

Oliver Cromwell

Oliver Cromwell (1599 –1658) was an English military and political leader. He served as “Lord Protector” of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1653 until his death, acting as both “head of state” and “head of government” of the “republic”.



He was born into gentry, a family descended from the sister of King Henry VIII's minister Thomas Cromwell. Little is known of the first 40 years of his life. He became an Independent Puritan after undergoing a religious conversion in the 1630s. He was an intensely religious man, and he fervently believed that God was guiding him. He was elected Member of Parliament (MP) for Huntingdon in 1628 and for Cambridge in 1640. He entered the English Civil Wars on the side of the "Roundheads" or “Parliamentarians”. He demonstrated his ability as a commander and was quickly promoted to one of the principal commanders of the army. He played an important role, under General Sir Thomas Fairfax, in the defeat of the Royalist ("Cavalier") forces.

Cromwell was one of the signatories of King Charles I's death warrant in 1649. He was selected to take command of the English campaign in Ireland in 1649. His forces defeated the Confederate and Royalist coalition in Ireland and occupied the country, bringing to an end the Irish Confederate Wars. During this period, a series of Penal Laws were passed against Roman Catholics (a minority in England and Scotland, but the vast majority of people in Ireland), and a substantial amount of their land was confiscated. Cromwell also led a campaign against the Scottish army in 1650.

After Charles I was executed in 1649, England became a “Commonwealth”, and stayed so for 5 years. In 1653, Cromwell was offered the crown, but he did not want to be king. So, on 20th April 1653, he dismissed the Parliament by force, and he was then invited to rule as “Lord Protector” of England (which included Wales), Scotland, and Ireland. So Great Britain was a “Protectorate” for 6 years (1653 – 1659). Great Britain was therefore a “republic” for a total 11 years. As a ruler, Cromwell executed an aggressive and effective foreign policy. He died from natural causes in 1658 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. The Royalists returned to power with Charles II as king in 1660. To demonstrate their hatred of Cromwell, they exhumed his corpse, hung it with chains, and beheaded it, for all the public to see.

Cromwell is one of the most controversial figures in the history of Great Britain. He is considered as a dictator by some historians, as a military dictator by others, and as a hero of liberty by many academics. His measures against the Catholics in Ireland have been regarded by some as genocidal, and he is intensely disliked by the Irish. In a 2002 BBC survey, he was selected as one of the ten greatest Britons of all time.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Cromwell