

The History of the British Monarchy: From Royal Power to Pomp and Ceremony

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Part One: William the Conqueror: Creation of the English Monarchy, 1066

Key Monarchs Before William of Normandy came to England:

King Arthur: The Legendary King and Roman Britain

- Britannia was part of the Roman Empire from about 43 to 410 AD
- Arthur often linked to “Artorius” or another warrior, a Celtic warrior, who united Britons against Saxon invaders
- Earliest mentions in Welsh poetry
- Very possible he didn’t exist, at least not as King, but legend comes to define ideal king

Alfred the Great (c 849-899)

- King of West Saxons from 871-886
- King of Anglo-Saxons from 888-899
- Defeated Vikings, took control of London; oversaw conversion of Viking leader Guthrum to Christianity
- Known as great warrior and learned man who encouraged education and established court school
- Called “The Great” from 13th century; only native-born English monarch to have that title

Æthelstan (c 894-939)

- Grandson of Alfred the Great
- King of Anglo-Saxons from 924
- Called “King of the English” from 927
- Centralized government
- First English king to achieve lordship over north

Edward the Confessor (c 1003-1066)

- King of the English from 1042 until his death
- Last monarch from House of Wessex
- Nickname probably comes from reputation as a pious, unworldly man
- Did not have children, which led to confusion and ultimately Norman Conquest
- Canonized as saint in 1161; his feast day, 13 October, is celebrated by Church of England and Catholic Church

Key Monarchs after William the Conqueror

Henry I (c. 1068-1135)

- Fourth son of William the Conqueror
- Succeeded his brother William Rufus on English throne
- Married Matilda of Scotland; two legitimate children, Matilda and William
- William killed in “White Ship disaster” in 1120; declared Matilda his heir
- When he died in 1135, Stephen of Blois took throne

Stephen (c 1092-1154), Matilda (1102-1167) the Anarchy (1138-1153), and Henry II (1133-1189)

- Stephen seized throne in 1135
- Matilda, formerly married to Emperor Henry V and then to Geoffrey of Anjou, left Anjou to invade England to claim throne in 1139
- Matilda captured Stephen in 1141, but Church refused to crown her Queen
- In 1148, Matilda returned to Normandy and left her son Henry (FitzEmpress) to carry on in her behalf
- In 1153, both sides agreed to Treaty of Wallingford, whereby Henry would succeed Stephen as king
- In 1154, Henry took the throne as Henry II, first Angevin and Plantagenet King of England

Part Two: King John--The Barons and Magna Carta, 1215

Key Monarchs Before King John

Henry II (1133-1189)

- Married Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152, which brought her lands into English control
- Restored royal administration in England
- Clash with Church resulted in murder of Thomas Becket
- Sons tried to overthrow him in 1173; he prevailed against them and imprisoned Eleanor for 16 years
- Died in 1189; sons William, Henry, and Geoffrey predeceased him; succeeded by Richard

Richard I (1157-1199)

- Achieved reputation and nickname Richard the Lionheart because of success in war, especially the Crusades
- Ruled as King of England and Duke of Normandy, Aquitaine, and Gascony; also Count of Poitiers, Anjou, Maine, and Nantes and overlord of Brittany, inheriting combined empire of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine
- Appointed as Commander of Third Crusade and achieved several victories but did not recapture Jerusalem
- Most likely spent only about six months of his 10-year reign in England

Key Monarchs After King John

Edward III (1312-1377)

- Crowned at age 14 after his father was deposed; took full control at age 17
- Transformed England into one of most powerful military nation in Europe
- Ruled for 50 years, oversaw evolution of English Parliament
- Achieved great success in Hundred Years War against France
- Popularity and success declined in final years

Richard II (1367-1400) and Henry IV (1367-1413)

- Richard succeeded his grandfather, Edward III, at 10 years old; early government handled by regency councils
- Sought to end Hundred Years War
- Firm believer in royal prerogative and exceeded his rights as king and took revenge on those who stood up to him
- Deposed by Henry Bolingbroke, son of John of Gaunt, in 1399
- Henry IV was first English ruler whose native language was English
- Established House of Lancaster
- Put down threats from discontented English nobles as well as from Scotland and Wales

Key Monarchs After King John (cont)

Wars of the Roses: Henry VI (1421-1471) and Edward IV (1442-1483)

- ·Henry VI took the throne as an infant after the death of his father, Henry V
- ·Only English King to be crowned as King of England (1429) and King of France (1431)
- ·Unlike father, not interested in pursuing war in France
- ·Married Marguerite of Anjou, who became head of Henry's forces after his illnesses
- ·Challenged by the Duke of York, and civil war broke out in 1455 (a series of battles known as Wars of the Roses)
- ·Henry VI deposed in 1461 and Edward of York took throne as Edward IV and established the House of York
- ·Edward married English citizen Elizabeth Woodville, sparking discontent
- ·Lancastrian forces defeated Edward IV and reinstated Henry VI in 1470
- ·Edward IV and Yorkist forces defeated Henry VI and his followers in 1471, Edward retook the throne
- ·Edward IV reigned until his death in 1483; Edward's brother imprisoned Edward's sons and took throne as Richard III

Part Three: Charles I to William & Mary: Civil Wars, Interregnum, and the Glorious Revolution (1642–1689)

Key Monarchs Before Charles I

The Tudors: Henry VII (1457-1509), Henry VIII (1491-1547), Edward VI (1534-1553), Jane Grey (1537-1554), Mary I (1516-1558), Elizabeth I (1553-1603)

- Henry VII defeated Richard III and Battle of Bosworth 1485, took the throne and establishing the Tudor dynasty
- Peaceful transition from Henry VII to Henry VIII in 1509
- Henry had Parliament pass three Succession Acts, involving the body significantly in the choice of the next monarch
- Edward VI attempted to change the succession and nominate Jane Grey instead of his half-sister Mary with his “Devise for the Succession” in 1553
- Mary overcomes Jane’s support and peacefully took the throne as Mary I in 1553, becoming the first women crowned Sovereign and Monarch
- Elizabeth I, the final of Henry VIII’s children, took the throne in 1558 and rules until 1603 when she died without children, ending the Tudor dynasty and passing the crown to the Stuarts

Key Monarchs After the Glorious Revolution

William (1650-1702) and Mary (1662-1694)

- William of Orange and Mary were crowned as joint monarchs in 1685, meaning the survivor would succeed the other (only time in British monarchy)
- Mary died in 1694, after which William ruled alone until his death in 1702
- As the pair had no children, they were succeeded by Mary’s sister Anne

Queen Anne (1665-1714)

- By the time Anne took the throne in 1702, all her children had died
- Parliament had passed the Act of Settlement in 1701, which barred Catholics from the throne, so they determined that upon Anne’s death, the crown would pass to the closest Protestant relative, Sophia of Hanover
- Anne supported and promoted the Acts of Union in 1707, under which England and Scotland were united into a single kingdom known as Great Britain
- During Anne’s reign, Parliament’s two-party system was strengthened
- Sophia died two months before Queen Anne in 1713, so Anne was succeeded by George of Hanover, who took the throne as George I and established the Hanoverian dynasty in the British monarchy

Part Four: The Hanoverians and Queen Victoria: Settlement and Reform (1832–1884)

Key Monarchs After Victoria

Edward VII (1841-1910)

- Longest-serving Prince of Wales (until then-Prince Charles during the reign of Elizabeth II)
- Largely excluded from political work during Queen Victoria's long reign, he established the house of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, named for his father Prince Albert
- He supervised the modernization of the British Home Fleet and reorganization of the British Army
- The Edwardian era saw changes in technology and society
- Edward VII died during a constitutional crisis that was resolved by the Parliament Act of 1911, which restricted the power of the House of Lords and made the House of Commons more powerful

George V (1865-1936)

- Born in the reign of Queen Victoria, George saw the rise of republicanism and fascism in Europe during his lifetime
- Politics were turbulent from the beginning of his reign, and the Irish pushed for Home Rule
- In 1914, Britain declared war against Germany, something of a family battle as Kaiser Wilhelm II was George V's first cousin
- During the war, as the royal family's German name and connections caused resentment in Britain, George V officially changed the family name to Windsor
- The King delivered the first Christmas speech in 1932, starting a royal holiday tradition that continues to this day
- Although his eldest son, the Prince of Wales was extremely popular, George V believed he would be a terrible monarch and hoped the crown would pass to his second son and his granddaughter Elizabeth

Part Five: Edward VIII and Queen Elizabeth II: From Scandal to Jubilee, 20th and 21st Centuries

Other Key Monarch

George VI (1895-1952)

- As the second son, Albert Frederick Arthur George (known to the family as Bertie) did not expect to become king
- He married Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, a member of the British aristocracy, in 1923
- After Edward VIII's abdication, Bertie took the throne as King George VI. He and his wife were crowned on 12 May 1937
- The abdication was a significant challenge to the monarchy, and less than three years later the country was at war with Germany again
- George VI and Queen Elizabeth were very popular, as were their daughters Elizabeth and Margaret Rose; the family was a symbol of British determination to win the war
- Determined that his daughter be more prepared for the monarchy than he had been, George VI prepared Princess Elizabeth
- George died in 1952 and was succeeded by Princess Elizabeth, who took the throne as Elizabeth II and ruled for 70 years