

First &  
Exclusive

# Fifty states and the Englishman who set out to see them all



**Stephen Fry in America**  
**Wednesdays at 7pm. Premieres 15 July.**

Britain's best-loved comic genius Stephen Fry turns his celebrated wit and insight to unearthing the real America. Join him in his London cab as he takes a humorous and insightful journey across this extraordinary country.

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## COMMON PEOPLE: BRIT POP THE STORY

### VARIOUS ARTISTS

Release date: June 2009

This year marks the 15th anniversary of Britpop and Common People, a new three-CD compilation album, celebrates the homegrown sounds that defined a generation.

While the album could have been a classic one-off of acts from the '90s, as with too many compilations, it contains only a few great bands and a smattering of artists who delivered a few good songs. But with too diverse a range of quality the album falls short of its real potential – most notable by the absence of Blur and Oasis, who are widely credited with kick-starting the 90s movement and were the two biggest UK bands of the time.

Featuring 54-tracks, with comprehensive sleeve notes from St Etienne's Bob Stanley, disc one boasts Elastica, the Stone Roses, Dodgy, Dubstar and Black Grape. The second CD features Pulp's Common People, Supergrass, Ocean Colour Scene and Kula Shaker whilst the third disc offers Catatonia, Suede and Space.

And while there are plenty of great tracks such as Black Grape's In the Name of the Father and Placebo's Nancy Boy, neither of these, along with tracks from James, SFA, Gomez, Stone Roses and the Divine Comedy, could be considered strictly Britpop.

Although the compilation could have been so much better, with some careful cherry picking, there's still much to take you back.

## ISLAND LIFE: 50 YEARS OF ISLAND RECORDS

### VARIOUS ARTISTS

Release date: June 2009

Chris Blackwell's Island Records celebrates 50 years of some of the best music to come out of the UK this year. That's the good news. The bad news is the label is going to milk the occasion for all its worth. The first offering, Island Life 50 Years of Island Records, offers 43 tracks from the 50-year life of the album.

Be you mod, head banger, Britpopper or reggae man the album contains nostalgia trips that often tag the right musical milestones. Millie's My Boy Lollipop, presages the era of Ska which reached its apex in Desmond Dekker's Israelites.

Lover's rock is represented by one of its best exponents and song with Gregory Isaacs' Night nurse. Pulp's Common People is a fair pop at Britpop. Then of course there's Blackwell's finest act, Bob Marley, represented here with Jamming.

But you can't please all the people all the time especially with a back catalogue as catholic as Blackwell's.

There are of course some up to date contributions from the likes of the Sugababes, Amy Winehouse and Keane, but essentially this survey is aimed at listeners in or close to Blackwell's generation.

But back then we were all hopelessly partisan: what head banger in to Free is likely to get off on Kid Creole and the Coconuts? What Pulp fan is likely to have a secret horde of Jethro Tull albums? And then there are all the great artists that have gone awol on this offering. Where is John Martyn? Wither Sandy Denny? No Fairport Convention? No Third World?

Help is on its way in the shape of three genre albums: Folk Rock, Reggae and the Anthology. Specialists bide your time.



## TV – STEPHEN FRY IN AMERICA

BBC Knowledge, Now Channel 220 – 15 July, Wednesdays at 7pm



**BRITAIN'S BEST-LOVED** comic genius Stephen Fry turns his celebrated wit and insight to unearthing the real America.

In this six-part series he travels, mostly in a London cab, through all 50 states of the country that he could have nearly called home and which has always fascinated him.

Stephen's account of his adventures is filled with his unique humour, insight and warmth in a beautifully illustrated book that accompanies his journey for the BBC series. 'Stephen Fry is a treasure of the British Empire.' – *The Guardian*.

Stephen Fry has always loved America and in fact came very close to being born there. In the first episode, he explores the states that make up New England, before heading south to the nation's capital and ending up at the civil war battlefield of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania.

From the eastern seaboard, Stephen zig-zags across the country in his London taxicab, talking to its hospitable citizens, listening to its music, visiting its landmarks, viewing small-town life and America's breath-taking landscapes - following wherever his curiosity leads him, meeting a collection of remarkable individuals – American icons and unsung local heroes alike.

En route he discovers the South Side of Chicago with blues legend Buddy Guy, catches up with Morgan Freeman in Mississippi, strides around with Ted Turner on his Montana ranch, marches with Zulus in New Orleans' Mardi Gras, and drums with the Sioux Nation in South Dakota; joins a Georgia family for thanksgiving, 'picks' with Bluegrass hillbillies, and finds himself in a Tennessee garden full of dead bodies. Whether in a club for failed gangsters (yes, those are real bullet holes) or celebrating Halloween in Salem (is there anywhere better?), Stephen is welcomed by the people of America – mayors, sheriffs, newspaper editors, park rangers, teachers and hobos, bringing to life the oddities and splendours of each locale.

Presidential hopefuls in New Hampshire, witches in Salem, nuclear submariners in Connecticut, deer hunters, small time mobsters in NYC, socialites in Rhode Island, lobster fishermen in Maine, ice cream blenders in Vermont and card washers in New Jersey – Stephen meets them all as he takes the road through the autumn colours to uncover what really makes America tick.

## FILM – LOOKING FOR ERIC

**THE IDEA OF** Ken Loach making a football film is a tantalising prospect for anyone who knows his work. In *Kes*, the award-winning director created one of the funniest and most memorable footie scenes ever: Brian Glover as the brilliantly domineering gym teacher of a school in Barnsley.

In *Looking for Eric* he returns to the north with a story about a down on his luck Mancunian postman, Eric Bishop (Steve Evets), whose life is falling apart. He lives in a dump, his estranged second wife's kids treat him like crap and, at the start of the film, he crashes his car driving the wrong way round a roundabout after seeing his first wife – the one who got away – for the first time in 30 years.

Enter Eric Cantona as a drug-fuelled hallucination-cum-life coach, spouting the kind of mindless psychobabble that won him the attention of Guardian-reading types like Ken Loach in the first place. Who can forget

his one-line press conference after he was sentenced to community service for kung-fu kicking a Crystal Palace fan: "When the seagulls follow the trawler, it is because they think sardines will be thrown into the sea."

Bishop and his imaginary friend ("the flawed genius and the flawed postman") set about fixing all the screwed-up things in his life: his dysfunctional relationship with his stepsons, trouble with the local gangster and the longing he feels for Lily, his first wife.

Cantona's advice embraces Loach's working-class idealism, Gallic notions of fraternity and classic post-match banality: you must always trust your teammates. To underline the point, Cantona goes on to say that his favourite moment was not one of the stunning goals that are re-lived during the movie, but a deft little flick to gift Dennis Irwin an easy goal.

The advice helps Bishop to out-fox the gangster and get his life back on a track – in



a denouement that requires an unhealthy suspension of disbelief and leads, eventually, to a sickeningly heart-warming ending.

All in all, the sharp Mancunian banter in *Looking for Eric* provides some gentle laughs and Cantona does a good job of imposing his personality, but this is not the movie to convince that you Loach is a comedic film-maker or that Cantona is a proper actor.

## TOP 10 OF BRITAIN

From the bestselling author of Hamlyn's Top 10 of Everything series comes a special collection of 250 unique lists that observe the idiosyncrasies of our isles and encompass everything British.

The book lists hundreds of intriguing and bizarre facts about Britain's most iconic subjects, including: 10 defunct British national holidays; the 10 longest seaside piers; the 10 lowest-scoring UK Eurovision entries; the 10 latest winners of the World Conker Championships; the top 10 singles of all time banned by the BBC; 10 unusual British laws; the 10 latest winners of the Pub of the Year award... plus many other fascinating lists.



## 10 OF THE WORST TIMES TO HAVE LIVED IN BRITAIN

### ONE: 793

On June 8 Vikings made their first attack on England, sacking the monastery at Lindisfarne, Northumberland. This marks the beginning of the Viking age, when much of the country was ravaged by invaders.

### TWO: 1348-49

The Black Death arrived in Britain via ships landing at Bristol in the summer of 1348. By May of the following year 30-40% of the population, some 800,000 to 1.5 million, were dead.

### THREE: 1665-66

The Great Plague wiped out a large proportion of London's inhabitants, variously estimated at between 10,000 and 100,000, perhaps as much as one-fifth of the population. By the time of the Great Fire of London (September 2-3, 1666), which killed few people, it was already waning.

### FOUR: 1703

The Great Storm of November 24-December 2 1703 was probably the worst ever to affect Britain. Trees were uprooted, buildings destroyed, flooding occurred and many ships, including Royal Navy vessels, were lost. Among the 8,000-15,000 dead were Richard Kidder, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and his wife, Elizabeth, killed when a chimney fell through the roof onto their bed.

### FIVE: 1740

In the coldest winter to strike Britain since records began, many died of cold or during the famine and drought that followed. Icebergs appeared in the English Channel, water transport was halted and watermills and wells froze, with the result that coal became scarce and food prices rose rapidly. A Frost Fair was held on the frozen Thames on which the ice was so thick that a whole ox was roasted.

### SIX: 1845-49

Ireland, at this time part of Britain, suffered its devastating potato famine – a blight that destroyed the country's staple crop – with an estimated million people dying. Many emigrated to the US and other countries.

### SEVEN: 1849

Following a cholera epidemic in 1832, another struck with as many as 12,847 Londoners dying in the last three months of the year, along with 5,308 in Liverpool, 1,834 in Hull and many elsewhere. It was not until 1854 that Dr John Snow discovered the link between a cholera outbreak in Soho, London, and the water supply.

### EIGHT: 1858

Known as the year of the Great Stink, when sewage draining into the Thames, combined with a hot summer, made the river unapproachable. Many riverside buildings, including the House of Commons, were virtually uninhabitable. This was the final spur to the major improvement of London's sewers in the 1860s, masterminded by engineer Joseph Bazalgette.

### NINE: 1918

During the final months of the First World War, Britain was hit by an influenza pandemic in which some 225,000 died. It began in March 1918 and spread rapidly as a result of postwar movements of troops and refugees.

### TEN: 1940-41

The period from September 7 1940 to May 10 1941 was the period of the Blitz, when an estimated 18,800 tons of bombs rained down on London. Some 1,436 people were killed on the night of May 10-11 1941 alone, and even people sheltering in Underground stations previously believed to be safe were killed when Marble Arch, Balham and Bank received direct hits. In all, some 43,000 died.

## 10 BRITISH DESIGN ICONS

1. Concorde, British Aircraft Corporation/Aérospatiale, 1969
2. London Underground map, Harry Beck, 1931
3. Supermarine Spitfire, R. J. Mitchell, 1936
4. Mini, Alec Issigonis, 1959
5. World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, 1991
6. Routemaster bus, Douglas Scott, A. A. Durant, Colin Curtis, 1954
7. Catseye, Percy Shaw, 1934
8. Tomb Raider video game, Cors Design, 1996
9. Grand Theft Auto video game, DMA Design, 1997
10. K2 Red telephone box, Giles Gilbert Scott, 1926

## TOP 10 SONGS PLAYED AT WEDDINGS IN THE UK

1. Amazed – Lonestar
2. Everything I Do (I Do it For You) – Bryan Adams
3. Angels – Robbie Williams
4. You're Beautiful – James Blunt
5. Don't Want To Miss a Thing – Aerosmith
6. Still The One – Shania Twain
7. Truly, Madly, Deeply – Savage Garden
8. Have I Told You Lately – Van Morrison
9. From This Moment On – Shania Twain
10. I Will Always Love You – Whitney Houston

Source: Performing Right Society

## MOST COMMON PUB NAMES IN THE UK

1. Crown, 704
2. Red Lion, 668
3. Royal Oak, 541
4. Swan, 451
5. White Hart, 431
6. Railway, 420
7. Plough, 413
8. White Horse, 379
9. Bell, 378
10. New Inn, 372

Source: CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) survey, 2007

## TOP 10 BRITISH CITIES MOST VISITED BY OVERSEAS TOURISTS

Total spending / estimated overseas visitors (2006)

1. London / £7.8 billion / 15.6 million
2. Edinburgh / £484 million / 1.3 million
3. Manchester / £335 million / 912,000
4. Birmingham / £243 million / 779,000
5. Glasgow / £241 million / 741,000
6. Liverpool / £198 million / 625,000
7. Oxford / £193 million / 449,000
8. Bristol / £129 million / 403,000
9. Cardiff / £127 million / 355,000
10. Cambridge / £149 million / 348,000

Source: National Statistics

## TOP 10 SONGS REQUESTED AT FUNERALS IN THE UK

1. Goodbye My Lover – James Blunt
2. Angels – Robbie Williams
3. I've Had the Time of My Life – Jennifer Warnes and Bill Medley
4. Wind Beneath My Wings – Bette Midler
5. Pie Jesu from Fauré's Requiem
6. Candle in the Wind – Elton John
7. With or Without You – U2
8. Tears in Heaven – Eric Clapton
9. Every Breath You Take – The Police
10. Unchained Melody – Righteous Brothers

Source: The Bereavement Register

## TOP 10 LONGEST-RUNNING PROGRAMMES ON BRITISH TV

1. Panorama (11 Nov 1953)
2. What the Papers Say (5 Nov 1956)
3. The Sky at Night (24 Apr 1957)
4. Blue Peter (16 Oct 1958)
5. Coronation Street (9 Dec 1960)
6. Songs of Praise (1 Oct 1961)
7. Horizon (2 May 1964)
8. Match of the Day (22 Aug 1964)
9. The Money Programme (5 Apr 1966)
10. Gardeners' World (5 Jan 1968)

## TOP 10 HOUSE NAMES IN THE UK

1. The Cottage
2. Rose Cottage
3. The Bungalow
4. The Coach House
5. Orchard House
6. The Lodge
7. Woodlands
8. The Old School House
9. Ivy Cottage
10. The Willows

Source: HBOS

## TOP 10 BRITISH TV CATCHPHRASES

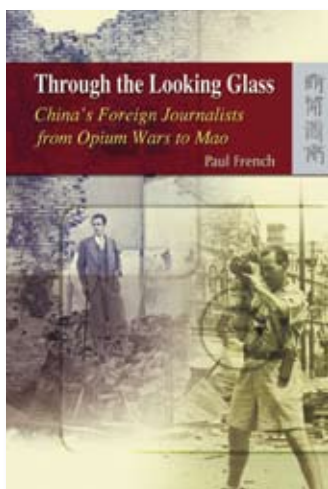
1. 'I don't believe it' Victor Meldrew (Richard Wilson), One Foot in the Grave
2. 'Yeah, but, no, but...' Vicky Pollard (Matt Lucas), Little Britain
3. 'Lovely jubbly' Del Boy (David Jason), Only Fools and Horses
4. 'Am I bowered?' Lauren Cooper (Catherine Tate), The Catherine Tate Show
5. 'I'm a laydee' Emily (Eddie) Howard (David Walliams), Little Britain
6. 'Deal or no deal?' Noel Edmonds, Deal or No Deal
7. 'Here's one I made earlier' Various presenters, Blue Peter
8. 'Suit you, sir' Ken (Paul Whitehouse) and Kenneth (Mark Williams), The Fast Show
9. 'I'm the only gay in the village' Dafydd Thomas (Matt Lucas), Little Britain
10. 'Just like that' Tommy Cooper

Source: www.onepoll.com survey, 2008

## OLD HACKS AND YOUNG DETECTIVES

**Mike Grinter** is intrigued by historical and crime offerings from British writers in Asia

Ex-patriots have produced some of the world's best-loved writers, Graham Greene, William Somerset Maugham, Henry James and T S Eliot to name just a few. Their primary purpose has been to interpret the exotic surroundings in which they have lived into something exciting and wild but comprehensible and safe for the readers back home. In very different ways John Burdett and Paul French uphold the tradition well.



### THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

*China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao*

**PAUL FRENCH**

Hong Kong University Press

*Through the Looking Glass – China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao*, Paul French's survey of foreign correspondents in China during its most intense upheavals introduces a pack of ex-patriots who first tried to make sense of a country that was virtually unknown to the rest of the world.

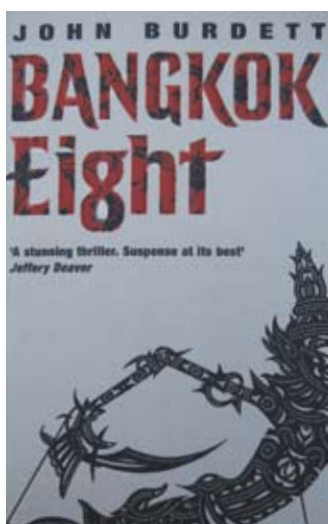
Maybe as a result of that ignorance the demand for news from China between 1900 and 1937 was greater than at any time since.

Most of the hacks and genuine journalists are long forgotten but others such as Arthur Ransome, now better known as the author of the children's story *Swallows and Amazons*, Ernest Hemmingway and Martha Gelhorn remain familiar names if not for their involvement in China.

All of them came with their own agenda from promoters of British interests in the mid-19th century to communist sympathizers in the last century. A few of them died for their actions and bravery, more died from the bottle.

As a survey French's book rattles along covering all the most important events from the Opium wars to the Boxer Rebellion, the Taiping uprising to civil war, war with the Japanese and eventually the new China under Mao.

But this is in some ways this is its disadvantage too: with so many earth shattering events being covered by so many correspondents, thumbnail sketches of characters and events are the order of the day when many could have formed a book in their own right.



### BANGKOK EIGHT

**JOHN BURDETT**

Corgi Books

Burdett, an ex-lawyer who practiced in Hong Kong before setting up as a novelist in Bangkok, uses the crime genre to rip open the underbelly of the city and offer insight into the Thai psyche through the intriguingly dysfunctional detective Sonchai Jitpleecheep.

The action starts almost from page one with a murder of gut-wrenching originality and the inadvertent death of Sonchai's partner.

Despite detective Jitpleecheep's self proclaimed Buddhist pretensions revenge is the name of the game as he trawls the sweaty, sex-charged Sois thronged with pimps, gangsters and exotic women who play darts without the use of their hands.

The only clue to the murder of a black member of the US Military is an exquisitely carved Jade phallus and a nude painting of his half-caste partner.

Sonchai – half Thai with an ex-whore for a mother and a missing unknown American father – knows the mean streets of Sukhumvit like the backs of his hands and is more than game for the usual hoods strung out on yaa baa pills and ganga. But he hasn't reckoned on the involvement of US intelligence goons.

Burdett drives a compelling plot with as many twists as a bent Bangkok cop but his protagonist's religious reflections while worthy in themselves can slow the action.