

# How long has England had royalty?

Like most of the other nations in Europe, it took nearly a thousand years for England to become united under a single king: the island had various rulers and warlords as far back as Roman times, but they only commanded the allegiance of individual tribes. It wasn't until long after the Romans left, in about A.D. 800, that the first recognizable major kingdom appeared: the Kingdom of Wessex, ruled by Alfred the Great. Even then, Wessex had to compete with other, smaller kingdoms in southern England.

Over the next few hundred years, a line of kings gradually emerged who could claim uncontested rule of the lower part of England (the upper part of the island, Scotland, was a separate kingdom until 1707). Today, England is one of the few modern countries to have a king or queen, although now the position is completely ceremonial—that is, the monarch isn't allowed to pass laws or set policy.



## What does it mean to be knighted?

In medieval times, becoming a knight involved owning your own horse, knowing how to joust, and employing a page. Today, though, knights are created in a simple ceremony presided over by the British sovereign, in recognition for outstanding achievements in art, music, government, or other fields. Being knighted allows the recipient to use the word “sir” in front of his name (or “dame” if she’s a woman), but not much more.



## What is an OBE?

Like the British peerage system, being honored for one's accomplishments in England is a complicated process with various subtle gradations. An OBE, or Officer of the British Empire, is an honor bestowed by the king or queen that doesn't quite rise to the exalted level of “knight.” It's also possible to earn a less prestigious title, an MBE (or Member of the British Empire).

## Why did Edward VIII abdicate the throne?

When he became King of England in 1936, Edward VIII was involved in a relationship with a married woman, Wallis Simpson. Although Simpson was willing to get a divorce so she could marry Edward, Edward was prohibited by court protocol from marrying a divorced woman. Partly for this reason, he resigned from the throne—the only British monarch ever to do so voluntarily—and spent the rest of his life married to Wallis as a private citizen.

