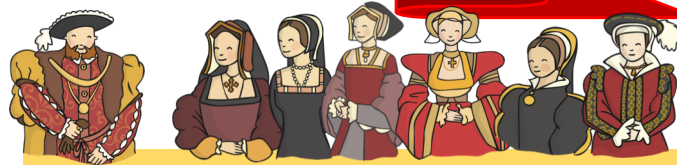


UK LAWS, FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS



Christianity was introduced to the UK by the **Romans** almost **2000 years ago**. This long history means that **it is deeply embedded in many of the laws, festivals and traditions of the UK**.



In the **16th century**, **King Henry VIII** broke away from the Catholic Church and the authority of the Pope and made himself head of the Church of England. Today as well as being head of state, the monarch is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. All monarchs are crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury.



The **Church of England** is the 'established' religion of England. This means that it has links to the government and other official bodies such as the judiciary (the court system).

Laws

The UK Parliament is the body that makes all UK laws by passing Acts of Parliament.

It is made up of two houses.

The House of Commons is made up of elected representative, MPs.

The House of Lords is not elected and its members are of two types: Lords temporal are appointed by the monarch, but the Lords spiritual are **26 of the most senior Church of England bishops**.

For laws to be passed they must be approved by both houses of Parliament. **So the Church of England has a direct role in shaping UK law.**

Meetings of both houses of Parliament **open with Christian prayers** and indeed, many of the laws of the UK reflect the teaching of some of the **Ten Commandments**, such as 'Do not kill' and 'Do not steal'.

Traditions

Many of our customs and ways of life have their foundation in Christianity, for example:

- ✓ **'Keep holy the Sabbath day'** is a Commandment. Traditionally Christians go to church on a Sunday and it was regarded as a **'day of rest'**. As a result the hours shops can trade on a Sunday are restricted.
- ✓ In the UK court of law witnesses giving evidence are asked to **swear they are telling the truth**. They often do this **on the Bible**, although if they are from a different religious tradition they can swear on their own holy book or if they are non-religious they can make a 'witness affirmation' where they promised to tell the truth without reference to holy book.
- ✓ **Christian hymns and readings are often made at public events**, for example the National Service of Remembrance held each year to commemorate those who died in the two World Wars in later conflicts.
- ✓ Lots of people in the UK mark important life events, like **marriage in a church**, even if they are not religious.



Festivals



The Christian calendar influences UK public holidays. **The two major Christian festivals,**

Christmas and Easter, are still widely celebrated in the UK. School holidays fall over these periods and many businesses will close. All the Christian festivals such as

St Valentine's Day are also celebrated, though for most people the religious context of the day is no longer important and it has become a more 'secular' festival, celebrating romantic love.

As the 2011 census results show, the UK is a place where many religions are practised. Today people of all the religious traditions may take time off school work to

celebrate their own festivals. For example, the biggest celebration of the Muslim festival Eid al-Fitr happens in Small Heath Park in Birmingham, where 75,000 people gather to celebrate the end of fasting during the month of Ramadan. There are games, entertainment and food stalls and people of all religious traditions (and none) are welcome to come and celebrate.



Knowledge Check

1. Who introduced Christianity in the UK?
2. When did Henry VIII break away from the Catholic Church?
3. What is the established religion of England?
4. Give three examples of our customs and ways of life that have their foundation in Christianity
5. How does the Church of England have a direct role in shaping UK law?
6. How many Church of England bishops are members of the House of Lords?
7. What are the two major Christian festivals that are widely celebrated in the UK?
8. What non-religious festivals are widely celebrated in the UK?

Choose a Task

1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

Exam Question

c) Explain the influence of Christianity in the UK today [8]

Non-Religious

There are also many other non-religious festival celebrated in the UK. **Bonfire Night** for example remembers the Gunpowder Plot when plotters led by Guy Fawkes attempted to blow up Parliament. Some non-religious festivals, for example the **Notting Hill Carnival** that happens every summer in London, celebrate the diversity of modern Britain with no-specific focus on religion. Non-religious groups, such as humanists, might recognise **World Humanist Day** (in June) or **Human Rights Day** (in December) but these are not widely celebrated in the UK.