

## INTRODUCTION to PART ONE

Dr Stephen Alford, University of Cambridge

Parts One and Two of *State Papers Online* give us practically all the sources we need to investigate the government of the Tudor kings and queens in microscopic detail. Never before have students and their teachers been able to inspect the archives that formed the backbone of the Tudor state so carefully and so easily. Here is Tudor government stripped bare, exposed in all its fabulous richness and subtlety.

The Tudor century was one of rapid, profound and irreversible change. Society was turned upside down by tectonic shifts in politics and religion. The kingdoms left behind by Queen Elizabeth I in 1603 were transformed from those ruled by her father in 1509, though for nearly ninety years the same problems arose over and over again: wars and entanglements with foreign powers, the controversies about religious worship, the difficult politics of royal succession, fears of rebellion and invasion, the tested loyalties of the crown's subjects. For a society that, as Matthew Clark shows us in his essay, prided itself on a careful and settled order, this was bewildering – yet we have to say that the Tudors coped remarkably well with what was, in all kinds of ways, little short of a revolution in many aspects of life in the sixteenth century. Still, great and rapid change often felt profoundly uncomfortable at the time.

It was a society of order and degree. Natural metaphors sprung easily to the minds of writers and theorists: society was a body, of which the king was head and his subjects the limbs; or perhaps, as Edmund Dudley had it in 1509, it was a tree, with roots, a firm trunk, branches, and fruit. Both metaphors reflected an essential truth, that everyone in the commonwealth of Tudor society, rich or poor, from titled nobleman to a prosperous farmer, was bound to one another by an organic bond of loyalty to God and to the crown. The interests of God, crown and society were inseparable: after all, the king or queen was God's lieutenant on earth, His direct representative in the governance of His people. It was far from an accident that in the coronation oath a Tudor king or queen swore to hold to people, law and church.

Tudor society was by no means simple. On the face of it, there was a neat hierarchy of ranks and degrees in society, a clear social order: but we know that economic pressures nibbled away at many social assumptions, so much so that Tudor writers and moralists fretted about their society being turned upside down. We find the same neat thinking about Tudor monarchy -- profound and mystical, kings unbound and unlimited in authority, anointed with holy oils at their coronations -- expressed by Shakespeare's King Richard II:

Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord. [*Richard II*, III.2.54-57]

Yet the Tudor kings and queens were challenged by rebellions, particularly when, like Henry VIII or Edward VI, they

seemed intent on destroying the Church. And one queen of Tudor blood, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, was executed in 1587 on the orders of a fellow anointed monarch, Elizabeth I. So, as Shakespeare's Richard found to his cost, life for kings was not so straightforward after all. But probably the Tudors knew this from the beginning. Henry VII, who got the throne by force from Richard III in 1485, understood the power of dynastic imagery and iconography, in stone, paint, print and propaganda. The power of propaganda, as John Cooper shows so well in his essay, was understood by all the Tudors.

It is impossible to say precisely when the revolution began, much less to suggest a year: historians can rarely afford to be that exact. Yet perhaps we can say that some of the seeds were sown in the later years of the 1520s, when King Henry VIII began to feel anxious about the legitimate male succession to his throne – and of course also to fall in love with Anne Boleyn. Richard Rex tells the story in fascinating detail. What is striking is how profoundly life changed even for ordinary people in the twenty years between 1520 and 1540: the monasteries and other religious houses gone, the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church denounced, the 'empire' of England proclaimed by Henry VIII; and with these enormous changes came many of the instruments and controls we associate with a modern state – tough laws against treason and conspiracy, the blurring of the boundary between private conscience and loyalty to the crown, and the careful oversight by the royal bureaucracy of the king's subjects.

So much of this revolution can be traced in wonderful detail through *State Papers Online*, from the appraisal and dissolution of the kingdom's religious houses to the plans for laws to break with the Church of Rome. Treason and suspicion in the 1530s have left behind them some rich sources which give us the inside story of Henry VIII's reign. We can read the papers of Cardinal Wolsey, whose career is sketched for us by David Grummitt. The papers of Wolsey's powerful successor, Thomas Cromwell, also survive: if Wolsey dominated King Henry's policy in the 1520s, then Cromwell was as influential in the king's affairs in the following decade. On all of these sources for the years between 1509 and 1547 Amanda Bevan's essay is indispensable.

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Historians have to look upon their sources with critical and appraising eyes. Rarely are manuscripts objects of unalloyed purity. Most of the original documents we read in *State Papers Online* were the everyday working papers of the royal government. Many were written quickly according to set forms and procedures and without great ceremony. Some are immensely valuable on their own and tell us a great deal about Tudor society: others communicate to us the fact of life that running a government can be a dull business. But even the dullest document can tell a story, and we have to be alive to it: Who wrote it? Why did they write it? Who read it? Whose handwriting can we see in the margin? How was it sent out? How long did it take to get from the royal palace of Greenwich to the Council of the North in York?

In reading *State Papers Online* we face too some intriguing matters of organisation. The wonderful thing about the resource you are reading is that it brings together documents which, though now in different archives in diverse collections and archives, once belonged together. If we want to understand the sheer scale of Tudor government – what

it could do and how it recorded its own activities – we have to re-integrate the archives: that is, to apprehend something of how these papers they were filed, arranged and used by the people who produced them.

Here it can help, oddly enough, to work backwards, and to understand something of the Victorian archivists who took the great piles of paper and parchment in the Tower of London and in private collections of families and archives and arranged them into the archives we use today. The Victorians' catalogues and calendars are indispensable, however much we need to read the original manuscripts. Indeed these calendars and calendars are important historical documents in their own right. For a century and a half they have been the keys to the State Papers. They also tell us a good deal about what the Victorians believed was important in the sources they read, and we can compare their summaries of documents to what we might choose to write today. Indeed we can do that easily enough by comparing the Victorian work of Robert Lemon to the modern calendars for the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I edited by Charles Knighton. Dr Knighton's essay on the calendars must be read by anyone who wants to understand why the State Papers are arranged as they are today.

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So we can thank the tireless Victorians, rarely daunted by enormous projects and undertakings, for the State Papers as we have them today. But we must not forget the councillors, secretaries and clerks of Tudor government who left us the manuscripts in the first place. They bequeathed a truly vast archive.

Some men stand out. Thomas Wolsey, Cardinal and Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII, is one: Thomas Cromwell is another. The careers of both men were fairly short. Wolsey was the pre-eminent power after the king for about fifteen years, Cromwell ten. In a career five times as long as Cromwell's, the great force behind Tudor government in the second half of the sixteenth century was Sir William Cecil, later first Baron of Burghley. Stephen Alford sketches this career in a short essay.

For a time in the sixteenth century, Cecil's personal papers are difficult to disentangle from the State Papers. There was no especial distinction at the time, other than between 'public' and 'private' business in the affairs of the crown – between, say, letters to military officers and justices of the peace in the counties and the petitions of private subjects to the queen or her Privy Council. Cecil, Elizabeth's Principal Secretary, kept government papers in his rooms in the royal palaces between which the queen was always moving and in the studies of his own private houses. Doubtless Wolsey and Cromwell had done just the same. This is one of the reasons why some of the Tudor State Papers survive in The National Archives at Kew and some in the private family collection of the Cecils at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, as Stephen Alford shows in his essay on the archives for the years 1547 to 1603.

The career of William Cecil gives us a number of barometric readings for the Tudor century. As a young man new to politics and government, he served the radical regime of King Edward VI, the boy-king whose kingship was used to promote change and Reformation far beyond what Henry VIII had attempted. The reign of Edward saw the end of

Catholic worship in England and Ireland (at least officially) and the introduction of the first Book of Common Prayer. Edward was seen by his councillors and courtiers as a second King Josiah: an Old Testament king sent by God to bring 'true' religion to the people. This Edwardian Reformation was thrown into sharp reverse by Edward's eldest half-sister Mary, an uncompromising Catholic. For eleven years two Tudor monarchs and their advisors engineered a double revolution, first away from the Church of Rome and then back to the Catholic fold. Cecil, the barometer, was close to one government and then for a time out in the cold. But in 1558, at the accession of Queen Elizabeth I, he was very much back at the heart of government and politics.

For Elizabeth's reign we can appreciate the richness, and also the vastness, of the State Papers. At times the sheer amount of detail is overwhelming. If we want to know how many armed men the county of Shropshire could provide to resist invasion, it is not hard to find it. If we wish to know how many men and women of Lancashire refused to attend Prayer Book services in their parish churches, a paper somewhere in the collection will tell us. Equally, intricate negotiations with foreign powers are set out in diplomats' letters to the Queen and her Council, and plans for war and defence are given in policy papers written by Elizabeth's closest advisers. Elizabethan society and government, politics and religion, are laid bare in the State Papers kept by Lord Burghley and his successors and other Tudor officials. The amazing thing is that we can say very much the same kind of thing for the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary.

By the mature years of Elizabeth's reign it was important, even critical, for the royal government to know what was going on at home and abroad. Anxieties about the royal succession, fears of foreign invasion by Spain and rebellion at home concentrated the minds of Elizabeth's advisers. If Henry VIII had extended the powers of the crown so effectively – if the Tudor monarchs, excepting Mary, refused to acknowledge any authority on earth but their own – all of this came with an anxious burden of eternal vigilance. If the Tudor state grew, and if its growth can be measured in good part by the sheer number of documents in the State Papers, then it was for the reasons of protection and defence in a world they believed to be so dangerous. This is one of the fascinating tensions of the Tudor century, and we can see it – almost feel it – in the State Papers: as Neil Younger has sketched, this was a state tied by habit to old ways of doing business but which had to change to survive.

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*State Papers Online* is a project on a vast scale. It is a fitting continuation of the work of the great Victorian archivists who, for all their faults, gave us the archives we use today. They may have been rather too rigorous in squeezing all the papers they read into neat categories and tidy volumes; in separating documents that belonged, and today still belong, together; in misdating or misunderstanding some of the sources they read. But they rescued papers from mice and damp and gave them order. If today we have to use our skills as historians to read and use these documents as they were once read and used by Tudor officials, then perhaps that is not such a bad use of our time. *State Papers Online* gives us just what we need to learn and practise those skills. For everything we can learn about the Tudor century, the effort is worth it.

We stand on generations of insight and scholarship. *State Papers Online* is a living and growing archive which will allow many hundreds of scholars, each with their own fields of knowledge and expertise, to add to our understanding of this fascinating and revealing archive.

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