England in 1603

Introduction

It is extraordinary that the death of Elizabeth I in 1603 did not result in a political crisis, perhaps even civil war. The virgin queen had failed to produce an heir and there were a number of contenders for the English throne and the Tudor inheritance. Nevertheless, shortly after the queen's death, James VI, the Stuart king of Scotland, was successfully proclaimed as her successor and henceforth took the dual title of King James VI of Scotland and King James I of England. Yet, within 40 years of James's accession, England was divided by civil war. To find an explanation for this has proved to be one of the most intractable historical problems in English history.

Before considering the key events and developments of early and mid seventeenth-century England, we need to consider an outline view of the condition of this country in the latter period of the reign of Elizabeth I. The actions and words of individuals as important as Sir Thomas Wentworth, William Laud, John Pym and Oliver Cromwell, all of whom were born in the Elizabethan period, cannot be explained without some knowledge of England before the arrival of James Stuart.

The **middle way** became a term used to describe the religious settlement fashioned by Elizabeth in 1559, which was a compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. Notably, although celebration of the mass was henceforth forbidden, bishops remained.

A **faction** is a small group of courtiers, usually based on support for the leading figure, or figures, of the group, for example the Howards, though the identity was often based on policy as well, for example war with Spain. Monarchs usually listened to different factions at the same time. If they listened to one only then an excluded faction might out of frustration resort to violence, as was the case with Essex and his followers in 1601.

The royal **court** was both a physical and a political entity, and although usually based in the palace at Whitehall it would also accompany the monarch on any royal progress into the country. By 1585 it was

A decade of crises, 1593–1603

In 1598 Elizabeth celebrated her 40th year as queen, four decades in which, for the large part, she had ruled with care, caution and with no little skill. At a time when other countries were being divided by religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant, Elizabeth had managed to avoid driving either group to rebellion, mainly by desiring not to make 'windows into men's souls'. Instead, she deliberately steered a **middle way** between the two extremes. Moreover, at a time when royal marriages often caused political division and sometimes even civil war, Elizabeth had refused to marry. Another cause of potential political division was **faction** at **court** but, in this respect also, the queen, at least until the very end of her reign, had managed to balance different factions.

Elizabeth I with figures representing Time and Death in an allegorical portrait, painted after her death, by an unknown artist. Her appearance is in vivid contrast to the glorious representations of the queen from the earlier part of the reign.

War with Spain

Yet, in the last ten years of Elizabeth's reign, England was beset by no less than four major crises: a foreign war, a rebellion in Ireland, a court revolt and an economic depression. Each on its own represented a challenge to Elizabeth's government but, combined, they proved a severe test.

The foreign war was against Spain, the wealthiest and most powerful of all European states. As the leading Catholic state, Spain had, for some time, been attempting to put down a rebellion against its authority in the Netherlands (also known as the United Provinces or Holland). In 1585 England had gone to war in support of the Netherlands, a fellow Protestant state. This was the immediate background to the Spanish Armada campaign in 1588. Even though the Armada was defeated, the Spanish did not give up and the war dragged on until 1604.

Essex and the revolt in Ireland

By the late 1590s it had been clear that the earl of Tyrone represented a challenge to English authority in Ireland which had to be put down, not least because the Irish were for the large part Catholic and thus represented what

also firmly established as a centre of artistic performance and patronage, an aspect which flourished during the reign of Charles I. The court was composed of hundreds of servants known as the household who were attendant upon the needs of the monarch.

many in England believed were the 'enemy within'. In 1599 the earl of Essex, the queen's favourite, led a force to crush a rebellion in **Ulster** headed by Tyrone. Having failed in his objective, however, and believing that his position at court was under threat, Essex returned to London and launched a revolt against royal authority – an action for which he was executed in 1601. In the same year, the Irish Rebellion, briefly supported by a Spanish force, was ultimately defeated.

Ulster is the most northern of the four Irish provinces, comprising the counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone, Londonderry, Antrim, Armagh, Down, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan.

Economic depression

The economic depression was caused by a series of bad harvests, an effect of which was the doubling of the price of wheat in the three years from 1594 to 1597. There is evidence of starvation, or near starvation, in parts of northern England and it is certain that the number of able-bodied beggars and vagabonds increased. The **Poor Laws** had to be revised in 1598 and 1601 in order to help deal with the problem.

The **Poor Laws** were medieval in origin. Drawn up by parliament, they enshrined the principle of compulsory giving. Amongst other things they included provision for the relief of those genuinely unable to work and measures to restrain vagrants. By the early seventeenth century it is possible to speak of a national Poor Law system in England.

Parliamentary opposition

There were other problems that resulted from these crises. In particular, Elizabeth had to meet with parliament in 1589, 1593, 1597–98 and 1601 in order to request money. Consequently, to the higher prices of the 1590s was added the extra burden of higher taxes. Even as they agreed to more taxes, MPs grumbled about financial devices such as **monopolies** and complained about what they saw as the abuse of royal power. Alarmingly for the crown, as more was asked of parliament, MPs began to demand more in privileges and freedoms.

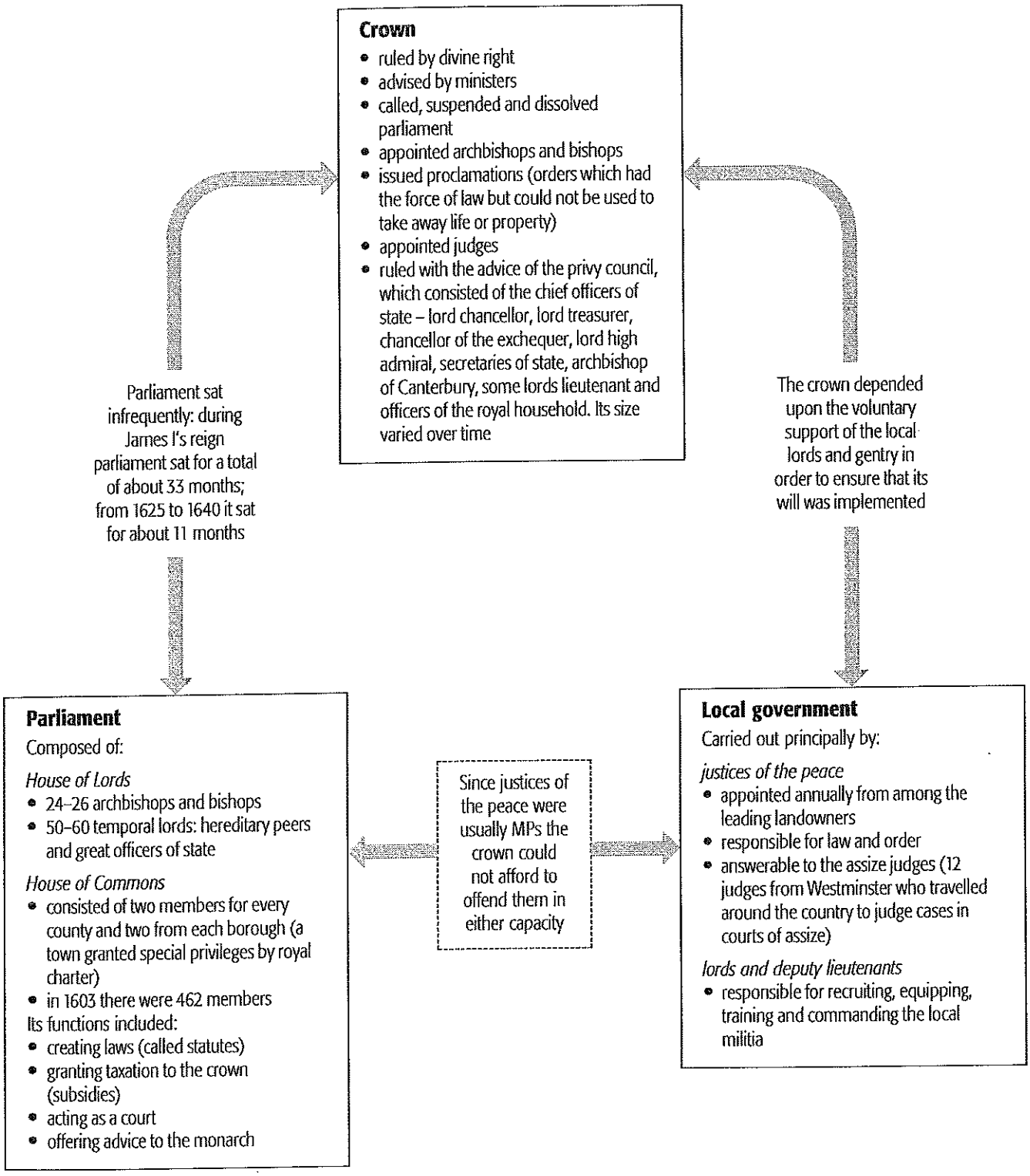
What was the nature of the government that had to deal with the consequences of these several crises?

Identify four problems that Elizabeth bequeathed to her successor, James VI and I.

Monopolies, which gave to the purchaser the sole right either to make or to distribute a particular commodity, were sold by the crown. They became a grievance of the political nation and featured in the parliaments of 1621 and 1624 (see pp. 13 and 14).

The government of England

At the head of the government was the crown. It enjoyed extensive powers collectively known as the royal prerogative and ruled by means of the main formal institution of government, the privy council, supplemented from time to time by a parliament (see page 5). The privy council had its origins in the medieval royal council. It varied in size from no more than 11 in 1590 to 13 in 1603. It grew steadily to over 30 during the reign of James VI and I and was about 40 strong under Charles I. It was composed of men chosen directly by the monarch. They were expected to discuss matters of state and present advice to the monarch. According to a contemporary of Elizabeth, the council acted as 'the wheels that hold the chariot of England upright'. It discharged a wide range of political, administrative and judicial functions.



The machinery of state in early seventeenth-century England. Members of the political nation served the crown and their local communities. Justices of the peace, for example, were usually MPs. In certain circumstances, this dual allegiance could lead to dangerous stresses within the system. This, in turn, could result in a 'functional breakdown' of government.

In an age when there was no civil service, efficient royal government was largely dependent upon the monarch obtaining and maintaining the goodwill of members of the political nation – composed of those members of society who, as a consequence of their wealth (usually measured in terms of property, family connections and education) enjoyed power and influence in the political process. Indeed, MPs would also often act in their localities as **justices of the peace**, a dual role that sometimes resulted in tension. However, this was generally avoided through the distribution of royal **patronage**. In turn, councillors could use patronage to manipulate parliament and control local government.

The monarch was powerful but not all-powerful. The crown had to live within the law of the land. Judges, even though appointed by the crown, did not always make the legal judgements the crown wanted and were obliged to uphold the law in the form of **common law** and **statute law**. England was, therefore, a mixed monarchy rather than an absolute monarchy and the Magna Carta of 1215 remained an important constitutional document. Nevertheless, at a time when many European monarchs were trying to establish some kind of royal absolutism, many English people feared that England might go the same way.

Justices of the peace were granted their authority by the crown and acted as 'the great surveyors of the kingdom'. In particular they ensured that the criminal law was effectively administered through the holding of Quarter Sessions, a court convened every three months at which all the JPs of a county were supposed to be present. There was an average of about 50 JPs in each county by the 1630s.

The term **patronage** can be used in one of two related ways. The first is the support given by a patron, a powerful figure, to a group of clients. The second is the power of appointment to government (or church) posts. Individuals appointed to such posts would be expected to support the patron in return. The monarch had the greatest patronage but many senior ministers (state and church) gained powers of patronage of their own.

Common law was the law of custom and practice, upheld by and developed by judges' decisions over many years. **Statute law** was the written law: law passed by parliament, and act of parliament. Common law was based on tradition but could be overridden by a new act of parliament.

The church in England

The government of early modern England also included the church. Religious beliefs and practices were central to people's lives. They believed that Heaven and Hell really existed. They went to church at least once a week. There was only one religion, Christianity, as was the case throughout Europe. There was only one Christian church, the Church of England. The head of the Church of England was the crown, not the archbishop of Canterbury. England had what was known as an established or Erastian church, one attached to and subordinate to the government. This had been so since the reign of Henry VIII. Until then, the church in England had been part of the Catholic Church, with the pope in Rome as its head. Everyone in England was a member of the church, at least in theory. It was an age of religious uniformity. The idea of religious toleration did not exist in the sixteenth century. There were still some who believed in the Catholic faith, who saw the pope as their spiritual leader, but they were a persecuted minority. They had to practise their Catholic faith in secret. Most Englishmen believed that the pope was the Antichrist. Because people's religion followed the monarch's, because religious uniformity was the norm, religious identity became tied up with national identity. A defining feature of late sixteenth-century England was its Protestant faith. This helped to bring it into conflict with Catholic states such as Spain, as was the case from 1585 onwards.

Catholicism was not the only challenge to the established church. Many Protestants wanted to make it more Protestant. They disliked Elizabeth's middle way. These reformers, the 'hotter sort of Protestant', became known as Puritans. They wanted to purify the church of any form of Catholic influence. Some Puritans wanted to simplify the church service and little more. Others wanted to reform the whole structure of the church, to replace the **episcopalian** church with a **Presbyterian** version. As long as Elizabeth was queen, English Puritans would not get very far. They looked with hope to her successor.

An **episcopalian** church was governed by the episcopacy. This was a hierarchy of bishops and archbishops, appointed by the head of the church.

Presbyterian churches were governed by presbyteries. A presbytery was a hierarchy of church elders, often appointed by the church congregation.

The royal succession

Unmarried, Elizabeth had no children to succeed her. The closest royal claimant was a descendant of her aunt, Margaret Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, who had married the king of Scotland. Their great-grandson was James VI. There was no one else with as strong a claim. Cecil, the dominant figure at Elizabeth's court in the last few years of her reign, made secret contact with James VI in order to ensure that, on Elizabeth's death, authority was passed quickly and peacefully to the Stuart king. 'The queen is dead. Long live the king.'

What were the two main challenges to the established church?

2 The reign of James I, 1603–25

Focus questions

- What was the relationship between James I and parliament?
- How were relations between James I and parliament affected by financial matters?
- How serious were religious divisions in England?
- How were relations between James I and parliament affected by foreign affairs?

Significant dates

1603	James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England.
1604	The Treaty of London is signed with Spain. James I holds the Hampton Court Conference. James I calls his first parliament, which lasts until 1611.
1605	The Gunpowder Plot is uncovered.
1606	Bate's Case occurred.
1610	The Great Contract between king and parliament is drawn up.
1614	James calls his second parliament (known as the Addled Parliament).
1615	George Villiers (earl of Buckingham from 1617) becomes James's favourite.
1618	The Thirty Years' War breaks out in the Holy Roman Empire.
1621	James calls his third parliament.
1623	Prince Charles and Villiers (to be made duke of Buckingham upon his return) travel to Madrid.
1624	James calls his fourth parliament.
1625	War breaks out against Spain. James I dies.

Overview

In March 1603 James Stuart, James VI of Scotland, also became James I of England. His 22-year rule of England has been the cause of great historical

debate, mainly in the context of the civil war that broke out within 18 years of his death. Some historians have argued that James I was a key factor in bringing war about as his method and policies of government made relations between crown and parliament, between king and country very strained. His son, Charles I, certainly did not help improve relations, so this school of thought argues, but the root of the problem lay with James I. Other historians view James I more sympathetically. They believe that his government of England was, in the circumstances, quite successful and that he managed the problems of governing England with some skill. This school does not hold James I as being significantly responsible for causing the English Civil Wars.

So, what was the reality? How well did James I govern England? What problems did he face? How did he deal with them? If the key political relationship in early modern England was, moreover, that between crown and parliament, how well did the new Stuart king get on with English bishops, Lords and Commons? We need first to examine the nature of that relationship.

Crown and parliament

Introduction

The powers and privileges possessed by the crown are collectively known as the royal prerogative. A key aspect of the royal prerogative concerned parliament. The monarch could summon and dissolve parliament at will. The crown also had the ability to prorogue parliament, in other words to adjourn a session and thus leave open the prospect of calling it to a sitting at a later date. This was an important weapon in the management of parliament. It meant that the crown could prevent the development of any sustained opposition. The sovereign also had the right to veto any legislation passed by parliament. (Elizabeth rejected a total of seventy bills during her entire reign. James I was to veto seven bills, Charles I one.) The prerogative also gave monarchs the right to appoint and dismiss ministers, judges and bishops and to declare peace and war.

Though the prerogative gave monarchs great power, it did not allow them absolute power. England was often called a 'mixed monarchy', in which political power is shared, and the key body with which English monarchs had to work was parliament.

Parliament is usually seen as including the House of Lords and the **House of Commons**, though strictly it involves the crown as well. This is best illustrated by the need for all three branches of government to approve legislation before it becomes the law of the land. The House of Lords included the Lords Spiritual and **Lords Temporal**. The former consisted of 24 bishops as well as the archbishops of York and Canterbury, all appointed by the monarch.

The **House of Commons** was far larger numerically than the Lords, totalling 462 in 1586 and 507 by the meeting of the Long Parliament in 1640. This growth was the result of new boroughs, or towns, being enfranchised.

The **Lords Temporal** were hereditary peers, who were non-churchmen. By 1628 they were to have grown in number to 126 from 81 in 1615, as many peerages were sold by the crown.

The Lords Temporal were hereditary peers, either dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts or barons (in descending order of rank). An appointment to a title was often a reward for service to king and country, which could take the form of paying money into the royal accounts. Elizabeth had been reluctant to create peerages. James I was not. This expansion of the peerage was soon to become a political issue. English monarchs could usually rely on the support of the House of Lords, which saw itself as trying to keep the peace between the crown and the more argumentative House of Commons.

The House of Commons consisted of MPs who represented a certain territorial area, or constituency. There were two types of constituency, county and borough or country and town. The MPs were chosen by election but only men who owned land with a rateable value of 40 shillings a year or more had the franchise, the right to choose MPs. In other words, the franchise was restricted to property owners. It has been estimated that, during this period, the total electorate numbered some 300,000, which amounted to more than a quarter of the adult male population of England. Contested elections were rare. The victor was normally a nominee of the greater landowners.

Why would the monarch call a parliament? There were three main reasons. Firstly, it was a useful way of obtaining advice from and the support of the political nation. Secondly, parliament was needed to pass legislation. Although the crown did have the right to rule by issuing proclamations, a form of royal decree, these were limited in scope and often difficult to enforce. Statute law, as the laws passed by parliament were known, was more effective. The proposal for a new law, known as a bill, had to go through a number of stages in both Houses before being sent to the monarch for final approval, after which, if given, it became an act of parliament. In Elizabeth's parliaments, there was an average of 126 bills per session, of which around a quarter normally became acts. Few of these acts would have come from the king's government, unlike today. Thirdly, parliament could provide the crown with a form of income known as subsidies. Subsidies were a property tax, levied on goods and land. The rate of tax on goods was 2 shillings in the pound (10 per cent), on land 4 shillings in the pound (20 per cent). In 1603 one subsidy was worth about £70,000. Parliament would normally grant a number of subsidies at the same time. Only the House of Commons could introduce proposals to raise subsidies, which in this respect made it more important than the House of Lords.

If the crown had the royal prerogative, peers and MPs had parliamentary privilege as a counter balance. They claimed the right not to be arrested when parliament was sitting – except if accused of treason, felony or breach of the peace. Both Elizabeth and James had refrained from arresting any member while a parliament was sitting. Charles I was to be less cautious. Both Houses

also claimed the right to free speech. Yet, Elizabeth, James and Charles all believed that parliament could debate only those issues that they put before it. They resisted parliament's attempts to discuss what they considered to be part of the royal prerogative, matters such as religion and foreign policy. The boundaries between what the Houses could and could not discuss remained necessarily vague. They were often breached, sometimes with disastrous consequences. A third privilege claimed by the Houses was the right to determine their own membership. They were particularly sensitive to government attempts to pack the Commons by ensuring the election of its nominees. This issue was to arise as early as 1604.

Identify the three component parts of parliament and list its main functions.

The new king

James I was 36 years old when he became the king of England. He had been king of Scotland for 35 years; during his adult life he had governed Scotland with considerable skill. He was married with three young children, two of them boys. Thus, the royal succession was secure. He was something of an intellectual, enjoying theological argument and debate and writing a number of pamphlets.

The most significant of these was *The trew law of free monarchies* (1598) in which he expounded on the theory of the divine right of kings. This was the belief that 'kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods', as he told parliament in a speech on 21 March 1610. James has often been criticised for the forthright manner in which he reminded parliaments that his authority was his by divine right. It is alleged that this resulted in difficulties between this king and his parliaments, for MPs feared that divine right could be used to justify an absolute rather than a mixed monarchy. Yet, in this same speech, James made it clear that he saw himself as obliged to observe the fundamental laws of the kingdom. He said that 'the king *with his parliament* here are absolute . . . in making or forming any sort of laws'.

What, therefore, were James I's aims as king of England? His main ones seem to have been:

- a political union of the kingdoms of England and Scotland;
- peace abroad;
- religious stability and greater conformity at home.

We need to reconsider these aims once we have studied the reign of James I.

The first parliament, 1604–11

Within a year of his becoming king, James met his first English parliament. Relations soon became strained over several issues. One of these was interference by the king's courts in an election result. One of the high courts

The sharp intelligence of King James VI and I is clear to the viewer in this portrait.

overturned the election of an MP who had defeated a government councillor, Sir John Fortescue. MPs angrily disputed the outcome, ordering the elected candidate, Sir Francis Goodwin, to take his seat. At this point James intervened, stating that the Commons 'derived all matters of privilege from him and by his grant' and ordered them 'as an absolute king' to attend a conference with the judges. In the end, the issue was resolved amicably: a fresh election was held and a parliamentary committee was established to resolve election disputes.

Historical opinion has divided over the significance of this event. The traditional school argued that James's actions provoked the Commons into drawing up the **Form of Apology and Satisfaction**. Revisionists conclude that James, in finally agreeing to another election, accepted a tactful compromise. They assert that there is no real evidence that the affair, in itself, unduly soured relations between the king and the Commons.

The **Form of Apology and Satisfaction**, 1604, was a document drawn up by a committee of MPs in which they rehearsed their privileges and liberties at length. The document was not passed by the Commons and never presented to the king.

The second issue causing strain came about as a result of James I's attempts to create a political union between England and Scotland. These came to nothing, despite James's best efforts over several years. Many of his subjects thought that a 'community of commerce' would cause English prosperity to be

undermined by Scottish poverty. They also feared an influx of Scots. Finally, James's desire to secure union under one law alarmed many. Rather than trying to merge the two legal systems, English MPs would consider a union with Scotland only on the basis that Scottish laws were subordinate to English.

It has been argued that the failure of the union project produced a dangerous distrust between king and Commons, particularly when James made himself 'king of Great Britain' and adopted a single 'Union Flag' for England and Scotland by royal proclamation. However, there was resistance to James's scheme in Scotland as well as England. Moreover, disaffection between the king and the Commons can be seen as a consequence of MPs being encouraged by the House of Lords to resist the scheme.

In 1605–6 the Gunpowder Plot caused further tension (see page 22). MPs were so relieved that the plot was stillborn that they voted James a financial grant of £400,000. It was soon spent. By the time of the fourth session of the parliament, in 1610, the most pressing matter was that of royal finances. Many MPs were resentful of the king's use of wardship and purveyance (see page 15). They were particularly fearful of impositions (see page 16), against which the lawyer MPs raised constitutional objections. They argued that a fourteenth-century law prohibited the king from receiving monies from custom duties that had not been sanctioned by parliament. This was the background to the Great Contract (see page 19) which collapsed in the fifth session. As a result of this, James I dissolved the parliament. It had lasted for almost seven years, an unusually long period.

What were the main reasons for relations between James and his first parliament becoming strained?

The second parliament, 1614

If James's first parliament was longer than most, his second was very short. It lasted for just three months. It had been called to provide finances to help meet increasing royal expenditure. This parliament had such a short life because the Commons refused to grant **subsidies** unless impositions were abolished. The latter James considered as part of his prerogative. He called the House of Commons 'a body without a head . . . At their meetings nothing is heard but cries, shouts and confusion. I am surprised that my ancestors should ever have permitted such an institution to come into existence.' He did add, 'I am obliged to put up with what I cannot get rid of.'

Subsidies were a form of parliamentary taxation. They were a tax on land and other forms of property.

He meant parliament as an institution. The 1614 parliament he soon dissolved. It passed no legislation at all and thus became known as the Addled Parliament.

The third parliament, 1621

After the final session of the 1604–11 parliament followed by the Addled Parliament, James seems to have tried to manage without parliaments and to

try and finance future expenditure by resorting to various feudal devices. For seven years, he ruled without parliament. By 1621, however, he had no choice but to call parliament again. His continued extravagance and the outbreak of the **Thirty Years' War** meant that he had to summon another parliament. This happened just as the country was experiencing one of the most severe economic depressions of the seventeenth century.

The first session, in which James was quickly granted two subsidies, was a success. Parliament seems to have forgotten its grievance over impositions. More probable is the argument that MPs realised that to raise the issue would jeopardise their continued sitting. Instead, MPs concentrated their resentment against monopolists and, in order to remove them from their positions of influence, revived the medieval device of **impeachment**. It was successfully used for the first time since 1459 in order to try Sir Giles Mompesson, who had been granted a patent for the licensing of inns, and Sir Francis Michell, a monopolist of gold and silver thread. In the process, the lord chancellor, Francis Bacon, was impeached on a charge of corruption. However, the second session was less successful and lasted less than a month. The Commons drew up and approved the Protestation, in which MPs insisted that freedom of speech was part of their 'ancient and undoubted birthright'. On the next day, James I ripped the Protestation from the Journals of the House and then arrested several of the more outspoken MPs. Apart from the subsidy bill, the parliament had achieved nothing.

Yet, one week later, James said that he wanted 'to govern our people in the same manner as our . . . predecessors'. The disagreement was the result of a misunderstanding. It was unclear whether the king wanted MPs to discuss foreign policy and the subject of Prince **Charles's marriage**. The end of the 1621 parliament did not mark a breakdown in crown–parliament relations.

The Thirty Years' War (1618–48) was a long, complex and bloody series of wars involving most of the continental great powers. It began with a dispute between the Habsburgs and a German ruler, the elector Palatine; James I's daughter was married to the elector.

Impeachment is a legal process by which MPs can bring government ministers and officials to account. In England, it involved the Commons putting charges to the Lords. The process died out in Britain but has survived in the USA.

As a means to resolving the Palatinate Crisis (see p. 28) James was pursuing complex negotiations which would have resulted in **Charles's marriage** to the daughter of the king of Spain, the infanta. However, MPs were deeply unhappy at the prospect of the heir to the throne marrying a Spanish Catholic.

George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, (1592–1628) had in 1614, at the age of 22, been introduced at court and quickly proved himself able to supply the emotional requirements of the king. He consequently experienced a meteoric rise from gentleman of the bedchamber in 1615 to earl of Buckingham in 1617, marquis of Buckingham in 1618 and

The fourth parliament, 1624–25

There is evidence that James did not intend to call another parliament but, in 1624, he had to. The situation of the Palatinate was worse than ever (see page 28). When he met the parliament James assured MPs that 'ye may freely advise me'. His son Charles and his favourite, **George Villiers, duke of Buckingham,** had recently returned from their disastrous trip to **Madrid** determined upon war with Spain. They worked with leaders of the Commons to ensure the new parliament was a success. Although James was voted three subsidies, they were insufficient for the needs of government.

The main issue now dividing king and Commons was over what type of war should be fought. If he wanted to fight at all, James wanted to fight a land war for the Palatinate. MPs, remembering the exploits of Elizabethan privateers, wanted to fight a war at sea against Spain. In order to try and ensure that

the money that they granted was spent on the war they wanted, the Commons specified the ways in which the subsidies should be spent. To the subsidy bill, they attached four appropriation clauses, which stated among other things that a navy should set sail as soon as possible.

Despite imposing on the king's prerogative by these appropriation clauses and by impeaching Cranfield, the lord treasurer and an opponent of Buckingham's quest for war with Spain, MPs were on good terms with the crown. In part, this was because James I accepted the Monopolies Act, which declared grants of monopolies to individuals illegal. More significantly, England was going to war against an old enemy of England. Thus ended 21 years of peace.

What is the main reason that James called parliaments in 1621 and 1624?

Royal finances

Introduction

It was understood by all concerned that the crown would ask for subsidies only during times of emergency, which usually meant war. As long as the country remained at peace, the crown was expected to rely upon its own resources, perpetuating the medieval notion that the sovereign should 'live of his own'. Asking for parliamentary subsidies was meant to be a last resort – a form of extraordinary income. The crown was therefore obliged to raise revenue from other sources, from ordinary income. So, from where did the crown normally raise its income?

Ordinary sources of crown revenue

The main source was rents from crown lands. The monarch was the largest landowner in the country – though, by 1603, many lands had been sold off to raise extra revenue, a short-term move that created long-term problems. In addition, the crown obtained revenue from certain sources because it was head of church and state. Most were based on ancient feudal rights. They included:

- Purveyance. This was the crown's right to buy and transport provisions at less than half the market price. Though purveyance provided the monarch with an obvious source of income, it annoyed the person who sold the goods.
- Wardship. When a minor – under the age of 21 if male, under 14 if female – inherited property, he or she became a ward of the crown. The revenue of the minor's estate went to the crown. When the heir came of age, he was often forced to make a payment to the crown in order to regain control of his estate.
- Monopolies. The crown sold the sole right to make or distribute a particular product or commodity, usually for a number of years.

then duke of Buckingham in 1623 – the first non-royal duke to be created since 1551. The nature of the hatred that Buckingham induced in the Commons was so intense that it suggests that he was more than an empty-headed courtier or an attractive figure at court.

Charles and Buckingham set off for **Madrid** on horseback in February 1623, because they were impatient with the slow pace of the marriage negotiations. They donned false beards and called themselves Thomas and John Smith. Poorly treated, they were prevented from meeting with the infanta.

In 1606 John Bate refused to pay impositions on currants. When **Bate's case** was taken to court, the judges upheld the crown's right to levy impositions. A series of revised Books of Rates, the first of which was in 1608, made impositions ever more lucrative. They were worth £250,000 per annum by 1640.

- Impositions. These were duties on goods entering or leaving the country, which were additional to those normally charged. After **Bate's case**, income from this source amounted to about £70,000 per annum, which was more than one subsidy was worth by the late 1620s.
- Forced loans. In special circumstances, the crown could also compel people to pay money to the state, even without the approval of parliament. The payment was a loan in name only.

In peacetime, the monarch would spend this money on the royal family, if the monarch had one (Elizabeth I did not), the royal household, royal palaces and the court. The attitude of the monarch towards royal expenditure was very significant. A frugal monarch could help maintain a balance between income and expenditure. An extravagant one would not. Elizabeth I had been so frugal as to be almost a miser. It soon became clear to which school James I belonged.

What is meant by ordinary and extraordinary income? Give examples.

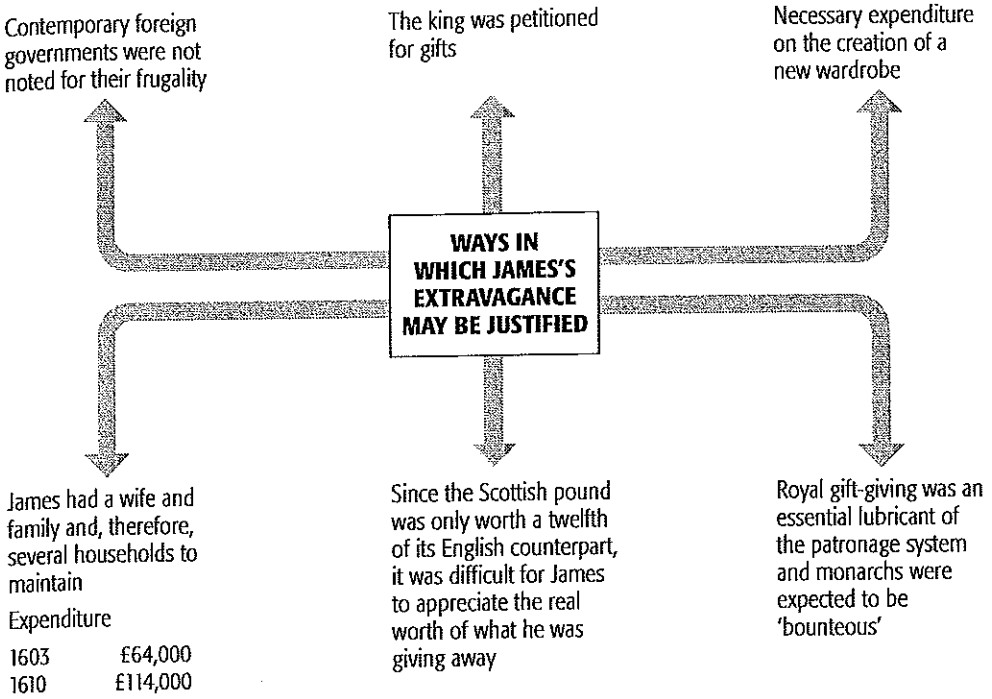
What was the state of royal finances in 1603? Reference has already been made to the extraordinary cost of the war with Spain. Thus, it is no surprise that Elizabeth had died leaving a public debt of £420,000. However, subsidies granted by parliament in 1601, totalling £300,000, were still to be collected. In addition, about £120,000 had been raised in the form of forced loans. In other words, James I inherited a kingdom with the books balanced, which is rather surprising. He saw himself 'like a poor man wandering about forty years in a wilderness and barren soil and now arrived at the land of promise'. After the poverty of the Scottish court, he was looking forward to the riches of England.

Royal expenditure

Robert Carr, earl of Somerset (d. 1645), fell from grace as a consequence of one of the greatest scandals of the age. In 1615 he was found guilty of poisoning Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower. Overbury, an attendant of Carr's, probably had evidence that would have prevented his master's marriage to Frances Howard. Carr and his wife were condemned to be executed, although they were pardoned by James in 1622.

James, as the archbishop of York observed, was 'too much inclined to giving'. The numbers receiving pensions increased, one page of the chamber being awarded £300 per annum. Above all, James showered gifts on royal favourites, individuals who received special favours from the king simply because he liked them. James gave a Scottish favourite whose motto was 'Spend and God will send' more than £400,000. Sir **Robert Carr**, earl of Somerset, was James's favourite from 1607 until 1615. The countess of Somerset – the wife of Carr – received £10,000 on her marriage. Carr was replaced in the king's affections by George Villiers, who was soon to be created duke of Buckingham. During the course of the next 13 years, Buckingham was to become a significant political figure. James was infatuated with him and showered him with countless gifts.

The problem of extravagance was compounded by the fact that James appears to have been incapable of appreciating the value of money. Once,



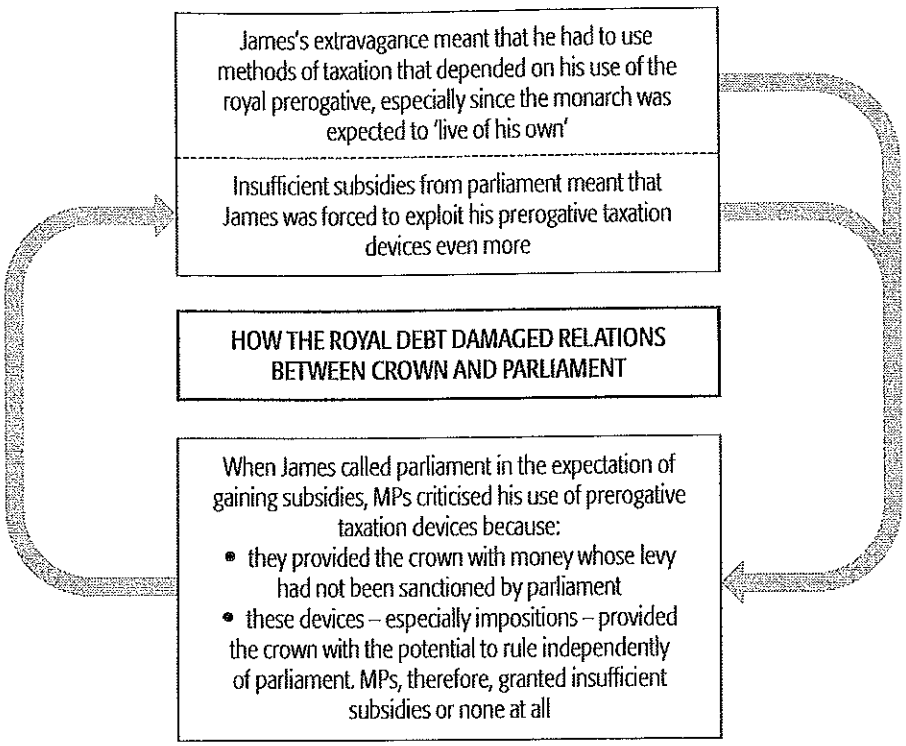
when he declared his intention to give £20,000 to his favourite Robert Carr, an exasperated lord treasurer, **Robert Cecil**

> 'left the money upon the ground in a room through which His Majesty was to pass: who, amazed at the quantity, as a sight not unpossibly his eyes never saw before, asked the treasurer whose money it was, who answered, "Yours, before you gave it away"; whereupon the king fell into a passion, protesting he was abused, never intending such gift: and casting himself upon the heap, scrabbled out the quantity of two or three hundred pounds, and swore he [Carr] should have no more.'

Robert Cecil, earl of Salisbury (1563–1612), was an important figure in Elizabeth's government; he found his position strengthened after the execution of his rival, Essex, in 1601. He successfully straddled the reigns of Elizabeth and James and was lord treasurer from 1608.

With the additional expenses of a young family and of court entertainment on a scale never allowed by Elizabeth, royal finances soon went into the red. The royal debt accumulated steadily for very nearly the whole of James's reign. In 1606 it was more than £700,000. Although reduced to £300,000 by 1610, it had risen to £500,000 by 1613. In 1618 it had grown to £900,000. This deterioration could not be linked with the costs of war because James ended the long-running war with Spain within a year of becoming king. There was the expense of the campaigns to control Ireland in the early 1600s but that was not a long-term commitment. The royal finances had become an urgent problem. What was to be done?

Expenditure could be curbed. Various lord treasurers tried to do so, especially Salisbury (1608–12) and Cranfield (1621–24). They had some success. However, James was hard to control. Courtiers disliked attempts to curb



expenditure. Their opposition helps explain the downfall of Cranfield at the hands of the 1624 parliament.

Income could be increased. Salisbury was particularly active in doing so and in a variety of ways: revising rents, expanding the scope of impositions in the aftermath of the Bate's case and granting more monopolies. His efforts explain why the royal debt was reduced during his time as lord treasurer. New sources of income were also developed. Some were successful, others not. They included:

- The sale of honours. A new title, baronet, was created in 1611. Those who owned land worth £1,000 per annum or more could buy one for £1,095; by 1614, £90,000 had been raised in this way. In 1615 peerages were put up for sale, each costing £10,000. One historian has estimated that the crown gained at least £620,000 from the sale of honours during the period 1603–29, although at a political cost. Selling titles created disaffection amongst the long-established nobility.
- The Cockayne project of 1614. William Cockayne planned to export cloth in its finished, or dyed, state, rather than in its unfinished 'white' form. He promised to enrich James by £300,000 a year and was granted a monopoly. In fact, the whole scheme was a disaster. Cockayne was poorly funded and it damaged the interests of others, including the Dutch, who resented losing the privilege of importing English cloth. The main importers of English cloth went elsewhere for the product. His monopoly was ended in 1617.

Such revenue-raising schemes could not be endlessly exploited and MPs were

reluctant to provide subsidies on the scale that was needed to balance the books. The financial system was breaking down. More fundamental reform was needed.

The Great Contract, 1610

Only once was fundamental reform attempted. In 1610 Salisbury proposed that parliament should grant James a single payment of £600,000, and £200,000 each year, in return for which James would abolish the prerogative revenues of wardship and purveyance. It became known as the Great Contract. After initially agreeing to the idea, MPs had second thoughts. They were concerned that an annual grant of £200,000, the equivalent of roughly three subsidies, might weaken the position of parliament. On the other hand, the king came to believe that a grant of £200,000 was probably insufficient to meet the needs of government. The opportunity for such a radical reform did not occur again during the reign of either James I or his son. After 1610 the royal finances once more began to deteriorate. By 1625, when the war with Spain had hardly started, the debt totalled almost £1 million.

Why was James so deeply in debt?

Religious policy

Introduction

Religious beliefs caused great disputes in early modern Europe. In the sixteenth century, the monopoly of the Catholic (or universal) Church in western Europe had been broken. Protestant churches gained support in many areas, most importantly from state governments. Religious wars – which were never just wars about religion – broke out in many countries. Under Henry VIII, England had rejected the authority of the Catholic Church, which it replaced with the Church of England. Under Elizabeth I, the Church of England developed as a kind of middle way in religious form and practice in order to make itself acceptable to both moderate Catholics and moderate Protestants. The more extreme Protestants, known as **Puritans**, became dissatisfied with this halfway house. They expected James I to support their plans, as Scotland was a more Protestant country than England. It had a **Presbyterian** Church – even though there was some form of episcopacy. The English Puritans saw James I as a hotter sort of Protestant and likely to reform the Church of England.

The term '**Puritans**' covered all those who wanted to purify the church, to remedy its faults and to reach new standards of godliness. They are often defined as 'the hotter sort of Protestants'.

A **Presbyterian** was a Puritan who wanted to reform the church organisation in a particular way. Presbyterians disliked the church being run by bishops (the episcopacy), who were wealthy and often corrupt. They disliked the church being controlled by the state (i.e. an Erastian church). Instead they wanted an independent church led by presbyters or elders, who were appointed by the members of the church to run church affairs.

There were two features of the Anglican Church, already well established by 1603, which no English monarch could allow to be challenged. They were:

- the monarch was the head of the church, as laid down in the **Act of Supremacy**;
- the church was governed by bishops appointed by the crown.

According to the terms of the 1534 **Act of Supremacy**, the monarch was also the head of the church.

In addition, as in all states at the time, religious uniformity was an essential feature of religious – and social – order. All subjects were expected to follow the monarch's religious beliefs. Formal and open religious toleration was just not possible. This made the position of Catholics in England very difficult. Since their loyalty was first and foremost to the pope, they were open to the charge of treason. This was especially so from 1570, when Elizabeth I was **excommunicated** by the papacy. English Catholics were enemies of the state, the enemy within. As a result, they suffered harsh penal legislation. Between 1590 and 1603, 88 Catholics were executed, 53 of them priests.

A person who is **excommunicated** is expelled from the church by the pope. It was believed that anyone who was excommunicated was thereby condemned to Hell on death.

The accession of a new king in 1603 meant that Catholics as well as Puritans petitioned James I for an improvement in their circumstances. These pressures suggested the need to create a new *via media*, or middle way, a Jacobean modification of the Elizabethan church settlement. It aimed to permit the majority of Puritans to remain within the existing national church but without jeopardising royal authority and the episcopal structure. The position of the Catholics in 1603 remained unclear. The initial issue was the Puritan challenge.

What was a Puritan? What were the main beliefs of those known as Presbyterians?

Puritans and the Hampton Court Conference

The English Puritans lost no time in making James aware of their hopes and expectations. As the king was riding south in April 1603, they presented him with the Millenary Petition, so called because it was supposed to carry 1,000 signatures. The petitioners requested that they be 'eased and relieved' of those ceremonies and practices which they considered to be remnants of the popish church. These included the use of the ring in marriage and bowing at the name of Jesus. They also asked that:

- the ministry be staffed by 'able and sufficient men';
- ministers be properly maintained;
- pluralism (the holding of more than one benefice or church living) be ended.

It was hoped that these measures would result in there being an educated preaching ministry. The proposals were extensive but moderate. There was no demand to abolish the episcopacy. The king, therefore, always keen to engage in theological debate, agreed to convene at Hampton Court in January 1604 a conference to discuss the requests put forward in the Millenary Petition.

The most famous incident of the Hampton Court Conference came after one of the Puritans mentioned the word 'presbytery'. James became agitated. He said that, if the office of bishop was abolished, he knew what would become of his supremacy: 'no bishop, no king'. Once the church hierarchy was removed, the state hierarchy would be vulnerable. In conclusion, James told

the Puritans that 'if this is all they have to say, I will make them conform themselves or I will harry them out of this land or else do worse'.

On the final day, the Puritans were then called in and informed that the great majority of the practices to which they objected, such as the wearing of the **surplice** and the hood, were to be maintained. Nevertheless, they were promised a number of reforms, including a reduction in the number of pluralists and a new translation of the Bible. This became the Authorised Version of 1611.

A **surplice** is a white linen vestment worn over the cassock.

The conference would, James hoped, create the context in which Presbyterians could more easily be identified. In order to give reality to this hope, convocation, the church body that paralleled parliament, met in April 1604 and produced a total of 141 canons that regulated all aspects of church life. One of these canons contained an oath, which was unacceptable to the more hardline Presbyterians and thus distinguished them from the more moderate Puritans. This divided the reformers and thus diminished the opposition to James. Moreover, the reforms offered to the Puritans at Hampton Court were in exchange for conformity within the established episcopalian church. Once a minister had formally recognised James's leadership and the institution of episcopacy, James was prepared, at least after 1605, to turn a blind eye to any minister who did not comply with what the Puritans saw as the popish practices, such as wearing the surplice and hood. After all, James himself regarded these things as 'indifferent'.

For a long time historians were highly critical of James's actions at Hampton Court. It was generally believed that, because of his temper and intransigence, James had missed an opportunity of reconciling the Puritans to Anglicanism. According to this interpretation, James, by insisting that the Puritans conform to the established practices of the Church of England, created a deep-seated disaffection that was finally to erupt in the 'Puritan Revolution' of 1642.

Research that is more recent questions this interpretation of events. This school of thought argues that the king did offer concessions to the Puritans, including the idea of a preaching ministry. Admittedly, most of these reforms were not implemented. That was the bishops' fault, not James's. The main criticism that can be made of James is that he failed to overcome the bishops' obstructionism.

Certainly, it is hard to see 1604 as the point at which the Puritans become an irreconcilable element determined upon some sort of revenge. No deep fissure appeared in the church. Only some 90 ministers, around 1 per cent of the total, refused to subscribe to the 1604 canons and were subsequently deprived of their benefices. The Hampton Court Conference did not result in large numbers separating from the established church. The emigration of

radical congregations to the Netherlands is notable for its rarity. If the Puritans were disaffected with the outcome of the Conference, it is difficult to find evidence of substantial and sustained resentment. Most Catholics were prepared to continue to work for reform from within the church. In this sense, the Hampton Court Conference was a very significant event.

Describe what took place at Hampton Court in January 1604.

Catholics, the Gunpowder Plot and its consequences

It is important to have some idea of how English Catholics fared under James I if only because there were Catholic influences in James's life. He was the son of the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots and had married a Catholic queen, Anne of Denmark. James was reported to have said that he 'would be gladly reunited with the Roman Church and would take three steps in that direction if only the church would take one'. Most Catholics seemed to have hoped that James would offer them some form of toleration. In a letter to Salisbury, he had stated that he did not intend to prosecute the Catholics for their faith. Yet, James never intended to extend a general toleration to the Catholics. Indeed, anti-Catholic legislation was soon applied with renewed vigour. This was a result of several factors:

- pressures from Puritans in parliament;
- the need to use **recusancy fines** as a source of revenue;
- the election of the intransigent Pope Clement VIII.

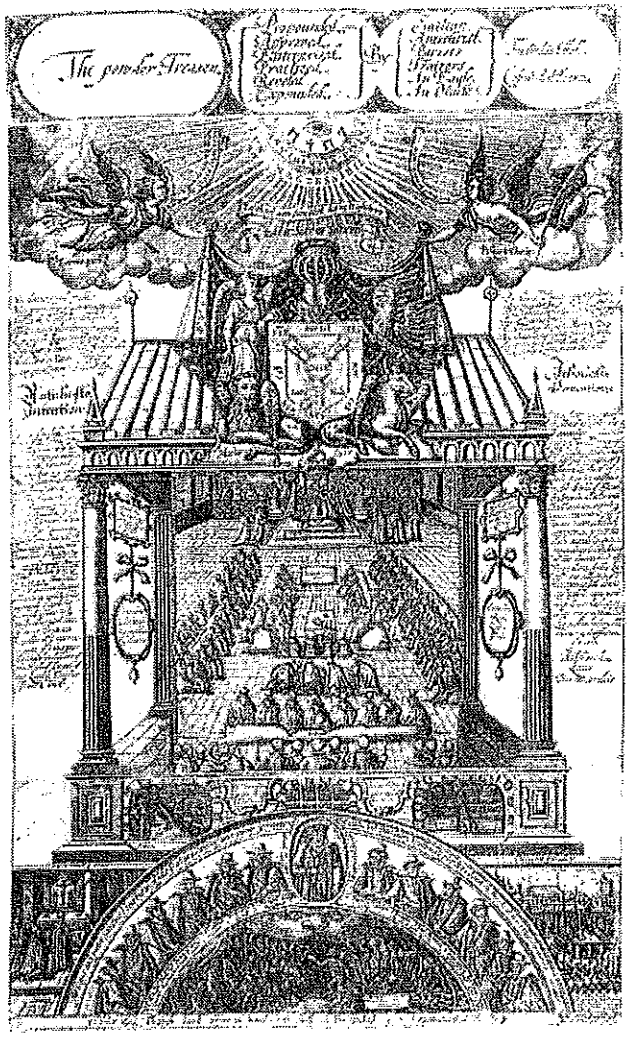
Anyone who refused to attend the national church, the Church of England, was known as a recusant. A number of laws, known as recusancy laws, were passed against them and they had to pay fines known as **recusancy fines** for non-attendance at church.

As early as 1604, James issued a proclamation banishing priests and ordered the collection of recusancy fines. Antagonised by this persecution, a group of Catholics schemed to remove James. The Gunpowder Plot was hatched. The plot is well known but what were its consequences?

James I was terrified and MPs were angry. Further anti-Catholic measures were introduced. The most important was the Oath of Allegiance of 1606. As in his treatment of the Puritans, the king placed a priority on political allegiance to crown and to the national church. He played down the question of doctrinal and ceremonial conformity. Despite his reaction to the Gunpowder Plot, James did not insist upon vigorous application of the Oath. In his Apology of 1608, he confirmed that the Oath was designed to identify those Catholics whose loyalty could not be relied on. 'I intended no persecution of them for conscience's cause,' he wrote, 'but only desired to be secured of them for civil obedience.'

George Abbot (1562–1633) was a moderate Puritan. His anti-Spanish and anti-Arminian (see pp. 57–58) views brought him into opposition at court to Robert Carr, the Howards and George Villiers. His reputation was darkened over the killing of Lord Zouch's gamekeeper in a shooting accident in 1621. In 1627 he refused to authorise the publication of Robert Sibthorpe's sermon justifying the forced loan, an action which led to his temporary suspension.

Treatment of the Catholics fluctuated over the remaining years of James's rule. Following the appointment as archbishop of Canterbury in 1611 of the anti-Catholic, **George Abbot**, persecutions increased for a time. However, from 1613 the circumstances of the Catholics steadily improved. This is because, in the second half of James I's reign, policy towards the English



The papists' powder treason. This is an allegorical engraving, produced for 5 November 1612, 'in eternal memory of the divine bounty in England's preservation from the Hellish Powder Plot'.

How did Catholics fare during the reign of James I?

Catholics seems to have been determined by a pro-Spanish faction at court and by the king's wish that Prince Charles should marry a Spanish princess. Included in the Spanish marriage terms was the demand that English Catholics should be granted full toleration. Even after the collapse of the Spanish match (see pages 28–30) tolerance persisted. In 1625 the Venetian ambassador was able to report that 'the Catholics feel perfectly happy and many Catholic lords who had already gone away return boldly to the city.'

The middle way under pressure

Towards the end of his reign, the balance of religious forces James had carefully constructed began to break down. James seemed to develop doubts about the **Calvinist** theory of **predestination**. In 1624 he allowed the publication of Richard Montagu's *A new gag for an old goose*, a work which attacked the Calvinist belief that God alone determined whether a soul would go to Heaven or Hell. Criticised for his actions, James exclaimed that 'if this be popery I am a papist'. James began to accept anti-Calvinist arguments. In May

A **Calvinist** was a follower of the the Geneva-based reformer, John Calvin (1509–64), who was a leading figure of the Reformation. Through close study of the Bible, he came to believe that the Catholic Church was based on 'usurped instruments of tyranny and ambition'. He also developed the doctrine of **predestination** – the belief that 'by an immutable [unchangeable] counsel God hath once for all determined both whom He would admit to salvation [Heaven] and whom He would admit to destruction [Hell]'.

1618 he had issued the *Book of sports*, which permitted a large number of recreations on a Sunday. This struck a blow at one of the key beliefs of the Calvinists that Sundays should be set aside for worship. Many clergy refused to read the *Book of sports* in churches, despite being instructed to do so. Finally, foreign policy was making it increasingly difficult to maintain the religious consensus. James's attempt to play the peacemaker in the Thirty Years' War and his desire for a Spanish match for his son antagonised many Puritans, especially as Catholic powers gained the upper hand in the war. In 1622, in order to gag criticism of royal policy, he issued his *Directions to preachers*, which surrounded preachers with 'limitations and cautions', thereby further alienating Puritans.

Moderate Puritans had been able to support James so long as he appeared sound on doctrine. Once he advanced anti-Calvinists, even as a consequence of practical politics, that support began to dwindle. However, criticism of James's religious policies remained muted. If there were religious divisions in England, they rarely surfaced to take the form of argument and conflict. The same could not be said of much of Europe. Developments on the continent were to have great consequences for English politics.

Foreign policy

Introduction

England was a European state. By 1603 it was a Protestant state, which put it in a significant minority among European powers. Because it was on the periphery, England had interests beyond the continent. However, Europe had the greatest effect on England's foreign policies.

Late sixteenth-century Europe had been dominated by the struggle, part religious, part secular, between Protestants and Catholics. In 1603 England had been at war for 18 years against the leading Catholic state, the great power of the time, Spain. England had resisted attempts at invasion by the Armada. By 1603 a kind of stalemate had been achieved. Then James VI of Scotland, the old enemy of England, became the English king. What would be the aims of his foreign policy? How far would he change from the foreign policy of Elizabeth I?

The aims of James's foreign policy

The main aim of James I was peace. He also wanted to play the role of mediator, to bring peace to Europe. Not that he was a particularly active peacemaker. He adopted a passive stance towards foreign affairs and tried not to get involved in European conflicts. Several reasons why he did so have been put forward.

Some are personal reasons, for example that he simply believed in the virtues of peace rather than war. Other reasons are psychological. It has been suggested that James's aversion to all forms of violence was a reaction to the turbulent times of his childhood. Some even argue that he disliked force because he was in his mother's womb when she saw the violent murder of her secretary, Cardinal Riccio, in 1566.

Other explanations are more practical. England had no substantial armed force and only a small navy. In addition, parliament was reluctant to provide the money needed to prepare for and fight wars. Allies were hard to find. Relations with the other leading Protestant state, the Netherlands, were not always good. Trade caused deep divisions between the two powers. France was too divided and too suspicious of England to be a reliable ally. England was often alone but that did not stop James trying to mediate between warring powers.

What are the main reasons that led James to pursue a policy of peace?

James the peacemaker

James began his reign by ending the war with Spain. The 1604 Treaty of London conceded nothing that was vital to the interests of England. Indeed, the terms agreed opened up opportunities for England to trade with Spain and the Spanish Netherlands, a development from which the English cloth industry benefited in particular. Yet, more aggressive Puritans objected to making peace with Catholic Spain, particularly when it was felt that one more attack would have provided the knockout blow.

In 1609 James helped bring about a truce to end the long-running war between Spain and the Netherlands by agreeing to guarantee the Protestant interest, should Spain end the truce.

It has been suggested that James should have tried to rebuild the anti-**Habsburg** alliance system of the 1590s, in particular by allying with France. Preferring to react to events rather than dictate them, and personally keener on peace than war, he failed to do so. In 1610, when the French king was assassinated and succeeded by Louis XIII, a monarch sympathetic to the Habsburg cause, that opportunity was lost. France agreed with Spain a double marriage treaty. Louis XIII was married to Anne of Austria, daughter of Philip III, and Louis's sister was married to the future Philip IV.

Members of the **Habsburg** family belonged to a great Catholic European dynasty whose influencé was dominant in huge tracts of territory. The Holy Roman emperor, though elected, was in practice always a Habsburg, as were the kings of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The latter alone commanded an empire over which the sun never set.

James the Protestant leader

James's preference for peace had meant that he turned down the opportunity to lead an alliance of Protestant states. However, in 1611 he changed his mind. He agreed to make a defensive alliance with the Protestant Union, a group of Protestant states that had formed an alliance in 1608. James encouraged the Dutch to make a similar arrangement with the Union, which they did in 1613.

In the same year, James's daughter, **Elizabeth**, married the new elector of the Palatinate, the Protestant Frederick V. As a leader of this confessional bloc (that is, a group of countries that belonged to the same faith) James was able to mediate in disputes where all parties involved were Protestant. Thus, James played an important role in arranging peace between Sweden and Denmark in 1613. It was a function that James proved capable of performing even when he had little obvious influence upon all the participants, as in 1614 when he helped settle the **second Cleves–Jülich crisis.**

Elizabeth (1596–1662) was the eldest daughter of Anne of Denmark and James I. Her marriage to Frederick, the elector of the Palatinate of the Rhine, in 1613 was celebrated with lavish ceremonies including a sham battle on the Thames costing £9,000. Having been expelled from the Palatinate at the start of the Thirty Years' War, she became a refugee in Holland. The 'Winter Queen' eventually returned to England in 1661.

The **second Cleves–Jülich crisis** occurred because the position of these German territories, astride the lower Rhine and adjacent to the United Provinces, meant that they were keenly sought after by the leading European powers. A series of crises (1609–14) occurred when John William of Cleves–Jülich died in 1609 without providing an heir.

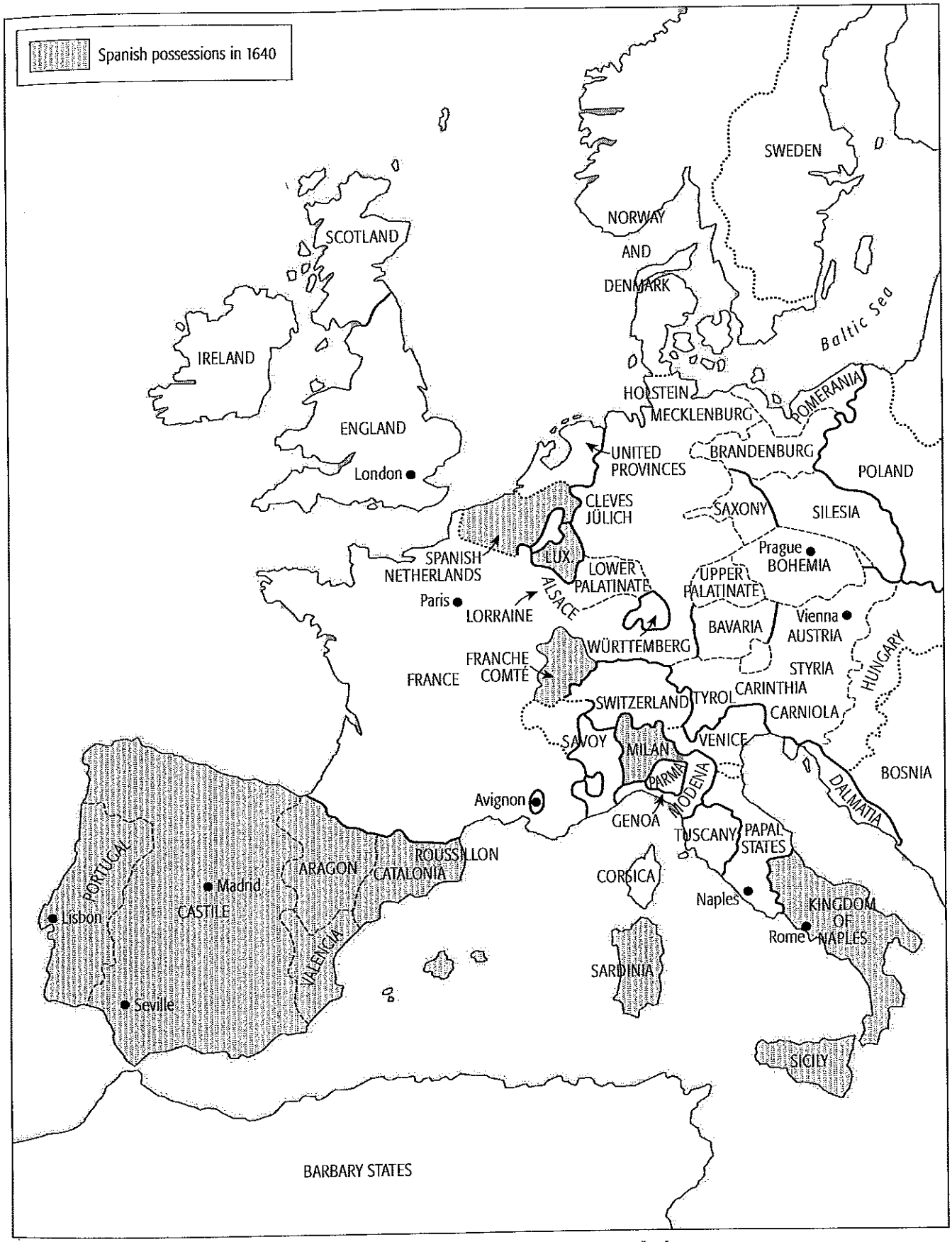
The Spanish match: negotiations begin

If James was to be an effective mediator in any future dispute involving both Catholic and Protestant elements he needed a mechanism that would permit him an influence in both camps. It was therefore necessary for him to counterbalance the effect of the marriage of his daughter to the Protestant Frederick. The most obvious way of doing so was to acquire a Catholic bride for his son. Thus, James set about marrying his younger son, Charles, to a Spanish Catholic princess. Negotiations had taken place on several occasions since 1603. 'If he [James] could now match his son with the Spanish infanta,' observes the historian Roger Lockyer, 'he would be, in his own person, the link between Catholics and Protestants, able to speak to both on equal terms and thereby bring about the reconciliation that had so far eluded human endeavour.' It was an admirable but ill-fated ambition.

James's attempts to forge a marriage alliance with Spain have received much critical comment. A number of points can be offered to support the notion that James's pursuit of a Spanish match was a 'tactical error'. Firstly, Protestant opinion in England regarded Catholic Spain as an implacable enemy. Any attempt, therefore, to co-exist peacefully with Spain and to marry the heir to the throne to one of its princesses appeared to be a betrayal of the national interest. Secondly, marriage negotiations, from 1614 onwards, highlighted anti-Catholic and pro-Catholic divisions at court. These divisions were made worse by the leisurely pace of negotiations. The comparative youth of the parties – Charles was fifteen in 1615 and the infanta six years younger – did not give the negotiations any sense of urgency. In addition, conditions imposed by the pope, for example that Charles should convert to Catholicism, nearly halted negotiations altogether.

What arguments have been put forward to suggest that James's pursuit of the Spanish match was 'a tactical error'?

In order to keep the negotiations alive, James was increasingly forced to appease Spain. Controversially, Sir Walter Ralegh was executed in 1618. The ostensible reason was that he had committed treason in 1603. The more likely reason was that, in 1617, against the orders of James, he had attacked Spanish possessions in the New World. It was at this point that negotiations were overtaken by events in central Europe.



The Spanish European empire and the Palatinate region. These regions were at the heart of the first two Stuarts' foreign policy.

The outbreak of the Thirty Years' War

The Defenestration of Prague on 23 May 1618, when four Catholic councillors were flung out of the window of the castle that stands guard over that Bohemian town, has become, as Geoffrey Parker reminds us, in *Europe in crisis* (1979), 'the best known single event of seventeenth-century European history'. It marks the beginning of what historians have called the Thirty Years' War, eventually concluded by the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648. Protestants in Bohemia, increasingly alarmed by the anti-Protestant measures being taken by their king-elect, the Archduke Ferdinand, deposed him. They offered the Bohemian crown to Elector Frederick V, Protestant ruler of the neighbouring territory known as the Palatinate. He was a leading member of the Protestant Union and husband of James's daughter Elizabeth. On 26 August 1619 Frederick was formally elected to the Bohemian crown. Two days later, the Archduke Ferdinand was elected as Holy Roman Emperor. Ferdinand was set upon revenge. Frederick, anticipating hostilities, wrote to James I, requesting help. However, James regarded his son-in-law as a usurper, a person who overthrew kings and seized kingdoms. James, therefore, sent no aid; instead, he offered to mediate between Frederick and Ferdinand.

Before he could take any major steps to do so, Ferdinand, helped by Spanish troops, had defeated Frederick at the Battle of the White Mountain close to Prague. He was replaced as elector by the Catholic Maximilian of Bavaria. James called a parliament in 1621, the first since 1614, but James did not intend actually to fight for the Palatinate. Quite apart from the fact that he did not have the material means to do so as he had received only two subsidies from the first session of the 1621 parliament, he hoped that the prospect of England entering the fray and the imminent end of the Twelve Year Truce (1609–21) between the Dutch and Spain, would be enough to force the Habsburgs to the negotiating table.

The Spanish match: negotiations fail

In the meantime, it became even more necessary to conclude the Spanish match as it would provide an important lever that could be used on the king of Spain and, through him, his Austrian relations and, in particular, the Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand. James believed that the Spanish king would have sufficient influence over Ferdinand to be able to order the latter to return the Palatinate to Frederick. James made several miscalculations. He fatally overestimated the influence of the Spanish Habsburgs over their Austrian cousins. He failed to realise that Maximilian of Bavaria would not give up the Palatinate, a state he had just acquired. Finally, for James's policy to have any chance of success, it was vital that he continued to appear to be well supported at home. Yet, the pursuit of the Spanish marriage caused a domestic crisis that

Count Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador at the court of King James, portrayed as Machiavelli in T. Scott's anti-Spanish pamphlet, *Vox populi*.

created the opposite effect. Frustrated by the king's apparent inactivity, the Commons, in 1621, petitioned James to fight for the cause of the Palatinate, to enforce the recusancy laws and ensure that 'our most noble Prince may be timely and happily married to one of our own religion'. In turn, this invasion of the royal prerogative provoked the dissolution of parliament.

Historians, for example David Harris Willson in *King James VI and I* (1956), have been generally critical of James's pursuit of a Spanish match beyond 1618, and especially after 1620. They point out that Spanish terms for a marriage alliance were pitched deliberately high. For example, the demand that recusancy laws be repealed was never likely to be met because that repeal could only be legitimately effected by parliament. Consequently, so it is argued, James was strung along by the Spanish. The marriage negotiations immobilised any effective English response to the Palatinate crisis and thus acted as 'Spain's best army'.

Frustrated by the lack of progress in the marriage negotiations, Charles and Buckingham set out for Madrid in 1623 wearing false beards and calling themselves Thomas and John Smith. James now agreed to the marriage articles. Included amongst the terms was the assurance that the infanta be allowed to bring with her to England 24 priests and one bishop and that a chapel should be built for the princess, to which all Englishmen who pleased might have access. A series of private articles promised the English Catholics toleration, to be confirmed by act of parliament in due course. At no point

Why did Charles and Buckingham travel to Spain in 1623?

was the Palatinate issue mentioned. Yet, the Spanish marriage never took place. Humiliated and mistreated during their time in Madrid, both Charles and Buckingham returned to England intent upon war with Spain as a way of revenge. The ageing king was overwhelmed by the bellicose energies of his son and favourite. Preparations for war were begun.

War with Spain

In 1624 a new parliament was called. Specific appropriation clauses (see page 15) were attached to the supply it voted, attempting to ensure what seemed a popular demand, that war be declared against Spain.

England also agreed to help fund the Dutch war effort for two years and to supply 6,000 volunteers. In addition, negotiations got underway for Charles to marry the sister of King Louis XIII of France, Henrietta Maria. The price of the French marriage that finally took place in May 1625 was that James was to free English Catholics from persecution. It was an unpopular arrangement but, as Sir Simonds D'Ewes observed, 'the English generally so detested the Spanish match as they were glad of any which freed them from the fear of that'. Moreover, if it brought the French into an anti-Habsburg military alliance that would enable the Palatinate to be liberated then it was a price worth paying.

This it seemed to do. In the early months of 1625, the French agreed to supply 3,000 cavalry to an English expeditionary force of 12,000 men under the leadership of the German mercenary Mansfeld. However, Louis XIII, fearful he might antagonise Spain, refused permission for Mansfeld's ships to land at Calais. Eventually they docked in the United Provinces where a lack of provisions, disease and cold took their toll. Within six months, only 600 of the original force of 12,000 remained. It was not an encouraging background for the new king, Charles I. On 27 March 1625 his father had died and the reign of James I had come to an end.

James I's achievements

We began by outlining James I's aims: political union of England and Scotland, peace abroad and religious peace at home. The first he soon abandoned in the face of English opposition. The second he eventually had to abandon as European affairs became more complex and as he came under pressure of various sorts – family, religious and political – to intervene. The third he did achieve, despite having to face a threat as serious as the Gunpowder Plot. There were some religious divisions towards the end of his reign but they were on a limited scale, especially in comparison with the bitter religion-centred struggles on the continent.

One thing that James I certainly did not manage to achieve was 'to live of his own'. He failed to curb his extravagance and thus made the crown's financial position a great deal worse. The corruption that went with the extravagance did not improve matters. These problems caused relations with parliament to be strained, especially in 1610 and 1614. However, as long as the expense of war was not added to all other expenses the issue could be contained. The war that James I allowed himself to be dragged into at the very end of his reign did not harm his position but posed dangers for the new king, who was a different character from his father.

Summary questions

1 (a) Identify and explain any *two* domestic problems which faced James I on his accession in 1603.

(b) Compare the success of James I's government by 1625 in dealing with at least *three* problems.

2 By what methods, and to what extent, did James fulfil his aims?