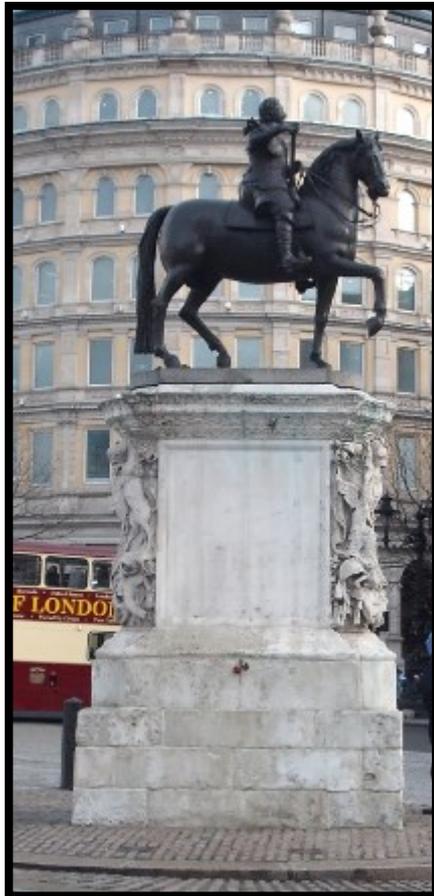


REMEMBERING KING CHARLES I: HISTORY, ART AND POLEMICS FROM THE RESTORATION TO THE REFORM ACT

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Abstract: The term Restoration can be used simply to refer to the restored monarchy under Charles II, following the Commonwealth period. But it can also be applied to a broader programme of restoring the crown's traditional prerogatives and rehabilitating the reign of the king's father, Charles I. Examples of this can be seen in the placement of an equestrian statue of Charles I at Charing Cross and a related poem by Edmund Waller. But these works form elements in a process that continued for 200 years in which the memory of Charles I fused with contemporary constitutional debates.



The equestrian statue of Charles I at Charing Cross, produced by the French sculptor Hubert Le Sueur c1633 and erected in 1675.

Photograph: T. J. Allen

At the southern end of Trafalgar Square, looking towards Whitehall, stands an equestrian statue of Charles I. This is set on a pedestal whose design has been attributed to Sir Christopher Wren and was carved by Joshua Marshall, Master Mason to Charles II. The bronze figure was originally commissioned by Richard Weston (First Earl of Portland, the king's Lord High Treasurer) and was produced by the French sculptor Hubert Le Sueur in the early 1630s. It originally stood in

the grounds of Weston's house in Surrey, but as a consequence of the Civil War was later confiscated and then hidden.

The statue's existence again came to official attention following the Restoration, when it was acquired by the crown, and in 1675 placed in its current location. Perhaps fittingly given Charles' own high church aesthetic and the sacerdotal view of kingship held by many royalists, it stands on the former site of one of the Eleanor crosses that Edward I built to the memory of his consort, and which was demolished by Parliamentary forces in 1647 (a Victorian replica can be seen at the entrance of Charing Cross station). Indeed, the Charles I statue narrowly missed a similar fate as Parliament had placed it with a brazier, John Rivett, with the intention that it too should be destroyed.¹

In the 1670s, the statue would have looked towards the complex of buildings forming the Palace of Whitehall, including the Inigo Jones' Banqueting Hall, which had been a venue for the royal masques that had infuriated puritan sentiment – and before which the king was beheaded in 1649. At this time, Charing Cross was a smaller open space, in contrast to the modern Trafalgar Square, marking the point at which the Strand (the main thoroughfare to the City of London, along which stretched the mansions of the upper nobility) met Whitehall at a pronounced bend in the Thames. Since its current placement in central London, the statue has therefore been part of a traffic island – and in the eighteenth century iron railings were added, although these were removed in 1860.²

The use of equestrian imagery to evoke princely power was a popular one in the seventeenth century, although innovative in England during the 1630s.³ It was employed by Charles I in various contexts, including major portraits by Anthony van Dyck (also from the mid-1630s) similarly showing the king in half-armour with baton and sword sheathed – an imposing example of which is on display in the National Gallery. Such images of the king were also used in engraving (for example by Wenceslas Hollar), coins and medals (such as that designed by Nicholas Briot in 1633 depicting Charles' return from his Scottish coronation).⁴ The purpose of such representations was to create an image that is majestic and commanding. They are also suggestive of martial activity, but without any overt reference to battlefields or conflict. This required careful management: Charles was of slight stature (his portraits with Queen Henrietta Maria are carefully positioned) and the campaigns against Spain and France that had occurred early in the reign had ended badly. Hubert Le Sueur also produced busts of the king in bronze and marble; and Charles presented these as gifts to certain individuals and localities. The concept of majesty embedded in these statues was meant to elicit a suitably respectful response from observers – the royal governor of Portsmouth required members of the garrison to lift their hats to a local bronze commemorating Charles' safe return from Spain in 1623.⁵

This carefully constructed Caroline iconography came crashing down during the constitutional crisis of 1641/42. Prior to the Civil War commencing in England, Charles' prestige

¹ Chambers, R. (1866) *The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities*, vol. II, p484.

² See British History Online:

<http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&ved=0CDUQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.british-history.ac.uk%2Freport.aspx%3Fcompid%3D68141&ei=XYbuUv7UONCM7Abri4HIBQ&usg=AFQjCNHsg8HqyBsG8CYQ73DH4ieVWVf4sg>

³ Sharpe, K. (2010) *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England 1603-1660*, Yale University Press, p198. A similar equestrian statue of Charles II was erected in Edinburgh in 1685, but using lead and displaying the monarch in Roman garb.

⁴ *ibid* pp200-201, pp219-220 and p359. Peacock, J. (1999) 'The visual image of Charles I in Coins', T. (ed.) *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I*, Cambridge University Press, p193.

⁵ Peacock (1999) *ibid* pp178-79 and pp209-220.

had been seriously undermined as a result of failed campaigns against the Scottish Covenanters (the so-called Bishops' Wars, 1639-40) and an Irish uprising (1641). In the circumstances, the king's personal rule ended as first the Short Parliament (April-May 1640) and then the Long Parliament (from November 1641) were convened, followed by the trial and execution of his leading minister, the Earl of Strafford, the imprisonment of Archbishop Laud and even threats of impeachment against the queen.⁶ Laud wrote that the king's abandonment of Strafford proved him to be 'a mild and gracious prince, that knows not how to be, or be made, great'.⁷ Subsequently, Charles was able to rally sufficient support during 1642 to make possible a protracted civil war. But it was the king's conduct following his military defeat rather than his generalship that had greater consequences for his memorialization.

At the end of the fighting, the king faced the ignominy of captivity, and was then tried and condemned as a tyrant. But his trial and execution proceeded only after the Army had mounted a coup (Pride's Purge) in which a large number of MPs were excluded from the Commons, which would shortly become a unicameral 'Rump' Parliament once it had dispensed with the House of Lords. This assisted the king in presenting himself as defending the rule of law and constitutional usage by refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Parliamentary Commission or 'court' that presumed to judge him. Declining to plead for his life, the king's demeanour as he went to the scaffold was widely judged to exemplify kingly behaviour, providing solace and inspiration to the (for now) defeated royalists.

On the day that Charles was executed (30 January 1649), royalists began circulating published copies of the *Eikon Basilike: the Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitudes and Sufferings*. This work purported to represent the king's own reflections on the Civil War as well as advice to his heir, Charles II, although its authenticity has long been debated. In tone, it seeks to avoid being polemical or partisan, presenting the king as the father of his people. But for the leading figures around whom the parliamentary opposition had coalesced there is scorn and he predicted (accurately): 'I am confident they will find Avengers of My death among themselves: the injuries I have sustained from them shall first be punished by them, who agreed in nothing so much as in opposing Me.'⁸

This and other royalist perspectives were actively challenged during the eleven years of republican government that followed, including by John Milton in his *Eikonoklastes*. Royalists forced to compound for their estates needed to be wary of offending the new regime. But Charles' prediction proved true in that Cromwell could find no satisfactory constitutional settlement that could command broad support, and the Commonwealth quickly unravelled after his death.

With the Restoration, there was a predictable royalist reaction. In political terms, this was most clearly manifest in the efforts of the Cavalier Parliament (1661-79) to restore the crown's prerogatives and episcopal government as well as to counter sedition. And while the crown offered a broad pardon (delivered by the Act of Indemnity and Oblivion) for acts committed during the Interregnum, there was an exception and bloody reckoning for those deemed to be regicides. In the context of this essay, concerned with fluctuations in personal reputation and the need for power to be underpinned by public display, it is noteworthy that in October 1660 several individuals who had sat in judgement or assisted at Charles I's execution were themselves publicly hung, drawn and quartered at Charing Cross before an audience that reportedly included

⁶ Cust, R. (2007) *Charles I: A Political Life*, Pearson Longman, p324.

⁷ Trevor-Roper, H. (1940) *Archbishop Laud: 1573-1645*, London, p409, citing Laud, *Works*, iii, p443.

⁸ *Eikon Basilike* reproduced in Daems, J. and Nelson, H. F. (eds) (2006) *Eikon Basilike with selections from the Eikonoklastes*, Broadview Editions, p198.

Charles II.⁹ On the 13th, for example, Samuel Pepys (who had been present in Whitehall at Charles I's death) mentions also being present for the execution of Major-General Harrison.

It was against this background that royalist writers did not simply challenge their opponents but, under his son, could develop a new state-sponsored orthodoxy regarding the first Charles. The years immediately following the placement of Charles' statue at Charing Cross saw, in particular, the publication by William Dugdale (1605-86), royal herald and antiquary, of his *Short View of the Late Troubles in England* (1681) and John Nalson's *Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State from the Beginning of the Scotch Rebellion in the Year 1639 to the Murder of King Charles I* (1682-3).¹⁰

The Statue of King Charles I

That the First Charles does here in triumph ride,
 See his son reign where he a martyr died,
 And people pay that rev'rence as they pass,
 (Which then he wanted!) to the sacred brass,
 Is not the effect of gratitude alone,
 To which we owe the statue and the stone;
 But Heaven this lasting monument has wrought
 That mortals may eternally be taught—
 Rebellion, though successful, is but vain,
 And kings so kill'd rise conquerors again.
 The truth the royal image does proclaim,
 Loud as a trumpet of surviving Fame.

In similar vein, but with greater brevity, Edmund Waller wrote his poem *The Statue of King Charles I* at the time of its erection.¹¹ From a literary perspective Waller is a comparatively minor poet, bridging the period between the Metaphysical Poets and the age of Dryden, and who promoted the use of rhyming couplets. In addition, he was a secondary figure on the political stage, sitting in various Parliaments between the 1620s and the Restoration. But his career was not atypical in that he sought to navigate the fraught conditions of the age in which he lived: having been found complicit in a royalist plot in the 1640s, he was banished from England; he subsequently ingratiated himself with the new regime by writing *A Panegyric to my Lord Protector* in

⁹ Weight, R. and Haggith, T. 'Reluctant Regicides', *History Today*, February 2014, p19. Jordan, D. and Walsh, M. (2012) *The King's Revenge: Charles II and the Greatest Manhunt in British History*, London, pp228-242.

¹⁰ Richardson, R. C. (1998) *The Debate on the English Revolution*, Manchester University Press, pp20-22.

¹¹ Waller's poems, including this one, are reproduced by Project Gutenberg, see <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/12322.html.gen>

the 1650s; but also wrote verse praising Charles II at the Restoration;¹² before offering this retrospective on the first Charles in the following decade.

Waller's *Statue* poem uses the word 'martyr' in relation to the late king – while also invoking sacredness and heaven, albeit in a rather terse manner. Martyrdom was the central theme among high-Anglican royalists. Charles I did not simply die for refusing to jettison his view of the constitutional rights of monarchy but also for defending the apostolic Church of England. This was an idea central to the *Basilike Eikon*; and it could be linked to the king's statements during his last days and to Bishop Juxon's reading to him of a lesson using *Matthew 27* (on Christ's crucifixion) immediately prior to the execution; it was formalised by the reference to 'K Charles Martyr' alongside 30 January in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*; and to Parliament's decision in 1681 to declare that day an occasion for public fasting.¹³ For Kevin Sharpe, the *Basilike Eikon* 'remade Charles into a king'.¹⁴

But the wheel of fortune was shortly to turn again. At the north end of Trafalgar Square stands the fine bronze cast of James II in Roman costume (attributed to Grinling Gibbons). The statue dates from 1686 when James appeared secure having defeated Monmouth's Rebellion a year previously. But within three years the Glorious Revolution (1688/89) would sweep aside James's absolutist pretensions, while doing so under the cover of restoring an ancient, mixed constitution (which in 1642 both sides had claimed they were upholding). The new monarch, William III, was content to present his father-in-law as having fled into exile, as were the political elite, allowing them to employ the convenient notion that the crown had been abandoned and therefore might be passed to the nearest protestant member of the royal family.¹⁵

Later ideas of divine right and regicide came to be associated with an earlier, less enlightened age. Moreover, as direct experience of the 1640s and 1650s faded and attitudes the new constitutional settlement became the litmus test in politics, it was natural that the emotions prompted by the reign of Charles I and the Civil War would lose some of their intensity. But if the need to control the narrative surrounding this period lost some of its existential quality, the recent past still aroused strong emotions and remained inextricably linked to party politics, although later adversaries (a few Jacobites apart) preferred to fight their battles vicariously and with the pen rather than sword in hand.

It was against this background that the great *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* by Edward Hyde (Earl of Clarendon, 1609-74) was belatedly and posthumously published in 1702-04. Hyde had been a key minister and confidant to Charles I and Charles II, although he had begun his parliamentary career as an opposition member, was acquainted with many of its leading members and respected the idea of a mixed constitution. He had also known Edmund Waller through the Great Tew Circle, a literary and clerical group brought together in the 1630s by Lord Falkland at his Oxfordshire manor. Perhaps inspired by its scholarly ideals, Hyde asked for publication to be delayed until tempers had opportunity to cool.

Reflecting on the conflict that followed, Hyde looked back on the 1630s as the time when England enjoyed the 'fullest measure of felicity that any people in any age for so long time together have been blessed'; in doing this he stressed that he had not forgotten the reign of Elizabeth I, whose memory was venerated (somewhat curiously) by many Roundheads, including

¹² *To the King, upon his Majesty's Happy Return*. [1660].

¹³ Cust *ibid* p461. Richardson *ibid* p42.

¹⁴ Sharpe, K. (2013) *Reading Authority & Representing Rule in Early Modern England*, Bloomsbury, p155.

¹⁵ While William III reigned alongside his wife Mary II until her death in 1695, executive power was vested in him alone.

Cromwell.¹⁶ Charles I is neither dissembler nor tyrant, and the slide to war can be attributed to the conceit and ill-will of certain opposition leaders. It also provides a window on a monarch not endowed with extraordinary abilities who has to contend with exceptional times, rather than a saint.

At the same time, it could not escape being labelled Tory history, in part because its publication was overseen by Hyde's son, Lawrence Hyde, Lord Rochester, who was recognised as a leader of the High-Tory party during the reign of Queen Anne and who appended his preface to the history; and also because of the considerate treatment given to Charles I. And for the rest of the eighteenth century, party labels continued to attach to most analyses of the Civil War. When mid-century, David Hume in his *History of England* decided that the evidence required a more sympathetic treatment of the Stuarts than was common at this time, his work was labelled as Tory. He found that Charles I death was 'tragical'. 'Never monarch, in the full triumph of success and victory, was more dear to his people, than his misfortunes and magnanimity, his patience and piety, had rendered this unhappy prince'.¹⁷

The opposing Whig historiography was less sympathetic to Charles I and absolutist claims, but it tended to recoil from regicide. For the influential Huguenot writer de Rapin, it was no easy matter 'to give a just character of Charles I amidst the excessive commendations bestowed on him by some, and the calumnies wherewith others have endeavoured to blacken his reputation...'.¹⁸ He had 'many virtues and noble qualities', even if sincerity was not among the most important of these. In the same spirit, Charles James Fox¹⁹ decades later wrote that the execution of the king was an event of such 'singular a nature' that it was to be expected that it would excite more sensation than any other event 'in the annals of England'. For Fox, who had very publicly sympathised with the French Revolution, the English Republic was not justified in taking the king's life on the basis of the precautionary principle, even if he doubted Charles' sincerity.²⁰

The nineteenth-century heirs to this Whig tradition wrote in similar vein. For Henry Hallam, seeking to write an authoritative constitutional history, Charles I had been arbitrary and his character imperfect but this did not justify his death.²¹ Lord John Russell, for whom resistance to Stuart pretensions was almost family property, observed the king while alive was a 'baffled tyrant' who became in death a royal martyr.²² Borrowing from Talleyrand, Macaulay observed crisply that in executing the king, and by allowing him to be portrayed as a martyr and penitent, his opponents had 'committed, not only a crime, but an error'.²³

Russell and Macaulay were also Whig politicians who were closely engaged with the passage of the Great Reform Act (1832). And it is notable that the constitutional struggles of the

¹⁶ Edward, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (ed. W Dunn Macray, 1888), Oxford, p93.

¹⁷ Hume, David (1778) *The History of England*, vol 5, reproduced by Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, pp541-454.

¹⁸ Rapin de Thoyras, P., *The History of England*, vol. 10 (trans. N Tindal, 1760) London, p538. The original work was produced in French during the 1720s, although dedicated to George I.

¹⁹ Fox, C. J. (1808) *A History of the Early Part of the Reign of James the Second*, London. Fox was via his mother a great grandson of Charles Lennox (1st Duke of Lennox), an illegitimate child of Charles II and therefore grandson of Charles I.

²⁰ Fox, Charles, James (1808) *A History of the Early part of the Reign of James II*, London, p13.

²¹ Hallam, H. (1827), *The Constitutional History of England from the Accession of Henry VII to the Death of George II*, vol. II, Paris, p376.

²² Russell, Lord John (1823) *An Essay on the History of the English Government and Constitution, from the Reign of Henry VII to the Present Time*, London, p90. William Lord Russell had famously been executed in the aftermath of the failed Rye House Plot against Charles II.

²³ Macaulay, T. B. (1848) *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, London, chp. I.

seventeenth century appeared to hold a particular fascination for historians, politicians and the wider reading public at this time, as Britain moved from a political system directed by inherited authority and landed property to one that was more broadly based. But the Whig-Liberal narrative did not go unchallenged; and in this last period before the rise of university-based academic history, Charles I was not without a new generation of sympathisers.

Isaac D'Israeli observed that after two centuries the king's name could still awaken the most conflicting opinions, but also noted the dangers of judging the past by modern standards and wanted to underline that the king had confronted circumstances that were exceptional.²⁴ His son, Benjamin Disraeli, was more pointed in drawing lessons for those that wanted to force the pace of constitutional change. In his address to the electors of High Wycombe in 1834, he looked back to that earlier period as demonstrating the dangers of an all-powerful Commons able to overawe both the Crown and the Lords.²⁵ This was a theme he returned to a decade later in the second novel of his Young England trilogy: *Sybil: or The Two Nations*.²⁶ For the poet Robert Southey, the king's death was simply murder.²⁷ Charles' ecclesiastical policy, advanced by Laud, was naturally favoured by the swelling number of adherents to the Oxford Movement. And among academic writers, the Roman Catholic historian John Lingard looking at Charles' opponents concluded that from the moment they felt that war was inevitable behaved as if they were 'absolved from all obligations of honour and honesty.'²⁸

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Civil War and the fate of the king at its end has hardly ceased to prompt controversy. As Blair Worden has shown, the decision to erect a statue of Cromwell next to Parliament in the 1890s was no small matter.²⁹ And Marxists have sought to identify the success of the puritan cause as a bourgeois revolution removing the vestiges of feudalism. But the fusion of political and historical thinking that existed for two hundred years following Charles I's demise has become less marked with time, even if Weight and Haggith have recently argued that Britons still find it difficult to come to terms with their revolutionary past.³⁰

As well as being geographically proximate, the King Charles' equestrian statue and Cromwell's share another link. In May 1941, a letter appeared in the *The Times* stating it was absurd that such a fine post-medieval sculpture as the one at Charing Cross should be left to take its chances in central London during the Blitz, and noting wryly that the subject had been liquidated by a military dictatorship.³¹ A few weeks later the statue was removed to a place of safety. The refuge chosen was Mentmore Park, Buckinghamshire. There was some irony in this choice. The Park belonged to the Earl of Rosebery, whose father had sponsored the erection Cromwell's statue. The statue returned to its long-term home in 1947.³² And a few years later, a bust of Charles I was added to the exterior of St Margaret's Church, Westminster opposite Cromwell's statue, to keep a wary eye on the Lord Protector.

²⁴ D'Israeli, I. (1828) *Commentaries on the Life and Reign of Charles the First, King of England*, three vols., London.

²⁵ Disraeli, B. (1913) *Whigs and Whiggism*, London, p35.

²⁶ Disraeli, B (1845) *Sybil: Or the Two Nations*, reprinted The Mayflower Press, Plymouth (1927). In which Charles I is described dying as a consequence of his church policy and his efforts to make taxation less regressive, see p350.

²⁷ Southey, R (1841) *The Book of the Church*, London, p508.

²⁸ Lingard, J. (1839) *A History of England from the First Invasion of the Romans*, vol. X, London, p268.

²⁹ Worden, B (2001) *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity*, Allen Lane, pp296-315.

³⁰ Weight, R. and Haggith, T., *ibid*, pp18-21.

³¹ *The Times* (London, England) May 30 1941, p5.

³² *ibid*, 5 May 1947, p8.

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