



# English Learning for Curious Minds



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**Episode #079**  
**The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom**  
**11th August, 2020**



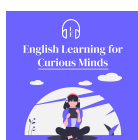
[00:00:00] Hello, hello, hello and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about The Strangest Laws in the UK.

[00:00:30] Now, perhaps you think of the UK as quite a sensible country. Or perhaps you think it is a bit of a ridiculous place.

[00:00:39] Whatever you think, the reality is that English law is the legal system of choice for a lot of international contracts.

[00:00:49] It's considered to be well-developed, clear, and fair for everyone.



## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

[00:00:54] What most people don't know though is that there are some laws in the UK that are, [quite frankly](#)<sup>1</sup>, completely ridiculous.

[00:01:04] Laws about carrying fish, laws that might surprise you about drinking alcohol, and laws about what the Queen can and cannot do to [swans](#)<sup>2</sup>.

[00:01:17] Today's episode is going to be a little bit ridiculous, but I hope it will be an interesting one.

[00:01:24] So, rather than me just telling you that there are ridiculous laws in the UK, let's just talk about them, and you can make up your own mind about whether you think they're ridiculous or not.

[00:01:37] OK the, firstly, did you know that it is illegal in the UK to "[handle](#)<sup>3</sup> salmon suspiciously"?

[00:01:46] The Salmon Act of 1986 was intended to [legislate](#)<sup>4</sup> against the illegal fishing of salmon, to stop people being able to catch salmon without permission. But there was a section in there that says it is illegal to [handle](#)<sup>5</sup> salmon suspiciously, without any kind of clarification about exactly what suspiciously actually means.

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<sup>1</sup> to be honest

<sup>2</sup> large, usually white birds with a long neck

<sup>3</sup> to touch or hold in your hands

<sup>4</sup> make a new law

<sup>5</sup> see 'handle'



## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

[00:02:13] It would probably be suspicious for you to be carrying a raw salmon in your hands walking down the street, and some people might say it would be suspicious for you to add tomato ketchup to a smoked salmon sandwich.

[00:02:28] You probably wouldn't be arrested for doing these things, but you should watch out - [handling](#) salmon suspiciously is against the law.

[00:02:37] It's worth pointing out that this law actually is pretty recent, from 1986.

[00:02:45] Most of the laws that we'll talk about today are a lot older than that, and they have really just been left there, never changed. So it is a little strange to see something that was created so recently be so weird, or at least, so [ambiguous](#)<sup>6</sup>.

[00:03:04] Our second law is related to [swans](#), the [majestic](#)<sup>7</sup> white birds that you might see floating down a river or on a lake.

[00:03:15] There are a few strange laws relating to [swans](#) in the UK.

[00:03:19] Firstly, all [swans](#) in the UK are protected. It is illegal to kill one, and you can be given a large [fine](#)<sup>8</sup> of up to £5,000 for killing a [swan](#).

[00:03:33] Fair enough, you might think - [swans](#) seem pretty nice, who would want to kill one?

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<sup>6</sup> unclear, or having multiple meanings

<sup>7</sup> beautiful and deserving of admiration

<sup>8</sup>



## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

[00:03:38] But the law and [swans](#) gets a little stranger.

[00:03:43] There is one [breed](#)<sup>9</sup> of [swan](#), one type of [swan](#), called a mute [swan](#), and this [breed](#) is owned by the Queen. Every single mute [swan](#) in the country is technically owned by Queen Elizabeth.

[00:04:00] She is even allowed to eat this [breed](#) of [swan](#), but only if she eats it when she is a guest of a college at Cambridge University.

[00:04:12] However, these [swans](#) are still protected, and even though the Queen is legally allowed to eat one, it is illegal to kill it.

[00:04:22] It's not really very clear how that works out. It seems like if the Queen was keen on eating a [swan](#), she could do it, but she would have to pay the £5,000 for killing it.

[00:04:36] Luckily for the [swans](#), the Queen hasn't shown much interest in [exercising](#)<sup>10</sup> her legal right to eat one yet.

[00:04:45] While we are on the subject of The Queen, let's talk about another law that involves her, and that is relating to money, postage stamps, or anything that has the

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<sup>9</sup> type of an animal

<sup>10</sup> using a power that you have



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[reigning<sup>11</sup>](#) [monarch's<sup>12</sup>](#) picture on it, the king or queen who is on the throne at that time.

[00:05:05] Now, the law is actually quite simple on this. You can't [deface<sup>13</sup>](#) it, meaning you can't [willfully<sup>14</sup>](#) damage it.

[00:05:14] So if you buy a stamp, then write all over that or [tear it up<sup>15</sup>](#), that is a crime.

[00:05:22] Similarly, with a banknote, if you [deface](#) that, you write on it, you [rip it up<sup>16</sup>](#), or do anything that on purpose that damages it, you could be [fined<sup>17</sup>](#) up to £200.

[00:05:36] So, not only would you have lost the money, because it would now be unusable, but also you could get [slapped<sup>18</sup>](#) with a very large [fine](#).

[00:05:47] Certainly one to avoid I think.

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<sup>11</sup> on the throne at that time

<sup>12</sup> of the king or queen

<sup>13</sup> to damage something by drawing on it

<sup>14</sup> on purpose, not accidentally

<sup>15</sup> to damage something by pulling it into pieces

<sup>16</sup> to pull something into small pieces

<sup>17</sup> made to pay money as a punishment

<sup>18</sup> (informal) given



## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

[00:05:50] Moving on, those of you who have been to the UK will know that pubs, and drinking, are quite a [feature](#)<sup>19</sup> in British life.

[00:06:01] So the next law might surprise you.

[00:06:05] It is actually illegal to be drunk in public.

[00:06:10] The Licensing Act of 1872 states that “every person found drunk in a highway or other public place, whether a building or not, or on any [licensed](#)<sup>20</sup> [premises](#)<sup>21</sup> can be fined up to £200”.

[00:06:27] I couldn’t find any statistics on this, but I would be pretty sure that this is the law that is most commonly broken in the United Kingdom, and that, unfortunately, whether you are listening to this episode at 8pm on a Friday evening, or at 8am on a Tuesday morning, there will be someone, somewhere in the UK, who is drunk in a public place.

[00:06:53] I should say that this law isn’t really [enforced](#)<sup>22</sup> in the UK, but what is illegal, and what you would get punished for, is something called being ‘drunk and [disorderly](#)<sup>23</sup>’.

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<sup>19</sup> an important thing

<sup>20</sup> given permission to serve alcohol

<sup>21</sup> building, especially one owned by an organisation

<sup>22</sup> if a law is enforced, the police make sure that people obey it

<sup>23</sup> violent or badly behaved



## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

[00:07:06] Essentially this is being drunk in public and causing trouble.

[00:07:11] But of course, as a loyal member of Leonardo English, I'm sure that you are unlikely to be drunk and **disorderly** on the streets of the UK.

[00:07:19] And we have just one more slightly strange law relating to alcohol. Naturally, like almost every country in the world, it is against the law to be drunk and drive a car.

[00:07:33] Obviously, this makes a lot of sense, and I'm certainly not saying that this is strange or ridiculous.

[00:07:39] But did you know that it is also illegal to be drunk and ride a horse?

[00:07:47] This law came in along with the one about being drunk in public, in the Licensing Act of 1872.

[00:07:54] It states that it is an offence to be drunk in charge of a "carriage, horse, cow or steam engine."

[00:08:03] So a carriage, just to explain that quickly, is the four wheeled vehicle that would be pulled by a horse. And a steam engine means, essentially, an old train.

[00:08:14] Luckily these two things are not really in use any more, but if you were thinking about having a few drinks and then riding a horse, think again - you're breaking the law.

[00:08:26] Our next law is one that, if you have been to London, you might have broken.





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[00:08:30] Certainly I've [witnessed](#)<sup>24</sup> many tourists breaking this law.

[00:08:35] You might know that forming a queue, making a line when you are waiting for something, is almost part of the [DNA](#)<sup>25</sup> of Britain. We are exceptionally good at making queues, and whereas in other countries it often seems like there is a mad rush to get to the front of the line, and people push past each other, in the UK we like to form an [orderly](#)<sup>26</sup> queue.

[00:09:04] But what you might not have known is that, when it comes to the laws of TfL, Transport for London, which [administers](#)<sup>27</sup> the underground network, there is a specific regulation relating to queues.

[00:09:20] If you are directed to join a queue by an authorised person at TfL, Transport for London, you must join the end of the queue and [obey](#)<sup>28</sup> their instructions. It's not just that in London we don't like [queue-jumpers](#)<sup>29</sup>, it's the law, or at least, the [by-law](#)<sup>30</sup> of TfL.

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<sup>24</sup> seen

<sup>25</sup> if something is "in someone's DNA", it means that they are destined to do something

<sup>26</sup> in an organised way

<sup>27</sup> manages and controls

<sup>28</sup> do what you are told to do

<sup>29</sup> people who go to the front of the queue

<sup>30</sup> a local government law



## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

[00:09:41] Now, this has so far been a little bit of a [silly](#)<sup>31</sup> episode. Of course, the UK has some ridiculous laws that should probably be fixed, or at least updated.

[00:09:53] They make little sense, are often ignored, and are just confusing.

[00:09:59] However, it is not just the UK that is guilty of having strange and mysterious laws, and all over the world there are laws that are, well, [unorthodox](#)<sup>32</sup>.

[00:10:12] In the small Pacific state of Samoa, it is illegal for a man to forget his wife's birthday. It's not quite clear what the sentence is, what the punishment would be if a man did forget his wife's birthday, but it is there in the law.

[00:10:29] As a loyal husband of course, I can't imagine ever forgetting my wife's birthday, although I hear for some men it can be an issue...

[00:10:37] In France, it is actually legal to marry a dead person. This might sound weird, but it does actually make some sense. It was first passed after the First World War, to allow the girlfriends of men who were killed in the war to marry them [posthumously](#)<sup>33</sup>, after they were dead, so that these girlfriends, or now wives, could receive death benefits from the state.

[00:11:04] Since then though, the law around it has been tightened up a little.

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<sup>31</sup> not serious

<sup>32</sup> different from the norm

<sup>33</sup> after a person is dead



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[00:11:10] Now, if you want to marry a dead person, you need to get [express](#)<sup>34</sup> permission from the French president. And apparently only 1 in 4 requests are actually allowed, which is also slightly strange.

[00:11:25] And going to Italy, there was a story going around about 15 years ago that the local government of Turin had put in place a law saying that if you owned a dog, you needed to walk it at least 3 times a day. However, despite this story seeming to be all over the global news, it appears to be fake, or at least, now it's not true.

[00:11:53] I spent about half an hour [combing through](#)<sup>35</sup> the Turin local government legislation so you don't have to, and there is nothing about dogs needing to be walked three times a day.

[00:12:05] Not that your dog wouldn't appreciate it, of course, it's just not against the law.

[00:12:11] There are, actually, a load of laws that people think are true, that just aren't. They make for funny little news articles, or [moderately](#)<sup>36</sup> amusing little podcast episodes, but a lot of them aren't true.

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<sup>34</sup> special, deliberate

<sup>35</sup> looking closely through

<sup>36</sup> averagely



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[00:12:27] There is a [rumour](#)<sup>37</sup> in the UK that killing a [swan](#) is [treason](#)<sup>38</sup>, which isn't true. It was considered [treason](#), but the law was changed in 1998.

[00:12:39] There's another [rumour](#) that the law states that a pregnant woman can urinate, she can pee, in a policeman's hat. That's not true either.

[00:12:50] There's a [rumour](#) that it is illegal to die in the Houses of Parliament, and that you are somehow punished after you die if you happen to pass away inside them. That is not true either.

[00:13:04] And there's another [rumour](#), which I have to confess, I thought was true until I did my research, that it was still legal to kill a Scotsman, a man from Scotland, within the city walls of the town of York.

[00:13:20] Sorry to disappoint you - that's not true either.

[00:13:25] At least in the UK, there is a bit of an effort to try to 'clean up' the law, to try to remove old, [pointless](#)<sup>39</sup> legislation that no longer applies.

[00:13:37] But of course this is less of a [priority](#)<sup>40</sup> than adding new laws for new technologies and new possibilities that didn't exist 100 years ago - from what happens

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<sup>37</sup> something that may be true, but you don't know

<sup>38</sup> the crime of acting against the best interests of your country

<sup>39</sup> without purpose

<sup>40</sup> something that is important and needs to be dealt with quickly



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if you fly a [drone](#)<sup>41</sup> over an airport to what happens to cross-border cryptocurrency transactions.

[00:13:57] Obviously, these are more important than [clarifying](#)<sup>42</sup> the law around alcohol and horses, or updating the law on what ‘[handling](#) salmon suspiciously’ really means.

[00:14:09] There are, probably, some incredibly weird laws that very few people even know exist, and nobody has even thought to [repeal](#)<sup>43</sup>, to get rid of.

[00:14:21] In fact, until the year 1960, it was technically required by law in the United Kingdom that every man between the age of 17 and 60 was required to keep a [longbow](#)<sup>44</sup>, those long bows that you use to fire arrows from.

[00:14:40] The Unlawful Games Act of the year 1541 required this, and said that every man needed to practise [archery](#)<sup>45</sup> regularly.

[00:14:52] This was kept in place for 400 years, and it was only [repealed](#) 60 years ago, centuries after people had actually stopped practising [archery](#).

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<sup>41</sup> a small aircraft without a pilot, operated by a radio

<sup>42</sup> making something more clear

<sup>43</sup> get rid of

<sup>44</sup> a large bow, used for hunting or in battles

<sup>45</sup> the sport of shooting arrows



## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

[00:15:03] Shortly after they got rid of this law, the UK set up something called the Law Commission, which was [tasked<sup>46</sup>](#) with modernising the law; updating laws that need modernising, and getting rid of outdated laws that are no longer relevant.

[00:15:21] It has got rid of over 2,000 different laws so far, but it seems that there is still a bit more work to be done.

[00:15:31] OK then, that is it for this little look at some of the strangest laws in the UK.

[00:15:39] I've certainly learned a lot researching this, and I hope you have too.

[00:15:44] And we both now know that the next time we want to have a few drinks and ride a horse, we [fancy<sup>47</sup>](#) killing a swan, or we want to push past in the queue to get our tube ticket, you and I both know those things are against the law.

[00:16:01] As always, I would love to know what you thought of the show.

[00:16:05] What strange laws do you have in your country?

[00:16:08] Surely there must be some fun ones from where you live that nobody else knows about.

[00:16:14] You can email hi - hi@leonardoenglish.com

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<sup>46</sup> given the job of

<sup>47</sup> would like to (do something)



## English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #079

### The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

[00:16:19] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:16:24] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

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## Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Quite frankly	to be honest
Swans	large, usually white birds with a long neck
Handle	to touch or hold in your hands
Legislate	make a new law
Handling	see 'handle'
Ambiguous	unclear, or having multiple meanings
Majestic	beautiful and deserving of admiration
Fine	money that is paid as punishment
Breed	type of an animal
Exercising	using a power that you have
Reigning	on the throne at that time
Monarch's	of the king or queen
Deface	to damage something by drawing on it





## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

<b>Willfully</b>	on purpose, not accidentally
<b>Tear it up</b>	to damage something by pulling it into pieces
<b>Rip it up</b>	to pull something into small pieces
<b>Fined</b>	made to pay money as a punishment
<b>Slapped</b>	(informal) given
<b>Feature</b>	an important thing
<b>Licensed</b>	given permission to serve alcohol
<b>Premises</b>	building, especially one owned by an organisation
<b>Enforced</b>	if a law is enforced, the police make sure that people obey it
<b>Disorderly</b>	violent or badly behaved
<b>Witnessed</b>	seen
<b>DNA</b>	if something is "in someone's DNA", it means that they are destined to do something
<b>Orderly</b>	in an organised way
<b>Administers</b>	manages and controls
<b>Obey</b>	do what you are told to do



## The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

<b>Queue-jumpers</b>	people who go to the front of the queue
<b>By-law</b>	a local government law
<b>Silly</b>	not serious
<b>Unorthodox</b>	different from the norm
<b>Posthumously</b>	after a person is dead
<b>Express</b>	special, deliberate
<b>Combing through</b>	looking closely through
<b>Moderately</b>	averagely
<b>Rumour</b>	something that may be true, but you don't know
<b>Treason</b>	the crime of acting against the best interests of your country
<b>Pointless</b>	without purpose
<b>Priority</b>	something that is important and needs to be dealt with quickly
<b>Drone</b>	a small aircraft without a pilot, operated by a radio
<b>Clarifying</b>	making something more clear
<b>Repeal</b>	get rid of



## English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #079

### The Strangest Laws in the United Kingdom

**Longbow** a large bow, used for hunting or in battles

**Archery** the sport of shooting arrows

**Tasked** given the job of

**Fancy** would like to (do something)

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