

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 7

Answers and Notes on UK History and Law

(These notes refer to the questions in Handout 6)

1. **Which king had his powers curbed by the Magna Carta?**
The answer is John. His name during his lifetime, incidentally, was Jean, not John, as he was French.
2. **Which year did all women over 21 get the vote in Britain?**
The answer is 1928. The decision to permit women to vote at all was made in 1918. But at that time only women aged at least 30 were allowed to vote. Women first used their vote on the same basis as men on 30 May 1929. It was not until 1969 that people aged 18, both women and men, were allowed to vote.
3. **Which three branches of authority need to agree to a law before it can come into force?**
The answer is the House of Commons, the Lords and the Queen. The Lords frequently make amendments to proposed legislation, but when there is disagreement between Lords and Commons, the view of the Commons prevails – in practice, though not constitutionally. The role of the monarch is purely symbolic and does not involve her or him personally.
4. **Are you a) a subject of the Crown, b) citizen of the Crown, or c) defender of the Crown?**
The answer is that strictly speaking the British are subjects, not citizens.
5. **Why is the Union Jack made up of its particular colours?**
The answer is that it's made up of the flags of St George of England, St Patrick of Ireland and St Andrew of Scotland. It was created in 1801. Subsequently (1923) the country now known as Ireland (as distinct from Northern Ireland) left the UK, but the flag remained unchanged. The correct name for the flag is the Union Flag, not the Union Jack. The latter term is derived from sailors' slang.
6. **Is a man allowed to punish his wife physically as long as it's in his own home?**
The answer is No. It is arguably worrying, or indeed very worrying, that the experts who phrased this question thought it worth asking.
7. **Which English monarch broke away from the Roman Catholic Church?**
The answer is Henry VIII. The break occurred in the 1530s and the monarch's motivation was secular not religious. For example, amongst several other reasons, he wished his marriage to be annulled. (For much fuller information, see The English Reformation at Wikipedia.) As individuals, not all English people converted. Within the Church of England to this day, there are individuals whose practice and beliefs are barely distinguishable from those of members of the Roman Catholic Church. (see Anglo-Catholicism at Wikipedia for fuller information.)

8. Who was the only politician in British history to abolish parliament?

The answer is Oliver Cromwell (mid-17th century). The episode is a reminder that British history has at times contained major conflicts and disruptions. So are several of the other episodes referred to in this test – in particular numbers 1, 2, 5, 7 and 9.

9. What did Guy Fawkes famously fail to do?

The answer is that Guido Fawkes, known after his death as Guy, failed with his fellow-conspirators to blow up the Houses of Parliament. The year was 1605 and the day was 5 November. Nowadays, 'Guy Fawkes Day' is widely celebrated by children with bonfires and fireworks. Fawkes and his fellow conspirators were Catholics and did not want a Protestant monarch (James I) on the English throne.

10. How long can a British government stay in office before a general election?

The answer is five years. Most governments, however, last rather less than this. Typically, the government of the day calls an election when it judges it has the best chance of winning – usually after about four years.

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