

# Understand Great Britain

## **GREAT BRITAIN TODAY.....962**

In the wake of divisive referendums on Scottish independence and the UK's membership of the EU, is Britain breaking apart?

## **HISTORY.....964**

From ancient civilisations to contemporary characters, Britain's history is varied – and certainly never dull.

## **THE BRITISH TABLE.....982**

Fish and chips, haggis or chicken tikka masala? Real ale, whisky or fine wine? We will tickle your taste buds.

## **ARCHITECTURE IN BRITAIN.....988**

In Britain you're never far from an ancient castle, soaring broch or graceful cathedral, while modern buildings continue to impress.

## **THE ARTS.....993**

Everyone knows Shakespeare. We showcase some other leading characters from the British canon of poetry and prose.

## **THE BRITISH LANDSCAPE.....1003**

A geographical variety pack, from sandy beaches to high mountains, with surprisingly diverse wildlife and stunning national parks.

## **SPORTING BRITAIN.....1009**

Where to see football, rugby, cricket, golf and more.

# Great Britain Today

For Britain and the British, the first decade and a half of the 21st century has been a time of change, controversy and national soul-searching. As Scottish and Welsh nationalism have gained ground, the English seemed to become less certain about their own identity. In 2016 a referendum vote on whether to remain part of the European Union revealed a nation divided over its future, and the long-term consequences remain uncertain.

## Best on Film

**Brief Encounter** (1945) Classic tale of buttoned-up English love affair.

**My Beautiful Laundrette** (1985) Touching and comic study of racism and homophobia in Thatcher-era London.

**Trainspotting** (1996) The gritty underbelly of life among Edinburgh drug addicts.

**Under Milk Wood** (1972) Film of Dylan Thomas' play about life in a fictional Welsh fishing village.

**Suffragette** (2015) Compelling account of the pre-WWI fight to secure votes for women.

## Best in Print

**Notes from a Small Island** (Bill Bryson; 1995) An American's fond and astute take on Britain.

**Raw Spirit** (Iain Banks; 2003) An enjoyable jaunt around Scotland in search of the perfect whisky.

**Slow Coast Home** (Josie Drew; 2003) The chatty tale of a 5000-mile cycle tour through England and Wales.

**On the Black Hill** (Bruce Chatwin; 1982) Traces 20th-century Welsh rural life through the lens of an oddball pair of twins.

**On the Slow Train** (Michael Williams; 2011) A paean to the pleasure of British rail travel.

## Goodbye to Europe?

On June 24 2016, Britain awoke to monumental news. By a slim referendum vote the UK had opted to leave the European Union, cutting ties stretching back 43 years. Within hours of the so-called 'Brexit' (British exit) result the Prime Minister, David Cameron, who'd campaigned to remain within the EU, announced his resignation. The pound fell to its worst level for 31 years; the FTSE 100 share index fell to an eight-year low.

The result mattered so much because British and EU laws had become intertwined, from migration to trade, from fishing to human rights, from weights and measures to the environment. The closeness of that relationship was a comfort to some but anathema to others. Remain supporters felt protected by Europe-wide civil rights; Leave supporters felt Britain's right to shape its own destiny was under threat. These divisions were brought sharply into focus by a fierce, often acrimonious, referendum campaign.

The referendum result was very close: 52% voted to leave the EU against 48% for remain, revealing a country polarised by different views. Some argued the country would be freed from the shackles of an ailing EU, while others saw a country cast dangerously adrift. The economy and health service were central issues, but – against the backdrop of a Europe-wide refugee crisis – the real flashpoint was immigration, an issue that has bubbled uncomfortably under the surface of British politics for decades.

This time the debate revolved around whether Britain should have the right to set limits on immigration from within the EU. Some argued Britain didn't have enough resources to cope with more migrants, others pointed to the ranks of EU workers fulfilling important roles, notably in the health service. There were bitter arguments over whether high levels of migration meant 'Britishness' itself was under threat. For some it was a