

1588, 1688 and 1988

IVAN ROOTS

Historical anniversaries come in clusters. 1988–89 saw a particularly solid one. Amid a plethora of centenaries and half-centenaries between Diaz landing in south Africa in 1488 to Chamberlain dropping in on Hitler at Munich in 1938 two great matters stand out of interest to southern historians: the Spanish Armada of 1588 and the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, both closely involving the English Channel and the southern seaboard, with two invasions, one a failure, the other victorious. Each was commemorated, in some places indeed, celebrated, internationally, nationally, regionally and locally. There were exhibitions, conferences, lectures, banquets, pageants and fireworks – and above all, publications. It is estimated that the Armada sank under the weight of some 200 items, most ephemeral, but some substantial and likely to be appreciated for many years to come. The Revolution attracted less popular interest. But here again, there were some works worth notice. What follows is a random but not unrepresentative harvest of these – determined by the publishers who were generous enough to send review copies to *Southern History*.

The City of Plymouth, taking as proprietorial a grip upon the Armada as upon the Pilgrim Fathers, sponsored James Midren's elegant pamphlet, *The Incredible Armada* (Devon Books, Exeter, 1988, pp. 40, £1.95) – 'incredible' is a new characterisation – which attempts 'an evocation'. Copiously illustrated, it sets 1588 in the context of the slowly deteriorating international politics which ultimately prompted Philip to essay 'the enterprise of England'. Philip gets the blame. Elizabeth I is Gloriana, 'born to rule, never to be ruled'. The disparity between the two fleets is overplayed. The 'defeat' of the Spaniards is taken to 'stem the advance of the Counter-Reformation allowing the emerging Protestant states – Sweden, Germany, Holland – to feel free to make up their minds what form of religion they should have'. Why then, the Thirty Years War and the eighty years struggle for Dutch independence?

Simon Adams' brief *The Armada Campaign of 1588*, 'New Appreciations in History, No. 13' (The Historical Association, 1988, pp. 24, £1.75, members; £3.50, non-members) is more circumspect. It concludes that though the outcome may not have been English mastery

of the seas it confirmed 'her naval pre-eminence in North European waters.' But what about the ubiquitous Dutch? And anyway Spain remained a great world naval power until the middle of the seventeenth century. Was Cromwell in going to war with her merely indulging in Elizabethan nostalgia? Dr Adams quotes the Victorian J.A. Froude on resistance to the Armada as 'the first great effort for the emancipation of Europe', but emancipation from what? Dr A.L. Rowse – it was certain that he would be in on this west-country and Elizabethan occasion – has got together a variety of Froude's writings as *The Spanish Story of the Armada* (Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1988, pp. 262, £5.95 paperback). Froude used Spanish as well as English archives and made a genuine effort to see both sides to the point of being harsher on the Queen (for her parsimony) than on Philip, apart from deploring his religiosity, implying hypocrisy, whereas the Prudent King seems in reality to have made a natural match of genuine personal devotion and secular ambition.

Francis Drake is, of course, prominent in these books. He is the hero of *Drake of Tavistock* (Devon Books, Exeter, in association with West Devon Borough Council, 1988, pp. 92, £3.95 paperback) by Helen Joy Harris, set off by his birth at Crowdale near Tavistock. Pleasantly written, it interlards the progress of the piratical protestant patriot with the history of the town. The Armada section asserts confidently that 'thanks to Drake and the navy they [the English, their queen and protestantism] were safe'. Yet, as a later page admits, 'the great war went on', only after the dangerous 1590s to 'dwindle into an exhausted peace'.

David A. Thomas's compilation, *The Illustrated Armada Handbook* (Harrap, 1988, pp. 218, £9.95 paperback) tells you everything you ever wanted to know – and perhaps more – about the affair, offering details of ships, commanders, armaments, commissariat, all held together by a narrative of events. Thomas casts doubt on those protestant winds, stressing instead superior English seamanship and gunnery. 'It was a watershed in the story of England, the birth of a new patriotism and the beginning of a new belief in the navy'. Just what were the old ones? Two illustrated large-format paperbacks emerged from the national Maritime Museum's role as the official English celebrant of 1588. The first is the magnificent official catalogue of its exhaustive international exhibition, 'the largest ever to commemorate a great naval event', *Armada 1558–1988* (Penguin Books and The Museum, 1988, pp. 295, £12.95). With many scholarly contributors, it is stuffed with plates and maps, preceded by a stimulating 'keynote essay' by M.J. Rodriguez-Salgado, which concludes sensibly that 'in the aftermath of the Armada neither Philip

nor Elizabeth could claim to have substantially advanced their faiths or increased their power'. Philip's reputation was dented but most contemporaries were not inclined to belittle his continuing potential, looking at him rather with renewed respect. 'In military and political terms the Armada was of limited significance. It did not radically alter the policies of either state nor cause serious damage to their interests.' The assertion that 1588 saw England's salvation came later in the seventeenth century, tied up with the endemic anti-popery that sometimes reached mass hysteria. But myths, of course, are often stronger than the real thing.

The Maritime Museum was involved with another glossy publication: *Royal Armada: 400 Years* (Manorial Research [Armada] Ltd. in association with Yale-Valor plc for the Museum, 1988, pp. 208, £3.00). The object was to bring 'to tens of thousands of people insights into one of our most glorious periods and to demistify some of the myths'. (A 'most glorious period' is itself perhaps one of these). Tackling this heavily-sponsored volume is like wading through a Sunday paper colour supplement. But it is worth the effort. There are informed essays on *inter alia* Drake (by Joyce Youings, a fellow-Devonian), Elizabeth I (Peter Roberts) and the Armada itself (Ian Thompson). In a second contribution, on the 'state of emergency', Professor Youings suggests that if the Armada had landed 'the greater professionalism' of the Spanish soldiery confronting the English defences would have been 'more than offset by their ignorance of the terrain', but what one knows of the condition and attitude of the militia hardly inspires confidence. One myth she does reject is that news of the coming of the Armada was flashed around the country by beacons. Not likely. Their neglected state underlined complicated standing orders which seem contrived more to prevent than to facilitate their lighting.

Penguin Books also reissued as a large-format illustrated paperback Garrett Mattingly's *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (1988, pp. 384, £7.95), first published in 1959. It holds up well. In the 1959 Epilogue Professor Mattingly wrote 'historians agree that the defeat of the Spanish Armada was a decisive battle, in fact one of the decisive battles of the world, but there is much less agreement as to what it did decide'. Today not everyone accepts that it was decisive and on its consequences consensus is as far off as ever. His own preference is for it clinching 'that religious unity was not to be imposed by force on the heirs of medieval Christendom.' Yet the Counter-Reformation whether in secular or ecclesiastical hands did not abandon the effort. A fresher view is taken by a Spanish historian working in England, Dr Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, whose *Spanish*

Armada (Oxford UP, 1988, pp. 300, £14.95) is subtitled 'the experience of war in 1588'. Its main objective is to convey what it was like on both sides to be caught up in or against the Enterprise. Dr Fernandez-Armesto's objectivity leads him to resist English tradition 'typified by some fairly loathsome chauvinism and by a pride in achievements unjustified by the facts'. Convincingly, he stresses that, though defective, the Spanish plans were not foolish and supports the claim that it was not so much brilliant English seamanship as atrocious weather that made for the failure. The real disasters came not in the English Channel but in the long depressing voyage home. 1588 saw neither the decline of Spanish nor the rise of English sea-power. The two states came to peace at Hampton Court in 1604 agreeing upon, neither one dictating, terms. Unpleasing as it may be to English patriotism it has to be recognised that even in the year of the Armada England lay on the margins of Spanish political ambitions, which were fixed on the so-called Dutch Revolt. A century later William of Orange took England on his way to France. Equally it could be said that Philip II aimed to take England en route to the Netherlands.

John Martin and Derek Parker's *The Spanish Armada* (Penguin Books, 1989, pp. 296, £10.00, previously published by Hamish Hamilton, 1988) is the academic study which has attracted most popular attention. It is the fruit of a happy collaboration between a marine archaeologist and a historian, the latter exploiting a vast range of international documentation, the former working over material raised from wrecks around Scotland and Ireland. Lavishly illustrated – 1988 must have been *annus mirabilis* for picture-researchers – their report is presented with great verve. A little too much at times. Did the world really 'hold its breath on 28 May 1588 as the duke of Medina Sidonia led his great Armada down the Tagus towards the open sea'? We are taken, too, through 'the cold' and 'phoney' wars to the expedition itself which 'came and went and was'. But generally judicious inter-disciplinary approach offers new insights into the nature of the Armada's intentions. Martin and Parker agree with Dr Fernandez-Armesto that though 'Medina Sidonia and his men had lost much, they had not lost their honour'.

Medina Sidonia was the seventh duke, an Andalusian grandee 'of impeccable lineage' with traditions of public service. He has not had a good press, particular among English writers portraying him as rigid and unimaginative, incompetent, even 'a fool, a craven', whose appointment as Captain-General of the Ocean Sea was almost inexplicable. Professor Peter Pieron's *Commander of the Armada* (Yale UP, New Haven and London, 1989, pp. 304, £20.00) takes a

refreshingly different line. No apologia, it surveys the whole of a long and devoted career antedating 1588 and going on in the service of Philip III. It was as natural for him to be given employment as it was for the monarch to accept it. After the Armada Philip did not blame him or dismiss him, conscious as the king was that by bringing back so much of the fleet to Spain the duke had done all that he could. Both king and commander believed it to be the work of God 'whose purposes are hidden from men', though that, of course, has never stopped anyone from probing them and, as in this instance, claiming that God is on their side. This is a handsome well-written and balanced biography which will surely long outlast the anniversary which no doubt prompted it.

J.A. Froude once remarked that history should read like a novel. The Armada has often featured in novels. 1988 spawned a big one, starkly entitled *Armada* (Michael Joseph, 1988, pp. 470, £11.95), by Robert Carter. Its protagonists are two young men from a sea-faring background – Devon, of course – whose interlocking careers are made part of the broader story of the strained Anglo-Spanish relationship which peaked – as the novel itself does – with the Armada. It takes a long time to get us there. *En route* we meet Philip, Elizabeth, Hawkins, Drake, Dee, Walsingham, Leicester and the seventeenth earl of Oxford – 'I'm the greatest poet in England, the greatest dramatist, and the greatest lover'. So much for William Shakespeare! Robert Carter has certainly read a great deal about the Armada and its context and is somewhat remorseless in shewing it. Even so, *Armada* may encourage its readers to tackle the true history for themselves, dispelling some of the mythology, though no doubt a lot will still be around for the next centenary.

Commemoration of the Glorious, the Happy, the Respectable Revolution or whatever we like to call it, did not produce a novel. It was, of course, a much less glamorous business than the Armada, 'a very tame affair' as somebody put it. Nevertheless its considerable and still controversial significance was acknowledged by an international commemorative committee, a parliamentary exhibition, colloquia and a plethora of publications, though not, apparently, by ox-roastings, jousting or balls. But in Devon certainly there was a local authority hype to enhance the region's tourist appeal. Here, too, myth was ravelled up with reality. There are still those who believe that William of Orange was proclaimed king at Newton Abbot. There are many in Northern Ireland who see him inaugurating the Orange Order, too.

The major general survey was W.A. Speck's *Reluctant Revolutionaries* (Oxford UP, 1988, pp. 267, £17.50) – a considered title. It

begins by citing Gilbert Burnet's *Own Time*: 'I come now to the year 1688, which proved memorable and produced an extraordinary and unheard of revolution'. To get there Professor Speck wisely goes back a little. Unexpected as the revolution was – the earl of Sunderland as late as August assured ambassadors that 'there never was in England less thought of rebellion' – the Restoration of Charles II is not irrelevant to the record of how a revolutionary situation came about. If there was no high road to the revolution itself from the troubles of the mid-century 'it would be absurd to treat 1688 in isolation' from them. Unpleasant memories of the 1640s were evoked, for example, by the Devon legal beagle Sir John Maynard in the Convention Parliament of 1689 when first steps were taken to a settlement. Charles II's victory in the Exclusion crisis, secured with Tory assistance, had brought James II to the throne. 'No king succeeded to a more powerful position than [he] did'. But, an old man in a hurry, papist James was upsetting parliament, the Church, the universities and traditional local leaders by policies political, religious and military which seemed to presage a social revolution. The birth of a Prince of Wales suggested their permanence. 'The immortal seven' – no altruists – invited William to intervene for 'a free parliament'. Professor Speck feels that in accepting William had already made up his mind to have the throne, but in any case the uninterrupted landing in the southwest and James's surprising 'desertion' left him and him alone the man with the power. William's greatest asset was the initial inertia of so many of the political nation. Once overcome by events the sceptical, the wavering and the reluctant moved towards him in the name of the preservation of liberty and property.

Professor Speck concludes that the consequences of the revolution were a mixed blessing. William got most of what he wanted. The interests of landed property dominated but in the long run opportunities were given and taken for monied men to get on. Dr Jonathan Clark's view that England was as much an *ancien regime* after 1688 as before is dismissed. Certainly it is at variance with many facts and with the observations of intelligent and envious contemporary continental commentators. Mrs Thatcher, inimical to the French Revolution, has commended 1688. Professor Speck shows why. '1688 deserves to be regarded as marking a shift in the process whereby England became recognised as a nation of shopkeepers'. Emphatically a good thing, glorious, in fact – for shopkeepers, at least.

'By the authority of the Lord Chancellor and the Speaker of the House of Commons' HMSO dutifully put out a well-illustrated large-format pamphlet on *Parliament and the Glorious Revolution*

1688–1988 (1988, pp. 32, £2.50, text by Neil Kirk), occasioned by the belief that the revolution really was a unique influence upon the evolution of parliamentary government and representative institutions around the world, laying the foundations of parliamentary democracy here and ‘shaping the way in which parliament still conducts its business’. Like Dr Speck’s the story here begins with the civil wars, glides through the reign of Charles II, until we reach the Prince of Orange for whom ‘the position of England was crucial to his own’. Then on to the constitutional settlement. Conventionally but hardly demonstrably, it declares that the king had become a paid servant of the state, Parliament had finally laid its hands on the purse-strings and ‘has never quite let go’. Not even to the Treasury? The revolution and settlement are pursued into Scotland but not into Ireland, where blood, indeed, was shed, profusely. The presumed influence of this revolution upon the American and the very different French revolutions is touched upon – a difficult theme. Much is made of the pervasive impact of the Bill of Rights. It is ironical that calls for a modern bill of rights for the ordinary citizen have been greeted with minimal enthusiasm by recent governments.

More substantial is Robert Beddard’s *A Kingdom without a King* (Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1988, pp. 208, £14.95). This prints from an unpublished manuscript the Journal of the Provisional Government self-appointed in London from 11 to 28 December to head off a disorderly interregnum. The peers there claimed ‘an inexpressible authority and jurisdiction kneaded (next to that invested in the imperial crown of England) into the very essence and fundamentall constitution of our laws in such extraordinary junctures as this is’ – the absence of the king being the occasion for its exercise. It demonstrated ‘the determination of the peerage not to let slip the reins of government, even at the cost of minimising irreconcilable political differences among themselves’ – a tribute to their social cohesion in a crisis, with the *mobile vulgus* (the mob) out on the streets. That unity would break as some accepted William while others moved into Jacobitism, which, it may be said, was born that December. Dr Beddard is correct to demand more attention for the Provisional Government – its composition, outlook and activities – and his handsome volume enhances understanding of the English side of the revolution, which is denied as ‘the product of a minutely conceived and carefully executed master-plan’ on William’s part.

David Lewis Jones effectively takes up the narrative where Dr Beddard leaves off. His *A Parliamentary History of the Glorious Revolution* (HMSO, 1988, pp. 308, £19.00) reprints reports of various debates in the Convention Parliaments of England and Wales and of

Scotland to show their role in 1689. Like Dr Beddard Mr Jones stresses how the reaction of men of substance to the excesses of the mob pushed them towards a quick resolution of the crisis through a parliament. As in any other seventeenth-century election, not all the seats for the Convention were contested at the hustings, resulting in a broad representation of views among the political nation, nearly all, however, tending towards an urge for stability. In all the upsets there was little to encourage 'the dream of reducing England to a democratical Republic'. That was 'incident only to persons of shallow capacities'. Edmund Ludlow, the old doctrinaire, came over from Switzerland but promptly went back. William himself said he would never be 'a Doge of Venice'. Experience of his position in the United Provinces convinced him that monarchy was not only the best policy for the English but for himself.

From Holland, not uninterested in the commemoration, comes S. van Raaij and Paul Spies's *The Royal Progress of William and Mary* (D'Arts/De Bataafsche Leeuw, Amsterdam and HMSO, 1988, pp. 176, £19.00), a heavily illustrated demonstration of the cultural legacy of the royal pair 'on both sides of the North Sea'. It concentrates on the nature of their court, its artistic life, buildings and gardens. There is a mass of information on individual architects and influences. Mary – of 'exquisite taste' – is shown as more intimately concerned with architecture than William, but he was not unaware of the allegorical and political significance of paintings and decorations. Portraying himself as Hercules surely expressed something more than a mere whim. Although William was dedicated to the downfall of Louis XIV's France, French influences are noticeable alongside the cultural exchange between England and the United Provinces. Neither William nor Mary was an innovator. The authors suggest that this was the effect 'not just of their conservatism but rather of their lack of interest in absolute power both in England and in the Republic. For this reason they never set an example as patrons'. That seems rather cryptic. It is not an observation explored in a book in which it is rather difficult to find one's way about.

In a timely contribution to the City of Portsmouth's prolific series of 'Portsmouth Papers' Professor Robert Jordan provides a study of *Portsmouth and the Glorious Revolution of 1688* (The City Council, 1989, pp. 30, £2.00). A clear and detailed narrative with an intelligent commentary brings out the port's big part in James's naval and military concerns. But as William moved on London Portsmouth wavered into a turmoil of faction, the mayor fled. By the end of December the city had swung to the Prince. What happened there

offers clues to developments elsewhere at grass roots which have yet to be adequately raked over in any region, north or south.

As with the Interregnum of the 1650s the permanent consequences of the revolution are hard to identify. Certainly there is no direct high road from the Convention Parliament and the Bill of Rights and all that to parliamentary democracy and the party system. Many of the planks in the old Whig interpretation have proven 'rotten studs'. But a few developments can be put forward with some confidence. One is the practical demise of republicanism. Another, union with Scotland, adumbrated by James I, forcibly imposed by Cromwell, abandoned in 1660, talked about under Charles II and finally negotiated as a necessary expedient in 1707. The revolution, too, was a crucial phase in the uneasy relationship of England and Ireland, where it saw small glory but much bloodshed. For a century after 1688 there was one more egregious offspring – Jacobitism, simplistically the expression of an urge to get the direct line of the Stuarts back on the throne. In another Historical Association 'New Appreciations in History', *Jacobitism* (pp. 28, pp. £1.75 to members; £3.50 to non-members) Dr Edward Gregg states rightly that 'in recent years the debate over the nature, extent and influence of the Jacobite movement . . . has become one of the new growth industries among professional historians'. His own contribution points to the existence of a movement characterised by 'ideological conflicts, shifting coalitions, temporary political alliances, mutual suspicions and personal feuds' for all the world, as he says, like a modern political party. Though indefinable in simple terms there was such a thing as a Jacobite movement and it had effects, mostly inadvertent, throughout the British Isles. For example, Dr Gregg sees fear of the Jacobite threat as 'a bonding element' in English society.

A much more substantial work by Paul Kleber Monod, entitled *Jacobitism and the English People*, (Cambridge UP, 1989, pp. 408, £30.00), extends from politics into society generally. It suggests that if the death of the Young Pretender in 1788 was in itself of no great historical moment, the birth of his father, the warming-pan baby, almost exactly a century before certainly was. Without his coming there might have been no revolution nor any Jacobite tradition. What followed was not just a romantic 'regressive political phenomenon of limited appeal'. Like Dr Gregg, Dr Monod sees Jacobitism as an amorphous widespread grouping, smitten by the appeal of a divine right monarchy. More than 'the ideal of a tiny band of half-crazed zealots', it entered most areas of social and intellectual life, making a context for opposition, feeding a developing popular radicalism while its aristocratic connexions made it a citadel of abiding conservatism.

Ironically its existence encouraged maintenance of a standing army, so much deplored in pre-revolutionary times but by then becoming acceptable. It may be true, too, that the Jacobites' theme of monarchy as 'the mythic component of the constitution' was taken over by George III and Victoria in making themselves symbols of national unity. This is an intelligent academic monograph, which ploughs for the non-specialist a deep furrow across the field of the theories of both the orthodox and the revisionists (a very mixed if not mixed-up lot).

Paul Monod turns up again in *By Force or by Default: The Revolution of 1688–89* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1989, pp. 198, £20.00) edited by Eveline Cruickshanks, a collection of papers given at a London international colloquium in 1988 on 'the Tory perception', which might well be somewhat different from that current at No. 10. The celebratory tone is muted. The Preface argues that the outcome of those distant events was neither constitutional monarchy nor parliamentary control. Dr John Miller has little difficulty in shewing that James II's Indulgences offered more than the Toleration Act of 1690, that 'product of an unedifying mixture of ecclesiastical and political horsetrading'. But it would not be the first time that the seeds of liberty have rooted and grown in a dunghill. What was valuable about it was that, though limited, it was statutory and not dependent on the word of a king. Dr Miller's conclusion is compelling. Observing the 'unmatched pluralism left by the civil wars' – stand up Oliver Cromwell! – he opines that 'without the civil wars, without James II's conversion, toleration would not have become established in England as early as it did'. That is probably true whether or not James II was genuinely tolerant.

The Editor's own article takes Exeter, 'the capital of the west', as a case-study in loyalty to James, the first to be tested by the invasion. Entering Exeter, William found the gentry and substantial citizens mostly gone and 'only some of the scruff and meaner sort' ran to him. It seemed unwise to move on – someone said that he even contemplated going back – until circumstances changed. From then on every move was calculated in action or reaction. But so it had been from the start. Dr David Davies ascribes the loss of James's throne to naval factors, notably the failure of the fleet to intercept the expedition. 'Without the landing there would have been no catalyst for provincial revolts, nor for the defection of the army.' But surely he went on to fail as a general and a statesman and, by deserting his kingdom, as a king? Why did he not go north, for instance, to rally support? Other contributions consider 'politics and high culture', with Steven Zwicker noting the striking indifference of 'English literature' at the

time to the celebration of the revolution. 'The muses were uncertain what to say and in what forms to say it'. Clio at least has remained puzzled to this day. Tim Harris looks into the Toryism that ran alongside Whiggery in the London mob in the '80s and connects it up with populist Jacobitism later. Ian B. Cowan tackles the 'reluctant revolutionaries' of Scotland and Jeremy Black the post-revolutionary development of foreign policy, suggesting that the early Georgian 'consolidation of a new relationship with France would now allow James's foreign policy and international attitude to be justified against many of the charges that have been fired at it'. If I had to pick out just one piece of the diverse commemorative output for 1688 it would be this volume, to which my only objection is that it contains too much might-have-been history. The revolution was unexpected, its outcome unpredicted, its interpretation is still uncertain. But the events of 1688 did take place. William invaded, was not intercepted, did land and march on London, his support accruing. James, feeling himself deserted, deserted himself. William of Orange became William III and so on. In the end historians must face this thing and 'reckon what it did and meant', long after the anniversarial commemorations have been forgotten.