

DOWNFALL: THE THIRTY DAYS THAT LOST A KING HIS CROWN.

In December 1641 Charles I prepared a fight-back against the populists who were using parliament to strip him of his powers. He hoped to gain the upper hand in THIRTY DAYS. In the New Year of January 1642 the claims made by his enemies that they spoke for the people would be exposed as a lie. They would be tried and executed as traitors, and he would save his crown.

The King's supporters held a majority in the House of Lords. His enemies dominated the Commons. But they owed their majority to intimidation, with demonstrations keeping moderate MPs away. Charles's plan was to force these moderates back. To achieve this **On 12 December** a royal proclamation summoned 'all members of both Houses of Parliament' to return to Westminster by 12 January.

The clock was now set ticking: on 12 January it would be clear if Charles could still rule England, or not.

I am the historian Leanda de Lisle, uncovering the Tudors and Stuarts behind the myths

The irony was that divisions of 1641 owed much to King Charles's efforts to ensure the opposite – consensus. His ambition was for his three kingdoms to practice the same moderate form of Protestantism, represented by the Church of England, which he judged to be 'the best in the world'. But when, in 1637, Charles had tried to impose an English style Prayer Book on the Presbyterian Scots, who practiced a purer form of Calvinist Protestantism, it had led to riot, then rebellion and then war.

The Scots rebels had formed a secret alliance with some of Charles's leading opponents from the 'Puritan' party in England, who also preferred a more stripped down Calvinist Protestantism than Charles did, and in 1640 the Scots had invaded England.

Charles had been obliged to call parliament to pay the Scots to leave, and his enemies had come to dominate it. They had achieved this by using the principle weapon of any populist politician – fear. They claimed that England faced a Roman-Catholic takeover and tyranny, from which only they could save its people. This ruling group, led by figures such as the ‘popular Lord’ Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, and the Puritan MP John Pym, was now known as ‘The Junto’.

They had warned that the king, who had ruled without parliament for eleven years, could not be trusted to keep Protestantism safe. They said his leading servants, even the Catholic bashing former Lord Deputy of Ireland, Thomas Wentworth Earl of Strafford, were in league with the Counter Reformation. They pointed to his Catholic wife, Henrietta Maria, and ancient prejudices about the seductive power of women made their claim that her influence was over-powerful the more believable.

In the summer of 1641 MPs had had Strafford executed as a traitor by Act of parliament and Charles had been forced to make a humiliating peace with the Scots. Increasingly, however, there was a sense amongst moderate MPs that the king had conceded enough. He was obliged under the Triennial Act to call parliament every three years, and ‘innovations’ in the Church of England, that allowed un-Calvinist additions like religious imagery and organs, were being rooted out.

The Junto tried to keep up the pressure, fanning the flames of fear, executing Catholic priests simply for the crime of being priests in England, in order to heighten the sense of threat. But moderates feared the Junto was becoming a potential oligarchy. Pym was sarcastically labelled ‘King Pym’. The Junto looked power hungry and many moderates feared the Junto were allied to extremists who threatened the social order, as well as the Church of England they had grown up with.

Then, the Junto had a stroke of luck. That October 1641, Charles’s third kingdom – Ireland – had risen in a rebellion.

The Irish Catholics wanted Charles to give them the same religious freedom he had granted the Presbyterians, and protect them from the anti-Catholic hatred of the Puritans and the Scots. But the rebellion had provoked vicious sectarian killing between the Catholic natives and Protestant settlers. This was a gift to the Junto's propaganda. They used the fast moving new media of pamphlets and newsheets to spread atrocity stories from Ireland and so ramp up their Project Fear.

Images of the babies of English Protestant settlers impaled on pitchforks were mass printed. Puritan preachers played the role of Shock Jocks, spinning tales of families burned in their homes. The numbers of victims quoted amounted to more than the entire Protestant population of Ireland.

Meanwhile Henrietta Maria was trolled as the hate figure behind the rebellion. And again it was implied that the king could not be trusted. The truth behind these 'alternative facts' was that Charles wished impose the same moderate Protestantism on Ireland, as he did in Scotland. He was as determined to crush the Irish rebels as the Junto.

To this end an English army had to be raised – but the question was, who would control this army? Armies were always raised in the name of the king, and the Junto feared that once Charles had defeated the Irish, he would use his army against them. To save their lives they needed to reduce him to being their puppet.

So, at the house of Warwick's brother, Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, the Junto was plotting a means of raising an army that would be loyal to their wishes. Amongst the regular attendees a beautiful cousin of the Rich brothers: Lucy Hay, Countess of Carlisle. She had been a friend of the executed royal servant, the Earl of Strafford, and remained a favorite lady in waiting to Henrietta Maria.

Lucy was a spy, but for which side was not yet clear.

The Junto's plan was to pass an impressment bill through parliament that would allow them to raise an army of draftees, who would fight in Ireland under their own hand-picked officers. To achieve this they first needed to remove the king's majority in the Lords. THEN THEY NEEDED TO STOP THE MODERATES ATTENDING THE COMMONS, AS THE KING HAD ORDERED ON 12TH DECEMBER.

TICK TOCK: On **15 December**, three days after Charles had issued his proclamation summoning MPs to London, the Junto ordered the printing of their 'Grand Remonstrance': a protest document drawn up by Pym. It showed that religion, liberties and law had to be defended together against a Popish plan to destroy Protestantism. The 'actors and promoters' of this threat included the Church of England's bishops – on whom the king's majority in the Lords depended

The publication had an immediate effect on the Common Council elections to the governing body of the City of London taking place on **21 December**. Royalist councilors lost their seats to supporters of the Junto, giving the Junto control not just of the Council but also potentially of the City's 8000 strong militia. Charles needed urgently to restore his ability to keep order in London.

The following day, **22 December**, Charles replaced the pro Junto Lieutenant of the Tower with his own candidate, Thomas Lunsford. The great fortress and its cannon would allow him to over-awe Londoners. But Lunsford was a hated figure, who liked to boast that he was 'fierce enough to eat children'. Mobs of 'factious citizens', organized by City radicals in league with the Junto, descended on parliament 'with their swords by their sides'. Charles tried to lower the temperature by replacing Lunsford with a less controversial figure, but it was too late.

From Christmas Eve, **24 December**, to Boxing Day **26 December**, the riots continued and worsened. On **27 December**, when the Archbishop of York, John Williams, got out of his coach at Westminster he had to fight off thugs with his fists. The Junto's

orchestrated violence had made it unsafe for any bishops to now attend the Lords - and so the royalist majority in the Upper House was lost.

As moderate MPs had not yet answered Charles summons to attend parliament, the Junto were now free to push through the impressment bill, and strip Charles of the last of his powers.

The king's supporters had, however, begun to flood into London. On **29 December** there were blows at Whitehall between Junto supporting 'citizens carrying clubs and swords' and royalist 'gentlemen of the Court, who went over the rails striking at them with drawn swords'. Civil war was growing ever closer.

The next day, **30 December**, Archbishop Williams urgently petitioned the king for a suspension of parliamentary business, arguing that without the bishops the Lords was no longer properly constituted. This would have ensured the business of legislation would have stopped. But that same night the Junto-packed Commons had ten of the twelve petitioner bishops arrested and imprisoned.

With Charles's rule set to be dismantled long before the 12 January deadline he made a last ditch effort to reach out to his enemies. On **1 January** he offered Pym the coveted post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. 'King' Pym turned him down.

Something drastic had to be done. **TIME WAS RUNNING OUT FOR CHARLES.**

On **3 January** king decided he would use the parliamentary process of impeachment to charge six of the Junto with acts of treason. They included five members of the Commons: Pym, amongst them. The one peer, Viscount Mandeville, was Warwick's son in law. Warwick himself was too powerful to be arrested just yet. But Charles hoped the legal proceedings against the six accused would clog up parliamentary business until the vital 12 January date.

Instead, the House of Lords appointed a committee to decide if the charges were lawful. And, when the king's Sergeant at Arms arrived at the Commons to arrest the five members, he was turned away.

The Junto now struck as close to the king as they dared. That night, news reached Charles that parliament was to deprive the queen of most of her household clergy. Henrietta Maria believed this was the prelude to her own arrest.

Someone had told her the Queen of a plan laid at Holland's house months earlier to hold her and the children hostage to the king's actions, if it proved necessary. The informant may have been her friend, Lucy Carlisle. She had heard too that it was being said that a 'queen was only a subject': as such she could be executed on trumped up charges of aiding Irish rebels.

She now believed that unless Charles intervened personally to have the five MPs were arrested, she would have to flee England forever. 'Pull those rogues out by the ears' she warned Charles, or 'never see my face more!' Others also urged Charles to act.

At ten pm Charles ordered that the canon at the Tower be armed and made ready to overawe the capital.

London was eerily quiet the next morning, **4 January**. TICK TOCK. At three o'clock in the afternoon, Charles emerged from his quarters at Whitehall. He called out to the multitude of armed royalist gentry who were standing around: "follow me my most loyal liege men and soldiers'. As they walked behind him he commandeered a carriage off a man in the street. He asked to be taken to parliament.

MPs may have ignored the arrest warrant for the five members delivered by Charles's Sergeant of Arms. Charles had been persuaded they could not ignore an order from his own mouth. Henrietta Maria agreed, and told Lucy Carlisle that the king was poised to reclaim his realm, 'for Pym and his confederates are arrested before now'.

What the queen did not know was that Lucy had betrayed them the previous night, sending a message to Pym. She liked to be close to power and had over the past few months become 'King' Pym's intimate friend – some said his lover.

Now, as the king's carriage rumbled down the street, followed by four or five hundred armed men, a Junto supporter in the crowd ran ahead to warn the Commons. The five MPs fled the Commons Chamber and hid in the neighbouring Court of the King's Bench. At that same moment Charles's cavaliers entered Westminster Hall and lined up on either side of the long room in order for the king to pass through between them.

The MPs sitting in the Commons Chamber heard the clatter as the king came up the stairs, followed by his men.

The MPs who remained seated could then see the king standing in the door, and behind a crush of soldiers. One held a pistol in his hand, already cocked. A false move and there would be blood on the floor of the Commons.

Charles walked centre stage to the Speakers Chair and addressed his MPs, who sat in stunned silence. He requested the five members be given up, looking around hoping to spot where they were. 'I do not see any of them', he said, 'I think I should know them'. There was nothing left to do but leave. The humiliation was evident as Charles walked out.

The silence gave way to shouts of "Privilege! Privilege!": a reminder of the free rights of the Commons, the angry voices pursued him all the way down the stairs. Two days later, on **7 January**, a petition was delivered to the king from the City Council, informing Charles that the fears prompted by the rebellion in Ireland, 'were exceedingly increased by his Majesty's late going into the House of Commons, attended by a great multitude of armed men'. As one royalist recalled sadly, 'All that

[the Junto] had ever said of plots and conspiracies against Parliament, which had before been laughed at, [was] now thought true and real’.

Henrietta Maria was blamed for the attempted arrests of the five members, and Charles, fearing for his family, informed the Junto that they would leave London. Holland tried to persuade Charles to stay, while Lucy Carlisle spoke to Henrietta Maria.

Lucy was now open in her support for the Junto to whom she had been communicating, ‘all she knew and more of the dispositions of the king and queen’. Nevertheless her advice to stay in London was worth listening to. Abandoning the ‘seat and centre’ of Charles’s empire, as they now did, was to prove a major error.

The royal family left Whitehall on Monday **10 January**, travelling by barge to Hampton Court. There the king of England arrived in a ‘most disconsolate, perplexed condition’.

The cold at Hampton Court was bitter and there were few beds made up. Charles, Henrietta Maria and their young children, aged six months to ten years, slept together. There was surely some comfort in the warmth of their bodies against each other on that January night. Soon they would be separated forever and England would be in civil war.

The moderate MPs that Charles had summoned on 12 December had never come, and the 12 January deadline had not been reached. Instead **twenty-eight days later** the game was up.

King Charles would not see London again for seven years, and then only to face his trial. By then parliament had consumed its ‘own and everything the moderates feared had come to pass. The Lords was abolished and the Commons purged by the Puritan

New Model Army. Their king had lost his crown and it was as Charles Stuart, 'traitor to the people', that he would lose his head.

If you are interested in reading more about Charles I you might enjoy my biography *White King: THE TRAGEDY OF Charles I*. And do feel free to ask me any questions via my website, facebook or twitter