

Absolutism vs. Constitutionalism

- Absolutism: a form of government in which a monarch has unlimited power
- Many other European governments had absolutist rulers at this time
- France, Prussia, Russia, Austria
- Constitutionalism: governmental authority is limited by laws
- laws can be written or unwritten
- balance between government power & people's rights
- England & Holland move toward constitutionalism
- The English monarchy and Parliament struggled between these two views during the 16th and 17th centuries



The English Parliament

From 1544, Parliament has included:

House of Lords
upper class of aristocracy

House of Commons
lower class of commoners



Changes in the House of Commons

The “commoners” were becoming wealthy

New agricultural techniques improved agricultural yield

Old common lands enclosed (enclosure movement) and turned into sheep runs

Rented out lands

Invested in commercial ventures: cloth production, joint stock companies

Made good marriages

It is said that members of the House of Commons were so wealthy they could
“Buy the House of Lords three times over!”

More \$ = better education

Willing to pay taxes but now they wanted to be sure they had a say





The Stuart Dynasty Begins

1603: childless Queen Elizabeth dies = Tudor dynasty extinct

James Stuart becomes King James I of England
cousin of Elizabeth and Son of Mary Queen of Scots
so he is also King James VI of Scotland

and so begins the Stuart Dynasty
a Stuart ruled England from 1603-1625

Scottish (and Protestant) James I
did not understand
many English laws or customs
(nor does he really care)

When urged to wave at crowds
he said he was tired
and threatened to drop his pants
“so they can cheer at my arse”

the Great Chain of Being and Divine Right of Kings:

kings receive their power directly from God
and are therefore responsible to no one except God
and have total, unquestionable jurisdiction over the
people (absolute right)

*it was during his reign that the King James Bible was written,
published in 1611*

James' essay on his ideas of divine right: “**The Trew Law of Free Monarchy**”

Kings are justly called gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth: for if you will consider the attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a king. God hath power to create or destroy make or unmake at his pleasure, to give life or send death, to judge all and to be judged nor accountable to none; to raise low things and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both souls and body due. And the like power have kings: they make and unmake their subjects, they have power of raising and casting down, of life and of death, judges over all their subjects and in all causes and yet accountable to none but God only. . . .

Conflict

The Gunpowder Plot of 1605

failed assassination attempt against King James I of England and VI of Scotland by a group of English Catholics

The plan was to blow up the House of Lords as the prelude to a revolt in which James's Catholic daughter would be installed as the head of state.

The plot was revealed to the authorities in an anonymous letter and during a search of the House of Lords at midnight conspirator Guy Fawkes was discovered guarding 36 barrels of gunpowder and arrested. Eight men, including Fawkes, were convicted and sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

James liked to squander money on a lavish court full of courtiers
(*flaunted male lovers in public*)
accumulated a lot of debt

Parliament, used to ruling *with* the king, showed their anger by using the “power of the purse:”
refused to appropriate funds to run the government

James died in 1625, succeeded by his son, Charles I

in 1628 Parliament passed the **Petition of Right:**
forbid taxes without Parliament’s consent, arbitrary imprisonment
quartering of soldiers in private homes
declaring martial law in times of peace





Charles I

Charles I officially accepted the Petition of Right
later reneges: it limits his power!

decides that since he can't work with Parliament,
he won't summon it to meet

had "personal rule" from 1629-1640 (11 years!)

Ship Money Tax

the Crown has always collected a tax on seacoast towns to pay for coastal defense
he started to collect it from coastal AND inland towns
used the funds for their protection AND for other government operations

middle class merchants and gentry opposed this:
accused the king of taxing without Parliament's consent

Was Charles Protestant or Catholic?

wife = Henrietta Maria

Catholic sister of French King Louis XIII

close friends with Archbishop
of Canterbury, William Laud
known to have very Catholic leanings

tried to force Scotland to use
the Anglican Book of Prayer =
Scots rise up in rebellion

Charles = no money = no troops
forced to call a Parliament to appropriate defense funds

The English Civil War

1642-1651

Charles tries to widen a division in Parliament by arresting some radicals
other radicals are outraged and civil war begins

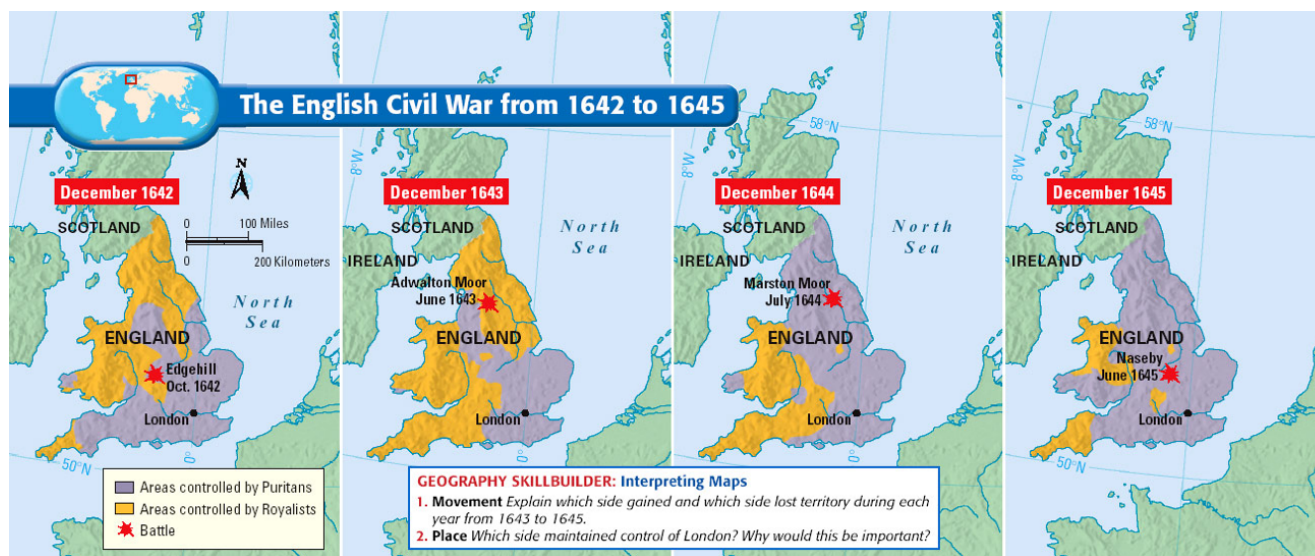
Charles = Royalists (“Cavaliers”)

Nobility, cavalry staff, rural gentry, merchants

V.

Parliament = Parliamentarians (“Roundheads”)

Militia of the city of London, country squires with business connections,
men with the belief in the spiritual duty of serving



devout Puritan Oliver Cromwell created the New Model Army:
extreme Puritans who believed they were doing battle for the Lord
Ends with Cromwell’s victory and capture of the king

Cromwell Rules



Cromwell kicked out all those members of Parliament who were opposed to putting Charles I on trial for treason
only 53 members remained

this so-called “Rump Parliament” tried and convicted Charles I of treason
he was executed on January 30, 1649

“He, the said Charles Stuart, as a tyrant, traitor, murder, and public enemy to the good people of his nation, shall be put to death by the severing of his head from his body.”



1653: Cromwell was named “Lord Protector,” Commander-In-Chief of the army, and head the Rump Parliament

created a 15-member Council of State
and abolished the Monarchy and the House of Lords

some members of Parliament (now only House of Commons)
questioned his authority and/or wanted to create a Presbyterian State Church

1655: Cromwell dissolved Parliament
and divided the country into 11 military districts, each ruled by a major general
in Ireland he:

brutally crushed a Catholic uprising, killed 1/3 of Irish people (directly or by starvation),
confiscated 2/3 of all the land and sold it to English landlords to pay off soldiers
sparked eternal hatred of the Irish toward the English

in 1650 Scotland crowned Charles II the new King of Scotland: Cromwell squelched their uprising
(Charles II escaped)

Cromwell's Rules



gave all but Catholics the right to practice their religion

censored the press and closed theaters

changed feast days to fast days (celebrate the saints)

banned Christmas celebrations

forbade the use of makeup, colorful dress, and the playing of sports

punishments included whippings, being put in the stocks, fines, and/or jail terms



Cromwell Dies



1658: Cromwell dies: malaria? kidney infection? poisoning?

his coffin was escorted by 30,000 soldiers

“It was the joyfulest funeral I ever saw; for there were none that cried but dogs”

John Evelyn

Cromwell’s son Richard succeeded him,
unsuccessfully

after only 18 months Charles II came out of exile and
was restored to the throne

monarchy reestablished: called “The Restoration”

Royalists desecrated Cromwell’s body

on January 30, 1661,

the 12th anniversary of Charles I’s execution

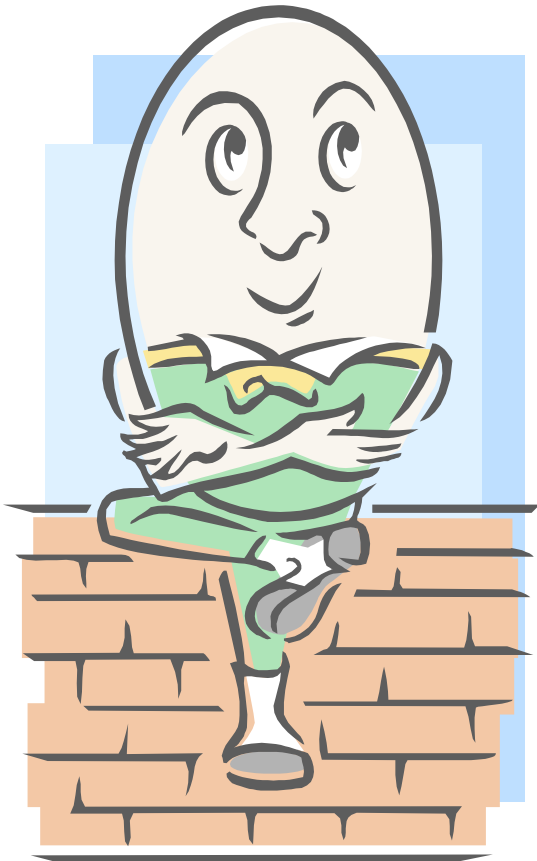
exhumed, hanged, and drawn and quartered

his head was placed on a pole at Westminster Abbey
(traditional punishment for treason at the time)

remained there for for 24 years



Is Humpty Dumpty about the English Civil War?



“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Couldn’t put Humpty together again.”

“According to an insert taken from the East Anglia Tourist Board in England, Humpty Dumpty was a powerful cannon used in the Siege of Colchester during the English Civil War. It was mounted on top of the church in Colchester, a Royalist stronghold against a Roundheads siege in the summer of 1648. The church tower was hit by enemy cannon fire and the top of the tower was blown off, sending ‘Humpty’ tumbling to the ground. Naturally all the King's horses and all the King's men (royalist cavalry and infantry respectively) tried to mend ‘him’ but in vain.”

Professor David Daube in The Oxford Magazine of February 16, 1956