

Landmarks in British history: The monarchy

The past

1066

The Norman Conquest after the Battle of Hastings

William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, defeats the Anglo-Saxon King Harold and becomes King of England.

1215

The Magna Carta guarantees rights and liberties. It limits the power of the king because the monarch is considered subject to the rule of law, and the church is free from domination by the king. Clause 29 guarantees: "No person shall be [...] deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law."

1534

The Act of Supremacy

After the conflict with the Pope in Rome about divorce, Henry VIII separates the English Church from the Roman Catholic Church and establishes the independent Church of England.

1533-1603

Queen Elizabeth I

In the Elizabethan Age English power and influence increases. Shakespeare writes his plays and English colonisation in America starts.

1599 – 1658

Oliver Cromwell

After the successful rebellion against the British monarchy, Oliver Cromwell rules as Lord Protector – the only time England is a republic.

After a rebellion by Irish Catholics in 1641, almost all land owned by Irish Catholics is confiscated and given to British settlers in Ireland.

1688

The Glorious Revolution

Mary and her Dutch, Protestant husband, William of Orange, are invited by Parliament to replace the Catholic, Stuart king, James II. At the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 William's troops defeat King James.

1689

With passage of the **Bill of Rights** England becomes a constitutional monarchy where the king has to refer to Parliament. The document confirms rights such as

- no taxation without the agreement of Parliament.
- the freedom to bear arms.
- the freedom of speech.

Roman Catholics are excluded from becoming king or queen. Catholic landownership falls from around 14% in 1691 to around 5% in the course of the next century due to penal laws.

The present

The French-speaking Normans, the new ruling class, enriched the English language, especially with terms in the fields of law, administration, science and literature. In modern English, this influence can be seen clearly.

The Magna Carta is still part of English law. Instead of a written (codified) constitution, English law relies on the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights of 1689 and the so-called conventions.

This fact might become an issue when/if there is a British referendum on the European Constitution.

Today Queen Elizabeth is head of the Anglican Church in England, but not in Scotland, Wales or Ireland.

The two Queens, Elizabeth I and Elisabeth II and their long reigns have been compared, e.g. rise and fall of the British empire, political and social changes.

The statue of Oliver Cromwell is still outside the Palace of Westminster and he ranks 10th in a BBC poll of "Great Britons".

The conflict in Northern Ireland between Protestants and Roman Catholics has a long history. Injustice suffered in the past still influences today's conflicts in Northern Ireland.

The Orange Order, a Protestant organisation in Northern Ireland and Scotland, still marches on the 12th of July to celebrate the Battle of the Boyne. The marches often cause problems because the men march through areas where many Catholics live.

The Constitution of the USA relies on a different Bill of Rights (1791). The second amendment of the American Bill of Rights guarantees the current right to bear arms and is an issue in the current discussion about gun laws. "No taxation without representation" is the slogan used by the settlers in the American colonies.

Even today Roman Catholics are explicitly excluded from succeeding to the throne, but since 1828 they are allowed to become Members of Parliament.

1707

United Kingdom of Great Britain

(= Scotland, England, Wales)

1801

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland

1922

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

1997

After a referendum, the Labour government creates **regional parliaments in Scotland and Wales** (the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly) with limited powers of legislation. This process is called devolution.

Even today, there is no British football team in international contests, but a Welsh, a Scottish and an English team.

In international matches football fans often brandish their flag instead of the Union Jack – the British flag.

A possible problem is that there is no regional English parliament. Critics see the United Kingdom at risk.

1819 – 1901

Queen Victoria

During her long reign the British empire expands and the Industrial Revolution brings about social, economic and technological changes. Britain becomes the dominant industrial and maritime power of the 19th century.

The rights of today's monarchs, "the right to be consulted, the right to advise, and the right to warn", were defined during the reign of Queen Victoria.

1931

British Empire → Commonwealth

With more and more states claiming independence, the British Empire is replaced by the Commonwealth, which is headed by the British monarch.

1948

Since there are no restrictions for citizens from countries of the Commonwealth, more and more immigrants enter Britain in search of a better life. The ship *Windrush* sails from Jamaica with almost 500 West Indian immigrants.

1971

The **Immigration Act** restricts immigration.

1972

Britain accepts 30,000 Asians of Indian origin who were driven from Uganda by its ruler.

The spread of the English language worldwide is one result of the British Empire. Many former colonies adopted the British legal and administrative systems and kept English as the language of administration.

Post-colonial literature produced famous writers such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy in India, Chinua Achebe in Africa, V.S. Naipaul in Trinidad and the Pakistani-British Hanif Kureishi, who all write in English.

Britain changes into a multicultural and multi-ethnic society with all its advantages and conflicts. The idea of British identity is being discussed as a result of this.

1973

The United Kingdom joins the **European Union**.

1994

The **Channel Tunnel** connects Britain with Europe.

2002

The United Kingdom chooses not to introduce the **Euro**.

2006

Britain postpones its referendum on the **European Constitution** after the French and the Dutch rejected it.

Britain turns towards Europe, though sometimes reluctantly.