

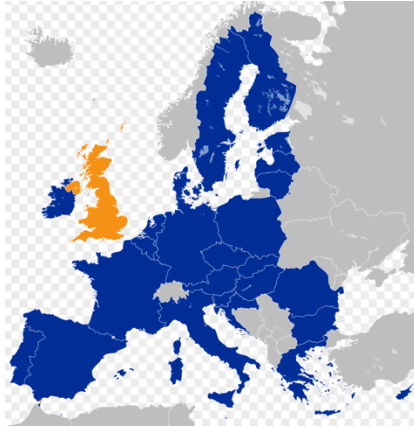
The Power of Geography

Reading Guide for Chapter 4, The United Kingdom

“Great consequences lie in the simple statements that Britain is an island group, set in an ocean, but off the shores of the great continent; that the opposing shores are indented.”

—Sir Halford Mackinder, 1902

Understanding **Brexit**: in 2016 the British people narrowly voted to leave the European Union (EU), a loose confederation of European states that came together after the two World Wars.



As with all things in life, going it alone has advantages, and it has disadvantages. Britain is no longer a great power, but it is a substantial second-tier power.

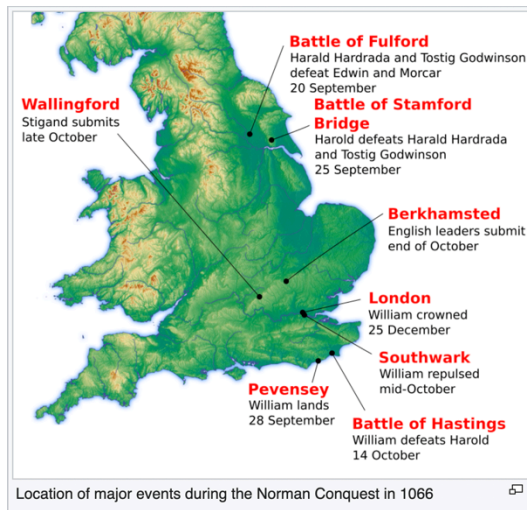
How the United Kingdom came to be, how geography shaped Britain's history.

Greek explorer Pythias in 330BCE sailed as far north as Iceland

The geographical divide in Britain is between the highlands and the lowlands

Scotland = 5.5 million people, England = 56 million, Wales = 3 million, Northern Ireland (6 counties in the north that the UK has kept control over) = 2 million (The Republic of Ireland is an independent nation of 5 million.)

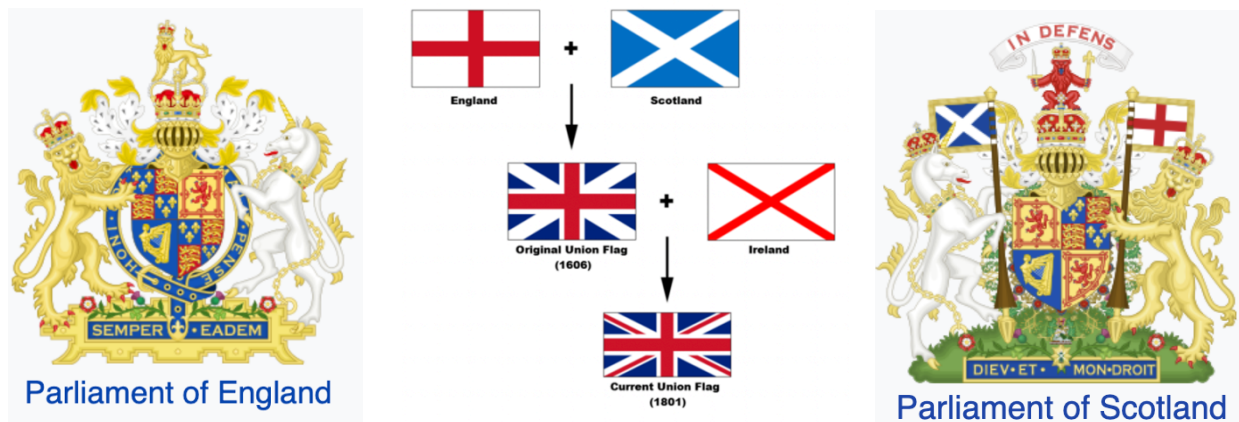
The Romans conquered much, but not all of Britain in the 1st century ACE. The Romans left in the 400s, and the Angles, Saxon, Jutes invaded from Denmark & northern Germany (hence, “Angleland”), & the Scotti invaded the north from Ireland. Anglo-Saxons pushed out the Vikings in the 9th century.



The Normans invade from France under William the Conqueror in 1066, winning the Battle of Hastings. “It was the most influential moment in British history since the departure of the Romans.” It reoriented Britain toward Western Europe and away from Scandinavia.

English dynasties followed: the Plantagenets (1154-1485)—the Magna Carta in 1215 is considered the foundation of the modern legal system — then the Tudors (1485-1603). Henry VIII broke away from Rome and created the Church of England, and his daughter Elizabeth I strengthened England. James I followed and was already the King of Scotland, so he unified England and Scotland. *This is very important in British history.*

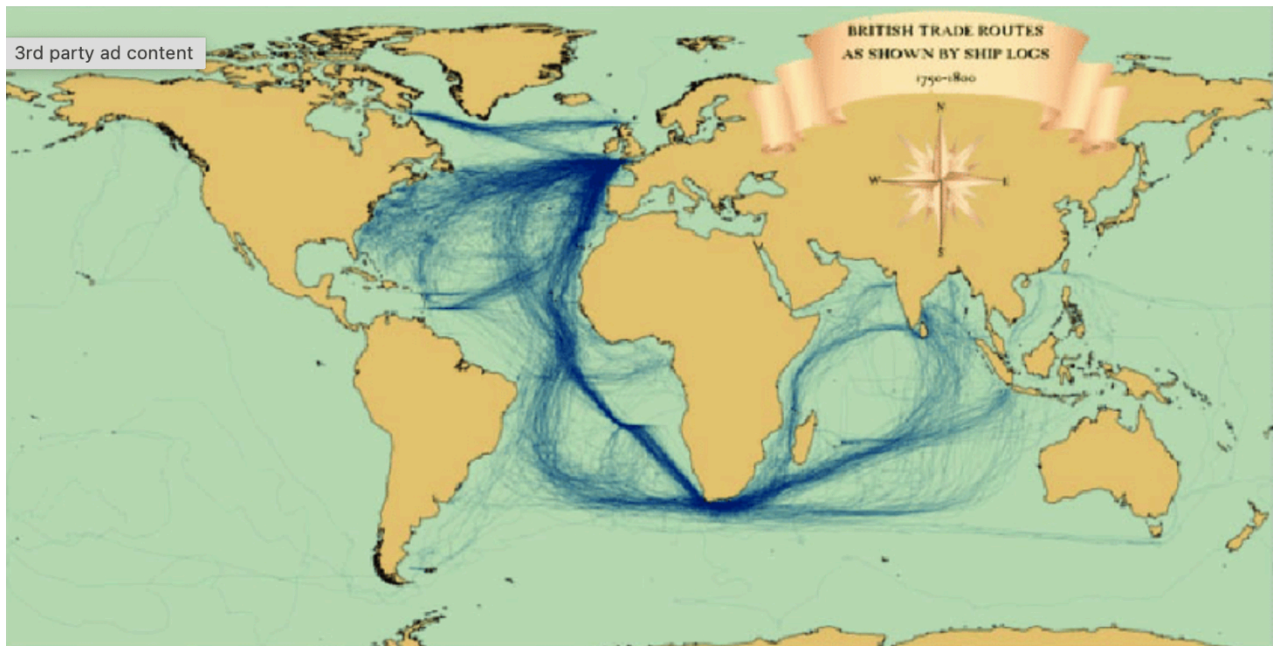
Scotland was a threat to England, a backdoor for France to attack England, so unification closed that door. The **1707 Acts of Union** formalized a single government for the island.



The British Empire grew rapidly due to sea power. Its dominance of the seas offset France’s and Spain’s land armies, and the British industrial revolution increased British power.

1801 Ireland was absorbed by Britain, against Ireland’s will.

The importance of British sea power: The Royal Navy held Napoleon of France at bay, and the navy controlled the Cape of Good Hope, Gibraltar, trade routes to India & the Caribbean, the Strait of Malacca, and the Suez Canal (opened in 1869).



End of the 19th century, Germany and the U.S. challenged the British Empire....The two World Wars broke the back of the British Empire

Britain had to find a new role in the Post-Second-World-War world. It chose to stay close to both the U.S. and the new **European Economic Community (EEC)**.

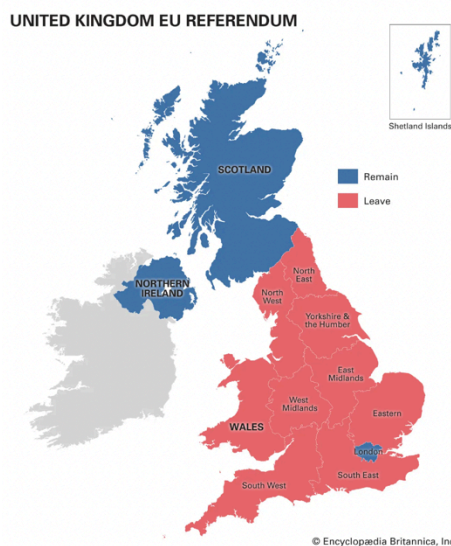
The **1956 Suez Crisis** showed Britain and France that the U.S. was the new global boss. The U.S. forced the UK & France to withdraw when they tried to occupy the Suez Canal after Egypt had threatened to take it away from UK control.

The EEC –eventually changed into the **European Union (EU)** -- was seen as the way Europe would end two centuries of bloody warfare. How? Economic unity, a single economic market in Europe without borders or tariffs, and with a single currency called the **Euro**, in order to compete with the U.S. economy.



“Swapping sovereignty for prosperity” Britain was reluctant. It decided to keep its own currency, the pound, and it turned away from closer ties to Europe, including the idea of a single European army—again, preferring the freedom to make its own decisions.

So, 2016 the British people voted 52% to 48% for the British Exit from the EU, the **“Brexit.”** The working classes were not experiencing the benefits of the EU. But divorces are messy and costly to both sides.



Since 2016 Britain seeks to remain close with the U.S. but the growing economic power of China is something no one wants to forego.

In the post-Cold War multi-polar world, the UK is looking for new relationships...

U.S. foreign policy still drives the U.S. U.K. relationship, but the UK plays an important role. It is a member of the **“Five Eyes” intelligence-sharing community** (USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) and would like to make it a loose trading partnership.



The U.K.'s changing influence in Europe. The UK now looks to **Poland**, a leader in Eastern Europe – Poland historically fears German and Russian power plays. And the UK is aligned with **France**. And the **E3** format of the UK, France, & Germany shares common diplomatic aims.

The UK is an economic, political, and military power. It is also a leader in “soft power” – the English language, the UK's higher-education system, sport, music, and tourism are all aspects of soft power.

The many challenges the UK faces: The possibility that Scotland someday may vote to become independent of the UK would be bad for the UK—for its navy (the Faslane Naval Base is critical to the Royal Navy). And if Scotland were to become independent, Northern Ireland may also seek to break away and reunify with the Republic of Ireland.

Geographical realities remain drivers of nations' priorities -- and perhaps their destinies?

