

# BBC Timeline

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1 January 1947

Britain's coal industry is nationalised

The nationalisation of the coal industry represents a major shift in industrial policy. It allowed for the rationalisation of the coal industry, with the closure of many small pits, although the nationalised industry soon came to need state subsidies in order to delay further restructuring and closures.

15 August 1947

India gains independence from Britain

India was regarded as the most valuable British imperial possession. World War Two forced Britain to realise that it could not maintain a global empire and the British agreed to Indian self-government. However, they could not find a political solution that was acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims, and the country was partitioned into India and Pakistan. The British were unable to prevent the resulting inter-communal violence which resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths.

22 June 1948

Post-war immigration from the Commonwealth begins

The liner 'SS Empire Windrush' docked at Tilbury carrying nearly 500 Caribbean immigrants to Britain, many attracted by offers of work. This arrival represented the beginning of significant immigration to Britain from the Commonwealth, particularly the Caribbean, and later the Indian subcontinent.

5 July 1948

National Health Service is established

The National Health Service, established by the post-war Labour government, represented a fundamental change in the provision of medical services. The General Practitioner (GP) service became organised on the basis of a 'capitation fee' paid by the government on every patient registered with a doctor. Voluntary and municipal hospitals were integrated under state control, exercised by the Ministry of Health

25 July 1948

Berlin Airlift begins after Soviet forces blockade the city

In June 1948, the Soviet Union began a blockade of Berlin, which had been divided into occupation zones by the victorious Allies at the end of the war. They hoped to drive the western Allies out of Berlin. The following month, British and American aircraft began to airlift supplies to West Berliners. In total, there were more than 277,000 flights to deliver food, fuel and medicine. In May 1949, the Soviets backed down and lifted their blockade.

29 July 1948

Olympic Games open at Wembley Stadium in London

The so-called 'Austerity Games' were held in London while rationing was still in force in Britain. Fifty nine nations took part, but the defeated powers of Germany and Japan were excluded. London saw the first Olympic photo finish, in the 100 metres, and the introduction of starting blocks for sprinters. These were the first Games since Berlin in 1936. The 1940 Games went to Tokyo, then Stockholm, but were cancelled - as were the 1944 games - due to World War Two.

18 April 1949

Republic of Ireland comes into being

The Republic of Ireland Act (1948) came into force on Easter Monday, April 1949, ending vestigial British authority in Eire. Under the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, the British crown had retained some authority in the Irish Free State, although this was limited by the 1937 constitution. The 1948 Act repealed the External Relations Act and took Eire out of the Commonwealth.

8 June 1949

George Orwell's novel 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' is published

Orwell's novel was a bleak political account of the future, in which big government had created a destructive totalitarianism which denied both human values and the truth. The novel made a major impact - such that it contributed the phrase 'Big Brother' to the language - and was seen as an attack on the Soviet Union.

23 February 1950

Labour wins the general election with Clement Attlee returned as prime minister

Labour remained in government but its majority fell greatly, to only five seats, as the electorate's enthusiasm for Labour's post-war vision dwindled away.

29 August 1950

British troops arrive to support US forces in the Korean War

British troops were sent to help the US-led United Nations force repel the Communist invasion of South Korea by North Korea. The conflict set the pattern for the Cold War, with South Korea backed by the US and its allies, and North Korea backed by the Soviet Union and China. An armistice was agreed in July 1953 and Korea was partitioned. Approximately two million Korean civilians, 1.5 million Communist troops and 450,000 UN and South Korean troops were killed. No peace treaty was ever agreed.

3 May 1951

Festival of Britain is opened by George VI

The Festival sought to sustain a mood of post-war optimism and confidence - or at least interest - in new solutions. The site chosen for the Festival, on the South Bank of the Thames, London, had been extensively bombed in World War Two. The dominant artistic mood of the Festival was neo-Romantic, apt for the traditionalist 1950s, although the Royal Festival Hall itself was a Modernistic work.

23 October 1951

Conservatives under Winston Churchill win the general election

The Labour government fell as the Conservatives won a clear majority. Remarkably, Winston Churchill became prime minister again at the age of 76. He focused on foreign affairs, including reducing escalating Cold War tensions and maintaining the 'special relationship' with America, which he had done so much to develop during World War Two. Other foreign concerns included the Malayan emergency and the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya.

6 February 1952

Elizabeth II succeeds her father, George VI

Princess Elizabeth was in Kenya when news of her father's death reached her. She immediately returned to Britain and was crowned on 2 June 1953. Elizabeth II proved an experienced and skilful adviser of successive prime ministers, but was careful to main constitutional conventions and not take a political stand publicly. Nonetheless, she held strong opinions, not least a belief in the

Commonwealth. Under Elizabeth, members of the royal family maintained their important charitable role.

25 April 1953

Watson and Crick publish their discovery of the structure of DNA

Scientists James Watson and Francis Crick were the first to describe the structure of a chemical called deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA, which makes up the genes that pass hereditary characteristics from parent to child. They received the 1962 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine, which they shared with another DNA pioneer, Maurice Wilkins. A hugely important discovery, it has since formed the basis for a wide range of scientific advances.

5 April 1955

Winston Churchill retires as prime minister

Winston Churchill was by now 80 and his health was declining. He was succeeded as prime minister by Anthony Eden, who had also served as Churchill's Foreign Secretary and was widely recognised as his 'heir apparent'.

26 May 1955

Conservatives win the general election, with Sir Anthony Eden as prime minister

This Conservative victory, with 345 seats to Labour's 277, strengthened the Conservatives' parliamentary position.

22 September 1955

Commercial television starts with the first ITV broadcast

The monopoly of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was broken when commercial television companies, financed by advertising, began broadcasting under the name of Independent Television (ITV) following the Television Act of 1954. The BBC started broadcasting a second channel, BBC Two, in 1964, and Channel 4 started broadcasting in 1982.

11 February 1956

'Cambridge spies' surface in Moscow after disappearing in 1951

Two British diplomats, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, were among five men recruited by the Soviet secret service, the KGB, at Cambridge University in the 1930s. The others were Harold (Kim) Philby, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross. All had been involved in passing to the Soviets highly damaging military

information, and the identities of British agents. Burgess and Maclean, who had fled Britain five years before, suddenly reappeared in the Soviet Union where they denied being spies.

8 May 1956

John Osborne's play 'Look Back in Anger' is staged

The 'Angry Young Men' generation of writers rejected what they saw as Britain's vulgar 'materialist' society, which they believed was disagreeable in itself and frustrating to them as individuals. Social values were lacerated by Osborne's play and in the novels 'Room at the Top' (1957) by John Braine, 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' (1958) by Alan Sillitoe, and 'This Sporting Life' (1960) by David Storey.

5 July 1956

Worsening pollution prompts the passing of the Clean Air Act

The Clean Air Act was part of a general move towards a cleaner environment, directed in particular against the burning of coal in urban areas. The Act was in response to the severe London smog of 1952, which killed more than 4,000 people. Another Clean Air Act followed in 1968.

17 October 1956

Britain switches on its first nuclear power station

Calder Hall, Britain's first nuclear power station - and the first in the world to supply substantial quantities of electricity to a national system - was opened by Elizabeth II.

5 November 1956

Britain and France invade Egypt after nationalisation of the Suez Canal

The Suez Crisis was sparked when Britain and France, allied with Israel, invaded Egypt over its decision to nationalise the Suez Canal - a vital waterway connecting the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. Under American pressure, the canal was handed back to Egypt and the invasion force was withdrawn. The crisis revealed Britain's declining world status and its subordination to the US.

9 January 1957

Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden resigns and is replaced by Harold Macmillan

The Suez Crisis of 1956 ruined Anthony Eden's reputation and fatally compromised his political career. His health seriously diminished as a result. His successor, Harold Macmillan, had been chancellor of the exchequer under Eden. Macmillan was the third Conservative prime minister in as many years.

6 March 1957

Ghana becomes the first British colony in Africa to gain independence

The British colony of Gold Coast gained its independence, with Kwame Nkrumah as its first leader, following election victories for Nkrumah's nationalist Convention People's Party (CPP). The country was renamed Ghana in the declaration of independence. This event marked the beginning of rapid decolonisation in Africa.

15 May 1957

Britain tests its first hydrogen bomb

Following tests over Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean, the government announced that Britain had joined the Soviet Union and the US as a nuclear power, with its own hydrogen bomb. The tests led to a debate in Britain about the dangers of nuclear weapons, and to the foundation in 1958 of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

5 December 1958

Motorway system opens with the M6 Preston bypass

The opening of the M6 Preston bypass by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was the first stage in the motorway system. The following year, the M1 was punched through the Midlands from Watford to Birmingham. The developing motorway system encouraged a major rise in long-distance private and goods travel by road.

8 October 1959

Conservatives under Harold Macmillan win the general election

In a massive personal triumph for Harold Macmillan, the Conservatives won by 365 seats (and 49.3% of the vote) to 258 for Labour. The Conservative campaign slogan 'you've never had it so good' reflected the growing affluence of the electorate.

### And just over the horizon:

11 January 1963 – *Please Please Me* released by the Beatles, it became their first No. 1 record.

14 January 1963 - France vetoes Britain's entry to the European Common Market

October 1963 - New universities open and students get state support (Robbins Report)

19 October 1963 - Conservative Sir Alec Douglas-Home becomes prime minister

1964 - Abolition of Resale Price Maintenance prompts the rise of supermarkets

15 October 1964 - Labour wins the general election, with Harold Wilson as prime minister