

#### Reading Task 1

Read the following three pages, which is an extract from Richard Rex's *The Tudors*.

Write a short paragraph for each of the questions below:

- 1. How stable was the English crown at the end of Elizabeth's reign?
- 2. What problems did Elizabeth face?

#### Challenge task

3. Which of these were long term?

# THE LEGACY OF THE TUDORS

When the last of the Tudors expired in 1603, the passing of the dynasty evoked mixed feelings. The Tudors had presided over one of the most radical periods of change in the history of the kingdom, change accompanied by unprecedented levels of judicial terror and torture. In terms of international politics, England was arguably no weaker at the sunset of the Tudor dynasty than it had been at its dawn. English interventions in European politics had been barely more effective in the 1590s than in the 1490s. But ultimately this was simply a problem of scale. A nation of around 3 million people was in no position to wage war effectively against the traditional enemy, France, with a population at least 10 million greater and with vastly superior natural resources. Henry VIII's expansionist policies had hit the fiscal wall in 1525, and succeeded in the 1540s only in dissipating the spoils of the Church and smashing the national economy. It was only the internal divisions of France in the later sixteenth century that enabled England to achieve modest foreign policy successes with minimal military commitments on the continent. And in the 1590s the costs of suppressing a rebellion in Ireland once more stretched royal finances to breaking point. The hardships of that decade were such that, for all the myth of Elizabeth, her death came as something of a relief. There was always more public concern with the accession of a new monarch than with the death of the old one, and the accession of James I, which soon brought with it the blessings of peace, meant that there was relief as well as regret at the passing of the Tudors. It was only as Stuart government ran into problems of its own that the days of the Tudors in general, and of Elizabeth in particular, began to be recalled as an age of special splendour.

However, the constitutional position of the English monarchy was probably stronger than it had been at any time since the Norman Conquest. The Crown's power over the kingdom had intensified throughout the century, though neither inevitably nor invariably. Equally, though, the power of the central machinery of government which the Tudors had established piecemeal for various short-term political objectives (the nationalisation of the Church, the suppression of rebellions, the elimination of religious dissent) had grown to a degree which made it an effective

tool not only in the hands of a strong monarch, but also to a certain extent in the absence of one. The ease with which a foreigner, and a Scotsman to boot (to call somebody a Scot could be grounds for an action for slander in Tudor England), took the throne in 1603 owed a great deal to the smooth operation of this well-oiled machine.

Admittedly this machine needed a king to function, but when the obvious supply ran out in 1603, it was able to recruit one with a minimum of fuss and inconvenience. This shows some considerable advance even since 1553, when the machine had made a similar, if riskier, attempt to shape the succession to suit itself. In 1553 Mary had been able to strike back. If the governing apparatus had looked elsewhere in 1603, it is hard to believe that James would have been able to do anything about it. Over the next century or so, that governing apparatus was to show itself equal to the task of kingmaking in 1660, 1689 and 1714. In the meantime it also learned the neat trick of ridding itself of unsuitable applicants. To that extent at least, the state was an emergent reality in late Tudor England: the fruit of, more than anything else, the recurrent uncertainty about the succession which plagued the century and overshadowed its politics. On the other hand, there remained important limits to the power of that state. Taxation remained a matter of national consent, expressed though Parliament, and the Tudor regime's capacity to tax the wealthy actually declined in the second half of the sixteenth century. To some extent this might be seen as the ruling class's price for supporting the Reformation. It is certainly the case that the nobility and gentry did very well out of the Tudor regime through co-operating with its assault on the Church. But the Tudor failure to achieve significant and lasting fiscal reform or stability left government policy a potential hostage to a tax-paying class whose parsimony was exceeded only by that of Elizabeth herself.

England was politically stable as well as constitutionally strong when Elizabeth died. The last rebellion had been in 1569, and had been put down with almost ridiculous ease. There may have been a handful of Catholic plots and the occasional food or enclosure riot, but there was to be no further rebellion until 1642. The Tudor dynasty had come to the throne at the end of the longest period of civil war in English history. It ended in the midst of the longest period of civil peace England had ever experienced. Seventy years were to pass without an aristocratic revolt. Although we have now learned not to view medieval politics as a story of intrinsic conflict between king and barons, the fact remains that recurrent conflict, whatever its cause, disturbed the basic political consensus. The Tudors had permanently changed the relationship of the nobility to the Crown, and when rebellion returned in the 1640s, for all its debts and appeal to the past, it would be a very different kind of rebellion from anything ever seen before.

The great legacy of the Tudors to the history of England, then, was the emergence of the nascent English state. Within a few years of Elizabeth's death, a court preacher (William Barlow, Bishop of Rochester) was able to refer quite unselfconsciously to 'our Church and State' in the sense in which we still use those words today. His predecessor a hundred years before, John Fisher, would have thought 'our Church'

#### The Legacy of the Tudors

universal rather than national, and would probably have needed the word 'state' carefully explained to him.

This emergence of the 'state', however, was not so much a dynastic achievement as a by-product of dynastic weakness. It was the vulnerability of the succession which called forth the 'state'. The royal supremacy in the Church of England, the omnicompetence of statute, the revival of Parliament, the institutionalisation of the Privy Council - all these constitutional developments arose directly from the succession problem or else from its attempted solutions. The succession was the running sore of the century: in 1502, when the death of Prince Arthur raised the spectre of the Wars of the Roses; in 1533, when Henry VIII's divorce and remarriage - an attempted solution to the succession crisis - led to sweeping changes in the English constitution; in 1553, when the state apparatus endeavoured to divert the succession for its own ends; in the 'exclusion crisis' of the 1580s, when the state apparatus envisaged war to the knife to prevent the succession of Mary Queen of Scots; in 1603 itself, when the state apparatus obtained the secure succession it desired in the person of the Stuart King James VI of Scotland. It is worth noting that the argument used to place legal obstacles in the path of Mary Stuart's succession (the exclusion of the Stuart line under the Act of Succession of 1544) was passed over in embarrassed silence in 1603. But then it was Mary's Catholicism that was the real problem, and James's Protestantism was enough to outweigh any technical problems. If England was to some degree a 'monarchical republic' (as Patrick Collinson has called it) by the time the last of the Tudors went to her grave, it was the constitutional changes, political manoeuvres and unconstitutional expedients scrabbled together in the face of recurrent succession crises that had made it so.

#### Reading Task 2

Read the following extract about James I. You will begin your course by assessing his reign.

- 4. Make bullet point notes on the text (maximum one A4 side).
- 5. What were the main problems with James's reign?Write a short paragraph in response to this question.

#### Challenge task

6. Were there any long term problems?

# JAMES I

### 1603 - 1625



The accession of James VI of Scotland – great-grandson of Margaret Tudor and great-great-grandson of Henry VII – to the throne of England in 1603 ended centuries of intermittent warfare between the two countries. Known in his own time as 'the wisest fool in Christendom', James was a timid, scholarly man whose learning bordered on pedantry. His lofty conception of kingship, embodied in the doctrine of 'the divine right of kings', blinded him to the political realities of his day, and sowed the seeds of the civil war that was to divide England in the reign of his son Charles.

#### BIOGRAPHY

**Born:** 19 June 1566, at Edinburgh Castle

Father: Henry Stewart, Lord

Darnley

Mother: Mary Queen of Scots

Married: Anne of Denmark
Children: three sons and
four daughters, of whom
the following survived into

adulthood: Henry (prince of

Wales, died 1612), Elizabeth (married Frederick of the Palatinate, later king of Bohemia), Charles (the future Charles I)

**Succeeded:** 25 July 1603 (he had been crowned king of Scotland on 29 July 1567) **Crowned:** 15 January 1559

Royal house: Stuart

**Style:** King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith and of the Church of England, and also of Ireland, on earth the Supreme

Head

**Died:** 27 March 1625, at

Theobalds House, Hertfordshire

**Buried:** Westminster Abbey



James I in a painting attributed to John de Critz (c.1605).

Physically, James was unprepossessing. One contemporary, Sir Anthony Weldon, left a malicious but not inaccurate description: 'His eyes large, ever rolling after any stranger came in his presence . . . His beard was very thin, his tongue too large for his mouth, which ever made him speak full in the mouth, and made him drink very uncomely . . .' James's physician, Sir Theodore Mayerne, also left an account of his master's physical characteristics: 'King James's legs were slender, scarcely strong enough to carry his body . . . he was very clumsy in his riding and his hunting, and frequently met with accidents.' Mayerne adds that James was 'very promiscuous in his use of wines', but apparently rarely actually inebriated. Other sources attest to the king's garrulity and delight in obscenity ('I give not a turd for your preaching,' he told one Scottish minister). The picture we are left with is thus of a corpulent, coarse, clumsy, slobbering buffoon – but then James never was very popular with his English subjects.

#### The boy king

James did not have an ideal upbringing. He was the only son of Mary Queen of Scots and her second husband, Lord Darnley. When James was only eight months old his father was blown up while staying in a house in Edinburgh. It was widely believed, with considerable justification, that he had been murdered by James Hepburn, earl of Bothwell, probably at the bidding of Mary herself, who shocked her countrymen by marrying Bothwell – after he had abducted and raped her. The Scottish lords rose in revolt, deposed Mary, and on 24 July 1567 made the one-year-old James king of Scotland. After a brief attempt to regain power the following year, Mary was forced to flee to England. James never saw his mother again. He does not seem to have grieved over much when, after 19 years of plotting against Queen Elizabeth, the mother he had barely known was put to death.

Brought up a Protestant, James was given a rigorous education, and among his tutors was the distinguished Scottish humanist George Buchanan. A succession of regents ruled during his minority, and the king became a pawn in the interminable internecine squabbles of the Scottish nobility. The 'timorous disposition' that Sir Anthony Weldon so despised in the older king is hardly surprising, and more than once the young James was seized by rival magnates, and made to fear for his life.

#### The Scots are coming

After James took power himself in 1585 he managed to impose his rule over the various rival factions, and restored a degree of stability to his realm. In 1586 he concluded a treaty of alliance with Elizabeth, and lodged only a formal protest when his mother was executed the following year. With Mary's death, James became the heir presumptive to the English throne, although Henry VIII's will had excluded from the succession the descendants of his sister, Margaret Tudor.

To the intense frustration of her ministers, Elizabeth never made it clear who was her preferred choice of successor, although the treaty of 1586 acknowledged James's right to the English throne. Some time before Elizabeth's death her chief adviser, Robert Cecil, entered into a secret correspondence with James, in an effort to ensure a smooth transition.

Elizabeth died on 24 March 1603. In a remarkable display of stamina, the messenger bearing the news rode the 400 miles north from London to Edinburgh in just three days. Just over a week later James set off on the journey south, glad to leave his poor kingdom for such a rich one. By the time he had reached York he had run out of money, and was obliged to write to the Privy Council in London to request more funds.

### **Timeline**

1566

(19 June) Birth of James

1567

(9/10 February) Murder of James's father, Lord Darnley

#### 1567

(24 July) James declared king of Scotland on the overthrow of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots. James Stewart, earl of Moray, becomes regent.

(29 July) James crowned king of Scotland, as James VI

#### 1570

(23 January) Assassination of Regent Moray by supporters of the exiled Mary. Matthew Stewart, earl of Lennox, becomes regent.

#### 1571

Assassination of Lennox. John Erskine, earl of Mar, becomes regent

#### 1572

(29 October 1572) Death of Mar, possibly by poison. James Douglas, earl of Morton, becomes regent, having held effective power since 1570

#### 1579

Esmé Stewart arrives in Scotland from France, and becomes James's favourite

#### 1581

(2 June) Morton, having been overthrown, is executed for the murder of James's father. James makes Esmé Stewart duke of Lennox.

#### 1582

Ruthven Raid: James abducted by William Ruthven, earl of Gowrie, held captive for ten months, and forced to dismiss Lennox

#### 1585

James assumes power in Scotland

#### 1586

Makes treaty of alliance with England, and is granted a pension by Elizabeth

#### 1600

Gowrie Conspiracy:
James claims he has been attacked while visiting their house by John Ruthven, earl of Gowrie, and his brother Alexander; both his alleged assailants are killed by the king's attendants

#### 1603

(24 March) James succeeds to throne of England as James I

(25 July) Crowned king of England

#### 1604

Parliament rejects James's proposal of a union with Scotland; end of war with Spain

#### 1605

(5 November) Discovery of Gunpowder Plot to blow up king and Parliament

#### 1606

(31 January) Execution of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators by hanging, drawing and quartering

#### King and Parliament

James was initially welcomed by his English subjects, who were relieved, after half a century of female rule, to have a king on the throne again – and what's more a Protestant king with male heirs in tow. But it was not long before James's popularity began to wane. After the carefully cultivated majesty of Elizabeth, James cut a homely and undignified figure. Ironically, while Elizabeth projected the image of absolute power but never asserted it, it was the other way round with her uncharismatic successor.

## 66 God's wounds! I will pull down my breeches and they shall also see my arse!

James I, when told that his English subjects wished to see his face.

James had been used to bulldozing the Scottish Parliament into doing his bidding, and he failed to recognize the growing sense of independence and power in the Parliament of England. Elizabeth had been irritated with some of the advice Parliament had thought fit to offer her, and its reluctance to grant her all the tax revenues she requested, but she never pushed the constitutional issues at stake to the test. James, on the other hand, had worked it all out intellectually. 'Kings are justly called gods,' he told the English Parliament, 'for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth.' He continued:

For if you will consider the attributes of God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a king. God hath power to create or destroy; make or unmake at his pleasure; to give life or send death; to judge all and to be judged nor accountable to none; to raise low things and to make high things low at his pleasure. And the like power have kings.

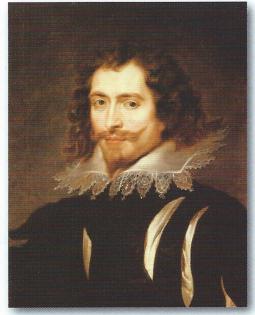
Needless to say, this sort of thing did not go down well, and in response Parliament asserted its 'liberties and privileges', particularly its sole right to grant new taxes. Increasingly, James attempted to rule without summoning Parliament, raising money for his unaffordable extravagances through a variety of unpopular stratagems, such as the sale of monopolies and the imposition of custom duties via the courts. He also sold peerages, and created the new rank of baronet primarily as a means of raising revenue.

66 I will govern according to the common weal,
but not according to the common will.

James I, in December 1621.

#### The favourites

In his formative years, with his father dead and his mother absent, James was kept from the company of women. As a result, he developed strong emotional attachments to a succession of good-looking male favourites, whom he in turn raised to positions of power. When James first came south, his patronage of his Scottish courtiers, such as his former pageboy, Robert Carr, caused resentment, and throughout his reign James made politics a very personal affair, restricting his favours to a small court circle while ignoring the aspirations of a wider section of his subjects.

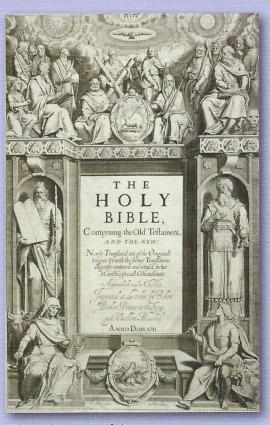


George Villiers, 1st duke of Buckingham, by Peter Paul Rubens (c.1625). The son of a minor nobleman, Villiers rose to high office under the patronage of James I.

## THE KING JAMES BIBLE

The Jacobean age, as the reign of James I is known, was one of the most remarkable periods in the history of English literature. It saw not only the later plays of Shakespeare and the poems of John Donne, but also the burgeoning of new genres of theatre, such as revenge tragedy and urban comedy, associated with the likes of Jonson, Middleton and Webster.

Shakespeare apart, perhaps the text from the period that has had the most profound influence on later language and literature was the beautifully poetic English translation of the Bible created by a group of 54 Anglican divines on the orders of James I, and afterwards known as the Authorized or King James Version. It has been described as the finest work of literature ever created by a committee.



The title page of the King James Bible, 1611.

#### 1607

(4 July) James prorogues Parliament after it again rejects James's proposal of a union with Scotland

(14 September) The Flight of the earls: the former Irish rebel leaders, the earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell, flee from Ulster, which is subsequently opened up to settlement ('plantation') by Scottish Protestants

#### 1610

Failure of the so-called Great Contract, by which James was to receive a regular income from Parliament in exchange for surrendering his feudal rights

#### 1611

(25 March) James makes Robert Carr, his favourite, Viscount Rochester

James creates the rank of baronet as a way of raising funds

#### 1612

(24 May) Death of Robert Cecil, James's chief minister; his place as secretary of state is taken by Robert Carr

(6 November) Death of Henry, prince of Wales, from typhoid

#### 1613

(14 February) Marriage of James's daughter Elizabeth to the Protestant Frederick V, elector palatine of the Rhine

(3 November) James makes Carr earl of Somerset The Gunpowder Plotters in a contemporary engraving. Robert Catesby and Guy Fawkes, respectively mastermind and explosives expert of the Catholic conspiracy against James I, are the second and third figures from the right.

#### 1614

(7 June) James dissolves the 'Addled Parliament', so called because it passes no legislation, owing to the deadlock between it and the king

#### 1615

Carr disgraced after he and his wife are found guilty of the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury

#### 1616

(23 April) Death of William Shakespeare

James begins to sell peerages

#### 1617

(January) James makes his favourite, George Villiers, earl of Buckingham

(June) James imposes the Five Articles of Perth on the Scottish Church, enforcing Anglican practices

#### 1618

(7 January) Francis Bacon becomes lord chancellor

(29 October) Execution of Sir Walter Ralegh (at the behest of the Spanish king) on a charge of treason dating back to 1603

#### 1619

James refuses assistance to his son-in-law, Frederick V, as the Thirty Years' War gets underway in Europe



After the death of his capable chief minister, Robert Cecil, in 1612, James chose Carr – still only 25 – as his replacement. It was a poor choice, Carr turning out to be both corrupt and ineffective. His successor was another handsome young man, George Villiers – 'sweet Steenie' – whom James made duke of Buckingham. Buckingham was more competent than Carr, but he was a haughty opportunist, and proved no more popular with Parliament or people.

James undoubtedly had strong homosexual leanings, at least at the emotional level. He addressed Buckingham as his 'sweet child and wife', and had no reservations about kissing his favourites in public, in a fashion that contemporaries variously described as 'lascivious' and 'slabbering'. But James was not entirely immune to female physical charms, and did more than his marital duty by his queen, Anne of Denmark, fathering three sons and four daughters. However, he found that Anne's interest in little other than clothes and jewellery only confirmed his prejudice against women as shallow, stupid creatures.

Religion and foreign policy

James was suspicious of the Presbyterianism of his fellow Scots, and insisted on his right to appoint bishops as a means of controlling the Church – 'No bishop, no king' was his motto. In England, he steered a middle ground between Catholics and Puritans, and was tolerant of both, insisting merely on loyalty. Despite this toleration, and the end of the war with Catholic Spain, in 1605 a group of Catholic conspirators led by Robert Catesby planned to blow up the king during the state opening of Parliament. But on 5 November one of the plotters, Guy Fawkes, was found with barrels of gunpowder in the vaults of the House of Lords, and the so-called Gunpowder Plot was foiled. To this day in Britain, fireworks are let off every 5 November, and effigies of Guy Fawkes burnt.

#### JAMES THE AUTHOR

James – sarcastically known as the British Solomon – was one of the most literary kings of England, writing poems, translations, and works on politics and theology, albeit none of them of any great merit. Among his better known works are:

- Daemonologie (1597). James took a great interest in devilry and witchcraft, and in 1590 had personally interrogated the so-called North Berwick Witches, who were accused of trying to kill him by supernatural means.
- The True Lawe of Free Monarchies (1598), which opposed the view of his old tutor George Buchanan that the king is responsible to his people.
- Basilikon Doron (1599), a treatise on the art of kingship in the form of a letter to his son.
- A Counterblaste to Tobacco (1604), in which James described the novel fad of tobacco smoking as 'loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black, stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless'.

James's foreign policy reflected his pacific approach to religion at home. Seeking for even-handedness in his dynastic arrangements (and also vainly imagining he could heal the religious wounds of Europe), he married his daughter Elizabeth to the leading German Protestant prince, Frederick of the Palatinate, and entered into lengthy negotiations to marry his eldest surviving son Charles to the daughter of the Catholic king of Spain. This last proposed match was deeply unpopular with James's Protestant subjects, especially as the Spaniards had successfully demanded the execution of Sir Walter Ralegh, whose activities in the New World had been an irritant to Spain. When in 1621 Parliament criticized the proposed match, James furiously tore out the relevant page from the journal of the House of Commons.

In his last few years James, although only in his fifties, was slipping into premature senility and suffering from chronic inflammation of the kidneys. Power effectively passed to his son Charles, himself infatuated with (and thus controlled by) Buckingham, and the two travelled together to Madrid to pursue the Spanish marriage. But they were rejected, and in their humiliation joined in the popular clamour for war with Spain. On 27 March 1625, having suffered a stroke, James died peacefully in his bed. The quietness of his passing says something for his abilities as a ruler, given that so many of his Stuart predecessors had suffered violent and untimely deaths. Such a violent end was also to be the lot of James's unwise son, Charles.

#### 1621

Francis Bacon impeached for corruption, but pardoned by James

The House of Commons objects to James's plan to marry his son Charles to a Spanish princess, calls for war on Spain, and denies the king has a right to imprison members of Parliament who criticize his foreign policy. In response, James arrests the MPs Sir Edward Coke and John Pym.

#### 1622

(8 February) James dissolves Parliament

#### 1623

(May) James makes George Villiers duke of Buckingham

(30 August) Buckingham and prince Charles leave Madrid, after the Spanish finally reject Charles's marriage proposal

#### 1624

(February) Parliament meets, declares monopolies illegal and votes to help Frederick V recover the Palatinate

(10 March) Declaration of war on Spain

(December) Marriage treaty with France, by which Charles is to marry Henrietta Maria, daughter of Henry IV

#### 1625

(27 March) Death of James