



Crown and Country: A History of England Through the Monarchy

David Starkey

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David Starkey looks at the monarchy as a whole, charting its history from Roman times, to the Wars of the Roses, the chaos of the Civil War, the fall of Charles I and Cromwell's emergence as Lord Protector - all the way up until the Victorian era when Britain's monarchs came face-to-face with modernity.

Crown and Country: A History of England Through the Monarchy Details

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From Reader Review Crown and Country: A History of England Through the Monarchy for online ebook

Mohamed Toorani says

Personal note: THIS TOOK ME THREE YEARS TO FINISH AND I'M DONE.

This book provides a great summary of the English-turned-British monarchy. Beware that this isn't a history of England per se, rather it focuses intensely on the royal dynasties.

With that said, each time period and reign is uniquely framed with the overarching themes of empire-building, modernity and so on. It's by no means comprehensive (after all, that would deserve several volumes) but it is a succinct read before bedtime.

After all, who wouldn't want to dream of starving princes in towers and anti-Catholic parliaments?

Phil Syphe says

As good as this history of England is, I wasn't as absorbed by it as expected. With it being written by David Starkey, presenter of many good history documentaries, I expected more depth.

To be fair, though, he does cover a huge span of time. I expected him to start with Alfred the Great, who set the foundations for his grandson Athelstan to become the first King of England. Instead, the author goes right back before Roman occupation, covering what's known of Britain's tribal kings. This was interesting, but it takes up a lot of space, therefore detracting from the actual kings of the whole country, making for some scant coverage on monarchs who did a lot more than is shown here.

I was really surprised and disappointed that King Athelstan was little more than a footnote. Before reading this book, I expected Athelstan to be the first main focus after a preface-like approach to his famous grandfather and then his father. Athelstan's reign isn't covered at all. He's skipped over.

This is a work that would most likely appeal to readers largely unfamiliar with the history of England's monarchy. I'm more knowledgeable in certain periods than others, so for those familiar periods it felt like reading a recap, as opposed to seeing things from a new or different perspective, which I'd hoped for from this historian author for whom I have a lot of respect.

In short, this is a good read that I feel would've been better if it started from Alfred's time in the 800s, rather than pre-Roman Britain, and therefore been more in-depth on the actual rulers of the whole of England from Athelstan onwards.

Mark says

I read this book because I'm very familiar with the medieval monarchy, but very hazy on what came after it. This book is a good overview. It necessarily glosses over a lot of detail, but provides a useful general sense

of how the British monarchy has evolved over the last 1000+ years.

The author is obviously a fan of the monarchy, and apparently voted for Brexit, so it's worth keeping those two things in mind when reading the last few chapters.

Shawn Thrasher says

Apparently, at one time this was two (much smaller) books that have been published as one. It's a lot to digest, but luckily Starkey is a rapid fire scribe who can (mostly successfully) condense years of material in pithy chunks of well-written prose. Whole books could be written on each and every king and queen, not to mention the multitude of lesser figures that dance across these pages; Starkey succeeds at a daunting task. I particularly liked his chapters on the Anglo-Saxon kings, and the Georgians (not a time period I tend to enjoy reading about, actually, which as least to me shows how well-written these chapters were). The last hundred or so years of the monarchy are squeezed together; I think he's overall less impressed from Victoria onwards (he calls Albert, later George VI, "second rate") but seems to have high hopes for a new kind of monarchy that Prince Charles may usher in. Great fun for those (like myself) who like reading about kings and queens.

Ruby says

informative book about all the kings and queens of England, the kind of book you sometimes pick up if you need to refresh your memory on a particular ruler.

kinda disappointed that Starkey basically never mentions the consorts, except for Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who is the main character in Victoria's subchapter (is it because he's a man???? we'll never know)

anyway, this book confirmed my love for Anne of Great Britain (why is she so underrated??? someone should totally make a movie/series about her), and I've found out that I actually really like Victoria's son Edward VII, especially because he refused to be called Albert on his accession <3

Emily Organ says

I think you have to be interested in the topic to get through this book, it's quite long. But then it would be as it covers around 2,000 years of English history up to the modern day. It's an informative guide to each of the monarchs of England (and the Anglo-Saxon kings before England officially existed). I really like David Starkey's impeccable writing style, it's not too dry and there's some caustic wit thrown in here and there. Each monarch can only be covered briefly because of the scope of the book, I felt there were some areas David Starkey dwelt more on than others, eg there seemed to be a vast amount on the Stuarts and I would have liked to have read much more on Elizabeth I's reign (although I think Starkey has written a separate book focusing on her). It's impossible to read a wholly objective historical view but it felt there was a huge amount of work, knowledge and reference behind this book (well there would be I guess). Starkey also has a go at predicting where the monarchy will go from here which is good to speculate on. I enjoyed this as it provides a useful context to British, and world, history. Recommended for armchair historians like me.

Noah says

I have long been a fan of the monarchy. The Queen has served Britain excellently, remained politically impartial and has been a fine representation of the best of the UK on the world stage. When I wrote to her aged 7, it was amazing to receive a response. Fond memories of celebrating the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton (as she was then known) entered my mind: a day of school, family dressed up, processions all over the country. The following year, it was an honour to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and say a huge thank you to her for all she has done. Therefore, I was looking forward to reading this book to learn about how the monarchy has become what it is. I was aware the monarchy used to involve itself far more in politics (and all the better it now doesn't) but didn't really have a solid understanding of where it all began! I'll admit, the book began at a slow pace. Until the Battle of Hastings, I was rather bored reading it, seeing it as a struggle rather than a great delight. The miniscule font didn't help. Unsurprisingly, there were many names to keep up with and some were utterly bizarre. Anglo-Saxon England was not for me. I think the most interested I've ever got about the Saxons was when an Apprentice team accidentally filmed a shoot promoting a modern car in a medieval village. Honest. Things gradually began to improve, the War of the Roses firmly holding my attention. I remember watching 'The White Queen' on the BBC based around the events and was taken straight back. Lancaster, then York, followed by Lancaster! The two warring tribes made for great reading. I knew the War of the Roses meant I was near to Tudor England, probably my favourite time period to study. The monarchy then were powerful characters, though hugely dangerous, yet captivating to read. For most amateur historians, there is a murky area of the monarchy in-between Elizabeth the first and Queen Victoria, so I was pleased to learn about that time period. I was especially surprised to learn England went a decade without an monarch, as that would seem so unreal today. Starkey carefully documented the work, with clever titles. I felt relived to be living when I am, as the monarchy seem to have evolved into a institution of which nearly everyone can be proud.

Nikki says

A fantastic history of monarchy in the UK from its beginnings right up to the present day. Starkey has a very readable writing style with a good command of the English language and good grammar (for some reason, improper use of commas really irritates me). It was fascinating to read about all the different monarchs - I didn't realise we'd had so many Williams, for example - and how our royal family are interlinked with the other European royals. Highly recommended.

James says

As concise and potted a history as you could ask for. I was both informed and entertained when read Starkey's book. Now If only someone would write about Irish history in a similar fashion...

Russell Mark Olson says

Probably going to echo a lot of the comments on this thread, but here goes:

Molar: Good overview written in a clear and strongly narrative fashion.

Molecular: Sometimes seemed over-simplistic in the handling of some of the people and periods. At other times (I'm thinking mainly the span of James I to James II) we are given loads of detail and the chronology becomes less than linear.

Overall: Great overview for someone like me (American ex-pat living in the UK) who is planning to learn more about the history of the English monarchy and needs a jumping off point.

Dan says

The book describes itself as a history of England through the monarchy and it did that job admirably. Starkey takes us right back to the origins of the monarchy at the fall of the Roman Empire right through all the early warlords and kings, through the Battle of Hastings and the struggle of various monarchs to obtain and hold power, right up to the present day.

The chances are that if you want to read this book you will have some knowledge on some areas of the history it covers. But equally likely is the fact that you probably don't know much about other periods of history- I suspect many people knew almost nothing about the pre-1066 monarchs before reading this book. Starkey manages to write the book in a clever way, telling the basics of the story without going too deep into it. This way you learn loads about periods you knew nothing about but don't get bored by the periods you do know about.

The book is not too bad at doing proper history. It would be totally wrong if Starkey simply told the story with no consideration for where the story came from. He regularly uses contemporary sources, or the nearest there is, and quotes from them, especially in the earlier portions of the book. Where there are several conflicting stories he discusses which seems more likely and happily questions things that are probably not true. There are plenty of little stories which are believed to be true but simply aren't and Starkey addresses this throughout the book.

If I had any criticisms, it would be the way the chapters are set out. The chapters are long and usually focus on a few monarchs at a time. Personally I would have preferred if the author had given every monarch it's own chapter. That way there would still be a few longer chapters but there would be lots of shorter ones too which would make the book a bit more readable. Although enjoyable, at 500 pages it's a long slog with the enormous chapters it has. Don't be put off by the length though because when you consider the book contains 2000 years worth of history you're lucky that it is only 500 pages.

An enjoyable history book which tells the story of the monarchy at a fairly basic level. I really felt it got the balance of detail and storytelling spot-on so I'd recommend this to anyone who wants to expand their historical knowledge.

María José says

por fin entendí todo lo que alguna vez quise entender de la monarquía británica, así que agradezco eso. si bien siento que el libro pasó por encima de algunos eventos históricos muy importantes, entiendo que esto es

un libro de la historia de la monarquía, no necesariamente del imperio inglés.

una vez más tengo que mencionar que me choquea leer el comportamiento medieval de la gente, pero eso es obvio.

en comparación con lo que transmitió el libro de los Romanov, la monarquía inglesa es mucho más moderada y normal, a pesar de todo. y francamente me aburrí con la cantidad de siglos que los británicos se pasaron peleando por razones religiosas, no tenía idea, y lo encuentro bastante insípido. no sabía que fue tanto tiempo. creo que desde Enrique VIII los británicos no pararon de pelear por qué religión debiera seguir el país, y después de un tiempo la cosa se puso monótona. especialmente sabiendo el clima religioso del siglo 21.

bueno decisión haber leído el libro, pero ojalá no me den ganas de aprender de más monarquías por un largo rato.

Glenn Horne says

The actual title of the book I read was: "Crown and Country: The Kings and Queens of England." At the moment, I've this stupid advertisement on my page, which I can't close. It's preventing me from seeing what I'm typing. Anyway, I thought the book excellent.

Andrew says

David Starkey's "Crown and Country" is exactly what its subtitle suggests, a history of England through the Monarchy. Starkey explores the role of the various conquests, from the Roman conquest to the Norman conquest, in shaping the long history of the country. In an epic story that spans two millenia, Starkey highlights how each monarch added or detracted from the country. He expertly weaves together the roles of Monarchy, the Parliament, and the Church in creating the nation that we know today. In a story like this, it would be easy for the author to get bogged down in the details, but Starkey does an excellent job in taking the middle road, providing enough details to support the broad trends of history, but not enough details as to lose the reader. This is a job well done, and definitely a book I would recommend for those interested in English history.

Lisa Shardlow says

After reading a lot about the Tudors recently I wanted to go all the way back to the beginning of the English monarchy and learn bits about all of them, so I read this book. Political matters seem to just go straight over my head, but mostly I found this interesting. I feel as though I've learned quite a bit about the history of the English monarchy, and that was my intention with reading this, it's just I found the matters of politics hard to understand and a little boring. Loved the biographies of each reigning King and Queen though.
