

AS/A Level History - Bridging Work

James VI and I

The course begins in 1603 when James VI of Scotland became James I of England. This marked the end of the Tudor dynasty and the beginning of the House of Stuart.

'The Scottish Connection'

Elizabeth I died in 1603 without producing an heir. This could have resulted in unsettled times had several contenders stepped forward to claim the throne. However, the accession of James Stuart was relatively smooth.

James - the early years



The young James had an unsettled and tumultuous childhood. His mother was Mary Queen of Scots and his father, Lord Darnley. Unfortunately the marriage was unhappy and Mary began to prefer the company of her Italian secretary, David Riccio. When Mary became pregnant, Darnley was suspicious she had been unfaithful. He was involved in the murder of the Italian secretary in 1566, when Riccio was dragged from a supper party and stabbed 50 times. Shortly afterwards, Darnley himself was assassinated. The house where he was staying was blown up and when his body was found it was revealed that he was strangled.

One person who was implicated in Darnley's murder was the Earl of Bothwell, whom Mary then married. An army was raised against the couple and Mary was forced to abdicate. After a failed attempt to regain her throne, Mary escaped to England where Elizabeth kept her under house arrest for nearly 20 years until agreeing to her execution in 1587.

In the midst of this intrigue James was crowned King of Scotland at the tender age of 13 months. The above portrait by Bronckorst shows James as a child king. His childhood has been described as 'lonely and emotionally barren'; his education tough but thorough. From the age of 4 he was educated by his stern tutor, George Buchanan, who is said to have had his monarch subjected to regular beatings. He was however, a distinguished scholar who stretched James' mind, turning him into an effective writer of verse alongside providing James with a good understanding of political theory.

James' life continued to be fraught with danger. Scotland was governed by regents until 1580, these regencies were unstable as Mary's supporters continued to fight on her behalf. Even James himself was captured and held prisoner for a few months until his escape.

However, by his early twenties, James began to establish his control and govern Scotland successfully.

In 1589 James was married Anne of Denmark.

Describe how James I had a turbulent childhood.

The New King

How did James' contemporaries (people at the time) view James I?

Read the extracts by M. de Fontenay and Sir Anthony Weldon. List the main points each writer makes about the character of James I.

(James) is for his age (18) the premier prince who has ever lived. He has three qualities of the soul in perfection. He apprehends and understands everything. He judges reasonably. He carries much in his memory and for a long time. In his questions he is lively and perceptive, and sound in his answers...In brief he has a marvellous mind, filled with virtuous grandeur and good opinion of himself.

His manners, as a result of the failure to instruct him properly, are aggressive and very uncivil, both in speaking, eating, clothes, games, and conversation in the company of women. I have noted in him only three defects which may possibly be harmful to the conservation of his estate and government. The first is his ignorance and failure to appreciate his poverty and lack of strength, overrating himself and despising other princes. The second that he loves indiscreetly and obstinately despite the disapprobation of his subjects. The third, that he is too idle and too little concerned with business, too addicted to his pleasure, principally that of the chase.

Written by Monsieur de Fontenay in 1584. He was reporting on James as King of Scotland. The report was for his mother, Mary.

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Bullet point James' characteristics as cited by de Fontenay:

He was of a middle stature, more corpulent through his clothes than in his body, yet fat enough, his clothes ever being made large and easy, the doublets quilted for stiletto proof... He was naturally of a timorous disposition...his eyes large, ever rolling after any stranger that came in his presence... 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 the cup at each side of his mouth. His skin was as soft as taffeta sarsent (a thin silk), which felt so because he never washed his hands, only rubbed his finger ends slightly with the wet end of a napkin; his legs were very weak, having had, (as was thought), some foul play in his youth... that weakness made him ever leaning on other men's shoulders; his walk was ever circular, his fingers ever in that walk fiddling about with his codpiece... He was very liberal of what he had not in his own grip, and would rather part with £100 he never had in his keeping than one twenty shilling piece within his own custody... A very wise man was wont to say that he believed him the wisest fool in Christendom, meaning him wise in small things, but a fool in weighty affairs.

Written by Sir Anthony Weldon. Weldon hated the Scots and wrote an abusive pamphlet about them after visiting Scotland in 1617. James was so offended that he dismissed Weldon from his court position. Weldon got his revenge by writing an acidic attack on James. This attack on James was not published until after Weldon's death. It was published one year after the removal of the Stuart monarchy in England with the execution of King Charles I in 1649.

Bullet point James' characteristics as cited by Weldon:

How far do these sources agree about James?

Extract from 'The Early Stuarts' By Katherine Brice

'The judgement of more discerning historians would agree with de Fontenay that James was intelligent, that he had appalling manners, that he often over-estimated his position in foreign affairs, that his fondness for young male favourites was very unpopular and that he neglected state matters to indulge his passion for hunting.

Many of James's personality traits can be traced back to his childhood. Deprived of both his parents as a baby (his mother was probably an accomplice in the murder of his father) he grew up as a lonely boy who was to crave affection throughout his life. His marriage to Anne of Denmark became loveless after a successful start. James turned to a series of young men, beginning in the 1580s with his cousin Esme Stewart, later Duke of Lennox. These supplied the family life that James had never known as a child and was unable to successfully create as an adult despite having two sons, Henry and Charles, and one daughter, Elizabeth, who survived into adulthood. It is striking that James's relations with Buckingham, his last favourite, were more cordial than with his own son Charles. James signed his letters to Buckingham 'your darling Dad' and addressed him as 'Steeny'. It is uncertain whether James was a practising homosexual but contemporaries were scandalised by the way he caressed his favourites in public and resentful of the honours he heaped upon them. James had no one on whom to model himself as king. It is unfortunate that his manners, which were extremely coarse, had not been corrected as a child. Persuading the king not to lecture his subjects, which he was inclined to do after he became King of England, might have been more difficult. James liked to prove the correctness of his position by lengthy explanations, but the unfortunate members of the English parliament did not enjoy the king haranguing them for hours at a time. James went so far as to apologise for this in 1621 'I never meant to weary myself or you with such tedious discourses as I have done heretofore'.

The positive side of this aspect of James's character was his love of learning. He was genuinely interested in philosophy and theology and he wrote a number of books including *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* which was a justification of the divine right of kings and *Basilikon Doron* which set out his views on religion. James was unusually tolerant for the early seventeenth century and the execution of Catholic priests virtually ended in his reign.

Another part of James's character that attracted unfavourable contemporary comment was his lack of physical courage. There had been a number of plots against him when he was King of Scotland and within three years of his accession to the English throne those involved in the Gunpowder Plot tried to blow up not only the king but the assembled members of the Lords and Commons. So James had a good reason to be wary of assassins especially as the death of Henry IV of France in 1610 confirmed the vulnerability of kings. However, contemporaries did not like their sovereigns to show signs of weakness and Sir Anthony Weldon wrote scathingly about James's padded clothes which were designed to prevent a dagger from reaching his body. Along with his fear of personal violence went a much more praiseworthy desire to avoid war. James hated war and sought throughout his reign to keep England from being sucked into one.'

Strengths as a monarch	Weaknesses as a monarch

Does James seem to have the qualities to be a successful King?