

HISTORY

1.1 History of Britain | Highlights

The Celts and the Romans

Before the Romans invaded Britain, the country was inhabited by Celtic tribes. They were good at farming and had a well-organized society. They lived in houses with thatched roofs. Men and women wore jewellery made of bronze and sometimes decorated with gold or silver. They had more than 400 gods who were believed to live in trees, rivers, lakes and other places. They believed in a life after death. Their priests were called Druids.

In 54BC the Romans under Julius Caesar conquered Britain and turned it into a Roman province. They ruled the country for almost 400 years. They did not take Scotland and Ireland. They built camps, forts, castles, and villas. They made roads using stones and gravel. They built towns with an imposing forum in the centre, fine houses which had underfloor heating, inns, and bath houses. Water came via aqueducts or pipes. To get rid of the sewage they had underground sewers.

London (Londinium) was the political, financial and commercial centre with a very busy port (⊕ 2.8.1). Bath (Aquae Sulis) was a spa with a thermal spring and a temple to Sulis Minerva, the goddess of healing. Bath is now a very popular tourist attraction. Wealthy people had slaves to do their work. This is why they had a lot of leisure time for fun and entertainment. Most popular were games fought by gladiators in amphitheatres.



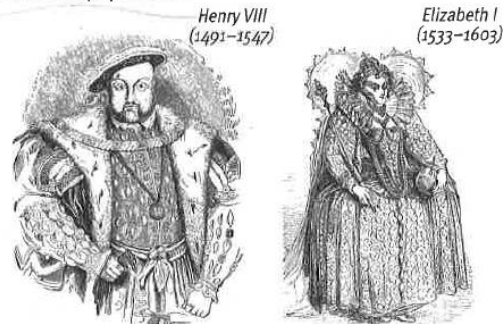
From the "Book of Kells" (Ireland, 8th century)

The Book of Kells is named after the monastery of Kells, Ireland. It is the finest example of the early medieval art of making books.

Medieval Life

In 1066, the Norman William the Conqueror invaded Britain and became King of England (⊕ 2.8.1). The following four centuries are called the medieval period. Many beautiful castles (⊕ 3.7) and churches still exist from that period, e.g. Canterbury Cathedral. The political system of the time was the feudal system. Under this system the king gave land to the lords in return for military service. The lords gave land to knights and other so-called vassals who also had to pay with military service and part of the produce of the land. Only 5% of the population lived in towns; most people lived in the country working as farmhands or sheep shearers for very low pay. Most of the work was done by hand. There was a big gap between rich and poor. Poor families often had to share one room. They ate mostly bread, vegetables, and stew. In towns you could also see a lot of beggars. Rich people lived in big houses or castles with large halls. They often had meals, so-called banquets, with ten or more courses.

In the 14th century the plague or Black Death killed large parts of the population.



Henry VIII and Elizabeth I

One of the most famous of English kings was Henry VIII. He became king in 1509 when he was seventeen years old. He was king for 38 years and died in 1547. He married six times. He divorced two of his wives, two were executed, one died in childbirth, and one outlived him. He had three children.

He founded the Anglican church

The best known of Henry's children was Elizabeth I. She became queen in 1558 after her brother and sister had both died. She ruled until 1603. She is regarded as a very successful queen and many things happened during her reign. William Shakespeare (⊕ 3.3) wrote his plays and English sailors went on many journeys of discovery. The most famous of these was Sir Francis Drake.

The Civil War

In 1642, the Civil War started between those who supported King Charles I and those who supported Parliament. The war divided whole families, with some members supporting different sides. The parliamentary army, led by Oliver Cromwell, won the war, and King Charles was executed. Cromwell ruled until his death in 1658. Charles's son became king in 1660 and was known as Charles II.



Queen Victoria
(1819–1901)

Words and Phrases

Victorian Life

Victoria became Queen when she was only 18 years old and she reigned until her death in 1901. She was Britain's longest-reigning monarch. Victoria married a German, Prince Albert, but he died at the age of 42. Victoria never stopped mourning her husband and wore black clothes for the rest of her life.

The reign of Queen Victoria was a period of many changes. New technology and machinery made farms more efficient. As a consequence many farmworkers lost their jobs. At the same time factories and railways were built and industries in towns grew (the "Industrial Revolution"). Many people left the country and moved to towns to find work in the factories. Living conditions in towns were very bad, because there were not enough houses and sanitary conditions were poor. Poor people often had to share a lavatory and buckets had to be emptied into the streets. Diseases like typhoid and cholera were quite common. Poverty also meant growing homelessness, crime, and alcoholism. Even children had to work in factories and mills. Sunday was the only day of rest. The famous writer Charles Dickens [⊕ 3.3] wrote about these conditions in his books, e.g. *Oliver Twist*.

Life was different for the rich: the aristocrats and the new wealthy businessmen. They had time for leisure activities such as cricket [⊕ 3.4], day trips to the seaside (Brighton), or visits to art galleries and museums.