

Oliver Cromwell

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Why do people interpret Cromwell in very different ways?

Ever since Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector of England there have been different interpretations of him. In the nineteenth century historians considered Cromwell to be a great reformer and a man of principle. In modern times many historians use examples from his actions in Ireland to say Cromwell was an inhuman monster. Using this worksheet you will investigate the different interpretations of Oliver Cromwell.

Between 1649 and 1658 Cromwell had more power than anyone else in Britain. In 1649 he took the New Model Army to Ireland. During the English Civil War Cromwell had heard terrible stories from Protestants in Ireland. He heard that Catholics committed horrible cruelties such as cutting off people's hands and feet and beating women's brains with poles. There were many such stories.

Whether the stories were true we don't really know - but Cromwell believed them. He was a Puritan, a strong Protestant. Puritans believed it was their duty to punish the Catholics. He went to Ireland determined to do just this!



Brief timeline of Cromwell

1599	born in Huntingdon.
1616	enters Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.
1628	MP for Huntingdon.
1642	raises troops for Parliament.
1644	Battle of Marston Moor, battle of Newbury.
1645	Lieutenant-General of the New Model Army, - Battle of Naseby
1648	Battle of Preston.
1649	supports trial and execution of the King, then commands army sent to crush Ireland.
1650	commands army sent to crush Scotland.
1653	dissolves Parliament and becomes Lord Protector.
1657	rejects Parliament's offer of the crown and remains Lord Protector.
1658	dies at Whitehall.
1661	exhumed and posthumously 'executed'.



When Catholic rebels in Drogheda refused to surrender to Cromwell, he ordered his soldiers to kill all the rebel soldiers. Hundreds of them hid in a church, but Cromwell ordered it to be set alight - many were burnt alive, and all the local priests were killed. People began to worry that Britain was sliding into the madness of religious wars.

The son of the dead Charles I soon caused Cromwell trouble, leading a Scottish army against England. Cromwell beat this army but Charles (as Charles I's son was called) escaped and lived abroad for nine years. Cromwell also expected Parliament to improve the country. All MPs (Members of Parliament) who had supported the King were not allowed into Parliament after 1648. There 60 remaining MPs had turned Britain into a republic called the Commonwealth. Yet these MPs were greedy and used taxes to make themselves rich.

In 1653 Cromwell had enough. He took 30 soldiers to the House of Commons and threw the corrupt MPs out. Cromwell ran the country himself for the following five years as Lord Protector. Despite Cromwell trying many different ways of ruling, people became keen to have a King again. They asked Cromwell to become the King.



Cromwell refusing the crown of England.

Cromwell refused to become King, but took extra powers and it was agreed that his son would become Lord Protector when he died. Many of Cromwell's enemies said that Cromwell was greedy and had taken all the power of the King, yet just without the name.

Cromwell allowed other Puritans to have a lot of power. All Puritans wanted to end all 'wicked behaviour'. Theatres were closed because Puritans said the devil used them. Dancing around May Poles was banned. Many inns were shut and popular sports of bull and bear baiting were prohibited. Nobody was allowed to work or even play football on Sundays! Even Christmas day was made a day of fasting (no eating allowed). This was strictly enforced with soldiers used to remove meat from ovens in London homes. If caught swearing you would have to pay a fine.

THINK!

In 1653 Cromwell took soldiers into the House of Commons. Remember that in 1649 Charles I had taken soldiers into the House of Commons and sparked the civil war. Cromwell, the great supporter of Parliament was using the army to shut Parliament down.

Tasks

Answer the questions below in full sentences

- Using the first paragraph, explain how historians have changed their opinions of Cromwell. (2 interpretations).
- Why do you think Cromwell took the New Model Army to Ireland? (2 reasons).
- What did Cromwell do to the Catholic rebels in Drogheda?
- In your opinion, should Cromwell have treated the rebels so harshly? (Explain with evidence)
- Which relation of the King caused trouble for Cromwell? How did he deal with the trouble?
- Why were some MPs now allowed in Parliament?
- What had the MPs of the new Commonwealth done that was so wrong?
- What did Cromwell do in 1653?
- What were Cromwell's actions of 1653 similar to - what did it probably remind people of?
- When Cromwell refused to become King, why did some people call him greedy?
- How would Cromwell's supporters have answered anyone calling Cromwell greedy?
- Create a diagram with illustrations showing all the things that were banned under Cromwell's rule.

Using evidence - decide: was Cromwell a hero or a villain?