

Going back to the American Revolution . . . how did Britain end up with King George III?

- Queen Elizabeth I dies without a declared heir on March 24th, 1603 (the last of the Tudors)
- The Crown passes to James Stuart (King of Scotland – son of Mary Tudor, Queen of Scots). He ascends the throne as King James I of England, Scotland, Ireland and France.
- He was protestant (Presbyterian) and had been King of Scotland since 1567.
- According to historian Antonia Fraser, the King in Scotland was little more than first among equals. In England, the Sovereign was the chief executive, Head of the Church of England, possessor of hereditary wealth, and the leader of his subjects in war and in peace. However, his power was constitutionally limited by Parliament – to wage war or meet extraordinary expenses the House of Commons had to be asked to vote money for their Sovereign.¹



- England was gripped by the growing Puritan movement – anti-Catholic. James had sympathies for the Puritans as fellow protestants, even convening a conference between his bishops (Church of England) and leading Puritans. He even commissioned the King James version of the bible in 1604 (completed by 1611).
- James was a learned man who was fairly tolerant of religious difference until the Gunpowder Plot on the 5th of November, 1605, soured his view of Roman Catholics.
- Before his death in 1625 King James I recognized the growing influence of the House of Commons and vainly warned his heir of the dangers that waited him.²

¹ Antonia Fraser, *The Lives of the Kings and Queens of England*, (London: Orion Publishing, 1997), 216.

² Fraser, 220.

- James was succeeded by his son, King Charles I. Charles found himself increasingly at odds with Parliament – his solution to their reluctance in voting him more money for various campaigns was to dissolve the House of Commons.
- Tensions between the King and Parliament centered around finances, made worse by the costs of war abroad, and by religious suspicions at home. Charles's marriage to the French (and Catholic) Henrietta Maria was seen as ominous, at a time when plots against Elizabeth I and the Gunpowder Plot in James I's reign were still fresh in the collective memory, and when the Protestant cause was going badly in Europe.
- Charles dismissed his fourth Parliament in March 1629 and decided to make do without either its advice or the taxes which it alone could grant legally.
- For much of the 1630s, the King gained most of the income he needed from such measures as impositions, exploitation of forest laws, forced loans, wardship and, above all, ship money (extended in 1635 from ports to the whole country). These measures made him very unpopular, alienating many who were the natural supporters of the Crown.
- Scotland, which Charles had left at the age of 3, returning only for his Scottish coronation in 1633, proved the catalyst for rebellion. Charles's attempt to impose a High Church liturgy and prayer book in Scotland had prompted a riot in 1637 in Edinburgh which escalated into general unrest.
- Charles had to recall Parliament. However, the Short Parliament of April 1640 queried Charles's request for funds for war against the Scots and was dissolved within weeks.
- Charles was finally forced to call another Parliament in November 1640. This one, which came to be known as the Long Parliament, started with the imprisonment of Laud and Strafford (the latter was executed within six months, after a Bill of Attainder which did not allow for a defence), and the abolition of the King's Council (Star Chamber), and moved on to declare ship money and other fines illegal.
- The King agreed that Parliament could not be dissolved without its own consent, and the Triennial Act of 1641 meant that no more than three years could elapse between Parliaments.



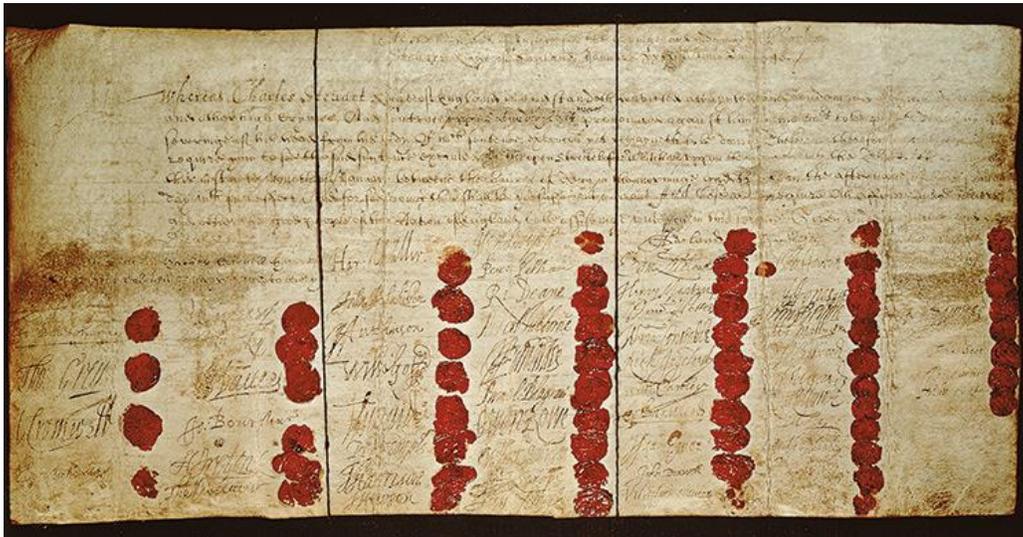
- The Irish uprising of October 1641 raised tensions between the King and Parliament over the command of the Army. Parliament issued a Grand Remonstrance repeating their grievances, impeached 12 bishops and attempted to impeach The Queen.



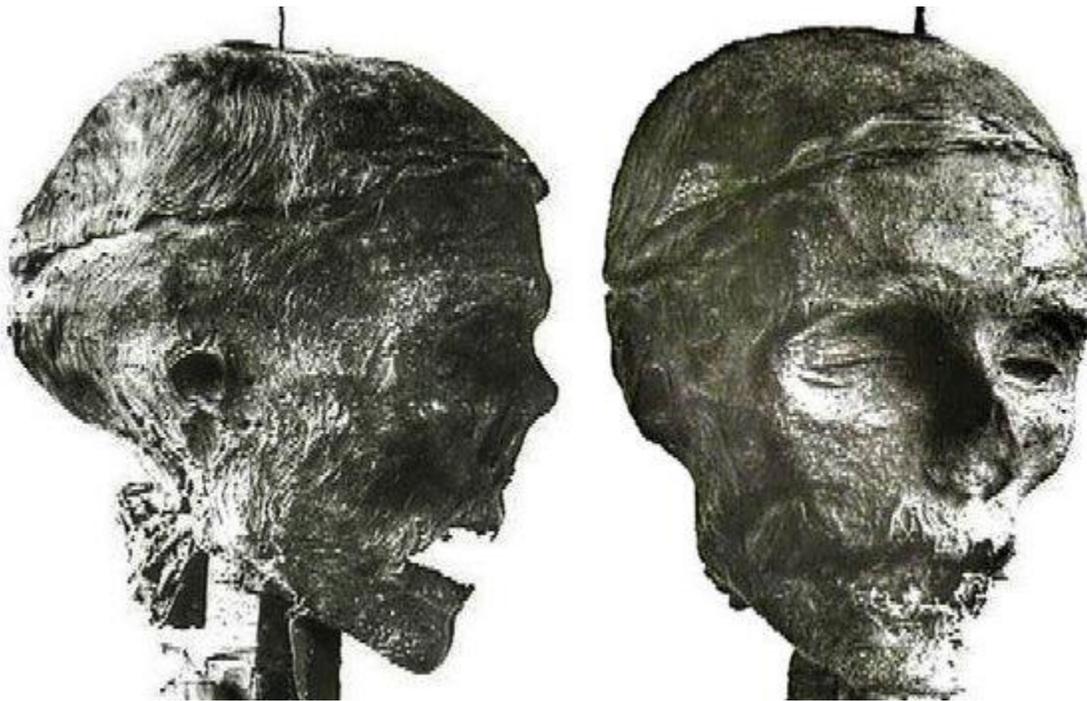
Canada's Usher of the Black Rod can trace back his office to the reign of King Henry VIII. His ceremonial act of knocking on the door of the House of Commons recalls King Charles I's attempt to arrest five MPs in 1642.

- Charles responded by entering the Commons in a failed attempt to arrest five Members of Parliament, who had fled before his arrival. Parliament reacted by passing a Militia Bill, allowing troops to be raised only under officers approved by Parliament.
- Finally, on 22 August 1642 at Nottingham, Charles raised the Royal Standard calling for loyal subjects to support him. Oxford was to be the King's capital during the war. The English Civil War, what Sir William Waller (a Parliamentary general and moderate) called 'this war without an enemy', had begun.
- In May 1646, Charles placed himself in the hands of the Scottish Army (who handed him to the English Parliament after nine months in return for arrears of payment - the Scots had failed to win Charles's support for establishing Presbyterianism in England).
- Charles did not see his action as surrender, but as an opportunity to regain lost ground by playing one group off against another; he saw the monarchy as the source of stability and told parliamentary commanders **'you cannot be without me: you will fall to ruin if I do not sustain you'**.

- The Army lead by Oliver Cromwell, concluding that permanent peace was impossible whilst Charles lived, decided that the King must be put on trial and executed. In December, Parliament was purged, leaving a small rump totally dependent on the Army, and the Rump Parliament established a High Court of Justice in the first week of January 1649.
- On 20 January, Charles was charged with high treason 'against the realm of England'. Charles refused to plead, saying that he did not recognize the legality of the High Court: it had been established by a Commons purged of dissent, and without the House of Lords - nor had the Commons ever acted as a judicature.³



King Charles' death warrant signed by Parliamentarians. A copy of this document is rumoured to hand in the Queen's robing room at the Palace of Westminster.



What is believed to be the head of Oliver Cromwell, the leader of the Parliamentarians and ruler of the Commonwealth of England (16 December 1653 – 3 September 1658) following the execution of King Charles I. The fact that his head is shown on a spike is not a good sign for him

³ "Charles I (R. 1625-1649)". The Royal Family. N.p., 2016. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.