

English for Life in the UK

Episode Ten: Religion in the UK

Welcome to episode 10 of the podcast English for life in UK. This podcast is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St Augustine's Centre in Halifax, Yorkshire. It is intended mainly for our students there but we hope it will also be of use to anyone wanting to improve their English and .. learn more about life in the United Kingdom. The St Augustine's Centre is a charity which provides help, advice and support to all those in need in the local area. In particular we support asylum seekers, refugees and recent migrants. The centre was originally established by the church but is now an independent charity which supports people from all religions and none. This episode focuses on religion, however it does not cover religious beliefs but rather the role of religions in the United Kingdom including festivals and other traditions.

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Mark: Okay so this week's session started with a visitor. So we had.. the Rev John Helliwell, who is the vicar of St Augustine's and is also the chair of the St Augustine's Centre from where we do this recording and where we do our course. And ... we asked John along because the topic today is religion so we thought we'd have somebody whose job it is working in .. within the Church of England and we asked him to talk to us about his job and what he does and how it's organised and .. I certainly found it very interesting and I learned some things from it and I think we all did. So shall we just start by saying something? Christine what did you take from John's session?

Christine: Well I was..I was interested in the different words he was using to describe different aspects of his role. I understand now what I ..I .. what's a priest and what's a vicar. I didn't know that he was both. I thought priest was from different religions so I was very interested to find that people are ordained as priests and then they take different jobs. Most of those priests become vicars and he's a vicar. So his job is a vicar but he is an ordained priest. So I found that very interesting.

Mark: John?

John: He discussed some of the .. the roles that vicars or padres play. They don't just maybe stick to a parish some of them will be padres in the Army or .. they would be ministers in prisons or in hospitals as well. I found that quite interesting, yeah, the range of roles that they take up.

Christine: Yes chaplains. (Yeah that's it) Chaplains in hospitals and prisons.

Mark: I suppose I was struck by just how complex the organisation of the Church of England is in terms of the different terminology but also the different roles people play and I suppose the internal politics, you might say, of how the .. how it is structured. So .. yeah, we have the Queen at the top, as formerly the head of the Church of England; the two archbishops, I didn't even realise that it was the North and the South, for

example. (No) So the Archbishop of York is the North of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury in the South. And the Archbishop of Canterbury, ..as I understand it, is kind of ... 'first among equals', was I think the phrase he used, so more important than York but actually supposed to be equal. Then under that you've got Bishops but then you've got these other roles, the Deacons, and the Vicars and then also the different structures so the parishes at a local level, and the diocese at the larger level, so where we are here that we .. the parish that we're in .. in the St ..the St.. Is it the St Augustine's parish? (Yes, I think so.) I think it is but we are part of the diocese of Leeds which apparently is one of the largest diocese and there are, was it six Bishops or was it four Bishops within the...?

Christine: I think it was six Bishops.

Mark: Six Bishops within the diocese of Leeds. So all very interesting.

Christine: I was interested ... that he said that .. about the percentage of the population locally who follow different religions and I think he said that about 50% of people in Halifax said they were Christian, whereas about 2% of the population in Halifax go to church.

Mark: Yeah.

Christine: And he also said that there's about 14% Muslim and but that ...

Mark: Very small percentage of Hindu and Sikh (and) less than 1% I think he said in Halifax.

Christine: ..Yeah.

John: I found it very interesting when we talked about the difference between the Catholic Church and the Church of England, the Anglican Church. .. So there's many similarities in terms of .. the sacraments, things that happen in church, which to a catholic would look very familiar but they are classed by the Catholic Church as being a Protestant church. But many people within the Anglican tradition would think of themselves as being very close to catholic. So there's.. he described it as a kind of hybrid almost between Protestantism and the established Catholic Church.

Mark: And all of those, and he went on to talk about others as well, are all different churches within the Christian tradition. (Mmm) .. And then John, you talked about the .. the **patron saints** (yeah). Tell us a bit about that.

John: Well, as we were, kind of basing, as we do, a lot of our lessons on the **Life in the UK Study Guide**, so things that will come up in the citizenship test, one of the questions that comes up in the subject of religion is they want people to know the **patron saints** of the constituent countries of the UK ...so we got them to put them in order with the pictures and the descriptions and we learnt, also the days that the **patron saints** are celebrated on.

Mark: So tell us about each one of those John.

John: Well the first one that is on the 1st of March is St David's Day. St David is the **patron saint** of Wales...There is a city in Wales called St Davids, with a Cathedral. And we explained that they would see on the television on the 1st of March .. people would wear daffodils. Welsh people, people of Welsh descent, would wear a daffodil to remember St David and to celebrate, well, Wales.

Mark: A daffodil being a .. a yellow flower that comes up early in the spring, isn't it, every year.

John: And then we moved on to St. Patrick whose saint's day is the 17th of March, Pat..St. Patrick the **patron saint** of Ireland. And we explained that this is a celebration that doesn't just take place in Ireland, it's celebrated right across the UK. It's celebrated New York, Boston, Sydney.

Mark: I was saying..I was saying that I was in Chicago on St Patrick's Day one year and they turned the river green there to celebrate.

John: Green being the colour associated with Ireland and St. Patrick. So we explained about the Irish diaspora. That's a new word that we came across today. So that basically means Irish, people of Irish descent who live all over the world. It's because so many Irish people when we looked at the history of migration and the empire, we .. we know that Irish people moved, for various reasons, to countries all over the world, emigrated. So St. Patrick's Day is celebrated all over the world. We explained wherever you are, whether it's Japan or South Africa or wherever, you'll always find an Irish pub for Saint Patrick's Day on the 17th. We then..

Mark: Perhaps I should say that the word 'diaspora' I think it .. I think it probably began with the Jewish migration but actually now is used to refer to any community of a different country somewhere else in the world that has settled somewhere in a different part of the world. So in fact most of our students are part of a diaspora from their current country of origin. (Yes)

John: And moving in chronological order: so the next one of our **patron saints** was St George ... the patron saint of England. And his day is celebrated on the 23rd of April, which is, when we are looking at literature, is also the birthday and death day of William Shakespeare. That's why we celebrate World Book Day as well on the 23rd of April. And it was interesting, we have a Turkish student in our class so we explained that St George wasn't English. He was in fact from a region that would be in modern day Turkey. And then famous for obviously killing the .. the **mythical** dragon. So we heard a lot about St George and the Dragon. We pointed out as well that ... if you're ever watching Barcelona football club they have St. George's Cross on their badge because St. George is also the **patron saint** of Catalunya.

And last, but by no means least, on the 30th of November we celebrate St Andrew's Day, St Andrew of course being the patron saint of Scotland. We explained .. the reason for the design of the saltire, which is the Scottish flag, is a diagonal cross. St Andrew was crucified on a diagonal cross so that's where the .. the Scottish flag comes from. We went on to talk a little bit about the city of St Andrews and the home of golf and a famous Scottish university.

Christine: Made famous, because Prince William went there... (of course) recently made famous and has become very, even more popular since then.

John: So that was all the **patron saints** covered

Mark: That's good and then Christine you went on and .. did an exercise with them about the different festivals, or some of the different religious festivals that will be celebrated throughout the United Kingdom so .. so tell us about those.

Christine: Yes we talked about, or we talked about, they read about, actually. That's what we did in the class, they read about and then we discussed the main .. Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter. And in this country at Christmas, Christians will go to church but many people, and many people who are not practising Christians go to church just on Christmas day, or on Christmas Eve. But most families in the country will ... give each other presents, they will decorate their tree, a Christmas tree its called, it's like a small pine tree that you bring inside and put presents below it; and have a special meal with turkey and so on. And of course Christmas and the day after which is called 'Boxing Day', they're both bank holidays. So that means certainly the banks are closed but also most businesses take a holiday in this country then. We talked to.. when we were talking about the **patron saints** I didn't mention but they are not bank holidays in this country in the main

John: Except St Patrick's day is a bank holiday in Ireland.

Christine: In Ireland, you're right. ..At Easter is ... celebrates the death of Christ and that's on the Friday .. and then his resurrection when he was ... well his resurrection when he was lifted from the dead on the Sunday. And traditionally in.. in this country people give each other chocolate eggs or painted eggs and often we have egg..egg.. Easter Egg hunts. That's certainly what I had when I was a child and the way I celebrated it with my son.

Mark: We .. we do that with our grandchildren. We hide eggs around the house and the garden and they have to find them.

Christine: And we also looked at .. some other religious festivals that are celebrated widely in the UK that.. that are not Christian festivals. For example: Eid, celebrated by Muslims. There are two Eids: Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Addah. And ..

Mark: What's the difference between those then?

Christine: Eid ul Fitr is at the end of Ramadan so at the end of the month of fasting and it's a time of prayer but also of eating, of feasting. Children like it because they get presents and they get money and it .. it's a time of big celebration.

Mark: And the other Eid?

Christine: The other Eid, Eid ul Adha, is at the time.. it's a time when you.. traditionally you slaughter an animal and it's ... it's at the end of the pilgrimage to .. the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. And so families would traditionally slaughter their own sheep. People would come back to their family. In the UK .. it's .. it's illegal to slaughter your own sheep so that is done in a slaughterhouse but families get together and they have big meals, children get new clothes and there are many community festivals as well. We also talked, very briefly, about Hanukkah one of the Jewish festivals .. which lasts for eight days. It's... this year it's going to run from the 11th to the 18th of December and every day Jewish people will light a new candle. And also we mentioned Vaisakhi, which is a Sikh festival. And actually, having lived in this country all my life, I've never seen Vaisakhi being celebrated so I read about the dancing and the street processions but I have never witnessed them. I might try..

Mark: Diwali is the other one, isn't it?

Christine: Oh yes, thank you and Diwali yes ...That's a Hindu and Sikh Festival. It's called the Festival of light. Typically it involves, well, lighting candles.

John: Quite often there are a lot of fireworks (fireworks yes)

Christine: Yes in big..in big.. in places with large Hindu populations like Leicester, they have huge firework displays.

Mark: OK now the other thing that students need to know a bit about is about some of the other key dates and festivals which aren't necessarily religious. John, what .. what did we include in that?

John: Yeah so there's.. ..again we're referring from the UK .. Study Guide for Life in the UK so some of the things that people need to know about are other festivals and traditions. So there's eight festivals and .. special days that we have from our calendar in the UK that are mentioned. The first one, obviously it's the 1st of January which is New Year's Day. In Scotland it is known as Hogma... well Hogmanay. So we have great celebrations on the evening of 31st of December into the early hours of the 1st of January to welcome in the New Year. In Scotland, traditionally for many people it's a bigger celebration even than Christmas. Up until the 1960s .. Christmas day was not a bank holiday in Scotland. people had to work on Christmas Day which I think many people nowadays found quite unusual but yes so traditionally that's been...

Christine: I remember that.

John: Yeah. So the 1st of January is a bank holiday across the UK and the 2nd of January is also a bank holiday in Scotland. Moving on to the 14th of February, people in the UK celebrate Valentine's Day and that's when lovers and boyfriends and girlfriends, husbands and wives, exchange flowers and cards, chocolates etc. so a day for romance. And sometimes anonymous cards are sent so if you are a secret admirer you might send an anonymous card to the object of your desire on the 14th of February. Obviously a lot of money made for florists and card companies so very commercialised. Some people are quite critical and think it's perhaps over commercialised. On the 1st of April we celebrate a day known as April Fools' Day. So that's celebrated in other countries in Europe and Scandinavia and basically it's the day when people play tricks on each other. Quite often the television and newspapers will often have a fake story or a made up story to try and catch out their listeners and readers.

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Language support

This is the section where I pick out a few words and phrases from the podcast to help with your language understanding. I am going to start with '**patron saints**'. John talked about the patron saints of the countries of the United Kingdom. A saint is a person recognised as leading a particularly special religious life, is seen as being close to God. Each country in the United Kingdom has a patron saint, that is a saint recognised as the protector of that country.

In talking about the patron saints, and in particular St George, the patron saint of England, John talked about him having killed the '**mythical dragon**'. Something that is **mythical** is a creature that is not real but based on a story or a legend from the past.

Later when John was talking about Valentine's day he said that this had become '**commercialised**'. For something to be **commercialised** it means that people are trying to make money from that particular tradition or event by selling things in this case, for example, flowers cards and other gifts.

Finally I want to talk a little bit about the '**study guide**'. John twice referred to the **study guide** which we have used to help to shape the content of these podcasts. This is a document, a book produced by the United Kingdom government and it is the official guide to the citizenship test which those people who wish to become British citizens will have to take. So the guide is called '**Life in the United Kingdom - Official Study Guide**' and we sometimes refer to that when we are putting together the podcast. Although we do not try to cover everything in that guide but just some of the areas.

That's it for this week. I hope you found the podcast useful. The transcript of this podcast should appear on the St Augustine's Centre website very soon.