

TIM GRAHAM/DAVID CHESKIN

n Charles



King Francis

The British monarch today would be King Francis II of Bavaria if the order of succession had allowed Catholics and women to take the throne, a royal historian has found.

As countries in the Commonwealth prepare to vote on changes that would give a daughter born to Prince William and his wife Kate equal rights to inherit the throne, research commissioned by The Sunday Times shows how history could have turned out if the Act of Settlement had not been passed in 1701.

If Catholics and women had been allowed to inherit the throne, Queen Elizabeth II would have lived out her days as a minor princess of Hanover. Instead, her distant cousin, Francis of the house of Wittelsbach, would be at Buckingham Palace, according to the historian Ian Lloyd.

Sorry, Wills, Franz gets the crown



If Catholics had been allowed to ascend the British throne, William and Kate would be paying homage to Franz, Duke of Bavaria

With the prime minister wanting to change the rules on royal succession, Giles Hattersley finds out just who history might have put on the throne

Imagine if this morning Princess Elizabeth, an 85-year-old German aristocrat, pulled on a headscarf and trundled down to the stables at her modest country pile outside Hanover. As usual, the twinkly-eyed granny has a pack of corgis in tow and not a care in the world.

Meanwhile in London her distant cousin, King Francis II, is gloomily preparing for another day of tedious ribbon-cutting and insufferable small talk. Over breakfast at Buckingham Palace, his spirits are momentarily lifted by a front-page story in one of the tabloids. "Looks like that Diana Spencer has married another internet billionaire," he chuckles to his wife. "What is that, her third?"

This alternate royal reality might have come to pass but for a law enacted 300 years ago. Last week David Cameron made a government's strongest pledge yet to tear up the 1701 Act of Settlement that forbids a first-born girl from claiming the British throne if she has a younger brother. Prospective monarchs, believes Cameron, should even now be allowed to marry Catholics (though being a Catholic oneself still remains unthinkable).

But what if the Act of Settlement had never been passed? What if, in fact, women and Catholics had been allowed to be kings and queens for centuries?

Ian Lloyd, a royal biographer who has studied succession lines in detail for years, fills me in. "The act had a seismic effect on the monarchy," he says. "When Queen Anne died in August 1714, the first 57 people in the order of succession were automatically declared ineligible for the throne under the terms of the act, which banned Catholics."

So who got the job? "Number 58 was George, the Protestant Elector of Hanover, whose grandmother, Elizabeth, Queen of

Bohemia, was a daughter of James I," he says, without pausing for breath.

To put that in context, if — God forbid — our own Queen keeled over tomorrow, and the same number of eligible royals had to be skipped over, the 58th in line to the throne would be the Duke of Fife, an 82-year-old great-grandson of Edward VII. Not a bad sort, apparently. He keeps his nose clean and face out of Tatler, but he was hardly groomed to rule.

"At the time of Anne's death," continues Lloyd, "the Catholic claimant was her half-brother James Stuart, the 'Old Pretender' and figurehead of the 1715 Jacobite rising against George I." His son, Bonnie Prince Charlie, would have succeeded him as Charles III in 1766, and in 1788 Henry IX, his younger brother, would have followed. But he died childless and that branch of Stuarts was done for.

"Succession would then have had to be traced back to Princess

Henrietta Anne Stuart," explains Lloyd, "the youngest daughter of Charles I, who was born in Exeter in 1644 at the height of the civil war."

Henrietta married Philippe, Duke of Orleans, younger brother of Louis XIV, and the royal line would have travelled through the Italian houses of Savoy and Este as well as the German house of Wittelsbach. Fast-forward to 1996 when Franz, Duke of Bavaria, would take the throne as Francis II on the death of his father Albert.

It's an odd thought. Who exactly is this alternate king of ours? At 75, he's never married, though there's a fetching portrait of him on the internet with a dachshund cradled lovingly on his knee. His family fled Germany as the Nazis rose and Franz himself spent time in a concentration camp after they were captured in Hungary.

Who would be next, one wonders? As Franz has no children, the title would apparently pass to his brother Prince Max, the father of five daughters. So one day our new queen would be Duchess Sophie Elisabeth Marie Gabrielle. And her son — stick with this — Prince Joseph Wenzel of Liechtenstein was born at the Portland hospital in London in 1995, making him the first Jacobite heir to be born on British soil since 1688.

However, perhaps more curious

twists to our national fate would have happened had male primogeniture been abandoned earlier. For example, if Henry VIII's elder sister Margaret had been able to take the throne in 1509 on the death of her father.

This might have done wonders for her younger brother's stress levels. "Had the onus not been on Henry to produce an heir, he could have stayed married to Catherine of Aragon, as by all accounts their union was a happy one," says Lloyd. "He wouldn't have had the five subsequent marriages, he wouldn't have had two of his wives beheaded. We wouldn't have had Edward VI, who gave us the Book of Common Prayer. We wouldn't have had the reign of Bloody Mary, the Catholic who killed the Protestant martyrs. But then we also wouldn't have had the glorious reign of Elizabeth I."

Three hundred years later, women were again overlooked with dramatic consequences.

"Think of Victoria, the princess royal," says Lloyd, "who married the future crown prince of Prussia and was for a short time empress of Germany. She was probably the most intelligent of Queen Victoria's children, and carried on many of her father's liberal beliefs."

Though, because of cancer, she barely outlived her mother, had she been able to claim the throne "her reign would have meant [her son] Kaiser Wilhelm II would have become King of England. It would have been an Anglo-German empire and prevented the first world war. Perhaps even the second."

It's time for a change, believes Lloyd. Not least because it is women — Elizabeth I, Victoria and Elizabeth II — who routinely top the polls of our most respected monarchs — though they might not always thank the quirks of fate that put them on the throne.

"When the Queen was a young girl and was out riding with her groom, she told him when she grew up she would like to live in the country with lots of horses and dogs," says Lloyd.

"In one way she has but I think it would be her dream existence to reside near Hanover and do exactly that, rather than attend to matters of state."

Perhaps Princess Elizabeth would have been a happier creature after all.

A very different royal family

What if a Catholic could have succeeded to the throne after the death of Queen Anne?

James Stuart
(James III and VIII of Scotland) 1714-66

Charles Stuart, right
(Charles III) 1766-88

Henry IX (younger brother of Charles, died childless) 1788-1807

The branch of the Stuart line would then have died out. The succession would have had to be traced back to Henrietta Anne Stuart, daughter of Charles I. She married Philippe, Duke of Orleans, brother of Louis XIV. Their great-great-grandson was Charles IV, King of Sardinia. He would have been the King of England



House of Savoy
Charles IV
1807-19

Victor I
1819-24

Mary II
1824-40

House of Este (Modena)
Francis I 1840-75

Mary III 1875-1919

House of Wittelsbach (Bavaria)
Robert I 1919-55

Albert I 1955-96

Francis II 1996-