

# ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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## **Episode #111**

### **British Pubs**

**1st Dec, 2020**

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] 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 British pubs.

[00:00:28] If you have ever been to the UK, you'll know quite how important pubs are.

[00:00:34] British people love them, and the average person in Britain will spend over €100,000, and 14 months of their entire life, in the pub.

## British Pubs

[00:00:46] So today we are going to talk about where pubs come from, how they have developed over the years, what role they play, why they are so popular, and talk about some of the [existential<sup>1</sup> threats<sup>2</sup>](#) facing the British pub.

[00:01:04] OK then, let's not waste a minute, and get straight into talking about British pubs.

[00:01:11] The concept of the British pub is quite hard for a non-British person to truly [grasp<sup>3</sup>](#), to truly understand.

[00:01:21] Some people try to [liken<sup>4</sup>](#) it to a bar or cafe in European countries like France, Spain or Italy.

[00:01:30] But that is an imperfect comparison.

[00:01:34] The pub has a place in many Brits' hearts that is difficult to compare to anything you might find in another country.

[00:01:44] For many people it's a second home, a [hub<sup>5</sup>](#), a place to meet friends, relax, chat, and of course, drink beer.

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<sup>1</sup> relating to the possibility of existing

<sup>2</sup> the possibility that something bad will happen

<sup>3</sup> understand

<sup>4</sup> make a comparison

<sup>5</sup> an area where there is a lot of activity

British Pubs

[00:01:54] It might surprise many Brits though to find out that the pub is debatably an Italian invention, or at least, the early concept was brought to Britain by the Romans.

[00:02:08] After the Romans invaded Britain, in 84 AD, they built an [extensive](#)<sup>6</sup> road network, a lot of which still exists today.

[00:02:19] Roman soldiers traveling around the country needed somewhere to rest on their trip, and they built what were effectively the first pubs, called in Latin tabernae.

[00:02:33] The word later got [corrupted](#)<sup>7</sup> into the English 'tavern', and these 'taverns' appeared all over Britain.

[00:02:42] They served beer, which had been [brewed](#)<sup>8</sup> and drunk in Britain well before the arrival of the Romans.

[00:02:50] Now, if you are thinking that this was some kind of a lager type beer, [fizzy](#)<sup>9</sup> and cold, a sort of Heineken or Budweiser type drink, you are most mistaken.

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<sup>6</sup> large

<sup>7</sup> (relating to language) to change the original form or meaning

<sup>8</sup> to make beer

<sup>9</sup> containing bubbles

## British Pubs

[00:03:01] This beer was **flat**<sup>10</sup>, it wasn't **fizzy**, and it quickly became the drink of choice in these taverns, more popular than the wine that the Romans had been used to drinking.

[00:03:15] After the Romans left Britain, towards the end of the fourth century AD, the taverns remained.

[00:03:22] Often, **settlements**<sup>11</sup> and villages had formed around them, and they had become social **hubs**<sup>12</sup>.

[00:03:31] Many continued to serve their original purpose, of providing accommodation for travellers.

[00:03:38] Indeed, if you've been to the UK you'll probably have seen 'inns' and 'pubs', and you might be wondering what the difference is.

[00:03:50] The difference is that an 'inn' traditionally had accommodation, so that travellers could spend a night there, and of course enjoy a meal and some beer at the same time.

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<sup>10</sup> not fizzy, not containing bubbles

<sup>11</sup> areas where people have built houses

<sup>12</sup> areas where there is a lot of activity

British Pubs

[00:04:03] Pub is more of a [catch-all<sup>13</sup> term<sup>14</sup>](#).

[00:04:06] Pubs don't have to have accommodation, inns do.

[00:04:11] And just on a further [linguistic<sup>15</sup>](#) note, pub comes from the term 'public house', and it's a term used for any [establishment<sup>16</sup>](#) that is open to the public, serves beer, and whose main job is to serve drinks.

[00:04:27] And what we now call a pub used to be called an '[alehouse<sup>17</sup>](#)'; the words are used [interchangeably<sup>18</sup>](#).

[00:04:36] So, the words pub, inn, [alehouse](#), tavern, they are all a pretty similar thing, and fall under the [umbrella term<sup>19</sup>](#) of 'the pub'.

[00:04:47] Pubs continued to [spring up<sup>20</sup>](#), and by the year 1577 in England and Wales there were 14,202 ale houses, 1,631 inns, and 329 taverns, which was one pub for every 187 people.

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<sup>13</sup> including all possibilities

<sup>14</sup> word used to describe something

<sup>15</sup> relating to language

<sup>16</sup> a business or place

<sup>17</sup> a pub, somewhere that sells beer

<sup>18</sup> if two things can be used interchangeably, they can be used to replace one another

<sup>19</sup> a word that is used to describe multiple things

<sup>20</sup> appear

British Pubs

[00:05:09] To give you a sense of how things have changed, there is now roughly one pub for every 1,200 people, so if you think that there are a lot of pubs in the UK now, back in 1577 there were six and a half times more of them, proportionally speaking.

[00:05:29] In the 17th century came the pub's first real [threat](#)<sup>21</sup>, and that came in the form of another alcoholic drink.

[00:05:38] Gin, and The Gin Craze.

[00:05:41] Now, if you want to learn more about this, we actually did a whole episode on it, which was Episode 37, you can listen to that one on the website.

[00:05:53] In short, there was a Gin [epidemic](#)<sup>22</sup>, and Britain was flooded with cheap gin, turning hundreds of thousands of people mad and completely [dependent](#)<sup>23</sup> on this drink.

[00:06:07] Gin wasn't normally drunk at pubs though, it was sold at little gin shops.

[00:06:13] And the fact that people were drinking so much of it posed an [existential threat](#) to the British pub.

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<sup>21</sup> the possibility that something bad will happen

<sup>22</sup> a sudden increase in the number of times that something bad happens

<sup>23</sup> addicted

British Pubs

[00:06:22] Luckily, for the pubs at least, the British government was **relatively**<sup>24</sup> quick to act, putting laws into place to deal with Britain's gin problem, and it started **encouraging**<sup>25</sup> people to drink beer and to go back to the pubs.

[00:06:41] Indeed, beer back then was viewed as a **harmless**<sup>26</sup>, healthy drink.

[00:06:47] It was safer to drink than water, because there were limited ways of **purifying**<sup>27</sup> water, and of course cities didn't have public water systems back then.

[00:06:58] Drinks like tea and coffee were too expensive, and gin would send you mad.

[00:07:04] So, beer was the safest and healthiest drink available.

[00:07:09] Given this, in 1830, as a reaction to the gin **epidemic**, the government relaxed the laws around the production of beer with something called The Beerhouse Act, making it far easier for anyone to start **brewing**<sup>28</sup> and selling beer.

[00:07:29] The government considered beer to be a much better option than gin, and encouraged people to drink it.

[00:07:37] And when I say people, I don't just mean adults.

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<sup>24</sup> quite

<sup>25</sup> persuading someone to do something

<sup>26</sup> not causing harm

<sup>27</sup> making pure, making drinkable

<sup>28</sup> making beer

British Pubs

[00:07:42] Children were also **encouraged**<sup>29</sup> to drink beer, **albeit**<sup>30</sup> a slightly less alcoholic version of it, called ‘small beer’.

[00:07:51] At least it was better than drinking the super alcoholic gin that many children had previously been drinking.

[00:07:59] The expression ‘small beer’ actually still exists in British English, it means something that is small and unimportant.

[00:08:09] With the Gin **Epidemic** over, pubs were back, and they continued to play a **vital**<sup>31</sup> role in British society, **albeit** an **evolving**<sup>32</sup> one.

[00:08:20] During both world wars the pubs remained open, with leaders considering them to play an important role in keeping up **morale**<sup>33</sup>.

[00:08:31] The role of pubs, and what actually happens inside pubs has changed dramatically over the years.

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<sup>29</sup> persuaded to do something

<sup>30</sup> although

<sup>31</sup> very important

<sup>32</sup> changing

<sup>33</sup> confidence felt by a group of people, especially in a dangerous or difficult situation

## British Pubs

[00:08:40] In the 19th century they would often be [split](#)<sup>34</sup> into different rooms for different classes of person, similar to how a train or an aeroplane might have different areas for different ticket types, different ticket prices.

[00:08:57] There was the public bar, or tap room.

[00:09:01] This was where working class men would meet, and would often be a single room with very few places to sit, and a floor covered in [sawdust](#)<sup>35</sup>, the little pieces of wood you get from [sawing](#)<sup>36</sup> a tree.

[00:09:18] The idea behind the [sawdust](#) was that it would [absorb](#)<sup>37</sup> [spilled](#)<sup>38</sup> beer and [spit](#)<sup>39</sup>, so the floors were pretty disgusting.

[00:09:28] Women weren't allowed into the public bar. It was a place for men to meet, drink beer, smoke, and not do much else.

[00:09:38] That was the public bar, but there was also a [lounge](#) bar, which had better quality tables and chairs, accepted women, and had better and more expensive drinks.

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<sup>34</sup> divided

<sup>35</sup> the dust and small pieces of wood that are produced when cutting wood with a saw

<sup>36</sup> cutting wood with a saw (a blade with many v shaped teeth)

<sup>37</sup> take in, soak up

<sup>38</sup> (of a liquid) accidentally dropped

<sup>39</sup> the watery liquid that is produced in your mouth

British Pubs

[00:09:51] This was a little bit more like most pubs you might go into today, and it was an acceptable place for a man and a woman to go and enjoy a drink together.

[00:10:03] During the late 20th century these two rooms started to be combined into one in many pubs, and they have [evolved](#)<sup>40</sup> into big, [open plan](#)<sup>41</sup> rooms with large bars in the middle.

[00:10:17] With almost 50,000 different pubs in the UK, it's impossible to generalise, but especially pubs in small villages and towns are very social places, where people of all ages [gather](#)<sup>42</sup> to meet, drink, and enjoy a meal.

[00:10:36] When I first tried to explain the concept of the pub to my [teetotal](#)<sup>43</sup>, my non-drinking, Italian mother in law, it was hard. She struggled to understand what I might be doing there.

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<sup>40</sup> changed

<sup>41</sup> an open plan room has few internal walls

<sup>42</sup> come together

<sup>43</sup> not drinking alcohol

British Pubs

[00:10:50] The [assumption](#)<sup>44</sup> that many people have is that they're places full of [drunks](#)<sup>45</sup>, of [alcoholics](#)<sup>46</sup>, and it's hard to understand why they hold such a special place in Brits' hearts.

[00:11:03] One way to think about it is that there's something universal about a pub.

[00:11:08] Anyone, at least any adult, can go into any pub, anywhere in the UK. It feels familiar, you can sit and enjoy a drink without [judgment](#)<sup>47</sup>.

[00:11:21] Or it's a place to meet friends, a place to go to celebrate with [colleagues](#)<sup>48</sup> after work, a place to enjoy a Sunday lunch, or simply a place to go and relax.

[00:11:34] As you will no doubt know, Britain isn't famous for its fantastic weather, and while those of you living in places like Spain, France or Italy might meet friends, [colleagues](#) or family members in a square, outside a cafe, or just outdoors, for the majority of the year in Britain, this isn't really an option.

[00:11:58] Coffee culture, at least the modern American, Starbucks-style idea of coffee culture didn't arrive in the UK until relatively recently, and so there weren't many alternative options to the pub.

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<sup>44</sup> belief

<sup>45</sup> people who are addicted to alcohol

<sup>46</sup> people who are addicted to alcohol

<sup>47</sup> belief

<sup>48</sup> people who work together

## British Pubs

[00:12:13] This has had the effect of turning Brits into some of the world's biggest drinkers.

[00:12:20] If you spend hours in a pub then you don't just drink one beer, you end up drinking quite a lot of beer.

[00:12:29] Non Brits who come to the UK to do things like study at British university or work are often [stunned](#)<sup>49</sup>, they are very surprised, at how much people drink in a pub.

[00:12:43] Whereas in France or Italy, for example, you might go to a bar and have a [bière](#)<sup>50</sup>, a half pint, or a glass of wine, if you go to the pub in the UK you might find your British [colleagues](#) drinking 4, 5, 6 or more pints of beer, so we're talking 3 or more litres of beer.

[00:13:05] Indeed, there was a [survey](#)<sup>51</sup> done a couple of years ago that suggested that over the average British [pubgoer](#)<sup>52</sup>'s life they would drink 13,104 alcoholic drinks, so that's beer and wine, and 3,276 shots, that's small glasses of whisky, vodka, and other [spirits](#)<sup>53</sup>.

[00:13:29] It's a lot, right?

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<sup>49</sup> astonished, very surprised

<sup>50</sup> a French small beer

<sup>51</sup> a set of questions asked to a large number of people in order to find out about their opinions

<sup>52</sup> someone who goes to a pub

<sup>53</sup> strong alcoholic drinks

British Pubs

[00:13:31] Obviously, I'm not suggesting that drinking lots of alcohol is a good thing, everything [in moderation](#)<sup>54</sup> of course, I'm just explaining some of the cultural reasons that Brits have ended up being such heavy drinkers.

[00:13:46] One fun [aspect](#)<sup>55</sup> of British pubs that is always amusing to non-Brits, not just non-native speakers, is their names, and the signs outside them.

[00:13:58] The painted signs outside pubs did serve a purpose though, and not just an artistic one.

[00:14:05] When [literacy](#)<sup>56</sup> rates were much lower, when fewer people were able to read, they helped people [locate](#)<sup>57</sup> the pubs, they helped them find the pubs.

[00:14:17] If you were looking for a pub called The Red Lion, it didn't matter if you couldn't read, you'd just go ahead until you found the one with a picture of a red lion on the outside.

[00:14:30] Pubs, and their [patrons](#)<sup>58</sup>, are also very proud of their names.

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<sup>54</sup> if you do something in moderation, you don't do it too much

<sup>55</sup> part

<sup>56</sup> the ability to read and write

<sup>57</sup> find

<sup>58</sup> people who go to pubs

British Pubs

[00:14:37] Many are named after famous people, so there are lots of Duke of Wellingtons or Shakespeares.

[00:14:44] Being a [monarchy<sup>59</sup>](#), there are lots named after kings and queens, as well as lots of The Crowns, The King's Arms, and so on.

[00:14:55] Lots are named after myths and legends, so you have ones like The Green Man and The Black Horse.

[00:15:03] And others are simply named after the types of people that used to go there - The [Bricklayer<sup>60</sup>](#)'s Arms, The [Mason<sup>61</sup>](#)'s Arms, and so on.

[00:15:14] There's even a game that you can play if you're going on a trip called Pub Cricket, which involves trying to [spot<sup>62</sup>](#) pub signs and getting one point for every 'leg' that exists on the sign.

[00:15:29] So if you see, let's say, The Lord Nelson, that's a person, you get 2 points, because he has 2 legs, but if you see a pub sign for 'The Sun', you get zero points and the turn goes to the next player.

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<sup>59</sup> a country that has a king or queen

<sup>60</sup> someone who builds walls

<sup>61</sup> someone who cuts stone into pieces to build walls

<sup>62</sup> see, find

## British Pubs

[00:15:46] This was definitely a **staple**<sup>63</sup> for long car rides when I was a child, and a fun one to play when driving through the English countryside.

[00:15:55] Although pubs are a hugely important part of British culture, they are under **threat**, and indeed even before COVID hit, and the pubs were forced to close, 6 pubs were closing down every single day.

[00:16:13] **Rents**<sup>64</sup> are increasing, costs are going up, and pubs are **struggling**<sup>65</sup> to survive.

[00:16:20] Many are being sold and turned into housing, turned into flats.

[00:16:25] They often occupy **prime**<sup>66</sup> locations in cities, and as the cost of their **rent**<sup>67</sup> increases they simply can't afford to stay in business.

[00:16:36] Many more now serve food than did 20 or 30 years ago, and they are **diversifying**<sup>68</sup> in an attempt to survive, but no matter how much time Brits spend in the

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<sup>63</sup> something that is used frequently

<sup>64</sup> the money you pay to a landlord

<sup>65</sup> having difficulty with

<sup>66</sup> very important

<sup>67</sup> the money you pay to a landlord

<sup>68</sup> starting to do different things

## British Pubs

pub, and how many beers we drink or Sunday lunches we eat, pubs are closing at a faster [rate](#)<sup>69</sup> than ever.

[00:16:57] Whether or not you're a [pubgoer](#) or a beer drinker, it's hard to [deny](#)<sup>70</sup> the impact that pubs have had on British culture, and it's hard to not be a little bit sad at the [rate](#) at which they are closing.

[00:17:12] Many really are historical buildings, a part of our cultural [heritage](#)<sup>71</sup>, with the added benefit that they are free to visit.

[00:17:21] Today, or at least in pre-COVID times, you could go into the same pub that Charles Dickens used to go to, the [Cheshire](#)<sup>72</sup> Cheese in London.

[00:17:32] When I was a student I used to go to a pub called the Fitzroy Tavern in London, which used to be [frequented](#)<sup>73</sup> by people like Dylan Thomas and George Orwell, the author of Animal Farm and 1984.

[00:17:47] In Oxford you can go to the pub where C.S Lewis, the author of classics such as Alice in Wonderland, and J.R.R Tolkien, of Lord of the Rings, used to meet.

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<sup>69</sup> speed

<sup>70</sup> say that something isn't true

<sup>71</sup> the beliefs and cultural history of a place

<sup>72</sup> a country in England

<sup>73</sup> gone to

## British Pubs

[00:18:00] And if you're in Cambridge you can go to the pub where Francis Crick, one of the scientists who discovered [DNA<sup>74</sup>](#), announced this [groundbreaking<sup>75</sup>](#) discovery.

[00:18:12] So, the British pub is a place where you can go and enjoy a delicious pint of beer, but it's much more than that.

[00:18:21] It's a truly British [institution<sup>76</sup>](#), a place to meet, celebrate, [debate<sup>77</sup>](#), [romance<sup>78</sup>](#), or just to have a little bit of peace and quiet.

[00:18:32] And if and when you get the chance to go to the UK, go to a pub, even if you don't drink alcohol, and just sit and observe, [soak it all in<sup>79</sup>](#).

[00:18:44] At least now you'll know a little bit more about where this unique aspect of British culture comes from.

[00:18:53] OK then, that is it for today's episode on British Pubs.

[00:18:58] I hope it's been an interesting one, and that you've learnt something new.

[00:19:02] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

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<sup>74</sup> the substance that carries genetic information

<sup>75</sup> very new and important

<sup>76</sup> a large and important organisation

<sup>77</sup> discuss ideas

<sup>78</sup> (old fashioned) to engage in romantic activity

<sup>79</sup> enjoy (a place) by just being there

[00:19:07] If you've been to a British pub, what did you think? What's the [equivalent<sup>80</sup>](#) of a pub in your country? If you've tried British beer, what did you think?

[00:19:17] You can head right in to our community forum, which is at [community.leonardoenglish.com](http://community.leonardoenglish.com) and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:19:26] I can't wait to see what you've got to say.

[00:19:29] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English

[00:19:34] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

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<sup>80</sup> the same

## Key vocabulary

<b>Word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Existential</b>	relating to the possibility of existing
<b>Threats</b>	the possibility that something bad will happen
<b>Grasp</b>	understand
<b>Liken</b>	make a comparison
<b>Hub</b>	an area where there is a lot of activity
<b>Extensive</b>	large
<b>Corrupted</b>	(relating to language) to change the original form or meaning
<b>Brewed</b>	to make beer
<b>Fizzy</b>	containing bubbles
<b>Flat</b>	not fizzy, not containing bubbles
<b>Settlements</b>	areas where people have built houses
<b>Hubs</b>	areas where there is a lot of activity

British Pubs

<b>Catch-all</b>	including all possibilities
<b>Term</b>	word used to describe something
<b>Linguistic</b>	relating to language
<b>Establishment</b>	a business or place
<b>Alehouse</b>	a pub, somewhere that sells beer
<b>Interchangeably</b>	if two things can be used interchangeably, they can be used to replace one another
<b>Umbrella term</b>	a word that is used to describe multiple things
<b>Spring up</b>	appear
<b>Threat</b>	the possibility that something bad will happen
<b>Epidemic</b>	a sudden increase in the number of times that something bad happens
<b>Dependent</b>	addicted
<b>Relatively</b>	quite
<b>Encouraging</b>	persuading someone to do something
<b>Harmless</b>	not causing harm
<b>Purifying</b>	making pure, making drinkable

British Pubs

<b>Brewing</b>	making beer
<b>Encouraged</b>	persuaded to do something
<b>Albeit</b>	although
<b>Vital</b>	very important
<b>Evolving</b>	changing
<b>Morale</b>	confidence felt by a group of people, especially in a dangerous or difficult situation
<b>Split</b>	divided
<b>Sawdust</b>	the dust and small pieces of wood that are produced when cutting wood with a saw
<b>Sawing</b>	cutting wood with a saw (a blade with many v shaped teeth)
<b>Absorb</b>	take in, soak up
<b>Spilled</b>	(of a liquid) accidentally dropped
<b>Spit</b>	the watery liquid that is produced in your mouth
<b>Lounge</b>	a room where someone can relax
<b>Evolved</b>	changed

British Pubs

<b>Open plan</b>	an open plan room has few internal walls
<b>Gather</b>	come together
<b>Teetotal</b>	not drinking alcohol
<b>Assumption</b>	belief
<b>Drunks</b>	people who are addicted to alcohol
<b>Alcoholics</b>	people who are addicted to alcohol
<b>Judgment</b>	belief
<b>Colleagues</b>	people who work together
<b>Stunned</b>	astonished, very surprised
<b>Bière</b>	a French small beer
<b>Survey</b>	a set of questions asked to a large number of people in order to find out about their opinions
<b>Pubgoer</b>	someone who goes to a pub
<b>Spirits</b>	strong alcoholic drinks
<b>In moderation</b>	if you do something in moderation, you don't do it too much
<b>Aspect</b>	part

British Pubs

<b>Literacy</b>	the ability to read and write
<b>Locate</b>	find
<b>Patrons</b>	people who go to pubs
<b>Monarchy</b>	a country that has a king or queen
<b>Bricklayer</b>	someone who builds walls
<b>Mason</b>	someone who cuts stone into pieces to build walls
<b>Spot</b>	see, find
<b>Staple</b>	something that is used frequently
<b>Rents</b>	the money you pay to a landlord
<b>Struggling</b>	having difficulty with
<b>Prime</b>	very important
<b>Rent</b>	the money you pay to a landlord
<b>Diversifying</b>	starting to do different things
<b>Rate</b>	speed
<b>Deny</b>	say that something isn't true

British Pubs

<b>Heritage</b>	the beliefs and cultural history of a place
<b>Cheshire</b>	a country in England
<b>Frequented</b>	gone to
<b>DNA</b>	the substance that carries genetic information
<b>Groundbreaking</b>	very new and important
<b>Institution</b>	a large and important organisation
<b>Debate</b>	discuss ideas
<b>Romance</b>	(old fashioned) to engage in romantic activity
<b>Soak it all in</b>	enjoy (a place) by just being there
<b>Equivalent</b>	the same

*We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.*

*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

Let us know in the forum [community.leonardoenglish.com](https://community.leonardoenglish.com)