

1. From Magna Carta to Civil War

England has only had one King called John. This is because he was so unpopular that Royal families never used the name again. It's said that at one time there was a contender for the crown called John of Gaunt, who many of the Barons couldn't support because of his name. The story of King John's reign, from 1199-1216, is the first chapter in the making of the British Constitution.

Later in this essay I will discuss the structure of the society over which John reigned and how it changed as England entered what historians call the "modern period". As society evolves certain changes occur: people begin to think differently about what Government is for and the role of Monarchs comes into question. This will take us into the conflicts of the 17th century.

The current Prince Charles has commented that if he ever becomes King he will consider taking a new name. That's because England's first King called Charles could challenge John in an unpopularity contest. The events that brought his inglorious reign to an end and the issues around his succession are the second chapter of the story. We must begin however, by going back to medieval England at the beginning of the 13th century.

Magna Carta

It's interesting that for 150 years before John, the Kings of England had been Norman French, and regarded their true home as Normandy. John was the same. His first language was French, him and his extended family owned most of France, and he spent almost all of his time there. His brother Richard, the previous King, had spent only 6 months of his 10 year reign in England. When there was no King around, the English Barons, that is to say, the big landowners, of which there were about 200, had got used to running things themselves.

In 1204 King John was in Normandy when he was defeated and lost the Dukedom to the King of France. He fled to England, and seemed to be intent on raising money so that he could reclaim Normandy and go back there. It's said that he tripled tax revenue during his reign and confiscated land. For example, in those days it was normal to pay the King a kind of inheritance tax. John charged Nicolas De Stuteville the enormous sum of £6,000 to inherit his estate, which De Stuteville couldn't afford. So the King took the castle of Knaresborough, which was part of the inheritance, as payment.

The story of Robin Hood dates from this time. He was said to be a landowner who was dispossessed by the King's man in Nottingham. The story goes that Robin gathered a gang of followers and went to live in the forest. They survived on hunting and stealing from rich people. He became a local hero by giving at least some of what he'd stolen to the poor.

While this is a legend, it's by no means unlikely that at least one dispossessed land owner behaved this way. There's no direct historical evidence that there was a Robin Hood, but there were plenty of Robin's in England and "Hood" just means thief. The truth aside, the fact that the legend is set at this time is testament to the unpopularity of King John.

In 1214, John tried to retake Normandy and was again defeated by the King of France. To the Barons this meant that all the tax revenue had been wasted and they were stuck with the King hanging around in England. Usually in medieval politics, if you were a big, powerful landowner and you wanted to get rid of a King, you turned to a rival Royal. On this occasion there seems to have been no good alternatives available so the Barons decided to force the King to change his ways.

At least 2/3rds of England's 200 Barons met and drew up a list of demands. After defeating the his army they made the King sign it. It was called Magna Carta, from “Carta” meaning a Charter, or list of rights given by a Lord to his vassals, and “Magna” meaning big and important. From this time on it has acquired a symbolic status in the Anglo-Saxon world. Its contents are less important than the principles of freedom it represents.

Immediately after signing it, the King got the support of Europe's last line of Judicial authority, the Pope, and it was officially annulled. The following year John died. The Barons went back to the old strategy of choosing an agreeable King. They chose King Louis of France. Who came to England and was crowned. When John's rightful heir, the 9 year-old Henry, announced that he would rule under Magna Carta, Louis knew he stood no chance, so renounced his crown and went home.

In the meantime however, the new King Henry III's Royal Court had removed the provision in Magna Carta for a council of Barons to hold the King to account. Over the following decades there were complaints of violations, but no mechanism of enforcement.

In 1258, the Barons held another big meeting at Oxford. They wrote a document called the Provisions of Oxford. Just like Magna Carta it was first accepted by the King and then annulled with the agreement of the Pope. This led to war with the Barons, led by the charismatic radical Simon de Montfort.

It was de Montfort's radicalism that both lost him the war and set a precedent for Parliament. When he called a body to enforce the Provisions of Oxford, it included the “commons”, that is to say, representatives of the towns and the Gentry (non-noble landowners). Many Barons switched sides and the rebels were defeated in 1264. Nevertheless, after this, even King Henry III saw the wisdom of calling a Parliament to legitimise his decisions. De Montfort's model was the one they used.

Despite all these events it is the original “Magna Carta” that has become iconic. The original document is a strange mixture of general principles, such the right of widows to inherit their husband's land and the right of trial by jury, and very particular issues of its day, such as reducing the tax on Nicholas de Stuteville to £400. It is not however, what Magna Carta says that is important, but a more fundamental idea it establishes.

An example of its operation in practice is the change in how land was inherited. Before Magna Carta, if you wanted to inherit some land, you had to apply to the Sheriff to get a letter from the King, which you could show to a Judge to make it official. After Magna Carta, Judges were aware of the right, and no letter from the King was necessary. This shows how Magna Carta represent the idea that abstract rights can carry legal force, greater perhaps even than the will of a Monarch. This is also known as the “rule of law”.

Medieval Society

All this happened a very long time ago. To understand the context it would be helpful to have an idea of the social structure in these times. However, it is not easy. The vagueness of records and terminology, not to mention the plethora of titles, some inherent some honorary, makes getting a clear picture rather difficult. The following sketch is my guess:

At the top of society there is Royalty. Although obviously very few in numbers, they owned vast amounts of land so had a lot of money, tenants and servants. You can think of Royalty as the highest

family within a network of families we can call the Aristocracy. Below Royalty, the next wealthiest and most powerful Aristocrats are called Nobles (or Barons, in some, particularly political, contexts). They had titles such as Earl or Duke and owned large estates. Their wealth came from collecting rents, commercial interests or from offices of state. They had tenants who were duty bound by old rights to give military and other services to them.

The vast majority of people in medieval society were not Aristocrats, they were Peasants. Some were Freeman who had to pay taxes and could own land or be tenants paying rent to a Lord. There were also Serfs. There was a ceremony of enserfdom recorded in medieval times in which a man hangs a bell rope around his neck and puts money on his head. He then walks to the Lord, who takes the money, signifying that a relationship of service and protection has begun.

It is fair to assume that such a thing would happen when the man has slipped into debt and sees no way to recover. After this he would be obliged to work on his Lords land, fight for him and perhaps serve him in other ways. It was like a paternal relationship in which the serf would have to ask the Lord's permission to do virtually anything. In return, the serf would get "protection", not have to pay taxes and have some of the Lord's land to farm for his own needs. Significantly, serfs could not leave a Lord's estate without his permission.

The word "Peasant" refers to a person who farms land for their own consumption, so that includes serfs and freeman with farms, unless they were commercial farmers, producing things to sell. It seems likely that before medieval times, many peasants in Britain were serfs, but over time the institution declined. It is not clear why. Two processes acting simultaneously are likely. Firstly, the sons of serfs may not have accepted the status, and secondly, the growth of commerce brought money into England. For anyone seeking labour, using money is generally more efficient than calling on a serf.

Finally, at the bottom of the social hierarchy there were "Slaves", although it is very difficult to know how many. Medieval writers do not list or talk about their slaves, but occasional passing mentions show that they existed. It is possible that household servants, who lived even in the houses of freemen, had this status. A slave is personal property and has no rights.

When social status changes it is called "social mobility". Enserfdom is downward mobility. When a slave or serf becomes a freeman it is upward mobility. Another kind of upward mobility is when a freeman becomes a "Gentleman". This may happen when a merchant or commercial farmer makes enough money and chooses to apply for a Coat of Arms. The College of Arms would grant one based on family associations, service to a Lord, jobs done or held, and amount of property.

Beyond that, a Gentleman could climb further and attain the status of Knight. Originally this may have been to do with being able to keep and fight on a horse, so it was an honorific and military title. Membership of the order of Knights was awarded by the King and marked with a ceremony. Later it lost its equestrian and military significance but retained its Royal patronage and ceremony. Being a Knight was a qualification for representing a "Shire" (a county) in Parliament.

The Gentleman of Britain, or "Gentry" were therefore a kind of "middle class". They had some security through land ownership, some freedom from labour and enough money to open business opportunities and education. They would tend to have better social skills and more confidence than Peasants but lacked the family connections and inherited sense of power associated with the Aristocracy. Perhaps their "second-rate" and more precarious position is why this class produced many of England's radicals.

Modern Society

A Parliament of Nobles, Knights and Gentry evolved in medieval England. To understand what happened next it is helpful to understand how the structure of society changed as we enter modern times. Historians typically date its beginning to around the end of the 15th century. In England this neatly coincides with the beginning of the Tudor dynasty. The first Tudor King was Henry VII, who took the throne in 1485. His son, who succeeded him as Henry VIII in 1509, played a significant part in the evolution of British Government.

In this time, there is no talk of serfs in England. It is generally believed that labour shortages after the plagues which began in 1349, meant that labourers began moving around to find work and as pay rose more Peasants joined them. If the idea of serfdom had been alive in England at the time, this would have tested it. In other words, if Lords did try to prevent serfs from leaving their land it seems to have been neither effective nor recorded.

Another change that appears to have happened after plague times, is a growth in the number of secure and better-off farmers. Evidence that there was status climbing at this time are the books that explain how to be a Gentleman or Gentlewoman. Nevertheless, not all could reach this level. The class of farmers who were slightly less wealthy on average than the Gentry, became known as the Yeomanry. In some accounts they are referred to as “forty shilling freeholder”, which is the requirement to vote in elections for Parliament.

In this period, we get a slightly better picture of land ownership and social status from books such as the one by William Harrison, a rural clergyman, called “Description of England”. It was written in 1577 and says that “We in England divided our people commonly into four sorts, gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeoman, and artificers or labourers.”

The status of “citizens or burgesses” is fairly easy to understand. These were Freemen of the towns. In the countryside we have the Gentlemen and Yeomen, as already noted. From Harrison's and several other accounts (Such as King and Wilson) we get some idea of the “artificers and labourers”, who are of three kinds: Husbandmen, Cottagers and Apprentices.

Husbandmen appear to be the same as the freemen of medieval times. They might own or rent land and, especially in modern times, do occasional work for extra income. Cottagers were labourers who had been granted by law four acres of land in Elizabethan times. Apprentices were perhaps slaves, or freemen without property who worked for wages in the towns.

You may have noticed that Harrison does not mention the Aristocracy. This is because when he says “Gentry”, he is probably thinking of all landowners, big or small. At this time the Nobility would have been about 2% of the population and owned 15% of the land. The true Gentry and Yeomanry may have owned about 50%. The Church and Crown are said to have owned 35%.

While there were thousands of Gentry (one record written in 1524, says there were 4,500, and another written in 1600 says there were around 50 Gentry families in each county), there were very few Nobles. Although there were around 200 Barons recorded at the time of Magna Carta there are believed to have been only about 60 Nobles when Harrison was writing his book, around 1577.

After the short-lived Tudor dynasty, by the way, the new, and even shorter-lived, Stewart dynasty took over. Its first King, James I, came to power in 1603. He was keen on promotion and the

number of Nobles rose to 120 by the end of his reign. He also created the “Order of Baronet” as a new rank, and sold 200 positions. There were about 800 members of this Noble order by the time of the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

More's *Utopia*

The beginning of the times historians call “Modern” was 400 years after Magna Carta, and 400 years ago. At this time, across Europe, two kinds of Christianity were at war. For our purposes it is the politics, not the theology that matters. On one side was Catholicism, which stressed the authority of the Pope in Rome. On the other side was Protestantism, which objected to that authority. Early Protestants put forward their own preachers as alternatives to the long established Catholic Priests.

King Henry VIII of England began his reign as an ally of the wealthy Spanish monarchy, the chief defender of Catholicism in Europe. Henry was himself a vocal and authoritarian Catholic. Several years into his reign however, allegiances shifted and broke with Spain. In defiance of the Pope he divorced his Spanish wife and in 1536, made himself Head of the Church in England. Not all of his ministers went with him.

Henry had two daughters. The first, to his Spanish wife, was raised a Catholic. She went off to marry the King of Spain. The second was raised a Protestant. Henry also had a cousin who had gone North to marry the King of Scotland. Her daughter, Henry's second cousin, was also significant in the story.

After Henry's death, his eldest daughter, Mary, returned with the King of Spain to rule England. They persecuted England's Protestants. When she died the crown was claimed by her Protestant younger sister, Elizabeth, and by Henry's second cousin, another Mary. This Mary, another Catholic, is known to history as Mary, Queen of Scots. She never became Queen and spent much of her life as a prisoner. Active Protestants in the English Civil Service and in Parliament, worked to make sure Elizabeth held on to power and Catholicism was never restored.

I tell this story partly because it will become relevant later, and partly to illustrate how historical events, to some extent incidental, can push the evolution of Government and political thought forward. In this case, power games amongst Europe's powerful families, prepared the ground for a clash that would shape modern British Government. They were also the backdrop to the thoughts of a significant English political theorist.

Thomas More had been a member Parliament for several years before being promoted through a few jobs to become the King Henry VIII's Chancellor. In this job he was one of the King's chief persecutors of Protestants. When the King changed sides he refused to go with him. He continued to represent the Pope against the King, until he was tried and executed in 1535.

During his rise to power he published a book called *Utopia*, a word he took from Greek meaning “No place”. It is a fictional account of an island, showing how a harmonious society could work. In *Utopia*:

- The population is evenly distributed.
- All property is held in common.
- Houses are swapped every 10 years.
- Everyone works the land for 2 years, and then does another trade.

- Nobody works more than 6 hours/day.
- Everybody must work.
- Every household has 2 slaves, who are periodically released for good behaviour.
- State euthanasia is allowed.
- Hospitals are free.
- Welfare is provided for the desperate.
- Divorce is allowed.
- Sex before marriage is punishable by enforced celibacy.
- Meals are cooked in turn by households and eaten in a common hall.
- The law is very simple and there are no lawyers.
- Several religions exist and tolerate each other.
- Atheists are despised and have to see a Priest until they change their minds.
- Privacy is not liked, and there are no places for private gathering.
- Utopians always try to capture, rather than kill their enemies.

The main character in the book is called Raphael Hythlodæus. His last name is Greek for “dispenser of nonsense”. This is a clue that More wasn't necessarily proposing any of these things. He is using satire to make a more subtle political point. By calling his character the speaker of nonsense, More is acknowledging the reader's intuitive rejection of Utopia's radicalness, and yet inviting them to question: is a harmonious society really possible?

Bacon's *New Atlantis*

Another century later, and another highly respected politician gave us his vision of a harmonious society. Francis Bacon lived from 1561-1626, which makes him a contemporary of Shakespeare. Like Shakespeare he saw the crown pass to King James. In fact, Bacon ended up with the same job as Thomas More. He was a Lord Chancellor to an authoritarian King.

Bacon was the most famous of the new philosophers of empirical science. He wrote many essays promoting the experimental method, which is all about overcoming the flaws in human nature to discover truths about the world. His politics was not unrelated. *New Atlantis*, published shortly after his death, is, like More's *Utopia*, a fictionalised portrayal of an imaginary place.

In case you're not familiar with the name, Atlantis was an island City in ancient Greece, which is said to have disappeared under the sea. It's not known whether the story had its origins in a real place or was entirely fictitious. Nevertheless, the name Atlantis, in the English-speaking world, has come to mean a place of high ideals and civilisation, which may or may not exist. In Bacon's version:

- The people of the New Atlantis have high moral standards.
- Religion and science complement each other.
- The culture is devoted to the exploration of nature.
- Society is of people working together to make life better.

Compared to More's, Bacon's vision of a better society cares less about rules and more about reason. More seems to think of humans as fixed by nature. It is the job of the state therefore, to restrain their base urges and hold society together. Bacon sees human nature as flexible, and the state can be used to improve it. *New Atlantis* is an ideal, not of people as they are now but controlled by better laws, but of people as they could be. The state can set standards for culture to follow.

Between these two, what we now call “utopian” visions, it is possible to see an evolution that parallels the thinking of many radicals. To begin with, young radicals look to politics, believing that the solutions to the problems they see around them is to change the system; remove irrational laws and conventions; expel venal and detestable rulers; reframe to constitution to eliminate exploitation and injustice. When confronted with the question of human nature, they will respond that people are basically good and that systems and rules corrupt them.

Many radicals over time, sense that their solutions are too simple. Systems, to some extent, reflect the people who have created them. A change at the top will not necessarily be echoed in society at large. Alas, the flaws of society at large may make the changes at the top impossible. The radical is thus inclined to shift attention from the political to the cultural. They seek to change how people think so that whatever improvements they make to the constitution will stick.

It is constitutional thinking that unites More and Bacon. What we see is a shift from thinking about the state as if it were the property of a Monarch, to thinking about it as a means to make society better. In modern society, the idea of the role of the state changes.

The fall of Kingship

“You wretches, detestable on land and sea,
You who seek equality with Lords are unworthy to live!
Give this message to your colleagues,
Rustics you were and rustics you are still,
You will remain in bondage not as before,
but incomparably harsher,
for as long as we live we will strive to suppress you,
and your misery will be an example in the eyes of posterity.
However we will spare your lives if you remain faithful,
choose now which course you want to follow”

“My master, God omnipotent, is mustering in his clouds
on our behalf armies of pestilence,
and they shall strike your children
yet unborn and unbegot
that lift your vassal hands against my head
and threat the glory of my precious crown”

What kind of a person would you guess would say these words, a spoilt child? It is actually meant to be a King. These are the words of Bacon's contemporary, William Shakespeare, given to the 16 year old, King Richard II, in the play of that name.

What I think is remarkable about this speech is that it's so bold. It doesn't hide anything about the real character of Monarchy. There is no mystery or magic. The King is a just a petulant, spoilt, little bully. This is a sign that something is changing in modern society. Whereas in the past, people thought of Kings, whether good or bad, as in some sense, superior or even divine. In Shakespeare's time, perhaps in part due to the portrayals by dramatists, Kings were increasingly turning into real people we could identify with.

Sometimes the late 16th century in England is referred to as “Shakespearean” times. It is significant

that as we reach modern times, we have the first period in British history not thought of as belonging to a race or a King, but to an artist. I think this is a reflection of the cultural change, a change to both society and to how people think, which is happening at this time.

Shakespeare's sixteen histories dramatise Royal households. Despite noticeably biases toward the Tudors, under whose Queen he had lived his early life, Shakespeare is brutally honest about the human failings and weaknesses of Monarchs, and about the corruption of Monarchy itself. His Kings are often moody, irrational, delusional, irritable and often very unlikeable. They are also shown to be self-serving. The whole world of politics on Shakespeare's stage is sordid and unpleasant, not to mention brutal and often promptly fatal.

Although the fading of Royal mystique began a long time ago, it has not yet truly died. Amongst Royalists today in Britain there is still a reluctance to think of members of the Royal family, having normal thoughts or doing normal things. For some people it is still important to preserve the intangibly quality of majesty they attach to Royalty.

Nevertheless, I think that the awakening from such illusions began early in modern society. Shakespeare's portrayal of the ugliness of power was part of a trend that saw people overcoming their magical beliefs about Monarchs. It was a trend that led to civil war in England.

The divine right of Kings

Power relations changed as England moved from a medieval to a modern society. In medieval Europe, the Church in Rome had its representatives, the Bishops and Archbishops, everywhere. While it wasn't a state with executive and legal powers (except locally, in Rome) it had a role throughout Europe. It was said to have "spiritual" authority, so could rule on family matters such as marriage, divorce and legitimacy. Its sanction gave legitimacy to Kings. Hence, medieval Europe was a kind of association, and the Church was its diplomatic service.

It was commonly believed that the Church of Rome was founded by one of Jesus's disciples. This was the source of its absolute authority on matters of religion. It was not supposed to dirty its hands with earthly matters, so executive power was devolved to the Lords it endorsed and oversaw. Hence, the source of all power was divine, It flowed top-down; from God to Church to Kings.

From the 16th to 17th century religious wars devastated Europe. One way of seeing those wars was as states breaking away from the European association and becoming independent. Theological debates, hatred of corruption and greed for power, blended into a potent mixture. States like England, with their own expanding financial and commercial systems didn't want Priests draining resources or Pope's telling them what was or wasn't allowed.

In breaking from the Church however, they were also breaking from the thing that gave authority to Kings. Constitutional thinking was growing and people were seriously discussing how states could be reorganised for the common good. What did the future hold for Monarchs? Some Kings felt it was necessary to re-established their role. Without the mediation of the Church, they would get their authority directly from God.

Henry VIII was the English King who broke from the Church of Rome. As I mentioned earlier, he had two daughters. The first, Mary, was Catholic and married the King of Spain. The second, Elizabeth, was Protestant and took over when Mary died. Meanwhile, Henry's second cousin, Mary Stewart, inherited the crown of Scotland, and became known to the English as Mary Queen of

Scots. She had tried to take the throne of England when the other Mary died, but Elizabeth defeated and imprisoned her.

Although my subject is British Government, I have so far only talked about England. Scotland, although geographically almost as big as England, is a small nation, barely 1/10 of England's population. In practical terms Scotland was swallowed up by England in the 17th century, and formalised in 1707 with the creation of the United Kingdom (or "Britain"). For this reason, before this time, British history is essentially English history. Scotland enters the story with Mary Queen of Scots.

Crowned as an infant and raised as a Catholic, the teenager Mary was sent off to France to marry the King. Radical Protestantism grew rapidly in 16th century Scotland. When her husband died, when she was only 18, Mary returned to try to rule her homeland, now hostile to her religion. After a series of scandals, conspiracies and uprisings, she was forced to flee to England, leaving behind her baby son. In 1567, Scotland again had an infant Monarch. This was King James VI, and he was educated by his Protestant regency, a group of wealthy Barons lead by a man called Buchanan.

Buchanan not only educated the young King, but also wrote a book on good Kingship. This must have had a big effect on James. By the time he was 18, in 1584, he was supremely confident in his role. In that year he became King in his own right and seemed averse to taking any further advice or instruction. Buchanan died the following year.

King James VI of Scotland cultivated an image of wisdom and in 1597 wrote his own version of Buchanan's manual. Soon afterwards he wrote a book spelling out the role of Kings. It was called "The True Law of Free Monarchs" and its basic ideas are these:

1. Kings are divinely ordained, that is to say, they are given their role by God.
2. They are only accountable to God.
3. The succession of Kings is hereditary.
4. Subjects of the King have no right to resist his rule.

Although the idea wasn't unique to James (there were others in Europe making the same arguments), he was the first to make it a manifesto of his rule. It became known as the "divine right of Kings". When Elizabeth died without an heir in 1603, James was undisputedly next in line for the English throne. He became King James I of England and VI of Scotland. The Tudor dynasty gave way to the Stewart dynasty.

King James I is famous for two things in particular. Firstly, he survived an extravagant assassination attempt that involved blowing up Parliament. This was the infamous Gunpowder plot of 1607, still commemorated in Britain as Bonfire night, every November 5th. Secondly, he introduced a new Bible (physically destroying all the others).

While he was reputedly well-read and intelligent, his affected wisdom was mocked by many in England. His ideas of Kingship and his attempt to interfere with English law and Parliament earned him the nickname "the wisest fool in Christendom". Above all his greatest failure, particularly with regard to his dreams of Kingship, was bringing his son, Prince Charles into the world.

Civil War

Charles became King on his father's death in 1625. Perhaps because of his upbringing in the spirit

of his father, he found compromise almost impossible. Raised to think he had a divine right to be obeyed, he saw it as his mission to defend Monarchy. In the event, like King John, his arrogance and unscrupulousness pushed his subjects into revolt. The story of his reign is the second chapter in the making of the British constitution.

The immediate cause of his conflict with Parliament was his attempt to raise money for old fashioned feudal wars. This was something many people were no longer prepared to accept. He dissolved Parliament and tried to rule without it. For many generations, the Burgesses and Knights of the Shires had been loyal social climbers, and had simply reflected the King's will in the country. Now however, Parliament was full of lawyers and historians. Many were Puritans, a branch of intransigent Protestantism, and they were used to fighting for their beliefs.

The idea, repeated by Parliamentary leaders, such as Robert Cotton, John Pym and John Cook, was that by dissolving Parliament the King had violated "English liberties", as enshrined in Magna Carta. It was they said, the moral and religious duty of the people to hold the King to account, and remove him if necessary.

The first wave of fighting went well for the King. Poorly organised and ill-equipped popular militias came out to defend Parliamentary authority in the towns, but the King's loyalists took over relatively easily. Then Parliament organised a proper army and in the second wave turned the tide. When the war ended in 1649, England became a Republic. Something happened that was unspeakable as far as European Monarchy was concerned. A King, who was said to be chosen by God to rule, was executed.

The well-drilled Parliamentary army was led by Oliver Cromwell. In the time of the republic he was made Lord Protector, and used this position to secure dictatorial powers. He was a fanatical Puritan and disliked any kind of indulgence. His government banned football and Christmas, and inevitably became very unpopular.

After 11 years of it, the popular mood was for change. When Cromwell died, his job was passed to his son, who quickly stepped aside for the return of a King. In 1660, Charles' son, another Charles, came back from exile in France, to rule as Charles II. This was known as the "Restoration" but in reality it could never restore Monarchy in quite the way it was before.

For one thing, there would never again be any talk of divine rights. The new King saw his job as keeping out of politics, and rebuilding the image of Royalty itself. Charles II played to the crowd. He supported the emerging sciences by sponsoring the Royal Society. He was also a patron of the arts. He accepted without dispute, Parliament's removal of his right to raise an army without its consent. Memories of civil war and the King's execution were alive in people's minds.

The settlement between Crown and Parliament however, wasn't yet complete. When Charles II died in 1685, his son came down from Scotland to be King. The problem was that young James had married a catholic and converted to Catholicism. Parliament had already passed a law forbidding a Catholic King. The danger of war loomed again.

Parliament conceded first, allowing James II coronation. They complained as he promoted Catholics to positions of influence. They watched in horror as he promoted loyalty to the Crown in the newly formed standing army. The tension eventually broke, and the trigger was when the Queen gave birth to a son. This meant a Catholic heir to the throne. It meant that the erosion of Protestant and Parliaments gains would continue for another generation.

Reverting to the age old method of finding a sympathetic King, Parliament took a bold step. In the Netherlands, Mary, James II's daughter, had married her cousin (who was also James's nephew), William of Orange. In 1688, Parliament invited them to England to rule as joint Monarchs. They came and having no significant means to resist it, James fled. The event is recorded in British history as “The Glorious Revolution”.

On arrival, a Bill of Rights was read to William and Mary. It confirmed the rights of Parliament, including removing the right of the King to block a law. It restricted his powers to raise money and by fixing a payment for the maintenance of the Royal household, it made it necessary for the King to call Parliament every year.

James II fled first to Ireland, then to France, and finally found enough money and supporters to launch a rebellion in Scotland. William of Orange's armies however, quickly drove him out and he was finally defeated in the north of Ireland. Despite further campaigns led by his James' son, the Parliamentary settlement stood firm. As confirmed in the Act of Settlement of 1701, British Government had evolved into what became known as a “Constitutional Monarchy”

Conclusion

The Barons of England had once forced their King to accept limits on his power. Magna Carta was in some respects a peace treaty, but took on special, symbolic significance. 400 years later, people were again prepared to fight their King, and cited its authority. This time however, society had change and the Royal mystique was fading.

The very fact that a King had to proclaim his “divine right” is evidence that the tide of history was turning. The revolution, commonly known as a “civil war”, ended with something unthinkable a generation before; the legal execution of a King. This was a turning point and although it would take decades to formalise the settlement, Britain was now governed by the rule of law, and Parliament was sovereign.

As we entered modern times, philosophers like Thomas More and Francis Bacon, suggested that we could resolve political and social conflicts through reason. Old hierarchies were weakening; mythical sources of power were fading from people's minds. A state could no longer be thought of as an apparatus to express the will of a Monarch. It now existed to serve the people and it was an open question how best to do this. So it was that modern Political theory was born.

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