Listen to the presentation about unusual British festivals and do the exercises to practise and improve your listening skills.

1. Preparation: matching Do this exercise before you listen. Match the two parts of the phrase to make common festival activities. Write a–f next to the numbers 1–6.

1..... follow	a firework display
2..... cook and eat	b. as a special character
3..... watch	c. your house or street
4..... take part in a	d. ancient traditions
5..... decorate	e. competition
6..... dress up	f. special food

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2. Check your understanding: true or false

Do this exercise while you listen. Circle True or False for these sentences.

1. Many of these festivals are actually races or competitions.
2. The Burning of the Clavie brings good luck for the new year.
3. On Shrove Tuesday in Scarborough people dance with ropes.
4. Cheese rolling involves running away from a big, round cheese.
5. Snail racing started in the UK.
6. The competition to pull the ugliest face is an old tradition.
7. The Burning of the Clocks festival marks the summer solstice.
8. The Burning of the Clocks festival ends with people throwing water.

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3. Check your understanding: multiple choice
Do this exercise while you listen. Circle the best phrase to complete these sentences.

1. The Clavie is
2. In the Up Helly Aa festival, they burn
3. During a pancake race, you have to
4. Nowadays, the people who win the cheese rolling competition are usually
5. The fastest snail in the Snail Racing is
6. Black pudding throwing is similar to
7. To win the best gurner competition, one man
8. The Burning of the Clocks festival is

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4. Listen to the text and insert the missing words in the text

Hello. I'm going to talk about British festivals. I'm sure you've heard about the Notting Hill Carnival in London and the Edinburgh Festival, but today we're going to look at a lot more that you might not know about. Actually, a lot of these are not exactly _____, but strange races or competitions. Some of them are ancient and some are modern.

So, let's start in January in the north of Scotland with the Burning of the Clavie. This is a whisky barrel which is set alight then carried through the streets as a _____. It's an ancient tradition which always takes place on 11th of January, the first day of the year, according to an older form of the _____. The bonfire brings good luck for the coming year and people used to keep bits of burnt wood as protection against evil _____. At the end of January, even further north, in the Shetland Islands, there's another fire festival, the Up Helly Aa. This seems like an ancient festival, but has actually only been going for about ____ years – well, it is fairly old, I suppose. People carry fire-lit torches and a Viking boat through the streets, then set fire to the boat. There's lots of dancing; it's good fun.

Now to the north of England. On Shrove Tuesday in February, otherwise known as Pancake Day, a special Pancake ____ is rung in Scarborough. Everyone goes down to the road next to the beach where they skip – yep, they jump over long _____, up to fifteen people to one rope. And they have pancake races. This is quite common in the UK – running with a frying pan and tossing a pancake at the same time.

Another kind of race takes place in _____– cheese rolling. In Gloucestershire, in the south-west of England, round cheeses in round boxes are sent rolling down a hill and people run after them and try and _____them. The hill is very steep, so people often fall over – if you take part in this you need to be very fit and wear your oldest jeans. _____this strange custom attracts visitors from all over the world, but the people from the local village are usually the ones who catch the cheese.

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From people-racing, to animals, very _____ animals. World Championship Snail Racing takes place in a village in Norfolk. The snails have to race from an inner circle to an outer circle and the winner gets a lot of lettuce. There's a party and barbecue for the snail _____ and observers. This custom began in the 1960s after a local man saw something _____ in France. In the UK we don't eat snails, by the way.

More fun, in my opinion, are the onion-eating contest, also in Gloucestershire – a race to finish eating a raw onion – and the Black Pudding Throwing Championship, in Lancashire. Black puddings are like big sausages made mainly from _____ blood. Contestants bowl three black puddings each at 21 Yorkshire puddings set on a six-metre platform; the _____ is the one who knocks down the most.

Another fun contest takes place in September at the Egremont Crab Fair in Cumbria in the north of England. The World Gurning Championship is a _____ to pull the ugliest face. It sounds ridiculous but this is an ancient British tradition and the Crab Fair itself dates back to _____. The man who won the title of best gurner the most in recent years had all his teeth taken out so he could make terrible faces more easily.

Finally, let's go back to the south of England. In Brighton there's a Burning the Clocks Festival to celebrate the winter _____ on December 21st. This custom started twenty years ago and is very popular. People make clock lanterns and time-themed _____ of paper and wood, then walk through the town to the beach where the sculptures are set on fire and there's a massive firework display.

So, that's just a taste of a few of our old and more modern traditions. Would you like to take part in any of them?

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