

The History Of Great Britain



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Picts

- The first Britons (people who live in the United Kingdom) were the Picts, who arrived about 10,000 years ago. In the eighth century B.C., the Celts arrived from Europe and pushed the Picts north into Scotland. In A.D. 43, the Romans invaded and ruled for nearly 400 years. They built roads, bathhouses, sewers, and large villas.
By the sixth century A.D., German peoples known as Angles, Jutes, and Saxons were moving into Britain. The Angles gave their name to England, and English people became known as Anglo-Saxons. From the 900s to the 1400s, England was ruled by Viking, Danish, and Norman invaders
- In 1485 the Welsh noble Henry Tudor claimed the English crown and became Henry VII, the first of five Tudor monarchs. Several important lines of kings and queens followed.
- By the 1800s, Britain was one of the most powerful nations in the world. Trade generated immense wealth, and the country built a huge overseas empire. But the early 20th century was a time of setbacks for Britain. Drained by World War I and II, Britain could no longer afford its empire, and most of its colonies became independent.

The Anglo-Saxons

- In the 5th century, the Romans progressively abandoned Britannia, as their Empire was falling apart and legions were needed to protect Rome.
- With the Romans vacated, the Celtic tribes started warring with each other again, and one of the local chieftains had the (not so smart) idea to request help from some of the Germanic tribes from the North of present-day Germany and South of Denmark. These were the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who arrived in the 5th and 6th centuries.
- When the fighting ceased, the Germanic tribes did not, as expected by the Celts, return to their homeland. In fact, they felt strong enough to seize the whole of the country for themselves, which they ultimately did, pushing back all the Celtic tribes to Wales and Cornwall, and founding their respective kingdoms of Kent (the Jutes), Essex, Sussex and Wessex (the Saxons), and further northeast, the kingdoms of Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria (the Angles). These 7 kingdoms, which ruled over the United Kingdom from about 500 to 850 AD, were later known as the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy.

The Normans

After settling in to their newly acquired land, the Normans adopted the French feudal system and French as the official language.

During that same period, the Kings of Wessex had resisted, and eventually vanquished the Danes in England in 10th of century. However, the powerful Canute the Great (995-1035), king of the newly unified Denmark and Norway and overlord of Schleswig and Pomerania, led two other invasions on England in 1013 and 1015, and became king of England in 1016, after crushing the Anglo-Saxon King, Edmund II.

During the 11 century, the Norman King Edward the Confessor (1004-1066) nominated William, Duke of Normandy, as his successor, but upon Edward's death, Harold Godwinson, the powerful Earl of Wessex, crowned himself king. William refused to acknowledge Harold as King and invaded England with 12,000 soldiers in 1066. King Harold was killed at the battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror become William I of England.

The Norman rulers kept their possessions in France, and even extended them to most of Western France (Brittany, Aquitaine...).

French became the official language of England, and remained that way until 1362, a short time after the beginning of the Hundred Years' War with France. English nevertheless remained the language of the populace, and the fusion of English (a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Norse languages) with French and Latin (used by the clergy) slowly evolved into the modern English we know today.



Britain in the reign of Elizabeth

- **Britain in the reign of Elizabeth**

- Many researchers believe that there has been no greater period in English history than the reign of Elizabeth, who was proclaimed queen in 1558.
- At this time the most critical question in England was that of religion. In 1558 a large proportion of English people were still indifferent in religious matters, and the power of the crown was very great. It was quite possible, therefore, for the ruler to control the form which the religious organisation of the people should take. Elizabeth chose her own ministers, and with them exerted so much pressure over Parliament that almost any laws that she wanted could be carried through.
- She and her ministers settled upon a middle course going back in all matters of church government to the system of Henry VIII. To carry out this arrangement two important laws, known as the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity, were passed by Parliament. According to these laws, the regulation of the English Church in matters of doctrine and good order was put into the hands of the Queen, and she was authorized to appoint a minister or ministers to exercise these powers in her name.
- Thus the Church of England was established in a form midway between the Church of Rome and the Protestant churches on the continent of Europe. It had rejected the leadership of the Pope, and was not Protestant like other reformed churches. From this time onward the organisation of the English church was strictly national.
- The political situation in England was not simple by the time Elizabeth took the throne. England was in close alliance with Spain and at war with France. Elizabeth managed to make peace with France, which was vitally necessary for England: her navy was in bad condition, troops few and poorly equipped, and treasury empty.
- One of the most significant internal problems of England during that period was pauperism, since the changes, rebellions and disorders of the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I had left much distress and confusion among people. Many men were out of work, prices were high and wages low, trade irregular. In one field, however, there was a great success. The restoration of the coinage took place; the old debased currency had been recoined to the new standards. This was one of the most beneficial actions of the long reign of Elizabeth. Also, in 1563 a long act for the regulation of labor was passed. It was known as the Statute of Apprentices and settled, among others, an approximate twelve-hour day of labour.
- The rivalry among Elizabeth and her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots became another chief political affair of sixteenth century, which finally led to Mary's long imprisonment and execution. In 1588 the war with Spain broke out. The most significant battle (and of historical meaning) of that conflict was the navy one. On July 30, 1588, the Invincible Armada of the Spanish was almost completely destroyed by much smaller fleet of the British under Lord Howard of Effingham command (although it's been assumed that the great deal of success in the battle was brought by the terrible storm that swept away the large part of the Spanish fleet).
- The last ten years of Elizabeth's reign were a period of more settled conditions and greater interest in the arts of peace, in the progress of commerce, and in the production and enjoyment of works of literature. The reign of Elizabeth revealed several quite gifted and talented English people who did a lot to widen the influence of England. Probably the most famous of them was Sir Francis Drake. The first one, being a corsair and a sea captain in Elizabeth's service, led a number of sea expeditions, mainly in Atlantic and Pacific oceans, bringing a lot of new knowledge of the world, and discovered a sound, later named after him.
- In cultural aspect, the real crown of the age was the Elizabethan literature, with such bright writers as William Shakespeare, Philipp Sidney and Edmund Spenser.

18th – 20th century

- The 18th century brought the Industrial Revolution. It gave development to the cotton industry and agriculture. In the 19th century Great Britain became the leading capitalist state. Britain's relatively peaceful development ended in the year 1914. Britain entered World War I. Strikes and unemployment were the result of it. World War II was another difficult period in the history of Britain. The British people withstood heavy bombing with great courage. London itself was bombed for 76 nights continuously. When the USSR entered the war, the Britain's situation became better. After the war many social reforms and economic development took place. Now Britain is one of the leading countries in the world and the history of the country continues.

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