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# The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland



# 1

## Chapter

# Geography, People and Language

### ▼ Think and Talk

- ▶ Do you know the full name of Britain?
- ▶ Do you know the geographical features of this country?
- ▶ Do you know its major cities—London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast, etc.?
- ▶ Do you know how the English language develops into a universal lingua franca?

## I. Geography

### Geographical Features

The full name of Britain is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. When people refer to the country, they often use different names such as Britain, Great Britain, England, the British Islands, the United Kingdom or the U.K. Located to the northwest of mainland Europe, it is made up of many islands collectively known as the British Isles (不列颠群岛), covering an area of about 243,000 square kilometers. Great Britain and Ireland are two main islands of the British Isles. The island of Great Britain accounts for more than 90% of the country's landmass. That is why the country is also known as Great Britain. The island of Great Britain is geographically and historically divided into three parts: England, Scotland and Wales. The island of Ireland is divided into two parts: Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, while the Republic of Ireland is an independent country.



England is the largest part of Great Britain, located in the south of the island, with Wales to the west and Scotland to the north. It has an area of 130,281 square kilometers and covers more than half of the whole island. The River Thames, the second longest and the most important river in Britain, originates in southwestern England and flows through the Midlands of England to London and empties into the North Sea. England is the most populous and wealthiest part of the country, so people sometimes refer to the whole country as England, a name that people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not like very much. England is highly urbanized, with about 80% of the population living in cities. London, the capital of both England and the United Kingdom, is located in southeastern England.

Scotland, with an area of 78,772 square kilometers, occupies the northern part of Britain. It is the second largest of the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom, both in population and in area. The Clyde River (克莱德河) is the most important river in Scotland. For a substantial period in history Scotland remained a unified state independent of Britain. Edinburgh (爱丁堡) is its capital. Tourism is one of Scotland's most important industries. Tourists from all over the world come to enjoy the beauty of Scottish scenery, to drink Scotch whisky and to see Scotsmen wearing kilts (格子呢褶裥短裙) and playing bagpipes (风笛).

Wales is very close to the most densely populated parts of central England. Its entire area is 20,780 square kilometers and it covers less than 9% of the whole island. The capital of Wales is Cardiff (加的夫). The longest river of Britain, the Severn River (塞文河), originates in mid-Wales and flows through western England to the Bristol Channel (布里斯托尔海峡) and the Atlantic Ocean. Wales has been dominated by England longer than the other parts. However, it retains a powerful sense of its difference from England. Its own language, Welsh, is spoken by about 20% of the population, much more than those who speak Gaelic (盖尔语) in Scotland and Ireland.

Northern Ireland is the smallest of the four parts, both in population and in area. It has an area of 14,135 square kilometers and occupies the northern one-sixth of the island of Ireland. The capital of Northern Ireland is Belfast (贝尔法斯特). Lough Neagh (内伊湖), the largest lake in the British Isles, is located in northern Ireland. It covers an area of 396 square kilometers.



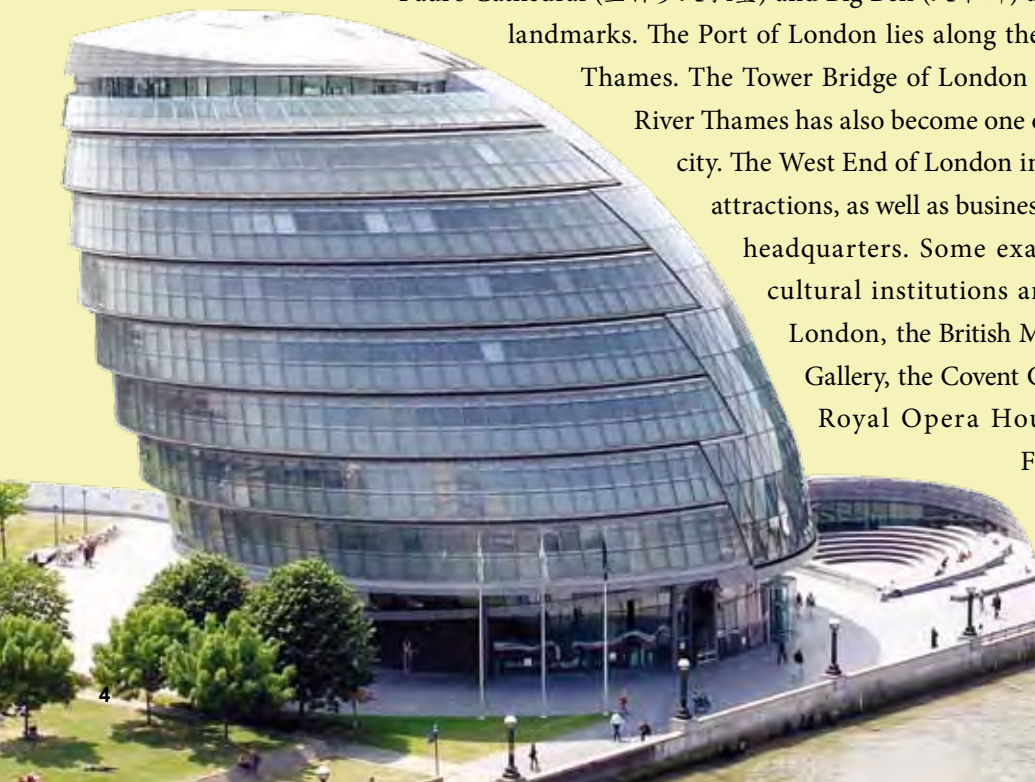
## Climate

The climate of Britain is classified as temperate, with warm summers, cool winters and plentiful precipitation (降雨量) throughout the year. Its climate is generally mild and temperate due to its proximity (接近) to the Atlantic Ocean and the warming of the waters around the British Isles by the Gulf Stream (墨西哥湾流). The summer temperature is usually around 20°C, with the high rarely going above 32°C. The average temperature in January is around 0°C and seldom falls below -10°C, even in northern Scotland.

The climate in Britain has three principal features. The first is the frequent fog that occurs in winter, for which London is famous. The second is the large number of rainy days. The third is its instability or changeability. Indeed, during a hot day in July the temperature can be the same as a mild day in January.

## Major Cities

**London**, the capital of both England and the United Kingdom, is the political, industrial, cultural and financial center of the country. It is one of the world's leading banking and financial centers. Buckingham Palace (白金汉宫), Guildhall (市政厅), St. Paul's Cathedral (圣保罗大教堂) and Big Ben (大本钟) are some of the city's landmarks. The Port of London lies along the banks of the River Thames. The Tower Bridge of London (伦敦塔桥) over the River Thames has also become one of the symbols of the city. The West End of London includes many tourist attractions, as well as business and administrative headquarters. Some examples of London's cultural institutions are the University of London, the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Covent Garden (科芬园), the Royal Opera House and the Royal Festival Hall.



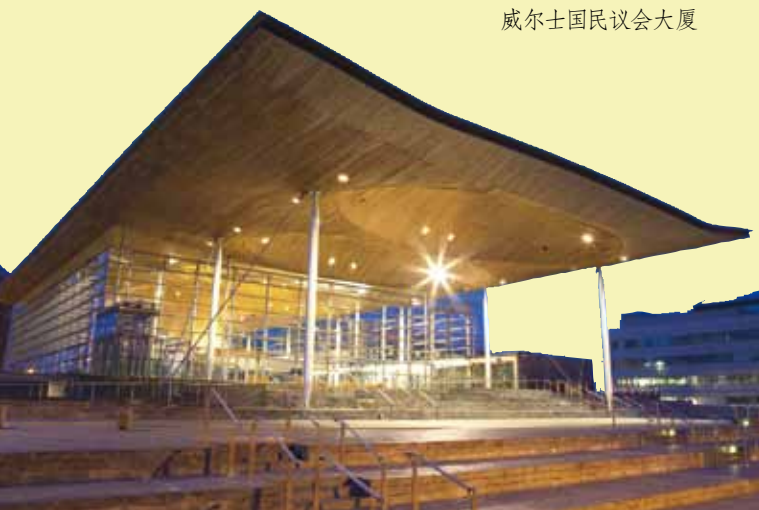
伦敦市政厅

**Edinburgh** is the capital of Scotland. Located on a river, the city is stunningly beautiful and its architecture is renowned the world over. Edinburgh is Scotland's administrative, financial, legal, medical and insurance center. It is also famous for the University of Edinburgh, one of the top-rated research universities in Britain.

爱丁堡大学老学院



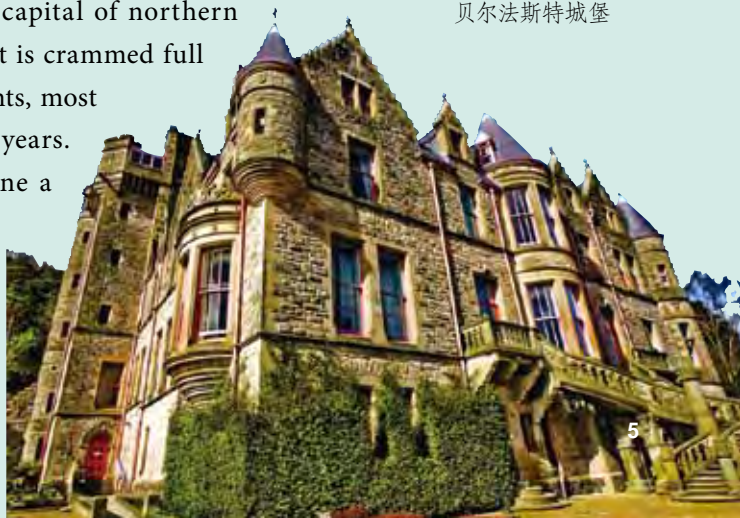
威尔士国民议会大厦



**Cardiff** is Europe's youngest capital city and has been the capital city of Wales since 1955. The city has undergone an enormous amount of urban regeneration (重建) and restoration and has recently become one of the most fashionable cities in Britain. With modern shopping centers, historic Victorian shopping arcades (室内购物商场), an impressive selection of hotels, world-class restaurants and a trendy waterfront area, Cardiff has become a popular city attracting thousands of visitors each year from home and abroad.

**Belfast** is the largest city and the capital of northern Ireland. As an important historic city, it is crammed full of spectacular landmarks and monuments, most of which date back many hundreds of years. In recent years this city has undergone a remarkable transformation. Many areas have been redeveloped, new restaurants and hotels have been opened, and impressive new shopping areas have been built.

贝尔法斯特城堡



## II. People

Britain has a population of about 63 million (2012). Its overall population density is among the highest in the world. About 53 million people live in England, with nearly 8 million in the capital. The rest are distributed in Scotland (around 5.2 million), Wales (around 3.1 million), Northern Ireland (around 1.8 million).

The majority of the population is descendants of the Anglo-Saxons\*, a Germanic people from Europe who went to England between the 5th and 6th centuries. These people settled in England and drove the native Celtic people (凯尔特人) to the mountainous areas of Wales and Scotland. Their language became the official language of the country.

Most people in Wales and Scotland are descendants of the Celtic people who were the earliest known inhabitants of Britain. The Irish people are also of Celtic origin.

Besides the early groups from Europe, Britain has a considerable number of Italians, Greeks, Australians and New Zealanders who have settled in the country as permanent residents. In addition, there is a large number of immigrants from Africa and Asia. Most of them come from the former colonies of the British Empire, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (孟加拉国), the Caribbean Islands and a number of African countries. All these immigrants have made Britain one of the most culturally diverse countries in Europe. In London, for instance, it is estimated that more than 300 languages and dialects are spoken.

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\* Anglo-Saxons: 盎格鲁-撒克逊人，属于日耳曼民族，包括盎格鲁人 (the Angles)、撒克逊人 (the Saxons)、朱特人 (the Jutes) 等。



### III. The English Language

English is a member of the Indo-European family of languages (印欧语系). This broad family includes most of the European languages spoken today. English is in the Germanic group of this family. This group began as a common language about 3,000 years ago and was later split into three distinct subgroups: East Germanic, North Germanic and West Germanic. English evolved from the West Germanic group. The development of the English language can be divided into three periods: Old English, Middle English and Modern English.

#### Old English

The Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes began populating the British Isles in the 5th and 6th centuries. They spoke a mutually intelligible language—now called Old English. They drove the original Celtic-speaking inhabitants out of what is now England into Scotland, Wales and Ireland, leaving a few Celtic words behind. The Celtic languages survive today in the Gaelic language of Scotland and Ireland, and in Welsh of Wales.

Old English was strongly influenced by Old Norse (古斯堪的纳维亚语) spoken by the Vikings (北欧海盗) and was closely related to the German and Dutch languages. The introduction of Christianity added the first wave of Latin and Greek words to the language. The Old English period ended with the Norman Conquest\*, when the language was influenced by the French-speaking Normans.

\* Norman Conquest: 诺曼征服，指诺曼底公爵 1066 年对英格兰的军事征服。

## Middle English



征服者威廉

William the Conqueror (征服者威廉), the Duke of Normandy (诺曼底公爵), invaded and conquered England and the Anglo-Saxons in 1066.

In the early part of this period, French, spoken by the Normans, replaced English as the official language in England, while English was only used by the lower class. Numerous French words came into the English vocabulary. One interesting phenomenon was that the animals began to have different names from their meat because they were raised by servants who spoke English and so kept the English names. The meat gained a French name when it was served to the French-speaking masters. For example, “pig” became “pork”, “sheep” became “mutton” and “cattle” became “beef”.

In 1204, King John lost the province of Normandy to the King of France. Norman nobles of England began to estrange from their French cousins and to adopt a modified English as their native tongue. After the Black Death\* (1347-1351), the laboring and merchant classes grew in economic and social importance, and English increased in importance compared to French. English evolved gradually into what is now referred to as Middle English.

## Modern English

From the late 15th century onward, the English language changed further into what is now described as Modern English. The printing press was introduced to England in 1476 by William Caxton, who brought standardization to English. The dialect of London became the standard. Spelling and grammar became fixed. The first English dictionary was published in 1604. Samuel Johnson’s dictionary—*A Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755, was influential in establishing a standard form of spelling.

English continued to assimilate foreign words, especially from Latin and Greek, throughout the Renaissance (文艺复兴). Despite some differences in vocabulary, the written material from the early 17th century, such as the works of William Shakespeare and the King James Bible (英王詹姆士钦定版《圣经》), is considered to be in Modern English.

\* Black Death: 黑死病, 14 世纪蔓延于欧亚两洲的鼠疫。

The Industrial Revolution and the rise of technology necessitated the introduction of new words in modern English for things and ideas that had not previously existed. Words like “oxygen”, “protein”, “nuclear” and “vaccine” were created using Latin and Greek roots. English roots were used for such terms as “horsepower”, “airplane” and “typewriter”. This proliferation (激增) of neologisms (新词) continues today, perhaps most visible in the field of electronics and computers. “Byte”, “cyber-”, “hard drive” and “microchip” (芯片) are good examples.

What is more, the rise of the British Empire and the growth of global trade led to the assimilation of words from many other languages. Hindi (印地语) and the other languages of the Indian subcontinent (印度次大陆) provided many words, such as “pundit” (专家), “shampoo”, “pajamas” and “juggernaut” (不可抗拒的强大力量). Virtually every language on Earth has made a contribution to the development of English, whether slight, as in the case of the Finnish word “sauna” and the Japanese word “tycoon” (大亨), or vast, as with French and Latin.

## Standard English

Standard English is based on the speech of the upper class of southeastern England, adopted as a broadcasting standard in the British media. It is used as much in printed materials as is normally taught at schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also called “the Queen’s English” or “BBC English”, and has become the language preferred by the educated. It has developed and has been promoted as a model for the correct British English. Standard English also refers to the norm carried overseas for non-native speakers learning English.

Today, Standard English is codified to the extent that the grammar and vocabulary of English are much the same everywhere in the world where English is used. The variation among local standards is really quite minor, so that the Singaporean, South African and Irish varieties differ only slightly so far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned.

At present, it is estimated that a third of the world’s population use English. It has become a universal lingua franca\*.

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\* lingua franca: 母语不同的人之间使用的通用语。

## Exercises

### I. Read the following statements and decide whether they are true (T) or false (F).

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. People in different parts of Britain like to use the name England to refer to their country.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The Severn River is the longest river of Britain, which originates in Wales and flows through western England.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Today more than half of the people in Wales still speak the ancient Welsh language.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. In terms of population and area, Northern Ireland is the second largest part of Britain.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Although the climate in Britain is generally mild, the temperature in northern Scotland often falls below  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  in January.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The majority of the people in Britain are descendants of the Anglo-Saxons.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The Celtic people were the earliest known inhabitants of Britain.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. English evolved into what is now described as Modern English from the late 16th century.

### II. Choose the best answer to complete each of the following statements.

1. The two main islands of the British Isles are \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Great Britain and Ireland                      B. Great Britain and Scotland  
C. Great Britain and Wales                      D. Great Britain and England
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is the capital city of Scotland.
- A. Belfast    B. Edinburgh  
C. London    D. Cardiff
3. Among the four parts of the United Kingdom, \_\_\_\_\_ is the smallest.
- A. England    B. Scotland  
C. Wales    D. Northern Ireland
4. English belongs to the \_\_\_\_\_ group of the Indo-European family of languages.
- A. Celtic    B. Norman  
C. Germanic    D. Roman



5. The introduction of Christianity to Britain added the first element of \_\_\_\_\_ words to English.
- A. Danish and Finnish                      B. Dutch and German  
C. French and Italian                      D. Latin and Greek
6. The evolution of Middle English was reinforced by the \_\_\_\_\_ influence.
- A. Norman                                      B. Dutch  
C. German                                      D. Danish
7. Samuel Johnson's dictionary was influential in establishing a standard form of \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. grammar                                      B. handwriting  
C. spelling                                      D. pronunciation
8. At present, nearly \_\_\_\_\_ of the world's population communicate in English.
- A. half    B. a quarter  
C. one-third                                      D. one-fifth

**III. Give brief answers to the following questions.**

1. Why do tourists from all over the world like to go to Scotland?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many periods can the development of the English language be divided into and what are they?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
3. Why did English become more important after the Black Death?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**IV. State your understanding of the following questions.**

1. Who are the British people?
2. What is Standard English?

○ **Learn and Check**

**Composing parts:** England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland

**Climate:** temperate, with warm summers, cool winters and plentiful precipitation throughout the year

**Major cities:** London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast

**People:** about 63 million (2012), the majority of the population being descendants of the Anglo-Saxons

**Language:** English. The development of the English language can be divided into three periods: Old English, Middle English and Modern English.