

BRITISH CULTURE ON THE WEB

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Undoubtedly, both teaching and learning English requires constant consulting of original sources. In the heyday of computers and the Internet, browsing websites in search for relevant data becomes a common practice and it is the Internet which occupies a crucial role in broadening horizons and developing language skills. This work is an attempt at a comparative review of a selection of websites devoted exclusively to the British or Irish history and culture and provides a brief summary of the general features, content and functions of the websites listed.

United Kingdom (<http://www.quistinfo.dk/>)

Undeniably, a strong point of the webpage is its being actively linked to various websites, which allows both students and teachers to doubleclick any category needed to get detailed information on e.g. UK education, geography, feasts, food, history, organizations and institutions etc. The website abounds in valuable and up-to-date information ranging from the national anthem, through the cultural and political history, historical and political figures, customs and traditions to the facts concerning the royal family in the UK. Furthermore, it provides extensive data about Ireland, Canada, Australia, the USA and New Zealand, soon – also about South Africa. What is worth attention about the portal is a vast array of dictionaries, i.e. *Acronym Finder*, *A Dictionary of Slang*, *A Dictionary of UK slang*, *A Dictionary of British Slang*, *Encyclopedia Britannica* and many more (http://hjem.get2net.dk/niels_quist/british.htm#dictionaries). Another important feature is the *English Resources* section divided into the following sections: poetry, reading, drama, Shakespeare, genre, biography, language, media (<http://www.newi.ac.uk/englishresources/ks3/read.html>). There are various language activities, test papers and worksheets under each category enabling students to develop both their language skills and the knowledge of history and culture of the English-speaking countries.

Woodland's Junior School (<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/index.html>)

One of the most comprehensive and richest EFL/ESL sites on the Web, a student-oriented one. Its user-friendly layout encourages students to upgrade their language skills and broadens their knowledge about British history and culture luring them with colorful photos. It features a calendar of traditions and customs observed on the national and local scale in the UK, a list of royal traditions held explaining their origin, providing their descriptions accompanied by representative pictures. Moreover, it comprises information about the flags of Britain, its costumes and clothes, national flowers and emblems, the motto of England and its patron saint as well as the history of making of the Union Jack. The section *Songs, Sayings and Superstitions* provides a selection of English proverbs and sayings together with the most popular and characteristic British songs. Various student discussions forums are extremely friendly and they play a vital role in stimulating students' interest in English culture that can be explored actively through the opinions of their English peers. This website offers a decisive advantage to learners, i.e. worksheets supporting the material found on the pages (<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/activities.html>).

BBC Timelines (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/timelines/>)

An educational website launched by BBC, divided into sections: *British Timeline*, *Northern Ireland Timeline*, *English Timeline*, *Scottish Timeline* and *Welsh Timeline*. By doubleclicking each section a list of topics devoted to given periods of history unfolds. Every entry features historical events and figures being part of the rich cultural heritage of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Moreover, all data are accompanied by colorful pictures. This page includes lots of links to other websites of interest grouped under *Related Links*. For biographies of the movers and shakers of history, one should search *Historic Figures* and *Featured People*. However, what makes this website really unique is the *Multimedia Zone* which tempts with its interactive games, virtual tours (a free VRML plug-in such as Cortona is provided by the page), animations and a dazzling array of photos. A student-friendly design of the *For Kids* section (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/forkids/>) enables learners of different language level to explore the history and culture of the UK in animations, short films and amazing sounds.

All Info About English Culture (<http://englishculture.allinfoabout.com/>)

The site, edited by [Paula Bardell](#), includes i.e. England in the Spotlight offering articles that keep the readers up-to-date with the latest news and developments in England, a Bi-weekly Newsletter that enables to stay abreast of what is happening there and Seasonal Features, e.g. concerning the Christmas fever. A selection of topics including: *Archaeology*, *Architecture*, *Art*, *Customs/Traditions*, *Festivals/Holidays*, *Film*, *Food & Drink*, *Genealogy*, *History*, *Language*, *News & Views*, *Politics* etc. give relevant information on a given question. If only it had any interactive materials for students, it might have been used more enthusiastically.

About (<http://gouk.about.com/library/weekly/?once=true&>)

The website features articles on Great Britain and Ireland, dealing specifically with their history, culture, current events or places worth visiting with city and region guides accompanied by maps as well as peculiarities of the British and the Irish. Similarly to the previously reviewed website, it offers no room for interactive language learning.

Visit Britain (<http://www.visitbritain.com/VB3-en-IE/destinationguides/index.aspx>)

Two of its most prominent sections are *Destination Guides*, a selection of richly illustrated articles with outline and route maps attached giving the taste of Britain's distinctive places, and *Experiences*, offering a wide variety of articles on Britain's landmarks and cities. This website depicts England, Scotland, Wales and the Channel Islands from the traveller's perspective and therefore may be a useful supplement to English classes. It is linked to other websites, e.g. **Visit London** (http://eu.visitlondon.com/city_guide/about_london/history/), which is the official London site with short articles outlining the city's most representative features and sights. Comprehensive data are grouped into the following sections: *Attractions, Eating Out, Entertainment, Royal London etc. City Search* is of invaluable help when looking for specific information, e.g. London's attractions. Furthermore, Visit Britain links to **Visit England** (<http://www.visitengland.com/destinationguides/index.aspx>), an essential guide to English sites of interest and cities that make it conspicuous. A reference map with counties and regions marked enables a closer look at their peculiarities. A selection of articles on famous places and Route Planner are the strong points of the site, yet Visit London and Visit England are rather traveller- and teacher-oriented for the lack of students' test papers or worksheets.

I-UK (<http://www.i-uk.com/>)

The website, maintained by the British Council, **UK Trade & Investment** and **Visit Britain**, discloses information on *Visiting the UK, Education, Life & Culture*, each of them subdivided into further categories offering a vast array of articles on a given topic and related links for more detailed search. An important feature is the FAQ section with immediate and precise answers. This site is to inspire both teachers and students, unfortunately has no interactive activities section.

Heart o' Scotland (<http://www.heartscotland.com/>)

A rich source of informative articles on Scottish customs and traditions, as well as its historical and cultural heritage, ranging from Scotland's national dishes through the origins of whisky, tartans and feasts to Scottish myths, legends and poems. Each and every website visitor can get the taste of what Scotland is all about. It provides references to books, films and other websites for further information.

Flying Haggis (<http://www.flyinghaggis.co.uk/scotland/custom.htm>)

It outlines Scottish traditions, customs, history or food (<http://www.flyinghaggis.co.uk/scotland/>) and the language with data concerning its origin, peculiarities and a word bank (<http://www.flyinghaggis.co.uk/scotland/glossary.htm>), which might provide a useful supplement to English classes.

Irish Culture and Irish Customs (<http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/>)

A website devoted exclusively to Irish traditions and customs all outlined in short brilliant articles accompanied by rich illustrations. *Kids' Ireland* (<http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/1Kids/1Home.html>) is a monthly column where Irish stories and legends are re-told making them more accessible for less advanced students of English. An important feature is *Basic Irish Language Index* (<http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/3Focloir/2Index.html>), offering the basics of Irish divided into 67 lessons. For entertaining facts concerning Ireland click on <http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/TriviaDidyouknow.html>. Having subscribed to a free monthly newsletter (<http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/Newsletter.html>), one may take part in a contest designed to check the knowledge about the Irish history and culture. This website might come useful for both teachers and EFL/ESL students.