

## **“The Good Old Cause: The Twists and Turns of the English Republic and why it failed – Part 2: Road Back to Monarchy”**

**Talk by Tim Craven, March 2024**

The 2023/24 HADS winter talk programme ended where it began, with a talk by Tim Craven on the English Civil War and the following period of the “Commonwealth”. The previous talk had ended with the dissolution of the “Rump Parliament” by Cromwell in 1653 and Tim now took us forward from there.

Many people will have noticed the statue of Oliver Cromwell outside the Houses of Parliament. The statue, unveiled in 1899, was anonymously funded and there have been motions to have it removed. To this day, Cromwell remains a controversial figure.



*Cromwell Statue outside Parliament*

The Rump Parliament was succeeded by “Barebone’s Parliament”, with 140 members nominated by Cromwell or the Army Council. Many members never turned up and this attempt to introduce stable government ultimately failed. Subsequently, under a written constitution called “The Instrument of Government”, Cromwell was given the title “Lord Protector”.

Although some progress was made and 80 pieces of legislation passed within 6 months in 1655, a royalist plot, led by Colonel Penruddock led to state paranoia and the “Rule of the Major Generals” was introduced; effectively a military takeover. England and Wales were divided into 10 regions, each ruled by a major general, answering to Cromwell. The major generals tended to be committed puritans, leading to public houses and fairs being closed down, along with the abolition of Christmas and Easter. Understandingly they proved to be unpopular!

Eventually, Cromwell suspended the major generals and new parliamentary elections took place although royalists were not allowed to take seats. The Council of State rejected 100 MPs and another 60 refused to attend. Parliament offered Cromwell the crown and it is likely he would have accepted if it wasn’t for the objections of the army.

Tim then went on to describe the many complex attempts to govern the country in the next few years with royal plotting and the ultimate failure of the government to provide a consensus. By late 1657 Oliver Cromwell was king in all but name, even being empowered to name his successor.

However, the Commonwealth was not a period of complete failure. During this time the Royal Navy became a major force and the English were victorious in the First Dutch War (1652-54). Other military success came through an alliance with the French against the Spanish, campaigning in Flanders and gaining Dunkirk and also defeating the Spanish and gaining Jamaica, one of the earliest colonies in what was to become the British Empire. For the first time England was a major European force. Cromwell also allowed Jews to settle in England for the first time since the thirteenth century.

When Oliver Cromwell died in 1658, his nominated successor was his son, Richard, who had no military experience and virtually no support. Many factions were against him; the most important being the army who refused their support. Eventually overtures were made to the exiled (future) King Charles II and the "Treaty of Breda" was signed. Charles was declared king on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1660.

Ultimately the Commonwealth failed through Cromwell not being ruthless enough with his enemies, effectively creating a military dictatorship, not having enough popular support and a lack of succession planning. However, it can be argued that the settlement in 1660 led to the beginning of a golden period in Britain's history.

*Alan Sandford*

*March 2024*