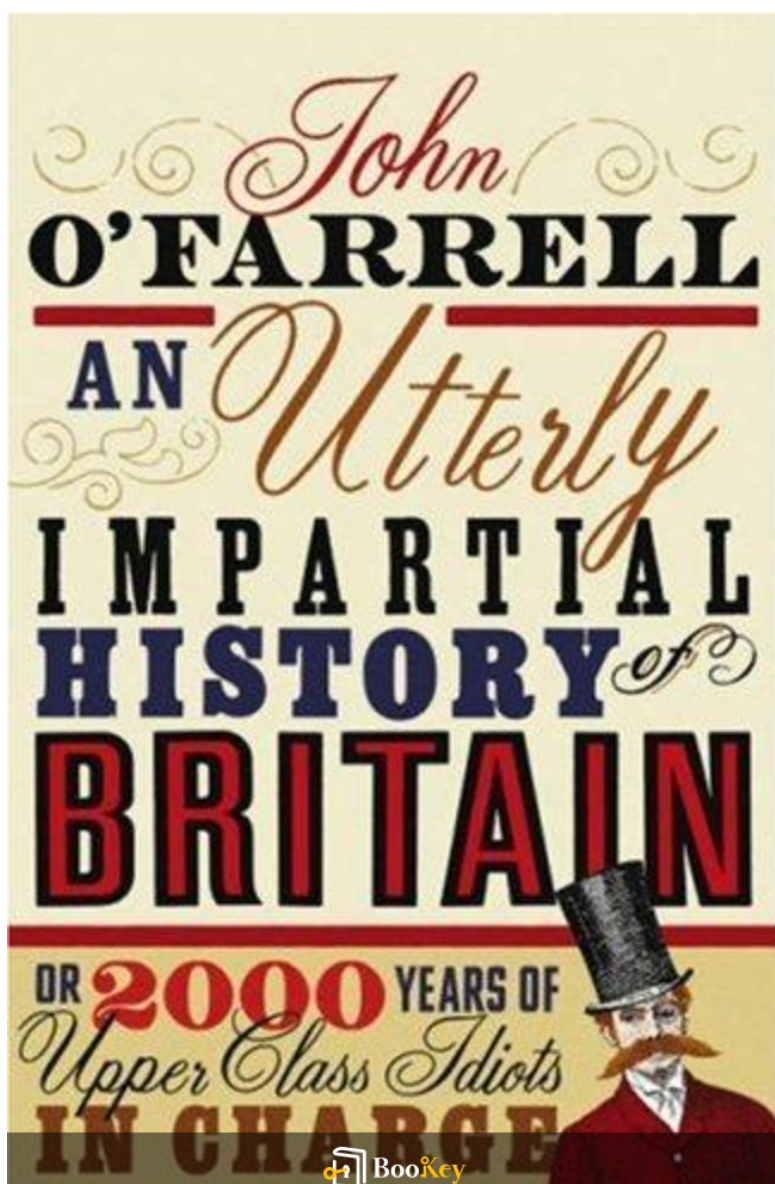


An Utterly Impartial History Of Britain Or 2000 Years Of Upper Class Idiots In Charge PDF

John O'Farrell



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About the book

Book Overview: An Utterly Impartial History Of Britain Or 2000 Years Of Upper Class Idiots In Charge

Author: John O'Farrell

Dive into the chaotic and comical saga of British history with John O'Farrell's engaging work. In this book, O'Farrell takes us on a wildly entertaining ride through 2000 years of Britain's past, filled with the antics of the upper class.

Using sharp humor and incisive irony, he critiques the significant missteps of those in power, from naive rulers to inept politicians, highlighting their laughable mistakes and blunders.

The narrative reveals a fascinating truth: despite the passage of time, many things remain eerily similar, reminding us how history tends to repeat itself, often in the most ludicrous ways.

Perfect for readers who appreciate humor paired with historical insight, this book not only aims to amuse but also to inform, making it a delightful addition to anyone's reading list.

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About the author

Profile: John O'Farrell

- Name: John O'Farrell
- Birthdate: March 27, 1962
- Birthplace: Maidenhead, Berkshire, UK
- Profession: Author, Scriptwriter, Satirist

Overview:

John O'Farrell is a prominent British author celebrated for his sharp wit and insightful commentary on societal and political issues.

Career Journey:

- Writing Start: O'Farrell launched his career as a writer for the renowned satirical TV show "Spitting Image."
- Television and Radio: He expanded his writing repertoire by contributing to various popular television and radio programs.
- Novel Writing: Transitioning into fiction, he authored several best-selling novels and non-fiction works.

Notable Works:

- Fiction: "The Man Who Forgot His Wife"
- Non-Fiction: "Things Can Only Get Better," "An Utterly Impartial History"

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of Britain"

Impact:

With a unique blend of humor and critical analysis, O'Farrell's writing resonates with a broad audience. His works continue to inspire thought while offering entertainment, encouraging readers to reflect on British society and history.

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An Utterly Impartial History Of Britain Or 2000 Years Of Upper Class Idiots In Charge Summary

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An Utterly Impartial History Of Britain Or 2000 Years Of Upper Class Idiots In Charge Summary Chapter List

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1. Chapter 1: An Overview of British History Through the Lens of Upper-Class Governance

In his irreverent exploration of British history, John O'Farrell presents a critical narrative that specifically focuses on the implications of upper-class governance. This first chapter offers readers an engaging overview chronicling how the behavior, decisions, and follies of the upper class have shaped Britain's trajectory over two millennia.

Beginning with the early days of settlement on British shores, O'Farrell humorously illustrates that from the very beginning, there was a tendency for the privileged elite to assume control. Leadership was often synonymous with land ownership and noble lineage, where power was concentrated in the hands of a few, who frequently acted out of self-interest rather than the collective good. The British aristocracy's stranglehold on power solidified the notion that wealth and class defined not just one's place in society, but ultimately the fate of the nation.

The chapter continues by addressing the Roman invasion of Britain. Here, O'Farrell highlights how the Roman elites viewed Britain as a frontier ripe for exploitation, establishing a hierarchical system that favored the ruling class. They imposed taxes and forced Labor on the local populace, illustrating a pattern where upper-class decisions led to socio-economic disparities that would echo throughout history. The Romans' extractive

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approach laid a precedent for how the elite would continue to treat the common populace in subsequent centuries.

Transitioning into the Anglo-Saxon period, O'Farrell describes a similarly tumultuous scene where upper-class idiots ruled through a blend of warfare and religious authority. The establishment of kingdoms like Mercia and Wessex prominently featured nobles quarreling for supremacy, sidelining the voices of the very people they dominated. Important figures, such as King Alfred the Great, are portrayed not through their military acumen but rather through the lens of social stratification that perpetuated the societal divide. While some advancements occurred under their reign, it often came at the expense of commoners, who bore the brunt of feudal obligations without reciprocation.

Then came the Normans, whose own elite titleholders established a brutal regime following their conquest in 1066. William the Conqueror's reign exemplified the pitfalls of governance via upper-class idiocy; with their greed, the Normans implemented harsh policies that alienated the English populace. Demands for taxation were compounded by despotism, as the upper classes engaged in land grabs that favored their kin while overlooking the plight of the dependent classes who toiled for their sustenance.

As the chapter progresses into the Middle Ages, O'Farrell emphasizes the

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role of the monarchy and its relationship with the upper classes, notably the feudal lords and barons. The capricious nature of monarchs, often more concerned with the expansion of their own power and wealth, leads to disastrous consequences such as the signing of the Magna Carta, a moment heralded as a triumph for common rights but more accurately a desperate attempt by rebellious lords to rein in the excesses of an incompetent king—John, who was seen as the epitome of upper-class foolishness. This act, while progressive, revealed an undeniable truth: the always-looming influence of the elite, when unchecked, could challenge the very foundations of governance.

O'Farrell continues this pattern, pointing out that even during the Renaissance, and the subsequent rise of industry, decisions made by the aristocracy often led to exploitation. As the scene shifted to the Industrial Revolution, rampant capitalism transformed Britain, and the upper classes, constantly grappling with their own ineptitude, failed to adequately address the dire living conditions of the working class. Instead, they focused on amassing wealth and power, leading to large-scale unrest.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on how this upper-class

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2. Chapter 2: The Romans, Saxons, and Normans: Elite Rule Through Turbulent Times

In Chapter 2 of “An Utterly Impartial History of Britain or 2000 Years of Upper Class Idiots In Charge,” John O'Farrell delves into the complex interplay of power and governance during the times of the Romans, Saxons, and Normans. This chapter offers a detailed examination of how elite rule persisted through periods marked by significant upheaval and change, setting the stage for a history rife with elitism and questionable leadership.

The chapter begins by painting a vivid picture of the Roman invasion of Britain in 43 AD, led by Emperor Claudius. O'Farrell suggests that the Romans embodied the very essence of an upper-class elite, imposing their governance upon a diverse group of tribes and societies. While the Romans brought advanced engineering, urban planning, and a semblance of order to Britain, their rule was often met with resistance from local tribes. The rebellion led by Boudica, queen of the Iceni, serves as a poignant example of the indigenous fight against imperialist elitism. Boudica's revolt highlighted the tension between the ruling elite and the common people's desire for autonomy and justice.

Transitioning to the Saxon period following the Roman withdrawal around 410 AD, O'Farrell chronicles the fragmentation of authority as various tribes began to establish their own kingdoms. The elite during this time were often

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warriors and chieftains whose power was maintained through violence and loyalty. This decentralized governance brought chaos, yet it also reflected a form of brutal aristocracy where power was continually wrested from one warlord to another. The figure of King Alfred the Great emerges as a notable exception. Through his diplomatic acumen and military reforms, Alfred attempted to unify the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms against Viking invasions. O'Farrell illustrates that even as Alfred strengthened his position, his elite status came at the cost of the lower classes, who bore the brunt of Viking incursions and the demands of their rulers.

The arrival of the Normans in 1066 fundamentally altered the trajectory of British governance. The Battle of Hastings and the subsequent conquest led by William the Conqueror ushered in a new era of feudal leadership that was characterized by a rigid social hierarchy. O'Farrell narrates how the Normans replaced the Anglo-Saxon elite, often through violent dispossession and land seizure. The Domesday Book, commissioned by William, served not only as a census but also as a tool of the elite to reaffirm their control. It documented land ownership and resources, effectively consolidating power in the hands of nobles who had little concern for the plight of the peasantry.

Throughout this chapter, O'Farrell deftly juxtaposes the actions of the ruling classes with the repercussions on the general populace. The narrative emphasizes that while the Roman doctrine of 'Pax Romana' sought to create



order, it was a façade for exploitation. The Saxon era, rife with its tribal factions, led to an elite class that abused its power through warfare and oppression. Finally, the Norman invasion solidified a system where the aristocracy dictated the lives of the common people, often leading to widespread resentment and occasional revolts.

Examples abound in this narrative; the chapter details how the implementation of serfdom under the Normans created a cycle of poverty and dependency that crippled the working class for generations. The elite's fixation on land and titles over the welfare of the populace encapsulates the core theme of O'Farrell's argument—namely, that Britain's history is saturated with figures in charge who, while noble in lineage, were often devoid of progressive vision or genuine concern for their subjects.

In conclusion, Chapter 2 serves as a crucial examination of Britain's formative years under elite governance, highlighting a turbulent journey marked by the rise and fall of various powers. O'Farrell portrays not only the historical progression of these ruling classes but also prompts readers to reflect on the enduring legacy of such elitism as it shapes contemporary British society.

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3. Chapter 3: The Monarchy and the Rise of the Upper Classes in Medieval Britain

The medieval period in Britain witnessed a significant evolution in the relationship between monarchy and the upper classes, a dynamic that shaped not just the social hierarchy but also the political landscape for centuries to come. As monarchs rose to power, often through violent conquest or strategic marriages, they relied increasingly on a cadre of nobility to maintain their rule and control over the land and its people. This chapter delves into how the monarchy's ambitions dovetailed with the interests of the emerging upper classes, illustrating a complex interplay of power, privilege, and societal structure.

To comprehend the rise of the upper classes during this period, one must first consider the nature of the monarchy itself. In early medieval Britain, particularly after the Norman Conquest in 1066, monarchs like William the Conqueror implemented a feudal system. This system was designed not only to consolidate royal power but also to ensure loyalty from powerful landholders. Every noble granted land was expected to provide military service to the king and to govern his territory. In this light, the monarchy became dependent on the upper classes, creating a symbiotic relationship. The classic structure of this feudal system set forth by William resembled a pyramid, where the king sat atop, but his power was inextricably linked to the loyalty and governance of the barons beneath him.



The Magna Carta of 1215 marked a significant turning point in this relationship. Forced from King John by a group of rebellious barons, the charter represented a pivotal assertion of the rights of the nobility, effectively curtailing the power of the monarchy. This moment not only affirmed the rising influence of the upper classes but also introduced the concept that monarchs were not above the law, sowing the seeds for future parliamentary democracy. The Magna Carta set a precedent that the will of the aristocracy could challenge royal authority, indicating a shift in the balance of power—one where the nobility began to claim their rights not only from the king but also within the broader context of governance.

As the medieval period progressed, various monarchs navigated this delicate balance of power. Kings like Edward I were known for asserting royal authority while simultaneously granting charters and rights that served to placate and empower the upper classes. The establishment of law courts and a burgeoning bureaucracy under Edward I allowed for a more organized method of governance and increased the reliance of the monarch on the nobility to execute these laws within their territories.

This period also saw the rise of a merchant class, which began to challenge the traditional land-owning nobility. The creation of towns and the growth of trade marked significant economic shifts. However, it was often the

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gentry—the lesser nobility—who benefitted from these changes, increasing their wealth and power while remaining loyal to the king. In many cases, traders and merchants would seek the patronage of these nobles for protection and business opportunities, thus fostering a new layer of upper-class elites.

One striking example of the interplay between the monarchy and the upper classes can be seen during the reign of Richard II, whose youthful rule faced significant challenges from powerful nobles. In the late 14th century, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 highlighted the tensions not only between the ruling class and the common people but also among the upper classes themselves. Richard, pushed to showcase his authority, initially sided with the peasants to a degree, but ultimately sought the support of the upper class to quash the rebellion. This episode illustrates how the monarchy often needed to mobilize the upper classes to maintain control despite popular dissent, further entrenching the significance of these elites in the political framework.

Moreover, the Wars of the Roses during the 15th century showcased the lethal stakes involved in the contest for power between the monarchy and the nobility. The war exemplified how rivalries among the upper classes could lead to devastating civil strife, ultimately concluding with the ascendancy of the Tudor dynasty. Henry VII and his descendants enacted



policies to stabilize and centralize power, often by strategically marrying into the nobility and controlling their ambitions.

As the medieval period came to a close, the relationship between the monarchy and the upper classes had become exceedingly complicated, defined by both collaboration and conflict. The emergence of powerful noble families set the stage for further political maneuvering and alignments that would impact subsequent centuries. The foundation laid during this era, characterized by an ever-stronger alliance between the monarchy and the upper classes, would influence the future of Britain, leading to an aristocracy that remained entrenched in governance long after the medieval times ended.

In conclusion, while the monarchy sought to maintain its authority, the rise of the upper classes during medieval Britain was not only facilitated by royal strategies but also challenged them at pivotal moments. This chapter highlights the complex symbiosis of monarchy and nobility, which ultimately shaped the backdrop against which British history would continue to unfold.

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4. Chapter 4: Victorian Era Idiocy: The Continued Downfall and Triumph of the Upper Class

The Victorian Era, spanning from 1837 to 1901, was marked not only by industrial progress and cultural expansion but also by a seemingly relentless series of foolish decisions made by the upper classes that often resulted in their precarious hold on power. John O'Farrell, in his "An Utterly Impartial History of Britain," unveils the layers of idiocy that plagued the British aristocracy, linking their misguided actions to both their downfall and their unexpected triumphs.

During this century, the British elite were characterized by a paradox; they were both the custodians of immense wealth and power and, simultaneously, a group increasingly out of touch with the lives of ordinary working Britons. The expansion of the British Empire and the wealth it generated contributed to a bloated sense of superiority among the upper classes, who often found themselves embroiled in extravagant lifestyles while neglecting the issues facing their subjects.

One of the most glaring examples of upper-class idiocy was the attitude towards the Industrial Revolution. While industrialists from the working class and the emerging middle class pushed for reforms to improve working conditions, the upper elite frequently dismissed these concerns as the



ramblings of the rebellious proletariat. Instead of acknowledging the stark human cost of factory labor conditions, upper-class leaders such as factory owners and politicians insisted on viewing labor as merely a tool for profit.

A classic illustration of this disconnect can be seen in the various Parliamentary reports that emerged during the 1830s and 1840s, which revealed the horrendous conditions within textile mills and coal mines. Despite the evidence, many aristocrats continued to advocate for laissez-faire economics, oblivious to the exploitation around them. It was not until public outcry and the tireless work of reformers like Lord Shaftesbury that change began to occur, leading to laws like the Factory Act of 1833, which sought to limit the working hours of children. Nevertheless, those reforms were more a result of pressure from outside the ruling class than any recognition of their own failures.

Furthermore, the Victorian era witnessed the ascendancy of pseudo-scientific theories that reinforced the elite's prejudices and provided a misguided justification for their dominance. The rise of Social Darwinism, for instance, suggested that the upper classes were naturally superior while framing the working classes as inferior beings. Such theories allowed the aristocracy not only to justify the existing social order but to simultaneously ignore the pressing needs of an entire segment of society. These beliefs often found their expression in colonial policies that viewed non-European



societies primarily through the lens of civilization and race. The upper class was keen to expand British influence abroad, often with little regard for the consequences. Events like the Opium Wars serve as stark reminders of how financial gain and upper-class arrogance could lead to ethical failures that marred Britain's global reputation.

Despite the manifest idiocy displayed by the upper classes during this period, it was also clear that they adapted to circumstances in a precarious balancing act. The growing power of the working classes and middle classes post-Industrial Revolution catalyzed some strategic maneuvering by the upper classes. The establishment of public schools and increased social philanthropy emerged as attempts to win back favor and create a buffer against the rising tide of discontent. Aristocratic families poured funds into charitable works, arts patronage, and even slum clearance projects to project an image of benevolence and social responsibility.

Moreover, the Victorian upper class adeptly utilized media and literature to craft narratives that reinforced their status. The works of authors like Charles Dickens exposed the harsh realities faced by the lower classes but were also co-opted by the elite to evoke sympathy and underscore their role as 'benevolent rulers.' Books like "Oliver Twist" and "David Copperfield" highlighted societal issues, but they equally served as a platform for the educated elite to present themselves as saviors of the downtrodden,

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affectionately labeled 'the poor.' This convoluted view allowed the upper class to maintain their stature and influence while seemingly addressing the very problems they had helped create.

In summary, the Victorian Era epitomizes a time of both stupidity and cunning among upper-class Britons. As they remained blind to the repercussions of their decisions and detached from the brutal realities of life for most of the population, they simultaneously reinforced their societal roles through strategically manufactured images of benevolence and responsibility. O'Farrell's examination highlights the complex interplay of downfall and triumph during a period marked by contradictions inherent in the British aristocracy's governance, setting the stage for the changes yet to come in the subsequent modern era.

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5. Chapter 5: The Modern Era: Contemporary Reflections on Britain's Historical Elite and Their Legacy

The modern era in Britain has, in many ways, continued the tradition of elite governance that has defined much of the country's history. The legacies of Britain's upper classes can be seen not just in societal structures but also in the political, economic, and cultural landscapes that shape the nation today. While the monarchy retained its symbolic relevance, the rise of parliamentary democracy and the gradual movement towards more inclusive governance played against a backdrop of upper-class influence.

In the post-war period, there have been clear markers where the remnants of aristocratic rule intersect with contemporary issues. The Suez Crisis of 1956 provides a pertinent example, highlighting the failures of decision-making within an elite that did not reflect the shifting desires and realities of British society. The political class, largely comprised of those from upper-class backgrounds, miscalculated the geopolitical landscape, leading to significant international embarrassment and a re-evaluation of Britain's role on the global stage. This crisis catalyzed a series of changes in British politics, wherein elitist attitudes began to be questioned more fervently by an increasingly diverse electorate.

Continuing into the late 20th century, figures such as Margaret Thatcher



embodied a complex relationship with Britain's upper classes. The son of a grocer and an O-level student herself, Thatcher emerged as a prime minister who appeared to challenge the elitist status quo while simultaneously upholding the values associated with her upper-class predecessors. Her policies, particularly in terms of economic liberalization, sparked debates about social equity. Some of her staunchest supporters were indeed from the upper echelons of society, and her tenure raised questions about whether class divisions were truly being dismantled or merely transformed under the guise of meritocracy.

The legacy of the upper classes in modern Britain also manifests in the enduring presence of institutions such as the House of Lords, composed heavily of life peers, bishops, and hereditary peers which can be seen as a hangover from Britain's feudal past. Despite reforms that have attempted to introduce more democratic elements into this chamber, the perception that it serves elite interests remains strong. Efforts for reform have been stymied frequently, reflecting the institutional inertia that is often characteristic of systems run by the upper class.

Moreover, contemporary events like the Brexit referendum in 2016 exposed the rifts between different social classes in Britain. The elite and the working classes showed divergent views; the upper class largely favored remaining within the European Union, showcasing their integration into the global



economy, while a significant portion of the working class voted to leave, driven by concerns over sovereignty and economic insecurity. The aftermath of this decision has left lingering issues regarding national identity and class division — a testament to the historical presence of an elite that often prioritizes its interests over those of the general populace.

Additionally, the recent revelations regarding the wealth and privileges of the upper class, particularly in the wake of scandals like the Panama Papers, have fueled public discontent. The contrast between the elite's apparent detachment and the everyday struggles faced by ordinary citizens illustrates a continuation of the divide that has characterized British history. The public outcry for transparency and accountability reflects a historical pattern where those in power, often from privileged backgrounds, have failed to act in the public's best interest.

As we navigate through the complexities of social justice movements, the echoes of Britain's upper-class history resonate profoundly. With increasing calls for equal representation, reform in political structures, and accountability in business and governance, modern Britons find themselves at the intersection of history and progress, challenging the legacy of the elite.

In conclusion, the modern era of Britain, with its tumultuous political landscape, economic disparities, and evolving social norms, reveals that the

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influence of the British upper class is still palpable. The historical trends established by centuries of elite rule inform contemporary discussions about power dynamics, class structure, and social equity. Understanding these legacies is crucial as society wrestles with the vestiges of inequality and strives for a more inclusive future where governance reflects the true demographics of all its citizens.

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- Key Insight 1**
 - Know yourself.
 - Gain insight into human nature
 - Our lives are shaped by temperament
 - Personal development demands loneliness and solitude
- Key Insight 2**
 - Have a good grasp of the subject-object relationship.
 - Riches are like seawater; what suit us is the most important