

1 The Stuart inheritance

In 1603, James VI of Scotland inherited the throne of England from his cousin, Elizabeth I. Although he had enjoyed a relatively successful reign as King of Scotland, his new kingdom presented quite a different set of challenges. England was larger, wealthier and more heavily populated than Scotland, and was a far more significant player on the international stage. It also differed significantly in its religious, political and economic make-up. James was fully aware of England's relative wealth, a prospect that he apparently relished, likening himself to a 'poor man' who had finally arrived in 'the land of promise'. However, in order to provide his subjects with effective government, he would also need to develop an understanding of other aspects of England's make-up.

English society c. 1600

England by 1603 was a society facing considerable strain. Despite the fact that the previous century had witnessed a dramatic population rise, from around 2.8 million to over 5 million inhabitants between the 1520s and 1640s, there had been little change in the pattern of life for most people. Ninety per cent of the population still lived in rural areas and were dependent on agriculture for their means of existence. Although London was the largest city in the country, with a population of around 200,000 by 1600, there were only two other cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants, Norwich and Bristol. Five others had populations of over 5,000, namely Oxford, Salisbury, York, Newcastle and Exeter.

The sixteenth century had also been a time of rapid inflation, and although wages had risen during the period, they had failed to keep pace with prices. This, together with the increase in population, led to an inevitable rise in both poverty and vagrancy in the later sixteenth century, which caused considerable alarm to the governments of the time. Harvest failure could still lead to starvation and serious disorder, which the country had experienced as recently as the 1590s.

In light of such pressures, the Government was keen to maintain the social fabric of the country, as far as possible. A hierarchical social structure was regarded as a guarantor of stability, and this hierarchy was regarded as part of God's divinely appointed plan for society. The importance of such ideas is reflected in the belief in a Great Chain of Being (see Figure 1.1). As God had arranged the universe in a certain order, the structure of society should reflect this in its own composition.

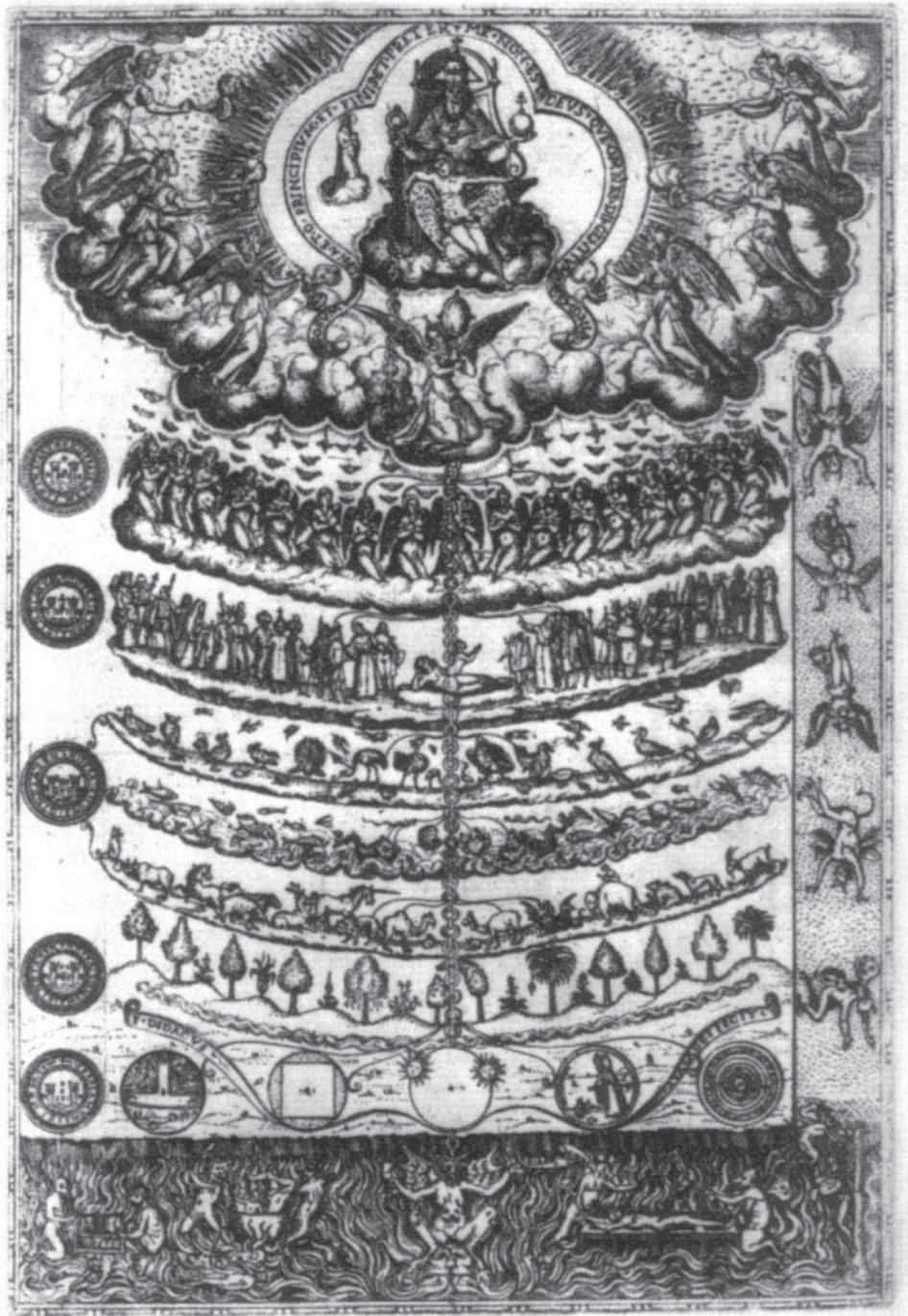


Figure 1.1 The Great Chain of Being, illustration from *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579)

'The homily of obedience', read regularly in Tudor and Stuart churches, went on to apply this principle to society as a whole:

Almighty God hath created and appointed all things in heaven, earth, and waters, in a most excellent and perfect order. . .in earth He hath assigned and appointed kings, princes, with other governors under them in necessary order. . .some are in high order, some in low, some kings and princes, some inferiors and subjects, priests and laymen, masters and servants, fathers and children, husbands and wives, rich and poor: and everyone hath need of the other: so that in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God.

In particular, there was a sense of the threat posed by landless vagrants, victims of economic change, whose lifestyle meant that they were beyond the traditional control mechanisms of society. As one magistrate from Somerset warned in 1596:

I do not see how it is possible for the poor countryman to bear the burdens duly laid on him, and the plundering of the infinite numbers of the wicked, wandering idle people of the land. . .Others there be. . .which may grow dangerous, by the aid of such numbers as are [vagabonds], especially in this time of famine, who no doubt animate them to all contempt both of noblemen and gentlemen, continually whispering in their ears that rich men have gotten all into their hands and will starve the poor.

In response to this threat, a series of Poor Laws was introduced. These included a range of measures designed to alleviate poverty and to punish those who sought to escape it by moving out of their home areas. William Harrison, in 1587, described graphically how such legislation was to work:

There is order taken throughout every parish in the realm that weekly collection shall be made for the help and sustenance of the poor, to the end that they should not scatter and, by begging here and there, annoy both town and country. . .Such as idle beggars. . .the law ordaineth this manner of correction: the rogue being apprehended, committed to prison, and tried. . .if he happen to be convicted for a vagabond. . .he is then. . .grievously whipped and burned through the gristle of the right ear with an hot iron. . .if he be taken a second time, he shall then be whipped again, bored likewise through the other ear, and set to service; from whence if he depart before a year be expired and happen afterward to be [caught] again, he is condemned to suffer pains of death.

(William Harrison, *The Description of England*, 1587)

Government

Role of monarch

As Head of State and Church, the powers and responsibilities James inherited as King of England were enormous. Government revolved around the monarch and was *its* Government. As Defender of the Faith, the monarch appointed archbishops and bishops, and directed

ecclesiastical policy. Judges and magistrates were appointed by the Crown to uphold *its* laws. The monarch directed foreign and domestic policy, chose its ministers, raised and controlled armies, and decided if and when to call the peoples representatives together in Parliament. Parliaments were usually summoned to provide the Crown with financial assistance, but the ultimate responsibility for finance also belonged to the monarch. Any financial difficulties would lead to a Crown debt rather than a national one, for which the monarch was responsible.

How Government worked

Lacking a standing army, an effective police force or a professional civil service in the localities, the Government was heavily dependent on persuasion to enforce its will. As we have seen, the idea of a Great Chain of Being was an important one at this time, and one that Government propaganda developed. 'The homily of obedience' emphasised the monarch's divinely appointed right to issue orders that their subjects must obey. Failure to do so would lead to anarchy: 'no man shall ride or go on the highway unrobbed; no man shall sleep in his own house or bed unkilld; no man shall keep his wife, children, and possessions'.

In addition the monarchy placed great emphasis on visual propaganda to try and secure the allegiance of its subjects. The projection of the royal image through coinage and portraiture, and of royal magnificence and wealth through architecture and Court ritual were designed to impress and inspire loyalty. The most important targets of this were 'the political nation', a relatively small group of men, whose support was vital to effective government of the country. However, this group's adherence could not be ensured by persuasion alone. The monarch had also to help meet the social and financial aspirations of such people. To do this, James would need to bear in mind the advice that Lord Burghley gave to his predecessor, that it was necessary 'that you gratify your nobility and principal persons of your realm and bind them fast to you...whereby you shall have all the men of value in your realm to depend only upon yourself'.

In order to 'bind' such figures to it, the Crown needed to be able to offer sufficient incentives for loyalty. The distribution of such patronage was a very important aspect of government. The Crown had a vast array of rewards at its disposal: offices in Church, Court or Government; honours, such as peerages or knighthoods; leases or gifts of royal lands; the grant of monopolies on the manufacture or trade of a particular commodity; pensions and annuities; or even gifts of money. These privileges were vital to both Crown and recipient, providing loyalty and service for one, and prestige and wealth for the other. An effective patronage machine would ensure that such benefits were spread widely to ensure the maximum possible coverage of the political nation, and would avoid the over-concentration of power in one particular group or faction.

The machinery of Government

The actual machinery of Government at the disposal of the monarch was relatively limited. At a central level, the most important institution was the Privy Council, which provided the monarch with advice and implemented royal policy. Great officeholders, such as the Lord Treasurer, or Secretary of State, would usually sit on the Privy Council, and were influential figures in Court as well. The Court, although not part of the Government machine as such, was also an important source of advice to the monarch, and the main channel through which patronage was distributed. A number of central courts also sat in London, which dealt, among

other things, with the enforcement of the monarch's rights and the settlement of constitutional issues. When summoned, Parliament could pass legislation and provide access to important tax revenues.

Local government was the responsibility of three main sets of office-holders: Sheriffs, Lords Lieutenant and Justices of the Peace (JPs). All were unpaid, and usually drawn from gentry backgrounds. It was these individuals upon whom the Crown had to rely, in order to keep order and to ensure that its policies were actually put into effect.

The operations of Government can be summarised in Figure 1.2.

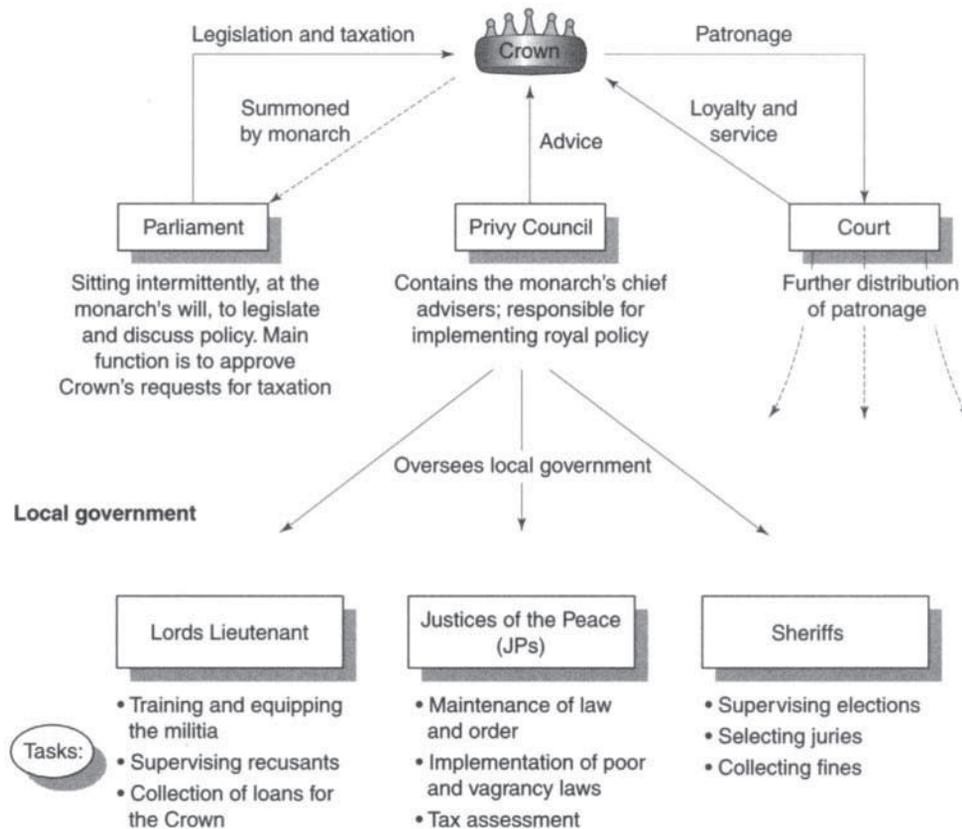


Figure 1.2 An outline of Government structure, c. 1600

Government by 1603

While Elizabethan government was remarkably successful given the constraints under which it was operating, there were certain issues evident by 1603. One was the importance of ensuring a wide distribution of patronage, and avoiding a monopoly over it, or Government, by any one individual or group. According to one contemporary, Elizabeth 'ruled much by faction and parties which herself both made, upheld, and weakened, as her own judgment advised'. The tensions that accompanied the rise of the Earl of Essex, and his domination of

the elderly Queen's favours towards the end of the reign, clearly illustrated the problems that could arise if this was not the case.

Another issue related to the effectiveness of local government. During Elizabeth's reign, the work-load of local government increased significantly, especially for JPs, who not only had to implement law and order as magistrates, but also oversee tasks such as the suppression of vagrancy and poor relief. In addition, many JPs were responsible for assessing levels of parliamentary taxation for their localities. During the reign, the value of subsidies fell significantly: a subsidy in 1559 brought in £140,000, but only about £80,000 by 1601. Though an important part of the Government, it was clear that there were limits to the level of co-operation that could be expected from overworked, voluntary officeholders.

Finance

Responsibility for finance also lay with the Crown, and sound finances were therefore vital to its ability to provide effective government. In theory, monarchs were expected to meet the normal costs of maintaining their Court and government through their *ordinary revenues*. These were split into four categories. Traditionally the most important source was the rents from *Crown lands*, although *customs duties* including levies such as tonnage and poundage, were also significant. These sources were supplemented from the *profits of justice*, the Crown benefiting from fines and confiscations of land, and from *feudal dues*. The latter consisted of a collection of ancient rights of the Crown, such as wardships (the Crown's right to control and profit from the estates left to heirs under twenty-one years of age) and purveyance (the Crown's right to purchase goods at a price set by itself), but were unevenly enforced.

In times of war or national emergency, the monarch would expect to have access to *extraordinary revenues*, which usually took the form of parliamentary taxation. This came in two distinct forms: fifteenths and tenths, raising around £30,000; and subsidies, raising around £80,000 each. If necessary, the Crown could attempt to cover any short-fall by borrowing, although if its financial situation were poor, finding sources of credit could present it with serious problems.

The reality of royal finance in the late sixteenth century proved somewhat different. As a result of inflation, the rents from Crown lands and the customs duties, which were charged at a fixed rate, were increasingly inadequate. Although Elizabeth took great care to minimise her spending on the Court and on patronage, the demands of the war against Spain (1585–1603), and the associated conflicts in Ireland and the Low Countries, put her under severe financial pressure. Crown lands were sold, despite the long-term implications, and large sums of parliamentary taxation sought and granted. However, these taxes were not adjusted to take account of inflation, and were assessed and collected by the local gentry, who tended to undervalue the level of their own contributions. Elizabeth did not attempt to tackle these 'structural' problems, and despite great efforts at economy, she died with a Crown debt of around £400,000 (although £300,000 in subsidies from 1601 were still to be collected, and the Crown itself was owed some substantial debts).

Documents

An indication of some of the issues that James was to face is contained in the following extracts from the Exchequer accounts of 1600:

Estimate of Her Majesty's domestic and foreign expenditure in £

The Privy Purse	2,000
Band of Pensioners	4,000
Treasurer of the Chamber	8,000
Master of the Wardrobe	4,000
Treasurer of the Household	4,000
Master of the Jewelhouse	2,000
Master of the Posts	2,840
Ambassadors etc.	4,000
Office of the Works	5,000
Treasurer of the Navy	2,000
Lieutenant of the Artillery	6,000
Master of the Armoury	400
Lieutenant of the Tower	2,000
Castles etc.	4,000
Justices	1,600
Ireland	320,000
Low Countries	25,000
Fees and annual payments	26,000
Total	422,840

Estimate of Her Majesty's yearly revenues of the Exchequer in £

Sheriffs' fines	10,000
Crown lands	60,000
Hanaper fines	4,000
Confiscations	4,000
Customs and subsidies of ports	80,000
Duty on wine etc.	24,000
Licences and fees	5,000
Recusancy fines	7,000
Church taxes	20,000
Subsidy of the clergy	20,000
Subsidy of the laity	80,000
Fifteenths and tenths	60,000
Total	374,000

- 1 Divide the Queen's expenditure into four categories—military, governmental, patronage and Queen's household. How much was spent on each?
- 2 Divide the Queen's income into four categories—taxes, customs duties, profits of justice and Crown lands. How much was received from each?
- 3 What conclusions might you draw from your findings? Are there any aspects of these figures that you might find particularly concerning, from the monarch's point of view?

Religion

Background

The impact of the Reformation on the religious and political map of sixteenth-century Europe was enormous. It provided a serious challenge to Roman Catholicism, as Protestant alternatives to the traditional Church emerged in a number of European countries. Although the Reformation was successful mainly in northern Europe, its impact was felt across the continent. The monopoly of the Catholic Church had been shattered, and, with it, the religious unity of Christian Europe.

The Reformation originated in Germany, and was inspired by the teachings of the monk and scholar, Martin Luther. Luther attacked both the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church, asserting that it placed too much emphasis on tradition, superstition and ceremony, instead of following a biblical model. For Luther, this involved the rejection of much Catholic doctrine, such as the role of the Pope as head of the Church. Through the doctrine of 'The Priesthood of all Believers', he taught that all Christians could approach God, without the need for rituals, or a priest acting as intermediary. Salvation came via belief based on Scripture ('Justification by Faith'), rather than through ceremony and observing traditional Church activities, such as pilgrimages, confessions, buying indulgences or praying to saints.

Luther's teachings attracted many people, not least some secular rulers, who saw them as a way of justifying seizing control of the Church in their own countries. In England, Henry VIII used them to break away from papal control, and to establish himself as head of the Church, in 1534. Although Henry had few concerns about overthrowing papal authority, he proved more conservative elsewhere in his religious policy, and it was not until the reign of his son, Edward VI (1547–53), that the Church could really be described as Protestant. The 1552 Prayer Book established the church as Protestant, and reflected some of the teachings of the Swiss Reformer, John Calvin, who had superseded Luther as the leading figure of the European Reformation. However, with the accession of Mary I (1553–8), the situation was reversed. Catholicism, complete with papal authority, was reintroduced, and fierce persecution directed at those who maintained their Protestant beliefs.

The Elizabethan Church settlement

The Church inherited by James was one that still conformed to the settlement imposed by Elizabeth in 1559. Although the Queen was Protestant by inclination, she was less interested in doctrinal purity, than in establishing a Church that could embrace as many of her subjects as

possible. Elizabeth's interest in a '*via media*' (middle way) had little to do with sentimentality, however. She was aware of the divisive potential of religion, and wanted to create something to which the vast majority of her subjects could belong. Although Elizabeth declared that she had no interest in making 'windows into men's hearts', she was determined that they should at least outwardly conform in religious matters. Hence religion could act as a means of unity and control, rather than division.

The Elizabethan Church settlement consisted of three main elements. First, the Act of Supremacy, which restored the monarch as the head of the Church. Second, the Act of Uniformity, which contained a new Prayer Book, laying out orders of service and regulations on aspects such as clerical dress and the use of ceremony, and established the principle of compulsory church attendance, via the use of recusancy fines. Third, the 39 Articles, which explained the doctrinal basis of the church. Overall, the settlement was firmly Protestant, even Calvinist, in doctrine, but in terms of its structure and style of service it had clear links to the Catholic past.

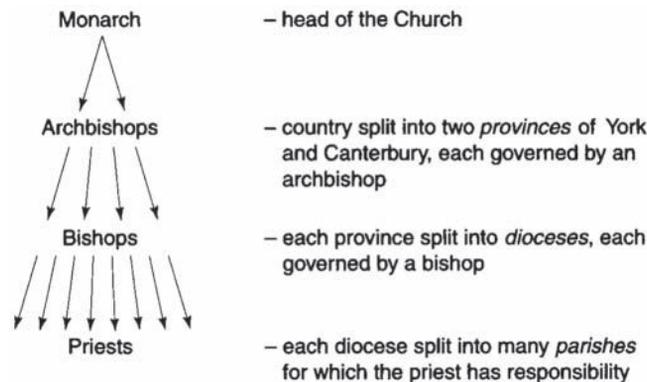


Figure 1.3 Structure of the Anglican Church

Catholics

Many Catholics did outwardly conform to the new settlement, although some 'recusants' did not attend church and became liable to recusancy fines. The position of Catholics during Elizabeth's reign and thereafter was an uneasy one. A papal bull (decree) in 1570 had deposed Elizabeth, and implied that her Catholic subjects' duty was to put that decree into effect. A series of plots between 1570 and 1586, aimed at replacing Elizabeth with the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, further linked Catholicism in the popular mind with treason and political violence. The war with Catholic Spain, and the Spanish Armada in 1588 in particular, associated Catholicism with foreign aggression and tyranny. Protestant propagandists played upon these images; especially important was John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. First published in 1563, Foxe's work was a bloody and highly romanticised history of the English nation's struggle against Catholic oppression, drawing particular attention to the persecution and burnings of Mary I's reign. As a best-seller of seventeenth-century England, second only to the Bible, its message was hugely influential throughout the Stuart era, and beyond.

Despite this popular image of Catholicism, the vast majority of English Catholics remained loyal to the Crown, and were not politically active. Although there was an upsurge in Catholic

missionary activity in the 1580s and 1590s, and a corresponding increase in persecution, with around 180 Catholics being executed for treason, the Catholic minority represented little real threat to the State by 1603. They were predominantly interested in trying to practise their religion, as far as possible, free from Government interference.

Puritans

There was disquiet among some Protestants over the form of the Church settlement. Known as ‘Puritans’ or ‘the godly’, they were particularly influenced by the teachings of John Calvin, and were concerned over the continuation of Catholic practices and ceremonies in the Elizabethan Church. They wanted to see ‘a further reformation’ to bring the Church into line with what they considered to be the biblical model. In particular, practices such as the use of special clerical clothing, or vestments, kneeling to receive communion, and making the sign of the cross at baptism, were seen as unnecessary and unsavoury remnants of ‘popish’ superstition. Most Puritans were willing to work from within the Church, accepting the monarch’s authority over it, for this further reformation. However, there was a minority that were not.

Presbyterians and Separatists were more radical than the more moderate Puritans, in that they rejected the structure of the Anglican Church, and the monarch’s role in it. In line with Calvinist practice, Presbyterians believed that the Church should be governed not by bishops and archbishops, but by elders and overseers, appointed from within the church, rather than by the monarch. Separatists went a stage further, believing that each separate congregation should be self-governing, and rejected any kind of national, or even regional, structure.

The political implications of these views were not lost on Elizabeth. The 1590s saw a concerted persecution of the Presbyterians in particular, under the guidance of Archbishop Whitgift, who shared Elizabeth’s views on the importance of conformity. The Presbyterian structure was uprooted and Presbyterianism, as an organised force, virtually destroyed. Separatists, despite their lack of numbers, were also persecuted; although ironically, it was they who were to present a more significant challenge to the established Church in the longer term.

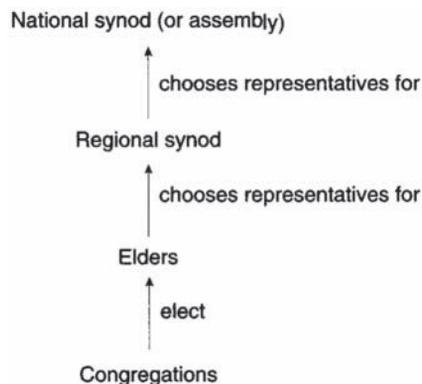


Figure 1.4 Structure of the Presbyterian Church

By the time of James's accession, the established Church had many critics. Whilst there was a substantial body of Protestants who supported the Church settlement, there were also many moderate Puritans who did not. The events of Elizabeth's reign had done little to dampen their hostility to anything perceived as Catholic and they saw the accession of a new king as an opportunity to press again for a more 'godly' reformation.

Summary of religious differences

Table 1.1 Summary of religious differences

Beliefs	Catholic	Protestants			
		Anglicans	Mild Puritans	Presbyterians	Separatists
Church structure	Church governed by the Pope, with structure of archbishops, bishops, priests, etc.	Same as Catholics, except the Pope is replaced as head of the Church by the monarch	→	Calvinist structure that excludes any governing role for the Crown	Each church should be self-governing
Role of ceremony	Ceremony and ritual central to church services – the mystical nature of faith is emphasised, as is the role of the priest	Some ceremony retained and role of priest still significant	←	Against ceremony and 'superstition'. Priest has no special function. Emphasis on 'rational' worship, especially preaching	→
Theology	Based on Church tradition – as interpreted by the Pope	←		Largely based on teachings of John Calvin	→

Parliament

Although similar in some ways to today's institution, Parliament at the beginning of the seventeenth century differed in some important respects. Although it claimed to represent the English people, it was not a democratic institution in the sense that we would understand. It consisted of three bodies: the Crown, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. The Lords were made up of senior churchmen, archbishops and bishops, and the hereditary aristocracy—dukes, earls, lords, etc. Although the Commons were elected, the regulations for those elections varied according to what type of constituency was being contested. In county seats, the franchise extended only to those citizens who met the minimum requirement of holding land worth at least 40 shillings a year. In boroughs, electoral rights varied widely, but again tended to restrict the franchise to relatively prosperous males. Overall, this meant that

those able to vote constituted a relatively small part of the population as a whole. Those who sat in the Commons, drawn mainly from the rural gentry and urban élites, therefore tended to reflect the backgrounds and interests of their electors, rather than the ‘common’ people as a whole.

Parliament did not sit continuously, but rather at the monarch’s convenience, being summoned to deal with specific business and then dismissed. For instance, during Elizabeth I’s reign, it was called together for thirteen sessions over a forty-five-year period, and it was not unusual for there to be a gap of three or more years between Parliaments. Traditionally little more than a device for extracting taxation, its significance as an organ of government had increased during the sixteenth century, as successive monarchs had used it to reinforce their religious policies and to introduce social and economic legislation.

Elizabeth had very strong views on the place of Parliament, and the extent of its rights and privileges, which did not always coincide with its own. She identified two distinct areas of Government business: ‘matters of State’ and ‘matters of commonwealth’. The former consisted of issues linked to royal marriage and succession, religion and foreign policy. These were part of the ‘royal prerogative’ (areas that were the sole preserve of the monarchy), and not to be discussed by Parliament, unless the monarch invited them to do so. The latter consisted of those areas that affected the well-being of the nation as a whole, i.e. social and economic issues.

Documents

Some historians have drawn attention to the conflicts that at times developed between Elizabeth and Parliament, seeing them as the beginnings of the struggle for control over Government, which would spill into the reigns of her successors. While most commentators now tend to question this interpretation and emphasise the degree of co-operation between Crown and Parliament during this period, there were nevertheless areas of tension and disagreement between them:

- A That the assembly of the lower House may have frank and free liberties to speak their minds without any controlment, blame, grudge, menaces or displeasure, according to the old ancient order...that the old privilege of the House be observed, which is that they and theirs might be at liberty, frank and free, without arrest, molestation, trouble or other damage to their bodies, lands, goods or servants, with all other their liberties, during the time of the said parliament, whereby they may better attend and do their duty; all which privileges I desire may be enrolled, as at other times it hath been accustomed.

(Speaker of the House, 1562, making the customary demand for the privileges of the House of Commons; in Sir Simonds D’Ewes’s *Journals*, 1682)

- B August 10, 1566: Parliament is to open at the beginning of October...they say that the Queen’s only intention in calling it is to obtain large supplies, and to defer the question of succession and her marriage. ...

September 14: It is believed for certain that Parliament will meet. ...They think that if the Queen does not marry or proclaim a successor, they will not vote her any supplies.

... October 19: I have been informed that in the House of Commons great difference existed yesterday as to whether the question of the succession should be discussed before voting supplies, some said that the succession...should be one of the reasons for voting supplies; others that the succession should not be discussed until supplies were voted, as they thought it was disrespectful to force the Queen in this way.

October 26: The discussion about the succession still goes on...they had offered her [the Queen] votes of £250,000 on condition that she would agree to [their nomination], but she refused and said that she would not accept any conditions, but that the money should be given freely and graciously, as it was for the common good and defence of the Kingdom.

... November 13: The Queen seeing that they were determined to carry on the discussion about the succession, sent them an order telling them not to do so, but ...the members thought that during sittings that they had full liberty to treat upon matters beneficial to the country: they have greatly resented the order. ...

December 2: The grants have now been made but to a smaller amount than was proposed. The Queen asked for £300,000 English money, in three installments, and they have voted £200,000 in two. ...

January 5, 1567: The Queen went to Parliament...and...dissolved it altogether; as I am told that she is dissatisfied with the representatives of the people who form it.

(Letters of the Spanish Ambassador, de Silva, to Philip II, 1566–7)

- C I saw [in the last Parliament] the liberty of free speech, which is the only salve to heal all the sores of this commonwealth, so much and in so many ways infringed... two things do very great hurt in this place of which I mean to speak. One is a rumour that runs about the house and it is 'take heed what you do, the Queen's majesty likes not such a matter; whoever prefers it, she will be much offended with him'. The other is sometimes a message brought into the House either commanding or inhibiting, very injurious to the freedom of speech and consultation. I would to God, Mr. Speaker, that these two were buried in Hell... [the Queen refused] good and wholesome laws for her own preservation, which caused many faithful hearts for grief to burst out with sorrowful tears and moved all papists ...in their sleeves to laugh all the parliament house to scorn. ...It is a dangerous thing in a prince unkindly to treat and abuse his or her nobility and people as her Majesty did in the last parliament...and I beseech God to endue her Majesty with His wisdom...and to send her Majesty a melting, yielding heart unto sound counsel...and then her Majesty will stand when her enemies are fallen, for no estate can stand where the prince will not be governed by advice.

(Peter Wentworth, 1576, in D'Ewes's *Journals*)

- D This day Mr. Treasurer...examining the said Peter Wentworth, touching the violent and wicked words yesterday pronounced by him in this House touching the Queen's Majesty...which words, so collected, the said Peter Wentworth did acknowledge and confess... [and] did take all the burden thereof upon himself. And so the said Mr. Treasurer

thereupon moved for his punishment and imprisonment in the Tower, as the House should think good, and consider of: whereupon, after various disputation and speeches, it was ordered... that the said Peter Wentworth should be committed close prisoner to the Tower, for the said offence; there to remain until such time as this House should have further consideration of him.

(The Journal of the House of Commons, 1576)

- 1 What privileges does Parliament claim in source A?
- 2 Briefly outline the events of the parliamentary session described in source B. How would both Parliament and monarch have justified acting as they did?
- 3 What is the essence of Wentworth's complaints in source C?
- 4 From the evidence of source D, how much sympathy does there seem to have been for Wentworth's stance?

Foreign affairs

An area of particular concern by 1603 was that of foreign policy. The well-being of the nation depended in no small part on a successful foreign policy, and it was the monarch's responsibility to ensure that success. To provide national security and prestige, it was vital to develop and maintain good relations with other European powers. While alliances had their uses, the deployment of military power, although expensive, had the potential to win even greater glory both at home and abroad. An effective foreign policy would also require the securing and development of trading links overseas, and their protection from potential rivals.

Traditionally, England's main rivals had been the 'old alliance' of Scotland and France, but by the later years of Elizabeth's reign this had ceased to be the case. France had been torn apart by religious warfare, and Scotland was no longer regarded as a threat under its Protestant king, James VI, who was widely expected to be named as Elizabeth's successor. The focus of concern had instead shifted to the great Catholic power of Spain. While Elizabeth went to great lengths to avoid conflict, she did eventually find herself dragged into war with Spain in 1585, which was to continue into her successor's reign.

The Anglo-Spanish war was the result of tension arising out of a series of dynastic, religious, strategic and commercial issues. Philip II of Spain had been previously married to Elizabeth's sister, Mary I, and had briefly reigned as joint monarch of England. Elizabeth had declined his subsequent offers of marriage, made out of a desire to enhance Spain's strategic position, and to consolidate the link between the two main parts of his European empire, Spain and the Netherlands. These dynastic ambitions were further complicated by religion. As the champion of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Philip was unhappy to see his former kingdom's descent into Protestant heresy, and was keen to see it return to the Catholic fold. Spanish hostility was fuelled by commercial conflicts over trade in the New World, which were heightened by the activities of English privateers such as Hawkins and Drake, preying on Spanish treasure ships with the tacit approval of the English Crown.

What finally forced Elizabeth into open hostilities, however, were strategic concerns that threatened the security of England itself. The prospect of the defeat of Dutch rebels struggling for independence from Spain raised the possibility of a Spanish invasion of England from the Netherlands. Elizabeth was determined not to allow this to happen, and declared war on Spain in 1585, sending an army under the command of the Earl of Leicester to aid the Dutch.

Although hugely expensive, the war against Spain was largely successful. The primary aim of securing Dutch independence was realised, and despite the considerable threat of invasion in 1588, the Spanish armada was defeated through a combination of good seamanship and bad weather. Spanish intervention in Ireland, aimed at supporting a Catholic rebellion in 1601–2, was also to end in failure. However, the Spanish war did take its toll. The 1590s were years of considerable economic and social strain, and the effects of war on trade and the constant demands for taxation placed even greater burdens on the country. While war had been necessary in terms of national security, it was clearly not something that could be afforded for much longer. The challenge that would face James would be how to bring hostilities to an end, without compromising over those issues that drove his predecessor into war in the first place.

Ireland

With Elizabeth I's death, James also inherited the crown of Ireland. Traditionally, English policy in Ireland had been to exercise the direct control over 'the Pale', an area of land around Dublin, while allowing Irish chiefs to hold a series of semi-independent lordships over the rest of the country. In the second half of the sixteenth century, this policy was to change, as the English government began to pursue a policy of 'Plantation'. This was based upon the idea that the only way truly to establish control over Ireland was to 'plant' loyal Protestant English settlers, who would hold lands confiscated from the Irish, thereby ensuring the obedience of the country to the English Crown.

This not only provoked the hostility of the Catholic Irish, but also of the 'Old English', those original English settlers of Ireland who had not converted to Protestantism and were unhappy at the prospect of direct English rule. By 1598, this discontent was serious enough to take the form of the Ulster Rebellion, under the leadership of the Earl of Tyrone. His victory at the Battle of the Yellow Ford threatened to overthrow English rule in Ireland altogether, and was followed by the intervention of Spanish troops in support of the rebels. It was only with great trouble and expense (around £2 million) that the revolt was quashed, with Tyrone eventually surrendering shortly after Elizabeth's death.

Although James was to reap the benefits of this pacification of Ireland, the problems that had provoked the revolt had still not been resolved. Religion remained an explosive issue, and the continued policy of plantations under the early Stuarts was to give fresh grievances to the native Irish population. Although the question of the authority of the English Crown over the Anglo-Irish nobility had been settled for now, the 'Old English' remained largely alienated from the 'New English' regime. The potential for future problems remained.

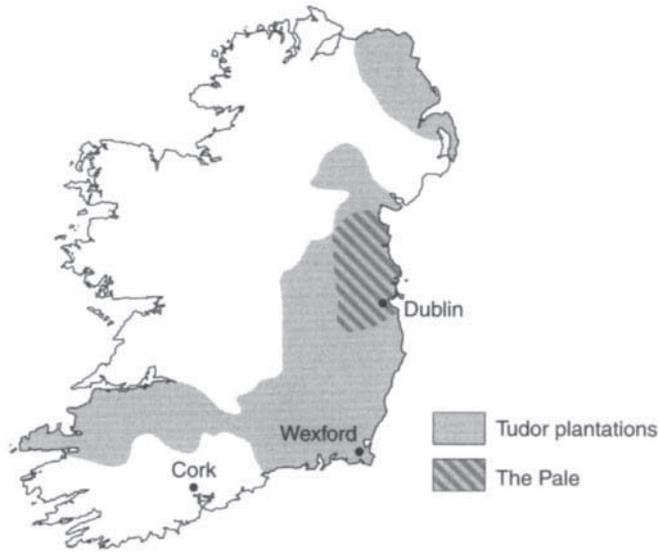


Figure 1.5 Map of the Irish plantation by 1603

England by 1603: historical perspectives

As is explained in the introductory section on historiography, historians are influenced by many different factors, and their interpretation of a whole period can often colour their view of one particular part of it. The state of England at the beginning of the seventeenth century is a case in point. Below are three interpretations, each of which takes a distinctive view of what the key issues facing the country actually were:

- A [There were] features which, at the opening of the seventeenth century, differentiated England from the other countries of Europe. Owing to these characteristics, it was still possible that...we might evolve some new kind of state. ...For England was a land of local government, local armaments, local feeling...where no feud existed between country and town; where ranks were ever mingling; where the gentry intermingled with the middle classes...bureaucrats and soldiers were almost unknown; the king depended for the execution of his laws on an unpaid magistracy, and for his defence on the loyalty of his subjects. The religion which most inspired the best and ablest men, did not depend, like the Protestantism of Germany or the Catholicism of France, on a State Church or a Church State, but referred the individual to his own intellect and his own conscience, and inspired him to defend his spiritual liberties. ...When Elizabeth died...whether in such a land, liberty had still a chance of survival; or whether

the universal tide of monarchy in Europe would not after all prove irresistible even in England...was soon to be decided.

(George Trevelyan, *England under the Stuarts*, 1904)

- B [Lawrence Stone identifies four factors, or 'preconditions', that existed, which made change in the seventeenth century highly likely.] The first was the failure of the crown to acquire two key instruments of power, a standing army and a paid, reliable local bureaucracy. Second comes the decline of the aristocracy and the corresponding rise of the gentry; a rise partly in terms of relative wealth, status, education ...and partly in terms of political self-confidence on the floor of the House of Commons as the representatives of a 'Country' ideology. Third, there was the spread through large sectors of the propertied and lower middle classes of...Puritanism, whose most important political consequence was to create a burning sense for the need for change in the Church and eventually in the State. Last but not least was the growing crisis of confidence in the integrity...of the holders of high office, whether courtiers or nobles or bishops or judges or even kings. It must be stressed that none of the factors here listed made the collapse of government inevitable, much less the outbreak of civil war or the rise of a genuinely revolutionary political party. These preconditions made some redistribution of power almost inevitable, and the reform of the church very probable, but whether these changes would come about by peaceful evolution, political upheaval, or force of arms was altogether uncertain.

(Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution*, 1972)

- C Although the years 1585–1603 did see the beginnings of 'the breakdown of the Elizabethan system', its achievements at the time of the Queen's death were still considerable. The Spanish war had ensured the preservation of the country's basic independence and security...the Essex rebellion was hardly a serious threat; and in ecclesiastical affairs organized Presbyterianism had been crushed and Catholic divisions exploited. On the other hand, the conquest of Ireland...contained the seeds of future tragedy; Catholicism had not been rooted out in England; moderate Puritanism was arguably stronger in the 1590s than it had ever been before... above all, perhaps, the government's needs for war finance in these years imposed strains on its relationships with both Parliament and with the localities, which emphasized the important truth that the English governmental system was not well equipped to raise money for war. ...The tensions which it provoked...were a warning that future governments should try very hard to keep out of armed conflicts.

(A.G.R.Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State*, 1997)

- 1 How do sources A-C differ, in terms of what issues they identify as being of particular concern by 1603?
- 2 Why do you think that they might have such different perspectives? (You may find it helpful to refer to the introductory historiography section.)