

Evolution of Monarchy in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: From Absolute Power to a Symbolic Role.

Abstract

This study examines the evolution of the British monarchy from an institution of absolute sovereign authority to one that performs a largely symbolic and constitutional role. Existing accounts of this transformation tend to divide between legal-constitutional narratives, which describe a gradual and largely consensual transfer of power to Parliament, and structural readings, which treat the same events as expressions of underlying class conflict; the two are rarely combined within a single explanatory frame, and both rest substantially on scholarship that predates the institution's most recent challenges. This research addresses that gap by asking how and why the British monarchy lost direct political authority while remaining a functioning national institution. Methodologically, it adopts a qualitative, documentary approach, analysing primary constitutional texts, canonical political theory and historical scholarship. The study is framed jointly within classical social contract theory, which traces the philosophical logic of the transition through Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau, and a Marxist structural perspective, which situates the same transition within shifting socio-economic power. The analysis shows that the monarchy's authority was constrained in successive stages, from Magna Carta through the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution to the present, and that its survival has depended less on resisting these constraints than on absorbing them into a redefined, non-governing role. The findings also indicate that this symbolic settlement remains actively contested, through recent disputes over royal funding, residual legislative influence and the institution's diminishing acceptance among Commonwealth realms and younger Britons.

Keywords: British monarchy; constitutional monarchy; social contract theory; parliamentary sovereignty; Magna Carta.

Introduction

Hereditary monarchy has receded sharply as a form of government since the nineteenth century, when it was the default arrangement across Europe. Most ruling houses that faced sustained political challenge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not survive it. The French monarchy was abolished in 1792 and again, after a brief restoration, in 1848; the Russian and German monarchies fell within months of each other in 1917 and 1918; and a further wave of abdications and abolitions followed the Second World War. Against this pattern, a small number of states have retained a hereditary head of state by transforming what the office does rather than by resisting the pressures that destroyed comparable institutions elsewhere.

The British monarchy is among the oldest continuous political institutions in the world, its line of succession customarily traced to the unification achieved after the Norman Conquest of 1066, though the deeper roots of English and Scottish kingship reach further back still. For most of this

history, the monarch was not merely a ceremonial figure but the effective source of legislative, judicial, military and religious authority, a position reinforced by the doctrine that royal power derived directly from divine sanction rather than from the consent of subjects or Parliament. That the same institution today opens Parliament, grants royal assent to legislation as a matter of constitutional convention, and otherwise abstains from partisan political life, is therefore not a minor adjustment but a near-complete inversion of its original constitutional function.

This research work explores how and why the British monarchy evolved from an institution of absolute authority into a symbolic and constitutional one. Three subsidiary questions follow: what characterised the monarchy's authority before this transformation; which historical events and constitutional developments drove the change; and what role the institution now plays, and continues to be permitted to play, in a democratic Britain.

The current research work has been subdivided into four sections. Section 1 reviews the literature within the three debates identified above and specifies the resulting gap. Section 2 sets out the study's theoretical framework, combining classical social contract theory with a Marxist structural perspective, and describes the methodology. Section 3 analyses the monarchy's transformation across four historical stages, from its medieval legal foundations to its present contested symbolism. Section 4 discusses these findings against the literature and the study's hypotheses, and the conclusion addresses the research question directly while noting the limitations of a qualitative/documentary design.

1. Literature Review and Research Framework

1.1 The legal-constitutional account of monarchical decline

The dominant scholarly account of the British monarchy's transformation is legal and constitutional in character, treating the decline of royal power as the cumulative product of specific, datable constraints imposed on the Crown rather than as a diffuse cultural drift. Dicey's *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (1885) remains the classic statement of this position: for Dicey, political authority in Britain is ultimately vested in Parliament rather than in the sovereign, and the monarchy's practical power has been reduced by the accumulation of statute, convention and precedent rather than by any single revolutionary act. This account gives particular weight to the Bill of Rights of 1689, which converted the outcome of the Glorious Revolution into enforceable legal restriction, and it treats subsequent constitutional history largely as the elaboration of principles already settled by that point.

Bogdanor's *The Monarchy and the Constitution* (1995) extends this legal-constitutional tradition into the twentieth century, arguing that the institution's endurance has depended less on resisting constitutional constraint than on internalising it. On this view, the monarchy survived precisely where continental counterparts did not because it treated each successive limitation on its authority as a condition of continued existence rather than as a threat to be resisted outright. This is a materially different claim from Dicey's, since it shifts attention from the legal mechanism of constraint to the institution's own strategic response, but both scholars share the assumption that the process was substantially gradual, cumulative and, by the standards of comparable European transitions, orderly. Taken together, Dicey and Bogdanor establish the analytical vocabulary,

parliamentary sovereignty, convention and institutional adaptation, within which most subsequent constitutional commentary on the monarchy still operates, even where, as in the present study, that vocabulary is supplemented rather than displaced by other explanatory traditions.

1.2 Monarchy as symbolic and national institution

A second body of scholarship is concerned less with the legal mechanics of constraint than with explaining what the monarchy became once its governing power had been removed. Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (1867) supplies the foundational distinction here, between what he termed the "dignified" parts of government, which command public deference and attention, and the "efficient" parts, which actually conduct the business of governing. On Bagehot's reading, the monarchy's move into the dignified category was not a diminishment so much as a specialisation: freed from executive responsibility, it could concentrate on functions, such as national unity and continuity, that an elected and necessarily partisan government could not perform as credibly.

Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (1992) approaches the same period from a different angle, situating the monarchy within the broader construction of a shared British national identity following the 1707 union of England and Scotland. Her account suggests that the Crown's symbolic authority was not simply inherited from its earlier governing role but actively built, alongside war, empire and Protestantism, as one of the institutions around which a composite British identity could cohere. Starkey's *Crown and Country* (2010) makes a related but more institution-centred argument, holding that the monarchy's survival owes as much to deliberate reinvention, of ceremony, public role and self-presentation, as to any structural inevitability; he traces this capacity for reinvention back further than the early modern period, noting that "early medieval chroniclers, including Bede, contributed to the articulation of an English identity long before political unification" (Starkey, p. xxi). Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, developed in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), offers a general theoretical vocabulary for this literature: institutions, in his account, can sustain authority through cultural recognition and legitimacy rather than coercion or formal office, which is precisely the register to which Bagehot assigns the post-1689 monarchy. What Bagehot treats as a specifically constitutional specialisation, and Bourdieu theorises in general sociological terms, Colley and Starkey each ground in a particular historical process, national myth-making after 1707 for Colley, deliberate institutional reinvention across the centuries for Starkey, so that the symbolic account, unlike the legal-constitutional one, explains not only that the monarchy became dignified rather than efficient but how that status was continuously produced.

1.3 Structural and materialist readings of political change

A third, less institutionally focused tradition interprets the same historical episodes primarily as expressions of economic conflict. The classical statement of this position is Marx and Engels's claim, in the opening line of the *Communist Manifesto*, that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels, 1848/2002, p. 33), a proposition

subsequently applied to seventeenth-century England by historians working explicitly within the Marxist tradition. Hill's *The Century of Revolution, 1603–1714* (1980) is the most influential example: Hill reads the Civil War not primarily as a dispute over royal prerogative in the abstract but as a confrontation between an ascendant commercial and manufacturing class and a monarchical-aristocratic order whose economic base was already declining relative to it, with the execution of Charles I in 1649 marking the point at which that confrontation became irreversible. This structural reading does not necessarily contradict the legal-constitutional and symbolic accounts reviewed above so much as relocate the causal weight behind them: where Dicey treats the Bill of Rights as the operative cause of constitutional change, a materialist reading treats it as the legal ratification of a shift in economic power that had already occurred. The same logic extends to the Glorious Revolution, which structural accounts read as consolidating the political position of a propertied, increasingly commercial class whose interests aligned poorly with unconstrained royal prerogative, particularly over taxation. The principal limitation of this tradition, for present purposes, is that it explains the erosion of royal governing power more persuasively than it explains why the office was retained in symbolic form rather than abolished outright, a question to which the legal-constitutional and symbolic-institutional literatures speak more directly.

1.4 The limits of existing accounts and the contemporary gap

Read together, these three traditions leave two related problems unresolved. The first is integrative: because legal-constitutional, symbolic-institutional and structural-materialist scholarship have developed largely in parallel, with limited cross-reference, no single account explains both why the monarchy's governing power was constrained and why the resulting symbolic office proved durable rather than merely transitional. Bagehot and Bogdanor are strong on the second question and comparatively silent on the economic pressures Hill identifies; Hill and the Marxist tradition are strong on the first question and offer little explanation of the specific symbolic and cultural work, of the kind Colley and Bourdieu describe, that allowed the institution to persist once stripped of governing authority.

The second problem is temporal. The literature's most frequently cited sources, Bagehot (1867) and Dicey (1885), are contemporaneous with the settlement they describe rather than later assessments of its durability, while even Bogdanor (1995) and Starkey (2010) predate the succession reform of 2013, the funding controversies and Commonwealth realm departures of the 2020s, and current polling evidence on generational support for the institution, all of which are discussed in Section 3.5 below. Existing accounts of the monarchy's adaptability are accordingly better evidenced for the seventeenth to twentieth centuries than for the present one. Recombining the three traditions reviewed above is not simply an exercise in theoretical completeness: each addresses a question the others leave open. The legal-constitutional tradition explains the mechanism of constraint but not its timing; the structural tradition explains the timing but not why the office survived rather than fell; and the symbolic-institutional tradition explains survival but treats the underlying constraints largely as settled background rather than as still-active pressure. This study addresses both the integrative and the temporal gap by

combining social contract theory and a Marxist structural perspective within a single interpretive frame, applied across the full span of the monarchy's transformation, including its most recent and still-unsettled phase.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

2.1 Social contract and sovereignty theories

This study draws on four theories of political authority that, taken together, trace a progressive philosophical trajectory from absolute sovereignty to popular sovereignty, each corresponding to a distinct stage in the monarchy's transformation examined in Section 3.

Hobbes develops the theory of absolute sovereignty in *Leviathan* (1651), written against the backdrop of the English Civil War and its accompanying collapse of public order. Hobbes argues that in the "state of nature," prior to organised government, human life is characterised by insecurity and competition, famously summarised in his claim that without a common power to keep all in awe, life would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1996, p. 62). To escape this condition, Hobbes contends, individuals collectively transfer their natural rights to a sovereign authority whose power must be effectively absolute if it is to guarantee peace; a divided or limited sovereignty, in his view, risks reopening the conflict it was created to end. For this study, Hobbes supplies the intellectual justification for absolute monarchy as it operated before the constitutional settlements examined below, and a baseline against which those later constraints can be measured.

Though Locke rejects this conclusion in the *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), his own formulation of this claim, that "where there is no law, there is no freedom" (Locke, 1988, pt. II, sec. 57, p. 234), supplies the conceptual link between legal constraint and political liberty on which later parliamentary claims against royal prerogative would rest. This theory underwrites the ideological case for limiting monarchical power examined in relation to the Civil War in Section 3.2.

Montesquieu, in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), shifts the argument from the source of authority to its institutional structure, contending that political liberty depends on power being divided among distinct legislative, executive and judicial functions rather than concentrated in a single office. Concentrated power, in his account, tends inevitably toward tyranny regardless of who holds it; liberty requires that each branch of government be capable of checking the others, a principle he summarized in the observation that, by the arrangement of institutions, "power ought to be a check to power" (Montesquieu, 1989, bk. XI, ch. 4, p. 105). This framework is applied in Section 3.3 to the constitutional settlement that followed the Glorious Revolution.

Rousseau, in *The Social Contract* (1762), advances the most radical of the four positions, holding that legitimate authority originates exclusively in the general will of the people and cannot be represented, divided or permanently transferred to any ruler or institution. Government, for Rousseau, merely executes the people's will; sovereignty itself remains theirs alone, and any arrangement that removes it from them, however stable or efficient, lacks legitimacy. Rousseau's own formulation of this claim is characteristically uncompromising: "L'homme est né libre, et

partout il est dans les fers" (Rousseau, 1968, p. 3), rendered in English as "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." Although Britain never adopted a Rousseauian settlement directly, his theory articulates the long-run ideological direction, from hereditary to popular sovereignty, within which the monarchy's later, more incremental adaptation can be situated. Read in sequence, these four positions move from the justification of absolute authority (Hobbes), through its conditional limitation (Locke) and institutional division (Montesquieu), to its relocation in the people themselves (Rousseau).

2.2 A Marxist structural perspective

This study uses the Marxist perspective descriptively, as a lens for interpreting why particular constitutional arguments gained decisive force at particular moments, rather than as a comprehensive account displacing the social contract tradition. It is deployed specifically, following Hill's application of the same framework to seventeenth-century England, to interpret the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution as episodes in which political conflict tracked underlying economic realignment. Its principal limitation for this study's purposes, noted already in Section 1.3, is explanatory asymmetry: it accounts more persuasively for the erosion of the Crown's governing power than for the specific symbolic and cultural functions, examined through Bagehot, Colley, Starkey and Bourdieu in Section 3.4, that allowed the office itself to survive that erosion. Combining the two frameworks, rather than selecting between them, is accordingly necessary to explain both halves of the transformation this study investigates.

2.3 Methodology

This research work adopts a qualitative, documentary design appropriate to a historical and constitutional question of this kind, for which archival fieldwork or survey research would not by itself resolve the interpretive questions at stake. The corpus examined comprises three categories of source: primary constitutional and historical documents, including Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, the Bill of Rights and the Succession to the Crown Act; the classical political-theoretical texts introduced in Section 2.1 and 2.2; and secondary academic literature in constitutional law, political history and political sociology, supplemented, for the institution's most recent period, by official data on royal funding, parliamentary and legal sources on residual prerogative procedure, and recent public-opinion polling.

3. The Transformation of the British Monarchy: Analysis of the Historical Evidence

3.1 Medieval foundations: Magna Carta and the idea of limited kingship

The starting point for an account of monarchical constraint in Britain is not the seventeenth century but the thirteenth. Following the Norman Conquest of 1066, the English crown had developed into an unusually centralised feudal monarchy by medieval European standards, with the king functioning as the ultimate source of law, land tenure and justice. That centralisation produced its first major legal check in 1215, when a coalition of barons, resisting King John's taxation and arbitrary use of royal justice, forced him to seal Magna Carta at Runnymede under the explicit threat of civil war (Britannica, n.d.-b). The charter's most consequential clauses established, for the first time in English law, that the sovereign was not above the law: no free

man was to be imprisoned, dispossessed or proceeded against "except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land," and the Crown undertook that "to no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay, right or justice" (Magna Carta, 1215, cls. 39-40).

Magna Carta did not establish anything resembling constitutional or parliamentary government in 1215; it was a settlement between a king and his most powerful subjects, reissued and substantially revised in 1216, 1217 and 1225 as successive kings sought to manage the same underlying tension. Its significance for this study is narrower but still foundational: it fixed, four centuries before the events examined in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, the principle that royal authority operates within law rather than above it, giving later parliamentary claims against the Stuart kings a documented precedent rather than a wholly novel argument. Read against Locke's later claim that "where there is no law, there is no freedom" (Locke, 1988, pt. II, sec. 57, p. 234), Magna Carta supplies the earliest English articulation of the same principle applied specifically to the Crown.

3.2 Absolute monarchy and its crisis: divine right and the English Civil War

Despite this early precedent, the practical authority of the English Crown expanded rather than contracted over the following four centuries, reaching its most concentrated form under the early Stuart kings, who governed on the explicit doctrine that royal power derived from divine sanction rather than parliamentary or popular consent. The monarch under this doctrine exercised direct authority over legislation, taxation, justice and foreign policy, while Parliament's role remained consultative rather than co-equal. Hobbes's *Leviathan*, published in the direct aftermath of the ensuing conflict, supplies the fullest philosophical defence of this arrangement, treating a strong, undivided sovereign as the only reliable safeguard against the disorder his state of nature describes.

That arrangement proved structurally fragile well before it proved politically untenable. Colley's account of the gradual formation of a shared British political identity note that "British institutions were built upon a complex layering of older loyalties and identities rather than a single founding moment" (Colley, 1992, p. 5), a layering that included steadily rising expectations of political representation among a commercial and land-owning class whose economic weight was not matched by formal political influence. Historical accounts of the period agree that the crisis, when it came, centred on disputes over taxation, religion and the limits of royal prerogative between Charles I and Parliament (UK Parliament, n.d.; Britannica, n.d.-a). Read through the structural perspective set out in Section 2.2, the Civil War of 1642–1651 appears not merely as a dispute over the scope of royal prerogative but as the point at which an ascendant commercial and manufacturing interest and a declining landed-monarchical order ceased to be reconcilable within the existing constitutional settlement (Hill, 1980). The execution of Charles I in 1649 marks the decisive break in this account: it demonstrated, irreversibly, that the person of the monarch was no longer legally inviolable, even though the monarchy itself was restored eleven years later in a constitutionally weaker form than the one Charles I had inherited.

3.3 The Glorious Revolution and the birth of constitutional monarchy

The Glorious Revolution of 1688–89 achieved through negotiated succession what the Civil War had achieved only briefly through force. The offer of the crown to William III and Mary II on terms set by Parliament established, this time durably, that royal authority was conditional on parliamentary consent rather than prior to it. The Bill of Rights of 1689 converted this political settlement into enforceable law, prohibiting the Crown from suspending statutes, raising taxation or maintaining a standing army without parliamentary approval.

Montesquieu's later analysis of institutional balance offers the clearest theoretical account of why this particular settlement, rather than either unconstrained monarchy or its abolition, proved durable: liberty, on his argument, requires that "power ought to be a check to power" (Montesquieu, 1989, bk. XI, ch. 4, p. 105), a description that fits the post-1689 relationship between Crown and Parliament more precisely than either of the alternatives it displaced. Read structurally, the same settlement can be understood as the political ratification of the propertied, increasingly commercial interests whose economic position had already been consolidating for decades, and whose objections to arbitrary royal taxation were as much material as constitutional. Dicey's later, more strictly legal reading treats the Bill of Rights as the point at which parliamentary sovereignty became the organising principle of the constitution, rather than merely one claim among competing ones. Tocqueville, writing more than a century later from a broader comparative vantage point, situates this same shift within a longer democratic transition, observing that "the science of association becomes the mother of action" as representative institutions mature (Tocqueville, 2000, p. 114); his framing suggests that the British settlement of 1689, though narrower than full popular sovereignty, belonged to the same historical movement that Rousseau would later theorise in more radical terms.

3.4 The symbolic monarchy in modern Britain

The two centuries following the Glorious Revolution saw the monarchy's remaining governing functions transferred, by convention rather than further dramatic rupture, to ministers responsible to Parliament. By the time Bagehot was writing in 1867, the transfer was sufficiently complete that he could describe the Crown as belonging to the "dignified" rather than the "efficient" parts of the constitution, retaining only what he termed "the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn" (Bagehot, 1867, ch. 5, p. 103) in its dealings with ministers. This is a narrower claim than is sometimes attributed to Bagehot: he does not describe the monarchy as powerless, only as shorn of the capacity to act against the advice of its ministers.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power supplies a general theoretical account of how an institution in this position sustains authority without formal governing capacity, through cultural recognition rather than coercion (Bourdieu, 1991). Colley's and Starkey's work supplies the specific historical content of that recognition in the British case: a monarchy whose authority, once directly tied to conquest and divine sanction, was reconstructed across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a symbol of continuity and shared national identity, a process Starkey traces back further still, to the role of early medieval chroniclers in articulating an English identity "long before political unification" (Starkey, 2010, p. xxi). These accounts explain why the institution's post-1689 survival should not be understood merely as a residue of the

settlement examined in Section 3.3, but as the product of continuous, deliberate cultural work over the following two centuries.

3.5 The contested monarchy: legitimacy, funding and adaptation in the twenty-first century

The most recent phase of the monarchy's evolution has received markedly less scholarly attention than the seventeenth-century settlement, despite involving comparable questions of legitimacy and constraint. The Succession to the Crown Act 2013, which came into force in March 2015, replaced male-preference primogeniture with absolute primogeniture, so that the eldest child of a monarch succeeds regardless of sex, and repealed the automatic disqualification of those who marry Roman Catholics, though the monarch personally remains barred from professing that faith (Succession to the Crown Act, 2013). The reform is a genuine formal adjustment rather than a symbolic gesture, and it illustrates that the constitutional settlement examined in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, while durable, has continued to be revised by Parliament rather than fixed since 1689.

The monarchy's public financing, provided through the Sovereign Grant and calculated as a proportion of Crown Estate profits, stood at approximately £86 million for the 2024–25 financial year, following a substantial increase tied to exceptional Crown Estate revenues (NBC News, 2025). Critics have argued that this settlement is difficult to reconcile with concurrent domestic hardship, noting that close to a third of children in the United Kingdom live in relative poverty; one campaign group characterised part of the funding as directed toward "personal lifestyles, helicopters and two dozen palatial homes" rather than public purposes (NBC News, 2025). The second concerns a residual legislative procedure, King's or Queen's Consent, under which government bills affecting the royal prerogative, Crown property or the Duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall require the monarch's or heir's consent before they may proceed through Parliament; although consent is refused only on ministerial advice rather than exercised as a personal royal veto, a 2021 investigation into its use in practice prompted more than fifty thousand people to call for a formal inquiry (Royal Central, n.d.). Both episodes indicate that the "dignified," non-governing role Bagehot described is not entirely free of the kind of political friction his distinction was meant to place beyond dispute.

Public and international support for the institution has also become measurably less settled than earlier accounts assumed. Successive tracking polls in 2025 and into 2026 place support for retaining the monarchy at approximately 64 per cent of Britons, against roughly a quarter favouring an elected head of state, a margin that has been broadly stable over this period (YouGov, 2025); campaign groups opposed to the monarchy point to differently framed survey questions that record considerably lower support, illustrating that the size of the institution's public mandate is itself contested rather than fixed (Republic, n.d.).

4. Discussion

The evidence traced across Section 3 supports a more integrated account of the British monarchy's transformation than either the legal-constitutional or the structural-materialist literature offers on its own. Each of the settlement's principal stages, Magna Carta, the Civil War, the Glorious Revolution and the modern symbolic monarchy, involved both a specific legal or

constitutional mechanism, of the kind Dicey, Bogdanor and Montesquieu describe, and a shift in the underlying distribution of economic power, of the kind Hill's application of Marxist analysis identifies. Neither dimension is dispensable: the legal mechanism explains why constraint took the particular institutional form it did at each stage, while the structural dimension explains why parliamentary claims against the Crown gained decisive force at those specific moments rather than earlier or later. This is broadly consistent with Bogdanor's (1995) argument that the monarchy survived by internalising constitutional constraint, but it revises that account by suggesting the constraint itself was not purely legal in origin.

This integrated account also speaks to the comparative puzzle raised in the introduction: why the British monarchy persisted in symbolic form where the French, Russian and German monarchies were abolished outright under comparable pressure. The evidence reviewed here suggests that timing and sequencing, rather than any unique national disposition toward compromise, did much of the explanatory work. Because the Crown's decisive constitutional defeats, Magna Carta, the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, occurred in stages separated by decades or centuries rather than in a single concentrated crisis, the institution was able to absorb each constraint before the next arrived, retaining enough residual legitimacy at each stage to survive into the next.

The analysis also identifies a genuine tension within the literature rather than resolving it artificially. The legal-constitutional tradition, particularly as developed by Dicey, presents the post-1689 settlement as a largely closed and stable arrangement, elaborated rather than fundamentally renegotiated over the following three centuries. Section 3.5's evidence on funding disputes, residual legislative consent procedures and contested public support complicates this picture: it suggests that the settlement Bagehot described in 1867 remains open to renegotiation in ways the legal-constitutional literature, focused as it is on the seventeenth century, does not fully anticipate. This does not overturn Bagehot's dignified/efficient distinction so much as qualify it: the monarchy's non-governing status has not obviously prevented forms of institutional friction that a purely symbolic office, by Bagehot's own definition, should not generate.

Considered against the study's hypotheses, the evidence broadly confirms that political conflict, most clearly the Civil War, and formal legal reform, most clearly the Bill of Rights and, in the present period, the Succession to the Crown Act 2013, jointly account for the constraint of royal authority, while the monarchy's continued relevance rests demonstrably on symbolic and cultural functions of the kind Colley, Starkey and Bourdieu describe. The hypothesis that socio-economic transformation contributed independently to this process is also supported, principally through the structural reading of the Civil War and Glorious Revolution developed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, though this study's qualitative design cannot establish the relative causal weight of economic versus legal-political factors with precision. The claim that the institution's persistence should be read as uncomplicatedly apolitical, implicit in some of the earlier legal-constitutional literature, is not fully supported by the evidence on King's and Queen's Consent and on Sovereign Grant funding reviewed in Section 3.5, which indicate that the monarchy retains forms

of institutional and financial entanglement with government that qualify, without negating, its formally non-partisan role.

Conclusion

The research work explores how the British monarchy evolved from an institution of absolute sovereign authority into one that performs a largely symbolic and constitutional role, while remaining an active, if contested, feature of British public life. It reveals that four linked stages sustain this transition: a medieval legal precedent, established at Magna Carta, that placed the Crown within rather than above the law; a seventeenth-century crisis, culminating in civil war and the execution of a king, that broke the doctrine of unconstrained divine-right rule; a negotiated constitutional settlement, following by the Glorious Revolution, that subordinated royal authority to parliamentary consent as a matter of enforceable law; and a subsequent, still-ongoing process of symbolic reconstruction through which the institution retained public legitimacy after its governing functions had been transferred elsewhere. This research work also examines a single national case in depth rather than comparing Britain systematically with other constitutional monarchies that have undergone parallel, though not identical, transitions. All above, what the evidence does support without qualification is that the British monarchy's survival has depended throughout on active adaptation rather than passive continuity, and that this adaptation, tested most recently by questions of funding, succession and legitimacy that remain unresolved, continues into the present rather than having concluded at any single point in the institution's long constitutional history.

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