ISSUE
How did these changes happen?

there was a considerable degree of harmony in the Church. They suggest that it was the personality of his son Charles that destroyed the relationship with Parliament. Others have disagreed about the relative importance of religion, or social changes, and recent research has emphasised the complications involved in governing three separate kingdoms. What emerges is a complex picture, in which any explanation of the changing relationship between King and Parliament can be challenged by competing interpretations.

The complexity of the issues arises partly from the fact that the process of change took place over a century of conflict, and did not occur through a simple chain of events, but through stages of development. It is clear that certain events – the outbreak of war, the execution of Charles I, the restoration of Charles II, and the 'abdication' of James II – defined key stages, and brought about new situations that require recognition in forming new questions. The process can therefore be viewed as a spiral of development, in which each level leads into the next. Each stage is defined by key events, and can be investigated using key questions as set out. The overall process can then be reconstructed by linking the separate stages to form an overview of development in Figure 2.

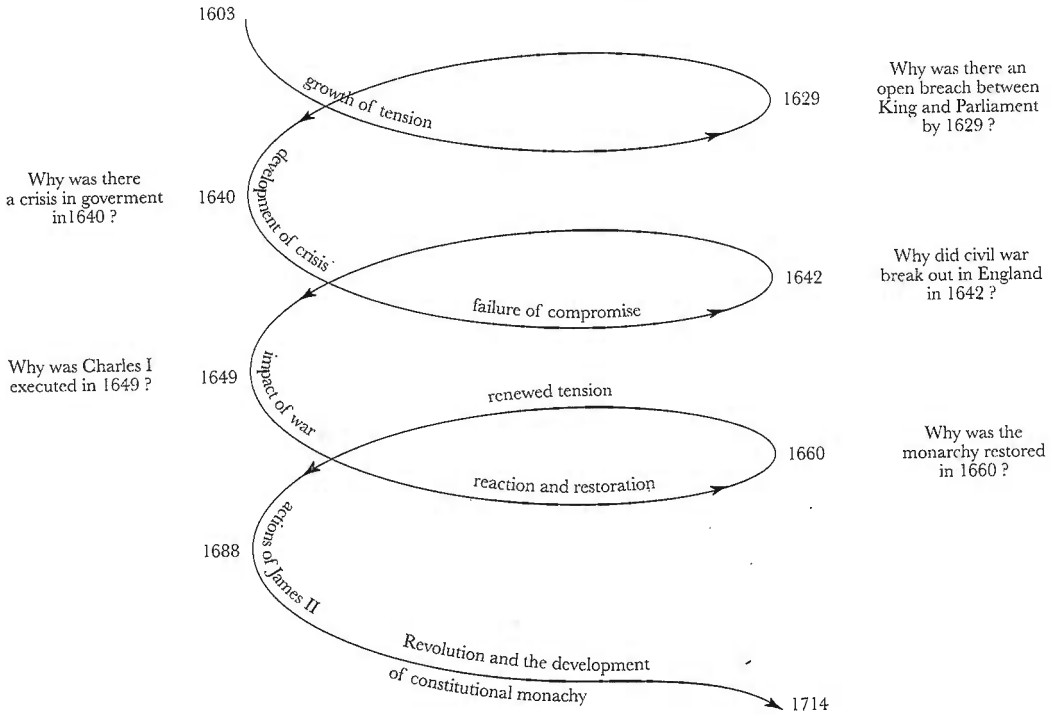


Figure 2 The changing monarchy – stages of development.

THE TUDOR LEGACY: BRITAIN IN 1603

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The material in this chapter is essentially background material, chosen to enable you to familiarise yourself with the nature of politics and government in this period. The activities and exercises included in the main text and at the end of the chapter are designed to help you understand how government worked, in theory and in practice, and the key issues and problems that concerned people at the time. The better you understand what James I inherited from his Tudor predecessors, the more able you will be to assess how effectively he dealt with it. You can also begin to examine the nature of the problems that led to the English Revolution. Although this chapter will do little more than introduce the issues, it will provide you with the basis for examining how they developed, a question which is considered in later chapters.

1 The British Kingdoms

By 1603 the process of uniting the British kingdoms had already begun. Wales had been conquered before 1500, and was incorporated into the English kingdom by three Acts of Union passed during the reign of Henry VIII. These had introduced English law and the system of county government based on Justices of the Peace, so that Wales was governed as an integral part of England. Henry had also extended the traditional claim of English kings to be 'lord of Ireland' into a claim of kingship. While this proved difficult to enforce in practice, strategic needs made it essential. The Protestant Reformation had divided Europe, and after Henry rejected the authority of the Pope and seized control of the English Church in 1534, there was a serious danger of Catholic reprisal. Since the majority of native Irishmen and Old English settlers remained Catholic, Ireland offered a potentially convenient base for an invasion, and it was therefore necessary to assert English control there. English influence, which had been limited to the area around Dublin known as the Pale, gradually increased through the sixteenth century. Irish chieftains were persuaded to accept English titles of nobility. Successive rebellions provoked by the arrogance of some

English administrators provided the excuse for extending English military control. In the 1590s a major rebellion led by Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone was defeated by Elizabeth's generals, and after a period of uneasy peace, the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnel, the last great chieftains of Ulster, fled to Spain in 1605, leaving the English in control of the whole island.

There had been similar problems between England and Scotland ever since the failure of English attempts to conquer Scotland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By securing a marriage between his daughter Margaret and James IV of Scotland in 1502, Henry VII had hoped to bring the two kingdoms together, but the more aggressive policies of Henry VIII had ensured that traditional hostilities lingered, and had encouraged the Scots to maintain an alliance with France. The accession of James as ruler of both kingdoms in 1603 brought an end to national hostilities, but left the matter of the relationship between the English and Scottish peoples in doubt. While James and his heirs had a natural desire to create greater uniformity of government and perhaps even to unite the two kingdoms, there were deep-seated cultural differences both within Scotland itself (see the map on page 14) and between the Scots and English. There was also a bitter legacy of hostility and warfare. The English feared an invasion of Scots seeking wealth and opportunity, while the Scots feared the loss of independence and resented English arrogance. In these circumstances, the problem of ruling multiple kingdoms and of regulating relationships between them became one of the most significant issues facing the Stuart monarchy.

ISSUE
Why was this a period of religious conflict?

2 Religious Divisions

The problem of ruling separate kingdoms was made more difficult and complex by religious divisions that cut across national borders. The Protestant Reformation had shattered the religious unity of Europe, and resulted in reform taking its own course in different areas. While there is no need to discuss the Reformation in detail here, it is necessary to understand some of its main features and effects, because they influenced the political and cultural development of the British kingdoms in important ways.

a) The European Reformation

Christianity in Western Europe had developed under the control of the Catholic Church, centred in Rome and led by the Pope, who claimed to have inherited the power given by Christ himself to the disciple Peter. In different countries the Church was administered by

bishops who were often chosen by the monarch, although they received their spiritual power from the Pope. The key features of Roman Catholic belief were:

- that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had sacrificed himself on the Cross to atone for human sins;
- that humans could avoid the punishments of hell and reach heaven once they died by believing in Christ and following his word;
- that the knowledge of Christ's word and the power to help human souls had been passed to Peter, and from him to those whom the Church ordained as priests;
- that this power was exercised by the priests in the ceremonies and sacraments ordered by the Church. The most important of these were the Mass, which re-enacted the Last Supper of Christ and his disciples, and the confession, in which the priest could forgive the sins of those who truly regretted them;
- that it was the duty of the Church to enforce its rules and doctrines, so that souls were brought to God.

The implications of these beliefs were that Christians could only reach God through the Church, and that the clergy were a special order, separated from the laity (non-clergy), and superior to them. Over the years the Church had become increasingly wealthy and powerful and, like many powerful institutions, had lost some of the spiritual strength that had justified its position. By 1500, there were many complaints that religion had become mechanical, faith had degenerated into superstition, and the leaders of the Church had become embroiled in politics and luxurious self-indulgence.

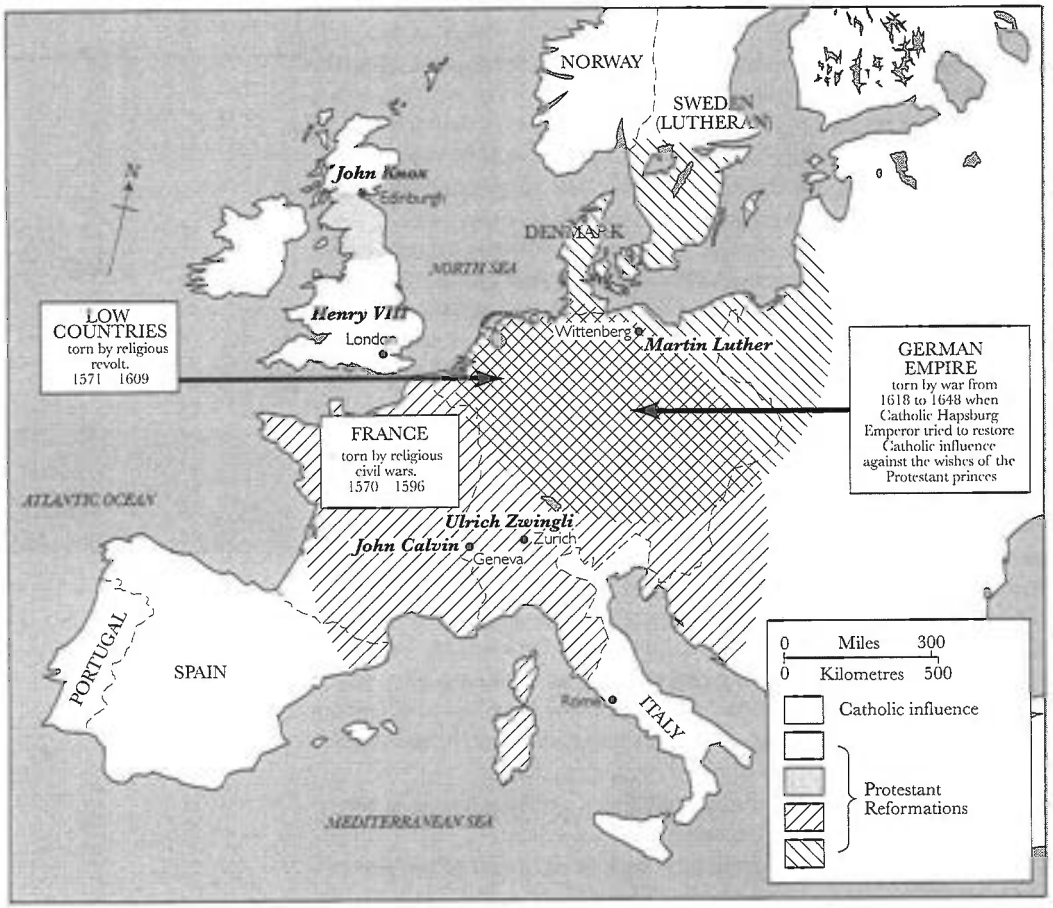
This was the background to the protest mounted by Martin Luther, a German monk who challenged the authorities and demanded reforms. Unlike most reformers, Luther challenged the ideas as well as the practices of the Church. The core of his argument was:

- that salvation – in which the human soul gained a place in heaven with God – could not be guaranteed by the Church or by good works, but only by individual faith;
- that God offered salvation as a free gift to those who believed in Him and followed Christ;
- that belief came from private prayer and study of the Bible, the Word of God;
- that church ceremonies and sacraments only symbolised internal faith, and too many encouraged ignorance and superstition;
- that, in God's eyes, priests and laity were equal, meaning that priests had no special powers; while the Church remained important as a source of guidance, teaching and preaching, there was no justification for the wide-ranging authority claimed by the Catholic Church.

The Counter-Reformation

This process of internal reform, known as the Counter-Reformation, began with the Council of Trent in 1570. The authority of the Pope was reinforced, administration was improved, and many of the scandals that had provoked Luther's protests were eradicated. The resulting renewal of faith, and of papal authority, strengthened the loyalty of Catholics and the fears of Protestants, and led to war in Europe. It also contributed to Catholic plots against Queen Elizabeth and James I, and to the anti-Catholic paranoia that affected many English Protestants in the seventeenth century.

Figure 3 The religious map of Europe showing major wars and civil wars.



By 1603, most of southern Europe was predominantly Catholic, as was Ireland. England and Scotland had Protestant Churches. Northern Germany was mainly Lutheran, and Switzerland was dominated by Calvinist churches, which were also influential in parts of Germany and Holland. France was officially Catholic, but with an accepted Protestant minority known as Huguenots.

The Pope and the leaders of the Church responded by declaring Luther a **heretic** and driving him out of the Church. He was not the first reformer to suffer this, but the rulers of Saxony, where Luther lived, protected him from the Church and its allies. This allowed him to develop and publish his views. Those who took up his ideas became known as Protestants, and by 1550 there were Protestant churches in much of Germany and Scandinavia as well as the Netherlands and England. Thereafter, the Catholic Church began to reform itself internally in a Counter-Reformation, and to reassert the authority of Rome and the papacy.

In 1570 the Pope's decisions were declared to have the authority of God himself. The new spirit was represented by the establishment of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits. Its founder was an ex-soldier, Ignatius Loyola, whose vision of a missionary order was based on the concept of soldiers of Christ. By the end of the sixteenth century Europe was divided between a militant Protestantism which rejected the authority of the past and looked for its rules and inspiration to the Bible, and a militant Catholicism determined to recover its control and destroy heresy.

b) Britain and the Effects of the Reformation

In England, the Reformation was carried out on the instructions and in the interests of Henry VIII. Henry was no Protestant, and his seizure of the Church and its property was motivated by a desire for power and wealth, as well as the need for a divorce in order to marry Anne Boleyn and, hopefully, to produce a male heir. Nevertheless, by rejecting the authority of the Pope he placed himself in the Protestant camp, and was forced to grant positions of influence in the Church to men with Protestant ideas. The result was a genuinely Protestant Reformation carried out during the short reign (1547–53) of his son, Edward, which his Catholic daughter Mary could not entirely reverse during her even shorter reign (1553–8). Her persecution of Protestants and her links with Spain (she married the heir to the Spanish crown) created a backlash against Catholicism. Perhaps equally important, her persecution drove some Protestants into exile in Europe, where they came into contact with other Protestant groups.

The development of Protestant ideas posed a number of problems for government. Luther argued that the rules for church government, as well as salvation, could be found in the Bible, and that the Christian monarch, or godly ruler, had the power and responsibility of interpreting and enforcing them. However, the Bible – part history, part mythology, part poetry – was often unclear and contradictory, and men and women who believed that their salvation

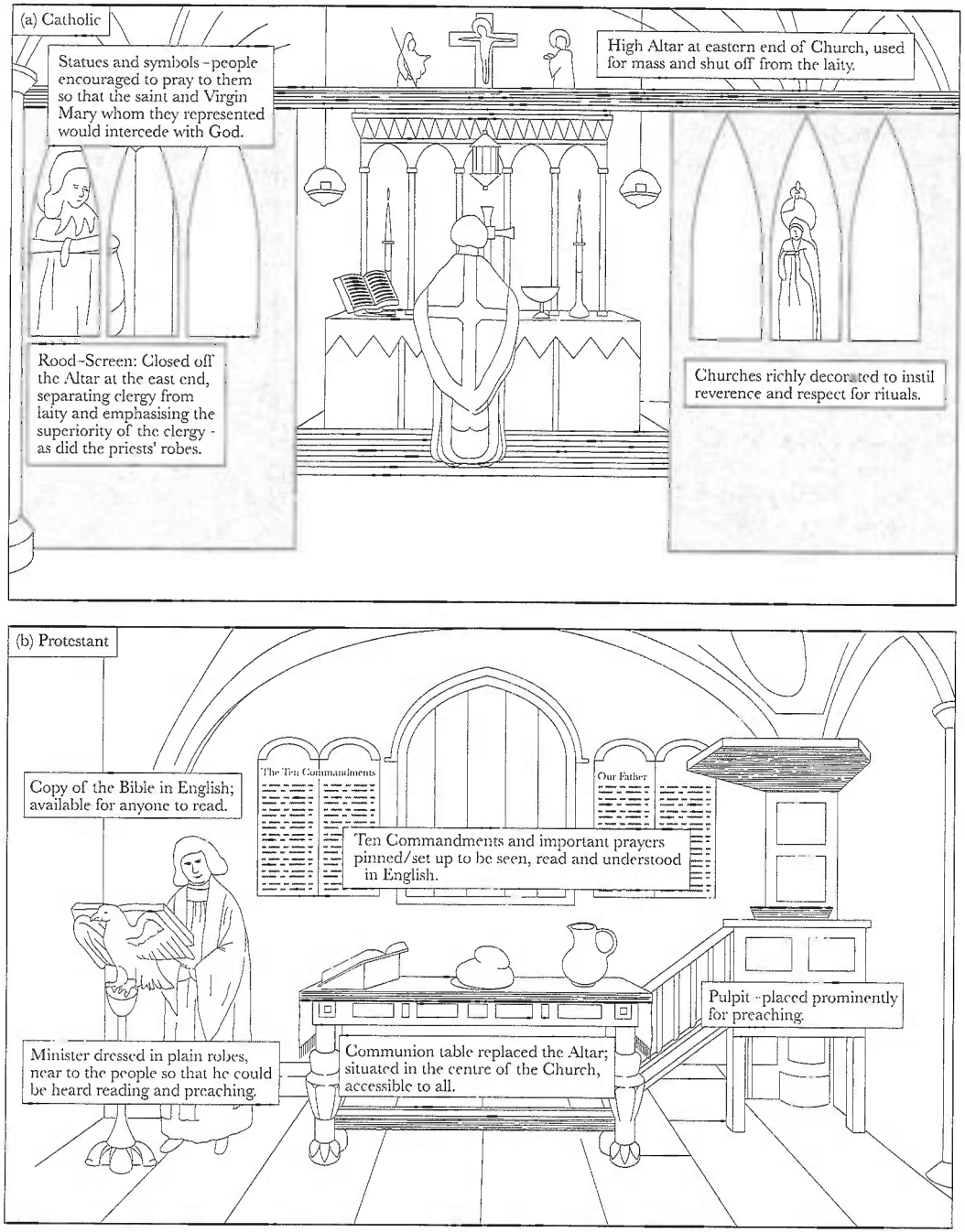


Figure 4 The key differences between Catholic and Protestant ideas.

depended on it were inclined to interpret it for themselves. The result was that Protestant ideas soon began to develop in different ways, and the varied and piecemeal nature of reform in different areas reinforced these differences. By the time of Mary's death, there was considerable variation of opinion on what constituted a 'true' church.

The model favoured by many was that established by the French reformer, John Calvin. Calvin had extended Luther's ideas about salvation to establish the doctrine that some people were predestined to be saved, because they were able to accept the gift of salvation and the disciplined Christianity that went with it. The sign of such **predestination** was the ability to live a godly life and accept the rules of a godly church. The idea that God would exclude some souls from a gift that He granted freely was in some ways illogical, and would be rejected by later religious leaders, but such assurance of salvation did encourage great dedication and commitment among Calvin's followers. The result was that many exiles returned after Mary's death, determined to reform the Church along Calvinist lines. This meant getting rid of all traces of Catholic ceremonies and rituals (see Figure 4) and allowing ministers to concentrate on preaching the Word of God and ensuring that their parishioners lived godly lives (whether or not they wanted to!). In Scotland the reformer John Knox was able to establish a Calvinist system known as Presbyterianism, but in England the reformers came up against a Queen who was more interested in political control and religious peace than in their cherished schemes of reform.

As the daughter of Anne Boleyn, whose marriage to Henry had never been recognised by the Catholic Church, Queen Elizabeth was bound to establish a broadly Protestant form of worship when she came to the throne in 1558. But as a skilful politician she recognised the need for healing and reconciliation in the religion of England. The result was the Elizabethan settlement, and the establishment of an Anglican Church which sought to provide a compromise, a 'middle way' between the Catholic and Protestant extremes. Undeniably Protestant in doctrine, it retained many of the familiar ceremonies and services inherited from the Catholic Church, as well as bishops, whom Elizabeth appointed and controlled and who therefore maintained her authority. It was able to satisfy the needs of most of her subjects but, like most compromises, it left dissatisfied minorities at both ends of the spectrum (see Figure 5).

A minority of English Catholics gave primary loyalty to the Pope; their treason in attempting to replace Elizabeth with the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots and their links with Spain did much to create anti-Catholic feeling in England. More significantly, a Protestant minority was dissatisfied with a half-reformed Church, and sought to

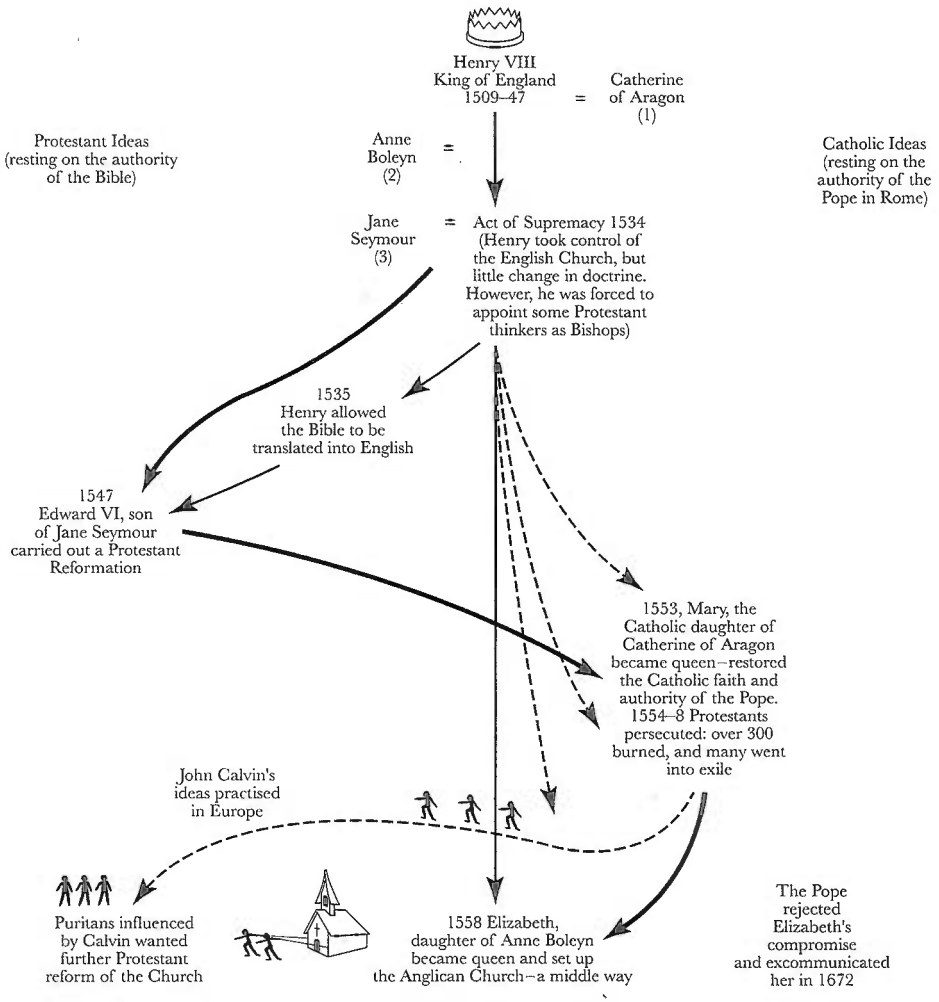


Figure 5 The Tudor pendulum.

persuade or pressurise the Queen into further change. Their desire for further purification of the Church led them to be nicknamed **'Puritans'**. In the 1570s attempts were made to introduce reforms through Parliament, prompting the angry Queen to forbid such discussions and raise political conflict over MPs' rights to free speech. Having lost this battle, Puritan preachers attempted to change the Church from within. Elizabeth, who was determined to maintain the system of bishops as the best method of ensuring her own, royal control, suppressed their meetings and silenced their protests.

The result was that James inherited a legacy of religious divisions across three kingdoms. In Scotland the Presbyterian Church dominated the lowland areas, but a sizeable Catholic minority remained in the Gaelic highlands. In Ireland the majority of the population remained Catholic, and the loss of traditional chieftains encouraged the people to look to Catholic priests as leaders in the community. English control, however, led to the imposition of an Anglican Church as the official Church of Ireland, while Protestant settlers, especially those from Scotland, who settled in Ulster, brought an extreme Protestant or Presbyterian tradition. In England the established Church was Anglican, based on Elizabeth's 'middle way', with a small Catholic minority who remained loyal to the Pope. Within the Church, however, there was a significant movement seeking to achieve further reform.

Q Why would these developments encourage religious confusion and division in England?

Q Define the meaning of Calvinist, Puritan, Presbyterian and Anglican. Explain the main points of difference between them.

JOHN CALVIN (1509–64)

-Profile-

John Calvin was the most influential Protestant reformer after Luther. He established his own church in the city of Geneva. His doctrine became dominant among Protestants in France, Switzerland, Scotland and the Netherlands and to an extent within the early Church of England. It's core was the idea of predestination which claimed that God divided humanity into 'saints' who were predestined to follow the path of true religion and escape sin, and sinners, the 'unregenerate' who were condemned to hell. The sign of sainthood lay in a daily struggle to avoid sin and to carry out God's will in daily life, a struggle that required the discipline and support of a Calvinist Church. These gave great authority to the minister and certain senior members of the congregation (known as elders or presbyters) to control the behaviour and lives of their followers. Only those who were able to accept the restrictions entailed by this discipline could be sure of salvation.

The harshness of this doctrine led it to be first softened (by an implied expansion of the number of possible saints and reduction of the number of irretrievable sinners) and later challenged by other reformers. It also came to be abused by some known as Antinomians, who argued that since they were predestined to heaven by God, they need not fear to sin in their daily life. For most Calvinists, however, the belief that, as long as they genuinely sought a godly life, they could be sure of ultimate victory over sin, was a powerful inspiration. They could serve God in whatever capacity they had – as a merchant or labourer as well as a minister – and any success was evidence of God's approval, as well as enhancing the reputation of God's people. The task was not easy, and it was important that the church to which they had access should support them with good preaching and instruction, and not hinder them by unnecessary and possibly corrupting ceremonies and sacraments. Hence Calvinist enthusiasts required the correct forms and organisation within their church, to reflect doctrine in practice as well as in words.

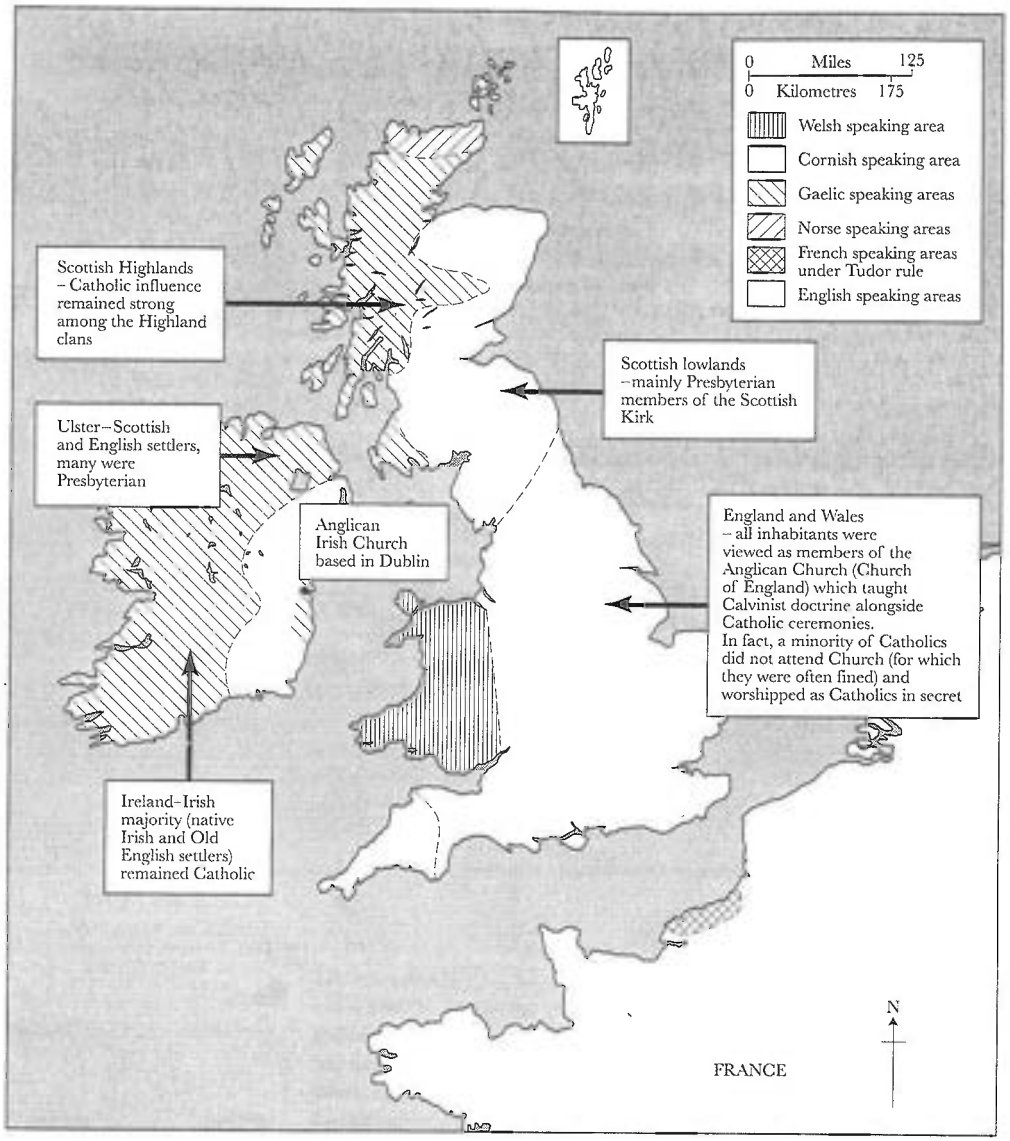


Figure 6 The religious map of Britain.

Why it was so difficult for different churches to coexist peacefully at this time, especially in Britain.

3 Economy, Society and Government

a) Population and Economy

ISSUES
What were the main features of the Stuart economy? How did population changes affect society and government?

The economy of Stuart England depended above all on agriculture. Although some primary industries, such as coal, tin and lead-mining existed, the vast majority of the population relied on farming, and such industry as existed was small-scale and craft-based. Even the cloth industry, the source of England's main export, was organised on a domestic basis, with clothiers delivering the raw fleeces to cottage workers and collecting the finished product at a later date. Most cloth workers were therefore also agricultural labourers or cottagers. Outside London there were few towns of any significant size; with the exception of ports like Bristol and Hull, most were market towns populated by craft workers organised in guilds, and many included sizeable areas devoted to gardens and plots suitable for growing food.

The main factor shaping economic development in early modern Britain was population and, in particular, the long-term rise in population from about 1500 to the mid-seventeenth century. Thereafter the rate of increase slackened and there was probably a slight fall after 1660, followed by a more gradual rise which lasted into the eighteenth century. Population statistics are notoriously difficult to compile for this period, since the records available from parish registers and social commentators are invariably partial and inaccurate. In addition, the detailed studies that have been carried out in particular parishes or regions reveal wide variations, so that overall figures, even when thought to be relatively accurate, can be misleading for any given area. It is therefore not possible to do more than establish general trends and suggest their likely effects over time.

The graphs in Figure 7 illustrate these general patterns and show the likely effect of population change on wages and living standards. After the Black Death of 1349 and the recurrent plagues that followed it, the fall in the population led to a labour shortage and a time of relative prosperity for many ordinary people. High wages and low rents allowed some to purchase their own land and establish themselves as independent **yeomen**.

The sixteenth century saw population recovery turn to rapid rise, bringing price inflation and lower wage levels. For those on fixed or limited incomes there was hardship and poverty. Wage labourers and cottagers suffered most severely, but the great landlords and aristocracy were also affected. Traditionally they leased out land for rent, often on long leases, rather than involving themselves directly in

YEOMEN
A class of independent farmers that emerged in the later Middle Ages between the gentry and the mass of peasants and labourers. Some were able to buy land freehold, that is free of rent, while others rented land from landowners. If they rented 'copyhold' – with a copy of their lease in writing – they were usually secure and able to hold down their rents as long as the lease lasted. Where agreements were unwritten and based on customary rights, their prosperity depended on the attitude of their landlord. These variations explain why some yeomen were able to prosper still further in the sixteenth century, while others faced hardship.

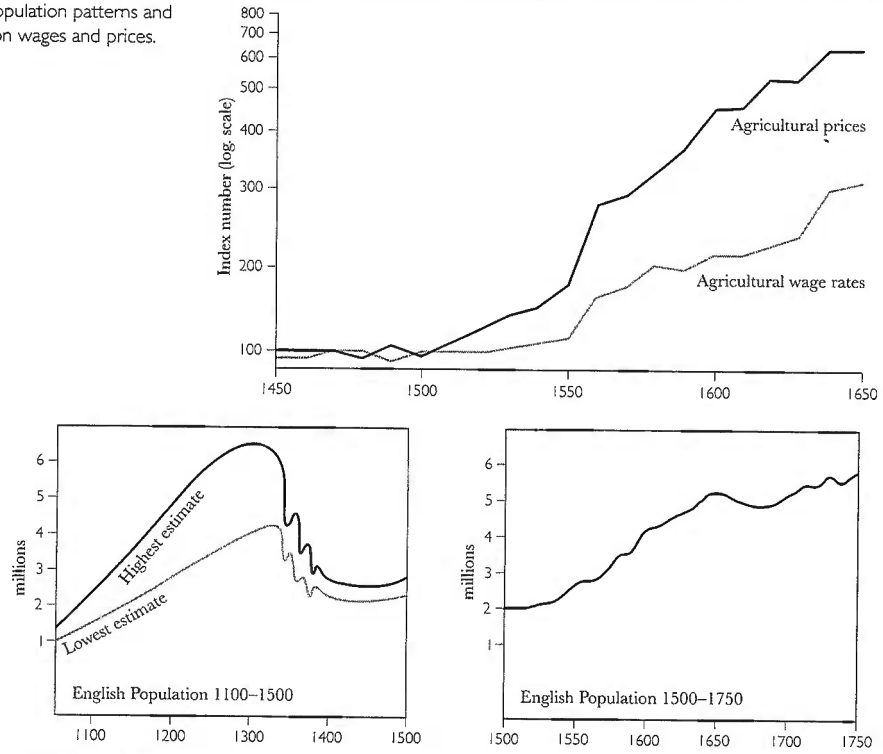


Figure 7 Population patterns and the effects on wages and prices.

POOR LAWS
A series of laws had been passed to punish vagrants and make provision for the needy within their own parishes, and had been drawn together in the Great Poor Law of 1601. Nevertheless, governments remained concerned about social tensions and popular unrest, especially at times of shortage and bad harvests. In addition, unemployment continued to encourage some population mobility, and helped to swell the population, criminal and otherwise, of that magnet for migrants, the city of London.

agricultural management, and they were dependent on the fixed rents that resulted. For those who owned their land freehold, or were able to limit their costs, however, population and price rises presented an opportunity. Food production and profits increased, new land was taken into cultivation, and the growing wool trade encouraged the development of sheep farming as a highly profitable enterprise. Yeomen and merchants were able to grow rich enough to purchase landed estates and move into the ranks of the minor gentry, while the minor gentry, who also managed their estates themselves rather than renting out their lands, were able to increase their wealth and status within the governing class. At the same time, some of the independent peasantry slipped into the class of wage labourers, while unemployment reduced a growing section of the labour force to the status of paupers. Ultimately, the rise in population produced a growing gap between rich and poor, and associated problems of vagrancy and popular unrest. By 1603, when James became king, the worst problems of vagrancy and unemployment had been brought under control by the Poor Laws.

b) Society and Government

i) The King and his Powers

The inheritance that James took up in 1603 was therefore a complex arrangement of partly unified kingdoms, each with its distinctive culture, religious structure and government institutions. His original kingdom, Scotland, had its Parliament in Edinburgh, a Church Assembly, and a Scottish **Privy Council** which advised the King and supervised government in his absence. The Scottish legal system was, and remained, different from that of England. Ireland was ruled as conquered territory, with a Lord Deputy to govern in the King's name and its own Parliament meeting in Dublin. As the largest and wealthiest of the kingdoms, England provided the dominant political culture. It was a personal monarchy, governed by a King with the help of a Privy Council, a system of law courts, and occasional meetings of the governing class in Parliament. Sources A and B describe his powers

PRIVY COUNCIL
The King's private council of advisers, who met regularly to discuss decisions and supervise how they were carried out. As a private council, it was entirely dependent on the King for its membership and the source of its power.

ACTIVITY

The king distributes his authority and power in the fashion of five things: in the making of laws and ordinances; in the making of battle and peace with foreign nations; in providing of money for the maintenance of himself and defence against his enemies; in choosing and election of the chief officers and magistrates; and fifthly, in the administration of justice. The first and third are done by the prince [king] in Parliament. The second and fourth by the prince [king] himself. The fifth is by the great assize [law courts].

Source A From *De Republica Anglorum*, Sir Thomas Smith 1583.

The King's power is double, ordinary and absolute... That of the ordinary is for... particular subjects, for the execution of civil justice, and this is exercised by equity and justice in ordinary courts, and is known as common law, and these laws cannot be changed without Parliament. The absolute power of the king is...that which is applied to the general benefit of the people, and this power is most properly named policy and government. This absolute power varies according to the wisdom of the king for the common good; and these being general...all things done within these rules are lawful.

Source B From *The Judgement of Chief Baron Fleming in Bates' Case, 1606.*

Questions on Sources A and B

1. What powers did the King exercise according to Source A?
2. What limits were placed on the King's 'ordinary' power?
3. In what circumstances did the King's 'absolute' power apply?
4. Who would you expect to decide when circumstances were appropriate for the King's 'absolute' power to apply?

ELITE
Describes a group of people with particularly high status. It can refer to social class, political power, or particular skills and talents such as an intellectual elite. Seventeenth-century England was governed by a ruling elite whose status was based on both social position (normally as substantial landowners) and their role in government.

PREROGATIVE
The King's personal power, as opposed to power dependent on law. It allowed him to take action and make decisions without reference to written laws or Parliaments, and could only be exercised by the King himself or anyone who was deputising for him, such as a privy councillor.

How did the structure of government outlined in Figure 8 concentrate power into the hands of the King?

ii) The Structure of Government

The Privy Council contained the King's closest advisers, the heads of major government departments, representatives of the greater nobility, and the monarch's personal favourites. As well as advising the King, its functions included the supervision of central administration and local government. Local government was carried out by Justices of the Peace who were appointed by the King and Council with the help of a county Lord Lieutenant who usually came from one of the leading county families. JPs were appointed from the ranks of gentry in the county, and from wealthy citizens or a merchant **elite** in towns and boroughs. Thus the system of local government represented a social as well as a political elite; their offices were unpaid, but carried considerable prestige and influence in the community, and were therefore highly prized. These arrangements are outlined in Figure 8.

Central administration consisted of major government departments such as the Treasury, but also of central Law Courts. The Court of King's Bench dealt with criminal cases, while the Court of Common Pleas covered civil law. Both drew on the common law, a mixture of custom and precedent, royal proclamations, and statute law made in Parliament. Judges were appointed and dismissed at the King's discretion, giving him considerable control over their interpretation of law. In addition, previous monarchs had developed a number of **prerogative** law courts, whose authority came directly from the King himself. Staffed by privy councillors acting directly in the King's name, they were widely respected for their rapid decisions which were not influenced by local interests and pressures. They did, however, favour the King's interests, and could cause resentment as a result.

Control was also exercised through the institution of the Church, of which the monarch was head. Bishops were appointed by the King, and could be relied upon to support his wishes in the House of Lords as well as in the administration of the Church. Most importantly, announcements and instructions from the pulpit reached into every town and village in a way that no other form of communication could achieve. Its teaching of deference, obedience to authority and loyalty to the monarch reinforced royal power and protected the social and political hierarchy on which it depended – in modern terms it provided a controlled media and an unrivalled propaganda machine.

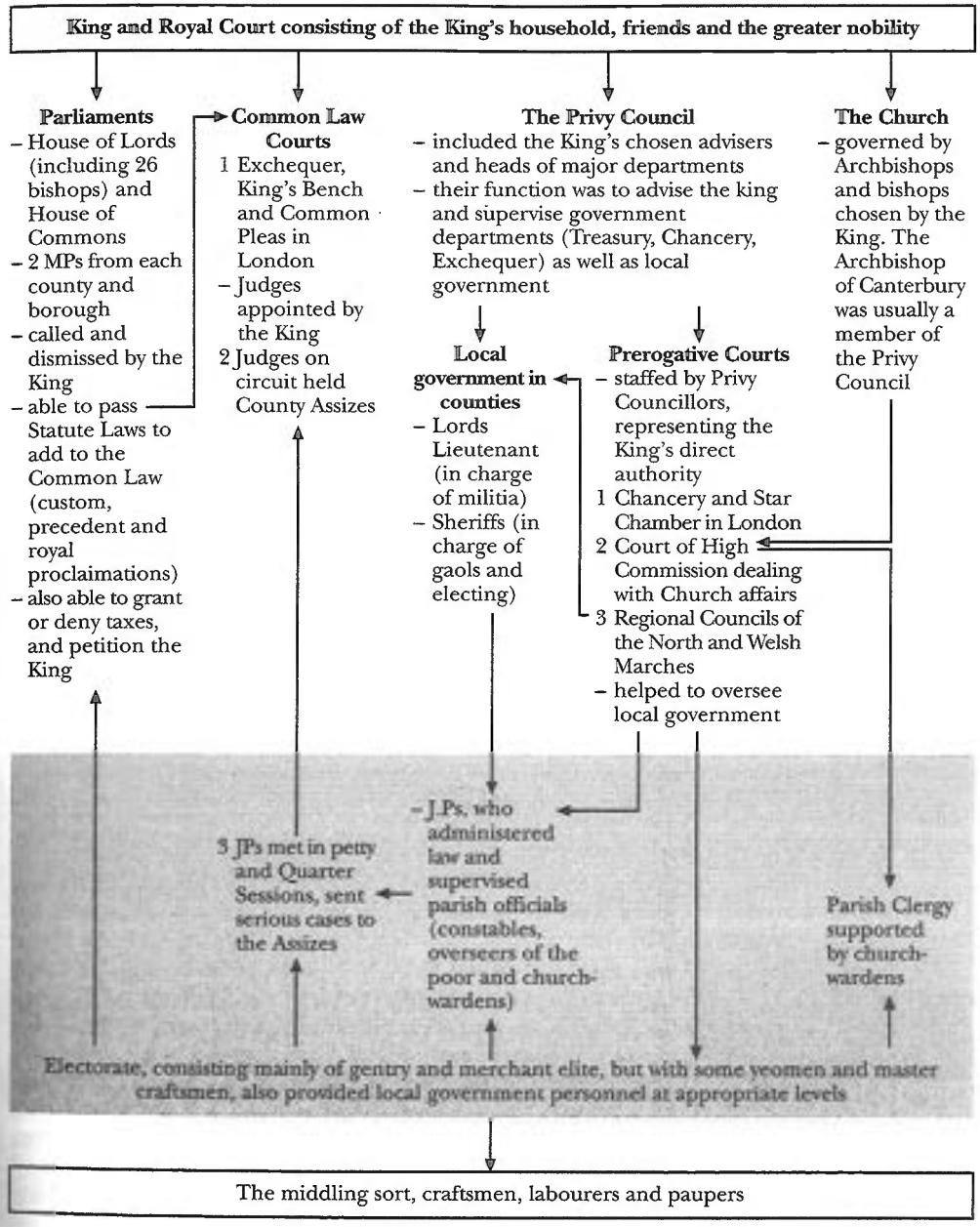


Figure 8 The structure of government and the governing class.

ACTIVITY

Almighty God hath created and appointed all things in heaven, earth, and waters in a most excellent and perfect order .... Every degree of people in their vocation, calling and office hath appointed to them their duty and order; some are in high degree, 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 other: so in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God.

Source C From an Elizabethan Homily; read in churches and widely taught to children.

Question on Source C

1. How would the ideas in Source C help to reinforce royal authority?

PATRONAGE
A system of influence in which a patron uses a position of power and influence to help and encourage individuals in an inferior position in return for their respect or support.

FACTIONS
The seventeenth century equivalent of political parties, but much smaller, and based on personal relationships more than on political beliefs. They gathered around influential figures at Court and created a rivalry for power that was linked to personalities and personal ambitions and only by chance to attitudes and beliefs. A skilful political figure could greatly increase his influence by working with, or manipulating other factions, while a skilful monarch could use his control of patronage to balance factions for his own purposes.

iii) The Importance of Patronage

Government worked through a system of **patronage** that emanated from the King and operated through the royal Court. The Court encompassed both government offices and the King's personal household. It was therefore both the pinnacle of the social hierarchy and the centre of political influence. The key to power, position and wealth was access to the King, and this could come through a position in the royal household, such as Gentleman of the Bedchamber, or through an administrative post such as Lord Treasurer or Secretary of State. Most offices were unpaid, but provided opportunities for profit and for royal gifts and grants. By virtue of their birth and social position, the greater nobility expected to hold such posts and exercise power, but kings also appointed talented advisers of humbler birth, and granted them lands and titles to raise them to the appropriate status. The nobility acted as a vital link between central government and the local communities. They expected to be leading figures in their county communities, and ambitious men could apply to them for an introduction or a position at Court. If they could grant it, their own status was enhanced, and in return they expected support from their clients in Parliament, in county affairs and in Court politics. The result was the formation of Court **factions**, which were also linked to regional and local interests through the power and prestige of the nobility within them. The regional power base of factional leaders served to enhance their position with the King, while their ability to persuade the King to offer posts and positions to their clients strengthened their local connections. The system operated to oil the machinery of government, and if skilfully manipulated by the monarch, enhanced his or her control over the social and political hierarchy.

THE ESSEX REBELLION: A FAILURE OF PATRONAGE

-Profile-

Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (1566–1601), painted by Marcus Gheeraerts

The importance of manipulating patronage effectively was shown towards the end of Elizabeth's reign in the rebellion led by the Earl of Essex in 1601. Essex had come to the Court as the stepson of Elizabeth's friend and favourite, the Earl of Leicester, and when Leicester died he became the leader of those who favoured extending the war against Spain to include a land campaign. He was opposed by the Cecils – Elizabeth's chief adviser, William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, and his son Robert – mainly on financial grounds. Elizabeth agreed with the Cecils, and although she favoured Essex in the courtly games at which such a handsome young man excelled, she denied him any real power.

Essex was unable to gain seats on the Privy Council for his allies, or positions for his clients. Instead, the Cecils gained a stranglehold on appointments, and blocked the progress of even such talented members of the Essex faction as Francis Bacon, later Lord Chancellor. Bacon, among others, deserted his patron, and Essex displayed such petulance towards the Queen that she boxed his ears. In reply he went for his sword, and had to be forcibly restrained. While many of his problems were the result of his own arrogance, Essex drew some support from those who resented the power of the Cecils.

In 1599 Elizabeth gave him a chance to show his talents and to reward his friends by appointing him to command her armies in Ireland. Essex squandered the opportunity, and when he returned to Court, Elizabeth refused to see him. In February 1601 he attempted to seize London, failed, and was executed for treason. Nevertheless, the revolt reflected widespread discontent among the nobility; although the Earls of Rutland, Southampton, Bedford and Sussex, as well as Lords Mountjoy, Sandys and Cromwell were implicated with Essex, none was brought to trial. This weakness reflected Elizabeth's political isolation and failure to distribute patronage with the sure touch that she had previously displayed.

iv) The Function and Powers of Parliament

ISSUE
What part did parliaments play in government?

While the Church, Privy Council and prerogative courts represented royal power, the functions of Parliament were more complex. It was controlled by the monarch, who called and dissolved parliaments when he chose and who exercised considerable direct influence over the Lords in the Upper House. The functions of Parliament were to advise the King, grant taxation, and to turn royal decisions into legal statutes, the highest form of law. Edward I had first called representatives of the knights and 'commons' to join the nobility in the 'parlement' (meeting) of his Great Council in 1297, in order to gain their support for royal taxation. Over the centuries the regular meeting, procedures and composition of parliament had gradually

taken shape according to the needs of the monarchy. Its primary function was therefore to support and enhance royal power. At the same time, however, MPs represented the communities who elected them, and stood for the **rule of law** and the liberties of the subject. They provided an opportunity for the expression of public opinion and symbolised the legal limits of royal power, but they were neither permanent, nor a necessary part of daily government.

RULE OF LAW
The idea that law made by the King in Parliament is supreme and must be accepted by Kings as well as subjects. It therefore guaranteed subjects rights as well as regal authority. While it was accepted that Kings made the law and could change it, the rule of law meant that they could not simply ignore it at their convenience.

MPs represented the county elites described above, being elected mainly by the gentry and merchants with some of the better 'middling sort' of yeomanry and master craftsmen. Most were amateurs, called occasionally, and for short periods only, to represent the views of their friends and neighbours, although a few might well be office-holders favoured by the Privy Council. As such, they had neither the ability nor the desire to take positive measures or formulate policies, and attempts by any minority to use Parliament in this way, such as the Puritan reformers of Elizabeth's reign, were both ineffective and short-lived. Their powers were largely negative, in refusing to formalise or finance the King's decisions, but they could, and sometimes did, limit or restrain his exercise of power. In addition, it was assumed that the King should govern within the law, and that law at its highest was made in and with Parliament. Just as efficient administration depended on a partnership of the monarchy and governing class through the medium of patronage, its legal and financial framework required that partnership to work in Parliament.

ISSUE
Were parliaments becoming more powerful and assertive in this period?

A number of historians have argued that the power and independence of Parliament, and of the House of Commons in particular, had increased during the sixteenth century. This was the result of growing wealth and of the Reformation of the 1530s, in which Henry VIII seized control of the Church and its very extensive assets (including about one-third of the country's farming land) using parliamentary legislation to ensure that the changes were legally enforceable. Not only had this process encouraged the development of parliamentary procedures and experience, it had also allowed Parliament to legislate concerning religion, the succession to the throne and the monarch's powers. Above all, it ensured that future changes would also have to be made through Parliament, significantly increasing its importance.

The Reformation also brought Protestant ideas to England, with religious, social and political consequences. Protestant ideas emphasised the importance of Bible-reading, and therefore literacy. Combined with the increasing reliance on educated laymen to fill government posts once held by priests, this resulted in a larger, more powerful, more confident and articulate gentry, who dominated the House of Commons. Some of them held strong religious views, which they were determined to express. Religious quarrels also

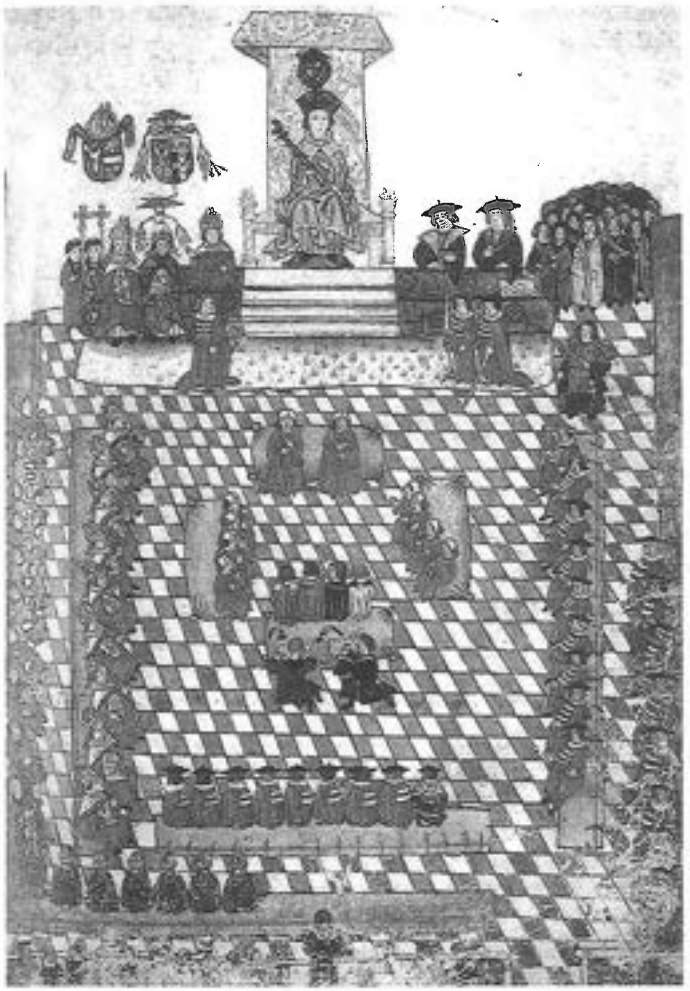


Figure 9 Henry VIII opening Parliament in 1519. The size of the figures is intended to reflect their relative importance; hence the King, Councillors and Archbishops are shown as larger than the other Lords, whilst the Commons are standing as small figures in the top corner.

became important in defining political factions among the nobility, and the existence of Parliament encouraged such factions to play out their rivalries there as well as, more traditionally, at Court. The Catholic Counter-Reformation and the influence of Catholic Spain created intense religious fears, and Queen Elizabeth's refusal to eradicate all traces of Catholicism from the new Church of England led some MPs to try to bring in reform through Parliament. The Queen forbade such discussions, raising issues related to MPs' right to free speech, as the following extract from a

statement read in the House of Commons by Lord Keeper Puckering indicates:

> For liberty of speech her Majesty commandeth me to tell you that to say yea or no to bills, God forbid that any man should be restrained or afraid to answer according to his best liking, with some short declaration of his reason therein, and therein to have a free voice, which is the very true liberty of the House; not, as some suppose, to speak there of all causes as him listeth, and to frame a form of religion or a state of government as to their idle brains shall seem meetest. She saith no king fit for his state will suffer such absurdities, and ... she hopeth no man here longeth so much for his ruin as that he mindeth to make such a peril to his own safety.

ACTIVITY

The extract above was from a statement read in the House of Commons by Lord Keeper Puckering in 1593. MPs had been discussing a Bill for reform of the Church, and when forbidden to do so, had claimed a traditional right to free speech.

1. Explain in your own words what Elizabeth meant by the phrases that are underlined.
2. What kind of free speech does it seem she was prepared to allow?
3. How did this differ from what MPs were trying to do?

MONOPOLY RIGHTS

Monopoly rights refer to the practice of granting a royal charter declaring that a particular group of merchants had the sole right to produce or import a particular commodity. This was sometimes justified to protect new trades or industries but, more often, they were simply ways of gaining money for the Crown, since the merchants usually paid handsomely for their privilege. Monopolies were highly unpopular, since they usually caused a rise in prices and a decline in quality.

Parliament's influence was also increased by the Crown's financial problems. These increased the need for additional taxation which only Parliament could grant. To some extent the financial problems were the result of a rising population and inflation across Europe, but they were made worse by the frequency and expense of warfare. Elizabeth attempted to control expenditure by avoiding war, but Spanish interference eventually made this impossible. Nevertheless, the political pressures made her reluctant to increase taxation even by updating assessments in line with inflation. Instead, she sold Crown lands worth £800,000, underpaid her officials and resorted to financial expedients such as the sale of **monopoly rights** – passing on to James an outdated tax system, a debt of £100,000, and a good deal of parliamentary irritation on the subject of finance.

Recent historical research has led to a number of these arguments being challenged. Historians have pointed out that Elizabeth successfully resisted attempts to reform the Church through Parliament, and imprisoned the MPs who abused their right to free speech. Since she called only thirteen parliaments in her reign, she was clearly able to govern effectively without them, despite her financial problems. Nevertheless, her attempts to do so added to the financial problems

faced by her successors, and the later years of her reign provide evidence of considerable annoyance among MPs regarding both finance and the Church. It could perhaps be argued that Elizabeth controlled any tendency for Parliament to overstep its traditional bounds because she knew how to operate the governing partnership with a combination of firmness and tact. In her old age, when her political skills were weakening, there were signs of the friction that could develop if the partnership came to be handled less effectively. The situation could be illustrated by the monopolies incident of 1601. The Queen had been granting monopoly patents on a considerable

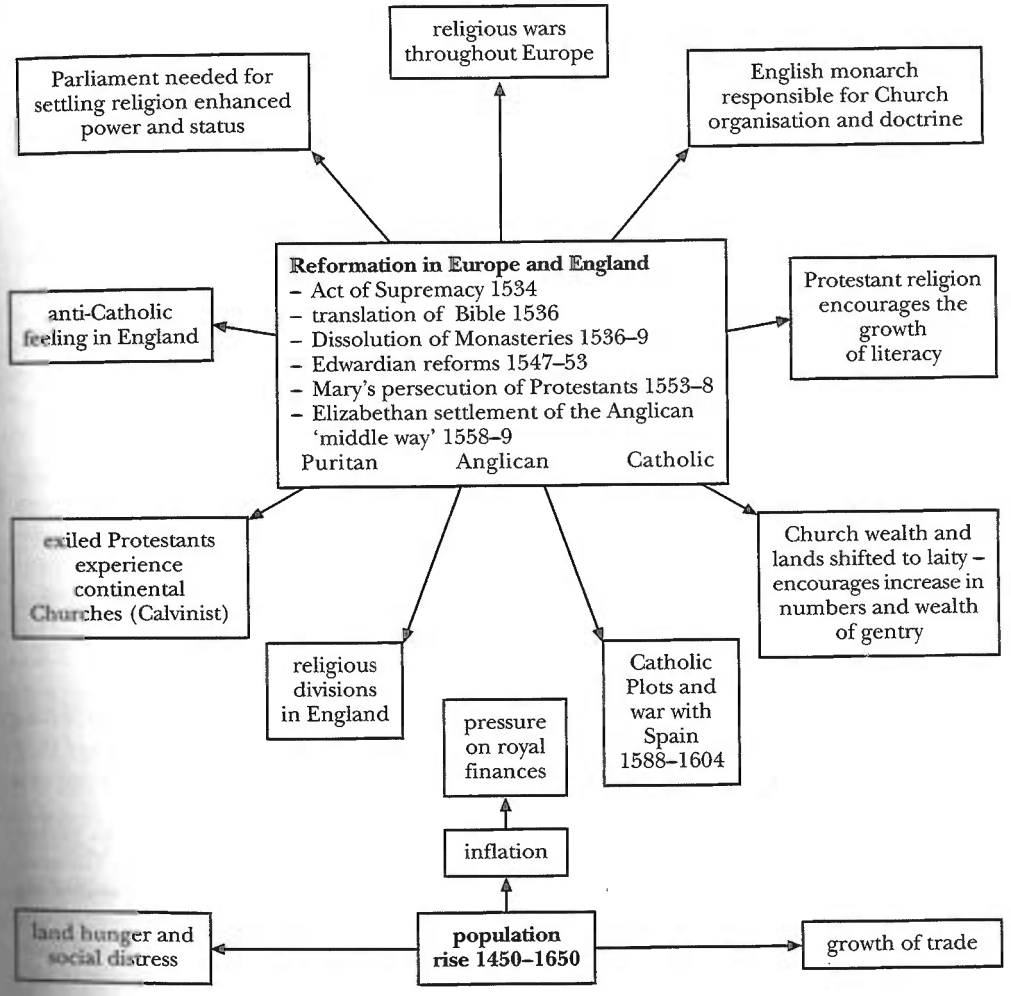


Figure 10 The Tudor legacy.

scale, and by 1601 complaints were mounting. Angry MPs threatened to refuse a grant of taxes unless the Queen agreed to withdraw many patents. Making a virtue of necessity, she came to Parliament and promised compliance with such grace and generosity that the crisis became a triumph. Under pressure, she was still able to exhibit the political skill required to make the Tudor system work.

The Tudor legacy to James was therefore mixed. On the one hand, he inherited a strong monarchy, a stable society and a fund of political and religious loyalty. At the same time, he inherited an expensive war, financial problems and political and religious tensions. The evolution of British government would depend on how these problems were dealt with by James and his successors.

Working on the Tudor Legacy

You do not need to remember the events described in this chapter in detail, but it will help you later on if you clearly understand the concepts and ideas that are explained here. The exercises below are intended to help you think about some of them. The primary purpose of this introduction is to give you a working knowledge of how Britain was governed in 1603, so that you can begin to examine how it changed in the years that followed. This might be approached by using four key questions to draw together and synthesise your ideas about the issues defined alongside the text above:

1. Who held the power to govern?
2. What skills were needed to make this power effective?
3. Why were religious issues so important and so divisive?
4. What problems would the system pose for a new king in 1603?

Before trying to answer these questions, you need to find some ways of organising the information contained in the chapter so that you can select what you need from it. One approach is to make notes; making notes helps you to remember what you have read and gives you a record of key points that you can use later for revision. In this case, however, you are primarily concerned with concepts and their practical implications, so some approaches that focus on exploring ideas may be useful.

One way is to use sources. The chapter text includes certain source extracts, which illustrate particular issues and ideas. The questions included alongside them should have helped you to analyse the key features of government that they referred to. However, by considering them together, cross-referencing between them, and interpreting them in the context of the wider awareness that you have

gained from reading the chapter, you can clarify your understanding of the problems and resources that James inherited.

EXERCISE 1: QUESTIONS ON SOURCES

1. Read Sources A and B on page 17.
   (a) In what ways do they differ in describing royal power?
   (b) Do they disagree about anything?
   (c) Can the apparent disagreements be explained?
   (d) Can you see any potential problems arising from them?
   (e) Using both sources, explain the nature and extent of royal power.
2. Read Source C and the source on page 24.
   (a) Sources A and B do not specifically describe the monarch's powers in religion. How would Elizabeth justify her claim that she, not Parliament, controlled the organisation and doctrine of the Church?
   (b) Using Source C and the source on page 24 together, explain her attitude towards the attempts by MPs to debate religion and reform the Church.
   (c) Using these sources supported by your wider knowledge, explain why religion was such an important political issue in this period.
   (d) Using all the sources interpreted in the context of your wider knowledge, explain what problems the nature of government in 1603 might create for a new monarch.

EXERCISE 2: USING DIAGRAMS

Another approach is to use diagrams, as you have already been asked to do on page 18. Diagrams are particularly helpful in showing how different aspects of a situation affect one another, and in illustrating causal or sequential relationships. Diagrams can include timelines, flow charts and spider diagrams, for example. One approach is to summarise what you have read in diagrammatic form (the chapter includes some examples for you to consider). Equally useful is the reverse process – to interpret and explain a diagram in words. These techniques can be used to address question 4 above.

(a) Using the Tudor Legacy diagram in Figure 10 and the information included in this chapter, describe the problems facing the monarchy in Britain in 1603. You may find it helpful to arrange your answer in four sections, headed:

- Religious Divisions;
- Monarchy and Parliament;
- Finance and Administration;
- Governing Three Kingdoms.