

## THE ILLUSTRIOUS HOUSE OF HANOVER

**Ann Lyon<sup>1</sup>**

*The illustrious House of Hanover,  
And Protestant succession  
To them obedience do I swear  
While they can hold possession  
And in my faith and loyalty,  
I never more will falter  
And George my lawful king shall be!  
Until the times do alter.  
Anon. The Vicar of Bray,  
eighteenth-century satirical song*

### Abstract

The Hanoverian kings have attracted none of the affection the popular imagination accords to the Tudors and Stuarts, still less the romanticism. They are dismissed as a boorish bunch of Germans, with the possible exception of George III, who went mad and lost America, and perhaps George IV, who left the Brighton Pavilion as a monument to extravagance and had a decidedly colourful matrimonial history. When a reporter described the Queen as a 'scowly, jowly Hanoverian', he was not being complimentary, and even Diana Princess of Wales once attributed many of her problems to marrying into a 'German' family. The truth is, as usual, more complex and infinitely more interesting, but, regrettably, little official notice is being taken of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hanoverian succession this year. This article seeks to redress the balance a little.

**Keywords:** House of Hanover, royal succession, constitutional history, Act of Settlement

### Introduction

Apart from a diversion through the female line in the person of Queen Victoria, and a change of name to Windsor, the House of Hanover has remained in place since 1714, to become the most enduring dynasty to rule over England since the Plantagenets at 331 years (though if the Stewarts/Stuarts' 232 years of rule in Scotland are added to their modest 111 years in Great Britain then they are the most enduring dynasty since the Norman Conquest).<sup>2</sup> In the context of the events of the previous century, perhaps the greatest achievement of the

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<sup>2</sup> It is realistic to regard all those who have reigned since the death of Queen Anne as members of a single dynasty, as the only breaches in direct parent to child or brother to brother succession have been George III, who succeeded his paternal grandfather, George II, and Queen Victoria, who succeeded her uncle, William IV. In contrast, the first Tudor monarch, Henry VII, was third cousin to his predecessor, Richard III, and the first Stuart, James I/VI, first cousin twice removed to Queen Elizabeth. Queen Anne and George I were second cousins. Interestingly, Henry VI and his supplanter, Edward IV, were also no more than third cousins (through the shortest of the three routes by which they were related), yet both are normally accounted Plantagenets.

Hanoverians was the peaceful evolution of a democratic constitutional monarchy with the parliamentary executive and cabinet government that we know today.

Could all this have been predicted in the first years of the eighteenth century? Between January 1685, just before the death of Charles II, and the end of 1702, the eponymous Vicar of Bray accommodated his conscience to four different religious and political regimes, in what were, to say the least, tumultuous times. In the 75 years before George I's accession, Great Britain first underwent a decade of civil wars, culminating in the execution of a king and the imposition of a short-lived republic, then a monarchical restoration and 25 year peace, followed by the deposition of another king. In February 1689, a Parliament of doubtful validity offered the throne to a foreign ruler rather than the immediate heir by blood. Only a dozen years later, the failure of the new line to produce surviving issue, and continuing religious divisions, meant that the succession was settled by Act of Parliament on the nearest Protestant heir. By 1714 this meant passing over 56 living individuals with better blood claims, and the Protestant heir was another foreign ruler, one, moreover, who had only once previously visited his new domains.

## **1 So Who were the Hanoverians?**

Albert Azzo, Count of Milan, built a castle at Este, near Padua, during the first half of the eleventh century. His elder son, Welf, inherited lands in modern Germany and Austria via his mother, who was heiress to her childless brother. Welf became the progenitor of the German house of Welf, or Guelph, while his half-brother, Fulco, inherited the county of Milan and founded the Italian house of Este, who in due time became Dukes of Ferrara and Modena.

Welf was created Duke of Bavaria by the Emperor Henry IV in 1070. He took part in the First Crusade and died in Cyprus in 1101 during his return journey. Interestingly, given later events, his second wife, the mother of his children, was Judith of Flanders, widow of Tostig, younger brother of Harold II, England's last Anglo-Saxon king. Welf's great-grandson, Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony and Bavaria, was a leading figure in the complex web of German politics in the mid-twelfth century, and also established a matrimonial link with England, by marrying Matilda, eldest daughter of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Henry the Lion's relations with the reigning Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, were stormy; in 1176 he was deprived of his duchies and in 1180 he was exiled to the English court.

The Welfs never regained the duchies of Saxony and Bavaria, though Henry the Lion's son was Emperor as Otto IV from 1209 until 1215. Otto, born in 1175, spent much of his youth at the English court and was subsequently a leading continental ally of his cousin, King John.

His defeat at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214 was a major factor in the failure of John's campaign to regain Normandy, and thus in the genesis of Magna Carta.

From the late twelfth century the district around Brunswick (German *Braunschweig*) formed the core of Welf power. Generally speaking, the Welfs were allies of the papacy against successive Emperors, to the extent that in Italy the papal party was referred to as the Guelphs. This association with the papacy came to an end in the sixteenth century, when the Welfs converted to Lutheranism, along with most of the rulers of northern and central Germany. During the Middle Ages and after, in keeping with the German tradition of partible inheritance between sons, the family possessions were divided and reunited several times. Two main lines became established, those of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel and Brunswick-Luneburg. The complex, not to say, bewildering, pattern of divisions within the Brunswick-Luneburg branch (all of whose male members were, to further confuse matters, styled Duke of Brunswick-Luneburg) came to an end during the second half of the seventeenth century.

In 1635, a redistribution of Brunswick-Luneburg lands following the death of Duke Friedrich Ulrich brought the principality of Calenberg to his son, Georg, who immediately moved his residence to Hanover. At his death in 1641, Georg left four sons. Two died without male issue, and the survivors, Georg Wilhelm and Ernst August, entered into an agreement in 1665 under which Georg Wilhelm would remain unmarried and on his death all the possessions of the Brunswick-Luneburg line would pass to Ernst August. Preferring to avoid the responsibilities of rule, Georg Wilhelm was content to receive only the small duchy of Celle.

However, no sooner was the scheme agreed than Georg Wilhelm produced a daughter, Sophia Dorothea, with his mistress. A morganatic marriage then legitimated the child. Salic Law applied among the Welfs, so Celle would in due time pass to Ernst August or his issue, but a proportion of her father's other property would nevertheless go to Sophia Dorothea. The prospect of continued division was neatly avoided by the marriage of Ernst August's eldest son, Georg Ludwig, born in 1660, to the 16-year-old Sophia Dorothea in 1682, and a declaration by Ernst August the following year that on his death all his property would pass by primogeniture.

This, inevitably, was not popular with his younger sons, but it provided the head of the family with a solid power base. Its significance is shown by a comparison with another German house of similar antiquity. The Wettin Dukes of Saxony became Electors of the Holy Roman

Empire in 1423, but the family split into two branches in 1485, when the sons of the Elector Friedrich II divided their inheritance between them. The elder, 'Ernestine' branch, lost the electorate to their cousins in 1547 and after further partible inheritances divided into many sub-branches, of importance only on the marriage markets of Protestant Europe. The Ernestines provided four royal consorts for Great Britain after 1714, notably Prince Albert, but their power in Germany was purely local. The younger, 'Albertine' branch, remained united, and not only produced a line of Electors and then Kings of Saxony which endured down to 1918, but also two elected Kings of Poland in the eighteenth century. A third dynasty, the Hohenzollerns of Brandenburg, also gradually consolidated their landholdings into a single hand from the early seventeenth century, beginning a trajectory whereby they became the greatest rulers in central Europe, and were elevated to Emperors in 1871.

The office of Holy Roman Emperor was elective. The Golden Bull of 1356 created an electoral college of seven Electors, three ecclesiastical (the Archbishops of Mainz, Trier and Cologne) and four lay (the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Saxony, the Margrave of Brandenburg, the Count Palatine of the Rhine). Bavaria became the eighth Electorate during the Thirty Years War (1618-48), and in 1692 a decision was taken to create a ninth to prevent future elections from being deadlocked. Though the imperial crown had in practice become hereditary among the Habsburgs during the fifteenth century,<sup>3</sup> the office of Elector carried huge prestige. It is a measure of the increasing importance of the House of Brunswick-Luneburg that Duke Ernst August became the ninth member of the electoral college, and assumed the title of Elector of Hanover.

Though the new Elector now held a significant position in Germany, he would have been of no importance to British history were it not for his marriage in 1658 to Sophia of the Palatinate. She was the daughter of Friedrich V, the Elector Palatine, and Elizabeth, eldest daughter of James I/VI. Friedrich was elected King of Bohemia in 1619 in opposition to the Habsburg Emperor, but was forced to flee his kingdom after barely a year. With their family, of whom Sophia, born in The Hague in 1630, was the twelfth of 13 children, Friedrich and

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<sup>3</sup> The office of Holy Roman Emperor, and the electoral college, lasted until 1806, and remained in the possession of the Habsburgs except in 1740, when Charles VI, the last Habsburg male of the male line died. He had spent much of his reign persuading the Electors to accept his daughter Maria Theresa as his successor in the Habsburg lands, and her husband, Franz Stephan of Lorraine, as Emperor. Once he was dead a majority among the Electors reneged (including George II as Elector of Hanover, contrary to his foreign policy as King of Great Britain), and chose Charles Albert of Bavaria as the new Emperor. During the War of the Austrian Succession which followed, Charles Albert was driven from Bavaria and took refuge in Frankfurt, returning shortly before his death in January 1745, when Franz Stephan was elected Emperor under the terms of the Treaty of Fussen, which ended the war.

Elizabeth lived in exile in the Dutch Republic. Friedrich died in 1632, but his eldest son was restored as ruler of the Palatinate under the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Like both her parents, Sophia benefited from an excellent education and possessed wide intellectual interests, particularly in contemporary philosophy – she kept up a lengthy correspondence with Leibniz, who was her tutor for a period, and was an admirer of Descartes and Spinoza.<sup>4</sup>

## **2 Meanwhile, Back in England.....**

The Commonwealth established after the execution of Charles I did not long survive the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658. The regime was excessively dependent on one man, and Richard Cromwell, who followed his father as head of state, lacked the ability either to mobilise support or to play off the various competing factions against one another. As on several previous occasions since 1642, the army took control. After a period in which no group was able to maintain power, General George Monck led the Army of Scotland on a march from Edinburgh to London, arriving early in February 1660. Having restored order, Monck concluded that the only means of creating a stable government was to restore the monarchy in the person of Charles I's eldest son, currently in exile in Holland, with whom he was already in communication. A Convention (not strictly a Parliament since there was no one with the authority to summon one) invited the young Charles to return, and he landed in England on 29 May 1660 to a hero's welcome.

The euphoria of the Restoration and the legend of Charles II as the 'Merrie Monarch' obscure the underlying problem that the issues which had brought about the Civil War had not been addressed. The prevailing religious divisions had, if anything, worsened since 1649, and, in particular, the extent to which the king could rely on prerogative powers to override parliamentary legislation or to raise revenue remained unclear. Further, there was no separation between the financing of government and that of the royal household, a particular problem when kings were personally extravagant. Charles I had been a major art

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<sup>4</sup> The Brunswick-Wolfenbützel branch enjoyed its greatest days in the first half of the eighteenth century, with a series of brilliant marriages. In 1708 Elizabeth of Brunswick-Wolfenbützel married the future Emperor Charles VI, and through their daughter Maria Theresa became the progenitor of all future Habsburg rulers. Her sister Charlotte married the Tsarevich Alexei, heir to Peter the Great, in 1711. Though the marriage was a failure and Alexei died after being tortured on his father's orders, their son reigned as Peter II from 1727-30 before dying from smallpox at the age of fourteen. Finally, Anton Ulrich of Brunswick-Wolfenbützel married Anna Leopoldovna, granddaughter of Ivan V, Peter the Great's half-brother and nominal co-ruler. Their two-month old son was named as heir by his mother's aunt, the Empress Anna Ivanovna, in 1740, and reigned as Ivan VI before being supplanted in a palace revolution in 1742. The balance of the boy-Emperor's life was tragic. As 'the prisoner without a name' he was kept in confinement apart from his family, until he was murdered by his gaolers in 1763 to foil a rescue attempt.

collector and patron of Rubens and Van Dyk. Charles II preferred to spend his revenues on mistresses and illegitimate children. During Charles II's reign religious conflict became polarised between Catholic and Protestant. As his marriage to Catherine of Braganza remained barren, it became increasingly clear from around 1670 that Charles's brother, James, Duke of York, newly converted to Catholicism, would succeed him. James's conversion made him extremely unpopular, and a series of Exclusion Bills were introduced into Parliament in 1679-81 to deny him the throne, but defeated by the king utilising his prerogative powers to dissolve successive Parliaments.

Like his ancestor, King John, James II/VII was in the unenviable position of being faced with a range of problems which had simmered beneath the surface in the previous reign. However, although his difficulties were not entirely of his own making, his handling of them was frequently inept, and matters were exacerbated by suspicion of his motives, particularly in relation to his Declaration of Indulgence of 1687. This sought to create freedom of worship both in public and private for the first time in more than a century, but was interpreted as an attempt to force the country back to Catholicism. To make matters worse, the Declaration was issued on the basis of James's claimed prerogative powers to *suspend* the operation of an Act of Parliament, in this case the Test Acts, which required all holders of public office to take an oath to uphold the doctrines of the Church of England, and so excluded both Catholics and Protestant dissenters from such office. The events of the Civil War and Commonwealth had given rise to a deep suspicion of standing armies as instruments of repression. Not only did James maintain a standing army of increasing size, but even before the Declaration of Indulgence he used the prerogative to *dispense* his Catholic friends (and some Protestant dissenters) from the requirements of the Test Acts in order to raise and command regiments. Fear of standing armies came together with fear of Catholicism, as concern grew that the new regiments would be used to force the populace back to Rome.

James grew increasingly unpopular from 1686, but he might well have survived as king had not his Queen, Mary of Modena, a member of the House of Este, unexpectedly produced a healthy son on 10 June 1688. James was aged 55, not in good health, and his heirs had hitherto been his two daughters, Mary and Anne, both firmly Protestant and married to Protestant princes. Anne's husband, George of Denmark, was an amiable nonentity (Charles II declared 'I have tried him drunk, and tried him sober, and there is nothing in him'), but William of Orange, married to Mary, was one of the leading military commanders of the day, and, in addition, had his own claim to the British throne through his mother, who was James's sister. The birth of James Francis Edward, rapidly created Prince of Wales, created

the spectre, in the eyes of James's enemies, of an indefinite succession of Catholic rulers. Shortly after his birth, seven bishops who had refused to publish the Declaration of Indulgence in their dioceses were tried for seditious libel and acquitted on all charges on 30 June, despite a pro-government summing-up by the Lord Chief Justice. The timing may be coincidental, but on the same day seven peers who had already been in secret negotiations with William of Orange despatched a letter inviting him to come to England with an army.

The purpose of the invitation to William is not entirely clear, but from his point of view taking control of the government of Great Britain and Ireland made excellent political sense. The central purpose of his life was defending his homeland against Louis XIV; the resources of Britain would vastly enhance his position. Whatever his original aim, events after he landed at Torbay with 12,000 men on 5 November 1688 show that he came to regard the crown as his target. Though James had shown considerable ability and decisiveness as a military and naval commander before his accession, his resolve rapidly evaporated as his senior officers began to take their regiments over to William. On 11 December, as his nephew approached London, he donned a disguise and fled. James's attempt to escape had a tragicomic aspect, as he was picked up by a group of fishermen, who searched him and discovered the coronation ring in his underwear, and the Great Seal, which he had flung into the Thames in the hope of frustrating the work of government, was caught by another group of fishermen in their nets. He was returned captive to London, but allowed to depart a second time on 22 December.

With James out of the way, William of Orange took charge. On arriving in London, he agreed to a request that he should assume responsibility for public order and civil administration, and summoned the surviving members of all Charles II's Parliaments then in the capital to a meeting on 23 December. It was there agreed that William should issue summonses for a Convention (again, not technically a Parliament) to assemble on 23 January. Before the Convention met, he lodged the Lord Chancellor, the notorious Judge Jeffreys, in the Tower, and dismissed all the judges appointed by James.

In 1660 there had been only one realistic candidate for the role of head of state, a man too young to have been associated with his father's actions, and whose public statements showed a desire for peace, moderation and reconciliation. In January 1689 matters were more complex. James II retained little personal credibility, but he was an anointed king, and elements within the Convention were prepared to allow him to remain on the throne, either on the basis of statutory limitations on his power, or with William as regent. Republicanism

had had its day, and the issue condensed into whether James should be permitted to return, or William should replace him. The Commons favoured William, and resolved on 28 January that the throne was vacant. The Lords rejected this, since James had not abdicated and a hereditary throne could not be vacant. The regency proposal was rejected by three votes, and a compromise solution was reached, whereby James was held to have deserted the throne. Having produced this legal fiction, the Lords further proclaimed their attachment to the hereditary principle, by declaring that the infant Prince of Wales was an imposter introduced into Mary of Modena's bedchamber in a warming pan (though more than 40 people had been present at the time of the birth), and that James's elder daughter was the rightful ruler.

Mary, the undisputed daughter of James and his first wife, Anne Hyde, had taken no part in events. She rejected any proposal that she should reign as queen regnant, and William at the same time declared that he would be neither regent or consort, but only king. Eventually, another compromise was reached whereby the Convention offered the crown jointly to William and Mary, each having full sovereignty. On 14 February they were duly proclaimed as William II and Mary II of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, their joint reign being dated from James's departure.

As events turned out, Mary submitted herself entirely to William and took no part in government. She died in 1694, inspiring Purcell's sublime *Funeral Music for Queen Mary*, but otherwise her importance was as the conduit for William's rule. The joint rulers were childless, and the widower showed no inclination to remarry. His heir therefore remained Mary's sister, Anne, as designated by the Bill of Rights 1689. Anne's marriage proved abundantly fertile, but her 18 reported pregnancies produced only six live births. Of these, only one, William, Duke of Gloucester, born on 24 July 1689, survived infancy. He never enjoyed robust health and died on 30 July 1700.

### **3 The Act of Settlement**

Another succession crisis loomed. William III was barely 50, but in poor health. Anne was only 35, but her health had been ruined by her disastrous gynaecological history (along with gout and heavy drinking – she was affectionately known as 'Brandy Nan'). Clearly, neither would produce a living heir. Across the Channel, the exiled James II lived as a pensioner of Louis XIV. He now occupied himself with religious austerities and no longer sought to regain his throne, but his son had survived the dangers of seventeenth century childhood and was now twelve. Like his uncle Charles II in 1660, the young James was young enough to have

had no role in his father's government. A significant minority of influential opinion remained attached to the hereditary principle and so favoured his accession, if not immediately then as successor to Anne. Further, Louis XIV, if only on the principle of my enemy's enemy is my friend, was prepared to give him some support against William and his heirs.

Meanwhile, the Revolution Settlement embodied in the Bill of Rights was incomplete. Though the suspending and dispensing powers were formally abolished, and it was explicitly stated that the Crown could only raise revenue with grant of Parliament, the monarch retained complete freedom to appoint ministers and to make policy, particularly foreign policy. Maintenance of a standing army and powers of discipline over its members required Parliament to pass a Mutiny Act every year (as remained the case until 1881), but the deployment of troops remained, and does today, a matter for the prerogative. Notably, William of Orange embarked on an eight-year war with France in 1689, within months of his accession. Further, the monarch's powers of patronage remained intact, and he controlled access to public office. In particular, not only did a change of monarch trigger a dissolution of Parliament, it also terminated all public appointments, so giving the new ruler a free hand to appoint according to his wishes. Appointees, including judges, held office at the monarch's pleasure, so had good cause to favour the monarch's interests. Finally, the intertwining of government finance and that of the king's household remained.

These two threads, the succession after the death of Anne, and matters left over from 1689, came together in the Act of Settlement 1701. The succession issue assumed yet more immediate importance because of events on the continent. Carlos II, the last of the Spanish Habsburgs, died on 1 November 1700 without an obvious heir. By his will he left his domains – not only Spain itself, but other possessions in Europe and vast areas of the New World – to his great-nephew Philip of Anjou, grandson of his half-sister by her marriage to Louis XIV. The possibility of a future union of crowns between France and Spain – or at any rate long-term amity to replace the traditional rivalry of the two kingdoms – was quite unacceptable to both William III and to the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I, whose younger son became the rival candidate for the Spanish throne. The thirteen-year War of the Spanish Succession followed.

The War of the Spanish Succession was fought largely between powers external to Spain, and the major battles took place away from Spanish soil. By contrast the major threat in relation to the British succession was of civil war for the Crown, with France and other Catholic powers intervening on behalf of young James. The danger was heightened by

major political and religious differences between England, Scotland and Ireland, still at this stage joined only by a union of crowns. It should not be forgotten that in 1701 the Civil Wars of the 1640s were within living memory. At that time, the continental powers had been too occupied with the Thirty Years War to intervene in Britain, but that would not necessarily be the case a second time.

The consequence of all this was that Parliament passed the Act of Settlement, which received William III's assent on 12 June 1701, and whose main terms remain in force today. First, the Act vested the succession to the English throne following the death of Anne on the Electress Sophia and her issue, provided they were not 'Papist' nor married to 'Papists'. This excluded not only James II, his son and daughter by his second marriage, and their future issue, but all the descendants of Charles I and James I with prior claims by blood, by reason of their Catholicism. Conveniently for the future, however, the Electress had a Protestant son, Georg Ludwig, who had succeeded his father as Elector of Hanover in 1699, a Protestant daughter, married to the new King *in* Prussia, Friedrich I, and four Protestant grandchildren. Though it was by now well-established that the royal succession could be regulated by Act of Parliament – the first such Act dated to 1405 – all earlier Acts had been passed very much at the will of the monarch, with the acquiescence of Parliament. Here there was a balance of power between king and Parliament, and other provisions of the Act reflect concessions by William.

Second, the 1701 Act secured the independence of the judiciary by providing that judges would henceforth hold office 'during good behaviour', and could only be removed on the authority of an address to the monarch from both Houses of Parliament (this procedure has only been used once). Further, judicial salaries were 'permanently authorised', and payable from funds independent of Parliamentary control, so that Parliament could not put pressure on the judiciary by threatening their salaries. Other provisions of the Act of Settlement sought to prevent a future foreign monarch from using English resources in support of his continental ambitions, as had been the case with William III, and forbade him from leaving England without parliamentary approval. Further, no foreign-born monarch could without Parliamentary consent take England into 'any War for the defence of any Dominions and Territories which do not belong to the Crown of England', so preventing England being drawn into a war for the defence of Hanover by the unchecked will of the monarch. No foreigner could be appointed to the Privy Council, or other public office, or sit in the English Parliament.

Barely three months after the Act of Settlement became law, on 16 September 1701 James II died in France, perhaps appropriately after suffering a stroke while hearing Mass. His son, now thirteen, was immediately proclaimed as James III and VIII by his supporters. William survived him by less than six months, dying on 8 March 1702 after a fall from his horse. No doubt in part as a result of Louis XIV being distracted by the War of the Spanish Succession, Anne was able to succeed peacefully. The danger from her half-brother did not become concrete until he reached adulthood.

Political difficulties continued during Anne's reign, though she was extremely fortunate to have the great soldier and diplomat John Churchill, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough, as her leading minister for much of that time. Jacobite sentiment was stronger in Scotland, where, moreover, the Act of Settlement did not apply, raising the possibility that on Anne's death the existing union of crowns would collapse. In 1702 Anglo-Scottish relations were in a poor state and matters were not improved when the following year the Scottish Parliament passed an Act of Security giving it power to nominate a successor to the throne of Scotland. Though the Act limited the succession to the Protestant descendants of the House of Stuart, it provided that the successor to the English throne would only succeed in Scotland if

there be such conditions for government settled and enacted as may secure the honour and sovereignty of this crown and kingdom, the freedom, frequency and power of Parliaments, the religion, liberty and trade of the nation from English or from any foreign influence.

Queen Anne refused royal assent to the Act, but the Scottish Parliament nevertheless passed it a second time in 1704, with the additional provision that the continuance of the union of crowns was conditional on free trade between the two countries – existing protective tariffs gravely disadvantaged Scottish commerce. This threat of a divided succession was one of the triggers of the Acts of Union of 1707, the other being the near-collapse of the Scottish economy as a result of the Company of Scotland's disastrous attempt to colonise Darien.

By the close of William's reign the political class in England had formed itself into two loose groupings known as the Whigs and the Tories (both originally terms of abuse). The dividing line between them was by no means absolute, but the Tories tended to favour landed interests, the Whigs commercial interests. The Whigs supported the Hanoverian succession. The Tories had mixed views; a minority had been prepared to accept the Revolution Settlement, but not the Hanoverian succession, believing the Pretender to be the rightful heir to Anne. The Tories strongly favoured the Church of England, and believed the major threat to it now came from the Dissenters, who formed a significant portion of the commercial

classes, and so the Whigs pursued a conciliatory policy towards them. For much of Anne's reign, the Tories were in position of strength, but in its final years the balance shifted towards the Whigs, as a result of the bitter rivalry between the two leading Tories, Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, as much as anything else.

On the continent the Pretender, 20 years old in 1708, looked to Scotland. In March 1708 he reached the Firth of Forth with a French fleet, but came down with an ill-timed attack of measles and did not land. James was not an inspiring figure, entirely lacking in the elusive 'something' that made men follow his deeply flawed yet charismatic elder son.<sup>5</sup> Though there is no suggestion that he lacked the physical courage expected of rulers in his day, his role in contemporary politics was essentially a passive one – he left it to others to plan and act on his behalf - and he was throughout his adult life a prey to ill-health and prolonged attacks of depression.

However, the Pretender did not lack support at high levels in British politics. His illegitimate half-brother, James FitzJames, Duke of Berwick, kept up a regular correspondence with his own uncle, the Duke of Marlborough (Berwick's mother, a long-term mistress of James II, was Marlborough's sister). Berwick was a highly capable soldier who became a Marshal of France; though he became a French subject in 1705 and thereafter never campaigned openly on behalf of the Pretender, he remained an active figure in the background. More seriously, Viscount Bolingbroke established secret communications with the Pretender before the spring of 1714, at a time when the Earl of Oxford was in communication with Hanover, and Queen Anne's health was visibly failing.

Critically, no plans had been made by the Pretender or his supporters, either domestically or at international level, for an immediate strike against England or Scotland on the Queen's death. Louis XIV's reign of 72 years was approaching its end; the Treaty of Utrecht had recently brought the long and costly War of the Spanish Succession to an end. After the deaths of Louis's only legitimate son and elder grandson, his heir was a sickly four-year-old great-grandson; the eyes of the leading political figures in France were focused on the forthcoming regency, and there was no appetite for any campaign in support of James. The new King of Spain, Louis's surviving grandson, Philip of Anjou, was similarly preoccupied with domestic matters, and the third of the leading Catholic rulers, the Habsburg Emperor,

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Edward, the 'Young Pretender', was vain, shallow, fundamentally selfish and even in his twenties a devotee of what his father termed the 'nasty bottle'. Yet for all his faults of character – and the huge price on his head – not a single person betrayed him to the authorities during his months as a fugitive after Culloden.

had no interest in English affairs (in any case, the Habsburgs, having benefitted from British support throughout the war and in the prolonged peace negotiations, were unlikely to seek to destabilise the monarchy for the time being by backing the Pretender). In England, an attempt by Oxford to get rid of Bolingbroke by bringing charges of corruption failed, but the Queen dismissed Oxford as Lord Treasurer on 27 July. Bolingbroke had hoped to succeed him, but the Privy Council instead sent for the Earl of Shrewsbury, one of the 'immortal seven' who had issued the invitation to William of Orange in 1688. The Queen was now mortally ill; on 30 July she lapsed into a coma, and on 1 August she died.

In contrast to their rivals, the Government had established plans to ensure the continuance of authority between Anne's death and the arrival of the new ruler from Hanover. The Succession to the Crown Act 1706 provided that, for the first time, Parliament would not be dissolved on the demise of the crown, but remain in being for six months unless dissolved earlier by a legitimate ruler under the Act of Settlement. Office-holders would also remain in office for six months, and until the Electress Sophie or her heir reached English soil power would vest in a Regency Council. The arrangements worked smoothly (in fact, the new king wasted no time in dismissing Bolingbroke from office before he crossed the North Sea), the Elector Georg Ludwig was proclaimed King of Great Britain, France and Ireland as George I without opposition, and arrived in London on 18 September after an undisturbed journey from Hanover.

#### **4 What Manner of Man was the First Hanoverian King?**

##### ***George I***

George I's reputation is as a lumpen German with no interest in his new kingdom, and who could not even speak English. In fact, though less an intellectual than his mother and sister, he had received a good education, and was a devotee of music, not least the newly popular Italian opera (he maintained a box at the Venice opera house). It should not be forgotten that he engaged the young George Frideric Handel as his court composer in 1710, in sharp contrast to Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, who rejected Johann Sebastian Bach for a similar post in 1721 - *after* the composer had written the Brandenburg Concertos for him. Though Handel had other patrons, he wrote several of his most famous works for the first two Hanoverian kings. Indeed, the Water Music was written specifically to entertain George I during a river journey to Windsor; the king enjoyed it so much that he ordered it to be played during the return journey as well.

As was not unusual at the time, George was educated in military matters by being taken on campaign by his father, at the age of 15, and subsequently saw action against the Turks at the Siege of Vienna in 1683. In 1680 he paid a visit to England, and it has since been suggested that he was regarded as a potential husband for the future Queen Anne, but there is no solid evidence of this. In 1682 he married his cousin Sophia Dorothea, but after producing a son and daughter (the future George II, and Sophia Dorothea, who married her first cousin, the future Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia) the two lived apart. In 1694 Sophia Dorothea came under suspicion of adultery with Count Philipp Christoph von Koenigsmarck, a Swedish soldier of fortune in her husband's service. On 2 July Koenigsmarck was murdered on the Elector's instructions, and his body thrown into a river. George used his powers as a ruler to divorce his wife, and had her confined in the castle of Ahlden until her death in 1728. George did not remarry, and contented himself with mistresses. Much later, the Koenigsmarck affair spawned the 1948 film, *Saraband for Dead Lovers*, with the then matinee idol Stewart Granger as Koenigsmarck, Joan Greenwood as Sophia Dorothea, Peter Bull as George and Flora Robson as a scheming Countess who betrays the doomed pair.

### **1715 and the Jacobites**

By the time the Pretender and his allies were ready to act, a year had passed, and the new ruler had established himself. Having disapproved of the then Tory government's making of a separate peace in the War of the Spanish Succession, he largely appointed Whig ministers. The new ministry then proceeded to purge the ranks of the office-holders; by February 1715, when the election was held, 22 of the 42 Lords Lieutenant of counties, whose role was highly significant as they had power to call out the militia, had been removed from office and replaced by Whigs. Having mounted a smear campaign against the Tories, which firmly identified them with Jacobitism, the Whigs secured some two-thirds of the seats in the Commons at the election, establishing a supremacy which lasted for most of the century. Bolingbroke only played into his enemies' hands by fleeing to the continent in April and entering the Pretender's service. There was sufficient concern over Jacobite-inspired rioting in London and the Welsh border counties for Parliament to rush through the Riot Act, which gave Lords-Lieutenant power to use troops against rioters who failed to disperse when the Act was read – the origin of the phrase 'to read the Riot Act' – and to suspend habeas corpus.

However, it was only after the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Mar raised the Pretender's standard at Braemar in September that James and his advisers stirred themselves, too late for any practical effect.

Having accumulated a force of 12,000 men and captured Perth, Mar met a government army commanded by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Argyll at Sheriffmuir, Perthshire, on 10 November 1715. The battle was inconclusive, but Mar's army was forced to withdraw to Perth. Meanwhile, a smaller Scottish force had joined with English Jacobites at Preston, and came under siege from government troops in the same week as Sheriffmuir. On 14 November the Preston Jacobites surrendered. The Pretender landed at Peterhead on 23 December, and made his way south to join Mar. His presence did nothing to inspire Mar's dispirited troops; plans for a coronation at Scone in imitation of that of Charles II in 1650 came to nothing, and on 4 February 1716 he re-embarked at Montrose for France, never to return. Mar's force then dispersed. By agreement with the British government, the regents for the six-year-old Louis XV required the Pretender to leave French soil, and he departed for Rome, where Pope Clement XI provided him with the Palazzo Muti as a permanent residence after his marriage in 1719, and his successor, Innocent XIII, a lifetime annuity sufficient to maintain a court in exile. If not prepared to take any action to secure the throne he believed to be rightfully his, James continued to have a high sense of his own importance. Every Sunday he travelled to Mass at the adjacent Basilica dei Santi Apostoli in a coach and six, for all that the lead horses reached the steps of the basilica before the coach had left the courtyard of the palazzo.

The debacle of the 'Fifteen' gave the Whigs the opportunity to place themselves in an unassailable position by continuing the purge of their political enemies on the basis of real or imagined Jacobite leanings. The Septennial Act of December 1716 further assisted them by prolonging the life of a Parliament from three years to seven. A planned Jacobite landing in 1719 was thwarted by a combination of unfavourable winds and the vigilance of the Royal Navy, and the next burst of activity on behalf of the Pretender had to wait until the 1740s, when his elder son was adult.

In 1743, six disillusioned Tories invited Charles Edward Stuart, the 22-year-old Jacobite 'Prince of Wales' to invade. After two years of unsuccessfully soliciting French support, Charles Edward, known to contemporaries as the Young Pretender and to romantics ever since as Bonnie Prince Charlie, landed on the Hebridean island of Eriskay on 23 July 1745 with seven companions and a quantity of French muskets. Though the young man's charisma brought large numbers to his cause, and his landing took place at a singularly inopportune moment for the government – most of the regular army was on the continent taking part in the War of the Austrian Succession, and George II was paying one of his extended visits to Hanover – failures of leadership and lack of logistical support meant that

the rising never posed a serious threat to the Hanoverian monarchy. The Prince's forces defeated a very second-rate government force at Prestonpans in September, and marched as far south as Derby before turning back after the hoped-for support from English Jacobites failed to materialise. By then the government had reacted, and an army headed by George II's second son, William, Duke of Cumberland, pursued them back into Scotland. The two armies met on Culloden Moor, a few miles from Inverness, on 16 April 1746, where Charles Edward's half-starved, ill-equipped and untrained highlanders were routed. The Young Pretender escaped to France after a period as a fugitive, but Jacobitism never recovered from this second debacle. Charles Edward himself declined rapidly into alcoholism and domestic violence towards both his long-term mistress, Clementina Walkinshaw, and his wife. He had no legitimate children; his brother Henry entered the Catholic Church as a Cardinal and rose to become Papal Chamberlain. In default of other heirs the Jacobite claim to the throne passed to the Wittelsbachs of Bavaria, descendants of Charles I's eldest daughter, in whom it vests today.

## **5 The Hanoverians and the Constitution**

Since the dramatic events of 1688-89, the British constitution has largely developed by peaceful evolution. Cabinet government had already emerged under Anne, but under George I matters went a stage further. As the King's English was limited and he spent much time in Hanover, he rarely attended cabinet meetings and the role of chairman passed to the Lord Treasurer. This paved the way for the emergence of the office of Prime Minister, as Sir Robert Walpole, appointed Lord Treasurer in 1721, was able to gain control of the House of Commons as well as the cabinet.

A consistent system of government finance had finally emerged under William III, when the government began to solicit long-term loans from members of the public in return for government stocks – the origins of the National Debt. This system was administered by the Bank of England, created in 1694. In 1697 Parliament also granted the monarch an annual revenue of £700,000, to be used to pay the costs of the Civil Service and the salaries of judges and ambassadors, as well as funding the Royal Household. Under the Hanoverians, the separation was completed, when George III surrendered the revenues of the Crown Estates (the remnant of the royal demesne kept in the king's hands after the Norman Conquest), in return for an annual sum, together with the revenues from the Duchy of Lancaster, for the Royal Household. This system continued under each monarch down to 2012, with the annual sum being determined by Parliament at the start of each reign. The inflation of the 1970s led to the sum being revised every ten years, although the system

greatly benefitted the Government, since the Crown Estate revenues have consistently been much larger than the sum going to the monarch under the Civil List. The Sovereign Grant Act 2011 took effect in 2012, and the official expenditure of the monarchy is now met from an agreed portion of the revenues from the Crown Estate.

As the monarch was also now the ruler of a strategically important German state, Britain also became more heavily involved in continental affairs. Hitherto, the country had tended to avoid foreign entanglements except when her own interests were directly affected. Now, following a pattern which had begun under another foreign monarch – William III – and continued during the War of the Spanish Succession, Britain became a regular participant in the shifting system of continental alliances, invariably in opposition to France. This inevitably also brought involvement in several wars, but Britain then benefitted on more than one occasion from being on the winning side, gaining various overseas possessions via peace treaties, notably at the end of the Seven Years War in 1763. This was an element in the development of the British empire in the Caribbean, the Americas, and in India and, more broadly, in Britain's emergence as a great power.