

After World War II (1945-80)

The Historical Context

Britain's position after the Second World War wasn't any more so strong as it had been before. Even if she had won the war, Japanese conquest of many British colonies in Asia had shown that Britain was weaker than before. So many colonies claimed for independence.

Meanwhile the Labour party came to power & started to lay the basis of the welfare state. Even if many industries were nationalised, this kind of government couldn't face up to unemployment, inflation or devaluation of the pound. In fact there were strikes organised by the trade unions.

The years between 1951 and 1964 are dominated by the Conservative party, which continued the welfare policy.

President Nasser of Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal. When Britain tried to oppose to this

decision, US and USSR make her withdraw the troops. Britain was no more the most powerful country in the world.

Then there are the years of the "Cold War" and the rise in Britain of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The Labour party came again to power in 1964 (until 1970) and tried to solve the problems left by the previous government (shortage of housing, poverty and economic decline, etc). But people didn't want to join the EEC (European Economic Community) which could help economically Britain. Social unrest, economic difficulties and problems in Ireland characterised the last years of the 1960s.

During the 1970s both the Conservative (1970-74) and the Labour (1974-79) party weren't able to face up to people's problems, the oil price crisis and the power of competitors like the US. The Labour government had to ask for help to the International Monetary fund. In the "winter of discontent" of 1978-79 a series of strikes by public sector workers caused

the government to be brought down.

In May 1973 the Conservatives won the elections and Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. The new government started to solve British problems with more determination than the previous government had had.

The Social Context

Thanks to the American economical help at the end of World War II, the Labour party introduced a National Health Service, the National Insurance Act (1946) and the National Assistance Act (1948).

In the 1960s the new youth cultures (Teddy Boys, Mods, hippies, Skinheads) celebrated freedom in all fields.

This led to permissiveness in sexual behaviour: the contraceptive pill was legalised, the abortion law was reformed and homosexual relations between consenting adults were legalised.

The neo-feminist movement fight for "Women's lib" (liberation), while the Labour party combatted racial discrimination.

In the 1960s were called "the swinging sixties" for the sense of freedom that young people had. Immigration and unemployment were two other problems that had to be solved by the government.

The Cultural Context

America influenced Great Britain in books, music, films, food, clothes, etc.

The Beatles and the Rolling Stones were the most representatives of the new Pop music that was reflected by the new movement of Pop Art.

Social satire, social criticism, and working-class environment were the protagonists of the "free cinema" of the 60s (free from the traditional conventions). TV became a cultural institution.

Poetry combined with improvised theatre, jazz and folk music to voice the mood of the age.

In the 1970s there is an increase of individualism and the birth of new social and political movements against the dehumanising forces of bureaucracy and technology. Some people were involved in the religious experiences and ecological movement.

The Story of English

Even if Britain declined after the Second World War, the English language didn't decline. In fact it got even more voice through the power of America. Television and advertising spread the American language all over the world.

RP was modified by the influence of new accents and the social changes. The upper-class RP was not any more fashionable, while the working-class culture (which modified RP) became the model for the BBC, too.

So RP pronunciation was levelled out to a general middle-class accent.

Finally English became the language of international Pop music and mass entertainment.