

CAMBRIDGE CONCISE HISTORIES • 剑桥国别简史丛书之二

A Concise History of BRITAIN 1707–1975 英国简史

W. A. Speck



上海外语教育出版社

SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS

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Professor of Modern History, University of Leeds



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出版说明

跨入21世纪后，全球一体化的发展趋势使世界各国的联系愈来愈密切，不同国家、不同民族之间的交往比以往任何时候都更加频繁和便捷。人们除了了解自己周围或自己国家的事情外，越来越多地把目光投向整个世界，关注其他国家和民族的发展与人们的生活。要了解一个国家、一个民族的现状，我们需要了解它的历史和发展沿革。由此，上海外语教育出版社（简称“外教社”）从英国剑桥大学出版社引进了这套“剑桥国别简史丛书”（*Cambridge Concise Histories*），奉献给我国广大读者，尤其是我国英语专业本科生、研究生以及具有一定英语基础并对世界历史感兴趣的读者。

“剑桥国别简史丛书”是剑桥大学出版社自上世纪八九十年代开始陆续推出的一套插图版国别简史丛书。丛书为一个开放系列，目前已经出版的品种涉及16个国家。作为第一批，我们从中挑选了英国、法国、德国、澳大利亚、希腊、印度、意大利、墨西哥、葡萄牙和南非等10个国家的简史图书，其中既有有关英语国家的，也有非英语国家的。

由于作者都是来自英国、美国、澳大利亚等国的历史学教授和知名专家，所以该丛书具有很高的学术价值和较强的权威性；作者又能采用浅显通俗的语言描述这些国家的政治、经济、文化、社会和历史，丛书信息量大、可读性强。该丛书在英国出版以后，深受读者欢迎，有的品种已重印多达10余次。

我们衷心希望该丛书的引进对我国读者学习、研究历史，了解世界有所帮助和参考作用，对掌握更多的历史文化知识有所裨益。

上海外语教育出版社

*For my brother
Jack*

PREFACE

Any historian who attempts to write an overview of British history from the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 to the entry into the European Community is bound to be heavily indebted to the work of others. In such a small compass their contributions will inevitably be compressed to the point of distortion, and I apologise here to the many scholars whose writings I have synthesised so succinctly that they might not even recognise them or, if they did, would disown them. This book is not intended for them. Rather it aims at readers who, while they might be on nodding terms with the outlines of modern British history, seek a concise résumé of recent scholarship.

Since my own area of expertise is the eighteenth century, two colleagues at Leeds, David Steele and Richard Whiting, kindly read the chapters on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They, together with the anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press, offered criticisms which saved me from many blunders. Any which survive are entirely my responsibility.

I wish also to thank others who helped to make this book possible. Leeds University granted me a term's study leave in the spring of 1989 which enabled me to make a start. Adrian Wilson rented me his house in Cambridge at intervals where much of the research was undertaken. My brother Jack generously let me have the use of his flat in Filey where most of the writing was completed. Mary Geiter and my daughter Jackie read rough drafts and suggested appropriate improvements. Finally William Davies of Cambridge University Press was very supportive throughout.

NIAS, Wassenaar

December, 1992

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page x
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
INTRODUCTION	I
1 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN	4
2 FROM THE ANGLO-SCOTTISH UNION TO THE UNION WITH IRELAND	18
3 NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN	50
4 FROM PITT TO PALMERSTON	65
5 FROM THE SECOND REFORM ACT TO THE BOER WAR	89
6 TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITAIN	115
7 FROM THE BOER WAR TO THE FIRST LABOUR GOVERNMENT	131
8 FROM BALDWIN TO ATTLEE	155
9 FROM THE ACCESSION OF QUEEN ELIZABETH TO THE ENTRY INTO THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY	179
EPILOGUE	201
<i>Appendix: Monarchs and ministries, 1707-1976</i>	202
<i>Guide to further reading</i>	205
<i>Index</i>	206

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

- | | | |
|---|--|--------|
| 1 | The Great Seal of Great Britain after the Union, 1707 (Public Record Office) | page 2 |
| 2 | Queen Anne receiving the Treaty of Union between England and Scotland, 1706 | 19 |
| 3 | King George I, painted by Lafontaine c. 1725 (reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen) | 24 |
| 4 | Sir Robert Walpole in the House of Commons, c. 1730, by Sir James Thornhill and William Hogarth (detail) (Clandon Park, Guildford; reproduced by permission of the National Trust) | 26 |
| 5 | 'George's Combat'. Engraving showing the battle between King George II and Jacobitism, 1745 | 28 |
| 6 | 'The Reception in 1760' and 'The Reception in 1770': two prints depicting the popularity of King George III at his accession, and his unpopularity by 1770 (<i>Oxford Magazine</i> , 1770) | 34-35 |
| 7 | The Irish House of Commons, 1780, by Francis Wheatley (Leeds City Art Galleries) | 40 |
| 8 | 'Wit's Last Stake', a cartoon depicting the canvassing of the Westminster elections by Charles James Fox and his agents, including the publican Sam House and the Duchess of Devonshire, 1784 (photo, British Library) | 42 |

<i>List of illustrations</i>		xi
9	The House of Commons, 1793-4, by Karl Anton Hickel (National Portrait Gallery, London)	46
10	Glasgow in 1835 (Mitchell Library, Glasgow)	52
11	The entrance of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the opening of the Great Exhibition (<i>Illustrated London News</i> , 1851)	57
12	'The census enumerator in a Gray's Inn Lane tenement' (<i>Illustrated London News</i> , 1861)	62
13	Osborne House, Isle of Wight (English Heritage)	64
14	King George III at Windsor, 1807, by Peter Edward Stroehling (reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen)	66
15	The trial of Queen Caroline, 1820, by Sir George Hayter (National Portrait Gallery, London)	69
16	The Kennington Common meeting of Chartists, photographed on 10 April 1848 by William Kilburn (reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen)	80
17	'His First Vote', a patronising view of the newly enfranchised agricultural labourer (<i>Illustrated London News</i> , 1885)	104
18	'The khaki campaign: a surrender', the radical carpenter seduced by the patriotic siren (<i>Illustrated London News</i> , 1900)	112
19	Queen Victoria in old age, c. 1900, by B. Muller (National Portrait Gallery, London)	113
20	King George V making his first Christmas broadcast in 1932 (Hulton Picture Library)	120
21	Evacuation of London schoolchildren, June 1940 (Hulton Picture Library)	125
22	Britain joins the EEC: front page of the <i>Daily Mirror</i> , 1 January 1973	129
23	'The shrieking sister'; a satirical view of the suffragettes (<i>Punch</i> , 1906)	142
24	Lloyd George and Churchill, 1915 (Hulton Picture Library)	145
25	Stretcher bearers at Passchendaele, 1917 (Imperial War Museum, London)	148

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 26 | 'The spirits of the hour', satirising the arrival of full female suffrage (<i>Punch</i> , 1929) | 160 |
| 27 | Campaign posters, 1945, focusing upon the leadership of Churchill and on the ills of the inter-war years | 171 |
| 28 | Dunkirk, 6 June 1940 (Hulton Picture Library) | 173 |
| 29 | Conservative campaign poster, 1951, depicting Attlee as a moderate façade for Bevanite socialism | 177 |
| 30 | The royal family at Balmoral, 1957 (photo: Paul Popper Ltd) | 180 |
| 31 | Demonstration by Edinburgh University students during the Suez crisis, November 1956 (by permission of the <i>Glasgow Herald and Evening Times</i>) | 184 |
| 32 | Election cartoon by Cummings of Harold Macmillan and Hugh Gaitskell published in the <i>Daily Express</i> , September 1959 (photo: Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricature, University of Kent at Canterbury) | 188 |
| 33 | 'Joining the club' by Vicky. Cartoon on Macmillan's abortive attempt to enter the EEC in 1963 published in the <i>Daily Express</i> | 188 |
| 34 | Labour replaces the Conservatives in office: cartoon by Vicky published in the <i>Evening Standard</i> , 1964 (photo: Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricature, University of Kent at Canterbury) | 192 |
| 35 | Winifred Ewing with Arthur Donaldson at the Scottish National party's meeting at Bannockburn, 1971 (by permission of the <i>Glasgow Herald and Evening Times</i>) | 196 |
| 36 | Edward Heath, seated between Sir Alec Douglas-Home and Geoffrey Rippon, signing Britain's agreement to enter the EEC in 1972 | 199 |
| 37 | Labour's decision to resolve its disagreements over Europe by a referendum, as satirised in the <i>Sunday Telegraph</i> , 26 January 1975 | 200 |

MAPS

- | | | |
|---|--|--------|
| 1 | County map of Great Britain | page 5 |
| 2 | Changes in parliamentary representation in England and Wales, 1831-2 | 73 |

Introduction

This concise history covers the period from the formation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707 to the entry of the British into the European Economic Community in the 1970s. Thus the chronology spans the whole history of Britain in the precise sense that the Union of 1707 brought it into being, ending the separate sovereignty of England and Scotland, and was for the Scots at least the 'end of an auld song'; while membership of the EEC was a partial surrender of British sovereignty, even if few were prepared to recognise it or admit it.

To cover such a long period in such a short compass is inevitably to reduce a symphony to a sleeve note. Some concentration is required to pick out the main themes. The principal theme is that change has been evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The peaceful adjustment of institutions and social structure to changing circumstances has been largely due to the fact that, since the Glorious Revolution of 1688, machinery has always existed for effecting such changes without resort to rebellion or revolution. There have not been wanting rebels or revolutionaries – Jacobites in the eighteenth century, Jacobins in the early nineteenth, for example – but they have never appealed to more than a minority. The majority have either acquiesced in the status quo or accepted that desired changes could be obtained by persuasion rather than by force. The ruling class was always susceptible to being persuaded because it remained answerable to the electorate through parliament, which never ceased to function as a representative institution even in the so-called 'age of oligarchy' in the middle of the eighteenth century.



1 The Great Seal of Great Britain after the Union, 1707

Another cause of the peaceful transition of British society from an oligarchy to a democracy has been that, for most of the time, the economy literally delivered the goods. Alternatives to the existing system only became widely attractive in rare intervals when such buoyancy was not sustained. By and large people were not only spared starvation but, through an unprecedented growth of population, the standard of living was at worst sustained and at best improved. This was not regarded as a mere coincidence. On the contrary, the connexion between limited or mixed monarchy and economic growth by contrast with absolutism and stagnation or decline was hammered home in learned treatises and crude propaganda.

Clearly the themes of consensus politics and population expansion underpinned by economic development do not hold for Ireland. The tragic history of 'John Bull's other island' is not incorporated except when it could not be ignored by people on the mainland.

Chronologically the book has been carved up conventionally into centuries. It has become fashionable of late to talk about a long eighteenth century starting before 1700 and stretching to 1832. But the

Unions with Scotland at the beginning and Ireland at the end give the short century more coherence. The Union of 1707 altered the constitutional framework and the very nature of the British state. It brought Great Britain into being. Similarly the Union with Ireland set a new agenda for British politicians. Each century has a short analytical introduction followed by chapters narrating those political events which illustrate the main themes. The narrative tries to avoid being a mere chronicle. As far as possible the emphasis remains on the interaction between state and society as epitomised in the fluctuating relationship between parliament and the classes who controlled it and the electorate to whom they had ultimately to answer.

Eighteenth-century Britain

It has been claimed that the single most important event in Britain's history occurred millions of years ago, or whenever it was during the formation of the earth's surface that the English Channel and North Sea were formed, separating the British Isles from the continent of Europe. Certainly the fact that the mainland of Great Britain, comprising England, Scotland and Wales, is an island has been of central importance to its development as a nation. Thus the isolation of the British made their history, in some respects at least, different from the rest of Europe's.

One of the crucial differences was the county. Until the Local Government Act of 1972, which became effective in 1974, England and Wales were divided into fifty-two counties and Scotland into thirty-three. In the eighteenth century the English counties were administrative units. Each had a sheriff, a commission of the peace, and a militia presided over by a lord lieutenant. The post of sheriff was irksome and expensive, and men tried to avoid selection for it. By contrast the offices of justice of the peace and deputy lieutenant of the militia, though they were unpaid, were coveted since they bestowed status on their incumbents. The justices administered a great deal of statute law, either singly, in pairs, or collectively, at the sessions held every three months and therefore called quarter sessions. They would refer the most serious cases, involving capital crimes, to the assizes, generally held twice a year in the county town, when a judge from one of the common law courts at Westminster would preside over the trials.