

Regicide

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

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A defeated king

In 1648, after the New Model Army defeated the Royalists in the Second Civil War, Charles I was imprisoned in Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight. He seemed to be running out of options. Yet Charles still believed he had a **divine right** to rule England. He was confident that the Parliamentarians would see sense and make a deal with him. The months dragged on, and Charles continued to **negotiate** with moderate Members of Parliament. Then, in December 1648, Charles I's luck finally ran out.



Pride's Purge

Ordinary soldiers in the New Model Army became frustrated that moderate **MPs** wanted to negotiate with Charles I. They saw Charles as the antichrist. So, on 6 December, Colonel Pride and his soldiers prevented 180 moderate MPs from entering Parliament (they even arrested 45 of these MPs). This event was known as Pride's **Purge**. All that was left was a 'Rump Parliament'.

Many people in the Rump Parliament hated Charles I. On 20 January 1649, they put him on trial. He was accused of being a tyrant (a cruel and wicked ruler), a traitor (someone who betrays their country) and a murderer.



The Trial of Charles I

The Trial of Charles I took place in Westminster Hall. All the stalls and shops were cleared from the hall. Over 5,000 people packed in to watch. It was a noisy, bustling affair. The trial was interrupted by cries of 'Justice! Justice!' and 'God save the King!'.

The Lord President, John Bradshaw, asked Charles to **plead** innocent or guilty. Yet Charles I refused. He would not recognise the authority of the Rump Parliament. After seven days, Bradshaw went ahead and found Charles guilty. The king was sentenced to death.



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Charles was executed on 30 January 1649. Huge crowds gathered in Whitehall to watch this unbelievable, unthinkable event take place. As the axe removed Charles head, many people fainted, wept and cried out.

Charles' death **traumatised** England. Most people did not want their king to die. The belief that all kings had a divine right to rule - that they were appointed by God - was still popular in 1649. Weeks after the execution, a pro-Charles book was published called Eikon Basilike. It began to be read up and down the land. Some of the Leveller leaders started to think they had made a terrible mistake.



Glossary

Divine right - God has given you the right to do something.

Negotiate - make a deal with someone and make compromises.

MP - Member of Parliament. There were 420 in the 1640s.

Purge - cleaning something by removing anything bad or dirty from it.

Plead - telling a court whether you are innocent or guilty.

Traumatised - really upset, concerned and worried by something.



Comprehension Questions

1. Where was Charles imprisoned in 1648?
2. What did Colonel Pride do to Parliament in December 1648?
3. What crimes was Charles I accused of committing?
4. How did Charles I plead during his trial?
5. How did most English people react to the execution of Charles I?

