

Lecture Eight: The Stuart Dynasty (1603 -1714)

1. James I (1603 -1625)

Although he was a Stuart and not a Tudor, his troubled reign continued and completed that of Elizabeth. He was the son of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, and already King of Scotland when he became King of England. As a result, he united both kingdoms in his person. A well-intentioned King, he wished to consolidate the Anglican position and ordered an official translation of the Bible in 1611. The unhappy Roman Catholics plotted to assassinate him, especially in the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. On the other hand, the Puritans, an extremist Protestant group, were discontent with his religious policy and preferred to emigrate to America rather than follow Anglicanism. The Pilgrim Fathers, who settled in Plymouth Plantation in 1620, The most dangerous legacy of Queen Elizabeth, however, was an affluent and powerful middle-class, who now controlled the Parliament, and did not fear the crown.

2. Charles I (1625 – 1649)

The second Stuart king, Charles I, acceded to the throne in 1625, and troubles with Parliament began right from the start. First, there were financial difficulties. To wage his costly wars, the King needed money; the parliamentary middle class, however, whose authorization was needed to pass laws for new taxes rejected the royal demands unless Charles I ensured them certain political guarantees. As a reaction, he dissolved three successive parliaments, and in 1628 Lord Buckingham, Charles's minister, was assassinated. This forced the King to sign the Petition of Rights, a modern version of the Magna Carta.

On the advice of his ministers, Charles I decided to rule without a parliament and imposed the illegal “Ship Money” tax to fill his coffers. There were many protests and rebellions against this taxation. Then, Charles I summoned a fourth and a fifth

parliament, when peace returned. The latter opened in 1640, lasted 13 years in office, and is known as the “Long Parliament”. It deprived the King of all his power, so the latter took up arms and the Civil War broke out in 1642.

The twisted poetic talent of John Donne (1573-1631) founder of the ‘*metaphysical*’ school reflects this troubled age.

3. The Civil War (1642 – 1649)

The ‘Cavaliers’, the King's supporters, were opposed by the ‘Roundheads’, or Puritans, with their soldiers ‘Ironsides’, under the command of Oliver Cromwell. Charles I was defeated in Naseby in 1645 and surrendered to the Scots who delivered him to Parliament in 1646. Parliament, under the control of Cromwell, condemned the King to death and executed him in 1649.

4. Cromwell and the Commonwealth

Having abolished the monarchy and the House of Lords, the Rump Parliament, proclaimed the Republic, or Commonwealth. This theocratic republic was in the hand of Oliver Cromwell, the victorious Puritan general.

Cromwell crushed the last royalists and ruled Scotland and Ireland fiercely. It was the first time that the three countries of the British Isles were united under one law. In 1651 he passed the Navigation Act which gave to the English fleet the monopoly of trade with England and her possessions.

To consolidate his power, Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament and declared himself Lord Protector in 1653. Because of his exaggerated authority, his former soldiers were discontented and in 1658, he died and his son Richard succeeded him. However, in 1660, General Monk brought the Stuarts back to the throne.

5. The Restoration (1660)

What an explosion of '*joie de vivre*'! No period of English history has been so exceptional if none has been so brutal and dissolute. The theatres reopened; the Restoration ran to extremes in both the naughtiness of its comedies and the bombast of tragedies. It is rich in talent and immorality. The fallen Puritans saw the vengeance of God in the Great Plague of 1665 and the Great Fire of London which destroyed the greater part of London in the following year.

5.1 Charles II (1660-1685)

The restored Stuart King, had re-established Anglicanism, intending to revert to Catholicism; however, Parliament, which was Protestant, passed the Test Act in 1673 which excluded Catholics from all public office.

5.2 James II (1685-1688)

He was an avowed Catholic. The famous Judge Jeffreys established a reign of terror in his name. In 1687, by the Declaration of Indulgence, James II attempted to annul the anti-Catholic regulations, despite Parliament. Seeing this, Parliament appealed to William of Orange, the Prince of Holland (of Stuart descent), a Protestant and brother-in-law to the King (He was the husband of Mary, the King's daughter.) James II abdicated from the throne and fled. This bloodless Glorious Revolution was over. William and Mary ruled as joint monarchs. James II fled to France and attempted to reconquer England with the help of Louis XIV but was defeated.

5.3 Mary II and William III (1688-1702)

Mary II was the legitimate Queen, but she reigned with her husband. The most important events of their reign were the establishment of the Bank of England and the freedom of the press.

Whigs and Tories Two groups rose in the English governing class: the Tories and Whigs. The Tories represented the landed aristocracy, authoritarian and favourable

to the Stuarts. The Whigs represented the new and powerful moneyed class and became the defenders of the new regime based on the power of Parliament.

5.4 Queen Anne (1702 – 1714)

She was the sister of Mary II and the last Stuart monarch. She was Anglican and Tory. Following the War of Succession with Spain, the English won the victories of Blenheim and Malplaquet. They established their influence over Portugal and gained control of Gibraltar. They also won Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and The Hudson Bay territory from France, so a network of commercial and military bases was established to form the framework of British imperial power. After the death of Queen Anne in 1714, the successor was King George I, another great-grandson of James I. He was from the House of Hanover, Germany.