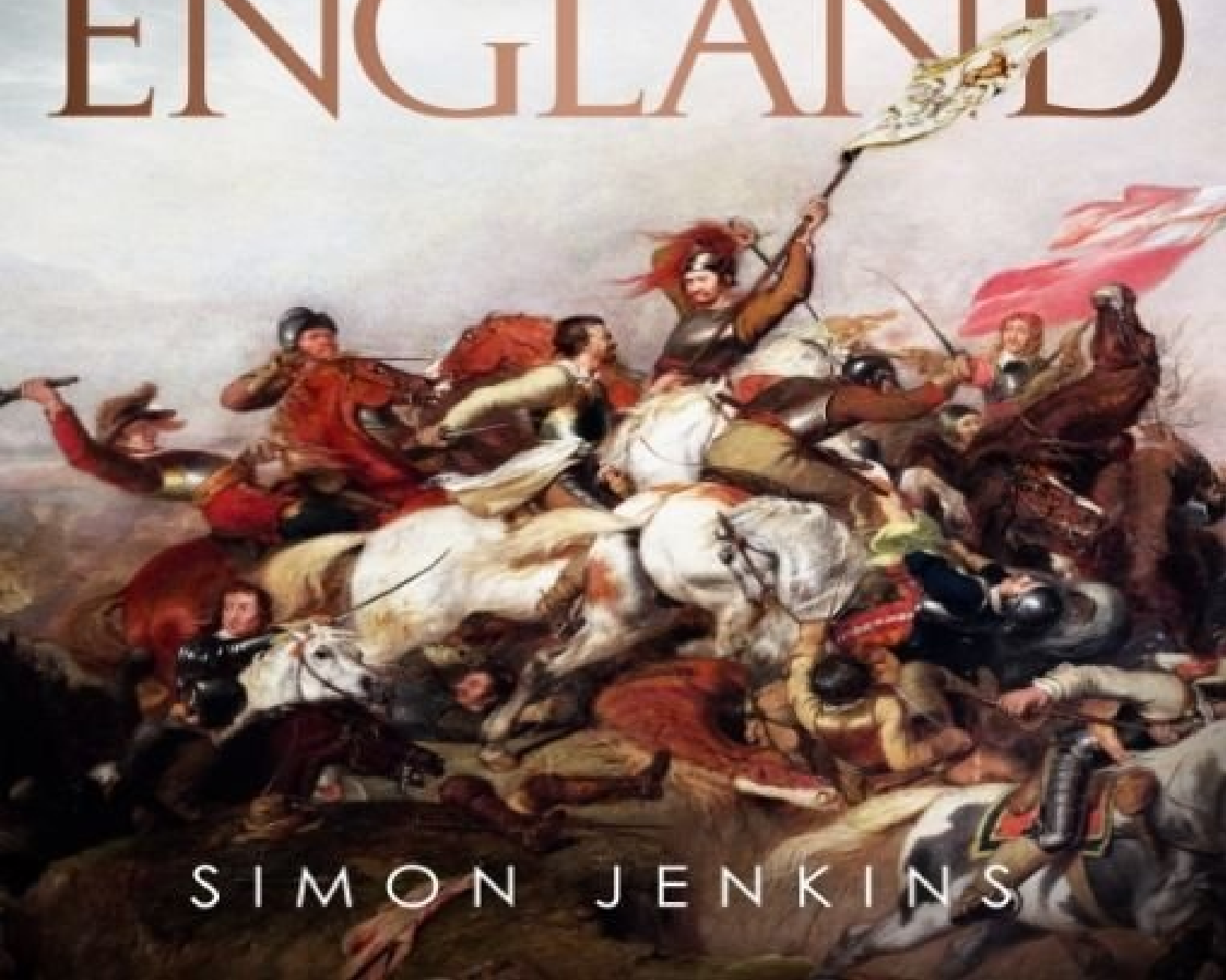
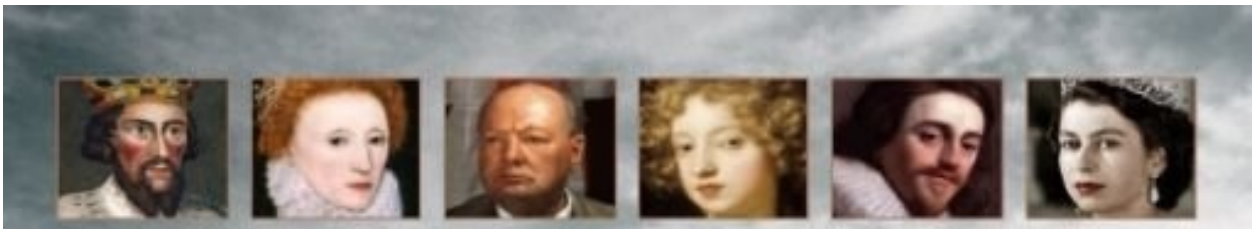
THE GLORIOUS STORY OF A ROWDY NATION

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLAND

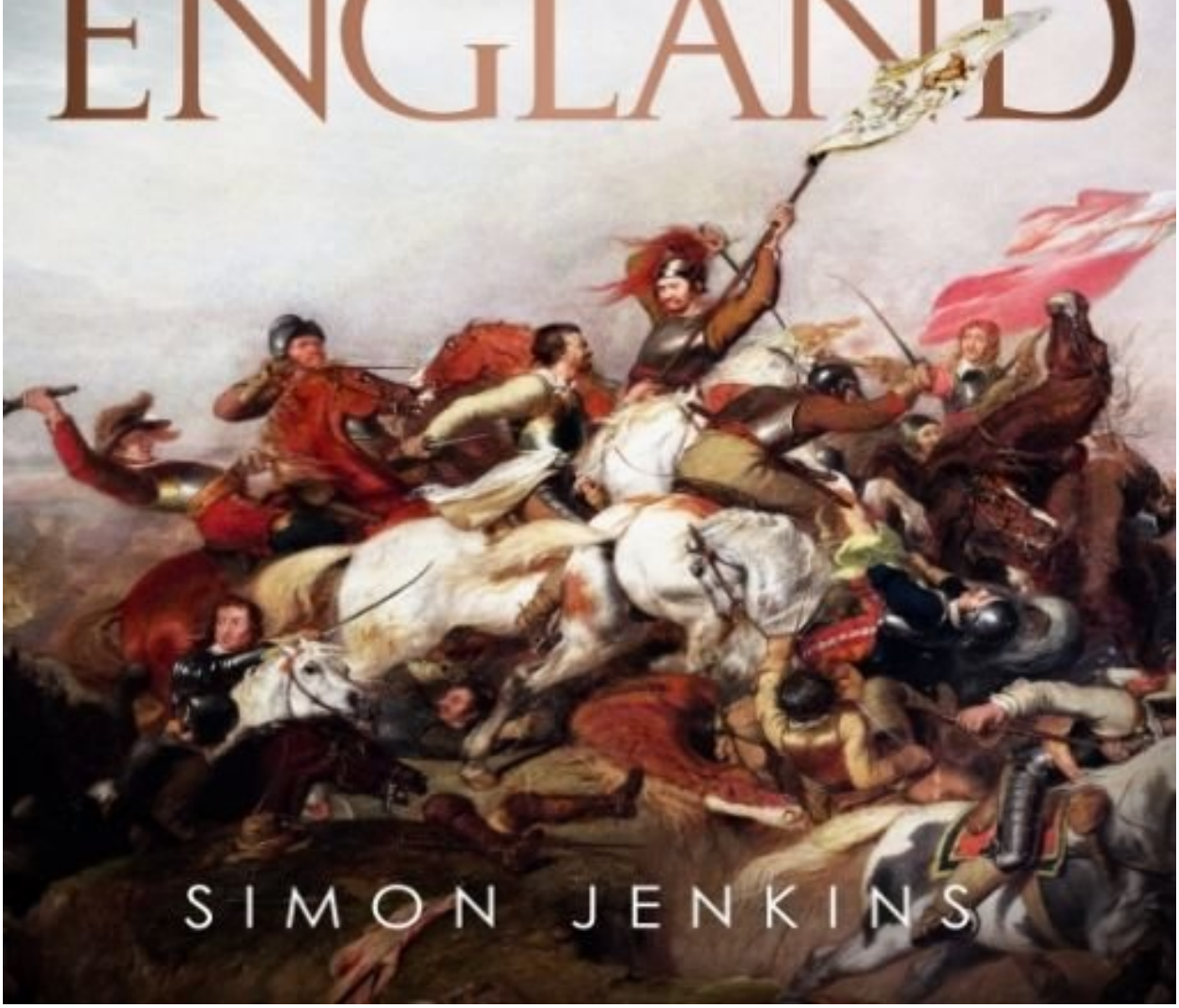


SIMON JENKINS



THE GLORIOUS STORY OF A ROWDY NATION

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLAND



SIMON JENKINS

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLAND

THE GLORIOUS STORY OF A ROWDY NATION

SIMON JENKINS

PUBLICAFFAIRS
NEW YORK

Table of Contents

Also by Simon Jenkins

England's Thousand Best Churches
England's Thousand Best Houses

Introduction

~

I HAVE ROAMED ENGLAND all my life. I have climbed Cornwall's cliffs, wandered Norfolk's marshes and walked the Pennine Way. I know England's cities and towns, churches and houses. For all that, until recently I did not really know England, for I was not aware of how it came to be. My England was a geographical stage set, a backdrop for events and characters familiar from my childhood: Alfred the Great, the Norman conquest, Magna Carta, Agincourt, Henry VIII's wives, Good Queen Bess, Cromwell, Gladstone, Disraeli, the Great War, Winston Churchill. Each stood as a magnificent moment in time, but they did not join up. They lacked a narrative.

I set out here to tell that narrative as simply as possible. I was helped by finding it exhilarating. England's history, its triumphs and disasters, must be the most consistently eventful of any nation on earth. Its origins lie in the Dark Ages, and possibly before, in the occupation of the eastern shores of the British Isles by Germanic tribes from the continent. They brought with them the name of Anglii, probably from the 'angle' of the coasts of Germany and Denmark. Their settlement on the north-east coast was named Angle-land and later England. These newcomers quickly drove the earlier inhabitants, so-called 'ancient Britons', to the west and north, to beyond Hadrian's Wall, the Welsh uplands and the Irish Sea, forming boundaries of England that have remained roughly constant ever since.

The English were themselves invaded by Vikings and by Normans. But while they had obliterated their British predecessors, they kept their Anglo-Saxon culture and language through all subsequent incursions. They were astonishingly resilient, aided by the security of an insular

geography and the seafaring enterprise often shown by island peoples. They quickly evolved a common language, common laws and a common system of government, rooted in a tension between the Saxon autonomy of ‘kith and kin’ and the Norman tradition of central authority. That tension is a leitmotif of my story. England was a nation forged between the hammer of kingship and the anvil of popular consent, a consent regularly withheld, not least by the Celtic half of the British Isles which came to form the first ‘English empire’. The result was such conflicts as led to Magna Carta, the baronial wars of Henry III and the Peasants’ Revolt, culminating in the religious and political revolutions of the Tudors and Stuarts. These revolutions resolved into a constitutional monarchy subject to a parliamentary democracy that was to prove the most stable in Europe.

The story was not always happy. Relations with France, the land of the Norman conquerors, were mostly dreadful, with conflict throughout the Middle Ages and again in the eighteenth century. Most British rulers understood the need for a defensive rather than aggressive stance towards the outside world. Yet from the Plantagenets to the elder and younger Pitts, the craving for overseas domain rarely dimmed. It led Britain to amass the largest empire the world had ever seen. It brought much glory and helped bind together the peoples of the British Isles in a ‘united kingdom’ of shared endeavour, whose legacy continues to this day. But the British empire came at a price and lasted barely two hundred years. In the twentieth century Britain’s global dominance passed to its offspring, America, leaving behind as a tidemark the extent of spoken English. Britain then declined, to become a relic of its former greatness and something of a poseur as a world power, its sovereignty compromised by European government and by the disciplines of a global economy. I return to these themes in my epilogue.

This is specifically a book about England. I regard Wales, Scotland and Ireland as countries with their own histories. They have spent less than half their existence as components of

a union of ‘Great Britain and Ireland’, an embrace that tends to subordinate them in conventional histories of Britain. But England is a country in its own right, different from its neighbours and with a people who call themselves English in differentiation from Scots, Welsh and Irish. Only when referring to all these collectively do I use the terms Britain and Britons. Indeed England is now part of two confederacies, of the United Kingdom and of the European Union, with separate assemblies and variable tiers of sovereignty. To be British and to be European is to be a legal member of one of those unions, and to become British is to sign a piece of paper. To be English is more a matter of self-definition, identifying with a distinctive culture and outlook as well as geography. To become English is a matter of assimilation, which can take a few years or a few generations. The genius of Englishness is that it encompasses all origins and races, but in a culture specific to the territory defined by the original Anglo-Saxon occupation.

The English have never been good at describing themselves. In the age of imperial confidence they did not feel the need. Today most of them dislike seeing themselves as Europeans, but they are no better at defining themselves as against their Celtic neighbours. They waged wars of suppression against Wales, Scotland and, with peculiar brutality, Ireland. At the start of the twenty-first century they find themselves with Ireland mostly detached and Scotland and Wales semi-detached, politically as well as culturally. The English component of the United Kingdom is thus left in a strangely anaemic limbo. It has no parliament or distinctive political institutions of its own. To refer to England and the English as distinct from Britain and the British is often treated as hostile to the cosmopolitanism implied by the union, even as racist. The English flag of St George has acquired a tinge of chauvinism and xenophobia and been adopted by the far right. I find this absurd. England is a country entitled to define itself and take pride in doing so. I believe that definition should begin with a narrative of its history.

To some, history is a matter of chance, to others it is

fashioned by heroes and villains, and to others it is buried in geography, economics, even anthropology. There are many ways of a telling a nation's story, with a current fashion for the personal and controversial. There are histories social, cultural, 'popular' and, in England's case, imperial. But a short history can only be selective, and the selection will be mostly devoted to politics. A nation is a political entity and its birth and development form a narrative of those who deployed power within it, be they monarchs, soldiers, politicians, the mob in the street or, more recently, the mass of voters. I regard history as more than a straight chronology but as links in a chain of cause and effect. It is this chain that holds the secret of how England came to be where it is today.

The Conqueror’s Children

1087 - 1154

THE INSTITUTIONS OF a medieval state were rarely strong enough to survive a monarch’s death unchanged. For all the rituals of inheritance and anointment, power defaulted to military strength. The death of the Conqueror left his eldest son, Robert Curthose (or short-stocking), inheriting the senior family domain of Normandy, while the next son, William, took the richer property of England. Known as Rufus from his ruddy complexion, William II (1087 – 1100) was a competent soldier but lacked his father’s self-discipline. He raced from Rouen to be crowned in Westminster before any rival might get there first, and then courted popularity by giving much of his father’s treasure to the church, plus £100 to each shire to be given to the poor.

The style of the Anglo-Norman court changed abruptly from the Conqueror’s spartan militarism to Rufus’s effete extravagance. He was openly infatuated with a Norman clerk, Ranulf Flambard, with whom he ruled and filled the court with French fashion in clothes, entertainment and architecture. Building began on the fortress cathedral of Durham and later on Westminster Hall by the Thames, probably the biggest buildings, ecclesiastical and secular, in northern Europe at the time. Such spending demanded an increasingly severe fiscal policy. Rufus confiscated the revenues of all heirs inheriting under age. When the archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc, died in 1089, Rufus left his post vacant to pocket the Canterbury income.

During the instability following the Conqueror’s death, the lords of the Welsh and Scottish ‘marches’, or borders, took

quasi-autonomous power from the monarch, symbolised by Goodrich castle on the Wye.

More serious, the new lords of the Welsh marches were allowed to raid deep into Wales, destroying the Conqueror's careful treaties of autonomy with its princes. As a result, for three centuries Wales was to be a thorn in the side of Norman monarchs. Lanfranc's eventual successor, the erudite Bishop Anselm, quarrelled with the king over money, the 'sinfulness' of the court and the 'effeminacy' of its fashions. In return the king openly ridiculed the church and summoned a council of barons to decide whether the king or the pope should rule. They carefully opted for the king.

Rufus was soon besieged by plots. His powerful uncle, Odo, rose against him in favour of his elder brother, Robert, with the support of an increasingly independent Anglo-Norman barony, but he was rescued by an unlikely ally. In 1095 Pope Urban II declared the First Crusade and summoned all Europe to set aside domestic quarrels and free Jerusalem from the infidel. All who died would have their sins remitted. The crusade was portrayed as the ultimate expression of faith, fusing religion with a developing cult of chivalry, of knightly valour and romantic love. Kings, nobles and even humble subjects eager for adventure were to find the call to crusade irresistible. It symbolised the magnetic power of the Roman church over the medieval imagination.

Rufus was a competent soldier but no crusader. He offered Robert £6,600 to go to Jerusalem in return for the entire revenues of the Duchy of Normandy in his absence. Robert agreed, the money being delivered to Rouen in sixty-seven barrels. Five years later, with Robert still absent, Rufus was shot with an arrow while hunting in his father's new hunting ground of the New Forest. What was called an accident was almost certainly murder, in the presence of Rufus's younger brother Henry. In an extraordinary scene, Henry and his friends left the corpse by the road (the spot, called the Rufus Stone, now lies off the A31) and galloped to the Treasury at Winchester to claim the crown. The body was found by a charcoal-burner and taken for burial at the cathedral. Henry's

swift coronation in 1100 pre-empted the arrival of Robert's representatives to assert his claim as the elder son.

Henry I (1100 – 35) took after his father, the Conqueror. He dismissed Rufus's favourite, Flambard, and in a coronation charter rescinded Rufus's penal taxes and pledged himself to 'end all oppressive practices'. This charter was to be cited as precursor of Magna Carta. Henry enforced priestly celibacy and insisted on short hair at court. His mistress, Princess Nest ferch Rhys of Deheubarth in Wales, widely celebrated for her beauty, was given to the Norman governor of Pembroke castle as a gesture of reconciliation with the Welsh. The king wed a popular Scottish princess, Edith (renamed Matilda), the only British blood to enter the royal line of England until the fifteenth century. When, a year later, Robert returned from the Holy Land to demand the crown, Henry negotiated a deal whereby each acknowledged the other's sovereignty in their respective domains and the right of succession to each other's lands.

Among Normans no such deals were ever secure. In 1106 Robert reneged and had to be defeated at the battle of Tinchebrai in Normandy, regarded by early historians as a 'return match' for Hastings. Robert was captured and imprisoned for life in Devizes and then Cardiff. Henry went on to marry his daughter, Matilda, to Henry V, the Holy Roman Emperor and king of Germany. The pope even agreed a settlement on church homage, with the English clergy owing allegiance to the king in secular matters but to the pope in church ones.

Like his father, Henry saw the need to put in place institutions of statehood. He was fortunate to have an adviser, Roger of Salisbury, who understood that need. Salisbury was the first in a line of clerical administrators who were to cement the Norman state. He ruled England as 'justiciar' when Henry was campaigning in France, on one occasion blinding and castrating ninety-four minters for debasing the coinage. Salisbury organised the national accounts with a chequer-patterned cloth on which the 'lords of the exchequer' would

assess taxes, rents and fines due to the king each Lady Day, at the end of March. This yielded the present ‘tax year’. The nomenclature of the law was also established. The king’s court of barons was replaced by ‘a court of the King’s Bench’ (hence court of law), with a legal profession residing in ‘inns of court’ along the Strand. Local courts were subject to appeal to the king’s justices travelling on circuit. Henry became ‘the lion of justice’.

All this work came to grief when, in 1120, Henry lost his only legitimate son, William, in the wreck of the royal vessel, the *White Ship*, crossing recklessly in bad weather from Normandy after a night of revelry. It was said that half the Anglo-Norman nobility died aboard. Henry was obliged to declare his daughter, Matilda, his heir and next monarch of England, forcing his barons to swear loyalty to her. Such a succession was doubly insecure. There was no Saxon tradition of female monarchy and, following the death of her husband, Henry V of Germany, the twenty-six-year-old Matilda had been married to the fourteen-year-old Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou. Anjou was a long-standing enemy of Normandy and what might have seemed a sound diplomatic match for a daughter, was considered unacceptable in a future monarch of England. When Henry died in Normandy in 1135, allegedly of a surfeit of lampreys (small eels), the throne was claimed by a cousin, Stephen of Blois, on the basis of an alleged deathbed change of heart by Henry. Stephen was accepted by the church and the citizens of London. Possession was at least half the throne, but Matilda and her husband strongly contested Stephen’s coronation and Anjou declared war on Normandy.

Norman fraternisation with the natives was encouraged: William’s son, Prince Henry, in bed with his mistress, Princess Nest of Wales. He went on to wed a Scottish princess. Such concord did not last and future monarchs married overseas.

Henry I's daughter Matilda failed to seize the throne from Stephen, but founded the Plantagenet line through her son, Henry II.

Though Stephen’s early years were peaceful, he recklessly expropriated the properties of the bishops of Salisbury, Lincoln and Ely, such that when Matilda landed in England in 1139, she found bishops and barons ready to recall their oath to her father honouring her succession. There ensued fifteen years of civil war, justly to be known as the Anarchy. Royal justice gave way to baronial despotism. Stephen continued to enjoy the loyalty due to an established monarch, while Matilda held that of a declared heiress. In 1141, after her supporters defeated Stephen at the battle of Lincoln, Matilda was briefly declared queen, but she was soon besieged in Oxford castle, escaping disguised in a white cape by walking down the frozen

Thames at night to Wallingford. After years of ongoing conflict, in 1148 Matilda returned to Anjou, handing her cause to her teenage son by Geoffrey, Henry of Anjou.

Eleanor of Aquitaine led an army on crusade and divorced her husband the king of France on falling in love with Henry II. This rare portrayal shows her riding with her daughter-in-law.

This young man was to set Europe ablaze. Thick-set and red-haired, he enjoyed physical endurance and ‘a countenance of fire’, described as ‘a face upon which a man might gaze a thousand times and still feel drawn to gaze again’. Through his father he held the lands of Anjou and Maine and through his grandfather, Henry I, he claimed Normandy. He took the sobriquet Plantagenet, after the sprig of broom (*Planta genista*) worn by the house of Anjou on its war helmets.

In 1151, Henry went to pay formal homage for his domains to Louis VII of France. The French king was a pious, humble man while his wife, Eleanor, was tempestuous. She was a ruler in her own right as Duchess of Aquitaine, and by the age of thirty she had led troops in person on the Second Crusade. When she set eyes on the young Henry she was infatuated. She mocked her husband, Louis, as ‘a monk and not a king’ and demanded an immediate annulment of her marriage. In May 1152 she wed Henry, ten years her junior, in her capital of Poitiers, thus uniting an empire that ostensibly ran from Scotland to Spain, ‘from the Arctic to the Pyrenees’. Europe was scandalised, but history was entranced. Passion and politics gave England’s link with France a new lease of life. Despite her age, Eleanor bore Henry eight children and no end of trouble.

With his inheritance contested both in Paris and in London, Henry rose to the occasion. His Angevin knights, many of them hardened crusaders, proved masters of all they encountered. When he landed in England in 1153 with 3,000 soldiers, Stephen did not stand in his way, acknowledging his succession and, in any event, dying within a year. The barons rushed to pay homage to a young soldier who had proved his potency and who offered them what all England now craved, unity and peace.

Henry III and Simon de Montfort

1216 - 1272

IF A REIGN SUCH AS JOHN'S could advance the rights of English people through the charter, what might emerge from the instability normal under a child king? At the moment of John's death, the nine-year-old Henry III (1216 – 72) was in the west country in the guardianship of the Marcher veteran William Marshal, attended by the papal legate Bishop Guala. Marshal now acted with speed, rushing the boy to Gloucester Abbey and crowning him with a ringlet of gold. When John's remaining courtiers caught up with him, they cried at the sight of the pathetic child, 'this tiny spark of minute beauty, the sole hope of the torn kingdom'.

As Marshal realised, an anointed king of whatever age and one approved by the pope was a powerful symbol of legitimacy. Barons and court officials who had sided with the French intruder Louis now rallied to Marshal's authority and Henry's crown. These included such magnates as Hubert de Burgh, Peter des Roches and the head of the royal army, Fawkes de Breaute. Acting as a council they reasserted Magna Carta and by the summer of 1217 had turned the tide against Louis. His forces were defeated in a chaotic battle of mounted knights in the narrow streets of Lincoln, while his navy was beaten by de Burgh off Dover. The prince retired to France to await his succession to the French throne as Louis VIII (1223 – 26). In 1219 the great Marshal died, to be buried in the Temple church in London, where he is represented to this day by an unadorned knightly effigy.

The affairs of state passed, for the first decade of Henry's reign, to Hubert de Burgh, soldier, administrator and father figure to the young king. He restored the administration of Henry II, including the assize circuit and the Court of

Exchequer, while in foreign affairs he sought an economical peace with France. Thus blessed, England in the 1220s blossomed with the works of imported French architects. They brought with them the lofty choirs and lancet windows of the new Gothic style, replacing the heavy lines of Norman Romanesque with the brightly glazed interiors of Salisbury, Lincoln and Wells, drawing on precursors at Chartres and Beauvais. The new choir at Canterbury was completed by a Frenchman, William of Sens, and work began on what became Henry's greatest obsession, rebuilding the shrine of Edward the Confessor at Westminster. These great structures were in stark contrast to the tumbledown wood-and-rubble buildings of medieval English towns. Archbishop Langton welcomed to England the new mendicant 'preaching' friars, the Dominicans in 1221 and the Franciscans in 1224, their asceticism a welcome contrast to the unpopular laxity of the Benedictines.

Despite attempts across Europe to curb the noble craze for tournaments, there was no waning of the Norman cult of chivalry. As the young Henry passed his teens, de Burgh did all he could to restrain any emerging warrior tendencies, but by 1229 the twenty-two-year-old king was beyond his control. Though lacking a talent for soldiering, he craved glory in battle and duly set sail to recover his grandfather's French possessions lost by John. It was a venture in which he failed and at great cost. In 1236 he married Eleanor, the thirteen-year-old daughter of Raymond of Provence, at an extravagant wedding whose dazzling guest list included King Louis IX of France and 300 attendant knights. Eleanor matured into a bright and assertive queen, avaricious for her relatives. Her retinue came from the royal houses of Poitou and Savoy and her family demanded that they be showered with offices and bishoprics. These were precisely the 'aliens' against which Magna Carta had warned. The Poitevins spoke the southern French language of Occitan, leading the barons to protest at the decline of the 'English tongue', by which they meant French. When Eleanor's barge was rowed down the Thames it was pelted with rotten fruit.

Castle building advanced over the thirteenth century under the influence of the crusades. The Marcher lord, Gilbert de Clare, built Caerphilly in Glamorgan, with a network of towers, gates and moats, as a defence against Welsh and English alike.

Henry modelled his reign not on the principles of Magna Carta but on the more autocratic French monarchy. He fulsomely honoured the papacy, remarking that ‘at a time when we were orphaned and a minor, it was our mother, the Roman Church … which placed us on our throne’. He devoted a fifth of the revenues of the English church to the pope, displeasing the bishops. Turning to the barons for support he found them reluctant to advance him funds, though this did nothing to relieve his extravagance. He welcomed at court yet more of his

wife’s Poitevin relatives, and even gave London its first zoo, kept at the Tower. It included a polar bear that swam in the Thames, lions, snakes, a rhinoceros and an elephant. The ostrich died after being fed a diet of silverware. Later visitors had to pay to enter, or bring a cat or dog as food for the lions.

In 1252 the king made a tactical error. He sacked his brother-in-law, Simon de Montfort, from his Gascony governorship, and thus made him a leader of dissident barons on the royal council. De Montfort was son of the headstrong French warrior of the same name and married to Henry’s sister, another Eleanor, widow of the late William Marshal. Like any who declare their opposition to a king, he immediately attracted malcontents, from the barons, from the City of London and from a clergy distressed by Henry’s ‘alien monarchy’. When in 1253 Henry returned to campaign in France, his brother, Richard of Cornwall, found he could not raise the requisite money, and summoned a ‘parlement’, a discussion, composed not just of barons and bishops but, for the first time, of shire representatives. This proto-parliament first met at Easter 1254.

The weakened Henry was now floundering on the wilder shores of diplomacy. He had no sooner made peace with Louis of France than he accepted the pope’s suggestion that his son, Edmund, become king of Sicily and his brother, Richard, be king of Rome. The catch lay in the cost: an astronomical £135,000 for armies to secure the relevant thrones. Facing years of harvest failure and widespread famine at home, the barons said no, and in 1258 seven magnates led by Simon de Montfort swore oaths of loyalty to each other and demanded further reforms of the king. ‘By God’s head,’ said Henry to de Montfort when out hunting in a storm, ‘I fear you more than all the thunder and lightning in the world.’ De Montfort was known to demand that the king be ‘locked up like Charles the Simple’.

The result was a revision of Magna Carta in the so-called Provisions of Oxford. Under them the barons demanded that ‘foreigners’ be expelled from all affairs of state, together with

papal emissaries and overseas bankers. The provisions went beyond a charter of civil liberties to address the structure of monarchical government. A council of fifteen under Simon de Montfort was put above the king's council of twenty-four, accountable to a parliament that would meet three times a year whether or not summoned by the monarch. Its skirmishes with the king moved to crisis in armed conflict, culminating in a scrappy battle outside Lewes in 1264. Henry was decisively beaten and he and his son, Edward, were taken prisoner by de Montfort's forces.

England now had its first taste of parliamentary rule, and it was not a happy one. A month after Lewes, in June 1264, de Montfort summoned a new parliament including two knights from each shire and two burgesses 'elected' from each city. Its purpose was to discuss not just taxes but any matter of public concern. It was thus regarded as the 'first' English parliament, but it did not meet until January 1265, in a field near Kenilworth castle, and dissolved itself within a month. The attendance is uncertain, though there were only five earls and eighteen barons.

De Montfort overplayed his hand. He found, as often before, that England's barons could unite against the king but soon divided among themselves. At Runnymede England had been ready for a House of Lords, but it was not ready for a House of Commons. Having supposedly rid themselves of Henry's 'foreigners', the barons were equally averse to de Montfort's commoners. The Marcher lord, Gilbert de Clare, defected to the king and began a fortress at Caerphilly in Glamorgan, a phenomenal edifice of keeps, baileys and lake moats. The king's son, Edward, escaped imprisonment and summoned support from barons hostile to the new parliament. The result was that, within a year of Lewes in 1265, de Montfort was confronted by the young Edward at the battle of Evesham. The defection of Llywelyn's Welsh horsemen sealed his fate in 'an episode of noble bloodletting unprecedented since the Conquest'. Henry had been carried into battle in a litter as a symbol of legitimacy by de Montfort, and had to plead for his

life after being accidentally wounded. After the battle the peaceable old man professed he dared not look on his rebel son Edward, ‘lest I embrace him’.

De Montfort’s body was dismembered as a symbol of his lost power and his head put on a spike. His supporters held out

Romanticised Victorian depiction of de Montfort and his barons demanding reform of Henry III, leading to the foundation of the modern parliament.

for nine months at Kenilworth castle, rendered impregnable with a ring of defensive lakes. Every means – from plague to excommunication – was used to capture it, but the occupants were eventually allowed to walk free. A new parliament summoned by the king revoked many of de Montfort’s provisions, though the barons ensured that their property rights were revived in the 1267 Statute of Marlborough. This is the oldest parliamentary statute still in effect, ‘ordained in an

assembly of discrete men, both high and low … put in writing to be observed by the inhabitants of the realm for ever'. England was at peace.

Edward the Confessor was revered by Norman monarchs as the true founder of their line. Henry III worshipped him and rebuilt his shrine here in Westminster Abbey.

Henry grew ever more pious in old age, worshipping his hero king, Edward the Confessor, of whom he had murals painted in his sleeping chamber. His gothic rebuilding of Westminster Abbey was completed amid scenes of splendour in 1269. He died in 1272, having ruled after a fashion for fifty-six years. Henry's reign was to prove a high point in the medieval power of barons and parliament. It was followed by three centuries of sometimes tyrannical Plantagenet and Tudor monarchy before parliament was to reassert itself in the seventeenth century. But Magna Carta and de Montfort's parliament had come to pass. To succeeding generations they stood as icons of consent to power, to be cited whenever rulers came to blows with those they ruled.

Map of Britain by Matthew Paris, c. *1250, showing Hadrian's wall and the lands of the Welsh and Scots that the Plantagenet kings attempted to subdue in the thirteenth century.*


SCOCIA: VLTRAMARINA:
AUSTER:
ORIENS
WALLIA
NORTH FOLK
SUFOLK
DORSET
London
Chaner

The Peasants’ Revolt to the Loss of France

1377 - 1453

RICHARD II (1377 – 99) IS OFTEN COMPARED with Edward II, and not only because both are thought to have been homosexuals. Neither was well cast for medieval monarchy. Richard’s coronation was presided over by his uncle, John of Gaunt, and so exhausted the boy that he had to be carried to his banquet asleep. Gaunt’s power incurred such suspicion that the council denied him the formal regency. Instead, a council of twelve, excluding Gaunt, was appointed to face the threat of a nationwide uprising against the poll tax.

This tax had risen to a shilling a head in 1381 and precipitated the Peasants’ Revolt, the first spontaneous rebellion by large portions of Saxon England against their Norman masters. It was composed not of peasants but of disparate groups of craftsmen already protesting against the post-plague statute of labourers, enforcing loyalty to their masters. There was little coherent organisation and the rebels marched to London from different counties in the south-east under leaders whose names were to become left-wing legends, Wat Tyler, John Ball and Jack Straw. Ball’s ironic couplet echoed down the ages: ‘When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?’ For two days in June 1381 anarchy ruled in the City of London. There was no competent authority. The archbishop of Canterbury was murdered at the Tower and Gaunt’s Savoy Palace on the Strand was gutted by fire.

Richard, by then just fourteen, displayed remarkable bravery in riding out virtually alone and against the advice of his council to meet the rebels. He promised to grant them their demands, notably relief from the poll tax and an end to the

lingering bonds of serfdom. The rebels were appeased and met again the following day at Smithfield, but when Tyler approached the king he became involved in an altercation with the mayor, whom he tried to stab. The mayor cut him to the ground in return. In the ensuing pandemonium, the king again rose to the occasion. He offered himself to the mob as ‘your captain and your king’. Though some riots against the tax continued in the provinces, Richard’s apparent compromise restored calm. Once that was achieved, penalties were imposed on the rebels and concessions cancelled as made by a minor ‘under duress’. Indeed, the king was later recorded as declaring, ‘Rustics you were and rustics you are still. You will remain in bondage not as before but incomparably harsher. For as long as we live we will strive to suppress you.’ This was not calculated to appease public opinion.

The Peasants’ Revolt was a rare popular uprising against the English crown. One of its leaders, John Ball, is shown assembling the rebels outside London, all careful to display patriotic standards, including the crusader cross of St George.

Richard II was a generous patron of art. The exquisite Wilton diptych shows him in a pose of extreme piety attended by John the Baptist and Saints Edward and Edmund.

As he matured it was clear that Richard lacked warrior demeanour. He proved delicate and highly aesthetic. His face was described as ‘round and feminine, sometimes flushed’, and his voice ‘abrupt and stammering in his speech’. He displayed a remarkable talent for art and architecture, but also a fatal incompetence at crucial moments in his reign. In 1382 at the age of fifteen, he married Anne of Bohemia, but the king paid more attention to a young courtier, Robert de Vere, Marquis of Oxford. He and Michael de la Pole, a merchant’s son elevated to the earldom of Suffolk, became the king’s constant companions, dominating what would today be a student fraternity rather than a royal court. With Gaunt absent in Spain, opposition to the king quickly formed, led by another royal uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, and by Gaunt’s son by his first marriage, Henry Bolingbroke of Lancaster. Deriding Richard’s friends as ‘rather knights of Venus’ than chivalric warriors, these nobles began a running confrontation with the king, culminating in 1388 in the fall of both Oxford and Suffolk at the hands of a cabal of ‘lords appellant’ led by Gloucester. The pair fled into exile, the humiliated king being unable to protect them.

As during the Peasants’ Revolt, Richard showed sudden resolve, if not tactical sense. Strengthened by Gaunt’s return from Spain, he pointed out to his council that he was now twenty-two and old enough ‘to take hold of my house and household, not to mention my kingdom’. He declared that government throughout the land was now ‘upon his own person’, upsetting the long-standing compromise of Plantagenet kingship. The reprise of Edward II’s feud with the barons did not augur well.

Richard realised a remarkable taste for flamboyance. He had the first widely celebrated English architect, Henry Yevele, complete the hammer-beam roof of Westminster Hall, probably the largest unsupported span in Europe at the time. Lavish banquets attended its opening in 1396. Richard also commissioned the devotional Wilton diptych, a masterpiece of medieval art, including a delicate and pious depiction of

himself. The chancellor, William of Wykeham, restored to power by Richard, founded academies at Winchester and New College, Oxford, and set a new standard of scholastic splendour.

Chaucer's masterpiece, the *Canterbury Tales*, was written at about this time in what was a just recognisable version of early English. In contrast to most European nations at this time, England now possessed the invaluable aid to cohesion, a common tongue. The *Tales* offered a colourful account of late-medieval life in the stories told by pilgrims on their way to Becket's shrine. The poem discussed the Peasants' Revolt and satirised the church, remarking, 'Friars and fiends are seldom far apart.' Like his contemporary Wyclif, Chaucer presented late-medieval England as an open society, prosperous, humorous and questioning of authority. With the Hundred Years War in abeyance, the rich were freed of taxes, and municipal and religious guilds spent copiously on chapels, colleges and ceremonies. England had recovered from the ravages of plague and war, and was emerging as more than a small island off the northern shore of Europe.

In 1397 Richard felt strong enough to take revenge against those nobles who had purged his court of his favourites eight years before. He had his uncle, Gloucester, murdered in France. A committee of eighteen friends replaced the parliamentary council hallowed by Magna Carta and Henry III, and settled a minor dispute between Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, by personally exiling them both abroad. This act was of reckless stupidity, leaving the previously loyal Bolingbroke as enraged as was his father, the elderly Gaunt. In *Richard II*, Shakespeare has Gaunt reflecting on England at the time as:

> This sceptr'd isle … now bound in with shame,
> With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds:
> That England, that was wont to conquer others,
> Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.

When Gaunt died in February 1399, Richard confiscated the entire Lancastrian estates that would have passed to Bolingbroke. Such expropriation, usually a sign of royal desperation, always unsettled the nobility. Unwisely, Richard took the opportunity to cross with a small army to Ireland to quell a revolt, leaving the way open for Bolingbroke to return from exile. He landed in Yorkshire and joined forces with the Percys, earls of Northumberland, intent on ending Richard's tyranny. The king was intercepted in north Wales and taken prisoner to London.

The king was forced, like Edward II, to abdicate on pain of his life. Thirty-three charges were read out against him in parliament, including most plausibly that 'the kingdom was almost undone for default of government and undoing of good laws'. Bolingbroke was crowned Henry IV (1399 – 1413), his usurpation appeased with a vial of holy oil purportedly given to Becket by an apparition of the Virgin Mary. Henry swore to govern not by his own hand, 'nor his voluntary purpose or singular opinion, but by common advice, counsel and consent'. He would be a ruler by general agreement whereas Richard had been a tyrant. But was consent sufficient justification for toppling an anointed monarch?

Chaucer's fictional pilgrims depart from Canterbury. The poem opened a vivid window on the customs, wit and restored prosperity of England half a century after the Black Death.

Henry might be a crowned king but he was a usurper, with his imprisoned predecessor still languishing in Pontefract castle. Irrespective of circumstance, such a situation tore at the continuity and stability of the state. Illegitimacy was to haunt Henry's reign and run as a theme through Shakespeare's history plays of the period. By the following February, Richard was dead, probably through starvation by his gaolers. But Henry was not secure, his crown constantly under threat throughout his reign.

In 1400 this challenge took the form of a charismatic Welsh landowner, Owain Glyndwr, who reacted to a dispute over land by calling on the Welsh to rebel. Glyndwr was a magnet for opposition to Henry and was initially successful. By 1402 he had won support from the Mortimers, earls of March, themselves claimants to Henry's throne, and from the impetuous Henry 'Hotspur' Percy, unwisely rejected by the king as a member of his council, despite the support of his Northumberland clan for his toppling of Richard II. In 1403 Percy marched south to join Glyndwr, but was cut off by the king in person outside Shrewsbury and killed on the battlefield.

By 1404 Glyndwr was holding court across west Wales and

even requesting support from Charles VI of France. He was crowned Prince of Wales in Machynlleth. He also proposed to Mortimer and Percy that they divide the kingdom into three, with Glyndwr taking Wales, Mortimer the south and the Percys the north. The Welsh revolt dragged on for seven more years, ending in 1409 when the rebel fortress of Harlech fell to cannons commanded by Henry's son, the future Henry V; Glyndwr vanished into legend.

Though only forty-five, Henry was by 1413 a sick man, obsessed by plots against his throne. Each revolt meant more executions and more potential enemies. Gradually the king's mind began to fail, convinced that his usurpation was the cause of what he diagnosed as incipient leprosy. In March that year he collapsed in Westminster Abbey and died in its Jerusalem chamber, fulfilling a chivalric prophesy that he would die 'in Jerusalem'. The crown passed to the twenty-six-year-old 'Prince Hal' as Henry V (1413 – 22). A warrior king could still excite a medieval parliament, which abruptly voted funds again to invade France and reassert Henry's ancestral claim to its throne. Feuds were set aside in the quest for glory against the old enemy. A Lollard uprising under a Herefordshire knight, Sir John Oldcastle, was savagely suppressed in 1414 and the following summer Henry sailed for France.

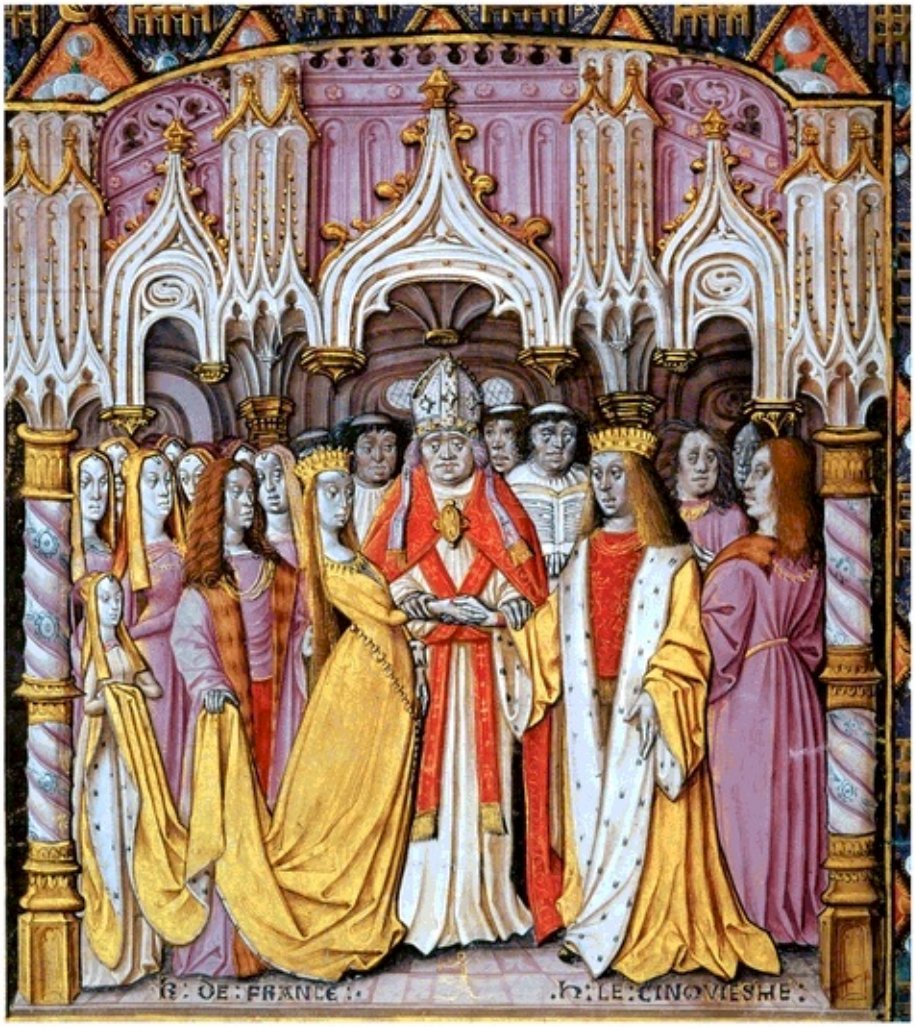
The initial siege of Harfleur was a near disaster, with a third of the English army of 10,000 dying from dysentery. A planned march on Paris was abandoned and Henry, desperate not to return home empty-handed, decided to head north for Calais. There he found his way blocked at Arras by a French army four times the size of his own. He hesitated to fight against such odds, but the price demanded by the French was the loss of his French domains. He decided to fight, relying on the tried-and-tested Welsh longbow men against the French cavalry.

The battle of Agincourt, fought on 25 October 1415, 'for England, Harry and St George', ranks with Trafalgar and Waterloo in the annals of English arms. The English knights were dismounted and spread behind a barricade of hidden stakes, flanked by the same array of archers as had triumphed

at Crécy and Poitiers. The French, constrained by the lie of the land, advanced against a storm of arrows and fell in such numbers that reinforcements could not advance across what became a rampart of men and beasts caught on the stakes. No quarter was given for fear of counter-attack. The flower of French nobility was slaughtered on the field, at a high cost in ransom forgone.

Agincourt was the climactic of English success in the French wars. Yet victory could not be turned to political advantage and it was soon reversed.

The marriage of Henry V to Catherine of France supposedly ended the Hundred Years War, but he died soon after and war continued. Henry is believed to have been the first medieval king who did not speak French.



The psychological impact of Agincourt on both sides was dramatic. The Burgundians firmly allied themselves to the English and recognised Henry V as king of France, as did most of Europe. Henry returned to a hero's welcome, with City aldermen coming to meet him at Blackheath and escorting him for five hours to London Bridge amid shouts of 'King of England and France'. At last England had a victory to celebrate. But it took five years for the French finally to capitulate at the Treaty of Troyes (1420) and Henry to enter Paris in triumph. The mentally disturbed Charles the Mad acknowledged him as his heir, a position secured by Henry marrying Charles's daughter Catherine. Henry had restored the European status of Henry II and Edward III. An English

king was at last acknowledged as ruler of France, ironically the first who was believed not to have spoken French.

As so often in the Hundred Years War, supremacy on the battlefield and in diplomacy proved transient. England was unable to hold in peace what it had won in war. To keep an army on the mainland of Europe was expensive and the king's presence as ruler in Paris was impossible. More serious, Henry was mortal. In August 1422, just seven years after Agincourt, he fell victim to the battlefield curse of dysentery and died. The glittering new empire fell on the inadequate shoulders of his baby son by his new French queen, Henry VI (1422 – 61 and 1470 – 71).

History now added surrealism to tragedy. Charles the Mad died that same year, leaving a ten-month-old baby king as territorially one of the mightiest monarchs in Europe. Henry V had appointed as regents the royal uncles, the Dukes of Bedford and Gloucester, alongside their Lancastrian cousins, the Beauforts of the Gaunt line, led by Edmund, now Duke of Somerset. They had the awesome task of honouring the legacy of Agincourt and suppressing the rival claim to the French throne of the house of Orléans. While Henry V might have risen to such a task, the regents were in no position to do so. Many in France recognised Charles's son, the Dauphin, as king, leaving their bitter rivals, the Burgundians, as loyal to the infant Henry. War duly recommenced between the English and the French.

The succession of the infant Henry VI dissolved the Anglo-French empire won by Henry V at Agincourt, despite his later coronation as king of France in Paris.

After six inconclusive years, a most extraordinary event occurred. In 1429 a seventeen-year-old peasant girl, Joan of Arc, entered the Dauphin’s camp during the English siege of Orléans. Exuding serenity, Joan claimed that saints had appeared to her promising the Dauphin the crown of France, but only if his coronation took place in Rheims Cathedral, deep in enemy territory. After much argument she succeeded in so inspiring the French troops that they forced an English retreat and a French advance on Rheims. There the Dauphin was indeed anointed as Charles VII. Joan was later captured by the Burgundians and sold to the English for ransom. When the

French refused to pay, the baffled English tried her as a heretic for refusing to renounce her miracles and, in 1431, burned her at the stake.

Though the English were still powerful enough to have the nine-year-old Henry crowned king of France at Notre Dame Cathedral, French forces were now sweeping across land supposedly ceded by the Treaty of Troyes. The exhausted English had no answer. In 1435 the Burgundians further undermined them by switching allegiance to Charles, rendering their position so desperate that Somerset sent ambassadors to sue for peace. This was achieved by Somerset's ally, the Duke of Suffolk, securing the French king's fifteen-year-old niece, Margaret of Anjou, as queen for Henry VI in 1445.

Henry had grown into a young man of twenty-three. He was tall, with a long, sad face and simple manner that ominously recalled the mental instability of his maternal grandfather. Both his piety and 'goodness of heart' were unimpeachable and his response to every argument was meekly to advise his councillors to 'make peace'. He went on to found Eton and King's College, Cambridge, obsessed with making their chapels bigger than a cathedral nave. Later generations even sought his canonisation. His wife, however, was of a different mettle. In her mid-teens, she was already pert and opinionated, unschooled in Plantagenet ways and fixated on making a peace with her French homeland. This put her firmly on the side of Somerset and the Beauforts, Lancastrian relatives of the king.

Peace after defeat in war rarely finds favour with English opinion. The king's house of Lancaster was discredited by military failure and rightly suspected of favouring appeasement with France. Parliament asserted its sovereignty and turned to the opposing faction led by the thirty-nine-year-old Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, also a descendant of Edward III with a long-standing claim to Henry's throne. In 1450 a leading Lancastrian, the Duke of Suffolk, was murdered and Somerset imprisoned. In 1453, the battle of Castillon signalled England's final defeat in the Hundred Years War. For the first time French cannons were deployed in sufficient numbers to mow

down an English army and the age of the longbow appeared over. On hearing of the defeat, Henry had a complete mental collapse. York, as heir apparent, assumed the protectorate with the full support of parliament and took up the reins of government. The Lancastrian cause seemed doomed.

Yet no sooner had York triumphed than, to widespread incredulity, the twenty-one-year-old queen was found to be pregnant and gave birth to a boy. To further astonishment, the king recovered a degree of sanity, sufficient to restore the queen and Somerset to their former ascendancy. York was forced to vacate his new position at court and the stage was set for the most savage civil war in English history.

Reformation, Counter-Reformation

1547 - 1558

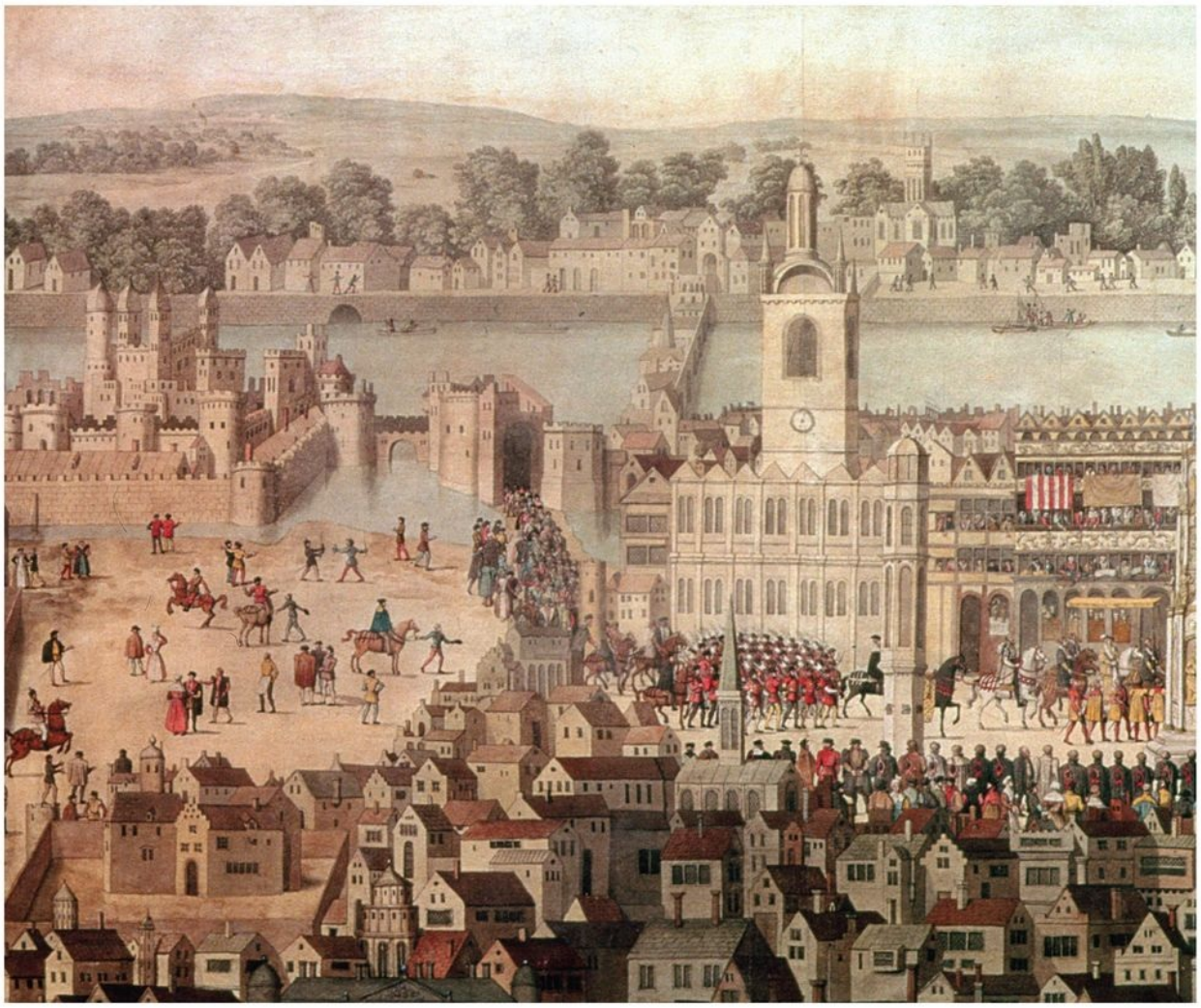
SUCH ARE THE VAGARIES of hereditary monarchy that Henry VIII, symbol of kingly potency, left his crown to a nine-year-old weakling. Archbishop Cranmer had been meticulous in preparing Edward VI (1547 – 53) for Protestant monarchy. He educated him in the reformed religion under a devoted tutor, John Cheke. The boy was precocious, studying history and theology and taking copious notes during sermons. He spoke French and Italian and could translate Cicero into Greek at the time of his coronation. Cranmer referred to him as ‘God’s vice-regent and Christ’s vicar within your own dominions’. The new king might be a loyal Protestant, but the seeds of the Stuart ‘divine right of kings’ were already sown.

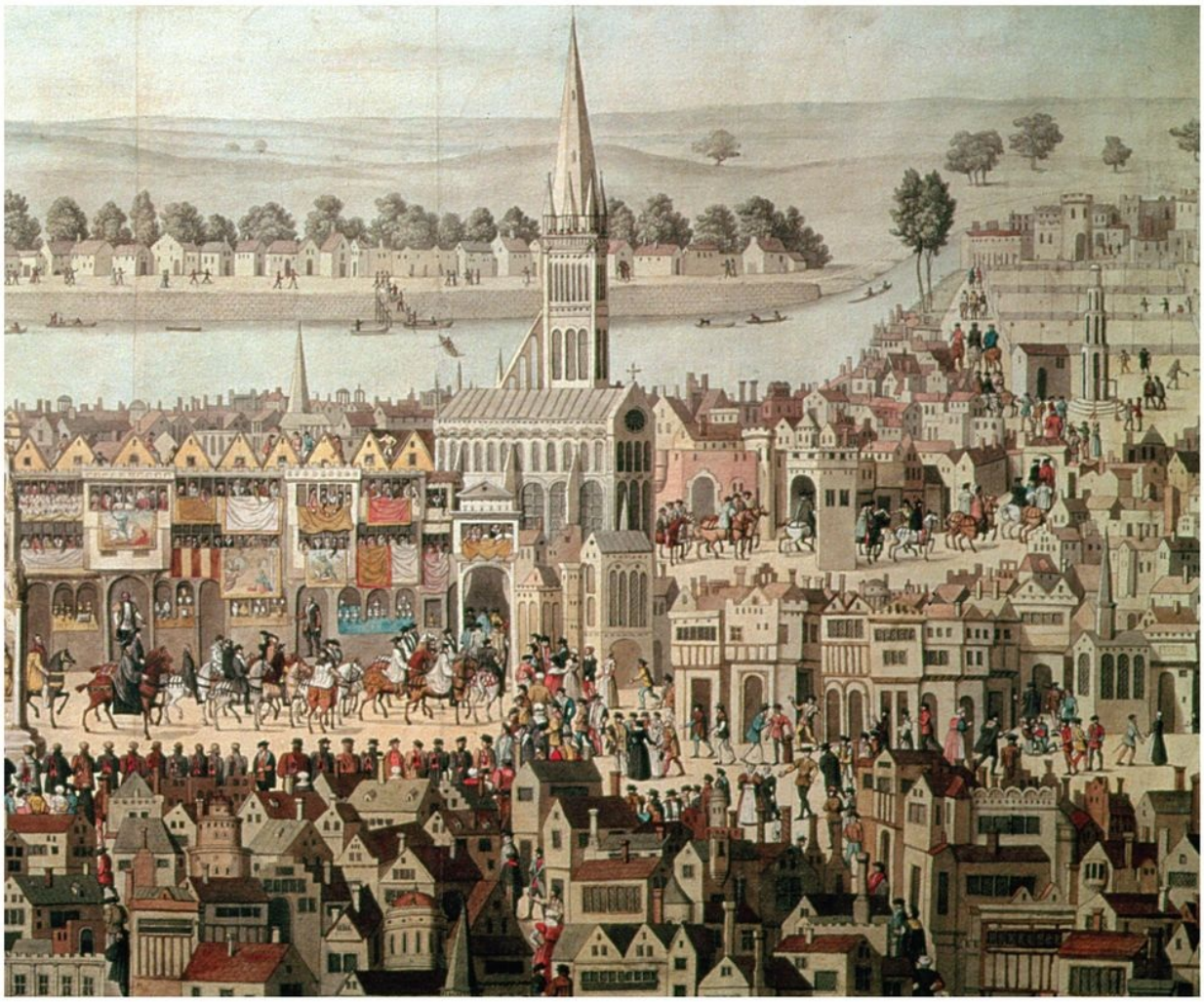
The power of Edward’s office was great, but who would wield it? Henry’s council of regents collapsed as the king’s uncle, the new Duke of Somerset, declared himself Lord Protector. He was openly opposed by another uncle, Thomas Seymour, who curried favour with the boy king by the tried-and-tested method of slipping him extra pocket money. He warned him that Somerset was leaving him ‘but a very beggarly king’. One night in 1549 Seymour went too far and tried to kidnap Edward, a crime prevented only by a furiously barking dog at the king’s door. Seymour was captured and executed. Princess Elizabeth, whom he had once courted, remarked that he was ‘a man of much wit and little judgment’. She would become an expert in the genre.

Somerset proved an incompetent ruler. He built himself a lavish palace on the Thames where Somerset House now stands. He went to war with both France and Scotland and debased the coinage to pay for it, responding to the resulting rise in food prices by fixing the price of corn and reviving

Wolsey’s ban on further land enclosure for sheep. He declared that the nation must be defended ‘with the force of men … not with flocks of sheep’. Stringent measures were taken to advance church reform and iconoclasm.

Henry was succeeded by the talented but feeble child king, Edward VI, whose coronation progress showed the Tudor City of London at its most magnificent. Here the procession passes down Cheapside, with the Tower on the left and Charing Cross on the right.





Evangelicals now demanded full-blooded reformation. The taking down of roods and abolitions of chantries was extended to the removal of ‘all images of stone, timber, alabaster or earth, graven, carved or painted which … yet stand in a nych or chapel’. Wall paintings were whitewashed and penalties imposed on the hiding of relics. The empty niches on thousands of English church towers bear painful witness to the destruction. Meanwhile Cranmer’s new prayer book, revealing in resonant English what had been obscured in Latin, was sent to all churches with orders that it be used exclusively. It was an emphatic gesture of cultural nationalism.

By the summer of 1549 revolts against Somerset’s rule emerged, mostly from Catholic sympathisers, in the west

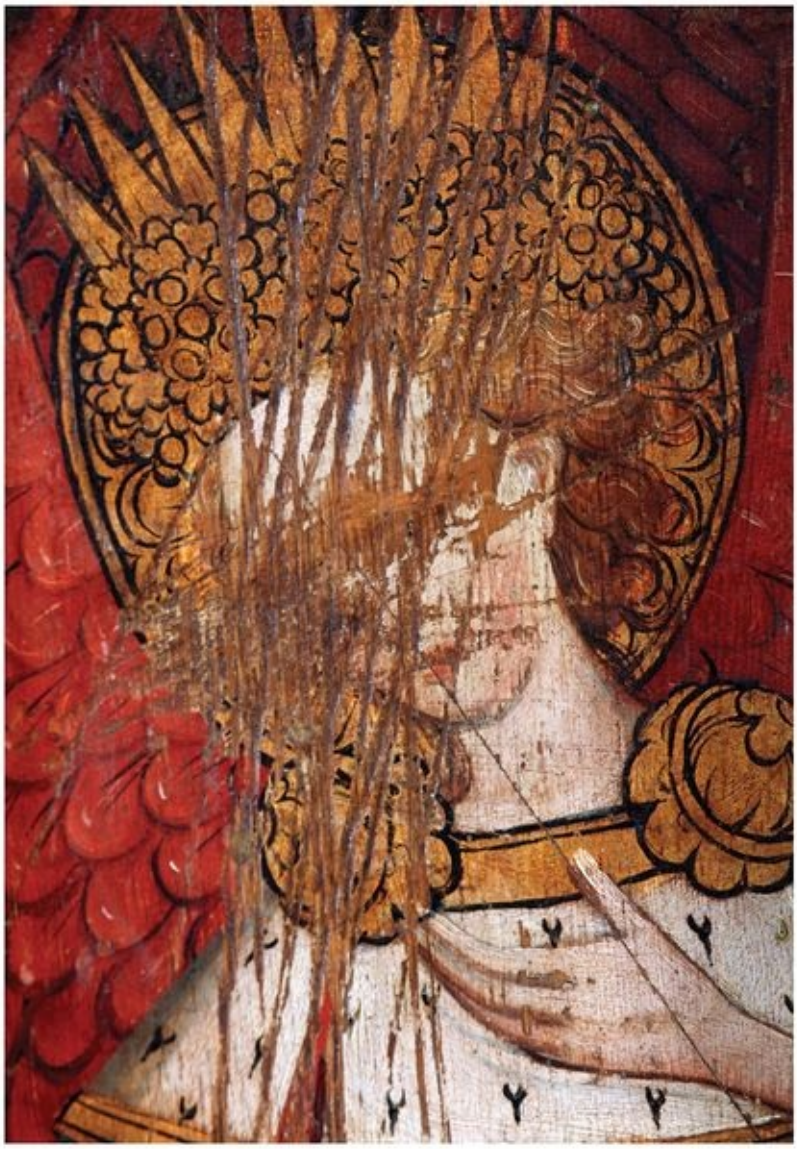
country and in Norfolk. Conservatives conspired to topple the king and give the crown to his Catholic elder sister, Mary. The council led by John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, deserted Somerset and summoned the City of London militia to arrest him and take him to the Tower. He was executed in 1552. Warwick, elevated to Duke of Northumberland, now took his place as ruler of England. The change led to no improvement in the quality of government. Only the young king appeared eager to restrain the spreading destruction. He was an uncompromising Protestant who, at the age of eleven, interrupted a bishop for invoking ‘God, the holy saints and all the evangelists’ and told him to invoke just ‘God through Jesus Christ’. But as orders went out to replace all altars with communion tables, Edward expressed sadness at so much destruction and turned one monastery, Greyfriars in London, into Christ’s Hospital school. He even welcomed back to court his sister Mary, who answered his kindness by processing through London with priests, crosses and rosaries. Reformation was by no means secure.

Mary’s marriage to Philip of Spain threatened to merge England with the Catholic Holy Roman Empire in the event of offspring. Mary died childless.

Then in the summer of 1553 the fifteen-year-old king, who seemed set to be both a wise ruler and a safe custodian of the Henrician settlement, died from consumption. On his deathbed Northumberland insisted he name as his successor not Mary, as Henry VIII had ordained, but his impeccably Protestant cousin Lady Jane Grey. This he did, leading Mary to flee to Framlingham castle in Suffolk, where an uprising in her favour won wide support. Northumberland lost his nerve. He faced 10,000 roughly armed men advancing on London and, with just a small force at his disposal, he soon capitulated, accepting the thirty-seven-year-old Mary as queen. It did him no good and within a month he had lost his head. Lady Jane Grey, uncrowned 'queen' for just nine days, was imprisoned in the Tower. Pro-Catholic peers and gentry surged back to power.

Mary I(1553 – 8) had been brought up under the influence of her much-abused Spanish mother, Catherine of Aragon, and retreated into a retinue of women that was as conservative as a convent. She sought advice on how to rule from her cousin, the Habsburg emperor Charles V, who recommended that she return the English church to Rome and marry his son and heir Philip of Spain. Mary needed no encouragement, claiming to be 'already half in love' with Philip from his portrait. Such a marriage jeopardised the English Reformation and implied an English crown subservient to the most powerful Catholic state in Europe.

Reformation iconoclasm was often more symbolic than real: defaced angel on the screen at Barton Turf church in Norfolk.



The so-called Marian Counter-Reformation saw new instructions going out from court for roods to be recarved and rituals restored, masses sung and holy days celebrated. Edward’s bishops, the elderly Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley, were imprisoned in the Tower for heresy, as was Mary’s Protestant sister Elizabeth. It was there she is believed to have met and fell in love with the dead Northumberland’s

young son, Lord Robert Dudley. A revolt in 1554 by Sir Thomas Wyatt against the queen’s impending marriage was brutally suppressed, and Lady Jane Grey was executed by royal

command as a precaution. Leading Protestants now feared for their lives as, in 1554, Philip of Spain arrived in London to claim his bride. Tiny in stature, he spoke no English – and Mary no Spanish. His only public words heard in English were ‘Good night, my lords all’ as he led Mary to the bedchamber and did his duty by her on their wedding night. A member of the Spanish party reported that ‘the queen is not at all beautiful, small and rather flabby … and has no eyebrows’.

Henry’s Act of Supremacy was repealed and Mary promised to rule in marital obedience. She promised to be ‘bonny and buxom in bed and at board’. Their children would fuse the English monarchy with the Habsburg line, though Mary assured a worried parliament that she would be ‘unable to permit’ Philip’s interference in specific decisions of government. Though she was soon declaring her pregnancy, it was widely doubted and Philip realised that it was a figment of a desperate imagination. Within a year he departed for the Netherlands and home, never to return, leaving his wife distraught.

Founding father of the Church of England, Archbishop Cranmer recanted his Protestantism. Then, when Mary burned him at the stake, he thrust the hand that signed the recantation first into the flames. From Foxe’s Book of Martyrs.

The queen sought to rid her realm of heresy. In November 1555 the elderly Cranmer, who had once declared Mary illegitimate by virtue of her mother, Catherine of Aragon's, 'illegal' marriage to Henry, was toppled as archbishop of Canterbury, and England was effectively ruled by the papal legate, Cardinal Reginald Pole. Protestantism was equated with heresy and heresy with treason, a reprise of the treason acts of Henry VIII. Latimer and Ridley were burned at the stake in Oxford, to be followed by Cranmer. Though he formally recanted his Protestantism, it did not save him. He duly recanted his recantation, dramatically thrusting the hand that signed it first into the flames with the cry, 'This hand hath offended. Oh this unworthy hand.'

Mary became Bloody Mary and gave the Protestant cause some 300 martyrs (as many as the Catholics her father had executed during the Pilgrimage of Grace). They were later celebrated in John Foxe's bestselling *Book of Martyrs*. Religious strife now ran through every parish and every community. Protestantism might seem to some a lacklustre and abstract creed, but over two decades it had begun to take root

as England’s church. Whatever the affection for the old liturgy, there was little enthusiasm for reverting to the authority of Rome. In addition, though Mary re-established some abbeys, including Westminster, monastic England had passed to a new class of gentry. They might murmur the mass, but even Mary accepted that they would never give their newly acquired estates back to the monks.

Worse news came in 1558 with the eventual marriage of the fifteen-year-old Mary Queen of Scots to the fourteen-year-old French Dauphin amid scenes of great splendour in Notre Dame in Paris. Edinburgh was rocked by Protestant riots and France seized the last English possession on French soil, Calais. Mary in London was devastated, swearing, ‘When I am dead and opened, you shall find Calais engraved on my heart.’ The Protestant nation established by Henry in the teeth of European opposition now faced an extraordinary fate: England might have a Catholic Spanish king and Scotland a Catholic French one.

Before that prospect could arrive, heredity again played its trump on history. In November 1558 Mary took ill and followed her brother to the grave, reluctantly conceding the succession to her sister, Elizabeth. The Catholic bishop of Winchester, preaching over her grave, warned his congregation that the Counter-Reformation was in jeopardy. ‘Soon the wolves will be coming out of Geneva … with their books before them, full of pestilent doctrines, blasphemy and heresy to infect the people.’ He was right.

The Locust Years

1918 — 1939

BRITAIN IN 1918 WAS A BRUISED, expectant land. Those who had given their all in war believed that national security overseas should breed social security at home. British citizens wanted protection not just against foreign enemies but against want, illness, unemployment and even the unfair distribution of income. This sense of insecurity was increased when, at the very moment peace was declared, the world was hit by an influenza pandemic. In 1918 and 1919 some 228,000 deaths were recorded in Britain alone, heavily concentrated among the young. With returning imperial troops spreading the disease to their native lands, the worldwide death toll was reputedly fifty million, making it the greatest human disaster in recorded history, worse even than the Black Death.

A month after the armistice Lloyd George held an election, the first to include women. He exploited his status as war leader and argued for a continued coalition with the Tories to aid reconstruction. Given the antagonism towards him of Asquith and roughly half the Liberal MPs, he colluded with the Conservatives not to put up candidates against supportive Liberals. These unchallenged candidates were sent a letter signed by Lloyd George and the Conservative leader Andrew Bonar Law. The letters were derided by Asquith as ‘coupons’, causing the 1918 poll to be dubbed the ‘coupon election’. The coalition won overwhelmingly, though its 478 MPs were mostly Conservatives. Asquith’s Liberals joined Labour in opposition, but the Liberal party would never again be regarded as a plausible home for the working class. That mantle passed to Labour, dismissed by Lloyd George as ‘the extreme, pacifist, Bolshevist group’.

The 1918 election saw women voting for the first time, advocated as reward for their war efforts.

The election was dominated by anti-German hysteria, with calls to ‘hang the Kaiser’ and ‘squeeze the German lemon till the pips squeak’. *The Times* refused to discuss the possible consequences of bankrupting Germany, merely demanding that ‘we present the bill’. The 1919 Versailles treaty ignored pleas for caution in treating the defeated enemy from Lloyd George and the young economist J. M. Keynes, and sought the most humiliating way of punishing the Germans. This meant the allied occupation of the Rhineland and heavy financial reparations. Versailles meant that Germany’s first taste of democracy was one of unsupportable debt, a predicament that was to give Hitler’s re-founded National Socialist party an easy ride to power after 1925.

Lloyd George described Versailles as ‘wild men screaming through keyholes’. Back home he reigned supreme. He was the first prime minister to govern in what approached a presidential style. He retained his wartime secretariat under Hankey and his outer office of aides in the Downing Street ‘garden room’. His Welsh intonation elevated his oratory, said Harold Nicolson, ‘to the class of Cromwell and Chatham’. In war he had bullied and cajoled the government machine to get things done. Now he did the same in peace. The government passed a housing act to subsidise ‘homes fit for heroes’ and required children to stay in school until aged fourteen. War mobilisation had doubled trade union membership and the government faced strikes by police, miners, railwaymen and even soldiers. Where they were in the public sector, the government usually capitulated.

Meanwhile across the Irish Sea, Churchill wearily remarked, ‘As the deluge subsides and the waters fall short, we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again.’ While Ulster Protestants continued to balk at home rule, at least without partition, Irish nationalists won almost all southern Irish seats at the 1918 election and, the following January, set up their own independent parliament in Dublin, the Dáil Éireann. This body, under the charismatic leadership of Michael Collins, declared open war on the British state. Ireland at the time was still ruled and policed by the mostly Protestant British. Terrorist outrages by the IRA were met with equal brutality by ‘Black and Tan’ police auxiliaries, many of them soldiers disbanded from the western front. Ireland was plunged into a guerrilla war, culminating in undisciplined soldiers burning villages and, in December 1920, the entire centre of Cork. Even under Lloyd George, British policy in Ireland was repressive and counter-productive. A Labour party report in early 1921 warned that ‘there are things [in Ireland] being done in the name of Britain which must make her name stink in the eyes of the world’. Eventually the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 led to a treaty negotiated by Lloyd George in 1921, providing for an Irish Free State, with a separate

assembly for Ulster's six counties. The first independent Irish elections were held in 1922.

Lloyd George's coalition soon ran out of political capital. His financing of his private office through the sale of honours had become a scandal (£15,000 for a knighthood, £50,000 for a peerage). The prime minister's womanising was common knowledge, giving rise to the popular song 'Lloyd George Knew My Father', with variations. The coalition's stock fell. The economy entered a new recession in 1920. By 1921 the Treasury was overwhelmed by the burden of the government's social programme and the cost of servicing war debts. The 'Geddes axe', named after Sir Eric Geddes, a coalition minister, proposed cuts in public spending across the board, from defence to schools, and even cuts in the pay of policemen and teachers.

British politics were now complicated by the shifting tectonic plates of the British left, as the Labour vote grew and the Liberals declined and fractured. The Tories were almost always the largest party, but faced the necessity of coalition with one or other of Labour or the Liberals. In 1922 the Lloyd George coalition was increasingly irksome to most Tory backbenchers and, in October that year, a large group of them met at the Carlton Club in St James's and decided to withdraw their support from it. A midland MP, Stanley Baldwin, said he would 'go into the wilderness' if the party continued to back a prime minister who was rarely seen in the Commons and who ruled by a personal 'kitchen cabinet'. Lloyd George was, said Baldwin, 'that terrible thing, a dynamic force'. The prompt collapse of the coalition precipitated a general election that year, which the Tories won with an overall majority. In celebration, Tory backbenchers thereafter called themselves the 1922 Committee. The Liberals remained divided and Labour took the position of official opposition. The 'Welsh wizard' was no more. Lloyd George could take credit as a principal founder of the welfare state and for his role in winning the war, but he had split his party, and done so not, like Peel or Gladstone, on a matter of principle but to hold on

to personal power. Faced with the challenge of adapting Liberalism to embrace organised labour, he suffered a failure of political imagination. He condemned his party to the political wilderness for the rest of the century.

Baldwin, the new Tory prime minister, was perfectly cast as reassuring contrast, the archetypal safe pair of hands, a pipe-smoking countryman, sensible, moderate and conciliatory. When trouble beckoned, he was said to retreat to his room with a crossword until it blew over. Yet as soon as he took office, Baldwin was seized by a conviction, borrowed from Joseph Chamberlain, that the recovery of the British economy needed tariffs. This was so drastic a change in policy that, with Liberals and Labour opposed, he felt he should call an early election on the issue. In this he miscalculated. The 1923 election was fought over ‘food taxes’ and the Tories lost ground. They were still the largest party but in a minority, with Labour in second place. Asquith, now again official Liberal leader, argued that the electorate had voted overwhelmingly against tariffs and, since Labour was the largest anti-tariff party, it should form a government, with his support.

In January 1924 Ramsay MacDonald was duly sworn in as the first Labour prime minister. The arrival of Labour in power, within living memory of working-class enfranchisement, was considered sensational. Many on the right declared it would mean the Russians would take over, property would be confiscated, marriage banned and free love licensed. Some fled to sybaritic lifestyles in Kenya and Rhodesia in preference. When MacDonald took his senior ministers to the palace, the press debated whether they should wear top hats, bow, kiss hands and appoint hereditary peers. (The question of peers was resolved by appointing only those with no male heirs.) As the new ministers awaited the king’s presence, one of them, J. R. Clynes, reflected on ‘MacDonald, the starveling clerk, Thomas, the engine driver, Henderson, the foundry labourer, and Clynes, the mill-hand, all to this pinnacle!’ MacDonald took easily to the Buckinghamshire mansion of Chequers, recently donated by the Lee family as a place of ‘rest and recreation for

prime ministers for ever’. He was soon accused of the occupational hazard of Labour leaders, falling under the spell of office and being embraced by high society, so-called ‘champagne socialism’.

MacDonald’s government was not a success. He relied on the government’s minority status to curb the socialist inclination of some of his colleagues, but his every move was treated with suspicion by the Tories and a mostly Tory press. When the government withdrew the prosecution of a communist newspaper for incitement, it was accused of being under the influence of revolutionary groups and lost a vote of confidence. MacDonald felt he should call what was the fourth election in six years. The cause of the left was not aided by events in Russia, which still cast a shadow over British politics. The opposition, eager to exploit any ‘red scare’, seized on what turned out to be a forged letter from a Soviet leader, Grigory Zinoviev, advocating ‘a successful rising in the working districts of England’ and bringing ‘the ideas of Lenin to Britain and the colonies’. Baldwin skilfully used the new medium of radio to promise ‘sane, commonsense government’ and not ‘revolutionary theories and hare-brained schemes’. Labour was bundled out of office with 419 Tory MPs to Labour’s 151. The Liberals managed to win just forty seats.

Ramsay MacDonald, first Labour prime minister. Though derided as a champagne socialist, he did much to make Labour electable.

Baldwin spoke for a nation that craved a return to pre-war normality. As the peacetime economy began to recover, the benefits of modernisation that had been enjoyed by only the richer Edwardians spread to a wider middle class. The position of women changed radically. A post-war shortage of men demanded a new self-reliance, while the growth of retail and clerical employment offered young women a new urban independence. The apostle of ‘family planning’, Marie Stopes, preached to a generation with access to the sexual liberation of contraception. Registered divorces increased from 823 in 1910 to 4,522 in 1928. The consumer economy boomed. The number of cars on the roads of Britain was doubling each year. Home ownership rose from 10 per cent in 1910 to a third by the end of the thirties, far ahead of anywhere else in Europe. The resulting low-density housing estates spread in ‘ribbon development’ across suburban England. A mere 20 per cent of English people now lived in something that could be called the countryside.

In government the spirit of Lord Salisbury returned. The Conservatives' policy of promising 'tranquillity and freedom from adventures and commitments both at home and abroad', never again to be 'the policeman of the world', was popular. The Locarno summit conference in October 1925 saw the war combatants affirm their everlasting respect for peace and for each other's borders. So enthusiastic was the Foreign Office with 'the spirit of Locarno' that it named its chief reception room after it. Britons yearned to put the trumpets and drums of battle behind them. Even the British empire was amended. In 1926 an imperial conference fashioned a new entity from the old self-governing dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, giving it the Cromwellian name 'Commonwealth'. It did not embrace non-white colonies.

In 1924 Baldwin brought Churchill back to the cabinet as a Liberal-turned-Tory chancellor of the exchequer. Churchill then made a mistake that was to hover over his career like Gallipoli, fixing the pound sterling against a price in gold at a rate considered far too high. Britain's coal exports were instantly rendered uncompetitive on world markets, leading to a cut in mining output and thus in wages. In May 1926 the TUC called on all unions to back the miners in Britain's first and only general strike. The stoppage was near universal across key industries and briefly evoked a wartime spirit among the public. Churchill edited a government newspaper and the brigade of guards escorted food from the docks. Oxford undergraduates had fun driving buses. But opinion was divided, with even the usually conservative king being heard to say of the strikers, 'Try living on their wages before you judge them.'

The cabinet struggled to mediate between the intransigent parties. One minister remarked that the miners' leaders 'might be thought the stupidest men in England, if we had not had frequent occasion to meet the mine owners'. Baldwin was in his element as peacemaker. Despite his reputed remark that a cabinet should never push its nose 'dead against the pope or the National Union of Mineworkers', he succeeded in isolating

the coal industry following a commission of inquiry, and the TUC agreed to end the strike after just nine days, though the miners fought on alone and unsuccessfully. The strike took on legendary status as an example of working-class solidarity, though the union's sense of betrayal at the way it ended also showed the limitations on its power. Baldwin's lack of triumphalism afterwards, indeed his consoling personality, was critical throughout. He was always affable, not least to new Labour MPs, and later supported their demand that unions should be able to levy their members to finance their party. With Neville Chamberlain as minister for health, welfare and local government, the Tories remained in the liberal tradition of Peel, Disraeli and Neville's father, Joseph. The old poor law guardians were wound up and elected county and borough councils made responsible for clinics and the relief of poverty.

Despite Baldwin's personal popularity, the Tories lost the 1929 election, possibly as a result of finally extending the vote to the last disenfranchised adults, women in their twenties, the so-called 'flapper vote' (after a free-hanging dress much in fashion). In another hung parliament the Liberals decided to put Labour and Ramsay MacDonald back in office. The new team had no time to prove itself. Within weeks, on 24 October, a bubble in US bond prices burst, leading to a crash not only on Wall Street but on all western stock markets. Guided by Keynes, the Labour cabinet proposed an immediate programme of public works, but this met with implacable opposition from the new chancellor, Philip Snowden. He demanded curbs rather than increases in public spending.

The 1926 general strike was precipitated by Britain's overvalued currency on the gold standard: a bus gutted by strikers' arson.

This familiar conflict yielded economic and political turmoil. Between the 1929 crash and the end of 1930, registered unemployed rose from one million to two and a half million and continued upwards. The following year banks failed across Europe, leading to German hyperinflation and financial collapse. By August 1931 Snowden's May Committee had out-axed Geddes, proposing £24 million in new taxes and £96 million of spending cuts, of which £66 million would come direct from unemployment relief, the so-called dole. Ministers exhibited every sign of panic. They rushed back from holiday, bank rate soared and gold sales emptied the vaults of the Bank of England, which unhelpfully warned that 'national bankruptcy is near'. The press carried such headlines as 'A Matter of Hours'. The relationship between publicity and confidence was as yet little understood.

Few Labour ministers could stomach Snowden's cuts and the cabinet resigned. But when MacDonald took his resignation to the palace, he returned to tell his stunned colleagues that he

and not Baldwin had been asked to head a national coalition with the Tories. He would seek ‘a doctor’s mandate’ from the voters to push through the cuts. MacDonald amazed even the loyal Snowden by telling him, ‘Tomorrow every duchess in London will be wanting to kiss me.’ On radio he declared, ‘I have changed none of my ideals. I have a national duty.’ In October 1931 a new election gave MacDonald his mandate, but only thirteen Labour MPs stayed loyal to him and he depended on 473 ‘national Conservatives’. As with Lloyd George in 1918, ambition had made him a prisoner of the Tories.

Politics was becoming increasingly polarised, driven by a highly partisan press committed to specific parties. Beaverbrook’s *Daily Express* and Rothermere’s *Daily Mail* were Tory, the *News Chronicle* Liberal and the *Daily Herald* and *Daily Mirror* Labour. Socialism at the time played on continued guilt about the losses of the Great War and the continued poverty of the depression, driven by a mix of pacifism and mild communism. J. B. Priestley made his *English Journey* round the poorer parts of England in 1933. It was followed by the Jarrow ‘crusade’ of October 1936, in which 200 unemployed walked from Tyneside to London, fêted by the public along the way. George Orwell made more sedate encounters in his documentary account of *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

Some on the left turned to a glamorous labour minister, Oswald Mosley, who resigned over Snowden’s cuts to form a ‘new party’, initially of Keynesian socialists. After a visit to Benito Mussolini in Italy in 1931, Mosley turned his party into the British Union of Fascists. At a time when democratic governments were failing across Europe, the appeal to ‘vitality and manhood’ and to modern dictators who, people said of Mussolini, ‘made the trains run on time’ carried some appeal. Had Mosley not lapsed into un-British uniforms, rallies and black-shirted thuggery, he would have been a considerable leader. As it was, while other nations responded to economic depression with Roosevelt’s New Deal, Stalin’s five-year-plans and the fascism of Mussolini and Hitler, Britain took comfort in a Scottish clerk and a Birmingham businessman. MacDonald

and Baldwin implemented Snowden's programme, devalued the pound, raised income tax and cut the dole.

With recovery from recession, 1930s Britain resumed the economic progress of the mid-twenties. Exotic art deco factories appeared along London's Western Avenue, making consumer goods such as Hoover vacuum cleaners, Gillette safety razors and Firestone car tyres. Woolworth's proliferated in every high street. The previously private British Broadcasting Company was nationalised under charter in 1927. Its director, an austere Scot named John Reith, established a tradition of independence which has held, against many odds, ever since. By 1932 England and Wales had ten million radio listeners and two million telephone subscribers. Britain's answer to America's Model T Ford, the Austin 7, appeared in 1922 and was reduced in price in the 1930s to £125. By the end of the decade there were three million cars on the roads. Super-cinemas with names such as Roxy, Regal, Odeon and Gaumont towered over their communities, offering the escapism of Valentino, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. American jazz became a craze.

The Jarrow 'hunger march', though at a time of economic recovery, illustrated the growing gulf between north and south of England.

Thus blessed, the British public took the pacifism of the previous decade to new lengths. In 1935 the biggest ever private referendum, the ‘peace ballot’, registered eleven million votes in support of the weak-kneed League of Nations and a prohibition on world arms manufacture. At the general election that year, at which MacDonald lost his seat, Baldwin returned as prime minister having been forced to promise, even to his own Conservative voters, that ‘there will be no great armaments’. Ministers were acutely aware that Germany, under Hitler as chancellor from 1933, was not the reliable ally of Locarno and was rearming rapidly, but public opinion at the time was uninformed and naive about events both in Soviet Russia and, with less excuse, in Germany. In 1936 it also had another matter on its mind. The death of George V led to his being succeeded by the forty-one-year-old Edward VIII. The new king liked dancing and informality and took a keen interest in public life, famously saying on a visit to the poor of south Wales that ‘something must be done’. But he was in love with a married woman, Wallis Simpson, whom he wanted to marry. Despite a clamp on publicity, rumour was rife and the king was

eventually told by Baldwin that he would have to choose between Mrs Simpson and the crown. He said, ‘In the choice of a queen, the voice of the people must be heard.’ While the monarchy no longer carried political weight and Edward enjoyed some public support, the exemplary role a king must play in public life was felt to make his relationship with Simpson unacceptable. In an emotional broadcast on 11 December 1936, he chose Mrs Simpson and abdicated. He was succeeded by his brother, ‘shy Bertie’, as George VI (1936 — 52), father of the present queen.

In 1937 an exhausted Baldwin gave way to Neville Chamberlain as prime minister. As chancellor for six years, Chamberlain had steered the country safely out of depression and taken forward the welfare state. But he lacked warmth or a human touch in public, and was abused variously as ‘a pinhead’ and ‘weaned on a pickle’. Nor had he and Baldwin, despite fast growing German belligerence, been able to sell the need for rearmament to the public. However, from 1938 Spitfire fighters went into mass production, new factories were opened and air-raid shelters planned for civil defence. When in September 1938 Hitler indicated his intentions to occupy the Czech Sudetenland in defiance of Versailles, Chamberlain travelled to parley with him in Munich. The nation was on tenterhooks, fearing war.

Chamberlain’s arrival back at Heston airport, waving a paper ‘symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again’, was greeted with wild enthusiasm. He told a crowd later that he had brought ‘peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time.’ Speaking on the radio, he added that it was ‘horrible, fantastic and incredible … that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing’. Churchill, now on the backbenches, was a relatively lone voice for openly opposing Germany, later calling these the ‘years that the locust hath eaten’. But when he described Munich in the Commons as ‘a total and unmitigated defeat’, he was howled down. Whatever hindsight

may suggest, British public opinion was massively relieved by Munich.

British attitudes to Hitler remained equivocal through the 1930s: the former Edward VIII, Duke of Windsor, with the duchess and Hitler in 1937.

Chamberlain's return from Munich after his agreement with Hitler was wildly popular in London. It appeased a dictator but it also bought time that was to prove vital in confronting him.

History was not kind to Chamberlain, seeing him as the principal appeaser of Hitler's Germany, though recent historians have been less harsh. Public opinion and most of the press were strongly for accommodating European dictators. They remained averse to a return to war, grasping at anything that might fuel their optimism. In addition this was the first generation of British politicians to govern under the aegis of a universal franchise and to feel bound by what they perceived as public opinion. The concept of consent to rule had finally asserted itself, and ironically done so against the security of the state. Chamberlain and his colleagues were also trapped by their military advisers. They had been rearming since the mid-thirties, but when the prime minister left for Munich, he was warned by the chiefs of staff that they were unready for any war with Hitler. Britain would be overwhelmed by a German attack and Chamberlain had to buy time. He bought just six months. In March 1939 Hitler broke his promise to Chamberlain and occupied Prague. In August he signed the

Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact with Stalin and, on 1 September, launched his ‘blitzkrieg’ on Poland. The invasion breached allied guarantees of Polish sovereignty and Chamberlain was forced to announce, two days later, that Britain was at war with Germany. An army of British soldiers crossed the Channel, as they had in 1914 and so often before. This time they returned, at first, defeated.

Thatcher’s Children

1990 — 2011

THE MAN WHO EMERGED as prime minister from the bloodstained chambers of Downing Street in November 1990 was Thatcher’s most loyal aide, John Major. He had been chosen by his colleagues, so they said, ‘to give Thatcherism a human face’. A kindly man behind a grey, much-satirised, exterior, he had an unusual past for a Tory politician, the son of a circus artiste in Brixton and without a university education. Major was seen as the safe pair of hands, the perfect ‘club hon sec’ and custodian of Thatcherism’s Indian summer.

The new prime minister set about his task quietly. He brought back Thatcher’s nemesis, Michael Heseltine, as his deputy and abandoned the poll tax. He stayed close to America in finishing the first Gulf war, expelling Iraq from Kuwait, and he negotiated a British ‘opt-out’ at the Maastricht talks on the future of Europe. This kept Britain out of the new euro currency zone and avoided restrictions on social and employment law. In 1992 Major led the Tories to an election victory that defied the opinion polls and stunned Labour. He won the highest popular vote in history, the only party leader to top fourteen million, though with a Commons majority of only twenty-one seats. The new government pushed ahead with privatisation, going where even Thatcher had feared to tread, selling water, coal and the railways and turning to private finance for new roads, schools and hospitals. Over all this Major sought to extend the comfort blanket of a ‘citizens charter’, the kind of vague ‘contract’ between governors and governed that appealed to turn-of-the-millennium politicians.

Major was unable to capitalise on his 1992 success. Despite Thatcher’s misgivings, Britain had joined the European

exchange rate mechanism (ERM) in 1990 and now found itself trapped in a mild recession and a run on the pound. On ‘Black Wednesday’, 16 September 1992, there was a classic sterling crisis and Britain withdrew from the ERM. Though the resulting devaluation proved beneficial, vindicating Thatcher’s opposition to any sort of regulated exchange rate, the event was seen as humiliating. Major was now constantly at odds with his right wing over Europe and made unnecessary enemies in Scotland and Wales by rejecting all requests for devolved powers from Westminster. The Tories fell ten points behind Labour and did not recover.

More dramatic was the impact of the 1992 election on Labour. With John Smith at the helm it threw itself into the arms of a charismatic young MP, Tony Blair. He and an uncharismatic Scot, Gordon Brown, founded what was called the ‘new Labour project’, aiming to restructure the Labour movement from top to bottom. What began as a ginger group became a revolution when Blair won the party leadership following Smith’s sudden death in 1994. At each party conference the project pushed changes to the constitution, emasculating union power, neutering the all-powerful national executive, replacing the old union block-voting system with one-member, one-vote for most internal elections, and depriving the annual conference of its traditional role in writing the manifesto. A mass movement whose character had remained little changed since the party’s inception almost a hundred years before was turned, almost overnight, into a machine for winning elections under an all-powerful leader. The reinvention of Labour was astonishing. A history of feuding, bad-tempered meetings and splits evaporated as Labour became more like the American Democratic party that Blair and Brown had carefully studied.

Between 1994 and 1997 Blair and Brown, together with a political aide Peter Mandelson and a tabloid journalist turned ‘spin doctor’ Alastair Campbell, effected a second transformation. They reassured the public that Labour policy would not unpick those elements of Thatcherism that had

proved popular. Blair refused to pledge a repeal of Thatcher's anti-union laws or her privatisation programme. Though once a member of CND, he was now in favour of Britain maintaining both a stock of nuclear weapons and a pro-American foreign policy. Brown vigorously endorsed 'prudence' in public finance, while promising no increase in income tax should Labour be elected. As a symbolic gesture, Blair and Brown removed the historic 'clause four' ambition of the party constitution printed on every membership card: 'To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry … upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.' Just as John Major had been eager to distance the Tory party from the more brutal extremes of Thatcherism, so Blair distanced Labour from its socialist past and led it along a 'third way', one of the many catchphrases that adorned his programme. Both sides were fighting to capture the centre ground, and Blair was winning. In 1995, as he rode the crest of an opinion-poll wave, Blair scoffed at the embattled Major: 'I lead my party. He follows his.' The traditional ethos of left and right had been reversed.

Blair and Brown turned Labour from a mass movement into a modern political machine under a strong leader. They brought the party thirteen years of uninterrupted rule.

The 1990s had seen Thatcherism bed down. The economy was substantially deindustrialised, relying for its wealth on financial services, information technology, tourism, culture and leisure. The soaring architecture of London’s rebuilt docklands was devoted to finance and financiers. While the centres of English provincial cities continued to languish far behind those in the rest of Europe, largely through central government curbs on local enterprise, a countryside long protected by tight planning laws saw rapid development. The M11 corridor in Cambridgeshire, the east midlands and the Severn valley sprouted housing estates and distribution sheds that consumed annually a land area the size of Bristol.

Agriculture showed resilience, largely underpinned by entrenched European farm subsidies. But rural Britain found new users. Walking, cycling, camping, even surfing, surged in popularity. National Trust membership rose from two million in 1990 to nearer three million by the end of the decade. The

Glastonbury music festival attracted over 100,000 visitors a year. After the Kyoto protocol on climate change was adopted in 1997, politics acquired a ‘green’ tinge, with environmental activism calling on the nation to restrict greenhouse gases. From the mid-1990s the internet’s world wide web began to penetrate every household, transforming daily communication and information retrieval. People could work from home, and economic activity develop in more distant parts of the country.

Labour’s victory over the Tories in 1997 was crushing. An unprecedented 419 Labour MPs subjected the Tories to their worst defeat since 1906. Blair’s campaign was unprecedented in its glitz, set to the pop anthem ‘Things Can Only Get Better’. With his wife Cherie he entered office in May in an overtly presidential style. Parties crowded the Downing Street calendar under the rubric ‘cool Britannia’. Peerages were showered on so-called Labour ‘luvvies’, from the arts and show business. Downing Street was the new Camelot. Ramsay MacDonald’s champagne socialism was rebranded for the age of celebrity.

Presentation came to rule Blair’s office. His closest Downing Street relationship was with his press secretary, Campbell, whose strong personality dominated the cabinet. Government seemed reduced to a succession of initiatives, each subjected to the test of, ‘How will it run in tomorrow’s *Daily Mail*?’ The prime minister’s style was described as Napoleonic or ‘sofa government’. The veteran Labour MP Tam Dalyell compared it to the court of Louis XVI.

The Blair style found early expression in August 1997 on the death in a Paris car crash of Diana, divorced wife of the Prince of Wales. An extraordinary outburst of public grief was enhanced by a media ‘narrative’ of youthful innocence ostracised by a stuffy establishment. The royal family, no fans of Diana, were forced by public opinion to return to London from Scotland and join in a public mourning. A mountain of plastic-wrapped flowers grew outside Diana’s home at Kensington Palace. Blair eulogised ‘the people’s princess’ and her brother’s hardly veiled attack on her critics was applauded

at her funeral.

Blair acted with despatch on one matter that had vexed his predecessors. Legislation was introduced to set up elected assemblies in Scotland, Wales and London. A Scottish parliament was in place by 1999, the first since 1707. A new Welsh assembly, the first since the Middle Ages, met the same year. Talks with republican leaders in Northern Ireland had been secretly initiated by Major, and in 1998 Blair oversaw a 'Good Friday' agreement between Protestant and Catholic parties, though the resulting power-sharing took another decade to make secure. These measures transformed the politics of the United Kingdom. A non-English discourse was noticeable in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, with separatist parties gaining ground in all three and Scottish Nationalists actually forming the government in Scotland in 2007. After a millennium of centralisation of power in London, the British Isles were at last recovering some constitutional equipoise. It was possible that the never happy union of English and Celts might relax into a looser confederation, if not a repeat of Ireland and outright partition.

The death of Princess Diana produced an outpouring of grief and briefly unsettled the monarchy: flowers outside Kensington Palace.

Thatcherism did not end with the arrival of ‘new’ Labour, however adept Blair was at disguising it. Thatcher was the new prime minister’s first, and very public, official guest at No. 10. At the Treasury, Brown stuck rigidly to Tory spending plans and took pride in his one innovation, allowing the Bank of England to fix interest rates. Blair respected his party’s roots sufficiently to introduce a minimum wage, a Sure Start programme for poorer children and, most dramatically, an act for freedom of government information. The last reform he later regretted, so much that he ‘quaked at the imbecility of it’. Other bouts of reform, aimed at the running of schools, hospitals and local government, continued the Tory policy of private sector involvement in state services. Blair was particularly eager to privatise public investment, much to the

profit of City finance houses. Nor was there any reversion to localism. While welfare in most of Europe was locally administered with less need for constant reorganisation, in Britain, investment and pay levels in the welfare state continued to be dictated from the centre.

By the turn of the century there was increasing evidence that the steady advance towards ‘cradle-to-grave’ welfare was under strain. The Blair government struggled to offer wider choice through diversity, sub-contracting and opting-out. Payments to the private service contractor Capita rose from £112 million in 1997 to £1.4 billion in 2005. All new hospitals built under Labour were funded by private finance, to the tune of £6 billion. New secondary ‘academies’ – schools that had opted out of the state system and were sponsored by private backers – sprang up throughout the country. Private companies also ran prisons and supplied traffic wardens and speed cameras. Blair hoped that privatisation would break through Whitehall’s inertia, complaining of ‘the scars on my back’ caused by trying and failing to get things done. Cabinet fell into disuse. Its secretary, Lord Butler, reported to a select committee that there had been 146 cabinet papers in 1975 and just four in 2002.

The public endorsed Blair’s methods by re-electing him in 2001, following which public spending began to rise rapidly. Leadership was taking the form not of decisions made by the cabinet but of targets and league tables issued from a Cabinet Office delivery unit. One senior civil servant complained of ‘a daily cannonade of orders and initiatives’. Expenditure on ‘change consultants’ reached £2.5 billion in 2005, by when the cost of running Whitehall was rising at three times the rate of inflation. For all this spending, polls persistently showed opinion critical of the quality of government services. YouGov regularly reported majorities claiming things had ‘deteriorated under Labour’.

Blair’s controversial invasion of Iraq led to the biggest anti-war demonstration ever in the streets of London and tarnished his

is *remaining years.*


PEACE
END
WAR
IRAQ
PEACE
NO
BLOOD
FOR OIL
NO
NO
WHERE
CAN I
BUY A
BODY
BAG
NOT
IN MY
NAME
Contra la guerra
Contro la guerra
Contre la guerre

Like most leaders who find themselves under pressure at home, Blair retreated to the calmer shores of foreign policy. He leaned heavily on his early friendship with US president Bill Clinton and in 1998 was rewarded with a spectacular White House dinner, to which he took an entourage with ‘more than a whiff of imperial progress’, according to his Washington ambassador Sir Christopher Meyer. A year later in Chicago, when British forces were fighting alongside America’s to drive the Serbs out of Kosovo, Blair proclaimed a ‘new generation of liberal humanitarian wars’, justifying Britain’s intervention wherever its leaders judged that evil was being done by one country to another and even by governments to their peoples. Though little noticed at the time, the old caution that had characterised foreign policy in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century was being abandoned, moderately by Thatcher but massively by Blair. Even the gung-ho new White House incumbent, the Republican George W. Bush, complained that Blair had ‘sprinkled too much adrenalin on his cornflakes’.

The new interventionism went critical after 11 September 2001, with al-Qaeda’s attack on the World Trade Center in Manhattan. Blair’s adrenalin level appeared high as he told his party conference that ‘this is the moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken … let us reorder the world around us.’ Britain joined America in a retaliatory attack on Kabul, followed by ‘mission creep’ towards a long-term project in nation-building. Blair signed up unreservedly to Bush’s unilaterally declared war on terror, culminating in a secret agreement at the president’s Crawford ranch in April 2002, to extend the Afghan retaliation into an unprovoked attack on Iraq.

Despite reservations over the legality of the war and the dubious claim that Iraq possessed ‘weapons of mass destruction’, Blair saw it as a modern crusade, arm-in-arm with America against militant Islam. The decision to invade Iraq saw London’s biggest ever anti-war march, of well over a million people on 15 February 2003. Britain’s occupation was to last

six years and cost 179 British lives. The British army withdrew in April 2009, by which time Blair had committed it to a lead role in the escalating conflict in southern Afghanistan. The 2006 British-led expedition to assert NATO control over the province of Helmand degenerated into a debacle, with the Americans having to take over operations in the province in 2010. Though Blair won a third election in 2005, it was with the lowest poll share of any government in modern times. Iraq and Afghanistan had not dusted him with the glory of war, as the Falklands had done Thatcher. On 27 June 2007, Blair resigned after ten years in office and gave way to the unopposed succession of his old friend, but increasingly fractious colleague, Gordon Brown.

Blair's government, while extending privatisation into almost all public services, had striven to soften Thatcherism's harder edges. In 2004 same-sex partnerships were recognised in law and the 2005 parliament boasted eleven openly gay MPs. Climate change moved up the agenda, at least nominally. People still greedily consumed no-frills airline tickets at '£1 plus tax' a seat, but at least some worried about their 'carbon footprint'. Even the once-doomed railway reported more passengers each year, and reached its highest loading in peacetime in 2010. The new Tory leader, David Cameron, elected in December 2005, felt compelled to take a husky safari to the shrinking Arctic and plan a wind turbine for his London home. Cars, houses and foodstuffs were advertised emphasising their green, safe or health-giving credentials.

The other side of the coin was a government increasingly intrusive and oppressive. 'Nanny state' policies were fixated on all forms of security. There were daily stories of expeditions, events, concerts banned because of 'health and safety'. Britain was credited with the most surveillance cameras and the highest spending on police and public safety in Europe. Following 9/11 and an attack by suicide bombers on London's public transport in July 2005, the Home Office introduced internment without trial, a measure unprecedented in peacetime other than in Northern Ireland. Concrete barriers

were erected round public buildings. Labour's penal policy was rigorous, taking the prison population to 85,000 in 2010, its highest ever. State agencies used the war on terror to justify what was essentially a wartime model of national security. New terrorism laws were passed almost every year.

Blair had rescued his party from defeat and brought it to terms with the Thatcher revolution. He was a poacher turned gamekeeper, opposing and then adopting the policies of his radical predecessor. While he mimicked Thatcher's aggression abroad, he chose his wars unwisely. At home he lacked her ability to make the government machine jump to prime ministerial command. He was in thrall to the right-of-centre floating voters much as his Labour predecessors had been in thrall to the trade unions. Blair's 'new Labour' was in reality a marketing ploy. His instinct was to swerve trouble and survive. He had come to office full of Saxon 'communitarianism' but left it with Thatcher's Norman state intact. Indeed, it was more than intact. Government spending had risen from 36 per cent of gross domestic product when Blair took office, to 47 per cent went he left, covered by heavy borrowing.

British troops welcomed in the streets of Iraq. The welcome did not last long.

On one matter Blair was right, his private conviction that Brown was unsuited to national leadership. His aide Campbell admitted to coining the leaked phrase that Brown was ‘psychologically flawed’. The former chancellor had overseen the Treasury for almost as many years as Gladstone, but had done so in growing conflict with his prime minister. As a result control over public spending collapsed. Brown’s introversion and bouts of temper were ill-suited to high office outside the Treasury’s ivory tower. He was unable to work with ministers with whom he disagreed, a serious handicap in politics, and he

eventually turned to his old comrade, and latterly foe, Peter Mandelson, who in 2008 was elevated to the peerage and became virtual deputy prime minister.

By then Brown's Treasury excesses had come home to roost. Early promises to bring the NHS spending up to the European average and to rebuild every secondary school in the country had resulted in spiralling upward pressure on the budget. As world stock markets crashed in the autumn of 2008, Britain was floating on a raft of debt. The much-vaunted financial services sector saw banks peculiarly exposed, as first Northern Rock, then Lloyds and RBS shuddered and fell back on the state. At the height of the crisis, Brown asked taxpayers to underpin bank rescue loans of over £500 billion. Public confidence in government was not helped when, in 2009, hundreds of MPs were revealed as having made wild and sometimes fraudulent expenses claims. Politicians joined bankers at the bottom of the table of public respect.

Brown was defeated at the polls in May 2010, his failure mitigated only by voters delivering not a Tory victory but a hung parliament. The Liberal Democrats found themselves briefly exhilarated as they replayed the 1920s and 1930s. But they were kingmakers for a day and prisoners thereafter. A long weekend of parlaying with the Tories' David Cameron led to the Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, emerging as deputy prime minister in a Tory-dominated coalition, with a formally negotiated programme and insistence that there would be a five-year parliament. This was a curious rewriting of the constitution, since any coalition is vulnerable to erosion and collapse. The new team had immediately to rescue the public finances, reprising the cuts programmes of 1921, 1931 and the 1980s with five years of reductions covering virtually every part of the public sector. The economy was now in recession. For all the rhetoric of the 1990s that 'boom and bust are over', the ghosts of Lloyd George, MacDonald and Thatcher again stalked the corridors of Westminster. Protests and strikes erupted from students, public-sector unions, the police, teachers and health workers. British public life experienced a

severe bout of déjà vu.

Beyond these immediate concerns, old tensions found new expression. Government yet again professed a desire to decentralise power from London and reduce the scale and reach of the modern state, yet found it difficult to do so. England remained Europe's most centralised political economy, with little local tax discretion, little subsidiary democracy and few public institutions free of state control. Local democracy, such as it was in 2011, was desperately stretched as central government searched everywhere to save money. Similar disciplines were demanded from the devolved assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. England's parliament, guardian of its freedoms for over half a millennium, was also forced, under the 2009 Lisbon treaty, to share legislative powers with states across the Channel, as the courts had to share judicial power with a European court.

The 2010 coalition of Cameron and Clegg was forced to introduce drastic measures to confront the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis.

In other words the pressures that had vexed England since the Middle Ages remained the same. Government struggled to govern. The people, struggling, protesting and complaining, consented. But at centre stage was still the one institution that had guarded the constitution for almost a millennium: a constitution-based parliament. There was no sign of an end to an inherited monarchy. There was no call for a directly-elected executive, or even much call for proportional representation in the House of Commons. Parlimentary arithmetic created the 2010 coalition and would determine its stability and eventual fate. As Simon de Montfort's parliament had defied Henry III, as the Long Parliament had defied Charles I and as the 1832 parliament had saved Britain from revolution, so it remained parliament that dictated the government of England.

The arithmetic of parliament has not only determined England's government down the ages but guided the path of

political reform. Its constitutional centrality remained intact at the start of the new century.

Epilogue

ENGLAND HAS BEEN A SUCCESS AS A COUNTRY. It matured early into nationhood, with remarkably little bloodshed and with only two sustained civil wars in its history, in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. By the end of the Georgian era most of its people enjoyed a security, prosperity and civil freedom that were rare anywhere on Earth. Even today, when other nations have equalled and even overtaken it, England still regards itself as a world power, with nuclear arms and claiming status with America as global policeman. It boasts pre-eminence in education, medicine, science and literature. Its capital city, London, its countryside, heritage and artistic activity attract visitors from all over the world.

A number of factors contributed to this success. Early in the story, the fertile geography of the eastern half of the British Isles suited the Saxon agrarian settlers. The borders formed by the North Sea, the English Channel and the uplands of Wales and Scotland were seldom peaceful, but they proved effective barriers against incursion. The Viking and Norman invasions were overwhelming, but did not obliterate the Saxon English. Newcomers were assimilated and Saxon settlements, culture and language remained largely intact. From then on, as Shakespeare remarked, England's insularity served 'in the office of a wall, or as a moat defensive to a house'. It was a defence that sufficed against Philip's Armada, Napoleon's grand army and Hitler's blitzkrieg.

The crucial fact of England's history in the Middle Ages was that it fell under the sway of a Norman dynasty that could not stop fighting. War with France lasted some four hundred years, off and on, from 1066 to 1453, ending only when the Plantagenets began fighting each other even more furiously than they did the French. Yet from this tribal belligerence arose the tradition of 'consent to rule', since to pay for their wars monarchs had to raise money and this required some

popular collaboration. Nothing curbed Norman autocracy as effectively as the king's need for taxes. From this arose the power of the City of London under Richard I, a codified rule of law under King John and a House of Commons in the parliaments of Henry III and Edward I. This bartering of power was absolute. Even the ruthless Edward I worried that people might take against him, and 'the aid and taxes which they had paid to us out of liberality and goodwill … may in future become a servile obligation.' He was right.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England was blessed with monarchs, counsellors and politicians whose talents guided it through storms of revolution to a new constitutional settlement. Henry VIII's marital woes drove him to shift wealth from the church to himself, and then on to a new middle class of merchants, lawyers and state officials. With wealth, as always, went power. Henry's religious revolution was entrenched by his second daughter, Elizabeth, one of the few European rulers with an instinct for a monarchy rooted in consensual government. In the seventeenth century, a newly empowered middle class engineered a second, political revolution against the Stuarts. Parliament disposed of the divine right of kings by executing Charles I in 1649, and of the royal prerogative by welcoming William of Orange in 1688. By the start of the eighteenth century England had rid itself of medieval autocracy and turned itself into a modern state. An assembly embracing England, Wales, Scotland and later Ireland established party politics, parliamentary procedure and judicial independence in forms that are recognisable to this day.

These forms produced a stability that emboldened England's maritime prowess and allowed Chatham and his son, Pitt the Younger, to acquire the most extensive overseas empire in the world. This empire survived the loss of the American colonies in the 1780s and also the shock of the French revolution, events that led not, as many predicted, to rebellion but to a national debate, one that culminated in the extraordinary revolution of the 1832 Reform Act. The resulting Victorian

prosperity saw parliament concede an ever wider ‘consent to rule’, as more and more Britons were brought within the orbit of the franchise. This underpinned what was now a United Kingdom’s emergence as the leading world power, blessed with natural resources, free trade, a liberal tradition and a spirit of scientific inquiry and enterprise, all seemingly without limit.

Throughout this time, the central institution of the British state, a bicameral parliament, never lost control. It was unrepresentative and always hesitant towards change, but it respected open debate and ultimately chained government to the will of the people, guiding Britain towards full democracy and a welfare state in the twentieth century. The so-called ‘game-changers’ of English politics may be listed as Cromwell, Walpole, Chatham, Peel, Disraeli, Gladstone and Lloyd George, but it was the collective of parliament that harnessed their talents to the service of the state. At no point in English history did extra-parliamentary action find political traction. When it did so in Ireland, the result was catastrophe. If there is any hero in this book, at least until the twentieth century, it is parliament.

At the time of Victoria’s death in 1901 these achievements were coming under threat. Free trade was undermining the economic power of empire. Other nations in Europe and America were outstripping Britain in capitalist enterprise and developing their natural and human resources. The rise of a competing imperialism, notably that of Germany, cost Britain dear in two world wars, such that after the second what was left of the British empire decomposed in just two decades. Nor was it only the overseas empire that failed. The earlier English empire within the British Isles was challenged. Ireland mostly broke loose in 1921, leaving Ulster to cause England continuing anguish. Separatist revivals in Scotland and Wales led eventually to the granting of partial autonomy. While the United Kingdom as a monarchy was secure, for the first time in history its parliament was forced to surrender power, both to the Celtic regions of the British Isles and to the a new confederacy formed of the states of western Europe. The

Plantagenets would have turned in their graves at such concessions.

These changes led to tensions. Post-imperial Britain had, in the words of the American Dean Acheson in 1962, ‘not yet found a role’ in the world. Island powers are usually ambivalent towards their adjacent continents, but Britain was neurotically so. Towards Europe it remained divided and undecided. While the empire had been discarded with relative ease, the cast of mind that created it had not. The twenty-first century saw Britain involved in successive wars of ‘liberal intervention’, variously claiming to champion humanitarianism, democracy, nation-building and regional stability. At times it seemed as if the Norman crusaders were back in the ascendant. Once chosen by the electorate, the executive proved adept at treating parliament not as a check on its discretion but as a rubber stamp.

Doubts also arose over the scale of that executive. Twentieth-century war had meant a rapid increase in the size and scope of the state, continuing in peacetime to meet the popular demand for welfare ‘from the cradle to the grave’. By the middle of the century, Britain’s health, education and social services, its public utilities and much of its industry and commerce had come under state control. This drift of authority to the centre was initially greeted with approval as part of the so-called welfare consensus, but by the 1980s the size of government and its inability to curb or reform itself led the consensus to dissolve. One response was the privatisation of much of the public sector, pursued by Tory and then Labour governments alike. But even where state activity was subcontracted to the private sector, nothing seemed able to curtail state spending. By the start of the twenty-first century, government was consuming 47 per cent of the nation’s output, a peacetime record.

It is as if Britain’s governors, shorn of an overseas empire, now craved a domestic one. But this new empire was as unwieldy as the old one. Economies of scale had become diseconomies. Whitehall and its agencies were unresponsive to

the checks and balances of what was still an informal constitution. The tax system appeared unable to sustain an ageing population, with a soaring health and welfare bill. Government slid easily into debt. The potency of the Norman state was reborn, but this time the Saxon people who had once fought to curb its excesses were now the grateful recipient of its largesse. The electorate willed the goals of state power, but balked at supplying the means in higher taxes.

Every age has its prophets warning against Leviathan. At the start of the new century it was widely held that the state, however benign its intent, cannot continue to grow inexorably, since the economy cannot support it. Across Europe, governments were proving unable to divest themselves of power. In Greece, Ireland, Portugal and even Britain, the spending of public money had grown ever more distant from the task of earning it. Yet democracy seemed unable to discipline it. Ask politicians why they cannot show stronger leadership and they will say, because the people who elect us will allow it. Central government, long the agent of discipline, had become an accomplice in indiscipline.

Throughout history, England's constitution has been forced to change only when its rulers have been deaf to the cries of the people, or at least to the march of events. It happened when medieval monarchs yielded to baronial and territorial power. It happened when the church yielded to Reformation and to an emerging merchant class. It happened when Stuart kings yielded to the rule of law and to the commons in parliament. In each case the monolithic tendency of the state was confronted by resurgent forces in society to which it had to give way. Even the nineteenth-century parliament, England's greatest contribution to European civilisation, had to yield to popular pressure for reform, while the roots of the welfare state emerged not from parliament but from innovative municipal corporations. Change came because the ruling elite proved sufficiently open to challenge and competition.

I regard this openness of English society as the crucial message of history. Today it is again being tested. Unless the

central state shows more respect to community and territorial loyalty, it starves itself of renewal from below, of innovation, experiment and new blood. England in its most potent era, the nineteenth century, was driven by a civic provincialism far from the metropolis. People are likely to lose faith in self-government when those exercising it on their behalf grow distant and unfamiliar. This is already noticeable in declining confidence in public services and a turning to private ones, for health, education and security. Few people in England can identify or name a leader of their local community. This anonymity is depoliticising communities and entrenching social divisions in a peculiarly domestic class system. While countries such as Spain, Italy, Germany and even France have devolved power to provinces, communes and mayors, England continues to concentrate it on London, Westminster and Whitehall.

That said, the picture is not all gloomy. The professions, universities, media and the law remain strong and relatively pluralistic, buttressed by such recent innovations as the internet, freedom of information, human rights law and a new supreme court. There is also a significant exception to the centralising trend, constitutional devolution within the United Kingdom to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The boundaries set for England in the Dark Ages are gradually re-emerging from the mist of time. The accretion of central power, required by the Saxons and then the Normans to define and defend England from the ancient Britons, is being reversed. The power of London, already withdrawn from the empire overseas, is now withdrawing from the empire at home. It is possible to see the acts setting up assemblies in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast as the first documents of a new constitutional settlement.

England is thus losing the will to govern the non-English peoples beyond its borders, even those elsewhere in the British Isles. There is a continuing need for institutions of a ‘united kingdom’, as long as the Scots, Welsh and some of the Irish want them. But the asymmetric nature of the Westminster parliament, with England’s government in partial thrall to MPs

from the semi-autonomous Celtic fringe, cannot be sustainable in the long term. It is a distorted democracy. Sooner or later, England will need its own assembly, either inside or outside the ambit of the Westminster parliament.

I used to regard written constitutions as a device of immature states. I have changed my mind. The incorporation of the European convention on human rights into British law has already given Britain a sizeable 'written' charter, whether or not it is later supplemented or replaced by a new bill of rights. The tradition of constitution where, in Tennyson's words, 'freedom slowly broadens down / from precedent to precedent,' is no longer sufficient to guard against elective dictatorship. Rights need writing down since they are persistently under threat, whether from surveillance technology, an obsession with imprisonment and an ever growing state discretion. The scope of local democracy needs codifying, to refresh the recruitment pool of the London establishment and refresh a public sector that now consumes a third of England's wealth. There is nothing novel in this. Such layered, subsidiary politics operated through most of English history, and still applies in the rest of Europe.

It was to these open traditions in England's history that the American revolutionaries turned for inspiration in the eighteenth century, even as they rebelled against the English crown. They mimicked the independent Tudor boroughs, counties, sheriffs and mayors, and the hallowed democracy of the town meeting. They turned to the early rule of law, to the Long Parliament, the glorious revolution and the bill of rights. The nations of the British Commonwealth, such as Canada, Australia and even sub-continental India, followed suit. They wrote down what mattered, and were guided by it in creating what are now exemplars of world democracy.

The message of history is that nations evolve most successfully when any change, social, economic or political, surges up from below. Central power corrupts those who wield it, becoming a conservative, repressive force. Those who believe in freedom and democracy must forever hold it in

check. Hence Kipling’s ringing words in saluting the earliest such curb, Magna Carta:

And still when Mob or Monarch lays
Too rude a hand on English ways,
The whisper wakes, the shudder plays
Across the reeds at Runnymede. And Thames, that knows the moods of kings, And crowds and priests and suchlike things, Rolls deep and dreadful as he brings
Their warning down from Runnymede!

One Hundred Key Dates

DATES ARE THE FINGER-POSTS of history. I regard those below as the hundred most important turning points in the national story:

410	Roman colonists in Britain abandoned to fight Saxons alone
597	Augustine’s Roman missionaries arrive in England
602	Canterbury cathedral founded
664	English church opts for Rome, not Iona, at synod of Whitby
731	Bede’s church history completed
785	Offa’s dyke marks England’s border with Wales
865	Danes arrive in England
878	Alfred defeats the Dane, Guthrum, at Edington
991	Ethelred pays Danegeld to avert Viking invasion
1016	Cnut becomes king of England
1066	Battle of Hastings, William I defeats Harold
1086	Domesday Book completed
1154	Henry II takes power
1170	Murder of Becket ends Henry’s campaign against church
1189	Death of Richard I, Lionheart

1199 Death of Richard Lionheart

1215 King John yields to barons and signs Magna Carta

1264 Simon de Montfort summons parliament

1277 Edward I invades Wales and defeats Llywelyn

1295 Edward summons ‘Model Parliament’

1314 Edward II defeated by Scots at Bannockburn

1327 Murder of Edward II in Berkeley Castle

1337 Start of Hundred Years War against France

1346 Edward III wins battle of Crécy

1348 Black Death kills quarter of population

1381 Richard II ends peasants’ revolt

1399 Henry IV usurps Richard II

1415 Henry V wins battle of Agincourt

1431 Joan of Arc burned at stake

1453 English defeat at Castillon ends Hundred Years War

1455 Battle of St Albans begins Wars of Roses

1469 Warwick the kingmaker switches allegiance to Lancastrian Henry VI

1471 Yorkists win battle of Tewkesbury

1483 Murder of two princes in Tower of London

1485 Henry Tudor’s defeat of Richard III at Bosworth ends Wars of Roses

1509 Henry VIII crowned king

1520 Henry meets Francis I at Field of Cloth of Gold

1533 Henry weds Anne Boleyn

1534 Henry’s act of supremacy over English church

1536 Dissolution of monasteries begins, execution of Anne

1547 Death of Henry, Edward VI crowned

1553 Accession of Mary I, start of Counter-Reformation

1556 Cranmer burned at stake

1558 Accession of Elizabeth I restores Reformation

1588 Spanish Armada defeated

1603 Death of Elizabeth, accession of House of Stuart

1605 Guy Fawkes’ gunpowder plot foiled

1628 Parliament’s Petition of Right against Charles

1640 Long Parliament meets

1642 Civil War begins

1644 Defeat of Royalists at Marston Moor

1649 Execution of Charles I

1653 Cromwell named Lord Protector

1660 Restoration of Charles II

1665 Plague hits London

1665 Plague hits London

1666 Great Fire of London

1688 Invasion of William of Orange, Glorious Revolution

1704 Marlborough wins Battle of Blenheim

1707 Act of Union with Scotland creates Great Britain

1714 Death of Anne, Hanoverian succession

1720 South Sea bubble

1746 Battle of Culloden ends Jacobite rebellion

1759 Climax of military success in Seven Years War

1781 Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown

1793 French revolutionaries declare war on Britain

1800 Act of Union with Ireland creates United Kingdom

1805 Nelson wins battle of Trafalgar

1807 British slave trade abolished

1815 Napoleon defeated at battle of Waterloo

1819 Peterloo massacre leads to widespread repression

1832 Great reform act

1837 Accession of Queen Victoria

1838 Publication of People’s Charter

1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws

1851 The Great Exhibition in Hyde Park

1853 — 6	Crimean war
1867	Second Reform Act
1876	Disraeli declares Victoria empress of India
1899	Start of Boer war
1901	Death of Victoria
1909	Lloyd George’s ‘People’s Budget’
1914 — 18	First World War
1920	Home rule for Ireland
1926	General strike
1929	Great crash and depression
1936	Edward VIII abdicates
1939 — 45	Second World War
1947	Independence of India
1948	National Health Service founded
1953	Coronation of Elizabeth II
1956	Suez crisis
1973	Britain joins Common Market
1976	Callaghan seeks IMF loan to relieve economic crisis
1979	Thatcher is Britain’s first female prime minister

1981 Wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer

1982 Thatcher wins Falklands war

1990 Fall of Thatcher

1997 Blair elected prime minister

2003 Invasion of Iraq

2008 Global financial crisis

2010 Coalition formed under Cameron

Kings and Queens of England from 1066

NORMANS	1066 – 87	William I of Normandy
	1087 – 1100	William II Rufus
	1100 — 35	Henry I
	1135 – 54	Stephen and Matilda
PLANTAGENET	1154 — 89	Henry II
	1189 – 99	Richard I
	1199 – 1216	John
	1216 – 72	Henry III
	1272 – 1307	Edward I
	1307 – 27	Edward II
	1327 — 77	Edward III
	1377 — 99	Richard II
LANCASTER	1399 — 1413	Henry IV
	1413 – 22	Henry V
	1422 – 61; 1470 – 71	Henry VI
YORK	1461 — 70; 1471 – 83	Edward IV

	1471 — 83	
	1483	Edward V
	1483 – 85	Richard III
TUDOR	1485 – 1509	Henry VII
	1509 – 47	Henry VIII
	1547 — 53	Edward VI
	1553 – 58	Mary I
	1558 – 1603	Elizabeth I
STUART	1603 — 25	James I
	1625 – 49	Charles I
	1649 – 60	Interregnum
	1660 – 85	Charles II
	1685 — 88	James II
	1689 – 94	William III & Mary II
	1694 – 1702	William III
	1702 – 14	Anne
HANOVER	1714 — 27	George I
	1727 – 60	George II
	1760 – 1820	George III
	1820 — 30	George IV
	1830 — 37	William IV

	1830 — 37	William IV
	1837 — 1901	Victoria
SAXE-COBURG- GOTHA / WINDSOR	1901 – 10	Edward VII
	1910 – 36	George V
	1936	Edward VIII
	1936 — 52	George VI
	1952 — present	Elizabeth II

Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom

1721 — 1742	Sir Robert Walpole, Whig
1742 — 1743	Earl of Wilmington, Whig
1743 — 1754	Henry Pelham, Whig
1754 — 1756	Duke of Newcastle, Whig
1756 — 1757	Duke of Devonshire, Whig
1757 — 1762	Duke of Newcastle, Whig
1762 — 1763	Earl of Bute, Tory
1763 — 1765	George Grenville, Whig
1765 — 1766	Marquess of Rockingham, Whig
1766 — 1768	Earl of Chatham, Whig
1768 — 1770	Duke of Grafton, Whig
1770 — 1782	Lord North, Tory
1782 (MAR — JUL)	Marquess of Rockingham, Whig
1782 — 1783	Earl of Shelburne, Whig
1783 (APR — DEC)	Duke of Portland, Whig
1783 — 1801	William Pitt, Tory
1801 — 1804	Henry Addington, Tory

1804 — 1806	William Pitt, Tory
1806 — 1807	Lord Grenville, Whig
1807 — 1809	Duke of Portland, Whig
1809 — 1812	Spencer Perceval, Tory
1812 — 1827	Earl of Liverpool, Tory
1827 (APR — AUG)	George Canning, Tory
1827 — 1828	Viscount Goderich, Tory
1828 — 1830	Duke of Wellington, Tory
1830 — 1834	Earl Grey, Whig
1834 (JUL — NOV)	Lord Melbourne, Whig
1834(NOV — DEC)	Duke of Wellington, Tory
1834 — 1835	Sir Robert Peel, Tory
1835 — 1841	Lord Melbourne, Whig
1841 — 1846	Sir Robert Peel, Tory
1846 — 1852	Lord John Russell, Liberal
1852 (FEB — DEC)	Earl of Derby, Conservative
1852 — 1855	Earl of Aberdeen, Tory
1855 — 1858	Viscount Palmerston, Liberal
1858 — 1859	Earl of Derby, Conservative

1858 — 1859	Earl of Derby, Conservative
1859 — 1865	Viscount Palmerston, Liberal
1865 — 1866	Lord John Russell, Liberal
1866 — 1868	Earl of Derby, Conservative
1868 (FEB — DEC)	Benjamin Disraeli, Conservative
1868 — 1874	William Ewart Gladstone, Liberal
1874 — 1880	Benjamin Disraeli, Conservative
1880 — 1885	William Ewart Gladstone, Liberal
1885 — 1886	Marquess of Salisbury, Conservative
1886 (FEB — JUL)	William Ewart Gladstone, Liberal
1886 — 1892	Marquess of Salisbury, Conservative
1892 — 1894	William Ewart Gladstone, Liberal
1894 — 1895	Earl of Rosebery, Liberal
1895 — 1902	Marquess of Salisbury, Conservative
1902 — 1905	Arthur James Balfour, Conservative
1905 — 1908	Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Liberal
1908 — 1916	H. H. Asquith, Liberal
1916 — 1922	David Lloyd George, Liberal
1922 — 1923	Andrew Bonar Law, Conservative
1923 — 1924	Stanley Baldwin, Conservative

1924 (JAN — NOV)	Ramsay MacDonald, Labour
1924 — 1929	Stanley Baldwin, Conservative
1929 — 1935	Ramsay MacDonald, Labour (from 1931 National Labour)
1935 — 1937	Stanley Baldwin, Conservative
1937 — 1940	Neville Chamberlain, Conservative
1940 — 1945	Winston Churchill, Conservative
1945 — 1951	Clement Attlee, Labour
1951 — 1955	Winston Churchill, Conservative
1955 — 1957	Anthony Eden, Conservative
1957 — 1963	Harold Macmillan, Conservative
1963 — 1964	Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Conservative
1964 — 1970	Harold Wilson, Labour
1970 — 1974	Edward Heath, Conservative
1974 — 1976	Harold Wilson, Labour
1976 — 1979	James Callaghan, Labour
1979 — 1990	Margaret Thatcher, Conservative
1990 — 1997	John Major, Conservative
1997 — 2007	Tony Blair, Labour
2007 – 2010	Gordon Brown, Labour

2010 — present	David Cameron, Conservative

Author's Note

IN RESEARCHING A BOOK OF THIS NATURE I inevitably encountered variations in the spelling of names and places, and in the chronology at least of early dates. I have given those most commonly accepted, including those taken from Bede and the Anglo-Saxon chronicles. A short history is chiefly reliant on secondary sources. I have mostly used the *Oxford History of England*, Churchill's monumental *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* and G. M. Trevelyan's social history series. Longman's *Chronicle of Britain* was a useful reference. I also delved into excellent general histories that have appeared recently by David Starkey, Simon Schama, Roy Strong and Rebecca Fraser.

The books I have used on specific periods are too numerous to mention. The one exception is where the story begins, in the continuing debate over the origins of the English people, admirably set out in David Miles's *The Tribes of Britain*. More idiosyncratic aids were John Vincent's *An Intelligent Person's Guide to History*, Jonathan Clark's 'counter-factual' *A World by Itself* and my old stand-by, Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly*. The last is a sober corrective to the entire corpus of world history.

I thank Ken Morgan, Tom Jenkins, Jeremy Black, my publisher Daniel Crewe and numerous others for reading and correcting the text in whole or part. I also thank Andrew Franklin of Profile Books for the head-spinning idea of attempting to put so much information into so few words in the first place.

List of Illustrations

46. Chepstow Castle. Photo: International Photobank/Alamy
47. Bischof Odon at a feast given by William the Conquerer, from the Bayeux Tapestry, late eleventh century. Musée de la Tapisserie, Bayeux. Photo: akg-images
50. The Keep and South East Tower, Goodrich Castle © English Heritage Photo Library
53. Henry I in bed with Princess Nest of Wales, manuscript illumination by French or Flemish school, *c*. 1315 — 25. Photo © British Library Board
54. Queen Matilda holding a charter, from *The Golden Book of St Albans*, 1380. Photo: akg-images/British Library
55. Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter-in-law led into captivity, fourteenth-century mural. Chapelle de Sainte-Radegonde, Chinon, France. Photo: The Art Archive/Alamy
58. Interior of the nave, Durham Cathedral. Photo: Globuss Images/Alamy
61. Thomas à Becket before King Henry II, from a fourteenth-century manuscript. Photo: akg-images/British Library
62. The Murder of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury Cathedral, early fifteenth century painting by Master Francke. Kunsthalle, Hamburg. Photo: akg-images/ullstein bild
67. Richard the Lionheart at the battle of Gisors in 1197, from *Chroniques de France ou de Saint Denis*, fourteenth century, French School. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library
68. King John hunting, from *Liber Legum Antiquorum Regum*, *c*. 1321. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library
70. King John signing the Magna Carta, twentieth-century illustration by A. C. Michael. © Stapleton Collection/Corbis
74. Caerphilly Castle. Photo: Robert Estall photo agency/Alamy
77. Simon de Montfort and the Barons demanding reforms from Henry III, nineteenth century illustration by Sir John Gilbert. Photo: Private Collection/The Stapleton Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
78. Tomb of Edward the Confessor, Westminster Abbey. Photo: Angelo Hornak/Alamy

80. Map of Great Britain from *Abbreviatio chronicorum Angliae*, 1250 — 59, by Matthew Paris. Photo: akg-images/British Library
84. Harlech Castle, Gwynedd. Photo: Skyscan/Alamy
86. Eleanor Cross, Hardingstone, Northampton. Photo: Robert Hunt/Alamy
87. Marriage of Edward II to Isabella at Boulogne, from *Anciennes Chroniques d'Angleterre*, by Jean Batard de Wavrin, *c*. 1470 — 80. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library
88. Execution of the Despensers, from *The St Alban's Chronicle*, fifteenth century. Photo: © Lambeth Palace Library, London/The Bridgeman Art Library
90. The Battle of Crécy, from *Froissart's Chronicles*, French School, fifteenth century. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris/The Bridgeman Art Library
95. The Black Death at Tournai, 1349 by Gilles Le Muisit. Photo: Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels/The Bridgeman Art Library
96. Edward III granting the Black Prince the principality of Aquitaine, 1386 — 99. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library
97. The opening of John's Gospel from a pocket sized version of Wycliffe's Bible thought to have been used by a travelling Lollard preacher. Courtesy University of Glasgow Library, Department of Special Collections
101. Peasants' Revolt showing John Ball leading the rebels, from *Froissart's Chronicles*, *c*. 1460 — 80. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library
102. Richard II Presented to the Virgin and Child by Saints John the Baptist, Edward and Edmund, *c*. 1395 — 99, by the Master of the Wilton Diptych. Photo: National Gallery, London/The Bridgeman Art Library
105. Lydgate and the Canterbury Pilgrims Leaving Canterbury, from *The Troy Book and the Siege of Thebes* by John Lydgate, 1412 – 22. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library

107. The Battle of Agincourt, 1415, from *The Chronicle of Enguerrand de Monstrelet*, *c*. 1390 — 1453. Photo: The Art Archive/Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
108. Coronation of King Henry VI of England as King of France, Paris, 16 December 1431, from *Anciennes Chroniques d'Angleterre*, French School, fifteenth century. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Photo: akg-images
110. Marriage of Henry V to Catherine of France, illumination, French School, fifteenth century. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library
117. Dunstanburgh Castle, Northumberland. Photo: © NTPL/Joe Cornish
120. King Richard III, English School, fifteenth century. Photo: Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
122. Herstmonceux Castle, near Hailsham, Sussex Photo: © Imagestate Media Partners Limited/Impact Photos/Alamy)
125. Allegorical depiction of England under the Tudor Rose, illumination, English School,
1516. Photo: akg-images/British Library
126. Detail from *The Thames at Richmond, with the Old Royal Palace*, *c*. 1620, Flemish School. Photo: Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge/The Bridgeman Art Library
128. Henry VIII, *c*. 1516, Flemish School. The Fairhaven Collection, Angelsey Abbey. Photo: © NTPL/Derrick E. Witty
132/3. Detail from *The Field of the Cloth of Gold*, *c*. 1545, English School. Photo: The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II/The Bridgeman Art Library
134. Interior of the Great Hall, Hampton Court. Photo: Pawel Libera Images/Alamy
138 (left). Cardinal Wolsey, after Hans Holbein the Younger. Photo: © Ipswich Borough Council Museums and Galleries, Suffolk/The Bridgeman Art Library
138 (right). Sir Thomas More *c*.1600, after Hans Holbein the Younger. Kenwood House, London Photo: © English Heritage Photo Library/The Bridgeman Art Library
139 (left). Thomas Cromwell, by Hans Holbein the Younger. Photo: IAM/akg-images

139 (right). Thomas Cranmer, 1546, by Gerlach Flicke. Photo: National Portrait Gallery, London/The Bridgeman Art Library
144/5. *The Coronation Procession of King Edward VI in 1547*, eighteenth century illustration by Samuel Grimm. Photo: Society of Antiquaries of London/The Bridgeman Art Library
146. Philip II and Mary I, 1558, by Hans Eworth. Photo: © Trustees of the Bedford Estate, Woburn Abbey/The Bridgeman Art Library
148. Defaced rood screen, St Michael's Church, Barton Turf, Norfolk. Photo: ASP Religion/Alamy
149. The Burning of Thomas Cranmer, from *The Book of Martyrs* by John Foxe, 1563. Photo: © Lambeth Palace Library, London/The Bridgeman Art Library
153. Elizabeth I when Princess, *c*. 1546, attributed to Guillaume Scrots. Photo: The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II/The Bridgeman Art Library
154. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, *c*. 1560 — 65, attributed to Steven van der Meulen. Photo: © Wallace Collection, London/The Bridgeman Art Library
155. Priest's hole in the Kings Room, Moseley Old Hall, Staffordshire. Photo: © NTPL/Andreas von Einsiedel
158/9. *The launching of English fireships on the Spanish fleet off Calais in 1588*, Flemish School, seventeenth century. Private Collection. Photo: © Rafael Valls Gallery, London/The Bridgeman Art Library
160. The arrival of Queen Elizabeth I at Nonsuch Palace, 1582, by Joris Hoefnagel. Photo: Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
163. Queen Elizabeth I being carried in Procession, *c*. 1601, attributed to Robert Peake. Photo: Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
167. James I, by John de Critz the Elder, seventeenth century. Photo: Roy Miles Fine Paintings/The Bridgeman Art Library
169. George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, by Studio of Daniel Mytens, seventeenth century. Private Collection. Photo: © Christie's Images/The Bridgeman Art Library
171. Charles I and Henrietta Maria with their two eldest

children, Prince Charles and Princess Mary, 1632, by Sir Anthony van Dyck. Photo: The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II/The Bridgeman Art Library

174. Bolsover Castle, Derbyshire. Photo: © Andrew Tryner/English Heritage Photo Library.

178. Unfinished miniature of Oliver Cromwell by Samuel Cooper, *c*. 1657. Photo: Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library

180. Detail from *The Battle of Marston Moor in 1644*, by Abraham Cooper, nineteenth century. Photo: Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, Lancashire/ The Bridgeman Art Library

183. *The Execution of Charles I at Whitehall in 1649*, attributed to Gonzales Coques. Musee de Picardie, Amiens, France. Photo: Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library

187. The Restoration of Charles II at Whitehall, 1660, by Isaac Fuller. Photo: Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library

189. Nell Gwyn, by studio of Sir Peter Lely, seventeenth century. Queen Anne's Gate, The National Trust. Photo: © NTPL/John Hammond

191. *John Rose, the King's Gardener, presenting Charles II with a pineapple at Dorney Court, Berkshire*, attributed to Hendrick Danckerts, seventeenth century. Ham House, Surrey. Photo: The Stapleton Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library

192. The Great Fire of London, by Dutch School, seventeenth century. Photo: © Museum of London/The Bridgeman Art Library

195. The Dutch in the Medway, 1667, by Willem Schellinks. Photo: © Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery, Kent/The Bridgeman Art Library

202. Kensington Palace showing the alterations made by William and Mary, from *Survey of London*, print after Johannes Kip and Leonard Knyff, 1730. Photo: Private Collection/ The Stapleton Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library

205. Detail of William and Mary, from the ceiling of the Painted Hall, 1707 — 14, by Sir James Thornhill. Royal Naval College, Greenwich. Photo: James Brittain/ The Bridgeman Art Library

206. Queen Anne, 1703, by Edmund Lilly. Photo: Blenheim Palace, Woodstock/ The Bridgeman Art Library
208. Detail of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough at the Battle of Blenheim 1704, from a tapestry at Blenheim Palace, Woodstock. Photo: © The Print Collector/Alamy
212. *The Bubblers Bubbl'd*, 1720, print by James Cole. Photo: Private Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library
213. Pulteney Street seen through the Gateway of Sydney Gardens, Bath, from *Bath, Illustrated by a Series of Views*, 1806, by John Nattes. Photo: Private Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library
214. Horace Walpole talking to the Speaker in the House of Commons, 1730, by Sir James Thornhill. Clandon Park, Surrey. Photo: © NTPL/John Hammond
217. William Pitt the Elder, by William Hoare, nineteenth century. Private Collection. Photo: © Bonhams, London/The Bridgeman Art Library
219. The Death of General Wolfe, *c*. 1771, by Benjamin West. Private Collection. Photo: Phillips, Fine Art Auctioneers, New York/The Bridgeman Art Library
222. Portrait of Edmund Burke. Photo: Stock Montage/Getty Images
229. *The Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805*, by Joseph Mallord William Turner. Photo: The Art Archive/National Maritime Museum/Eileen Tweedy
230. *John Wesley preaching in Old Cripplegate Church*, undated, English School. Photo: Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
232/3. The battle of Waterloo by Sir William Allan, nineteenth century. Apsley House, The Wellington Museum, London. Photo: © English Heritage Photo Library/ The Bridgeman Art Library
234. Detail from *The Peterloo Massacre, 1819*, by Richard Carlile and George Cruikshank. Photo: Manchester Art Gallery/The Bridgeman Art Library
236. *Leeds from Rope Hill*, *c*. 1840 by Alphonse Douseau. Photo: © Leeds Museums and Art Galleries/The Bridgeman Art

Library
238. Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington with Sir Robert Peel, 1844, by Franz Winterhalter. Photo: The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II/ The Bridgeman Art Library
240. View of Regent Street, 1825, English School. Photo: Private Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library
244. *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, *c*. 1835, by Joseph Mallord William Turner. Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania/The Bridgeman Art Library
245. *The Opening of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway*, 1830, by Isaac Shaw Junior. Photo: © NRM Pictorial Collection/Science & Society Picture Library
248. The Royal Family, 1846, by Franz Winterhalter. Photo: The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II/The Bridgeman Art Library
250. Sketch of a ward at the Hospital at Scutari, Crimea, *c*. 1856, by Joseph-Austin Benwell. Photo: Greater London Council/The Bridgeman Art Library
251. *The Charge of the Light Brigade, Balaclava*, after Richard Caton Woodville II, nineteenth century. Photo: Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
254. Disraeli and Gladstone, cartoon by John Tenniel from *Punch*, 1868. Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library
256. Bliss Tweed Mill, near Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. Photo: © David Jones/Alamy
259. *General Gordon's Last Stand*, by George Joy, nineteenth century. Photo: Leeds Museums and Galleries/The Bridgeman Art Library
261. Keir Hardie addressing suffragettes at a free speech meeting. Undated photo. Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library
263. British troops advancing up a hill in the Boer war, 1900. Photo: Topfoto
264. Queen Victoria, 1899, by Heinrich von Angeli. Photo: The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II/The Bridgeman Art Library
267. Edward VII, late 1900s. Photo: Everett Collection/ Rex

Features
270. David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, 1910. Photo: PA Photos
272. Mrs. Pankhurst arrested outside Buckingham Palace, 21 May 1914. Photo: Topfoto
273. Advertisement for the White Star Line, 1911. Photo: Cauer Collection, Germany/The Bridgeman Art Library
277. First World War recruitment poster featuring Lord Kitchener. Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library
279. *The Territorials at Pozières during the Battle of the Somme on 23rd July 1916*, by William Barnes Wollen. Photo: National Army Museum, London/The Bridgeman Art Library
284. A mother casting her vote during the General Election, 1918. Photo: Hulton Archive/Getty Images
288. Ramsay MacDonald leaving Downing Street, 7 June 1935. Photo: Topfoto
291. A bus wrecked by strikers in South London, 1926. Photo: Private Collection/ The Stapleton Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
293. Coal miners demonstrating in Jarrow, 1936. Photo: Topfoto
295. Adolf Hitler with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor at Berchtesgaden, Germany, 1937. Photo: © Bettmann/Corbis
296. Neville Chamberlain holding the Peace Accord, signed with Adolf Hitler, September 1938. Photo: Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library
299. Dunkirk Evacuation, May 1940. Photo: © Fox Photos/Getty Images
300. Bomb-damaged street in the London area after a German air-raid, May 1943. Photo: AP/PA Photos
302. London Underground station serving as a bomb shelter, 1940. Photo: Topfoto/Ullstein
304. Advertisement for Jaeger promoting its range of wartime utility clothing, 1944. Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library
306. Winston Churchill mobbed by crowds after his victory speech on V. E. Day, May 1945. Photo: PA Photos
312. Jamaican immigrants with an RAF recruiting officer

aboard the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury, 1948. Photo: Topfoto
315. Elizabeth II, 1952. Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library
316. The Devon Regiment assisting police in looking for Mau Mau terrorists, Karoibangi, Kenya, *c*.1954. Photo: Popperfoto/Getty Images
317. Protest marchers arriving at Aldermaston, April 1958. Photo: Topfoto
319. Advertisement for the Morris Mini-Minor, 1960s. Photo: Land of Lost Content/HIP/TopFoto
323. Margaret and Denis Thatcher enter Downing Street, May 1979. Photo: Tim Graham/Getty Images
324. Marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer, St Paul's Cathedral, July 1981. Photo: Tim Graham/Getty Images
327. Troopship *Canberra* returns from the Falklands. Photo: Nick Rogers/Rex Features
329. NUM President Arthur Scargill addresses a miners rally in Barnsley, 1984. Photo: PA Photos
333. Anti-Poll Tax Demonstration, London, April 1990. Photo: David Batchelor/Rex Features
334. Marchers including actor Ian McKellan and Peter Tatchell protest against Clause 28, Manchester, 1988. Photo: Photofusion/Alamy
339. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, April 1997. Photo: AFP/Getty Images
342. Floral tributes to Diana, Princess of Wales, Kensington Palace, September 1997. Photo: Fiona Hanson/PA Photos
344. Anti-war rally, Hyde Park, London, February 2003. Photo: Topfoto
347. Iraqis welcome British troops into the centre of Basra, Iraq, April 2003. Photo: © Camera Press, London
349. David Cameron, left, greets Nick Clegg on the doorstep of 10 Downing Street, London, May 2010. Photo: PA Photos
351. Westminster at night. Photo: The Travel Library/Rex Features

Index

Page numbers in italic refer to illustrations.

A

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

K

L

M

N

O

P

Q

R

S

T

U

V

W

Y

Z

Author photo © John Millar.

SIMON JENKINS is the author of the international bestsellers *England's Thousand Best Churches* and *England's Thousand Best Houses,* the former editor of *The Times* and *Evening Standard,* and a columnist for the *Guardian*. He is chairman of the National Trust.

PublicAffairs is a publishing house founded in 1997. It is a tribute to the standards, values, and flair of three persons who have served as mentors to countless reporters, writers, editors, and book people of all kinds, including me.

I. F. STONE, proprietor of *I. F. Stone's Weekly,* combined a commitment to the First Amendment with entrepreneurial zeal and reporting skill and became one of the great independent journalists in American history. At the age of eighty, Izzy published *The Trial of Socrates,* which was a national bestseller. He wrote the book after he taught himself ancient Greek.

BENJAMIN C. BRADLEE was for nearly thirty years the charismatic editorial leader of *The Washington Post.* It was Ben who gave the *Post* the range and courage to pursue such historic issues as Watergate. He supported his reporters with a tenacity that made them fearless and it is no accident that so many became authors of influential, bestselling books.

ROBERT L. BERNSTEIN, the chief executive of Random House for more than a quarter century, guided one of the nation's premier publishing houses. Bob was personally responsible for many books of political dissent and argument that challenged tyranny around the globe. He is also the founder and longtime chair of Human Rights Watch, one of the most respected human rights organizations in the world.

. . .

For fifty years, the banner of Public Affairs Press was carried

by its owner Morris B. Schnapper, who published Gandhi, Nasser, Toynbee, Truman, and about 1,500 other authors. In 1983, Schnapper was described by *The Washington Post* as “a redoubtable gadfly.” His legacy will endure in the books to come.

Peter Osnos, *Founder and Editor-at-Large*

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by Profile Books Ltd.
Published in the United States by PublicAffairs™,
a Member of the Perseus Books Group

eISBN : 978-1-61039143-6