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Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700–1870

David Eastwood

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First published 1997 by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-55286-5 ISBN 978-1-349-25673-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-25673-0

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

This book is printed on paper suitable
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managed and sustained forest sources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
06 05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97

Typeset by Expo Holdings, Malaysia

Published in the United States of America 1997 by
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, INC.,
Scholarly and Reference Division
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010

ISBN 978-0-312-16577-2

To Mum and Dad

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
1. English Exceptionalism	1
Convergence and Divergence: English State Formation in Context	1
From Medieval to Modern: The Long-run Development of the English Polity	5
2. Public Life in Rural England	26
Political Culture and Public Life in the English Parish	26
The Parish State	42
3. Civic Ideals and the Life of Towns	57
The Urban Community: Definition, Defenders, and Detractors	57
Urban Improvement and Civic Virtue	64
Political Culture and Political Reform in Urban England	73
4. County Communities and Patterns of Power	91
Imagining the County	91
The Political Home of the Gentry	94
County Politics	102
Personal Power and Public Policy	107
5. Public Policy in Provincial England	117
Personal Power and Local Patriotism	117
Enclosure and the Challenge to Customary Regulation	121
Poverty and Political Transformation	123
The English Penal Revolution; or Magistrates as Modernizers	134
From Local Police to Policeman State	139

6. Remaking the Public Domain in Provincial England	155
Describing the Present and Theorizing Change	155
Private Bills, Parliament, and Public Health	159
Towards the Modern State	162
<i>Bibliography</i>	171
<i>Index</i>	197

Preface

This is a study of neglected but important aspects of state and social formation in England. I have here sought to develop an argument about the changes in the structural and cultural relationships between state and society in England. Much of what I say would apply to that other state, the British state, and on another occasion I will venture into the broader question of relationships within the British state. Nevertheless, English provincialism has been at least as neglected a theme as the relationships between England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, and even in restricting myself to the more modest ambition of writing about the English experience much has had to be left unsaid. In what follows, therefore, I explore relationships between centre and locality in England, the decline of English provincialism, and the profound cultural, ideological, economic, and social changes that determined structural developments within the English polity. To colleagues working in Welsh, Irish, and Scottish history, aspects of the story that I tell will, I hope, seem familiar.

Many friends have contributed intentionally or inadvertently to the making of this short book. Jeremy Black asked me to write it, and was typically good-humoured as its shape changed and its completion was delayed. Richard English invited me to contribute to a series of lectures on the state at Queen's University, Belfast, which made me begin to think systematically about English exceptionalism, and present my ideas in a context in which understanding English state power and political culture still matters enormously. James Campbell kindly gave me an offprint of his richly suggestive Stenton Lecture and taught me much about medieval England through agreeable conversation. For a number of years John Prest and I shared both teaching duties and research interests with pleasure and profit. Paul Langford has been a consistent source of ideas, advice, and kind encouragement. Joanna Innes has made me rethink some of my more fanciful readings of

eighteenth-century developments, and Peter Ghosh has done the same for the nineteenth century. My friend and former colleague, Miri Rubin, reminded me that I was still a historian when mushrooming administrative duties seemed to suggest otherwise. The Annual Conference on the English state at St Peter's College, Oxford, has done much to refine my understanding of its long-run development. The bulk of this book was written after I joined the Department of History at the University of Wales Swansea and, although this is a book which is resolutely about England, it has gained much by way of perspective from being written in so agreeable a Welsh setting. My father has again been unstinting of his time in reading and commenting on the text, while the dedication is a small token of a vastly deeper gratitude. Finally, my family have tolerated my spending too long in my study and too little time with them. I shouldn't promise them that things will be different in the future, but no doubt I will try.

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