

## Editors' Introduction

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### FORUM: FIRST PAST THE POST? THE NEW POST-REVISIONISM IN EARLY STUART POLITICAL HISTORY

**T**his issue begins with a forum of four articles on the high politics of early Stuart England. The articles were submitted independently to the journal, but we present them here as exemplary instances of the state of the field at a time when a new historiographic consensus we might call the new post-revisionism seems to have emerged. Taken together, these articles by Michael Quester, Rei Kanemura, Richard Cust, and Tom Cogswell mark an early twenty-first-century moment when the historiographic civil wars that characterized the field in the preceding century seem to have receded. They also point the way forward to a new, perhaps less contentious, but nonetheless revealing research agenda. When read together, these four original articles offer a telling survey of the current state of the field of early Stuart political history.

The early seventeenth-century reigns of the first two Stuart kings of England have been almost inextricably linked to the longstanding debates on the origins and causes of the civil wars and revolutions that erupted in the 1640s and 1650s. Whereas Whig-ish historians such as Samuel Rawson Gardiner located the temporal origins of the conflicts in the English accession of the Stuart dynasty, revisionist historians increasingly challenged that contention during the last three decades of the twentieth century. The reign of James I in particular saw a dramatic reevaluation as the revisionist emphasis on short-term causes for the civil wars looked away from the accession of the Stuart dynasty and more towards the troubled reign of Charles I for an understanding of the mid-century crises. By the 1980s, James could be characterized in the pages of this journal as “a subtle manipulator of men and as a masterly short-term political operator.”<sup>1</sup> The rehabilitation of James’s reputation as a skillful and

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, “The Ecclesiastical Policy of James I,” *Journal of British Studies*, 24:2, (Apr., 1985), 206. See also Maurice Lee Jr., “James I and the Historians: Not a Bad King After

politically savvy royal manager has largely survived the historiographic transition from revisionism to post-revisionism that marked the 1990s and 2000s.

The post-revisionist critique of certain revisionist excesses – such as an exaggerated emphasis on ideological consensus or on the narrow localism of the early modern English *mentalité* – nevertheless assimilated other aspects of the revisionist paradigm. These included a greater appreciation of the differences in royal management styles between James I and Charles I and a sense of the close connections between the royal court and its parliaments, as well as a heightened interest in the internal divisions at court and in the early Stuarts' parliaments.<sup>2</sup> The early years of this century witnessed the consolidation of this post-revisionist paradigm. In 2002, Kevin Sharpe declared here that “the Civil War is over,” and “at last we may... begin to leave the old quarrels between revisionists and antirevisionists to explore new questions and causes.”<sup>3</sup> The articles in this issue's forum largely conform to the new post-revisionist consensus identified by Sharpe, but they also break new ground by posing somewhat different questions about the Stuart accession and the reigns of James I and Charles I than those that emerged in the course of the revisionism debates.

If the accession of James I as King of England in 1603 is no longer understood to be a clearly defined step on the high road to civil war, the accession of the first Stuart King of England has retained a crucial place in the narrative of early modern political history. The revisionist emphasis on the British problem in early modern state formation highlighted the problems inherent in the union of the Scottish and English crowns that the Stuart accession ensconced, and attention to the complexities of the dynastically enabled Anglo-Scottish union of 1603 has remained central to post-revisionist histories.<sup>4</sup> In this issue, Michael Questier's article, “Sermons, Separatists and Succession Politics in Late Elizabethan York,” looks at the ways in which the succession question figured prominently in the religious politics of the last years of Elizabeth I's reign. He shows how the prospect of a new monarch opened up new opportunities for persecuted religious minorities such as the English Roman Catholic community. In “Kingship by Descent or Kingship by Election? The Contested Title of James VI and I,” Rei Kanemura provides another take on the Stuart accession in England by examining the ways in which James I's title to the throne was debated and justified by his English subjects in the early years of his reign.

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All?” *Albion*, 16:2 (Summer, 1984), 151–63; for an early statement, see Marc L. Schwarz, “James I and the Historians: Toward a Reconsideration,” *Journal of British Studies*, 13:2 (May, 1974), 114–34.

<sup>2</sup> For trenchant criticisms of revisionist claims for consensus politics, see the articles by Johann P. Somerville and Nicholas Tyacke in the JBS special issue on ‘revisionisms’: *Journal of British Studies*, 35:2, (Apr., 1996): 139–94; for early ‘post-revisionist’ criticisms of the revisionist localist paradigm, see Ann Hughes, “The King, the Parliament, and the Localities during the English Civil War,” *Journal of British Studies*, 24:2, (Apr., 1985): 236–63; and Clive Holmes, “The County Community in Stuart Historiography,” *Journal of British Studies*, 19:2 (Spring, 1980): 54–73.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Sharpe, “Print, Polemics, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Journal of British Studies*, 41:2 (Apr., 2002): 244.

<sup>4</sup> Our next issue will feature a special forum on early modern Anglo-Scottish identities; it will include an article on the Stuart dynastic union by Sarah Waurechen, “Imagined Politics, Failed Dreams, and the Beginnings of an Unacknowledged Britain: English Responses to James VI and I's Vision of a Perfect Union.”

Both Questier and Kanemura query the givenness of James's accession, emphasizing instead its contingency and hence the problems that it posed for contemporaries. Questier looks at the ways in which various parties looked forward to a Stuart accession during the last few years of Elizabeth's reign, and thereby reminds us that the problems faced when James became king began well before his court moved south of the River Tweed. Kanemura, on the other hand, points out that debates about James's claim to the English throne continued well after he had been crowned. Both of these articles sketch a picture of James's reign in which his claim to the English throne was less settled and more open to public debate and political manipulation by interested parties than previous scholarship may have recognized.

Richard Cust's contribution, "Charles I and the Order of the Garter," turns to the political culture promoted by King Charles I in the years preceding the outbreak of the English civil war in 1642. Here, Cust provides a new interpretation of the contemporary cultural and political significance of King Charles's evident valorization of the chivalric Order of the Garter. He manages to revise the revisionists by arguing that Charles's understanding of the Order of the Garter had a more martial character to it than previous accounts have suggested. Cust is careful not to draw any close connections between the king's penchant for military regalia and ceremony and the actual recourse to arms that would tear his three kingdoms apart in the 1640s. Post-revisionism has perhaps come of age now that it has achieved the historiographic hegemony not enjoyed since the heyday of the soi-disant 'Whig interpretations' of the early to mid-twentieth century. Aspects of early Stuart political culture, such as Charles's penchant for chivalry, can now be explored for their own sake and without recourse to either confirming or challenging broader arguments about the mid-seventeenth century crisis. While Cust hardly argues that a knight was just a knight, he can now explore the meanings of knighthood for Charles's court and early modern concepts of chivalry that are interesting subjects in their own right.

Thomas Cogswell's review essay, "The Human Comedy in Westminster: The House of Commons, 1604–1629," assesses the History of Parliament Trust's volumes on *The House of Commons 1604–1629*, (2010). This article also works within a post-revisionist paradigm to develop further insights into the parliamentary history of the early Stuart era. Cogswell's reading of the collective biographies of nearly two thousand Members of Parliament assembled by Andrew Thrush and his team of researchers sees "a political universe in flux," (p. 388) and he notes that "political behavior underwent a major transformation in the late 1620s when the continental war brought ideological tension and religious controversy to a boil." (p. 381) Like many post-revisionist scholars of the early Stuart era, Cogswell sees Parliament as a key forum for political expression, organization, and conflict, and he finds support for this perspective in the recently published work of the History of Parliament Trust.

We would like to present these articles as a tribute to the remarkable work and expansive historical vision of the late Kevin Sharpe (1949–2011). Sharpe played an active and indeed often provocative role in the revisionist and post-revisionist debates that have shaped the field of early Stuart history; he also took a great interest in North American scholarship in the field of early modern studies. His lively mind and his irrepressible curiosity will be missed, but his works will remain influential for years to come.



Other articles in this issue tackle a wide variety of topics, ranging from ethnicity and the extent of equal treatment (or not) under the law in eighteenth-century Britain to the politics of representation of the Titanic in the twentieth century.

In "Ethnicity, Prejudice and Justice: The Treatment of the Irish at the Old Bailey, 1750–1825," Peter King raises the fascinating question of how ethnic difference (including language differences in some cases) affected the treatment of both plaintiffs and defendants in trials in London from the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. This is a question with a modern ring: as King points out, scholars of modern justice systems have been preoccupied with the question of the ability of immigrants and minority groups to obtain justice, but there is little comparative data from the period before the early nineteenth century. Simply to get at the question is difficult, especially as the ethnicity of trial participants was frequently not recorded; among other strategies deployed here, King nonetheless takes advantage of the fact that the Criminal Registers from 1791 to 1805 actually recorded the place of birth of almost 12,000 offenders. The result is the first systematic analysis of the interactions of Irish plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses with the criminal law in the long eighteenth century. King suggests that ethnicity and language did in fact have an impact on trial results, although not always in a straightforward manner, and that the evidence does not indicate clear and unidirectional prejudice against the Irish in the eighteenth-century courtroom. Judicial discrimination against the Irish appears, nonetheless, to have been growing by the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

In "The Effect of Southern State Bond Repudiation and British Debt Collection Efforts on Anglo-American Relations, 1840–1940," Markham Lester takes up the cudgels against Southern debtors to argue that there was initial fault on the American side in what he sees as a century-long period of tension over debt repayment that plagued the Anglo-American relationship. It is well known that the British borrowed large amounts of American money during World War One, and subsequently tried and failed to obtain debt relief. Lester argues, however, that the debate was given particular piquancy by the fact that a number of southern American states, or entities backed by state credit, had issued bonds both before and after the Civil War to fund economic development, which they (or their successor states) later repudiated. Lester traces the vain efforts of British bondholders to be reimbursed, as well as the complicated histories that led the Americans to argue for the morality and necessity of debt repudiation. Lester suggests that these attempts actually had a negative impact on the development of the American South (since states were blocked from obtaining cheap credit on international bond markets) as well as affecting later struggles over debt. Even though the estimated \$125 million owed to the British from repudiated Southern bonds "represented only a fraction of the \$4.6 billion owed by Britain after the First World War," Lester argues that "it is still not surprising that many of the British elite viewed the Americans as hypocritical when taking a high moral tone about the sanctity of contract."

In recent British imperial history, the idea of the "British world" as a key vector of analysis has been mooted in an influential series of "British world" conferences and a related series of edited collections, as well as in articles and a few monographs. Among other things, "British world" scholars have sought to re-examine the connections between white settler societies, including a shared sense of Britishness. How well has this model stood up to a series of reinventions and conceptual challenges

some fifteen years after the first British world conference held at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in June 1998? Tamson Pietsch, in her article, "Rethinking the British World," evaluates the on-going utility of the idea of the "British world." A long list of potential criticisms might include, she claims, problems of conceptual fuzziness, the lack of a clear definition of what might count as the "British world" (seemingly a mobile target), the inherent difficulty of reconciling local and global histories, and insufficient attention to local power dynamics. Nonetheless, the re-emergence of interest in large-scale settler migration, in the context of intensified scholarly focus on the history of globalization, makes the time ripe to revisit the concept. In the latter part of her article, Pietsch develops a case study of the 1903 Allied Colonial Universities Conference. She uses the example to show that participants thought of British world space in at least three different ways: as networked space characterized by the material circulation of good and people, as an imagined space of community, and as a space characterized by considerable local variation. Drawing on recent work by imperial historians and on the longer-standing work of historical geographers, Pietsch thus argues that the analysis of "space" and spatial networks needs to be nuanced with attention paid to unequal access and to multiple kinds of space. This approach opens the door to a revitalization of the idea of the British world.

Finally, Andrew Wells's article, "Sinking Feelings: Representing and Resisting the Titanic Disaster in Britain, 1914-ca.1960," tackles the subject of the way the sinking of the Titanic has been remembered and commemorated. His concern here is not individual memory, but rather reenactments of the Titanic disaster in art and documentary form up to 1960. He argues that historians have underestimated the degree of resistance to portrayals of the sinking, notably by a shipping industry worried about public perceptions of safety and eager to bury the memory of the Titanic – clearly not a successful enterprise. He also discusses ways in which the image of the Titanic sinking became a political football when a German film used the Titanic sinking to criticize British industrial practice and class relationships during the turbulent inter-war period. At the same time, some forms of media excited more unease among the public and among government regulators than others. Wells interestingly breaks down different types of media representation. He argues, for example, that radio in the inter-war period was seen as potentially very traumatic for listeners, given the disruption of realistic sounds of drowning beamed into domestic space; novels were not seen as risky in the same way. The article thus uses the example of the Titanic to explore the politics of memory, including the importance of considering how governments and companies actively sought to control the representation of the disaster well into the twentieth century.