

Course 03: British History

1. The origins of the inhabitants of Great Britain:

The Iberians were hunters who went from the south-west corner of Europe, known as Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal), seeking for fertile tracks.

The Celts migrated from central Europe in what is nowadays Belgium, Switzerland, and Austria, to England around 500 BC.

The Romans (43 - 410)

- In 55 BC, Julius Caesar won the battle against the Celts.
- By A.D. 43 Romans took control over the province of Britannia (England and Wales).
- Romans ideology was not large scale settlement. Rather, it was a merely colonial control.
- Romans brought to Britannia a new culture and a new way of life.
- They built Hadrian's wall to protect their province from Scots and Picts attacks.
- In 410, Romans left Britain.
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The Germanic Invasions (410-1066)

Anglo-Saxon 5th-8th Centuries

- Unlike the Romans, the Germanic tribes were eager to invade and settle permanently in Britain.
- Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians were great tribes that contributed to the transformation of Britain.
- The origin of these tribes was Germany for Anglo-Saxons, and Netherlands as well as Danemerak concerning Jutes and Frisians.
- They divided up England into several kingdoms and settled in Essex, Middlesex, Wessex, Sussex, Norfolk and Suffolk.
- They forced the Picts and Celts to leave to Wales and Scotland.
- Their culture and way of life predominated almost all England.
- They were great farmers, and they introduced new agricultural methods which guaranteed the self- sufficiency.
- In the beginning, they were Pagan.
- By the 6th and 7th Century, the Anglo-Saxons became Christian thanks to the Christian missionaries coming from Rome and Ireland.
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Vikings 9th-11th Centuries

- The Vikings were another type of Germanic invasion.
- They went from Scandinavia (Denemark, Sweden and Norway).
- They settled in some islands near Scotland and some regions in Ireland, then in England.

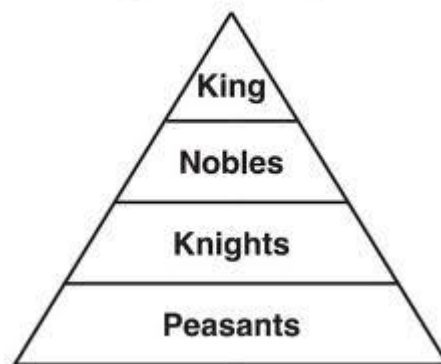
- The cultural and the linguistic differences between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes were very few the reason that facilitated the political union. The result was the kingdom of England characterised by Germanic culture and the Gaelic kingdom which encompasses most of Scotland predominated by the Celtic culture.

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The Dukes of Normandy: the Medieval Period (1066 – 1458):

- 1066 was one of the most important crossroads in the British history.
- This period was characterised by the Norman invasion under the leadership of William the Duke of Normandy who is known as '***William the Conqueror.***'
- During this era, the **feudal system** was strictly imposed on the Britons.
- The feudal system dictates obligations and duties to be respected.

European Feudal System



- Properties were hierarchically distributed respecting the figure above.
- The whole land belongs to the Crown. William took the quarter of the land as personal property.
- Peasants were represented by the English- speaking Saxons. They were not allowed to marry neither to travel without permission. They were obliged to work for free.
- The Barrons and Nobles were the French-Speaking Normans.
- This system was the first step towards English social classes.
- The Normans brought a strong governmental system which made of England one of the most effective and dominant political power.
- By the end of the 13th C, Anglo-Romans lords succeeded to control most Eastern Ireland and all Wales.
- During that time, the word Parliament was firstly introduced. Its origin is '*parler*' or speak. It describes the gathering of the nobles and the king. This was the first step towards the evolution of the present democratic body.
- Despite the Norman-English rule, the Welsh language and culture perpetuated. Welsh festivals, poetry and songs still exist until today.
- Scottish lowlands adopted the Anglo-Norman style of government, life and language. Whereas, highlands preserved the Gaelic culture and language.
- In 1086, William's officers documented the '***Domesday book***' which recorded all people and their possessions.

2.The Sixteenth Century: The Tudors (1485-1603):

- The Tudors were the first to put an end to the war that lasted 30 years.This war was called ’’ The Wars of the Roses’. It occurred between two groups of nobles: the house of York whose symbol was the white rose and the house of Lancaster with the red rose.
- In 1485, Henery Tudor (from Lancaster) killed the Yorkist Richard III at the battle of Bosworth and reunited the country by his marriage with the Yorkist Elizabeth.
- This era was full of historical events that reshaped Great Britain:
 - The parliament was divided into two: house of commons and house of lords. The emphasis was put on the agreement of the house of commons which was represented by powerful merchants and landowners.
 - The feudal power was weakened.
 - The education flourished, schools were built and poor people had the right to education.
 - The English Printing press was invented, and the first translated version of the bible was printed.
 - The rejection of the Roman church.
 - During the reign of Henry VIII, England witnessed the rise of Protestantism. To manage political and to legitimise his six marriages, Henry VIII declared himself the head of the church and rejected the Roman church.
 - All England became Protestant (England adopted Anglicanism which is not very different from Catholic organisation and rituals).
 - Scottish highlands and Ireland remained Catholic.
 - Scottish lowlands were Calvinist: a more idealistic branch of Protestantism with a strict focus on simplicity and avoidance of celebration and rituals.
 - During the Elizabethan age, England, and with the help of natural circumstances, defeated the ‘*Spanish Armada*’ (fleet of ships sent by the Catholic King Philip of Spain to invade England).
 - After the Death of Elizabeth I, the Scottish Dynasty succeeded and king James VI of Scotland became James I of England.

3.The seventeenth century: The Stuarts

The nomination of James VI of Scotland as James I of England led to the union between Scotland and England and initiated the era of the Stuarts through which Great Britain witnessed the following:

- Modern English became the written standard in Scotland, and Scottish churches adopted the English Bible instead of the Scots Bible.
- The relationship between religion and politics was adamant.
- Many attempts to assassinate the king who was not religious enough or too religious. One example was the ‘gunpowder plot’ when a group of Catholics tried to murder the king.
- The dominance of the parliament over the monarchy.

- The growth of Puritanism which rejected Catholicism.
- *The Civil War* (1642) which was the consequence of a religious conflict. It was between the parliamentarians and royalists. It ended with the victory of the Parliamentarians.
- In 1649, Charles I was executed, and England became Republic.
- Oliver Cromwell, the leader of the parliamentarians, became the '*Lord Protector*' of Britain and Ireland.
- After the death of Cromwell, the governmental system and the Puritan principles could not survive anymore.
- In 1660, Charles II, the son of the first executed monarch, was asked to come back and rule Britain. This led to the restoration of Monarch and the revival of Anglicanism
- During the reign of James II the brother of Charles II, problems between parliament and monarch reappeared due to the fact that James II encouraged and promoted Catholicism.
- The '*Glorious Revolution*' (1688) was a bloodless revolution that initiated many changes:
 - The deposition of James II.
 - The defeat of the Catholic army gathered by James II at the battle of Boyne in 1690.
 - Legislation of laws that deprive Catholics of voting and owning lands.
 - The Nomination of William of Orange as William III of England.
 - The Parliament passed the 'bill of rights' which guaranteed for Protestants to practice their religion freely. Also, it legitimated the Presbyterian church in Scotland, but it did not permit any Dissenter to become a member of parliament.

4.The Eighteenth Century

During the Eighteenth century, the political situation in Britain was very stable. Indeed, the act of union passed in 1707 and Scotland joined England and Wales to form the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain'. Although the Scottish parliament was dissolved and only some of its members became part of the English Parliament located in London, the Scottish legal system remained separate from that of England.

In this era, the system of parties in the UK was at its embryonic stage. This was due to the cleavage that led to clear divisions in the parliament. In fact, there existed the 'Whigs' who were the parliamentarians' descendants and who supported Protestant principles and on the other hand, there were the 'Tories' who value and respect the monarch and the Anglican church.

The eighteenth century was mainly characterised by cultural transformations and changes. The disappearance and the ban of the Celtic traditions is one good example. Also, the political stability permitted the UK to gain properties in America, West African Coast and

India. Moreover, industry, trade and agriculture flourished. People were encouraged to innovate, invent and create. Hence, the British way of life has evolved, and people started moving to live in cities. This factor revitalised the British economy and made it stronger. Additionally, it made of South England and especially London the industrial, business and trade centre.

5.The Nineteenth Century

All along this century, the UK passed through different and multidimensional phases. It stepped forward from losing its colonies during the American war of independence to stop the French invasion of Britain and controlled one of the largest empires of the world.

This epoch was characterised by the dominance of the British culture in Ireland. Indeed, the Gaelic language and customs were dissolved and substituted for English as the first language and supreme culture.

Internationally speaking, the UK had an ideology to possess more territories than to govern them. Hence, the UK aim was not to colonise; neither was it to settle and military control. Instead, it targeted enlarging and stretching its boundaries to encompass Australia, Canada, New Zealand and India (see map on page 19). This reinvigorated the British economy and contributed to making the UK one of the world's supreme and paramount powers.

Due to that fact, the British developed their sense of confidence and arrogance vis-à-vis the British culture and civilisation. They even felt responsible for spreading this noble and great culture and civilisation all over the world.

Additionally, this period was portrayed by metamorphoses of social structure. The following are some examples:

- The growth of the middle class.
- The majority of people left the countryside to gain a more comfortable life in the cities and towns.
- People relied more on industry.
- Some values and principles were fervently prominent like hard work, thrift, the notion of family and religion, promoting honesty and respect, and performing duties. These values are known as the '*Victorian values*'.
- The initiation of various reforms rather than revolutions.
- The abolition of slavery and laws that deprived humans of their freedom to practise their religion.
- The legislation of laws that protect workers and guarantees their rights.

- The foundation of some public services like police.
- People began admiring the beauty of the countryside and developed an emotional attachment to it thanks to the romantic poets who produced poems that appeals to the senses.



This inconsistency emanated two different consequences: progress and decline. Consequently, this era in the British history has been characterised by diversified events that sometimes weakened the British power and the other times serve in the evolvement of this nation. Here are the main events ordered chronologically:

- The Emergence of the German and the American powers which weakened the British force
- At the level of the parliament, the Liberal party was substituted for the Labour party
- The appearance of suffragette which helped the woman to gain its right to vote in 1918.
- Disagreement between the government and the house of lords about taxation.
- The division of Ireland in 1920
- The south of Ireland became independent in 1922, the six southern countries became the province of 'Northern Ireland' and remained within the UK. Therefore, Britain lost one of its colonies in addition to many others.
- The Trade Union became powerful and reached its higher state between 1930- 1980
- Economic crisis in 1931.
- In 1944, the education became compulsory and free (up to age of 15)
- In 1946, the foundation of the national health service.
- In 1949, Ireland became Republic

- In 1956, Great Britain's superpower diminished when it failed to stop the Egyptian control over Suez channel.
- In 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus which was a former British colony.
- Great Britain joined the European Union.
- 1997, Great Britain lost Hong Kong.

Suggested Homework 3

- Describe the UK in the First decade of 21st century.
- Look for: *Spanish Armada, Victorian values, feudal system, domesday book, civil war, Glorious Revolution.*
- What is stonehenge?
- Who was king Arthur ?

Further reading

British History and Culture by Stella Nangonovà