

THE HISTORY OF GREAT BRITAIN

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Annotation: We can learn the history of the Great Britain in this article. The history of the United Kingdom began in the early eighteenth century with the Treaty of Union and Acts of Union. The core of the United Kingdom as a unified state came into being in 1707 with the political union of the kingdoms of England and Scotland, into a new unitary state called Great Britain.

Key words: Economic, kingdoms legal system, prime minister, colony, unionists and nationalists.

In 1707 after centuries of enmity between Scotland and England, the long discussed union of the two kingdoms became reality. The motivation was largely economic for the Scots and political for the English. At that time, Scotland had enormous economic problems; people struggled for survival because of underfeeding and hunger. The Scots were hoping that the union with England would improve their difficult situation. Since 1707, both kingdoms titled themselves “Great Britain”. To maintain this union, similarities were created. From this day forth Great Britain had one currency and the Scots got seats at Westminster (forty-five in the House of Commons, sixteen in the House of lords)[1]. On one hand the Scottish parliament was abolished, but on the other hand Scotland’s legal system (very different from the English law), was safeguarded. During much of the 18th century there was unrest and warfare (1715/1745) in Scotland because of rivals (supporters of Jacob II.), who were against the union. However, it turned out, that England was stronger and the Scots gave in.

Whigs and Tories

During the 18th century, two political groupings dominated Great Britain: The Whigs and the Tories. The Tories supported the interaction between their own interests and the Anglican Church and the “blue sea” strategy [2]. One of the most important members of the Tories was Robert Harley. The Whigs supported the interests of the wealthy middleclass. In 1714, George I. formed a Whig ministry to reward his own faction. With this, he initiated a period of seventy years in which the Tories lacked effective influence. A financial crisis in 1720 brought the great Whig minister Robert Walpole to power again.

Sir Robert Walpole

Robert Walpole held high government office from 1715, as first lord of the treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, until he resigned in 1717 because of an issue of foreign policy. As mentioned above he got back in office in 1720 and held both positions until 1742. Moreover, he developed a personal control over the British political system unrivalled in length by any minister before. Walpole himself always rejected the term “prime minister”, but he is regarded as the first British politician to have held this office. The main aim of his politics was to preserve the House of Hanover on the throne. Another important issue was to keep up peace with the rest of Europe. But in 1739 he failed to prevent Britain of going to war with Spain and resigned during the War of the Austrian Succession.

Britain and France

After the end of the War of Spanish Succession in 1713, Britain and France had a “peaceful” alliance because the leaders of the two countries (Sir Robert Walpole, Cardinal Fleury) saw peace as an important aspect of national prosperity. Nevertheless, when the two leaders were not in charge anymore, the whole situation changed completely. Because of the colonies, there has always been a competition between Britain and France. This competition reached its critical stage in 1756 when the French attacked the British colony Menorca. Britain allied with Frederick the Great of Prussian and declared war on France. This was the beginning of The Seven Years War. Three years later, the British captured Quebec and beat the French. Canada became British colony. In 1763, the Peace of Paris concluded the Seven Years War. One of the main points of this peace treaty was that France ceded the territory between the Mississippi and the Ohio rivers to Britain. This was the end of the French empire in America and Britain became the dominant power in the northern part of the continent.

Britain and America

The new colonies in America not only brought self-confidence to the British Empire. The British government felt, that it was important to control and to defend them. However, that cost a fortune. That is why London passed a series of taxes on goods imported into America. In retaliation, the colonists organized boycotts of British goods. The conflict got to its critical stage in 1773 with the Boston Tea Party. The British reaction was to send more troops to America to put down the revolt. The War of Independence had begun and would last until 1783.

United Kingdom, island country located off the northwestern coast of mainland Europe. The United Kingdom comprises the whole of the island of land, Wales, and Scotland—as well as the northern portion of the island of Ireland. The name Britain is sometimes used to refer to the United Kingdom as a whole. The capital is London, which is among the world’s leading commercial, financial, and cultural centers. Other major cities include Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester in England, Belfast and

Londonderry in Northern Ireland, Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland, and Swansea and Cardiff in Wales.

The origins of the United Kingdom can be traced to the time of the Anglo-Saxon king Athelstan, who in the early 10th century CE secured the allegiance of neighboring Celtic kingdoms and became “the first to rule what previously many kings shared between them,” in the words of a contemporary chronicle. Through subsequent conquest over the following centuries, kingdoms lying farther afield came under English dominion. Wales, a congeries of Celtic kingdoms lying in Great Britain’s southwest, was formally united with England by the Acts of Union of 1536 and 1542. Scotland, ruled from London since 1603, formally was joined with England and Wales in 1707 to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain. (The adjective “British” came into use at this time to refer to all the kingdom’s peoples.) Ireland came under English control during the 1600s and was formally united with Great Britain through the Act of Union of 1800. The republic of Ireland gained its independence in 1922, but six of Ulster’s nine counties remained part of the United Kingdom as Northern Ireland. Relations between these constituent states and England have been marked by controversy and, at times, open rebellion and even warfare. These tensions relaxed somewhat during the late 20th century, when devolved assemblies were introduced in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Nonetheless, even with the establishment of a power-sharing assembly after referenda in both Northern Ireland and the Irish republic, relations between Northern Ireland’s unionists (who favour continued British sovereignty over Northern Ireland) and nationalists (who favour unification with the republic of Ireland) remained tense into the 21st century.

Great Britain is traditionally divided into a highland and a lowland zone. A line running from the mouth of the River Exe, in the southwest, to that of the Tees, in the northeast, is a crude expression of this division. The course of the 700-foot (213-metre) contour, or of the boundary separating the older rocks of the north and west from the younger southeastern strata, provides a more accurate indication of the extent of the highlands.

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