Trivia

Queen Victoria

Born in 1819
Ascended in 1837
Died in 1901, aged 81
Reigned for 63 years
Married to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg bearing 4 sons and 5 daughters.

Eighteen-year-old Queen Victoria acceded to the throne on the 20th June 1837, after her childless Uncle William IV had left no heir to the throne. Despite her youth, she proved to be a powerful, obstinate Queen with a strong sense of duty to her people. She was a relief to a country that was becoming sick of its history of debauched and irresponsible kings and this soon made Victoria very popular.

Initially she was delighted with her coronation but she soon tired of her position. Although she continued in her duties quite admirably, her boredom was obvious and a suitable husband was sought. She married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, nephew of King Leopold of Belgium, on the 10th February 1840. Later that year she gave birth to the Princess Royal, Victoria Adelaide, who later married Frederick III of Prussia and gave birth to the infamous Kaiser William II of Germany.

Victoria had nine children in total, but her next child, Albert, born in November 1841, was to be heir to the crown. She had a great many political problems throughout her reign, but Victoria weathered these, and several attempted assassinations, to become one of the longest reigning monarchs Britain has seen. Her husband Albert was always a massive support to her, but since he was a foreign Prince, he had no power in affairs of state

In 1861 Albert died suddenly, causing the devastated queen to withdraw from public duties. She went into a long mourning and, during this time, the people started to turn against her. Her reign, however, ended in glory because she had been persuaded, largely by Disraeli, to resume public duties.

Many political changes occurred during Victoria's reign and she relied

heavily at first on the advice of her Whig Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. He acted more as a kind of fatherly uncle to her and, although he was carefully deferential to the headstrong Queen, it was obvious who held the real power.

When the Tory government, led by Sir Robert Peel, came to power Victoria mistrusted the new minister. However, Peel was Prime Minister and eventually she grew to trust him almost as much as Lord Melbourne. Victoria was happy to let him control her affairs while she busied herself with the needs of a growing family. Many areas of Britain were very poor at this time and the people were becoming rebellious.

Peel tried to make changes in the Corn laws to encourage free trade, but instead caused a rift in the Tory party (many of them had private interests in protecting the Corn Law). Many people were in favour of the People's Charter, which was calling for even greater changes following the Reform Act. Peel's government gave way to Lord John Russell and the Queen feared for her own life.

There were rebellions all over Europe and without Russell she felt that there could be one at home - indeed the tension in Ireland was becoming unbearable due to the terrible Great Potato Famine of 1847. In 1848 there were riots in Italy, Vienna, Budapest and Berlin. The French King, Louis Philippe, was forced to flee to the comparative safety of England.

Victoria's husband, Albert, was always a massive support to her. However, as he was a foreign Prince, he had no power in affairs of state. He was an active man, but he could not even organise his own household because that was the duty of Baroness Louise Lehzens. Albert soon became bored and eventually he managed to be rid of her and take complete control over the royal household. However, when he tried to become involved in affairs of state there were complaints, especially over the Crimean crisis. He was even accused of treachery due to his German and Russian connections.

It was only in 1857 that Albert officially became Prince Consort to the Queen, giving him legal entitlement to advise her and make decisions, but this was after the Crimean War had ended. The war had lasted for less than three years of Queen Victoria's reign and had been caused by the Russians attacking ships belonging to the Turkish Ottoman Empire. This was partly due to their involvement with French interests and Britain sent

forces to protect the Turks and declared war on Russia. The Victoria Cross was created and awarded to soldiers *For Valour* in the Crimean War.

One achievement of Prince Albert's that helped to occupy him was the organisation of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The huge Crystal Palace, designed by Joseph Paxton, was built especially for it to hold an *Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*. This displayed everything from tepees to the new mechanical computer designed by Sir Charles Babbage.