

Les clés de la civilisation britannique



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INTRODUCTION

Cet ouvrage s'adresse aux étudiants de tous horizons.

Rappelons toutefois que la civilisation des pays anglophones fait désormais partie du cursus des études d'anglais jusqu'à la licence. Les classes préparatoires littéraires ont ouvert leur champ à la civilisation. L'option civilisation est l'option la plus choisie à l'agrégation d'anglais. C'est dire à quel point c'est là un passage obligé pour tous les étudiants spécialistes. Par ailleurs, l'analyse du monde contemporain domine dans la partie britannique de ce large domaine.

Sujet neuf et inattendu, dense et touffu, la civilisation britannique en particulier se présente aux nouveaux étudiants comme une vaste étendue de connaissances portant sur l'histoire, la vie politique et sociale d'un pays qu'ils connaissent peu et qu'ils ne savent pas de quelle façon aborder.

Les questions de réflexion qui leur sont posées exigent beaucoup de lectures, et de lectures en anglais, faute de quoi ils ne sont pas à même de saisir les concepts spécifiques et le vocabulaire approprié.

Cet ouvrage de civilisation britannique contemporaine est donc né d'une sensibilisation des enseignants aux difficultés rencontrées par leurs élèves dans l'acquisition de connaissances nouvelles et dans la méthode à suivre pour atteindre ce but.

Au travers des *Clés de la civilisation britannique* (couvrant principalement la période allant de 1945 à nos jours), les auteurs se sont attachés à offrir aux étudiants les connaissances synthétiques essentielles pouvant leur permettre de cerner leur sujet et donc de le maîtriser davantage avant de se lancer dans des ouvrages plus spécialisés. Ils ont fourni ces données bien ramassées en leur décomposant le travail. En effet :

- une introduction en français résume ce qui va être dit aidant ainsi le lecteur à se repérer dans ce qui suit ;
- la division en 14 chapitres permet de répertorier les grands thèmes à travers lesquels l'étudiant peut naviguer ;
- la décomposition de chaque chapitre en parties et sous-parties clairement annoncées et définies guide et filtre la lecture ;
- les tableaux chronologiques et synoptiques résument les grandes lignes historiques ou donnent les jalons indispensables ;
- la rédaction en anglais accoutume l'étudiant à l'immersion en anglais et le prépare ainsi à des lectures et des rédactions futures ;
- les indications lexicales lui font mettre le doigt sur les termes-clefs ou les notions complexes (signalés par un astérisque qui renvoie au « Vocabulary ») qu'il doit assimiler et reprendre plus tard s'il veut être clair et pertinent dans ses comptes rendus ;

- les nombreux extraits d'articles de journaux en particulier le familiarisent à une lecture indispensable et difficile, l'incitent à aller y chercher plus d'informations encore, le préparent aux analyses de textes qu'il sera amené à faire ; lui font prendre conscience de l'actualité de l'ouvrage et de l'importance d'une actualisation constante ;
- l'index final lui permet de retrouver un point ou de répondre à une question précise qui se poserait soudain à lui.

Il va de soi que les connaissances ainsi développées vont bien au-delà d'une épreuve obligatoire à l'examen. Toute langue véhiculée en permanence ses références historiques, sociales ou politiques et les étudiants s'apercevront bien vite que grâce à un tel ouvrage, ils auront enrichi aussi leur perception de la langue, de la littérature, du monde contemporain et cela pour les années à venir, quel que soit leur domaine d'études par la suite.

Les spécialistes ou les littéraires ne seront pas les seuls à y trouver des références indispensables : n'oublions pas que les élèves des classes préparatoires commerciales ou scientifiques sont aussi interrogés sur leurs connaissances en civilisation, qu'on attend des étudiants en histoire, en droit etc., des élèves de BTS ou des IUT, des acquis en civilisation et que par ailleurs, sans ces « pré-requis », ils passent à côté de bien des interprétations.

Les *Clés de la civilisation britannique* s'adresse donc à tous et peut devenir un ouvrage d'auto-apprentissage ou la référence complète et indispensable, facile à utiliser et à consulter.

Les auteurs osent espérer que la curiosité intellectuelle de leurs lecteurs sera satisfaite par l'esprit de synthèse et de clarté qu'ils ont essayé d'imprimer à leur ouvrage ainsi que par la quantité et l'actualisation des connaissances apportées.

Gérard Blamont et Anne Paquette

Les auteurs adressent des **remerciements spéciaux à Katsy Blamont-Newman** (professeur agrégé en classes préparatoires littéraires au lycée de Sèvres), leur relectrice dévouée et attentive, caution de l'authenticité de la langue, sans qui ce travail n'aurait sans doute pas été possible.

Que les conjoints des auteurs soient tous deux remerciés également pour leur patiente bienveillance.

Chapitre I

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Introduction

Le Royaume-Uni fut bâti au cours des siècles par la volonté des monarques d'Angleterre, la puissance dominante des Îles britanniques. Par sa constitution, le Royaume-Uni est un État unitaire — non fédéral — mais, en raison de son histoire (conquête des pays celtes voisins, construction d'un empire colonial), il offre de nos jours l'image d'un pays multi-national, multi-ethnique, multi-religieux, à tel point que l'on peut se demander ce qu'être britannique peut encore signifier. Une politique de décentralisation a été mise en œuvre depuis 1997, mais certains remettent en cause l'existence même du Royaume-Uni (voir chapitre 14).

Le pays a considérablement changé depuis les années soixante : révolution des mœurs d'abord, fin du consensus politique et révolution thatchérienne ensuite. La Grande-Bretagne est devenue la tête de pont du libéralisme économique en Europe. Cependant la réussite des uns ne saurait faire oublier la détresse des plus pauvres. Enfin, si le pays s'est ouvert aux influences extérieures, en particulier celles venues du continent, la confiance dans les valeurs traditionnelles et les institutions s'est effritée et les problèmes de société, par exemple, la montée de la violence, ne laissent pas d'inquiéter.

Le Royaume-Uni est aujourd'hui une puissance moyenne, mais l'empreinte de son passé de grande puissance économique, militaire et coloniale, isolée du continent, demeure présente. Désireux de cultiver la "relation privilégiée" avec les États-Unis et les liens avec les pays du Commonwealth, les gouvernements ont rarement joué le jeu européen sans arrière-pensées. De nombreux Britanniques voient dans l'intégration européenne avant tout une perte de souveraineté nationale et certains seraient prêts à soutenir un retrait de l'Union européenne. En 1999, le gouvernement travailliste ne semblait guère décidé à braver cette fraction de l'opinion en conduisant une politique européenne volontariste.

I – Historical background, the four nations, overseas territories

The UK (in full, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland, or Eire, form the British Isles. The UK consists of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland (the former Irish province of Ulster). The terms "Great Britain" and, increasingly, plain "Britain" are used to refer to the UK; the adjective "British" is the only one available to describe something pertaining to or someone from the UK. A Briton is technically a UK citizen but people who hold a British passport think of themselves primarily as a citizen of one the four nations: English, Welsh, Scottish or (Northern) Irish. The fact that "English" is used unduly to refer indiscriminately to somebody British is a sign of the historic political and economic dominance of England. A significant part of the political history of the UK until the 19th century is that of the extension of the domination of England over the "Celtic fringe*" i.e. the other three home nations: Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

A – History

c. 250 000 BC	First evidence of human life in the area
c. 5 000 BC	Britain became an island
c. 3 000 BC	Neolithic people (from Spain, North Africa?) settled; left stone circles (e.g. Stonehenge); followed by "Beaker people" of Alpine stock
c. 700 BC	Celtic peoples from Europe, organised in tribes (kin groups), spread their culture over Britain
55-54 BC	Julius Caesar's expeditions to Britain
43 AD	Roman invasion under Claudius Roman colony named Britannia; the Celtic fringe: west of Wales, north of Scotland (Caledonia) and Ireland (Hibernia) not invaded
409	End of Roman rule in Britain
c. 440-late 8th century	Angles, Saxons and Jutes, three Germanic tribes, invaded present-day England and established seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Saxon heptarchy)
793	First Viking invasion: during the 9th century, Norsemen and Danes settled in parts of Ireland, north of Scotland and in England (Midlands, East Anglia)
1016	Saxons finally defeated by Danes. Cnut became King of England, now part of a vast Scandinavian empire
1066	William, Duke of Normandy, invaded England French, the language of the ruling elite, became the official language of politics and law
1154-1168	Maine, Aquitaine and Brittany, in addition to Normandy, became English possessions
1170	Dublin and small area around it (the Pale) controlled by the English
1276-1283	Wales conquered by Edward I. Prince Edward: first Prince of Wales in 1301

1312	Robert Bruce defeated the English at Bannockburn, thus securing Scottish independence
1346-1453	Hundred Years' War, at the end of which only Calais remained an English possession
1362	English took over from French as the official language in Parliament and law courts
1536-1543	Wales and England brought under one common administration
1560s	Triangular trade with newly established colonies in the West Indies and North America began
1603	Union of English and Scottish crowns: King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England
1611	Ireland became England's first major colony Plantation of Ulster: Protestant settlers took most of the land
1707	Act of Union: Scotland lost its Parliament, which was incorporated into the Westminster Parliament
1783	Treaty of Paris: Britain lost its 13 American colonies
1800	Act of Union between Ireland and England Parliamentary union became effective in 1801
1902	At the end of the South African war, British Empire at the height of its power
1921	Irish Free State set up
1931	Statute of Westminster codified doctrine of the British Commonwealth of Nations and status of member countries
1947	Partition of India and Pakistan, which gained their independence
1949	Proclamation of the Republic of Ireland
1973	The UK joined the European Economic Community

B – The four home nations

Each of the four nations has its own flag and patron saint, its own sports teams (at least for some sports like soccer, though there is only one Olympic team for the whole UK). Under English rule Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland managed or were allowed to keep some specific features e.g. in their educational or legal system, and each now has its own national assembly or parliament.

The word "national" refers both to each of the four individual nations and to Britain. Thus the Union Jack is the national flag of the UK, made of the combined flags of three nations: England's St George's cross (red on white), Scotland's St Andrew's cross (white on blue, diagonally) and Ireland's St Patrick's cross (red on white diagonally). Each nation has its national anthem*, but that of England, *God Save the Queen*, is also the British national anthem.

In addition to the four nations, there are two Crown Dependencies, which are not part of the UK: the Channel Islands (including Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark) off the French Normandy coast, and the Isle of Man between the north west of England and Northern Ireland. They have their own Parliament and tax system: they are tax havens*. They are largely self governing

but a Lieutenant Governor appointed by the British government represents the Queen.

C – Overseas Territories

Overseas Territories are what is left of the British Empire, with an overall population of 200,000. Three-quarters of them live in Caribbean islands whose economies are based mostly on tourism and financial services: Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands. In Europe, 30,000 people live in Gibraltar, a strategic place which used to control the entrance to the Mediterranean. The South Atlantic Ocean Territories, which include Ascension Island, Saint Helena and the Falkland Islands are sparsely populated. The British Indian Territories and the vast British Antarctic Territory (1.7m sq Km) have no permanent inhabitants. Most of these territories are largely self-governed* and have their own elected assemblies but they also have governors appointed by the Queen; a specific department within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office oversees programmes for economic and social development. They are entitled to claim their independence if they so wish. The Falkland Islands and Gibraltar have a special status, since Argentina and Spain respectively have laid claim to them: the UK guarantees that they will remain under British sovereignty as long as they wish.

II – The UK population

The UK has an area of 243,000 square kilometres, which places it in seventh position in the European Union behind Italy. But the density of its population is well above the EU average. England is by far the most densely populated of the four nations and Scotland the least, well below the EU average.

	Area (sq Km)	Population (millions)	Density (per sq Km)
England	130,000	48.9	375
Scotland	78,000	5.1	66
Wales	20,700	2.9	140
N. Ireland	13,500	1.6	122
Total	243,000	58.6	241
France	543,000	58.1	107
EU	3,192,000	372.1	117

The UK population in 1995 (source: Britain 1999)

The overall population is still growing slowly: it was estimated to be 59 million in 1997. Two English regions, the North-West and Merseyside (the third most populated region) and the North-East, actually lost some of their population to the south of England in the period 1981-1996. As English people prefer living in houses rather than flats, land in the south of England is at a

premium and plans to extend small villages by building large estates to take overspill* from urban areas are often controversial. Three-quarters of the population live in towns and cities. England has 18 cities over 200,000 inhabitants, Wales has one (Cardiff), Scotland two (Glasgow and Edinburgh), Northern Ireland one (Belfast). Britain's largest cities are, in order, London (the Greater London area holds 20% of the UK population), Birmingham (1m), Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester. But these cities are also the centres of large conurbations. London is the political, cultural and financial centre of the UK. It houses the UK Parliament, the central government departments, the headquarters of the national TV networks and papers, the Bank of England and the City.

A – Ethnic groups

The population of the UK —and particularly that of England, is multi-national and multi-ethnic. Protestants from Scotland and England settled in Ireland, hence the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland. In the 19th century many Irish people emigrated to Scotland, hence the large Catholic community there (0.8 million people). In England especially, in addition to the millions of people or descendants of people who migrated from Wales, Scotland and Ireland, there are also millions who come from former overseas colonies:

- West Indians from the Caribbean
- Black Africans
- Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis from the South Asian sub-continent i.e. from what used to be India before independence (the phrase Asian Britons usually refers to this group in British English)
- Chinese from China and other south-east Asian countries.

The bulk of immigration from South Asia and the Caribbean took place in the 1950s and early 1960s when the British economy was short of labour. There are also Europeans; many (mostly Jewish people) came from Eastern and central Europe fleeing Nazism and later Communist regimes, but there is also more recent immigration, notably from southern Europe.

The 1991 census* was the first one in which respondents were asked about their ethnic background. Over 5% (3 million) of the population belonged to other groups than white. Half of them were born in the UK.

Ethnic groups	millions
black groups	0.9
including: – black Caribbeans	0.5
– black Africans	0.2
Indians	0.8
Pakistanis	0.5
Chinese	0.16
Bangladeshis	0.16

(source: *Britain 1999*)

They live mostly in urban areas. Half of them live in the South-East of England with more than half of black British citizens and 40% of Indians in London; but there are large concentrations of Asians in the Midlands (e.g. Leicester) and West Yorkshire (Bradford, which has a big Pakistani community).

B – Religions

Because it is multi-national and increasingly multi-ethnic, the UK is more than ever a multi-religious country. A large majority of the British population consider themselves as Protestants, whether Church of England, Church of Scotland or Free Church (i.e. dissenters, or non-conformists): mainly Methodists, Baptists and United Reformed Church. About 10% describe themselves as Catholics, and 2% as Jews (Sephardim from Spain and Portugal, and Ashkenazim from central and eastern Europe). There are about half a million Hindus, and about as many Sikhs (from Punjab in India). But the Muslims form the largest non-Christian community in the UK, with between 1 and 1.5 million, mostly from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

C – Languages

Compulsory education from the age of five dispensed in English means that all British people can use this language even if it comes in several dialectal forms, depending on the geographical location and class of its speakers. Modern English is the language which has evolved from the combination of the Germanic language of the Anglo-Saxons and the French brought in by the Norman invaders. Standard English (syntax and vocabulary) constitutes the English taught at school. RP (Received Pronunciation English), which is the model generally taught abroad, and that taught in "good" schools and by elocution teachers in the UK, is spoken by only a small percentage of the population (under 5% according to some linguists). "Estuary English," a model based on the traditional London accent, and used in many TV programmes, is becoming increasingly popular, especially among the younger generation.

However, other languages co-exist with English. Celtic languages have not quite been wiped out by English. Welsh is spoken as a first language by about 20% of the Welsh people, especially in the rural west and north-west of Wales. Public notices are bilingual, Welsh is taught in most schools, and there is a Welsh TV channel. Another Celtic language, Scottish Gaelic, which has survived in the western Highlands and islands, is spoken as a mother tongue by a small percentage of Scots.

Asian Britons in particular continue to use their native language —at home especially— and there are newspapers —including special editions of local newspapers— published in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi and Punjabi. Administrative (health, social security etc.) pamphlets are also often available in these languages.