

Start with the familiar; Sizergh Castle.

If you go into the newly refurbished cafe, you'll see a line of four portraits on the far wall. The last is of Mrs Angela Hornyold-Strickland who still lives alone in the north wing of the castle. Hence the caption in big capital letters on the same wall as the portraits, "We've been here since 1230".

Well yes they have....almost! In its 800 year history the castle has been abandoned twice: first during the Civil War when Government and Royalists agreed to treat the castle as neutral as long as either side didn't garrison it; second in 1689 when Sir Thomas Strickland and his wife Winifred accompanied James II into exile. The castle was boarded up and left empty, placed in trust and not reoccupied until the new century. Winifred was a lady in waiting to Mary of Modena, Queen Mary and second wife of James II. She was present at the startling birth of the Prince of Wales, and later in exile became his governess. Both Sir Thomas and Lady Winifred would never return to Sizergh but in their place came wonderful gifts from Mary of Modena.....

If you climb the first staircase into the first room in the castle trail, described as the dining room, wood panelled from floor to ceiling and with a Stuart period chandelier, you will find mind-blowing contemporary portraits of members of the Stuart family; Charles II, James II, Queen Mary Beatrice, their youngest daughter, Princess Louise, Prince James (the Prince of Wales or the Old Pretender).....

Look especially at James, Duke of York....James II. It's his story we are following.

King Charles II returned from exile in France in 1660, stepping ashore at Dover to an ecstatic welcome. The Stuart dynasty was about to be restored after the trauma of the civil war and the rule of Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth.

Several portraits show the proud arrival of Charles; he is there with his brothers James and Henry. All seemed well and the future bright: at the banquet Charles famously said, "If I'd known I would have been so welcomed, I would have come sooner!"

But nothing is perfect and the illusion was soon shattered. Months after the return Henry died of smallpox. Charles was soon to marry Catherine of Braganza who miscarried four times and then was incapable of conceiving: and James had got a commoner, Anne Hyde, pregnant.

Charles' marriage is an interesting study, but not part of our remit. There seems to have been a tacit understanding that he was free to roam, which he did, fathering at least 16 bastards. His 4 favourite mistresses were Lucy Walter, Barbara Villiers, Nell

Gwynne and Louise de Keroualle. Lucy Walter gave him a son when he was just 19, James Scott, Duke of Monmouth....worth remembering for later events.

But back to James.....

James Duke of York, eventually married his pregnant girlfriend, Anne Hyde, in secret; a scandalous thing because it was unheard of for royalty to marry anyone other than royalty. It would be 1923 before a commoner again married a prince of the blood. Despite the scandal, Anne Hyde's daughters, the Princesses Mary and Anne, were both to become Queens of England, Ireland and Scotland.

Anne was not an outstanding beauty, but she was English, Protestant and most of all clever, far more so than James. She managed everything about her husband but his roving eye. She was also fertile, bearing seven children in their eleven years of marriage. Their first son, Charles, died in 1661. Three more sons died in infancy and another daughter failed to reach her fourth birthday. Only the Princess Mary, born in 1662 and the Princess Anne, born in 1665, lived to grow up and play their fateful part in James' later career.

The marriage began to go wrong even as Anne was giving birth to her first child. James loved the challenge of seduction but he also had an unattractive habit of staring hungrily at women; "the most unguarded ogler of his time." Samuel Pepys, who worked for James, records in his diary (11th April, 1669) how his wife Elizabeth, seemingly very attractive, was introduced to James in a London park where "he eyed her mightily." There were mistresses and prostitutes for his bed and Anne turned instead to sweets and cakes to compensate.

Charles made James Lord High Admiral of the Fleet and he worked hard to rid the service of mismanagement and corruption; however his good work here was overshadowed by his decision in the summer of 1670 to convert to Roman Catholicism. Anne joined him and their joint conversion became the worst kept secret in England, causing rising concern about the succession, because in June 1669, Queen Catherine had miscarried. It was her third failed pregnancy and it was now thought unlikely she would give Charles II an heir. James was next in line to the throne and for many a popish king meant popish execution, the inquisition, torture and burning. James still believed he could turn that vast Protestant opposition into ardent Catholicism.

Meanwhile Parliament brought in the first of the Test Acts aimed at driving Roman Catholics from public office. Anyone who held such office, civil or military, had to swear the 'test', specifically disowning the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (the Test Act was not repealed until the Catholic Relief Act, 1829).

"I, *name*, do declare that I do believe that there is not any transubstantiation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or in the elements of the bread and wine, at or after the consecration thereof by any person whatsoever"

James refused to make this declaration and resigned all his offices and positions rather than take the test, including that of Lord High Admiral of the Fleet, a position he'd held with such distinction.

On 31st March, 1671 Anne, Duchess of York, died. At 33 she was not an old woman, even by the standards of the time. She ate too much and had grown obscenely fat. Repeated pregnancies had broken her health and she had breast cancer. Her death was painful and slow and James didn't attend her funeral.

Charles took charge of the quest to find a new wife for his brother who only specified she needed to be beautiful and a Roman Catholic Princess. After a European-wide search, Mary of Modena, aged just 15, was identified and married to James by proxy in September and then in person in November 1673. James was then 40 years old: worn, tall and very thin. His unpopularity with the public was obvious. Mary was alone in a strange country whose language she didn't speak, horrified by sex with an older man and saw her marriage as her personal cross. Surprisingly it turned out to be a very happy match. Mary was beautiful with dark eyes and lustrous skin and she never lost her figure. She learned to speak English fluently and her friendly nature won general affection. In the early years of the marriage she was almost constantly pregnant, bearing five children, all of whom died in infancy, and suffering several miscarriages. James didn't stay faithful but he now regarded adultery with guilt and kept it secret. He tried hard in his own way to make the marriage a success and Mary was loyal and loving to him. Mary was only four years older than James' elder daughter, Princess Mary, and the two became good friends.

In 1677 a family wedding had a significant bearing on the succession. James' daughter, Princess Mary married her cousin, William of Orange. Mary was 15 and William twelve years her senior. He was small, four inches shorter than Mary and suffered badly from asthma. He was not particularly attractive and a man of few words, though he could become passionate about warfare and theology. Mary was big, buxom and pretty. She was a strong Protestant and very hostile to her father's Catholicism. The married couple returned across the channel to the United Provinces where Mary knew no-one and could not speak a word of Dutch. The marriage would prove childless, though both were happy in each other. Mary worked hard to make the marriage a success, becoming devoted to her Prince and when she died he was heartbroken; by that time of course he was King of Scotland, England and Ireland.

Meanwhile fears over the succession continued to grow and the danger of another civil war was very real. In these difficult times it seemed only James had sufficient standing to calm fears. Charles decided to give him the power to run Scotland's government and this he did for two years until 1682, during which time Scotland's parliament passed an act guaranteeing James' succession to the Scottish throne. He returned to England in 1682 with Scotland at relative peace, the law respected and

the church secure. Charles allowed his brother to stay and he enjoyed three good years in England.

The Whigs, who dominated parliament, still agitated against popery but James' record in Scotland suggested he would defend the Church of England whatever his personal religion. In May, 1684, James resumed his seat on the Privy Council and took up his old position at the Admiralty.

Charles died in 1685, the first Stuart monarch to die without an heir, although he fathered fourteen illegitimate children. The throne passed, amid much disquiet, to his brother, James, Duke of York.

James II and VII was our last Roman Catholic monarch and the last who attempted to rule by direct power. After his coronation his opening address to parliament promised a new start, and the speech was afterwards read out in every church pulpit in the three kingdoms.

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James had barely been crowned when he had to face and fight an open revolt against him led by the Duke of Monmouth, Charles' senior bastard, who, we are told, was a carbon copy of his father. James acted decisively, defeating and arresting the Duke, who was then tried and beheaded- badly, it took five chops- on 15th July, 1685. It was the high point of James' short rule. But also Judge Jeffries and the Bloody Assizes.

People knew James' age and did not expect a long reign; best of all, there was no catholic heir. But concern grew when James resolved to remove the various penal laws that discriminated against Catholics such as the Test Act: would Catholics once more rise to power and exterminate Protestantism in the same way that King Louis XIV had recently expelled the protestant Huguenots from France? Parliament refused to repeal any anti-catholic legislation and was prorogued in November, 1685. James never called another.

Catholics were now elevated to high positions of state and army with James using his dispensing power. In April, 1687 the King issued a Declaration of Indulgence, suspending all laws which discriminated against Catholics; many said this was enforced popery.

Then the nation was shocked by an unforeseen event: the Queen was delivered of a boy, a Roman Catholic heir!

Within weeks seven leading politicians, Whig and Tory, sent word to William of Orange that he would be welcomed in England. He left the United Provinces on 12th November and four days later landed at Torbay with a bodyguard of 10,000 men. James still had his army and the control of key cities but he sank into indecision and withdrew from affairs. On 9th December he lost his own credibility when the Queen

and his young son, the Prince of Wales, were sent to safety in France. On the 11th December he tried to escape himself, first throwing the Great Seal of State into the Thames, but was caught and returned to London. Finally he was allowed to escape again on 23rd December and it was Samuel Pepys who arranged the boat to take him to France. No-one wanted to execute another Stuart Monarch.

There was now a curious power vacuum. Was James still King and if not how could that be explained? Who should succeed him? His infant son was the logical heir but he was now in France with his father. Mary, Princess of Orange, was the next most logical successor but she refused the throne without her husband as joint monarch, not merely her consort. On 22nd January, 1689 a convention in London agreed the compromise. They resolved:

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A Declaration of Rights was issued which stressed the primacy of parliament in government; it also laid down that no Roman Catholic or spouse of a Roman Catholic could hold the crown in future (still true today, though being debated).

William and Mary were proclaimed King and Queen of England and Ireland on 13th February, 1689 and on April 11th to the throne of Scotland. The Glorious and Bloodless Revolution had succeeded in overthrowing King James II.

But what if James II had continued to reign?

- James lived on until 1701 when his son James Francis Edward would have become James III at the age of 13: a secure succession because he in turn fathered two sons. The Stuart Dynasty would have continued rather than ending with Queen Anne.
- British foreign policy shifted from antagonism to the Dutch (three Dutch Wars) and alliance with France, to the complete opposite and we became involved in a continental war with France.
- There would have been no Jacobite plots or Rebellions in 1715 and 1745. The bitter war in Ireland in 1690-92 would not have happened and there would have been no battle of the Boyne, and all those memories that have come down to haunt us.
- General Wade would not have felt it necessary to build his military road and to demolish most of Hadrian's Wall in the process.
- The break-up of the Highland Clans would not have followed on from the battle of Culloden in 1746 and this inevitably onto the Highland Clearances of the nineteenth century.

- All the people who made Britain great in the eighteenth century would still have been there to do their thing.
- The dysfunctional Guelph family would not have become our rulers; an obscure German Elector, a distant relative of James I, who couldn't speak English and had locked up his wife in a distant castle. A mad George III might not have lost the American Colonies.

But c'est la vie!