What kind of king was Charles I?

Case Study 2: Charles I as a ruler

The rulers who came before Charles I were Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and James I (1603-25).

In this case study you can examine a range of sources to see whether Charles I carried on ruling in the same style or whether he brought in changes.

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Case Study 2: Charles I as a ruler – Source 1

An image of Charles I from the records of the Court of King’s Bench, c.1625
(Catalogue ref: KB 27/1542/2)

What is this source?
This image of Charles I appears at the start of a document recording a court case.

Cases dealt with by the Court of the King’s Bench usually involved the monarch in some way, for example cases involving taxes or customs duties. Monarchs were always interested in cases concerning how much money they received.

What’s the background to this source?
Charles did not actually sit in the court and make the judgements. His image is in this record to show that he was the ruler of the kingdom. However, Charles was very involved in the daily business of government.

Records like the State Papers in the National Archives show that Charles was always on top of his paperwork. He personally took charge of appointing top government officials. He also took personal charge of important decisions such as war or peace or summoning Parliament.

It’s worth knowing that ...
Charles had very similar ideas to his father about the Divine Right of Kings. This was the idea that kings were appointed by God, therefore their subjects should obey them.

At the time Charles was beginning his reign, monarchs in Europe were becoming increasingly powerful. Rulers like Louis XIV of France were becoming ‘absolute monarchs’. They had absolute control of their kingdoms and no person or organisation was allowed to challenge them. They could even break their own laws if they felt the need. Charles had a similar attitude towards ruling his lands.

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Your turn: What does this source tell us?

1. In what ways is this image similar to the images in the seals of Elizabeth I and James I? (See Case study 1: Monarchs before Charles I)

2. Does this image give you any clues about Charles’s views on how a king should rule?

3. Study some other images of Charles I painted at the time. What do they tell us about how Charles saw his role as king? Good examples can be found at:
   - [http://www.abcgallery.com/V/vandyck/vandyck52.html](http://www.abcgallery.com/V/vandyck/vandyck52.html)

Source 1

![Image of Charles I]

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/
Case Study 2: Charles I as a ruler – Source 2

Documents relating to the Duke of Buckingham, 1627
(Catalogue ref: SP 16/68/52, SP 16/68/54, SP 16/67/53)

What is this source?
These are extracts from the State Papers of Charles I. The documents concern George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.

By the early 1600s it was impossible for monarchs to look after every detail of government personally. Most relied on trusted allies to help them run the government. These officials usually came from important and powerful families.

The first two extracts are official documents that show how Charles gave various powerful positions to Buckingham.

(The third extract is a private letter to Nicholas Windebanke, Secretary of State, from a man in Buckingham’s household. We’ve included it just because it shows how different court life was in those days compared with modern times.)

What’s the background to this source?
Villiers (usually known as Buckingham) was Charles’s closest friend and political ally in the earliest years of his rule. Charles trusted him with many important posts.

Important posts in the government brought a lot of honour and prestige. They usually brought wealth and power as well. Important posts allowed you to appoint your own family members and friends to other positions (often in return for a fee). There was a lot of competition for the top jobs in the government. The great families expected to get a share of important positions in return for serving the king loyally.

It’s worth knowing that ...
James I had always been clever at giving different government posts to members of different groups or families. He tried to keep the political nation happy this way. Charles I was less skilled at spreading top jobs among different rival groups. He gave enormous power and influence to Buckingham.

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Under James I it was relatively easy for an important noble to meet the king. Under Charles I it became much more difficult. Charles wanted a very formal, ordered court with rigid rules. He could only be seen at certain times. To get an appointment to see Charles, you usually had to go through Buckingham first. His job as first gentleman of His Majesty’s Bedchamber allowed him to control the king’s appointments.

Buckingham used his links to Charles to make himself, his friends and his family wealthy and powerful and exclude other families. Many rivals resented Buckingham. In 1627 many MPs felt that Buckingham was a bad choice to lead the army and navy. He had already led one disastrous expedition to Spain in September 1625. Charles refused to listen and Buckingham led his forces to another humiliating defeat in October 1627. Buckingham was later assassinated in August 1628.

Your turn: What does this source tell us?

1. In source 2a Charles gave Buckingham the power to appoint his own deputy. James I had always kept this type of power for himself. Which king would you say was wiser? Why?
2. Study source 2b. Which important positions did Buckingham hold?
3. Buckingham was extremely unpopular with many leading nobles. Does source 2b give any clues as to why?
4. Which of these two interpretations is best supported by sources 2a and 2b?
   - Charles was a good monarch because he rewarded loyal servants well.
   - Charles showed poor judgement by giving too much power to one man.
5. Study source 2c. Does this tell us anything about the Duke of Buckingham and court life?
Source 2a

And by virtue of the same power, which our late
granted and confirmed, and do hereby grant and
confirm unto the Duke of Buckingham. Our
for like wise hereby authorize him the said Duke
of Buckingham, to make election of his Deputy
in his absence, upon the occasion of other Affairs
in his service; and to confirm and confirm
Upon and to his said Deputy, the same Commission
of power, to execute all things, in all points
Belonging to the Office and Command of him the
said Duke in his employment; with all full
and absolute authority, and as effectually
as if he the said Duke of Buckingham were
himself in person present.
Source 2b

George, late Marquess of Winchester, Earl of Automation, infant of the late Lord Viscount of Devizes. Son of the late King, Prince of England and Lord High Steward of the Oath of the Lunatick. Upon the death of the present King, and by the force of law, is declared to be the King of England.

Source 2c

Two occurrences here of no great consequence; we have them all at the second hand from you: Little George the Queen's dwarf fell last day out of the window at Denmark House. The Queen took it to be heavy that she should not her self that day; were she all well, only my lady Stuke s a little, which makes us hope she is well child; for wishing you all happiness in your proceedings & rest.

Your most faithfull & affectionate friends,

Buckingham House
18 June 1627
Case Study 2: Charles I as a ruler – Source 3

An order to pay a bill for embroidering royal gowns, March 1627
(Catalogue ref: SP 39/19/51)

What is this source?
This is an order to pay a bill for embroidering the gowns of Charles’s wife, Queen Henrietta Maria, and thirteen ladies in waiting.

The order went to the Treasurer of the Exchequer, the man in charge of the government ‘department’ that dealt with money and taxes. The £913 10s in this bill would be the equivalent of about £115,000 in the early 2000s – just for the embroidery, not the gowns themselves!

What’s the background to this source?
Charles was a small shy young man with a stammer. He was probably a little insecure. This was one reason why he wanted to be surrounded by impressive art, buildings and clothes for him and his wife and his nobles.

Most of the nobles loved art, architecture and fine things. As king, Charles was keen to have the finest things of all. Magnificent buildings like the Banqueting House and the Palace of Whitehall did impress people. Charles also insisted on strict rules of behaviour at court. People could only talk to him at certain times. His rules were designed to remind people that he was the king.

It’s worth knowing that ...
All monarchs liked to be surrounded by beautiful things. Elizabeth I and James I both spent large amounts of money on art, architecture, entertaining, clothing etc. Charles I was the same.

Elizabeth and James were often in financial trouble. When their money troubles became critical they usually called a Parliament. Both realised that ruling involved give and take. MPs would agree to taxes and in return the monarch listened to the concerns of MPs and tried to do something to help. Charles found it hard to listen to any advice or concerns and saw all comments as criticism. This meant he had a difficult relationship with MPs, but he needed them because they had to agree to new taxes to raise money.

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/
Your turn: What does this source tell us?

1. What is being paid for in this document?
2. Does it seem like a lot of money?
3. Check out a newspaper or website. Do celebrities today spend similar amounts on clothes?
4. Do you think people in the 17th century would have all agreed with one of the following views, or do you think they would have been divided?
   - It’s an outrageous amount of money to spend on decorating clothes.
   - It’s necessary that the queen and the royal court look their best so that the country looks rich and important.

Source 3
Case Study 2: Charles I as a ruler – Source 4

A petition against royal taxes from the town of Woodbridge in Suffolk, February 1627
(Catalogue ref: SP 16/55/59)

What is this source?
This is a petition or request from the people of Woodbridge in 1627. They were explaining to the government why they had not supplied the information they were asked for. They wanted to get out of paying a tax called 'ship money'.

The government had asked for information about shipping in Woodbridge. Once the government had all the information, the town would be told how much tax it had to pay. Ship money was a tax which was usually paid by coastal towns to help pay for the navy. It was a tax that Charles could collect without consulting Parliament.

What’s the background to this source?
There were several different types of taxes that towns had to pay. As well as ship money, other taxes took the form of paying for the king’s soldiers. This might be cash for the wages, ships to transport them, equipment or food for the troops. Plus in the 1600s the government did not have police forces, traffic wardens and all the other officials it has today. Instead people in towns like Woodbridge had to carry out many different jobs for the king.

- They had to raise money for a royal building.
- There was no full time army with bases and barracks. Soldiers were recruited and trained in local areas. The local people had to find food and shelter for these soldiers in their homes, farms and barns.
- They paid for powder and matches. These were essential for an army in the 1600s. Without them the guns did not work.
- They kept the beacons. These were alarm signals. If attackers were spotted coming in from the sea, a beacon would be set on fire. The next beacon further away would see the first beacon and send a signal, and so on. This would raise the alarm.

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It’s worth knowing that ...

Most monarchs in the 1600s were short of money. Charles I was no exception. Charles was facing a war against Spain in 1626. He was recruiting and training soldiers and sailors. He needed money to feed, pay and equip them.

Monarchs usually called Parliaments when they needed money for wars, but Charles did not like dealing with Parliament. His father (James I) had always understood that running the country meant some give and take. Charles disliked the idea of making deals and compromising. He simply wanted people to do what he told them.

Your turn: What does this source tell us?

1. The petition set out five reasons why Woodbridge would struggle to pay ship money. What were they?
2. Which reasons do you find most convincing?
3. What does this source tell us about what people had to pay for in towns like Woodbridge?
4. According to this source, had Charles been paying his bills?
5. Do you get the impression that the people of Woodbridge have a good case or do you think they are just dodging taxes?
Source 4a

[Image of historical document]

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/

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Source 4b