**Georgian Period Beginnings**

We will be discussing the Georgian Period, a period in English History that began in 1714 with the start of the Reign of King George I of England and ended in 1837 or 1830 with the reign of King William IV of England.

The story begins in Hannover in 1701. Queen Anne of England has failed in producing an heir for the English Throne. The Stuart Dynasty was at the end so the English Parliament wanted to find a ready made the royal family.

The Act of Settlement was passed which set a rule for the future heirs of the English throne. The rule was that the heir could not be Catholic and had to be raised Protestant nor could they marry a Catholic. Thus a search of the family tree was in order for a Protestant Heir. The search for the next heir to the Throne began in the Duchy of Brunswick-Lüneburg, also known as Hanover named after the capital of the Duchy and the Electress Sophia.

**Electress Sophia of Hanover**

In their search for the next heir the Parliament went all the way back to King James I of England his daughter Elizabeth. She had a daughter Sophia, who was the Electress of Hanover and thus she became England’s next heir. She was a devoted Protestant and more importantly Sophia had a son, George Ludwig, who in turn had a son George thus securing the dynasty for a further two generations. Even though there were 50 nearer relatives to Queen Anne, they were disqualified because of their Catholicism.

Electress Sophia was clever, intelligent, and well read, who had the potential to be a good queen. She was brought up in the German tradition of educated princess and female aristocrats leading the life in court. If Queen Sophia would have succeeded Queen Anne, Sophia would have been the oldest person to inherit the English Throne. Unfortunately, while on a walk in the gardens of her palace she dropped down dead a few months before Queen Anne’s own death. Historian Lucy Worsley states that Sophia could have been “potentially one of England’s Greatest Queens.” Upon Queen Anne’s death, Sophia’s son George Ludwig became King George I of England.

**King George I of England**

Prince George came to England to be coronated King. It was the first time the Bible was read out loud in English for a coronation. Witnesses to the coronation were in tears, relieved that their liberty and property would be protected when King George was crowned. He was a popular monarch among his supporters.

However, King George had his critics. They didn’t like that he was a foreigner, that he didn’t speak English well and thought he came from a backwater. He was called a turnip head and people marched through the streets with turnips on a stick. Even though he was criticized, the people were quick to adapt the architectural style he brought over. It was stark, simple, symmetrical, unadorned, and paid careful attention to the proportions of the horizontal to vertical. It was based on Ancient Roman designs but with an Anglo-Saxon twist.

King George worked carefully with Parliament, in contrast to his Stuart predecessors. Parliament limited his finances and informed him that he couldn’t leave the country without their permission. However, knowing that they were the ones that elected him King, King George proved himself willing and able to work with Parliament. It was during this time, markets were being set up and unified. King George believed that “there was no Protestant or Catholic when it came to a good bargain,” and believed that profit was a solution to the religious differences that divided England. He provided stability to England and it was by doing this he won respect.

It was also the first time in history where people could participate in a stock market. So Parliament sold the National Debt to the South Seas Company, which had a monopoly on the British Slave Trade. They sold shares to the British public who bought them up. By 1720 the financial revolution was underway as people realized that they could make money out of servicing the debts of other people. King George was about to plunge the country into a financial crisis which was known as the South Sea Bubble. Share prices rose so quickly that people started pulling out of the company which caused the bubble to burst. The market collapsed and King George called Robert Walpole to fix the problem.

Robert Walpole was in charge of an investigation that did not find much in the South Seas Company. His investigation was widely panned in satires, which started and became popular during this time period. Satires distribution was aided by Parliament, who accidently forgot to renew the presses royal license to print. Now the press could print anything they want without fear of punishment. Satire allowed people to criticize the upper crust of society without being thrown in prison and Robert Walpole, instead of the King, was the biggest target of the satirists.

The King was often away in Hanover with members of the government, and this political gap was filled by Robert Walpole. He continued to hold meetings with the ministers and invented something called “Cabinet Government,” meaning that that cabinet members had to be able to defend their polices to the public or resign, which is still being used in Britain today.

King George was the head of one of the most dysfunctional royal families in the world. His ex-wife Sophia of Celle had an affair with a Swedish Count. The Count was murdered and Sophia was put on trial for adultery. She was locked up in a castle. George and Sophia’s son George was 11 at the time and he blamed his father for all his problems. Thus began a family feud that would last for generations. Father and Son would snipe at each other, which would lead the Father to take away the son’s children as a sort of hostages to ensure the son’s good behavior.

This feud would also be reflected in the courts of King George and his son George at the time the Prince of Wales. The court of King George was full of serious, sober minded people. The Prince of Wales’ court was younger and had better parties. If you disagreed with King George, instead of loosing your head, you could join the Prince of Wales’ court as a member of the loyal opposition.

It was during this time Voltaire made his way to England. After being imprisoned in France, he fled to England. What he found in England surprised him, as there was no center of power in England. He could find different centers of powers and he commented on how free the English were to express themselves.

King George brought peace and stability to England, which in it’s past went through violent civil wars and political upheavals. Even though he kept his Hanover home, fearing Parliament would kick him and his family, the English was grateful for King George’s rule.

**Bibliography**

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