England in the Tudor state

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REVIEW ARTICLES

ENGLAND IN THE TUDOR STATE


Over the past thirty years research in Tudor history has tended to concentrate in two main areas, changes in religion and in the institutions and effectiveness of government. In both, recent work has exposed marked regional differences in the impact of government within England, although as yet no systematic efforts have been made to assess the significance of these variations for our understanding of England's position within the Tudor state as a whole. What follows, a consideration of some new (and disparate) additions to the literature, is an attempt, by establishing a broader context, to draw out the implications of this work for the overall history of the Tudor state; and in conclusion, to make some tentative suggestions towards the erection of a new framework for the writing of that history.

The recent trend away from the study of government at the centre towards its impact on the provinces has added a new dimension to our understanding of Tudor
England. Research on the place of the nobility in provincial government and society has shown that the erosion of magnate power and the advance of central government control was a much more patchy process than had once seemed the case. In some parts there was no dominant local power capable of challenging royal authority, either because as in the south-east the pull of the court was too strong, or because as in Cheshire there were no resident magnates. Elsewhere, in Durham and Norfolk for example, the collapse of noble power permitted a comparatively untroubled extension of royal influence. In other regions, however, especially the far north, the strengthening of central government control did not keep pace with the overthrow of overmighty subjects, with the result that the growth of law and order and of more settled forms of society was retarded. Historians have also discovered that popular acceptance of Protestantism and the enforcement of parliamentary religious legislation went forward at markedly different rates in the various parts of England. Again these divergences may be attributed largely to local conditions—such factors as the vitality of pre-Reformation Catholicism and the extent to which indigenous unorthodoxy or continental Protestantism had already permeated the region before the 1530s, the relative effectiveness of diocesan administrative structures, proximity to London or a seaport trading with the Netherlands or north Germany, or the particular attitude of local magistrates and magnates.

Margaret Bowker’s long-awaited study of the diocese of Lincoln under Bishop Longland (1521–47) falls into this second category of regional history, of which she is in many ways a pioneer, but like all good local history its conclusions have important implications for government in the wider context. The appearance at this juncture of a book examining the impact of the Reformation under Henry VIII is particularly timely in view of the apparently contradictory conclusions about the extent of the Protestant advance by 1547 reached in studies of individual counties elsewhere. In those counties near to London, Kent and Essex for example, the new ideas had broken through in the mid-1540s, so that the triumph of Protestantism under Elizabeth seemed almost inevitable; whereas in outlying parts, in Cornwall, Lancashire and Yorkshire, their impact was marginal before the 1570s. The diocese of Lincoln, however, was the second largest in England and stretched across ten counties. In spite of the presence in the south of a number of conditions generally thought favourable to the spread of Protestantism—a university in which Lutheranism had gained an early foothold, indigenous unorthodoxy in Buckinghamshire, and proximity to London and the diocese of Ely under the Protestant Goodrich—Bowker’s very significant conclusion is that the diocese was still overwhelmingly Catholic and conservative at Longland’s death. This would appear to tip the balance firmly in favour of those who argue that the majority of Englishmen accepted Protestantism only in the middle of Elizabeth’s reign.

In Lincoln, apparently, Longland played a major role in keeping the diocese conservative, pursuing Buckinghamshire Lollards and Oxford Lutherans, enquiring into heretical books, promoting theologically conservative graduates, licencing them to preach and silencing Protestant preachers. More generally, the picture of a medieval church in decline and ripe for reformation has been substantially modified


2 See especially Christopher Haigh, ‘The recent historiography of the English Reformation’ in Historical Journal, xxv (1982), 995–1007 for this and much of the following two paragraphs.
in recent years by more detailed research (notably Bowker's own studies) on the standards of the parish clergy, the leadership given by the bishops, and the operation of the church courts. The notion that this decline precluded significant educational developments has also been challenged by the demonstration of a substantial increase in schools in the west of England in the late middle ages. In this context Dr J. H. Moran's able demonstration of a similar growth in educational opportunities in York, a city in serious economic decline, and of the remarkable increase there in bequests, especially by the laity, of church service books hardly suggests any serious alienation of the northern laity from the pre-Reformation church. It reinforces the view that the medieval church was no pushover for Protestantism, although Moran might have outlined more clearly the overall impact of the Reformation on York schooling. As a courtier and the king's confessor, Bishop Longland was perhaps in a particularly favoured position, but even in other circumstances it is difficult to imagine a rapid Protestant advance without a carefully co-ordinated and consistent campaign of preaching organized by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, supported by local gentry, and other favourable influences. And under Henry VIII the rapid shifts and ambiguities in the government's religious policy, swinging from state Catholicism to a near-Lutheran position and back, rendered this combination unlikely. Thus, although the scope for individual initiatives by local bishops, whether conservatives such as Longland or reformers like Cranmer, was greater during the Henrician Reformation, it would seem that natural conservatism and dislike of innovation would normally inhibit the rapid progress of reformed ideas.

In some measure the kind of problems faced by English reformers are illustrated in microcosm by Dr Michael Lynch's revisionist account of John Knox's Edinburgh, the key burgh in the Scottish Reformation. The book is a useful antidote to the tendencies both to view the Reformation crisis as the steady decay of Catholicism which precipitated inexorable Protestant progress and, more particularly, to reduce Edinburgh's Reformation to a biography of Knox. In reality, Protestantism had been imposed by outside forces, despite Edinburgh's healthy civic Catholicism, and its active supporters in the 1560s were a small minority, weak and insecure, and mostly below the rank of burgess. The burgh council was unable to impose a blanket religious test on office-holders nor even to dismiss the stubbornly Catholic schoolmaster. The majority of burgesses were far more interested in trade and the protection and extension of the city's privileges than in religious controversies; Philip Broadhead in Reformation principle and practice shows this was true also of Reformation Augsburg, but there popular pressure narrowed the council's choice to a decision about when was most expedient to proclaim reform. The kirk session was continually baulked by the Edinburgh council in its efforts to repress Catholicism and gradually tamed by the infiltration of wealthy ex-councillors, merchants and lawyers; only a limited outward conformity could be secured, and the old faith, far from succumbing to a campaign of fierce persecution, died out only gradually. It was not until the 1580s that widespread popular Protestantism appeared.

As elsewhere, the Reformation in Edinburgh 'succeeded most readily where it changed least' (p. 31). Its progress, influenced by the external pressures of the court
and the English ambassador and shot through with ambiguities and compromises, thus matches far more closely the picture that is emerging about the enforcement of the Elizabethan church settlement than what is known about city Reformations on the German model. There was no endemic conflict between merchants and craftsmen to be exploited by reformers, as in some north German towns, and in the 1560s the burgh was far from being a hotbed of radicalism continually at loggerheads with Queen Mary. The book is however primarily about the impact of the Reformation on the governing elite of Edinburgh society, 1550–85: the fairly narrow range of sources precludes any extended consideration of popular beliefs and the quality and continuity of Catholicism. It is a careful and conscientious study, but the wider arguments are partly obscured by the author’s concern to explode earlier arguments about Protestant progress, Edinburgh politics and the impact of the civil wars. Anyone unfamiliar with the Scottish Reformation and its politics will find it heavy going (the cryptic list of events appended is of little help): this is unfortunate because the book deserves a wider audience and might well have commanded one had some of the detailed appendices been sacrificed for an explanatory narrative.

For different reasons, Dr Bowker’s painstaking study also contains serious weaknesses. Quite evidently the compilation of statistical data from episcopal registers, accounts, wills, visitation and court books was an immense labour. These form the basis of authoritative judgements on a whole series of problems concerning the actual impact of the Henrician Reformation in the parishes and the authenticity of the Commons’ complaints in the Reformation Parliament. The book includes other important insights into such topics as the motivation of the Lincolnshire rebellion, Longland’s manipulation of preaching, leases and advowsons for conservative ends, and the effects of inflation on the incomes of the bishop and his clergy. Nevertheless, many of its broader conclusions are less convincing. Despite the large gaps in the record for the mid-Tudor period and the more practical limitations on the historian’s capacity to read and digest so large a body of evidence, the factors influencing practice in the parishes and the failure of Protestantism under Henry VIII cannot be properly explained without reference to subsequent change. We need to know when and why the reformers gained ground after 1547 and the reasons for the eventual acceptance of the Elizabethan settlement. Moreover, some sections, such as those dealing with the effects of legislation and inflation on the clergy’s incomes or their comparative effectiveness as promoters of the new rites and ceremonies, would clearly have benefited from a consideration of the impact of the successive religious settlements, 1547–59. Building on previous work, an examination of the diocesan records c. 1558–85 would probably now provide convincing answers to a whole range of leading questions about the English Reformation. As it is, the attempt to include a biography of Bishop Longland (of whom there is a convincing portrait) in a more widely-focused sequel to the author’s previous book is not really successful and the decision to concentrate on change in the diocese, 1521–30, in Parts I and II, to balance the largely static picture given in that earlier work is misleading.

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6 Secular clergy in the diocese of Lincoln.
(despite the early warning on p. 2). The section on the monasteries excludes any detailed consideration of their role in the lay communities where they were situated, popular support for them and their contribution to the religious life of the laity. A more serious omission concerns the secular side of policy enforcement. The attitude of the gentry and nobility was crucial to the fate of government policy, and not only in England, for, as Alastair Duke shows in the Dickens festschrift, Protestantism spread through the Netherlands despite Philip II and the church, because insufficient care was taken to manage the magistrates. To give just one example, the commissions of the peace were an important instrument in the detection and apprehension of dissenters. Without an investigation of these problems, it is hard to accept Bowker's conclusion that the 'part played by Longland personally in keeping so large a diocese on a traditional path cannot be overestimated' (p. 181).

The significance of local lay support is considered more carefully in a very welcome examination by Professor Wallace MacCaffrey of policy-making in the mid-Elizabethan period. In the forty years since the opening of the Reformation Parliament, the problems of the bishops in administering their dioceses had increased tremendously. They had long lost their pre-eminence as great courtiers, and their standing in the localities had been greatly weakened by successive attacks on church privileges and property, a point also brought out in Michael Graves' study of the mid-Tudor House of Lords. Indeed the 1559 settlement was very much a lay reaction to clerical pretensions: Elizabeth regarded it as immutable and expected the bishops to perform unaided the routine task of enforcement. Many of the bishops, however, were less than enthusiastic about the settlement, the administrative machinery for its enforcement was slow and cumbersome, and they faced an uphill struggle to win acceptance from an unsympathetic populace abetted by local lords and gentry. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the triumph of Anglicanism both over puritans better connected at court than were the bishops and over a Catholicism revitalized by Trent was so long delayed. In 1581–6, for example, fines for recusancy could be collected from only 69 Catholics, despite the council's active intervention: Norfolk, Suffolk and Hampshire supplied almost half of them, but the notoriously Catholic north hardly any (p. 142). And in York, Claire Cross has shown that the old clergy remained conservative and barely conformist through successive settlements until they died. Even with the continuous active support of the crown and the political community the task of conversion would have been immense, but the government was 'fumblingly uncertain' (p. 508) in its approach to a problem which at first it barely acknowledged. It was only in the later 1580s that a 'distinctively Anglican polity' emerged (p. 118) when Elizabeth exceptionally supported an archbishop who had earlier written an ex post facto defence of the settlement and now insisted on its literal observance.

The recent festschriften in honour of two leading historians of early modern Europe, A. G. Dickens and J. H. Hexter, also treat of England and the Reformation, but their range is much broader, reflecting the wide interests of those honoured. In fact the title of the Hexter festschrift is no more than a peg on which to hang some very miscellaneous contents. Nevertheless, the quality of its papers is high and three are particularly stimulating and important: G. R. Elton underlines the need for a

7 'Salvation by coercion: the controversy surrounding the "Inquisition" in the Low Countries on the eve of the revolt' in Brooks (ed.), Reformation principle and practice, pp. 137–56.
thorough modern study of the Pilgrimage of Grace; Robert Harding modifies the traditional picture of conflict in French provincial government between wilful aristocratic governors and royal intendants by stressing co-operation and their common interests; and William Bouwsma argues that anxiety in the early modern period was generated not by cumulative contemporary recognition of increasing disasters but by the redefinition of culture and its inadequacies in imparting meaning to life. Unfortunately during an excessive time-lag between writing and publication – apparently about six years – the appearance of new work has weakened the impact of some papers (Harding, David Underdown's historiographical essay on the English Revolution, and Quentin Skinner's important revisionist piece on the Calvinist theory of revolution). Otherwise this is a particularly fine example of a species of historical writing which, though more common of late, has not often been practised successfully. The Dickens festschrift is more uneven in quality: it includes two solid and wide-ranging pieces, Bob Scribner's on the reality of the typical preacher in German towns, and Alastair Duke's on the Inquisition in the Netherlands; a provocation sketch of Sir Thomas More by Geoffrey Elton, and a case-study by Patrick Collinson of a Kentish village, which casts doubt on ideas about the logical development of religious dissent from Lollardy to separatism. Many of the other contributions, however, are distinctly lightweight, and overall the standard is disappointing.

The major and more original portion of MacCaffrey's book is a masterly examination of Elizabethan foreign policy centring on the Low Countries. The difficulties involved in apportioning responsibility for proposing and deciding policy are notorious, though the nature of the evidence allows the historian considerably more scope in the matter of transmitting and implementing policy decisions. Despite the title, the author has more valuable comments to make on the later stages in the process, on which he makes a major contribution. For MacCaffrey, Elizabethan policy was essentially a process of reaction to contingencies in foreign and domestic affairs, but it amounted to a genuine policy because based on a range of preconceived ideas and traditional habits of thought. By continental standards, the English monarchy appeared old-fashioned in its continuing preoccupations with internal order and good government when the attention of other European princes was focused on the problems of large-scale and continuous warfare and the development in response to this of more efficient fiscal and military institutions. Yet the traditional aims now needed modification in two important directions. These reflected the increased importance and difficulty of foreign affairs as the limited and regulated dynastic warfare of Henry VIII's day gave way to a more thoroughgoing ideological struggle which threatened the very survival of the regime; and the need to build a living national church on the legislative framework laid down by parliament and to prevent religious dissidence from undermining the established order of society. These twin problems explain the structure of the book.

Particularly in its treatment of foreign policy the book proceeds by a helpful commentary superimposed on a narrative account which assists the reader in reaching his own conclusions rather than seeking to persuade him by examples which support the author's conclusions. Though laborious, this technique is particularly suited to a theme which has already been well researched: it inspires confidence in the numerous revisions suggested concerning the motivation and soundness of Elizabethan foreign policy, particularly in response to Charles Wilson's Queen Elizabeth and the revolt of the Netherlands (London, 1970). Elizabeth always made her
own decisions, but during the years 1577–84 the initiative in policy-making often came from her. Her overall aims — to get the Spanish army out of the Netherlands, keep the French out, and restore the Netherlanders to the liberties enjoyed under Charles V — were reasonable, but the means employed were inadequate. Her bold and risky intervention in continental politics to forge an anti-Spanish alliance contrasted with her earlier caution and indecisiveness, but the strategy of alliance with France was ‘fundamentally misconceived’ (p. 506), and by 1585 English policy was bankrupt; Elizabeth was unable to influence events in the Netherlands and England faced war with Spain alone. MacCaffrey thus convincingly counters the argument that to talk about Elizabethan foreign policy is simply ‘rationalising into policies, ex post facto, what was, in reality, a succession of shifts and muddles into which the Queen stumbled’. By contrast, Arthur Bryant’s narrative of the first thirty years of Elizabeth’s reign goes far too far in the direction of Elizabethan policy as far-sighted planning in which a heroic leader of political genius set a nation divided firmly on the road to empire. A more scholarly contribution by Dr R. B. Wernham has unfortunately been upstaged by MacCaffrey’s book. It makes many of the same points, although the reaction to Wilson is more obtrusive and Wernham goes further in suggesting that the government’s day-by-day reactions grew into a coherent foreign policy because they sprang ‘from a clear and balanced appreciation of the true interests of the government and nation’ (p. 3). None the less the work is much more concise and its focus much broader, making it a useful introduction to the study of Elizabethan foreign policy.

Elizabeth’s policy, as MacCaffrey shows, reflected very closely her own character, on which he has important insights — he notes particularly her lack of ideals or of conventional royal ambitions, her instinct to power and relentless control over every significant decision of state (pp. 16, 433–5). She rejected the temptation to seek acquisition of continental territory in Holland or France, or to attempt the recovery of England’s medieval empire. However James VI of Scotland was treated abominably as an English client and the papal expeditions to the half-conquered south-west of Ireland in 1579 and 1580 were regarded as no less an act of war than the alleged papal sponsorship of the Northern Rising. The territorial ambitions of the English state were thus becoming more sharply defined. Yet MacCaffrey’s choice of religion to illustrate the making of domestic policy, coupled with the emphasis on foreign policy, may overstate somewhat Elizabeth’s role in policy-making. We should expect the government’s approach to the two leading problems of the day to be Elizabeth’s, but this is not necessarily true of secondary concerns. The occasional but persistent references to rebellions in Ireland, its garrison, and administrators with long service there, would suggest that that peripheral but persistent problem of government was a more significant factor in Elizabethan policy than has yet been allowed. It is also an especially suitable topic for examination in this context because the need to operate through a subordinate central administration in Dublin gave rise to a continuing dialogue within government, a product of contingency and response on two levels, between Westminster and Dublin and between Dublin and the country. What it is significant here is that unlike other centres of provincial administration, such as York, the records of the Dublin government were systematically preserved. These records suggest that the queen and privy council, who had little first-hand experience of Ireland nor genuine interest

* Wilson, Elizabeth and the Netherlands, p. 6.
in its problems, were frequently misinformed by the governor and council there whose advice tended to prejudge the various issues and involve the regime without adequate consideration of the consequences in strategies which were expensive, unrealistic or simply unorthodox by normal standards. In these circumstances it might be fairer to say that the extent to which actual responsibility for Elizabeth's decisions rested with the queen herself depended on their importance within the general context of policy-making, her particular interest in the problem at hand and how far she could obtain full information and sound advice about it.

In some measure the extent to which the outward image of monarchy, one of monolithic stability and self-confident decisiveness, concealed an inner tension, diversity of viewpoint and even contradiction among the policy-makers is illustrated by an important chapter on parliament. If Elizabeth made all the decisions, the council was rarely unanimous in its advice, and in time of parliament attempts were made to pressurize the queen into changes of policy, attempts which were occasionally backed by councillors following debates in council (pp. 486–91). These attempts reflected the wide public concern about questions of religion and foreign policy, of which the regime was forced to take account: but this development of Sir John Neale's work on Elizabethan parliaments receives a new twist in the emphasis on the very limited sense in which the realm could be said to have possessed a public opinion on national questions. In reality England consisted of 'numerous complex local societies which were only loosely held together by the authority of the Crown' (p. 3). There was no 'national political community' because 'late Tudor England had not yet achieved an integrated political culture on a national scale. Politics was the business of...the Court' (p. 493); 'the country had its own local politics' (p. 433). In these circumstances the scope for concerted opposition in parliament to government policy was somewhat limited. As Professor Elton shows, even when government policies were so intensely disliked as to provoke rebellion in almost a third of the country, as in 1536–7, it took considerable planning by a defeated court faction to organize and control what purported to be a large-scale spontaneous rising and secure common acceptance of a plausibly authentic set of demands suitable to their faction's purposes. In fact the private parliamentary diaries show that individual localities remained preoccupied with their own particular interests, Hooker's journal of Elizabeth's third parliament (1571) especially paid little attention to affairs of state.

These valuable unofficial records of Elizabethan parliaments, together with speeches, memoranda and petitions on single issues, many of them available elsewhere, are now being edited by Dr T. E. Hartley, largely from documents originally assembled by Neale and transcribed by Miss Helen Miller. The first volume to appear, handsomely produced and covering the years 1558 to 1581, is intended to be used alongside the official Lords and Commons journals and D'Ewes' compilation. The documents reproduced are of course of much wider interest, especially for social and economic developments, than the use to which Neale put them: yet just as the collection provides the evidence by which to judge the validity of Neale's interests and sympathies, it is also manifestly the product of his approach to the study of parliament. Dr Hartley therefore faced a tricky task in preparing this volume at a time when objections were being raised to Neale's view of the history

of parliament as the rise of the Commons and its increasing resistance to arbitrary royal policies, but before it had become obvious in what direction the new ideas were leading: it must be said that he has succeeded admirably. The editorial style is unobtrusive and economical: Hartley provides a straightforward text with a minimum of notes but indicating significant variations in the different versions of the documents. The introduction is likewise short and sensible, but includes some valuable suggestions for a broader study of the role of parliament, and of prime importance, there is a good index.

Clearly in the long term parliament acted as a focus for national unity, but the peculiar nature of the institution, involving the periodic gathering of representatives from disparate local communities to discuss matters of common concern, also provides a deceptively one-sided perspective on the unity of the realm. The earlier preoccupation of historians with conflict and confrontation in parliament and the rise of the Commons also assumed a substantial unity of purpose among the members. Yet parliament was not very representative of the realm as a whole, with the north notoriously under-represented and in particular Durham and, until late in Henry VIII's reign, Cheshire not represented at all. The northern peers, moreover, were long distinguishable from the rest as a conservative, comparatively poor and ill-educated elite of near-professional soldiers. Work by Professor Elton and his pupils, based on bills and acts rather than records of debates is now leading towards a more balanced appreciation of parliament's significance in Tudor government and society. Even so the recent interest in parliament's institutional history and integrative role in bringing court and country together again presupposes substantial common interests and concerns, while the actual importance of these matters to individual localities still remains problematic.

Michael Graves' book on the institutional history of the Lords, 1547–58, the first systematic study of the Tudor upper House, is an important contribution in the Eltonian mould. Working from the premiss that co-operation rather than conflict was the normal setting of parliamentary activity, it seeks to rescue the Lords from the obscurity to which an earlier generation of historians had consigned it and to explain why it remained important in the legislative process. Its members were generally better educated than the Commons, formed a smaller, more cohesive body (about 25 bishops and 50 peers) with greater continuity of membership and included many with wide experience in government as privy councillors, military or naval experts and provincial viceroys. The Lords could also call on the services of a superior clerical organization and the judges and other law officers who attended there to assist and advise. In consequence about 60 per cent of the bills originally introduced into the Lords were enacted compared with only 25 per cent from the Commons. On all this the author makes his case convincingly and in detail, despite the difficulties of the evidence. He shows, moreover, that the government's legislative programme was comparatively small: it had to compete for priority with the preponderance of private bills from sectional and local interests who looked on parliament as an opportunity to promote local concerns. Conflict between crown and community was thus much less likely than over private bills which cut across the vested interests of others, and parliament spent much time in arbitration between competing interests. Dr Graves also investigates very thoroughly such questions as absenteeism, the crown's discretionary powers in summoning and excluding lords, and marriages, rivalry and feuds among the lords. Nevertheless this is a difficult book

Graves, *House of Lords*, p. 50.
to read and not very well conceived. The polemical style, the impatience shown for
the earlier interpretation of opposition as the defence of traditional liberties, and
the frequently cryptic references to political events which are only explained, if at
all, in the last chapter, will irritate many readers. More importantly, the reigns of
Edward VI and Mary were in many respects so atypical of the Tudor period that
one wonders quite how typical were the Lords’ activities then; and the Lords’
particular contribution in the parliamentary process might have been further
clarified by its consideration in the context of parliament as a whole. As it is, Graves’
final frank admission that the peculiar circumstances of Mary’s reign brought a
temporary but substantial decline in the Lords’ performance (now much inferior
to the Commons) spoils what should have been a good case; and the bald assertions
that it ‘cannot be taken for granted that the House thereafter slithered into the
obscurity to which it was so conveniently assigned by Neale and Notestein’ and that
in Elizabeth’s reign it was ‘still capable of matching and even excelling the Lower
House’ rather beg the question (pp. 200–1).

To the present writer, accustomed to view the workings of Tudor government from
the perspective of Ireland, a borderland which is most frequently cited only as an
exception to the rule, what emerges most forcibly (though tangentially) from recent
work on the subject is the extent to which Tudor England still remained a complex
of local communities owing a common allegiance, rather than a unified nation state.
It is of course true (and frequently remarked) that later medieval England was
precocious by continental standards in the centralization of its government and the
uniformity of its administrative institutions. Moreover under the Tudors the lack
of a standing army, paid bureaucracy, or commensurate taxing power which would
have provided the crown with effective means of coercing its subjects created a
different but equally striking contrast between the English monarchy and its
continental counterparts. The continued preoccupation of English kings, responding
closely to the needs of their subjects, with the perfecting of existing institutions and
the preservation of law and order was very much at odds with the activities of
continental kings concerned to build more effective fiscal and military structures in
order to sustain warfare on a grander scale.13 In this way historians have been able
to explain why English kings were unable to emulate monarchs like Philip II and
Louis XIV in turning their kingdoms into effective police states and war-making
machines. Yet this very necessary comparison, coupled with the parallel preoccupa-
tion with administrative change at the centre, has perhaps led English historians
to understate the substantial measure of regional variation and localism which still
survived and to neglect the fact that many of the characteristics of government in
England were also shared with other areas of the Tudor state. Within England itself
the more recent trend towards the study of the impact of government on the
provinces has helped to redress the balance but this in turn raises problems of
perspective concerning the position of England within the Tudor state as a whole.

In England, it appears, the importance of the central government in the
administration and daily life of the provinces varied considerably from one region
to the next. In the diocese of Lincoln the statutory enactments of the Henrician
Reformation had little or no impact on popular religious practice, although in Kent,
for example, there was a Protestant breakthrough in the 1540s. And throughout the
north the official Reformation made little practical progress before the 1570s.
Indeed, if the Westminster government bit deeper into the life of the Home Counties,

we need to consider whether this was perhaps only because the survival and stability of the dynasty dictated that the scanty resources available had to be concentrated on securing the region nearest the centre of power. More law-suits came from these areas because more litigants there felt that the crown would be sufficiently interested and able to redress their grievances. Parliaments were assembled to endorse the government's handling of 'national' questions, but it is significant that members had to be warned against neglecting these matters in favour of purely local problems. Moreover parliamentary representation tended to favour those regions whose interests were more likely to coincide with the government's, as the northern Pilgrims had cause to complain of in 1536. Indeed, rather than making policy, the government was in fact reacting to events largely according to their perceived impact on the south-east, and the court in particular. In most regions the government struggled with inadequate resources and a cumbersome machinery to enforce its wishes not only against natural conservatism and dislike of change, but also against the particular interests and problems of the localities: in the north, for example, the presence of the border dictated that the nobility should remain a military elite long after their southern counterparts had found their raison d'être elsewhere. Research has established that Tudor government was tolerably successful in the traditional aims of government within the recognized limits of its authority, but the vast extension in the claims of government on its subjects which followed the changes of the 1530s commanded much less popular support and met more strenuous resistance. Of course we have long known that a peripheral area like Cornwall might resist taxation for border defence against the Scots (1497) or oppose the First Book of Common Prayer on the pretext that some Cornishmen understood no English (1549), but hitherto there seemed to be reasonable grounds for maintaining the traditional working distinction between an England which was relatively peaceful and well-governed and the borderlands which were not. In the light of recent work on the English provinces the traditional distinction now seems far less meaningful: however in conjunction with research in progress on the borderlands this work may lead to the development of a broader context for the study of the Tudor state. The following remarks are intended to suggest some possible lines of approach.

The English monarchy was English primarily in the sense that a common law, governmental system, customs and language which were identifiably English were dominant throughout its dominions. They were not however confined to England nor universal there. Kings of England claimed authority over a number of disparate territories: in the case of France (excepting, until 1558, Calais), Scotland and Gaelic Ireland, these claims were vigorously resisted; but English kings exercised well-defined and generally accepted rights in the Principality and Marches of Wales, the Lordship of Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, Calais and England itself. Only a part of England was directly under the control of the Westminster government: the rest was governed like the other territories through regional councils headed by a magnate or civil servant with varying vice-regal powers. The north had its own provincial council, though Lancashire was administered separately through the duchy of Lancaster, and the marches were controlled by their own wardens. Shropshire, Worcester, Hereford, Gloucester and until 1569 Cheshire were attached to the council in the marches of Wales; there was briefly (1539–40) a council in the West, and the extension of English government in Ireland even prompted Elizabeth to erect subordinate provincial councils there (the presidencies of Connaught and Munster) which were answerable to the Irish council. The strategy was evidently
to maintain a provincial council in any region in which the government felt that its control was inadequate. The proximity of the border was the main problem in the north, Ireland and Calais, which necessitated the upkeep of small garrisons augmented in time of war, but the marches of Wales were a frontier only in a cultural sense. Nevertheless, though prepared to delegate authority in this manner, the government tried to insist that the king’s writ, law and legal process should operate throughout the English territories. In England, the palatinates of Durham and Lancaster and the liberty of Hexham were effectively assimilated into shire ground in 1536. At the same time, English local administration was extended throughout Wales and the partial toleration previously extended to Welsh law and custom was withdrawn. English administrative forms and the common law had long been established throughout the Irish lordship, but the proximity of the border necessitated acceptance of many hybrid customs called march law (as in the north), and the abolition of the palatinates there was a much more piecemeal process. Interestingly, as Brian Levack shows in the Hexter festschrift, with the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603, the advocates of a consolidated Britain, including James himself, generally favoured the incorporation of Scotland in similar manner into a unitary English state, but the circumstances of the union of the crowns prevented the government from following the strategy pursued in Wales and Ireland. The Tudor government pursued a consistent but perhaps not altogether conscious policy of anglicization, largely ignoring minority languages such as Cornish or Gaelic and insisting on the use of English: its introduction into church services for instance was an important development. In each of the crown territories, the king’s chief subjects considered themselves Englishmen and spoke English, although the dominance of English was challenged by Celtic or French dialects and culture. Thus in early Tudor times, within the Welsh marcher lordships and the Irish lordship the communities of Englishry claimed the same rights as subjects in England and enjoyed a superior status at law to the native population. Nevertheless, the government came increasingly to view nationality in terms of country of birth rather than racial extraction, and it gradually extended the rights of freeborn Englishmen to all its subjects regardless of race or condition.

In these circumstances the writing of a national history of England with a cursory examination of one or two outlying areas tacked on by way of contrast can seem more than somewhat contrived. What has generally been considered the normal context of government applied in fact only in parts of lowland England, and even here there were marked regional variations in its effectiveness. On the other hand, the outlying areas which have been regarded as a special case, in reality comprised over half the Tudor state. Viewed collectively these borderlands presented sufficiently similar problems to the government and elicited a sufficiently similar response as to merit a more systematic study by historians, as integral parts of the Tudor state rather than mere appendages.

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