

Edward VIII, a short biography



Keystone/Alamy



Camera Press/Globe Photos



Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy

(1894–1972). Edward VIII reigned as king of the [United Kingdom](#) for less than a year. He abdicated, or gave up the throne, in December 1936 in order to marry Wallis Warfield Simpson of the United States. He was the only British sovereign ever to voluntarily resign the crown.

Edward was born on June 23, 1894, in Richmond, Surrey, England. The oldest child of George, duke of York, he became heir to the throne in 1910 when his father became King [George V](#). In 1911 he was made prince of Wales. During [World War I](#) he served as a staff officer. After the war and through the early 1920s, Prince Edward made extensive goodwill tours of the British Empire. In the 1930s he took an increasing interest in national affairs and became very popular with the British people.

Edward was nearly 42 years old when he became king upon George V's death on January 20, 1936. Toward the end of that year he expressed the desire to marry Wallis Warfield Simpson, whom he had met in 1930. Simpson, an American, had already been married twice, and her second divorce was not yet final.

The British and [Commonwealth](#) governments strongly opposed this marriage as not in keeping with the dignity of the British crown. Edward, however, had made up his mind, and on December 10, 1936, he abdicated. His younger brother took the throne as [George VI](#). The first act of the new king was to name his brother duke of Windsor. The duke married Simpson in France on June 3, 1937, and she became the duchess of Windsor.

From 1937 to 1939 and after 1945 the duke and duchess made their home in Paris, France. During World War II, at the invitation of British Prime Minister [Winston Churchill](#), he served as governor of [the Bahamas](#), which was then a British colony. Though they were counted among the social elite, not until 1967 were they invited to attend an official public ceremony with other members of the royal family. Edward died in Paris on May 28, 1972. The duchess died there on April 24, 1986. They were buried side by side in the royal cemetery at Frogmore, within the grounds of [Windsor Castle](#) in England.