

What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell?

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others

It would not be good history if we tried to understand Cromwell **only** by looking at his own words. We also need to look at what others said about Cromwell. See what these sources tell you.



Portrait of Oliver Cromwell, c.1655



Extracts from the Humble Petition and Advice, 1657



Picture of Cromwell's body lying in state in 1658



Memoirs of a senior army commander



Summary of Cromwell's character by a royalist



Reactions to the death of Cromwell

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 1

Portrait of Oliver Cromwell, c.1655

(National Portrait Gallery, London: 5274)

What is this source?

Samuel Cooper painted this portrait of Oliver Cromwell.

Cooper painted many famous people and made several portraits of Cromwell. This little watercolour painting (called a miniature) measures 6 cm x 4.8 cm.

What's the background to this source?

Rulers often used portraits of themselves as a form of propaganda.

Propaganda is information (in words or pictures) that promotes some cause or viewpoint. For example, kings and queens had beautiful paintings done of them, dressed in wonderful clothes, showing their jewels or horses, with their most important courtiers surrounding them. The purpose of these pictures was to make the monarch appear strong, wise, rich, powerful and beautiful (even if they weren't)!

It's worth knowing that ...

Cromwell had a reputation for being uninterested in decoration and portraits used as propaganda.

One story says that he was content to be painted, as he looked, 'warts and all'. This may be where the saying 'warts and all' comes from. It means telling something exactly as it is and not changing any details.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. Would you say that this portrait was an example of propaganda?
2. Cromwell had a reputation for wanting people to take him as they found him, rather than trying to impress them. Does this source help us to decide whether that reputation was true?
3. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?

4. How does this image of Cromwell compare with other images? You can find a large collection by going to the National Portrait Gallery website and doing a search on Oliver Cromwell.



Source 1



Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 2

Extracts from the Humble Petition and Advice, 1657

(Acts and Ordinances, published by Parliament, 1657)

What is this source?

These are extracts from the 'Humble Petition and Advice'. This was a constitution or system for government drawn up in 1657.

It was an attempt by MPs to move back towards a traditional form of government.

What's the background to this source?

In 1657 Cromwell gave up trying to rule with Parliament. He brought in a system of rule by military commanders called Major Generals. This proved unsuccessful and unpopular. This in turn led to the 'Humble Petition and Advice'. Cromwell accepted the terms of the Humble Petition. However, he refused to become king, which many MPs had wanted as well.

- We do not know for sure why Cromwell refused the crown.
- If he had become king, he would have solved the problem of what happened when he died. (By the time of this document, he was not a well man.) MPs feared another civil war between rival leaders who wanted to take his place (see section 1 of the Humble Petition where they asked Cromwell to name his successor).
- Cromwell becoming king would have made most MPs happy. However, many in the army did not approve of the idea. Cromwell may have wanted to keep peace with the army.
- Above all, Cromwell refused the crown because he thought God would disapprove of this action and see it as a sign of pride and ambition.

It's worth knowing that ...

The Humble Petition did not stop disagreements between Cromwell and Parliament. The main issues were liberty (freedom) and being tolerant (allowing people to have different ideas and ways of doing things).

- MPs were terrified of returning to the chaos and damage of the Civil War years. They believed that any religious or political ideas that were even slightly unusual should be crushed to stop them causing more problems to society (see section 11 of the Humble Petition).
- If Cromwell had sided with MPs on this issue, he could have gained a lot of popularity and support. However, he did not. He thought stability was important, but he thought religious freedom and civil liberty were important as well. He would not simply crush all groups whose views were unusual.
- Cromwell was certainly not afraid to make up his own mind and take difficult or unpopular decisions if he felt they were right.
- Like MPs, Cromwell believed in crushing potential threats. On the other hand, Cromwell believed that people could find God in their own ways – not just by belonging to the Church of England and obeying its laws and rules. He defended the right of smaller Protestant groups to worship God in their own ways. He even tolerated Catholics as long as they did not cause trouble. During Cromwell's reign Jews were allowed back into England for the first time since the Middle Ages.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What powers did the Humble Petition give to Cromwell?
2. What limits were there on his power?
3. What clues do we get from this source about the threats that MPs feared in the 1650s?
4. What overall impression does this source give of what MPs thought of Cromwell?



Source 2

I.

That Your Highness will be pleased by and under the Name and Stile of Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland, and the Dominions and Territories thereunto belonging, To hold and exercise the Office of Chief Magistrate of these Nations, and to Govern according to this Petition and Advice in all things therein contained, and in all other things according to the Laws of these Nations, and not otherwise; That Your Highness will be pleased during Your Life time, to Appoint and Declare the Person who shall immediately after Your Death, Succeed You in the Government of these Nations.

II.

That Your Highness will for the future be pleased to Call Parliaments consisting of Two Houses (in such maner and way as shall be more particularly afterwards agreed and Declared in this Petition and Advice) Once in three years at furthest, or oftner,



IV.

That those who have Advised, Assisted or Abetted the Rebellion of Ireland, and those who do or shall profess the Popish Religion, be disabled and made incapable for ever to be elected, or to give any Vote in the Election of any Member to sit or serve in Parliament; And that all and every person and persons who have Aided, Abetted, Advised or Assisted in any War against the Parliament, since the First day of January, One thousand six hundred forty one (unless he or they have since born Arms for the Parliament or pour Highness, or otherwise given signal Testimony of his or their good Affection to the Commonwealth, and continued faithful to the same) And all such as have been actually Engaged in any Plot, Conspiracy or Design against the per-

son of pour Highness, or in any Insurrection or Rebellion in England or Wales since the Sixteenth day of December, One thousand six hundred fifty three, shall be for ever disabled and made incapable to be elected, or give any vote in the Election of any Member to sit or serve in Parliament.



V I.

That in all other particulars which concern the calling and holding of Parliaments, your Highness will be pleased, That the Laws and Statutes of the Land be observed and kept; and that no Laws be Altered, Suspended, Abrogated or Repealed, or new Law made, but by Act of Parliament.

XI.

That the true Protestant Christian Religion, as it is contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and no other, be held forth and asserted for the publique profession of these Nations;

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 3

A picture of Cromwell's body lying in state in 1658

(Cromwelliana: A chronological detail of events in which Oliver Cromwell was engaged from the year 1642 to his death 1658. Published by Machell Stace, Westminster, 1810)

What is this source?

This shows Oliver Cromwell after his death in September 1658. His body lay in state at Somerset House in London.

The picture was made around the time of Cromwell's death. This copy was published in a later book about Cromwell.

What's the background to this source?

When rulers died they were usually laid out for mourners to come and say goodbye. This was called lying in state.

Cromwell died in September, but his funeral took place in November, when he was buried in Westminster Abbey. If his body had lain in state in Somerset House for months, it would have got rather smelly. In fact this picture is probably not of Cromwell's actual body, but of a model of wood and wax, made for mourners to see when they came to pay their respects.

It's worth knowing that ...

There are a lot of details in this source that provide clues about people's attitudes to Cromwell.

You can see:

- People mourning Cromwell;
- His guard of honour;
- The crests of England and Scotland, the lion of England and the unicorn of Scotland;
- The crown (although it is not on his head as he never became king);
- His fur robes of office (very much like a king's robes);

- The large bed he is lying on, with 4 pillars (pillars sometimes represent power – on the other hand they sometimes just hold up the drapes)!

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. Would you say that this picture was meant to make Cromwell look grand?
2. What details in this source tell us about Cromwell's power and importance?
3. Compare this image of Cromwell with the images of James I and Elizabeth I in Gallery 2. What is similar about them? What is different about them?
4. What overall impression does this source give of what people thought of Cromwell?



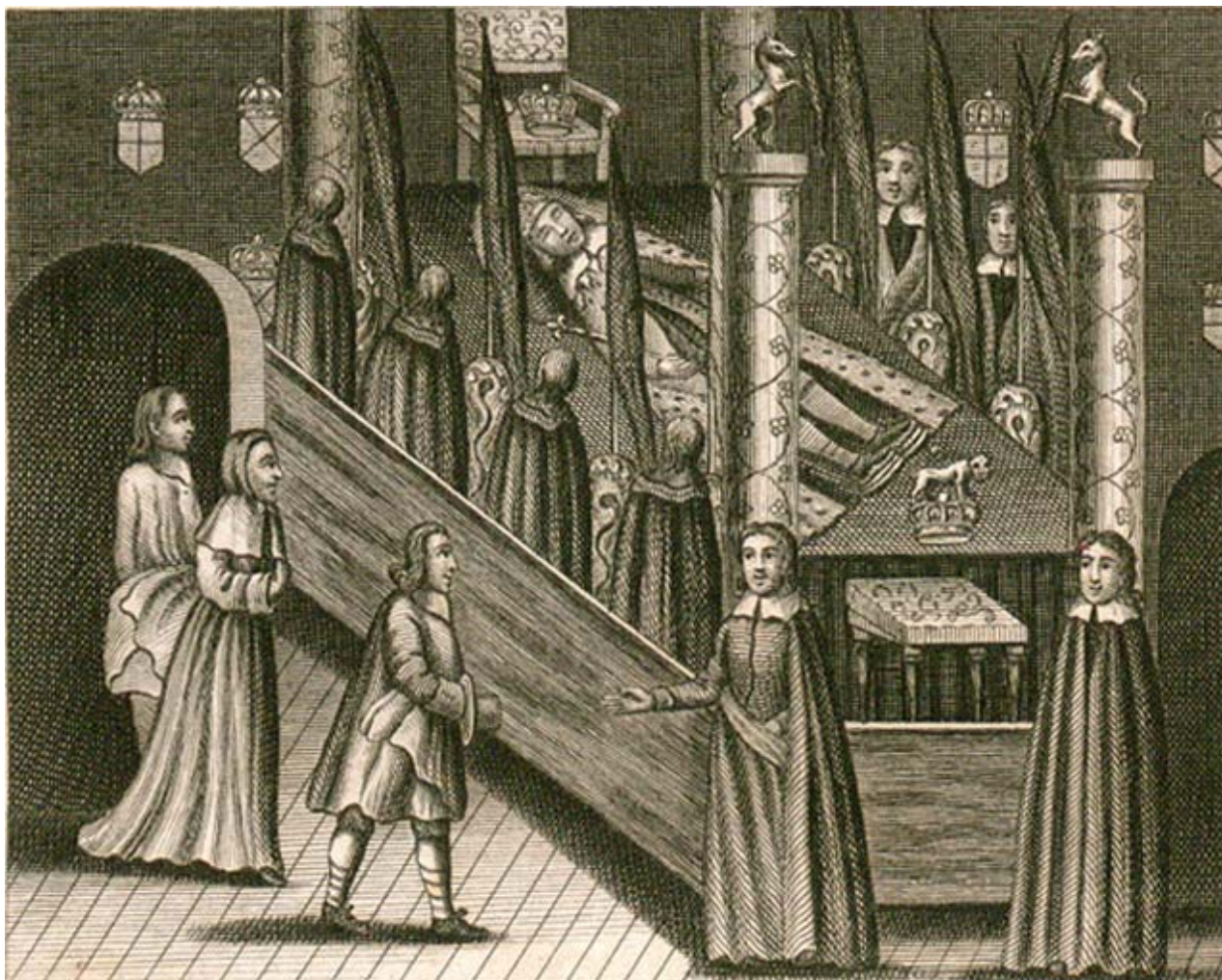
Learning Curve

Civil War

A
the national archives

Civil War > What kind of ruler was Oliver Cromwell? > Cromwell in the eyes of others

Source 3



Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 4

The memoirs of a senior army commander, first published around 1670

(By permission of Taylor & Francis: *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, by his widow Lucy, published by George Routledge, 1906, pp. 297, 300)

What is this source?

Here are two extracts from the *Memoirs of the life of Colonel Hutchinson*, written by his wife. Her account was written in the 1660s. It describes his life and career.

He was a senior commander in the army and a trusted ally of Cromwell at first. However, as time went on Colonel Hutchinson became concerned about Cromwell's actions.

What's the background to this source?

By the end of Cromwell's rule Colonel Hutchinson was a bitter critic of Cromwell.

Another critic of Cromwell was named in this source. John Lambert was a general on the Parliamentary side in the Civil War. Afterwards he was an important leader and deputy to Cromwell. However, in 1657 they fell out when Lambert and other army officers urged Cromwell not to accept the offer to become king. Lambert then retired from public life and went to live in Wimbledon.

It's worth knowing that ...

Working out the viewpoint of this source is an interesting challenge for an historian. Hutchinson was not a supporter of Cromwell by the time this was written. However, the Hutchinsons were no friends of the monarchy. Hutchinson was one of the men who signed Charles I's death warrant.

This book was written in the 1660s, when Charles II (son of Charles I) was back in power. Lucy Hutchinson's book was not published until about 1670 as it contained too many criticisms of Charles I to be approved by Charles II.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What does source 4a accuse Cromwell of doing?
2. What positive things does source 4b say about Cromwell?
3. Does this seem strange in a source that is written by a critic of Cromwell?
4. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?
5. According to this source, did Cromwell face much opposition to his rule?
6. Why should historians be careful when using memoirs as sources?



Source 4a

In the interim Cromwell and his army grew wanton with their power, and invented a thousand tricks of government, which, when nobody opposed, they themselves fell to dislike and vary every day. First he calls a parliament out of his own pocket, himself naming a sort of godly men for every county, who meeting and not agreeing, a part of them, in the name of the people, gave up the sovereignty to him ¹. Shortly after he makes up several sorts of mock parliaments, but not finding one of them absolutely for his turn, turned them off again ².

Source 4b

were every day forming designs, and plotting for the murder of Cromwell, and other insurrections ¹, which being contrived in drink, and managed by false and cowardly fellows, were still revealed to Cromwell, who had most excellent intelligence of all things that passed, even in the king's closet; and by these unsuccessful plots they were only the obstructors of what they sought to advance, while, to speak truth, Cromwell's personal courage and magnanimity upheld him against all enemies and malcontents. His own army disliked him, and once when sevenscore officers had combined to cross him in something he was pursuing, and engaged one to another, Lambert being the chief, with solemn promises and invocations to God, the protector hearing of it, overawed them all, and told them, 'it was not they who upheld him, but he them', and rated them, and made them understand what pitiful fellows they were; whereupon, they all, like rated dogs, clapped their tails between their legs, and begged his pardon, and left Lambert to fall alone, none daring to own him publicly, though many in their hearts wished him the sovereignty.

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 5

A summary of Cromwell's character by a royalist

(Earl of Clarendon, Edward Hyde: The History of the Great Rebellion, Vol. III, part 1, p.432, p.509. Published at Clarendon Printing House, 1767-1786)

What is this source?

These are two extracts from 'The History of the Great Rebellion' by the Earl of Clarendon, Edward Hyde (1609-1674).

His writings, published in the early 1700s, have proved to be a very useful source for historians.

What's the background to this source?

Working out the viewpoint of this source is an interesting challenge for an historian. The writer had no reason to like Cromwell, but may also have had reason to dislike the royal family.

- The Earl started out as a country gentleman.
- He became an MP in 1640.
- At first he was a strong critic of Charles I.
- However, when war broke out he joined the Royalist side. During the Civil War he stayed with the king in Oxford. He became very close to Charles I.
- He continued to support the Royalist cause after Charles was executed. He lived in exile with Charles's son.
- In 1660, when this son became Charles II, Hyde was rewarded for his loyalty. Charles II made him Earl of Clarendon.
- However, in 1667 he fell out of favour with Charles II for criticising the king's personal lifestyle. He then went into exile.

It's worth knowing that ...

Machiavelli was an Italian political writer. He wrote a book called 'The Prince', which explained how rulers stayed in power.

He recommended that rulers should use every possible way to destroy their enemies. Even today we describe someone who uses cunning and dirty tricks as being Machiavellian.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. According to source 5a, what were people's attitudes towards Cromwell?
2. Does source 5b tell us anything about Cromwell's bad qualities?
3. Does source 5b tell us anything about Cromwell's good qualities?
4. Why might an enemy of Cromwell have written about Cromwell's good points?
5. What overall impression does this source give of Cromwell?



Source 5a

THERE cannot be a greater Manifestation of the universal prejudice and averſion in the whole Kingdom towards *Cromwell*, and his Government, than that there could be ſo many deſigns and conſpiracies againſt him, which were communicated to ſo many Men, and that ſuch ſignal and notable Perſons could reſort to *London*, and remain there, without any ſuch information or diſcovery, as might enable him to cauſe them to be apprehended;

Source 5b

To conclude his Character, *Cromwell* was not ſo far a Man of blood, as to follow *Machiavel's* method; which preſcribes, upon a total alteration of Government, as a thing abſolutely neceſſary, to cut off all the heads of thoſe, and extirpate their Families, who are Friends to the old one. It was confidently reported, that, in the Council of Officers, it was more than once propoſed, “that there might be a general Maſſacre of all the Royal Party, as the only Expedient to cure the Government, but that *Cromwell* would never conſent to it; it may be, out of too great a contempt of his Enemies. In a word, as he was guilty of many Crimes againſt which Damnation is denounced, and for which Hell-fire is prepared, ſo he had ſome good Qualities which have cauſed the Memory of ſome Men in all Ages to be celebrated; and he will be look'd upon by Poſterity as a brave wicked Man.

Case study 2: Cromwell in the eyes of others – Source 6

Edmund Ludlow, on reactions to the death of Cromwell

(By permission of Oxford University Press: Firth (ed.), *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, Lieutenant-General of the Horse in the Army of the Commonwealth of England, 1625-1672*, Vol. II, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894, pp.45-6)

What is this source?

This is an extract from the *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*. It was published in the early 1700s.

Ludlow's memoirs were edited in the 1690s. At this time the monarchy was back in power.

What's the background to this source?

Ludlow was an opponent of Charles I, but he also fell out with Oliver Cromwell.

- Ludlow was an MP and commander of the Parliamentary armies in the Civil War. He was a hard-line opponent of Charles I and signed his death warrant.
- Ludlow later clashed with Cromwell when Cromwell closed Parliament in 1653 and became Lord Protector. He felt that Cromwell's rule was illegal.
- Ludlow felt very strongly that the role of the army was to obey the government, not to take part in government.

It's worth knowing that ...

After Cromwell's death there was the problem of who would rule the country.

- Cromwell's son, Richard Cromwell, became Lord Protector. However, he was not the man for the job and retired.
- MPs were then faced with the possibility of another civil war between rival army leaders. However, one commander, General Monck, emerged as the most powerful leader.

- He agreed with Parliament that the best solution to the problem of running the country was to bring back the monarchy. As a result, Charles I's son became Charles II in 1660.

Your turn: What can we learn from this source?

1. What can we tell about Cromwell's rule from this source?
2. What were the different reactions to his death?
3. Who were the different groups competing for power after his death?
4. What overall impression does this source give of what people thought of Cromwell?



Source 6

Different were the effects that the death of Cromwell produced in the nation : those men who had been sharers with him in the usurped authority were exceedingly troubled,

whilst all other parties rejoiced at it : each of them hoping that this alteration would prove advantageous to their affairs. The Commonwealthsmen were so charitable to believe that the souldiery being delivered from their servitude to the General, to which they were willing to attribute their former compliances, would now open their eyes and join with them, as the only means left to preserve themselves and the people. Neither were the Cavaliers without great hopes that new divisions might arise, and give them an opportunity of advancing their minion, who had been long endeavouring to unite all the corrupt interests of the nation to his party. But neither the sense of their duty, nor the care of their own safety, nor the just apprehensions of being overcome by their irreconcilable enemy, could prevail with the army to return to their proper station. So that having tasted of sovereignty under the shadow of their late master, they resolved against the restitution of the Parliament.