

Editors' Introduction

Brian Cowan and Elizabeth Elbourne

This issue begins with a triptych of articles on late medieval and Tudor state formation in the British Isles. Medieval historians have given substantial attention to the Gaelic world that stretched across the North Channel between Ireland and Scotland. In this journal, David Green has recently offered a thought-provoking comparison of the colonial experiences of the medieval English state in Ireland and Aquitaine during the mid-fourteenth century.¹ As yet, there has not been comparable investigation of the relationships between the English and Irish regions that faced each other across the Irish Sea. Brendan Smith takes up this challenge in “Late Medieval Ireland and the English Connection: Waterford and Bristol, ca. 1360–1460” as he explores the relationship between the Irish port city of Waterford and the English port city of Bristol in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Smith demonstrates the close economic, cultural, and political relationships between these cities, and he argues that they are evidence of a still vibrant connection between Irish Waterford and the late medieval English world. The two cities were linked by “a single aristocracy with ties of blood and landownership that transcended the sea between them” (561). The existence of these ties meant that the crisis of lordship that preoccupied the late fifteenth century would be extended from the English West Country to east Munster. Thus the 1462 battle of Piltown that took place to the west of Waterford city, he argues, must therefore be understood as the first battle of the Wars of the Roses not fought on English or Welsh soil.

Christopher Maginn also explores the relationship between the English monarchy and its Irish dominions in “The Gaelic Peers, the Tudor Sovereigns, and English Multiple Monarchy.” Here, Maginn studies the emergence of the new category of the Gaelic peer in the later years of Henry VIII’s reign and the impact of these new peerages on Anglo-Irish relations throughout the rest of the Tudor era. He observes that while “the appearance of the Gaelic peer represents an important step in the formation of the Tudor state” (567), the Tudor monarchs failed to cultivate a cohort of Gaelic peers that was numerous and robust enough to cement a broader Irish loyalty to the English monarchy. This was, he argues, “symptomatic of the exclusivist pattern of state formation pursued by the crown and government of England with relation to Ireland and its Gaelic

¹ David Green, “Lordship and Principality: Colonial Policy in Ireland and Aquitaine in the 1360s,” *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 2008): 3–29.

population” (569). The attempted Anglicization of the Gaelic elite complicated the Tudor monarchs’ attempts at co-opting those elites as they tried to centralize their authority into a unified state.

Tudor state formation is also a central concern of David Dean’s article, “Elizabeth’s Lottery: Political Culture and State Formation in Early Modern England.” Dean offers a close study of the first attempt to use a national lottery in England to raise funds for the state. In 1568, a lottery was implemented with the hopes of raising sufficient funds to assist with the repair of the harbors and havens of England. The plan did not succeed in raising the revenue that had been anticipated, and Dean explains why this first lottery project was such a failure. Earlier experiences of debilitating coinage debasements fed anxieties about the reliability of the government in paying out the rewards offered by the lottery. This lack of faith in the government’s fiscal credibility, when combined with particularly Protestant concerns about the morality of gambling, and funding the commonweal with the proceeds from gambling, ensured that this effort to improve state revenues would fail. Dean reminds us that the history of English state formation has never been a smooth story of success. The development of the English state was, he argues, “hesitant, reactive, and somewhat haphazard” (589).

A rather different crisis faced the British state in the final years of the eighteenth century as radical critics of the state were emboldened by the revolutionary transformations taking place in France. The 1790s were the great age of deeply politicized “state trials,” about which Frank Prochaska observed in this journal that “behind most of them was the assumption that defendants should be condemned, not because their opinions were untrue, but because they were untimely.”² What were the options open to defendants in political trials in the turbulent 1790s, and what were the stakes attendant on each option? In “Between Heroism and Acquittal: Henry Redhead Yorke and the Inherent Instability of Political Trials in Britain during the 1790s,” Amnon Yuval looks at the uses of defense statements in political trials, and in particular at the choices exercised by the young radical Henry Redhead Yorke at his trial for conspiracy in 1795. Yuval suggests that trials in the 1790s were inherently ambivalent spaces, deeply shaped by the fact that they played out in public: for example, defendants needed to choose between high-stakes bids for political heroism and rhetorical moderation that might see them acquitted but lose their out-of-doors support, while judges and juries needed to bolster a public trust in the integrity of the court system that paradoxically sometimes could only be maintained through clemency. If the result was that trials were inherently unstable and not always predictable, this only reflected the wider instability and ideological oscillation of British politics in the 1790s.

In “‘It Is Said That Burns Was a Radical’: Contest, Concession, and the Political Legacy of Robert Burns, ca. 1796–1859,” Christopher A. Whatley contributes to the burgeoning field of the study of memory and commemoration. More particularly, he examines contestation over the legacy of Robert Burns in early to mid-nineteenth-century Scotland. Was Burns a radical, or was he rather a reassuringly conservative figure whose poetry portrayed a contented Scottish peasantry and could be turned to the ends of a worried elite? These questions played out at

² Frank K. Prochaska, “English State Trials in the 1790s: A Case Study,” *Journal of British Studies* 13, no. 1 (November 1973): 64.

major events commemorating the poet's life. By the mid-century mark, however, even supporters of a conservative vision of Burns had to concede that he had in fact been a radical during his lifetime. While this was in part due to a declining fear of radicalism in a changed political world, it was also due to a determined appropriation of Burns by many people, ranging from Chartist activists to weaver poets, who created their own particular versions of the "people's poet."

Christine Grandy turns to less obviously great writing to explore popular views of the financier in the aftermath of the first world war. Through an analysis of best-selling novels, her article "'Avarice' and 'Evil Doers': Profiteers, Politicians, and Popular Fiction in the 1920s" shows how pervasive the image of the villainous war profiteer was in the period. It has been suggested that the experience of war affected ideas of heroism and of masculinity; Grandy argues that the war also affected views of villainy. Anxiety about profit taking further reflected anxiety and uncertainty about the post-war economy and Britain's role in it. Grandy suggests more broadly that the newly identified phenomenon of the "best seller" is a fruitful but underused source of information about society and popular culture in the 1920s.

Finally, in "Parties, People, and Parliament: Britain's 'Ombudsman' and the Politics of the 1960s," Glen O'Hara examines the creation of the institution of an ombudsman under the Parliamentary Commissioner Act of 1967, the early operation of the office, and the extensive debate that preceded its establishment. The idea of the ombudsman became prominent, he suggests, as faith in government faltered. It may thus be seen as one of a series of state efforts to regain credibility and to win consent from an increasingly skeptical public. The eventual emergence of political consensus around the value of an ombudsman further suggests that citizenship and consumption were not as mutually antagonistic as some scholars have argued. Rather, consumerism and citizenship were in constant interplay with one another and should not be understood as static or mutually incompatible. Study of the ombudsman's office therefore underscores the "contradictions and instability of overlapping definitions of the individual as 'consumer' and 'citizen'" (695). Finally, the event illustrates the growing power of transnational political processes, as well as the role of individual policy brokers.

Our next issue of the journal will include a special forum on history and memory in modern Britain, Ireland, and the broader British world. It will also contain articles on anti-atheism in Elizabethan England, on opposition to the government of Charles I in the 1620s, and on working-class education in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras.