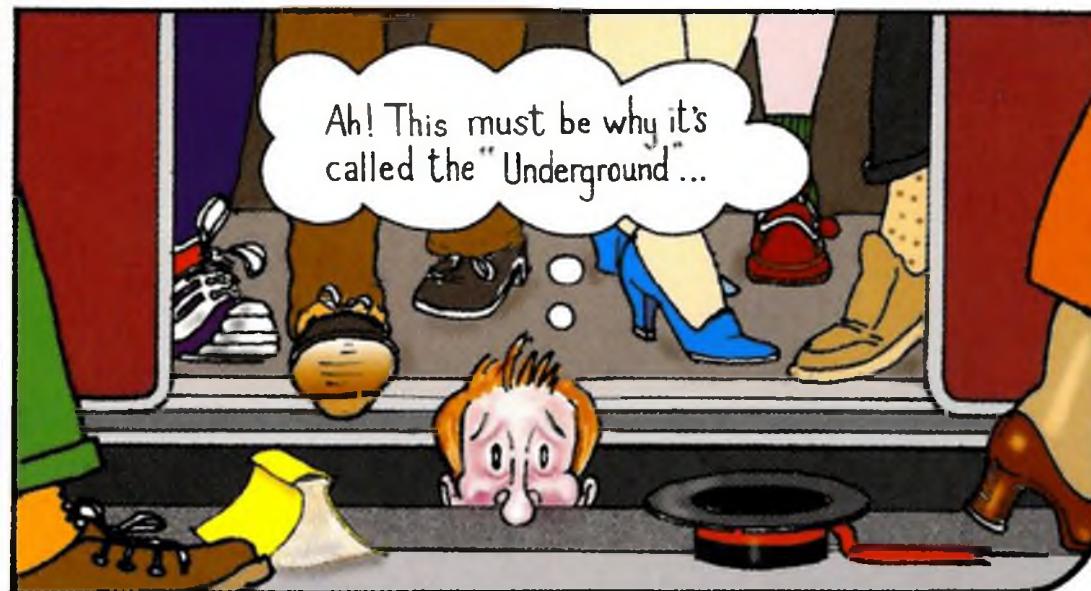
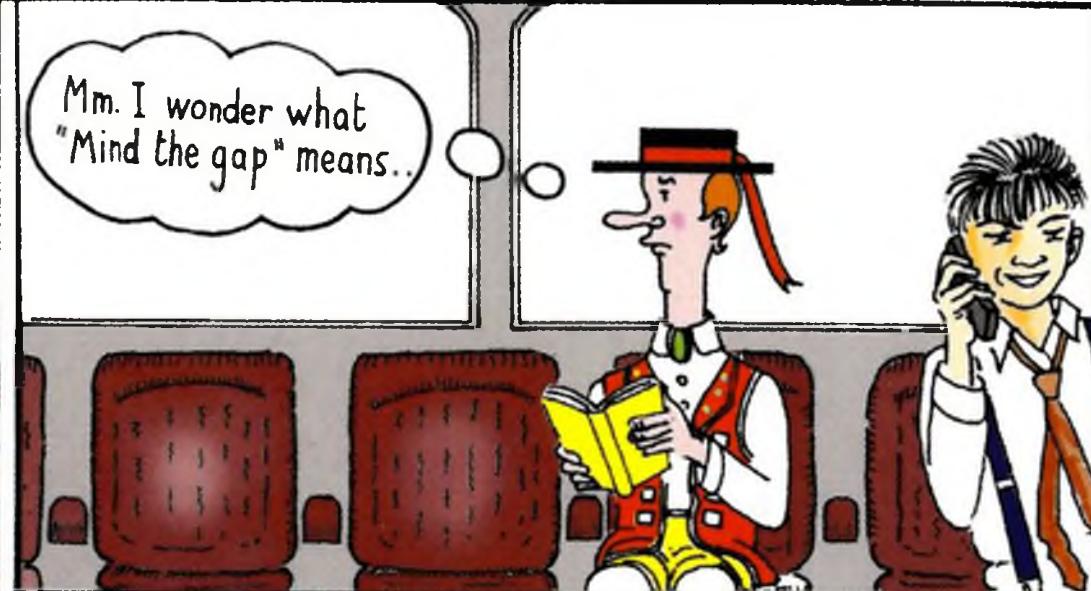
Single to Manchester, please.

Porter!

Get
around in

ENGLISH

Lesson Thirteen
Survival English



29 Ye Olde Britain

The coach sets you down at the market cross. The people here live in black and white half-timbered houses with pretty window boxes full of flowers. There's a Norman church with Saxon windows and a Gothic spire. There's a grand house with priest holes and a ghost.

You are taken down a cobbled street to see the oldest pub in England, where pilgrims, smugglers and runaway princes all met (though not necessarily at the same time). There, sitting outside at a wooden table with a ploughman's lunch and a tankard of ale, you'll find our true Brit. Stroll out of town past the guildhall, and the mediaeval stocks where rogues were punished (unlike today!), then climb the hill to the old castle with its ruined battlements. The weather is always fine, so stop for a picnic in the meadow with scones ("as mother used to make them") and strawberries and cream. On the river there are chaps in blazers standing up in flat bottomed boats, and girls in straw hats waving to them from the bank. They say you shouldn't live in the past. But the true Brit does, and he's very happy there.

Expressions to learn

I just love your picturesque old houses/streets/churches/toilets/people!

Avoid saying

When you've seen one church, you've seen them all!

Excuse me, is there anything new to see around here?

ANTIQUES

KING ARTHUR
SHOPPED HERE

GOOD OLD
FASHIONED
ENGLISH
FOOD
AT UP-TO-
DATE PRICES

Ye Olde
Traditional
CREAM
TEAS

TIMES
GONE
BY

FORMER
GLORIES

MEDIEVAL
TOILET
HISTORIC
RUINS

13th CENTURY
CHURCH
SOME EVEN
OLDER BITS

Relive the dangers
& discomforts of the
DARK AGES
in our OLD TOWN
TOUR • Departs
Thrice daily fr.
Ye Olde Market
Cross • Perio

30 Queuing

It is not true that queuing in Britain has died out. Only the bus queue seems to have dissolved more or less into a continental free-for-all. Go to a post office, or bank, or supermarket check-out and you will find the custom is thriving, with special rails and tapes to keep the line straight.

Queue-jumping is a low and mean offence, like tipping old age pensioners out of deckchairs. Not fame, nor wealth, not merit nor urgency will get you to the front of the queue. Only time. And small shuffling steps. And queuing is an opportunity to review your life, or at least your purchases. A queue in a shop can provide important cooling off time for the hot-headed shopper (“What am I doing? I don’t *really* want this red PVC mini-skirt!”) Though you may be unhappy to join the end of a long queue, the reward is being able to turn round later and see how that unhappiness has passed back to the faces that have accumulated behind you.

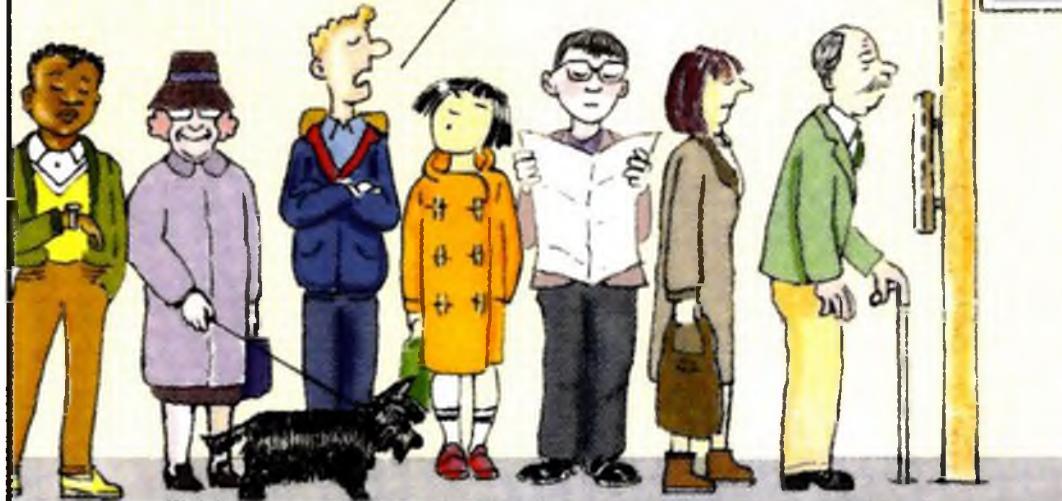
Expressions to learn

First come, first served.

Avoid saying

I’m in a hurry. Do you mind if I go first?

When visiting England, it's important to queue patiently



And, when visiting England, it's even more important to dress sensibly!



31 Shopping

The British invented the idea of the fixed price. This was to avoid the embarrassment caused by haggling. We don't like bargaining for things and we do not like pushy sales assistants, which is why shopping in hot countries can be such an ordeal for Brits. Far from trying to beat down the price of an article, the visitor to Britain should even offer to pay a little more than the asking price:

- VISITOR £10? Are you sure? Don't do yourself down. You've got to make a living too! Look, I'll give you £20. It must be worth at least that.
- BRIT That's very good of you, but I couldn't possibly accept more than £15 for a second-hand radio that doesn't even work.
- VISITOR Never mind. In my eyes it has historical and cultural value. Why don't I give you £18? etc.

Expressions to learn

It was worth every penny!

Keep the change!

Avoid saying

These are much cheaper in my country.

BRITAIN'S TOP TOURIST ATTRACTIONS



Castles



Cathedrals



Colleges



Cashpoints

32 Departure

Now it's over. Your flight's been called; only a few minutes remain in which to grab a last jacket potato with tuna mayonnaise, or to write those goodbye-and-thank-you-for-everything cards you bought (the British have a card for *every* occasion). Then it's farewell to "This royal throne of kings / this precious stone set in the silver sea" — the land where they tear off their tops at the first glimpse of the sun, but where life grinds to a halt the moment a few flakes of snow fall. You know you'll be back one day, for who could keep away? Meanwhile, there are your memories. And your hand luggage bulging with souvenirs: Union Jack shorts for your brother, Winnie the Pooh writing paper for your sister, the tea-towel with the Loch Ness Monster on it for auntie. Oh, and the stick of Brighton rock. Whatever *that's* for!

Most people have to die before they go to Paradise, but you've been there, and you're still alive!

Expressions to learn

Would anyone like to buy a second-hand umbrella?

Avoid saying

Well, that's taught me a lesson!



I hope there's a kind English gentleman at the check-in desk!

The How To Be British Collection

Martyn Ford & Peter Legon

With a globalised mass culture standardising our food, our social customs and even our language, where can the overseas visitor find a truly *British* experience?

The answer lies in the *How To Be British Collection*, which celebrates the traditional values of our reserved, polite, pet-loving, tea-drinking nation — values which have long made Britain ‘different’.



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