

What kind of king was Charles I?

Case study 1: Monarchs before Charles I – Source 1

The second Great Seal of Elizabeth I

(Catalogue ref: SC 13/N3)

What is this source?

This is the Great Seal of Elizabeth I. The main job of a seal was to seal up a document. The queen rolled or folded the document, poured hot wax on the join and then pushed this seal into the hot wax.

This stopped anyone from looking at the document except the person it was sent to. The seal also showed that the document really did come from the queen.

What's the background to this source?

Elizabeth had a reputation as an outstanding ruler. This was partly because she was very good at propaganda (promoting her own viewpoint and reputation). However, she could also point to many real achievements.

For example, her forces defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588. Elizabeth also got on reasonably well with her nobles and with Parliament. She had many arguments with them, but she was usually able to find a compromise, a middle way that everyone could accept.

It's worth knowing that...

The other job of the seal was to send very strong messages to people about the ruler. It was packed full of symbols.

You can see:

- The motto: Elizabetha Dei Gracia Anglie Francie Et Hibernie Regina Fidei Defensor (Elizabeth, by the grace of God, ruler of England, France and Ireland and Defender of the Protestant Church)
- The orb (the round object representing the queen's role as head of the church)



- The sceptre (representing the queen's power on earth)
- Rays of light shining down on Elizabeth
- Elizabeth on a throne and Elizabeth riding a horse
- A Tudor rose, the badge of the Tudor monarchs of England
- A fleur-de-lys, which stood for France, and a harp for Ireland

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What do you think the rays of light shining down on Elizabeth were meant to show?
2. What other features can you find in this seal and what messages do you think they were meant to send?
3. Looking at the seal, which of the following words best describe the image of Elizabeth:
 - a. Powerful?
 - b. Wise?
 - c. Foolish?
 - d. Weak?
 - e. Magnificent?
 - f. Strong?
 - g. Cruel?
 - h. Fair?
 - i. Caring?
4. Why do you think Elizabeth had the symbols for England, France and Ireland on her seal?
5. Do you think there is a connection between images of the queen like this and Elizabeth's reputation as a great ruler?



Source 1a





Source 1b

