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Review Article
The State of British Political History

Roger Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas, from Bevin to Blair*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2001; pp. xxvi + 244; ISBN 0 333 80160 1
N.J. Crowson, *The Longman Companion to the Conservative Party since 1830*, Harlow, Pearson Education, 2001; pp. xii + 244; ISBN 0 582 31291 4 (hbk); pp. x + 336; ISBN 0 582 31292 2 (pbk)
James Eaden and David Renton, *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2002; pp. xxi + 220; ISBN 0 333 94968 4
John Garrard, *Democratisation in Britain. Elites, Civil Society and Reform since 1800*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2002; pp. xv + 317; ISBN 0 333 64640 1 (pbk)
E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism. Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2002; pp. viii + 309; ISBN 0 19 820593 7
Russell Holden, *The Making of New Labour's European Policy*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2002; pp. viii + 223; ISBN 0 333 91447 3
Simon James and Virginia Preston (eds), *British Politics since 1945. The Dynamics of Historical Change*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2001; pp. xi + 229; ISBN 0 333 67511 8
Scott Kelly, *The Myth of Mr Butskell. The Politics of British Economic Policy, 1950–55*, Aldershot and Burlington, Ashgate, 2002; pp. viii + 248; ISBN 0 7546 0604 X
Adam Lent, *British Social Movements since 1945. Sex, Colour, Peace and Power*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2001; pp. xiii + 252; ISBN 0 333 72009 1
Alex May (ed.), *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe. The Commonwealth and Britain's Applications to Join the European Communities*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave, 2001; pp. xx + 188; ISBN 0 333 80013 3
Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2001; pp. x + 220; ISBN 07190 5511 3
Noel Thompson, *Left in the Wilderness. The Political Economy of British Democratic Socialism since 1979*, Chesham, Acumen, 2002; pp. viii + 312; ISBN 1 902683 54 4 (pbk)
Matthew Worley, *Class against Class. The Communist Party in Britain*

between the Wars, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2002; pp. x + 352; ISBN 1 86064 747 2

Hobsbawm devotes one chapter in his recently-published autobiography to what he calls a 'war for the modernization of historiography'. Waged in his lifetime, this resulted, according to his account, in the rejection of a 'traditional' belief that 'history is past politics', whether of nation states or international relations, and in the triumph of modernizers who believe in 'a history of the structures and changes in societies and cultures'. 'On the whole, in the thirty years following the Second World War, the historical traditionalists were fighting a rearguard action in a losing battle', and since then, he believes, history as an academic discipline in Britain has been transformed.[1] His views sum up one version of what has happened which has now been around for so long that it might well itself be called traditional. At the start of the twenty-first century, however, it no longer seems as convincing as it perhaps once did. The war in retrospect looks as if it has been a phoney one. Political history has not been displaced from the mainstream of research and teaching. Social historians, if anyone, are experiencing a crisis of confidence, arising from a loss of faith in their subject's capacity to have 'a central, integrative role'.[2] Far from its acceptance being intrinsic to modernization, as he seems to imply, Hobsbawm's assertion that economic, unlike political, history has 'an accepted universe of discourse', is as contentious as it ever was. Modernizer and traditionalist no longer seem clear or distinct categories. While Hobsbawm deplores as a waste of time E.P. Thompson's critique of Althusser, it represented Thompson's engagement with influential currents of thought. Academic history may have been far less affected by what can be loosely termed postmodernism than English Literature, but at the very least it has changed how historical methodology is perceived and defended. Postmodernists apart, we are all traditionalists now.

Despite huge changes in the intellectual and academic landscape over the last 40 years or so, more political history is being published than ever before, much of it contemporary history, with the nation state as its focus. The books under review are a fair sample of this writing on Britain. The only obvious gap is the absence of any political biography. Some of the best recent work has taken this form — John Campbell's *Edward Heath*, the two volumes of his *Margaret Thatcher* and, above all, Robert Skidelsky's great three-volume life of Keynes, to cite only three of the most obvious examples.[3] Nevertheless, the

1 Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times, A Twentieth-Century Life* (London 2002). All the quotations are from the chapter entitled, 'Among the Historians', which he recommends the general reader to skip, oddly, since the academic development of his subject is scarcely peripheral to any historian's life.

2 Editorial, 'Time for Reflection', *Social History Society Bulletin*, 24, 1 (Spring 1999).

3 John Campbell, *Edward Heath* (London 1993); John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher*, vol. 1, *The Grocer's Daughter* (London 2000), and *Margaret Thatcher*, vol. 2, *The Iron Lady* (London 2003); Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes, Hopes Betrayed 1883–1920* (London 1983);

books under review are representative in what they cover — parties and political ideology, policy-formation, élites and social movements, electoral behaviour and the wider political culture — and the issues they raise. Together they offer as valid a basis as any for reflection on the nature of United Kingdom democracy, and on how its history is being written.

In writing contemporary political history one problem, a preliminary one but really more significant than this suggests, is where to start. Only two of the authors, Garrard and Stapleton, feel any need to take a long perspective. Garrard begins his account of democratization in 1832 after an opening chapter on 'the old system' (though he avoids a narrative based on successive Reform Acts). Stapleton begins her analysis of twentieth-century debate on politics and national identity by describing 'the late Victorian inheritance', and subsequent groups of chapters cover 1918–50, 1930–70 and 1945–2000. Why these overlapping periods are singled out, however, is never very clear. Only James and Preston, *British Politics since 1945*, is explicitly concerned with identifying the most significant phases of the recent past (the problem of periodization rather than 'periodicity' as the general editor of the series calls it). By starting in 1945, however, it may implicitly be endorsing an assumption that contemporary history starts with the second world war. That the war divides the twentieth century in two, whatever other divisions are made, is perhaps too easily taken for granted. For postmodernists, contemporary history may be an oxymoron, but for others there is a problem of definition, which is not always acknowledged.

Identifying the main phases, whether of post-second world war or twentieth-century politics, is inextricably bound up with a debate on consensus, which has been going on for so long that very little new can be said. *The Myth of Mr Butskell* is one of the latest contributions, completely uncompromising, extreme even. It argues that Gaitskell and Butler had fundamentally different approaches to economic management which reflected their different political doctrines, that the Conservatives and the Treasury were never converted to deficit financing, nor Labour away from a belief in controls and physical planning to demand management. Even the rejection of ROBOT, the plans for convertibility which the Conservative government seriously considered only to shy away from, is conscripted as evidence for the absence and not the existence of cross-party agreement, by claiming that it was a minor matter within a persistent movement towards decontrol, and that fixed rate convertibility (though not ROBOT's floating rate) was reached in 1958. All this is throwing the baby out with the bathwater with a real vengeance, or trying to, for if there is no consensus during this period, when can there have been? The infant, of course, is still happily splashing about. Kelly's attempt to kill off consensus, like previous ones, depends on a narrow focus on particular aspects of policy-making to the neglect of changing circumstances and pressures and the general context

idem, *John Maynard Keynes, The Economist as Saviour 1920–1937* (London 1992), and idem, *John Maynard Keynes, Fighting for Britain 1937–1946* (London 2000).

within which specific decisions were being taken. By concentrating on the organizational framework (the Treasury, the Bank of England, the Ministry of Supply, the Board of Trade) and dealing with areas of policy in isolation, he avoids engaging with accounts of economic and budgetary policy (such as Cairncross's or Dell's) which, from very different standpoints of approval and disapproval of the decisions being made, agree that continuity marked the transition from Labour to Conservative control.[4] Even so, some glossing over and explaining away are necessary (*vide* the references to full employment).

Attempts to disprove the existence of consensus may show the need to use the term carefully. Nevertheless, however it is defined, it apparently remains indispensable. Even the party histories provide scant support for a view of British politics as polarized between right and left. The two books on the Communist Party show how marginal it was throughout its history, its members' distinctive concerns and thinking isolating them, both intellectually and within their class, despite their influence at times within a few trade unions. Green shows the diversity of Conservatism until the advent of Thatcherism, and Thompson the left's failure to develop any convincing alternative to Thatcherite economic analysis. As a result, political disagreement has sometimes been as much within as between parties and has always been within broadly-accepted, though shifting parameters. The real issues relate to the nature of consensus, and how it has fragmented and reformed, not only since the second world war but also earlier.

In identifying the major points of transition in postwar British politics, different dates can be singled out, and conventionally are, according to whether the focus is on foreign policy, economic management, the constitution or some other area of policy. Nineteen fifty-six and Suez seem the end of immediate postwar politics and of the delusion that Britain remained a world power. The industrial and economic problems of the 1970s mark the beginning of the end of corporatism. Britain's application to join and her eventual membership of the European Community start the erosion of national sovereignty. The collapse of Stormont and Scottish and Welsh claims to devolution begin a parallel process of internal constitutional change. Lastly, there is the collapse of Conservatism and the advent of New Labour. The essays in James and Preston, originally delivered as papers at a conference on postwar politics and periodization, do not change these points of transition so much as highlight the problems of describing them in detail. For example, the statement that 'the most obvious change in the character of the British polity was the demise of Britain's half-hearted flirtation with corporatism' begs questions about the commitments which were being abandoned.[5] Postwar economic and social policies rested on broader and deeper public agreement and on more powerful

4 Alec Cairncross, *Years of Recovery. British Economic Policy 1945–51* (London 1985); Alec Cairncross and Nina Watts, *The Economic Section, 1939–1961. A Study of Economic Advising* (London 1989); Edmund Dell, *The Chancellors. A History of the Chancellors of the Exchequer* (London 1997).

5 James and Preston (eds), op. cit., 5.

intellectual foundations than later ones, or at the very least it cannot be assumed that they did not. The most interesting essay, not just because of its content, is by Samuel Beer.[6] More than a generation ago, his *Modern British Politics*, by concentrating on ideology, modified Robert McKenzie's account of the Labour and Conservative parties as similar in character and organization.[7] Some years earlier, his *Treasury Control* reinforced the post-Stafford-Northcote view of the civil service as providing expertise, stability and continuity to government.[8] These early writings encapsulated the generally-held view at the time that distinctive party policies, effective voter choice, and efficient central control and direction were what characterized the British political system. A comparison with the much later views of his essay, which he himself seems to invite, indicates how much has changed. As he writes, when he began to study British politics, Britain was seen as a model of 'how democracy could cope with the problems of modern capitalism'. However, in the 1960s 'a self-destructive pluralism' in the 'form of gridlock or incoherence' set in, so that what came to characterize the system later was a failure of government.[9] In his view, Thatcherism only achieved a sort of privatized corporatism without reducing either public spending or the scale of government, and the self-interested politics of professional groups became a major barrier to any radical change, as old party and class ties and civic culture weakened. Only a few admiring remarks (which already look dated) about Blair's leadership and policies qualify this gloomy picture.

This is a stimulating overview of political change since the mid-twentieth century, which leaves vague whether the seeds of later problems were sown during the period when the political system seemed effective and efficient — whether, in other words, admiration for it was misplaced. In particular, quite how the Welfare State, acknowledged to have been intended to remedy market deficiencies and strengthen civic solidarity, became instead a source of gridlock, is never clear. The description of Thatcherite pensions policy as achieving some budgetary savings while retreating from more radical action, for example, is vague and puzzling, and in this and other instances historians seem to be adapting to a shift in political language brought about by Thatcherism without coming to grips with the evolution of policy. Whatever criticisms they may invite, however, the ambitious scope of Beer's generalizations remains impressive.

An even longer perspective might have been even more valuable. The

6 Samuel H. Beer, 'The Rise and Fall of Party Government in Britain and the United States, 1945–96: The Americanisation of British Politics' in James and Preston (eds), op. cit., 18–50.

7 Samuel H. Beer, *Modern British Politics. A Study of Parties and Pressure Groups* (London 1965); Robert McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (London 1955). Behind McKenzie lay Michels and his iron law of oligarchy. McKenzie modified Michels without challenging his basic correctness. See Seymour Martin Lipset's introduction to Robert Michels, *Political Parties. A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York and London 1962).

8 Samuel H. Beer, *Treasury Control. The Co-ordination of Financial and Economic Policy in Great Britain* (Oxford 1956).

9 James and Preston (eds), op. cit., 18–19.

opening sentence of *The Road to 1945*, which started the whole debate on consensus, is mostly overlooked — that the book 'is about the decline in one established order in politics and the rise of another: Attlee's consensus replaces Baldwin's'.[10] The issue of longer-term continuity and discontinuity has been raised, however, particularly by recent histories of the Labour Party. Dell sees New Labour as literally that — as breaking completely with the party's past by repudiating socialism. Other historians detect some degree of continuity.[11] The Blair governments, after all, are not the first Labour ones to have pursued economic policies of extreme caution and orthodoxy; the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the light of history, can seem at times the Philip Snowden of our day. In the case of the Conservative Party, too, there is the same issue. Did the Thatcher governments effectively break with the party's past? Green ends his study of Conservative ideology by asking whether Conservatism as understood and practised during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century is dead. His answer is a qualified yes.

The most obvious general point of agreement in this recent writing is that the role of élites is crucially important for understanding political change, not just since the 1960s, when the British social and occupational structure began to alter rapidly, and class cohesion weakened, but over the far longer term. Garrard describes the expansion of the electorate as the outcome of successive negotiations between the political élite and previously excluded groups, whose fitness to participate in politics was accepted mainly because they displayed a conditional deference towards the existing order. Since the passivity of the masses was marked, there is little room in his account for class conflict. On the whole, policy was determined from above. There was no class struggle. The political élite was a prisoner of circumstance only in the sense that its freedom of action depended on rising living standards and the spread of respectability, both of which were beyond its control.

In his study of social movements since the 1960s, Lent dissents from Garrard on the ability of élites to decide the political agenda. He singles out organizations campaigning on issues of gender and women, sexuality, disability, race and ethnicity, peace and the environment, and argues that they expressed a new grass-roots militancy which forced concessions from governments. Ultimately these organizations declined and fragmented in the 1980s, with some small groups moving outside politics (into spheres of privacy and self-help), and others becoming incorporated into the political establishment (through the development of commercial fund-raising, paid lobbying, Labour Party entryism, and a new professionalism). This opens up an area of radical politics which, as Lent claims, tends to become lost in narrative accounts of postwar history. He fails to establish, however, that outside pressure was as

10 Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945. British Politics and the Second World War* (London 1994), 9.

11 Cf. Edmund Dell, *A Strange and Eventful History. Democratic Socialism in Britain* (London 2000), and Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge 2000).

significant as he believes. Both the extent of political mobilization and its impact seem to be overestimated. Only movements which regarded themselves as progressive are singled out (though not comprehensively, as the influential Child Poverty Action Group is omitted). Right-wing populism, particularly opposition to immigration, is ignored, despite maybe offering better support for the general thesis. Also omitted is the anti-Poll Tax movement, which had a far more powerful impact than any of the campaigns analysed, on the grounds that its militancy lacked an ideological basis. Finally, no account is taken of earlier campaigns on similar progressive issues (by peace movements, for example, between the two world wars), which bring into question whether those of the 1960s and 1970s were really a new phenomenon. If the organizations which appeared in the 1960s are regarded as pressure groups rather than social movements, and the case for doing so seems reasonable, then they can be clearly seen to be part of well-established pluralist lobby politics. The decriminalization of male homosexuality, for example, reflected a generational change in morality, described by Noel Annan in *Our Age*.[12] This and other changes in the law were not conceded reluctantly. Militant language and demands often provoked as much opposition and uncertainty as support outside parliament, and on some issues, such as the abolition of the death penalty, MPs were obviously ahead of public opinion.

If its validity is accepted, the problem in this sort of historical analysis is to identify the groups or minorities who set the agenda at different times. The concept of a political élite or establishment is difficult to define, except narrowly as ministers, civil servants, opposition leaders, members of parliament, and others directly involved in day-to-day decisions at the centre of government. Problems arise in broadening it out to include those who influence public opinion or exercise power indirectly. Particularly the concept of the political intellectual like the Cheshire cat or Blair's Third Way tends to fade away under scrutiny. The writers and academics singled out by Stapleton in her study of the creation of public identities are so miscellaneous that doubts arise continuously in the reader's mind about the basis of selection. Why no economists except Hayek (who was not English)? Why only these few historians (who together constitute such an odd bunch)? Terms such as 'establishment' or 'meritocracy' appear fleetingly in the pages of the books under review, but no one capitalizes the first and uses it with Annan's confidence. One reason no doubt is that the Establishment of which he was a member, and which was entered through 'ability, family connections and knowing some-one', 'the old school tie', 'Oxford and Cambridge' and 'the London School of Economics', had lost much of its power and influence before his death.[13] The civil service had also changed with the hiving off of departmental functions to agencies and an increasing politicization which blurred the distinction between impartial advice and ministerial responsibility for final decisions. As Middlemas writes, in the ten years after the mid-1970s, 'individual senior civil servants who retained faith in [the state's]

12 Noel Annan, *Our Age. Portrait of a Generation* (London 1990).
13 Ibid., 6–8.

directive power, on lines hallowed in the postwar era, were either silenced or marginalised . . . [by] a reassertion of political mandates, and of party government over the state'.[14] Still the best account of what happened, Hennessy's *Whitehall* is written too close to events to be the final word;[15] and if the changed institutional framework for the exercise of power has not been fully analysed, the same is even truer of changes in channels of patronage and élite recruitment.

The paradox that democratization creates a democratic deficit used to be explained in constitutional terms, as the result of a decline in collective cabinet responsibility and parliamentary independence, and the consequent lack of public accountability and increase in prime ministerial power.[16] Now there seems to be a shift towards a cultural explanation. Garrard concludes his study of the creation of a democratic electorate by asking, 'Why is Britain not more democratic than it is . . . ?' And his answer is that, 'If capitalist development can breed variety, it can also produce democratic and civic passivity through satisfaction and . . . distraction.'[17] J.K. Galbraith's concept of a 'controlling contentment . . . now that of the many, not just the few', is easily invoked in this way, whether it is directly cited or not.[18] His 'culture of contentment' (like his verdict, 'affluence and squalor', earlier on postwar 'affluent society') offers a portmanteau explanation, perceptive and general, of so much — the absence of planning, electoral passivity, the acceptance of inequality, attitudes towards taxation, the role of foreign policy and military spending, the informal commitment to laissez-faire, conformity and the penalization of dissent, bureaucratic delegation, layers of command and status, managerial immunity, the accommodation of economic theory. The danger is that other explanations may be crowded out. Galbraith is really describing the USA, while suggesting that his description may hold true for other industrial countries in the late twentieth century, as it certainly does, he asserts, for Britain under Thatcher. The book which is forgotten, as its author felt it might be, because it falls between social history, social pyschology and political theory, is W.G. Runciman's *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*.[19] Although dealing with Britain in the 1960s, it offers an implicit critique of the ideas now so in vogue. In examining the relationship between inequality and stability, revealed by two surveys in 1961 and 1962, it found that prosperity and political passivity could not, as was commonly assumed, be equated. It concluded that, 'Most people's lives are governed more by the resentment of narrow inequalities, the cultivation of modest ambitions and the preservation of small differentials than by attitudes towards public policy or the social structure as

14 James and Preston (eds), op. cit., 14.

15 Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London 1989, revised edn 1990).

16 John P. Mackintosh, *The British Cabinet* (London 1962). Richard Crossman never managed to fulfil his ambition to rewrite Bagehot for the later twentieth century; but see his introduction to Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London 1963).

17 Garrard, op. cit., 282.

18 J.K. Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment* (London 1992), 10.

19 W.G. Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice* (London 1966).

such . . . The relationship between inequality and grievance only intermittently corresponds with either the extent and degree of actual inequality and the frequency of relative deprivation.'[20] Its findings may well be out of date, though there is no later equivalent empirical evidence, despite almost constant public opinion polls since of voting intentions and of attitudes towards a wide range of issues. The major change these document is the dwindling significance of class among the variables influencing voting. There is enough, nevertheless, to suggest that contentment, like apathy as an explanation for non-voting, provides only a very limited explanation of electoral behaviour.

The vacuum in recent analyses created by the absence of class appears to have been filled by nationalism. Often the focus is narrow, however, on Englishness and English identity, open to the accusation of being unbalanced in neglecting the sense of common identity and the existence of other national identities within the UK. The disparity between the attention paid to relations with the European Community and to internal constitutional changes (evident in the books under review) may be an aspect of this almost obsessive concentration at times on England. Whether they are associated, the effect certainly is the same — a failure to give due weight to profound changes in the state's character since the start of the twentieth century.

Sometimes it seems as if Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been consigned to separate categories from British history, as somehow not fully component parts of a unitary state. Stapleton exemplifies this confusion and compounds it in trying to justify her approach to issues of culture and identity. Despite her book's title, 'the national community' examined is England. The solecisms 'England/Britain' and 'English/British' are used, and her introduction suggests that 'the historic national culture of Britain' is imperilled by 'the combined forces of Scottish independence [sic], European encroachment upon national sovereignty, and the heavy demands of multiculturalism'. She acknowleges 'the existence of minority cultures' only to argue that a 'majority or mainstream' culture, 'recognisably English in form', disproportionately shaped British identity and exercised an influence outside the confines of England; and she takes Linda Colley to task for failing to allow for 'the continued dominance of the concept of England' in her account of the creation of British national identity in the eighteenth century.[21] At best, all this is open to the criticism of being very simplified and in places reflecting an ignorance of British history. Undoubtedly England was always the predominant partner in the parliamentary unions with Scotland and Ireland which formed the modern state. English identity, however, was affected as much by existing within the UK as vice versa. British identity was never subsidiary. When, each year on Trafalgar Day, Nelson's monument on the Carlton Hill in Edinburgh is dressed with his signal to the fleet as it engaged with the enemy, this is not as a result of English predominance.

20 Ibid., 286.

21 Stapleton, op. cit., 1–6 and 195.

The Longman Companion to the Conservative Party since 1830 illustrates the difficulty of setting developments within the context of the United Kingdom and the problems of failing to do so. Essentially a compilation — lists of leaders, cabinets and cabinet changes, votes in general and other elections, dates in office and opposition, party chairmen, Chief Whips and so on — it provides more useful information, readily accessible, than most readers are ever likely to need. It also aims to outline the party's history by providing brief chronologies of events and a description of its policies. It is here that problems arise. The modern party was created by the Home Rule crisis and the fusion with Liberal Unionists. This allowed it to become the major force in late-nineteenth-century politics, but the predominance which made the twentieth century into the Conservative century was only established in the general elections of 1918 and 1922. Whether its tenure of power, alone or in coalition, for 68 out of the 100 years, reflected its electoral appeal, as Green and other party historians claim, may be dubious. Certainly it reflected the first-past-the-post system and the absence of proportional representation. In the disaster of the 1906 election, Conservatives won 156 seats on the basis of a 43.4 per cent share of the poll, and in the 1918 triumph 382 seats *on the basis of a 39.6 per cent share*. The figures are taken from the *Companion*. What these and other election statistics do not show is that Conservatives became predominant in a reconstituted and renamed state with drastically redrawn boundaries. The loss of national territory in 1922 as a result of Irish independence was as significant as Germany's in 1945. Yet the Irish issue, so important for both the party and the state, is raised in Part IV of the *Companion*, in sections first on the 'Conservatives and the regions' and then 'Conservatives and Ireland'. One result is that the Ulster Unionist MPs' decision in 1972 to drop the Conservative Whip is noted before the chronology of the events detailing the replacement of Ireland by Northern Ireland as a component of the British state.

In general, the forces of twentieth-century cohesion and disunity are often relegated to the background and seldom adequately placed. It has been commonplace for some time for seventeenth-century specialists to agree that the history of the state created by the 1603 Union of Crowns has to be written as the history of three kingdoms and the interaction of events within each. The history of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has to be approached with a similar resolution. To misquote Kipling, 'What do they know of England who only England know?'

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