This week in History Alive magazine, we look at kings and queens who changed English history.

**King Harold II (Jan–Oct 1066)**

King Harold was the last Saxon king of England. Nine months after he became king, the Vikings invaded the north of England, in York. Amazingly, Harold’s army walked 300 kilometres from London to York in four days – and then they defeated the Vikings. But three days later, a Norman leader, William, invaded the south of England. Harold’s tired army marched 320 kilometres south, and then they fought the Normans. At the battle of Hastings the Normans killed Harold. William became king and for nearly 300 years French-speaking kings ruled the country.

**King Henry VIII (1509–1547)**

The Tudor family ruled England and Wales for 118 years. Henry VIII was the second Tudor king. He wanted a son to become king after he died. When he didn’t have any sons with his first wife, he asked the Pope for a divorce. The Pope refused, so Henry VIII left the Catholic Church and started the Church of England. And that’s the reason why Britain isn’t a Catholic country today! Henry married five other wives. He had one son and two daughters. Henry’s younger daughter Elizabeth became one of the greatest queens of England!
Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603)

When Elizabeth became queen, England was weak. Rulers in Catholic countries like Spain and France wanted to attack England and make it a Catholic country again. But Elizabeth was a brave queen and fought back. Because of her, England became a safe country for hundreds of years.

Elizabeth sent explorers to Africa and America. One, Sir Francis Drake, sailed around the world. She loved the theatre too, and William Shakespeare wrote the greatest plays in English history at this time. Elizabeth never married. She was the last Tudor queen because she had no children.

Queen Victoria (1837–1901)

Queen Victoria became queen at 18. She ruled England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales – and lots of other countries, too. She was a very brave woman. In 1842, an assassin tried to shoot her on a London street. The man’s gun didn’t work and he ran away, but Queen Victoria wanted to catch him. The next day, she went down the same road again. This time the man shot at her and missed, and the police caught him.

Queen Victoria had the biggest empire in history and ruled over 400 million people, but she never visited any of the countries in her empire.

King Edward VIII (Jan–Dec 1936)

Edward VIII was king for only 326 days. Why? Because he loved an American woman called Wallis Simpson. But Wallis was divorced, and she was also a Catholic. These things were unacceptable to the Church of England and the Government. So Edward abdicated to marry Wallis, and his younger brother became King George VI. In 1952, George’s oldest daughter became Queen Elizabeth II.