British Monarchy Timelines

Plantagenet/Angevin Line (1154-1399)

HENRY II

Henry II (1154–1189) married the strong French woman, Eleanor of Aquitaine. He was king over England and much of France as well as other territories; English rule over Ireland began during his reign. He had tremendous energy and was an effective leader over all the lands he ruled. The Constitutions of Clarendon which he implemented was the beginning of the structure of local government that still is in use today. His sons who succeeded him were not as successful.

RICHARD I

Richard I (1189–1199) was called "Lion Heart" because of his military exploits, especially in the Crusades. He was called "the absent king" because he was so often away in battles. He also worked to keep France in the English fold. He was succeeded by his brother.

JOHN

John (1199–1216) During his reign the Magna Carta was signed, not because he believed in it, but because he was forced to sign it, at Runnymede, by his barons, to right many wrongs in his governance. He lost the Angevin (French) inheritance his father had attained.

HENRY III

Henry III (1216–1272) was named for his grandfather. He also married a French woman. Unfortunately he was a weak ruler. He was stronger on aesthetics; his greatest achievement was the restoration of Westminster Abbey. During the reigns of Henry III and Edward I, II, & III, there was marked development of Parliament as a governing body; the seeds of the House of Commons began in 1265. Henry's son became the next king.

EDWARD I

Edward I (1272–1307) also married an Eleanor (of Castile, in Spain). He fought in a Crusade. His hand guided the formation of the British legal system and gave Parliament more power. Wales became annexed under the crown. His fourth son was born in Wales and was the first to be called "Prince of Wales." His son, the Prince of Wales, succeeded him.

EDWARD II

Edward II (1307–1327) was a weak and frivolous king, never gaining control over the land, but was himself controlled by his flawed and immature personality. Parliament eventually deposed him as king in favor of his son. Edward II was later murdered.
EDWARD III

Edward III (1327–1377) Sometimes called "The Perfect King" because of his charm and chivalry. Because he was only 15 when he was crowned he became a pawn in the ensuing power struggle. Later he took to battle as a way to emulate the Arthurian legend he'd studied and scored significant military victories. His son, the "the Black Prince" died valiantly in battle. Another son, John of Gaunt, did not live up to the standards set for him. The crown went to the king’s grandson, Richard.

RICHARD II

Richard II (1377–1399) was the last of the Plantagenet line. As his father had died in battle, Richard II followed his grandfather Edward III, to the throne. Again, he was too young to take over the throne (crowned at age 10), so was governed by ambitious guardians in the early years of his reign. He showed some strengths in several incidents and seemed likely to be a fine king. Later he became despotic and revengeful. He warred with some of the members of his own court and slid into disfavor. His cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, fought him and eventually captured and imprisoned him. Because of the unpopularity of Richard, Henry was accepted as king and began the Lancaster line. Richard died in captivity. His name is the title of a Shakespeare play.

There is disagreement amongst historians about which monarch was the final Plantagenent. Some include the houses of Lancaster and York, who fought in the War of the Roses, in the Plantagenet line, as the last of the Plantagenet monarchs. Both families had roses in their family crests, thus the phrase, "Wars of the Roses".

Lancaster Line (1399-1461)

HENRY IV

Henry IV (1399-1413) Henry was always troubled by the fact that he had taken the throne by conquest and was a usurper, and was continually defending his title. He was a "self-made" king. Shakespeare wrote him into a play, "Henry IV" parts 1 & 2. He was in several battles, mainly over a Welsh rebellion. Though he secured his position as king he had not the temper of a usurper. All the wars and battles diminished his health. His son followed him.

HENRY V

Henry V (1413 –1422) He turned his attentions to the re-conquest of France. Shakespeare also wrote him into a play, "Henry V", which extolled his ability, bravery, and consideration for his soldiers, no longer the wastrel, "Prince Hal," of "Henry IV." The Battle of Agincourt is still regarded historically as a remarkable battle; it was a high point in English military history. These battles were amongst those of the Hundreds Years' Wars with France (ends 1453).
HENRY VI

Henry VI (1422–1461) was not as energetic nor interested as his father was in soldiering. He cared only for religion and books, founding Eton, and King’s College, Cambridge. He was completely ineffective as king. Because of that, as well as his mental health problems, some of his family members began vying for the throne in what became known as the Wars of the Roses (1455–1487) – brothers who were descendants of Edward III each claimed power – The Duke of York vs the Duke of Lancaster. In his last eight years Henry was continually embattled for the throne. His Yorkist nephew won the prize.

York Line (1461-1485)

EDWARD IV

Edward IV (1461–1483) He became the first in the York line. As the son of the Duke of York who was killed in battle, Edward was the nearest in line to take the throne. Though Henry VI was still alive, he was not in his right mind and could not serve. After 10 years of battles Edward became king in his own right. He seemed to have the visible requirements for a king and had been proved in battle, especially in France. He was genial and tended to his kingly tasks, while enjoying the fruits of life excessively. His behavior caused his early demise.

RICHARD III

Richard III (1483–1485) Edward IV’s brother, Richard of Gloucester, was the last York. Through scheming and manipulation, he eventually assumed the throne after his brother. Richard was designated as Protector of the twelve-year-old child of Edward IV, who would have been Edward V, if he had been crowned. But he and his younger brother, nephews of Richard, were taken to the Tower before the prince could be crowned, and they never left that place. It is assumed, but not proved, that the two youngsters died at the command of their unscrupulous and unpopular uncle, and he became king. His short reign was troubous. He died in battle at Bosworth field in combat with the victorious army of the Welshman Henry Tudor, who then became the first Tudor king.

Tudor Line (1485-1603)

HENRY VII

Henry VII (1485–1509) Henry Tudor descended from the Lancaster line and he married Elizabeth, from the York line. With their marriage the Wars of the Roses came to an end as the families were reconciled. He was a successful king. He and his wife had two sons (the first one died early) and two daughters. All the succeeding monarchs are descended from this couple, from son Henry, and from one of their daughters who married a Scotsman.
HENRY VIII

Henry VIII (1509–1547) Henry had six wives (divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived) but only three children, all of whom succeeded to the throne. His strong abilities and personal qualities of intelligence, creativity, and statecraft collided with his hubris. To attain his goal of a male heir he challenged the Pope, broke with Rome, and thereby changed the path of religion in England. In 1534 Parliament declared Henry the supreme head of the Church of England. Though he yearned for a male heir, his only son reigned for just six years.

EDWARD VI

Edward VI (1547–1553) son of Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour, was only ten when he came to the throne, so the country was ruled by a regent. Protestant doctrines held sway. The first Book of Common Prayer was introduced. Edward was never strong and his half-sister took the throne when he died at age sixteen.

MARY I

Mary I (1553–1558) The first child and daughter of Henry VIII was born of a Spanish Catholic mother, Catherine of Aragon, and never gave up that religion. Mary attempted to turn the country back to Catholicism and tried to rid the country of Protestants and Protestant trappings. Her method of disposing of her opposition was to burn them at the stake, thus earning the name, "Bloody Mary," and losing popular support. Her brutality poisoned the people for Catholicism. None were dismayed at her death after five years, and her half-sister became queen.

ELIZABETH I

Elizabeth I (1558–1603) became the greatest monarch of the Tudor line. She favored religious toleration. Elizabeth never married, preferring to rule on her own. She maintained she was married to England. The people adored her. She was nicknamed "Gloriana," a patriotic title that described her personal style of royalty. England's power and purse greatly thrived while she was in power and her 45-year reign was called "The Elizabethan Age." Shakespeare wrote during this period, accentuating a "Golden Age" in English history, also exemplified by the extraordinary defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Stuart Line (1603-1714)

[Elizabeth Tudor had no offspring. Therefore the crown passed to the Stuart family in Scotland. Henry VIII's sister, Margaret, had married James IV of Scotland, and later, Archibald Douglas. She had children by both men. The grandchildren of these marriages married each other years later – Mary, Queen of Scots, to Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley. The marriage did not last long but they had a son who became James VI of Scotland. He was made king of England when Elizabeth I died, becoming the first Stuart, James I.]
JAMES I

James I (1603–1625) James, a Protestant, married Anne of Denmark, a Catholic. He believed in and wrote treatises on the 'Divine right of Kings.' He was an intellectual and wrote books and poetry thus contributing to the English literary tradition. He was responsible for having the Wycliffe and Tyndale Bibles translated into a new version of the Bible in English, giving the world the King James Bible.

CHARLES I

Charles I (1625–1649) followed his father. He married a French Catholic woman but was himself Protestant. Like his father, he was also certain that royalty had divine right to govern, and ruled without Parliament for eleven years, though he lacked political expertise. This autocratic style eventually caused such consternation that a civil war broke out in 1642 between supporters of the Crown (the Cavaliers) and supporters of the Parliament (the Roundheads). Seven years later in 1649, Charles was captured, sent to the Tower, and beheaded. It was the only public execution of a monarch. There followed ten years of a "Protectorate" headed by the Puritan, Oliver Cromwell. Following his death, Cromwell's son, Richard, succeeded him for a year. With their stern rule the Cromwells lost the people's confidence, and by 1660 the eldest son of the executed king was called back from exile in Holland by Parliament to re-establish the monarchy.

CHARLES II

Charles II (1660–1685) He was crowned in the year of his return to England from Holland. The country was delighted to have a king again, and to throw off the strictures of the Puritans. Charles' 25-year reign was called "The Restoration." There was a return to plays, balls, sports, banqueting, etc. He tried to keep religious toleration but was challenged in that by his Catholic brother, James, and some in Parliament. His Portuguese wife, Catherine of Braganza, conferred on England as a part of her dowry, the port of Bombay, giving England the entry to their eventual colonizing of India. She also brought two chests of Tea, the first seen in the country, and the affinity for tea captured the nation. As they had no children, Charles was succeeded by his brother.

JAMES II

James II (1685–1688) James, a Catholic, was not popular with the people or Parliament because of his inflexible stance on his religion as well as issues of governance. Eventually Parliament asked James' Protestant daughter, Mary, to take over from her father. She and her husband, William, came to the throne after what was called "The Glorious Revolution." James was exiled to France. Parliament then determined that thereafter no Catholic could be the monarch.
WILLIAM III AND MARY II

William III and Mary II (1689–1702) Mary's Dutch husband required that he govern equally with her and they became the only dual monarchy in English history. The "Glorious Revolution" was a bloodless turnover, and it guaranteed that Britain would be a Protestant country. There was a significant battle in Ireland, The Battle of the Boyne, in 1689, when James tried to regain the throne, but the defeat of his army caused him to flee the country to France, forever. The Boyne battle had far reaching repercussions in Ireland. Because William and Mary had no children, Mary's sister, Anne, became Queen.

ANNE I

Anne I (1702–1714) She married George of Denmark. Anne's reign was marked by many European battles. That was the period of the military rise of John Churchill, later named Duke of Marlborough, after a significant victory at Blenheim in Germany. He was an ancestor of Winston Churchill. None of Anne's children survived to adulthood so it was necessary to reach back in the genealogy to find a family member who was qualified to take the throne.

Hanover Line (1714-1901)

[James I's daughter, Elizabeth, married Frederick V Elector of Palatinate, of the German aristocracy. Her grandchild was asked to take the throne after Anne died, and became George I.]

GEORGE I

George I (1714-1727) never learned to speak English. The position of Prime Minister was invented to enable the king to know what Parliament was doing. Robert Walpole was given the post. This was a relatively peaceful period in which England prospered in sea power, commerce and colonies. Though German by birth, George F. Handel lived in London by this time and his "Water Music" was first performed in 1717 on the River Thames for the king.

GEORGE II

George II (1727-1760) was born in Germany, and had a German wife when the family moved to England, and he did learn English. The king's influence in parliamentary affairs had declined by this time and the power of the Prime Minister, the same Mr. Walpole, increased. The PM persuaded the king to his view that a prosperous country was a peaceful one, and he emphasized commerce instead of foreign entanglements. Later there were wars, particularly the Seven Years War (1756–1783), and North America became a battleground, mostly in Canada. His own eldest son died early and the throne went to the grandson of George II, also named George.
GEORGE III

George III (1760-1820) was grandson to George II and was the most prominent of the Hanovers and the first one to grow up speaking English. His reign is one of the longest and most eventful, including the loss of the American colonies. One line he wrote in his diary has become well known, "April 17, 1776 – Nothing important happened today." In Concord, Massachusetts, however, there was a different view of that day. The French Revolution also occurred during this period. The king went in and out of good health several times in his later years, compromising his ability to rule. His eldest son, the Prince of Wales, was named Regent, but was incapable of filling that role effectively. The king's virtuous and steady manner, when he was well, endeared him to the people, unlike his son, who later became king.

GEORGE IV

George IV (1820–1830) followed his father but only came to the throne at age 58 after being Regent for his father for ten years. However, his political ability was nil. His life was spent in much idleness, with excessive money spent on himself and his friends and their activities. The people held him in contempt for his selfish and spendthrift ways and by the time he died his conduct had diminished the royal reputation.

WILLIAM IV

William IV (1830–1837), also a son of George III, was no better at kingship than his brother. Though he had a successful naval career before taking the throne at age 65, those qualities did not transfer to his next post as king. While the people despised his brother, they found William ridiculous because of his lack of dignity and odd behaviors. It is thought that he may have had a shadow of the insanity of his father.

VICTORIA

Victoria (1837–1901) She was the last surviving grandchild of George III, and became Queen at age 18. From the beginning, she was impressive in her manner and performance. She had a very happy marriage to her German cousin Albert. He was a valued aid to her in her job as Queen. Britain surged ahead as a world power during her reign. She became Empress of India, and England had a vast empire spanning the globe: in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Her influence was strong even though she was a constitutional monarch with limited powers. The early death of her husband when she was 42, proved calamitous, as she became a virtual recluse afterwards. But she lived on until age 81. Her name defined the age, "The Victorian Era." At the time of her death many of her subjects had known no other monarch, for her reign was the longest to date. She was known around the world. It was said, "The sun never set upon the British Empire."
House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1901-1910)

EDWARD VII

Edward VII (1901–1910) He was the second child of Queen Victoria and was fifty when he came to the throne. Though a family man, married to Alexandra of Denmark, he was seen as a playboy. While waiting to be king, he was given no training for kingship. His style made him quite popular after Victoria's seriousness. The term, "Edwardian Age," was applied to his reign, and the meaning has been taken as a frivolous one, the opposite of the previous era. He was also called "The Peacemaker," traveling widely and attempting to promote international friendship.

Windsor Line (1910-Present)

GEORGE V

George V (1910–1930) He was the second son of Edward VII, and became heir to the throne on the early death of his elder brother. He married his brother's fiancée. During his reign the Ulster-Irish renewed their push for Home Rule. Outrage with the Germans boiled up before WW I and the king changed the family name to Windsor. The war cancelled the Ulster challenge. He was a man with fine qualities, who did not incline toward governing as much as representing his subjects.

EDWARD VIII

Edward VIII (1936) He was the first son of George V. He created great consternation by renouncing the throne, an unheard-of act. It was because he wanted to marry a woman who would not have been allowed to be queen because she was divorced. (She was also an American.) They married and lived in exile, taking the title of Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

GEORGE VI

George VI (1936–1952) He was the brother of Edward. He was an unlikely candidate for king and had not been prepared for it. He and his wife, Queen Elizabeth, had two daughters. During his reign WWII took place and the royal family gained prestige and the affection of the population for their war efforts. When the first daughter became Queen, her mother became known as the Queen Mother.

ELIZABETH II

Elizabeth II (1952– ) She has overseen the decline of the British Empire, which has taken place since the end of WWI. Those nations have been absorbed as sovereign independent members into the Commonwealth. Britain is now a leading member of the European Union. The Queen enjoys the second longest reign after Victoria, so far, and is given great approval as a monarch.