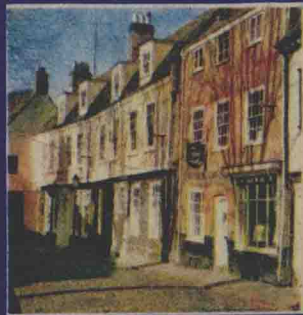
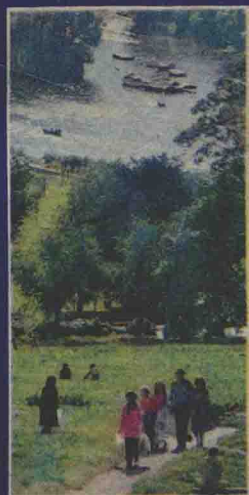


# Britain

Richard Musman

# Today




Longman Background Books

# Britain Today

Richard Musman



Longman 

Longman Group Limited  
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# To the teacher

*Britain Today* has as its first aim to provide a social and cultural background to English language teaching. As the title implies, the background is that of contemporary Britain. It covers a wide range of subjects which are essential to a full understanding of what British people say and write, as well as the way they behave. The social and cultural background presented in this book has two aspects: national character and national institutions.

All observers agree that the British character is in many respects very diverse, and that class distinctions are important in British society. The best that can be done, therefore, is to portray national character through a description, as well as through the words and actions, of a number of more or less representative individuals from different social backgrounds. (There will probably be occasions when you will need to remind your students that the characters in this book are individuals as well as representatives of types, in order to guard against the formation of rigid stereotypes or sweeping generalisations about the British national character.)

Suggestions now follow which cover use of the reading texts, the additional notes, and the exercise material, as well as the accompanying cassette.

## 1 Elicitation

Your students may already know—or *think* they know—quite a lot about some British institutions. It is always worthwhile eliciting the real extent of their knowledge—or misinformation—before commencing to read a new section of *Britain Today*. You could list the main points that come out of this discussion on the board, and after reading the book, go through the list again, marking the various points “True” or “False” etc. as the text has shown them to be. (In a few cases you may possibly not find the necessary information in the book, and then you might like to set a research assignment.) If your students cannot manage to conduct this elicitation session in English, it would be sensible to hold it (or some parts of it) in the mother tongue, rather than deprive any student of the chance to participate.

## 2 Presentation of characters

There are two types of character in the book: real figures in public life like Queen Elizabeth and the Beatles; and imaginary people, like the Blakeney. During the elicitation stage, you could find out what facts your students already know about the real people and you can ask them to make intelligent guesses about the attitudes and behaviour of the fictional ones.

It would also be a good idea, in your first lesson with the book, to go through the list of characters on page xi and find out the students' ideas of what each character will be like, before reading the extended descriptions which follow on pages 1 to 14.

### 3 Choice of sequence of topics

If you decide to teach the various sections of *Britain Today* out of sequence, or even miss one or other section out, no very serious problems will occur, though you will meet occasional cross-references. This said, the book was written for use in the printed sequence, and unless you have any strong reasons for not doing so, we suggest you keep to it.

### 4 New words and vocabulary extension

New vocabulary is necessarily extensive in such a book as this, but a great deal of it is explained or paraphrased within the text. It should therefore not be necessary to present new words before reading the texts. A few words are asterisked, and the glossary at the end of each unit explains these. The glossary should not be regarded as a selection of the most important words to be added to the students' active vocabulary. Rather the reverse, a passive understanding of them is all that is required. Words which are really worth learning for productive use have been picked out and included in the different types of vocabulary-building exercise, i.e. *Understanding words* or *Write sentences using the following words*; and some of the exercises in which words in column B have to be matched with, or added to, words in column A. (The remainder of the last type of exercise are concerned with reading comprehension.)

### 5 Reading comprehension

Although the comprehension exercises appear at the end of each main topic, it should be noted that many of them refer exclusively to one short section of the whole topic, and can therefore be used immediately after that section has been read.

Comprehension exercises are provided in a variety of formats:

- true or false?
- finish the incomplete sentences (ending *because* or *because of*) with the correct reason
- matching the correct parts of sentences given in two boxes
- completing dialogues based on an incident narrated in the text.

Most of these exercises are equally suitable for either classwork or homework.

### 6 The 'Notes' section

These additional notes, e.g. population statistics of the UK, are mainly intended for your own and your students' reference, as well as for project work and other assignments, and will not normally be read in class.

## **7 *Listening to the cassette for functional intonation***

The dialogue in each unit is recorded on the cassette. This is particularly valuable as a means of making the characters seem more real and giving the students insight into their behaviour, as well as into their reactions to particular issues. Since many of the chosen issues are emotive ones, there are frequent opportunities for students to hear anger, frustration, sarcasm, irony, and enthusiasm. Intonation associated with dialectical functions such as persuasion, acceptance, doubt and disbelief, rejection, even coercion, come across very strongly on this cassette.

## **8 *Discussion***

The book introduces plenty of stimulating and even controversial topics, such as the equality of men and women. Discussion of these topics may be handled in two ways. All students, whether or not they have first-hand experience of Britain, can make comparisons with people, conditions and institutions in their own country. This will be particularly interesting when the class is made up of students from several different countries. For students who have already been to Britain, the text may also be compared with the students' own experience of life and people there.

Discussion will often benefit from preparation in groups or pairs.

## **9 *Note-making***

Certain questions, e.g. What role does the Church have in society today? (see Unit 8) provide good opportunities for students to develop their note-making skills. You could allow students to write, on a piece of paper measuring not more than 5 cm square, the essential facts which they can discover in the text, and then use this scrap of paper as a cue when delivering a short speech about (for example) the Church.

## **10 *Project work***

There is a natural extension from this kind of exercise into project work. By using reference sources, such as encyclopaedias, and by contacting embassies, consulates, travel agencies, and offices of commercial firms, students can gather extra information which can form the subject of a class display. For example, travel agents' offices contain a considerable amount of free material which would enable students to illustrate the section on holiday areas and tourist attractions in Britain.

References in the text to the BBC World Service and to the various British newspapers might be a suitable moment to encourage students to listen to or read these, and report on what they have heard or read. An assignment of this kind needs to yield results within a short period of time, otherwise students' motivation may evaporate. You should set the students some finite task, such as reporting on any references that have been made to their own country during one week by British newspapers or the BBC.

You may also be in a position to encourage correspondence with pen-friends or to organise an exchange visit with a school in Britain.



## II Written composition

A limited amount of written composition work is also provided for, chiefly in the form of expanding a summary, or rewriting a piece of narrative as a dialogue. These types of exercise are particularly suitable as homework.

# The characters

**Gwyn Williams** (aged 45), a factory worker

**Mary Williams** (43), his wife

**Jim Williams** (17), their youngest son—works in a fish market

**Gareth Williams** (18), Jim's brother—still at school

**Christine** (19), Gareth's girlfriend—a typist

**Ian Macdonald** (28), a bank clerk

**Peggy Macdonald** (27), his wife—a secretary

**Sir Eric Blakeney** (64), a country gentleman and managing director of an industrial firm

**Hester (Lady Blakeney)** (55), his wife

**Susan Blakeney** (20), their daughter—a student

**Charles Blakeney** (32), their son—director in the family business

**Anne** (25), his Australian wife

**Penny Martin** (23), a friend of Susan's—a photographer's model

**Jeremy Martin** (22), Penny's brother and Susan's boyfriend—of no fixed job

**Herbert Perkins** (44), owner of a supermarket chain

**Culver Jones** (50), an American friend of Charles Blakeney

**Carlos Garcia** (45), a South American friend of Charles Blakeney

**George and Phyllis Blandford**, neighbours of the Blakeney's

**Leonard Townsend** (32), a television interviewer

**Elizabeth Townsend** (29), his wife—a social worker

**Roy Martindale** (45), an aristocrat

*Characters taking part in radio and television interviews and discussions with Leonard Townsend:* The headmistress of a primary school, the secretary of a West Indian Association, an Indian doctor, a politician with right-wing tendencies, an American professor, a sociologist, a councillor in a new town, a chief inspector of police, a militant left-wing student, a Church of England parson, three students from three different universities, a television dramatist, the president of the "Keep Television Clean" society, two Conservative MPs, one Labour MP and one Social Democrat MP.

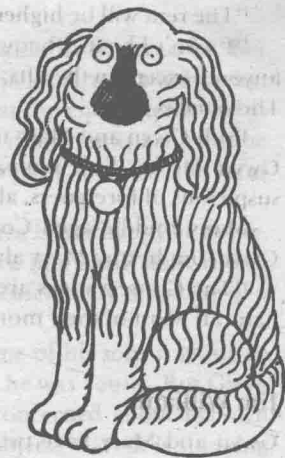




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# Introducing the British



## Gwyn and Mary Williams

The Williams family live in the East End of London—in a street of terraced houses called “Royal Row”. Royal Row, built during Queen Victoria’s reign, is far from “royal”. The once yellow bricks are now black with the dirt, smoke and rain of more than a hundred years. Each house has two small rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. There is no bathroom, and the toilet is in the backyard. All the houses in the street are due to be pulled down next year.

However, a visitor to Royal Row would be deceived by first appearances. If he looked closely at the children playing in the dusty street he would find that most of them were well dressed and well fed. Among the old second-hand cars parked outside the front doors, he would see new Minis and Volkswagens, and if Mary Williams invited him inside number 10 he would find that the brightly-flowered wallpaper, the red and orange carpets, and the shiny brown furniture all looked new and spotlessly clean.

Mary has a large china dog sitting on a table in the front room, just under the window. It looks out into the street, and at night the curtains are drawn round it so that passersby can see and admire it.

“Where’ll we put it in the flat? We’ll be on the seventh floor!”

Gwyn and Mary are being re-housed in a new block of flats which already towers above them a few hundred yards away. The building stands among pleasant gardens and from their living-room windows they will have a fine view of the River Thames.

“Why are they building all those skyscrapers?” asks Gwyn. “Why don’t they give us a council house that’s got a garden back and front?”

“That’s what I asked the man from the council this morning,” Mary replies. “‘Why don’t you build more council houses?’ I say. ‘We *are* building council houses,’ he says, ‘but if we build too many of them, London’ll soon join up with Scotland!’ ‘Very funny!’ I say. ‘Well, you can laugh,’ he says, ‘but there’s more room in the sky than on the ground. That’s why we’re building blocks of flats.’ ‘I don’t want any of your flats,’ I say. ‘What!’ he says. ‘You mean you’d rather stay in *this* place?’ ‘What do you mean, “place”! It’s not a “place”. It’s our home. We came here the day we were married.’”

"The rent will be higher in that new place," says Gwyn.

"I won't like it, I know," says Mary. "Up on that seventh floor I'll never see anyone, except in the lifts, and they're always breaking down. They're filthy, too. The smell is awful."

Both Gwyn and Mary tend to dislike and resist change of any kind, especially Gwyn. He has little sympathy with modern young people and is inclined to be suspicious of foreigners, although he would help anyone who was in trouble.

Many middle-aged Conservatives have the same attitudes and prejudices as Gwyn, but he and Mary always vote for the Labour Party.

"The Conservatives are for the bosses," says Gwyn. "Of course they are! It's natural! Most of their money comes from big business."

## Jim Williams

Gwyn and Mary have two sons, but Jim and his brother Gareth have nothing in common. Jim left school as soon as he could, at sixteen, and is already earning a fair wage as a packer in the fish market. He is both jealous and scornful of Gareth—jealous because Gareth is cleverer than he, and scornful because, although Gareth is the elder, he is still at school and is not earning any money. Jim keeps himself to himself. He spends much of his time cleaning and repairing his motorbike.

"He never tells me anything!" complains Gwyn. "I'd like to know what he's doing—when he's not with his motorbike!"

"Mrs Smith says she's seen him with Rob Milligan and his gang."

"That lot! They ought to be locked up. I'm not having him going about with them. I'll talk to him, I will!"

"It won't do any good. You know it won't."

Jim is bored, bored by his job and bored by the long hours when he is free. That is why he rides his motorbike at 160 kph (= kilometres per hour) on the motorway, and that is why he goes about with the Milligan gang.

*Jim, Gareth and Christine.*



## Gareth and Christine

Gareth Williams is ambitious. He does not yet know what he wants to be, but he has been told by his teachers that he will certainly win a place at a university, probably Oxford or Cambridge. He is leaving school at the end of term and is now waiting for the examination results. He knows that if his results are good he will not have to worry about the cost of going to university, because the local council will pay for everything.

Yet Gareth has problems which worry him deeply. He is not happy at home. For the last year he has had to do his scholarship work in a small dark room, surrounded by the oily parts of Jim's motorbike and deafened by the noise of a transistor radio.

Gareth is fond of his father. Gwyn is pleased that one of his sons is going to have a better chance to get on in life than he had when he was young. But Gwyn left school when he was fourteen, and is now more concerned about his own future at the factory where he works than about the subjects Gareth is studying for his exam.

Gareth's relationship with his mother is less satisfactory. He finds her love for him and her pride difficult to bear. She never leaves him alone.

"I've got a special dinner for you today, Garry!"—"Come and give your old Mum a kiss!"—"Isn't he good-looking, Gwyn! Just like his Dad used to be!"—"Aren't you clever, Garry, to know all those things!"

There are times when Gareth runs out of the house for fear of exploding and hurting his mother's feelings.

"You haven't shaved again this morning, Garry!"

"No, Mum. I'm going to grow a beard!"

Gareth intends to grow a beard when he leaves school, chiefly because he knows his mother doesn't want him to. It is his way of rebelling, the first step towards breaking ties with a home for which he feels little sympathy.

He usually makes his escape to his girlfriend, Christine. Christine is a typist in the office of a local store. She has long legs, long fair hair, and she laughs a great deal—she often laughs at Gareth when he is too serious. Both her parents are school teachers in a primary school in the East End, one of the poorest parts of London. She has no brothers or sisters, but she has an understanding with her parents which Gareth envies. Gareth and Christine spend long hours together in coffee bars, at discotheques or walking in the parks. They discuss many things, including their parents.

"There isn't so much a generation gap\* in this country as an education gap," said Gareth. "Take your parents! I can talk to *them* about my work and politics and things. It's impossible at home."

"Why do you worry such a lot?" said Christine. "Take your Mum and Dad as they are! After all, you don't talk about your work with me—or about politics, for that matter!"

## The Macdonalds

The Macdonalds live in a north London suburb. Peggy travels to the City<sup>1</sup> each day by underground—a tiring journey that takes three-quarters of an hour. Ian

is a clerk in a local bank. The Macdonalds married young and have seven-year-old twins, Douglas and Jane.

Peggy, a trained secretary, went back to work when the children were three. She has been with her boss, a City businessman, for two years, and is one of the thousands of married women in Britain doing a full-time job. Like many such women she has long been critical of the attitude of male employers towards women workers.

But at the end of 1975 there were new laws concerning women's employment. Now Peggy must receive the same pay as men doing the same job. She must also have the same opportunities for promotion, or of being accepted for any job for which she is qualified. Employers who advertise jobs usually reserved for men (engineers, builders, lorry drivers etc.) must now word their advertisements "man/woman wanted" or "person wanted". Otherwise they can be fined.

Peggy is able to work full-time only because Ian's mother lives with them. Mrs Macdonald helps with the housework and the care of the twins, and she sometimes annoys Peggy by telling her that she's too soft with them.

Ian's good humour and good sense help to keep the family peace. Ian is *too* good-humoured, in Peggy's opinion. She wishes he was more ambitious, but Ian is quite content to work at the bank from nine till five, and has no desire to get the necessary qualifications to become a manager. He is, in fact, more interested in his garden than in his work. Like so many Englishmen he is out in his garden

*The Macdonalds live in a north London suburb. Peggy travels to the City by underground.*





in all weathers and at all hours, even planting his seedlings by lamp light if necessary.

Peggy admires his garden, but she sometimes complains.

"I love your new red roses, Ian, but you've dug up so much of the lawn that there's no room left for the children. They're always going next door to play with the Painter children now."

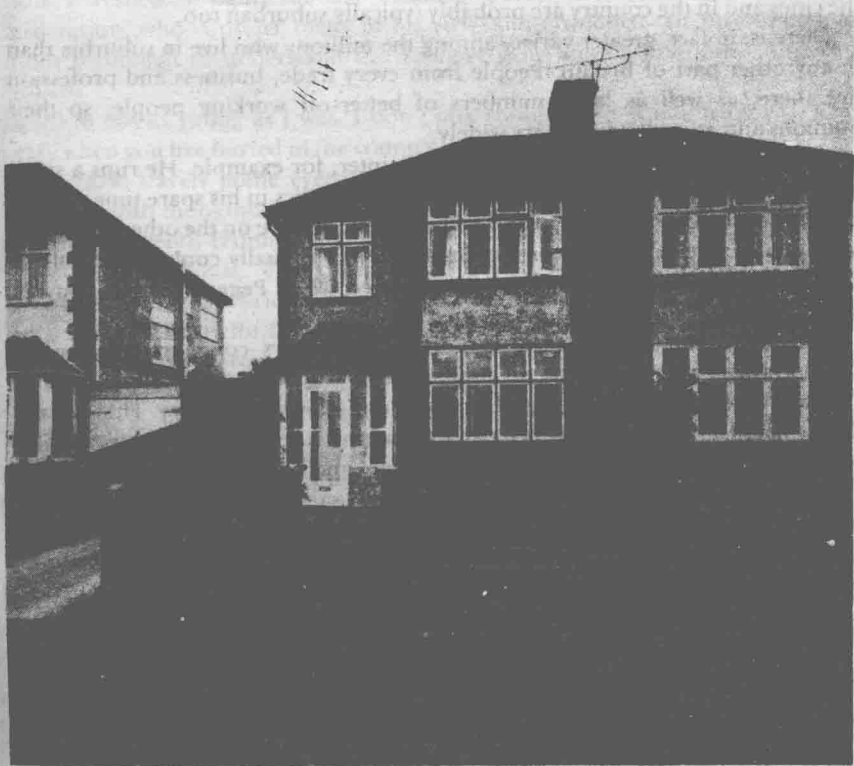
"Well, they can't do any harm in Sid's garden."

Sid Painter's garden is the only one in Woodbury Avenue that is not neat and tidy and gay with flowers. The fences which separate the gardens are boundary lines and when Ian looks over them he sometimes makes envious or self-satisfied comparisons.

As Peggy and Ian are out all day during the week, it is usually Ian's mother who keeps them informed about their neighbours' activities. She misses little of what is going on in the street.

"The Browns have just got a new car. Old Mrs Potter says it's a foreign car and it's very expensive. Mr Brown must be earning more money than you do, Ian! Oh, Peggy, do you know what? Mavis Pink didn't go to work this morning. A

*The semi-detached houses in Woodbury Avenue have neat and tidy gardens.*



very smart young man in a sports car came and took her out. Who do you think it can be?"

The houses in Woodbury Avenue and in the neighbouring streets and districts are not all alike, but they have a style which could be called typically suburban—because there are houses like them in every suburb of every town and city in Britain. This style is difficult to describe. In fact, it is really a mixture of styles, including at one extreme, very modern, low, box-like buildings with lots of glass, and at the other, imitations and variations of architecture of past centuries. The great majority of suburban houses are privately owned and were built by speculative builders (building companies looking for quick profits).

The houses in Woodbury Avenue are semi-detached, that is to say they are joined together in pairs. The semi-detached is one of the most characteristic houses of Britain, and is far more common in the suburbs or outskirts of a town than it is in the town centre, or in the country.

Strictly speaking, "suburban" means "on the edge of the city". Suburbia is neither town nor country, but the word suburban has come to suggest something else. Like the French word, *bourgeois*, it now suggests a state of mind, an attitude towards life. Suburban people, like the French *bourgeoisie*, work in towns and are for the most part comfortably off. They are sometimes accused of being conservative, conventional, narrow-minded, unintellectual and snobbish; but if being typically suburban means all these things, then many people who live in the cities and in the country are probably typically suburban too.

There is, in fact, greater variety among the millions who live in suburbia than in any other part of Britain. People from every trade, business and profession live there, as well as large numbers of better-off working people, so their opinions and attitudes differ very widely.

Take the Macdonalds' neighbour, Sid Painter, for example. He runs a small art magazine, grows his hair long, and helps alcoholics in his spare time. He is a member of the Communist Party. The Jacksons, who live on the other side of the Macdonalds, are extremely conventional. They continually complain about the noise which the twins make, and are shocked when Peggy sunbathes in her bikini.

Not surprisingly, most of Britain's floating voters come from suburbia. Floating voters are people who do not have any particular political loyalties: they "float" between the parties instead of "swimming" with one party. They usually do not make up their minds which party to support until the last minute, and it is often they who decide the results both at general and local elections.

"I don't think I'll vote at the next election," said Peggy, after listening to a political talk on the radio. "It won't make any difference to us which party gets in."

"Everybody ought to vote," said Ian.

"Well, if I do, I'll vote Labour. Their ideas on education are better."

Ian, who always votes Conservative, disagreed, but they did not quarrel. They rarely argue about politics.



*Sir Eric Blakeney enjoys shooting. His wife, Hester, prefers gardening.*

## Sir Eric Blakeney<sup>2</sup>

Sir Eric is managing director of a large machine-tool company. He is about to retire, and is going to hand over the business to his son, Charles, next year. He is still a respected figure in the business world, even among the younger generation, who consider many of his views old-fashioned. Sir Eric sometimes finds it difficult to understand the younger generation and admits this to his friends.

"I'm not as young as I was. I don't mix enough with young people. It's not easy when you live buried in the country, as I do."

Sir Eric travels home every evening to his house in the country on trains crowded with thousands of other people who work in offices. Blakeney Hall is a large, seventeenth-century building standing in a park full of oak trees which are as old as the house. The park is surrounded by woods well stocked with pheasants, which Sir Eric and his friends enjoy shooting during the season. Yet, in spite of his liking for blood sports, Sir Eric has a real love of wild animals. He is an enthusiastic bird-watcher and is a member of the Wild Life Preservation Society. He is an open air man with few intellectual interests.

As one might expect, Sir Eric is a Conservative. His friends are Conservatives too—at least, it would never occur to Sir Eric that they weren't. He is proud of his country's past and sad, sometimes angry, when ancient traditions disappear or are attacked.

His daughter, Susan, who is twelve years younger than Charles, is continually surprising and worrying him with her different sense of values and her different way of thinking.

"The young people of today don't seem to have any sense of responsibility," he said to his wife, Hester. "Take that long-haired boyfriend of Susan's—Jeremy something or other. Doesn't he have any pride? Doesn't he ever look at himself in the mirror? And who does he think he is, dragging Susan off to all those demonstrations?"