

# UK DEMOCRACY TIMELINE

**So how and why do we have the democracy structure and systems that we have currently? To answer that we need to meet a few characters from history to pinpoint a few key dates.**

**1215** Ah hello you must be King John. Excellent. So it's 1215 and you have just signed the Magna Carta – congratulations – (realise you lost the battle which meant you had to do it!). You have just ensured that no one – yep, not even the King is above the law and an advisory council of 25 barons have got you to sign up to 63 rules about how the country and the law will operate. Thank you King John good to meet you.

**1265** Well well, Simon de Montfort – quite a character – good to meet you – and you have just rebelled against King Henry III, isn't that right? And created the first ever parliament with invited representatives from the towns and shires. Well, let's hear a big thank you to Simon for creating the first parliament for us and going on to create the first model parliament with a House of Commons and a House of Lords.

**1414** Ah yes I see a bit of time has passed now and finally the monarch – Henry V to be exact – does actually finally acknowledge that the approval of both Houses (Commons and Lords) is necessary to make a new law. Well, Henry, it's still the system we have today, so many thanks for that acknowledgement back in 1414.

**1536** Leaping forward over 100 years and here we meet another monarch – hello Henry VIII – looking very well – and you have just joined England and Wales, I gather? Yes, the Act of Union in 1536, isn't that right, Henry? You made sure England and Wales have to follow the same laws and is Wales now represented in Parliament? Marvellous. Oh and your palace, Westminster Palace had been on fire a few years back, hadn't it? Did you move out? Yes? Give it to Parliament? Fair enough. They still use it you know. One of the most iconic buildings in the world. Thank you.

**1605** Ah, Guy Fawkes – hmmm – well now, we understand Catholics were being oppressed and persecuted and that yourself and Robert Catsby and friends were understandably very angry with King James I but trying to blow up Parliament? I'm afraid you will be burnt on bonfires for 400 years every 5th November as a result which is not the outcome you were seeking.

**1649** Now then King Charles I, good to meet you. Gosh, it's all been going on with you, hasn't it? You burst into Parliament 7 years ago, trying to arrest some MPs and well, no monarch has been allowed in ever since. And then you go and start the English Civil War. Good grief man, no wonder you lose your head. Tried in 1649 in the Great Hall at Westminster and executed.

So in 1649, the House of Commons abolishes the monarchy (yes that's right we haven't always had a monarch) and abolishes the House of Lords too (it was all going on in 1649) and England is declared a Commonwealth. Then in 1653...

**1653** Oliver Cromwell, how are you? Made Lord Protector, I understand? Great. What happens when you die? New Lord Protector democratically elected? No? Ah, your son inherits the title. Ah right, and then he is deposed and then we have political anarchy? Right. Maybe you should have thought about holding a general election!

**1660** Hang on, the monarchy is back. Restored hence it's the Restoration period and here is Charles I's son Charles well yes, you guessed it, Charles II, and guess what else he restores? The House of Lords.

Charles II died on 6 February 1685 from apoplexy, after supposedly converting to Catholicism on his deathbed. Having no legitimate children, he was succeeded by his brother James, who reigned in England and Ireland as James II and in Scotland as James VII.

He was deposed in the Glorious Revolution (1688–89) and replaced by William III and Mary II. That revolution, engendered by James's Roman Catholicism, permanently established Parliament as the ruling power of England.

**1688/89** So the monarchy is back and James II is now on the throne until he is deposed in the 'Glorious Revolution' by Mr William of Orange from Holland. Hello William. There was a long argument over whether James II had abdicated and had thereby made the throne vacant or whether he had temporarily deserted the throne. William of Orange cut the debate short by threatening to abandon the country if he was not made King. On 6 February 1689 Parliament resolved that James II had abdicated by his departure and that the Crown should be offered jointly to William and his wife Mary, the actual successor of James II.

Which led to the Bill of Rights. So, William what does the Bill of Rights do exactly apart from being a landmark document in the development of civil liberties in England? Doesn't it constitutionally prevent the absolute rule of Kings and Queens and make Parliament the true seat of power which it remains until this day?

Thought so.

**1707** Well, in 1707 we had another Act of Union. This time between England and Scotland and then in 1721... Hello, you must be Sir Robert Walpole...acknowledged as the first ever Prime Minister. Lovely to meet you. So you are the longest ever serving PM. How many years was it? 21? Amazing. And King George II gave you a house to live in, I understand, the keys to number 10 Downing Street London. Congratulations Mr Walpole.

Now not many people could vote back in 1707. In fact, you had to own a large property and have a lot of money but thank fully in...

**1832 and 1837** there were a couple of reform acts and by the second, all male householders, no matter how much their house was worth, could vote. Well that's good for all the men but it wasn't until 1918 that...

**1918** Women finally got the vote (5 years after Emily Davison threw herself under the King's horse to get women the vote in 1913) and all men could vote whether or not they

owned a house.

The first female MP, Constance Markievicz, was elected in Northern Ireland but did not take her seat.

**1919** One year later the MP Nancy Astor was the first woman to take her seat in UK Parliament.

Only women over 30 who owned property could vote mind you until...

**1928** All women aged over 21 get the vote.

**1948** We finally have one person one vote.

**1951** The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was formed. The ECSC Treaty was the origin of the EU institutions as we know them today. Created in the aftermath of World War II, the ECSC represented the first step towards European integration.

**1957** The first of the three organisations in the European Community was the European Economic Community (EEC), also known as the Common Market which was established by the Treaty of Rome as a way to unify the economies of Europe and reduce tensions that could lead to war...

**1964** The Labour party created the Welsh Office.

**1969** The voting age was lowered to 18.

**1973** UK joins the EEC (the common market).

**1979** First Welsh Referendum on independence. Majority vote against.

**1997** People of Wales hold another referendum the majority vote in favour (just) (50.3%/49.7%) of Wales being a devolved nation and creating a Welsh Assembly.

Until 1999, the UK Parliament was the source of all legislation across the whole of the UK (made all the laws).

**1999** Devolution. Since devolution, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly have taken on the task of passing laws for their respective nations and have developed distinctive new bodies of law in areas of devolved responsibility.

**2006** The Senedd opens (Senedd is Welsh for 'parliament').

**2011** Referendum on giving Welsh Assembly law making powers, without needing to ask Westminster. There are 21 areas which are devolved and which the Welsh Assembly can create laws about without reference to Westminster so it is very important that people of Wales vote in the UK Parliamentary General election and the Welsh Senedd elections.

**2014** 16 and 17 year olds were able to vote in the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum.

**2015** Welsh Government passes the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015), which gives people in Wales the ambition, permission and legal obligation to improve their social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being. The Well-being of Future Generations Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

**2015** Scotland passes law to allow 16 year olds to vote in Scottish and Local Government elections.

**2016** UK voted to leave the EU.

**2020** 16 year olds and qualifying foreign nationals are able to vote in Welsh and Scottish parliament elections and local elections in Wales and Scotland.

The Welsh Assembly's name is changed to Senedd Cymru.

UK left the EU.

**2021** Law changes to allow 16 year olds and qualifying foreign nationals to vote in local council elections in Wales.