

## HISTORY AND SOCIETY. 1 (from the Celts to 1649)

The **Celts**, from Eastern Europe, occupied Britain around 700 BC. They were divided into tribes, their religion was **Druidism** and their language is still spoken in some areas of England like Scotland and Wales. What we know about them is thanks to Greek and Roman historians as they did not leave any written document.

After the Celts the Romans invaded Britain with Julius Caesar in 55 B.C.. Their rule lasted until 410 A.D. when they were called back to defend Italy from the barbaric invasions. The Roman left their culture, their buildings and Latin remained the language of the Christian Church established in England by St. Augustine (597 A.D.).

Left without defence, Britain was subject of raids from Picts and Scots, tribes coming from the North. In 450-60 AD tribes of Angles, Saxon and Jutes from the Western countries occupied and settled in the country naming it *Angleland* or land of the Angles. The Celts retired in the West.

During the Anglo Saxon period, Britain suffered waves of invasions by the Danes or Vikings from Scandinavia. It was King **Alfred the Great** (871-899), the first English king, that defeated them confined them North of the Thames.

In 1066 **William the Conqueror**, Duke of Normandy, conquered England in the battle of **Hastings**. He introduced the feudal system and ordered the first survey, the **Domesday Book** (1086). French became the language of the court, Latin was still spoken by the clergy and the Saxon was used by common people.

The kings that took the power after William were the Plantagenets. Henry II (1154-1189) created civil itinerant courts of justice and tried to that weaken the Church opposed by **Thomas à Beckett**, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England, then murdered by the king's knights in his cathedral (1170) and proclaimed saint. Henry was succeeded by **Richard the Lionheart** (1189-99) who took part in the third Crusade. In his absence, his brother, **John Lackland**, (1199-1216), was appointed to substitute him. Because the heavy taxes he imposed, the barons forced him to sign the *Magna Charta* (1215) which limited the rights of the king. This document was followed by the first **Model Parliament** (1295) under King **Edward I** (1272–1307).

Between 1348-49 the **Black Death**, a terrible plague, killed one third of the population. In 1381 Watt Tyler and John Ball led the **Peasants' Revolt** which marked the end of feudalism while **John Wycliffe** attacked the clergy preaching a return to a humble Church.

In 1337 England started a war, which lasted about 100 years, to defend her lands in France, the **Hundred Years' War**. The English lost their territories, except the port of Calais. During this war **Joan of Arc**, la Pucelle d'Orléans, helped the French troops with her strength and faith, but was then sold to the English, accused of heresy and burned on the stake (1431).

At the end of the Hundred Years' War, under **Henry VI** of Lancaster (1422–1461), a civil war burst in Britain, the **War of the Two Roses** (1455-1485) so called after the emblems of the two families contending for the crown. The fight ended when Henry Tudor defeated the last York king **Richard III** at Bosworth and married a Lancaster princess, becoming **Henry VII** (1485–1509) and starting the great Tudor dynasty.

**Henry VII** tried to maintain peace and created a powerful the merchant fleet to encourage trade.

Under his son **Henry VIII's** (1509-1547) reign, England became Anglican: he repudiated his wife Catherine of Aragon, who had not given him a male heir, disobeying Pope Clemente who had refused to give him the divorce. Catherine was the aunt of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain and the pope was forced to excommunicate Henry who, in 1534, ordered the Parliament to pass the *Act of Supremacy* proclaiming himself *Head of the Church of England*. His break was purely political, the doctrine of the new church was not changed substantially. Henry is still famous for his six wives, and three children: Mary, Catherine of Aragon's daughter; Elizabeth, his second wife's heir (Anne Boleyn, executed) and Jane Seymour who died giving him Edward who succeeded his father as **Edward VI** (1547-1553), but died very at the age of sixteen.

When **Mary** (Catherine of Aragon's Daughter; 1533-1558) was crowned she tried to re-establish Catholicism in the country and persecuted the Protestants; for this reason she is known as 'Bloody Mary'.

She was succeeded by her half sister **Elizabeth I** (Anne Boleyn's daughter; 1558-1603) who promoted again the **Anglican Church**. Even though she did not persecute the Catholics, France and Spain, still under the Church of Rome, plotted against her also with the help of her cousin, Mary of Scotland. Mary had made enemies in her country and had been forced to ask for Elizabeth's protection. The English Queen kept her as a prisoner for about twenty years and then executed her on charge of conspiracy against her person.

Supported by sailors like **W. Raleigh, F. Drake** and **J. Hawkins** England had started attacking Spanish galleons back from America loaded with silver and gold. As a consequence Spain moved war against England trying to conquer her with its fleet, the *Invincible Armada* which was memorably defeated in 1588.

As Elizabeth had no male heir, her successor was Mary Stuart's son, **James VI** of Scotland, **James I** (1603-1625) of England, the first of the **Stuart dynasty** (1603-1714). As he tried to rule without the support of the Parliament, there were plots against him like the unsuccessful **Gunpowder Plot**. Besides, as he opposed the Puritans and their requests, a group of them, the so called pilgrim Fathers sailed on board the *Mayflower* and landed on the coasts of **Massachusetts** where they founded the first North American colony (1620). **NOTA SUI PURITANS**

His son and successor **Charles I** (1625-1649) dissolved the Parliament who did not approve his heavy taxation. When, after eleven years he was forced to call it back, the parliament asked him to abandon control of all military, civil and religious affairs. Charles' answer was invading the House of Commons and a Civil War started. The King was supported by the **Cavaliers**, rich people and aristocratic, while the Parliament was supported by the **Round-heads** (named after their haircut), middle class men led by a gentleman farmer, **Oliver Cromwell**, who formed a new *Model Army* and defeated the Royalists (1645). The king was executed on January 31, 1649.