



EXPLORING HISTORY

Seven Ages of Britain

Introduction



Seven Ages of Britain is a social and cultural history of Britain, telling the story of the nation and its peoples through art and artefacts, precious treasures and everyday objects. Over the course of seven episodes, David Dimbleby journeys through the nation's past, from Iron Age pre-history to the present day. This is a history of British society told not through documents and written records, but through the material culture of each age – works of art, craft, and industry. David travels around Britain and to locations overseas that have inspired British culture and where Britain's political and cultural influence have been most strongly felt. In a range of locations, he admires, handles and interprets all kinds of art and artefacts in order to tell the story of Britain. There are:

- Monumental sculptures, of triumph or commemoration, like the bust of the Roman Emperor Hadrian excavated from the River Thames,

the thirteenth-century roadside cross erected in memory of Eleanor of Castile, queen of Edward I, or the classical statue of Charles II at the Royal Hospital Chelsea.

- Paintings that capture the spirit of an era, like the medieval religious devotion of the Wilton Diptych, the sumptuous portraits of the gentry by Gainsborough in the eighteenth century, or the studies by Barbara Hepworth on the first years of the NHS.
- Intricate creations of great craftsmen and women, like the eleventh-century needlecraft of the Bayeux Tapestry, the stained glass windows of Canterbury Cathedral, and the elegant furniture and cabinet-making of Thomas Chippendale.
- Sumptuous treasures of incalculable value, like the Anglo-Saxon shoulder clasps from the Sutton Hoo hoard, the fourteenth-century English crown in Munich (pictured above right), and the Elizabethan Drake Jewel.



- Triumphs of engineering, science and invention, like Henry VIII's armour, the seventeenth-century Hooke Microscope (opposite), and the amusement and wonder of magic lantern shows in the nineteenth century.
- Examples of culture that reflect the best or worst of its society, like the eighth-century Codex Amiatinus illuminated Bible, the plays of Shakespeare, and the prints and paintings of Hogarth.



- Buildings, architectural features and interior spaces that illuminate how people lived, were ruled, and shaped their environment, like the Norman Tower of London, the Georgian elegance of Edinburgh's New Town, and Government House in imperial Calcutta.

- Objects that capture the lives of ordinary people at a moment in time, like the shoes and combs brought up with the wreck of the Mary Rose, maternal souvenirs at the Foundlings' Hospital, and the Austin 7, the 'people's car'.

Art and artefacts are part of our shared cultural heritage and have a story of their own to tell. For historians, written or textual sources dominate what we know about past societies. They can include documents of record, the treaties, Acts of Parliament and official papers; contemporary narratives, works of scholarship, treatises and other texts; newspapers, pamphlets and speeches; public and personal letters, diaries and memoirs. However, there are other kinds of evidence too, what historians would call 'visual sources' or material culture, which are the objects and artefacts of the past that we can see and (sometimes) touch. Visual sources can complement or confirm what we know about the past from written sources, or sometimes they can tell us something quite different that we would not otherwise know.

One of the most important elements of studying history is to learn how to read and interpret the materials of the past, understanding them on their own terms, the social or historical context that gave rise to their creation, and the cultural values at the time they were produced. For a visual source, an artwork or artefact, we need to ask the same sorts of questions that we ask about written sources:

- Who produced it, in what circumstances, and why?
- When was it created, and how much do we know about the historical period or people it depicts?

- Who was the intended audience or recipient? Do we know anything about how the artwork or object was received or understood at the time?
- What is the broader cultural context of the image or artefact? Does it fit into a particular artistic genre or draw upon or reference particular visual 'language'?

We may need to look upon the object with what has been called 'the period eye' as well as our own, given that the prevailing culture at the time when it was produced may mean that people saw and interpreted images slightly differently to how we might in the twenty-first century. Previous societies had different aesthetic criteria of artistic skill, of personal beauty and of good taste, but cultural and historical readings of an artwork or an object can be more serious than that. A good example is the porcelain teapot from the eighteenth century from the artefacts featured in this booklet. The tea-party decoration probably struck its original owner just as a charming domestic scene whereas, as historians, we may pick out the black pageboy figure as a reminder of the period's slave trade.

Seven artefacts have been chosen for this booklet, one from each of the seven 'ages' of history covered in the seven episodes of the television series. Each is a different type of visual source: a piece of design craftsmanship (the Bayeux Tapestry), an architectural feature (the Beauchamp Chapel and tomb), a woodcut illustration (the frontispiece of Henry VIII's Great Bible), a luxury item of domestic technology (the Mostyn Clock), an everyday object (porcelain teapot), a painting (the Ochterlony portrait), and popular culture (British cinema). Each historical artefact, in fact everything produced by people in earlier centuries, is a record of its society. As such, art, artefacts and material culture have great value to historians as evidence of the past, and also have plenty to tell us about our ancestors and how we have become the society we are now.

- Artworks depicting Britons through the eyes of others, like the Roman Britannia frieze in Turkey, the nineteenth-century Rajasthan frescoes, and the West African statuette of the Queen-Empress Victoria.

The Bayeux Tapestry (1066)

The Bayeux Tapestry has been described as one of the most important pieces of medieval art

Medieval art

It is not a woven design, so it is not technically a tapestry as is understood today, but is in fact an embroidery, stitched in at least eight colours of yarn on eight separate pieces of linen, joined together to make a 70 metre (231 feet) long wall-hanging. The mere survival of the Tapestry since the eleventh century is remarkable enough to make it worthy of study. However, the Tapestry is more than simply decorative: it is an extraordinary pictorial narrative

of events surrounding the Norman Conquest of England in the year 1066 and, hence, is an historical source of great value.

Not as clear, however, is the viewpoint and provenance of the Tapestry. Records confirm that it has been at Bayeux in France certainly since the late fifteenth century, but its origins and ownership prior to that date are not certain. In older French histories, it was sometimes called 'la Tapisserie de la Reine Mathilde' (Queen Matilda's Tapestry), in the

romantic belief that it was stitched personally by Matilda of Flanders, wife of William the Conqueror, and her ladies-in-waiting. However most historians now believe that the Tapestry was made in England on the instructions of Odo, half-brother of William, and who was made Archbishop of Canterbury after the Conquest. Anglo-Saxon needlecraft was much prized in early medieval Europe, while a number of Anglicised oddities in the Latin commentary suggest an English commission. Odo was also Bishop of Bayeux, which



Edward's death

This section is a perfect example of the complexity of the Tapestry as an historical source. Despite appearances, it does not just function like a cartoon strip or storyboard, moving in a linear fashion, scene by scene. The story here flows from right to left, from Edward's deathbed testimony to his funeral process to the location of his tomb at Westminster Abbey. One of the Anglo-Saxon chronicles records that on 4 January 1066, the day before his death, Edward took Harold's hand and said, 'I commend this woman [Queen Edith, Harold's sister] and all the kingdom to your protection'.

- 1 King Edward's bedchamber: portraying a scene like this is surprising, perhaps, for a Norman source, since it depicts Harold positively, but that depends how we interpret the king's words. Is he naming Harold as his successor, or entrusting the kingdom to him temporarily as a guardian until his 'real' heir, William, arrives?
- 2 Edward's body is blessed and prepared in downstairs chamber.
- 3 The escort of bearers, including two small boys tolling bells, carry the elaborate jewelled bier to Westminster on 6 January.

- 4 Westminster, the Abbey of St Peter's, built by King Edward. The Abbey is still being finished (note the workman fixing the weather-cock) and God's hand descends from the Heavens (right) to bless the burial, in premonition of Edward's canonisation in 1161.

would explain why the Tapestry ended up in the town, and why he and several of his known followers appear prominently in the tableaux.

All contemporary accounts of the Norman Conquest tell a slightly different version of events and story of the Bayeux Tapestry is no exception. Its main theme is the personal relationship between William of Normandy and Harold of Wessex. We see Harold sail to Normandy, feast with William, fight alongside him in Brittany, and swear an oath of some kind to him on holy relics. Was this a general pledge of friendship, an oath of fealty and obligation, or specifically a solemn promise to support William in his claim to succeed his cousin, Edward the Confessor, as King of England? The Tapestry is elusive, but is clear in its depiction of the consequences of breaking the oath when Harold takes the crown himself on Edward's death.

A valued artefact

As well as providing a unique narrative of the Norman Conquest, the Bayeux Tapestry gives the viewer a glimpse of several aspects of life in the eleventh century. As part of the story itself, we see hunts, feasts, the felling of timber and the building of transport ships, and finer points of fashion and architecture, however stylised. We also gain an insight into the military history of the period. For instance, in the battle scenes, knights throw spears from above their shoulder, not charge with a lance under their arm, and they ride with straight legs in stirrups far longer than today. In strips above and below the main narrative, small marginalia depict mythical beasts, as well as tales from Aesop like the Fox and the Crow, scenes of ploughing and daily life, and, around the battle scenes, stark depictions of corpses being stripped of their armour as plunder.

The Bayeux Tapestry is an astonishing artefact of its period, but also an invaluable narrative to add to the many accounts of the Norman Conquest. Not surprisingly then, in 2007, the Tapestry was awarded special UNESCO status as a documentary record on its 'Memory of the World' register.



Harold at Edward's deathbed



Harold's coronation as King of the English

In a series of scenes, this panel cleverly shows that, in the eleventh century, there was no one clear path to the throne – no heir by birth alone. The Anglo-Saxon title of the *Ætheling* (noble one) was held by many members of a king's family, his sons and brothers, and all of their sons, and it marked out any man or boy with sufficient royal blood to be considered as a prospective king when the time came. Harold's accession demonstrates a mixed process of king-making – with him being at one and the same time designated, elected, sanctified, and popularly acclaimed. We've seen the deathbed scene with Edward, designation, as the preferred choice of one's predecessor.

- 5** The Witan, the Council of Earls, in discussion, carrying the battle-axes of Anglo-Saxon housecarls (royal household troops). On the very day that Edward died, 5 January, the Witan confirmed the designation and nominated/elected Harold as King from amongst their number.
- 6** Harold's coronation on 6 January, after Edward's funeral, which sees him enthroned and sanctified by God through the offices of the Church. Next to the throne is Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury.
- 7** Outside the Abbey, there is acclamation and cheering by the people. Events had moved smoothly and there is

no suggestion in any written source of the time – English or Norman – that the choice was not unanimous in England. There was no regime change of advisers – no earls fell from power – as had been the case before. However, the Tapestry subtly questions the rightness of Harold's reign by showing Stigand prominently as though he has crowned the King. Some English sources claim that Harold was crowned by Aldred, Archbishop of York; if so, why this discrepancy? By tying Harold's crowning to a dubious archbishop, whether genuinely or as propaganda, the Tapestry throws doubt on the validity of the ceremony and, through that, raises questions about the legality of Harold's claim.

The Beauchamp Chapel (1443-75)

Personal knightly piety is given public artistic expression



Gilt bronze effigy of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, lying on a funeral bier or hearse

St Mary's Church in Warwick is the burial place of many of the earls of Warwick and their families. The most famous tomb is that of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick (1382–1439) whose descendents founded in his honour an ornate side chapel off the main nave of the church. This is known as a chantry chapel.

Included in the legacy left to the church was payment for prayers to be chanted three times a day in perpetuity for the deceased, hoping that these would substitute for penance for his sins and speed

his soul through Purgatory into Heaven. The chapel is not just a place for the dead, then, but a living space of drama, ceremony, and daily commemoration of his life. Beauchamp's ornate effigy and the decoration of the chapel are a final celebration of his aristocratic status and wealth as well as an artistic expression of his trust in salvation. Like many other high-status tombs of the period, Richard Beauchamp's final resting place combines the two key ideals of the Middle Ages – chivalry and intense religious belief.

Richard Beauchamp was a contemporary of King Henry V and fought alongside him in his campaigns in Wales and France. He was an important political figure too, serving on the Privy Council, as tutor to the infant Henry VI, and as a diplomat and royal deputy (a lieutenant-general) in English-held lands in northern France when he died at Rouen in Normandy in 1439, aged 57.

Beauchamp chose to be depicted in the prime of life, dressed as a knight in fashionable armour of the Italian



Figures of family mourners known as 'weepers' set around the edges of the tomb

style. His head rests upon an ornate tournament helmet, topped by a crest of a swan (one of his family's badges) wearing a coronet, as a mark of his status as a peer of the realm. His membership of the Order of the Garter is shown by moulded badges around the main archway. There are other heraldic symbols around the tomb. At his feet are a bear (the main emblem of the Warwicks) and a griffin (emblem of his widow, Isabelle Despenser). Banners of the lands and titles of Beauchamp and the families from whom he and his two wives claimed descent are hung in pride of place. The bear and ragged staff emblem features again in the stained-glass windows along with images of Beauchamp's favoured patron saints, including St Thomas Becket, St Alban, the first English Christian martyr, and a Yorkshire saint, St John of Beverley, whose cult was popular at the court of Henry V.

As well as patron saints in the windows, Beauchamp's effigy is also looked over by a painted figure of the Virgin and Child on the ceiling directly above. His hands are raised in prayerful adoration and his eyes open, gazing upwards, as if in appeal to the Virgin for her intercession to save his soul from Hell.



View of the decoration of the Beauchamp Chapel

On the wall behind the effigy's head, facing the stained-glass window, was a large painting of a Doom or Last Judgement, depicting the souls of the dead being welcomed to Heaven or dispatched into Hell – the fate that preoccupied most medieval people and which explains the careful planning of Beauchamp's tomb and the perpetual prayers for his soul. Around the bier are small figures set into arcades known as 'weepers', meant to represent his relations and friends in mourning, and to remind them, still alive, of their duty to keep

up prayers for his soul once he was dead and could do no more to ensure his own salvation.

Work on Beauchamp's chapel began in 1443, soon after his death, but he was not finally laid to rest there for over thirty years later. The chapel had first call on the funds of his will and, at a total cost of £2,500, it nearly bankrupted his heirs. Its completion, and its lavishness, demonstrate its importance to him and to his heirs.

The Great Bible (1539)

The Great Bible was the first authorised English edition, issued by Henry VIII

The frontispiece is a woodcut print showing Henry VIII (1509–47) himself, handing copies of the Bible to Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and to Thomas Cromwell, royal chief minister and Vice-Regent in Spirituals, the enforcer (some might say, instigator) of Henry's religious reforms. As an artefact and an historical source of the sixteenth century, the Great Bible can tell us a good deal about these early years of the English Reformation.

Evangelical reformers across Europe in the early sixteenth century agreed on the importance of translating the Bible into national languages (vernaculars) for spreading their message and to support the claim that faith ought to be based on the Word of God. Many of these translations became landmarks in the development of national languages, such as the German Bible of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and, in English, William Tyndale's New Testament and Miles Coverdale's Bible.

Increasing literacy, the introduction of printing and growing uniformity in the English language stimulated a demand for religious texts in English in the 1520s and '30s. Protestantism had adherents at Henry's court, among them Cranmer and Cromwell, but the King himself was not necessarily among them. Henry's Reformation has been called 'an act of state', more about establishing royal (rather than papal) supremacy over the Church in England. Royal supremacy gave the king the power as well as the duty to impose his view of true religion within his realm. He had censored Tyndale's Bible and other religious texts in 1530, but was prepared to countenance the commission of an 'official' English Bible 'so that the people should not be ignorant in the law of God'.

In the aftermath of the Catholic protest of the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1537, a revision of Coverdale's translation was organised by Cromwell, and the official Great Bible (printed in Paris) first appeared in churches in England in April 1539. The frontispiece gives a clear picture of how Henry regarded the new English Church and its scriptures – the king is second under God; he is the Lord's anointed, and the minister of God's Word, bestowing it upon priests and congregation. It is clearly Henry's Bible, not that of the people, using the translation and editing that he chose, not them, and handing it down as an act of royal patronage and clemency, not as of right.

Henry was keen that his subjects accept God's law on the duty of obedience to earthly power – hence the enthusiastic cries of 'Vivat rex'. Production of an authorised Bible that all congregations had to use reminds us that the Reformation was not only about radical evangelism and personal choices of faith. It was also about obedience and religious uniformity, this time under Henry's command rather than the Catholic Church.

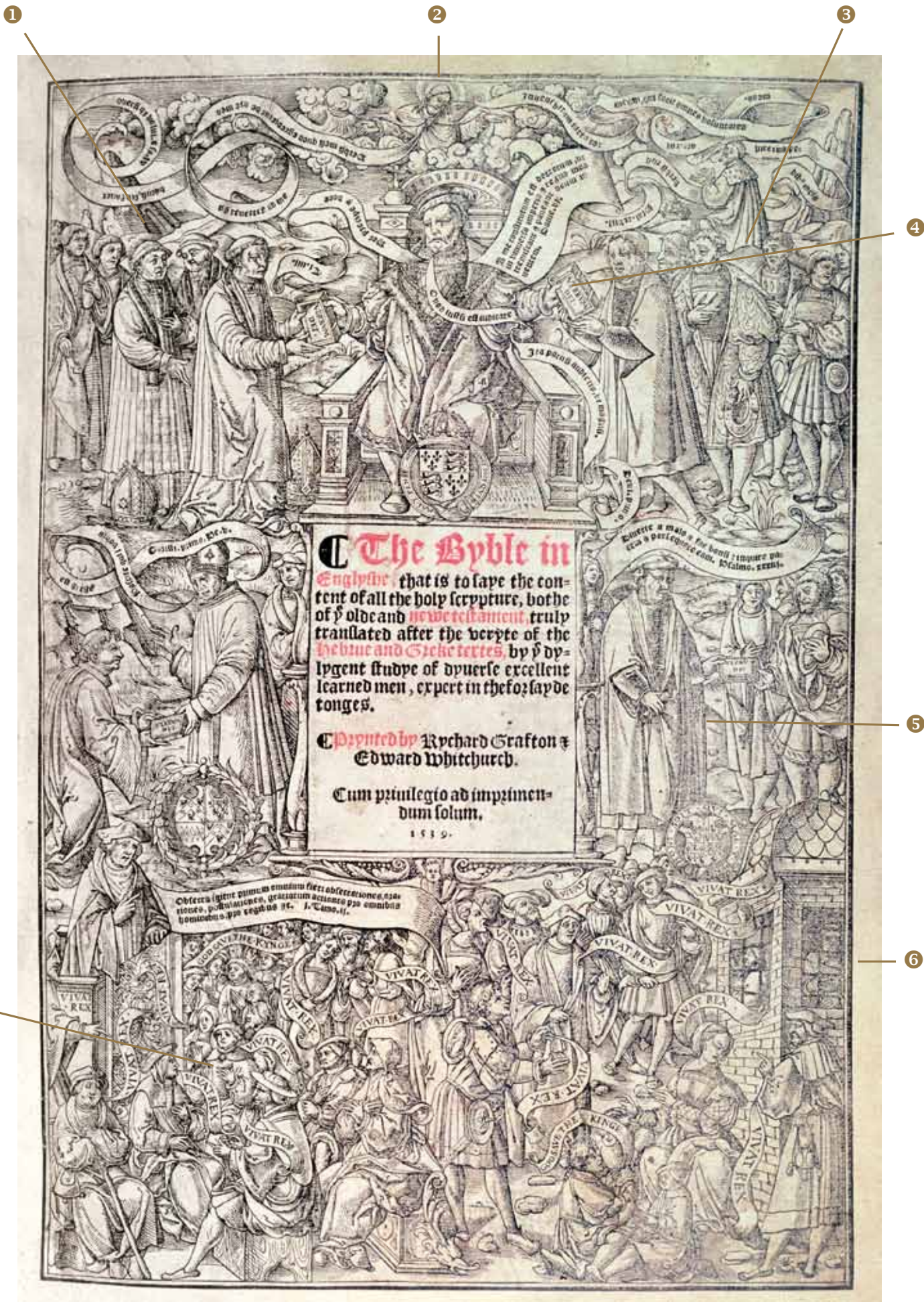
Many historians would argue that, in matters of his personal faith, Henry VIII would remain Catholic until he died and, in many senses, England was not truly 'Protestantised' in 1547. However it was no coincidence that the veneration of religious images and saints' relics were abolished at the same time that every parish was ordered to buy a state-sponsored English Bible. The predominantly visual culture of late medieval Catholicism had been replaced by a faith of the Word, with sermons and Bible reading at the heart of worship, and thus a text-based, literate Protestant English culture began.

Illustration follows the model of a *Chain of Being*, a well-known image of the period where Creation was drawn as a hierarchy, with God at the top, then angels, then mankind, then beasts of the air, sea and earth, and demons in Hell. In the vision of England here, Henry is at the top of his creation, with every person of all ranks knowing their place under him.

- 1 Archbishop Cranmer and bishops
- 2 God in his Heaven, gesturing towards Henry as his earthly representative in this endeavour.
- 3 Thomas Cromwell and political classes
- 4 Henry VIII, enthroned, issues copies of the Great Bible to the clergy on his right and the laity on his left.
- 5 The Bible is distributed by Cranmer to parish priests (on left) and by Cromwell to the people.
- 6 The bearded man (above) reads his new English Bible privately at home.
- 7 The new Bible is read to men, women and children from the pulpit. All hearing it, whether from the priest or through the window, declare 'Vivat rex' (Long live the King) or, in English, 'God save the King' (detail below).



Detail of a boy listening to the Bible being read, and praising the king



The Mostyn Clock (c.1690)

An artefact celebrating the Scientific Revolution and a new regime

The seventeenth century in Britain was one of revolutions. This is most obvious politically with the Wars of the Three Kingdoms that saw the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the establishment of a Parliamentary Commonwealth, and then the ousting of James II (James VII in Scotland) in 1688 to be replaced by his Protestant daughter, Mary, and son-in-law, William of Orange. However, the period was also one of huge expansion in trade and commerce: it saw a rise in economic prosperity amongst the 'middling sort', the gentry and merchant classes, as well as the acceleration of scientific knowledge and enquiry.

The Mostyn Clock is an artefact that reflects all of these patterns of change. In its mechanics, it is technologically innovative as the first year-going, striking, spring-driven clock and it was created by the acknowledged 'father of English watch-making', Thomas Tompion (1639–1713). Tompion became apprenticed to a London clockmaker in 1664 and was an early member of the Clockmakers' Company. He was also one of the few watchmakers to become a member of the Royal Society (although some historians consider evidence on this status to be inconclusive), and played a pivotal role in scientific developments of the late seventeenth century. On the request of Charles II, Tompion designed two clocks for the new Royal Observatory in 1676 that needed to be wound only once a year and, with thirteen-foot pendulums on a two-second beat, provided accurate measurements needed by royal astronomers.

The Mostyn Clock was made by Tompion for William III (1689–1702), and believed to have been commissioned in 1689, the year of

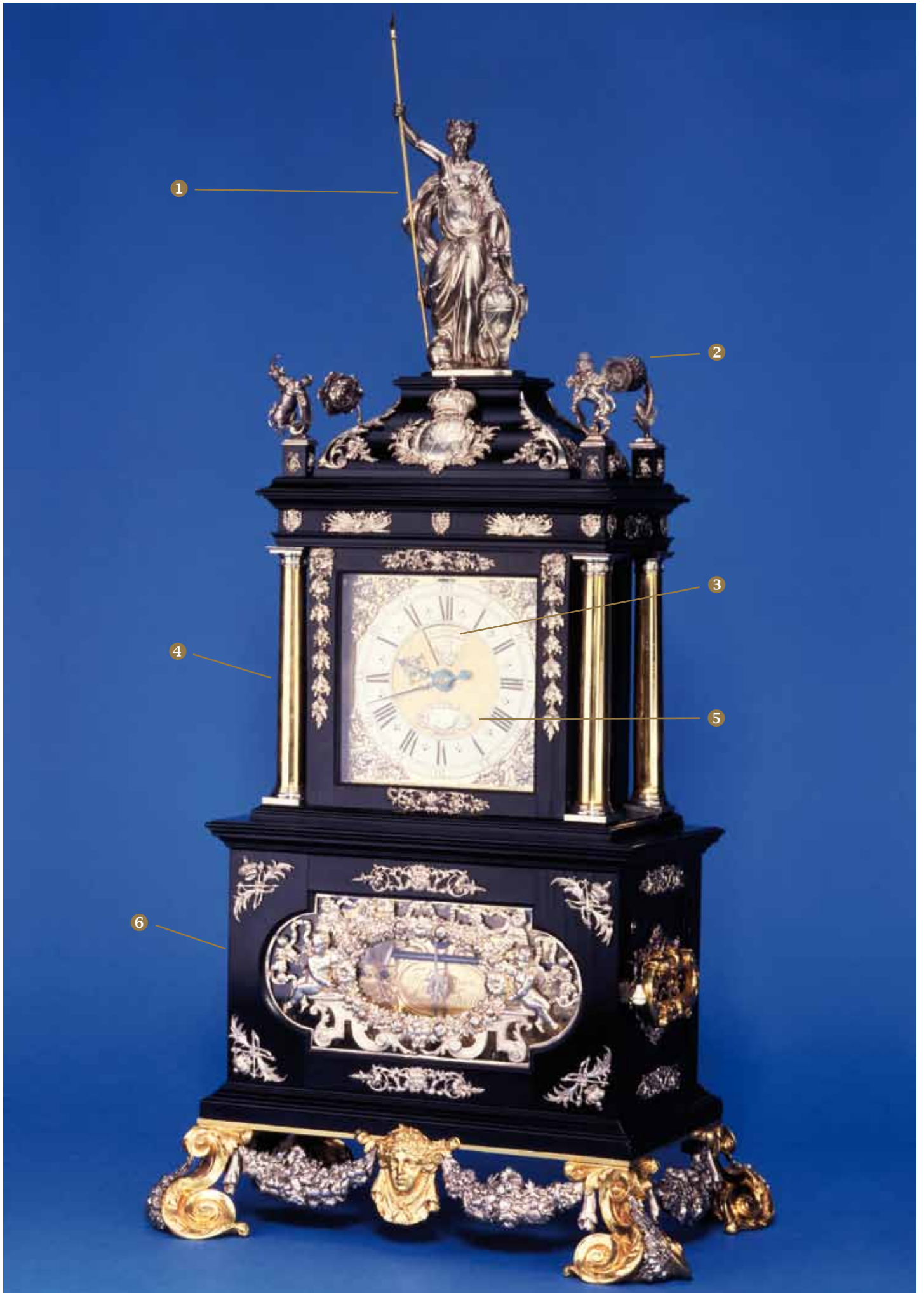
Despite historians' reservations with the term, the Scientific Revolution is a useful concept in evoking the fundamental changes of this period in our understanding of the natural world, and in new ways of looking at the world, such as abandoning classical authorities and traditional teachings of the Church in favour of rational analysis and experiments. Useful time parameters are from 1543, and Nicholas Copernicus's work on astronomy and the orbit of all planets around a stationary Sun, to the publication of Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia* (1687) and his laws of physical motion.

the coronation of William and Mary. This would make sense given that the clock's rich decoration seems to celebrate the continued union of the two kingdoms of England and Scotland under the new Protestant monarchs after a second Stuart deposition within forty years and the exile of the Catholic James II & VII. The clock is topped by a triumphant Britannia and heraldic emblems of the two kingdoms and is richly decorated around its casing with fine silver mounts of crowns and crossed sceptres, victory palms, military trophies and cherubs. The luxurious ebony veneer of the case mimics the look of the most expensive cabinet-making of the period, with wood transported by the English and Dutch East Indies companies. It rests on gilt baroque-scolled feet, linked by modelled swags of leaves and flowers. The mechanism is based on a relatively delicate verge escapement, regulated by a short pendulum. It has a complex driving work of six-wheel gear trains, twin barrels and reversed pulley fusees in order for the clock to strike hourly

- 1 Figure of Britannia, crowned and holding a shield decorated with the standard of Great Britain (combined crosses of St George and St Andrew) in use since the time of King James I & VI.
- 2 More symbols of the twin kingdoms of England and Scotland – the lion and the unicorn on the front corners, and the thistle and the rose on the rear corners.
- 3 Clock dial with aperture displaying day of the week and the related classical planet associated with it.
- 4 Doric columns mirroring Palladian architecture being used by Sir Christopher Wren and others in the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire (1666).
- 5 Maker's plaque in silver: 'T. Tompion Londini Fecit' ('Thomas Tompion of London made it').
- 6 Casing veneered in ebony wood with silver and gilt-brass mounted decoration.

and to run for a full year on a single winding. Remarkably, the Mostyn Clock is a compact and elegant 70cm (28 inches) tall at a time when other year-going clocks were long-cases, over two metres (6 feet) in height.

The Mostyn Clock was one of a series of table clocks produced for the royal couple, but it was kept in the King's private quarters and he bequeathed it on his death to one of his Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, Henry Sidney, Earl of Romney, from whom it descended to the Mostyn family. Tompion was later appointed official Clockmaker to the King by William III, to whom he presented a barometer and sundial for Hampton Court as well as another year-going clock, this one showing the difference between solar and Greenwich Mean Time that is still displayed at Buckingham Palace. Thomas Tompion's status and fame as a craftsman at his death in 1713 is demonstrated by his burial at Westminster Abbey.



English porcelain teapot (1755)

Everyday household objects can open a window onto social and cultural history

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Britain was transformed both as a sovereign state and as a society. Politically, the Act of Union (1707) united the previously separate kingdoms of England and Scotland under a single Crown and one Parliament, while incorporating an Act of Settlement that required the heir to the throne to be a Protestant descendent of the Electress Sophia, grand-daughter of James I & VI, and thereby effected the Hanoverian succession in 1714. Intercontinental warfare, in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8) and the Seven Years' War (1754–63), raised Britain's profile on the world stage, as naval supremacy proved decisive and its overseas possessions increased, leaving it the dominant colonial and trading power.

Economically, the eighteenth century for Britain was one of commerce and consumerism. It also witnessed the identification of a 'middling sort' as a social class. This was the group of merchants, retailers, entrepreneurs, bankers and manufacturers who drove the economic growth. These middle ranks – moderately prosperous property owners with family incomes of between £50 and £200 a year – comprised nearly 25% of the population by the 1780s and were the backbone of a British society described by the eighteenth-century law professor, William Blackstone, as 'a polite and commercial people'. New money created new markets for fine and beautiful things, which were manufactured on a scale never seen before, and markets particularly for items whose use reflected the fashions, tastes and aspirant gentility of their owners.

In the eighteenth century, tea was still a relatively recent arrival into Britain. It

was first sold in very small quantities by apothecaries and pharmacies for medicinal purposes, but was becoming a fashionable alternative beverage in coffee- and chocolate-houses by the mid-seventeenth century. Charles II's Portuguese queen, Catherine of Braganza, has been credited with introducing 'the drink of temperance' to the Stuart court. By the early eighteenth century, tea had even replaced beer as the drink of choice for breakfast in the household of Queen Anne, and these royal connections heightened the vogue for tea. Coffee-houses had always been enclosed masculine spaces, hotbeds of political gossip, fevered debate and commercial dealings. However the tea-gardens of the eighteenth century, such as Vauxhall, which opened its doors in 1732, were venues where whole families went to enjoy music, play games or stroll along lantern-lit walks, as well as providing an environment where young women and men could mingle.

However, tea-drinking was most often a domestic ritual and an important social occasion in the lives of upper- and middle-class women in the eighteenth century. In 1717, Thomas Twining opened London's first dedicated tea-house on The Strand where women might purchase their teas to be stored at home often in ornate wooden tea caddies. These caddies normally came with two inner canisters, one for black tea and the other for green, along with a porcelain bowl in which the Lady of the House could blend the two teas to her own taste. The taking of afternoon tea, and a social gathering of informal callers, became a regular part of the day in the eighteenth century and, within the domestic sphere, fulfilled a similar function for women as the coffee-house had done for men – an occasion to meet, converse and forge social networks. The tea table was female territory, with the hostess presiding, brewing the tea herself in front of her guests before serving them and herself, and with one of



the male guests or a daughter of the house normally handing around cups. The hostess and her prized collection of decorated china and elegant tea accoutrements were all on display as she performed the ceremonies of tea-making. Porcelain cups and saucers, tea urns, boilers, spoons and creamers in silver or pewter, and the teapot itself, are key examples of how consumer fashion and the commodities themselves can be seen within an historical and cultural context. Items such as these signified the social standing of their owners, or promised one to which they aspired, while also equipping their home

- ① Produced by the Bow Porcelain Factory in the mid-1750s
- ② Decorated by transfer printing in red enamel of a 1755 engraving, 'The Tea Party' by Robert Hancock, one of the most popular designs used on 18thC English ceramics
- ③ Depicts a wealthy, fashionable couple taking tea on a garden bench
- ④ Exotically-dressed black pageboy

smartly and appropriately to facilitate sociability amongst their peers. Until import duties were abolished in 1784, tea remained a luxury item and, hence, its consumption was a voguish status symbol for the upper and middle classes.

The couple depicted on the teapot are attended by an elaborately dressed black pageboy, who pours hot water from a kettle into a teapot. Although many of the 10,000–15,000 black men, women and children estimated to live in Britain by the mid-eighteenth century were of free status, others arrived in Britain as household slaves and remained so. Even for the free, especially in port cities like London and Bristol where freed slaves, unemployed African sailors and their families tended to settle, domestic service was one of the most common forms of employment.

The African pageboy serving tea is a vivid reminder of the metaphorical convergence of Britain's two key

trading 'triangles' in the tea cup. The huge escalation in the consumption of tea in Britain in the first half of the eighteenth century is mirrored by a comparable increase in the import and sale of cane sugar from the slave plantations of the Caribbean in order to sweeten that tea. Tea-trading by the East India Company between Britain, India and China, and the growing fashionability of tea-drinking in Britain, was one of several consumer drivers of the Atlantic slave-trade triangle and of cultivating the peculiarly sweet-tooth of the British. Tea features almost as an active participant in the history of Britain and its empire in this period: the thirst for tea in the domestic market drove East India Company men to establish plantations of tea across India and south-east Asia, while its popularity in the British North American colonies made tea an easy target for monopoly and heavy taxation from London, becoming a symbol of unjust imposition and of militant resistance in the Boston Tea Party of 1773.



Sir David Ochterlony in Indian dress, c.1820

Cultural interaction and conquest during the building of Empire

The origins of the British Empire should not necessarily be seen as deliberate political expansionism, given that, in many areas, empire-building was not carried out by the state, but by trading or settlement companies set up specifically for overseas activity.

The establishment of colonies in North America first took place under the initiative of powerful individuals or groups operating as joint stock companies under a Royal Charter, such as the London Company, the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers and the Hudson's Bay Company. The East India Company was first granted a limited monopoly on trade with all countries from the South African Cape eastwards in 1600 and, with the patronage of the Mughal emperors, soon established trading posts (factories) at major ports across India.

By the early eighteenth century, the Company had amalgamated with its only rival, developed a political lobby through its enriched officers in both Houses of Parliament, and was in the financial position of being able to lend millions of pounds to the Treasury. Although the priorities of trade and profit remained, the

Company wielded state-like powers in the territories that it controlled. These territories expanded, too, in the second half of the century through war against the French and the Nawab of Bengal, as well as forming subsidiary alliances where, under threat of conquest, neighbouring princes granted control over trade and foreign affairs in return for Company protection. Troubled by claims of the Company's financial mismanagement, the British government assumed partial control over the Indian territories in 1773, appointing a Governor-General through whom the Company and its directors would act as sovereign power on behalf of the Crown. Further Acts of Parliament over succeeding decades imposed more scrutiny on Company officials and gave additional powers to governors until direct rule was imposed in 1858.

Sir David Ochterlony is a good example of an early British empire builder. He was born in Boston, in the American colony of Massachusetts, and made his fortune with the East India Company as a soldier and as a regional official (Resident). This anonymous painting depicts

① Formal European portraits, including officers of Highland regiments, remind the viewer that this *is* the official residence of a Westerner, and contrast starkly with rich Indian fabrics and soft furnishings of this reception room.

② Male servants in attendance, one fanning Ochterlony with ostrich plumes.

③ Male and female Indian musicians.

④ Nautch girls (professional dancers).

⑤ A serpentine hookah pipe at the centre of the tableau.

⑥ Ochterlony portrayed relaxing in the style of an Indian potentate, reclining on ornate cushions and wearing the robes and turban of a Mughal official. His age in the picture has led it to be dated to his second Delhi residency, between 1818 and 1822.

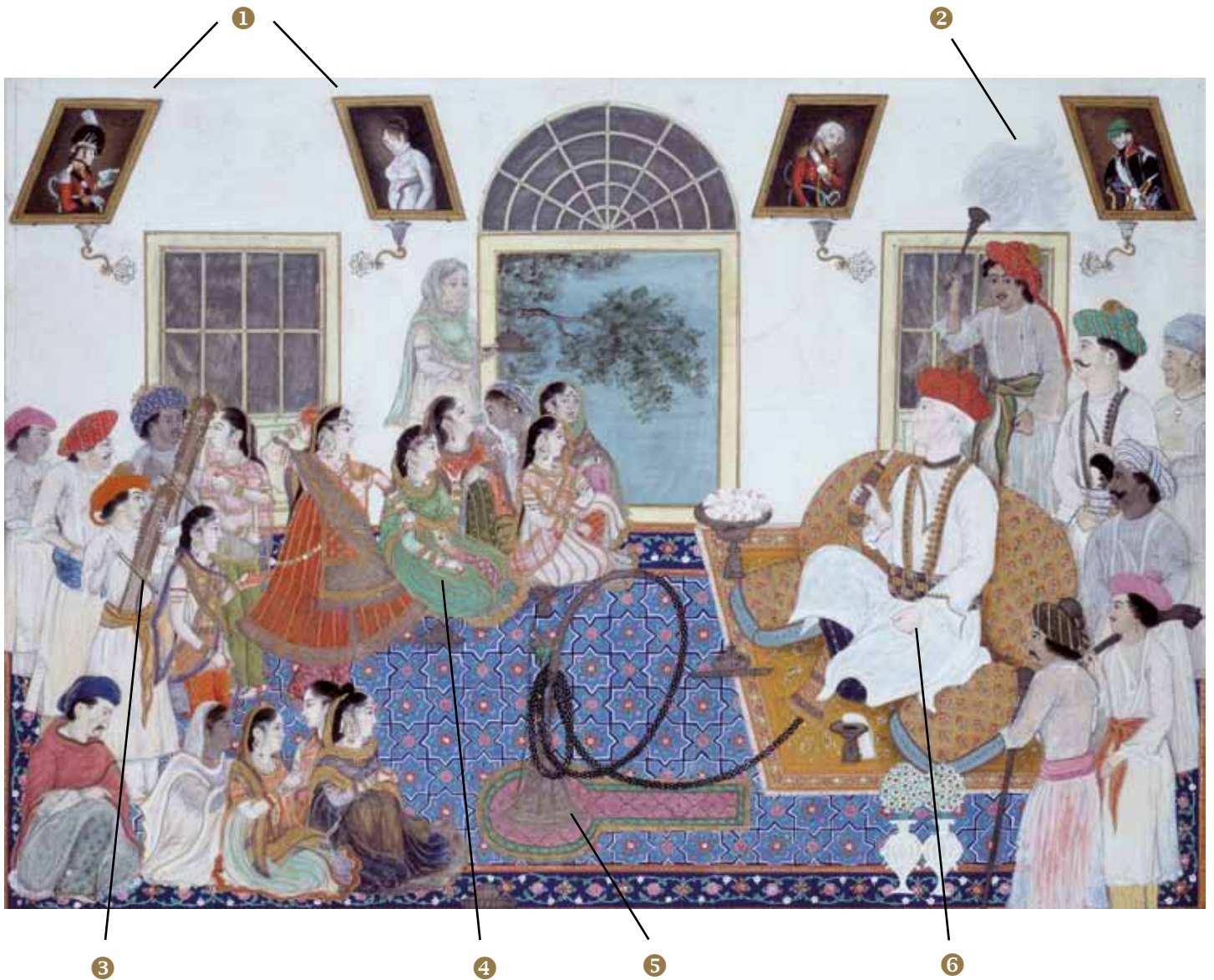
an evening's entertainment in the Delhi Residency in the early nineteenth century and demonstrates Ochterlony's familiarity with and enjoyment of Indian culture. There is nothing of the stiffly-attired and socially exclusive *sahibs* and *memsahibs* of the later British Raj about Ochterlony here. It is a hybrid world, reflecting the lifestyles of many merchants and administrators of the East India Company in this period

Sir David Ochterlony (1758–1825)

He was the eldest son of a Scottish father (another David Ochterlony), a merchant sea-captain who died insolvent in 1765. The widowed Katherine Ochterlony was American-born and remained initially in the family's home in Boston before travelling with her three sons in 1770 to England. There, she married Isaac Hearst whom, it is thought, used his growing political

influence in the College of Arms to secure Ochterlony a position in the Bengal regiments of the East India Company in 1777. Ochterlony fought in Mysore, Rajputana and the Punjab, as well as holding a command in the Anglo-Nepalese War for which he was rewarded with a baronetcy in 1815 and induction into the Order of the Bath in 1816. Like many British men making a name for themselves in India, Ochterlony built a political

career on the back of his military exploits. He was made the first British Resident at Delhi from 1803–6 after taking a lead role when the city fell to the Company, and Resident of Delhi (1818–22) and Rajputana (1822–4) after diplomatic success with Amir Khan. After falling out of favour with a new Governor-General, Ochterlony died in July 1825 at Meerut, where he was buried.



who immersed themselves in Mughal culture, who learnt Persian and Indian dialects, who married or co-habited with local women, and had mixed-race children.

Evidence from wills in Company archives shows that in the 1780s more than one-third of British men in India left possessions to one or more Indian wives or children, even if not all of them, unlike Ochterlony, were prepared openly to acknowledge these relationships during their lifetimes. Traditional claims that Ochterlony took the evening air in Delhi with thirteen Indian wives mounted on thirteen elephants is heavily influenced by folklore. Ochterlony never married, but is known to have had at least six children, one son and five daughters, by two or more Indian women, and he wrote movingly of his worries for

their upbringing. His three eldest daughters were married comfortably to Company officials; trust funds were left in his will for the two youngest, while his son worked as Ochterlony's interpreter. His grandson, Charles Metcalfe Ochterlony, inherited the baronetcy through special parliamentary patent in 1825.

The period of cultural intermingling depicted in the Ochterlony painting did not last, as the Charter Act of 1813, which asserted Crown sovereignty over all Company possessions, ended most of its trading monopolies and opened up India to missionaries and other Western influences. The mutiny of 1857 finished off the process. With British victory and direct rule, genuine interaction with the top rank of the Mughul elite disappeared and the governing culture was

unapologetically imposed from London. As opportunities in the empire for greater numbers of British men and women broadened in the later nineteenth century, ideas about appropriate roles and behaviours seemed to contract. The integration with local culture that 'white mughals' like Ochterlony enjoyed was made contemptible by fears that 'going native' would lead to degeneracy and the decline of imperial authority. What it was to be British, particularly a British imperialist abroad, became increasingly expressed in terms of difference to the colonised.

Social realism on the big screen

In the twentieth century, the art-form of the people was arguably cinema

Many of the early pioneers in cinematography in the late nineteenth century were British, such as William Friese Greene who developed perforated celluloid film, and Robert Paul and Birt Acres, the first men to build and operate a 35mm camera. Before 1914, movie audiences were as likely to view a film produced in Britain or France as one from the USA. However, by the early 1920s, US cinema had begun to dominate screens on both sides of the Atlantic, with the Los Angeles suburb of Hollywood becoming synonymous with the motion picture industry.

There were over 4,000 cinemas in Britain by 1925, but there was real expansion in the 1930s when the introduction of 'talkies' led to larger, purpose-built premises to accommodate new technology, and a ballooning audience in more luxurious surroundings. By 1940, there were 5,500 cinemas in Britain, with every town having at least one, housing almost 4½ million seats – all of which were needed. Between 1934 and the outbreak of World War II, there was a 10% increase in cinema attendance amongst the British population, with sales rising from 903 million tickets in 1934 to 990 million in 1939.

Cinema-going was a huge part of everyday cultural life in the mid-twentieth century, particularly for children and young adults, and remained the most popular leisure pursuit in late 1940s and early 1950s Britain. The all-time peak of attendance was in 1946, topping 1,600 million ticket sales, while one survey conducted in 1949 found that 40% of adults visited the cinema regularly every week. However, the climate of cinema-going changed over the course of the 1950s, with the advent of TV as an accessible and affordable entertainment, alongside

broader post-war improvements to comfort in the average home and greater demands on the family budget to sustain this. By 1961, it was estimated that 75% of British households had a TV set, and television often kept at home the 'family audience' who would still treat themselves to a movie on high days and holidays, but otherwise infrequently so. Cinema in the 1960s would be increasingly left to those who spent evening leisure outside the home, so much so that, by 1960, young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 constituted almost half of those frequenting the cinema regularly (once a week or more). That there would also be changes in the output of mainstream cinema to

reflect this changing audience goes almost without saying.

In the 1960s, British films appealed to a youthful demographic in a number of ways, tapping into their aspirations for independence and new experiences with light-hearted products like *Summer Holiday* (1963), while also capitalising on the growing image of 'Swinging London' internationally with Richard Lester's *verité*-style Beatles' showcases, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965), the heady mix of glamour, violence and humour of the James Bond franchise (1962–), and taboo-breaking dramas like *Alfie* (1967). British cinema in the 1960s also challenged its young audience, reflecting the harder edge

'England swings like a pendulum do –
Bobbies on bicycles, two by two,
Westminster Abbey, the Tower and Big Ben,
The rosy red cheeks of the little children.'

Roger Miller, *England Swings*
(US Top 10 & UK Top 20 single, 1965–6)

Carnaby Street, London, 1960s



of their lives along with changing expectations and continued frustrations of class and gender roles. The 'British New Wave' or 'kitchen-sink realism' genre of British filmmaking was gritty, personal yet unsentimental, and tightly filmed, almost documentary in style and influenced by 'Mass Observation' policies and Ministry of Information films. Among the most realistic films, and arguably having stood the test of time better than some others, is *Poor Cow* (1967), directed by Ken Loach.

Loach had learned his craft in TV, graduating from *Z-Cars* to 'Wednesday Play' productions like *Up the Junction* (1965) and *Cathy Come*

Home (1966). *Poor Cow* was Loach's debut cinema feature but was familiar territory for him, with a screenplay by *Up the Junction*'s author, Nell Dunn, and starring the leading actor of both 'Wednesday Plays', Carol White. *Poor Cow* is the story of three years in the life of Joy, a resilient yet ultimately fragile young mother whose world spirals steadily downwards over the course of the movie, seemingly out of her control. Joy is married to Tom, a criminal who is violent to and contemptuous of her, and whose prison sentence for robbery holds out the possibility of a new life for her. She starts an affair with Tom's friend, Dave, who is kind to her and

her baby son, falls in love, and is devastated when he, too, is jailed for twelve years for robbing a jeweller's shop. Despite hearing in court of Dave's long criminal past, and his violent attack on the female jeweller, Joy vows to stand by him. She first becomes a barmaid, then takes up provocative life-modelling for a camera club, and begins numerous affairs in an increasingly squalid existence. She contemplates divorce from Tom, but reconciles with him on his release, before bitterly regretting it and encouraging him back into crime in the hope he'll be imprisoned again and she'll be free.

The atmosphere of *Poor Cow* is intense from the start, with realistic close-ups of Joy giving birth to her son, Jonny, and the audience almost as her confidante throughout as she acts as a narrator. Loach uses irony to prompt sympathy for her situation, such as the inter-title, 'The world was our oyster ... And we chose Ruislip', when Joy and Tom move to the suburbs early in the film, and the playing of the Ivy League's 1965 hit *Funny How Love Can Be* from the jukebox in a café when Tom subjects Joy to crude comment and rough treatment in front of his mates.

Like Loach's TV 'kitchen-sink' dramas, *Poor Cow* is a vivid reminder in a feature film that the 1960s may have been 'Swinging' only for a lucky metropolitan few and, for a good proportion of the cinema audiences in suburbs and market towns, lives could still be circumscribed by poverty, class and society's limitations.

At one point, Joy tells us, 'All you need is a man and a baby and a couple of nice rooms to live in'. In reality, she wants more, but that basic right to health, happiness and prosperity, which is held tantalisingly beyond her grasp, permeates the film, imbuing it with an idealistic faith in humanity and society.

Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (1992), pp.151-2

Carol White plays the young mother, Joy, in *Poor Cow*



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Social realism on the big screen

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