

Historical Chronology: Key Events in 17th Century (1603-1688)
ENGL 520/622

This chronology's major events are taken from Deborah Cosier Solomon's "The Seventeenth-Century Timeline" in Robert C. Evans and Eric J. Sterling's anthology, *The Seventeenth-Century Literature Handbook*. Interspersed quotations come mainly from Simon Schama's *The History of Britain: The Wars of the British, 1603-1776*. The document also draws from Robert M. Adams's *The Land and Literature of England*. Abbreviations used: S = Schama; A = Adams.

Summary statement about the seventeenth century's key events:

"Seventeenth-century English literature was shaped by various historical occurrences and cultural phenomena such as the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the subsequent ascension to the throne by James I (James VI of Scotland), the loss of power and subsequent beheading of Charles I in 1649, the Interregnum and the Protectorate under Oliver and Richard Cromwell, the Restoration of the English royal family to the throne in 1660 under Charles II, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The period also saw such other important developments as the closing of the theaters in 1642 and the return of theatrical performances—ones that allowed women to perform onstage—in 1660; the fear and spread of bubonic plague early in the seventeenth century and again in 1665; the devastating Great Fire of London in 1666; the spiritual-political conflicts between and among such diverse groups as Anglicans, Catholics, Puritans, and Quakers; scientific exploration and a growing thirst for empirical knowledge; colonialism and world exploration; and other influential cultural trends. These events—and many others—are significant because they helped to inspire the themes employed by seventeenth-century writers, and similarly, the literature by seventeenth-century authors greatly influenced historical, religious, and political occurrences and early modern cultural thought" (Sterling, Introduction, Evans and Sterling 1-2).

Major Players:

- King James I (1603-1625): Protestant; former King James VI of Scotland.
- King Charles I (1625-1649): Protestant but had a Catholic wife, Henrietta Maria of France.
- Cromwell's Protectorate (1649-1659): Independent, i.e., a Puritan who wanted even less church government than the Presbyterians; named Lord Protector, "a term used in earlier centuries when a member of the nobility would stand in for a monarch who had not yet come of age (Richard Harp, "Historical Contexts," Evans and Sterling 53).
- King Charles II (1660-1685): Officially Anglican but tolerant of Catholics; had a Catholic wife and converted to Catholicism on his deathbed.
- House of Commons: the elected branch of Parliament that represented the people.
- House of Lords: the upper chamber of Parliament; members were members by hereditary peerage; bishops were excluded in 1642 but were reinstated in 1661.
- Cavaliers were supporters of King Charles I. Their opponents were the Parliamentarians or Roundheads.
- Independents = those who favored tolerance and inclusiveness regarding worship.
- Levellers promoted the idea that the government should help the poor. They also favored direct representation.

Major Periods (Harmon & Holman):

- 1500-1557 The Early Tudor Age
- 1558-1603 Elizabethan Age
- 1603-1625 Jacobean Age
- 1625-1649 Caroline Age (Med. Latin *Carolus*, Charles)
- 1649-1660 Interregnum: Commonwealth, Protectorate, Commonwealth
- 1660-1685 Restoration

Major Historical Events:

- The English people killed their king, Charles I. They experimented with a republican government under Cromwell. Then monarchy was restored.
- The Jamestown colony was founded; the Pilgrims arrived in America on the *Mayflower*; slaves were first brought to the new world. Puritans like Edward Taylor, Mary Rowlandson, and Anne Bradstreet left England for North America and wrote about their experiences there.
- Theaters were closed and then reopened, with females now being allowed to act.
- The first woman made her living by writing—Aphra Behn (which is why Virginia Woolf celebrates her in *A Room of One's Own*).
- Modern scientific method was born (induction, experimentation), along with the idea that science should give us dominion over nature. The Ptolemaic world view and humoral theory gave way to astronomy and anatomy: Galileo and Vesalius, respectively.

Causes of the Civil War(s):

- Religious struggles between Protestants and Catholics (and among Protestants: Anglicans, Puritans, Presbyterians, Independents, etc.). What Puritans favored: no bishops; stripped-down ritualism (altar, cross, holidays [including Christmas because it contains the word “mass”]), fewer sacraments, long sermons. Puritans considered Archbishop Laud to be the Anti-Christ.
- English society was now composed differently: gentry, middle class (bankers, shopkeepers), and Parliament vs. the king and the old nobility. (English society was no longer made up of nobility, clergy, and commoners.)
- King Charles I, by imposing “ship money” and other taxes between 1629 and 1640 (Parliament did not meet during this time; he had to raise money on his own), violated the Petition of Right (1628): “no man hereafter [shall] be compelled to make or yield any loan, gift, benevolence, tax, or such like charge, without common consent by act of Parliament.”
- Barbara Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton*, page 120: conflicts of “Anglicanism with Puritanism, of royal with parliamentary supremacy, of a patriarchal economy with emergent individualism, of a rising middle class with a declining aristocracy, and of theories of absolute monarchy with social contract theories of the state.” She adds: “Milton clearly thought the revolution was about profound religious and political differences, and intended his polemical tracts to participate in the fierce parliamentary debates and pamphlet wars prompted by those conflicts.”

The following is a chronology of selected key events:

1170 – St. Thomas Becket tried to help the church become independent of King Henry II.

1509 – Henry VIII ascended the throne. His children were Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth.

1534 – Parliament’s Act of Supremacy declared Henry VIII the supreme head of the Church of England. Henry then dissolved Monastic communities (monasteries, convents), distributing this wealth to the aristocracy (see Marvell, “On Appleton House”).

1544 – Succession Act established Mary and Elizabeth as heirs to Edward.

1547 – Edward VI (Protestant) became king.

1553 – “Bloody Mary” (Catholic) became queen. The “Marian Persecution” ensued (persecution of Protestants).

1558 – Elizabeth (Protestant) became queen.

1558 – Queen Elizabeth took the throne.

1559 – Cranmer’s Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*.

1587 – Mary Queen of Scots (the Catholic mother of the future King James I of England) was executed.

1588 – England defeated the Spanish Armada.

1588-1589 – Marprelate controversy—Puritan pamphlets written by Martin Marprelate (pseudonym) attacked bishops and the episcopacy.

1594 – Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

1600 – London’s population reached 200,000 (4 million people in England). Over the next 100 years, England would swell to 5 million, London to 600,000.

1603 – Death of Queen Elizabeth; accession of King James I (Protestant). Plague in London.

1604 – Hampton Court Conference (James I mandated Anglican worship and the *Book of Common Prayer*). James made peace with Spain (bad optics; so was being married to a Catholic, Anne of Denmark).

- S 23-24: “The obsession with ‘union’ and ‘uniformity’ that Consumed. Both James and Charles I turned out to guarantee hatred and schism. . . . Ironically, then, the business of building a harmonized Britain was auto-destructive, creating discord both among the three kingdoms and within them. . . . The refusal of both Scotland and Ireland to do as they were ordered, except when coerced, brought about the British wars. Britain killed England.”

Religions:

- England: Church of England (good works, ceremony, hierarchy of king → bishops) vs. Puritans (Calvinist double predestination, stripped-down worship)
- Scotland: Presbyterian, Calvinist (highly anti-Arminian)
- Ireland: Catholic

1605 – Gunpowder Plot (Catholic plot to blow up Parliament). *Macbeth* was performed.

1607 – Jamestown colony was founded in Virginia.

1608 – John Milton’s birth.

1609 – The English set out to plant settlers in Ireland.

1610 – James I reinstated bishops in Scotland. Around this time, English landlords and Scots farmers were relocated in Ireland. Irish land was given to them.

1611 – The King James Bible was published.

1618 – Thirty Years War (religious conflict) began in Europe.

1612 – Prince Henry, heir to the throne, died. Younger son Charles now in line for the throne. Donne's *Anniversaries*.

1616 – Ben Jonson's folio *Works*. The death of Shakespeare.

1619 – First African slaves were brought to Virginia.

1620 – Pilgrims arrive in America on *Mayflower*. Milton turned 12. Emigration to North America responded partly to decadence and scandal at James I's court. Papist army defeated James I's new son-in-law Frederick; James did nothing to help Protestant states on the continent but wanted Charles to marry the Spanish princess.

1622 – Native Americans massacre Jamestown colonists.

1623 – Shakespeare's first folio *Works*.

1625 – King James I died. Accession of his son Charles I—he married French princess, Henrietta Maria (sister of Louis XIII). Plague. Bacon published his *Essays*.

- S 69: Charles I favored inclusiveness in an effort to broaden the church. Predestination (Puritans, Calvinists) vs. Arminianism, the belief “that salvation was not exclusively predetermined” and that good works mattered. That is, predestination (Puritans) vs. free will (Charles I). Like his father, Charles wanted to unite Britain. Charles I also had great conflicts with Parliament regarding taxation.

1628 – William Laud (a high church Anglican) was appointed Bishop of London. Parliament passed the Petition Act (legislature now dominant over the king).

- S 76: The birth of political news reporting occurred in 1628-29.

1629 – King Charles dissolved parliament (it would not meet again until 1640). “Personal rule” began. Parliament would not be called again until 1640. Milton: Nativity Ode.

1630 – Future King Charles II was born. Milton: *Arcades* and “On Shakespeare.” Emphasis during this decade on colonizing the New World.

1632 – Second folio edition of Shakespeare's *Works*.

1633 – Laud became Archbishop of Canterbury. Prince James was born (King James II). Donne's *Poems* and Herbert's *The Temple* were published. William Prynne published *Histriomastix* (against the theaters; also claimed that a king who violates God's laws could be overthrown). In 1634, Prynne had his ears cut off, was fined £5,000, and was sentenced to life in prison.

- S 82: “The heart of Laudian doctrine was nothing more than the endorsement of ceremony and sacrament that had certainly been upheld by James I and his own favoured ministers and bishops. . . . Charles, on the other hand, saw in Laudian theology a way to bring the congregation of Christians together within an orderly hierarchy of the Church.” Page 85: Charles would impose the Prayer Book on Scotland.

1634 – Controversy over “ship money” (through 1641). Milton: *Comus*.

1637 – Riots in Scotland against imposition of English Church’s Prayer Book. Charles wanted a single Arminian church throughout Britain. Critics of bishops—Prynne, Henry Burton, and John Bastwick—were punished by having their ears cut off. Milton may have been present for their punishment (mutilation).

1638 – War with Scotland after Scots rejected bishops (Scots favored a Presbyterian system). Scots’ “National Covenant” affirmed Presbyterianism vs. Laud’s wishes. United opposition: Church and clan. Milton: “Lycidas.” Milton’s Italy trip took place in 1638-39.

1639 – Charles I failed to impose ecclesiastical hierarchy on Scotland. A “Pacification” was signed, but he still expected to get his own way. Cozying up to the Irish made him look Popish.

1640 – English lost war with Scots over bishops. Long Parliament began, ending Personal Rule. Parliament objected to ship money, impeached Laud and Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford (king’s religious and secular advisors, respectively). Prynne, Burton, and Bastwick were liberated.

1641 – Parliament impeached 13 bishops and voted to abolish ship money. Strafford’s execution (royalist MP; Lord Deputy of Ireland, 1632-1639). As a result, rebellion broke out in Ireland (the Irish preferred Strafford over the Scots). By this year, nearly 100,000 English, Welsh, and English had been “planted” in Ireland.

1642 – Civil War began. Parliament excluded bishops from membership and closed the theaters. Charles I went to Parliament with soldiers to arrest five MPs who had fled. War now inevitable. Militia Bill: Parliament gave itself power to raise an army. Sir Thomas Browne published *Religio Medici*.

- S: Two key assumptions:
 - 124: “The fact was that parliament, along with Pym, now simply believed that Charles, together with the Irish, was committed to an English Counter-Reformation.”
 - 126: The king was not “entitled to impress any of his subjects except when the realm was plainly threatened by *foreign* invasion.”

1643 – After king’s army scored victories, Parliament allied with the Scots (promising that church government in England would be Presbyterian if they prevailed).

1644 – Scottish army entered England. Both sides won battles. But Parliament, allied with the Scots, won the Battle of Marston Moor. Milton: *DDD, Areopagitica, Of Education*.

- S 147: “By the end of the year parliament was in control of thirty-seven of the fifty-seven counties of England and Wales and the majority of the most populous and strategically important towns.” Still, the king fought on.”

1645 – Laud was executed at the age of 72. New Model Army (led by Sir Thomas Fairfax) won an important victory at Naseby, but there were now internal civil wars in all four nations—England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales. Milton published *Poems*.

1646 – First civil war ended: King surrendered to the Scots; Parliament abolished bishops. The Army now started to become the real power in England. Vaughan's *Poems*.

1647 – Scots turned Charles over to Parl. when he refused to endorse Presbyterianism. Tension between Parliament and New Model Army. Late in the year, Charles allied with the Scots against Parliament.

1648 – Oliver Cromwell's forces defeated Scots (second civil war). The Westminster Confession (statement by the Church of England). Pride's Purge (Colonel Thomas Pride) leads to the "Rump" Parliament. Fairfax bows out.

- A 219: "That a king of England should conspire with foreigners (and the Scots were not only foreigners but long-time enemies) was the last straw."
- S 163: "So Charles was increasingly prepared, even eager, to deliver himself to his fate, convinced that his death would wipe clean his transgressions and follies, excite popular revulsion and guarantee the throne for his son." (King could have saved his own life if he had sold land belonging to the bishops and had given up some of his authority to Parliament; by losing his life, he guaranteed the restoration of the monarchy.)

1649 – Trial and execution of Charles I. Republic was declared. the House of Lords was abolished. Cromwell suppressed Irish revolt. Milton published *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, became Latin secretary of the Republic. *Eikon Basilike* was published.

- S 168: "... this compulsion to bring together those ill-matched partners, Scotland and England, was what had sustained the Stuarts and what (not for the last time) had ruined them."
- S 169: Lessons of the civil wars: 1) divine right was a bad idea; 2) the king is not = the institution of kingship; 3) military action could not change people's hearts or make politicians' wishes legitimate; 4) the Crown might actually be stronger WITH Parliament's partnership.
- S 202-03: "... what Oliver Cromwell the perpetrated in Ireland in the autumn of 1649 has been remembered as one of the most infamous atrocities in the entirety of British history, a enormity so monstrous that it has shadowed the possibility of Anglo-Irish co-existence ever since." Several hundred thousand people died from sickness and hunger. Thousands of people were also killed outright, including hundreds of prisoners of war. See Marvell's "Horatian Ode" for praise of Cromwell.

1650 – Charles II assumed the Scottish throne. Cromwell defeated Scottish royalists. Fairfax (whose wife

was a Presbyterian and a Scot) did not lead the expedition. All adult males were ordered to swear allegiance to the Republic. Milton published *Eikonoklastes*, his reply to *Eikon Basilike*.

1651 – Charles II went into exile in Paris. The Navigation Act of 1651 prohibited all but English ships (or ships from the country of origin) from bring cargo into England (this was aimed at the Dutch). Hobbes published *Leviathan*. Milton: *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*.

- S 173: Hobbes “was certainly unequivocal in his condemnation of the rebellion against the king.”

1652-1654 – First Anglo-Dutch war (the first of three wars with the Dutch over trade; the others were 1665-1667 and 1672-1674).

1653 – Cromwell dissolved “Rump” Parliament. He brought armed men into Parliament, which is ironically similar to what Charles I had attempted in 1642. His hand-picked Parliament was called the “Barebones” Parliament. In December, Cromwell became Lord Protector.

- S 226: “. . . Cromwell himself crossed the line from bullying to despotism. In so doing he undid, at a stroke, the entire legitimacy of the war which he himself had fought against the king’s own unparliamentary principles and conduct.”

1654 – Milton: *Defensio Secunda*.

1655 – Cromwell dissolved Parliament again. Royalist uprising was defeated.

1656 – Second Parliament of the Protectorate began meeting after its membership was purged. The Protectorate allowed Jews to return to England.

1657 – Cromwell refused offer of kingship; however, his relationship with Parliament was now like what Parliament had wanted with Charles I. So why not return to monarchy?

1658 – Cromwell died during “a tornado-like tempest,” which some interpreted as the Devil coming to claim His soul (S 242). His son Richard succeeded him as Lord Protector.

1659 – Richard Cromwell was forced to resign. Protectorate ends. Commonwealth resumes. Milton publishes *A Treatise of Civil Power*.

1660 – Milton published *The Readie and Easy Way To Establish a Free Commonwealth*. Restoration of the monarchy under King Charles II (back from exile in France). Charles issued the Declaration of Breda (amnesty for MPs who had favored civil war; no amnesty for regicides who had signed the death warrant).

- S 21: The civil wars had taken 250,000 lives (disease, starvation, battle, siege).
- S 248: “The extraordinary irony about the restoration of Charles II is not that he became king because the country desperately needed a successor to Charles I. He became king

because it desperately needed a successor to Oliver Cromwell. . . . It was indeed the republicans who killed the republic.”

1661 – On January 30 (the anniversary of Charles I’s execution), the bodies of Oliver Cromwell and other republicans were exhumed and hanged, then buried in a pit. “Cavalier” Parliament reversed many policies of the Interregnum.

1662 – King Charles II married Catherine of Braganza. Act of Uniformity strengthened conformity to Anglican Church.

1663 – Parliament pressured Charles to withdraw his Declaration of Indulgence (protection of religious freedom).

- S 258: “. . . parliament enacted a series of punitive acts known collectively as the ‘Clarendon Code’ and expressly designed to strangle the life out of non-Anglican Christian worship. . . . The acts were intended to marginalize, and then uproot, the entirety of English Presbyterian Calvinism.”
- Printing presses were shut down, and licensing returned.

1664 – England annexed area now known as New York (formerly under Dutch control). Parliament passed act against religious nonconformists. A comet was seen during the summer of 1664, later thought to be a portent of the plague.

1665 – Great Plague in London: one sixth of its population died. (110,000 dead; other outbreaks in 1603, 33,000 dead; and in 1625, 41,000 dead). Parliament passed more legislation against religious nonconformists.

- S 265: It was thought that cats and dogs spread the plague; therefore, 40,000 dogs and 200,000 cats were exterminated.

1666 – The Great Fire destroyed much of London but definitively ended the plague.

- S 266: Numerology—666. Fire was thought to be from hell.
- S 270: “Some 13,200 houses had been destroyed in 400 streets and courts. Eighty-seven churches, six chapels, much of St Paul’s Cathedral and forty-four halls of the livery companies, as well as the Guildhall, the Royal Exchange, the Custom House, Bridewell Prison, the great law courts, four bridges and three city gates, were gone.”

1667 – Milton published *Paradise Lost*. Dutch fleet inflicted major damage on England. Second Anglo-Dutch war ends.

- S 277: “Charles and his governments had been unable to protect the country from plague and fire. And now they had shown themselves incapable of fulfilling the elementary obligation of defending the country against foreign invasion. Astoundingly in June, a fleet

commanded by the great admiral Michiel de Ruyter had sailed up the river Medway with impunity, landed soldiers at Sheerness, stormed the river forts at Upnor and Chatham, broken the barrier chain and destroyed or captured the better part of the English fleet. The king's flagship, the *Royal Charles* (which as the Naseby had been the terror of the North Sea), was taken back to Amsterdam in triumph."

1669 – Scottish church was brought under English control.

1671 – Milton published *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*.

1672 – Charles II granted new freedoms to religious nonconformists; third war with the Dutch begins.

1673 – Parliament passed Test Act (public servants had to renounce Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and take Church of England's Sacrament). It also canceled the king's indulgences to religious nonconformists.

1674 – Third Anglo-Dutch war ended. Anti-Catholicism returned to the public consciousness. Milton published revised ed. of *Paradise Lost*. Milton died.

- S 285: "Milton, the great guardian of the free conscience, refused to allow that Catholics were, in fact, Christians at all."

1677 – William of Orange (Netherlands) married Princess Mary (daughter of Prince James, heir).

1678 – Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Popish Plot.

1679 – Parliament tried to exclude James (Charles's Catholic brother) from the throne. This effort continued into 1680.

1685 – Charles II died. His brother becomes King James II (pro-Catholic).

1688 – William of Orange (Protestant), James's son-in-law, invaded England. James fled to France. Aphra Behn published *Oroonoko*.

1689 – William of Orange (grandson of Charles I) was crowned William III. His wife Mary (King James II's daughter) became Queen Mary.