

MACMILLAN CULTURAL READERS

PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

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# England



MACMILLAN



# 1 A Short History



**Hadrian's Wall, built by the Romans**

Back in England's oldest times, people lived in big groups called tribes. They were farmers – they grew their food, and kept animals for meat and eggs. They lived in villages, in wooden or mud<sup>4</sup> houses, and there was often fighting between the different tribes. Life was simple but dangerous.

Then in AD 43, forty thousand Roman soldiers invaded<sup>5</sup> England from the area of Europe that is now Italy. The Roman army was very well-organized and had good weapons<sup>6</sup>. The soldiers built a wall around themselves every night so they were safe. They moved across the country, fighting and winning battles<sup>7</sup> against the different tribes, and after four years they controlled<sup>8</sup> the south of England.

The Romans had to fight for many years before they controlled all of England. They made many changes in the country, such as building towns and cities, and good roads. They brought a new language to England – Latin – and made laws, so people knew what they could and could not do. The religion<sup>9</sup> of Christianity came to England in Roman times too.



The Romans never took control of<sup>P</sup> Scotland, which is north of England, and Scottish tribes came to fight against them in the north of England again and again. Because of this, in the second century AD, the Romans built a wall to stop the Scottish tribes coming to England. This wall between England and Scotland was one hundred and twenty kilometres long, and was called Hadrian's Wall.

For English people in towns and cities, life in Roman times was good. Towns now had clean water and sewers (pipes taking away dirty water), and there were strong walls around them, so people felt safe. People came to the towns to buy and sell things, and food became more interesting and enjoyable. To relax, people could go to special bath houses, where they met their friends, kept clean and exercised.

There are many stories in England about King Arthur, who fought against the Anglo-Saxons. No one knows if King Arthur ever really lived, but he is important in a lot of English art, music and literature<sup>10</sup>. One famous story about Arthur is the story of the sword<sup>11</sup> in the stone. Arthur was the son of King Uther, but these were dangerous times in England, and Arthur's family wanted to keep him safe. So when Arthur was a baby, he was taken to live with another family, who took care of him along with their own son Kay. When King Uther died, no one knew that he had a son. The important people in England did not know who should be the next king. But then they saw a strange white stone with a sword in it. Gold writing on the stone said, 'The man who can pull out this sword will be King.' Many men tried to pull out the sword, but no one could move it. One day Arthur, who was looking for a sword for Kay, pulled it out. Then everyone knew he was the next king.



But after AD 250, Roman soldiers began to leave England. They had to fight in other parts of the world, and it was too expensive and difficult for them to keep England safe. By AD 411, all the Roman soldiers had left England. Then the Anglo-Saxons, from Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, began to arrive. The Anglo-Saxons had come to England several times before, but the Romans had always defeated<sup>12</sup> them. Now, with the Romans gone, the English could not win battles against the Anglo-Saxons, and many Anglo-Saxons came to live in England.

The Anglo-Saxons did not like the Romans' towns, so they did not use them, and the towns stayed empty. The Anglo-Saxons built their own villages near rivers or the sea and made



wooden houses. In their villages, they grew crops – plants they could use for food. They also kept pigs, sheep and cows, and caught fish and other animals.

By AD 600 in England, the Anglo-Saxons had made seven kingdoms – different parts of the country, each controlled by its own king. The four main kingdoms were Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and Wessex. The three minor kingdoms were Essex, Kent and Sussex. In each of these kingdoms, the king had nobles – important men who fought for him. The other people in the kingdom were either peasants or slaves. Peasants were poor people who had some land, but had to give money to the nobles. Slaves had nothing and had to work for other people for no money at all. People bought and sold slaves like animals.

The Anglo-Saxons stayed in England, but in AD 793 a new group of people invaded the country. The Vikings, from Norway, Sweden and Denmark, wanted good farming land. They came to England in strong wooden ships, and soon they took control of many parts of the country. But the Anglo-Saxon king of Wessex, Alfred the Great, won a big battle against the Vikings. After this, part of England, called Danelaw, was given to the Vikings, but the Vikings had to promise not to invade other parts of the country.

After Alfred the Great died, the Viking and Anglo-Saxon parts of England came together, and England was now ruled as one country with one king. The Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons continued to fight a lot, and for a while England had Viking kings, but by 1042, the Anglo-Saxon King Edward ruled England.

With Edward as the king, London became the most important city in England. Edward had many nobles,

In the AD 780s, the King of Mercia built a big ditch – a long, deep hole – between his kingdom and Wales. It was called Offa's Dyke, and you can see parts of it between Wales and England today.



The names of many places in England tell us about their history. Towns with 'chester' or 'cester' on the end of the name, e.g. Manchester (/ˈmæntʃɪstə/) and Gloucester (/ˈglɒstə/), were Roman towns. The Anglo-Saxon for 'town' was 'burh', so towns like Scarborough (/ˈskɑːbərə/) and Peterborough (/ˈpiːtəˌbərə/) were Anglo-Saxon. Towns with names ending in 'by', e.g. Derby (/ˈdɑːbi/) and Rugby (/ˈrʌɡbi/), are Viking towns.





and he let them become very powerful<sup>13</sup>. He had no children, so when he died, one of his nobles, Harold, became the king. But Edward's cousin William, a Norman (from the north of France), believed that he should be the king of England. In October 1066, William brought a big Norman army from France to England. The Normans fought against Harold and his soldiers at the Battle of Hastings. Harold was killed, and William the Conqueror<sup>14</sup>, as he was called, became the king of England.

The French made a beautiful tapestry showing the story of William's invasion of England and the Battle of Hastings. You can see this today in Normandy.



**The Bayeux Tapestry**

William the Conqueror made many important changes in England. A lot of castles were built. One of these was the Tower of London, which you can visit today. William the Conqueror brought the feudal system to England. In the feudal system, the richest and most important person was the king. Below the king were the nobles, then the knights and then the serfs, who were the poorest people in the land. The king owned everything in the country, but he gave a castle and land to his nobles, and they paid him money. The nobles gave land to the knights, who had to fight battles for the nobles and the king. The knights gave some land to the serfs, who had to work for the knights and give them food from the land.

William the Conqueror wanted to know exactly what he had in England. He sent people all around the country, asking many questions, and they made a big book called the Domesday Book. The book showed how much farming land there was in England and how many animals. We know a lot about life in Norman England because of the Domesday Book.

The time from William the Conqueror's rule until the fifteenth century in England is often called the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages, most people



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lived in villages. The people of the village had to work for the nobles, and give them crops and animals. The nobles lived very well, in big houses and with expensive food, but most people were very poor.

Religion was very important in the Middle Ages, and the Catholic Church became very powerful. From 1095 to 1291, soldiers went to other countries to fight religious battles. There was more fighting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as France and England fought the Hundred Years War, hoping to win land from each other. Many of the battles of the Hundred Years War were fought by knights. As well as fighting battles for nobles and for the king, knights also fought as a sport in competitions<sup>15</sup> called jousting tournaments. Young men who wanted to become knights had to spend many years learning all the things that a knight could do.



Armoured knights jousting at a tournament in the Middle Ages



In 1348, a terrible illness called The Black Death came to England. Only about four million people lived in England at that time, but in two years, nearly one-and-a-half million of them died.

From 1455–1485, there were terrible battles between people who wanted the kings of the country to be from different families, and many more people died. Finally, in 1485, Henry Tudor became the first Tudor king of England, King Henry the Seventh.

Some of the Tudor kings and queens are now very famous in England's history. Henry the Eighth, who became the king in 1509, lived some of the time at the Tower of London, but he had other beautiful palaces in and around London, including the Palace of Westminster and Hampton Court. He and the people around him lived very well. They wore the best clothes and ate wonderful food, and at the palaces there was always dancing, sport, poetry and music. Henry enjoyed life, and he drank and ate too much. When he became the king, he was a sporty, good-looking young man, but later he became so fat he could not walk!

England was a Catholic country, but Henry the Eighth wanted England to leave the Catholic Church, so he started a new church. It was a Protestant church (a Christian church, but for people who believe in a different kind of Christianity) called the Church of England, and he controlled it. Anyone who disagreed with the new church was executed – killed for their crime. When Henry the Eighth was ruling England, more than seventy thousand people were killed because of crimes, or because they disagreed with the king about religion or other important things.

Henry the Eighth had six wives! He ended his marriage with two of them, and executed another two. One died, and one was alive when he died in 1547.



Six years after Henry the Eighth died, his oldest daughter Mary – the daughter he had with his first wife, Catherine of Aragon – became Queen Mary the First of England. She was a Catholic and wanted England to be a Catholic country again, but many

people had left the Catholic Church and had become Protestants. Mary executed hundreds of Protestants who refused to become Catholic again.

But in 1558, Mary died, and her half-sister Elizabeth – the daughter Henry had with his second wife Anne Boleyn – became the queen. Queen Elizabeth the First was a Protestant, but she did not make Catholics follow her religion, and she soon became one of the best loved of England's kings and queens.





The second half of the sixteenth century, which was known as the Elizabethan period, was a very important time for English literature. Many people liked to go to the theatre, and William Shakespeare wrote a lot of plays and poetry at this time. Ships also began to travel to other parts of the world. Sir Walter Raleigh sailed to America, and Sir Francis Drake became the first Englishman to sail around the world.

But life in England was also very difficult for many people in the Elizabethan period. There was less work in farming now, and a lot of people were very poor. There was a lot of crime, but no police, and when people were caught for crimes, they were often executed.

After Queen Elizabeth the First died in 1603, kings and queens called the Stuarts came to power<sup>16</sup> in England. The Stuarts were from Scotland, and for the first time, they ruled both England and Scotland. The second of the Stuart kings was Charles the First. He argued with Parliament because he spent a lot of money fighting wars in Europe, and in 1642, he started a civil war<sup>17</sup>. For seven years, the King's men and Parliament's men fought against each other, and thousands died. But with Oliver Cromwell as leader, Parliament's army became very strong and fought very well, and in 1649, they won the war. Charles the First was executed, and for eleven years England had no king or queen. The country was ruled by Cromwell and Parliament. Cromwell was a Puritan – a Protestant who believed in a simple, hard-working life – and when he ruled, there was no sport or dancing in England, and theatres were closed.

When Cromwell died, England was ready to have a king again, and the Stuarts came to power once more. There were some difficult times for England in the second half of the seventeenth century. In 1665, another terrible illness came to London and killed nearly seventy thousand people, and a year later, large parts of London were burnt down in the Great Fire of London.

There were many other changes at this time too. England now traded – bought and sold things – with many other countries, so English people could get different foods like tomatoes, chocolate, coffee and tea for the first time. People continued to work on the land, but now there were other jobs, in cloth<sup>18</sup>-making or glass-making, and in the coal<sup>19</sup> or iron<sup>20</sup> industries<sup>21</sup>. London was rebuilt with wider roads and many beautiful new buildings, and scientists like Sir Isaac Newton began to do important work and learn many interesting things. England started its first colonies too. These were





other parts of the world, like America, which were ruled by England. For the first time in the seventeenth century, people from England went to live and work in these places.

There was one more important change as England entered the eighteenth century. In 1707, the Act of Union brought England, Wales and Scotland together with one parliament as Great Britain.

The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were called the Georgian period because Britain's kings were George the First, Second, Third and Fourth. But during this time, kings became much less powerful, and Parliament really began to rule the country. An industrial revolution began in Britain too: machines were built, and they were used in many different

industries. People could now make many things very quickly, and because of this towns began to grow.

In 1783, Britain lost the American War of Independence, so America was no longer ruled by Britain and became independent<sup>23</sup>. Britain did not have its old American colonies anymore, but it now found new ones. In that same

In 1814, George Stephenson made the first steam engine<sup>22</sup> for trains, and in 1830, one of the first railways, between Liverpool and Manchester, was opened. Now people and things could move from one place to another much more quickly than ever before.

year, France gave its colonies in Canada to Britain, and by the end of the eighteenth century, Britain had won many battles in India, which soon became an important part of the British Empire<sup>24</sup>. This was a great time for exploration: travelling to different places to find new things. The famous sailor Captain Cook visited many new lands and was the first European to go to Australia and New Zealand.

In 1801, Ireland and Britain came together as the United Kingdom (UK) with one parliament. (Today, Northern Ireland is the only part of Ireland which belongs to the UK.) The ruler of this new UK, from 1837 until 1901, was Queen Victoria. Victoria ruled for longer than any other English or British king or queen, and she was much loved by many of her people. In the Victorian period, the British

In the Victorian period, very poor people with no homes went to live in places called workhouses. Here they were given very little food and had to work very hard. Charles Dickens wrote about the workhouses in his famous book *Oliver Twist*.



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Empire became bigger and more important, and the industrial revolution continued. The country was growing, but at first this made life difficult for many people. More and more factories<sup>25</sup> were built in the UK, and factory work was very hard and very dangerous. Towns got bigger and bigger, but people put their rubbish<sup>26</sup> and dirty water in the streets, so there was a lot of illness.



***The Wealth of England: The Bessemer Process of Making Steel, William Holt Yates Titcomb, 1895***

But soon important new changes started to happen. Towns became cleaner, and in 1880, all children aged 5–10 began to go to school. People had electric lights and telephones for the first time, and because the railways grew, they could now travel around the country easily. By 1901, when Queen Victoria died, the modern United Kingdom was arriving.

AD 43	AD 450	AD 793	1066	1485	1603	1714	1837	1901	i
Romans	Anglo-Saxons	Vikings	Middle Ages	Tudors	Stuarts	Georgians	Victorians	Modern United Kingdom	

