

An Outline of British History

By Steven L. Rosen, Ph.D.



MAIN PERIODS IN BRITISH HISTORY

- ◆ **STONE AGE BRITAIN (5000 BC- 55BC)**
 - ◆ **THE CELTS (800-600 BC- Roman occupation)**
 - ◆ **ROMAN BRITAIN (55BC- AD 440)**
 - ◆ **ANGLO-SAXON AND VIKING PERIOD (440-1066)**
 - ◆ **EARLY MIDDLE AGES (1066-1290)**
 - ◆ **LATER MIDDLE AGES (1290-1485)**
 - ◆ **THE TUDOR AGE (1485-1603)**
 - ◆ **THE STUARTS(1603-1714)**
 - ◆ **GEORGIAN ENGLAND (1714-1837)**
 - ◆ **THE VICTORIAN AGE (1837-**
 - ◆ **MODERN BRITAIN (20th Century-)**
-

The Beginnings of British History: Stone Age Britain

Over thousands of years, groups of people came from the continent of Europe to Britain. The very first people were Stone Age hunters living all over Europe and the British Isles. It was about 2400 BC when the first farmers arrived in England from southern Europe; these are the people who built the mysterious stone monuments like Stonehenge. Then, about 1700 BC another group of taller and stronger invaders who used metal tools came from Holland and Germany. Like all the groups who invaded Britain throughout its early history, they married and mixed in with the native population.



Stonehenge

The Celts

The Celts came to England about 800 BC from Central Europe (France and Germany). Another group of warlike Celts invaded in the 4th century BC and conquered land in the north of England and Scotland and Ireland. They became the first aristocracy to control most of Britain. They imposed their language (Gaelic) on the people, which still survives today to some degree in Ireland and Scotland and Wales.

The Romans

After the Celts, the next group of people to come to Britain and rule over it was the Romans. The Romans first came in 55 and 54 BC. They lived peacefully in England for about 300 years. They brought to Britain a highly developed legal system, system of taxation, engineering skills, Roman architecture and the Latin language. In the 4th century Rome was converted to Christianity and Christian missionaries went to Britain to spread that religion. We sometimes call talk about this period as the *Celtic-Roman* period because the two different cultures lived together peacefully. In the 4th century AD, during the period of the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Roman troops in Britain left.

Some historians say the Romans were important in British history, others say that their influence was really very small. In any case, after the Romans left, the Celtic people who remained were then invaded by a new group of people who had a very big influence on British history: the Anglo-Saxons.

The Anglo-Saxons

After the Romans left England in the 4th century, the peaceful Celtic Britons were attacked by the warlike Angles, Saxons and Jutes, three groups of people who came from West Germany and Denmark. They took control of most of the country they called, "Aengla-land" between AD 450 and 600. They were an agricultural people who lived in long houses and spoke a language we now call "Old English," which is, of course, a Germanic language.

The Vikings

The Vikings came from Scandinavia. They were similar to the Anglo-Saxons, but more aggressive and warlike. Their Scandinavian language (Old Norse) was also Germanic so that was relatively easy for them to communicate with the Anglo-Saxons who had come from Germany and Denmark years before. When Vikings attacked in their long boats, the Anglo-Saxons united under King Alfred the Great (872-901) to try to fight them off. King Alfred is called The Great because he kept part of England free from Viking control. The Danish Vikings controlled the east northeast by the 9th century; the Saxons were able to maintain control in the west.



“The Middle-Ages” in British History (1066-1485)

Key facts:

- England was ruled by the Norman French.

 - The country was united under a feudal system.

 - Great castles, cathedrals and monasteries were built.

 - England went to war with France over land and lost.

 - The Norman French rulers gradually became English.

 - The language of the people gradually changed into what we call “Middle English.”

 - England went to war with Scotland and lost.

 - The Black Death (plague) killed off almost half the population.
-

The Normans

In October 1066 William, the Norman king invaded England, becoming King William I (William the Conqueror) of England. Within five years, the Normans had conquered all of England. They imposed unity on England and helped to link England with the culture of the rest of Europe. William gave a lot of land to the Norman nobility (known as *barons*). These barons then owed military service to the king. The nobility gave land to others to work on as farmers. People in the village who received land had to work 2 or 3 days a week on the rich person's land or pay taxes. This system of land holding is known as feudalism.

The French invaders became the upper-class aristocracy who ruled over the English. French was the language of the upper classes, of law and government and the army. The Anglo-Saxon peasants did not speak French.

The Normans built many castles which helped them to rule the land they had conquered. They also built beautiful churches in the shape of a cross. The arches above the doorways were always rounded (Romanesque style). They build fine monasteries which became the center of village life.

The Rise of the English Nation

By the 13th century, the rulers of England thought of themselves as English, not French. The rulers eventually spoke English like everyone else, not French. English and French had mixed over the years and evolved into what we now call Middle English. This period was a time of great changes in government

and society. Oxford and Cambridge universities started in the 13th century. Also the power of a Parliament started growing in this period.

Edward I (1272-1307) was a strong king who tried to take Scotland- but failed (because of brave Scotsmen like William Wallace and Robert Bruce).

Then in (1348-9) the Black Death (plague) came to England killing almost half the population.

The Tudor Age (1485-1603): Renaissance, Reformation and a New World

The social and economic order of the medieval period was beginning to break down. More and more people were rejecting the authority of kings and the Catholic Church. This was the period of the English Renaissance, and the growth of a new form of Christianity which rejected the authority of the Roman Catholic Church: Protestantism.

The two most famous English monarchs in this period were Henry VIII and Elizabeth I of the House of Tudor.

Henry VIII (1509-1547)



Henry VIII was a typical Renaissance prince: a poet, musician, fine horseman and lover of the arts. When he was 36, he still had no son and became tired of his Spanish wife Catherine of Aragon. He loved Anne Boleyn and asked the Pope permission to divorce Catherine so he could marry Anne. The Pope said no, and Henry broke with Rome. There was a lot of anti-Catholic feeling in England so Parliament and the people supported Henry against the Pope.



Anne Boleyn

Parliament made the king the “Supreme Head of the Church of England,” and helped him to destroy the Catholic Church. Henry took church lands and buildings and gave much of the wealth to his friends. He ordered that church services should be

in English instead of Latin and that each church should have an English bible.

Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603)



Henry's first daughter, Mary, was Catholic like her mother Catherine, and tried to bring Catholicism back to England. However, when she died, the next in line was Henry's second daughter Elizabeth (by Henry's second wife, Ann Boleyn). She came to be queen at age 25. She was fluent in Greek, Latin, French, and Italian. She studied theology and became a strong Protestant.

When she came to power England had no army or police and a weak bureaucracy. When she died in 1603, she left England as one of the most powerful nations on earth.

In 1559 Elizabeth made Protestantism as the national

religion by having Parliament pass the Act of Supremacy: this law made the queen (or king) the supreme head of the Church of England. There were rumors that Catholics were going to try to assassinate Elizabeth and that Mary, Queen of Scots was involved. Parliament wanted her executed and Elizabeth had her head cut off (in 1587).

King Philip of Spain wanted to help the Catholics in England (this was a time of fighting between Catholics and Protestants). Also, English and Spanish ships were coming into conflict on the ocean. By the mid 1580's it became clear that Spain and England would go to war with each other. In one of the most famous battles in English history, the English beat the whole Spanish fleet in the English Channel (1588).

In this same year Shakespeare arrived in London. He wrote 20 plays which Elizabeth enjoyed very much. Many of his historical plays celebrated England's greatness.

This was a time of great economic growth for England. This was also the beginning of the great age of exploration and discovery around the world.



Great Elizabethan Playwrite

The English Civil War

Under Elizabeth, the power of Parliament was growing. After she died, her cousin, king of Scotland, became King James I of England (1603). This was the end of the Tudor dynasty and the beginning of the **House of Stuart**.

At this time, there were religious reformers who thought the Anglican Church (Church of England) was not strict enough and they wanted to reform it. These groups of religious reformers were called **Puritans**, because they wanted to purify the church. There was a lot of hostility towards these Puritans and some escaped England to make a new religious community, first in Holland, and then later in America (in Massachusetts).

After King James I died, his son became King Charles I (1625). Charles believed in the divine power of kings and tried to rule without Parliament. He tried to arrest Members of Parliament. Parliament fought back. Thus began the English Civil War.



King Charles I

Civil war started in 1640, with **Oliver Cromwell** as the leader of Parliament. The main issues of this war were religious

toleration (for Puritans and other Protestant groups) and more power for Parliament (and less power for the king). Puritans supported the Parliament against the king.

King Charles I was defeated by Cromwell's army and executed on January 30, 1649, and for the first and only time in English history, there was no monarch.

England without a King: “The Commonwealth” (1649-1660)

England now had no king. It was ruled by Cromwell as a “**commonwealth**” rather than a kingdom. There were many different groups (religious and political) competing for power, and so the army generals under Cromwell took control. England became a **military dictatorship** under Puritan rule. There were strict religious laws (e.g., the theaters were all closed).



Oliver Cromwell

The Restoration (1660-1713)

Eventually the people got tired of this Puritan form of government and wanted a king. King Charles II was invited back to England and the people rejoiced (1660). Theatres were opened and a period of great artistic and cultural achievement began. The main spirit of the Restoration was that of **reason**. The power and wealth of the middle classes grew. This was a time of great commercial success around the world, and scientific achievement. This was also the beginning of science and medicine and the period known as the English Enlightenment. Also, the king no longer had absolute power; from then on, he had to share power with the Parliament.

The Rise of the British Empire

During the 17th and 18th centuries the British sailed across the seas with the purpose of increasing British power and wealth, competing mostly with France for colonies around the world. Emigration was a solution to the over population problem in Britain. Little by little, people looking for freedom or wealth settled in these far away places. By the late 19th century, under queen Victoria, England ruled about 1/4 of the world's land and population. During this period, England also became the leading industrial nation in Europe. In fact, England was the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution.

In 1834, Britain stopped slavery in all its colonies. In the 19th and 20th centuries, her colonies became more and more independent, and the big companies were not allowed to monopolized trade. It became too difficult to maintain such a huge Empire, and so it gradually disappeared; today there is only a linguistic and cultural connection with Great Britain.

Major Colonies in the British Empire:

America

1607 - Jamestown was founded in Virginia as for trade (tobacco and cotton).

1620- Massachusetts: A religious colony started by strict Puritans (Pilgrims).

By mid-18th century there were 13 English colonies stretching up and down the east coast of America.



Canada

The Hudson Bay Company was important for exploring Canada and setting up trade (especially furs). The British went to war with France in Canada and won (1763). Many French stayed there living peacefully with the British in eastern Canada. After America won its independence, many pro-British colonists went north to Canada (especially the Toronto area).

On the west Coast of Canada (British Columbia), Vancouver was started for the China trade (1788). In 1936 Canada became a self-governing nation in the British Commonwealth.

India: “The Jewel in the Crown”

The East India Company started in 1600; it had a monopoly on trade for the next 150 years; the import of tea (and export of tea to America) made the company rich because the English became addicted to tea in the 18th century.

In 1750, the British defeated the French in India and the British East India Company to take control of India. The Indian people tried to revolt in 1857 but lost. After this, the British government took over the administration of India, until Indian independence in 1947.

Australia and New Zealand

New Zealand and Australia (called New South Wales) were discovered by the British (Captain Cook) and made part of Britain (in 1770). In the beginning, Australia was a prison colony for Britons convicted of fairly minor crimes. In 1813 the islands of New Zealand were made part of New South Wales, under British protection. Many Scottish farmers made New Zealand into a rich colony. New Zealand was colonized from 1840. Like Australia, New Zealand became an independent country within the British Commonwealth and Empire. By the 1840, six separate colonies

covering all of Australia were decided; in 1910 they formed into one Commonwealth of Australia.

South Africa

In the 19th century, the British and the Dutch (Boers) fought each other for control of South Africa. In 1880 an Independent Boer Republic was started, but South Africa remained under British rule. Finally in 1948 the Boers (Afrikaner National Party) took control of the government.

Hong Kong

In 1841 the British took Hong Kong Island to trade with China. They shipped opium from India and sold it to China and imported lots of Chinese goods. Britain had a year lease (till 1997) on Hong Kong. They never gave the Hong Kong people democracy.

Other:

Britain controlled many other lands around the world, such as Singapore, which became Britain's main naval base in Asia, Caribbean islands like Jamaica, and Egypt.

Conclusion

The British Empire came to an end in the 20th century after

Britain fought in two world wars. Many profound changes occurred in English social and political life, as was the case throughout most of Europe and America in the 20th century. This last century of ours, the 20th century, really requires a separate textbook to fully understand all the important changes that have taken place. Although Great Britain is now radically different from its pre-20th century history, it still has many influences from the past. Hopefully this textbook has given you, the student, a good basic understanding of the roots of British history for your further study of this great nation.



Recommended Films for British History

Brave Heart (13th century/Scotland)
A Man for all Seasons (16th century/ Henry VIII)
Barry Lyndon (18th century)
The Crucible (Puritans in America)
Michael Collins (20th century/ Irish Independence)
A Passage to India and Gandhi (British Colonial Empire)



British History Timeline

250,000- 50,000 year ago: hunter-gather people (all over Europe)

about 600 B.C.- Celts come to Britain from

43 AD- Large Roman invasion; Romans rule Britain for almost 400 years

[4th century- The Roman Empire converts to Christianity]

6th century- Four large Germanic tribes (Jutes and Angles from Denmark, Saxons from Northern Germany, Frisians from Northern Germany and Holland); by 550 they occupied the whole of England

597- St. Augustine comes to England from Rome to bring Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons. By end of the 7th century had spread to all of England.

8th, 9th and 10th centuries- Viking invasions from Scandinavia

878- King Alfred of Wessex defeats the Vikings

879-1042- Vikings become Christianized and live peacefully with Anglo-Saxons.

1066- Norman French invasion of England

1348- Black Death plague: population drops and French language loses its importance.

|1485- Tudor period begins; Henry VII becomes first Tudor

king.

[16th century: the age of “Merchant Adventurers”; the discovery of a sea route to India and the East by way of Africa; the discovery of America and Canada; West coast of Africa;

1529-1536- Henry VIII breaks with the Pope

1558- Elizabeth becomes queen

[17th century: conflict between Puritan Parliament and Anglican monarchy/Stuart Kings]

1601- The East India Company created

1603- Queen Elizabeth dies and her cousin James of Scotland becomes king; the start of the Stuart period; Scotland and England are finally united the two kingdoms.

1642-49- The English Civil War

1649-1660- England is a republic called “The Commonwealth” – a Puritan controlled one.

1660- The restoration of the Stuarts

1759- French armies defeated by the British in India and Canada.

1776- American Declaration of Independence

1782- Colonies in North America, with French help, became the United States of America

1793-1815 France and Napoleon fight British; British victory in 1815 making it the supreme power in Europe.

1812-14 War with America

1832- the First Parliamentary Reform Act

1837 (-1901) Queen Victoria

1899-1902 Boer War

1921 Southern Ireland becomes independent

1928 Women can vote

The Royal Houses of Britain

Saxons and Danes (802-1066)

House of Normandy (1066-1154)

House of Angevin (1154-1216)

House of Anjou Anjou/Plantagenet (1216-1399)

House of Lancaster (1399-1461)

House of York (1461-1485)

House of Tudor (1485-1603)

House of Stewart (1603-1414)

House of Hanover (1741-1901).

House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (later Windsor) (1901-1910)

House of Windsor (1910-)

Kings and Queens of England from Norman Times

- William I (1066-87)

- William II (1087-1100)
- Henry I (1100-1135)
- Stephen (1135-1154)
- Henry II (1154-1189)
- Richard I (1189-1199) Richard the Lion Heart
- John (1199-1216)
- Henry III (1216-1272)
- Edward I (1272-1307) “Longshanks”
- Edward II (1307-1327)
- Edward III (1327-1377)
- Richard II (1377-1399)
- Henry IV (1399-1413)
- Henry V (1413-1422)
- Henry VI (1422-1461, 1470-71)
- Edward IV (1461-1483)
- Edward V (1483)
- Richard III (1485)
- Henry VII (1485-1509)
- Henry VIII (1509-1547)
- Edward VI (1547-53)
- Jane (1553)
- Mary (1553-1558) □ “Bloody Mary”
- Elizabeth I (1558-1603)
- James I (1603-1625)

- Charles I (1625-1649)
- Oliver Cromwell (1658)
- R. Cromwell (1660)
- Charles II (1660-1685)
- James II (1685-1689)
- Mary II (1689-1694)
- William III (1689-1702)
- Anne (1702-1714)
- George I (1714-1727)
- George II (1727-1760)
- George III (1760-1820)
- George IV (1820-1830)
- William IV (1830-1837)
- Victoria (1837-1901)
- Edward VII (1901-1910)
- George V (1910-1936)
- Edward VIII (1936)
- George VI (1936-1952)
- Elizabeth II (1952-

.....

For the teacher:

Midterm Take Home Exam

Choose only two questions from below and write a short

essay (about 1 page) on each in English. You will need to do some extra research at the library or using internet to give a good answer. Does not just copy from a book- use your own words to give a clear answer.

1. In the early period of English history, various groups settled in England: first the Celts, then the Romans, then the Anglo-Saxons and then the Vikings. In the beginning, none of these groups were Christian, but they all became Christian. Explain how this happened.
2. In 1066 the Norman French invaded England. Explain how England changed after the Norman invasion.
3. The Elizabethan period, or Tudor period, is also known as *the English Renaissance*. Why is this period known as the English renaissance?
4. What were the causes of the English Civil War? What changes did it have on English politics and society?
5. In the 17th, 18th and 19th century England became an **empire** with colonies all around the world. Describe the commercial or economic consequences of this.

Final Exam: "British History"

Choose the best answer.

1. Which of these groups came to Britain first?
a) the Anglo-Saxons (b) the Celts (c) the Vikings (d) the Romans
 2. Which group came from parts of Germany to Britain?
a) the Anglo-Saxons (b) the Celts (c) the Vikings (d) the Romans
 3. In 1066 England was invaded by
a) the Romans (b) the Vikings (c) Protestants (d) the Norman French
 4. During the period of the Middle-Ages (about 1066-1485), England was
a) a Protestant nation (b) a feudal country (c) a Commonwealth (d) a colony
 5. By the 13th century, the rulers of England thought of themselves as
a) Puritans (b) French (c) English (d) an empire
 6. William Wallace
a) was king of Scotland (b) brought Christianity to Scotland (c) broke relations with Rome (d) helped to keep Scotland free from English control
-
7. When England had a feudal system in the Middle-Ages,
a) the king needed the Parliament to rule. (b) the king was head of the Anglican Church.
(c) the king give land to the nobility in return for military service.
(d) everyone was equal.

8. Queen Elizabeth I

a) was a Puritan (b) was a Protestant (c) was a Catholic (d) was a Norman

9. The Tudor Age in England (1485-1603)

a) was the time of Shakespeare. (b) was the period when Old (Anglo-Saxon) English was spoken. (c) was a time when the Catholic religion was the main religion in England. (d) is called "the Restoration Period".

10. The Anglican Church (=Church of England) was started by:

a) Elizabeth I (b) Henry VIII (c) the Puritans (d) the Romans

11. At the end of the English Civil War (1649),

a) Elizabeth was assassinated. (b) King Charles I was executed. (c) Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. (d) the Parliament lost control of the country to the King.

12. Which is true about the Restoration Period?

a) Puritans controlled cultural life. (b) There was a flowering of architecture and other artistic works. (c) It was a time when the king had total power and control over the political system. (d) It was a time when England lost its American colonies.

13. Who did the British Empire compete with for colonial control of South Africa?

a) the French (b) the Spanish (c) black slaves (d) the Dutch

14. In 1834

a) America was born (b) Britain controlled all of America. (c) Britain stopped all slave trade. (d) The English switched from drinking tea to smoking opium

15. Which is true about India?

a) The British government and king ruled all of India in the 17th century. (b) The East India Company controlled India as a colony in the 17th century. (c) Gandhi won a victory through violent revolt in the 17th century. (d) India became a major exporter of tobacco.
