

Introduction:

The Stuart Era started when King James I (James VI of Scotland) was crowned after the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603 with no son and/or heir. When James I ascended the throne, a war broke out between England and Scotland. The Stuart era witnessed severe political and religious problems that gave power to parliament instead of the monarchy. Meanwhile, improvements and inventions shaped society, science and architecture.

The Stuart Dynasty

The shrewd James I (1603–25) was the son of Elizabeth I's cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, effectively joined the two long-fighting countries of England and Scotland. In spite of dangers to his rule, including **the Gunpowder Plot (1605)**, he was able to keep peace at home and abroad.

The Gunpowder Plot was a failed trial to overthrow England's King James I (1566-1625) and the Parliament on November 5, 1605. The **plot** was organized by Robert Catesby (1572-1605) in an effort to stop the bullying of Roman Catholics by the English government.

James's attractive elder son Prince Henry passed away in 1612, leaving his younger son, **Charles I (1625–49)**, to follow. This serious, ceremonious king was committed to the arts and to the Anglican Church, and extremely aware of his divine right to govern.

Royal decree and Civil War:

Charles ruled by royal decree (without Parliament) from 1629 until 1640. His citizens became more and more tired by the taxes he imposed on them and by the censorship of Puritanism by William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

After the failure of the Bishops' Wars with the Scots of **1639–40 (provoked by the obligation of Charles's religious reforms)**, the king was obliged to recall Parliament in a proposal to raise money. Disappointment spread as Charles refused to give Parliament real power in State and Church. Both sides armed themselves, and although there was a prevalent wish for negotiation, **civil war** broke out in **August 1642**.

The civil wars and their outcome were disastrous. Many people were killed in England, Scotland and (especially) Ireland than the First World War. Several palaces were pressed into active service for the first time since the middle Ages and various – like **Scarborough** in North Yorkshire – underwent impressive blockades.

A King accused

By **1647**, Parliament's New Model Army, led by Sir Thomas Fairfax and Oliver Cromwell, had defeated King Charles. He was jailed at **Carisbrooke Castle** on the Isle of Wight, as though he was a peace negotiator while he in secret worked to inflame a **Second Civil War**, which began in **1648**. Parliament was again victorious, and this time the army accordingly insisted (despite moderate protests) on his trial and death sentence in **1649**.

The very first public execution of a monarch spread shockwaves through Britain and Europe. In 1651, with Scots help, the future Charles II mounted a desperate raid of what was now a nation, the **English Commonwealth (1649–53)**. Defeated, he fled to France after notably **hiding in an oak tree** at **Boscobel** in Shropshire.

The interregnum

The period after Charles's beheading, known as **the Interregnum**, saw the loosening of state and Church control. In response, there was an extraordinary turmoil of revolutionary ideas spread by many booklets. Radical religious groups grew, numerous hoping the Christ would come again. The Levelers demanded votes for all people and universal religious tolerance.

Oliver Cromwell, who ruled as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland from **1653** until **1658**, personally favored acceptance of all religions though he was a radical Puritanism. However, he used military power to maintain both his Civil War victory and national stability, commanding the confidence of both army and civil government.

At his death, this stability declined. Charles II was invited to come back, and became a ruler in **May 1660**.

Restoration and Revolution

Charles II's rule (1660–85) is remembered for its racy court, the restoration of theatres, and new developments in art, daily life and architecture, demonstrated by Sir **Christopher Wren's** London churches. It also saw distinguished scientific improvements, promoted by the Royal Society.

Following the serial disasters of **the Great Plague (1665)**, the **Great Fire of London (1666)** and the humiliating Dutch attack on the Medway (1667), the latter years of Charles's rule were characterized by attempts to eliminate his Catholic brother James from taking the throne.

James II (1685–8) did succeed, however. His soldiers easily crushed the upheaval (1685) of Charles's illegitimate Protestant son, the Duke of Monmouth. However, Judge Jeffrey has wicked Bloody Assizes – the trials of the rebels – and James's Catholicizing policies made the king gradually more hated.

The birth of James II's male heir made a persistence of Catholic rule more likely. A group of important Protestants invited James's Dutch Protestant son-in-law, William of Orange – who was married to James's eldest daughter, Mary – to get involved. William duly invaded in 1688, James escaped, and William and Mary were crowned the following year.

Succession and Union

The combined rule of **William III (1689–1702)** and **Mary II (1689–94)** brought peace to England, although in Ireland and Scotland James's supporters fought on. **The Act of Settlement (1701)** guaranteed the succession of Mary's sister, Anne – rather than James II, his son or any other Catholic pretender – and finally the 'Protestant Succession' of the House of Hanover. This was even more required since none of Anne's 18 children were mature.

During Anne's rule, (1702–14) the **Duke of Marlborough** won famous victories against **Louis XIV** of France, but the most significant political event during her time on the throne was **the Act of Union with Scotland (1707)**. For the first time, England was part of a unified Great Britain.

Source: Britain by James O'DRISCOLL./ <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/stuarts/>