

British Monarchy: The Rest of the Story

George IV 1820-1830: He has been called “the first gentleman of England.” He acted as regent when his father became insane. Although he was charming, George IV lived a decadent lifestyle. He had extravagant tastes, including his taste for food, and thus became morbidly obese later in life. Known as a womanizer, George IV married Caroline of Brunswick. He detested her and would not allow her admittance to his coronation. They had one child, Charlotte, who died while giving birth.

During George’s reign, England continued expansion and the US gained power. In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase led to Western expansion. In 1805, the battle of Trafalgar established British naval supremacy, and in 1806, the British occupied South Africa. While these events pre-date George IV, their effects on the language fully took hold during his reign.

William IV 1830-1837: William was a sailor who never expected to be king. He had no heir and recognized that his niece Victoria would succeed him to the throne. However, he hated Victoria’s mother. Thus, when his health began to fail, he asked doctors to “tinker him up a bit” so he could live to see Victoria turn eighteen and be free of her mother’s control. He died shortly after Victoria’s eighteenth birthday. Victoria did, in fact, exert independence from her controlling mother immediately after this birthday.

Victoria 1837-1901: Victoria married her cousin, Prince Albert, with whom she was deeply in love. They had a number of children. With Albert at her side, Victoria invented the monarchy as figurehead and defined the Victorian Period. Although she was personally very traditional, her reign ushered in the Industrial Revolution.

During Victoria’s reign, New Zealand ceded Maori to the British crown (1840); the Society for Pure English presented the proposal that led to the making of the OED (1857); the British Raj was created in India (1858); and the Spanish American War led to the US assuming a major role in international politics (1898).

Edward VII 1901-1910: Although he was charming, a good diplomat, and popular, Edward was a disappointment to his parents. He was unable to meet their strict demands on his education as a youth, and as a teenager and young adult, he fell into what his parents would consider a very decadent lifestyle (gambling, drinking, and fornication!). In fact, Prince Albert died shortly after paying a visit to Edward to chastise him for a scandalous affair with an actress. Victoria never forgave Edward for this death. She also did little to prepare him for his future role as king. Nonetheless, during his brief reign, Edward had some success, especially as a diplomat and was successful at foreign policy. Edward did marry and have children, but never truly settled into marital life, as he had a number of mistresses.

George V 1910-1936: George is known as a tough and demanding father. As monarch, he was considered formal and aloof. He was the second son of Edward VII and had to leave behind his

military career after his older brother died. He married his older brother's widow, Mary of Teck, and they had six children. During WWI, George proved an effective leader, visiting hospitals and troops near the front line. Because of anti-German sentiments, in 1917 George changed the family name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to the more British-sounding Windsor.

During the reign of George V, the following events affected the English language: WWI (1914-1918), the first public radio broadcasts (1906), the first motion picture (1927), and the first television service (1936).

Edward VIII 1936 (abdicated): Creating a scandal, Edward married the twice-divorced American Wallis Simpson. He abdicated the throne in order to marry her. The couple later created even more scandal, associating with Nazis. Edward reportedly once saluted Hitler.

George VI 1936-1952: George was reluctant to assume the throne when his brother abdicated. For one thing, he had a bad stammer which he struggled to overcome. He married for love (the queen mother Elizabeth). He was much admired for his handling of England during WWII. He was also much admired for visiting hospitals and troops near the front line, and for refusing to evacuate when danger drew near. His wife insisted that she and their two daughters remain with him. His diplomacy solidified British and American relations. He died of lung cancer.

During his reign, WWII exerted a major influence on the English language.

Elizabeth II 1952-present: You know the story! She is Britain's longest reigning monarch.