

The Civil War in England

1. Introduction

Next to the Reformation itself, the English Civil War was the most critical event in early modern English history. The war was **a violent struggle for power between Parliament and the king** that at first seemed to have been settled in favour of Parliament, but **in the end created a constitutional monarchy**.

The civil war began **in 1642 when both Parliament and King declared they had control of the army**, Some members of the army chose to obey the king while others chose to obey Parliament. The Civil War ended in 1649 with the execution of Charles I by Parliament. Yet, within a few years, Oliver Cromwell took control of England (he proclaimed himself **Lord Protector**), and he governed for most of the 1650s. When he died, the English ruling class was ready to do almost anything to restore the monarchy, and Charles II returned to England in 1660. His return was nearly bloodless.

The conflict between king and Parliament has a very long history, going back almost to the beginnings of Parliament itself.

2. Background

James VI of Scotland became **James I of England in 1603**. James was **an autocratic king**, a believer in **Absolutism and divine right**, and he was **innately suspicious of Parliament**.

He **offended Parliament with his autocratic behaviour**. Parliament protested, but James usually temporized. He managed to avoid serious crises and his manoeuvring delayed confrontation. After he died in 1625, the members of Parliament were determined to assert their claims. But they met with a new king who was more autocratic than his predecessor.

3. Charles I (1625-1649)

Charles followed the path of James I. **He imposed an absolutist ruling and he began to rely increasingly on French advisors at court**, worsening the situation with Parliament.

The **Parliament he called in 1628 turned out to make so many claims that he ordered it adjourned**. He went eleven years before calling another Parliament.

4. Religion & the Scottish question

Another key conflict between King Charles I and the Parliament centred on religion:

- Charles was widely believed **to favour Catholics**.
- Another sore point was access to public office, for **only Anglicans were allowed to hold government office (not other Protestants such as Calvinists)**.

5. The Long Parliament

The parliament that was summoned in 1640 sat for thirteen years, becoming a power within the government in its own right. The political reforms went down smoothly enough, but **when Parliament turned to religious reform, conflict with King Charles I began to show clearly**.

On one side was the king and those who supported him--the **Royalist party**, also called the **Cavaliers**. On another side were the **Independents**, who wanted to do away with the Anglican Church altogether. Another group was the **Presbyterians**, who wanted to reform the Anglican Church along the lines of the Scottish national church. Both these were what we would call **Puritans**.

Also among the Puritans was an even more extreme group called the **Levellers**. **They called for annual sessions of Parliaments, payment for members, and the right to vote for all householders; in short, an end to privilege based on birth**.

Religion and politics were thus completely tangled together in England in the 1640s. By late 1641, many of the most pressing political reforms had been enacted by Parliament, and Charles did not accept such a situation.

6. War with the King

In March 1642 Charles, believing that Parliament had gone too far when it issued the **Grand Remonstrance**, moved to arrest some **members of Parliament** but the latter **fled to London where they were hidden by Puritan loyalists**. That summer Parliament tried to seize control of the army by issuing orders for soldiers to report to Parliamentary, rather than royal representatives. The King countered by ordering the bill ignored and raised his own army in August. Some turned out for the King, some for Parliament, and the war was on.

Those loyal to Parliament were called **Roundheads**; those loyal to the king were **Cavaliers**. The **Independents dominated the Parliamentary army**. Parliament was now free of the king and it passed numerous reforms.

The Battle of Edgehill, in October 1642, was the first real battle between king and Parliament. It was an indecisive battle, but it showed both that Parliament was not strong enough to defeat the king, and that Charles was unable to take London.

In January 1643, Parliament sent out a delegation to negotiate peace, but Charles was feeling stronger and refused to talk. Both sides were seizing the estates of their enemies to finance the war effort, creating even more political chaos. **The King gained several victories in 1643**, which all the more inclined him not to negotiate or compromise with the rebels.

7. Marston Moor: the Rise of Oliver Cromwell

In December 1643, John Pym died, but before he did he had struck a deal with the Scots. In January 1644, 20,000 strong Scots invaded England again. A royalist army went north to fight them and **on 2 July 1644, the Battle of Marston Moor** occurred. During that battle, **Oliver Cromwell (allied to the Scots) led a cavalry charge which brought a complete victory for the Roundheads**.

8. The New Model Army

The issue that faced Parliament was what to do with the king. The moderates did not want to bring the King to a final battle but wanted to negotiate with him. However, **the radicals wanted a complete victory over the king -- these were the Independents, and Oliver Cromwell was emerging as their leader**.

In 1644, Parliament passed **Self-Denying Ordinance**, intended to get soldiers out of Parliament, for the Roundhead army was largely officered by MPs. Cromwell was specifically exempted because everyone recognized he was the rebels' most effective general. All other MPs were to lay down their military commands and **a new army was formed: the New Model Army**. It was a **Puritan army**, with Puritan preachers in every unit. Parliament had managed to get politics out of the army, but not religion.

9. Naseby: the Final Victory

The first test for the **New Model Army** came soon enough. At **Naseby, 14 June 1645**, Roundheads and Cavaliers again met. Again, **Cromwell was victorious with his cavalry charge**.

Naseby marked the real victory of Parliament. Charles fought for another year, but surrendered finally in May 1646, not to Parliament but to the Scots. The Scots, however, turned the king over to Parliament in February 1647. Parliament had won its victory. **The English king was then a captive**.

10. The Army Takes Over

Parliament had won, but really it was the army that had won, and that **army was deeply tied to radical religious movements all over England**. The radical ministers within the army were agitating for even more change and stronger measures. In addition, Parliament was broke and couldn't pay the soldiers, giving them cause for complaint.

Parliament was still being led by men who sought some sort of settlement with the king. After long negotiation, in May 1647, Charles agreed in principle to accept both Presbyterianism and parliamentary control of the army for a limited number of years. In exchange, Parliament ordered the current army to disband. The army refused. Oliver Cromwell took charge of the army and set a guard over Charles to prevent the King from further negotiating with Parliament behind the army's back. **With his actions since Naseby, Cromwell had emerged as the real leader of the army and Parliament.**

11. Execution of the King

In November 1647, Charles escaped and fled to Isle of Wight where he opened negotiations with Parliament and with the Scots. **In January 1648, Cromwell, fed up with the king's behaviour, denounced Charles to Parliament.** Parliament was increasingly dominated by the radicals, led by Oliver Cromwell and his companions. King Charles had some supporters in the English society but they were persecuted by Oliver Cromwell. That summer, the Scots invaded again, Cromwell and Parliament fought and defeated them (in August 1648). Charles made the mistake of joining the Scottish army and was again captured.

The Parliament finally brought the King to trial for treason. The trial began 20 January 1649 and took only a few days. He was convicted of treason, and **he was beheaded before a large but silent crowd on 30 January 1649. It was the first time the public authority executed a king**, either in England or anywhere else in Europe. It marks how far political thinking had advanced, and it marks how strong the non-noble classes had grown. It also showed yet again, as if anyone needed the demonstration, of how powerful a political force religion could be.

12. Oliver Cromwell

The undisputed leader of Parliament was **Oliver Cromwell**. He had been born in Huntingdon, East Anglia in 1599. He first appeared in Parliament in 1627, but his early political career was unremarkable.

The Levellers were not appeased by the execution of Charles. They wanted radical political and social changes. These fomented more revolts and Cromwell ordered more executions. He acted so decisively that he broke the Levellers.

13. The Protectorate under Cromwell

During these years, Cromwell had problems with Parliament and he was as unhappy as Charles had been with it. But he also found himself dependent on it, for he too needed money for the wars. In April 1653, Parliament proposed to expand its membership and to sit permanently but Cromwell called his troops into the House and cleared it. **Oliver Cromwell seized complete power.**

Cromwell tried once more, calling a new Parliament, known as the **Parliament of Saints**, or the **Barebones Parliament. It was the most radical.** It was a failure, and he dissolved it after six months of power struggle. Cromwell had adopted the title of **Lord Protector of the Commonwealth.**

After a Royalist uprising (rebellion) in 1655, Cromwell divided England into 11 military districts commanded by major generals. This measure turned people against Cromwell and Puritans.

The protectorate collapsed after Cromwell died in September 1658. His son, Richard, was unable to gain the respect of the army, and General **George Monck**, the commander of the English army in Scotland, marched to London, recalled the Long Parliament, and initiated the return of the dead king's eldest son from exile.

The Restoration and the Glorious Revolution:
Politico-Religious Confusion in the late 17th Century

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1. The Restoration

England approved the return of Charles II in May 1660. Parliament restored bishops to the church and expelled Dissenters (Protestants who did not conform to the Church of England). It also restricted their worship and political activity. In **1673**, the **Test Act** (a second Test Act was passed in 1678) removed Roman Catholics from the royal government. The Popish Plot of 1678 and the move to exclude James, the king's Roman Catholic brother, from the succession **revealed the political parties then forming**: The **Whigs** favoured Parliament, and the **Tories** supported the kings and the Anglican Church. However, Charles rapidly regained control and ruled without Parliament. He died in 1685, passing the throne to James.

Despite some works praising Puritanism (such as *Paradise Lost*, written by John Milton and published in 1667, and *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan and published from 1678 to 1684), the Restoration Period was a reaction against Puritanism—in behaviour, literature, and drama. In 1662, Charles chartered the **Royal Society**, to promote the study of natural science. In 1665, the last outbreak of bubonic plague occurred, and a great fire ravaged London in 1666.

2. The Glorious Revolution

James II soon lost the friendliness he had inherited. Unpopular measures and autocratic behaviours quickly led to conflict with the Parliament:

- In 1685, he created a standing army.
- **He put Roman Catholics in the government, army, and university.**
- In 1688, his **Declaration of Indulgence**, allowed Dissenters and Catholics to worship freely.

In addition, the birth of a son, which set up a Roman Catholic succession, encouraged James's opponents to ask for the help of **William of Orange**, a Protestant and stadtholder of the Netherlands and husband of the king's elder daughter, Mary. When William landed, James fled since his army having deserted to William.

*The **Battle of the Boyne** was the most important military engagement of the **Glorious Revolution** in England (1688-1689). Fought on the banks of the Boyne River in Ireland on July 12, 1690, the battle was waged between troops of the exiled James II, former king of England, and the forces of the Netherlands ruler William of Orange, who had been proclaimed William III, king of England, Scotland, and Ireland in 1689. To prevent James from regaining the throne, William led an army of about 35,000 men to Ireland, where James was ensconced with 21,000 of his supporters. James suffered a complete defeat, losing 1500 men, while William lost only 500; James returned to exile in France.*

William temporarily took control of the government, and in 1689, Parliament gave him and Mary the crown jointly, provided that they affirm the **Bill of Rights**. That bill listed and condemned the abuses of James. A **Toleration Act** gave freedom of worship to Protestant dissenters. This revolution was called the **Glorious Revolution** because, unlike that of 1640 to 1660, it was bloodless and successful: Parliament became sovereign.