



Queen Elizabeth I 'greatest ever monarch'

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Although the current sovereign is on the brink of becoming Britain's longest reigning monarch, research by the Historical Writers' Association (HWA) found that she is not viewed by authors as the best monarch of all time.

Elizabeth I - the last Tudor monarch - who was known as the Virgin Queen, came top with 36% of the votes, followed by Alexander the Great with 10% and Henry II with 6%.

Writer Elizabeth Buchan praised Elizabeth I, whose 16th century reign is heralded as one of triumph and success, for her achievements.

"She held this country together at a time when religious factions could have torn it apart. This would have been no mean feat for a king. For a woman at that period it was unprecedented," she said.

Queen Victoria - whose record time on the throne is set to be passed by Elizabeth II on September 9 - came joint fourth - ahead of her great-great-granddaughter.

Elizabeth II - who shared fifth place with a number of other monarchs including George III, King Arthur and Tsar Alexander II - received just one vote from the 64 writers.

The backing came from historical fiction author SD Sykes, who insisted: "She does the perfect job of being a dutiful but detached and neutral head of state. As a hereditary monarch, I'm happy that she keeps her opinions to herself."

Oliver Cromwell, who brought Charles I to trial and execution and ruled Britain as Lord Protector, also made it onto the list despite not being a king, with some of the authors arguing they considered him to be a monarch.

Elizabeth I's father, Henry VIII, was labelled the worst monarch - with 20% of votes, followed by Elizabeth II's uncle, Edward VIII, who abdicated, at 14% and King John of England and Charles I, who both received 8%.

Author Robert Wilton described Henry VIII as "a gross man-child, wilfully and capriciously dangerous to everything around him including the country".

He added: "Psychologically he barely made it out of infancy, let alone adolescence, and ruled with little more policy than petulant self-gratification. He ties with Edward VIII in sacrificing national interest to spoil self-indulgence."

Manda Scott, chair of the HWA, said: "Royalty has shaped our country today, and history authors are well placed to comment on the monarchy. We hope this survey will trigger debate for its future as Queen Elizabeth II marks her longest reign."

The survey was conducted to mark the Harrogate History Festival, which runs from October 22 to 25, in partnership with the HWA.

The Greatest Monarchs Survey:

1. Queen Elizabeth I
2. Alexander the Great
3. Henry II
4. Augustus Caesar, Queen Victoria, Oliver Cromwell
5. Napoleon, King Philip Augustus of France, George III, Elizabeth II, Suleiman the Magnificent, Edward IV, Richard I, King Arthur, James I and VI, Edward III, Charles II, Oswald of Northumbria, Louis XIV, Tsar Alexander II, Henry VII, Richard II

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