

The English Civil War

The conflict between monarchy and Parliament had its origins in Charles I's belief in the Divine Right of Kings. The English Civil War was really three wars fought between Parliamentarians and royalists in 1642–46, 1648–49, and 1649–51.

On August 22, 1642, Charles I raised his battle standard at Nottingham, signaling the start of a civil war that split England down the middle, pitting brother against brother and father against son. By the time it was over, around 10 percent of Britain's population was dead.

This war was not just the product of a quarrel between Parliament and the king. Religion also played a key role, as for many Parliamentarians, Catholicism and tyranny were inseparable. In 1640 Charles had recalled Parliament in order to raise money to quell a revolt in Calvinist (see pp.258–59) Scotland against his clumsy attempts to impose “popish” reforms, such as the Anglican prayer-book, upon them. However, instead of granting him cash, they countered with their own catalog of recriminations, fueled by 11 years of grievances. He was forced to dismantle the institutions of absolute rule



Statue of Charles I

The reign of Charles I was characterized by religious conflict. Combining charm with stubbornness, his absolutist tendencies, (see p.279) put him on a collision course with Parliament.

and lost his right to dissolve Parliament. Rumors of his complicity in an Irish rebellion against Protestant English rule increased the tension. When news reached Charles that Parliament intended to impeach (charge with improper conduct) his Catholic queen, Henrietta Maria, he took drastic action. In January 1642, he entered the House of Commons with an armed force, intending to arrest five leading radical MPs for high treason. Forewarned, they took refuge in the City of London, which considered Charles's actions an outrage. Fearing for his safety, Charles went north to raise an army, while his queen went abroad to raise funds to pay for it.

The years of conflict

While the king commanded the loyalty of Wales, the west, and the north, Parliament controlled London, the east, and the south. The initial battles were inconclusive—a draw at Edgehill was followed by victories for the royalists, or Cavaliers, at Landsdown and Adwalton Moor in 1643, and for the Parliamentarians, or Roundheads, at Turnham Green and Newbury. Numerical supremacy and Scottish involvement led to Roundhead victories at Marston Moor in 1644, and at Naseby and Langport in 1645.

“God has brought us to where we are...”

OLIVER CROMWELL, ADDRESSING THE ARMY COUNCIL, 1654

The conspirators meet and Lady d'Aubigny (left) shows them Charles's Commission of Array (a royal commission summoning his officers to war)—to be proclaimed once Charles sends word of his advance.

The conspirators intend to seize the Tower of London and secure the forts, while Royalist forces from Oxford meet up with the advancing Cornish forces under Sir Ralph Hopton.



The Guildhall is the planned storehouse for the conspirators' magazine (arms and gunpowder).

With suspicions aroused, the Commons orders the detention of the King's emissary Alexander Hampden on May 22. On May 31, they order the arrest of the suspected conspirators on the evidence of a spy.

BEFORE

Since the 13th century, the English monarch had needed Parliament's approval to raise taxes; its increasing interference infuriated the Stuart kings.

THE TUDOR REFORMATION

When the pope refused Henry VIII a divorce from his first wife, Henry rejected the pope's authority and declared himself head of the Church of England in 1534. The Reformation << 256–59 that followed was consolidated during Elizabeth I's << 260–61 reign by legislation making Protestantism England's national religion. Since she was childless, she was succeeded in 1603 by her Stuart cousin, James VI of Scotland.

KING JAMES I

James's belief in the Divine Right of Kings (that the king was god's representative on Earth with unlimited authority) antagonized Parliament. He quarreled with them over taxes and religious laws.

KING CHARLES I

Relations between James's son Charles I and Parliament disintegrated further, exacerbated by his anti-Puritan << 259 policies. By 1629, he had dismissed Parliament three times, governing alone during the "Eleven Years Tyranny" (1629–40). He enforced royal authority through the Courts instead and raised money by selling titles.

Parliamentarian uniform

The New Model Army, formed in 1645 by Parliament, was England's first professional army. The foot regiments, comprised of pikemen and musketeers, were provided with the distinctive red tunic shown here.

red coat was the only uniform item officially issued to the New Model Army

soldiers were often issued swords, also called tucks

woolen breeches



colored bow, which was used to fasten breeches

Foiled royalist plot

This propaganda print was probably intended for popular consumption. It is a graphic account of the "Malignants' plot" against Parliament that was unearthed on May 31, 1643.



The plan is to arrest the leading parliamentarians, including their (Puritan) leader John Pym, along with two members of the House of Lords.

The conspirators are hanged at the Tyburn gallows. Responding to the Covenant, the King issues a proclamation making all who support it guilty of treason. The die is cast.

After the fall of Oxford in 1646, Charles's surrender to the Scots at Newark marked the end of the first civil war.

Parliament's supporters now split into those who wanted to share power with the king, and a more radical group, supported by the army generals, that wanted a republic. Despite his confinement, Charles continued to bargain with various parties, finally making a deal with the Scots to adopt Presbyterianism (their system of church government) in England in return for their support. The royalists rose again in July 1648 and the Scots invaded England. The New Model Army (see caption, left) easily suppressed these uprisings before crushing the Scots at Preston. They then marched on Parliament and dismissed most of its members. The 58 who remained—known as the Rump Parliament—were ordered to set up a High Court to try the king for treason. Charles I was found guilty and beheaded on January 30, 1649. This was truly revolutionary; monarchs had been deposed or killed before, but never legally executed. Parliament now abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords, declaring England a republic or "Commonwealth."

The Lord Protector

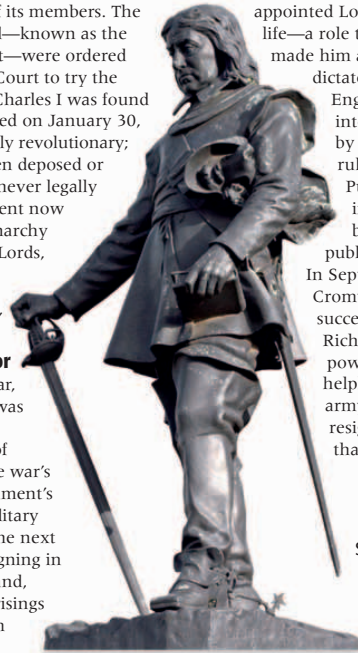
Before the civil war, Oliver Cromwell was a landowner and Puritan Member of Parliament. By the war's end, he was Parliament's most powerful military leader. He spent the next two years campaigning in Scotland and Ireland, crushing local uprisings and bringing them



Charles I's death warrant

On January 29, 1649, Charles I was found guilty of being a traitor. His death warrant, shown here, is endorsed by many signatures, including that of Oliver Cromwell.

firmly under English control. His defeat of a Scottish army loyal to Charles I's son (later Charles II) at Worcester in 1651 finally brought an end to the civil war. In 1653, Cromwell dismissed the Rump Parliament, unhappy at its failure to pass any reforms. After being appointed Lord Protector for life—a role that effectively made him a military dictator—he divided England and Wales into 10 districts ruled by army generals. His rule, based on strict Puritan principles, included the banning of most public entertainments. In September 1658, Cromwell died and was succeeded by his son Richard. With no power base, he was helpless against the army generals and resigned after less than a year.



Statue of Cromwell
A devout military leader and shrewd politician, Oliver Cromwell became king in all but name.

AFTER

In 1660 the monarchy was reinstated to restore national unity. A second revolution to restore Protestantism was followed by a Bill of Rights (1689) that marked the start of a more limited, constitutional monarchy.

THE RESTORATION

After Cromwell's death, the throne was offered to Charles II on the condition that he supported religious toleration and pardoned those who had fought his father. Puritan rules were swiftly dropped—theaters and music halls reopened, and public festivals, such as Christmas, were restored. Nell Gwyn, a former orange-seller turned actress, became one of the king's most popular mistresses.



NELL GWYN

THOMAS HOBBS

Hobbes, one of England's most influential political thinkers, lived through the bloodshed of the civil war. His book *Leviathan*, published in 1651, advocates strong government at the expense of personal freedom, arguing that humankind's natural state is one of unending conflict.

THE "GLORIOUS REVOLUTION"

The openly Catholic James II, who succeeded Charles II in 1685, alienated his subjects by placing religion above politics. His advisers secretly invited the Dutch Protestant prince, William of Orange, to take over the throne in 1688.

In response to John Pym's report on the royal plot, the Commons accepts the imposition of a vow of support for Parliament known as "the Covenant," which is sent around the country as a test of loyalty. On June 15 the City of London observes a day of Thanksgiving to celebrate the prevention of this "wicked plot."