



Charles II was Prince of Wales when his father was beheaded during England's Civil War.

He came to power, in 1660, after the death of Oliver Cromwell and at the end of England's experiment with a "Protectorate" form of government.

This image - by Philippe de Champaigne, created in 1654 - depicts Charles II as a king-in-exile.

The BBC provides a [short biography of Charles II](#):

Charles II was king of England, Scotland and Ireland, whose restoration to the throne in 1660 marked the end of republican rule in England.

Charles was born on 29 May 1630, the eldest surviving son of Charles I. He was 12 when the Civil War began and two years later was appointed nominal commander-in-chief in western England. With the parliamentary victory he was forced into exile on the continent. He was in the Netherlands when, in 1649, he learnt of his father's execution.

In 1650, Charles did a deal with the Scots and was proclaimed king. With a Scottish army he invaded England but was defeated by [Oliver] Cromwell at the Battle of Worcester in 1651. He again escaped into exile and it was not until 1660 that he was invited back to England to reclaim his throne.

Although those who had signed Charles I's death warrant were punished, the new king pursued a policy of political tolerance and power-sharing. His desire for religious toleration, due in large part to his own leanings towards Catholicism, were to prove more contentious. He made a number of attempts to formalise toleration of Catholics and Non-conformists but was forced to back down in the face of a strongly hostile parliament.

The early years of Charles's reign saw an appalling plague (1665) and the Great Fire in 1666 which led to the substantial rebuilding of the city of London. Between 1665 and 1667 England was at war with the Dutch (the Second Anglo-Dutch War), ending in a Dutch victory.

In 1670, Charles signed a secret treaty with Louis XIV of France. He undertook to convert to Catholicism and support the French against the Dutch (Third Anglo-Dutch War 1672-1674), in return for which he would receive subsidies from France, thus enabling him some limited room for maneuver with parliament.

In 1677, Charles married his niece Mary to the Protestant William of Orange, partly to re-establish his own Protestant credentials. Although Charles had a number of illegitimate children with various mistresses, he had none with his wife, Catherine of Braganza. His Catholic brother James was thus his heir. Knowledge of his negotiations with France, together with his efforts to become an absolute ruler, brought Charles into conflict with parliament, which he dissolved in 1681. From then until his death he ruled alone.

Charles's reign saw the rise of colonization and trade in India, the East Indies and America (the British captured New York from the Dutch in 1664), and the Passage of Navigation Acts that secured Britain's future as a sea power. He founded the Royal Society in 1660.

Charles died on 6 February 1685, converting to Catholicism on his death bed.

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