

William IV of the United Kingdom

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William IV (William Henry; 21 August 1765 – 20 June 1837) was King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of Hanover from 26 June 1830 until his death. William, the third son of George III and younger brother and successor to George IV, was the last king and penultimate monarch of the House of Hanover.

He served in the Royal Navy in his youth and was, both during his reign and afterwards, nicknamed the Sailor King. He served in North America and the Caribbean, but saw little actual fighting. Since his two older brothers died without leaving surviving legitimate issue, he inherited the throne when he was sixty-four years old. His reign saw several reforms: the poor law was updated, child labour restricted, slavery abolished throughout the British Empire, and the Reform Act 1832 refashioned the British electoral system. Though William did not engage in politics as much as his brother or his father, he was the last monarch to appoint a Prime Minister contrary to the will of Parliament. Through his brother, the Viceroy of Hanover, he granted that kingdom a short-lived liberal constitution.

At his death William had no surviving legitimate children, though he was survived by eight of the ten illegitimate children he had by the popular actress, Dorothea Bland, better known as Mrs. Jordan, with whom he cohabited for twenty years. He was succeeded in the United Kingdom by his niece, Victoria, and in Hanover by his brother, Ernest Augustus.