

History - Lesson 1 of 6

# Civil War divisions

Enquiry: In what ways was Britain turned upside down in the seventeenth century?

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# Roundheads and Cavaliers

In 1642, a bloody **civil war** began between King Charles I and his Parliament. During this war, England was turned upside-down; almost 200,000 people died, fathers fought their sons and brothers killed their brothers. Both sides printed **pamphlets** that accused each other of horrific atrocities. To many ordinary people, this war seemed like the end of the world.

Both sides in the war used nicknames to insult one another. Royalists were called Cavaliers (after wild Spanish cavalrymen). Parliamentarians were called Roundheads (after the shaved heads of some of their thuggish supporters).



# Choosing sides

Choosing sides in the Civil War was complicated. It was not the case that all the rich supported the king and all the poor supported Parliament. In fact, it was religion and geography that *really* divided people. Most strict **Puritans** supported parliament. Most moderate Protestants and Catholics supported the king. Most people in London supported parliament. Most people in the 'Celtic fringe' (Wales and Cornwall) supported the king. In addition, there were some foreign **mercenaries** like Captain Carlo Fantom who only fought for money. Others, who were **press ganged**, did not get to choose their side.



# Society breaks down

Some people did not want to pick a side. Small armies of 'clubmen' formed in parts of England to keep the Roundhead and Cavalier armies away. But this was impossible. The bloodshed of war was everywhere. Canons, muskets, pikes and swords made the battles of the war deadly.

Thousands of women were widowed and men disabled by the brutal battles; many became beggars in the big cities. Moreover, pamphlets full of stories about atrocities terrified people across the land. Rumours of babies being thrown onto pikes and being women pushed off cliffs spread like wildfire.



# The New Model Army

At the start of the war in 1642, neither the Roundheads nor the Cavaliers had well-trained armies. Their forces were disorganised, poorly-trained and unwilling to fight outside the **counties** where they lived. By 1645, it was still unclear which side would win the Civil War.

This all changed with the New Model Army. Parliament paid £53,000 a month for 22,000 well-trained soldiers. The New Model Army defeated the Royalists at Naseby in June 1645. A year later, it took Oxford - Charles I's capital. Finally, Parliament's Roundheads had won the Civil War.



# Glossary

**Civil war** - a war between different sides within the same country.

**Pamphlets** - cheap printed booklets that were mass-produced on printing-presses in seventeenth-century England.

**Puritan** - someone with very strict Protestant beliefs. Puritans disliked alcohol, theatre and gambling.

**Mercenary** - someone who will fight for any side that will pay them enough.

**Press gang** - men who kidnapped people and forced them to join the army.

**Counties** - smaller parts of England (Cornwall, Devon, Northumberland).



# Comprehension Questions

1. How many people died in the English Civil War?
2. What insulting nicknames did the Parliamentarians and Royalists call each other?
3. How did people choose sides in the English Civil War?
4. What did some pamphlets claim happened to women and children during the English Civil War?
5. How did the New Model Army help Parliament win the war?

