



## WHIG ENGLAND

**The reign of Queen Anne.** As William of Orange had no children he was succeeded by princess Anne (1702-1714), his wife's sister. The new queen continued William's policy against France and was soon involved in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). In 1700 the king of Spain died leaving no children and Philip of Anjou, a grandson of Louis XIV, succeeded him. In order to prevent the union of the two monarchies of Spain and France, which represented a threat to the European stability, England allied with Holland and the Empire, supporting the claim of the Archduke Charles of Austria to the throne of Spain.

John Churchill (1650-1722), Duke of Marlborough, at the head of the Anglo-Dutch army, reported decisive victories at Blenheim (1704), Ramillies (1706), Oudenarde (1708), Malplaquet (1709) and Saragossa (1710); he arrested the advance of the Austrians and forced the French to retire from the Spanish Netherlands. But by 1710 signs of weariness for the long and costly war began to appear on both sides.

In England the Whigs supported the war as they thought it as the most likely means to keep themselves in power. But when the Tories succeeded in gaining the supremacy, Marlborough was dismissed and the war ended by the Treaties of Utrecht (1713) and Rastadt (1714). Philip of Anjou remained king of Spain, Britain kept Gibraltar and

Minorca, keys to the naval domination of the Mediterranean, Nova Scotia, and the Hudson Bay territory in America, which had previously been French possessions.

During Queen Anne's reign the Acts of Union (1707) were passed, uniting the two Parliaments of England and Scotland. When England and Scotland combined into a single kingdom, Anne became the first sovereign of the Kingdom of Great Britain. The queen died in 1714 and, as none of her many children survived her, she was the last monarch of the House of Stuart: the English crown went to George (her second-cousin), of the House of Hanover (the sovereigns belonging to this House ruled Britain from 1714 to 1901. In this context, the adjective «Hanoverian» usually refers to the 18th century rather than to the whole period).

**The reign of George I.** First Hanoverian king of Great Britain, George I (1714-1727), Elector of Hanover, proved a petty and unimaginative sovereign, a foreigner to English questions and even ignorant of the English language. The only thing that mattered to him was to receive the amount of honour and flattery leaving the state affairs in the hands of the Whig leaders.

At the beginning of his reign, attempts to restore the Stuart monarchy were made by the Tories: they aimed at placing James II's son, «The Old Pretender», on the throne, but all these attempts failed.

In 1716 the Government passed the Septennial Act increasing the life of Parliament from three years to seven. George I no longer presided at meetings of the Privy Council where he was replaced by his chief minister, Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745). Walpole, a convinced Whig, adopted a financial policy connected with the interests of the emerging middle class and strove hard to reduce taxation. In foreign policy Walpole tried to keep England out of wars as he considered them harmful to the expansion of trade.

It was during Walpole's office that the Cabinet system began to take shape. The executive power, that is to say the detailed direction of affairs, which had been a prerogative of the Crown, was transferred to the Cabinet, and this was a first important step towards the establishment of the modern form of Cabinet Government. George I was succeeded by George II.

**The reign of George II.** Like his predecessor, also George II (1727-1760) was to reveal much more interest in Hanoverian than in English affairs, and quite ready to leave the administration of the state in the hands of his ministers, first Walpole, whose office lasted uninterrupted for twenty-one years (1721-1742), and then William Pitt (1708-1778), «The Great Commoner», often known as William Pitt the Elder to distinguish him from his son, William Pitt the Younger.

Walpole represented the more conservative and peaceful section of his party in contrast with the other one that believed in the possibility of assuring even more wealth through a policy of colonial wars. It was this section to prevail in 1739 and to force the reluctant Walpole to declare war on Spain that, allied with France, was threatening English trade with South America; the war proved a failure and the English were defeated at Cartagena (1741).

In 1740 England, as supporter of the claim of the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa on the hereditary dominions of the Habsburg family, was involved in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). It was not completely successful as the military situation in the colonial possessions of North America remained still undecided.

During this war, in 1745, another attempt of a Jacobite restoration took place in the person of the «Young Pretender» (or «Bonnie Prince Charles»), Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the grandson of James II, who helped by France, landed in Scotland. His army advanced without opposition, as far as Derby, but the rebellion was crushed with a certain difficulty in 1746, at Culloden, and Charles Edward was forced to flee to France.





England was to draw more profits from the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) that enveloped both European and colonial theatres (the war was described by Winston Churchill as the first «world war», as it was the first conflict in human history to be fought around the globe). The war involved all major powers of Europe: Austria, in order to recover Silesia, made alliance with France and Russia, while England – with British Colonies in North America, the British East India Company and Ireland – supported Prussia; Spain and Portugal were later drawn into the conflict. The most tangible outcome of the war was the end of France's power in the Americas and the emergence of the United Kingdom as the most powerful colonial power in the world (Treaty of Paris, 1763). France's navy would never again be at near equal terms with the British Royal Navy, and the British East India Company acquired the strongest position within India, which was to become «the jewel in the imperial crown».

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF EVENTS

**1701 Beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession.**

**1702-1714 Reign of Queen Anne:** 1707 → Acts of Union; 1713 → Treaty of Utrecht; 1714 → Treaty of Rastadt and end of the War of the Spanish Succession.

**1714-1727 Reign of George I:** 1716 → Septennial Act; 1721 → Robert Walpole appointed Prime Minister.

**1727-1760 Reign of George II:** 1740 → Beginning of the War of the Austrian Succession; 1741 → Battle of Cartagena; 1742 → Resignation of Robert Walpole; 1745 → Prince Charles Edward's rebellion; 1746 → Battle of Culloden; 1748 → End of the War of the Austrian Succession; 1756 → Beginning of the Seven Years' War.

**1763 End of the Seven Years' War (Treaty of Paris).**

