

English for Life in the UK

Episode 29 - Architecture and Buildings in the UK

August 2020

(Mark) Welcome to the podcast "**English for Life in the UK**".

This podcast is for intermediate-level learners of English and is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St Augustine's Centre in Halifax, Yorkshire, where we provide a range of support and advice to those in need and, particularly, to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The aim of this podcast is to help anyone wanting to improve their English and at the same time learn more about life in this country.

Before we start today's episode, we want to ask for your help. We have now reached 29 episodes of this podcast and we know we have well over 100 regular listeners and over 3000 episodes have been accessed. But, we don't know who you are or what you think of the podcast, so we have decided to ask you. We would love to hear from you, what you think of the podcast, how it could be improved, and what subjects you would like us to cover, in the future. We have created a short survey for you to fill in. It will only take a few minutes. You will find the survey on our website :

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

That's spelt s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x

Near the bottom of the 'Home' page, by clicking on the "survey here" link in the section about the podcast; or - if you prefer - you can now email us, on our new email address, which is :

EnglishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com

That's spelt:

e-n-g-l-i-s-h-f-o-r-l-i-f-e-i-n-t-h-e-u-k

You can tell us what you think of the podcast in the email, or we can send you a link to the survey.¹ We would be very grateful to hear from you, in any of these ways and we will use your comments to help to design the next phase of this podcast.

(3 minutes: 25 seconds)

So, let's get on with this week's episode, which is brought to you by Sheena, Christine and Mark.

(Music)

¹ Here is the link:

<https://forms.gle/ppEWhVDCrAXXBU2s8>

(M) So, today we're going to talk about **architecture and buildings in the United Kingdom**.

So, by **architecture**, we mean planning and designing and constructing buildings and other structures, for example, bridges and in the Official Guide which the Government has produced, they talk about some examples of architectural styles and architects - the people who do the designing - and some examples of some of the buildings as well.

Clearly, Britain has quite a rich and varied history of magnificent buildings - churches, cathedrals, castles - going way back. So, for example, the Tower of London, which is on the River Thames in London, dates back to the time of the Norman conquest (1066), it was built just after that.

(Christine) Mark - you said they were in the **Official Guide**. I wonder if you'd like to tell us what official guide you're talking about?

(M) Yes - Ok - thank you. This is the "Life in the United Kingdom: Official Study Guide" which the Government produces, every few years, and is the thing on which they base the Citizenship test, which I think we've told people about, previously.

(C) Thank you.

(M) So it's in there. Just to say, obviously we will be talking about some different buildings as we go through this week, and in the transcript we'll put some links to where you can find pictures of those buildings, for those of you who are interested.

So, in the Guide some of the buildings - more recent buildings - they mention were built in the 17th century: St. Paul's Cathedral was built and the architect there was Sir Christopher Wren - probably one of the most famous of Britain's architects and St Paul's Cathedral is built in what is known as the Baroque style. That means it's very ornate - very decorative - and it also has lots of curves to it².

(C) And it's in London, isn't it?

(6:31)

(M) It's in London.

In the 18th century, they mention - you'll be pleased with this, Christine - they mention a Scottish architect, called Robert Adam, who apparently designed a number

² www.stpauls.co.uk

of great country houses, not just in Scotland, but elsewhere - what they mention is Dumfries House³. I don't know if you know that one, Christine?

(C) I don't know it. I have seen it.

(M) Then in the 19th century, we have the Houses of Parliament, obviously again, in London on the River Thames. I'm sure many of you have seen pictures of the Houses of Parliament.

That was designed by an architect called Charles Barry. And it's regarded as being in the Gothic style. Now Gothic buildings go right back to medieval times. Many of the churches and cathedrals that we were talking about earlier were Gothic buildings and that tends to mean that it has lots of pointed arches and pointed towers to it - that's one of the distinctive things about a Gothic building.

And, of course, many of the town halls in cities and towns - particularly in the north of England - were also built in this Gothic style during the 19th century - and that includes Halifax town hall which is our local town hall.

Into the 20th century, the Official Guide talks about an architect called Sir Edwin Lutyens. Now, he designed the Cenotaph, which is basically the war memorial that is in Whitehall, in London.

But he also built, he also designed a lot of war memorials particularly, in France, for example, from the First World War. And he also designed many of the government buildings for the Indian Government under the Empire - under the British empire, in Delhi, in New Delhi. Then into ... Also in the 20th century - more recently, three particularly well-known architects:

Sir Norman Foster, who, amongst other things, designed the sky scraper which is called - or known as "The Gherkin" - it looks - it's a bit in the shape of a gherkin - a gherkin is a vegetable, for those who don't know it.

³ <https://dumfries-house.org.uk/>

Then there is Richard Rogers - another current architect and he designed the Millennium Dome - also in London, on the River Thames, a modern building that was to celebrate the year 2000.

(9:46)

And Dame Zaha Hadid, who was born in Iraq, but who is a British Iraqi. I think she has recently died. But she designed, amongst other things, the London Aquatic Centre, which is basically where the swimming took place for the Olympic Games, in London in 2012.

So those are some of the architects and some of the buildings that are mentioned in the Official Guide.

I

We thought we'd talk to you a little bit about our favourite buildings or buildings that we think are of interest. And I think, Sheena, you're going to start with something quite local to us, where we are.

(Sheena) Yes, Mark. I would like to point out it is not only London that has some amazing buildings, but in the north of England we also have some very impressive buildings, I think. You mentioned the Town Hall in Halifax and I think what's interesting about that is that Charles Barry who designed, or rebuilt, the Houses of Parliament was actually the architect for Halifax Town Hall. Which ... very small world and very surprising. Apparently he was the judge in the architects' competition to see who should build the Town Hall and he didn't like any of them, and said he could plan a better one. And that's probably how he got a lot of business, I think. So we have a very fancy town hall, in Halifax, like many other industrial towns in the North, as well. But the other, the other building in Halifax, which recently has made Halifax an important place to visit, is The Piece Hall⁴. It's been around since 1779, and again it

⁴ <https://www.thepiecehall.co.uk/>

expresses, I think, the wealth of the area, pre-industrial revolution, because it was where the pieces of cloth, which were like 30 foot [yards] or 27.5 metre lengths of cloth that would be produced on a hand loom, would be sold. So they would be sold at the Piece Hall in Halifax. The building was like a gigantic market place, really, and the design of it was to show how important, I think, manufacturing and the people ... the manufacturers in the area - were how grand they were ... Many people say, about the Piece Hall, it would look very much at home in Italy, because it's like this grand building with its the size of it is - its 66,000 (sixty six thousand) square foot [feet]⁵ courtyard, which is surrounded with buildings that - in the West side, are on two levels and in the East side, three levels, because - like the rest of Halifax, it's built on a slope. So it's built on a hill so to level it up, there are three levels on one side. It's made from huge sandstone blocks and what I always liked about the Piece Hall was the columns. There's an arcade area at the bottom with great, iron gates with 'coats of arms' on them, where the traders would enter - and some of the traders would actually trade from the floor of the Piece Hall if they couldn't afford one of the three hundred little shop/office-type buildings which were there for the richer traders.

(14:00)

And then the columns for the first level - it's called the rustic level - so they are tall, square - very sturdy-looking - columns which is, I think, to reflect the sturdiness of the people and the area. And then the higher columns have got what are called Tuscan columns which are more rounded and they narrow, towards the top, probably - I think - to make it look grander, and taller, so I think the people who built this had learnt a lot from classical architects and what we have now, is a modernised building. So in 2017, after 200 years of wondering what to do with the Piece Hall - some modern architects - one of them called Philip Allsop⁶ who, I think, he was from Manchester - and often had some very interesting ideas about buildings. So he persuaded the Council to integrate some modern ideas and to encourage footfall, to link this old building with Square Chapel theatre and cinema, and the new library⁷, which is, I think, the most interesting building in Halifax, because it is all glass and steel apart from one wall that

⁵ Refers to the previous imperial measurement system, still often used in spoken language. There were 3 feet to a linear yard - and a yard is 36 inches, compared to a meter at 39.37 inches. Inches are sometimes shown as, for example, 12" = 1 foot (*plural: feet*).

⁶ This is an error, the correct name is Will Alsop.

⁷<https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/v2/residents/leisure-and-culture/libraries/your-local-library/central-library>

has an 18th century rose window⁸ from the church next door. So one whole wall is formed from a building that is 200 years old and the light from the massive rose window reflects on the glass and the modern steel, so that's my favourite part of this building.

(M) Thanks, Sheena - I agree with you - I think that's a really impressive bit of architecture: the way they've combined in the library there - the original stained glass window into the newly designed modern-looking library. I think it's very impressive.

(S) I do - it's clever isn't it?

(M) Christine, what about you?

(16:13)

(C) Well, I just want to say on that one - what I like about that is the fact that you can just step from one to the other - from the Piece Hall, into the library. They have connected it very well.

When we were talking about this I was thinking about my favourite buildings, and I do love some very grand buildings, I do, but I also love some very humble buildings.

I live in Hebden Bridge which is one of the towns in the valley - in the Calder Valley - and it has these funny little terraced houses which seem to tumble down the hillside and I had never seen anything like it, when I first moved here. They seemed quite topsy-turvy⁹. Now, terraced housing is very popular architecture in cities. I think they were first built in the 17th century as - they were as large, elegant dwellings for the wealthy people who lived in cities, and they would also - they would mainly live in the country, in their country houses. But, at ... in certain seasons, they would come to town and live in these lovely, elegant buildings which, you know, are still there, in London, in Bath. In fact, most of our grand cities have some elegant, central housing but when the Industrial Revolution came, suddenly they had to make a lot of buildings for workers, workers who had come to towns, leaving their weavers' cottages locally, leaving the weavers' cottages and coming to work in town, in the mills, and so a large number of terraced houses were built.

Terraced houses are when you get a row of houses that all join on to each other, so they share a wall. So on the left side you have one family and on the right side of your house, you have another family, and you're in the house in the middle. Well, back-to-

⁸ rose window : a circular window segmented in the style of a rose flower

⁹ informal way of saying 'upside down' or in a confusion.

back terraced houses have a house - another family - behind you, as well, so you only have windows on one wall - the windows and the door are all on one wall. And that opens on to one street and the house behind you opens on to another street and that back-to-back housing was very common-place, but actually it wasn't very hygienic, in the days before you had bathrooms and toilets inside. There would be shared facilities outside and so most towns and cities got rid of that, in the 20th century, but here in Hebden Bridge, we still have some - and they all have bathrooms and toilets inside - so, it's perfectly healthy.

(19:24)

But here also, you get back-to-earth houses and they are houses - because Hebden Bridge is so steep - the hillside is so steep - that ... when you look at Hebden Bridge, you see this grand, four-storey house on the hillside, but when you look more closely, you realise that the bottom two storeys belong to one house and the top two storeys belong to another house. And the bottom two storeys are accessed by one street and they have - you can't go through the back door - they have no back door - they're built into the hillside. And then, further up there's another street and there's doorways that will access the top two storeys. And they're made of millstone grit, which is a kind of sandstone in fact, very similar to what the Piece Hall is made from - it's the local building material - and they do look very, very pretty, and also, they're good solid, well-built houses.

I personally live in a more modern house - it was built, like many houses were, after the war - in fact it's called a semi - a semi-detached house, and it was built by the Council, for the post-war housing; and it's not as well-built as the local Victorian terraced houses. The roof here - my house - has tiny, little, flimsy tiles on it, whereas the terraced houses in town have heavy stone, which is designed to withstand the strong winds we get here. So that's what I thought of when we were thinking of these buildings - which buildings we liked.

But Mark, I think you've chosen something a bit further away from Halifax.

(M)

Well I have, but it's one that has a personal link for me - and rather than talking about a building, I'm going to talk about two bridges - and they are bridges over the River Tyne and the River Tyne flows through the city of Newcastle, in the north east of England. And I chose this, partly, because my father was born in Newcastle and he worked in a building that was on the riverside and so he actually looked out on some of these bridges that were there, when he was working. But also, I chose it because I

do think they are beautiful bridges in a beautiful city, that's been recently modernised and is now, really, quite a tourist attraction in its own right.

(22:38)

So I'm going to choose two bridges - one of which is called The Tyne Bridge - it's the largest of the bridges that's there and most people in England, if you ask them to think about a bridge in Newcastle, that's the one they'd think of. It was built in 1928 it was opened by the King at the time - who was George V¹⁰ (the fifth) - and it's known as a through-arch bridge, which basically means: the bridge is a huge iron arch which spans from one side of the river to the other and then the road runs through the middle of that arch. It's the same design as the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge, in Australia, which people may also know. It's a very similar design and I think one was influenced by the other. I'm not sure which way round it was for that.

So that's one of the bridges, but just down the river - it's no more than 200 yards perhaps - oh, 200 metres - from one bridge to the other, is something called the Gateshead Millennium Bridge, and that is a modern bridge, so the Tyne bridge built in 1928, the Millennium Bridge was built in the year 2000, to celebrate the millennium and it is a pedestrian and cycle bridge so, it's for people who are walking - that's what a pedestrian is - or cycling, across the river. But what it's famous for - what's unusual about it, is that it's called a tilting bridge - also known as the "blinking eye bridge" because it has got two spans which look a bit like an eye - a bit like two eyelids - and when tall ships are coming through, it tilts. It moves so that there is a larger space for the boats to be able to get underneath - and so it's called a tilting bridge, but also known as the "blinking eye bridge" because it looks a little bit like that. So, those were my choices, there¹¹. I hope people found that interesting.

(C) I've seen those bridges, Mark, but I've never known I didn't know it was called "the blinking eye bridge". I'll look for that, when I'm the next in Newcastle.

(M) Yeah - that's its unofficial name.

OK. Well, we hope that you've found that useful and in the next part of the podcast we're going to focus on a bit of grammar around the adjectives that we used, whilst we were describing those buildings.

¹⁰V = the number 5 in Roman numerals which are traditionally used when referring to Kings and Queens

¹¹<https://www.bridgesonthetyne.co.uk/index.html>

(C) And I'd like to say we hope you did find that interesting and please tell us, because now you can tell us because we have our very own email and so you might like to write it down, you can ... it is: englishforlifeintheuk@gmail.com so, we'd love to hear from you.

(M) Thank you very much, Christine.

(Music). (26:25)

Language Support

(M) This is the part of the podcast where we choose an aspect of English language and talk about it. Today, Christine is going to tell us a bit about adjectives.

(C) We've used quite a few adjectives in this episode: adjectives are the describing words that we often use in front of a noun. For example - a green mug - green is the adjective.

And I wanted to say a bit about the order of adjectives, because quite often you use two, or even more, adjectives, in front of a noun and there aren't absolute rules about the order you put them in, in English, but most English speakers generally follow the same pattern, and so I'd like to talk to you a bit about that. If an adjective gives a general opinion - in other words, if it could be applied to lots and lots of different nouns, that will generally come first; for example, good, or bad, or wonderful, or nasty - you can say

"a good idea", "a good book", "a good pair of boots", "a good friend" -

These are the words you can apply in lots of situations. They give an opinion, but it's a very **general** opinion and those often come first. After that, you get adjectives which give opinions but they're only applicable to **certain nouns**. For example: if you're talking about food, you could say "delicious", or "bland"; if you were talking about a person - you could say "kind" - "a kind man", or "a clever girl", or "a friendly boy" - but you couldn't say "a friendly pizza".

So, these are still opinions but they are specifically related to different nouns, so they would normally go afterwards. So, if you were putting them together, you would say the **general** opinion first and then, the **specific** opinion. So you might say

"a good, kind person", or "a wonderful, stylish pair of shoes", or "a strange angry man" -

that would be the order - the general opinion, followed by the specific opinion. And then, after that - you could use adjectives that are more directly descriptive something about the size, shape, colour, where they come from, or what they're made of - adjectives like that. And those, too, go in an order - so for example - **size** normally come before **shape** - so you would say

"a large, old house" - shape normally comes before age -

so you would say

"a fat, old man" - not "an old, fat man".

This is generally - as I say, these aren't rules - this is, normally, what you would say.

Age comes before **colour** - so you would say

"a new, red dress".

And **colour** would come before the **nationality**, or the origin, **place of origin**, so you would talk about "pink, Italian ice cream".

And the **nationality** would come before the **material** that something is made of - so you would talk about

"Indian silk flowers".

Now, in this episode, I noticed Mark mentioned "a huge, iron arch" - now he wouldn't say "an iron, huge arch" - that wouldn't sound right at all. But if he wanted to give an opinion about this "huge, iron arch" the word would come first. He might think it was a "spectacular, huge, iron arch" -

He would say 'spectacular' first.

Sheena talked about "great, iron gates" and if she wanted to say they were beautiful, she would say

"beautiful, great, iron gates".

I think I talked about "tiny, little, flimsy tiles". And if I wanted to say they were 'awful' - I would say that they were:

"awful, tiny, little, flimsy tiles".

It's unusual, that you have so many adjectives before a noun, but you can. In fact, if I wanted to tell you what those "awful, tiny, little, flimsy tiles" were made of, I would say

"awful, tiny, little, flimsy, clay tiles"

and put "clay" - because that's what they're made of - right at the end of the list of adjectives.

So, I hope that's helpful. As I said at the beginning - I'll say again now - these are not *absolute* rules but they're patterns that most English speakers follow. You can change the order for emphasis, if you want to. If you keep listening you might notice it.¹²

(M) That's it for this week. We hope you've found this episode useful. Just a reminder - that we would really like to hear from you about what you think about the podcasts and what we should do, in the future. You can do this by completing our survey, which you can find at our website.

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or you can email us at:

englishforlifetheintheuk@gmail.com.

We really look forward to hearing from you. Goodbye for now.

(Music) 33:18

¹² For more information on adjective word order, see for <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar-reference/adjective-order>