

When in England

A couple of months ago a former Quaker Oats Company colleague who now works for Unilever told me he was being assigned to England. I told him he would enjoy it because I certainly did. I worked in England for 4 months a few years ago in a post retirement gig. Please do not confuse England with Scotland, Ireland and Wales. If you need a lesson on what constitutes the United Kingdom, Great Britain, England, the British Isles, etc. let me know. I jotted down some English lessons that I learned and it is time to reissue. Let's start with some vocabulary to help you get around. You'll need it for the Olympics in London this summer.

ASDA – Wal-Mart's stores in England

bangers – sausage, served with mashed potatoes and called bangers and mash

bacon - actually sliced ham, reminds me of TN country ham but not salty

bank holiday - everything is closed; they have lots of bank holidays

bloke - a guy

booking - reservations

brown bread - whole wheat

car boot - trunk

car boot sale - flea market

chips – French fries

crisps - potato chips

chemist - pharmacist

clotted cream - we have nothing like it; real cream from real cows and spread on scones.

cock-up - mistake, screw up

concessions - discounts, like for students and seniors

conservatory - sun room

en suite - the loo is in your room, some small hotels still have them down the hall

engineers - maintenance people

football - soccer

free recovery - free towing

full Monty - English breakfast with bangers, bacon, porridge, beans, toast

gammon steak - ham

give way – yield

high tea – late afternoon tea with mini-sandwiches and cakes

holiday - vacation

ironmonger - hardware store

jacket potatoes - baked potatoes

jolly good - outstanding

lift - elevator

lorry - truck

loo - toilet

lovely - great, opposite of cock-up

marmalade - jam

mash – mashed potatoes

mate - guy (at least they don't pronounce it "might" like the Aussies)

mobile - cell phone

motorway - interstate

no fouling - no littering

pensioner - retiree

petrol – gasoline, sold by the liter

ploughman - farmer

porridge – oatmeal

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pub – public place, a tavern
public school – private school
punt - flat bottom boat pushed with a pole
roundabout - highway intersections, no lights but big circle
royal mail - post office
snog - kiss
sparkling - carbonated water
still - noncarbonated water
sweet - dessert
take away - take out food
tariff - what your room costs
telly - you should know this one
WC - water closet, toilet
welcome break – highway rest stop w/ services
underground - subway

Spelling 101:

centre, not center
cheque, not check
colour, not color
endeavour, not endeavor
fayre, not fair
favour, not favor
ploughing, not plowing
programme, not program
tyres, not tires

Conclusion: The Brits speak English. We speak American. “We are two nations divided by a common tongue.” This last quote has been attributed to Winston Churchill or sometimes George Bernard Shaw.

Random thoughts starting with food & drink:

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- Beer is not beer – there is ale, pilsner, bitters, stout, etc. all served at near room temperature in a 16 oz glass filled to the brim with very little head. My favorite was John Smith, a name I could remember even after a few.
- The best places to eat are the pubs; food is fresh, prices reasonable and you get to meet the locals and know the owner. The owner is usually tending bar. Some pubs date back hundreds of years.
- I sometimes went to lunch at McDonald’s. There’s no ice in their soft drink and isn’t very cold. There are no free refills either.
- We have ubiquitous Chinese restaurants; the English have Indian restaurants instead.
- Fish and chips are traditionally served with mushy peas, which is better than it sounds.

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- American restaurants have ketchup/catsup on the table. The Brits give you malt vinegar whether you ask for it or not. But when I asked for vinegar at McDonald's, they didn't have it. Well, McDonald's is American.
- English food gets a bad rap. It is quite good really, except for vegetables, a lot of which is simply steamed. But the sweets are exceptional with excellent presentation.
- Like continental Europe, they won't bring your restaurant bill until you ask for it. When you pay by credit card, they always check the signature. No tipping is required, that goes for restaurants, bars, salons, spas, etc.
- One of their curious traditions is serving pork & beans for breakfast. Yup, the pork and beans that are sold in cans and usually served during picnics & barbecues. It is served for breakfast there. When I asked a local where it started, of course they didn't know. The practice reminds me of Hawaii where they serve Spam for breakfast. Maybe American GI's started it in both places.
- People take their pet dogs to the pubs. While staying in Corby, I saw this guy come in just about every evening with his dog. It is unusual to go into a pub without seeing at least one dog. I guess if they drink too much, the dog will lead them home.
- You can still smoke in a lot of the pubs, with a lot of smokers in spite of a pack costing around \$7.
- They drink more and eat a lot of chips but there seems to be a lot fewer overweight people there.

Driving Around:

- Only the foreigners and tourists drive cars with automatic shift. The stick shift is to the left of the steering wheel which in turn is on the right side of the car. It takes a little getting used to.
- To enforce speed limits, the Brits have radar attached to cameras at strategic locations. If you go over the speed limit, it takes a picture of your license plate. Quite a few P&G people have had to pay fines. They nail you for going a few miles over. The locals know where the cameras are. You can buy a program for your cell phone that will tell you if you're approaching a camera. There is a downhill curve near where I stayed. The speed limit drops to 30 and there's a camera. I know I've gone 35 or more. The rental car companies pay the fine then tacks it onto your bill but I never got one.
- The English use the metric system; Americans use the English system. Go figure.
- Our family's cars (like Val's Grand Marquis) or pickups, trucks, SUV's and vans wouldn't fit in their parking spaces or garages. The average car has a 1.6L

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engine. And don't complain about the price of petrol, I mean gas. It is around 1 English pound per liter and translates to \$7 a gallon.

The Working Class:

- We have Latinos and other immigrants coming over to the USA to do the hardest manual tasks. The Brits have eastern Europeans. Since all are members of the EU, all they need is a train ticket to where the jobs are. It is all legal. What are we worried about in the U.S.?
- Between the locally hired people and the P&G managers brought in from Belgium to operate the new Pringles plant, there were people from Nigeria, Poland, Czech Republic, Portugal, Belgium, Mexico & Pakistan. The Belgians are diverse too. Some of the Belgians were of Moroccan heritage and could be French or Flemish speakers. In Uppingham, a pub and pizza place was owned by a Maltese. We're not talking a very big city either.
- The first inhabitants of Britain migrated from what is now northern Germany and Denmark - the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. The native Brits were originally migrants too. So they shouldn't complain about immigration, though I never heard anyone complain.

Miscellany

- This place is clean. 500 year old houses are kept up, there's no garbage along the highway or graffiti on structures. In the small towns, it is like stepping back in time architecturally.
- The English have what they call ASBO or anti-social behavior order. That's when the neighbors try to get the court to impose on you if you have loud parties, unruly children or pets, etc.

The Upper Crust:

- The Dukes and Earls who own castles and thousands of acres have to open their estates to the public. They sell Made in China souvenirs to pay for the upkeep. It takes a fortune to heat those castles. Of course servants today don't come cheap either. The upside is that for a few \$, you get to see how the 0.1% lives. They also collect a lot of rent. For example the village of Rockingham belongs to the Rockingham castle family. Every door in the village that is painted green means they're owned by the nobles up the hill. That includes farms, shops, pubs, inns and restaurants.
- In English peerage, the oldest male progeny gets the castle, land, etc. If a Duke & Duchess or Earl & Lady have no male offspring then it goes to his nearest male relative like a brother, nephew or cousin. If there aren't any, then it goes to the nearest male relative by marriage like a son-in-law or brother-in-law. This was all explained to me by a guide at the Belvoir Castle, home of the Duke of Rutland. The original Duke got his title from no less than Henry VIII.

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- Across the street from my B & B was Uppingham School, a prestigious boarding high school. For uniforms, the boys wear dark gray slacks, black shoes, dark blue blazer and striped tie. The girls wear blue stockings, with skirts and blazers same color as the boys. But their ties are lighter with different stripes. They all look really neat. I was looking out the window on a drizzly Saturday morning and they are going to and from classes. Yes, they have Sat. classes. They have a rigorous curriculum with Latin and Greek. On Sunday morning it looked like they were marching in formation, for church services I assume. How prestigious are they? Well, the cost per year ranges from 15,000 to 22,000 pounds. That is about \$27 - 40,000. That is more than a lot of U.S. colleges. Hey, want to send any of your children to an English boarding school?

Last word:

After getting tired of my first hotel in Corby, I moved to a B & B in the town of Uppingham. Over a weekend one of the guests was an elderly gentleman named George Melly, whom I would call the quintessential British eccentric. He is a famous jazz musician and author (go to Wikipedia for full details). He had a couple of shows in town. He came down to breakfast one morning barefoot and wearing his night shirt. Yes, a night shirt straight out of Dickens, going down to his ankles. George has one eye patch and wears oversize suits with broad vertical stripes of yellow, red and blue. He tops it all off with a broad brimmed hat. One evening he couldn't find his room so I helped him find it. Maybe it was too much ale. Maybe it was old age or a combination. But he is still the trouper. Hats off to you George! Jolly good show.

I would love to go back.