



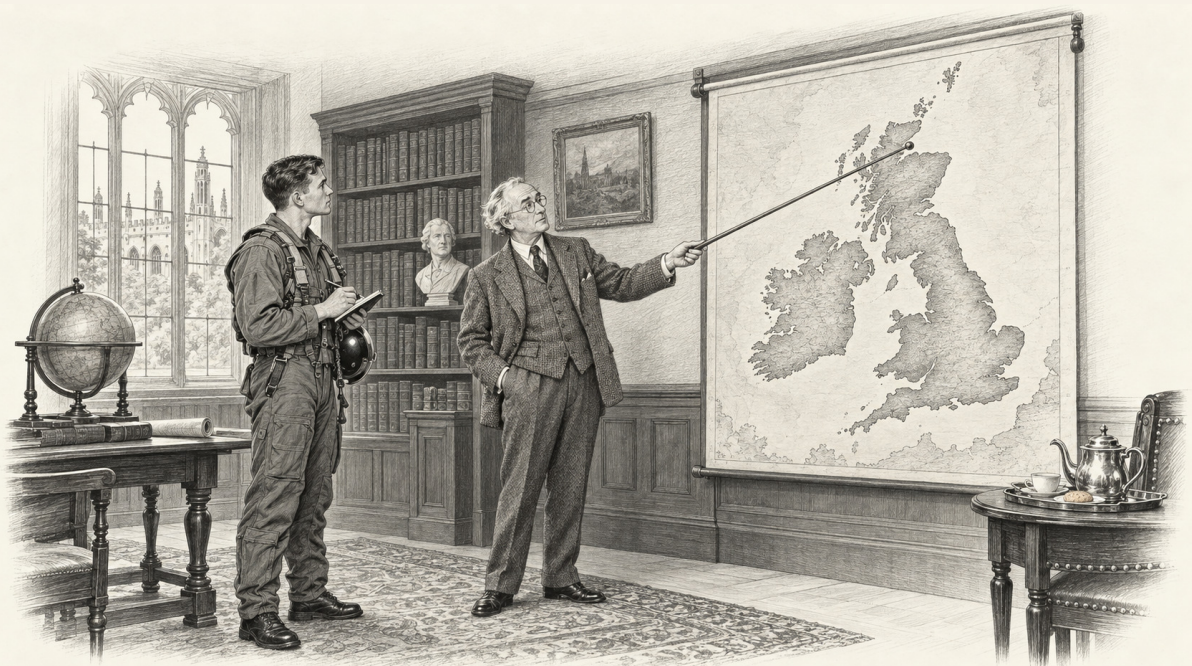
KING ETHELRED'S COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Established in 978 (ish)

DEPARTMENT OF STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHY, INTERNATIONAL LAW,
CROWN WORKS AND APPLIED COMMON SENSE

THE BRITISH ISLES, EXPLAINED SLOWLY

*A nomenclatural briefing for a visiting aviator, covering Great Britain, the United Kingdom,
both Irelands, three Crown Dependencies, the Isle of Wight and a rock*



A departmental briefing prepared under the College Fellowship Ordinance
(Visitors, Colonials and Other Guests) 1783

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*Fortitudine.
Ingenio.
Tea and biscuits.*



ABSTRACT

This briefing was not supposed to exist. The College does not, as a rule, publish papers explaining what the United Kingdom is, on the grounds that a gentleman already knows and everyone else can be told at dinner. It has made an exception for a visiting aviator from the United States Air Force who, having explained the difference between a turbojet, a turbofan, a ramjet and a scramjet to the Senior Common Room without notes, admitted that he could not absorb the difference between Great Britain, the United Kingdom, England and the British Isles, and asked, with a directness the College found refreshing, what precisely this place was.

The paper answers him. It sets out the geographical terms (the British Isles, the islands of Great Britain and Ireland), the two sovereign states (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Ireland), the four countries of the United Kingdom, the three Crown Dependencies that belong to the Crown but not to the Kingdom, the Isle of Wight, which needs no explanation and receives one anyway, and Rockall, a granite islet in the North Atlantic that is British because a helicopter said so in 1955. Each term is defined, dated and, where the Department could manage it, forgiven.

The principal finding is that the United Kingdom is a country made of countries, on an island that is not the country, in a group of islands that is not a political unit, beside a second country that shares one of the islands. The Department recognises that this is a great deal to take in for a guest whose own nation was founded during the College's most recent repainting of the Porters' Lodge, and it asks him not to worry. The residents do not.

Research status. This is a fictional King Ethelred's College briefing. The dates, statutes, treaties, distances and constitutional arrangements are real and referenced. The Visitor is real in the sense that somebody always asks. The Department's opinions about Rockall are its own and are not shared by Rockall.

Keywords: British Isles; Great Britain; United Kingdom; Ireland; Northern Ireland; Crown Dependencies; Isle of Man; Jersey; Guernsey; Isle of Wight; Rockall; nomenclature; visitors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks the Visitor, a serving officer of the United States Air Force, for asking the question in the first place and for taking the answer with good grace, a full notebook and only one request that the College start again from the beginning. He is referred to throughout as the Visitor, at his own request and on the advice of his embassy.

Professor Sir Peregrine W. Fortescue, Regius Professor of Strategic Geography and Keeper of the South Atlantic Map Cupboard, supervised the work and lent the Department's only globe, on condition that it be returned with the Falkland Islands still attached. They were. He also supplied the departmental method, which is reproduced in Chapter 1 and which the author has applied to every claim in this paper, including the ones she liked.

The Department of Applied Geopolitics is thanked for reviewing Chapter 7 and for its written opinion that Rockall is 'not currently a domino'. The Department of Improbable Systems calculated the distance from Rockall to the nearest working kettle and asked that its answer be treated as an upper bound on hospitality.

Mrs Enid Partridge of the Senior Common Room provided the Visitor with tea throughout the briefing and, at the point where the Crown Dependencies were explained, a biscuit. She has asked it to be recorded that the biscuit was not a comment on his progress, which she described as 'better than most Fellows'.

Gerald was asked to find the Department's copy of the Interpretation Act 1978. Neither has been seen since.

Statement on nomenclature. Throughout this briefing the terms are used in their precise senses, which is the point. Where the Department departs from precision it says so, apologises, and puts the kettle on. The Irish Government does not use the term 'British Isles', and the Department has noted where an alternative exists.

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NOMENCLATURE

Symbol	Meaning
BI	the British Isles: a geographical term for the archipelago; not a state, not a nationality
GB	Great Britain: the largest island, containing England, Scotland and Wales; also the ISO code for the UK
UK	the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: the sovereign state (1801; present name 1927)
NI	Northern Ireland: part of the UK, on the island of Ireland (1921)
ROI	'Republic of Ireland': the statutory description of the state whose name is Ireland (1948 Act, in force 1949)
CD	Crown Dependency: the Isle of Man, the Bailiwick of Jersey and the Bailiwick of Guernsey; the Crown's, not the UK's
British Islands	a legal term: the UK plus the Crown Dependencies (Interpretation Act 1978)
BOT	British Overseas Territory: fourteen of them, from Gibraltar to the Falklands; out of scope, in the Map Cupboard
EEZ	exclusive economic zone under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea; a rock does not get one
IONA	'Islands of the North Atlantic': a proposed neutral alternative to 'British Isles' that has never caught on
Wight	the Isle of Wight: an English county in the Solent; briefly a kingdom (1444 to 1446)
Rockall	a granite islet c. 300 km west of St Kilda, annexed 1955, incorporated 1972; about 17 m high
the Visitor	a United States Air Force officer, of the lands of the Duke of York, who asked
c.	circa; the Department's honest prefix for any distance measured from a map with tea on it

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The question

The Visitor is a serving fighter pilot. He can state from memory the thrust of most Western combat aircraft in afterburner, and he explained the thermodynamic cycle of a scramjet to the Senior Common Room with a clarity that the Department of Aeronautical Engineering has asked to borrow. He then said that he had been in the country for three weeks, had been told on successive days that he was in England, in Britain, in Great Britain, in the United Kingdom and in the British Isles, had been corrected each time by a different person, and would be grateful if someone could tell him, once, what this place was called.

The room fell quiet in the way that rooms do when everyone present realises that they know the answer and that none of them could give it in under a minute without a diagram. Professor Fortescue said that it was a question for the Department. The Department said that it was a question for a briefing. The briefing is before you.

1.2 Why the College does not normally write this down

An institution founded in 978 (ish) does not, as a rule, publish an account of what country it is in. A gentleman is presumed to know, in the way he is presumed to know which fork to use and which way to pass the port, and a College that wrote it down would be admitting the possibility of a Fellow who did not. The subject is therefore taught in the usual way, which is by being corrected at dinner for several years until it stops happening.

The Visitor does not have several years, and the Department accepts that his difficulty is not his fault. He comes from the lands of the Duke of York, a province named in 1664 for a man who later became King James II and who did not, on balance, keep the job. His country has since been founded, expanded, divided, reunited and rearranged at a pace that the College regards as brisk. A great deal has changed in a short space of time for him. It is a small drop in the ocean for an establishment of this age, and the Department is content to explain it slowly, once, and in writing, so that it need never do so again.

1.3 Method

The Department applies the Fortescue method to every term: remove adjectives; check dates; separate a legal fact from a habit; apply the proposed rule symmetrically; if the rule produces a British claim on Calais, inspect it again; put the kettle on. Where a term has a precise meaning and a loose one, both are given and the loose one is labelled, because the loose one is the one the Visitor will hear in the pub.

College hypothesis. Everyone who lives here knows what the United Kingdom is. Nobody who lives here can explain it in one sentence. The two facts are not in tension; they are the national character.

2 THE ISLANDS

2.1 The British Isles

The British Isles is a geographical term for the archipelago off the north-west coast of Europe: two large islands, Great Britain and Ireland, and something over six thousand smaller ones, of which the Visitor will meet perhaps five. It is not a country. It has no government, no flag, no passport and no team. It describes rock and water, and it describes them regardless of who is standing on them, which is why it is the one term in this paper that has not changed its meaning since the Department was founded.

It is also, the Visitor should know, a term the Irish Government does not use, for the understandable reason that it contains the word 'British' and a good deal of Ireland. Alternatives exist. 'These islands' is used in polite company and in treaties. 'Islands of the North Atlantic', with its agreeable acronym IONA, was proposed in the late twentieth century and has been adopted by almost nobody, which the Department regards as a pity and Professor Fortescue regards as inevitable, on the grounds that it also describes Iceland.

2.2 Great Britain

Great Britain is the larger of the two big islands. It contains England, Scotland and Wales, and nothing else. It does not contain Northern Ireland, which is on the other island; it does not contain the Isle of Man, which is in between; and it does not contain the Channel Islands, which are off France. 'Great' distinguishes it from Brittany, the lesser Britain across the water, and not, whatever the Visitor may have been told in the pub, from anything the island has done.

The word 'Britain' on its own is used loosely for the United Kingdom, and 'British' is the nationality of everyone in the United Kingdom, including the people of Northern Ireland, who are not on Great Britain. The Visitor is asked to accept this rather than resolve it. The residents have.

2.3 Ireland, the island

Ireland is the second large island. Most of it is the sovereign state of Ireland; the north-eastern corner is Northern Ireland, a part of the United Kingdom. The island therefore has one name, two jurisdictions and a land border that is the only one the United Kingdom possesses, which is the reason it has occupied more diplomatic effort per mile than any other line on the Visitor's map.

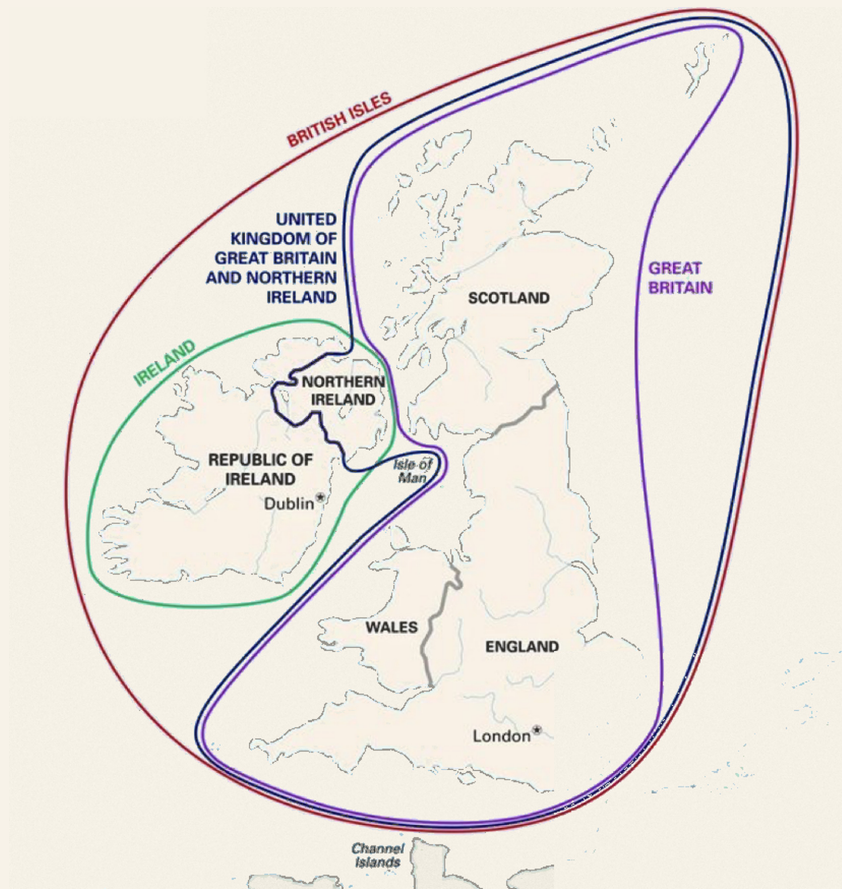


Figure 2.1 - The terms as geography, islands and constitutional arrangements.

The pencil is illustrative; the definitions are not. The Visitor is advised to begin with the red line and tea.

2.4 The rest of the six thousand

Of the smaller islands, a few will be needed. Anglesey is Welsh. The Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland are Scottish, Shetland having been Norwegian until 1469, when it was pledged as a dowry for a royal marriage and never redeemed, a transaction the Department admires. Lerwick, its capital, is closer to Bergen than to Edinburgh. The Isles of Scilly are English and mild. The Isle of Wight is English and dealt with in Chapter 6, because the Visitor asked and because the Department has never been able to resist it. The Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are dealt with in Chapter 5, because they are not in the United Kingdom at all, and this is the point at which the Visitor's notebook was first observed to be turned over and started again.

3 THE TWO STATES

3.1 The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is the sovereign state. It was assembled in stages, none of them designed with the Visitor in mind. England and Wales were joined by statute in 1535 and 1542. England and Scotland, having shared a monarch since 1603, joined as the Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707. Great Britain and Ireland joined as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland on 1 January 1801. Most of Ireland left in 1922, and in 1927 the name was adjusted to its present form, the Department suspects with some relief.

The Visitor asked whether the state is therefore called Britain, Great Britain or the United Kingdom. The answer is the third, though the first two are used by everyone including the Government, the passport says 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland', the international code is GB, and in 2021 the code on the back of cars was changed from GB to UK so that Northern Ireland would feel included. The Department reports this without comment, which took some effort.

3.2 Ireland

The other state is called Ireland. That is its name, in its constitution, in the English language and at the United Nations. 'Republic of Ireland' is its statutory description, adopted in 1948 and in force from 1949, and is useful precisely because it distinguishes the state from the island, which is why the Visitor will hear it constantly and why this paper uses it. The state left the United Kingdom in 1922 as the Irish Free State, adopted its present constitution in 1937 and became a republic in 1949. It is a member of the European Union. The United Kingdom no longer is. The Visitor is asked to file this under 'a lot has changed recently for them, too'.

3.3 Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland was created in 1921 and is part of the United Kingdom. Its people may hold British citizenship, Irish citizenship or both, an arrangement confirmed by the 1998 agreement that the Visitor may know as the Good Friday Agreement. It sends athletes to the Olympics as part of Team GB or, if they prefer, as part of Ireland. It plays rugby as part of an all-island Ireland team and football as Northern Ireland. The Department offers no rule that reconciles these. There is none. There is a table, in Chapter 4.

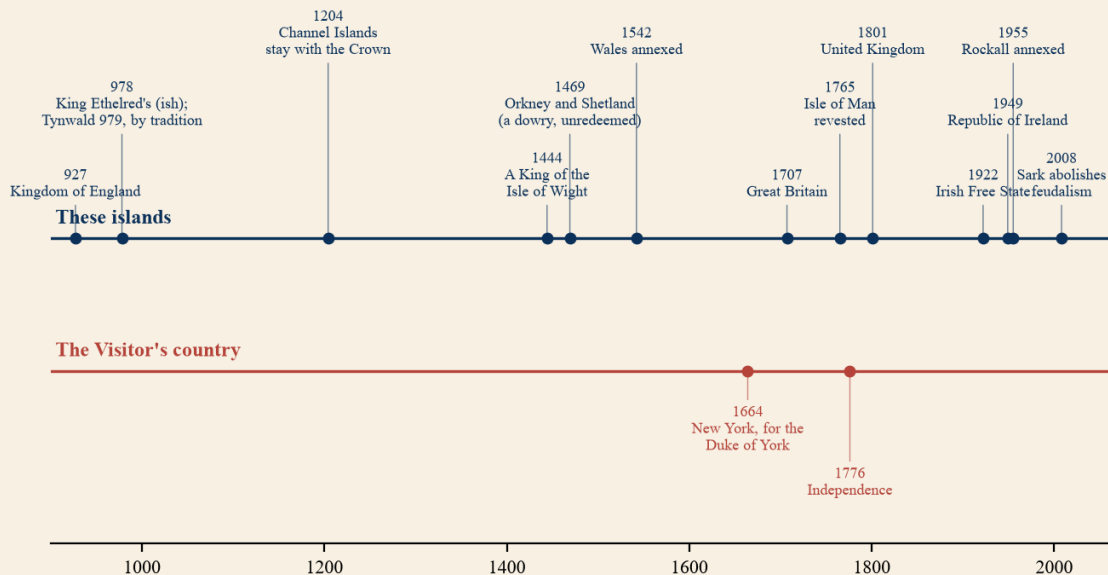


Figure 3.1 - What the map said, and when. The lower line is provided for the Visitor's sense of proportion and is not intended unkindly. The Department notes that everything on the upper line after 1776 also happened in his lifetime as a nation.

3.4 A note on the word "mainland"

The Visitor will hear Great Britain called 'the mainland' by people in Northern Ireland, the Hebrides and the Isle of Wight, and he will hear the continent of Europe called 'the mainland' by people on Great Britain, usually while boarding a ferry to it. The word means 'the larger piece of land I am not currently standing on', and it is the only term in this paper that is defined by the speaker's shoes.

4 THE FOUR COUNTRIES

4.1 Countries within a country

The United Kingdom is made of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are called countries by the Government, by the Office for National Statistics and by their inhabitants, and the Visitor is advised to do the same. Three of them have their own parliaments or assemblies with devolved powers; England does not, and is governed from Westminster, which is also the parliament of the whole. The Visitor asked whether this was fair. The Department said that it was a matter for the Department of Applied Geopolitics, which said that it was a matter for the Bursar, who was at lunch.

England is the largest, by population and by the habit of being confused with the whole. Scotland has its own legal system, its own banknotes and, since 1999, its own parliament. Wales was annexed in the sixteenth century, retained its language, and since 2011 has been formally described as a country by the international standards body, having been listed for some years as a principality on the strength of a title held by the heir to the throne. Northern Ireland is Chapter 3.

4.2 The sporting evidence

The Visitor, being a practical man, asked how many teams the place fields. The honest answer is that it depends on the sport, and Table 4.1 sets out the position for the ones he is likely to be shown on a television.

Sport	Who turns up	Note for the Visitor
Football	England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, separately	Four associations, four anthems, four ways to lose on penalties
Rugby union	England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland as one island	The Irish team includes Northern Ireland; nobody minds
Cricket	'England', run by the England and Wales Cricket Board	Wales is inside the name; Scotland and Ireland play separately
Olympics	'Team GB', officially Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Northern Irish athletes may choose Ireland instead
The Ryder Cup	Europe	Including the Republic of Ireland; excluding the Visitor, by design

Table 4.1 - Who plays for whom. The pattern is not a pattern. The Department has stopped looking for one.

4.3 Berwick-upon-Tweed

The Visitor will at some point be told that the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed, having changed hands between England and Scotland thirteen times, was left out of the peace treaty at the end of the Crimean War and remained technically at war with Russia until a Soviet official signed a peace with the mayor in 1966. The Department has checked. It is not true. The Department regrets this more than it can say and has included the story anyway, labelled, so that the Visitor can enjoy it responsibly.

5 THE CROWN DEPENDENCIES

5.1 The Crown, but not the Kingdom

This is the chapter at which the Visitor asked for the window to be opened. Three territories in the British Isles belong to the Crown and are not part of the United Kingdom: the Isle of Man, the Bailiwick of Jersey and the Bailiwick of Guernsey. They have their own parliaments, laws, courts, currencies at par with sterling, and tax arrangements about which the Department has been asked not to be funny. The United Kingdom is responsible for their defence and international representation. They were never in the European Union. They are not represented at Westminster. Their people are British citizens. The Visitor wrote all of this down and then wrote 'why' in the margin, which the Department considers a fair summary of the literature.

The law has a word for the United Kingdom together with the three Crown Dependencies, and the word is 'the British Islands', which is not the same as the British Isles, and the Department apologises for that on behalf of the Interpretation Act 1978, which did not.

5.2 The Isle of Man

The Isle of Man sits in the Irish Sea between all four countries of the United Kingdom and belongs to none of them. Its parliament, Tynwald, claims by tradition to have met continuously since 979, one year after the founding of this College, and like the College it has no documentary evidence for the date. The Department regards this as a bond between institutions rather than a matter for correction. The island was purchased by the Crown from the Duke of Atholl in 1765, an arrangement known as the Revestment, and the King holds it under the title Lord of Mann, which the Visitor may hear at the loyal toast. It has a motorcycle race, a tailless cat and a three-legged flag, and it is the only place in these islands where the Department has been offered a kipper as a form of identification.

5.3 Jersey and Guernsey

The Channel Islands lie off the coast of Normandy and are the last piece of the Duchy of Normandy still held by the English Crown, having stayed with King John in 1204 when the rest of Normandy did not. They are two Bailiwicks. Jersey is one island. Guernsey is several: Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herm and some smaller ones, each with its own arrangements, of which Sark's included a feudal constitution until it held its first democratic election in December 2008. The loyal toast in the islands is 'The King, our Duke'. The Crown's official position is that the monarch is not the Duke of Normandy. The islanders' position is that they will drink to it anyway.

The Channel Islands were the only part of the British Isles occupied by Germany in the Second World War, from June 1940 to 9 May 1945, which the islands keep as Liberation Day. The Department mentions this so that the Visitor does not, and so that he understands why the islanders are relaxed about most questions of nomenclature and unmovable on that one.

Territory	In the UK?	In the British Islands (law)?	In the British Isles (geography)?	Whose is it?
England, Scotland, Wales	Yes	Yes	Yes	The King's, via Parliament
Northern Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	As above; see Chapter 3 before saying so aloud
Republic of Ireland	No	No	Yes, geographically; the term is not used there	Its own
Isle of Man	No	Yes	Yes	The King's, as Lord of Mann
Jersey; Guernsey	No	Yes	By convention	The King's, as a Duke he officially is not
Isle of Wight	Yes	Yes	Yes	England's; briefly its own, 1444 to 1446
Rockall	Yes (Scotland)	Yes	Yes, at a stretch	Britain claims it; the sea disagrees daily

Table 5.1 - Who is in what. The Visitor is advised to photograph this table rather than attempt to memorise it. Several Fellows have.

Departmental observation. The Crown Dependencies are the constitutional equivalent of a relative who lives in the annexe: not in the house, not out of it, on excellent terms, and with their own front door key.

6 THE ISLE OF WIGHT

6.1 Why a chapter was necessary

The Isle of Wight requires no explanation. It is a county of England, lying across the Solent from Hampshire, with a population of about 140,000, a ferry, a hovercraft and a great many people who will tell the Visitor that they are going to 'the mainland' when they mean Portsmouth. It is in the United Kingdom, in Great Britain by any reasonable reading and in the British Isles by every reading. It is included here because the Visitor asked about it, having been told by a colleague that it was 'sort of separate', and because the Department, once started on the subject, found that it could not stop.

6.2 The kingdom

The island was, briefly, a kingdom. In 1444 King Henry VI, wishing to raise his childhood companion Henry Beauchamp, Duke of Warwick, to something nearer his own standing, crowned him King of the Isle of Wight in person. The English nobility objected that there was nothing in English law that permitted a king of the island. Beauchamp died in 1446 at the age of twenty-one, without an heir, and the title died with him. The island has had no king since and has not asked for one. The Department records that the arrangement lasted two years, which places it, for constitutional durability, somewhere between a Prime Minister and a lettuce.

6.3 The Solent, and the last hovercraft

Queen Victoria kept a house at Osborne on the island and died there in January 1901, which is the reason the island has never quite accepted that it is not the centre of things. Cowes has held a regatta since 1826. The Needles are chalk. And the crossing from Southsea to Ryde is made by hovercraft, one of the last scheduled passenger hovercraft services anywhere in the world, an invention the Visitor's country has never taken to and this one has never quite given up. The Department recommends it to him as the only form of transport in these islands that is, in the strict sense, neither in the water nor out of it, and therefore a fair introduction to the constitution.

7 ROCKALL

7.1 What it is

Rockall is a granite islet in the North Atlantic, roughly 20 metres across and 17 metres high, about 300 kilometres west of St Kilda, itself uninhabited since 1930. It has one flattish ledge, no soil, no water, no vegetation to speak of and a great many birds. It is British. The Department wishes to be clear about this before explaining why, since the why is not much of an argument and the fact is not much of a prize.

7.2 How it became British

On 18 September 1955 a party from the survey ship HMS Vidal was landed on Rockall by helicopter, having waited three days for the wind, and raised the flag, fixed a plaque and claimed the islet for the Crown. The purpose was to make sure nobody else could use it to observe a planned missile test range. In 1972 Parliament passed the Island of Rockall Act, which made it part of Scotland, specifically of Inverness-shire, which it has never visited. The plaque was still there in 1997 and had gone after Greenpeace spent 42 days on the rock that summer and declared it the independent state of Waveland. In 2014 an explorer named Nick Hancock lived on it for 45 days in a survival pod, a record the Department has no plans to challenge.

Ireland does not recognise the British claim. The Visitor may find this surprising, since nobody else wants the rock either, but the disagreement concerns the fishing grounds around it rather than the rock itself, and on that the position is settled by treaty: under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which the United Kingdom ratified in 1997, a rock that cannot sustain human habitation or an economic life of its own generates no exclusive economic zone and no continental shelf. Rockall therefore contributes to the British map exactly what it contributes to British life, which is a name.

7.3 On guard

The Visitor asked whether anyone had ever tried to hold the place. In 1974 two Royal Marines from the frigate HMS Tartar were landed on Rockall, erected a traditional wooden sentry box on the guano-covered ledge and stood guard beside it in full dress uniform while the Atlantic broke over the rock behind them. The photograph exists. It is, in the Department's view, the finest single image of British territorial policy ever taken: two men, one box, no enemy, immaculate turnout and the sea. Nobody attacked. The Department has been unable to establish whether this was because of the sentries or because there was nothing to attack, and it suspects the Marines were told the same.

The Department notes for the Visitor's benefit that the sentry box is a piece of equipment his own armed forces would have replaced with a fence, a sign and a lawyer. The College regards the box as the correct answer. It states, at a glance and without paperwork, that somebody is responsible for this, that he would rather be elsewhere, and that he will nonetheless be here at the end of his watch.

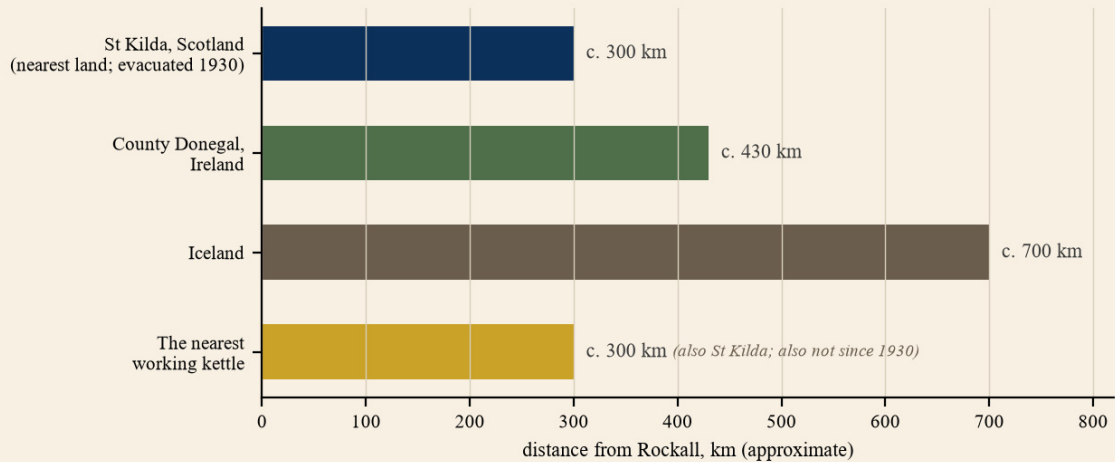


Figure 7.1 - Rockall in context. Distances are approximate and were measured by the Department of Improbable Systems, who also supplied the last bar and would like it to be taken seriously.

Departmental finding. Rockall is British, wet and unwanted, and has been all three since 1955. The Department regards it as the most honest territory in the Kingdom.

8 THE VISITOR'S FRAME OF REFERENCE

8.1 The lands of the Duke of York

The Visitor is from New York, which was New Amsterdam until 1664, when it was taken from the Dutch and renamed for James, Duke of York, brother of the King. James became King James II in 1685 and left the throne in 1688 in circumstances the Department describes to visitors as 'a change of management'. The colony kept his name. The Department mentions this because it is the earliest point at which the Visitor's history and the College's overlap, and because it establishes that his country was named after a man who was later removed from office for constitutional reasons, which ought to make him feel at home in Chapter 5.

8.2 A sense of proportion

The Visitor's country declared its independence in 1776 and has since become the most powerful nation on earth, a record the Department acknowledges without reservation. It has done so in 250 years. The Kingdom of England is eleven centuries old; the College is a little younger and less well documented; the Isle of Man's parliament claims to be older than both and cannot prove it; and Great Britain, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland are, by comparison, recent arrangements that the older institutions are still getting used to. Figure 8.1 sets this out. It is not intended to diminish the Visitor. It is intended to explain why nobody here is in any hurry.

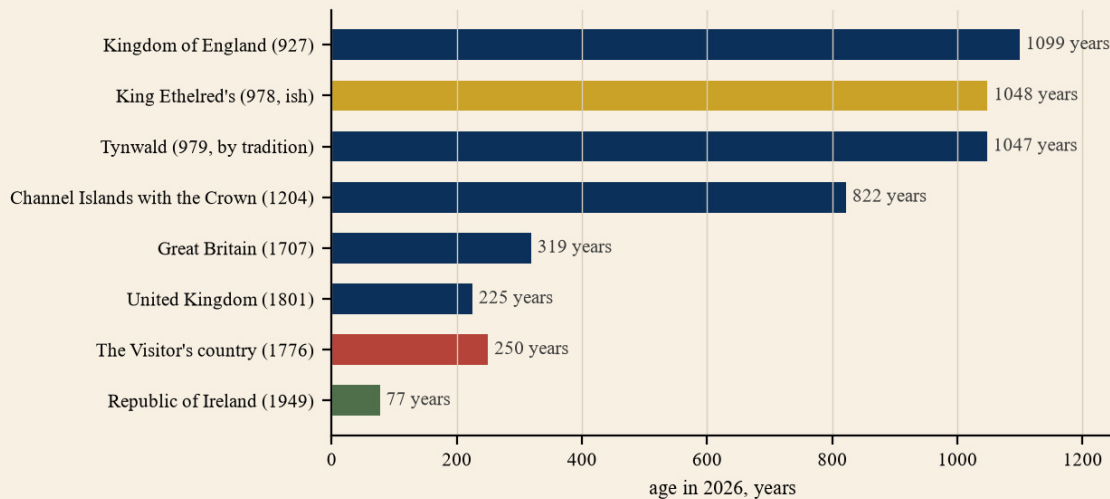


Figure 8.1 - Institutions by age in 2026. The College's bar is drawn in gold because the College drew it. The Visitor's country is in red, as it was on the old maps, though for different reasons.

8.3 What the Visitor had been calling things

On arrival the Visitor used 'England' for the state, 'English' for its people, 'the Queen' for its head of state and 'the British Isles' for the country. These are, respectively, a part for the whole, a part for the whole, two years out of date and a category error. The Department does not hold this against him. It has heard all four from Members of Parliament, and it has heard the third from itself.

9 A CARD FOR THE COCKPIT

The Visitor asked, reasonably, for the short version. It is given in Table 9.1, which he is invited to laminate. The Department's only condition is that he does not read it aloud in Dublin, Douglas or St Helier without first checking which column he is on.

If you mean	Say	Do not say
The sovereign state you landed in	The United Kingdom, or the UK; "Britain" will pass	"England", unless you are in it
The big island	Great Britain	"The mainland", unless you know whose
The other big island	Ireland	"Southern Ireland"; it has a north coast
The state on most of it	Ireland; "the Republic of Ireland" to be clear	"Eire", unless speaking Irish
The UK part of it	Northern Ireland	"Ulster"; three counties of Ulster are in the Republic
The whole archipelago	The British Isles, or "these islands" in company	Anything with "kingdom" in it
The people	British; or English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish; or Irish	"English" for a Scot; the Department will not attend the inquest
Man, Jersey, Guernsey	The Crown Dependencies	"Part of the UK"; they have their own stamps and will show you
The Isle of Wight	The Isle of Wight; it is in England	"Sort of separate"; it is not, and it minds
Rockall	Rockall	Nothing else; there is nothing else to say

Table 9.1 - The short version. The Department accepts no liability for its use in Glasgow.

College doctrine. When in doubt, say 'the UK' for the state, 'Great Britain' for the island, 'Ireland' for the other island and its state, and 'these islands' for all of it. Then ask for tea. The tea will be forthcoming everywhere in the table, including, on the evidence of Chapter 7, nowhere.

10 CONCLUSIONS

- The British Isles is a geographical term for an archipelago of two large islands and some six thousand smaller ones. It is not a state, and its use is not universal on the western island.
- Great Britain is the larger island, holding England, Scotland and Wales. The United Kingdom is the sovereign state, holding those three and Northern Ireland, and has had its present name since 1927.
- Ireland is the second island, most of which is the sovereign state of Ireland, described in statute as the Republic of Ireland, and the north-east of which is part of the United Kingdom.
- The Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey belong to the Crown and not to the Kingdom. With the United Kingdom they form the British Islands, a legal term that differs from the British Isles by three letters and one Act of Parliament.
- The Isle of Wight is in England, was a kingdom for two years in the 1440s, and is reached by hovercraft.
- Rockall is British because of a helicopter, an Act of 1972 and the absence of any competing enthusiasm. It generates no economic zone and no tea.
- The Visitor's country is 250 years old. Everything in this paper that confused him was in place, in some form, before his country existed, and most of it before his country's continent had been drawn.

Principal finding. The United Kingdom is a country made of countries, on an island that is not the country, in a group of islands that is not a political unit, beside a second country that shares one of the islands. The Visitor is asked not to worry. The residents do not.

Secondary finding. A gentleman is presumed to know all of the above. The Department has now met a great many gentlemen and has concluded that the presumption is doing most of the work.

REFERENCES

- [1] Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Terminology of the British Isles', the diagram the Visitor produced from his telephone and from which this briefing proceeds.
- [2] Interpretation Act 1978, Schedule 1: 'British Islands' means the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.
- [3] Union with Scotland Act 1706 and Union with England Act 1707; Union with Ireland Act 1800 (in force 1 January 1801); Royal and Parliamentary Titles Act 1927.
- [4] Laws in Wales Acts 1535 and 1542; Government of Ireland Act 1920; Constitution of Ireland 1937, Article 4; Republic of Ireland Act 1948 (in force 18 April 1949).
- [5] Ministry of Justice, 'Crown Dependencies', on the constitutional relationship between the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey; Isle of Man Purchase Act 1765.
- [6] Tynwald, 'History', on the traditional date of 979 and the absence of documentary evidence for it; Reform (Sark) Law 2008.
- [7] Dictionary of National Biography, 'Beauchamp, Henry de, Duke of Warwick', on the 1444 coronation as King of the Isle of Wight.
- [8] Island of Rockall Act 1972; HMS Vidal ship's record of the landing of 18 September 1955; United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Article 121(3), ratified by the United Kingdom in 1997.
- [9] Department for Transport, on the change of the international vehicle registration code from GB to UK, 28 September 2021.
- [10] Hovertravel, Southsea to Ryde passenger hovercraft service, in operation since 1965.

Sources were consulted in September 2026. The College is fictional; the statutes are not. The Berwick-upon-Tweed story in Section 4.3 is included as folklore and labelled as such.

APPENDIX A - THE FORTESCUE METHOD, APPLIED

The Visitor asked to see the method work on a hard case. The Department chose the sentence 'England is an island'.

1. Remove adjectives. None present. **2. Check dates.** England has existed since 927; Great Britain, the island, for rather longer. **3. Separate the legal fact from the habit.** The habit is to call the island by the name of its largest country. The fact is that Scotland and Wales are on it too and have said so repeatedly. **4. Apply the rule symmetrically.** If the largest country names the island, then Ireland, the island, is 'the Republic', and Northern Ireland is in the Republic, which it is not. **5. Does it produce a British claim on Calais?** No, though it is the sort of rule that would. **6. Put the kettle on.** Done. The sentence is false. The Visitor may keep the kettle.

APPENDIX B - THINGS THE VISITOR WAS TOLD IN THE PUB

Claim	Verdict
England is an island	No; see Appendix A
Berwick is at war with Russia	No; but see Section 4.3, and enjoy it
The Isle of Wight is sort of separate	No; it is in England, and it has a hovercraft
The Isle of Man is in the UK	No; it belongs to the Crown and has its own parliament, which is older than most things
Jersey is in France	No; it is off France, which is a different preposition and a different history
Ireland is in the UK	Part of the island is; the state is not, and has not been since 1922
Rockall is a made-up place	No; it is real, and the Department has the plaque inventory to prove somebody lost one
Everyone here is English	The Department has arranged for the Visitor to repeat this in Cardiff, for his education

Table B.1 - Pub claims and their standing. The Visitor collected these in three weeks. The Department collected the same set in 1,048 years.

APPENDIX C - FUTURE WORK

The fourteen British Overseas Territories, from Gibraltar to the Falkland Islands, are outside the scope of this briefing and inside the South Atlantic Map Cupboard, where the Department's existing monograph on the Falklands already deals with the difficult one. The Visitor has asked about Bermuda. The Department has asked why.

A second briefing on the Isles of Scilly, Lundy and the several tidal islands that are part of England only at low water is in preparation and will be issued when the tide is right.

The Visitor's colleagues have submitted a further question, which is whether Scotland is a country. The Department has replied that it is, and has advised them not to ask it in Scotland in any other form.

APPENDIX D - DEPARTMENTAL NOTE

The Department of Strategic Geography, International Law, Crown Works and Applied Common Sense records that this briefing was prepared in an afternoon, checked over two days, and read by the Visitor in an hour, at the end of which he said that he now understood the whole thing perfectly and would explain it to his squadron. The Department wished him luck and gave him the laminated card.

It further records that the Visitor, on leaving, thanked the College for its hospitality and asked whether he was now in England. He was. The Department regards this as progress, and has filed the question under Crown Works, where it will be reviewed in a century or so, when a great deal will have changed for him and very little for us.

Persevera Etelred