

The United Kingdom : Overview

Overview: The United Kingdom (in full: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) is located off the northwestern coast of mainland Europe and consists of four geographic and historical parts: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The sea surrounds the United Kingdom, except for its land border with the Irish Republic. To the south of England and between the United Kingdom and France is the English Channel. The North Sea lies to the east. To the west of Wales and Northern England is the Irish Sea, while western Scotland and the northwestern coast of Northern Ireland face the Atlantic Ocean. The national capital is **London**, situated on the **River Thames** in the southeastern corner of England.

Even UK citizens frequently mix up the names of the **United Kingdom**, **Great Britain**, and **England**. However, **England** is just one country within the Kingdom. **Great Britain** comprises **England**, **Wales**, and **Scotland**. Whereas the **United Kingdom** comprises **Great Britain and Northern Ireland** (as shown on the map below). People sometimes use the term Britain to refer to the entire United Kingdom.

Figure 1: Shows the difference between England, Britain, and the United Kingdom in the map below.

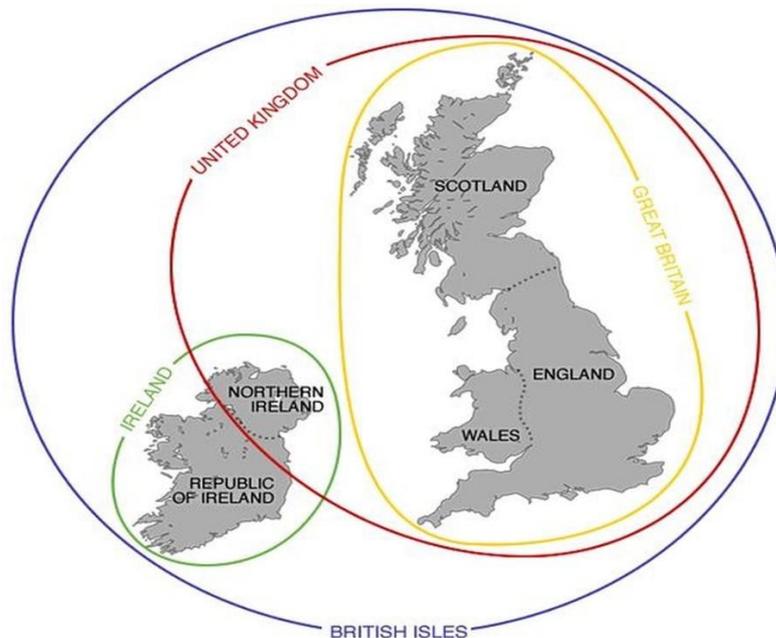
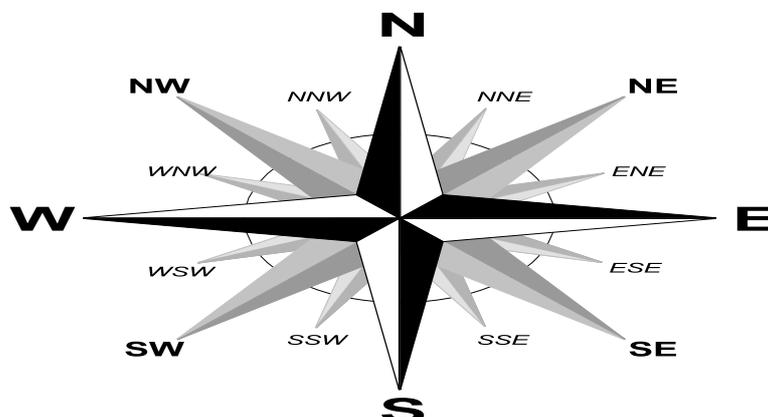


Figure 2: The Compass of the four cardinal directions.



I- Prehistoric Britain:

Archaeologists and historians use the term "**pre-history**" to refer to a time in a people's history before they used a written language. In Britain, the term **prehistory** refers to the period before Britain became part of the Roman Empire in AD 43. The prehistoric period in Britain lasted for hundreds of thousands of years and this long period of time is usually divided into: **The Stone Age** (Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic), **the Bronze Age**, and the **Iron Age**. Each of these periods might also be subdivided into early, middle, and late.

II- A Brief Introduction to Pre-historic Britain:

Britain has not always been an island. **It became one only after the end of the Ice Age.** The temperature rose and the ice melted, flooding the lower-lying land that is now the North Sea and the English Channel. The Ice Age was not just one long equally cold period. There were warmer times when ice cap retreated, and colder periods when the ice cap reached as far South as the River Thames. The first evidence of human life is a few stone tools, dating from one of the warmer periods, about 250.000 BC. These simple objects show that there were two different kinds of inhabitants. The earlier group made their tools from flakes of flint. The other group made tools from a central core of flint.

However, the ice advanced again and Britain became hardly habitable until another milder period, probably around 50.000 BC. During this time, a new type of human being seems to have arrived, who was the ancestor of the modern British. These people looked similar to the British, but were probably smaller and had a lifespan of only thirty years.

Around 10.000 BC, as the Ice Age drew to a close Britain was peopled by small groups of hunters, gatherers, and fishers. Few had settled homes, and they seemed to have followed herds of deer which provided them with food and clothing. **By the 5000 BC, Britain had finally become an island**, and had also become heavily forested. For the wanderer-hunter culture this was a disaster, for the cold-loving deer and other animals on which they lived largely died out.

✓ Remember:

✚ The Stone Age period was divided into three parts, **Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic:**

a- Paleolithic (c. 800.000 BC- 10.500 BC): This is the longest period in prehistory and is often divided up by archaeologists into the lower, middle, and upper Paleolithic. It has marked the coldest period known as the Ice Ages. There were warm periods in between and humans came and went depending on the climate.

b- Mesolithic (c. 10.500 BC - 4000 BC; the middle part of the Stone Age): This period of prehistory marked the end of the last Ice Age. Humans returned to Britain as the climate got warmer and followed a hunter-gatherer life style moving around the landscape to find the best sources of seasonal food. Stone continued to be the main material for making tools. Small pieces of flint were set into wood to make spears and harpoons.

c- Neolithic (c. 4000 BC - 2400 BC): the later part of the Stone Age): This is the period when farming was introduced to Britain. People moved from a hunter-gather life style to a life-style based on farming domesticated animals and growing crops. Hunting and gathering continued to be the main material used to make tools through pottery began to appear especially pots for storing, cooking, and eating food.

✚ **Bronze Age (c. 2400 BC - 800 BC):** At the start of the Bronze Age copper started to be used as a material for making tools. This was quickly followed by bronze (an alloy of copper and tin) which is harder and better for making tools and household objects. Roundhouses began to be built and there is evidence for the emergence of social elites and armed conflict.

✚ **Iron Age (c. 800 BC - AD 43):** During this period iron emerged as a key material for making tools. Farming productivity increased and the population grew. Regional groups of people- often known as tribes- emerged. In the late Iron Age, there was growing contact with the Roman Empire which had extended to include Gaul (modern France).

✚ **Roman Empire (AD 43- c. AD 411):** In AD 43 England and Wales became part of the Roman province of the Britannia. Roman rule continued for the next 400 years after which the Anglo-Saxon period began in England.

List of less Frequently used Abbreviations:

A.D.	Anno Domini (in the year of the Lord)
B.C.	Before Christ
b.	Born
cca. /c.	About
i.e.	That is (to say)
cc.	Centuries

List of Frequently used Abbreviations:

CE BCE	Common Era Before Common Era
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Works Cited:

McDowall, David. *An Illustrated History of Britain*. Longman Group UK, 1989.

Prehistoric Britain. The British Museum.