B|B|C

# Victoria (1819 - 1901)

*Victoria was the longest reigning British monarch and the figurehead of a vast empire. She oversaw huge changes in British society and gave her name to an age.*

Victoria was born in London on 24 May 1819, the only child of Edward, Duke of Kent, and Victoria Maria Louisa of Saxe-Coburg. She succeeded her uncle, William IV, in 1837, at the age of 18, and her reign spanned the rest of the century. In 1840, she married her first cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. For the next 20 years they lived in close harmony and had a family of nine children, many of whom eventually married into the European monarchy.

Queen Victoria ©

On her accession, Victoria adopted the Whig prime minister Lord Melbourne as her political mentor. In 1840, his influence was replaced by that of Prince Albert. The German prince never really won the favour of the British public, and only after 17 years was he given official recognition, with the title of 'prince consort'. Victoria nonetheless relied heavily on Albert and it was during his lifetime that she was most active as a ruler. Britain was evolving into a constitutional monarchy in which the monarch had few powers and was expected to remain above party politics, although Victoria did sometimes express her views very forcefully in private.

Victoria never fully recovered from Albert's death in 1861 and she remained in mourning for the rest of her life. Her subsequent withdrawal from public life made her unpopular, but during the late 1870s and 1880s she gradually returned to public view and, with increasingly pro-imperial sentiment, she was restored to favour with the British public. After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, the government of India was transferred from the East India Company to the Crown. In 1877, Victoria became empress of India. Her empire also included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and large parts of Africa. During this period, Britain was largely uninvolved in European affairs, apart from the Crimean War from 1853 - 1856.

Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and her Diamond Jubilee in 1897 were celebrated with great enthusiasm. Having witnessed a revolution in British government, huge industrial expansion and the growth of a worldwide empire, Victoria died on 22 January 1901 at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.