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ПРАЗДНИЧНЫЕ ДНИ В ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНИИ

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CULTURAL HOLIDAYS IN GREAT BRITAIN

Introduction

Holidays, which are celebrated but do not result in mandatory time off from work or school, are typically referred to as *observance holidays* or *cultural holidays*. Unlike bank holidays, they are more informal and vary in recognition across different cultures and communities. These holidays often celebrate familial bonds, love, and appreciation, rather than historical events or national achievements. The examples of such holidays include Saints’ Days, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and May Day. These occasions often involve personal celebrations, gift-giving, and social gatherings but do not carry the legal weight that public or bank holidays do.

In the table you can see some of the most important cultural holidays celebrated in different countries of Great Britain (namely, England, Scotland and Wales). In this article we are going to describe these holidays, focusing on customs and traditions associated with them.

Table 1

CULTURAL HOLIDAYS IN GREAT BRITAIN

England	Scotland	Wales
St. George's Day April, 23	Burns Night January, 25	St. David’s Day March, 1
May Day First Mon. in May	Beltane May, 1	Beltane May, 1
Bonfire Night November, 5	St.Andrew’s Day November, 30	Gwyl Mabsant (varies)

There are *three distinctive types* of culture holidays. Some of them date back to the ancient times and are celebrated in different parts of the UK, but each celebration has its distinctive national character. The example of such a holiday is May Day, or Beltane (as it is known in Scotland and Wales).

May Day in England, or Beltane in Scotland and Wales

In England May Day is celebrated on the first Monday in May, while Beltane traditionally falls on May 1st. Since ancient times these festivals have marked an

essential time for pastoral societies, signifying the seasonal movement and management of livestock. Hence, some of the festivities are traditional and common in different parts of Great Britain. They include *maypole dancing* and *crowning the May Queen*. Over time, these Beltane customs largely revived in the 20th century have blended into the broader May Day celebrations across Britain.

One of such Mayday customs is *maypole dancing*, a popular children's activity, which was once done only by women (in England) or men (in Wales). Each child, holding a coloured ribbon, circles the maypole with a hopping, skipping step. As they dance, the children pass each other until the ribbons are plaited together and wrapped tightly around the Maypole. When the circle becomes small, the dance is reversed to unwind the ribbons so that the dancers are back in their starting places.

The *maypole* was also an important part of Welsh May Day tradition. It was called '*codi'r fedwen*', 'raising the birch', in south Wales, and '*y gangen haf*', 'the summer branch', in the north. In the south, the maypole was made of birch. It was painted different colours and the leader of the dancing would wrap his ribbons around the pole, followed by the other dancers until eventually the pole was covered in ribbons. The maypole would then be raised and the dancing would begin.

In Wales a *May King and Queen* would be crowned as part of *Calen Haf*, a mock fight between two men representing Winter and Summer, in which Summer would always win the battle to choose the king or queen[1].

Nevertheless, there are Mayday customs which are observed in certain countries of Great Britain. For example, *Morris dancing* is a famous traditional English form of folk dance. From around April and through summer groups of Morris Dancers will be seen in market towns and on village greens up and down the land, performing their medieval dances to the click clack of their sticks and the sound of bells, pipes, and drums [2].

In Scotland and Wales the celebration involves *decorating a May bush*, usually a hawthorn, which is sacred and only cut on May Eve due to prevailing superstitions. Villagers would gather hawthorn branches and flowers and use these to decorate the outside of their houses. It was believed to be unlucky to bring hawthorn blossoms into the house [3].

Another way to celebrate Beltane in Scotland is the *weaving of wreaths of flowers and herbs*. On this holiday, one was supposed to make a wreath, make the most secret desire and let it float on the water [4].

Wales is also known for its rich Beltane customs, such as *Beltane fires* that are traditionally observed represented purification and the banishing of disease, and extravagant ceremonies with music costume and dancing.

'Spirit nights', known as *Yspryd nos*, took place in Wales on May Eve. These nights offered an opportunity for divination, a chance to reveal who one's true love would be.

It is impossible to imagine May Day without traditional food. In England this holiday is the perfect opportunity for a family picnic as many festivities take place

outside, so traditional foods include *sandwiches*, *salads*, *sausage rolls*, and *scotch eggs* [4]. In Scotland they bake *Beltane bannocks* (a type of flatbread) on the Beltane fire and eat it with *dairy dishes* and *green herbs* [3]. Wales is famous for its *mead* or *Metheglin* (a beverage made with herbs including woodruff, a sweet-scented herb) and *elderberry and rhubarb wine* [1].

There are culture holidays which honour patron saints, these days are of great significance in the country because they are celebrations of local history and culture. Here belong *St. George's Day* in England, *St. Andrew's Day* in Scotland and *St. David's Day* in Wales. Though the celebrations are regional and have the national flavor, they have a lot in common.

St. George's Day

This holiday is celebrated in England on April 23rd every year in honor of St. George, one of the key Christian martyrs who died during the crusades. Major cities like London host parades featuring bands, dancers, and knights in armor, showcasing national pride. Many people adorn their homes and pubs with St. George's flags and wear red roses. Morris dancing and singing the hymn "Jerusalem" are common.

The perfect place to join in the celebrations is London, from parades and festivals to feasts and fireworks, there are a host of activities and events to enjoy in the city on St. George's Day. Events like *the Feast of St. George* in Trafalgar Square include live music, dancing, and medieval displays.

No St. George's Day celebration is complete without a traditional English feast. Many restaurants in London offer special menus for the day, featuring classic English dishes such as *roast beef* and *Yorkshire pudding*. Other traditional dishes include: *full English breakfast* (a hearty meal with bacon, sausages, eggs, beans, and toast), *toad in the hole* (sausages baked in Yorkshire pudding batter), *fish and chips* (battered fish and thick-cut chips), *shepherd's pie* (a savoury dish of cooked minced meat topped with mashed potato and baked) and *rhubarb crumble* (a popular dessert made with rhubarb and a crumbly topping) [5].

St. Andrew's Day

Today, St. Andrew's Day is one of the most important dates in the Scottish calendar. The main celebrations take place in Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland. The morning of November 30 begins with the ceremonial raising of the national flags on the huge suspension road bridge *Forth Road Bridge*. After the official congratulations, the city becomes the scene of mass public festivities, which glorify traditional Scottish culture through music, dance performances and gastronomic events.

The largest celebration of the day can be observed in St. Andrews, the ancient city on the east coast of Scotland. It stretches for a week and includes a street parade with the participation of the city pipe band, the gala dinner *St Andrew's Day Dinner*, the culinary festival *Savour St Andrews*, dance parties-ceilidhs, concerts, exhibitions and free tourist tours of the city.

All over Scotland people dress in traditional costumes and have the national flag painted on their faces. Everyone gets together, dances, sings, and the celebration ends with a ceremonial parade to the sounds of traditional bagpipes.

Some traditional Scottish dishes to sample on St. Andrew's Day include **Cullen Skink** (smoked haddock chowder), **haggis** (a type of pudding made from sheep's innards, lamb's heart, lungs and liver, beef, onions, oats, and spices) and **Cranachan** (a dreamy raspberry, cream, oatmeal and whisky concoction) [6].

St. David's Day

Every year on March, the Welsh come together to celebrate their patron saint St. David with parades, concerts, traditional meals and more. It is a lively day to commemorate Welsh culture and heritage. On this day, traditional symbols are used in parades or as gifts to friends, including daffodils and onions, worn on lapels. Children also take part in the celebrations, wearing traditional Welsh costumes.

St. David's Day is marked by Welsh cultural festivals and parades, dedicated to music and poetry. For example, in Cardiff there is **the National St David's Parade**, which marches through the city with bands of musicians and dancers.

Traditional foods On St David's Day include **Welsh cakes**, **Bara Brith**, **cawl** (a dish of lamb or beef with leeks, beetroot, potatoes, carrots and other seasonal vegetables) and **Glamorgan sausages** (a traditional Welsh vegetarian sausage, mainly made from cheese and leeks, covered in golden breadcrumbs) [7].

Some culture holidays are unique and celebrated only in one of the countries in Great Britain. Here belong **Bonfire Night** in England, **Burns Night** in Scotland, and **Gwyl Mabsant** in Wales.

Bonfire Night in England

On Bonfire Night, celebrated on 5 November, people remember the plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament. All over the country there are firework displays and bonfires with models of Guy Fawkes, which are burned on the fire.

The biggest and best-known firework display is the **Edenbridge Display** in Kent, which has the biggest Guy, a nine-metre 'celebrity' model, burned there every year.

Traditional Bonfire Night food is **hot baked potatoes**. They are cooked on the bonfire and filled with butter and cheese. There are also **toffee apples** (apples on a stick, covered in sweet toffee) and **parkin** (a special type of cake eaten in the north of England) [8].

Burns Night in Scotland

This traditional Scottish holiday, held on January 25th, honoring the beloved poet and his contributions to literature and culture. The evening includes a feast of haggis (a savory meat dish), readings of Burns' poetry, and plenty of traditional music and ceilidh dancing. Participants recite Burns' poetry, and often someone will deliver the "Address to a Haggis". After the meal, toasts are made to Burns, and various speeches celebrating his work and influence are given [9].

Traditional food on this day include a flavourful soup like **Cock-a-Leekie** (chicken, leek and rice) **soup**, **Cullen Skink**, or **homemade Scotch broth**, **Cranachan**, **haggis** served with **mashed neeps** and **tatties** [10].

Gwyl Mabsant in Wales

It is celebrated every year on the ninth of February. On this day races and "smiling matches" for elderly women, cockfights, playing bando (a modern version of hockey), or playing "fives" (a primitive version of squash) are held.

Food Traditions that day include sweet spicy *Welsh cakes*, *Bara Brith* (a fruit loaf), *Rarebit* (a *savory cheese toast dish with mustard or beer*) or *hot pudding* [11].

Conclusion

Cultural holidays in Great Britain serve as vibrant celebrations of familial bonds, heritage, and community spirit, distinct from formal bank holidays. They reflect the rich tapestry of traditions that characterize the unique identities of England, Scotland, and Wales. Each holiday is steeped in history and local customs, showcasing a blend of ancient practices and contemporary festivities. Celebrating their cultural holidays, people not only honor their past but also strengthen the connections within their communities, ensuring that these cherished traditions are passed down through generations. Embracing the diversity of these celebrations enriches people's understanding of each other and highlights the beauty of cultural expression across Great Britain.

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