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Derek Hirst. *England in Conflict 1603-1660.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. vii + 359 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-340-74144-3.

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Derek Hirst has produced a worthy successor to his important survey volume, *Authority and Conflict 1603-1658*. It is a sophisticated work and one which on the whole succeeds in presenting a clear narrative history of the period. One approaches all second editions with some degree of scepticism about the extent of new research and its incorporation into the text, but from the outset Hirst reassures the reader. Importantly, the anomalous ending of *Authority and Conflict*, 1658, is replaced by a continuation until just before the Restoration in 1660. This provides greater balance and removes the necessity of the reader scurrying back to the library to discover the final political and military machinations which led to the arrival of Charles II on English soil. Hirst also displays a mastery of weaving recent scholarship on the 'three kingdoms' into the narrative. Indeed there is no doubt that his analysis of the late 1630s and early 1640s owes much to these works and his skill here is demonstrated by acknowledging that events in Ireland, and more so, Scotland, did influence what occurred in England. Hirst manages to achieve this without falling into the trap of attempting to accord equal weight to the events in all three kingdoms. He acknowledges with a refreshing degree of honesty (encapsulated in the title) that the book is a history of England and that 'many aspects of England's story bore scant reference to Scotland and Ireland' (p.vi).

Hirst opens the book with a thematic structure much expanded from its predecessor. He incorporates many of the themes which have rightly come to prominence in the last twenty years – the importance of the localities, the role of women, education and family life. This approach is to be applauded but it occasionally sits awkwardly in what is essentially a political history of the period. For example, why is witchcraft accorded as much space as the discussion on central courts? The difficulty lies in performing a balancing act between the incorporation of social, cultural and women's history within a centralized structure of a high political narrative. And if one adopts this approach then what of the impact of print culture, literature, propaganda and science, to name but a few? These interdisciplinary questions need to be addressed and Hirst is to be praised for drawing some of these subjects to the attention of the reader.

Having disposed of the thematic structure, Hirst then produces a lucid and compelling narrative of the political history of England. James VI and I emerges in a more sympathetic light than he did in *Authority and Conflict*, and the book is better balanced for it. Hirst stylishly weaves Court scandals, government financial woes and economic adventures into the story while allowing the problems faced by early modern monarchs to remain at the forefront. In this his handling of the long-neglected

period of 1610-1620 becomes required reading for anyone who seeks an effective overview of the decade. Hirst is less sure, and somewhat dismissive (at least in length), of the last few years of James's reign, but the strength of the narrative reasserts itself with Charles. He is particularly strong on the character of the new king and rightly notes both his incalcitrance and his refusal to see that his policies alienated substantial sections of the governing class. Hirst discounts much of the revisionist scholarship on the 1630s and presents a strong case that 'time after time the king affronted the cardinal political principle of reciprocity' (p.142). This forms the crux of Hirst's argument that when parliament was called in 1640, MPs and the governing class felt they could no longer trust Charles.

It is in telling the story from 1640 until 1660 that Hirst's writing is at its most clear and powerful. Presenting a readable narrative of the events of these years has defeated many a historian and even those who disagree with the interpretations of the author on the role of the King, Cromwell or the New Model Army will find valuable and rewarding insights. In particular he succeeds in illuminating the factional battles between the Presbyterians and Independents in the mid 1640s and in providing a vivid picture of how Parliament came to the decision to put the King on trial. Hirst's coverage of the 1650s is equally laudable and he draws together disparate and often seemingly impenetrable research to provide an up-to-date picture of the decade. This, like his analysis of the 1610s, is a must read.

In lavishing this praise I am left with one particular lingering doubt –who is the intended audience of this book? It seems to fall awkwardly between a general survey for undergraduates and a more detailed political analysis which graduates and academics will refer to often. The greatest blame for this must be laid at the door of the publishers who, as Hirst acknowledges, did not allow any footnotes. The book cries out for them, and the provision of a bibliographical essay, while useful, provides little recompense. I am not suggesting that it should copy the format of a scholarly monograph, but to expect undergraduates and incoming graduates to understand the complexity of the debates Hirst presents without providing scholarly references is a baffling omission – a point equally true of some of the quotations from less than obvious sources. Perhaps, given the lack of footnotes, Hirst should have re-thought the policy of not introducing the names of historians in the text. Although this can often detract from the narrative, it is possible, as Mark Nicholls has recently shown in *The Two Kingdoms* (Oxford, 1999), to weave this into a flowing style. In saying this, however, Hirst's second edition deserves to adorn the bookshelves of academics and students; not only that, but to be read by them as well. The research is meticulous, the synthesis of recent historiography is impressive, and it is admirably clear and precise. It is a work which I will continue to recommend to both students and early modern colleagues and one which I will often take down from my own shelves.

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