The Later Stuarts - A Glorious Restoration?

By John Morrill | Published in History Today Volume: 38 Issue: 7 1988

POLITICAL GLORIOUS REVOLUTION STUART EARLY MODERN (16TH-18THC) BRITAIN

John Morrill argues that recent scholarship is re-shaping our view of the fortunes of monarchy and Parliament between 1660 and 1688.

The Restoration was the clear, firm settlement that failed; the Glorious Revolution the deeply ambiguous one that succeeded. The Restoration was predicated upon the Declaration issued by the Convention Parliament on May 8th, 1660:

> ... It can no way be doubted but that His Majesty's right and title to this Crown and Kingdom is and was every way completed by the death of his most royal father of blessed memory, without the ceremony or solemnity of a proclamation.

It was a commitment to historical rootedness, to that coral reef of precedent, custom and statute that underpinned the obedience of the subject and which stood more chance of defining and restraining rulers than paper constitutions or the language of consent had proved able to do. And it promised to underpin not only divine right monarchy but also a divine right church and the divine right of the gentry to govern the shires. The great irony of the restoration was that Charles II and James II both owned themselves divine right kings, but cared not a fig for the Church, or ultimately, of the natural right of the gentry to govern in their names. When the gentry had to choose in 1688 between these different varieties of divine right, monarchy came a poor third.

In contrast, 1688 saw a civil war that wasn't a civil war; a deposition that wasn't quite a deposition; a religious toleration as grudging and tight as could be; a decentralisation of power but an agglomeration of the resources of the state; an enhancement of the power of the Crown but a sharp contraction of the personal authority of the monarch. The 1688 settlement, like the 1559 settlement, succeeded because of its ambiguity.

This brief essay will explore how it came about, by noting and expanding the new agenda being created by recent writing which is rescuing Restoration historiography from a prolonged period of torpor. The new themes are becoming clearer: the rediscovery of the ideological roots of late seventeenth-century politics; the on-going crisis in the relations of centre and locality, and the crisis of Parliaments.

Much of the best work on this period has always taken the form of political biography: Andrew Browning's Danby, K.D.H. Haley's Shaftesbury, G.V. Bennett's Atterbury, Henry Horwitz's Nottingham, and J.P. Kenyon's Sunderland (still the best of all early modern biographies). It is therefore fitting that the most important change of direction should be signalled in two new biographies which, without any de-emphasis on the pragmatism and dishonesty of political life, retrieve and explore the deep ideological commitments which underlie the sharp political practice. Richard Ashcraft's Revolutionary Politics and Locke's 'Two Treaties of

Government' (Princeton University Press, 1986) and Jonathon Scott's Algernon Sidney and the English Republic (Cambridge University Press, 1988) to be followed by his Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis (Cambridge University Press, 1989) both argue to far sharper and more deeply-held divisions in the England of the 1670s and 1680s than has been traditionally acknowledged.

Ashcraft's Locke is a man whose experience as political secretary to the Earl of Shaftesbury, led him to fashion his political ideas not as abstract reflections on the philosophical nature of politics, but in the context of justifying the beliefs and actions of a radical minority of dissenters, artisans, tradesmen, merchants, farmers and dissident gentry who made up the first Whig party in the late 1670s, and subsequently of the desperadoes who plotted the violent overthrow of Charles II in 1682-83 and James II in 1685 and in 1688. An advocate of manhood suffrage and of governments strictly accountable to the people, Locke comes out of Ashcraft as far more the heir of the Levellers than of aristocratic or bourgeois constitutionalism. Against the claims of J.R. Janes (echoed by many other scholars) that historians of ideas have little to learn from the 'hysteria, the lies, the betrayals and injustices of the Popish Plot' and that 'the Whigs had no developed, coherent political philosophy', Ashcraft seeks, largely successfully, to recreate the serious debate conducted through the presses in which basic questions of sovereignty, rights and government-under-law were thrashed out.

Scott's two-volume study of Sidney shares much of Ashcraft's vision of the 1670s and 1680s. Sidney too conspired with dissenters, with exiled Commonwealthsmen, with foreign princes. Sidney accepted that little was prescribed either by God or by the condition of Man as to forms of government. Many forms were acceptable and had to be judged by their results. A pragmatism as to forms which only the experience of the Interregnum could engender (the fact that the unthinkable had happened made it thinkable again) went along with a continuing commitment to civil and religious liberties. Scott differs from Ashcraft in his scepticism about the extent to which there was a single Whig movement, and he would see Shaftesbury and therefore Locke as engaged in a cause different from and incompatible with that of Sidney and his friends. As so often in history, the fragmentation of the Left fatally weakened its force. But the viciousness of political life and the vigour of intellectual debate are common themes in these biographies. The tendency to view the politics of 1660-1714 as being essentially cynical struggles for control within the elite and within the existing institutional framework, is also undermined in a three-volume study in progress by Richard Greaves. So far only the first volume, Deliver Us From Evil (Oxford University Press, 1986) has appeared, but it offers a gripping narrative of the interlocking activities of a substantial group of men and women (mainly ex-soldiers and sectaries) whose seditious talk and yearnings made them a reservoir of potential warriors fur the smaller group of planners. The interconnections between the plots of the 1660s is very striking. Important work on the intelligence system of the Restoration by Alan Marshall, a foretaste of which will appear in a study of the double agent Thomas Blood (Historical Journal, 1988 no. 4), will further demonstrate the degree to which government preoccupation with security was well-founded.

Second in importance only to the studies of Ashcraft and Scott comes Tim Harris' London Crowd in the Reign of Charles lf (Cambridge University Press, 1987). This too looks at 'popular politics' and at the way they might be exploited by parliamentary leaders. But it also retrieves the Tory crowd to be set alongside the

Whig crowd, and demonstrates the popular base of anti-dissenting feeling. It is crucial in reminding us that there was not only a Whig anti-popery (why is the government so concerned with persecuting Protestant dissenters when the true enemy is popery?) but also a Tory anti-popery (why do the dissenters, upon scruples of conscience, divide and weaken Protestant unity, allowing the common enemy, popery, to thrive?) As a prelude to understanding the 1680s and the Glorious Revolution, Harris' book is fundamental. As John Miller argued so cogently in Popery and Politics, 1660-1688 (Cambridge University Press, 1973), anti-popery is as much at the heart of the crises of 1678-89 as we now realise it was to those of 1637-49.

Between the 1580s and 1630s anti-popery shifted from being a fear of external threat, of invasion by Spain and a linking-up with the dissident, alienated, marginalized Catholic subjects of a Protestant monarch, to become a fear of a cancer in the very bowels of government. It became a fear of an insidious plot designed in Rome and the Escorial (as later at St Germain and Versailles) to infiltrate agents into the very heart of government in order to subvert it from within. This has been shown to be a crucial feature of the perceptions of those who took up arms against Charles I in 1642. It is also at the very core of the Whig perception of misgovernment in 1678 and, with fuller reason, in 1688.

It cannot be said firmly enough that the so-called (and miscalled) Exclusion Crisis is not about popery to come: it is about popery already here. Why else should Shaftesbury's obsessive concern in the early months of the crisis have been not with the succession but with the destruction of Danby? And why else should the impeachment articles against Danby allege that he was 'popishly affected'? The comment of Sir Henry Capel: 'lay popery flat and there is an end of arbitrary government' is often quoted but never fully explained. It was not just a demonstration of anti-popish venom: it draws attention to a perceived symbiosis between popery and arbitrary government. End popery and end arbitrary government. Therefore where there is arbitrary government, there must be popery. This solves the puzzle of Danby's fall. Here was a minister who was apparently pursuing firmly Anglican-Protestant policies at home and abroad, who was committed to budgetary equilibrium and a more friendly relationship between Crown and Parliament. And yet here also was the minister who was destroyed on a charge of promoting popery and arbitrary government. The answer is that the arbitrariness of his government was seen precisely in the partisan Anglicanism of his domestic policies, in an anti-French foreign policy which came to appear as no more than a screen for creating a standing army, and in his corrosion of the independence of Parliament. And because all this was experienced as arbitrary government, he had to be a closet papist. This is a classic example of paranoiac logic The Test Acts had flushed out and revealed some very surprising papists: but the persistence of misgovernment led all too many to believe that the true papists were still in the woodwork. The more someone proclaimed his Protestantism but acted in an arbitrary way, the more certain it was that he was at the heart of a popish conspiracy.

Thus, the failure of the Stuarts at any point to display a commitment to the Church of England was at the very core of political instability throughout the restoration period. And James' dual commitment to promote Catholicism (not merely by the granting Catholics rights of religious assembly, but by the creation of Catholic dioceses and seminaries and no doubt by a sharing of the plant and endowments of the established Church) and to build an alliance with the dissenters to strip back the

monopoly on power and influence of churchmen, was to prove a grotesque culmination to three decades of edgy Church-State relations. By 1689, the gentry had to decide whether Church or Crown constituted the greater bulwark to gentry power. It proved a paralysing choice.

What made it worse, of course, was that the gentry also found the Crown reneging on its obligations, entered into at the Restoration, to let local government run itself. In the shaping of the financial settlement, in the Militia Acts, in the Corporation Act, and in the ecclesiastical settlement, the gentry-in-Parliament devolved upon themselves in the localities largely unsupervised responsibility for the implementation of policy. Compared with the period 1540-1640, the Crown in the 1660s possessed little capacity to monitor or to enforce – or to arbitrate disputes in relation to – excise, hearth tax, and assessment; the Militia Acts combined unparalleled concessions to the Crown with regard to the right to raise, train and deploy the militia, with equally unparalleled decentralisation of its day-to-day control and administration. The Crown employed country gentlemen to under take, largely unsupervised unprecedented purges of the boroughs and to intrude their own interests. Never had the boroughs been so comprehensively subordinated to rural elite control as in the early Restoration.

Whatever the religious character of the ecclesiastical settlement, we should note its extraordinary Erastianism. The autonomy of the Church so striven for by Laud was destroyed utterly: High Commission, the only church court with claws, was (uniquely) reabolished at the Restoration, Convocation ceased to meet after 1664 until after the Glorious Revolution. The House of Commons built into the Act of Uniformity that Parliament, and not the Church, had the right to determine every detail of the prescribed liturgy; and nothing was so tenaciously restored as the rights of lay patrons to impropriations and other church property. The major acts reshaping the Church and imposing conformity – Prynne's Bill, the Act of Uniformity, the Conventicle Acts and the Five Mile Act, were all to be enforced by Justices of the Peace, for the most part working singly or in pairs and without accountability.

Unhappily for the Crown, the religious settlement itself was at odds with the political settlement in one vital respect. In the distribution of office and favour, Charles set out – unlike Cromwell – to accommodate his former enemies more than his former friends. Almost half of the privy councillors in 1660-61 were enemies of his father, several were active supporters of the Protectorate. Amongst the Royalists those who stayed at home and acquiesced under Interregnum regimes did better than those who had gone into exile. A clear majority of the paid civil servants of the 1650s were retained, especially in the middle ranks. More than half of the senior officers in the Restoration army and navy and one in three of the judges had served in the 1650s. About 30 per cent of all JPs had served under the Protectorate; and a further 30 per cent had identified to some extent with the Parliamentarian cause in the 1640s, while distancing themselves from the Interregnum. In a majority of counties only a minority of the JPs in the early years of the Restoration had suffered for their royalism. When these findings are combined with the extraordinary leniency of the Act of Oblivion and with the final form of the land settlement that gave no relief to most ex-royalists and possession, if not title, to many purchases of Crown and Church lands, the political basis of the Restoration becomes very clear. Charles II believed that it was better for him to offend his friends (who would not

send him on his travels again) than his erstwhile opponents (who might do so if sufficiently provoked).

The greatest source of weakness in the Restoration settlement was that while Charles created a comprehensive political settlement, he failed in his attempt to create a comprehensive religious settlement. His ecclesiastical patronage in the early months – at parish, capitular and episcopal levels – makes this point, and on balance it seems clear that the Worcester House Declaration of 1661 represents his true intentions for a religious settlement. The terms of membership of the established Church were to be relaxed so that all but a few thousand diehards amongst the laity and perhaps two hundred or so of the clergy could accept it, and he intended to grant even that dissenting rump a share in the general toleration which was intended mainly to help the Catholic recusants whose political loyalty was not in doubt and with whose religious beliefs he almost certainly was privately deeply sympathetic.

In the event, these plans for religious comprehension collapsed. In part this was because of Charles' own miscalculation; in part it was due to inexorable pressure from the Anglican gentry who, for short-term reasons, found themselves in a dominant position in the Parliament of 1661; in large measure it was due to the intransigence and inflexibility of the leading 'Presbyterian' negotiators at the Savoy Conference which attempted a compromise between them and the Church of England of 1661, and in their attack on Charles' plans for toleration. Whatever the cause, the outcome was a disaster for the king and for the prospects for a stable settlement: the Act of Uniformity drove one in four of the clergy and perhaps between 5 and 10 per cent of the laity into actual or mental dissent from the established Church. It also meant that there was a fundamental imbalance and contradiction between the basis of the political and the religious settlement. It created immense problems over the next thirty years.

Danby, from 1675-79, and James, from 1685-89, both set out to destroy gentry self-determination in the shires and to reassert central control; the first through a monopoly of power for the Cavalier-Anglicans, James by a denial of power to the Cavalier-Anglicans. Danby's programme systematically built up the central government's interference in local affairs, above all efficient tax collection which resulted in a striking financial improvement. It also rested upon an ever-greater willingness to rely upon men from one background in local government: the Cavalier Anglicans. There were (minor) purges of living justices in more than half of the English shires. More importantly, those JPs from old Parliamentarian/Cromwellian backgrounds who died between 1675 and 1678 were replaced not by their sons and men of like mind. There was an inexorable move on hand to shift the balance towards the loyalist sons of loyalist Anglican families. There was nothing on the scale of the purges of the 1680s, of course, but it was enough for powerful local groups of 'Country' and pro-dissenting gentry to see the writing on the wall. The emergence of the very phrase 'the Country Lords' at this juncture is telling enough. At the grassroots, 'Whiggery' frequently grew out of those who could see their heirs and their values being squeezed out of power. And they saw it as a betrayal of the Restoration Settlement.

In the 1680s, of course, threat became reality. As Lionel Glassey has shown, the purges of local government were on a scale unprecedented even in the 1640s and 1650s. The general themes of ever-growing central intervention can be found in

Andrew Colesby's Central Government and the Localities: Hampshire 1649-1689 (Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Anthony Fletcher's Reform in the Provinces (Yale University Press, 1986) (although I differ from Coleby over the early Restoration, as the above makes clear). Even more gripping, of course, was the undermining of the independence of towns. Borough government for the most part lay in the hands of self-perpetuating oligarchs acting under charters granted by the Crown and periodically amended, most usually to meet the requirements of dominant local interests. Not for centuries had the Crown so blatantly attempted to change the composition of borough governments or to refashion their powers so as (in the early 1680s) to impose a particular policy (Tory reaction religious uniformity) or (as in the later 1680s) to transform the Crown's capacity to pack Parliament.

Here the most crucial of all points about the late seventeenth century needs to be made. Too often historians have assumed that absolutism is government outside Parliament, a the expense of Parliament; that the ultimate aim of Stuart kings was to be rid of Parliaments. This may be true of the early Stuarts. But it is categorically not true of the later Stuart~ Furthermore, Tudor experience pointed another way. Faced by the memory of fifteenth-century anarchy occasioned by weak government, b the sight of religious wars abroad and by the social and economic dislocations occasioned by demographic and inflationary forces, Tudor Parliaments – Crown-in-Parliament – collaborated to develop the authority of the State. Sixteenth-century Parliaments did not reduce royal power: they shaped its growth, Tudor monarchs-in-Parliament were more powerful than any other European rulers, with an instrument – the omnicompetent statute – which could sheer through prescriptive right and natural law like a scalpel through flesh. By statute, Henry VIII was allowed to intrude his bastards into the line of succession and to extrude legitimate lines. By statute, Henry VIII could abrogate all irrevocable grants of jurisdiction granted away by his predecessors. By statute, successive rulers were accorded unrivalled control over the minds and consciences of their subjects. By statute, the Crown secured a ubiquity and universality for its writs unparalleled elsewhere. In fact, by statute, the Plantagenet patrimonial state became the Tudor empire. By statute, rex did indeed become imperator in regno suo. Parliament was a unique instrument in shaping the growth of royal power, and it chose to shape the growth of that power by requiring the Crown to exercise it through members of those elites whose representatives served in Parliament.

Under the early Stuarts the monarchy was unable to sustain that identity of interest with the other estates. The Houses lost their bargaining power and their willingness to solve the Crown's problems by the grant of further powers. But while the Houses prevented the expansion of royal authority, they could do little to reduce it. The failed Act of Union and the Great Contract were arguably missed opportunities; the Statute of Monopolies a futile gesture; the Petition of Right the one half-effective measure. But the Crown retained the veto and the power to summon, prorogue and dissolve Parliament at will; and the decline in the value of subsidies reduced the Houses' bargaining position considerably. Thus the total proportion of the royal budget provided by parliamentary grants fell from 17 per cent under Elizabeth, to 7 per cent under the early Stuarts, before rising to 22 per cent under Charles II and James II. In these circumstances, the Crown was not threatened by a parliamentary takeover; it simply lost the capacity to rely on statute to solve its and the nation's problem. It had to fall back on its residual and underdeveloped discretionary and prerogative powers. The paradox is that governing without Parliament made the

Crown far weaker than governing with Parliament. The monarchs of the early seventeenth century resemble executives who had driven to work for thirty years in smart cars who suddenly discover that they have to get about on a rusty bicycle. While it was tempting for Charles I to attempt to govern without calling Parliaments, it also revealed the weakness of early Stuart rule and not its strength.

Against this background, we can see that the later Stuarts recognised the folly of governing without Parliament. Their aim was to govern by more effective and directive management. In the late 1680s this amounted to a fundamental perversion of parliamentary independence; but as with manipulation of local government, that which became a reality under James II had been feared and suspected over the last eight years of Charles' reign. We should not underestimate the Crown's potential: the House of Lords throughout this period was dominated by first generation peers and bishops. It was also steered through its business by the judges and law officers who sat as advisors and who influenced much of the work of the House. Although after 1678 the Crown lost control of the appointment of the Speaker of the Commons, it still appointed the clerks, and their ability to use their office to steer business towards or away from matters of concern to the Crown is much underrated, as was their selective deafness when it came to hearing the names of those proposed as members of key committees.

Negatively, the Crown's broad powers to summon, prorogue, adjourn and dissolve remained vital (as Charles showed in 1679-80) as indeed was its right to determine where Parliaments should meet (as he showed in 1681). None of this secured a quiet life for the Crown in the parliamentary sessions of 1661-74, although the extent to which jurisdictional disputes between the Houses and personal rivalries vitiated the smooth passage of Crown bills should not be understated. The ineffectiveness (from the Crown's point-of-view) of those sessions was by no means always due to the unpopularity of the Crown or its policies.

But from 1675-78 Danby set out to 'manage' Parliament. This meant careful distribution of secret service money and of the loaves and fishes of office to sympathetic members. It was not buying consciences; it was buying the attendance of the naturally but lazily loyal backbenchers. It also involved Charles in adopting policies in which he did not really believe: but then the policy that mattered above all was an untroubled life, We must remember too, that this management took place in a Parliament that had been elected in 1661 and seemed set to see Charles' reign out. Many MP's had largely lost touch with their constituencies and now resided semi-permanently in London. This appeared to some to mean that they were easier to buy. As MPs died off, they were replaced at by-elections, and while the government had mixed fortunes in controlling those by-elections without the kind of gerrymandering of franchises that was attempted after 1681, it is true that government involvement in by-elections was far more intrusive and effective than it could ever hope to be in general elections. The obsessive concern of Shaftesbury in the mid 1670s was to have the Cavalier Parliament dissolved and fresh elections held. Otherwise, Parliament would become a rubber stamp of the royal will, and king-in Parliament would become the most authoritarian government in Europe. Here the memory of parliamentary tyranny of the 1640s and 1650s proved an ironic precedent. Hence the furore too when Charles and Danby tried to impose a Non-Resistance Test (similar to that already imposed on the clergy and the boroughs) on MPs; and hence the furore over the standing army in 1678.

As Professor Ashcraft has so well reminded us, Locke's analysis of Stuart tyranny centres around the corruption of Parliament, the destruction of its independence and its conversion into a tool of the royal will. The truth fell far short of Shaftesbury's imaginings. Danby was simply trying to ensure a smoother ride through the Houses of limited and traditional Crown business. Charles was no visionary king. He had no fire in his belly other than to see his days out in peace. The burning ambition of his youth had been to acquire his throne, not to do anything with it. But the jolt which the crisis of 1678-81 gave him turned his mind to bolder strokes and to careful preparations for unprecedented royal manipulation of the 'Tory reaction' Parliament (the fruits of the campaign can be seen in the elections after his death in 1685). This in turn gave way to grotesque manipulations planned and executed by James II in 1687-88. No wonder the scattered Whigs maintained such a deafening silence about Charles' failure to honour the Triennial Act, which provided for a new Parliament every three years, in 1684. Despotism was unthinkable in the absence of Parliament: all too feasible once a monarch had a rubber stamp in St Stephen's Chapel.

The rewriting of the parliamentary history of 1660-88 is the most urgent of all tasks. John Miller's revisionism (TRHS, 1984) creates something of l the agenda, but misses the most crucial points made above. Derek Hirst's refreshing reassessment of the Cavalier Parliament (Parliamentary History, 1987) stops before Charles II and James II took a grip in the problem.

The Glorious Revolution itself stands at the turning point. To pull the strings together, I need to make a final, oblique, approach. When I was in China in 1987 I heard a fascinating paper from a Chinese scholar on state formation in Europe and in China. Whereas western scholars automatically classify state systems in Aristotelian categories (monarchical/aristocratic/democratic, or as blends of these), Chinese scholars categorise state systems as monotonic, diatonic or multitonic according to whether the locus of power is centralised, or balanced between two or more institutions or places. England is viewed as a clear diatonic system, as having, from early in its development, dual loci of authority in the royal Court and in the shires (with their distinctive patterns of officers, courts, juries and so on.) Parliament arose as an institution to co-ordinate these two distinct centres of power. By the seventeenth century both institutional bifocation and the political need for integration were at their height.

Such an approach is immensely fertile – although it has its difficulties. Certainly it helps to pull together the strings of my argument. In a state in which the Crown could only govern with the consent of social elites whose primary sources of wealth and status derived only indirectly from the Crown, it was essential that there should be a perceived identity of interest between Crown and those elites and institutions which could mediate between them. The English system had developed a whole series of checks to allow that to happen. First, there was no hereditary caste of families like the French noblesse de robe surrounding and sheltering the Crown. In every generation the great majority of senior civil servants and household officials were the sons of 'mere' country gentry, clergy, lawyers or urban oligarchs. Their sons were more likely than not to return to the shires to plant new landed dynasties. Secondly, the Crown was not compelled in central or local government to work with and through all members of those alise groups whose values and beliefs it felt it could safely ignore (as Elizabeth slowly squeezed out Catholic recusant families in the late sixteenth century, and the Hanoverians squeezed out Tory

families, or some kinds of Tory families in the eighteenth). Thirdly, as we have seen, the Crown allowed itself to become more and more dependent upon parliamentary statute to create law, to shape the growth of its institutions and to finance its activities. For much of the time, these mechanisms secured cooperation and stability. England was, after all, the most law-abiding, the least violent, the most orderly state in Europe for most of the seventeenth century. But when there were a succession of monarchs whose preferred lines of policy were significantly different from the spectrum of views held by groups within the elite, there was bound to be tension within the system. How, and how far, could the monarch overcome the reluctance of legislators to fund and to give legal force to their policies? How far could the legislators call the king and his servants to account for proceeding beyond or failing to carry out their legal duties? When king and the representatives of the local communities were in conflict, who was to decide between them?

If the Tudor century, for all its frictions, represents the triumph of perceived underlying harmonies of interest, the seventeenth century witnessed the collapse of cooperation and the pursuit of several false solutions. Charles I attempted to govern outside, and independently of, Parliament. From 1660-89 a further failure to create an identity of interest between Crown and political elites continued to weaken government. The Crown now tried an alternative strategy: it intervened in the selection of MPs, manipulated its powers to determine the times and places of meetings, and sought to influence the business and procedures of the Houses so as to create an artificial co-operation of Crown and Parliament. In response to this challenge, those whom we know as the Whigs developed a precise mirror-image policy: co-operation had to be achieved not by the executive reshaping the legislature, but by the legislature reshaping the executive. Locke was an influential proponent of that view.

From 1689 to 1730 and beyond, we see the re-establishment of equilibrium between Crown and Parliament and (or is it through?) a new dominance of the centre over the provinces. The wars of 1689-1714 more than the settlements of 1688-89 (let alone the half-abandoned settlement of 1701) created two new contexts: the primary one was that Britain was faced – for the first time since the 1590s – with invasion and conquest. As a result, the political elite acquiesced in the transference to the state of the bureaucratic, fiscal and military resources necessary to see off French absolutism and Catholic monarchy. This proved to be an irreversible transfer of resources. It strengthened the office of monarchy more than the persons of the monarchs, but it was a fundamental switch. It permitted Britain to emerge as a formidable naval and colonial power and proved self-extending.

Alongside this, however, was a second and more unexpected development: a new, delicate, but effective, interdependence of legislature and executive. Earlier demands for government by a Council nominated by or accountable to the legislature were supplanted by the emergence of a cabinet council comprising those who could command a majority in both Houses on bills crucial to the Crown, and many combinations of ministers were normally in a position to deliver those goods. At times, too, the electorate could deliver such a rebuke to the Crown and its ministers that adjustments were necessary. But behind the ministers and the independent squires and men of property in the Houses sat a new 'ballast', the career civil servants and placemen (or Court and Treasury party) whose votes could normally stabilise the government in all but the most violent of political squalls. This 'ballast' was made possible by the vast expansion of patronage resulting from

the mobilisation of resources for global war. And the Crown more generally held elections to strengthen the ministers in Parliament than it held an election and then had to change its ministers as a result.

Parliament in early-modern England was crucial not only because it was such a powerful instrument for making law and approving taxation, but also because it demonstrated to the Crown the limits of its enforceable will. The Stuarts forgot that lesson and it cost them dear: but for the eighteenth century as for the sixteenth, this was to be the true bed rock of liberty and Property. It was not really what Lockeian separation of powers and the subordination of governors had striven for: but, as usual in British history, the resolution of political crisis owed less to political precept than to muddling through.