# House of Welf

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*See also: Elder House of Welf*

The **House of Welf** (historically rendered in English, Guelf or Guelph) is a European dynasty that has included many German and British monarchs from the 11th to 20th century.

**House of Welf (Guelf or Guelph)**



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|---|---|
| **Country** | Germany, Italy, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland |
| **Ancestral house** | House of Este |
| **Titles** | ▪ Duke of Bavaria<br>▪ Duke of Saxony<br>▪ Duke of Spoleto<br>▪ Margrave of Tuscany<br>▪ Count Palatine of the Rhine<br>▪ King of the Romans<br>▪ Holy Roman Emperor<br>▪ Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg<br>▪ Prince of Lüneburg<br>▪ Prince of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel<br>▪ Elector of Hanover<br>▪ King of Hanover<br>▪ Duke of Brunswick<br>▪ King of Great Britain<br>▪ King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland<br>▪ Empress of India |
| **Founder** | Welf I, Duke of Bavaria |
| **Final sovereign** | Ernest Augustus, Duke of Brunswick |
| **Current head** | Ernst August V, Prince of Hanover |
| **Founding** | 11th century |
| **Dissolution** | 1918 (in Germany);<br>1901 (in UK and India) |
| **Cadet branches** | House of Hanover |

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## Origins

The House of Welf is the older branch of the House of Este, a dynasty whose earliest known members lived in Lombardy in the 9th century. For this reason, it is sometimes also called **Welf-Este**. The first member of this branch was Welf IV; he inherited the property of the Elder House of Welf when his maternal uncle Welf, Duke of Carinthia, died in 1055. In 1070, Welf IV became duke of Bavaria.

Welf V married Countess Matilda of Tuscany who died childless and left him her possessions, including Tuscany, Ferrara, Modena, Mantua, and Reggio, which played a role in the Investiture controversy. Since the Welf dynasty sided with the Pope in this controversy, partisans of the Pope came to be known in Italy as "Guelphs"; see Guelphs and Ghibellines.

## Bavaria and Saxony

Henry the Black, duke of Bavaria from 1120–1126, was the first of the three dukes of the Welf dynasty carrying the same name. His son, Henry the Proud, duke of Bavaria and also of Saxony, was the favoured candidate in the imperial election against Conrad III of the Hohenstaufen. Henry lost the election, as the other princes feared his power and temperament, and was dispossessed of his duchies by Conrad III.

Henry the Lion recovered his father's two duchies, Saxony in 1142, Bavaria in 1156. In 1158 he married Matilda (1156–1189), the daughter of Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine, and sister of Richard Lionheart. Dispossessed of his duchies after the Battle of Legnano in 1176 by Emperor Frederick I and the other princes of the German Empire eager to claim parts of his vast territories, he was exiled to the court of his father-in-law Henry II in Normandy in 1180, but returned to Germany three years later. Henry made his peace with the Hohenstaufen Emperor in 1194, and returned to his much diminished lands around Brunswick. He died there in 1195.

## Brunswick and Hanover

Henry's son Otto of Brunswick was elected king and crowned emperor as Otto IV. His grandson Otto the Child became duke of a part of Saxony in 1235, the new so-called 'Duchy of Brunswick-Lüneburg', and died there in 1252. The Welf dynasty of Brunswick-Lüneburg would continue to rule in Hanover until the defeat of George V of Hanover, Austria's ally in the Austro-Prussian War, and the annexation of Hanover by Prussia.

In 1692 the head of the cadet Calenberg line was raised to the status of an imperial elector, and became known as the Elector of Hanover. His son, Georg Ludwig, inherited the British throne in 1714 as a result of the Act of Settlement 1701. Members of the Welf dynasty continued to rule Great Britain until the death of Queen Victoria in 1901; in Britain they were known as the House of Hanover.

Hanover itself was raised to a kingdom in 1814, but was annexed by Prussia following the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, in which Hanover had sided with Austria. The senior line of the dynasty ruled the much smaller Duchy of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. This line became extinct in 1884. Although the Duchy should have been inherited by the Duke of Cumberland, son of the last king of Hanover, suspicions of his loyalty led the duchy's throne to remain vacant until 1913, when Cumberland's son, Ernst August, married the daughter of Kaiser Wilhelm II and was allowed to inherit the duchy. His rule there was short-lived, however, as the monarchy came to an end following the First World War in 1918.




The possessions of the Guelfs in the days of Henry the Lion

The Welf dynasty continues to exist. Its current head, Ernst August, is the third and present husband of Princess Caroline of Monaco.

## Early Welf Princes (1070-1269)

### Dukes of Bavaria and Saxony

- Welf I, Duke of Bavaria (1070-1077, 1096-1101)
- Welf II, Son of Welf I; Duke of Bavaria (1101–1120)
- Henry the Black, Son of Welf I; Duke of Bavaria (1120–1126)
- Henry the Proud, Son of Henry the Black; Duke of Bavaria (1126–1138), Duke of Saxony (1137–1139)
- Henry the Lion, Son of Henry the Proud; Duke of Saxony (1142–1180), Duke of Bavaria (1156–1180)

### Count Palatine of the Rhine

- Henry V, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Son of Henry the Lion; Count Palatine of the Rhine (1195–1213)
- Henry VI, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Son of Henry V; Count Palatine of the Rhine (1213-1214)

### Holy Roman Emperor

- Otto IV, Son of Henry the Lion; Holy Roman Emperor (1198-1215)

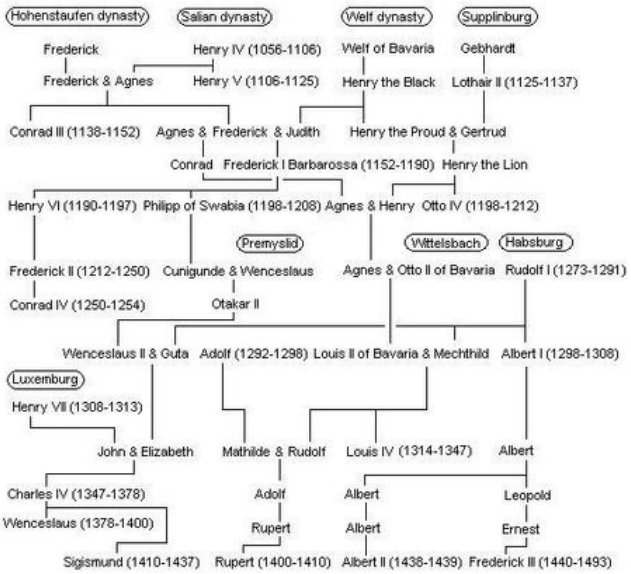
### Dukes of Brunswick-Lüneburg

- Otto I, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, Grandson of Henry the Lion; Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1235–1252)
- Albert I, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, Son of Otto I; Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1252–1269); Ancestor of the House of Hanover
- John, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, Son of Otto I; Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1252–1269)

## See also

- Kings of Germany family tree.

### Welf family tree 12th century




## External links

- Die Welfen. Official site (in German) (http://www.welfen.de/)
- Succession laws in the House of Welf (http://www.heraldica.org/topics/royalty/HGBraunschweig.htm)

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