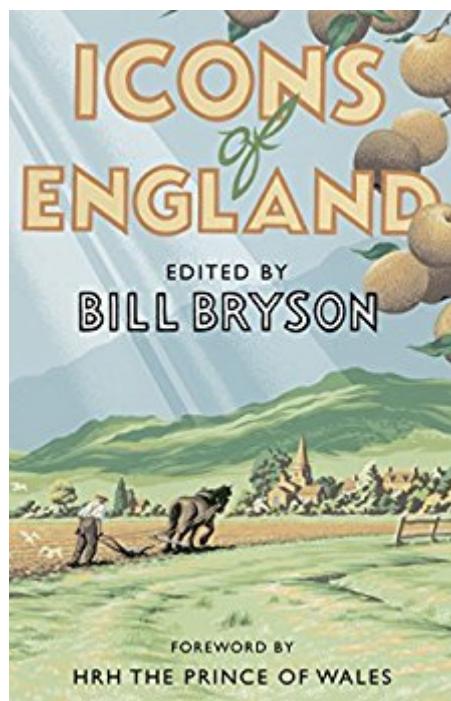


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# Icons Of England



## **Synopsis**

This celebration of the English countryside does not only focus on the rolling green landscapes and magnificent monuments that set England apart from the rest of the world. Many of the contributors bring their own special touch, presenting a refreshingly eclectic variety of personal icons, from pub signs to seaside piers, from cattle grids to canal boats, and from village cricket to nimbies. First published as a lavish colour coffee-table book, this new expanded paperback edition has double the original number of contributions from many celebrities including Bill Bryson, Michael Palin, Eric Clapton, Bryan Ferry, Sebastian Faulks, Kate Adie, Kevin Spacey, Gavin Pretor-Pinney, Richard Mabey, Simon Jenkins, John Sergeant, Benjamin Zephaniah, Joan Bakewell, Antony Beevor, Libby Purves, Jonathan Dimbleby, and many more: and a new preface by HRH Prince Charles.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

OK, OK. I know it says "Edited by Bill Bryson". Apparently, I just looked at the big name on the cover and made some assumptions. I love reading Bill Bryson. Everything he writes makes me

laugh. I wanted to read Bill Bryson humour about icons of England. This book contains short (1-3 page) essays about icons of England, which are lovely and thoughtful and illuminating, but NOT written by Bryson. The best part of the book for me was the short introductory passage written by Bill Bryson, which was only 6 pages. I was disappointed, but you may not be, if you clearly understand what you are buying.

Superb, this collection of essays is worth it alone for Eric Clapton's humble and heartfelt story. Here are thoughts on trees, country houses, railway branch lines, rolling fields and many other icons of England. I particularly enjoyed Tony Robinson's reminiscences on Mick Aston and how Mick introduced archaeology to him, all the more poignant now, after the unexpected and sad passing of Professor Aston, a few months ago. Ignore the bad reviews - Bill has done a wonderful job of editing this book. Sure, we all wish he would release a new book every year to make us laugh out loud and learn simultaneously. However, that would be impossible and in the meantime, console yourself with reading this. You can read it out of order, a few pieces at a time. Ponder the beauty, the nostalgia for childhood, the small everyday inclusions that make the country unique. Highly recommended, inspires you to travel and explore England and to acknowledge the treasure it is for us all.

I've always liked Bill Bryson's books, and have several of his earlier publications in hard-copy. This was the Kindle Edition, and is a collection of short stories (in some cases only 2-3 pages long) of icons of the UK - whether these be dry-stone walls, village pubs or the iconic mailbox shown on the front cover. Each is by a different author (Bill only provides the introduction), so there are a variety of writing styles from the casual to the very formal. For me (an UK ex-pat) an interesting commentary on the English countryside, and some of its more endearing (though in some cases quickly vanishing) features.

I didn't read the front cover properly and presumed this book was actually written by Bryson, whereas it is in fact edited by him. Not a problem if that's what you're expecting, but had I paid for this (it was a library book) I would have been disappointed, as others reviewing here have been. The book is set out into approximately two page 'chapters' where each contributor (Eric Clapton, Jo Brand, Jonathon Dimbleby, Gabby Logan, Kevin Spacey etc.) describes something that endears them to England. Some I found interesting or emotive and others just bland. I like facts and history so the chapters I enjoyed the most were the informative writings about Mary Anning the 19th century fossil hunter, Hadrian's Wall and Britain being blessed with ancient trees (with "more

500-year-old trees than France and Germany combined" in Richmond Park alone!) Although you can 'look inside' before buying on , the chapter titles don't always give much clue as to the content. Subjects include: urban childhoods; hares; cricket; family butchers; The Green Man; The Norfolk Broads and Pub signs (that comforting "rectangle, swinging free in wind or rain...where you will find the comforts of your local town or village" no matter how far from home you are.) Bryson does contribute in his indomitably observational style to the book at the beginning, but it would have been more fun had he contributed more. No book about Britain would be complete without a mention of the weather though, in this case by Floella Benjamin who arriving from Trinidad in 1960 had never experienced the same extent of season changes and coldness! She encapsulates about the climate, what surely most of us feel about 'Blighty' in general. It's home, and we love and miss it when we're away for any length of time...even the coldness! ;-) Incidentally all royalties from the book go to The Campaign to Protect Rural England.

I'm hopelessly prejudiced in favor of Bill Bryson. Ever since "The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid" I have been a fan. "Icons of England" is not written by Bryson, but is a priceless collection of pieces about Britain. This was my first purchase down-loaded to my new Kindle e-reader and it brought a smile to my face each time I switched on. That smile was also at the money I saved by buying it on-line for my Kindle. Any Angophile will love this collection of essays, some disappointingly short, but all little gems in their own right.

I'm a huge fan of Bill Bryson and must have read everything he's written at least twice. I bought "Icons of England" purely because it has his name on the cover (and yes, I know it is edited by, rather than written by Bill). Unfortunately it is disappointing - the articles are short on fact and long on reminiscing about the past. As such I suggest they are perhaps only really of interest to their writers. The articles' only saving grace is that each is very short, allowing the reader to quickly skip through each one and on to the next in the increasingly forlorn hope that one of them might be amusing or of interest. This didn't happen though and I got to the end of the book very quickly and with a certain sense of gullibility, based on the fact that this is one book that I erroneously judged by its cover! Sorry Bill, but I expect more from something with your name on it.

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