



# The History of England

## History of England



The **history of England** is one of invasions, cultural [revolutions](#), and change. Let's take a wild at the wild side of this interesting country. It is important to note that the idea of "England" did not appear until the reign of Alfred the Great, but to truly understand the history of England, one must engage with the history of the region as fully as possible.

When the Ice Age ended, and the sea levels rose, the low-lying land of modern-day England was swamped, creating an island. It was first inhabited by "[modern](#)" humans during the Upper Paleolithic period but took its name from the Angles, a Germanic tribe from the Anglia peninsular who settled there in the 5th and 6th centuries.



## Iron Age



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The Iron Age followed the Ice Age when hunting continued as a source of food, but farming technology developed, allowing the nomadic peoples to create settlements. Early farmsteads began to appear on the landscape. Named due to the use of bronze and copper to create tools, weapons, and decorative items, the Bronze Age continued from 2300 to 800 BCE. Sometime during the Neolithic period, which lasted from 4300 to 2000 BCE, large stone structures or Henges, such as Avebury and Stonehenge, were constructed.



However, it is important to note that the identity of the builders of Stonehenge, a popular tourist attraction today, remains a mystery. Around 1000 BCE, the Celts arrived on the scene. Eventually, the Celts came to the attention of the last dictator of the Roman Republic, [Julius Caesar](#).

## Julius Caesar's Invasion of Britain



### Julius Caesar's Invasion of Britain

In 55 BCE, he tried but failed to conquer the British Isles in the name of self-defense. The Romans succeeded in 43, and they ruled the Briton land as a colony for the next few centuries, calling the province Britannia Major.

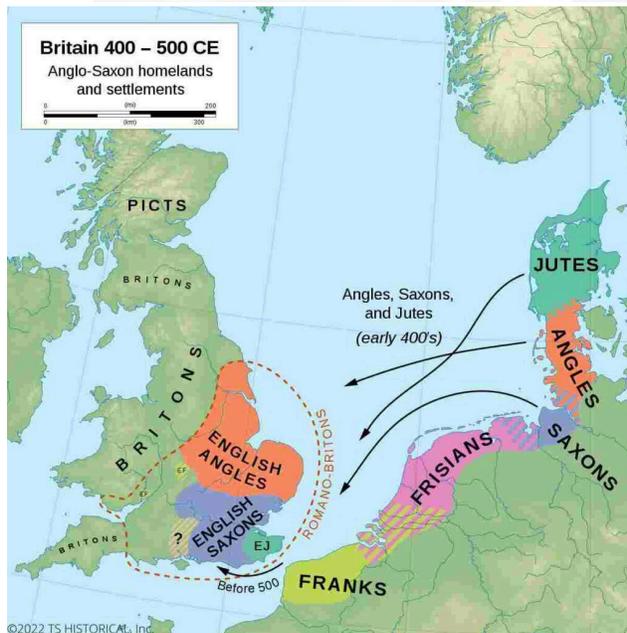
They brought with them elements of their civilization, and constructed roads and cities with forums, baths, aqueducts, and theaters. Traders and craftsmen arrived, and the population grew.



Around 122, Emperor Hadrian commissioned a massive wall between what is modern-day England and Scotland to dissuade attacks from the Picts and Scots. Known as Hadrian's Wall, it marked the boundary between Roman Britannia and the unconquered lands to the north. As the [Roman Empire](#) began to crumble, troops were withdrawn from the [British](#) Isles to defend Rome.

In 410, Rome fell to a Visigoth army, and the former Roman province of Britannia Major was left to fend for itself. Forty years later, around 450, Vortigern, a local ruler, invited Saxon mercenaries (hailing from [Germany](#)) to defend his lands from attacks led by the Picts and Scots. At the time, the area would have been called something else, and some scholars refer to it as sub-Roman Britain. With the opportunity right in front of them.

## Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain



Spread of Angles (orange) and Saxons (blue) around 500 AD



The Saxons established the first Saxon kingdom of the British Isles. Other mercenary groups invaded, resulting in establishing a patchwork of rival Saxon and Angle kingdoms that were continually at war. These rivalries continued in the era known as the Dark Ages; it is called this because written sources are scarce.

This period was violently ended by the constant invasion of Viking armies, who established settlements and took over Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Eventually, after many battles, the separate kingdoms were unified during the reign of Æthelstan, based on the dream of Alfred the Great, and a united England was created.

In 1066, on the death of Edward the Confessor, one of the last Anglo-Saxon English kings, three men vied for the English crown: Harold Godwinson, the man who took the throne, Harald Hardrada, King of Norway, and William of [Normandy](#).

This rivalry led to two invasions. Harold defeated the Viking army at Stamford Bridge but was later defeated by William at Hastings, who, upon Harold's death, crowned himself king on Christmas Day, 1066. To control the defeated Saxons, William gave vast tracts of the land to his Norman lords and constructed several large stone castles.

To raise money, he instructed that a detailed inventory be taken of all English lands, an undertaking that became the Domesday Book. In 1199, John I of England took the throne. However, the barons disputed his many demands.

In 1215, they presented the King with an ultimatum, a document known as the Magna Carta. The year after its signing, King John died, and in 1216, his son, nine-year-old Henry, inherited the crown. In the mid-14th century, England was scourged by the plague, known as The [Black Death](#), responsible for killing around one-third of the European population.



## Bloodiest Conflicts in Europe



The 14th century also witnessed one of the bloodiest conflicts in Europe up until that point: the Hundred Years War. This conflict between England and [France](#) continued for, well, you might not guess it, but 116 years, finally ending in the mid-15th century.

This was followed quickly by another drawn-out conflict known as the Wars of the Roses, in which the House of Lancaster and the House of York went toe-to-toe for dynastic supremacy.

In 1485 – when Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field – the Tudor dynasty began. Henry VII ruled wisely, but after his son Arthur died, he decreed that his younger son, also called Henry, should marry Arthur's widow, Catherine of Aragon.

Henry VIII became king not long before his marriage to Catherine, and after a little over 20 years of marriage and only producing one daughter, Mary and Henry divorced



Catherine for not producing a male heir. To ensure the divorce, he broke away from the Catholic Church and declared himself the head of the [Church](#) of England.

Couple with this was Martin Luther's Reformation, and thus began a long cycle of religious persecution in Europe, in which the Catholics wanted to oust the Protestants – and vice versa.

Though it sounds a bit like a soap opera, drama ensued in Henry VIII's search for an heir. After his divorce from Catherine, Henry married Anne Boleyn. This marriage resulted in another daughter, Elizabeth, and he had Anne tried for treason just a few years later.

She was executed at the Tower of London. Henry VIII married six times. During his third marriage to Jane Seymour, he fathered a son named Edward. Jane died shortly after her son was born, and eventually, Henry died as well. Edward, who was nine years old, inherited the crown. When he died at the tender age of 15, the crown passed to his cousin Jane Grey, who was forcibly deposed after just nine days by Mary,

Edward's elder half-sister, wanted England to revert to Catholicism. She died childless, leaving Elizabeth to become Queen. During the reign of Elizabeth I, which included most of the latter half of the 16th century, the navy established by Henry VIII developed into England's major form of defense and became the means through which the English explored, colonized, and traded around the globe.

This prosperous period is often called "England's Golden Age" or "the Elizabethan Era." It should be noted that during the 16th and early 17th centuries, the British colonialist enterprises started coming into their own. This attributed to a rapid increase in England's wealth.

Elizabeth never married. Dying, she indicated that she wanted James VI of Scotland to succeed her, and so, in 1603, James VI of Scotland became James I of England. His debts and Catholic baptism were the sources of some contention, giving rise to the infamous assassination attempt known as the Gunpowder Plot. After his death, his successor and son, Charles, took the throne.



Charles believed God had made him King, and due to that belief, he did not trust the English Parliament. Between 1629 and 1640, he dismissed it, choosing to rule by royal decree, a situation that led to the English Civil War.

### King Charles I executed for treason





In 1649, Charles I was tried, found guilty of treason and beheaded. The war ended when Cromwell's Parliamentarian New Model Army defeated King Charles II's royalists at the Battle of Worcester on 3rd September 1651.

Charles II was exiled, and the monarchy was replaced with the Commonwealth of England and then the Protectorate under the personal rule of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell died in 1658, and his son, Richard, became Lord Protector, but he lacked his father's talents. He eventually resigned, and Parliament arranged for Charles II to take the throne.

In 1685, when the Catholic James II took the throne, several English politicians objected and wrote to William of Orange, a popular Protestant who had married James II's daughter. He accepted the offer, came to Brixham, and began a march on London. Before he arrived, James II fled to France, although not without some difficulties. He was first captured before being allowed to flee the country. William of Orange was crowned alongside his queen, Mary II.

The couple ruled jointly until Mary's death. William lived for several more years, dying in 1702, which was when Mary's sister, Anne, ascended to the throne. When Anne died in 1714, the Georgian period began, named after the four Hanoverian Kings – George I-IV, and included the short reign of William IV.

The term is used to describe the social and political history, architecture, and fashions between 1714 and the 1830s. The industrial revolution began around 1760 and lasted well into the 1840s, making England one of the richest countries in the world. However, it was also the period when England lost control of its [American](#) Colonies.

Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, aged 18, and she came to be the ruler of Great Britain, Canada, [Australia](#), [India](#), New Zealand, and parts of Africa.

Her rule heralded an unprecedented series of inventions and discoveries. When she died in 1901, her reign had seen the invention of steam power, industrialization, and major advancements in the arts.

The 20th century began with the death of Victoria and the ascension of her son, Edward. Edwardian England was a period of decadence and enjoyment. However, his



reign lasted only nine years. He died in 1910 and was succeeded by his son, George V. Talking about the 20th century, one can hardly ignore the two Great Wars.

The causation of the First [World War](#), which lasted from 1914 to 1918, was protracted – as each European country found itself dragged into the conflict after Germany declared war on Russia on 1st August 1914 – and on France two days later.

On 4th August, Britain, too, declared war. When it ended in 1918, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the First World War had been the deadliest conflict in human history. After the war, some women, who had worked jobs usually filled by men, were granted the vote in 1918.

Gradually, the net expanded, and voting rights were extended to all women in 1928. Post WW1, England underwent a period of unrest when different industrial workers went on strike for better working conditions and higher wages, leading up to the General Strike of 1926, followed by a financial crash known as the [Great Depression](#).

In January 1936, King George V died and was succeeded by his eldest son Edward VIII. However, Edward had fallen in love with a divorced American woman, Wallis Simpson. Even in the 1930s, a member of the Royal Family was not allowed to marry a divorcee, and Edward refused to break off his relationship.

So, he abdicated, passing the crown onto his brother, George VI. War broke out again in 1939 when England stood firm against the aggression of Nazi Germany under the leadership of [Winston Churchill](#). The war ended in 1945, and the reconstruction of London and England began.



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## The Festival of Britain 1951





In 1951, the Festival of Britain was staged to celebrate national recovery. A year later, George VI passed away. His elder daughter, Elizabeth II, ascended to the throne, and her coronation took place in 1953. The current monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is the longest-lived and longest-reigning monarch in British history.

The 1960s saw a huge social and sexual revolution with the invention of the pill. Groups such as the Beatles led youth culture, and “swinging London” led the world in fashion trends. The decade also saw great technological advances, such as the Moon Landing, to which British engineers had contributed immensely. Other advancements included supersonic flight, the joining of the EEC, and the establishment of London as a global financial center. However, in the second half of the 20th century,

England’s power began to wane as its colonies demanded independence. Today, Britain is but a small portion of its once large empire. After Brexit, it has even withdrawn its membership in the European Union. Only time will tell where its future and global position in the 21st century lies.