

State Papers Online: Eighteenth Century, 1714-1782, Part One: State Papers Domestic, Military, Naval, Scotland, Ireland and the Registers of the Privy Council

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Various source media, State Papers Online



What part did politics and the state play in the central narratives and questions of eighteenth-century Britain? This was the society that, in remaking itself, transformed human potential, providing a crucial spur to modernity. How far are politics and the state part of the story? The 'long eighteenth century', the period, at least in international relations, from the overthrow of James II (and VII of Scotland), in the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9, to the final defeat, at Waterloo in 1815, of Napoleon's attempt to remould Europe, was an age of major changes, each of which was to be of great significance for the human condition. The Industrial Revolution, at once both reality and concept, is the most apparent, but it led a charge of revolutions in Britain that included transformations in agriculture and transport. Meanwhile, on the world scale, Britain became the leading imperial and naval power, the dominant force on the oceans by the end of 1759, as well as, by 1815, in South Asia, the West Indies, and the Mediterranean.

The American Revolution, which broke out in 1775, represented a crisis, and in 1783 George III was obliged to accept a peace settlement in which, aside for accepting the independence of the thirteen colonies which became the basis of the modern USA, there were territorial losses to France and Spain, including Florida. Nevertheless, even in 1782-3, Britain remained the most powerful Western maritime power, a key capability that underwrote much of what is covered in the State Papers as a whole, and one that is covered by Richard Harding in his essay here on the State Papers Naval^[1]. As he shows, State Papers Naval is a significant collection because it contains papers that found their way to the Secretaries of State and because it provides the best single collection for developing an

understanding of major naval commands and operations during this period. In his second discussion on State Papers Military, Harding notes that the correspondence sent by the Secretary at War to the Secretaries of State in Series SP41 are the matters that went beyond the routine. Again, both decision-making and the information important to decision-making are the focus of attention.

A close reading of State Papers, both Domestic and Foreign, captures the anxiety and anxieties of the period, not least to the extent to which rumour circulated. Government acted as a clearing house for information, a system fed by reports sent in, by officials and others, and also by requests for information.

At home, as William Gibson shows in his essay on the reigns of George I and George II^[2], British society faced serious issues. State Papers Domestic frequently relate to crime and unrest, with particular attention devoted to Jacobite activities and rumours about such activities. At the same time, British society was transformed into one that was, by the standards of the age, especially open to the free expression and dissemination of new ideas. These new ideas proved the seedbed for a range of new subjects for discourse and discovery and of new intellectual strategies, notably economics, geology and sociology. These ideas and strategies were potent with the power of the future and risking analysis in terms of inevitability and teleology, as well as muddling cause and effect. Aside from those problems, there is the issue of where this account, and these questions, leave both foreign policy and also the domestic politics of Britain, and, more especially, the details of both that are revealed in State Papers? Are they of any consequence? Or, instead, are they topics to be treated essentially as of interest to a former generation of

scholars, but now of less concern because of their allegedly limited relevance.

It is not easy to draw a direct line from particular episodes in government activity, foreign policy and domestic politics, to Britain's rise to greatness in the long eighteenth century. At times, when focusing on questions of domestic stability and war and peace, and notably of the Jacobite Challenge in 1745-6 and of territorial expansion, especially in North America, the West Indies and India in 1758-65, it is, indeed, possible to make such connections. These connections are most pertinent if set in a general context of the significance and consequences for Britain's development both of foreign policy and of domestic politics. Andrew Thompson focuses in his essay on a series that provides a key link between these topics, covering 1716 to 1755, State Papers Regencies (SP 43). This series contains the correspondence between officials made necessary by the absences of George I and George II in Hanover. As such, it throws light on government, foreign policy, and ministerial politics. State Papers Regencies frequently captures the fast-moving nature of crises, and the excitement and fear involved. This was certainly the case in 1745 as the Jacobites prepared to invade. The news of the fall of Ghent to French forces led William, Earl of Harrington, the Secretary of State with George in Hanover to write to Thomas, Duke of Newcastle, his counterpart in London, about the need to prevent an embarkation from the French coast^[3]. As the crisis mounted, Newcastle was ordered to prepare transports to bring over to England the troops of the Duke of Cumberland's army, then in Belgium. Newcastle had already pressed for the return of George from Hanover^[4]. It is clear from State Papers Regencies that the government was looking to its

security before news of the landing of Bonnie Prince Charlie (Charles Edward Stuart) arrived, and the vital military move, the transfer of troops from the Continent, was already being prepared.

State Papers Regencies also record the operation of the Anglo-Hanoverian relationship. Thus, in 1723, Townshend's correspondence with Newcastle from Hanover recorded his attempt to influence Hanoverian politics, for example to manage Christian Ulrich von Hardenberg, the new leading Hanoverian minister^[5]. The nature of patronage was also captured in the correspondence. Thus, a letter from Townshend to Sir Robert Walpole revealing the interrelationship between patronage and politics indicates the extent to which the latter, in this case, was a matter of the commitment and manoeuvring of prominent Whigs. Townshend made clear his rivalry with John, Lord Carteret, his co-Secretary of State, and his own dependence on Walpole's skill:

'I make no doubt but Lord Carteret and his emissaries have taken care to set forth the Church preferments as the effect of his superior interest here; but I do assure you that his credit with the King [George II], as well as that of his friend Bernstorff is fallen so low, that unless some new mine should be sprung at the Göhrde [hunting palace] (of which I see no probability) he is without resource on this side the water. But by some discourse I have had with him I find he has great hopes from [Earl] Cadogan and [the Duke of] Roxburgh's being able to form a party in England. He often insinuates that people who think themselves in danger will act offensively as defensively; but the Duchess [of Kendal, George's partner] bids me tell you that as we have kept everything here in better order than could be expected; she depends on you for setting matters right

in England; towards which nothing can contribute more than the endeavouring to gain Lord Berkeley and Lord Chancellor and cultivating the present good dispositions of the bishop of London, Lord Lechmere and Sir Peter King; though I think it will be very hard to find anything proper for the last¹⁶¹.

In turn, such political issues direct attention to linkages, causal or permissive, between the factors in British stability and development, notably between preconditions, precipitants and events; or what (sometimes controversially) can be divided into these categories. Each of them leave evidence in this collection. Connections across type of history and across the eighteenth century as a whole are therefore at issue, and this provides a background to what is covered in the State Papers. To take the connections across time first, the British state and empire faced a number of serious crises in 1688-1815. In turn, the circumstances in which each was faced were, at least in part, a product of the resolution of earlier difficulties. That point provides what might seem a somewhat limp, even passive, account of the diachronic dynamic, the causal relationship across time. Nevertheless, such a relationship, of options opened and others closed, is of significance and leaves a considerable legacy in the archives. So also was the extent to which this relationship included the setting, resetting and settling of mental attitudes, all of which leave significant evidence in this collection. Indeed, what would more recently be termed "strategic culture" was of great significance in providing a belief in the necessity to give force and effect to a sense of the possible. Strategic culture is a concept based on the importance of general beliefs, attitudes and behaviour patterns that were integral to the politics of power and that provided the

context within which military tasks were shaped. In part, the recovered memory of the past was important in setting goals, although politics and polemic about the current situation both played a major role in this process. For example, the Jacobite threat, a major theme, explicit or implicit, in State Papers Domestic, Regencies, Military, Naval, Scotland and Ireland, was understood in terms of the experience of the past as well as anxieties in the present and about the future. Normative assumptions thus took (and take) on meaning, both in history and as a result of history. This helps explain the major role Henry, Viscount Bolingbroke, a key Tory politician and thinker, took in the 1730s in presenting an account of the national past, and also why his arguments were challenged. Indeed, Whig-Tory contention over recent and earlier history was a leading feature of the culture of print, one that extended to other forms, including plays and sermons.

State Papers Regencies contains much on foreign policy, which, indeed, was the key topic in the correspondence between the Secretary of State accompanying the King to Hanover and his counterpart left at home. Thus, in 1725, there were the tensions caused by the developing international crisis, in 1729 the question of possible conflict with Spain, and in 1735 of how Britain was to respond to the War of the Polish succession. Moreover, State Papers Regencies provides a context for the development of attitudes to Britain's place in the world. Most obviously, the conviction of an imperial destiny for Britain, and notably of inevitable naval and trans-oceanic struggle for mastery with the Bourbons (France and Spain), a conviction that was to be so important in the Seven Years' War (1756-63), but also thereafter, in practice owed much to the developments of 1714-55. Indeed, this link between

these developments and the Seven Years' War helps give significance to the often obscure politics and diplomacy of the period, which are greatly clarified by State Papers Regencies, as well as by the material on policy seen in State Papers Naval and Military.

Britain was actually allied to France from 1716 to 1731, an alliance Spain joined in 1729. Yet, within a decade, Britain and Spain were at war, the War of Jenkins' Ear, declared by Britain in October 1739. Moreover, the British ministry had to contemplate the possibility of French intervention in that struggle, a possibility that appeared particularly acute in 1740. In the event, and for different reasons, notably the impact of a crisis in Continental Europe, hostilities between Britain and France began only in 1743, and war between them was declared only in 1744. Conflict with both Spain and France lasted until 1748. If the idea of linked wars is helpful, these conflicts can be joined to those of the Seven Years' War. Thus, 1739 was the beginning of a grave, but episodic, crisis that lasted until the Peace of Paris of 1763, one amply covered in the State Papers. As these reveal, foreign policy and domestic politics were closely linked in a crisis focused on the prospect of French support for a Jacobite rebellion. Given that the key element in Britain's rise to global power was the struggle with the Bourbon empires (France and Spain), this collapse of the attempt to work together and the move instead to confrontation (from 1731 with France, and from 1733 with Spain), and then to conflict, was a crucial development in Britain's history. This development, moreover, was certainly seen as crucial by contemporaries.

As the three states were the three leading naval and trans-oceanic powers in the world, these years were also of major significance for world history. Britain won

the naval conflict so that, by 1763, and again by 1815, there was no real 'multipolarity' in the Western system at sea, to employ a concept understood in the period, even if the term was not. Therefore, there was a clear leadership for Britain as a trans-oceanic imperial power. This situation impacted greatly on the rest of the world, and, notably, on India from the mid- eighteenth century, and on China from the 1830s. This theme, of great-power confrontation and imperial rise, can be approached in a number of ways, which, again, explains the importance of the State Papers. It is possible to put the stress on systemic factors, namely the idea of immutable factors in the international system, combined with a discussion of Britain in terms of national exceptionalism, both leading to inevitable progress. An emphasis on what is termed systemic factors in international relations might simply seem an anachronism bred of more recent concepts of these relations, from geopolitics on; but this is not the case. Instead, the idea of systemic factors proved attractive to eighteenth-century commentators who, as the State Papers reveal, thought, spoke and wrote, in terms of a balance of power and of the related concept of natural interests for particular states. However, there were major differences between assessments of the balance as descriptive and/or naturally occurring, or as normative and, therefore, requiring action. The last was at play in the early 1740s as commentators, notably in Britain, pressed for action against an allegedly over-mighty France. This led to George II leading an army into battle at Dettingen in 1743, the last time a British monarch took the field. State Papers Regencies provide much information on the campaigning and diplomacy of this year, and also on the diplomacy of 1741 and 1743. As concepts and a discourse, the balance of power and natural interests, both also found in the State Papers

Foreign^[7], proved valuable to contemporaries seeking to understand their world, and has a use for modern commentators eager to shape the international relations of the period for analysis. However, in contrast to the systemic approach offered by these concepts, it is possible to put varying degrees of emphasis on the short-term, the contingent, and the incessant impact of a context of uncertainties and counterfactuals. These elements appear more apparent if the focus is on the details of foreign policy, as also for international relations and domestic politics. State Papers Regencies makes uncertainty a key element. Thus, in 1725, ministerial correspondence has the net effect of a crisis of uncertainty about intentions, capabilities and the effect of change, combined with a strong strain of bellicosity^[8]. As a result of this engagement with detail, this series, with its necessary use of a chronological organisation for the individual categories of documents, offers both a methodology and a conceptualisation that encourages a qualifying of the systemic approach. Qualification, however, does not mean that the latter element is absent, as State Papers indicates. Moreover, to take the concept forward, a different structural account appears possible in terms of a system focused on such uncertainty. In working in the State Papers, it is necessary to work broadly, a process helped by this online publication. It is often the case that readers do not appreciate that letters from a given official may appear in a series other than that for which he was formally responsible.

Turning to connections across types of history leads to a stress on the political basis for the British Industrial Revolution, with politics understood as foreign as well as domestic policy. More particularly, an appreciation of the major role of trade in economic change results in

a consideration of the politics, both domestic and diplomatic, of trade. As a related theme, fiscal elements come to the fore, as the availability of plentiful credit, at low rates of interest, linked foreign policy, government borrowing, private investment, and domestic politics. Taxation also provided an aspect of the equation, not least as low rates both kept liquidity in the economy and helped lessen political tension in Britain. Peace was very important for the security of trade and for insurance rates. Domestic stability and foreign policy played key roles in political economy. Different analyses, however, can be, and were, offered. On the one hand, Britain's avoidance, of war, from the negotiation of peace with Spain in 1720 until the outbreak of war with her in 1739, and of direct participation in conflict in Continental Europe until 1743, greatly helped prevent upward pressure on the national debt which had already risen substantially due to the protracted warfare of 1689-97 and 1702-13. In addition, avoiding war kept interest rates and taxes low, and certainly lower than in years of conflict. Moreover the situation contrasted with the Continent where, in the period covered by this series, France was involved in war from 1733 to 1735 and from 1741, Austria from 1733 to 1735, 1737 to 1739, and from 1740, Spain from 1733 to 1735 and from 1739, and Russia from 1733 to 1735, 1736 to 1739, and 1741 to 1743. In Britain links between peace and easier, safer and better trade were observed and noted, and not only when Bourbon attacks on British commerce were an issue. Thus, on 24 June 1727, the London Journal, a leading ministerial newspaper, claimed 'The export of our woollen manufactures for Spain increases daily'. This item may have been intended to reassure the manufacturers of woollen cloth who feared the decline of their trade. Nevertheless, in contrast to this approach and its

stress on the value of peace, a different narrative of the relationship between foreign policy and economic growth would focus on the benefits of imperial territorial expansion and naval mastery, and thus the significance of conflict with the Bourbons. The gain of areas for British trade, for both imports and exports, becomes significant in this account, as does damage to the commercial systems of rival powers. From this perspective, foreign policy is of great importance as leading to such conflict. The warfare of 1739-48, which is extensively covered in State Papers Regencies, Naval and Military, provided a prelude and practice for the greater conflict of 1754-63, for it was in 1754 that fighting in what was to become the Seven Years' War began. Thus, two approaches towards trade, power and politics, each of considerable weight, can be offered, which help explain the significance of the available documents of debates over policy during the period and also more recent divisions in scholarly analysis.

Another basis for British growth was that of political strength, more especially the question of political stability. This, again, is a theme linked to foreign policy because a key challenge to this stability was offered by the Jacobite threat, a threat that was most significant if supported by hostile foreign powers. The challenge was magnified in the case of Scotland and Ireland, both centres of Jacobite activity, as the difficult suppression of Jacobitism in 1689-1719 had demonstrated Daniel Szechi, in his essay here on Scotland and Ireland in the eighteenth century, indicates the more general problems of managing Scotland and Ireland and shows how the relevant series, State Papers Scotland and State Papers Ireland, suggest that there was no inevitability about the development of Britain in this period. The security situation was clearly linked to the

prospect of foreign intervention. In 1729, General Wade, the Commander in Scotland, wrote from Dalnacardock in the Highlands to Thomas, Duke of Newcastle, the Secretary of State then in Scotland:

'though the Jacobites are more numerous here than in any other part of His Majesty's dominions, by the present disposition of the forces it seems to me impracticable for them to give any disturbance to the government unless supported by troops from abroad'^[9].

There is also valuable material on the public response to Jacobitism. Thus, on 18 September 1745, as the threat posed by Charles Edward Stuart escalated, Charles Areskine wrote from Dumfries to John, 4th Marquess of Tweeddale, the Secretary of State for Scotland:

'The body of the people in this country where I am, and in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, are extremely hearty in the common cause, but without arms, without officers, and without advice of any kind from any of the officers of the Crown, as if government for some time had fallen into an apoplectick fit'^[10].

Domestic politics and foreign policy thus come into play. They provide the basis for explaining the consolidation of the Revolution Settlement, the constitutional and political system created as a result of the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9, not least consolidation in the absence of a renewed Jacobite challenge, which was the situation in the 1720s and 1730s. Political stability, of course, involved more than the defeat of Jacobitism. It also reflected national acceptance of election results, political decisions without significant unrest, a topic that can be charted in State Papers Domestic, and the monarch being willing to understand, and work with, the logic of parliamentary monarchy, a development that can be followed in State Papers Regencies. At the same time, the thwarting, and eventual defeat, of Jacobitism was a crucial element, not least as a precondition of these

other factors. Foreign policy was of great importance as the context for the struggle with Jacobitism and also as a significant element in the developing national consciousness. The interaction of state and nation saw foreign policy in play in both the content and theme of public politics. The State Papers emerge as a crucial historical source.

NOTES

^[1] See Richard Harding's essay below, 'State Papers Naval (1714-1782)' *State Papers Online: Eighteenth Century, 1714-1782*, Cengage Learning EMEA Ltd, 2013

^[2] See below William Gibson, 'The Reigns of George I (1714-27) and George II (1727-60)', *State Papers Online: Eighteenth Century, 1714-1782*, Cengage Learning EMEA Ltd, 2013

^[3] Harrington to Newcastle, 20 July 1745, NA. SP 43/36.

^[4] NA. SP 43/36-7.

^[5] Townshend to Newcastle, 27 Nov. 1723, NA. SP 43/5 f. 282.

^[6] Townshend to Walpole, 5 Oct. 1723, NA. SP 43/5 ff. 111-12.

^[7] See *State Papers Online; Eighteenth Century, 1714-1782, Parts 2,3 and 4* (forthcoming)

^[8] Townshend to Newcastle, 11 Sept., 2 Oct. 1725, NA. SP 43/7 ff. 10, 145-6.

^[9] Wade to Newcastle, 29 Aug. 1729, NA. SP 54/19.

^[10] Areskine to Tweeddale, 18 Sept. 1745, NA. SP 54/26 f. 90.

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