



Charles I: A Life of Religion, War and Treason

Christopher Hibbert , David Starkey (Foreword)

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When Charles Stuart was a young child, it seemed unlikely that he would survive, let alone become ruler of England and Scotland. Once shy and retiring, an awkward stutterer, he grew in stature and confidence under the guidance of the Duke of Buckingham; his marriage to Henrietta of Spain, originally planned to end the conflict between the two nations, became, after rocky beginnings, a true love match. Charles I is best remembered for having started the English Civil War in 1642 which led to his execution for treason, the end of the monarchy, and the establishment of a commonwealth until monarchy was restored in 1660. Hibbert's masterful biography re-creates the world of Charles I, his court, artistic patronage, and family life, while tracing the course of events that led to his execution for treason in 1649.

Charles I: A Life of Religion, War and Treason Details

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From Reader Review Charles I: A Life of Religion, War and Treason for online ebook

Christieanddavid19 says

This book was as good as any of the other Hibbert books I've read except for the ending. I wish Hibbert had included some information about Charles I's family and other major players after Charles I was removed.

C says

If you've made a trip to London (as I recently did), and it sparked your interest in the history associated with Charles I, this is wonderful follow-up read. The biography's most redeeming attribute is that it isn't bogged down with minutiae that can bore a non-historian to tears. In fact, it reads almost like a historical novel but, of course, contains more accuracy of account.

Lois says

Extremely readable mostlt interesting

Brenna says

For the age of the book, I think Hibbert covered all of the major bases and did it in a very informative way. I walked away with a much better understanding what why the Civil War ocured but thought the ending was a bit over the top (the ending of the war, not the book). I would have liked the Author's Note to include a run down of what happened to Charles I's children who were left behind. Hibbert alludes to death but provides no explanation. Oh well, I guess I will find out in another book. Overall, a very good introduction and reference guide to Charles I.

Janine Urban says

3.5 stars. This book is a good overview of the life of Charles I. The second son of James I, Charles was a sickly, weak boy who succeeded his brother Henry as Prince of Wales upon his untimely death at age 18. It's clear that Charles was doomed from the get go. His father believed that the sovereign was all powerful. That he held Christ's place upon this earth; basically what he says goes. These opinions, which Charles also held, would mold and shape his reign; leading to the absolving of parliament, offices for his favorites, civil war, and loss of his head. I would have liked to have seen some more discussion of the trial; the few pages it covered didn't feel like enough, and more discussion on the events that led up to the civil war would have earned a higher rating.

Patricia says

Good read. I've read some of Christopher Hibbert's other biographies and this is one of the best of them. I knew the history of Charles I but this book went into just the right amount of detail. I must admit I got a little bored with some of the battles but this book is still very good and very interesting.

Susan Grimshaw says

More interesting than I had expected and very well illustrated. Several typing errors including a wrong date [1624 should have read 1642] had escaped the proof reading.

Mrs Cox says

I really enjoyed this book and indeed have dipped into it on many occasions when researching aspects of Charles' life. It is very informative, easy to read and leaves the reader wanting to learn more.

Scott says

I found this to be a distressingly poor biography of one of the most fascinating of the British monarchs.

Charles I is remembered primarily for the English Civil War and the circumstances of his regicide. Neither of these is detailed convincingly in this vapid and dull text.

Whilst the general reticence and distance of Charles as a person makes him a difficult subject for analysis, the fact that he comes across as a blank slate after 300 pages of text suggests a less-than-engaged biographer.

The facts are all present, the sources assuredly immaculate, but this is a dull and lifeless work that consistently failed to engage this reader.

Ed says

One reason to read a biography is to get a better idea about the character of the subject. Character, it seems to me, to be revealed in a subject's decisions and how they are made. By this standard this biography of Charles I is excellent. Charles had to make many decisions on his road to disaster and Hibbert lays out how he went about making those decisions. It is a tragic story well told. At the same time Hibbert provides a lot of background about the period and other actors in the drama.

Jeremy Perron says

His life could have been much better had his older brother Henry lived. That way England could have had its King Henry IX and Charles, the Duke of York, could have been a great art director. Instead death took his brother's life and sent Charles to a position in which he was so over his head that he lost it.

During the course of this book I wondered how a monarchy so powerful in the days of the Tudors could become so weak and feeble. Part of King Charles' problem was he was the son of King James. King James I had often boasted of his absolute power and wondered why his ancestors allowed an institution such as Parliament to come into existence. If King James had only done a tad bit of research he may have discovered that Edward Longshanks stole the idea from Simon De Montfort. King Edward I thought it would be best to have a meeting where the various interests of the kingdom could discuss any problems the kingdom was facing, raise money, and if anyone had any grievances to be able to air them. This allowed the King to govern more effectively and for most of its history Parliament was just a state of being as opposed to an institution with its own interests. For many effective monarchs, Parliament was just a method used by the King to strengthen his own power. One could imagine that Edward I, Edward III, Edward IV, Henry VII, Henry VIII, or Elizabeth I could have handled the problems the King Charles had to deal with far more effectively than he did. For King Charles I was brought up listening to his father's theories and believed every one of them.

Charles was clearly the wrong man for the job. He was so stubborn in his position that he would never negotiate until it was too late, and then, when willing, he wanted the previous terms offered to him. He had almost no sense of his situation. Despite being absolutely sure in his position he was slow to action. Everything he tried from his attempts to arrest Pym and other members of the Commons to his battle strategies he was too slow and unimaginative.

"Underlying melancholy there was a certain lack of sympathy in the King's responses, a defensive rejection of an intimacy that might reveal him as a less assured man than he tried to be. Few men ever felt that Charles really liked them. Few servants ever felt that their services were truly appreciated: if they did not do their duty they were politely dismissed, if they did do their duty they were doing what was expected of them, they were treated well but rarely with a hint of warmth or affection." (p.136)

After his defeat and imprisonment he remained as stubborn as ever, he made several attempts to escape and he tried to hold out hoping things might turn his way again. His moment of glory and greatness came, ironically, at his lowest moments. An American statesman, Senator Al Gore Sr., once observed that in defeat one could often let their glory out. Charles could and did at his trial and execution. He directly challenged the court questioning its legitimacy. His bravery and dignity at his own execution turned him into a martyr.

The one drawback of this book is there is no real discussion on the legitimacy of King Charles' trial. When Louis XVI is tried by his people it is done with the monarchy abolished and the former King reduced to just plain citizen Louis Capet. When King Charles is tried he is tried as the King of England. That the King could be tried under existing laws is something absurd when one thinks of it. Yet this is never brought up, the only thing about the legal irregularities brought about was the mention that most of the nation's top attorneys refused to participate.

In the end I found this to be a great an informative book. King Charles I was probably the second worst King of England, with only King Edward II being worse. Was Charles a tyrant like Richard II? I do not think so. Yes, he could be brutal, but no more than the Tudors or many other great kings and monarchs of this time period. I do feel what replaced him was, in the end, far worse.

Lady of the Lake says

Christopher Hibbert did a fine job laying out the life of Charles I making it easy for me to "know" him. I came away from reading this book aware of so much more than just of Charles I. He grew from a weak child who was insecure and even had a stutter. No one would ever have imagined him to live let alone become the ruler that he did. His political marriage to Henrietta of Spain began to try and unite the two countries had eventually blossomed into a marriage of respect and true love. In this book there was so much to give me the human side of Charles which I liked very much. Charles I however is best known for starting the English Civil War in 1642. This book is a good representation of his life up until his execution for treason in 1649.

Katy M says

I kept finding my mind wandering as I was reading this. It didn't hold my interest very well. And, I didn't really get the feeling that I knew Charles I at all at the end of the book.

Marita says

Baby Charles was a sickly little thing who was not expected to live. However, he lived to the age of 48 years. His older brother, Henry, on the other hand was "good-looking, athletic, intelligent and charming" and the heir to the throne. It was not to be: Henry it was who died of an illness when he was 18 years old, and it was Charles who ascended the throne as Charles I of England, Scotland and Ireland.

Charles (Portrait from the studio of Anthony van Dyck, 1636)

Charles was born in Scotland on the 19th November, 1600. He was 5'4" tall, had weak legs and a stammer, but he went to extraordinary lengths to overcome these handicaps. Initially he was under the care of Lady Carey, but later he spent some time at the Royal Court where he became very attached to his father's favourite, George Villiers the Duke of Buckingham. At some stage Charles had latched onto the idea of marrying the Spanish Infanta Maria Ana and he and Buckingham set off incognito to Spain in order to negotiate the marriage. This event turned farcical and embarrassing. Eventually Charles married Princess Henriette Marie of France.

Apparently Charles had a genuine appreciation of art and a formidable collection of art works:

“On the walls of his twenty-four royal residences, from palaces to hunting lodges, ranged in splendid profusion, were the works of every Flemish painter of repute from Rubens and Van Dyck to Jakob Jordaens and Peter van der Faes; of Van Dyck's most talented English pupil William Dobson, who succeeded Van Dyck as Serjeant-Painter to the King, and of numerous Italian masters; Leonardo, Titian, Raphael, Tintoretto, Correggio, Mantegna, Giorgione, and Romano.

Amongst the pictures were coins and marbles, medals and cameos, the intricate work of master goldsmiths, silversmiths and jewellers, treasures from the ruins of Apollo's temple at Delos, tapestries from the flourishing works at Mortlake, busts by Bernini and Nicholas Stone, etchings by Wenceslaus Hollar, the royal children's Bohemian drawing master, the entire

collection of the Duke of Mantua (purchased for £ 25,000), 'a chess board, said to be Queen Elizabeth's, inlaid with gold and pearl', 'a conjuring drum from Lapland', 'a Saxon King's mace', and so many statues that 'a whole army of old foreign emperors, captains and senators [were landed] on his coasts to do the King homage and attend him in his palaces'."

Buckingham (Portrait by Michiel J. van Miereveld, 1625)

He was the son of an impoverished squire, but was very good looking, graceful and charming. He caught the eye of King James who affectionately called him "Steenie" and Steenie's rise to fame and fortune was meteoric. Not everyone loved him though as he was assassinated when he was 35 years old.

Henrietta Maria (Portrait by Anthony van Dyck)

The fifteen year old French princess married Charles, but initially their marriage was not a good one. She did not bother to learn to speak English and spent much of her time with her French entourage, her masques and her dwarves. She was Catholic and as such refused to attend Charles's coronation. She didn't seem to like his friends and attendants much, and she positively detested Buckingham. Eventually, after Buckingham's death and the departure of most of her French staff, Charles and Henrietta came to love each other. They had several children and Henrietta Maria was distraught when Charles died.

Prince Rupert

Charles's ill-tempered and arrogant nephew was a Royalist commander in the English Civil War. Everywhere he went his little white poodle seemed to go and unfortunately the poor little thing was killed at the Battle of Marston Moor.

Oliver Cromwell

Charles's nemesis. Plainly dressed and plainly spoken. A big man with a ruddy face and a sharp voice, Member of Parliament for the city of Cambridge.

““Pray, Mr Hampden,’ the Member for Wendover was once asked by a colleague, ‘who is that sloven?’ ‘That sloven, that sloven whom you see before you hath no ornament in his speech; but that sloven, I say, if we should ever come to a breach with the King (which God forbid!) in such a case, I say, that sloven will be the greatest man in England.’”

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On the morning of 30th January, 1649 Charles dressed warmly, brushed his hair and put on his pearl earrings and walked out the door to be executed.

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Mr Hibbert's biography of Charles I is written in an easy to read novelistic manner. It is never dry or boring. I have provided the barest of basics of this history as a brief outline above, but there is of course much more to the story of Charles I and how he came to be executed. Mr Hibbert does a fine job of explaining what happened. He does not provide any annotations, but he does give a list of his sources.

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All pictures are from Wikipedia.

Julie says

A very accessible biography on an often overshadowed monarch. Hibbert's book gives a "portrait in the round" of Charles I and the larger forces at work in England during the time of the Civil War.
