

WAS OLIVER CROMWELL GOOD FOR ENGLAND?

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Ayes (Mike, Annette, Pauline):

Cromwell was given a bad press by the restored Monarchy in England. History is written by the winners!

His body was exhumed in 1661, and posthumously executed. It was decapitated, the body displayed in chains before being thrown in a pit. The head was displayed on a pole outside Westminster Hall until 1685. His reputation may also have suffered in later centuries by conflating his deeds with those of his great-uncle Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's destroyer of the monasteries in the 16C.

Cromwell was accused of banning Christmas, but this was done by Parliament before the Protectorate. He was a staunch Puritan, and thus disapproved of "lascivious behaviour" such as dancing, theatre etc. Also, if something had no basis in the Bible, it shouldn't be done. This last explains his and Parliament's objections to Christmas, with its pagan roots.

As a self-taught soldier during the Civil War he was incredibly successful. One of the chief architects of "the New Model Army", he was the leader of the cavalry, and one of very few English Cavalry leaders in history who had his riders under disciplined control. (Anyone disputing this should read Wellington's comments about English Cavalry during his time: - "the best mounted and the worst led".)

Although essentially a humble man, he was highly intelligent, consultative, rational and caring of ordinary people. One of those who helped to end the Absolute Monarchy in England, more than a century before France, and more than 250 years before Russia and, indeed, Germany, Cromwell helped change England forever. His legacy is the establishment of Parliamentary Democracy and a Constitutional Monarchy.

"A larger Soul hath seldom dwelled in a house of clay".

Nays (Liz, Jenni, Derek):

Cromwell is one of the most controversial figures in the history of the British Isles, considered a regicidal dictator by historians such as David Sharp, and a military dictator by Winston Churchill.

Strongly Puritan by the late 1630s, was tolerant of other religions (including Judaism) but intolerant to the point of genocide when it came to Catholicism.

In 1641 he was involved in drafting the "Root and Branch" Bill to abolish Episcopacy.

Although much praised as a soldier, after Naseby his campaign in western England included the siege and taking of Basing House, it is said he had 100 of defenders killed AFTER they'd surrendered.

During 2nd Civil War, he became a firm believer in "Providentialism" and believed that he, Cromwell, was one of God's "chosen people".

By 1648 Cromwell had come to believe that only by killing Charles could the Civil Wars be ended. He was the 3rd signatory to Charles' Death Warrant, and the one who wrote and signed (a Colonel Hacker was the co-signatory) the order to carry out the execution.

He strongly disagreed with the “levellers” in the New Model Army over popular sovereignty, extended suffrage, equality before the law, and religious tolerance. He believed only Landowners should have the vote. The Bishopsgate and Banbury mutinies in the Army followed in 1649, which Cromwell put down, and several of the mutineers were executed.

His activities in Ireland and later, Scotland, have been criticised very strongly since, and with justification. Thousands of Catholics died as a result of his orders, including soldiers and civilians who had surrendered to his forces.

During the early days of the Protectorate, Cromwell as Lord Protector put much of the country under military rule, but the opposition to this was strengthening and Cromwell shoved his military governors “under the bus”. Although this was a pragmatic and logical decision to try to preserve the peace, it did not go down well, either at the time or in later years.

Although he allowed the Jews to return (350yr after Edward I threw them out), his real motive was to convert them to Christianity (of the Puritan variety of course).

Conclusion:

This was something of a one-sided debate. The “Nays” tried hard to be critical of the man, but the “Ayes” made a very good case in the man's favour. The Group concluded that Oliver Cromwell was, indeed, good for England, if not so much for Ireland.