

## **King Charles 1, King and Martyr 30<sup>th</sup> January**

King Charles 1 was the first English king to be executed publicly on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1649 after losing the Civil War, or rather what historians call the second Civil War between those who supported Parliament and those who supported the Monarchy.

Charles 1 had a very inflexible view of his role when he became king and in the first half of the seventeenth century, he was only obliged to call parliament to raise money. During part of his reign he had used old laws to raise taxes. Some of these taxes were indeed expanded in scope so that originally a tax to supply maritime defences (Ship money) to coastal areas was extended to inland towns. This is just one example of the way Charles manipulated so as to gain more financial support. He was so successful in this that he didn't need to call parliament for eleven years. He also found that the king's right to impose monopolies on manufactured goods brought in a fair income. Many of those who opposed Charles' actions were Puritans.

However, there were many people who feared the king was bringing in a king of absolute rule and the law courts became involved. Indeed, one of the cases brought against his father (who had tried the same thing) was mentioned in the ruling of the Supreme Court last December.

The reasons for the Civil Wars were not just political but also religious. Charles believed in what was called "The Beauty of Holiness" which in a way, meant an emphasis on what is called Arminianism, a theology very different to that of Calvinism. His archbishop of Canterbury tried to introduce things like vestments and positioning of the altar in such a way that many Puritans, who were mostly Calvinists felt was not right. Many of those who opposed Charles 1 therefore did so on religious as well as political grounds.

Charles days were numbered however when he tried in 1637, to impose the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer on Scotland, at this time a separate country and one which was ruled by Presbyterians, a kind of Protestantism, who did not believe in the authority of bishops, or the liturgy of the Book of Common prayer. The opposition to the Prayer Book became violent and within a short time the Scots had raised an army and threatened to invade England.

The first "round" of the English Civil wars ended with Parliament's victory at the battle of Naseby and Charles was captured by the Parliamentarian army in 1646.

If Charles 1 had been willing to negotiate with the leader of the army, Oliver Cromwell he might have survived but he was not willing to give way to Cromwell's vision of new way of ruling in England both politically and in the way England should be ruled in religious matters. That is why he made a secret alliance with the Scots, who followed Presbyterianism. Although the Scottish army invaded England, with the aim of freeing Charles and restoring the old monarchy, they were defeated.

Really Charles 1 was executed because Parliament could not trust him. So, a High Court of Parliament was set up and condemned Charles to death, in what was basically a military coup.

Undoubtedly Charles 1 was a king but was he a martyr? The court which tried him and ordered his execution was not representative of parliament but had been “packed” by those who opposed the monarchy. Charles was willing to start another civil war and many more people would have died. Did he die because he would not give up the idea of church governance through bishops? Charles himself certainly believed he was a martyr.

Historians have argued about the death of Charles 1 ever since.