

William Pitt the Younger

William Pitt the Younger (28 May 1759 – 23 January 1806) was a prominent British **Tory** statesman of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He became the youngest **Prime Minister** in 1783 at the age of 24. He left office in 1801, but was Prime Minister again from 1804 until his death in 1806. He was **Chancellor of the Exchequer** for most of his time as Prime Minister. He is known as "the Younger" to distinguish him from his father, **William Pitt the Elder**, who had previously served as Prime Minister.

The younger Pitt's prime ministerial tenure, which came during the reign of **George III**, was dominated by major events in Europe, including the **French Revolution** and the **Napoleonic Wars**. Pitt, although often referred to as a **Tory**, or "new Tory", called himself an "independent **Whig**" and was generally opposed to the development of a strict partisan political system. He led Britain in the great wars against **France** and **Napoleon**. Pitt was an outstanding administrator who worked for efficiency and reform, bringing in a new generation of outstanding administrators. He raised taxes to pay for the great war against France and cracked down on radicalism. To meet the threat of Irish support for France, he engineered the **Acts of Union 1800** and tried (but failed) to get **Catholic Emancipation** as part of the Union. He created the "new Toryism", which revived the Tory Party and enabled it to stay in power for the next quarter-century.

The historian **Asa Briggs** argues that his personality did not endear itself to the British mind, for Pitt was too solitary, too colourless, and too often exuded superiority. His greatness came in the war with France. Pitt reacted to become what **Lord Minto** called "the Atlas of our reeling globe". His integrity and industry and his role as defender of the threatened nation allowed him to inspire and access all the national reserves of strength. **William Wilberforce** said that, "For personal purity, disinterestedness and love of this country, I have never known his equal."^[1] Historian Charles Petrie concludes that he was one of the greatest prime ministers "if on no other ground than that he enabled the country to pass from the old order to the new without any violent upheaval... He understood the new Britain."^[2] For this he is **ranked highly amongst British Prime Ministers**.

Early life^[edit]

The Honourable William Pitt, second son of **William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham**, was born at Hayes Place in the village of **Hayes, Kent**.^[3] Pitt was from a political family on both sides. His mother, Hester Grenville, was sister to former prime minister **George Grenville**.^[4] According to biographer **John Ehrman**, Pitt inherited brilliance and dynamism from his father's line, and a determined, methodical nature from the Grenvilles.^[5]

Suffering from occasional poor health as a boy, he was educated at home by the Reverend Edward Wilson. An intelligent child, Pitt quickly became proficient in **Latin** and **Greek**. In 1773, aged fourteen, he attended **Pembroke College, Cambridge**,^[6] where he studied political philosophy, **classics**, mathematics, trigonometry, chemistry and history.^[7] At Cambridge, Pitt was tutored by **George Pretyman**, who became a close personal friend. Pitt later appointed Pretyman **Bishop of Lincoln** then **Winchester** and drew upon his advice throughout his political career.^[8] While at Cambridge, he befriended the young **William Wilberforce**, who became a lifelong friend and political ally in Parliament.^[9] Pitt tended to socialise only with fellow students and others already known to him, rarely venturing outside the university grounds. Yet he was described as charming and friendly. According to Wilberforce, Pitt had an exceptional wit along with an endearingly gentle sense of humour: "no man ... ever indulged more freely or happily in that playful facetiousness which gratifies all without wounding any."^[10] In 1776, Pitt, plagued by poor health, took advantage of a little-used privilege available only to the sons of noblemen, and chose to graduate without having to pass examinations. Pitt's father, who had by then been raised to the peerage as Earl of Chatham, died in 1778. As a younger son, Pitt the Younger received a small inheritance. He received legal education at **Lincoln's Inn** and was **called to the bar** in the summer of 1780.^[11]

Early political career^[edit]

During the general elections of September 1780, Pitt contested the **University of Cambridge seat**, but lost.^[12] Still intent on entering Parliament, Pitt, with the help of his university comrade, **Charles Manners, 4th Duke of Rutland**, secured the patronage of **James Lowther**. Lowther effectively controlled the **pocket borough** of **Appleby**; a by-election in that constituency sent Pitt to the **House of Commons** in

January 1781.^[13] Pitt's entry into parliament is somewhat ironic as he later railed against the very same pocket and [rotten boroughs](#) that had given him his seat.^[14]

In Parliament, the youthful Pitt cast aside his tendency to be withdrawn in public, emerging as a noted debater right from his [maiden speech](#).^[15] Pitt originally aligned himself with prominent [Whigs](#) such as [Charles James Fox](#). With the Whigs, Pitt denounced the continuation of the [American War of Independence](#), as his father strongly had. Instead he proposed that the prime minister, [Lord North](#), make peace with the rebellious American colonies. Pitt also supported parliamentary reform measures, including a proposal that would have checked electoral corruption. He renewed his friendship with William Wilberforce, now MP for [Hull](#), with whom he frequently met in the gallery of the House of Commons.^[16]

After Lord North's ministry collapsed in 1782, the Whig [Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd Marquess of Rockingham](#) was appointed prime minister. Pitt was offered the minor post of vice-treasurer of Ireland, but he refused, considering the post overly subordinate. Lord Rockingham died only three months after coming to power; he was succeeded by another Whig, [William Petty, 2nd Earl of Shelburne](#). Many Whigs who had formed a part of the Rockingham ministry, including Fox, now refused to serve under Lord Shelburne, the new prime minister. Pitt, however, was comfortable with Shelburne, and thus joined his government; he was appointed [Chancellor of the Exchequer](#).^[17]

Fox, who became Pitt's lifelong political rival, then joined a coalition with Lord North, with whom he collaborated to bring about the defeat of the Shelburne administration. When Lord Shelburne resigned in 1783, [King George III](#), who despised Fox, offered to appoint Pitt to the office of prime minister. But Pitt wisely declined, for he knew he would be incapable of securing the support of the [House of Commons](#). The [Fox-North Coalition](#) rose to power in a government nominally headed by [William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland](#).^[18]

Pitt, who had been stripped of his post as Chancellor of the Exchequer, joined the Opposition. He raised the issue of parliamentary reform in order to strain the uneasy Fox-North coalition, which included both supporters and detractors of reform. He did not advocate an expansion of the electoral franchise, but he did seek to address bribery and rotten boroughs. Though his proposal failed, many reformers in Parliament came to regard him as their leader, instead of Charles James Fox.

Impact of the War of American Independence^[edit]

Losing the war and the thirteen colonies was a shock to the British system. The war revealed the limitations of Britain's [fiscal-military state](#) when it had powerful enemies, no allies, depended on extended and vulnerable transatlantic lines of communication, and was faced for the first time since the 17th century by both Protestant and Catholic foes. The defeat heightened dissension and escalated political antagonism to the King's ministers. Inside parliament, the primary concern changed from fears of an over-mighty monarch to the issues of representation, parliamentary reform, and government retrenchment. Reformers sought to destroy what they saw as widespread institutional corruption. The result was a crisis from 1776–1783. The peace in 1783 left France financially prostrate, while the British economy boomed due to the return of American business. That crisis ended in 1784 as a result of the King's shrewdness in outwitting Fox and renewed confidence in the system engendered by the leadership of Pitt. Historians conclude that the loss of the American colonies enabled Britain to deal with the [French Revolution](#) with more unity and organisation than would otherwise have been the case.^[19]

Rise to power^[edit]

The Fox-North Coalition fell in December 1783, after Fox had introduced [Edmund Burke](#)'s bill to reform the [East India Company](#) to gain the patronage he so greatly lacked while the King refused to support him. Fox stated the bill was necessary to save the company from bankruptcy. Pitt responded that: "Necessity was the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It was the argument of tyrants; it was the creed of slaves."^[20] The King was opposed to the bill; when it passed in the House of Commons, he secured its defeat in the [House of Lords](#) by threatening to regard anyone who voted for it as his enemy. Following the bill's failure in the Upper House, George III dismissed the coalition government and finally entrusted the premiership to William Pitt, after having offered the position to him three times previously.^[21]

A constitutional crisis arose when the King dismissed the Fox-North coalition government and named Pitt to replace it. Though faced with a hostile majority in Parliament, Pitt was able to solidify his position

in a few months' time. Some historians argue that his success was inevitable given the decisive importance of monarchical power; others argue that the King gambled on Pitt and that both would have failed but for a run of good fortune.^[22]

Pitt, at the age of 24, became Great Britain's youngest Prime Minister ever. The contemporary satire *The Rolliad* ridiculed him for his youth:^[23]

Above the rest, majestically great,
Behold the infant Atlas of the state,
The matchless miracle of modern days,
In whom Britannia to the world displays
A sight to make surrounding nations stare;
A kingdom trusted to a school-boy's care.

Many saw Pitt as a stop-gap appointment until some more senior statesman took on the role. However, although it was widely predicted that the new "mince-pie administration" would not last out the Christmas season,^[24] it survived for seventeen years.^[25]

So as to reduce the power of the Opposition, Pitt offered Charles James Fox and his allies posts in the Cabinet; Pitt's refusal to include Lord North, however, thwarted his efforts. The new Government was immediately on the defensive and in January 1784 was defeated on a [motion of no confidence](#). Pitt, however, took the unprecedented step of refusing to resign, despite this defeat. He retained the support of the King, who would not entrust the reins of power to the Fox-North Coalition. He also received the support of the House of Lords, which passed supportive motions, and many messages of support from the country at large, in the form of petitions approving of his appointment which influenced some [Members](#) to switch their support to Pitt. At the same time, he was granted the Freedom of the [City of London](#). When he returned from the ceremony to mark this, men of the City pulled Pitt's coach home themselves, as a sign of respect. When passing a Whig club, the coach came under attack from a group of men who tried to assault Pitt. When news of this spread, it was assumed Fox and his associates had tried to bring down Pitt by any means.^[26]

Pitt gained great popularity with the public at large as "Honest Billy" who was seen as a refreshing change from the dishonesty, corruption and lack of principles widely associated with both Fox and North. Despite a series of defeats in the House of Commons, Pitt defiantly remained in office, watching the Coalition's majority shrink as some Members of Parliament left the Opposition to abstain.^[26]

In March 1784, Parliament was dissolved, and a [general election](#) ensued. An electoral defeat for the Government was out of the question because Pitt enjoyed the support of [King George III](#). [Patronage](#) and bribes paid by the Treasury were normally expected to be enough to secure the Government a comfortable majority in the House of Commons but on this occasion the government reaped much popular support as well.^[27] In most popular constituencies, the election was fought between candidates clearly representing either Pitt or Fox and North. Early returns showed a massive swing to Pitt with the result that many Opposition Members who still had not faced election either defected, stood down, or made deals with their opponents to avoid expensive defeats.^[28]

A notable exception came in Fox's own constituency of [Westminster](#) which contained one of the largest electorates in the country. In a contest estimated to have cost a quarter of the total spending in the entire country, Fox bitterly fought against two [Pittite](#) candidates to secure one of the two seats for the constituency. Great legal wranglings ensued, including the examination of every single vote cast, which dragged on for more than a year. Meanwhile, Fox sat for the pocket borough of [Tain Burghs](#). Many saw the dragging out of the result as being unduly vindictive on the part of Pitt and eventually the examinations were abandoned with Fox declared elected. Elsewhere Pitt won a personal triumph when he was elected a [Member for the University of Cambridge](#), a constituency he had long coveted and which he would continue to represent for the remainder of his life.^[28]

First premiership[\[edit\]](#)

Further information: [First Pitt ministry](#)

India[\[edit\]](#)

His administration secure, Pitt could begin to enact his agenda. His first major piece of legislation as Prime Minister was the [India Act 1784](#), which re-organised the British East India Company and kept a

watch over corruption. The India Act created a new Board of Control to oversee the affairs of the East India Company. It differed from Fox's failed [India Bill 1783](#) and specified that the Board would be appointed by the King.^[29] Pitt was appointed, along with [Lord Sydney](#) who was appointed [President](#).^[29] The Act centralised British rule in India by reducing the power of the Governors of [Bombay](#) and [Madras](#) and by increasing that of the [Governor-General](#), [Charles Cornwallis](#). Further augmentations and clarifications of the Governor-General's authority were made in 1786, presumably by Lord Sydney, and presumably as a result of the Company's setting up of [Penang](#) with their own Superintendent (Governor), Captain [Francis Light](#), in 1786.

Parliamentary reform^[edit]

In domestic politics, Pitt also concerned himself with the cause of [parliamentary reform](#). In 1785, he introduced a bill to remove the representation of thirty-six rotten boroughs, and to extend in a small way, the electoral franchise to more individuals.^[30] Pitt's support for the bill, however, was not strong enough to prevent its defeat in the House of Commons.^[31] The bill introduced in 1785 was Pitt's last parliamentary reform proposal introduced in Parliament.

Finances^[edit]



In *A new way to pay the National Debt* (1786), [James Gillray](#) caricatured [Queen Charlotte](#) and George III awash with treasury funds to cover royal debts, with Pitt handing them another moneybag.

Another important domestic issue with which Pitt had to concern himself was the national debt, which had doubled to £243 million during the American war. Every year a third of the budget of £24 million went to pay interest. Pitt sought to reduce the national debt by imposing new taxes. In 1786, he instituted a [sinking fund](#) so that £1,000,000 a year was added to a fund so that it could accumulate interest; eventually, the money in the fund was to be used to pay off the national debt. By 1792 the debt had fallen to £170 million.^[32]

Pitt always paid careful attention to financial issues. A fifth of Britain's imports were smuggled in without paying taxes. He made it easier for honest merchants to import goods. By lowering tariffs on easily smuggled items such as tea, wine, spirits and tobacco, he grew the customs revenue by nearly £2 million.^{[33][34]}

Foreign affairs^[edit]

Pitt sought European alliances to restrict French influence, forming the [Triple Alliance](#) with [Prussia](#) and [Holland](#) in 1788.^[35] During the [Nootka Sound Controversy](#) in 1790, Pitt took advantage of the alliance to force Spain to give up its claim to exclusive control over the western coast of North and South America. The Alliance, however, failed to produce any other important benefits for Great Britain.^[36]

The King's condition^[edit]

In 1788, Pitt faced a major crisis when the King fell victim to a mysterious illness,^[37] a form of mental disorder that incapacitated him. If the sovereign was incapable of fulfilling his constitutional duties, Parliament would need to appoint a regent to rule in his place. All factions agreed the only viable candidate was the King's eldest son, [Prince George, Prince of Wales](#). The Prince, however, was a supporter of Charles James Fox; had he come to power, he would almost surely have dismissed Pitt. However, he did not have such an opportunity, as Parliament spent months debating legal technicalities

relating to the regency. Fortunately for Pitt, the King recovered in February 1789, just after a [Regency Bill](#) had been introduced and passed in the House of Commons.^[38]

The general elections of 1790 resulted in a majority for the government, and Pitt continued as Prime Minister. In 1791, he proceeded to address one of the problems facing the growing [British Empire](#): the future of British [Canada](#). By the [Constitutional Act of 1791](#), the province of [Quebec](#) was divided into two separate provinces: the predominantly French [Lower Canada](#) and the predominantly English [Upper Canada](#). In August 1792, coincident with [the capture of Louis XVI by the French revolutionaries](#), George III appointed Pitt as [Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports](#), a position whose incumbent was responsible for the coastal defences of the realm.^[39] The King had in 1791 offered him a [Knighthood of the Garter](#), but he suggested the honour go to his [elder brother](#), the second Earl of Chatham.^[39]

French Revolution[[edit](#)]

Main article: [French Revolutionary Wars](#)



Pitt (standing centre) addressing the Commons on the outbreak of the war with France (1793); painting by [Anton Hickel](#)

An early favourable response to the French Revolution encouraged many in Great Britain to reopen the issue of parliamentary reform, which had been dormant since Pitt's reform bill was defeated in 1785. The reformers, however, were quickly labelled as radicals and as associates of the French revolutionaries. Subsequently, in 1794 Pitt's administration [tried three of them for treason](#) but lost. Parliament began to enact repressive legislation in order to silence the reformers. Individuals who published [seditious](#) material were punished, and, in 1794, the writ of [habeas corpus](#) was suspended. Other repressive measures included the Seditious Meetings Act (which restricted the right of individuals to assemble publicly) and the [Combination Acts](#) (which restricted the formation of societies or organisations that favoured political reforms). Problems manning the [Royal Navy](#) also led to Pitt to introduce the [Quota System](#) in 1795 in addition to the existing system of [Impressment](#).^[40]



William Pitt

The war with France was extremely expensive, straining Great Britain's finances. Unlike the latter stages of the [Napoleonic Wars](#), at this point Britain had only a very small standing army, and thus contributed to the war effort mainly by sea power and by supplying funds to other coalition members facing France.

In 1793, Pitt decided to take advantage of a slave revolt in the French colony of St. Domingue (modern Haiti) to seize the richest French colony in the world, believing this would strike a great blow at France while bringing St. Domingue into the British Empire and ensuring the slaves in the British West Indies would not be inspired to likewise revolt.^[41] The British landed in St. Domingue on 20 September 1793, stating they had come to protect the white population from the blacks, and were able to seize some coastal enclaves.^[42] The heavy death toll caused by yellow fever made conquering St. Domingue impossible, but an undeterred Pitt launched what he called the "great push" in 1795, sending out the largest British expedition yet mounted to conquer St. Domingue.^[43] As the British death toll caused by yellow fever continued to climb, Pitt was criticised in the House of Commons with several MPs suggesting it might be better to abandon the expedition, but Pitt insisted that Britain had given its word of honor that it would protect the French planters from their slaves, and the expedition to St. Domingue could not be abandoned.^[44] The British attempt to conquer St. Domingue between 1793-98 ended in disaster with the British pulling out on 31 August 1798 after having spent 4 million pounds (a sum roughly equal to about £224,120,000.00 in today's money) and having lost about 100,000 dead or men crippled for life over the preceding five years, achieving nothing.^[45] The British historian Sir [John William Fortescue](#) wrote Pitt and his cabinet had tried to destroy French power "in these pestilent islands...only to discover, when it was too late, that they practically destroyed the British army."^[46] Fortescue concluded that Pitt's attempt to add St. Domingue to the British empire had killed off most of the British army, cost the British treasury a fortune and weakened British influence in Europe, making British power "fettered, numbered and paralyzed", all for nothing.^[47]

In 1797, Pitt was forced to protect the kingdom's gold reserves by preventing individuals from exchanging banknotes for gold. Great Britain would continue to use paper money for over two decades. Pitt was also forced to introduce Great Britain's first ever [income tax](#). The new tax helped offset losses in indirect tax revenue, which had been caused by a decline in trade. Despite the efforts of Pitt and the British allies, the French continued to defeat the members of the First Coalition, which collapsed in 1798. A [Second Coalition](#), consisting of Great Britain, [Austria](#), [Russia](#), and the [Ottoman Empire](#), was formed, but it, too, failed to overcome the French. The fall of the Second Coalition with the defeat of the Austrians at the [Marengo](#) (14 June 1800) and at the [Battle of Hohenlinden](#) (3 December 1800) left Great Britain facing France alone.

Resignation^[edit]

The French Revolution revived religious and political problems in [Ireland](#), a realm under the rule of the King of Great Britain. In 1798, Irish nationalists attempted a [rebellion](#), believing that the French would help them overthrow the monarchy.^[48] Pitt firmly believed that the only solution to the problem was a

union of Great Britain and Ireland. Following the defeat of the rebellion which was assisted by France, he advanced this policy. The union was established by the [Acts of Union 1800](#); compensation and [patronage](#) ensured the support of the Irish Parliament. Great Britain and Ireland were formally united into a single realm, the [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland](#), on 1 January 1801.



Gillray caricatured Pitt's resignation in *Integrity retiring from Office!* (1801).

Pitt sought to inaugurate the new kingdom by granting concessions to [Roman Catholics](#), who formed a majority in Ireland, by abolishing various political restrictions under which they suffered. George III, however, did not share the same view. The King was strongly opposed to [Catholic Emancipation](#); he argued that to grant additional liberty would violate his coronation oath, in which he had promised to protect the established [Church of England](#). Pitt, unable to change the King's strong views, resigned on 16 February 1801,^[49] so as to allow [Henry Addington](#), his political friend, to form a new administration. At about the same time, however, the King suffered a renewed bout of madness; thus, Addington could not receive his formal appointment. Though he had resigned, Pitt temporarily continued to discharge his duties; on 18 February 1801, he brought forward the annual [budget](#). Power was transferred from Pitt to Addington on 14 March, when the King recovered.^[50]

Pitt supported the new administration, but with little enthusiasm; he frequently absented himself from Parliament, preferring to remain in his [Lord Warden's](#) residence of [Walmer Castle](#) – before 1802 usually spending an annual late-summer holiday there, and later often present from the spring until the autumn.



In *Britannia between Death and the Doctor's* (1804), Gillray caricatured Pitt as a doctor kicking Addington (the previous doctor) out of Britannia's sickroom.

From the castle, he helped organise a local [Volunteer Corps](#) in anticipation of a French invasion, acted as [colonel](#) of a [battalion](#) raised by [Trinity House](#) – he was also a Master of Trinity House – and encouraged the construction of [Martello towers](#) and the [Royal Military Canal](#) in [Romney Marsh](#). He rented land abutting the Castle to farm, and on which to lay out trees and walks. His niece [Lady Hester Stanhope](#) designed and managed the gardens and acted as his hostess.

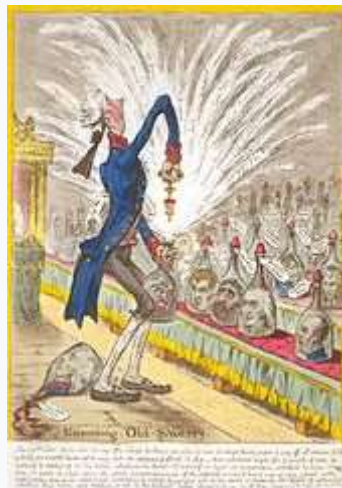
After France had forced peace and recognition of the [French Republic](#) from the [Russian Empire](#) in 1799 and from the [Holy Roman Emperor](#) (Austria) in 1801, the [Treaty of Amiens](#) between France and Britain marked the end of the [French Revolutionary Wars](#). By 1803, however, war had broken out again between Britain and the new [First French Empire](#) under [Napoleon](#). Although Addington had previously invited him to join the Cabinet, Pitt preferred to join the Opposition, becoming increasingly critical of the government's policies. Addington, unable to face the combined opposition of Pitt and Fox, saw his majority gradually evaporate. By the end of April 1804, Addington, who had lost his parliamentary support, had decided to resign.^[51]

Second premiership[[edit](#)]

Further information: [Second Pitt ministry](#)



Younger Pitt



In *Uncorking Old Sherry*(1805), Gillray caricatured Pitt uncorking a bottle of [Sheridan](#)that is bursting out with puns and invective.

Pitt returned to the premiership on 10 May 1804. He had originally planned to form a broad coalition government, but faced the opposition of George III to the inclusion of Fox. Moreover, many of Pitt's former supporters, including the allies of Addington, joined the Opposition. Thus, Pitt's second ministry was considerably weaker than his first four.^[52]

The British Government began placing pressure on the French Emperor, [Napoleon I](#). Thanks to Pitt's efforts, Britain joined the [Third Coalition](#), an alliance that also involved Austria, Russia, and [Sweden](#). In October 1805, the British Admiral, [Horatio Nelson, 1st Viscount Nelson](#), won a crushing victory in the [Battle of Trafalgar](#), ensuring British naval supremacy for the remainder of the war. At the annual Lord Mayor's Banquet toasting him as "the Saviour of Europe", Pitt responded In a few words that became the most famous speech of his life:

I return you many thanks for the honour you have done me; but Europe is not to be saved by any single man. England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example.^[53]

Nevertheless, the Coalition collapsed, having suffered significant defeats at the [Battle of Ulm](#) (October 1805) and the [Battle of Austerlitz](#) (December 1805). After hearing the news of

Austerlitz Pitt referred to a map of Europe, "Roll up that map; it will not be wanted these ten years."^[54]

Finances^[edit]

Pitt was an expert in finance and served as Chancellor of the Exchequer.^[55] Critical to his success in confronting Napoleon was using Britain's superior economic resources. He was able to mobilize the nation's industrial and financial resources and apply them to defeating France. With a population of 16 million, Britain was barely half the size of France, which had a population of 30 million. In terms of soldiers, however, the French numerical advantage was offset by British subsidies that paid for a large proportion of the Austrian and Russian soldiers, peaking at about 450,000 in 1813.^[56]

Most important, the British national output remained strong and the well-organized business sector channeled products into what the military needed. Britain used its economic power to expand the Royal Navy, doubling the number of frigates and increasing the number of large ships of the line by 50%, while increasing the roster of sailors from 15,000 to 133,000 in eight years after the war began in 1793. France, meanwhile, saw its navy shrink by more than half.^[57] The system of smuggling finished products into the continent undermined French efforts to ruin the British economy by cutting off markets. By 1814, the budget that Pitt in his last years had largely shaped, had expanded to £66 million, including £10 million for the Navy, £40 million for the Army, £10 million for the Allies, and £38 million as interest on the national debt. The national debt soared to £679 million, more than **double the GDP**. It was willingly supported by hundreds of thousands of investors and tax payers, despite the higher taxes on land and a new income tax.^[58] The whole cost of the war came to £831 million. By contrast the French financial system was inadequate and Napoleon's forces had to rely in part on requisitions from conquered lands.^{[59][60][61]}

Death^[edit]

The setbacks took a toll on Pitt's health. He had long suffered from poor health, beginning in childhood, and was plagued with **gout** and "biliousness" worsened by a fondness for **port** that began when he was advised to drink the wine to deal with his chronic ill-health.^[62] On 23 January 1806, Pitt died at Bowling Green House on **Putney Heath**, probably from **peptic ulceration** of his stomach or **duodenum**; he was unmarried and left no children.^{[63][64]}

Pitt's debts amounted to £40,000 when he died, but Parliament agreed to pay them on his behalf.^{[65][66]} A motion was made to honour him with a public funeral and a monument; it passed despite the opposition of Fox.^[65] Pitt's body was buried in **Westminster Abbey** on 22 February, having lain in state for two days in the **Palace of Westminster**.^[67] Pitt was succeeded as Prime Minister by his first cousin **William Grenville, 1st Baron Grenville**, who headed the **Ministry of All the Talents**, a coalition which included Charles James Fox.^[68]

Personal life^[edit]

Of his social relationships, biographer **William Hague** writes:

Pitt was happiest among his Cambridge companions or family. He had no social ambitions, and it was rare for him to set out to make a friend. The talented collaborators of his first 18 months in office—Beresford, Wyvil and Twining—passed in and out of his mind along with their areas of expertise. Pitt's lack of interest in enlarging his social circle meant that it did not grow to encompass any women outside his own family, a fact that produced a good deal of rumour. From late 1784, a series of satirical verses appeared in *The Morning Herald* drawing attention to Pitt's lack of knowledge of women: "Tis true, indeed, we oft abuse him,/Because he bends to no man;/But slander's self dares not accuse him/Of stiffness to a woman." Others made snide references to Pitt's friendship with **Tom Steele**, Secretary to the Treasury. At the height of the constitutional crisis in 1784, Sheridan had compared Pitt to **James I's** favourite, the **Duke of Buckingham**, a clear reference to homosexuality. Socially, Pitt preferred the company of young men, and would continue to do so into his thirties and forties. It may be that Pitt had homosexual leanings but suppressed any urge to act on them for the sake of his ambitions. He could be charming to women, but it seems certain that he rejected intimacy whenever it was proffered – and would do so publicly at a later date. In practical terms it appears that Pitt was essentially **asexual** throughout his life, perhaps one example of how his rapid development as a politician stunted his growth as a man.^[69]

At one point rumours emerged of an intended marriage to [Eleanor Eden](#), to whom Pitt had grown close. Pitt broke off the potential marriage in 1797, writing to her father, [Lord Auckland](#), "I am compelled to say that I find the obstacles to it decisive and insurmountable".^[69]

Pitt became known as a "three-bottle man" in reference to his heavy consumption of [port wine](#). These bottles would be around 350ml in volume.^[69]

Legacy^[edit]



[Marble bust](#) of William Pitt by [Joseph Nollekens](#), 1807. [Yale Center for British Art](#)

William Pitt the Younger was a powerful prime minister who consolidated the powers of his office. Though he was sometimes opposed by members of his Cabinet, he helped define the role of the Prime Minister as the supervisor and co-ordinator of the various Government departments. After his death the conservatives embraced him as a great patriotic hero.^[70]

One of Pitt's most important accomplishments was a rehabilitation of the nation's finances after the American War of Independence.^[citation needed] Pitt helped manage^[how?] the mounting national debt, and made changes to the tax system in order to improve its capture of revenue.^[citation needed]

Some of Pitt's other domestic plans were not as successful; he failed to secure parliamentary reform, emancipation, or the abolition of the slave trade, although this last did take place with the [Slave Trade Act 1807](#) the year after his death. Biographer [William Hague](#) considers the unfinished abolition of the slave trade to be Pitt's greatest failure.^[71] He notes that by the end of Pitt's career, conditions were in place which would have allowed a skillful attempt to pass an abolition bill to succeed, in part due to the long campaigning Pitt had encouraged with his friend [William Wilberforce](#). Hague goes on to note that the failure was likely due to Pitt being a "spent force" by the time favourable conditions had arisen. In Hague's opinion, Pitt's long premiership, "tested the natural limits of how long it is possible to be at the top. From 1783 to 1792 he faced each fresh challenge with brilliance; from 1793 he showed determination but sometimes faltered; and from 1804 he was worn down by... the combination of a narrow majority and war".^[72]



Statue in [George Street, Edinburgh](#)

Historian Marie Peters has compared his strengths and weaknesses with his father:

Having some of his father's volatility and much of the self-confidence bordering on arrogance, the younger Pitt inherited superb and carefully nurtured oratorical gifts. These gave him, like his father, unsurpassed command of the Commons and power to embody the national will in wartime. There were, however, significant differences. The younger Pitt's eloquence, unlike his father's, included the force of sustained reasoned exposition. This was perhaps in part expression of his thoroughly professional approach to politics, so unlike his father's, but possibly deriving something from Shelburne. The younger Pitt was continuously engaged in depth with major issues of his day. He regularly and energetically sought the best information. He was genuinely progressive, as his father was not, on parliamentary reform, Catholic emancipation, commercial policy, and administrative reform. His constructive capacity in his chief responsibility, financial policy and administration, far surpassed his father's record, if it was less impressive and perhaps more equally matched in foreign and imperial policy and strategy. With good reason, his long career in high office was the mirror image of his father's short tenure. In contrast, only briefly was Chatham able to rise to the challenge of his age. By his last decade time had passed him by.^[73]

Commentary on Pitt[\[edit\]](#)

[Sir George Nicholls](#) and [Thomas Mackay](#) write in *A History of the English Poor Law* (1899):

Mr. Pitt introduced a Poor Law Bill in 1796 which, it is not too much to say, contained some of the most ill-considered and mischievous proposals that were ever submitted to parliament. It is now chiefly remembered by having called forth from [Bentham](#) the scathing criticism of his "Observations on the Poor Law Bill February 1797."

[Kirby Page](#) writes in *Jesus or Christianity* (1929):

In his famous Poor Law Bill, the proposal was made by Pitt that children should be set to work at the age of five. Children of six and seven were employed on a widespread scale, and their hours were incredibly long. Twelve to fifteen-hour schedules were common.