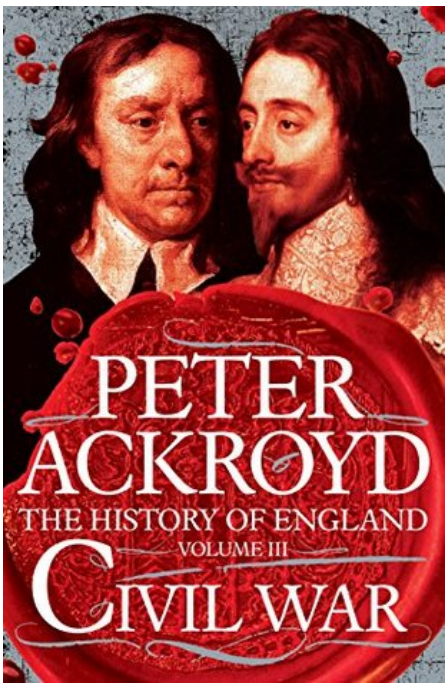

Civil War: The History of England Volume III

Peter Ackroyd

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In *Civil War*, Peter Ackroyd continues his dazzling account of England's history, beginning with the progress south of the Scottish king, James VI, who on the death of Elizabeth I became the first Stuart king of England, and ends with the deposition and flight into exile of his grandson, James II. The Stuart dynasty brought together the two nations of England and Scotland into one realm, albeit a realm still marked by political divisions that echo to this day. More importantly, perhaps, the Stuart era was marked by the cruel depredations of civil war, and the killing of a king.

Ackroyd paints a vivid portrait of James I and his heirs. Shrewd and opinionated, the new King was eloquent on matters as diverse as theology, witchcraft and the abuses of tobacco, but his attitude to the English parliament sowed the seeds of the division that would split the country in the reign of his hapless heir, Charles I. Ackroyd offers a brilliant - warts and all - portrayal of Charles's nemesis Oliver Cromwell, Parliament's great military leader and England's only dictator, who began his career as a political liberator but ended it as much of a despot as 'that man of blood', the king he executed.

England's turbulent seventeenth century is vividly laid out before us, but so too is the cultural and social life of the period, notable for its extraordinarily rich literature, including Shakespeare's late masterpieces, Jacobean tragedy, the poetry of John Donne and Milton and Thomas Hobbes' great philosophical treatise, Leviathan. *Civil War* also gives us a very real sense of the lives of ordinary English men and women, lived out against a backdrop of constant disruption and uncertainty.

Civil War: The History of England Volume III Details

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From Reader Review Civil War: The History of England Volume III for online ebook

Josh Friedlander says

Enjoyable, fast-paced, and intensely atmospheric. Ackroyd mines his sources for an authentic feeling of everyday life during these turbulent times. Quotes from the sometimes potty-mouthed Stuart kings are especially entertaining; noteworthy, too, for me, were the many literary and biographical interpolations, discussing the lives of Newton, Dryden and Samuel Pepys, or the still-shocking liberties of Restoration comedy. If you'd like to know history but aren't seriously "into" history, this is for you.

Pete daPixie says

I think I have read around half a dozen Ackroyd books now. Perversely, in this series I have so far missed out Vol II. All Peter Ackroyd's historical writings are jam packed with interesting facts and details that are guaranteed to reveal something new and unique. I can strongly recommend his work on 'London' and 'Thames' which are very similar in form to 'Civil War'.
If I have a teeny weeny criticism of this coverage of the Stuart period is that it is very London centric. Whatever happens in the country at large is given scant coverage, before we are back in the capital once again. What effect these turbulent times had on the population at large in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland remains in large part a mystery.
Having said that, I'm sure it will not be very long before I catch up with Vol II and continue this series for as long as the Ackroyd keyboard clatters through the centuries.

Andrew Harrison says

can't go wrong with Peter Ackroyd. Guarenteed to be beautifully written, idiosyncratic and thought-provoking.

Nicki Markus says

Another compelling chapter in Peter Ackroyd's History of England, Civil War introduces a period with which I was less familiar than those book-ending it, having often skipped the Stuarts in my previous reading. Therefore, I found it fascinating. As ever, Ackroyd's prose is immensely readable and clear, and perusing the pages feels like reading a novel rather than a ponderous history text. Sometimes in this series I do wish for a few more cited references in additional to the general "further reading" lists, but that is a minor complaint about an excellent series. I look forward to volume four.

Leanda Lisle says

If you are bored of the Tudors, then the Stuarts are what you have been waiting for. With their gay lovers, horrible murders, extravagant queens, and glorious revolutions, the dynasty offers enough scandals and drama to put their predecessors in the shade.

This third volume of Peter Ackroyd's History of England covers a great deal more than the 'Civil War' of the title. In fact, it opens a full thirty-nine years earlier with the accession of the first Stuart king of England, James I, in 1603. After a lifetime of ruling violent and poverty stricken Scotland, the king sees England as a land of milk and honey - or rather, of riches and beautiful young men. He is soon enjoying both, and Ackroyd has almost as much fun describing James's scandal ridden court.

Here men 'wallow in beastly delights', women 'abandon their sobriety and roll about in intoxication', while James spends money like water. But James also has ambitions. He commissions the King James translation of the bible and yearns to be a bringer of peace and religious unity. He succeeds at the former, making a truce with Spain that ends the fifteen years of war. But he fails to unite his three kingdoms – England, Scotland and Ireland –into a single British state. Nor is he able to impose a single form of Protestantism on his wayward subjects.

By the time James's son becomes King Charles I, the peace with Spain is breaking down. Charles faces MPs who don't trust a Stuart king with taxpayers money and won't vote him the subsidies he needs to prosecute the coming war. It is also soon evident that Charles not only shares his father's belief in the divine right of kings to rule, he is less willing to back down in his confrontations with parliament. One result is the murder of a hated councillor the Duke of Buckingham – who he had refused to sack.

For eleven years after Buckingham's murder, and following a brief parliament, Charles rules alone, raising taxes by royal right alone. That is enough to make him bitterly unpopular. But it is his single-minded efforts to fulfil his father's ambitions to create one British Protestant church that drives his kingdoms to rebellion. Two wars with Scotland are succeeded by revolt in Ireland. A year later, in 1642, the English turn on each other and the age of the roundhead and the cavalier is born.

According to Ackroyd more people died in the English civil war, as a percentage of population, than England lost in World War I. And the bloodshed didn't end after Charles I was tried, condemned for treason against his own people, and beheaded. The subsequent dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell proved to be no great improvement on Charles's 'tyranny' and after Cromwell died, the king's eldest son was invited back as Charles II.

Ackroyd covers the reigns of the merry Charles II and his dourer brother James II, in short order, concluding in 1688, with James's expulsion from England. Rejected as a Catholic James II spent the rest of his life in France, where his mother, Henrietta Maria, had spent so many desperate years during the civil war and its aftermath. It is romantic and tragic story, and Ackroyd packs it with colourful quotations and anecdotes. But despite having a chapter on 'the women of war' there is an absence of strong female portraits. Henrietta Maria is barely more than a shadow.

Ackroyd is also weak on analysis and makes some silly mistakes. Charles I was not crowned in a white cloak. Brilliana Harley, was a famous parliamentarian heroine, not a 'royalist letter-writer'. It makes you

wonder what else he has wrong and without references it is hard check his facts. Nevertheless, as you follow the remarkable successes and disastrous failings of the Stuart dynasty in England, you cannot but enjoy the exuberance of the ride.

An edited version of this review was published in the Mail on Sunday

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Paul says

More than the Civil War we get the whole sorry tale of the Stuart dynasty in England, plus contect chapters on the relevance of such writers as Milton, Bunyan and scientists like Bacon and Newton in the changing intellectual landscape as it shifted from religious absolutes to the birth of scientific enquiry. Eminently readable.

Josh says

Civil War is the third book in Peter Ackroyd's series on the history of England and spans the tumultuous 17th century, from the accession of James I to the English throne in 1603, through the civil wars and Cromwell's military dictatorship, ending with the overthrow of James II in the 'Glorious' revolution of 1689. The book begins energetically with the furious gallop of a courtier bringing news of Elizabeth I's death to James the VI of Scotland at Holyrood Palace. He assumed the crown of England and became James I, for the first time uniting under one crown England and Scotland. Each subsequent chapter is a vignette detailing an aspect of life during the Stuart period – most chapters follow the main historical arc, but many pause to spotlight various cultural, religious, and political movements. The book puts into context the literature of the day, such as Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan, John Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress, and John Milton's Paradise Lost. It also explores broader movements of scientific and religious ideas.

Ackroyd weaves an historical narrative rich in its biographical and cultural details, but sparse in its analysis of cause and effect. He gives the reader a lean account of the main events without judgement; although he will allow himself an occasional economical sentence to summarise the temper of the age: 'This was an age of religious polemic'; 'It was an age of music'; 'It was in certain respects a time of silence.' This makes it a good book for an introduction into the period for the uninitiated, like me. Ackroyd also manages to capture the lives of ordinary people, whose existence in turbulent times was ruled by fear and uncertainty. When writing about the Jacobean period, this is brought to life by a discussion of Robert Burton's book The Anatomy of Melancholia, a fascinating and idiosyncratic treatise on the ubiquitous malady of the time. Much of the history is characterised by religious and political schism. While Ackroyd touches on this religious frisson, in my view he fails to truly capture the sense of religious fervour of the time. It was the driving force behind much of the upheaval because of the simple fact that it was still a hugely important aspect of peoples lives. Even Isaac Newton, the supreme experimental genius and mathematician of the age, was called by John Maynard Keynes the 'last of the magicians'. He frittered away countless hours on what could have been productive endeavours on studies of alchemy and biblical chronology. The 17th century was still a time when religious ideas ardently animated people – evinced by the explosion in religious sects, from anabaptists and quakers, to fifth monarchists and muggletonians.

Oliver Cromwell, the key focus of the book, was zealous in his religiosity; he believed he was fulfilling

divine destiny, which gave him extraordinary focus and drive when he believed he was backed by providence: ‘This extraordinary man, without any other reason than because he had a mind to it…mounted himself into the throne of three kingdoms, without the name of king, but with a greater power and authority than had ever been exercised or claimed by any king’. He had a mind to it because he believed he was doing God’s will. Because of his drive and military prowess he ascended through the ranks of the army to become one of the principal commanders of the New Model Army during the civil war period 1642-49. He then infamously lead the brutal campaign into Ireland to stamp out royalist opposition. Victories in war and success in parliament placed him in a position of first among equals, styled ‘Lord Protector’, during England’s flirtation with republicanism. He remains an intensely controversial figure; at times he could be fun-loving and playful:

"At the end of the discussion Cromwell, in one of those fits of boisterousness or hysteria that punctuated his career, threw a cushion at one of the protagonists, Edmund Ludlow, before running downstairs; Ludlow pursued him, and in turn pummelled him with a cushion.”

Cromwell could also be unsure of himself and had routine periods of soul searching and vacillation, but he was far stronger willed and more decisive than any of the kings of the period.

Ackroyd describes James I as extravagant in his personal tastes, as well as learned and eloquent on state matters, but with a tendency to prevaricate over important diplomatic or military decisions. He had been king of Scotland since the age of 13 months, and had acquired a belief in the divine right of kings and consistently butted heads with Parliament over his understanding of English Common Law. For example, on his way down to London he executed a common criminal without due deference to the procedures of the law. A lifetime of political intrigue and violence had made James shifty and paranoid. He was the king that famously survived attempted assassination in the ‘gunpowder plot’. His overriding goal was to unite the kingdoms of Scotland and England under a unified religion and parliament. However, he was unpopular with parliament because of his intended alliance with Spain and he constantly had to petition for funds. When money was not forthcoming, he resorted to extrajudicial sources of revenue such as the highly controversial ship money levy. Perhaps his greatest legacy was a new authorised English translation of the Bible.

Charles I inherited his father’s belief in the divine right of kings. Although his hand was forced in several circumstances during the civil war and he was required to make concessions, he would never wholly concede and always tried to strengthen his position through underhand deals and connivance. Ackroyd recounts the colourful episode when, as a young prince, he set out on an ill-fated adventure to claim the Spanish Infanta as a bride. He was held hostage, but during this time he developed an exquisite taste in European art, and when released brought much of it back to England, such as Andrea Mantegna’s Triumphs of Caesar. His main character fault, it seems, was an inability to empathise with others and understand other people’s viewpoints, so he maintained a unbending view of kingship. Ackroyd writes, “He could never see the point of view of anyone but himself, and this lack of imagination would one day cost him the throne.” Although it must be said that during the trial leading up to his execution, Charles remained admirably calm and steady.

Charles II, who was restored to the throne following the death of Cromwell and the disintegration of the protectorate, was known as the ‘merry monarch’. Famous primarily for his innumerable mistresses, he is also portrayed as devious and secretive. His jovial epithet, however, belies the general malaise of this period. Ackroyd captures a sense of mounting gloom and rampant speculation on the end of days that gripped ordinary people. To many, the apocalypse was presaged by the plague and the subsequent great fire of London in 1666. Prognostications of doom indeed. London, five sixths of which was destroyed, bounced back quickly with room for more permanent architecture such as Christopher Wren’s ambitious new St. Pauls cathedral. For these scenes, Ackroyd relies heavily on the animated diary writing of Samuel Pepys.

Civil War is not for those who want a detailed account of the Civil war period specifically; it is particularly void of military detail, but offers an insightful and vivid narrative of the whole of 17th century England that retains the period’s intricacy and complexity. While Ackroyd’s style is to make the civil war period seem rather like a series of accidents, common themes emerge that still influence our culture today. Most notable was the refinement of the role of parliament in a constitutional monarchy and an emphasis on the due process of the law. It’s easy to view 17th century England as a time of intense religious and sectarian violence, but one can also sense the development of religious toleration and burgeoning belief in science, experimentation, and reason. The century also witnessed the last successful invasion of England by the protestant William and Mary, who became the new monarchs after usurping James II, a staunch catholic.

Yzabel Ginsberg says

(I got an ARC of this book courtesy of the publisher through NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.)

I like to say that you can't really go wrong with Peter Ackroyd, and it seems to be once again the case. Even though what I read of him years ago feels pretty far by now, I still stand by this opinion. The man has a knack to present historical elements in such a way that one just can't help but come back to his books no matter what—at least, I can't. I stopped counting how many times I put my tablet in Sleep mode, thinking "I should do something else/read all the other books that I should have reviewed long before this one", yet kept opening the file again after half an hour or so.

Of course, I'll also confess to a complete lack of impartiality when a book deals with the Civil Wars, since it's one of my favourite periods of British history (the other one being the Victorian era, but let's not go there for now).

What you won't find here, obviously, is a very detailed account of every little event of the 17th century: there's just not enough room for that, and I'm well aware of it. *Rebellion* is the third volume of "The History of England", and as such, it deals with the period as a whole. (If I wanted to know how exactly the battle of Naseby went, I... Actually, I would open another book I own, detailing precisely that, down to the bullets found years later on the battlefield.)

What you'll get here, however, is a solid account that can be read even if you're not a History major. In a compelling style, the author manages to convey causes and consequences with definite clarity, and even some humour. Because, let's be honest, this is a gem:

> "At the end of the discussion Cromwell, in one of those fits of boisterousness or hysteria that punctuated his career, threw a cushion at one of the protagonists, Edmund Ludlow, before running downstairs; Ludlow pursued him, and in turn pummelled him with a cushion."

Also:

> "Cromwell now always carried a gun. In a riding accident, later in the year, the pistol fired in his pocket and the wound kept him in bed for three weeks."

It gets to show that the historical figures we take for granted in terms of seriousness aren't always so. But then, there's no way now to forget about those assassination plots, right, since they pushed Cromwell to carry that gun?

The narrative (it reads like a narrative, not like something arid, for sure) is interspersed with such little anecdotes, as well as chapters about literature (Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*...), science (Isaac Newton...), and other daily life happenings, reflecting how people lived in the period.

In short, heartily recommended by yours truly.

Leah says

A plague on all their houses...

The time of the doomed Stuart dynasty (in England) has always been one of those periods where I felt I knew the basics but didn't really understand the ins-and-outs of it all. Peter Ackroyd's history takes us from the accession of James I (VI of Scotland) to the throne of England on the death of Elizabeth in 1603, through to the flight of James II (VII) to France and the arrival of William of Orange and Mary in 1688. Since this is the third book in what I understand is to be a six-book series, Ackroyd doesn't delve much into the pre-Stuart era, nor does he say much about what happened after the events he is describing, but that doesn't present problems because he thoroughly explains the main players and factions as he goes along.

And what a bunch they were! I don't think I've ever read about a war where I so emphatically felt that I didn't want to support either side. While the Stuarts seem to have been a particularly inept, corrupt and often depraved crowd of absolutist monarchs, the Parliamentarians come across as a bunch of deeply unpleasant, power-hungry, money-grubbing, squabbling incompetents (clearly true precursors of today's lot). When Cromwell's military dictatorship begins to look like the good times, then it gives an indication of the awfulness of the alternatives. What a pity M. Guillotin hadn't been born yet...

Ackroyd's style is very accessible and he incorporates quotes from many contemporaneous sources - not just the people in power, but many fairly ordinary onlookers who give a flavour of the despair that must have been felt by the pawns in this bloody chess-game. Of course, we still can't hear the voices of the illiterate poor, but Ackroyd shows the impact on them of the various machinations of both sides, and the manipulation of them, usually via the various religious factions. Ackroyd also looks at the plays and writings that were produced at the time, showing how they were influenced by events, and how they would have been understood by the audiences of the day. And he discusses the impact of plague and fire, both as physical events and as how they would have been perceived symbolically.

As well as this clear picture of events in England, Ackroyd sets the story well into the international context. He manages to keep the reader on top of all the shifting treaties and loyalties, showing how dependant international affairs were on personal relationships at that time. We get a feel for the beginnings of the various European empires and how important that was becoming in determining alliances and enmities. And he reminds the reader that both Scotland and Ireland, now linked to England by a shared monarchy, played important roles in providing support or distraction to the English factions.

Overall, this is a very readable and interesting account of the period, written in a way that makes it easy for the non-academic reader to follow. It's certainly left me feeling much clearer about the reasons behind the

events and about the personalities of the people involved. I appreciated that he didn't romanticise either side - his treatment felt very even-handed to me. But I'm afraid the question of whether I'd have wanted to be a Roundhead or a Cavalier remains unresolved - Cavalier probably, but only on the grounds that their hairdos were more fun... 4½ stars for me, so rounded up.

NB This book was provided for review by the publisher, St Martin's Press.

www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com

Brian Willis says

Another sterling, straightforward account of the history of England, this time covering the years of the Stuart kings, from 1603-1689. The best section is by definition the Civil War era, the slow downfall of Charles I, his execution, and the Commonwealth era. But the strength of these volumes is how they disentangle very dense historical events, complicated by intertangled religious and political beliefs that often shift, and make them easy to follow. In these years, we see the follies of four kings and one Lord Protector, who are very human and very flawed. We also see the more important social and cultural contributions by important Englishmen such as Samuel Pepys and Sir Isaac Newton. If you want a straightforward survey of English history, Ackroyd's accounts are perfect and eminently readable.

Jayson says

(B+) 77% | Good
Notes: Women have scant presence in this volume, and aside from religious allegiance, are given little purpose in the story.

Spiros says

Ackroyd covers a lot of ground here, in the extremely eventful century of the Stuart monarchy; nonetheless, he is able to squeeze in jewels like this:
"The [New Model Army] commanders argued amongst themselves about the relative merits of 'monarchial, aristocratical or democratical government', but could come to no conclusion. Cromwell, in one of those fits of boisterousness or hysteria that punctuated his career, threw a cushion at one of the protagonists, Edmund Ludlow, before running downstairs; Ludlow pursued him, and in turn pummeled him with a cushion." It is good to know that at critical moment in British history, the high and mighty managed to find time for a pillow fight.
An equally bizarre incident Ackroyd relates is the incognito journey of the Duke of Buckingham and Charles, Prince of Wales (later, the ill-fated Charles I, here losing his head in an entirely figurative manner) into enemy territory of Spain, for the opportunity of wooing the Spanish Infanta; the entire incident is redolent of an episode of "Blackadder", to the extent that this reader kept hearing the voice of Baldrick saying "My Lord, I have a cunning plan". And let's not ignore the anti-prebyterian eloquence of on Sir Francis Windebank, who apostrophized the Scottish Covenanters as "those scurvy, filthy, dirty, nasty, lousy, itchy, scabby, shitten, stinking, slovenly, snotty-nosed, logger-headed, foolish, insolent, proud, beggarly, impertinent, absurd, grout-headed, villainous, barbarous, bestial, false, lying, roguish, devilish...damnable,

atheistical, puritanical crew of the Scottish Covenant". So we see invective did not in fact die with Sir Thomas More.
Altogether, a very valuable overview of a very turbulent time.

Kate says

This book has taken me over two weeks to read, and actually was good in every way. I hover between four and five stars because at times there was a lack of analysis. Example is why did Oliver Cromwell's son Richard abdicate? I've read in other books that the son wasn't intellectually fit to rule England, to put it politely, but in this book no reason is given. On the other hand this book has a terrific and easy to follow narrative, and I was never lost as to what year it was or what was happening. I highly recommend this read.

Chris says

Disclaimer: ARC read via Netgalley.

I can hear you wondering. You've been wondering for the past three years. Do we really need another history of England? There are hundreds, thousands, maybe even a million (you can count, if you have the time), why do we need another one? How about a history of one of the –stan countries instead, you may ask. Well, we are talking about Peter Ackroyd's multiple volume history of England, so yes, we need this one. The third volume in the series covers the Stuarts – from James I to James II losing the throne to his son-in-law.

What makes Ackroyd's work better than average and well worth the reading are two things? The first is his style. While not the prose poem that his London is, the writing is chatty and intimate. In part this is simply style. Ackroyd makes sure the full impact of events is known, but this is a popular, common, every man's history. The reader doesn't need a degree in history, and important events are described in enough detail but not too much.

The most important thing is the little humorous and emotional touches. There is a wonderful passage about soap and how it connects to the English Civil War. There Muggletonians. There is debate about hacks in London. It is the story of James I and his feelings towards his eldest son, they died too early Henry.

Then there are the brief interludes dealing with major cultural issues, such as Hobbes' Leviathan.

But I keep coming back to the little touches, the same events that are often overlooked or under seen or the huge events that are overseen and overanalyzed. Ackroyd keeps balance. When he introduces a little over looked detail – the attacks on brothels - he connects it. It might be included because of whimsy, but it also has a point. When he mentions the departure of the pilgrims, it is with a somewhat nod that the boats pass out the scope of the history he is writing so he lets it go.

An Everyman's History is what this series is, not so much as in focus on the little guy, but in the way the events play out, on the effects. It is an intimate history, far more than say Simon Schma's History of Britain. Ackroyd's history is something to be read over wine while traveling, allowing the words to seep slowly in

and stay forever.

Malapata says

Este volumen cubre la dinastía de los Estuardo, incluyendo el interludio republicano tras la guerra civil. En otras lecturas había leído referencias a esta guerra y el gobierno de Cromwell, pero nunca había tenido una idea clara de qué había sucedido en realidad. Este libro explica bastante de manera amena tanto sus causas como su desarrollo y consecuencias.
También cubre la época posterior; la restauración monárquica y cómo esta degenera hasta la Revolución Gloriosa que llevó al gobierno a la Casa de Orange.

Gretchen says

An informative book overall. The random chapters about various artists were a little annoying. An example would be the Isaac Newton chapter. I understand Newton's significance to English history but the chapter felt like it was randomly thrown into the book to fill space. There were a few chapters like this especially towards the end of the book. I just skimmed through most of them since they were essentially Wikipedia pages. Unfortunately for me, my kindle edition did not include some of the extra illustrations and footnotes that more than likely would have made this book a better read.

Robert Owen says

I don’t like brussel sprouts, but when I find them on my plate I eat them because I know they’re good for me. Reading this book was like eating a barrel full of brussel sprouts. I finished it…..ate every last one of the slimy green balls…… and I’m sure I’m a better person for it.....but cripe, was it a chore.

I had only the most rudimentary understanding of 17th century British history; basically I knew there was a duce of Jameses, a duce of Charleses and that somewhere, stuck in the middle of it all was religious dissent, a civil war and the commonwealth reign of Oliver Cromwell. The reason I chose to gain a fuller understanding of this history was because of its significance to American history. Jamestown was colonized early in the reign of James I, the Pilgrims and Puritans, religious dissenters from England seeking freedom of worship in the new world, settled New England a couple of decades later and, throughout the century, thousands of English migrated to the American colonies either to flee the troubles at home or as dragooned victims reduced to indentured quasi-slaves as punishment for being on the wrong side of one or the other British controversies. Moreover, the political evolution of England during this period gave rise to the British Enlightenment and the writings of Hobbs, Sydney and Locke that had such a profound influence on America’s founding generation a century later. Given these and other profoundly important social, cultural and political links I felt that to better understand my own country’s history it was necessary to understand the history of England during this period.

It is with this purpose in mind that I purchased and read Mr. Ackroyd's big barrel of brussel sprouts.

Look, I understood when I bought it that the book was not, nor did it need to be, an exposition on the ways

the English Civil War impacted the American Colonial experience. In fact, the story could have been told quite well and given me the insights I was looking for without mentioning England's American colonies once. However, what I did expect and what I was horribly disappointed about when I didn't get it was some meaningful explanation of the motivations of the major actors and the society they represented. That certain people did certain things on certain dates is explained in excruciating detail, but fundamentally why they did the things they did or what lasting impact their acts had on the history of England is, in Ackroyd's hands, left wholly to the reader's powers of deduction to work out. There are dates, times, places, rudimentary sketches of individual personalities and endless lines of contemporary plays, slips of doggerel or amusing examples of personal polemics in each and every place where meaningful analysis of events and motivations ought to be. After having read "Rebellion" I now know the history of England in the 17th century but sadly, am far less wiser for it than I ought to be.

Enough with brussel sprouts – it's time for a quart of ice cream and a good cry (if only Nicholas Sparks wrote history

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Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Lisa says

I thoroughly enjoyed this, the third volume of Peter Ackroyd's *History of England*, which covers a period of our history that I knew virtually nothing about (I don't think I can really count Horrible Histories' Charles II song as 'knowledge'), from the succession of James I following the death of the childless Elizabeth I through to the flight of James II, taking in the civil war and the unprecedented execution of a king that happened in between. Here's what I learned…

James I of England, also James IV of Scotland, was the first Stuart king, uniting the English and Scottish thrones. Different in every way to his predecessor except for his tendency to prevaricate, James' court was a rather licentious one. No stranger to scandal, James I spent money like it was water and was often rather drunk, as well as rumoured to be homosexual due to his obvious affections for his favourites (particularly the baby-faced Duke of Buckingham). Believing that kings had the divine right to rule, James' relationship with Parliament was often strained by his attempts to impose his will, as well as by his constant demands for more money through the raising of taxes. During his reign, religious tensions between the various factions of Catholics and Protestants (and the many other sects in existence) would worsen as he sat on the fence, placating one group and then the other to no-one's satisfaction. Some of these tensions would come to a head – it was during James' reign that the Thirty Years War started and the Gunpowder Plot was thought up and discovered – while others would simmer until the reign of his son, who succeeded him in 1625.

Charles I was a more severe man than his father, differing from him in every way save for his constant fights with Parliament over his belief that he should be supreme ruler, with them answering to him rather than the other way around. Parliament would soon come to be seen as representing the voice of the people against a corrupt king, who constantly tried to raise new taxes to finance his many attempts at war (most of which ended in humiliation) and dissolved Parliament whenever they wouldn't do what he wanted, which gave him

an increasingly despotic air. This would culminate in Parliament going so far as to lock themselves into their chambers against the his soldiers, with Charles retaliating by arresting various members, while they passed laws that went against his interests. Parliament eventually managed to curb Charles power, appointing their own army and seizing control of his armouries, whilst also proving to be just as bad as him when it came to raising taxes and religious persecution (a common punishment of the time for those who Parliament felt were believing in God wrong was for their ears to be cut off and their faces branded, with at least one prisoner so badly maimed that on leaving prison he was no longer able to see, hear or walk). No longer representing the people but having become despots themselves, citizens could be imprisoned for simply saying that Parliament didn't have the king's consent. A series of battles took place between the King's forces (already known as Cavaliers) and those of Parliament, with the latter finally claiming victory under the command of one Oliver Cromwell and his New Model Army. Having been taken hostage by the Scots, to whom he'd fled after his losses, Charles was sold back to Parliament for the sum of £400,000. Refusing to compromise on a deal where he would remain a figurehead whilst Parliament ruled, Cromwell declared him an enemy of the state and, after a loaded trial, Charles was sentenced to death and a resolution passed barring any successor to the throne. A new constitution was written, with Cromwell styled as 'Lord Protector' and given more power than was originally held by the king, and England was turned into an even more miserable place with laws passed to 'improve' public morale, including the banning of Christmas, drunkenness, plays and gambling, and with even travelling on the 'Lord's day' seeing you liable to be put in stocks or a cage. While he'd lost public sympathy with many of these new measures, Cromwell ruled until his death, naming his son Richard as his successor.

Richard Cromwell, however, had no appetite for rule and when the usual squabbles arose – people were still arguing that others were believing in God wrong (and still are) – he abdicated in an attempt to avoid bloodshed, leaving the way clear for Charles II's return to England (having spent the time since the death of his father, Charles I, wandering Europe) and ascension to the throne.

Seen as an affable figure, Charles II's return was greeted with jubilation, with 'the Merry Monarch' declaring a general pardon for all treasons committed in the recent past save for those who signed the death warrant for this father. Surrounded by a circle of 'wits', his court became a scandalous one, with their purpose seeming to be to make as much money for themselves as possible (which suited Charles as it made them far more easy to manipulate for his own ends) and with the king devoted to pleasure – by 17 of his known mistresses he had 13 illegitimate children although his wife, Catherine of Braganza, would never manage to bear him a child. With his reign taking in a bout of the Black Death (where as many as 10,000 fatalities were listed each week) which eventually abated thanks to the Great Fire of London, and a trade war with the Dutch, plots once again arose to overthrow the king in favour of a monarch more suited to whichever religious group was currently doing the plotting – the Catholics preferred the king's brother, James (who had converted to Catholicism) whilst the Protestants preferred Charles illegitimate son, the Protestant Duke of Monmouth. On Charles' death following a period of ill health, his brother became James II, but not for long. James attempted to reassert the rights of Catholics in England and, with the Duke of Monmouth having been beheaded, various earls started writing to William of Orange (grandson of Charles I through his daughter and husband of daughter of James II), inviting him to invade and seize the throne. With the lords having deserted him, James fled England for France where he would spend the rest of his life, leaving William of Orange free to claim the abdicated throne for himself.

As well as taking in all of the above, Ackroyd also makes sure to include what life was like in general during these years, encompassing the changing fashions, leaps in architecture and scientific knowledge thanks to figures like Christopher Wren and Isaac Newton, and the changing moods in music and literature from the likes of Shakespeare, John Milton and Samuel Pepys. He's been a great guide so far, and I'm pleased to have already been bought the fourth volume of this work, fleshing out the histories that I'd only previously known

of through *Blackadder* and the aforementioned *Horrible Histories* (one of the greatest TV programmes ever made, even if it’s supposed to be for kids). If you’re at all interested in finding out the history of our small island, Ackroyd is a must-read.

Also posted at Cannonball Read 9

Anneliese Tirry says

"Civil War" is het derde deel uit "The History of England" van Peter Ackroyd. Deze schrijver schrijft boeiend, maar in het geheel is dit boek, en bij uitbreiding de hele reeks, niet simpel!
De eerste 2 delen las ik al eerder, dit derde deel had ik al zeker een jaar liggen. Het feit dat ik dit boek NU las, is omdat ik op vakantie in Engeland tegen de grenzen van mijn kennis van de Engelse geschiedenis liep. Kan ik spontaan één en ander vertellen over The war of the Roses of over The Tudors, over de Stuarts wist ik niets. Na een bezoek aan Boscobel House waar de latere King Charles II zich even schuil hield, wou ik er snel meer over weten.
Natuurlijk zal ik het meeste van wat ik net las snel weer vergeten, maar er is nu een zaadje van kennis geplant over de tijd na Elizabeth I, over de 17e E. Een erg boeiende tijd met opstanden tegen koning die meent dat hij almachtig is, met godsdienstoproer en -onrust, de uitbouw van het parlement (House of Commons, House of Lords, the Tories (royalisten) en de Whigs), de opkomst en het bestuur van Oliver Cromwell en zoveel meer.
Zeer interessant en herkenbaar! Vervang de namen van groeperingen of ijveraars door namen van nu, Trump, Catalonië, IS, ... er is waarlijk niets veranderd. Het zoeken naar macht, naar het zelf beter hebben, naar het grote gelijk, toen en nu, ... niets is er veranderd - pamfletten, "fake news", beperking van de persvrijheid, het zit er allemaal in.
Verhelderend - Interessant - niet simpel!
