



Why did people want the king back in 1646?

Key people & events

Outline of the war

- For most of 1642 Royalists and Parliamentarians went round the country trying to get hold of soldiers, weapons and supplies. At a local level, fighting broke out from April. The first big battle was at Edgehill in October 1642.
- For the first year of the war the Royalists had the upper hand, but then the Parliamentarians recovered. They joined forces with the Scots in September 1643.
- The Royalists were defeated at the Battle of Marston Moor in July 1644.
- Despite this, there was a stalemate from August 1644 to early 1645. Neither side could gain total victory.
- By this time the majority of the population were fed up with war. They no longer cared about the cause each side was fighting for.
- Divisions appeared within the Parliament forces. Some MPs started peace talks with the king, but by February 1645 this came to nothing.
- Parliament then reorganised its forces into the well disciplined and well paid New Model Army. The New Model Army won the Battle of Naseby in June 1645. This broke the strength of the Royalists.
- Charles finally surrendered to the Scottish armies in May 1646.

The effects of war

Historians think that about 180,000 people died from fighting, accidents and disease. That was about 3.6% of the population. (In World War 1 around 2.6% of the population died). The Civil War also saw terrible events. For example, in May 1644 Royalists massacred the Parliament forces in Bolton. This was provoked by the Parliament troops hanging several Royalist prisoners during the battle.

As in most wars, civilians suffered a nightmare experience. Royalists and Parliamentarians were constantly trying to force men to serve in their armies. Both sides took horses, food and other supplies for their armies. Both sides forced people to provide free food and shelter to whichever troops turned up in their village or farm. In some areas people formed their own armies to keep the Royalists and Parliamentarians away from their homes. There was widespread fear that army discipline would collapse and law and order would break down.

Support for Charles

As the war went on Parliament gained the upper hand. One of the reasons for this was their effective use of the lands they controlled, especially London, with its large population and great wealth. Parliament appointed loyal men to be on County Committees. These men collected the taxes Parliament needed, rounded up horses and supplies for the army, and carried out any other commands Parliament sent out. The County Committees were often harsh and ruthless, but they were effective. This helps to explain why Parliament won the war. They were able to keep large armies supplied better than the Royalists. As Parliament forces took over more of the country, the rule of County Committees spread.

Strangely, this factor eventually helped to increase support for Charles I. The County Committees were so good at collecting taxes that they made Charles's rule appear to be less harsh! There were other concerns as well. Many of the men in County Committees were Puritans. They believed that churches and church services should be simple. In many areas they destroyed the decorations, statues and paintings in local churches. This sometimes upset local people.

Another factor that concerned people was the growing power of the army. The army needed heavy taxes to pay for it. Some of the army commanders were also MPs and Puritans. As time went on the army became an important political force. Many people were suspicious of this. They believed that the army should not have political ideas. It should simply do what Parliament or the king told it to do. All of these factors helped to turn people towards Charles. It was not so much that they loved the king. Rather, it was that rule by the king was less unpleasant than rule by Parliament and the army.

Find out more

British Civil Wars, Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1638-60
<http://www.british-civil-wars.co.uk/index.htm>

The Civil War in the west
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/englishcivilwar/west_01.shtml

The English Civil War
<http://www.thevickerage.worldonline.co.uk/ecivil/>