



St Faith's, Cambridge

# Has the United Kingdom Always Been at Odds With Europe?

By Connie, Year 8

## **Has the United Kingdom Always Been at Odds with Europe?**

### **By Connie**

In the present day, the United Kingdom's relationship with Europe is highly contested, and this essay will examine two millennia of history to consider to what extent this has always been the case. Wars, Religion and culture all play a major role in understanding this troubled relationship. This essay will argue that there have been almost constant disagreements, however, the countries of particular enmity and the points of dispute differ. Europe has had a huge impact on Britain's development. It has shaped its geography, language, culture, architecture and its way of thinking, from the Romans to the world wars to the European Union. However, the historical evidence in this essay illustrates the complexity of this unstable relationship. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland make up the United Kingdom today and this essay will refer to these countries collectively or separately as appropriate.

Wars have been very important in developing relationships between countries and in shaping the Europe that we know today. Many wars have divided European countries as they have fought both with and against each other. However, many of these alliances and indeed enemies have changed with each war. France has often been the United Kingdom's main adversary, with many conflicts occurring through the years, for example the Norman Conquest, the Hundred Years' War and the Napoleonic Wars.

William the Conqueror from Normandy, in Northern France, was the last enemy to successfully invade and conquer England in 1066. In the fourteenth century, Edward III of England wanted to be king of France and England. He started, what was to become the Hundred Years' War with France, in which the French eventually drove the English out of France. This war was also an early trade war, driven by high wool taxes and smuggling of wool to France. Napoleon also wanted to invade England in the early nineteenth century but England triumphed under Admiral Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar at sea and then under Wellington on land at the Battle of Waterloo. A London station and square was built as memorials and symbols of the newly united Europe. This led to the founding of the Concert of Europe in order to resolve future conflicts peacefully. Britain soon lost interest and focussed on relationships with the rest of the world and of course the Empire. This reflects the current affairs of modern Europe and demonstrates the long troubled history of the United Kingdom's relationship with Europe.

However, in both World Wars, England and France were allies fighting together against Germany. The United Kingdom was at odds with Germany this time and not France. Similar alliances, formed with different countries at different times, have always been part of the United Kingdom's relationship with Europe. In the Seven Years' War, starting in 1756, Europe was split into two coalitions, but on this occasion it was England and Germany against France and Spain.

Furthermore, Great Britain has a history of European invasions which have largely benefited the nation, shaping and advancing it as a country. Firstly, the Celts arrived from Europe and introduced bronze and iron, as well as the wheel. The Romans also represent a very successful invasion of Great Britain by Europeans. Many would argue that this occupation and rule by the Romans was a very good thing, as there were great engineering and cultural advances and several centuries of stability with local traditions and customs blending with Roman culture. London started to thrive as a port during this period. Other Europeans then invaded Britain, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes from Germany and the Vikings from Scandinavia. These peoples were not as advanced as the Romans, and Britain went backwards, along with the rest of Europe and entered the Dark Ages. Furthermore, some invaders from Europe plundered the country such as the Saxons, Vikings and the Jutes. William the Conqueror is another example of a European invader harming Britain. His actions were ruthless and resulted in 100,000 citizens dying as he caused famine to set in.

Some European dynasties have made positive impacts in Britain. For example, the Romans and the Hanoverians from Germany during the Georgian period, who were made kings due to their Protestant faith. In addition, even the Vikings can be seen to have played a role in forming present day England, for example, many English words have their origins in Old Norse. This highlights how even 'negative' European pressures are still important to consider. Then later, the United Kingdom was formed, as England and Scotland rallied together against Louis XIV of France, again demonstrating the integration of British and European history.

Religion has been a huge influence in the relationship with Europe, and Christianity has both bound together and divided the countries of Europe. Christianity was introduced to England in 597 when Pope Gregory sent a monk called Augustine. He had seen two Angle slaves in Rome with such bright yellow hair that he thought they were angels and should therefore be

Christian. With the introduction of the church in England came justice, law and learning. Augustine brought many books with him, including a Bible. The Pope was the head of the Catholic Church and had power and authority over much of Europe. During this period Britain established many centres of learning and schools, for example, Oxford and Cambridge, which are still of European and Worldwide importance for research and teaching today. Many churches and Cathedrals were also built, establishing new places of culture, art and learning.

This remained the case in Great Britain until the sixteenth Century, when Henry VIII was on the throne. Yet, in 1532, England parted from The Roman Catholic church which was prominent in most of Europe. This was the Reformation. This was a major point of separation with Europe and caused great difficulties with Catholic countries, especially Italy, France and Spain. These countries were angry that Henry made himself head of the church of England so that he could divorce his wife, a Spanish Princess. England was firmly at odds with Europe during this period. Religion continued to be key factor separating England from much of Europe, and in the 1700's Britain sought further differentiation and wanted to be the leader of Protestantism.

On the other hand, there has always been many similarities between Europe and Britain and clear benefits to close relationships. Connectivity exists in art, architecture, music, fashion and many other areas. England has gained many new ideas from its nearest neighbours to name only a few examples: the Palladian architecture style introduced from Italy by Andrea Palladio, which was particularly popular in the early eighteen century. The music of Ludwig Van Beethoven, this well-known German composer, brought his classical music to England in the nineteen century. In addition, the Italian painter Canaletto sold many of his paintings to Englishmen whilst they were on their grand tours of Europe. Finally, British pop music by artists such as Adele is widely listened to in Europe.

Trade has always been important with Europe, making us close allies, yet sometimes ripping us apart as it also caused wars, such as the Hundred Year' War as described above. Tradesmen have travelled across Europe using their skills. The Greeks and Phoenicians travelled to and from Britain to trade and probably introduced money to facilitate trading. The wool trade with Europe brought enormous wealth to Britain. British Roman pottery can be found throughout Europe indicating trading links during the Roman era. Another example are the Huguenots, who were expelled from France fro their Protestant faith and brought

lace making and clock-making skills to the UK. Many words in the English language have their roots in Greek, Latin, Scandinavian and French, for example, the word 'refugee' comes from the Huguenots.

However, today, the United Kingdom is once again attempting to separate from Europe and its Union. Originally, The United Kingdom made the choice of joining the European Economic Community out of necessity, not enthusiasm. This was because they could not compete economically or politically with the two super powers of the time, the USA and the Soviet Union.

Britain joined the EEC in 1973, through a humiliating and tiresome application process. Charles De Gaulle, the president of France, was reluctant to allow Britain's entry and refused their request twice. However, whilst this remains a major moment in the history of Britain's relationship with Europe, deep connections and trade links existed well before 1973 as shown above.

This essay illustrates how the development and history of the United Kingdom has been heavily influenced and shaped in both positive and negative ways by its relationship with Europe. Many wars and religious arguments have meant that Britain is often at odds with different countries in Europe or indeed the whole of Europe, as is the case with Brexit today. Alongside these conflicts, there have been many examples of when the United Kingdom is not at odds with Europe, sharing culture, art and trade. However, on the whole the negatives outweigh the positives and conflict and being at odds with the neighbouring countries better defines our relationship with Mainland Europe.

Word Count: 1,512

#### Bibliography:

- A picture history of Britain - Clare Hutton
- Seven Years War - The Canadian Encyclopaedia
- The Norman Conquest - BBC Bitesize,
- KS3 History Napoleonic Wars - Wikipedia
- The Guardian - Britain will go back into the European club
- Simon Jenkins The conversation - Britain and Europe: a long history of conflict and cooperation
- BBC news - Europe: Six decades of strife and controversy for UK