

Charles II



Louis XIV, shown here, and the court of France were great influences on Charles II, so much so that he tried to emulate their splendour in his own court.

On 25 May, 1660, King Charles II landed at Dover. After 15 years in exile the king was returning to his kingdom.

It had soon become apparent that Richard Cromwell was not capable of running the country. 'Tumbledown Dick' was quickly removed from office, and parliament invited Charles to return and take up his crown. People across the country rejoiced that the strict Puritan regime of the Commonwealth was at an end.

During the Commonwealth, the Puritans had banned many festivals and pastimes that they considered frivolous. For example, in 1652 Christmas was abolished and in 1654 cock-fighting, a popular sport in town and country, was banned. In the towns, theatres were closed down and alehouses shut.

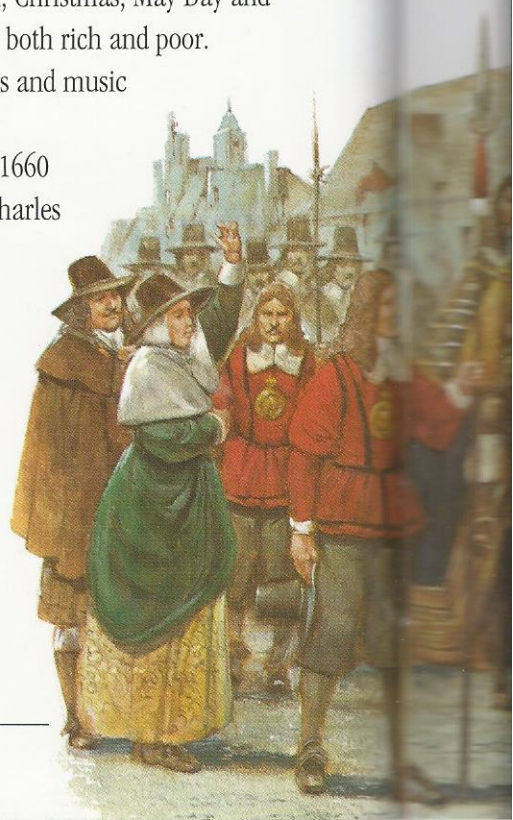
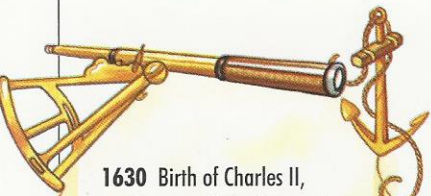
After the restoration of Charles II, it is little wonder that people greeted the return of merriment with relief. Sports such as football and cricket were very popular. In London there were many colourful pageants on the river Thames, such as the Lord Mayor's Show, and many celebrations were held. Once again, Christmas, May Day and harvest time became important festivals and were enjoyed by both rich and poor. In the relaxed atmosphere of Charles's court, French fashions and music became all the rage.

The policies of the Restoration were established between 1660 and 1662. The Church of England became more powerful. Charles himself wished for religious tolerance, particularly towards Roman Catholics – he himself was a Protestant but the rest of his family were Catholics, including his wife.

This horn book was used to teach children the letters of the alphabet. Sons of the nobility and the gentry were usually sent to public or grammar schools. Girls were mostly educated at home.



- 1630** Birth of Charles II, eldest son of Charles I and Henrietta Maria.
- 1649** Execution of Charles I. Charles II is proclaimed king of Scotland.
- 1651** Defeat of Royalist troops at Worcester. Charles escapes to France.
- 1659** Declaration of Breda sets out terms of restoration of king.
- 1660** End of Long Parliament. Restoration of King Charles II (May). By now coffee houses are becoming fashionable meeting places in cities.
- 1662** Charles marries Catherine of Braganza, daughter of the king of Portugal.
- 1665** Great Plague causes thousands of deaths. War with the Netherlands (until 1667).
- 1666** Great Fire of London (3–6 September).
- 1678** So called 'Popish plot' to murder the king results in persecution of Catholics.
- 1684** London experiences a freezing winter; a 'Frost Fair' is held on the iced-over river Thames.
- 1685** Death of Charles II (6 February).





Coffee was introduced from Arabia into Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. Together with tea and chocolate, coffee changed the drinking habits of many British people, replacing beer as the main beverage. Coffee drinking became a craze for the well to do, and after the 1650s coffee houses opened all over London and in many other cities and towns.

But there was still deep suspicion of Roman Catholic 'popery' in parliament and across the country. In 1662 parliament passed an act banning any religious services except those of the Church of England.

As the years passed, the king and his wife failed to produce any children. This meant that the legitimate heir to the throne was Charles's brother, James. He was a devout Catholic and, although his daughters from his first marriage were brought up as Protestants,

he had since remarried a Catholic princess. In 1678, two conspirators named Israel Tonge and Titus Oates came forward with accusations about a Catholic plot to murder Charles and put James on the throne. The accusations were untrue, but hysteria about 'popish' plots overran the country and many Catholics were persecuted and killed. Some MPs tried to force the king to agree to an 'Exclusion Act' which would prevent James succeeding him. But Charles refused and when he died in 1685, James II was proclaimed as his successor. As he lay dying, Charles allegedly accepted the Catholic faith.

The Restoration ended a period of great turmoil in Britain: a raging civil war, a king beheaded and a time of strict Puritan rule. The war had had a devastating effect on many areas of

the country and on many ordinary people.

The Restoration was a peaceful time in which the country and people prospered once more.



Between 1660 and 1669, Samuel Pepys kept a detailed diary of his life. Among other things, he recorded the effects of the Great Plague and the Great Fire in London. He wrote of the plague: 'But Lord, what a sad time it is, to see no boats upon the River — and grass grow all up and down Whitehall-court — and nobody but poor wretches in the streets.'

Charles II arrives in London to an enthusiastic welcome. The diarist Samuel Pepys was one of those who travelled across the Channel to bring the king back. The crowds who greeted Charles were enthusiastic in their welcome. Pepys wrote: 'The shouting and joy expressed by all is past imagination.'

