

YEAR 11 INTO 12 SUMMER TRANSITION TASK 2025

Subject: History

Qualification/Level: A Level

Examination Board: Edexcel

LEVEL HISTORY

UNIT 1: Britain, 1625-1701: conflict, revolution and settlement

SUMMER PREPARATION

Aims:

- To develop some background knowledge about 17th century Britain, and about the first Stuart monarch.
- To experience *how* you will learn at A Level using preparation reading for use in lessons. A Level is more independent than GCSE.

The following tasks are to be completed and taken to your first lesson in this subject in September.



The Task

1. Using the information on pages 3-4:
 - a. Create a profile for King James I. E.g. What was his style and views on monarchy/kingship? Religious preferences? Etc.
 - b. Analyse your findings. E.g. what were his strengths and weaknesses as a king?
2. Read "James I and the succession" on pages 5-10, highlight and answer the ten questions in as much detail as you can.
3. Update your profile for King James I in light of your TASK 2 reading.
4. Based on your findings in tasks 1-3, write an essay in response to the following question: *How far do you agree that James I as King of England was a disaster?*

Paragraph 1 - Introduction	You should make your judgement clear straight away. Was James I a disaster?
Paragraph 2	Explain why James I can and has been seen as a disaster. Include as much detail from your reading to support your explanation as you can.
Paragraph 3	Explain why James I can and has been seen in a more positive light. Include as much detail from your reading to support your explanation as you can.
Paragraph 4 – Conclusion	Explain in detail your decision and persuade me that your judgement is the right one.

How the work produced will fit into subsequent work and the specification as a whole

When you return in September we will be exploring the reign of Charles I (James I's son). This work is an important prelude to the themes you will be exploring soon.

How the work should be presented

Tasks 1-3 should be completed as a detailed set of notes. It should be explained in your own words. Task 4 should be written as an extended piece of writing. Guidance given above.

Success criteria

This needs to be a detailed piece of work. You should aim to produce between 2-3 sides of A4 for the notes to tasks 1-3. You should aim to write 2 sides of writing for task 4 (Approximately 1000 words). Preferably type up your work using ICT if available to you.

Resources to be used

Attached (pages 3-10)

Who to contact if you should require further assistance with the work before the end of term

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What equipment will be needed for the subject in September?

- *Two A4 folders*
- *Lined paper*
- *Folder dividers*
- *Plastic wallets*
- *General stationery (pens, pencils etc)*

Sources on James I

His education was **Protestant** based and he was pushed very hard by his teachers. However, James became fluent in Latin and French and competent in Italian. In his early years, James developed a great desire for knowledge but it also gave him an over inflated idea as to his own worth as an academic. He believed that he was capable of out-arguing almost anyone. He was unable to accept that others might be right.

As a youth James was surrounded by men who, in an attempt to boost their influence, tried to flatter him at every opportunity. It was a tactic that George Villiers was to use with great success after James was made King of England.

He married Anne of Denmark in 1589. She proved to be a shallow and frivolous person and James found respite from her by surrounding himself with young men...

On April 5th, 1603, James started his journey south to London. Accompanied by a host of advisors and servants, James crossed the border into England. Once he got to York, he wrote to the **English Privy Council** requesting money. Despite being King of Scotland, James was not a wealthy man by English standards.

The **English Privy Council** was keen to make a positive start with their new king. The last few years of Elizabeth's reign had seen her popularity fall as her unpredictability had increased. The Privy Councillors saw this as a fresh start. When both parties met for the first time, the Councillors were impressed with the king's sharp brain and his aptitude for business. They were equally impressed by his ability to make a quick decision – whether it was right or wrong – after suffering from years of Elizabeth's procrastination. The Privy Council also took to his informality and sense of humour, which some noted did, on occasions, border on obscene.

James became king of England aged 37. At the English court, his appearance was a source of comment, though not criticism. He was tall and broad shouldered. Yet he had thin spindly legs. The formality of a banquet held by Elizabeth was somewhat undermined in the era of James by his eating habits that to some English courtiers bordered on the comical: *“His tongue was too large for his mouth, which ever made him speak full of mouth, and made him drink very uncomely, as if eating his drink, which came out into the cup of each side of his mouth.”*

Courtiers in London were certainly not used to his way of behaving. Nor were **foreign dignitaries**. The French **ambassador** to London remarked, “Where he (James) wishes to assume the language of a king, his tone is that of a **tyrant**, and when he condescends he is vulgar.”

James was a fervent believer in the **Divine Right of Kings**. He had a high opinion as to his academic ability. He also held in high regard his ability to be a king. In Scotland, he had faced a lawless society where many lords simply ruled as they wished in their own area. By the time of his departure for London in 1603, James had done a great deal to tame the Scottish **nobility** and this had greatly boosted his own belief in his ability to be king. He described himself as “an old experienced king, needing no lessons.”

While in Scotland, James had done a great deal of reading about statecraft. He had also produced a book in 1603 titled “**The True Law of Free Monarchies**”. The theories in this book were not original but they did state with extreme clarity his belief that kings had absolute legal sovereignty within their state, that a king had absolute freedom from executive action and that a king’s sole responsibility was to God.

James I and the succession

At the end of the first session of parliament in the summer of 1604, some MPs recounted for the benefit of the new king how they felt on the day he was proclaimed king of England. On 24 March 1603, they wrote, 'a general hope was raised in the minds of all your people that under your Majesty's reign religion, peace, justice, and all virtue should renew again and flourish; that the better sort should be cherished, the bad reformed or repressed, and some moderate ease should be given us of those burdens and sore oppressions under which the whole land did groan'.¹ It was only the passing of time which lent enchantment to the reign of Elizabeth I and allowed the tradition of 'the reign of our late queen of blessed memory' to pass into popular mythology. In 1603 there were few who mourned her passing and fewer who did not welcome the peaceful accession of the new king. J. E. Neale's study of Elizabeth's later parliaments reveals the extent of the disaffection at many aspects of Elizabethan government felt by those represented in parliament, a situation amply confirmed by a recent analysis of an anonymous document, 'the Memorial' of March 1603 addressed to the new king, which catalogued grievances like wardship and purveyance and defects in the Church such as the lack of preaching ministers, pluralism and non-residence, and which amounted (according to Nicholas Tyacke) to 'sweeping plans for change' in both Church and State.² Nor had Elizabethan government been a guarantee of political stability, which might have compensated for its defects. Elizabeth's refusal to marry or to name a successor, even on her deathbed, ensured that her reign was dominated by uncertainty, which increased yearly and became the principal domestic issue of her reign. James VI of Scotland was Elizabeth's most obvious successor, but no one in the late sixteenth century could have been certain that his succession would go unchallenged. In 1600 Thomas Wilson tried to console himself with the conviction that James VI would be accepted as king of England, but, looking at the vast range of competing claimants, he wryly commented that 'this Crowne is not like to fall to the ground for want of heads that claime to weare it, but upon whose head it will fall is by many doubted'.³ James was an alien and a member of a nation hated by the English. Legally his claim was weakened by Henry VIII's will, which debarred from the succession the heirs of Margaret Tudor. A peaceful succession was thus not guaranteed. That the fears of contemporaries did not materialize was due partly to James's diplomatic negotiations with European powers in Elizabeth's last years and, possibly to a greater extent, to the political skill of Robert Cecil in England. Not the least of James's attributes in the eyes of Englishmen was that he already had two sons and that his accession promised an end to the uncertainty over the succession to the English throne which had threatened political stability in England since at least the 1450s.

¹ Kenyon, *Stuart Constitution*, p. 30.

² Nicholas Tyacke, 'Puritan politicians and King James VI and I, 1587–1604', in T. Cogswell, R. Cust and P. Lake, eds., *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain* (2002), p. 42.

³ F. J. Fisher, ed., *The State of England Anno Dom. 1600 by Thomas Wilson*, Camden Society, 3rd ser., LII (1936), p. 5.

By the middle of the twentieth century, most historians agreed that James's record as ruler of his multiple kingdoms after 1603 was a disaster.⁴ Very influential in the formation of the black legend of James I was a book written during James's reign by one of his ex-household officers, Anthony Weldon, called *The Court and Character of James I*. This book contains the infamous 'codpiece' pen-portrait of the king:

He was naturally of timorous disposition, which was the reason of his quilted doublet; his eyes large, ever rolling after any stranger that came into his presence, insomuch as many for shame have left the room, as being out of countenance. His beard was very thin, his tongue too large for his mouth, which . . . made him drink very uncomely, as if eating his drink, which came out of his cup each side of his mouth. . . . His walk was ever circular, his fingers ever in that walk fiddling with that codpiece; he was very temperate in his exercise and in his diet, and not intemperate in his drinking . . . he would never change his clothes until worn out to very rags.⁵

To that image of a personally repellent, prematurely senile and shabby dirty-old-man, other damaging charges were added and accepted by later generations. It was alleged, for example, that the Scottish king was totally ignorant of conditions in his new southern kingdom and that, as a result, he blundered into making many serious errors after 1603. It was said that he opened up fundamental and permanent fractures in the fabric of the English State because his ruinous extravagance destroyed the already creaking structure of English public finances. He also created, it was alleged, serious divisions along religious lines by his inflexible, uncompromising attitudes to those who demanded further reforms within the Church. This forced godly Puritans to begin to move away from advocating moderate reforms within the Church towards demanding radical measures, like the abolition of bishops. James was also charged with allowing himself to be led by Count Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador in London, into following a pro-Spanish foreign policy that was against England's national interests. As a result, it was argued, in the early seventeenth century the stability of the country was threatened, not only by a constitutionally aggressive parliament and a Puritan ideology that was subversive of the social and political status quo, but also by the accession of an inept and foolish king, 'the wisest fool in Christendom' as Henry IV of France was wrongly thought to have called him.⁶ In these circumstances it was accepted by many that England became deeply divided on 'court versus country' lines and that England was firmly set on the celebrated (if mythical) 'high road to civil war'.

Without doubt, most of the charges implicit in the image of James I as 'the wisest fool in Christendom' are unfair, as has been demonstrated by historians since the 1980s.⁷ Contemporary accounts of the deterioration in his physical appearance and

⁴ A view illustrated clearly in D. H. Willson, *James VI and I* (1956, Cape paperback edn., 1963).

⁵ Quoted in C. Daniels and J. Morrill, *Charles I* (1988), p. 9.

⁶ The phrase was in fact coined by Weldon: Jenny Wormald, 'James VI and I', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004–8), p. 59.

⁷ Crucial to the process of James's rehabilitation as ruler is the brilliant seminal article by J. Wormald, 'James VI and I: two kings or one?', *History*, LXVIII (1983). See also the books on James by Houston, Lockyer and Durston in the Bibliographical note, p. 521.

habits as an old and sick man in the last five or six years of his life have been used wrongly, out of chronological context. Even his physical decline in his last years can be exaggerated, since right until the end of his life he often got out of bed at dawn to go hunting. James's lively letter in 1624 to an ill duke of Buckingham is hardly one of a man debilitated by senility: 'My only sweet and dear child, Blessing, blessing, blessing on thy heartroots and all thine. This Tuesday morning here is a great store of game, as they say, especially partridges and stone curlews. I know who shall get their part of them.'⁸ Above all, Weldon's assessment of James has been taken at its face value, regardless of the fact that Weldon was hardly fitted to be an objective commentator on the king. For one thing, Weldon was violently prejudiced against Scotland and all things Scottish. In his book *A Perfect Description of the People and Country of Scotland*, which Weldon wrote after visiting Scotland as part of James's entourage on a royal tour in 1617, he wrote that Scotland is 'too good for those that possess it, and too bad for others to be at the charge to conquer it. The air might be wholesome but for the stinking people that inhabit it . . . There is a great store of fowl too, as foul houses, foul sheets, foul linen, foul dishes, and pots, foul trenchers and napkins.' In this book, Weldon was careful to distinguish between the mass of Scottish people and the king. 'I do wonder', he wrote, 'that so brave a prince as King James should be born in so stinking a town as Edenburg in lousy Scotland.'⁹ Not surprisingly, James was furious and he sacked Weldon from his court office. After that Weldon had no reason not to turn his bitter pen against James as well as the Scots; *The Court and Character of King James* is the result. It is certainly not the piece of objective historical evidence that it is often assumed to have been. An essential starting point for a proper historical assessment of James I is the abandonment of the distorting mirror of English anti-Scottish opinion as seen in Weldon's book or Lady Ann Clifford's diary comment on the Jacobean court: 'We all saw a great change between the fashion of the court as it now is and of that in the Queen's time, for we were all lousy by sitting in the chamber of Sir Thomas Erskine [one of James's Scottish entourage].'¹⁰ Such comments are an interesting reflection of those English views on the Scots that were to block James's plans for a union of his two kingdoms, as will be seen. But they give a very misleading picture of contemporary attitudes to James I. The realization of this has led in recent years to a justified rehabilitation of James's reputation as king of England. James I of England was as successful a monarch as was James VI of Scotland.

As with other aspects of historical 'revisionism', however, it is important that favourable reassessments of James I are not carried too far.¹¹ As will be seen, some of the origins of the causes of the opposition faced by Charles I before and after 1640 are to be found in the reign of his father; and some of these derived from James's defects as a monarch. Both as a man and as a king he was not without unappealing characteristics, some of which had damaging political consequences. This is not particularly true of James's

⁸ G. P. V. Akrigg, ed., *Letters of King James VI and I* (1984), pp. 14, 438.

⁹ Quoted in Wormald, 'Two kings or one?', pp. 190–1.

¹⁰ Quoted in Willson, *James VI and I*, p. 191.

¹¹ This is not done by Pauline Croft in her excellent *King James* (2003), or by the contributors to R. Houlbrooke, ed., *James VI and I: Ideas, Authority and Government* (2006); see especially the editor's essay on 'James's reputation, 1625–2005'.

voyeuristic prurience about sexual matters, which led him to visit the bedrooms of newly married courtiers to interrogate them about the intimate details of their first post-wedding nights together, or of the cruel references he made about Robert Cecil's lameness in his 'dear beagle' letters to his chief minister during the first part of his reign. These are more out of tune with modern attitudes than they seem to have been with those of his contemporaries. James's male chauvinism – women, he advised his son, 'are no other thing else but *irritamenta libidinis* [incitements to lust]¹² – also grates more on twenty-first-century liberal ears than it probably did on those of patriarchally minded early seventeenth-century people. What, however, did contribute to the political tensions (which, it will be seen, are a thread running through the history of Jacobean parliaments) was the fact that James made no attempt to counter the image of his court as decadent and corrupt. His displays of public affection for his male favourites and his occasional bouts of drunkenness were noted disapprovingly in the diaries and letters of his important subjects, along with the sexual and corruption scandals that rocked the Jacobean court in the second decade of his English reign. When his brother-in-law Christian IV of Denmark came to England on a state visit, one report of the masque that was put on for the royal visitor noted that

the entertainment went forward and most of the presenters went backwards or did fall down. Hope [one of the characters in the masque] did essay [try] to speak but wine rendered her endeavours so feeble that she withdrew . . . Charity . . . returned to Hope and Faith who were both sick and spewing in the lower hall.¹³

Unlike Elizabeth I, who mastered the technique of image projection long before the days of the modern public relations industry, James scorned the task of cultivating his regal popularity. When large crowds came to see him, James is said to have shown his resentment. On one occasion at least, on being told that the people had come to express their love for him, he cried out (fortunately perhaps in an impenetrable Scottish accent), 'God's wounds! I will pull down my breeches and they shall also see my arse.'¹⁴

James's irritation at popular adulation and his failure (unlike other early modern European monarchs like Louis XIV) to hide the seediness and corruption of the court behind a veneer of glory were matched by his dislike of attending to matters of routine administration. His preference for hunting, while leaving day-to-day government business to others, need not, as has often been assumed, have led to administrative inefficiency. The personal application to routine matters of government practised by Philip II of Spain or Henry VII of England was not necessary as long as monarchs delegated administrative business to capable subordinates; in Robert Cecil, until he died in 1612, and (later) Lionel Cranfield, James had such ministers. Unfortunately, however, James sometimes undermined his ministers' policies (especially their efforts to reform the antiquated royal financial and administrative structure, by his extravagance), so that it

¹² Quoted in Willson, *James VI and I*, p. 135.

¹³ Quoted in J. Miller, *Bourbons and Stuarts: kings and kingship in France and England in the seventeenth century* (1987), p. 26.

¹⁴ Quoted in Willson, *James VI and I*, p. 165.

will be seen that his ministers' pleas for parliamentary support for administrative reform often got a hostile reception. As will be seen, too, many of James's deeply held beliefs – his willingness to extend a measure of toleration to Catholics and his pacific approach to foreign policy, for example – struck a discordant note in the ears of the political nation. Furthermore, generally successful as were his ecclesiastical policies, sometimes his actions, especially in the last years of his reign, roused rather than calmed anxieties in both England and Scotland, and fuelled a belief in the reality of a 'popish plot' aimed at subverting the Protestant Church in both countries.

Yet recent writing on James I has successfully established two important general points that put James's historical reputation in a much brighter light than the black 'wisest fool in Christendom' legend noted above. The first is that the political tensions of the reign were not caused solely, or indeed mainly, by James I. Elizabeth's legacy to the new king in 1603 was not a good one: a country at war, dissatisfaction in many quarters with the condition of the Church, a royal revenue system in need of radical reform, and grievances over which the late queen had failed to satisfy her last turbulent parliament in 1601. As has been seen at the end of the previous chapter, fears about parliament's future existence in England were already prevalent before Elizabeth died. The queen's attempts to raise extra-parliamentary taxes to finance the expensive wars against Spain and in Ireland, at a time when some continental monarchs were seen to be undermining representative assemblies in their kingdoms, was the main reason for the suspicions many MPs in Jacobean parliaments had of the court's 'absolutist' intentions; and for the expression of coherent constitutional ideologies that asserted parliament's traditional rights and liberties which were felt to be under threat. In these circumstances, the task of governing Britain in 1603 was extremely difficult. The second point in James's favour is that it is now clear that he carried out this daunting task with much more success than he has often been given credit for, using the political skills of flexibility and compromise that he had long deployed in Scotland to defuse some of the fears of his new English subjects. As will be seen, James saw himself as a *rex pacificus* – a peacemaker king – in foreign affairs. He also displayed the same qualities in domestic affairs, in the Church and State. These were seen not on the great public occasions that have often been given prominence in unfavourable accounts of James's reign, when the king could not resist lecturing parliamentary audiences about the divine origins of monarchy. James's qualities of political flexibility and tact are instead to be seen away from the public parliamentary political arena, in a less formal political forum in and around the court.

James's court might have lacked the formal decorum of the courts of Elizabeth I or Charles I, but its informality allowed a wide variety of views to be openly expressed. At his court James was accessible to the representatives of many powerful factions. He was never, even in the most ardent phase of his homosexual relationship with the duke of Buckingham, the prisoner of one faction in the ways that both Elizabeth I in the 1590s and Charles I in the late 1620s were. During James's reign, Buckingham never achieved the dominance of the court that he gained in the late 1620s or that the Cecils had in the 1590s. Significantly, one of James's first actions after his accession in England was to promote the Howards (Henry Howard was created earl of Northampton) to

counterbalance the dominant position of the Cecils. James's experience in coping with the factional jungle of Scottish politics made him adept at balancing faction in the English court; and also (as will be seen) at acting as an arbitrator, defusing the factional tensions within the English Church. Moreover, James's 'extravagance', in part, is to be explained by his perceptive recognition that it was essential for successful early modern monarchs to be bountiful.¹⁵ The distribution of royal largesse helped to secure the cooperation between leading magnates and the crown, which it has been seen was vital if the governmental system of late Tudor and early Stuart England was to operate smoothly.

It will be noted in what follows that James's reign did not see the emergence of an unbridgeable gulf between 'court and country'; nor did it see an uninterrupted slide towards the serious political crises of the late 1620s. Yet it will also be seen that James did not make full use of his political skills, or of his insights into the realities of political life in his new kingdom.

Reading questions:

1. How did some MPs say they felt on the day James became king of England?
2. Why was a peaceful succession from Elizabeth I to James I not certain?
3. Why did James I succession to the English throne end uncertainty over the succession?
4. How did most historians by the middle of the twentieth century judge James I's reign?
5. How did Anthony Weldon contribute to the 'black legend of James I'?
6. Identify 3 serious errors historians accused James I of making.
7. Why can't Anthony Weldon's views about James I be necessarily be trusted?
8. The author of this chapter says 'it is important that favourable reassessments of James I are not carried too far.' What criticism does the author have about James?
9. Why can't political tensions of his reign be blamed entirely on James I?
10. In what other ways is the author of this chapter positive about James I?