

The Glorious Revolution



William, who had long been anticipating such a call, accordingly set sail with an army for England. James II fled to France a few weeks later and William and Mary were crowned as joint monarchs the following year.

James II still had many supporters in Ireland, and in March 1689 he landed there with a French army.

William now assembled an army of his own to meet this challenge, and in 1690 he decisively defeated James at the Battle of the Boyne. James promptly returned to France, leaving William free to consolidate his hold on power.

The death of Mary in 1694 left William as sole ruler of the three kingdoms, and by 1700 all eyes were turning to the problem of the succession.

Because neither William nor James II's surviving daughter, Anne, had any children, Protestants were terrified that the throne would eventually revert to James II, to his son, or to one of the many other Catholic claimants.

To avert this danger, the Act of Settlement was passed in 1701, directing that after the deaths of William and Anne the throne would return to the descendants of James I's daughter, Elizabeth.

Sophia, electress of Hanover, and her heirs thus became next in line to the English throne.

In 1702, William died and was succeeded by Anne. Five years after this, a formal union of the kingdoms of England and Scotland was contrived, in order to ensure that there would be a Protestant succession in Scotland too.

Henceforth England and Scotland officially became one country, and when Queen Anne, the last of the Stuart monarchs, died in 1714, it was to the throne of the United Kingdom of Great Britain that George I, the first of the Hanoverians, succeeded.

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In 1688 a group of nobles invited James's daughter Mary and her husband William to become king and queen of England. William and Mary were both Protestants, living in the Netherlands. James, knowing that it was pointless to fight, fled to France. Parliament gave the throne to William III and Mary II as joint rulers. This transfer of power became known as the Glorious Revolution.

With the Glorious Revolution, Parliament had essentially crowned the new king and queen. More important was a document that William and Mary had to sign before taking the throne—the English Bill of Rights. This document prevented the monarch from levying taxes without the consent of Parliament, among many other provisions. Decades later, the Bill of Rights was reflected in the U.S. Constitution.

The Bill of Rights was central to England's growth as a constitutional monarchy, the term for a monarchy limited by law. The document's approval came after decades of dramatic changes in English government. England had rejected the concept of an absolute monarch who supposedly ruled by divine right for a monarchy ruled by law.