

## The “Glorious Revolution” of 1688

Although James II survived the Monmouth rebellion, he was to lose the throne within the next three years. The overthrow of James II in 1688 was the second time in the 17th century that a Stuart king had lost his crown. However, unlike Charles I, his father, James II did not lose his head as well. It was a bloodless revolution, but nonetheless an extremely important one. The kings and queens who have succeeded to the throne since 1688 have all had to obey a set of rules imposed by the representatives of the people, that is, by Parliament. In other words, 1688 marks the end of absolutism and the beginning of Constitutional Government in England.

James II was a Catholic king in a country that was thoroughly Protestant and which wanted nothing to do with the pope in Rome. The king wanted to change the State religion of England back to Catholicism. The recent “Revocation of the Edict of Nantes” by Louis XIV, however, had shown how repressive a Catholic despotism could be.

Even though there were laws against Catholics being officers in the army or navy, James II appointed several Catholics to senior positions in the forces. More than this, he increased the size of the army and camped soldiers in a threatening position on the edge of London. Feeling the threat, Parliament protested, at which point James decided to copy his father and rule without Parliament.

James II’s first wife had been a Protestant and James’ grown-up daughters, Mary and Anne, had been brought up as Protestants. Mary was married to the Dutch Protestant prince, William of Orange. At this time, Holland was anxious for its safety against the Dutch enemy, Louis XIV of France. William of Orange, the *stadtholder* or Dutch Head of State, feared an alliance between Catholic James II and the Catholic French king.

By January 1688, secret envoys from Parliament in London were sent to Holland. These envoys learned that William of Orange and his wife, Mary, would be prepared, if necessary, to lead an armed force to England to place the Protestant princess on the throne, if a suitable invitation from men of influence was sent.

On 10th June 1688, James II’s second wife, Mary of Modena, gave birth to a son. The boy would be brought up as a Catholic, like his parents, and would become heir to the throne, over his half-sisters. An unending Roman Catholic dynasty was envisaged. A number of Whigs and Tories entered into an alliance and a letter, signed by seven of them, was carried to Holland by an admiral disguised as a common sailor. This letter invited William and Mary to bring an army to England to drive out James II.

William of Orange landed at Torbay on 5th November 1688. Although James II’s army was twice the size of William’s, James could not give battle since so many of his officers and men were deserting to the other side. It was clear that the country had abandoned its king.

On 18th December 1688, William of Orange was welcomed into London. James II had fled down the river in disguise. He went into exile in France. The “Glorious Revolution” was over, without a shot having been fired. Parliament was able to claim (incorrectly) that, by abandoning his country, the king had abdicated and that the throne was therefore vacant. On the 6th February 1689, William and Mary were declared king and queen of England.

## The “Orangemen” of Northern Ireland

In April 1689, James II, having recovered his nerve and being determined to win back his throne, returned to Ireland, which was home to many fellow-Catholics. From here James hoped to raise an army and cross again to England. Although the new English king, William III, was in difficulty fighting the French, a Protestant army was able to deliver a crushing defeat against James and his Catholic supporters at the Battle of the Bryne, in June 1689.

This Protestant victory over the Irish Catholics is still celebrated every year by the “Orangemen’s Parade” in Belfast. To Irish Catholics this celebration is a painful reminder of the Protestant conquest of Ireland.

## The Jacobites

Both James II’s Catholic son and grandson tried to regain the throne of England and Scotland. In 1715, James’s son, called the “Old Pretender”, landed in Scotland but did not stay to give battle. In 1745, James’s grandson, known as the “Young Pretender” or “Bonnie Prince Charlie”, landed in the Hebrides and gathered supporters from all over the Scottish highlands. They entered Edinburgh and began to threaten England.

The Duke of Cumberland, son of King George II, led an English army against Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden, near Inverness, in April 1746. This was the last battle to be fought on British soil. It was a crushing defeat for the Jacobites, as the supporters of the Catholic Stuarts were known.

Bonnie Prince Charlie managed to escape, even though a reward of £30000 was placed on his head. He went into exile in France and finally died forty years later, a hopeless drunkard. When his younger brother, Henry, died in 1807, the direct line of the Stuarts came to an end.