



## The Recent Historiography of the Hanoverian Regime

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*The Historical Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 4. (Dec., 1986), pp. 1005-1020.

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*The Historical Journal* is currently published by Cambridge University Press.

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## THE RECENT HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE HANOVERIAN REGIME

*Britain in the Age of Walpole*. Ed. Jeremy Black. London: Macmillan, 1985. Pp. vii + 260. £16.00.

*Aristocratic Century*. By John Cannon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. Pp. x + 193. £19.50.

*Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth Century Britain*. By Ian R. Christie. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. Pp. 226.

*English Society, 1688–1832*. By J. C. D. Clark. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. xiii + 442. £30.00 (Paperback £10.95).

*Partners in Revolution; The United Irishmen and France*. By Marianne Elliott. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982. Pp. xx + 411. £15.00.

*Beyond Liberty and Property: the Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth Century Political Thought*. By J. A. W. Gunn. Kingston and Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1983. Pp. xii + 331.

*The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*. Ed. Margaret Jacob and James Jacob. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984. Pp. x + 333.

*The Justices of the Peace, 1679–1760*. By Norma Landau. Berkeley and London: 1984. Pp. xvi + 421. £35.40.

*France and the Jacobite Rising of 1745*. By F. J. McLynn. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981. Pp. viii + 277. £15.00.

*The Jacobite Army in England: 1745*. By F. J. McLynn. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983. Pp. xii + 210. £15.00.

*Virtue, Commerce and Industry*. By J. G. A. Pocock. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. x + 321. £25.00 (Paperback £7.95).

*English Radicals and Reformers, 1760–1848*. By Edward Royle and James Walvin. Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press. Pp. 233. £5.95.

The wells of scholarship on Hanoverian Britain appear to be filling. The customary trickle of (on the whole, not very exciting) books is now rising into a steady stream. More importantly, and now, even, excitingly, Hanoverian scholarship is coming of age. What was once the forgotten century, the difficult and boring stretch between the perils of the 'Century of Revolution' and the wholesome enterprise of the 'Age of Improvement', is now, and at last, receiving the right sort of attention. Historians are now addressing some of the most central questions about Hanoverian society which it is possible to address, the sort of problems which the historians of other periods and societies have been discussing for years. This latest torrent of books enables us to focus

on some of these issues, not least the nature of social relationships and the continuity and stability of Hanoverian society. They raise basic questions concerning the role of politics, the functions of ideology and the much neglected place of religion in explaining popular acquiescence in the authority of the richest and most exclusive ruling order in British history.

The tone is set by Professor Christie's published Ford lectures of 1984, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth Century Britain* and in Professor Cannon's published and extended Wiles lectures of 1982, *Aristocratic Century*. The common theme of these books is that the Hanoverian regime was securely based upon sound economic and social foundations. The old order is depicted as socially dynamic, technologically inventive and politically liberal. Healthy religious diversity could be tolerated in the pursuit of national unity and social harmony. Both books stress the cohesion of Hanoverian society. Professor Cannon adopts a revised version of Professor Plumb's 'oligarchy' thesis, according to which the establishment of Whig supremacy in the early eighteenth century cleared the way for aristocratic domination of social and economic life, for aristocratic control of the political system in the shape of the one-party state of the Whigs and for aristocratic influence over contemporary thought and values, a veritable ideological hegemony over Hanoverian Britain. Professor Christie appears to acquiesce in such a model, arguing for the success of the Hanoverian regime in maintaining social harmony and political stability and, as in his earlier works, discountenancing the significance of opposition to the executive, whether parliamentary or radical. (The reader in search of either a detailed treatment of the Foxite Whigs or a sympathetic discussion of the radicalism of the 1790s will find neither in these pages.)

The simultaneous publication of these two authoritative and thoughtful volumes, nevertheless, represents an emphatic affirmation of established, familiar and orthodox interpretations of Hanoverian Society. Dr J. C. D. Clark wishes to overturn this model in its entirety. In his latest book, *English Society, 1688-1832*, he argues that Britain remained a staunchly monarchical society of the *ancien régime*. In a bold and sweeping revision, he contends that divine right traditions may have been rendered politically harmless but that they were consequently diffused throughout the social fabric. Society remained hierarchical, patriarchal and, until long into the nineteenth century, deeply christian. Not surprisingly, then, the Church of England served profoundly important functions, acting as the moral and psychological motor of a deeply traditional society. In Dr Clark's judgement, historians have neglected these potent realities of eighteenth-century thought and society because they have been too keen to emphasize those qualities which came to fruition in the industrial society of the later nineteenth century: individualism, secularism and political liberalism, to name just three. There seem to be the makings here of a first rate historiographical controversy.

Such conflicts of interpretation usually share at least some common ground and the present case is no exception. No one could deny that Hanoverian Britain was dominated by the aristocracy. As Professor Cannon demonstrates, few men from the outside made it into the ranks of the aristocracy. Even during the relatively 'open' period between 1780 and 1800 only seven out of 113 peerage creations ennobled new blood (*Aristocratic Century*, pp. 21-2). The British aristocracy was no more open than its continental counterparts and Professor Cannon is just as ready as Dr Clark to discuss its powers and its personnel in a European context (*ibid.* pp. 1-3). Indeed, he is anxious to warn us that 'assertions of the uniquely liberal character of eighteenth century English society should be treated with some reserve' (*ibid.* p. 33). Indeed they should. I am, however, just a little anxious at this sudden outbreak of pan-Europeanism. We should not jump

at the opportunity simply to write off the British aristocracy as a variant of a European model of the *ancien régime* before we have examined all aspects of the question. Indeed, in some of its characteristics, the British aristocracy remains distinctive when set against its continental counterparts. It was arguably less militaristic in its traditions and it retained uniquely acquisitive economic qualities. Furthermore, the aristocracy's cultivation of its estates, together with its involvement in both commercial and industrial undertakings explains, as Professor Christie argues, 'the extraordinary responsiveness of Parliament to the representations of commercial and industrial pressure groups throughout the eighteenth century' (*Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth Century England*, p. 69). Government economic policy, in fact, was deliberately designed to achieve social as well as economic objectives. In a fascinating contribution to a most valuable collection of essays (*Britain in the Age of Walpole*, ed. Jeremy Black, p. 124) Michael Jubb demonstrates that even in the (bad old) days of Sir Robert Walpole 'The key to economic growth and national prosperity was generally seen as the creation and preservation of employment, to be achieved primarily by promoting the export of manufactured goods.'

Much rests upon these economic arguments. I thoroughly endorse Professor Christie's emphasis upon economic expansion and acquisitiveness. What helped to consolidate and to maintain the Hanoverian regime was the spread of wealth and property and the prospects of gain and advancement in an expanding economy. The consolidation of aristocratic estates and the concentration of enormous amounts of economic power and power and wealth has rightly been taken to be one of the essential foundations of the Hanoverian regime. This is a complex and technical subject and the reader is indebted to Professor Cannon for his lucid summary of the literature (*Aristocratic Century*, pp. 126-47). The economic fortunes of the aristocracy owed much to their ability to keep land and property taxes as low as possible while wealth and capital taxation was non-existent. This may not have endeared them to those who had to pay the excise but it did absolutely nothing at all to upset other owners of land and property and holders of capital. There was significantly little resentment against the aristocracy on the part of those just beneath them in the social hierarchy. Cannon's ingenious computations reveal that the aristocracy more or less maintained their share of expanding national income within the ranks of the landed classes but the ratio of peers' incomes against greater merchants worsened significantly from 7:1 to 3:1 'between the late seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries' (*ibid.* p. 131). Similarly, the enormous scramble for place and office did not create a pool of permanently embittered suitors. Economic prosperity had much to do with taking the edge off political competition.

The same argument may be applied to those lower down the social scale. As Cannon reveals, the ratio of peers' income against the income of artisans more than doubled while that against labourers increased by around 40 per cent. These inequalities do not seem to have created serious social tension. Professor Christie, plunging into dauntingly difficult sources on wage rates, finds that between 1750 and 1800 total family earnings were steadily rising. He argues from macroeconomic data that real output was running far ahead of population increase in the second half of the century and discovers that the number of poor families was a rapidly declining proportion of the population. Prosperity was growing and wealth was being spread if not equally then, at least, more widely. There did not exist the social and economic threat to order and discipline which might have existed in a stagnant economy or even in a recession. Furthermore, there always remained other mechanisms for guaranteeing some level of civilized subsistence –

notably public and private philanthropy together with the operation of the poor law – which did much to relieve distress and minimize hardship.

Might there not still be in this picture of a thriving and expanding economy, carefully monitored by a tinkering government of good intentions and whose initiatives were supported by a secular elite of charitable disposition, might there not be in all this a realistic and fruitful set of explanations for the social cohesion of Hanoverian Britain? Edward Thompson and his school would, of course, not accept such explanations.<sup>1</sup> Their distaste for the political and social system of Hanoverian Britain has been enormously influential and, when repackaged in the engaging volume of Dr Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, which appeared in 1982, remains compelling. For Thompson and Porter, the aristocratic and landed classes of the eighteenth century were useless ornaments whose displays of paternalism simply concealed their true, exploitative ambitions. The institutions of the state and, of course, the church, were simply instrumental in preserving the class power of the aristocracy and its clients.

For Dr Clark, both the Plumb and the Thompson models entirely miss the point. Britain was a state of the *ancien régime* dominated politically, culturally and ideologically by the three ancient pillars of any early-modern social order: the monarchy, the aristocracy and the church. His book is avowedly polemical: ‘to reintegrate religion into an historical vision which has been almost wholly positivist; to discard economic reductionism; to emphasize the importance of politics in social history; and to argue against the familiar picture of eighteenth century England as the era of bourgeois individualism by showing the persistence of the *ancien régime* until 1828–32, and the autonomous importance of religion and politics until its final demise’ (*English Society, 1688–1832*, pp. ix–x). Such an enthusiastic sense of mission is wholly laudable. Hanoverian historians everywhere should, indeed, purge themselves of casual descents into anachronism and Dr Clark has some telling points to make in this vein. But it is not long before doubts start to appear. Some historians will resent being tarred with the brushes of Plumb, Thompson and Kramnick and resent being told that they must escape the historiographical clutches of the 1960s. In any case, several of the more convincing of Dr Clark’s contentions have already been anticipated in the work of other scholars, notably that of Professors Cannon and Christie, among others, a fact which he fairly but rather sadly acknowledged at the end of the book. Similarly, he is far less pioneering than he imagines in his quest to depict Hanoverian society from above. Did not Sir Lewis Namier make a very fair attempt at it fifty years ago? (In any case, why should we view the regime *from above* any more than we should view it *from below*? Why should we not simply endeavour to view it in the round?)

What causes most unease, however is the repetitious insistence upon the traditional elements in the Hanoverian social system. The old society, writes Dr Clark, in a patent attempt to pen an enduring aphorism, had three characteristics: ‘It was Anglican, it was aristocratic, and it was monarchical’ (ibid. p. 7). It was these three things – of that there can be no doubt – but it was much else besides. Hanoverian society derived enormous strength from prevailing religious, aristocratic and monarchical values and

<sup>1</sup> Edward Thompson’s ruminations on the nature of the Hanoverian regime are, astonishingly, not accompanied by systematic footnote references. (See ‘Patrician society and plebian culture’, *Journal of Social History*, vii, 4 (1974), 383–405; ‘Eighteenth century English society: class struggle without class’, *Social History*, iii, 2 (1978), 133–65. Dr Porter’s popular volume, *English society in the eighteenth century* (Harmondsworth, 1982) was widely acclaimed when it appeared but it does not seem to me to have survived the criticisms of its methodology and, even more serious, of its ideological prejudices meted out by Dr J. C. D. Clark (‘Eighteenth century social history’, *Journal of Social History*, xxvii, 3 (1984), 773–88). At the time of writing Dr Porter does not appear to have responded to these criticisms.

sentiments but it derived enormous strength, at the same time, from countervailing secular and entrepreneurial ideals and practices, from commercial and from imperialist aspirations and beliefs. Dr. Clark seems to underestimate the capacity of a hierarchical society to develop its economic potential, the ability of a confessional state to tolerate and to encourage secular ideals and modernizing tendencies and, finally, the capability of a monarchical structure to foster libertarian and reformist sentiments of gathering strength. He seems, moreover, to be unduly impressed with the lingering force of hierarchy and subordination. 'Until the evolution of class', he writes, 'hierarchical subordination was scarcely dissolved' (ibid. p. 86). Yet hierarchical subordination was being circumvented and manipulated by the productive and retailing sectors throughout the century, and with increasing confidence. The society depicted by Dr Clark resembles a rural back-water in which the symbolic structures are the church, the mansion and the palace. A balanced interpretation of Hanoverian society would incorporate the bank, the shop, the academy, the political club and the trade organization. It would probe the meaning of 'hierarchical subordination' and terms like it and it would endeavour to estimate the influence of such conceptual categories in the newspaper and periodical press. Most of all, it would attempt to understand and explain the success of the Hanoverian ruling elite in practice and the achievement of social cohesion and social stability in actual communities. (The sub-title of Dr Clark's book is *Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime*.) What this book seriously misses is the *interaction* between the traditional world of Anglicanism, patriarchalism and divine right and the newer economic, political and technological forces, not least those affecting communications. Somewhere in this interaction lie the dynamics of ordered change and the establishment of social stability. Dr Clark impressively depicts a set of archaic political and cultural forms. He does not establish that these continue to dominate Hanoverian society, nor does he seriously pursue the issues of stability and cohesion, unless it is to assume that old Anglicanism somehow envelops the whole of society. Such a position is surely untenable.

It is part of Dr Clark's mission, nevertheless, to rehabilitate Hanoverian politics and political life. For this we can be grateful to him. Successive generations of historians from Namier to E. P. Thompson have been anxious to diagnose a condition of advanced moral decay in the body politic of Hanoverian Britain. Dr Clark wishes to advance two propositions. The first is that Hanoverian Britain was no less politically active at the electoral level than during the reign of Anne ('The psephological argument'). The second is that party alignments did not disappear after the Hanoverian Succession ('The party argument').

As to the first, Dr Clark argues that, in fact, electoral turnout was remarkably low even before 1715 and that, therefore, the limited participation of the electorate after 1715 was of little consequence. In fact, Clark has mistaken his evidence. Using Professor Holmes' data concerning the low turnouts of the gentry he has assumed that other groups within the electorate would be *less* likely to vote. In fact, as pollbook evidence makes perfectly clear, the gentry were just about the group *least* inclined to vote within the entire electorate. There is happily no need for Dr Clark to pursue his 'fundamental revision of our assumptions about the nature and working of the representative system' (ibid. p. 17). Turnouts were much the same before and after 1714, depending, of course, on the structure and tactics of the election contest. Indeed, they were not so very far different from those of the later twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> John G. Phillips, *Electoral behaviour in unreformed England, 1761-1802*, (Princeton, 1982), pp. 86-101; Frank O'Gorman, 'The unreformed electorate of Hanoverian England: the mid-eighteenth century to the Reform Act of 1832', *Social History*, xi, 1 (1986), 37-8.

As to the second, the argument that parties did not suddenly disappear soon after 1714 has been well established for some years thanks to the distinguished researches of Dr Linda Colley. Dr Clark's failure even to acknowledge her work is astonishing. After all, the Ph.D. dissertation upon which *In Defiance of Oligarchy* was based was completed ten years ago, in 1976. Although he acknowledges that the Court-Country thesis has come in for 'heavy shellfire' the heaviest piece of artillery is not even mentioned. What Clark really wants to establish, however, building upon the work of Dr Cruickshank and Professor Fritz, is 'the existence of a real ideological divide between Tories and opposition Whigs' (*ibid.* p. 32). The substance of this ideological divide may be summed up in one word: Jacobitism. If Jacobitism can be built up into a serious, popular movement then a number of hypotheses about the traditional character of Hanoverian society and politics become at once a sight more plausible than they might otherwise remain. There are few issues as likely to ensure historiographical guerrilla warfare in the next decade as this one. The reasons for this are twofold. First, Jacobitism has been unjustly neglected and dismissed as peripheral, almost unworthy of the historian's attention. Second, many of the arguments about Jacobitism cannot be satisfactorily 'proved' one way or the other. Hard evidence is scanty and protagonists on both sides of the firing lines find it possible to set aside the evidence which does not suit them.

Of one thing we can at least be sure. Jacobite *sentiment* was quite widely distributed throughout Scotland and England between 1714 and 1759, from the Hanoverian Succession down to the destruction of the French fleets at Lagos and Quiberon in the latter year and with them the last prospects of a forcible restoration of the Stuarts. What we cannot be so sure about is why Jacobite sentiment never seems to have fostered Jacobite activity. However disastrously unsuccessful the '15 and the '45 may have been in their outcome, they ought, at least, to have capitalized upon the lack of positive enthusiasm for the personalities of the Hanoverian monarchs and the unedifying character of the Hanoverian regime. If, as some have argued, Jacobitism constituted the ideological mainstream of opposition to the Hanoverian regime in the first half of the eighteenth century then why should Jacobite sentiment prove so politically elusive, so insubstantial in solid achievement and impact? Can it really be the case, as Romney Sedgwick argued back in 1970, that 'the available evidence leaves no doubt that up to 1745 the Tories were a predominantly Jacobite party, engaged in attempts to restore the Stuarts by a rising with foreign assistance'?<sup>3</sup>

Nothing in the literature at present under review appears to disturb the claim originally made by Dr Colley that the Tories were a party content to seek power through legitimate parliamentary means. They were not a Jacobite party committed to the restoration of the House of Stuart by foreign invasion and by domestic insurrection. Some individual Tories implicated themselves in Jacobite plots but it has not been demonstrated that the majority of them did. Dr Cruickshank in her essay in *Britain in the Age of Walpole* argues that Tory speeches in parliament show not regard for the prerogative but frequent use of revolution principles. Does this mean that Tories advocated revolution and the violent overthrow of the dynasty from the benches of the House of Commons and House of Lords? She furnishes evidence that the Tories (not unnaturally) disliked the new dynasty after 1714 but this scarcely implicates them as a party in every Jacobite plot which litters the period. The first two Hanoverian monarchs may not have entertained the idea of an exclusively Tory administration but the Tories continued to hope that they would and until that time they were content

<sup>3</sup> R. R. Sedgwick, *The House of Commons, 1715-54*, (2 vols., London 1970), I, ix.

to pursue the less ambitious political objective of a mixed administration. After all, the Tories did not need Jacobitism as an ideological cement. They had their leadership, their own organization, their own traditions, their own ideology and their own critique of the Hanoverian establishment.

If the case for significant Tory attachment to Jacobitism remains unproven what, then, for the prospects of a Jacobite military option? How convincing is the argument that the forcible overthrow of the Hanoverian regime may have been tolerated, if not encouraged, by Jacobite sentiment in the country? Logically, of course, it does not follow that *because* the personalities of the first two Hanoverians were less than prepossessing, *because* the Hanoverian regime was unpopular in the country and *because* the Walpolean regime alienated many sections of society then there would be general acquiescence in a Jacobite revolt. After all, a Jacobite revolt not only needed a French armada and a Scottish invasion but it also needed extensive English collaboration and at least *some* active support. Even when there was the political and military opportunity, pathetically few English Jacobites actually did anything. It has been argued that the military failure of the Jacobite armies made it impossible for Jacobites to show themselves.<sup>4</sup> But military failure was a *consequence* not a *cause* of Jacobite indifference. The whole point of the Jacobite army's march into England in 1745 was precisely to give the English Jacobites a rallying-point and an opportunity to declare themselves.

All of this is made perfectly clear in Dr McLynn's excellent volumes on the Jacobite rising of 1745, *The Jacobite Army in England: the Final Campaign* and *France and the Jacobite Rising of 1745*. He shows convincingly and clearly that the invasion of England was intended to force the English Jacobites to show themselves and thus convince all doubters at the French court that their king ought at all risks to open a second front in England (*France and the Jacobite rising*, p. 89). The Jacobite army could not remain in Scotland indefinitely, wasting its precious resources. It could only be financed by collecting the excise from the towns through which it passed. As d'Argenson saw, and more clearly than some recent historians, the English Jacobins were taking a very long time to declare themselves (p. 90). This was, in fact, one of the reasons why the French invasion was delayed and the major reason why the Jacobite army, having reached Derby, was forced to retreat. The '45 demonstrated once and for all that for all the drinking to the King over the water, the English Jacobites were a thin and spineless group, small, insignificant and 'an object of near-universal contempt at Versailles' (p. 197). It is all very well to argue for a lingering attachment to Jacobitism, to 'reconstruct the world of discourse' and to believe that 'a Stuart restoration would have been widely justified, defended, and interpreted in the light of that body of doctrine'<sup>5</sup> but at some point somebody had to *do* something to waken them from their Jacobite dream-world. If the Jacobite option was such a powerful alternative and if it was always 'tactically available' then why did not somebody take it? There is no doubt that the Jacobite threat was potentially a very damaging achilles heel in the body politic of Hanoverian Britain, especially in view of potential French involvement and invasion in war-time. That it came to so little says much for the underlying vitality of the Hanoverian regime.

It came to so little, and this is the heart of the matter, because as Dr McLynn argues, there was no prospect of success for Jacobitism so long as James Stuart refused to abandon Catholicism. How could an Anglican people, the *raison d'être* of whose constitution in church and state was a repudiation of Catholicism acknowledge a

<sup>4</sup> J. C. D. Clark, 'The politics of the excluded: Tories, Jacobites and Whig Patriots, 1715-60', *Parliamentary History Yearbook*, II (1983), 210-11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 211.

Catholic Pretender sponsored by Catholic France? Dr Clark has performed a service to scholarship in his insistence upon the Anglican nature of the English state in the eighteenth century. Herein lies the fundamental reason for the failure of the Jacobite rebellions.

This rediscovery of Anglicanism has been a feature of the recent literature on Hanoverian Britain. Professor Gunn, in his admirable, if slightly diffuse study, *Beyond Liberty and Property*, insists that 'traditional doctrines in defence of the Church (High-Church) and the state (High-Tory) remained attractive to many' (p. 141). For Professor Gunn 'Divine right and the majesty that surrounds a king were more familiar and more comforting sentiments than the colder idiom of a state of nature, of a contract, or of co-ordinate powers' (p. 149). He even argues the case for a revival of high church political doctrines after 1760 (pp. 164-85). Dr Clark throughout argues for the Anglican and divine right context of 'the conservative Whig ideology which provided the intellectual structure of the British Establishment into the early nineteenth century' (*English Society*, p. 200). Neither author, however, has much to say about the currency of these ideas and attitudes. In what sense did these providential maxims amount to an official orthodoxy of the church and state? To what extent were the secular officials of the state inclined to accept them? If they accepted them, did they act upon them? Even if they did, how much was the political nation, to say nothing of the extra-political nation, convinced by them?

At the practical level it is a little difficult to sustain the argument that Britain was an Anglican polity. Professor Christie marshalls some powerful evidence in this regard (*Stress and Stability*, pp. 196-7). In 1809 over one thousand parishes were without pastoral care. In some areas less than 15 per cent of the population 'regularly went to church or were communicants'. (In Oldham, in fact, according to Foster, only 4 per cent of the people were communicants.) Even in rural Lincolnshire at the end of the eighteenth century less than one in three of the population had anything at all to do with the church and only one in six took communion. No doubt, as Dr Clark is at pains to argue, the Hanoverian regime was endangered by the growth of a new urban and industrial civilization. Nevertheless, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that in its religious practices, at least, the *ancien régime* was crumbling from within. The drift away from the Anglican church was already well under way even in the rural parishes from which the urban populations were to be drawn. What sort of Anglican polity was it, whose state neglected its church and whose citizens, in overwhelming majorities, ignored its ministrations?

A somewhat different set of perspectives can be obtained if we view the Hanoverian regime in its British and in its European contexts. Within Europe, the acquisition of Hanover lined Britain up against Prussia and Russia in central Europe. It was all the more necessary, then, to maintain some sort of understanding with the Bourbon powers and to prevent Britain's natural political, religious and, increasingly, economic rivalry with them from running out of control. A formal alliance with France existed until 1730 and even thereafter Walpole maintained a tacit understanding which avoided provoking the French into armed support for the Jacobites. As Jeremy Black points out in his essay in *Britain in the Age of Walpole* (pp. 93-9, 108-13, 160-70), there can be no doubting the passionate concern for diplomatic and commercial issues both in the press and in parliament. On the whole commercial influences came to outweigh dynastic concerns in the course of eighteenth-century foreign policy. Working arrangements with France and Spain, and sometimes with Holland, permitted peaceful economic competition. Periods of warfare against them permitted colonial acquisition

and development. Walpole may be criticized – as indeed he was vociferously criticized by his contemporaries – for paying too much heed to Hanover and not enough attention to commercial considerations but that criticism cannot realistically be levelled against his successors. As Black argued in his *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Walpole*, ‘successive British governments in this period saw war as a means of promoting commercial growth and sought to achieve a military and diplomatic equilibrium as the essential condition for maintaining and extending trade’ (p. 93). Although there can be no disputing the intrusion of political factors into diplomatic questions – the influence of the monarch, the strength of the parliamentary opposition, most commonly – it nevertheless remains very difficult to find in the world of foreign policy the sort of body politic described so eloquently by Dr Clark.

The body politic under description is, of course, that of England. Hanoverian *Britain* was an experimental state. The Hanoverian Succession yoked together a German electorate with a state whose outstanding feature was the gradual absorption of one Celtic nation (Scotland) by England and the growing dependency of another (Ireland) on it. In the case of Scotland, the key to absorption was the Scottish aristocracy. As Bruce Lenman points out in his authoritative contribution to *Britain in the Age of Walpole*, they were coming to the view that their interests ‘might best be served by total absorption in the English political system’ (p. 70). What the Act of Union of 1707 brought together and what it kept apart is dealt with very skilfully by Lenman. He emphasizes that the Act made every reasonable concession to Scottish industry and commerce. Nevertheless, it was the poverty of the Scottish aristocracy which was the key to its Anglicization, and through educational institutions, to the emergence of a common culture. As for Jacobitism, Lenman is rudely dismissive. Jacobitism ‘was essentially a conservative backlash led by disgruntled lairds and nobles’. For Lenman, ‘The real problem is to explain why Jacobitism survived at all as a political force’ (p. 88). His solution is to argue that Jacobitism was a reaction of moral outrage against Walpole and his dirty deeds. Scotland, apparently, was ‘outraged by the venality and the lack of principles, scruples and identity which tended to characterise the higher Whig leadership’ (p. 90). Even after the fall of Walpole there was no moral regeneration and consequently the Jacobite army was able to stroll from Glenfinnan to Edinburgh without exerting itself. Dr Lenman’s earlier volume, *The Jacobite Risings in Britain, 1689–1746* was a distinguished analysis of Jacobite support in Scotland. It is almost as though the author had forgotten the main lines of the argument of that book in the present essay. He mischievously seems to underrate Scottish Jacobitism and the cultural and social roots which produced it. On Lenman’s analysis, it almost appears that English Jacobitism may have received more enthusiastic support than its Scottish counterpart but I cannot imagine that he intends us to reach such a conclusion.

In Scotland the prospect of dynastic opposition to the Hanoverian regime became steadily less feasible and the possibility of national resistance to the English increasingly remote. In Ireland the tactical options of both national opposition and even nationalist insurrection burst into prominence in the 1790s. Not that Jacobitism survived in Ireland at the popular level. By the end of the eighteenth century there was little resistance to English rule. Marianne Elliott’s exciting and scholarly book, *Partners in Revolution: the United Irishmen and France*, however, underlines the sophistication of political culture in Ireland. ‘The image of Irish rural society in which the impoverished and degraded cottier class is the dominant element comes later, from the era of the great famine’ (p. 15). The Irish Catholics had a firm grasp of local traditions, political liberties and enjoyed a flourishing oral culture. All of this was to provide a solid foundation to the

revolutionary activity of the United Irishmen. At first only moderate reformers, committed deeply to limited monarchy and the connexion with England, they had become by the mid-1790s militant and revolutionary republicans. Sympathy for the French in the war against the allied powers after 1792 began to shift their sympathies. 'The events of 1793-95, however, were to reveal the Irish government and parliament as mere cyphers of England, and the odium was accordingly transposed to the connection itself' (p. 32). Thereafter, the assertion of national identity and even a national uprising appeared to be the only means of securing religious, social and institutional reform on a secure and permanent basis. This heady mix of religious nationalism and revolutionary ideology constituted perhaps the most disruptive element in the structure of the Hanoverian state. Had the anti-protestant motivations of the southern Irish rising of 1798 not alienated the Presbyterians of the north-east and driven them over to support the Ascendancy, then the British government may have been more seriously embarrassed than it was. The act of Union in 1801 failed to confront the religious and social problems of Ireland. It merely afforded a framework in which for the foreseeable future they might be contained.

The most fundamental weakness of the Hanoverian regime, then, was neither its corruption, nor the exclusiveness of its elite nor its antiquated representative system. Rather, it was its assertion of imperial control over its Celtic sub-nations. Chauvinistic self-regard disabled the rulers of Hanoverian England from identifying the reasonable and objective grievances of Scotland and Ireland; continuing indifference, political incompetence and, at times, party and personal advantage threatened the integrity of the United Kingdom, as in the 1760s it threatened the integrity of the empire in America. It is a profound and serious criticism of many of the books reviewed here and, indeed, of much of the historiography on Hanoverian Britain to date, that this dimension has scarcely been addressed. It is this, above all else, which weakens the learned, and sometimes ingenious, formulations of Dr Clark's book. If England was a monarchical, Anglican and aristocratic polity, as he persistently claims, then the consequences of this reality for the rest of the United Kingdom require detailed consideration and, perhaps, a drastic reappraisal of approach. Professor Christie, too, has more or less nothing to say about Ireland, after a preliminary discussion of its revolutionary disturbances in the 1790s, while Scotland, apart from its Poor Law is completely neglected. At some point in historiographical time, Great Britain must be treated as a multi-state rather than England with a few Celtic projections.

Structurally diverse the British state may have been, but it enjoyed a remarkable underlying cohesion. Professor Christie denies the existence of serious social or class divisions, preferring to stress objectives and elements of common concern: the acquisitive spirit, the steady expansion of wealth and affluence among the middling and lower orders, the responsiveness of the political system to economic interests and, not least, a well-meaning if uninspiring Anglicanism (*Stress and Stability*, pp. 215-19). Professor Cannon prefers to emphasize the inability of the middling orders to mount any sort of serious challenge to the regime, even in the 1790s. When Cannon has finished with them they look less like a threat to aristocratic power and authority than a gang of social climbers, out to emulate rather than to threaten, their aristocratic superiors. Behind political and religious disagreements he identifies 'a massive consensus, based upon the widespread acceptance of aristocratic values and aristocratic leadership' (*Aristocratic Century*, p. viii). He also says something about the practical diffusion of these values and the processes of their acceptance among the people. 'Thousands of them were employed on the great estates, hundreds of them were shop-keepers, inn-keepers,

attorneys in small market towns, directly dependent upon the nobility for custom. Many thousand of others were caught up in the detailed and intricate network of patronage and corruption... Aristocracy was not perceived separately but as a part, albeit an important one, of the great system of authority and subordination which formed the context for men's lives... under these circumstances, envy was more likely to be directed at those immediately above one in the system than at those infinitely remote' (ibid. pp. 169-70). Nevertheless, relations of dependence often breed resentment. Just how dangerous was social resentment at any level in Hanoverian Britain and how was it defused? How did the bourgeois reconcile itself to aristocratic values? After all, little is said about the extensive and sophisticated bourgeois cultures of Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, Newcastle and Norwich. How were they so successfully incorporated into the Hanoverian consensus? These are important issues. If, as seems to be the case, a post-Thomsonian perspective upon Hanoverian society is beginning to form then historians will need to sharpen their analysis.

To what extent was there a serious threat to this social and value system in the 1790s? Most of the authors on review seem unimpressed with the scale of the danger. Professor Cannon concedes that 'There were moments in the 1790s, with the war against Revolutionary France going badly, disaffection in Ireland and an upsurge of radicalism in England when it began to look a close run thing' but by 1797 'the worst was over'! (ibid. pp. 164-5). Professor Christie argues that the 'small minority of revolutionaries who wished for the total overthrow of the system' only represented a very minor threat to the safety of the state. The normal run of radical reformers 'scarcely constituted a serious threat.' Only from the standpoint of an unusually alarmist political and social establishment could the objectives of the radicals be regarded even as 'implicitly revolutionary' (*Stress and Stability*, pp. 51-2). On the whole, this slightly dismissive attitude towards the threat to the stability of the Hanoverian regime in the 1790s is justified by recent scholarship on the decade. I would like, however, to enter two reservations. First the moment of greatest danger to the regime came in 1797-8, when military danger was enhanced by naval mutiny, Irish rebellion and crisis of subsistence. Second, the strength and power of the threat to the regime need not necessarily be overwhelming in order to endanger stability. If we measure the threat to the regime in terms of popular political disaffection, serious ideological challenge and the pattern and extent of radical mobilization then it is by no means obvious that the *ancien régime* in France was any more in danger in 1787-9 than the *ancien régime* in Britain was in 1792-8. What may be suggested, however, is that the British political system was by the end of the eighteenth century capable of containing such tensions. As Professor Dickinson remarks, stability and strife are more likely to be held in a symbiotic rather than an antithetical relationship. 'Political stability did not rest simply on the absence of strife, tension and disputes. It was also the product of a political system that was flexible enough to contain the competing demands of different interests and rival pressure groups' (*Britain in the Age of Walpole*, p. 68).

The underlying strength, economic and social as well as political, which the regime enjoyed, helped it to survive the 1790s at a time when the *ancien régime* in France was going under. Nevertheless, the remarkable upsurge of patriotic and loyalist sentiment which began to sweep the country in the winter of 1792-3 needs much greater emphasis than it is given in the works of Professors Cannon and Christie and of Dr Clark. The existence of around 1500 loyalist and 'church and king' societies is a remarkable phenomenon. They represent the rallying of the propertied classes in defence of the throne, the church and the constitution. What they achieved, within their particular

communities, was the mobilization of common people in defence of these institutions upon a wave of unprecedented sentiment. To ignore this is to ignore the revival of Anglican enthusiasm and the proliferation of popular piety in the literature of Hannah Moore and others which accompanied it. All this amounted to something like a reconstitution of loyalty towards the symbols of the Hanoverian regime. Professor Pocock has committed himself to the view that the Whig oligarchy 'was notoriously incompetent at thought control' (John G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, p. 33). Nothing, in the 1790s, could be further from the truth.

The threat of revolution, then, came to very little because the regime was capable of renewing its ideological appeal and extending the bases of its support. The one-party state of Walpole was becoming a patriotic community, capable of sustaining economic crisis and acute social conflict. This type of formulation is entirely different from that of E. P. Thompson, who saw ideological control being imposed by the legal system, which existed 'as an ideology which not only served, in most respects, but which legitimized class power'.<sup>6</sup> Thompson was perceptive enough to recognize that the currency of legal norms may have gone some way towards defining and thus limiting the arbitrary powers of the Hanoverian oligarchy, he nevertheless maintained that a system of social control amounting almost to a reign of terror was imposed upon the mass of the people by the force of the majesty of the law, by draconian enactments, by harsh sentences and by the full weight of symbolic allocations of mercy and clemency. It is exactly at this point that Professor Landau's excellent volume comes into its own. Neither an apologist for the Hanoverian elite nor a camp-follower of any school or orthodoxy, she sets out on the basis of some hard and slogging research to uncover the system of legal administration and its impact upon the county of Kent in the first half of the eighteenth century. And in some small ways her book does give some credence to a Thompsonian analysis. The courts *were* used to intimidate, to frighten and to indoctrinate. Eighteenth-century governments *did* use Grand Jury addresses to advertise the virtues of themselves and of their measures. Quarter Sessions *were* magnificent spectacles and symbolic stage-settings for social and even legal performances of local elites. Further than this, however, it is difficult to go in the direction of an 'ideological' interpretation of the Hanoverian legal system. The great virtue of Landau's *Justices of the Peace, 1679-1760* is her sense of realism, her ability to depict the legal system in operation without recourse to *a priori* theorising. For all the talk of legal hegemony, for example, she demonstrates both that Tory J. P.s did, in fact, survive and that even Lord Hardwicke could not root them out. In the 1750s both Whigs and Tories were being appointed to the bench. By the end of Professor Landau's period it was impossible for the law to be used as an instrument of one-party rule. The idea of the solidarity of the bench is shown to be entirely mythical (p. 293). In urban areas the J. P. was normally used less as an agency of indoctrination and intimidation than as a means of settling quarrels and reconciling disputes. Even in rural areas, where the J. P. might be more remote from his people than his urban counterpart, 'many of the greater gentry and a large proportion of the lesser gentry who acted did so because they desired good governance for their neighbourhoods... attempting to enact the ideal of altruistic public service' (p. 331). Indeed, by mid-century the old stereotypes are passing away. Many J. P.s were not local gentlemen at all and 'were not the obvious leaders of their communities' (p. 319). Landau concedes that the eighteenth century saw 'a mode of rule which replaced government by the gentry as eminent individuals with government

<sup>6</sup> E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and hunters* (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 262.

by the rulers as a group' but she stresses that this transition 'remodelled patriarchal involvement in the neighbourhood into patrician concern for the condition of Englishmen' (p. 15). Consequently, by the later eighteenth century justices rarely used their powers in order to build up an electoral interest, as they had done earlier in the century. They were far more likely to offend local farmers and shopkeepers by their liberal administration of poor relief. 'By grafting the attribute of legal administrator to the older paternal image, England's rulers insured that the lesser justice would receive the deference accorded his more illustrious predecessors. No longer did the justice have to assume the majesty of king or God to awe his community' (p. 343). Historians, indeed, have much to learn from Professor Landau's pages about the role and function of the administration of the law in sustaining the Hanoverian regime, however much her lessons contradict positions commonly held.

It follows, then, that the cohesion of Hanoverian society owed much to the ability of the aristocracy to establish a legitimate domination of all significant areas of public life and to secure formal endorsement of that domination. It is not at all easy to know what the mass of the people felt about all this. At one level, popular perceptions of the regime were unquestionably hostile. There is a growing body of evidence to argue for a popular culture in which local traditions of dissent, political as well as religious, and often going back to the seventeenth century, were extremely powerful even if, before Wilkes, such sentiments lacked both a public voice and a public focus. At another level, much popular behaviour, especially in some areas of economic life, were bound up with the defence of existing practice, rights and privileges. The cohesion of Hanoverian society, then, rested upon a broad consensus of views about the law, about property, about politics and religion. It was almost impossible for so-called 'radical' writers and activists to stand outside such a consensus. The popular culture of the period was intensely defensive and profoundly conservative, preoccupied with the defence of existing rights and privileges. The technological innovations of the century, on the whole, confirmed this tendency, as they endangered the traditional craft structures and patterns of employment and life which accompanied them. Professor Malcomson's essay 'Workers combinations in eighteenth century England' in *The origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, brings this out very well indeed, emphasizing the demand for wage regulation and protection in an increasingly competitive society. Conflicts rooted in the processes of production were rarer than food riots but they were no less legally-minded nor less socially deferential. Amidst this sort of mentality, it was difficult for radicalism to make much ground. Indeed, the immediate ideological ancestry of radicalism may be found in the experiences of the Tory party of the first half of the eighteenth century. Indeed, it was the final disintegration of the Tory party in the early years of the reign of George III which bequeathed the reform issue to a combination of nonconformist groups, urban radicals and members of parliament. Dr Clark is quite mistaken in attributing the origins of radicalism to the elimination of the Jacobite option, which apparently released British radicals 'from a strategic imperative which had made them such vociferous loyalists to the Hanoverian regime' (*English Society*, p. 324). Dr Nicholas Rogers' essay, 'The urban opposition to the whig oligarchy' in *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* finds that in many urban centres in the first half of the eighteenth century Tory radicalism sustained the bulk of political agitations against the Whig oligarchy. What 'Tory radicalism' lacked, for Rogers, in contrast to the urban radicalism of the post-1760 period, were 'new institutional bases' and a radical ideology that was couched in terms that were anti-aristocratic rather than simply opposed to the executive' (*ibid.* p. 144). With the emergence of new types of political

association, more progressive and more egalitarian than their forerunners, urban radicalism arose out of the ashes of old Tory radicalism. Nevertheless, even urban radicalism could not sustain a role that was likely to prove fatally destructive to the regime. Most radical writers up to and including Paine were anxious to pay their respects to property and to enhance discipline, subordination and obedience.

The Hanoverian regime was ultimately endangered, according to Dr Clark, by forces beyond its scope and outside its control. 'What changed was not the theoretical validity or potential success of Anglicanism in an urban or industrial society, but the emergence of that society very largely beyond the pale of the traditional Anglican parochial structure' (*English Society*, pp. 372–3). Indeed, Dr Clark is inclined to argue that the ligaments of Hanoverian society were strengthening amidst the patriotic response to the French revolution and the flexing of military muscles. Why on earth, then, should such a going concern permit itself to be quietly overtaken by history? Did nobody notice that they were becoming redundant? Clark concedes vaguely that 'The Establishment eventually responded with impressive programmes of school and church building' (*ibid.* p. 373) but only, alas, when it was much too late. His treatment of the radicalism of the post-war years is sceptical and condescending. The picture he draws is static to the point of caricature. It is almost as though two decades of almost continuous warfare had no impact upon the dynamics of radicalism. As Edward Royle and James Walvin make clear in *English Radicals and Reformers*, the period of the Napoleonic wars added a new industrial strain to old artisanate radicalism (p. 107). The publication of Cobbett's *Political Register* as a twopenny open sheet in November 1816 is neglected, together with the impact it created on the radical mind (40,000 copies per issue). The sheer size and extent of popular radical agitation and the researches of Dr Belchem are nowhere confronted. Dr Clark is so anxious to argue that the confessional state of Hanoverian Britain was being quietly overtaken by the sudden rise of Dissent that he minimizes the extent of the conversion of the middle classes to parliamentary reform (*English Society*, p. 375).

The passing of the *ancien régime* in Britain, according to Dr Clark, was a sudden shock – 'the shattering of a whole social order' – together with 'its appropriate values and modes of behaviour'. It was 'a final and sudden betrayal from within' which accelerated 'the gradual numerical erosion of a social, religious and political hegemony' (*ibid.* p. 409). Both the political and ecclesiastical establishments 'compromised with, and capitulated to, sectarianism and democracy' (*ibid.* p. 408). No doubt the Ultras have had a bad press but that is no reason to adopt their exaggerated and apocalyptic view of things. Why did not a single bishop oppose the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828? As for Catholic emancipation, surely many members of both the political and ecclesiastical establishments had believed for some years, indeed, over a decade, that emancipation must come. In 1814 a motion for an enquiry into Catholic claims passed the Commons and failed in the Lords by only one vote. In 1823 Nugent's bill passed the Commons by 59 votes. There is no 'sudden betrayal' here. The transformation of the *ancien régime*, and transformation it was when it came in 1828–35, as Professor Cannon demonstrated five years ago<sup>7</sup> was one which embodied many of the propertied and hierarchical values of the Hanoverian system. Lord Grey would have been astonished to learn that the Reform Act of 1832 'shattered the electoral basis on which the late eighteenth century Establishment had rested in the House of Commons' (*English Society*, p. 410) since he had been desperately trying to do just the opposite,

<sup>7</sup> J. A. Cannon, 'New lamps for old: the end of Hanoverian England', in *The Whig ascendancy: colloquies on Hanoverian England* (London, 1981), pp. 100–18.

an achievement with which practically every historian who has ever examined the matter is inclined to credit him. Clark even doubts that the purpose of the reform petitions of 1831 was parliamentary reform at all. He argues that the overwhelming mandate secured by the Grey administration in 1831 was achieved mainly through the use of the king's name, a remarkable argument for which no evidence is adduced (*ibid.* p. 404). I do not understand why Dr Clark refuses to believe that in 1831 the vast majority of the electorate which voted and, by every conceivable measure and standard, the vast majority of the population too, wanted the Reform Bill. Nor am I clear why the effect of the legislation of 1828–32 'was to open the floodgates to a deluge of Whig radical reforms' (*ibid.* p. 412) in view of the commonly accepted assessments of the tentative nature of Whig reformism. Finally, 'the cultural hegemony of the aristocracy and gentry' surely could not have 'disintegrated with great rapidity in the 1830s and 40s' in view of its ability to survive down to the end of the nineteenth century.

We should, then, be ready to incorporate Anglicanism, monarchy and aristocracy into our treatments of Hanoverian society – as, indeed, many of the books currently under review were already doing – but without the singular framework offered by Dr Clark. Two final, cautionary notes need to be struck in this regard.

First, it is difficult for this reviewer to accept the denial of steady internal change within the fabric of Hanoverian society. It is not merely the appearance of new communities in hitherto undeveloped areas which is significant but the impact upon market towns, cathedral cities, corporate towns and ports, of the press and of the (surely uncontroversial) massive increase in political knowledge and political concern. Was not even the landed interest itself infected by a growing spirit of enquiry and of criticism – of the aristocracy, of tithes, of the church and of corruption – and, in time, of the electoral system? Was not the accumulating acceptance of parliamentary reform in traditional urban and rural centres, the massive popularity of reform candidates even before 1815, the enormous number of signatures to reform petitions and the steady spread of reform societies – was not all this a sign of changing values within the political womb of Hanoverian England? Were there not pressures for change within the regime which in the eighteenth century could easily be contained but which, given the appropriate conjuncture of circumstances, might transform the existing regime by modernizing and reforming its structures?

Second, if we are to understand the dynamics of change, and ultimately of transformation, in Hanoverian Britain, then we need to concern ourselves fully with those many periods of strain and crisis which regularly punctuate the history of the Hanoverian regime: in the mid-1740s, in 1756–7, 1762–70, 1779–84, 1792–1801, 1815–20 and, of course, 1828–35. These challenges to the established order had much in common, a fact which appears to suggest the systematic recurrence of common strains and tensions and, consequently, recurrent tactics in attempting to contain them. They normally persisted for a number of years and involved a collection of issues of quite fundamental constitutional significance. (That of the 1760s, to take just one example, raised issues concerning the role of the monarchy in politics, the function of the House of Commons in the constitution and the relation of the Commons to its electors.) These challenges elicited a quite remarkable degree of popular involvement in political affairs: the participation of the mob, the crowd, the streets and not just of the political nation in the fortunes of the regime. They seem to be increasingly characterized by petitions, demonstrations, disorders, behind which lie the formation of political societies and the potent circulation of the press. They culminate in the extraordinary mass mobilizations of the period 1815–20. These were crises of loyalty to the regime in which its opponents

were often tarred with the brush of treason and foreign involvement – Jacobites, Friends of America, Jacobins and Radicals. Once contained, these crises served to strengthen the Hanoverian regime by rallying its (very considerable) supporters and tapping the wells of (potentially very powerful) sentiment. This was not merely a dynastic and religious sentiment but came increasingly to involve a secular patriotism. Thus the Hanoverian regime was able to contain successive periods of strain and crisis. That, however, of the late 1820s was altogether more severe than its predecessors. It was unique in that it caught the old (Tory) ruling class in disarray at the moment when one royal reign gave way to another. It was dangerous in that it raised in acute form the problems of religious nationalism in Ireland and the future integrity of the United Kingdom. It was threatening in that it brought to a simultaneous crescendo powerfully backed, and opposed, demands for the ending of religious exclusions against Catholics and Dissenters. Last, but not least, it was unprecedented in its extensive mobilization of all political classes against the old electoral system. Such a combination of circumstances could not be resisted and against it no regime could stand.

Yet it was, in the last analysis, a peaceful and a successful transformation. Much of the old order was saved: the church, the monarchy, the aristocracy, the House of Lords, a propertied electoral system. There is no great mystery about how this was achieved. For decades, the leaders of the Hanoverian regime had been perfectly prepared to collaborate with the middling orders, to incorporate men and ideas from that source, and to adopt their political ideologies and organizational techniques. Nor was this the first occasion upon which concessions had been made to protestant dissenters or Roman Catholics. There was no sudden betrayal in 1828–32. The brittle, dynastic and narrowly Anglican state of the early eighteenth century had become a rich and powerful capitalist economy with a reasonably stable, successful and adaptable political system, capable of absorbing new groups and interests and containing stresses and strains.