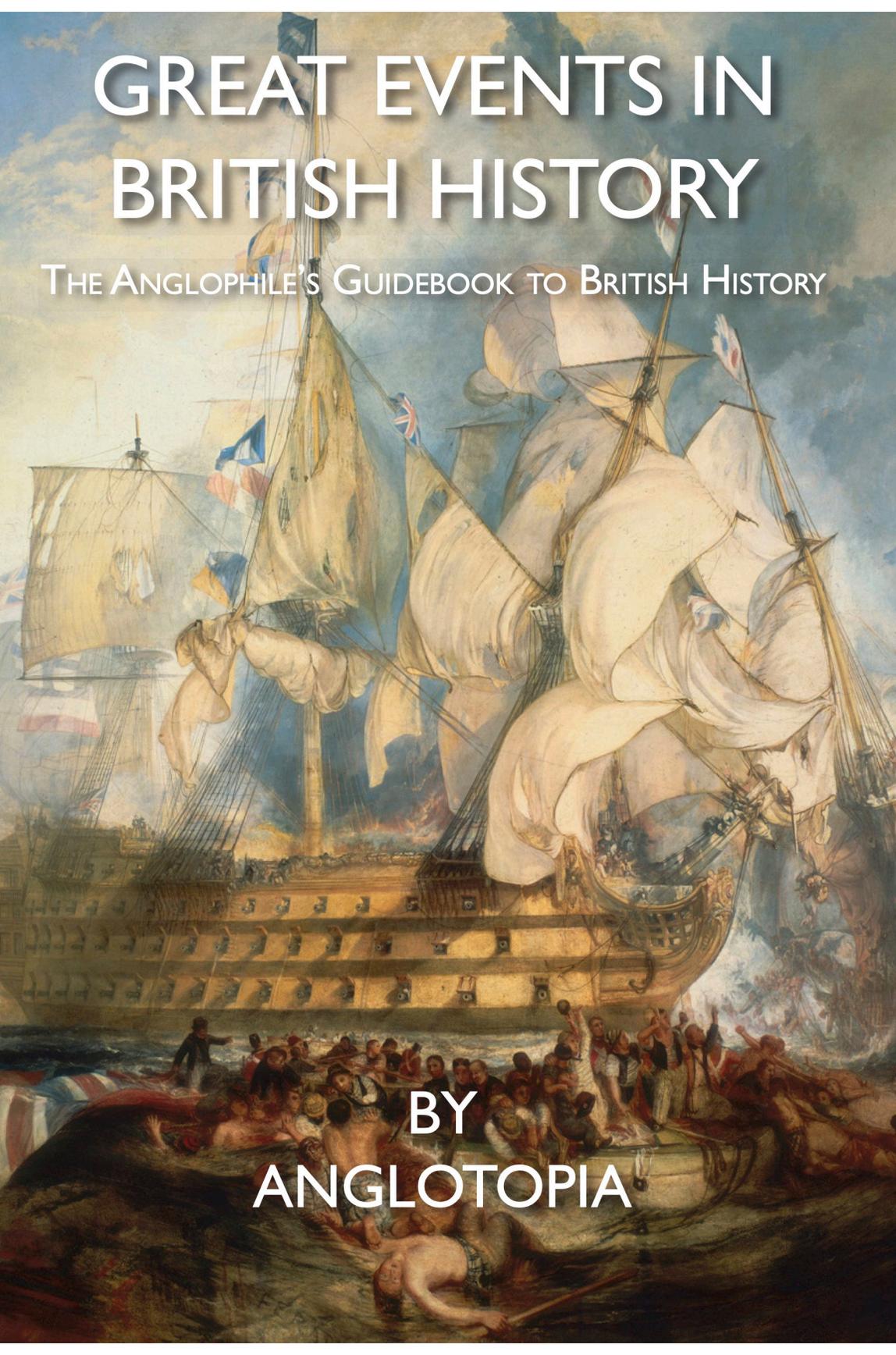


GREAT EVENTS IN BRITISH HISTORY

THE ANGLOPHILE'S GUIDEBOOK TO BRITISH HISTORY



BY
ANGLOTOPIA

GREAT EVENTS IN BRITISH HISTORY

THE ANGLOPHILE'S GUIDEBOOK TO BRITISH HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

As a young Anglophile, I found myself lacking in knowledge of key events in British history. When I started Anglotopia, my gaps in knowledge of British history became apparent very quickly. There was so much I simply didn't know, simply because I was raised in the United States of America, and our history is very US-centric - our knowledge of British history pretty much stops at the American Revolution, when we kicked out the King.

There's so much to know. When you look at the things that British children learn about their own history, it's fascinating to look at the differences. The differences became a problem, though, when one would watch British Films and TV shows. So many historical events are referenced that it's easy to not know what they're talking about. And crucially, you can miss out on key things that fill in a story simply because you don't know.

Shows like *Downton Abbey* are an excellent example. That show became a tour de force of popularity in America, but while it was a historical drama, the writers didn't spend much time explaining that history. Except when you look a little deeper, *Downton Abbey* takes place at a critical moment in British history, when historical forces add so many layers to the show - and make it more interesting than a typical aristocratic soap opera.

So, this book is for people like me, people curious about British history but don't know where to start. After all, there are over 2,000 years of

history to get a handle on. This book will not explain it all. But the goal of this book is to tell you all about the most important events in British history. Each essay in this book is a survey of the events and will explain the key information and the legacy that event had in British History.

I am not a trained historian; I'm an enthusiastic amateur (but with a background in English literature history). But I've given every effort to be as thorough as possible. Choosing just fifty events was a challenge. But when we started publishing these articles almost half a decade ago, our goal was to cover the most important events; it's all we could afford to do! There are thousands of 'important' events in British history. But we've distilled it down to fifty; we apologize if you think we've missed an important event; we cannot please everyone. Now, as with our book 'Great Britons' - we use the general term for 'great.' Many of these events are not 'great' as in they're amazing. They're great, as in they had a huge impact on British history or culture. Their impact makes them 'great' - now how interesting they are.

We have made every effort to be accurate, and every chapter in this book has been fact-checked twice. We generally avoid discussing controversies, but where there is controversy, we try to give both sides, but we're only really interested in the facts. Arguing over opinions is for internet comment sections. Some events have been left completely out - you may notice that we don't really cover the British Empire in great detail. That really deserves a book entirely on its own. And if you're more interested in the people surrounding a lot of these events, I recommend checking out our book *Great Britons: 50 Greatest Brits Who Ever Lived*, which was published in 2021, and is a survey of Britain's most important non-Royal historical figures.

Like with our book *Great Britons*, we have to define what we mean by 'British' events. We use it as an all-encompassing term for any major event that involved the British and affected their history. So, the settling of Jamestown and Australia are included because they're important to British history. The American Revolution is not because that's important to American history, not so much the British (it's not even covered in England's curriculum). We include two major events of Irish History because Ireland was deeply involved in British history until it got its independence. Same with Scotland (though they remain part of the United Kingdom). If you think of British history as one long play, there are events, characters, and countries that come into the show and leave but have a lasting effect on the audience.

As for the order of events, we have chosen to keep it pretty much in chronological order. There are several events in this book that overlap

with each other, so we have made every effort to make sure they're near each other in the timeline. We begin at the beginning - which is when 'British' history is generally thought to begin - when the Romans invaded. We end in the 1980s when venturing further risks turning into current events rather than history.

Our goal with this book is to give Anglophiles a survey of overall British history, a guidebook if you will to help you navigate British film, tv, and music. Within these fifty stories, there are thousands of smaller stories, and we've made every effort to give you resources for further research. It's easy to go down a rabbit hole. Entire books have been written about each event we cover here.

We hope you learn something you didn't know before, and when someone mentions the Regency era on a TV show, you'll know exactly what they mean.

Happy reading!

Jonathan & Jackie
Publishers
Anglotopia



THE ROMAN CONQUEST

Roman Britannia

Key Dates

- 55 BC Julius Caesar's first campaign against Britain
- 54 BC Julius Caesar's second campaign
- 43 AD Emperor Claudius sends a further invasion force
- 47 AD Londinium founded
- 60 AD Boudicca leads a revolt
- 77 AD Last British tribes defeated
- 79 AD Unsuccessful attempt to invade Scotland
- 122 AD Hadrian's Wall built
- 142 AD Antonine Wall built
- 312 AD Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire and Britain
- 360 AD Attacks on Romans from Picts, Franks, Scots, and Saxons
- 388 AD Romans legions begin to withdraw to defend Rome
- 410 AD Final withdrawal of Romans from Britain

Key Figures

- Julius Caesar
- Emperor Claudius
- Aulus Plautius Roman General and Britannia's first Roman Governor
- Caratacus Tribal Chief, leader of resistance
- Togodumnus Brother of Caratacus
- Boudicca Queen of the Iceni tribe, led a revolt

After a couple of failed attempts at invasion, the mighty Roman Empire finally got a foothold in Britannia. Their conquest of the small island was neither easy nor complete. However, over the centuries that they ruled the country, their influence and customs were gradually accepted. When they retreated, they left behind a legacy that had enriched, rather than destroyed, their former province.

On the Edge of the Empire

In the years leading up to the Roman conquest of Britain, the country was inhabited by various Celtic tribes. These people had migrated from Europe and were kinsmen of the Gauls. Visitors to Britain described a tall, fierce race, many of whom lived in small, scattered farming communities. The Britons wore their hair long, often dyed blonde with lime, and favored mustaches. They wore colorful clothes, usually trousers with striped or check cloaks fastened with brooches. The Britons were not a united people, being split into separate tribes, each with a king or warlord. There were often tribal wars, with the men going into battle naked save for their blue war paint. Some say the women joined the fighting too. Britannia, as the Romans called it, was a harsh, distant place, yet covetous eyes were being cast toward her shores from across the water in Gaul.

In 55 BC, Julius Caesar mounted an expedition to Britain. He was campaigning in Gaul, and some say that he was motivated to make the journey to Britain in retaliation for British tribes supporting his enemies in Gaul. Alternatively, he may have been curious to investigate an island that some scholars refused to believe existed. Caesar's motivation is lost to us, as are his intentions. As an exploratory visit, his landing in Kent was a reasonable success; as an invasion, it was a disaster. The great general left after setting up camp on a beach and receiving some local dignitaries. Large numbers of armed tribesmen on the cliffs above the beach prevented Caesar from moving inland, and, surprised by the ferocity of the tides and weather, which were destroying his ships, he returned to Gaul.

The following year, Caesar returned with a larger force. Rather than the two legions he brought the previous year, he had five legions. This time he managed to march 12 miles inland and engage a local warlord. The Romans were victorious, but again Caesar left, content to take hostages and agree on the payment of a tribute. No legionaries were left behind, and it was the last that Britain would see of Roman aggression for nearly a century, though trade with Rome was opened up. Gradually, diplomatic ties between the kings of the tribes and Rome grew.



Roman Baths in Bath, England

A disagreement between two kings finally opened up the way for Roman invasion. Emperor Claudius ostensibly invaded to reinstate an exiled king who had appealed to him for help, though he was also keen to use a successful invasion to boost his popularity. In addition, Britannia, the “land of tin,” had natural resources to exploit.

Claudius sent four legions under the command of Aulus Plautius, who was destined to become the province’s first governor. One of the legions, Legio II Augusta, was commanded by Titus Flavius Vespasian, who would later rule as Emperor Vespasian. Emperor Claudius crossed the Channel with the second wave of troops.

Neither the precise date nor the points of departure and landing are recorded, but it seems likely that the legions left Boulogne and landed at Richborough in Kent, though some historians support a landing in the Solent. Wherever the Romans landed, it is agreed that they met the first heavy resistance from the Britons at Rochester on the River Medway.

Two brothers led the Britons. Togodumnus and Caratacus were members of the Catuvellauni tribe, of which their late father, Cunobelinus (immortalized by Shakespeare as Cymbeline), had been king. The Catuvellauni were based in the South East of England, and it may well have been this tribe that led the successful defense against Julius Caesar’s



Hardknott Roman Fort, Cumbria

invasion a century earlier. It was Caratacus' ousting of a rival king, Verica, which the Romans had come to resolve. The stakes for the brothers were high.

The initial battle between the two sides was fierce. Fighting at the Battle of Medway went on for two days. Eventually, the Romans were able to drive the Britons back to the River Thames, where another battle resulted in the death of Togodumnus. With resistance crushed for the meantime, Plautius sent for Emperor Claudius so that he could be present for the final stage of the Roman's progress to Camulodnum, the Catuvellauni's capital. Here Claudius received a surrender from many of the tribes of the South East of England. The Romans took over Camulodnum as their own capital, and after Claudius returned to Rome in triumph, the legions prepared to strike northwards and westwards to complete their conquest. Caratacus, who had escaped after the river battles, fled to the west and set about leading a resistance movement.

Caratacus found refuge with the Silures and Ordovices tribes in Wales, leading them against the advancing Romans. In 51 AD, the new Roman Governor of Britain, Publius Ostorius Scapula, defeated Caratacus' forces at the Battle of Caer Caradoc. Once again, Caratacus escaped, but his wife and daughter were captured. He sought shelter with the northern

tribe of the Brigantes, but their queen, Cartimandua, was a client of the Romans and felt obliged to give him to her allies. Caratacus was taken to Rome and paraded in chains, but he made a great impression on the Romans and was pardoned, spending the remainder of his days in Rome.

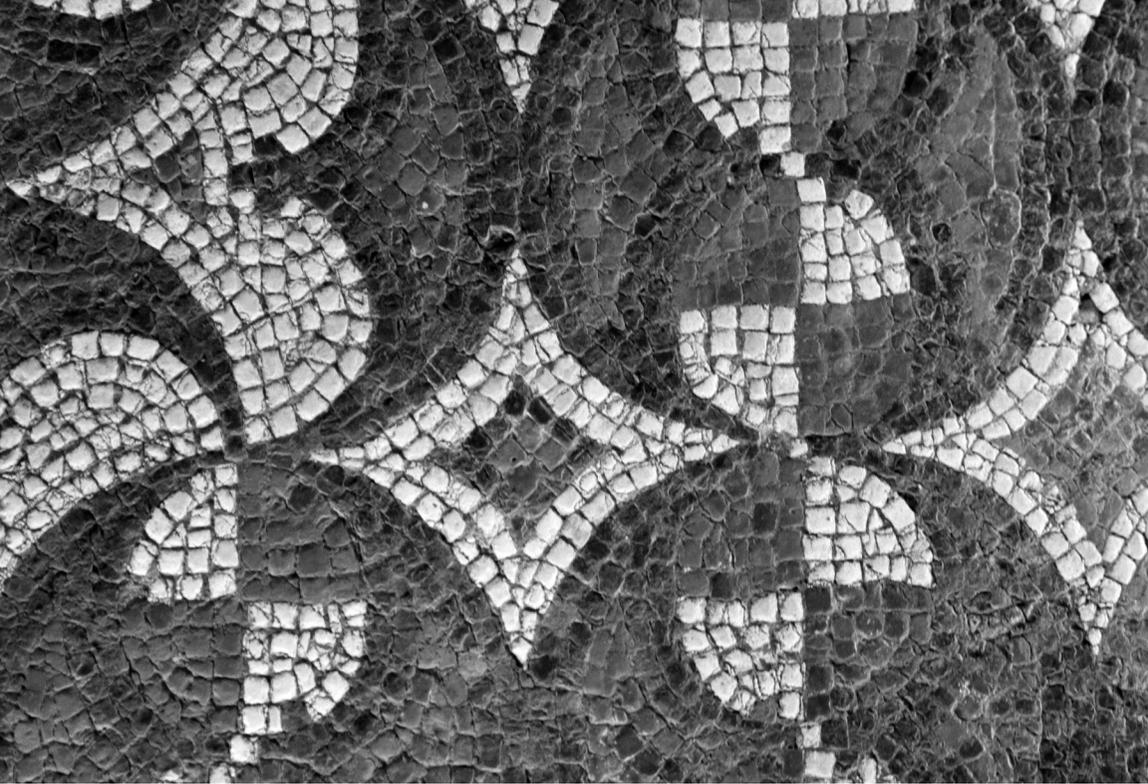
With Caratacus gone and his former lands in the southeast under control, the Romans consolidated their position on the Welsh borders, but Claudius decided against further expansion. His successor, Nero, resumed the conquest, and the legions pushed deeper into Wales. In 60 AD, the legions reached Mona, the main center of the Celtic druids. The druids were massacred, and their shrines and sacred groves destroyed. While the legion was in Mona, a rebellion broke out on the other side of the country. The Iceni, led by their queen, Boudica, were threatening to rampage throughout the southeast of the country.

The Iceni were based in modern-day Norfolk. Their king, Prasutagus, had been a client of Rome, and the tribe allowed to live relatively independently. Anxious to maintain his tribe's autonomous status, the king drew up a will that left his lands jointly to his daughters and the Emperor. When he died, the Romans ignored his will, instead seizing all his land. They went further, flogging Queen Boudicca and raping her daughters. Outraged, Boudicca and the Iceni plotted a revolt with the tribe, the Trinovantes.

The two tribes targeted the city of Camulodnum, which they destroyed with relative ease. The Legio IX Hispania attempted to reach the city, but they too were destroyed, with only their commander and a few cavalry escaping. Boudicca turned her attention to Londinium, by which time Suetonius, the Governor leading the legions in Wales, had heard of the revolt and was himself rushing to meet the rebels in Londinium. When he arrived, he decided not to give battle due to the rebels' superior numbers but instead evacuated the citizens. With London largely abandoned, Boudicca's army destroyed it and killed any lingering Romans. Their next target was Verulamium, which suffered the same fate as Londinium. Riding high on their victory, the Britons turned towards the Midlands, where they were met on Watling Street by Suetonius and his legions.

The Britons vastly outnumbered the Romans, but the legionaries' discipline won the day. It was not just a defeat, but a massacre since many of the warriors were accompanied by their families. Tens of thousands of Britons were killed. Boudicca took poison rather than fall into Roman hands. Following the suppression of Boudicca's revolt, the Romans began to gradually extend their territory north.

Queen Cartimandua's husband, Ventius, led a revolt against her in 70 AD, which was put down by the Romans after the queen petitioned



Roman Mosaic at Chedworth Roman Villa

them for help. The result was that her tribe, the Brigantes, as well as the Parisii, ceased to be autonomous clients and came under Roman rule. This extended the Roman territory into Yorkshire. In addition, the Governor at the time consolidated Roman power in Wales. Both the Brigantes and the Ordovices of Wales were to continue rebelling, until the next Governor, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, comprehensively defeated them.

By 71 AD, the Romans pushed on towards Caledonia. Agricola spent the years 80 to 84 AD campaigning along the east and northern coasts of Scotland and won several victories. Roads and forts were built, but once Agricola returned to Rome, his successors let his gains in the far north slide. The Romans withdrew and established a defensible border along which they built Hadrian's Wall. Attempts were made to push the border further north during several campaigns and the Antonine Wall was constructed. After construction, the Romans abandoned the wall, withdrawing to Hadrian's Wall.

The Roman legions had expanded as far as they could. Many legionnaires spent long, lonely years defending the western and northern borders from those Britons who would not submit to Roman rule. Meanwhile, in the subdued southeastern region of Britannia, the people came to accept the Romans, adopted many of their customs and styles, and prospered.

Legacy

The Romans swept away much of the Celtic culture that existed before they arrived, but in return, they brought many benefits. Their occupation of Britain gave the island its name, influenced the language, the architecture and its culture. Unity was also forced upon the people who had hitherto been tribal. In many respects, the Romans sowed the seeds that grew into Britain.

Sites to Visit

Hadrian's Wall is a World Heritage Site that straddles the north of England between Bowness-on-Solway and Newcastle. Highlights of the 73-mile wall include:

- Birdoswald Roman Fort, managed by English Heritage, this is the longest stretch of the wall together with a fort.
- Cawfields Roman Wall and Milecastle set in the dramatic Northumberland countryside.
- Arbeia Roman Fort and Museum, a full-scale reconstruction of a fort, in South Shields.
- English Heritage hold events, such as night-time patrols and talks from historians. They also advise on walking routes to enjoy the archaeology, wildlife and scenery that surround the wall.

Further north, in Scotland, is the Antonine Wall, another World Heritage Site. Among the sites of interest along the wall are:

- Rough Castle, the best-preserved remains of a fort.
- The University of Glasgow's, Hunterian Museum houses a permanent exhibition about the Antonine Wall.

The Roman Baths at Bath are a unique site, allowing a glimpse into Roman life. The well-preserved bath complex has recently undergone an upgrade in visitor facilities, with reconstructions of what the rest of Bath (Aquae Sulis) might have looked like in Roman times.

At Caerleon (Isca Silurum or Isca Augusta) in Gwent, you can visit the former base of the Legio II Augusta. The remains include a well-preserved military , baths and barracks. Not too far away is Caerwent, where there

are the remains of the Roman town of Venta Silurum.

Fishbourne Roman Palace and Gardens are located near Chichester, Sussex. The huge villa was excavated in the 1960s. The site has the largest collection of Roman mosaic floors in situ and the surrounding land has been used to recreate the villa's gardens.

Films and TV

- The BBC's documentary series *What the Romans Did For Us* is available on the BBC Mini Series Channel on Youtube.
- *The Roman Invasions Of Britain* (2004) is narrated by Brian Blessed and includes battle re-enactments. Available on DVD.
- *King Arthur* (2004) starring Clive Owen and Kiera Knightly portrays Arthur as a Roman commander defending England from a hoard of invading Saxons in the dying days of Rome's occupation of Britain. Available on DVD.
- *Britannia* (2017) In 43 AD, the Roman Army returns to crush the Celtic heart of Britannia. Lavish British drama about the Roman era.

Further Research

- *Roman Britain: A New History* (2013) by historian, author and broadcaster Guy de la Bedoyere is lavishly illustrated and investigates life in Britain under Roman rule.
- *What the Romans Did For Us* (2000) by Adam Hart-Davis is the book to accompany the BBC series of the same name, exploring the benefits brought to Britain by the Romans.
- *Boudica's Last Stand: Britain's Last Revolt Against Rome AD 60-61* (2011) by John Waite gives the author's perspective on the great queen of the Iceni.
- Books 1-5 in Simon Scarrow's *Eagles of the Empire* series follows the exploits of two legionnaires, Macro and Cato, during their time in Britain.



THE NORMAN INVASION

William the Conqueror Takes Over

Key Dates

- Events unfolded during 1066

Key Figures

- Edward the Confessor, King of England
- Harold Godwinson, Harold II of England
- Tostig Godwinson
- Harald Hardrada, King of Norway
- Duke William II of Normandy, later William I of England, “William the Conqueror”

In 1066 England suffered a series of upheavals. The death of the old King led to a power struggle for his throne that resulted in two invasions by separate foreign armies. The English army successfully fought off the first threat but failed to defeat their second foe. Invasion ultimately turned to conquest, and the Anglo-Saxons were forced to accept their new masters, the Normans. England would never be the same, turning from a small-time satellite of the Scandinavian kingdoms into a European power in her own right.

England and the Norman Invasion

In the first week of 1066, the English King, Edward the Confessor, died. His death created a power vacuum since, being childless, he had no obvious heir. However, there were three powerful men who were each eager to claim the crown as their own.

Harold Godwinson succeeded to the throne on Edward's death. His claim appeared strong. Harold was the Earl of Wessex, a nobleman whose influence, wealth, and authority was second only to the King's, so he was ideally placed to take over the reins of power. More importantly, according to Harold, the dying King had named him as his successor on his deathbed. Accordingly, the day after Edward's death, the noblemen of the Witan, or King's council, acknowledged Harold as their King, and he was crowned at Westminster Abbey.

Harold had managed to manoeuvre himself smoothly into power, but he was soon facing a rough ride to keep his crown as events from the past returned to haunt him.

Tostig Godwinson was Harold's younger brother and the Earl of Northumbria. Unlike Harold, Tostig was an ineffective and unpopular leader, and by 1065 the nobles of Northumbria had had enough of him. They raised a rebellion resulting in Tostig being driven out of his stronghold and his men killed. A group of the rebels traveled south to demand that Tostig be outlawed. They were met by Harold, who was acting as the King's representative. Harold realized that his brother had no hope of holding on to his earldom and that the peace of the kingdom was threatened, so he advised the King to do as the rebels asked. Tostig blamed his brother for the loss of his power. Taking his family abroad, he began plotting against his brother, and by the spring of 1066, he staged a series of unsuccessful raids on the coast of England before sailing to Norway. Tostig went to the King, Harald Hardrada, and persuaded him that he should pursue his distant claim to the English throne by invading

England and ousting Harold.

While Tostig and Harald Hardrada were discussing attacking England, plans for an invasion were already underway in Normandy. The young Duke of Normandy, William, was convinced that he was the rightful heir to the English crown and he was prepared to take it by force.

William claimed that King Edward had promised him the throne years before in 1051. Furthermore, William stated that Harold Godwinson had sworn an oath in 1064 in which he not only acknowledged William's right to the throne but promised to support him. William and his court were outraged that Harold had failed to keep his oath and instead taken the throne for himself. A petition was sent to the Pope, and he declared his support for William's cause. The Duke now felt that he had right, might, and God on his side, and by the spring of 1066, he was busy assembling an invasion force.

The Vikings Attack

In the event, it was Harald Hardrada's Vikings who were the first to invade. In September, he and Tostig assembled around 300 longships, packed with around 15,000 men. Initially, he sent a force to the English Channel to await Duke William's men. However, many of his soldiers were ordinary men who were needed to gather the harvest back in Norway, so he had to allow them to sail home. He and Tostig then concentrated on the North of England. By 20 September 1066, Harald's Vikings had defeated the army hastily assembled by the local Earls and taken control of the city of York. News of the invasion soon reached King Harold, and he set off on the long march north, gathering more men along the route.

Harold set a punishing pace for his army, covering around 25 miles a day. Their reward was that they took the Norwegian King and his forces by surprise. At dawn on 25 September, Harold's English army destroyed their enemy at the village of Stamford Bridge. Both Harald Hardrada and Tostig were killed, and the surviving Norsemen submitted to a truce. Whereas they had arrived in 300 longships, they needed only 24 to sail home, and the bones of their fallen comrades were said to have turned the battlefield white for the next 50 years. It was the end of the Viking era; the end of the Anglo-Saxon era would follow swiftly.

The Norman Invasion

While King Harold was away in the north defeating the Vikings, Duke



Battlefield in... Battle, England

William was finally launching his invasion. He had gathered around 700 ships and about 7,500 men. Although they were ready to invade in August 1066, strong winds put off their attack until September. William landed in England, at Pevensey, on 28 September. He built a wooden castle and gathered supplies for his army by raiding the surrounding villages. For the Anglo-Saxons, it was a taste of how their future.

Harold was already returning south when he received the news of the invasion. Again, he made rapid progress, but this time his men were already exhausted, and he had to leave many behind. Once he reached London, he rested for a week, then marched for the south coast. Unlike the Battle of Stamford Bridge, he did not have the element of surprise, and the two armies met face to face at Senlac Hill, near Hastings on 14 October 1066.

Although Harold did not have the benefit of surprise, he was fortunate to occupy the high ground at the top of Senlac Hill. This was a serious problem for William, since his heavily armored knights were unable to charge up the hill. Instead, his foot soldiers labored up the hill where they were repeatedly repulsed by the Anglo-Saxon shield wall. Norman casualties began to mount steadily, and some of William's troops began to panic and flee. The English cavalry seized the opportunity to pursue and



The Death of Harold

cut them down too. Fear was growing amongst the Normans, and rumors spread that the Duke had been killed. William responded by pulling off his helmet to show that he was still alive, which rallied his troops. Watching the English response to his men's flight had also given William an idea; it was an idea that would turn the battle in his favor.

Once his troops were back in check, William sent out orders that they should feign another retreat. The ordinary and inexperienced soldiers in Harold's ranks were delighted to see their enemy running away, broke the ranks of the shield wall and ran down the hill in pursuit. Once the English had broken ranks, William turned his cavalry on them, cutting them down. His archers then picked off what remained of the shield wall.

Harold was left with his housecarls, his bodyguards. They formed a ring around him, but he eventually fell. He may have been hit by an arrow in the eye, as suggested in the Bayeux Tapestry, but there is no definitive account of his death. His body was left on the battlefield and William refused to release it to Harold's mother, even though she offered the weight of the body in gold. Legend has it that Harold's long-term mistress, Edith the Fair, secretly visited the battlefield, found Harold's corpse, and had it buried at Waltham Abbey.

After such a decisive victory, William had expected to be accepted by

the Anglo-Saxons as their King. He was not. The Witan declared 15-year-old Edgar the Aetheling, the last male member of the House of Wessex, as their King. Edgar did not get the chance to be crowned. William marched from Hastings towards London, and by the time he had crossed the River Thames at Wallingford, support for Edgar began to melt away. By December, the Witan resolved to set Edgar aside in favor of William. Finally, on Christmas Day 1066, William was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey.

There were pockets of English resistance to the Normans for a few years. The largest rebellion broke out in the north in 1069, led by Edgar the Aetheling, with the aid of allies from Scotland and Denmark. William's response was brutal. Not only were the armies defeated, but he ordered that villagers, their animals and their crops were to be destroyed. Those who survived the "Harrying of the North" were left destitute and starved to death. The Norman invasion had turned to Norman Conquest; the age of the Anglo-Saxons was over.

The Norman Legacy

The arrival of the Normans touched every aspect of English life. An obvious physical sign of the arrival of the Normans was their buildings, notably their castles. These mighty strongholds allowed the Norman lords to rule their new lands without fear of recrimination. Eventually, their great castles also emboldened these great lords to rebel against their kings. The Normans didn't just build castles though; many churches, cathedrals and monasteries were erected.

England's place in the world changed too. For centuries, England had been linked to Scandinavia, sharing with the Norse many customs, laws and even kings. The many quarrels, rebellions and disputes between competing Danes, Norwegians and Anglo-Saxons kept England relatively unstable. Once the Normans arrived, England became tied to Normandy and Europe. The old order was swept away. The Norman aristocracy, whilst often ruthless, were also ambitious and perhaps it was their drive, administrative ability and military power that pushed England to become a world class power.

The richness and variety of the English language also owes a debt to the Normans. For many years there were two languages being spoken in England: French for the ruling classes, Anglo-Saxon English for the peasants. Hence, modern English often has two words for the same thing. For example, from the French we have mutton, phantom and purchase,



Westminster Abbey

whilst we still use the Anglo-Saxon equivalents sheep, ghost and buy.

Places to Visit

- Battle Abbey, in Sussex was built to commemorate the Battle of Hastings. The altar is said to be sited on the place where Harold fell. The town of Battle grew up around the Abbey and stages events throughout the year. English Heritage have a visitor center with various exhibits and a tour of the battlefield.
- There is a grave, said to be King Harold's, at Waltham Abbey. You won't find William's grave in England. He died whilst on a military campaign in France and lies buried in Caen.
- The Tower of London has at its center the White Tower. This excellent example of a Norman keep was built by William the Conqueror in the 1070s.
- Windsor Castle is another fortress originally built by William.
- The original Bayeux Tapestry remains in Bayeux, Normandy. A Victorian replica is on display in a dedicated gallery at Reading Museum, Berkshire.

Appearances on TV and Film

- Curiously, Hollywood have neglected the Norman Conquest. There have been reports in the past few years that there are several films in production, but none have made it to the screen yet.
- In 1990, Michael Gambon played the title role in the TV drama *Blood Royal: William the Conqueror*. (Available to watch online at British Lion Films)
- *1066*, a docu-drama (2009) featuring Ian Holm, is available on DVD.
- *The Normans*, (2010) a BBC Two documentary, is available on DVD.

Further Research

- One of the first accounts of the England in the years leading up to the Norman Invasion can be found in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A History of England from Roman Times to the Norman Conquest*. Written by contemporary scholars, this important source includes an account of the Battle of Hastings.
- Compiled on the orders of William, the Domesday Book gives a picture of England in 1086.
- Marc Morris' *The Norman Conquest* (2013) is a well-researched yet readable account of the background and effects of the Norman invasion.
- *Harold, the Last Anglo-Saxon King* by Ian W Walker (2010), fleshes out the story of Harold Godwinson.



THE PEASANTS' REVOLT OF 1381

The Beginning of the End of Feudalism

Key Dates

- 1380 Per capita poll tax is introduced
- 12 June 1381 Rebels assemble at Blackheath, south of London
- 13 June 1381 Rebels enter London and attack targeted sites in the city
- 14 June 1381 Richard meets rebels at Mile End
- 15 June 1381 Richard meets rebels at Smithfield; Wat Tyler is killed

Key Figures

- John Ball Radical preacher and leader of the revolt
- Wat Tyler Leader of the revolt
- Richard II English monarch (1377-1399)
- John of Gaunt to Richard II 1st Duke of Lancaster and uncle/advisor
- William Walworth Mayor of London

“Now the time is come... in which ye may cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty.”

So spoke John Ball, the English radical preacher, and leader of the so-named Peasants’ Revolt, in a rousing sermon at Blackheath on the 12th of June 1391. Ball spoke passionately to the crowd that had assembled on the heath, urging them to cast off the yoke of servitude and to claim their freedom. The next day, the rebels swept through the capital, destroying the property of indolent and corrupt nobles, rousing the wider population, and finally, taking the Tower of London. Just three days later, however, the state responded with a brutal suppression of the rebellion. The leaders of the movement lost their heads, and the dream of liberty remained unrealized.

The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 is regarded, in many accounts, as an early expression of the long-standing British tradition of radical egalitarianism. This dramatic moment in the nation’s history appears, from a modern perspective, to have been the first instance of collective action in the name of freedom, egalitarianism, and liberty, ideals that we usually understand to have been a product of the Enlightenment and the 18th century. Although the movement ultimately failed in its goals, the Peasants’ Revolt lives on in British memory as the beginning of the end for the old order of feudal hierarchies and serfdom.

Poll Taxes and Plague: The Sparks that Kindled a Rebellion

In 1381, England was a country still reeling from the effects of the Black Death, the horrific plague that had swept through Western Europe and wreaked havoc on English society in the 1340s, 1360s, and 1370s. The terrible death toll inflicted by the plague led to a dramatic demographic restructuring of English society: labor was now scarce, and large swathes of land were left unworked, simply because many large landholders lacked the manpower to invest in cultivation. This meant that the cost of labor rose considerably in line with market forces, placing pressure on landlords. In response to these rising costs of labor, in 1351, the English Parliament passed the Statute of Labourers, a law designed to set a maximum wage for workers, thereby compelling ordinary men and women to work for artificially low wages. These new labor laws caused considerable anger among the wider population, particularly among those who depended

on wage labor for their livelihoods. This group included artisans, rural laborers, tradesmen, and farmers, all of whom aspired to a better quality of life and felt unduly suppressed by the punitive laws.

In addition to this elite effort to suppress wages, the second half of the 14th century witnessed a rise in the extent and form of taxation. The need for greater taxes was a direct consequence of the expensive and somewhat abortive wars with France, which continued throughout the century and required extensive funding to ensure that the armies on the continent were adequately supplied. English administrators in this period were therefore pursuing a variety of creative solutions to extract the money they needed from the country, which led to a succession of experiments with various forms of taxation. In 1377, a poll tax was introduced, followed by two more in 1379 and 1380. This system of taxation diverged from previous methods of revenue collection by the crown, as they were a per capita tax rather than a graduated system based on income or social status. The 1380 poll tax was applied to every person living in England over the age of 16, men and women alike, and was set at three groats (or 12 pence). This was a threefold increase on the poll tax of 1377 and was met with widespread anger and resentment.

The taxes themselves, however, were not the sole cause of the revolt. In the spring of 1391, in response to complaints of tax evasion in certain parts of the country, a number of inquiries were set up in order to investigate and punish those who had failed to pay their taxes. In Essex and the southeast of England, these investigators were said to have behaved heavy-handedly, angering local residents and increasing opposition to the tax and local authorities. The poll tax, and the behavior of those in positions of authority, appear to have opened up a range of issues in English society relating to power, liberty, and unfair oppression. Whilst the poll tax forms the backdrop for the revolt, it was by no means the only grievance brought by the movement's leaders.

The Outbreak of Revolt

The seething resentment, then, that emerged in the spring of 1381 came to a head in May. In the southeast of England, primarily around Kent and Essex, groups of dissenters began to organize and rouse their fellow men to anger and rebellion. News and people traveled quickly in this region, which was well connected by rivers and trade networks. Early demonstrations in the countryside were extremely successful in gathering support for the cause, but the real goal was London, where the protesters



English soldiers landing in Normandy

could take their demands to the lords and nobles who were legislating against them. Ultimately, the call went out: the feast of Corpus Christi on June 13th would be the day when the crowds would gather and march on the capital.

One of the principal leaders of the rebellion was John Ball, a radical preacher who had been imprisoned and excommunicated as a result of the content of his sermons. His preaching was rooted in millenarianism, predicting an imminent and total social overhaul, and he was intensely critical of the social hierarchies that placed high-ranking clerics and lords over the needs of ordinary people. We know very little of his early life, just as we have almost no information about the other major leader of the revolt: Walter (Wat) Tyler. He was a craftsman from Essex who joined the Kentish rebels, and he emerged as a key figure due to his charismatic leadership qualities and his capacity for organization. Both of these men were extremely important in shaping the character of the revolt and channeling the anger of the roused crowds.

On June the 13th, the crowds marched on London from the south, crossing the river at London Bridge. The king and his council remained ensconced in the Tower of London, fervently debating how to deal with the revolt. As they stalled for time, the rebels stormed through the city,

attacking the prisons at Southwark and Newgate, throwing open the doors and rousing the men of the city to their cause. As the different groups of rebels rounded on Fleet Street, the object of their anger became clear. The Savoy Palace, the lavish home of John of Gaunt, stood between the road and the river. John of Gaunt was the king's ambitious and powerful uncle who was widely credited with having masterminded the new poll taxes. The rebels entered, almost unopposed, the luxurious interiors of this vast Palace were torn down and destroyed, and the building burned to the ground. It is remarkable, however, that amidst these targeted attacks, very little appears to have been stolen. The Savoy Palace, despite being filled to the brim with valuable treasures, was destroyed but not looted, and similar attacks on high-ranking nobles appear to have been ideologically rather than financially motivated. The violence and destruction continued until, at nightfall, the crowd gathered outside the Tower of London.

On June 14th, Richard decided to approach the rebels himself, in doing so, distancing himself from the ministers that appeared to be the principal object of their anger. Throughout the city, riots, violence, and destruction of property continued, and almost as soon as Richard had left the Tower, it was stormed by a group of rebels. Simon Sudbury, the Lord Chancellor, and Robert Hales, the Lord of the Knights Hospitaller, were both seized and executed. Richard continued, however, to Mile End, where he resolved to meet with some of the leaders of the movement and negotiate an end to the revolt. This meeting is a remarkable event in the story of the revolt, as it is clear that Richard himself took a huge risk in going to meet the rebels with only a small bodyguard. Was this a simple act of naiveté? Or a stroke of diplomatic genius?

During the meeting at Mile End, Richard listened to the rebels' demands and made a series of extraordinary promises. All of the rebels involved in the violence were to be given amnesty, and a series of charters were drawn up that detailed the abolition of serfdom. Richard refused to give up any of his officials, which was a key demand of the rebels, but he did promise to administer justice in cases of unfair behavior on the part of landlords.

These extraordinary concessions, whether they were made in sincerity or not, were not sufficient to assuage all of the rebels. A large contingent, led by Wat Tyler, demanded a second meeting with Richard the next day at Smithfield, to which Richard acquiesced, and the two camps, royal, and rebel, gathered at opposite ends of the field. Tyler spoke for the rebels, stating that further concessions must be made before he was prepared to tell the crowds to stand down. Angry words were spoken, and as the tensions escalated, a fight broke out between Tyler and William

Walworth, the Mayor of London. Moments later, Wat Tyler was dead, and the movement had lost its head.

In the moments after Tyler fell, panic and confusion reigned among the rebels, and it is likely that they would have erupted in violence were it not for the instinctive actions of Richard. The boy-king rode out to the rebels, calling to them and declaring himself to be their king and leader. He led them from the field and out into Clerkenwell, thereby diverting what would have likely developed into a massacre. As the rebels dispersed across London, the nobles, headed by William Walworth, began to rouse forces of their own to launch a crackdown.

The death of Wat Tyler symbolized the death knell of the revolt. In the days after the 15th of June, all of the promises made by Richard were revoked, and the rebels were pursued relentlessly. In London, Essex, Kent, East Anglia, and even further north, where similar, smaller-scale revolts had also broken out, dissenters and those associated with the rebels were attacked, tried, imprisoned, and sometimes executed.

A Peasants' Revolt?

Traditional interpretations of the Peasants' Revolt tend to characterize it as a reaction to the traditional feudal order and hierarchies of the late medieval period. The participants, according to this view, would have been primarily peasants and serfs, and they were aiming to break down the vertical structures of power and authority that profoundly limited their freedoms. The demands made to the king on the 15th of June did include the abolition of serfdom and extensive land reform. The call for a radical social change does seem to have been widely reiterated, and it is clear that the rebels attributed their inability to better themselves to the inequities inherent to the feudal social order.

Large numbers of peasants, i.e., serfs and rural workers, would have been involved in the revolt simply because of the balance of probabilities and the composition of English society at that time. However, the demographic of the revolt was rather broader than is generally allowed in modern accounts of the events. It included members of the clergy, artisans, urban workers, even some gentlemen, occasionally sheriffs and bailiffs, and local manorial officials: essentially a broad spectrum from 14th century English society. The anger was directed mainly at the ruling classes. The traditional legal recourses of many of these people was limited, because parliament, property, and local governance fell largely in the hands of elite landholders who were, it was felt, abusing their power in order to



Cleric John Ball encouraging the rebels

protect their interests and deliberately legislating against the favor of the commoners.

This is reflected in the nature of the attacks on the city, where the violence was terrible but targeted and singled out individuals and groups deemed to have been complicit in the systems of taxation, landholding, and serfdom that continued to oppress rural laborers. When the rebels reached Lambeth Palace, for example, and the offices of the Royal Chancery, they destroyed records of taxation and landholding but left the libraries intact. The goal of the revolt was not total revolution and the overthrow of the monarchy, but rather the removal of the corrupt intermediaries that stood between commons and king, and importantly, the king's justice.

Legacy

The Peasants' Revolt achieved few of its original aims. Concessions and manumissions issued by the king were immediately retracted, the nobles retained their place, money, and position in English society, and there was no further discussion of the representation of the laboring masses. However, this does not mean that the revolt achieved nothing

whatsoever. There were no further poll taxes, and the kings and nobles had understood the message that exerting too tight a squeeze on those of the bottom rung of the social ladder would have consequences. Noble and royal power was not absolute, and controversial policies could not simply be imposed without inciting violence. The institution of serfdom continued, although by the end of the 14th century, it was clear that this system of landholding was in the process of terminal decline.

In addition to this, the idea of the Peasants' Revolt endured for centuries in the English imagination and operated as a sort of subconscious limit on royal and noble power. The violent and bloody events of 1381 took on an iconic status in English culture and literature and were mentioned in a number of medieval and early modern literary works, including those by Chaucer and the poet John Gower. The Peasants' Revolt also supported the romantic notion of a tradition of British radicalism and egalitarianism. This English spirit of radicalism, understood to have been the driving force behind the civil wars and political upheavals of the 17th century, is embodied in the popular imaginary by the Peasants' Revolt.

Sites to Visit

- Smithfield Market, Farringdon, London. The current market stands on the site of the large, grassy field where the Wat Tyler met his end at the culmination of the revolt. During the medieval period, this site operated as a notorious place of execution, particularly for dissenters and rebels against the crown, including William Wallace.
- Blackheath, London. This ancient common was a frequent meeting place in the medieval period and like many other open sites in the city, was used as a burial place during the Black Death. It was here that John Ball delivered his rousing sermon to the crowds of rebels. Today, the heath remains an area of undeveloped common land, in which it is possible to imagine the gathering of protesters in the 14th century.
- The Savoy Hotel, The Strand, London. The present-day hotel stands on part of the medieval site of its namesake, the Savoy Palace. This lavish Palace was the home of John of Gaunt, and was destroyed by rebels in 1391. The Palace occupied the space between the Strand and the river, and is home to a number of streets and buildings named to commemorate the former building.

Film, Literature, and TV

- *Now is the Time*, by Melvyn Bragg. A historical novel dramatizing the Peasants' Revolt, focusing on the iconic meeting between the rebels and the king.
- *Medieval England: The Peasants' Revolt*. A BFI film, part-narration, part-dramatization, with Anthony Hopkins in the role of Wat Tyler

Further Research

- Dan Jones, *The Summer of Blood*, (General Books, 2010). This accessible and well-written book is a gripping account of the events of the summer of 1381.
- Juliet Barker, *1381: The Year of the Peasants' Revolt*, (Harvard University Press, 2014). This scholarly work presents the most up-to-date summary of research into the Peasants' Revolt, with a useful appendix of sources and letters.
- Mark O'Brien, *When Adam Delved and Eve Span: A History of the Peasants' Revolt*, (Bookmarks, 2016). A readable and introductory history of the revolt, with rich descriptions of 14th-century peasant life in England.



THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Cousins at War

Key Dates

- 1455 –first battle, at St Albans.
- 1460 –Battle of Wakefield.
- 1461 – victory at the Battle of Towton secures the throne for Edward of York.
- 1470 – Henry VI is restored to the throne by the Lancastrians.
- 1471 – the battles of Tewksbury and Barnet are won by Edward IV. Henry VI put to death.
- 1483 – Edward IV dies, his two young sons disappear and his brother becomes Richard III
- 1485 – Richard III is killed at the Battle of Bosworth. The victor, Henry Tudor, becomes king.
- 1487 – Henry VII wins the last battle of the Wars of the Roses, the Battle of Stoke.

Key Figures

House of Lancaster (Red Roses)

- Henry VI
- Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI's Queen Consort
- Henry Tudor, later Henry VII

House of York (White Roses)

- Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York
- Edward IV, son of Richard of York
- Richard III, son of Richard of York
- Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's daughter and later wife of Henry VII

Also:

- Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick – changed allegiance from York to Lancaster

In the mid-fifteenth century, two branches of England's royal family each believed they had the right to the throne of England. A series of battles took place over thirty years during which the rivals vied with each other for power. Since the Lancaster family's emblem was a red rose and the opposing York family wore a white rose, the conflict was dubbed "The Wars of the Roses." Following the final battle, a new dynasty took power, uniting the rival factions and bringing peace and stability to England.

The roots of the Wars of the Roses lay buried almost a century before the first battle began. Edward III, a hugely successful king, had left the crown to his ten-year-old grandson, Richard II. Since the new King was a minor, his uncle, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, was appointed regent. After Richard came of age, he proved to be an arrogant, extravagant, and ineffective leader. Eventually, John of Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke, led a rebellion and took the crown. Henry became the first king of the House of Lancaster, ruling as Henry IV.

Henry IV was succeeded by his son Henry V, who in turn left the crown to his infant son, Henry VI. Henry VI was crowned King of England at the tender age of nine months, and his kingdom was ruled by several regents. The King's mother, Catherine de Valois, remarried, and with her new husband, Owen Tudor, she had two sons, Edmund and Jasper Tudor. Edmund married a very young Lancastrian noblewoman, Margaret Beaufort, who bore him a son, Henry Tudor, who in time would provide the resolution to the conflict that was to come.

When King Henry reached 16 years of age, he took over the running of the kingdom. Unfortunately, he was not equal to the task. Pious and unworldly, he was also prone to bouts of mental instability. Gradually, power slipped from his fingers and into the hands of a small group of nobles. He did have one staunch and fearsome ally: his wife.

Henry married Margaret of Anjou, the niece of the King of France, in 1445. As part of the marriage agreement, England gave up the territories of Maine and Anjou, land that had been hard-won by the English during the Hundred Years' War with France. The English blamed Margaret for the loss, and she was never popular. Whilst she did not gain the love of her people, she was trusted implicitly by her fragile husband, and it was Margaret who was to take the lead in defending her husband's crown when it was threatened by the powerful Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York.

Richard posed a real threat to Henry. Not only was he immensely wealthy, but he had, arguably, a better claim to the throne than Henry. Henry derived his claim through John of Gaunt, Edward III's third son. Richard, on the other hand, had a double claim, boasting two bloodlines

that flowed from Edward's second and fourth sons. Not surprisingly, Richard of York was viewed with suspicion by the King's advisors, and they did their best to marginalize him, giving him posts in France and Ireland that kept him away from England for long periods.

Eventually, York could stay away from England no more. By 1450, the country's weak and corrupt leadership was causing serious unrest in the country. Richard of York sailed from Ireland and made his way to London, but he failed to raise enough support to challenge the King. However, in 1453 the King suffered a complete mental collapse, and York managed to get himself elected as Protector of the Realm, despite the opposition of the Queen. The King had recovered by 1455, but York had used his time as Protector well, finding new support amongst England's nobles, most notably his brother-in-law's family, the Nevilles. He was now well-placed to mount a challenge for control of England. The Wars of the Roses began.

The two sides, the King's Lancastrians and Richard's Yorkists, met at St Albans on 22 May, 1455. The King's force was outnumbered, and York and his ally, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, took the victory. There were few casualties, but York did kill two of the King's leading supporters and, more importantly, captured the King. York declared himself Constable of England and briefly took on the role of Protector once again when the King fell ill again. Although many of the nobles of England were beginning to support York, he had one implacable enemy: the Queen.

Queen Margaret was now a mother, having given birth to Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1453. She was determined to protect the birthright of her son and managed to rally support against York. In 1459, Richard and Warwick were accused of treason, and their forces were defeated. Richard fled to Ireland and did not return until Warwick had managed to defeat the King's army and take him, prisoner. Richard returned to England in triumph and was acknowledged as the heir to the throne. He had little time to revel in his new position. In the north, loyal Lancastrians were gathering, and Margaret had contacted the King of Scotland for support. Richard of York set out from London on what would be his last campaign.

The armies met at Wakefield on 30 December 1460. It was a resounding Lancastrian victory. Richard of York was killed, and his head, complete with a paper crown, was displayed on the city wall at York. It was not the end of the House of York, though.

After the death of his father, Richard of York's eldest son Edward led the Yorkist cause. Although only 18 years old, Edward of York proved to be an able commander, defeating a Lancastrian army led by Jasper Tudor at Mortimer's Cross in Herefordshire early in 1461. Days later, the Earl of Warwick, who had the King in his custody, was not so fortunate. His

army was defeated by Queen Margaret's forces at the Second Battle of St Albans. The King was abandoned by the retreating York army, although two York knights stayed by his side, having sworn that no harm would come to him. Despite their chivalry, the Queen had them beheaded.

The remains of Warwick's army fled and joined up with Edward's forces, and the men marched on London, where they were met with enthusiasm. The Queen had decamped to Dunstable, and the York army followed them north. The two armies met at Towton in Yorkshire, and there followed the largest and bloodiest battle of the Wars of the Roses. The casualties were high, with around 20,000 men losing their lives. It was Edward's army that carried the day, and Margaret took the King and her son further north to safety in Scotland. Many of the Lancaster supporters abandoned the cause and pledged themselves to Edward. Entering York, one of Edward's first acts was to have his father's head removed from its spike on the wall.

Edward was welcomed back to London for his coronation in June 1461. Margaret and some diehard Lancaster followers continued to mount attacks, but they were all futile. In 1465, Henry was captured and imprisoned in the Tower of London. Margaret and her son went into exile in France. It might have been the end of the bitter wars, had King Edward not unwittingly made an enemy of one of his closest allies.

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, was rewarded for his part in the Yorkist's victory with considerable influence at court. He was a wealthy man in his own right and now had several important official positions. He decided to use his influence to arrange a marriage between Edward and a French princess. Edward, meanwhile, fell in love and married a widow, Elizabeth Woodville, without consulting Warwick. His negotiations in tatters, the Earl was humiliated, and his anger grew as the power of the new Queen's family rose at the expense of his own. Warwick plotted with Edward's brother George and raised an army that managed to defeat the King in 1469. Unable to capitalize on his victory as he had failed to gain popular support, he was obliged to sail for France. Here he made contact with the exiled Margaret.

Warwick and Margaret agreed to form an alliance, sealed with a marriage between Warwick's daughter Anne and Margaret's son Edward. An invasion was launched in the autumn of 1470, which proved successful as the King was away in the north dealing with another rebellion. Henry VI was restored to the throne, and Edward fled to Burgundy.

The House of Lancaster was back in the ascendancy, with Warwick and George, Duke of Clarence, ruling in Henry's name. The restoration of the King was brief due to a miscalculation on Warwick's part. He

declared war on Burgundy, with the result that Edward's host, the Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, assisted Edward in taking back the throne. Edward returned to England and met the Lancastrian forces at Barnet on 14 April 1470. The York army routed the Lancastrian army. The Earl of Warwick was killed as he fled the battlefield. A month later, Henry VI's son, Edward, led the Lancastrian army into battle at Tewksbury. The 17-year-old lost his life, and his army lost the battle. Edward IV regained the crown, Henry VI died a month later – perhaps by order of Edward - and England was not troubled by war for some years.

Edward IV died in 1483, leaving behind a young family. The new King, Edward V, was only 12, so his uncle, Richard of Gloucester, served as Lord Protector. Mysteriously, the young King and his brother, having been declared illegitimate, disappeared into the Tower of London, never to be seen again. Richard took the crown, ruling as Richard III.

Richard's rule was challenged in 1483, but he put down the rebellion. He was not so fortunate in 1485 when Jasper Tudor and his nephew Henry led a rebellion. Henry Tudor met the King on the battlefield at Bosworth Field, defeating Richard, who became the last of England's kings to fall in battle on home soil. Henry, whose mother was a Lancastrian, took as his wife Elizabeth of York, one of Edward IV's daughters. Reigning as Henry VII, his emblem was the Tudor Rose, which symbolically combined the white and red roses of York and Lancaster.

Legacy

The end of the Wars of the Roses, and the union of the Houses of Lancaster and York under Henry VII, ushered in a long period of stability for both the English monarchy and the people, which allowed the country to prosper.

Places to Visit

- English Heritage looks after several of the battlefield sites, including those at:
- Barnet, Greater London, where there is an 18th Century memorial on what is now a golf course
- Tewksbury, Gloucestershire, the site of the climactic battle between Margaret and Edward of York, is now a peaceful and picturesque area near a quiet village.
- Bosworth Field, Leicestershire, where Henry Tudor took Richard

III's crown. A visitor center helps set the scene.

- The beautiful city of York still retains significant stretches of its old city walls and gates. At Mickelgate Bar, you can see the spot where Richard of York's head was set on a spike. The gatehouse also houses a small exhibit about Henry VII.
- Richard III's skeleton was discovered in a plain grave in Leicester in 2012. A new tomb in Leicester Cathedral should be ready for public viewing in March 2015.
- At the Tower of London, you can visit the Bloody Tower that was the last known residence of the "Princes in the Tower" and see the stairway in the White Tower under which two small bodies, perhaps those of the Princes, were found in 1674.

Film and TV

- The BBC adapted Philippa Gregory's "The Cousins' War" novels in their 2013 series *The White Queen*. Available on DVD.
- Henry VII is the subject of BBC Two's 2013 series *Henry VII: Winter King*, available on DVD.
- *The Wars Of The Roses - A Bloody Crown* (2011) is a comprehensive documentary, available on DVD.

Further Research

- Dan Jones has written best-selling history books before, and his recent (2014) book *The Wars of the Roses: The Fall of the Plantagenets and the Rise of the Tudors* looks set to follow.
- Philippa Gregory has written several novels about the Wars of the Roses: *The Cousins' War* series, which looks at events through the eyes of the women involved.
- Conn Iggulden too has his own series of novels, named simply *Wars of the Roses*
- The Richard III Society has a host of information on the much-maligned King on their website, <http://www.richardiii.net/>



THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

A Time of Martyrs

Key Dates

- 1509 Henry VIII accedes to the throne, Marries Catherine of Aragon
- 1517 Martin Luther publishes his 95 theses sparking the Protestant reformation
- 1521 Henry awarded the title of Defender of the Faith by the Pope
- 1526 First translation of the Bible to English by William Tyndale
- 1527 Henry is set on a divorce from Catherine
- 1533 Henry marries Anne Boleyn, Statute in Restraint of Appeals.
- 1534 Act of Supremacy – Henry becomes Head of the Church in England
- 1536 Tyndale executed for heresy, Dissolution of the monasteries begins.
- 1547 Death of Henry. Edward VI accedes to throne.
- 1549 First Book of Common Prayer published
- 1553 Death of Edward. Mary I accedes to the throne.
- 1554 Roman Catholicism restored.
- 1556 Thomas Cranmer executed for heresy
- 1558 Death of Mary, Elizabeth I accedes to the throne, Final break with Rome.
- 1563 39 Articles published setting out Anglican doctrine
- 1587 Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots
- 1588 Spanish Armada defeated
- 1603 Death of Elizabeth, James VI of Scotland accedes to English throne as James I

Key Figures

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|-----------------------|---------------------|
| • King Henry VIII | King of England |
| • Catherine of Aragon | Henry's first wife |
| • Anne Boleyn | Henry's second wife |
| • King Edward VI | King of England |
| • Queen Mary I | Queen of England |
| • Queen Elizabeth I | Queen of England |

During Henry VIII's reign, England started on a journey of religious change. The old faith, Roman Catholicism, was pushed aside in favor of a new Protestant Church of England. It was neither a seamless nor a peaceful transition. Both sides suffered during the reigns of Henry and his children, but by the close of the House of Tudor, the Church of England was firmly established and remains so today.

The Great Schism

Christianity had arrived in England during the first century, brought by the Romans. For centuries, England followed the Roman Church. There were dissenters, such as the Lollards, but they faced almost universal opposition from the clergy and state. In 1517, German clergyman and scholar Martin Luther produced his 95 Theses, in which he protested many of the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. His action sparked the schism in the Church that led to the Protestant Reformation.

While Luther's ideas found increasing favor, Henry VIII was a firm believer in Roman Catholic doctrine. He was also a well-read scholar. In 1521 he wrote and published his own rebuttal of Luther's ideas. Grateful for his support, the Pope awarded him the title of "Fidei Defensor," or "Defender of the Faith."

Henry's loyalty to the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church was tested within a few years. Catherine of Aragon, Henry's wife, had failed to provide him with the son he needed if his dynasty was to continue. Catherine was getting past the age of child-bearing, and by 1527 Henry's eyes had alighted on a vivacious and alluring lady of the court, Anne Boleyn. Henry petitioned the Pope for an annulment of his marriage to Catherine, citing biblical references to support his case that his marriage was wrong in the eyes of God due to Catherine's first marriage to Henry's late brother, Prince Arthur. Henry's theological arguments did not sway the Pope, who was mindful of the fact that Catherine was the aunt of the most powerful man in Europe, the Holy Roman Emperor. The annulment was not forthcoming, despite years of negotiating. Henry was determined to find another route out of his marriage.

Anne Boleyn was more than just a pretty face. She was educated, intelligent, and interested in the ideas of the Protestant Reformation. Along with Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer, Anne saw a way out for Henry. Cromwell, a lawyer and Member of Parliament, was quietly supportive of the Protestant cause, and he rose to prominence as an assistant to Cardinal Wolsey. His friend Cranmer was a leading clergyman

who had become favorable to Lutheranism and who was appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1532 through the lobbying of the Boleyn family. Between them, Cromwell and Cranmer were able to find a solution to the King's Great Matter: a break with Rome.

Once Cranmer had become Archbishop, he began working on the legal case for annulling Henry's marriage. Henry did not wait for the conclusion of Cranmer's work. He had no time to lose because Anne Boleyn was pregnant, so he married her in January 1533. Cromwell was laying the groundwork to deal with the dissent that would inevitably arise when Cranmer declared the annulment of Henry's first marriage. He drafted an Act of Parliament that established the monarch as the final legal authority in England and Wales and forbade any appeals on religious or other matters to the Pope. The Statute in Restraint of Appeals was the cornerstone of the Reformation in England. It not only allowed Cranmer to grant Henry his annulment without reference to Rome, but it declared England to be an independent country and empire that was not subject to any foreign authority on any matter. Henry was declared the Supreme Head of the Church in England the following year in the Act of Supremacy.

Henry had achieved his objective in breaking with Rome. His first marriage was annulled, and he was married to Anne. The door to the Reformation was open, but Henry remained a Catholic at heart and balked at full-scale reform. That was left to men like Cromwell and Cranmer. With Queen Anne's influence, they were able to appoint reformers who were willing to challenge the faith. Although Henry was happy to preside over the dissolution of the monasteries, which brought him considerable wealth, he opposed radical change. In 1539, he had Parliament pass the Six Articles, which restated Roman Catholic ideas of the clergy, Mass, and the sacraments and brought in punishments for those who challenged them. The king also disagreed with the idea that an English Bible should be readily available. When William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English, was executed abroad for heresy, he cried out from the stake, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." Henry's conservatism was confirmed when he appointed like-minded men to be on the regency council for his son on his death. In Henry's mind, the split with Rome was all the Reformation that was needed.

After Henry's death in 1547, his nine-year-old son took the throne. Edward had been brought up as a Protestant. Intelligent and precocious, he was a firm believer in the Protestant cause. Any change to the country would have been delayed had his father's original choice regency council stood, but it was changed, and Edward's uncle, Edward Seymour, took control. Major changes were put into action in the first year of the new

king's reign.

Churches were targeted first. Stained glass, images, shrines, and statues were removed or destroyed as an altogether plainer style of Church was demanded. Stone altars were replaced by wooden communion tables. Priests lost their vestments, but were allowed to marry. People were no longer allowed to pay for masses to be said for the souls of the departed, and religious processions were banned. A new Common Prayer Book, written in English, had been introduced in Henry's reign, which followed the Catholic tradition, but now a new version, far more radical, was distributed.

These were huge changes for the English since religion was at the core of their lives. Some embraced the changes while others clung to the Catholic traditions. Rebellions broke out in Cornwall, Devon, and East Anglia, while in other places, there was a quieter resistance, with people simply not remodeling their churches, hiding vestments and altars, or hearing Mass in private. Indeed, so unpopular was the Reformation that it was in danger of grinding to a halt anyway, but the death of Edward meant that it did not just stop; it was turned on its head.

Edward had attempted to protect his Protestant legacy by naming his cousin Lady Jane Grey as his successor. Like Edward, Lady Jane was a fervent Protestant and far preferable to his Catholic older sister Mary. However, the country preferred to take its chances on Mary, and after a reign of less than two weeks, Lady Jane was deposed and put in the Tower of London to await trial.

Mary, like her late mother Catherine of Aragon, was a devout Catholic. She had no love for the Protestants; their rise had meant her mother's fall. Her dearest wish was to return the country to the bosom of Rome for the sake of her people's souls. Mary sought to turn the clock back, starting by ordering her parents' marriage to be declared valid once again. Thomas Cranmer was ousted as Archbishop of Canterbury and tried for heresy. He recanted several times during his imprisonment, but it was not enough to save him from a heretic's death. At the last moment, he renounced his recantations and thrust his right hand, the hand that had signed his recantations, into the fire, saying that it had offended God and should be burnt first. Cranmer was just one of many whom Mary sent to the stake. Some were well known, others just ordinary people. There were more than 300 victims of Mary's quest to rid England of Protestants, earning her the nickname "Bloody Mary."

All of Mary's attempts to reintroduce the Catholic faith were to be in vain. Despite marrying her Catholic cousin, Philip of Spain, she was to die childless, and her successor, her sister Elizabeth, was a Protestant.

Elizabeth could be nothing else; her parent's marriage was not recognized by the Catholic Church, making her claim to the throne invalid in Catholic eyes. During her sister's reign, she had been obliged to attend Mass so as to avoid conflict on religion and perhaps the fate of those who had been executed. She had also seen the unhappiness and turmoil created in her brother's reign when he had forced through radical reforms to the Church. Learning from her sibling's mistakes, her approach throughout her reign was to be one of religious tolerance. She remarked that she did not want to make "windows into men's souls." As long as people trod the middle ground, the queen was happy to let them make their own way.

One of the first hurdles in Elizabeth's reign was undoing Mary's legislation that returned England to the Church in Rome. Elizabeth's first attempt, the Reformation Bill, which would have made her Head of the Church and had harsh penalties for Roman Catholics, was defeated in Parliament. Two redrafted bills were later passed – the Act of Supremacy 1558 and the Act of Uniformity 1558. The former made Elizabeth the Supreme Governor of the Church, a title which was acceptable to more conservative bishops. The latter made it mandatory for people to attend an Anglican Church service on a Sunday and to read from the Common Book of Prayer.

Despite Elizabeth's liberal approach, there was religious strife during her reign. Those on either end of the religious spectrum were not pleased with the queen, and she did not tolerate them. On the one hand, were the Roman Catholics who still gave their allegiance to the Pope. These people could not accept Elizabeth as queen since, according to the Pope, she was illegitimate. Their loyalty to their religion was incompatible with their loyalty to the crown, so they were considered traitors. From this group, Mary, Queen of Scots, would draw support for her claims to her cousin's throne. At the other end of the religious spectrum were the radical Protestants who agitated for further reform for the Church of England and who would eventually separate from it.

Legacy

On her death, Elizabeth left the throne to the son of Mary, Queen of Scots. James I was a Protestant who inherited a nation that was largely at peace with itself and content with the reformed Church of England but at whose edges there was simmering discontent. Both Catholics and Puritans would resort to violence during the reigns of the Stuarts, and both would be on the receiving end of persecution. However, the Anglican

Church, with the monarch as Supreme Governor, remains the established Church to this day.

Despite the Reformation, British coins continue to carry the legend “Fid. Def.” or “FD” to commemorate the Pope’s award of the title of “Fidei Defensor” to Henry VIII, a title that the monarch still retains.

Sites to Visit

- At the University Church St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, a plaque is set into the wall commemorating both Catholic and Protestant martyrs who were connected with the town. Thomas Cranmer’s name is remembered since he was executed in Oxford.
- St Edward King and Martyr Church in Cambridge is sometimes called the Cradle of the English Reformation as several clergymen preached about the new teaching from its pulpit. Three men, Thomas Bilney, Robert Barnes, and Hugh Latimer, who were all executed, are commemorated on a plaque. The trio also met at the nearby White Horse Inn, the site of which is marked by a blue plaque.
- On the wall of Drake’s Pub, Fairmeadow, Maidstone, there is a plaque commemorating seven people who were burnt at the stake nearby in 1557.
- Although divided by religion in life, Mary I and her half-sister Elizabeth I are buried together at Westminster Abbey in a tomb which bears the inscription: “Consorts in realm and tomb, here we sleep, Elizabeth and Mary, sisters, in hope of resurrection.”
- Films and TV
- David Starkey’s *Henry VIII: Mind of a Tyrant* (2009) explores the man who used the Reformation for his own ends. Available on DVD.
- Simon Schama: *A History of Britain - The Complete BBC Series [DVD]* covers the reigns of all the Tudors and beyond.
- *A Man for All Seasons* (1966) concerns the effects of Henry’s divorce on his great friend Sir Thomas More. Paul Scofield won an Oscar for his portrayal of More. Available on DVD.

Further Research

- The Church of England’s official website has a section on their history as well as information on how they continue to reform

today.

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/>
- *The Reformation* (2005) by Professor Patrick Collinson is a fairly brief study of this major event in Britain's history.
- Peter Marshall is a leading authority on the English Reformation and its effects and has used his knowledge to produce the *Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation* (2015).



THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERIES

Henry VIII's Seizure of Wealth and Power

Key Dates

- 1534 Act of Supremacy declared Henry Supreme Head of the Church of England
- Thomas Cromwell began compiling information of monasteries' wealth
- 1535 1st Suppression of Religious Houses Act ("Dissolution of Lesser Monasteries Act")
- 1536 Pilgrimage of Grace, a revolt in the north of England
- 1539 2nd Suppression of Religious Houses Act ("Dissolution of Greater Monasteries Act")
- 1540 Waltham Abbey, last of the monasteries, closes

Key Figures

- King Henry VIII
- Thomas Cromwell, the King's Chief Minister 1532-1540
- Robert Aske, leader of the Pilgrimage of Grace
- The term "monasteries" included all religious houses, including abbeys, nunneries, priories, and friaries.

Henry VIII broke with the Church of Rome following the Pope's refusal to grant him an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Once he was Head of the Church in England and in possession of a new wife, Henry cast his eyes covetously on a new prize: the wealth of the country's many religious houses. He stripped away not only the land, money, and privileges amassed by the religious orders over the centuries, but also the aid and shelter they gave to the common people. With the monasteries swept away, England saw a redistribution of wealth and power and had to deal with the problem of how to help the poor. Over the years, Britain's laws to deal with the poor evolved into the modern Welfare State.

The King's Great Robbery

In the sixteenth century, religious houses were a part of the fabric of English life, as they had been for several centuries. They served many purposes. Some housed extensive libraries, many helped the local communities, offering food, schooling, and medicine, whilst others provided shelter to travelers. The leading religious houses were fabulously wealthy, having spent centuries amassing money and land from those desperate to earn a place in heaven by way of gifts to the Church. As a result, the Church's landholdings accounted for around a quarter of the arable land in England. The monasteries wielded political power, too: 25 abbots sat in the House of Lords. It seemed inconceivable that such a rich, powerful, and useful institution could be swept away, yet in four short years, Henry VIII brought centuries of tradition to a close.

Henry had already shown that he was not a man to be cowed by tradition or authority when it got in the way of what he wanted. When Henry needed an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, he did not meekly accept the Pope's refusal. Instead, he broke with Rome, set himself up as the new Supreme Head of the Church in England, and married his mistress, Anne Boleyn. By the mid-1530s, Henry had a new desire: money.

Several costly wars with France and Scotland had eaten away at the vast fortune left to Henry by his prudent father. In addition, unlike his father, he enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle. He could have sought a solution through taxation, but his Chief Minister, Thomas Cromwell, had a more innovative and radical suggestion.

Early in his career, Cromwell had worked for Henry's former Lord Chancellor, Cardinal Wolsey. In the 1520s, with the Pope's blessing, Wolsey

had closed down some 30 abbeys that were either disreputable or falling into decay. The money generated from the closure of these abbeys was channeled into charitable enterprises by Wolsey. A decade later, Cromwell used his knowledge of the wealth that could be found in religious houses to curry favor with his King. Interested by Cromwell's suggestion, Henry asked for more information.

Cromwell began by sending his men to monasteries to collect information on both the wealth and the behavior within the monasteries. Through these "visitations," he was able to present to the king evidence that there were a great many monks and nuns who were living dissolute lifestyles behind the walls of their establishments, though it is likely that he overstated the occurrence of impropriety and failed to mention the good work done by the majority of the abbeys.

Besides Cromwell's propaganda concerning the State of monasteries, Henry had his own reason to dislike the monasteries. They were a symbol of the authority of the Church of Rome, the monks owing allegiance to the Pope rather than the King. Henry also convinced himself that the monks sent money to Rome, which galled him. With his money worries and the perceived threat to his authority, he was very open to Cromwell's plans for the troublesome monasteries and gave his permission to press forward with the scheme.

In 1536, the First Suppression Act came into effect. Under the terms of the Act, those religious houses that had an income of less than £200 per annum were to close. Their property was forfeit to the Crown. The heads of the houses were offered a pension, and the other members were given a choice of transferring to a larger establishment or returning into the lay community, free of their vows of poverty and obedience but still bound by a vow of chastity. Around 300 smaller houses were affected by the Act, although around 75 were allowed to stay open after paying a fine to the King. Often, the houses that stayed open had connections at court and were able to present their case, as well as their money, to the King.

The wealth of the smaller houses was quickly redistributed. Their plate was melted down, their land rented out to neighboring landowners, their furniture auctioned off, and the very fabric of the walls plundered for building material. It did not take long for a monastery to take on the appearance of a ruin.

The common people might have been dismayed at the removal of the institutions that had provided them with comfort over the centuries, but many merchants, gentry, and nobles were in favor. They found themselves benefitting from Henry's scheme, so had a vested interest in it carrying on. These were the men to whom Henry sold the land and entitlements to

sell “livings,” the right to appoint the parish priest. They found that their power and independence increased, and as beneficiaries of the Dissolution, they wanted to keep Henry as Head of the Church, as a return to Rome might undo his work. Henry had found a new way to keep the loyalty of an influential section of his countrymen.

The work to break up the monasteries was not entirely without opposition. In the north of England, there was disquiet, and several uprisings occurred. The most serious of these took place in Yorkshire on 13 October 1536 and became known as the Pilgrimage of Grace. A mixture of grievances about the high price of food, the King’s treatment of Queen Catherine, and worries about rumored taxes on baptism caused the people to revolt. A lawyer named Robert Aske led the protesters, who peacefully marched to the city of York holding religious banners and crosses. Once in the city, they restored the recently dispossessed monks and nuns to their former houses and sent messages asking Henry to spare the monasteries. Several nobles sided with the rebels, and the King, via the Duke of Norfolk, offered a free pardon and promised to consider their pleas. Trusting the King’s word, the rebels dispersed and returned to their homes. Unfortunately, another revolt sealed the fate of those pardoned by the King. He had them arrested, charged with treason, and executed. Robert Aske was hanged in chains at Clifford’s Tower in York in 1537.

After the Pilgrimage of Grace, Henry felt free to continue the closure of the monasteries and targeted religious shrines too. Thomas a Becket’s shrine at Canterbury Cathedral was destroyed, and the King was accused by the Pope of burning the saint’s bones. If he was upset by the Pope’s condemnation, Henry might have taken solace in the 21 carts, piled high with valuables, which trundled from the site of the shrine to his palace.

In 1539, the Second Suppression of Religious Houses Act sealed the fate of the remaining houses. Most of the monks acquiesced, but some, notably the Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey, resisted and were consequently executed. The last abbey to be closed was Waltham Abbey, which was surrendered to the King on 23 March 1540.

It had taken Henry and Cromwell four years to dismantle centuries of tradition. From Henry’s point of view, it was not altogether successful. The vast wealth that he had acquired soon slipped through his fingers as he sold off the land and rights to collect tithes and grant livings to his subjects in order to pay for his wars. Had he kept hold of the vast fortune, it is likely that neither he nor his successors would have had to summon Parliament again as they would have been free from the need to rely on money from taxes.

Legacy

With the monasteries closed, the poor, sick, and old had nowhere to go, and there was an increasing problem of vagrancy. The welfare of the poor had to be shifted from the Church to the State. Parish poor rates were levied, and, over time, Poor Laws were enacted, which eventually transformed into the Welfare State, acknowledging that the State has a responsibility to look after the vulnerable.

The Dissolution of the monasteries affected a shift of power away from the Church. At a local level, abbots were no longer in the position of power that they once had been, their authority being taken over by the local gentry. On a national scale, the loss of 25 abbots in the House of Lords gave the secular lords a majority, so the Church lost much of its political power.

In addition, the beneficiaries of the sale of the Church's land feared that any return to Catholicism would endanger their new wealth and power, so the landed classes became supporters of the Church of England rather than the Church of Rome. The fear of a return of a Catholic monarch persisted for centuries, and there is still a bar on the throne of the United Kingdom being occupied by a Catholic.

The Dissolution was a blow for English culture and learning. Many of the monasteries housed libraries, which were broken up or destroyed. Hundreds of handwritten and illuminated volumes were lost.

Across the countryside, the ruins of many of the monasteries remain, a stark reminder that even the most powerful institutions can fall from grace.

Monasteries to Visit

- Fountains Abbey, near Ripon in West Yorkshire, was a Cistercian monastery and its large, well-preserved ruins are now part of a UNESCO World Heritage site that is open to the public.
- Like Fountains Abbey, Westminster Abbey is a UNESCO World Heritage site. However, London's most famous abbey escaped ruin after Henry designated it a cathedral. The building is still in use today and is a popular tourist destination.
- The ruins of Glastonbury Abbey, allegedly founded by Joseph of Arimathea and the resting place of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, are open to the public. Nearby on Glastonbury Tor, the last abbot, Richard Whiting, was hanged, drawn, and quartered

for challenging Henry's authority.

- The last religious house to close, Waltham Abbey, is reputed to be the resting place of England's last Anglo-Saxon King, Harold Godwinson.

Films and TV

- At the beginning of 2015, the BBC started screening an adaptation of Hilary Mantel's Wolf Hall novels, charting the rise and fall of Thomas Cromwell. Available on DVD
- David Starkey's Monarchy series for the BBC covers the Dissolution. Available on DVD.
- Thomas Cromwell: The King's Collaborator is a documentary about Cromwell, told from a Catholic perspective. Available on DVD.

Further Research

- Geoffrey Moorhouse has written two well-researched books relevant to the Dissolution: The Pilgrimage of Grace: The Rebellion that Shook Henry VIII's Throne (2002) and The Last Divine Office: Henry VIII and the Dissolution of the Monasteries (2012)
- The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580 (2005) by Eamon Duffy explores the Reformation, including the break-up of the monasteries.
- Tracy Borman is the author of Thomas Cromwell: The untold story of Henry VIII's most faithful servant (2014) tells the story of the architect of the Dissolution.
- C J Sansom's Shardlake novels are set in Henry VIII's reign, and Dissolution (2008) is particularly relevant to this period.
- Hilary Mantel's Wolf Hall trilogy charts the rise and fall of Cromwell.