

BRITAIN YESTERDAY & TODAY

1830 to the Present

SIXTH EDITION



Walter L. Arnstein

Britain Yesterday and Today

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University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign

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A HISTORY OF ENGLAND

General Editor: Lacey Baldwin Smith

THE MAKING OF ENGLAND 55 B C to 1399

C. Warren Hollister

University of California, Santa Barbara

THIS REALM OF ENGLAND 1399 to 1688

Lacey Baldwin Smith

Northwestern University

THE AGE OF ARISTOCRACY 1688 to 1830

William B. Willcox

Walter L. Arnstein

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

BRITAIN YESTERDAY AND TODAY:

1830 to the Present

Walter L. Arnstein

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

To Charlotte

Foreword

Carl Becker once complained that everybody knows the job of the historian is "to discover and set forth the 'facts' of history." The facts, it is often said, speak for themselves. The businessman talks about hard facts, the statistician refers to cold facts, the lawyer is eloquent about the facts of the case, and the historian, who deals with the incontrovertible facts of life and death, is called a very lucky fellow. Those who speak so confidently about the historian's craft are generally not historians themselves; they are readers of textbooks that more often than not are mere recordings of vital information and listings of dull generalizations. It is not surprising, then, that historians' reputations have suffered; they have become known as peddlers of facts and chroniclers who say, "This is what happened." The shorter the historical survey, the more textbook writers are likely to assume godlike detachment, spurning the minor tragedies and daily comedies of humanity and immortalizing the rise and fall of civilizations, the clash of economic and social forces, and the deeds of titans. Anglo-Saxon warriors were sick with fear when Viking "swift sea-kings" swept down on England to plunder, rape, and kill, but historians dispassionately note that the Norse invasions were a good thing; they allowed the kingdom of Wessex to unite and "liberate" the island in the name of Saxon and Christian defense against heathen marauders. Nimbly the chronicler moves from the indisputable fact that Henry VIII annulled his marriage with Catherine of Aragon and wedded Anne Boleyn to the confident assertion that this helped produce the Reformation in England. The result is sublime but emasculated history. Her subjects wept when Good Queen Bess died, but historians merely comment that she had lived her allotted three score years and ten. British soldiers rotted by the thousands in the trenches of the First World War, but the terror and agony of that holocaust are lost in the dehumanized statistic that 750,000 British troops died in the four years of war.

In a brief history of even one "tight little island," the chronology of events must of necessity predominate; but if these four volumes are in any way fresh and new, it is because their authors have tried by artistry to step beyond the usual confines of a textbook and to conjure up something of the drama of politics, of the wealth of personalities, and even of the pettiness, as well as the greatness, of human motivation. The price paid will be obvious to anyone seeking total coverage. There is relatively little in these pages on literature, the fine arts, or philosophy, except as they throw light upon the uniqueness of English history. On the other hand, the complexities, the uncertainties, the endless variations, and above all the accidents that bedevil the design of human events—these are the very

stuff of which history is made and the "truths" that this series seeks to elucidate and preserve. Moreover, the flavor of each volume varies according to the tastes of its author. Sometimes the emphasis is political, sometimes economic or social; but always the presentation is impressionistic—shading, underscoring, or highlighting to achieve an image that will be more than a bare outline and will recapture something of the smell and temper of the past.

Even though each book was conceived and executed as an entity capable of standing by itself, the four volumes were designed as a unit. They tell the story of how a small and insignificant outpost of the Roman Empire hesitantly, and not always heroically, evolved into the nation that has probably produced and disseminated more ideas and institutions, both good and bad, than any state since Athens. Our hope is that these volumes will appeal both individually, to those interested in a balanced portrait of particular segments of English history, and collectively, to those who seek the majestic sweep of the story of a people whose activities have been wonderfully rich, exciting, and varied. In this spirit this series was originally written and has now been revised for a fifth time, not only to keep pace with new scholarship but, equally important, to keep it fresh and thought-provoking to a world becoming both more nostalgic and more impatient of its past.

Lacey Baldwin Smith

Preface

This book is the product of thirty-four years of teaching courses—at Roosevelt University, Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign—that surveyed the history of modern Britain. More distantly, it reflects the influence of my own teachers, among them Professor Emeritus Oscar I. Janowsky of the City College of New York and the late Professors Herman Ausubel and J. Bartlett Brebner of Columbia University. More immediately, it is the product of much—if never quite enough—reading of relevant books, articles, and reviews; of impressions gathered during several lengthy sojourns in the British Isles since 1956; and of the imaginative suggestions of Professor Lacey Baldwin Smith.

The decision to produce a second, a third, a fourth, a fifth, and now a sixth edition has allowed me to correct factual errors, to rethink and to rephrase numerous paragraphs and chapter subsections, and to retitling and rearrange several chapters. I have also taken into account the explosion of historical work in various facets of the social and economic history of Victorian Britain and in numerous aspects of twentieth-century history generally, for which the relevant cabinet and personal papers were closed to researchers until recently.

For the sixth edition, I have rewritten sections dealing with numerous topics throughout the volume, ranging from the changing roles of women to popular culture, from the implications of the Irish Famine to the conduct of the Crimean War, and from Britain's involvement in World War I to the British role in the origins of the Cold War, which in the 1990s is fading from the international scene as rapidly as it came to dominate it during the 1940s. I have expanded Chapter 22 to encompass the whole of the Margaret Thatcher era and to introduce the prime ministership of John Major.

The book rests on the assumption that, even in the final years of the twentieth century, students may still benefit from reading the national history of a political and geographical entity other than the one to which they belong. The framework remains chronological, and political history retains a significant, but by no means predominant, place. Social and economic developments are clarified by charts, tables, and photographs as well as by words, and political and diplomatic events are enlivened by cartoons. Analogies drawn from American history are deliberately included. The volume may therefore serve as an appropriate companion to the student of English literature or as a guide to the tourist wishing to put places and events into context. The completely revised bibliography is

intended to provide interested students with sources in which they may learn more about virtually every theme, event, or person mentioned in the book. The aim has been to provide balance without excluding controversy. The names and dates of modern British history are not in dispute, but interpretations often conflict, and I have made no attempt to disguise that fact.

I am in debt to the late Professor William B. Willcox of Yale University, Professor Emeritus Charles Mullett of the University of Missouri, the late Professor Robert Zegger of Northeastern Illinois State University, and Professor Jean Reeder Smith of Northwestern University for their suggestions. Two University of Illinois colleagues made helpful comments: Professor Paul W. Schroeder on Chapters 4 and 6, and Professor Richard W. Burkhardt on Chapter 5. Dr. Alan E. O'Day of the Polytechnic of North London provided useful suggestions on Chapter 9. Professor R.J.Q. Adams of Texas A & M University and Professor Marjorie Morgan of Southern Illinois University (Carbondale) both read the fifth edition with care and made helpful recommendations that were incorporated into the sixth. Dr. Prudence Ann Moylan and Dr. Randall E. McGowen aided me with the second and third editions while serving as University of Illinois graduate research assistants. In comparable fashion Dr. James Filkins assisted with the fourth edition, Dr. Chet DeFonso with the fifth, and Dr. John Beeler with the sixth.

During that long-ago era before computers and word processors, my wife did much of the typing for the original edition and spotted many a fuzzy thought and long-winded sentence. Prior to proofreading the most recent editions, she made numerous useful suggestions, including the reminder that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Scottish experience differed significantly on occasion from that of other parts of the United Kingdom. In appropriate if utterly conventional fashion, however, I take full responsibility for what ultimately appears on the printed page.

W. L. A.

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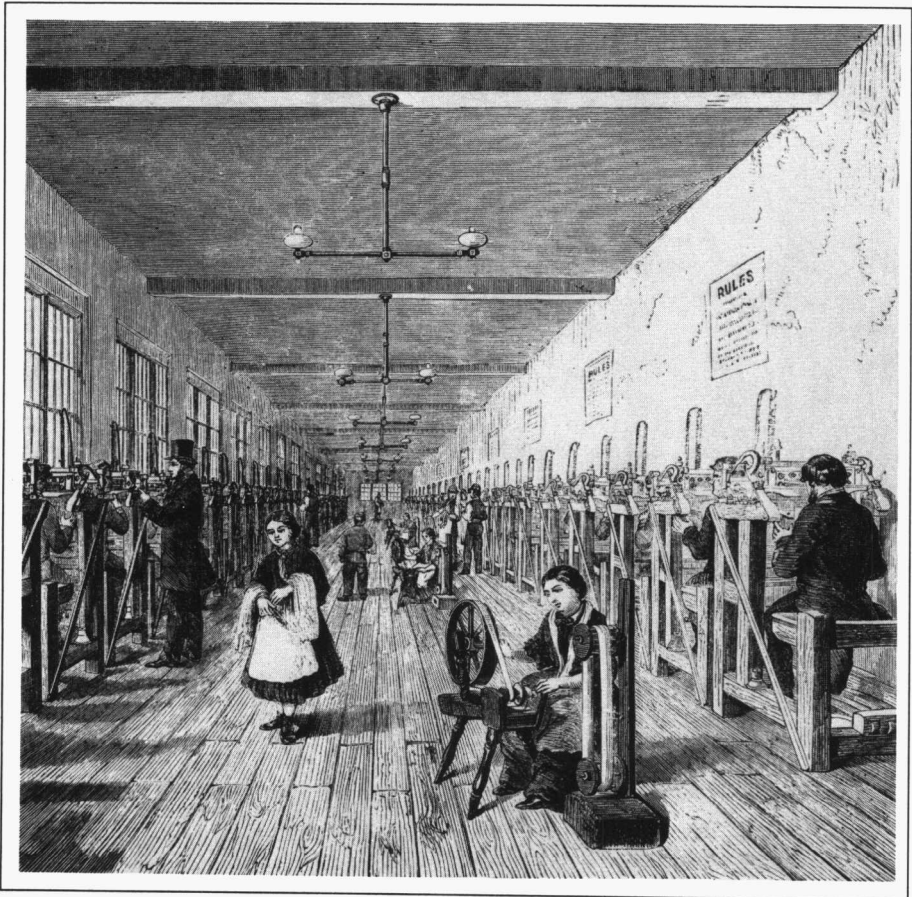
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PART ONE

The Age of Improvement

1830 to 1851



A MODEL TEXTILE MILL OF THE 1830s This factory, with work rules displayed prominently on the walls, was located at Tewksbury in the west of England. (*The Granger Collection*)