

What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 1: Cromwell in his own words – Source 3

A document making Colonel William Boteler a Major General, October 1655

(W.C. Abbott (ed.), *The writings and speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, Vol. III, pp.849-50. Published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1947)

What is this source?

This is part of a document appointing Colonel William Boteler as a Major General.

It set out what authority he had and also the duties he had to carry out. It put him in charge of several counties in England.

What's the background to this source?

Cromwell became Lord Protector in December 1653. He hoped to make Britain an orderly place and put an end to all the wars and fighting over religion and political views. He tried to work with MPs to achieve this. However, he found this difficult and dismissed the first Protectorate Parliament in January 1655. To help him rule, he appointed eleven army commanders (Major Generals) from August 1655.

He put them in charge of particular parts of the country. Their job was to keep the country secure from enemies. They also ran everyday affairs like collecting taxes and keeping order.

It's worth knowing that ...

Cromwell appointed the Major Generals soon after he had news of a major defeat by the Spanish in July 1655. He felt that this defeat was God punishing him for not trying to make England a more religious, godly place.

Like Cromwell, the Major Generals were committed Puritans (hard-line Protestants). Part of their job was to try and make England more godly. They clamped down on what they considered to be rowdy behaviour (such as heavy drinking, music, dancing and fairs). They even tried to



stop Christmas celebrations. Not surprisingly, the rule of the Major Generals was not popular.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What powers did the new Major General have?
2. According to this source, what threats did Cromwell's Protectorate face?
3. How would you describe the approach taken towards enemies of Cromwell?
4. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?

Source 3

with the advice of Our Council assigned, made, constituted, and ordained, and by these presents do assign, make, constitute and ordain you to be Major General and Commander-in-Chief within the said Counties of Northampton, Huntingdon, Rutland and Bedford and all corporate and privilege places within the limits and precincts of the same, as well within Liberties as without; and do by these presents give full power and authority unto you to take into your charge, and to train, exercise, command, and keep in good discipline the said Militia Forces, and such others as shall be raised or assigned to you within the said Counties; And also to conduct and lead them against all and singular

enemies, rebels, traitors, and other offenders and their adherents against Us, and this Commonwealth. And with the said traitors, enemies, and rebels to fight, and them to invade, resist, repress and subdue, slay, kill, and put to execution of death by all ways and means according to your good discretion. And further We do hereby by the advice aforesaid give unto you full power and authority in case of invasion or rebellion to levy, gather and call together all persons meet and apt for the war, dwelling and inhabiting within the said several Counties as well within Liberties as without; And them to train, exercise, and put in a readiness, and to cause them to be armed and weaponed, and to take the muster of them in places most convenient, and to lead and conduct them for the purposes before expressed.