FG: Hello and welcome back to Episode 19 of the Counties of England podcast where we will be covering the most populous county in England, the most densely populated county in England and the capital city of the UK. If you haven’t guessed what county I am talking about today, then I really am concerned, but nonetheless, today we will be covering the county of Greater London.

Just to clear things up, you may have noticed that in Episode 8 which covered the City of London, I spoke about only the area right in the centre of what you would call London. I also alluded to the fact that the rest of London was part of a different county, and this is the episode in which I will speak about London as you know it. Greater London encompasses London and surrounding areas like Hillingdon, Barnet, Havering, Sutton, Bromley, and Kingston upon Thames just to name a few areas, which may not be considered part of London by locals but are within the borders of the Greater London administration.

I think that it is also worth explaining how the Greater London administration and borders came about. This short clip from one of my favourite YouTubers Jay Foreman, who has a whole YouTube playlist dedicated to the quirks of London, will explain why the County of London, as it was previously known had to be scrapped and replaced by Greater London. [Play first Jay Foreman clip]. Sir Edwin Herbert was tasked with the job of creating the new border, and this clip will explain the various tests he came up with to decide whether an area should be considered part of London or not. [Play second Jay Foreman clip]. This had an impact on all the home counties, which this clip will explain. [Play third Jay Foreman clip]. Today, living in Greater London has significant benefits, as this clip will explain. [Play fourth Jay Foreman clip]. So, I hope that all these clips have helped you understand why Greater London is as it is, and why which side of the border you live on makes a difference. Again, credit to the brilliant Jay Foreman for all the YouTube clips, I seriously recommend that if you want to learn more about London, that you go over to his YouTube channel and check those videos out.

It is split into 32 boroughs which I will not name for now, but in the blog post for this episode I will try to include them. Because it is a weird county, like the City of London in that respect, it does not have a county town as per-se. Greater London also does not have a flag. The population of Greater London is 8,899,375 which puts it as the most populous county when ranked against the others, which is expected considering how dominant London is in England. In terms of area, Greater London is the 12th smallest county when ranked against others, and in terms of population density, Greater London holds 14,685 people per square mile, which is comfortably the most out of any county, and is expected considering the population and area of Greater London.

The median salary in Greater London is £41,000 putting it above the UK average of £31,500. The unemployment rate in London is 5.6%, putting it above the UK average of 4.8%. The average house price according to Zoopla estimates is £678,273 putting it at over double the UK average, and I will explain why this is so high later in the episode.

Greater London is split into 73 different parliamentary constituencies, and this is purely because of how many people live in Greater London. Constituencies roughly have a population of 70,000, so inevitably with more people living there, you are going to get more parliamentary constituencies. The most famous of the bunch is, of course, the prime minister Boris Johnson. He has been Prime Minister since July 2019 and has held the constituency of Uxbridge and South Ruislip since May 2015. Labour leader Keir Starmer’s constituency is also in Greater London as he holds the seat of Holborn and St. Pancras and has done so since May 2015.

Greater London is also split into boroughs which are essentially mini cities in their own right with an average of around 200,000 people in a borough. They came about because before 1965, coincidentally when the boundaries of Greater London were adjusted, because there was one governing body for the whole of London, and it was incredibly inefficient and led to whole neighbourhoods being forgotten about. So 32 boroughs were created and since then it has stayed that way. This is reflected on the London Eye which has 32 pods to represent the 32 boroughs of London.

There is something of a housing crisis in London. As I alluded to earlier in the episode, house prices in London are over double that of the UK average. This is down to a few factors, which I will try to explain. Firstly, there is a limited supply of houses in London. House building has not kept pace with population growth. The capital may seem awash in building sites, with every shuttered pub being converted into flats and everyone with a stray million quid dreaming of developer fortunes, but all that activity added just 31,723 new homes to London between April 2017 and 2018, well below the 77,000 London needs to add each year to keep up with population growth. And secondly, there is a high demand for people living in London. Quite simply, lots of people want to live there, whether it be because they work there, or whether they just want to live there, purely because of what London has to offer, with a high demand, this pushes the price up even further. House prices in London have increased by 521% since 1995, and that shows no signs of slowing down, as house prices in London are expected to increase by 21.6% by 2025.

Additionally, London is one of the most diverse places in the world. Over 300 languages are spoken in the city, and approximately 1/3 of Londoners were born abroad. At the 2011 census, London had the smallest percentage of White British people, at 44.9%. Newham in London was the local authority where people from the White ethnic group made up the lowest percentage of the population (at 29.0%); 8 out of the 10 most ethnically diverse local authorities were in London.

London has massive impact both nationally and internationally. Nationally, London is by far the most important place in the UK. The Parliament is centered in London, the Prime Minister lives in London. The capital generates 22% of UK GDP despite accounting for only 12.5% of the UK population. London is by far the largest city in the UK with it being around 9x the size of Birmingham in terms of population. It is also one of the largest cities in Western Europe. It is also one of the most important financial hubs in the world, alongside New York City and Shanghai.

London is also important culturally. Some of the most famous football clubs in the world are found in London, with the likes of Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham all calling the capital their home. There is of course Wembley Stadium which is home to the England Football team as well as also being one of the most famous football stadiums in the world. Additionally, it is home to Lord’s Cricket Ground which is seen as the home of cricket. The Oval in Kennington is also one of the most famous cricket stadiums in the world. Twickenham stadium in South West London is also one of the most famous Rugby stadiums in the world.

London is also home to world famous museums like the Natural History museum and the Science museum. One of the reasons why these two museums are some of the most famous in the world is because they are both completely free. You also have the Globe Theatre, which was built in 1997 as a replica for the original Globe Theatre where Shakespeare’s plays would be performed. Also, Leicester Square is seen by many to be the cinema centre of London.

Finally, you may have heard of a transport project named Crossrail in recent years. This clip from Londonist will explain what Crossrail is. [Play Crossrail clip]. Work on Crossrail began in May 2009, and it is still yet to fully open. Only sections of the line have opened, and the whole project has been delayed by at least 3 years, and it is now wildly overbudget.

It is a little-known fun fact about London that the city officially went through a period called the Gin Craze between 1720 and 1751. During the peak of the craze, the average consumption of gin was 2 pints per week – for every person in the city – including children.

Culex Pipiens Molestus is a subspecies of mosquito that has evolved specific habits suited to its life on the London Underground. It can live in dark places for long periods of time, doesn’t have to hibernate, is a particularly voracious biter and doesn’t need water to lay its eggs.

Albert Gunter was driving a bus over Tower Bridge in 1952 when it started to rise – with the bus still on it. It all ended well thanks to some quick thinking on Gunter’s part. He put his foot down, sped the bus up and got it to clear a 10ft gap before landing on the other side. He was given the day off as a reward.

That just about wraps it up for this week’s episode, there was so much more that I could have spoken about but I decided to keep the episode to a decent length, I will be linking some Jay Foreman videos and more information on London boroughs in the blog post for this episode, so make sure to check that out if you have time. Next week’s episode will be on Greater Manchester on the 15th of May so stay tuned for that. In the meantime, have a good week and I will speak to you again next Saturday.