

Knowledge Organiser: The English Civil War (Year 8 HT1)

Overview

- **Dates:** 1642-1660
- **Main theme:** The struggle between **King Charles I** and **Parliament** over **who should rule England** and **how**.
- **Outcome:** The king was defeated and executed; England briefly became a republic under **Oliver Cromwell**, before the **monarchy was restored** in 1660.

1) Why Did King and Parliament Fall Out?

Cause	Explanation	Key Terms
Divine Right of Kings	Charles I believed he had been chosen by God to rule, so he thought he didn't need Parliament's approval for decisions. This angered MPs who wanted to limit his power.	Divine Right
Money and Taxes	Charles spent heavily on wars with Spain and Scotland. When Parliament refused to raise taxes, he found new ways to collect money (like Ship Money) without their consent.	Ship Money, Tax
Religion	Charles supported Archbishop Laud , who introduced more decoration and ceremony into churches. Many Protestants (especially Puritans) thought this looked too Catholic .	Protestant, Catholic, Puritan
Personal Rule (1629-1640)	Charles shut down Parliament and ruled alone for 11 years. MPs called this period the " Eleven Years' Tyranny ."	Personal Rule
The Short and Long Parliaments	When Charles needed money to fight Scottish rebels, he recalled Parliament. MPs demanded reforms before granting money – leading to further conflict.	Rebellion, Reform

2) Who Were the Two Sides?

Side	Supporters	Beliefs	Nickname	Appearance & Image
Royalists (Cavaliers)	Nobles, wealthy landowners, some in the countryside and north/west	Supported the king's authority, the Church of England, and traditional values.	Cavaliers	Long flowing hair, elaborate clothing, plumed hats – seen as glamorous and loyal.
Parliamentarians (Roundheads)	Merchants, Puritans, tradespeople, many from London and the south/east	Wanted Parliament to share or limit royal power; supported	Roundheads	Short-cropped hair, plain armour and clothes – seen as serious and

Side	Supporters	Beliefs	Nickname	Appearance & Image
		Protestant reform.		disciplined.

3) What Was the New Model Army?

Aspect	Details
Created:	1645 by Parliament after years of poor coordination between local armies.
Leaders:	Sir Thomas Fairfax (Commander-in-Chief) and Oliver Cromwell (Head of Cavalry).
Organisation:	Soldiers were recruited from across the country to form a national, professional army , replacing regional militias.
Training and Discipline:	Soldiers were well-drilled, paid regularly, and promoted for merit , not social class – revolutionary for the time.
Beliefs:	Many soldiers were Puritans who believed they were fighting for God's cause; this gave them strong motivation and unity.
Weapons and Tactics:	Used muskets, pikes, cavalry charges , and coordinated tactics. The cavalry (led by Cromwell's "Ironsides") were fast and disciplined, attacking in organised lines.
Key Victory:	Battle of Naseby (1645) – decisive win for Parliament. The Royalist army was destroyed, and Charles lost his chance of victory.
Impact:	The New Model Army's success made it a powerful political force . Later, it helped put Charles on trial and supported Cromwell's rule.

4) Chester and the Civil War

Key Idea	Details
Strategic Importance:	Chester was a Royalist stronghold and a key port – vital for bringing troops and supplies from Ireland.
The Siege of Chester (1645-1646):	The city was surrounded by Parliamentary forces. After months of heavy fighting, bombardment, and starvation, the city surrendered in February 1646 .
Local Impact:	Homes destroyed, shortages of food and fuel, spread of disease, and many civilian deaths.
Result:	The fall of Chester cut off one of Charles's last supply routes, helping to bring about his defeat.

5) Why Did Charles Lose?

Reason	Explanation
Leadership Problems	Charles ignored advice, chose weak commanders, and often interfered with his generals.
Lack of Money	Parliament controlled London (the richest city) and could tax trade. Charles relied on loans and gifts.
The New Model Army	Parliament's army was better trained, equipped, and led. It fought with discipline and belief.
Losing Support	Some Royalists grew tired of the war; others disliked Charles's religious ideas.
Losing Key Cities	The loss of Chester, Bristol, and Oxford left Charles with few strongholds.

6) The Trial of King Charles

Aspect	Details
Captured:	1647, after trying to negotiate and then escape.
Accused of:	Treason — starting a war against his own people.
Trial:	Held in January 1649 at Westminster Hall. Charles refused to accept the court's authority, saying "a king cannot be tried by his subjects."
Execution:	30 January 1649 — Charles I was beheaded outside Whitehall Palace, London. He faced his death calmly, believing he was a martyr.
Significance:	First time in English history that a monarch had been tried and executed by his own government — a huge turning point.

7) Was Cromwell a Hero or Villain?

Perspective Hero	Villain
Evidence	
- Brilliant general who helped Parliament win the war. - Promoted people by talent, not birth. - Tried to make government fairer and more efficient. - Brought temporary peace and stability after years of war.	- Closed theatres, banned sports, and cancelled Christmas celebrations. - Ruled as Lord Protector — effectively a dictator. - His army brutally crushed rebellion in Ireland (e.g., Drogheda and

Perspective Hero

Villain

Wexford, 1649).

Legacy: Cromwell is one of history's most controversial figures – seen as both a defender of liberty and a ruthless ruler.

8) The Restoration

Aspect	Details
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When:	1660
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Why it Happened:	After Cromwell's death, his son Richard failed to rule effectively. People grew tired of strict Puritan rule and longed for normal life.
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What Happened:	Parliament invited Charles II (Charles I's son) to return from exile and become king.
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The Monarchy Restored:	The king returned in May 1660 to great celebration – but his power was now limited by Parliament .
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Significance:	The Restoration marked a compromise – the monarchy survived, but England had changed forever.
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✕ Key Timeline

Year	Event
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1629	Charles I begins Personal Rule (no Parliament).
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1640	Long Parliament recalled.
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1642	Civil War begins.
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1645	Battle of Naseby – Parliament wins.
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1646	Chester falls; Charles surrenders.
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1649	Trial and execution of Charles I.
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1653	Cromwell becomes Lord Protector.
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1658	Cromwell dies.
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1660	Restoration of monarchy under Charles II.
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Key Vocabulary

Term	Definition
Civil War	A war between groups within the same country.
Monarch	A king or queen.
Parliament	Group of representatives who make laws and control taxes.
Puritan	Strict Protestant who wanted to remove all traces of Catholicism from the Church of England.
Treason	Betraying one's country or ruler.
Republic	A country without a monarch, ruled by elected officials.
Restoration	The return of the monarchy in 1660 after Cromwell's rule.
Divine Right	The belief that the king's power comes directly from God.