

## The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century: An Overview

Some important dates:

- 1660: Charles II restored to the English throne.
- 1666: Great Fire of London.
- 1673: Test Act requires all holders of civil & military office to belong to Anglican Church.
- 1679-81: Exclusion Crisis: Whigs attempt to exclude Charles's brother James from the succession.
- 1685: James II becomes king.
- 1688-89: The Glorious Revolution: James II deposed and William of Orange made king.
- 1700: Death of John Dryden.
- 1702: Anne (last of the Stuart line) becomes queen on death of William III.
- 1702-13: England involved in War of the Spanish Succession.
- 1707: Act of Union unites Scotland and England into Great Britain.
- 1714: George I (of the house of Hanover) becomes king on death of Anne.
- 1719: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* published.
- 1721: Sir Robert Walpole effectively becomes the first prime minister.
- 1727: George II becomes king.
- 1737: Licensing Act requires government approval of all plays produced.
- 1741: Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* published.
- 1742: Walpole falls from power.
- 1744: Death of Alexander Pope.
- 1745: Death of Jonathan Swift.  
Jacobite Rising: Scottish army invades England in attempt to put the Young Pretender (James II's grandson) on the throne, but is brutally defeated at Battle of Culloden in 1746.
- 1749: Henry Fielding's novel *Tom Jones* published.
- 1756: Seven Years War against France begins.
- 1759-67: Laurence Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy* published.
- 1760: George III becomes king.
- 1763: Treaty of Paris ends Seven Years War & consolidates British power in Canada & India.
- 1765: Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* published.
- 1776-83: American War of Independence.
- 1778: Frances Burney's novel *Evelina* published.
- 1780: Gordon Riots take over London for several days.
- 1784: Death of Samuel Johnson.
- 1788-89: Regency Crisis: George III suffers serious attack of porphyria (thought to be madness) and Parliament battles over powers of regent.
- 1789: French Revolution begins.
- 1793: France declares war on Britain.
- 1795: Parliament passes two acts restricting freedoms of speech, of assembly, and of the press.

Some important themes:

*Politics:*

Gradual decline of royal power and increase in Parliamentary power  
Fear of arbitrary power and tyranny  
Fear of anarchy and disorder  
Problem of corruption  
Emergence and growth of political parties (Whigs and Tories)  
Growing radicalism and calls for reform by end of century

*Religion:*

Hatred (and fear) of Catholics and Catholicism (“Papists” and “Popery”)  
Scorn of Dissenters and Nonconformists (associated with revolution and excessive zeal)  
Sense of need to protect Anglican church

*Society:*

Great increase in population (from 5 ½ million to 9 million)  
Gradual emergence of middle class (and sense of class in general)  
Hierarchical organization of social orders  
Improvements in agriculture  
Beginning of shift towards industrialization and manufacturing  
Increasing sense of national (British) identity and pride  
Gradual shift towards education in schools rather than at home

*Science:*

Interest in physical and natural sciences (astronomy, physics, chemistry)  
Discoveries like Newton’s law of gravitation  
Emphasis on empiricism  
Interest in discovering God’s order in the universe through science

*Literature:*

Augustanism/Neo-classicism: interest in classical models  
Importance of Nature and the universal  
Decorum: “thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject” (Dryden)  
Wit and urbanity  
Satire  
Debate over ancients versus moderns  
Heroic ideal and the mock-heroic  
Increasing emphasis on morality  
Emergence of the novel  
Cult of sentimentality and sensibility: the literature of feeling  
Gothic and the sublime