

# England and the Rise of the British Empire

## ***Introduction: Robinson Crusoe – A British Colonist***

When the novelist Daniel Defoe sends Robinson Crusoe, aged 19, off to sea on the first of September, 1651, his protagonist is about to embark on one of the greatest adventures in the history of Western literature. Defoe's main character and the novel that bears his name have since become very famous. Crusoe is a very interesting figure. When he suddenly leaves his parents and goes to sea, he follows  
5 what he calls a "wandering inclination". This adventurous spirit ultimately leads to his famous shipwreck\* on an uninhabited island off the coast of South America where he lives for twenty-eight years until he is rescued by a group of Spanish pirates and brought back to England. Crusoe provides a key to understanding the rise of England as a world power, because the First British Empire, which had its origins in the late 16th c. and lasted until the second half of the 18th c., lived off characters like Robin-  
10 son Crusoe. Defoe's protagonist has therefore since been seen as the "prototype of the British colonist [...]. The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence, the unconscious cruelty, the persistence, the slow yet effective intelligence".

One of the motives of seafaring adventurers\* like Crusoe was the promise of becoming fabulously rich. Robinson Crusoe, for instance, becomes a wealthy man through the investments he makes in a  
15 plantation in Brazil before he lands on his island. Throughout the Middle Ages, trade and overseas investment of capital had been greatly impeded by devastating wars (such as the Hundred Years' War\* from 1337 to 1453 or the Wars of the Roses\* from 1455-85) and epidemics that reached biblical dimensions (such as the Black Death\* of the years 1348-49 which wiped out more than one third of England's population). When Henry VII, of the House of Tudor<sup>1</sup>, came to power in 1485, he ushered in  
20 a new era in the history of England, marking the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Early Modern Era\* for England. This was also the beginning of the British Empire.<sup>2</sup>

## ***The First British Empire: From State-Sponsored\* Piracy to Colonial Hegemony\****

The British took a late start in colonizing the world. Unlike Portugal and Spain, which had acquired huge colonial empires by the 16th c., the monarchs of the British Isles showed little interest in over-  
25 seas expansion well into the 16th c. Following the successes of Columbus's voyages, Henry VII (rule from 1485-1509) sent the explorer John Cabot on a voyage to discover the sea route to Asia, but no permanent settlements were founded\* and no attempts were made at claiming domination\* over the land that English sailors "discovered". It was only under Henry VIII (rule from 1509-47) that first steps were taken towards joining Spain and Portugal in the Age of Discoveries\*: the Tudor king made large investments in shipbuilding and marine infrastructure\* and thus laid the foundation stone of Bri-  
30 tain's navy. The Tudor monarchs were generally too busy with issues at home to put much energy and capital into risky overseas ventures\*. Another reason is that the discoveries the English sailors had

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<sup>1</sup> Royal house that ruled England from 1485-1603.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note, though, that the beginnings of the British Empire were neither imperial nor actually British. The first voyages of discovery made by English captains and the first settlements overseas in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> c. were not part of a colonial masterplan with the aim of founding an overseas empire; and the process of nation-building, at whose end stood the united kingdom of Britain, took several hundred years and was only just beginning at the time (for details s. below).

made (mainly in North America) did not promise the riches of the Orient, India, or Central and South America, where colonial rivals like the Spanish, the Portuguese, or the Dutch (in the first half of the 17th century) were enriching themselves with gold, jewels, and spices\*. To get their share\* of the profits without putting themselves at risk, the Tudors authorized\* pirates (so-called privateers\*) like  
5 Sir Francis Drake (1540–96), John Hawkins (1543–1595), or Christopher Newport (1561–1618) to raid\* and plunder\* enemy ships and secure some of the colonial treasures for Britain.

This strategy increased the trouble that was already brewing between England and Spain for religious reasons. The Spanish king, Philip II (1554–98), who saw himself as defender of the Catholic church, had been greatly offended\* by the anti-Catholic policies of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603)<sup>3</sup>.  
10 After she had executed her Catholic cousin, Mary Queen of Scots (1542–87), whom the Spanish considered the only rightful\* monarch of England, and after she had supported the revolt of the Protestant Dutch against the Spaniards\* in 1585, the Spanish sent an invasion fleet of 130 ships (the “Spanish Armada”\*) to depose\* Elizabeth and return Catholic rule to Britain. The Spanish invasion, however, failed. The swift English ships were better suited for the conditions in the narrow Channel and re-  
15 pelled\* the Spanish fleet, which people had thought to be invincible\*. When the English sent eight burning ships into the direction of the Spanish fleet, the Spanish had to give up their battle formation and were then attacked by the English. In the battle that followed the Spanish losses were high. Just when the English ran low on ammunition\*, a storm came up and blew the Spanish ships north towards Scotland. The Spanish abandoned their invasion plans and fled back to Spain.

This victory over the Armada in 1588 and the Treaty of London (1604), which eventually ended hostilities\* between England and Spain, terminated the Spanish hegemony at sea. The English now changed their colonial strategy and became more active as colonizers. The explorations and “discover-  
ies” that the English made in North America as part of that strategy proved very difficult to maintain, however. They were economically disappointing when compared to the lucrative\* spice trade of the  
25 Portuguese with Indonesia and the gold and silver the Spanish were extracting in vast quantities from Mexico and Peru. The English found it very hard to survive in what they saw as the “wilderness” of North America. The first colonial settlement, Roanoke Island (founded by Sir Walter Raleigh on the coast of present-day North Carolina in 1585), was abandoned after only one year due to a shortage of supplies. The colonies in New England (on the northern coast of North America), which were founded  
30 in the first half of the 17th c., continued to be troubled by many problems: the settlers were faced with diseases, a scarcity\* of food and attacks from the native Indians. A letter from a survivor who had lived in the colony of Virginia gives a good impression of colonial conditions: “So lamentable was our scarcity, that we were constrained to eat dogs, cats, rats, snakes, toadstools, horsehides, and what not; one man even killed his wife, powdered her up with flour to eat her, for which he was burned. Many  
35 others fed on the corpses\* of dead men”. Rather than looking to the colonies across the Atlantic which even in the middle of the 17th was still seen by British rulers as “poor, cold, and useless” (in the words of Oliver Cromwell), the English focused on an area closer to home: Ireland. England had been inter-  
ested in Ireland since King Henry II had invaded the island in 1155 with the aim of reforming the Irish church. Throughout the Late Middle Ages, England tried to bring Ireland under its control, but the  
40 Black Death epidemic of the 14th c. and the civil war of the 15th c. had stopped English colonial am-

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<sup>3</sup> Enter Elizabeth’s “Armada Portrait” here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Elizabeth\\_I\\_%28Armada\\_Portrait%29.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Elizabeth_I_%28Armada_Portrait%29.jpg).

bitions. Towards the end of the 15th c., the Tudor monarchs increased English control over Ireland again by placing the Irish Parliament under direct control of the Parliament of England and by sending tens of thousands of Protestants from Scotland and England over to Ireland to form a new Protestant ruling class that in the future would help the British administration\* of Ireland. In 1607, when the  
5 most powerful Irish chieftains\* had succumbed to the British military superiority and had fled the country (“Flight of the Earls”), Britain had gained control of most of Ireland and reinforced its settle-  
ment policy by dispossessing\* Irish Catholic landowners and giving their land to Protestant settlers from Britain. The relationship between Protestants and Catholics continues to be a troubled one. Espe-  
cially in Northern Ireland (which belongs to the United Kingdom and is officially ruled by the British  
10 monarch), Catholics still feel they are being treated unfairly by their Protestant rulers.<sup>4</sup>

In the history of the British Empire, the foundation of Ulster\* Plantation is of seminal importance. It provided an example of how the British Empire might work. The mechanisms of imperial domina-  
tion were all already present in Ulster: the dispossession of the original landowners, the large-scale  
15 settlement of British colonists, the economic exploitation\* of the newly won lands, as well as the com-  
plete and unashamed disregard for the culture and the beliefs of the native population. It was in Ireland  
that English and Scottish colonial ambitions were first seen as a common, a “British”, colonial enter-  
prise\*, especially in the political propaganda of James I, who had hoped the union of the crowns in  
1603 would also lead to a “union of the hearts”. The reality was different, though. Empire remained  
very much an English undertaking, dominated by English economic and political interests.

20 Although successful, the example of Ulster Plantation did not immediately effect a change in Brit-  
ish imperial policies. There was no recognizable master plan behind British colonization throughout  
most of the 17th c. The colonies that were founded came into existence for a number of reasons and  
through a number of initiatives: Jamestown (established 1607), the first permanent British settlement  
in North America, was founded after an initiative of the British king. Many of the colonies that fol-  
25 lowed on the east coast were established for religious reasons. Plymouth Plantation (est. 1620), Mas-  
sachusetts (est. 1629) and Connecticut (est. 1636), for instance, served as refuges\* for Puritans\*,<sup>5</sup>  
Maryland (est. 1632) attracted Catholic exiles from Britain and Ireland, and Pennsylvania (est. 1681)  
was initially peopled exclusively by Quakers\*<sup>6</sup>. The promises of commercial success were the engine  
behind the foundation of the Newfoundland Company (est. 1605), which wanted to exploit the rich  
30 fishing grounds\* off the coast of Canada; the Hudson’s Bay Company (est. 1670) was to get involved  
in the lucrative fur trade\*. All of the British colonies in the Caribbean were likewise founded as a  
source of revenue\*: the British West Indies such as St Kitts (est. 1623), Nevis (est. 1628) and Jamaica  
(est. 1655) produced – with the help of the slaves British traders were shipping to the islands in tens of  
thousands – large quantities of sugar and rum and increased British wealth.

35 The colonies in Africa and Asia were all established primarily for profane\* reasons – most of them  
in the name of commerce. The Royal African Company (est. 1672), for instance, was formed out of a

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<sup>4</sup> Popular culture has commented very frequently on the troubles. Students might find an approach to this part of British history through the song “Through the Barricades” (by Spandau Ballet) or “Sunday, Bloody Sunday” (by U2) interesting.

<sup>5</sup> Puritans were a Protestant group which believed in simple forms of church ritual and strict moral behaviour. They were persecuted by the Stuart kings and, as a consequence, fled to America.

5 <sup>6</sup> A religious group which was founded in the 1650s. They called themselves quakers because some of their members quaked (shivered) with religious excitement when praying. Like the Puritans, they were nonconformists\* (i.e., did not conform to the principles of the established, i.e., Anglican, Church\*). They therefore did not swear the Oath of Allegiance\* to the British monarch and were, as a consequence, persecuted\* in England.

number of trading posts\* in the Gambia, in Sierra Leone, and on the Gold Coast (in present-day Ghana); it had been granted a monopoly\* on the profitable slave trade in the area and thus formed an important part of the infamous triangular trade\* in the course of which Britain shipped an estimated 3.5 mio Africans as cheap labour\* to the plantations in the Americas. The triangular trade, which also  
5 helped to boost British economy, involved three regions and trading routes: the West African Coast, from which the human cargo was loaded onto trading vessels\* and taken to the Caribbean; in the Caribbean the profits made from selling the slaves were invested in raw materials\* like rum, sugar, cotton and tobacco which were then carried to the British Isles; and in Britain, goods such as iron and all sorts of manufactured products\* like guns and cloth were transported to Africa, where they were  
10 traded in\* for slaves.

Next to the Americas and Africa, Asia became an increasingly important field of British colonial activities in the 17th c. In Asia, British traders at first faced heavy competition from the Dutch and especially the Portuguese. The latter had held a monopoly\* on the silk trade with the Indian subcontinent\* and the spice trade with the Indonesian archipelago\* since the early 16th c., but were about to  
15 lose their hegemony due to financial and dynastic troubles of the Portuguese monarchs. The Dutch, who took over the Portuguese hegemony in Asia for half a century (from 1602 until 1652), were so much in the way of British interests that the countries fought three wars (Anglo-Dutch Wars) in the second half of the 17th c. The hostilities between Britain and the Netherlands only ceased when William of Orange, a Dutchman, became King of Britain in 1689 (for details, see below) and helped the  
20 two nations to come to an agreement over their colonial struggles: while the spice trade with the Far East (Indonesia, Moluccan Islands etc.) was left to the Dutch, the British secured for themselves the Indian subcontinent.

India was to become the jewel in Britain's imperial crown. It took well into the 18th c. until the British had gained control of more or less the whole of the subcontinent. The British relationship with  
25 India started out with the establishment of the East India Company in London in 1602, which was granted, by royal charter\*, the monopoly of all British trade with Asia. Like most of the other companies that were responsible for British colonies around the globe, the East India Company was set up as a joint-stock company\* with capital being collected from wealthy merchants who were looking for promising investments for their money.

The Company started to trade in silk, cotton, indigo\*, saltpetre\* and tea. It set up trading posts in various parts of India and co-operated well with the Mughal\* Emperors who controlled most of the Indian subcontinent at the time. The Company was subsequently given more and more authority by the British crown (see chapter J. Plüer "Decolonization"). It started to actually acquire territory, to make treaties with local leaders, to coin\* money and to administer justice\* as well as to keep its own army.  
35 After the disintegration\* of the Mughal Empire in the first half of the 18th c., the security which the Mughals had provided to the British East India Company gave way to a period in which a number of the successor states\* of the Mughals started to hinder British colonial interests. The French, late-comers on the colonial scene in India, used this opportunity and interfered with British agents and merchants by backing up states in southern India which opposed British rule. The conflict between  
40 Britain and France, which resulted in first military confrontations between the two European nations and their Indian clients in the 1740s, was part of a wider conflict between European nations that even-

5 tually led to the Seven Years' War\* (1756–63). This involved all major European nations and was fought in various locations in the Americas, across Europe, some spots in Africa and in Asia and is therefore often referred to as the first “world war”. In a number of battles (amongst them the Battle of Plassey in 1757) Britain and its Indian allies defeated the French client states and heralded in Com-  
pany rule over most of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>7</sup> By that time it had become the dominant colonial and maritime power of its age.

10 Today, in postcolonial times, the way in which the British treated their colonies has come in for a lot of criticism. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), an Indian politician and leading figure in the Indian Independence Movement, once wrote: “A significant fact which stands out is that those parts of India which have been longest under British rule are the poorest today. Indeed some kind of chart might be drawn up to indicate the close connection between length of British rule and progressive growth of poverty”. Such a negative assessment is considered unfair by some, because it does not give credit to the improvements which the British brought to India in the fields of infrastructure, medicine and hygiene, for instance.

### ***The Secret Behind Britain's Imperial Success***

15 The Age of the Tudor monarchs (1485–1603) and the Stuarts that followed them (1603–89) is seen as a watershed\* in British history. Within 200 years, Britain changed from a middle-sized medieval power consisting of three disparate nations (England, Scotland and Wales) to a politically unified state that was developing a strong sense of common identity. The changes the Tudors in particular made to the country were so great that they have given rise to the so-called Tudor Myth. According to this  
20 myth, the Tudor monarchs saved England from the dark ages of the 15th c. with its bloodshed\* in the Wars of the Roses and delivered the country to a period of peace and prosperity\* – the golden age\* of Elizabethan England. Shakespeare was one of the most prominent propagandists of this tradition of thinking; he supported it in many of his plays and thus popularized this concept very much.

25 In his play *King Richard II* (c. 1595), he described the new England of the Tudors in flamboyant terms:

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
30 Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
35 Against the envy of less happier lands;  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England [...].

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<sup>7</sup> This era lasted until 1857/58 when the so-called Indian Mutiny compelled the British government to administer India directly. During the legendary time of the Raj (as the period between 1858 and Indian independence in 1947 came to be known), Britain was at the height of its imperial power and prestige.

There is no doubt that after the civil wars of the 15th c., the first Tudors brought relative stability. After all the bloodshed of the Wars of the Roses, the country was finally ready for the Renaissance to bring a new, a modern way of thinking to the isles – one hundred years later than most countries on the continent. Henry VIII, the second Tudor king, was a Renaissance man himself. His court was a centre of science and art and Henry himself was a learned\* man who wrote scholarly\* texts and poems and who was also a passionate musician. His political and administrative reforms helped to guide England from the Middle Ages to modernity: he was a very strong and sometimes even intimidating king who was described by one of his contemporaries as “the life, the head and the authority of all things that be done in the realm of England”. Henry’s most consequential act was the break with Rome and the Catholic Church, though. When the Pope refused to grant him a divorce\* from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536), who after 18 years of marriage had failed to produce the male heir he demanded from her, he separated the Church of England from Rome through the Act of Supremacy\* (1534), which made himself, and not the Pope, the Supreme Head\* of the Church of England. He thus paved the way for the reformation to spread all over England and to make it a Protestant country. In order to completely destroy Catholicism in his country, Henry dissolved all monasteries\* and nunneries\*, which had still owed obedience\* to the Pope, sold the valuable land and all other possessions of the monks and nuns and pocketed the money for himself and his court. The break with Rome made England independent from foreign influence and control. It also strengthened the position of British monarchs who, to this day, rule over worldly and – as heads of the Anglican Church – spiritual matters at the same time.

The English people quickly adopted their new, Protestant religion. Catholicism, however, continued to play a major role in British politics for another 200 years. Till then, the possibility of a Catholic take-over of the country through English, Scottish or Irish Catholics with the help of Spain and France was seen as a constant threat to the integrity and the independence of Britain. There were several attempts at restoring Catholicism to Britain – they were all either short-lived or complete failures: there was Mary Tudor (1516–58), the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, who earned herself the nickname “Bloody Mary” through her ruthless and bloody tactics of restoring Catholicism to England during her reign in England from 1553 and 1558; under Elizabeth I, the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots claimed the English throne and thus posed a threat to English Protestantism; throughout the 17th c., under the Stuart rulers, Catholicism never quite left the political agenda in Britain. A restoration of Catholicism could only be averted by a joint effort of all political forces in the country. Seeing that their latently Catholic king, James II (1685–88), was trying to restore Catholicism with the help of the French king, Parliament in a hitherto unseen and revolutionary act invited William of Orange, the husband of James’s Protestant daughter Mary, over to England. William and Mary followed the calls for help, drove the Catholic Stuarts out of the country with an army of 14,000 men and safely re-established the Church of England during their reign from 1689 to 1702.<sup>8</sup> In 1701, when James II’s Catholic son, who had grown up in the Stuarts’ exile in Catholic France, was proclaimed James III, King of England and Scotland, by the French king, William and Mary together with the British Parliament passed the Act of Settlement\* (1701) which provided for all times that the British sovereign must be a

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<sup>8</sup> In return for making William and his wife Mary monarchs of England, parliament made them sign the “Bill of Rights” (1689). This important constitutional document limited royal powers in favour of parliamentary powers. From that point on, the monarchs of Britain need parliamentary permission when they want to levy\* taxes or when they want to raise an army in peacetime (for more details about the Glorious Revolution, see below).

member of the Church of England (that is, not Catholic). Under the Hanoverian kings,<sup>9</sup> who succeeded to the throne in 1714, Catholicism finally left Britain as a political factor and as a threat.

Next to creating a separate religion for their kingdom, the Tudors also pushed forward the internal unification of the crowns and of the people of the island and thus laid the foundation for the United Kingdoms' successful overseas expansion in later years. In 1536, through the Act of Union, Henry VIII managed to bind Wales lastingly to England. He also accepted the title King of Ireland in 1541, but the Irish – not least because of their deep-rooted Catholicism – never really accepted domination from a foreign Protestant monarch. The Tudors had a particularly hard time with Scotland, though. The Scots presented a constant threat to their country and their rule. Under Henry VIII, the Scots teamed up with Henry's enemy France and invaded England twice; the last Tudor monarch, Elizabeth I, was threatened by Mary Queen of Scots, a Catholic from the House of Stuart, who lay claims to Elizabeth's throne and – after spending 18 years in custody\* – was tried\* and sentenced\* to beheading for trying to assassinate Elizabeth (s. above). When Elizabeth died without an heir, Mary's son, James I, who was King of Scotland, inherited the English throne from Elizabeth and thus brought about the dynastic union of the two countries. It took another century until the parliamentary union with Scotland, effected by Queen Anne<sup>10</sup> (1702–14) through the union of the Scottish and the English parliaments in 1707, also united the people of the two countries. The union, however, was not exactly a "love match". Daniel Defoe, who was working as an English spy\* in Scotland at the time, observed that "a firmer union of policy with less union of affection has hardly been known in the world". On the side of the Scots, the union was seen with much bitterness. They did not want to give up their sovereignty by resigning their parliament over to England and felt, when the union had come about, they were "bought and sold for English gold". It was sheer political necessity that drove both the English and the Scots to union. The Scots, whose treasury was near-bankrupt since the dramatic failure of their attempt at founding their own colonial empire in Central America in the 1690s, hoped for English money to consolidate their finances, and the English had realized that only as a united kingdom could they hope to prevail against the strong international competition on the colonial scene. Internal unification and empire-building thus went hand in hand.

Another factor that played an important role in the rise of Britain as a world power was the modern organization of the British state and the political rights that its citizens were enjoying. While monarchs elsewhere in Europe still ruled more or less arbitrarily\* and absolutely, British monarchs were bound to the consent\* of the people (as represented through parliament). They ruled not by divine right\*, but by the consent of the representatives of the people. The history of English parliamentarism goes back to the Magna Carta of 1215, the first legal document worldwide to limit and control the power of a monarch. Throughout the Late Middle Ages, the importance of the English parliament grew steadily. By the early 14th c., parliament claimed the right that no law be passed and no tax be levied without its consent. Not all British kings and queens co-operated with parliament, though. In the 17th c., the Stuart kings insisted on their divine rights to rule the country. They, however, depended on parliament for raising taxes and had to make a lot of concessions\* to parliament because they needed a lot

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<sup>9</sup> The Hanoverians were a German dynasty who succeeded to the English crown when Queen Anne died without an heir in 1714. Their first ruler on the English throne, George I (1714-27), spent much time back home, in the Hanover region. While George was in Germany, his chief minister (who later came to be called Prime Minister) took over the government and became very powerful.

<sup>10</sup> Queen Anne was a tragic figure: She had 17 (!) children, all of whom died when they were still young.

of money for the many wars they fought. In 1628 Charles I (1625–49) was forced to sign the Petition of Right\*, which prohibited arbitrary imprisonment and taxation without the consent of parliament. The dualism\* between parliamentary and monarchical powers was finally decided in favour of parliament in 1688/89, in the Glorious (because bloodless) Revolution\*. The people’s representatives had  
5 come together out of their own initiative and had invited the Protestant William of Orange\* over to secure the Anglican tradition from a take-over by a Catholic king (s. above). Through the Glorious Revolution, the monarch became a political officer appointed\* by parliament, while parliament itself became the true British sovereign. The Bill of Rights (1689) confirmed these parliamentary rights and turned Britain into the first constitutional monarchy\* in the world. The Toleration Act\*, passed in the  
10 same year, gave religious freedom to the British but secured that the Anglican Church be the official religion of the country.

Ever since, the British people enjoyed religious, political and intellectual freedoms unlike anywhere else in Europe. Together with the advanced financial system<sup>11</sup>, the Protestant work ethic\* which saw the accumulation\* of wealth as a sign of personal salvation\*, and the sense of being special, of  
15 living on “a scepter’d isle”, these liberties allowed Britain to develop an extraordinary commercial activity which turned the country into the “workshop of the world”, into a “nation of shopkeepers” whose merchants’ ships ruled the waves and whose culture was exported into all parts of the world.

Andreas Gaile

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<sup>11</sup> The Bank of England was founded in 1694 and financed wars and other overseas activities; it also offered itself as a place of safe deposit for money.



## Glossary

shipwreck	when a ship runs aground or is destroyed by a storm	Schiffbruch
seafaring adventurer	a brave person going to sea, taking a lot of risk	Abenteurer
Hundred Years' War	bewaffnete Konflikte zwischen E und F im Zeitraum von 1337 to 1453	Hundertjähriger Krieg
Wars of the Roses	bewaffnete Konflikte zw. den englischen Herrscherhäusern York und Lancaster um die Krone (1455-85)	Rosenkriege
Black Death	outbreak of the bubonic plague that killed roughly thirty of all Europeans in the years 1348-50	Schwarzer Tod (Beulenpest)
Early Modern Era	period between the end of the Middle Ages and the French Revolution	Frühe Neuzeit
state-sponsored	supported by or at the request of the state	mit staatlicher Unterstützung; auf staatliches Geheiß
hegemony	if a person or a state dominates others	Hegemonie, Vorherrschaft
to found (e.g. a settlement)	to establish	eine Siedlung (be)gründen
domination (over)	rule (over)	Herrschaft (über)
Age of Discoveries	that time in modern history when the New World was "discovered" by Europeans	Zeitalter der Entdeckungen
marine infrastructure	harbours, piers, passenger terminals	Infrastruktur an der Küste
venture	a slightly risky undertaking	Unternehmung
spice	used to make food taste more appetizing (e.g. salt, pepper, cinnamon)	Gewürz
share	part	Anteil
to authorize	to allow, to permit	beauftragen, autorisieren
privateer	pirates working for the English crown	Freibeuter
to raid	to attack	überfallen
to plunder	to rob	ausrauben, plündern
to be offended (by)	to be insulted	(durch etwas) beleidigt sein
rightful	legal	rechtmäßig
Spaniard	s.o. from Spain	Spanier
Spanish Armada	large fleet sent by the Spanish king to invade England (1588)	Spanische Armada (Flotte)
to depose s.o.	to remove s.o. from a high position (e.g. a throne)	jdn absetzen
to repel s.o.	to drive s.o. back or away	jdn zurückschlagen, abwehren
invincible	impossible to be defeated	unbesiegt
ammunition	needed to load weapons	Munition
hostility	deep-seated ill will	Feindseligkeit
lucrative	producing wealth	lukrativ, finanziell ergiebig
corpse	dead person	Leiche
administration	rule over	Verwaltung, Herrschaft
chieftain	chief of a tribe or a clan	Stammesfürst, Häuptling
to dispossess	to take the possession of s.o. away	jdn enteignen, ndm Besitz abnehmen
exploitation	the act of making use of s.o. in an unfair way	Ausbeutung
enterprise	undertaking	Unternehmung
Ulster	region in Northern Ireland	Ulster
refuge	place that people retreat to when they are looking for safety	Zufluchtsort
Puritan	member of a religious group in 16th and 17th c. England that opposed the	Puritaner

	Church of England as impure (not acting according to the bible)	
Quaker	member of a religious sect that rejects formal ceremonies and priests	Quäker
fishing grounds	place where fishermen hunt down their prey	Fischgründe
fur trade	trade with the thick soft hair that covers animals like beavers	Fellhandel
revenue	money	Einkunft
profane	secular; related to ordinary life, not religion or holy things	profan, weltlich
trading post	place where people could trade wares, esp. in remote or faraway places	Handelsposten
nonconformist	member of a type of Protestant church that does not conform to the main (i.e. Anglican Church)	Nonkonformist
Anglican Church	Church of England (official church of England)	Anglikanische Kirche
Oath of Allegiance	promise to be loyal to s.o.	Treueeid
to persecute s.o.	to treat s.o. cruelly or unfairly	jdn. (bspw. aus religiösen Gründen) verfolgen
triangular trade	trade between Europe, Western Africa and the Americas in the Early Modern Era	Dreieckshandel
labour	work	Arbeitskraft
trading vessel	ship used for trading	Handelsschiff
raw material	iron, crude oil etc.	Rohstoff
manufactured product	product that has been produced by humans in a factory	Fertigware
to trade s.th. in	to give s.o. one good and get another one in return	etwas eintauschen
to hold a monopoly	to be the only one allowed to do s.th.; to be in complete control of s.th.	ein Monopol halten
subcontinent	very large part of a continent	Subkontinent
archipelago	group of islands	Archipel, Inselgruppe
royal charter	contract signed by a monarch which grants certain rights to a person or an institution	kgl. Satzung
joint-stock company	company owned by people who own parts of it (through shares or stocks)	Aktiengesellschaft
indigo	dark blue colour	Indigo (blauer Farbstoff)
saltpetre	substance used for making gunpowder	Salpeter
Mughal	member of the ruling dynasty in India	Mogul (indischer Herrschertitel)
to coin money	to make money from metal	Münzen prägen
to administer justice	to enforce the law	Recht sprechen
disintegration	when s.th. falls apart	Zerfall
successor state	state that follows a state that has disintegrated	Nachfolgestaat
Seven Years' War	war fought between 1756 and 1763; involved all major European nations and was fought on various continents	Siebenjähriger Krieg
watershed	an event in history when important changes happen	(auch fig.) Wasserscheide, Wendepunkt
bloodshed	killing of many people	Blutvergießen
prosperity	when people have money and everything else that is needed for a good life	Wohlstand
golden age	period of great happiness and success	goldenes Zeitalter
scholarly	relating to the serious, academic study	wissenschaftlich

	of a subject	
learned	well educated	gelehrt
divorce	when husband and wife split up	Scheidung
Act of Supremacy	law passed by in 1534 by the English parliament that made Henry VIII Head of the Church of England	Suprematsakte
Supreme Head of the Church	title held by Henry VIII saying that he was the leader of the Church of England	Oberster Kirchenherr
monastery	place where monks live and work	Kloster
nunnery	place where nuns work and live	Frauenkloster
to owe obedience to	to follow the rules set or orders given by s.o.	jemandem Gehorsam schulden
Act of Settlement	act passed by parliament in 1701 which provided that the British monarch must be a Protestant	sog. Grundordnung
to levy taxes	to say that people must pay taxes	Steuern erheben
custody	imprisonment	Gewahrsam, Haft
to try s.o.	to bring s.o. before a court of law	jdn vor Gericht stellen
to sentence s.o.	when a judge punishes s.o. who has been tried in a court of law	jdn verurteilen
spy	s.o. who secretly collects information about a person or a state	Spion
arbitrary	if s.th. is done without legal basis or in a very unfair manner	willkürlich
consent	agreement	Zustimmung
divine right	doctrine which holds that a monarch is ordained by God and therefore only subject to God	Gottesgnadentum
to make a concession	to say "yes" to s.th. in order to come to an agreement with s.o.	ein Zugeständnis machen
Petition of Right	constitutional document from 1628 which provided that taxes must not be levied without consent of the parliament	
dualism	rivalry between two persons, groups or states	Dualismus
Glorious Revolution	revolutionary changes that happened in England in the years 1688-89	Glorreiche Revolution
House of Orange	European dynasty	Oranier (Herrscherhaus)
to appoint s.o. to an office	to choose s.o. for a position or a job	jdn in ein Amt einheben, ernennen
Toleration Act	act of parliament from 1689 granting religious freedom to nonconformists	Toleranzakte
work ethic	set of values based on the belief that hard work and diligence are a way towards happiness	Arbeitsethik
accumulation	buildup, gathering	Anhäufung
salvation	state of being saved from evil	Erlösung, Heil