**English Revolution 1640**

The term "**English Revolution**" has been used to describe two different events in [English history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_history). The first to be so called—by [Whig](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig_%28British_political_party%29) historians—was the [Glorious Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glorious_Revolution) of 1688, whereby [James II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_II_of_England) was replaced by [William III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_III_of_England) and [Mary II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_II_of_England) as monarch and a constitutional monarchy was established

In the twentieth century, however, [Marxist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism) historians introduced the use of the term "English Revolution" to describe the period of the [English Civil Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Civil_War) and [Commonwealth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_England) period (1640–1660), in which Parliament challenged King [Charles I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_I_of_England)'s authority, engaged in civil conflict against his forces, and executed him in 1649. This was followed by a ten-year period of [bourgeois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourgeois) [republican](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic) government, the "Commonwealth", before the monarchy was restored under Charles' son, [Charles II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_II_of_England), in 1660.

**Whig theory**

In the Glorious Revolution of 1688, James II was replaced by William III and Mary II as monarch and a constitutional monarchy was established and was described by Whig historians as the English Revolution.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Revolution#cite_note-M._Trevelyan,_1938-1) This interpretation suggests that the "English Revolution" was the final act in the long process of reform and consolidation by Parliament to achieve a balanced constitutional monarchy in Britain, and laws were made that pointed towards freedom.

**Marxist theory**

The Marxist view of the English Revolution suggests that the events of 1640 to 1660 in Britain were a [bourgeois revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourgeois_revolution) in which the final section of English feudalism (the state) was destroyed by a bourgeois class (and its supporters) and replaced with a state (and society) which reflected the wider establishment of [agrarian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrarianism) (and later industrial) capitalism. Such an analysis sees the English Revolution as pivotal in the transition from [feudalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) to [capitalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism) and from a feudal state to a capitalist state in Britain.

According to Marxist historian [Christopher Hill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Hill_%28historian%29):

The Civil War was a class war, in which the [despotism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Despotism) of Charles I was defended by the reactionary forces of the [established Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Established_Church) and conservative landlords, and on the other side stood the trading and industrial classes in town and countryside ... the yeomen and progressive gentry, and ... wider masses of the population whenever they were able by free discussion to understand what the struggle was really about.

Later developments of the Marxist view moved on from the theory of bourgeois revolution to suggest that the English Revolution anticipated the [French Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolution) and later revolutions in the field of popular administrative and economic gains. Along with the expansion of parliamentary power the revolution broke down many of the old power relations in both rural and urban English society. The guild democracy movement of the period won its greatest successes among London's transport workers, most notably the [Thames Watermen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watermen), who democratized their company in 1641–43. And with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, rural communities began to seize timber and other resources on the estates of royalists, Catholics, the royal family and the church hierarchy. Some communities improved their conditions of tenure on such estates.

The old status quo began a retrenchment after the end of the main civil war in 1646, and more especially after the restoration of monarchy in 1660. But some gains were long-term. The democratic element introduced in the watermen's company in 1642, for example, survived, with vicissitudes, until 1827.

The Marxist view also developed a concept of a “Revolution within the Revolution” (pursued by Hill, [Brian Manning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Manning_%28historian%29) and others) which placed a greater deal of emphasis on the radical movements of the period (such as the agitator [Levellers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levellers%22%20%5Co%20%22Levellers), mutineers in the [New Model Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Model_Army) and the communistic [Diggers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diggers)) who attempted to go further than Parliament in the aftermath of the Civil War.

There were, we may oversimplify, two revolutions in mid-seventeenth century England. The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property (abolition of feudal tenures, no arbitrary taxation), gave political power to the propertied (sovereignty of Parliament and common law, abolition of prerogative courts), and removed all impediments to the triumph of the ideology of the men of property – the protestant ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the Protestant ethic.

Brian Manning has claimed that:

The old ruling class came back with new ideas and new outlooks which were attuned to economic growth and expansion and facilitated in the long run the development of a fully capitalist economy. It would all have been very different if Charles I had not been obliged to summon that Parliament to meet at Westminster on November 3rd, 1640.

The term "English Revolution" is also used by non-Marxists in the Victorian period to refer to 1642, as (for example) critic and writer Matthew Arnold in "the Function of Criticism at the present time". ("This is what distinguishes it [the French Revolution] from the English Revolution of Charles the First's time.")

**Criticism**

The notion that the events of 1640 to 1660 constitute an "English Revolution" has been criticised by historians such as [Austin Woolrych](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austin_Woolrych), who has pointed out that

painstaking research in county after county, in local record offices and family archives, has revealed that the changes in the ownership of real estate, and hence in the composition of the governing class, were nothing like as great as used to be thought.

Woolrych argues that the notion that the period constitutes an "English Revolution" not only ignores the lack of significant social change contained within the period, but also ignores the long-term trends of the early modern period which extend beyond this narrow time-frame.