

# HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL OVERVIEW

**Great Britain** In 1903, the remains of an Ice Age man were discovered buried in a limestone cave in Cheddar Gorge in present-day Somerset county. Named “Cheddar Man” he lay undisturbed in London’s Natural History Museum until 1996. At that time samples of Cheddar Man’s DNA were taken and compared to samples from volunteers living in the Cheddar district. Amazingly, Cheddar Man’s DNA closely matched the DNA of a Mr. Adrian Targett. The samples proved that Mr. Targett was a direct descendant, through his maternal line, to a man who lived in the Cheddar area during the Middle Stone Age (around 7000 BC)! This discovery indicates that portions of today’s British population have lived in the same geographical areas and are members of local kinship groups that go back three to four hundred generations.

Throughout their history, the British people have adapted to and absorbed successive cultures. The historic gene pools of the Celts, Romans, Saxons, Vikings, Normans and others are still there. The customs, beliefs, linguistics, knowledge, skills and physical traits of these earlier people are all a part of Britain’s heritage and culture.

## THE BEGINNING

Until the formation of the English Channel, between 7,000 and 6,000 BC, the land we know as Great Britain was part of the European Continent. Evidence shows that the first humans arrived on the lands that would become the British Isles about 450,000 BC. These people were nomads who used stone and flint tools to hunt, fish, and gather plants and crustaceans. Through seasonal migrations, they followed herds of animals and their food supply. They did not have permanent settlements but they would take temporary shelter in caves. For a time at the end of the last Ice Age all evidence of human habitation in the area ended, but humans did return about 8,000 BC. When the English Channel formed animal migrations stopped between Britain and the continent, but humans still made the crossing.

By 4000 BC there were permanent settlements in Britain. These inhabitants developed farming techniques, built hilltop enclosures, made decorated pottery and buried their dead. The earliest “megalithic monuments” date from this period. Many marked the tombs of collective burials. These types of standing stone avenues and rings can be found from Scotland to Spain along the Atlantic coast. The earliest stones of the famous Stonehenge on the Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, date back to this time. Stone was also used in architecture. The Stone Age village of Skara Brae dates to 3000 BC.

Successive waves of immigrants from continental Europe influenced Britain. Between 3000 BC - 2000 BC Beaker or Bell-Beaker people from the Russian Steppes arrived. Soon after them came the Battle-axe or Flanged-axe Warriors. These “warrior-farmers” mixed with the Neolithic farmers of Britain. They are thought to have introduced the Bronze Age to Britain together with domesticated horses, wheeled carts, and beer (hence the beakers).

The Isles may have been foggy and wet but they were mineral rich. During the Early Bronze Age, 1800 BC - 1500 BC, a skilled group of inhabitants known as the “Wessex Culture” engaged in trade between the south of England and the continent—especially Brittany. They traded gold from Wales and Ireland, tin from Cornwall and also amber. Artifacts from this period display a skill of workmanship and a level of ornamentation previously unknown in Britain. They left beautiful ornaments of gold and amber, gold cups and amulets and metal daggers with decorated hilts.

The invention of the wheel during the Bronze Age revolutionized transport. Horses and oxen could now be driven and larger masses moved. The ox-drawn plow increased productivity and the amount of land that could be cultivated. A wider variety of crops were grown and sheep and cattle farming increased. This increase in agriculture led to an increase in population and the demand for more farmland.

## **THE CELTS: “MEN OF IRON”**

Between 800 BC - 500 BC, Hallstatt people originally from the area of present day Austria brought the Iron Age to Britain. Successive groups of Celts (Gauls and later Belgae) settled, traded and inter-married with the people of Britain. Their culture and language survive among the Irish, Welsh, Cornish, and Highland Scots of today.

Although the different groups of Celts had a lot in common, they were never all governed by one ruler. A council of free citizens and an elected chieftain governed individual Celtic tribes. The basic population consisted of farmers and craftsman with an aristocracy of warriors, priests and poets. The Celts built hill-forts and were the first in Britain to use the horse for war—to pull their chariots and possibly as a cavalry mount. There was a warlike society that glorified the pursuits of battle, feasting and horsemanship. They believed in the immortality of the soul and gave high status to women. Druids were aristocratic priests and judges who were the guardians of traditions and learning. They controlled the calendar, the planting of crops and presided over religious festivals and rituals.

An advanced Celtic culture developed during the 5th century BC known as the “La Tene” style—named for a settlement in Switzerland. They produced fine metal work decorated with flowing circular designs. Examples of their skilled craftsmanship have survived as war gear, chariot fittings, harness, jewelry and vessels. The La Tene chariot burials of Yorkshire (The Arras Culture) attest to the importance and use of the horse and chariot in warfare.

The Belgae were Celts from Gaul (modern France and Belgium) who were driven out by the Romans and Germanic tribes. They arrived in Britain in 75 BC. They introduced coinage and established urban settlements or ‘capitals’ from which they conducted extensive trade with Rome and Gaul. Raw materials—gold, silver, iron, grain, wool, hides and cattle from Britain were exchanged for manufactured goods—glass, jewelry and other luxuries. In general, the La Tene Culture inhabited the west and north of Britain and the Belgae culture inhabited the south and east.

## **ROMAN BRITAIN**

Roman influence in Britain is most strongly felt in what is now known as England. Julius Caesar made a tentative excursion to Britain in 55 BC and a more extensive one in 54 BC. Caesar achieved little and it was almost a century before the Celtic chieftains had to again deal with the Romans.

In AD 43 four Roman legions landed in Kent. This time the Romans methodically brought Britain into the Roman world. The Celtic troops, without breastplates or helmets, were no match for the Roman legions. Hurling their javelins at the Celtic troops, horses and chariots, the Romans subdued and slowly supplanted indigenous ways of life in the southern and eastern lowlands. Most tribes were defeated, others came to terms, and some welcomed the Romans and became their allies. Chieftains were executed, lands taken, and weapons confiscated. The tribes that survived were heavily taxed.

Eventually, the south of Britain became a prosperous Roman province. The north, however, continued to be beyond the control of Rome. In AD 122, the emperor Hadrian ordered the construction of a defensive barrier against the “barbarians” of Caledonia (Roman word for Scotland). Hadrian’s Wall, stretching seventy-five miles from coast to coast across the north of what is now England, remains an impressive structure. From the 2nd to the 4th century AD, England and Wales (as they later became) settled down as Britannia, the most northerly Roman province. Most Celtic chieftains adapted to Roman customs and comforts. They learned to live in villas, speak Latin and benefited from trading links to the Roman Empire. The Romans built towns with defensive walls and a system of roads that connected the towns and the smaller villages, which were used as way

stations for horses and travelers. Tribal centers, including Winchester, Dorchester, Cirencester and Canterbury, developed into prosperous Roman towns, each with a Forum (market place) and basilica (town hall). London developed at the same period as a center of trade and the focal point of the network of Roman roads. Bath, with its hot springs, became Britain's first resort. Chester, Caerleon and York were established as Roman headquarters and Lincoln, Colchester and St. Albans as settlements for men retiring from the legions. The Romans also built factories, public baths and temples. Christianity arrived in Britain about AD 200. However, Britons who paid their taxes and obeyed Roman laws were allowed to continue to worship their own gods.

During the late 4th century, the declining Roman Empire began to withdraw its legions from Britain. When Gaul fell to Germanic tribes in the 5th century, the Roman British (Celts) were extremely vulnerable. The main threat to Britain was from two tribal groups pressing southwest from the Baltic coast—the Angles and the Saxons. Vying with each other for control of territory and deprived of their protective Roman legions, tribal Celtic chieftains were unable to resist continuous waves of these ferocious intruders. For about fifty years, starting in AD 490, rival Celtic chieftains did organize and managed to hold back the Anglo-Saxons. Some feel the struggle of these Christian Celts against the pagan Saxons is personified in the legend of King Arthur.

## **ANGLO-SAXONS**

As was their practice throughout the empire, the Roman army in Britain had hired Saxon mercenaries to battle the Celts as early as AD 400. Some of these Saxon troops, joined by their families, established settlements in southern Britain. These early Saxon settlements became a “home base” for later invading Germanic tribes (Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians). Seeking farmland, these new invaders joined by their comrades in the south of Britain, eventually drove the indigenous Roman/Celtic population to the west and north. At the same time, other Germanic tribal groups established themselves in Ireland and on the west coast of Northern Britain—the Scots and Picts. By the 6th century, Britain's Celtic chieftains were confined to Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Angles, Saxons and the other German tribes occupied the fertile plains of England.

The regions seized by the Anglo-Saxons were mainly those that had been most dependent on Rome. These regions were also the ones most effected by the great plague of the 6th century that originated in Egypt. Occupation was a slow process of settlement and growth—some peaceful—some not. Anglo-Saxon chieftains set about establishing themselves as regional kings. Like the earlier Celtic tribes, the Anglo-Saxon tribes constantly sought domination over each other. Eventually the Anglo-Saxon territory was divided into seven kingdoms: Kent, Sussex (the South Saxons), Wessex (the West Saxons), East Anglia, Essex (the East Saxons), Mercia (including the Middle Angles), and Northumbria (comprising Bernicia, Deira and Lindsey).

In AD 597 Pope Gregory sent Augustine to England to convert the “pagan English” and restore Christianity. The older Roman Christian Church had remained in parts of Britain (notably Wales and Scotland) as the Celtic Church. Augustine was received in the kingdom of Aethelbert. Aethelbert became the first Anglo-Saxon king to be converted. He installed Augustine at Canterbury in Kent. The religious conversion of the Anglo-Saxons created an institution that transcended political boundaries, overrode individual loyalties and led to a new concept of unity among the various tribal regions. King Aethelbert was also the first to set down a body of laws in the English language.

## **VIKINGS or NORSEMEN: DANES, NORWEGIANS, SWEDES**

An ominous entry in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A year-by-year summary of events in the southern English kingdoms) speaks of “heathen men” harrying the settlements. The Norsemen were attracted by the wealth of religious settlements often located near the sea. Unlike the Saxons who came to settle, the Vikings at first were more intent on looting and pillaging. Starting with the devastation of Lindisfarne in AD 793, for the next hundred years army after army of Norsemen

crossed the North Sea, first to find treasure and then to take productive farm lands. Arriving in dragon headed prows, they raided the coast of Britain and then sailed up the rivers. They marched inland, destroying and burning until half of England had been taken. By AD 851 the Vikings, instead of sailing home with their booty, were staying and establishing settlements. They founded their cities where the rivers met the sea.

Alfred the Great became King of Wessex in AD 871, the year the Danes defeated a large English force at Reading. Without a standing army, Alfred was at first forced to pay tribute to the Danes and then fight a guerilla war. He eventually managed to build up a fighting force and a West Saxon navy that could meet and defeat the Danes. He united the men of Wessex and in AD 878 put the Danes to flight. Wessex was saved. Eventually all the people of England who were not under the power of the Danes came to recognize Alfred as their leader. Alfred the Great became the first true king of England. Aside from his defeat of the Danes, Alfred's major contributions to England included a uniform code of laws, restoration of the monastic life of the Church, patronage of the arts and learning, and recognition from Europe for himself and his kingdom.

Outside of Wessex, however, most of England remained under the control of the Danes and the rule of Scandinavian Kings. For 200 years Danish rule and settlement had an enormous effect on Britain. As many Norsemen migrated to Britain as had Anglo-Saxons. Danes and Anglo-Saxons had similar traditions, customs and language. Both were military societies that valued personal friendships and loyalty. While the two people easily merged, the Danes did bring changes. They collected taxes in gold and silver instead of levying payment in goods. This led to the beginnings of a class of civil servants composed of clerks, secretaries and tax collectors. Saxon people had not maintained contact with their homeland, Scandinavians did. For the first time the English had to deal with the world beyond their borders and become less insulated. Attacks from the Scandinavians continued throughout the 9th and 10th centuries.

Harthacnut was the last Danish King of England. Edward the Confessor who succeeded him was the legitimate heir of Alfred the Great. Though he took steps to provide for his succession, circumstances after his death led to turmoil and paved the way for the arrival of William the Conqueror in 1066.

## **THE NORMANS**

In the ninth century AD, bands of Viking warriors were also attacking and plundering the towns and monasteries of northern France. In 911 the French king gave land to the Viking chief, Rollo, hoping he and his men would defend the land against other Vikings. Rollo and his men settled the land that became known as Normandy—"the land of the Northmen." The Vikings married French women and raised their children as Catholics. By 1000 the Norsemen were French-speaking, Christian Normans. Duke William of Normandy (William the Conqueror) was the great-great-great-grandson of Rollo.

The Bayeux Tapestry, woven after 1066, depicts the events leading up to the Norman invasion of Britain as well as the great battle. Claiming Edward the Confessor named him as his heir, Duke William of Normandy landed in England on September 28, 1066, to claim his throne. The Norman invasion of Britain was unlike those involving the mass immigrations of the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes who were seeking new lands to farm. William's victories were swift. No new waves of people came—only a small, ruling aristocracy. William was crowned King of England at Westminster on Christmas Day, 1066. Now England would be governed by a foreign King and subjected to a foreign aristocracy. Its resources and manpower would be used to keep French interests alive. The conquest brought feudalism to England and close cooperation between King and Church. William ruled with ruthless severity—unmercifully crushing any outbreaks of rebellion. Eventually the Anglo-Saxons lost both their land and all authority.

The Normans profoundly changed English society. William ordered landholders to produce, on demand, a quota of mounted knights. Those at the bottom of the system lost all rights as free men and were regarded as property of the manor. Vast royal forests were created in which all hunting rights belonged to the king. This eliminated a vital food source for the poor, especially after a bad harvest. In 1080 the “Domesday Book” was begun. It was an inventory, an accounting, of all the wealth, belongings, and property in England. Using it William determined what he was due—what taxes were to be paid. The Normans were builders. Castles, cathedrals, abbeys, and monasteries were built in the “Romanesque” style. Though English was still spoken by the majority, it was the language of the common people. Those in power spoke French. Eventually a huge body of French words became part of the English vocabulary.

Under William, there was tremendous growth in the power of the king. Though his rule was harsh, he did bring a new degree of political unity, law and order to England. Sheriffs were appointed by the king to keep order and make sure that laws were followed. A treasurer or “Exchequer” kept the national accounts. The church became a place of sanctuary—refuge from the law. Trouble and turmoil, however, returned with William’s death in 1087. William I passed the crown to his favorite son, William Rufus and gave the Duchy of Normandy to his eldest son Robert. Power struggles followed. Robert of Normandy was on Crusade in the Middle East to win back the Holy Land from the Seljuk Turks when in 1100, William II was killed in a hunting incident. The Throne of England passed to the youngest brother, Henry. Henry I was strong and capable, but anarchy returned upon his death in 1135.

## **MEDIEVAL ENGLAND**

Medieval England saw a succession of kings, some strong and capable, others not. Added to this were the constant efforts to dominate Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Richard I (1189-1199) though a strong leader, managed to squander his wealth and devastate the English economy. Richard’s courage in battle earned him the nickname Coeur de Lion (heart of the lion). However, the “Warrior King” heavily taxed the English barons to pay for his Crusades and battles on the continent. Richard’s brother and successor, John (1199-1216), totally mishandled his responsibilities. John’s levying of an income tax, continuous disregard of English law and customs, and the disgrace of being defeated by the French (and the loss of French lands) led the English barons to present their grievances at Runnymede on June 15, 1215. The Magna Carta, “Great Charter” was a compromise treaty of peace between John and the barons whose chief grievance was that of punishment without trial. The Magna Carta is considered one of the greatest developments in human rights and the precursor of the United States Bill of Rights. During the thirteenth century, the loss of England’s continental possessions focused the monarchy’s attention closer to home. There were considerable constitutional changes and the period saw the beginning of parliament to advise the king.

The Late Medieval Period in England was dominated by the long conflict, now known as the Hundred Years’ War. In addition the Black Death (bubonic plague) arrived in 1348. Between a tenth and a third of the population of England perished and profound social and economic changes followed. A labor shortage led to the demand for pay and in effect the elimination of serfs. A new population of traveling workers was created. Parliament continued to develop and English rather than French became the language of daily use. This was the time of Chaucer (1342-1400). Scotland saw the establishment of a new dynasty—a dynasty that would eventually acquire the English throne—the Stuarts.

The end of the period was marked by a bloody civil war known as the War of the Roses—a struggle between the Houses of York and Lancaster for the throne of England. For over 30 years the two branches of the royal family fought over who would rule England. The armies of Richard III of York and Henry Tudor of Lancaster met on Bosworth Field in 1485. Henry defeated Richard and became King of England. He later married Elizabeth of York and united the two houses. As a symbol of unity the red rose of the House of Lancaster and the white rose of the House of York were combined to form the Tudor Rose.

## **THE TUDORS**

The Tudors in England and the Stuarts in Scotland dominated the early modern period of British history. The accession to the English throne of the Tudor Dynasty, with its Welsh origins, transformed Wales from a conquered territory to an integral part of the English kingdom. Henry Tudor, as Henry VII (1485-1509) of England, began a dynasty that lasted 118 years. During this time England became a great sea power, literature and drama flourished, great economic and social changes occurred and England set a path toward world domination.

Henry VIII (1509-1547) was athletic, loved music and military arts, and was interested in building England's navy. Considered a true "renaissance prince," he was however ruthless like his father and tolerated no opposition—real or imagined. His quest for wealth and a male heir led to the eventual break with the Catholic Church and the formation of the Church of England (of which he proclaimed himself Head). This ended 100 years of monastic influence in England. Henry sold the lands and property of the monasteries to those who could afford to pay. He used the funds to pay for wars with Scotland and France, build coastal defenses and strengthen the navy. This process created a new, rich landed aristocracy that dominated England's rural scene for centuries. Political privileges of the old nobility were curtailed as a new middle class of "landed gentry" rose. By 1544 Parliament had both a House of Lords and a House of Commons.

Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was the daughter of Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn, who was beheaded. Elizabeth succeeded a half brother and sister who died early deaths. This was the tumultuous time of the Reformation and Elizabeth understood the politics of religion. The majority of the common people of England were Protestant and Elizabeth realized she needed their support to rule. She brought back Protestantism but was careful not to outlaw all Catholic ways. Elizabeth was determined, charismatic and intelligent. She had a great ability to choose the right people to carry out her policies. Her reign was considered a "Golden Age" in which the arts, theater, literature, and exploration flourished. This was the age of Shakespeare, the Globe Theater, Spenser, and Marlowe. Francis Drake and Walter Raleigh expanded English influence in the New World and in 1600 Elizabeth granted a charter to the East India Company.

Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth's cousin, was a Tudor, a Stuart, a Catholic and next in line to the English throne. When it was reported that Mary and her Catholic supporters were plotting to kill Elizabeth and take the English throne, Mary was arrested and put on trial. In 1587, Elizabeth reluctantly signed Mary, Queen of Scots' execution order. King Philip II of Spain, furious over the execution of Mary Stuart and determined to return England to Catholicism, launched a fleet of 130 ships. The Spanish Armada sailed from Lisbon in May 1588 for a rendezvous with an army of 30,000 men from the Netherlands to form a combined invasion of England. The fate of England rested on her navy. The smaller, faster, more maneuverable English ships with their long-range guns and with the help of the unpredictable Atlantic weather created havoc for the Spanish ships. Elizabeth realized that the English had a narrow escape. At the time of Elizabeth's death in 1603 England's "Golden Age" was coming to an end. The high cost of wars, high taxes, bad harvests, soaring prices, and peasant unrest were resulting in the growth of parliamentary influence. The landed class (middle class) used parliament to exert their influence against the royal prerogative. The way was being paved for great political changes—the incoming Stuarts would suffer the consequences.

## **THE STUARTS**

In 1603 Mary Stuart's son James VI of Scotland, became James I of England (1603-1625). One could say that Mary finally ruled from the grave. Although James was king of both Scotland and England, the two nations retained their separate parliaments, privy councils, courts and national church. Continuing religious (Catholic/Protestant) problems and James' insistence that his was a divine rule did not sit well in England. Puritans fled England. Long reaching problems were created

in Ireland when James encouraged Presbyterian Scots to settle on lands that rightfully belonged to native Catholics. His failures continued in the reign of his son Charles I (1625-1649). Charles I's conflict with Parliament eventually led to civil war and his execution. England became a commonwealth (1649-1660) with Oliver Cromwell (and in 1658 his son) the "Lord Protector." The Commonwealth of Great Britain came to an abrupt end when parliament invited Charles II (1660-1685) to take the throne. Having learned nothing from the failures of his father, Charles II's reign was occupied by political and religious struggles, civil war, and finally plague, fire and war with the Dutch.

Charles II was succeeded by his brother James II (1685-1688) and then by the joint rule of William and Mary (1688-1702). Parliament showed its growing strength and influence by inviting the rule of William and Mary. In 1698 Parliament resolved that it (not the monarchy) had the right to control the granting of trade monopolies. This act led to the growth of a new class of powerful traders and financiers who were loyal to Parliament.

When William died in 1702 the young Princess Anne, a Protestant, succeeded. The reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714) was dominated by the war with France. John Churchill, husband of Queen Anne's close friend Sarah, became leader of the English and Dutch forces in the Grand Alliance. Under his leadership as the Duke of Marlborough, England became a leading military power. By the 1700s the English Empire was rapidly expanding in the New World. Power and profit finally did bring the kingdoms of England and Scotland together—they were joined by the 1707 Act of Union.

## **THE GEORGIANS**

In 1701 the Act of Settlement was passed. It barred any monarch who was not a Protestant from ascending the throne—a provision that is still enforced today. This ensured that Queen Anne's heir would be the granddaughter of James I, Protestant Electress Sophia of Hanover, and not James Edward Stuart, Anne's exiled Catholic half-brother. When Sophia died the same year as Anne, her son George left Hanover to claim the English throne. George I (1714-1727) arrived knowing only a few words of English. Soon many British regretted the Act of Settlement and wished for the restoration of the Stuart monarchy.

The Georgian period was a time of change and conflict. The cause of the exiled Stuarts became known as Jacobitism, from the Latin for James (Jacobus). George I's reign began with a Jacobite Rebellion. The rebellion failed and James Stuart fled back to France. Since George I knew little English and did not understand the English government, the administration of the country fell to Robert Walpole. Walpole gained such influence that he is remembered as England's first Prime Minister. The reign of George II (1727-1760) was a time of great agricultural and industrial developments and innovations. These led to increased population, urbanization, improved communications, and increased wealth (for some). Britain was becoming the world's first modern society. As the head of a world empire, vast profits were being made in sugar, tobacco, sea-island cotton and other products.

During George III's reign (1760-1820) the enormous expenses of wars with France and Spain and the protection of the Colonies led Parliament to insist that Americans pay for their own defense. This was used as justification for the sugar tax of 1764 and the stamp duty a year later. These were only two of many repressive measures that were designed to benefit England's mercantile, industrial and agricultural interests. As American pioneers began to move west and large numbers of immigrants from countries other than Britain swelled the population, thoughts of breaking ties with the "Mother Country" took hold. A way to break away from Britain's control had been discovered in 1750—the Cumberland Gap. To keep the colonists within his control, King George in 1764 decreed that the "Colonists remain east of the sources of rivers that flow into the Atlantic." In 1767 Daniel Boone defied the decree by taking a party through the Gap and into Kentucky. Within 10 years 10,000 plus pioneers were living in the new territories of Tennessee and Kentucky.

The final revolt of Britain's American Colonies was a long time coming. To protest restrictions on movement and trade and increased taxes the Colonists issued their "Declaration of Rights and Grievances." The infamous "Boston Tea Party" and the resulting closing of Boston Harbor united the Colonists. In March 1775 Patrick Henry made his famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech and the dye was cast. On September 3, 1783 the Treaty of Paris recognized the independence of the American colonies. Paradoxically Britain's great age of Empire was just beginning.

In October 1805 one of the greatest sea victories in British history took place. Admiral Nelson defeated the combined French and Spanish fleet at Trafalgar near Gibraltar. This victory halted Napoleon's planned invasion of Britain and ended France's hope of being a great sea power. On the continent, however, the French armies continued to be victorious until Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812 (This was the same year that Britain and the United States began a 30-month war). The Battle of Waterloo in June, 1815 followed a series of defeats for the French armies. At Waterloo the Duke of Wellington (Arthur Wellesly) and Prussian leader Marshall von Blucher stopped Napoleon and ended 23 years of British war with France. With the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, concluding the "War of 1812," England was now poised to become a world leader—the American statesman and Kentuckian, Henry Clay, was one of the signers. The Georgian period came to a close with the reigns of George IV and William IV. During their rule the British Empire continued to expand. Meanwhile, the fight for democracy was sweeping Europe. In Britain, The British Reform Act of 1832 extended the voting franchise to middle class landowners and was the basis for future acts that eventually enfranchised all adults.

## THE VICTORIANS

Queen Victoria (1837-1901) was not only the longest reigning British monarch but she was the figurehead of a vast empire and the inspiration for a highly complex culture. The only child of Edward Duke of Kent and Victoria Maria Louisa of Saxe-Coburg, she succeeded her uncle, William IV at the age of 18. In 1840 Victoria married her first cousin, Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. They had nine children, many of whom married into the European monarchy.

Victoria won the nation's hearts with her modesty and practicality. It seemed the more urbanized and industrialized Britain became, the more stylized, ritualized and popular became its monarchy. Albert's interests in the arts and sciences inspired the Great Exhibition of 1851 hosted at Crystal palace. Proceeds from the exhibition funded Britain's greatest public museums including the V&A. These institutions became a source of national pride. Victoria's reign saw the implementation of institutional reform and the move to a more constitutional monarchy. The empire doubled in size to include India, Australia, Canada and parts of Africa and the South Pacific. The period was almost free of war. An Irish uprising in 1848, the Boer Wars in South Africa and an Indian rebellion in 1857 were the only exceptions. The Crimean War (1853-56) was the only continental conflict.

Victorian Britain experienced dramatic economic growth but at great social cost. The census of 1851 recorded half of the population of Britain as living in towns—the first society in history to do so. The towns offered a better chance of work and higher wages than the countryside. Large towns were, however, desperately unhealthy, with levels of death that had not been seen since the Black Death. Cholera and typhoid were carried by polluted water; lice spread typhus; and swarms of flies spread dysentery. Charles Dickens was no stranger to the poverty and despair of London. His novels, Oliver Twist and Bleak House, vividly portray conditions in the inner city and the plight of London's poor—especially the children.

## **20th CENTURY**

The century began with the short reign of Edward VII (1901-1910), the popular Prince of Wales. George V (1910-1936), who changed the family name from the German Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to the English Windsor, continued the popularity of the monarchy. By the turn of the century Britain's industrial advantage was being challenged by other nations such as the United States and Germany. Political life in Britain was also changing. Men such as Lloyd George showed that those of humble origin could rise to lead the country. The new Liberal and Labour Parties brought changes in social, economic and political policies.

After a century of almost unchallenged political security Britain was about to face the militarism of the new German State. Britain (and her Empire) lost a large part of a generation of young men in the First World War. Growing nationalist movements impacted both the British rule of Empire and individual nations of the British Isles. An independent Irish Parliament was established in 1918 after the Sinn Fein uprising of 1916 and the Government of Ireland Act (1920) divided Ireland along religious lines. The creation of an independent India and Pakistan heightened the desire for independence on behalf of almost all of Britain's colonies—although most retained ties with Britain through the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Edward VIII (1936) eldest son of George V married American divorcee, Wallis Simpson, and abdicated the throne after reigning only eleven months. George VI (1936-1952) married Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon in 1932. They had two daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret. After unsuccessful attempts of "appeasement" Great Britain (and France) declared war on Germany in 1939. George (like his father before him) and Elizabeth visited troops, factories, supply docks and bomb-damaged areas to support the war effort. As the Nazi's bombed London, the royal family remained at Buckingham Palace. Their actions during the war years endeared them to the British people and greatly added to the prestige of the monarchy. They and Prime Minister Winston Churchill led Britain through the difficult years of WWII.

The nation and the Commonwealth mourned the death of King George VI. He with his queen, Elizabeth, brought dignity and honor to the monarchy. Young Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1952 brought a renewed optimism to the British people. It was the first coronation to be televised around the world. Elizabeth had married Philip Mountbatten in 1947. They have four children: Charles, Prince of Wales, Anne, Andrew and Edward. Elizabeth is one of the few remaining European monarchs and the most widely traveled Head of State in the world. She has reigned for fifty years. Like her father, she has raised the character of the monarchy through her actions.