How did a rural and agrarian English society transform itself into a mercantile and maritime state? What role was played by war and the need for military security? How did geographical ideas inform the construction of English—and then British—political identities? Focusing upon the deployment of geographical imagery and arguments for political purposes, Jonathan Scott’s ambitious and interdisciplinary study traces the development of the idea of Britain as an island nation, state and then empire from 1500 to 1800, through literature, philosophy, history, geography and travel writing. One argument advanced in the process concerns the maritime origins, nature and consequences of the English revolution. This is the first general study to examine changing geographical languages in early modern British politics, in an imperial, European and global context. Offering a new perspective on the nature of early modern Britain, it will be essential reading for students and scholars of the period.

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For John Morrill, a fishy tale
There was a man who was born in Yen but grew up in Chu, and in old age returned to his native country. While he was passing through the state of Jin his companions played a joke on him. They pointed out a city and told him: ‘This is the capital of Yen.’

He composed himself and looked solemn.

Inside the city they pointed out a shrine: ‘This is the shrine of your quarter.’

He breathed a deep sigh.

They pointed out a hut: ‘This is your father's cottage.’

His tears welled up.

They pointed out a mound: ‘This is your father’s tomb.’

He could not help weeping aloud. His companions roared with laughter. ‘We were teasing you. You are still only in Jin.’

The man was very embarrassed. When he reached Yen, and really saw the capital of Yen and the shrine of his quarter, really saw his father’s cottage and tomb, he did not feel it so deeply.

The Liezi

Quoted in Kuriyama Shigehisa, ‘“Between Mind and Eye”: Japanese Anatomy in the Eighteenth Century’, in Charles Leslie and Allan Young (eds.), Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge (Berkeley, 1992)
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Preface: Geography and the sea

This study began as a trickle and swept me out to sea. It remains a limited vessel navigating more than one large body of knowledge, but I hope it is seaworthy. I began by reading voyage narratives, most, though not all, maritime. These included the journals of Cook and the frequently hair-raising accounts by early British settlers of their voyages to New Zealand. The travellers were always seasick, there were always storms, and amid the sharks, seabirds, red shrimps off Argentina, and many other creatures and events, life went on: birth, eating, drinking and death. Most travellers arrived. ‘[W]e could see the smoke rising from several fires on shore. The coast was by what I could see rocky and steep … we hauled a fine white fish weighing about 40 pounds like our cod and called by the natives harbouker [hapuka, grouper] … Fine night dead calm the harbour like a mirror reflecting all the lights from the little shops that ran along the beach.’

This starting point owed something to the work of J. C. Beaglehole, and not only to his famous editorial labours (those footnotes still hold good, and he was an extremely sound judge of south-east Asian tropical fruit). Beaglehole also wrote about seventeenth-century England, gave a brilliant inaugural lecture called ‘The New Zealand Scholar’, and produced his lip-smacking first book, *The Exploration of the Pacific*, while a semi-unemployed doctoral graduate trained in an entirely different historical area.

Several of the preoccupations informing this study are characteristic of New Zealanders, including, and perhaps especially, expatriates. They include maps, geography, islands, and the mental contemplation

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1 ATL, MS Papers 0495, Diary of G. Darling, November 1842, entries for Tuesday 1st and Thursday 3rd at New Plymouth, New Zealand, p. 16.
When the Waves Ruled Britannia

of distance in space as well as time. When my father died in 1960 a collection of essays was published in his memory called *Distance Looks our Way* because for New Zealanders that was the case.3 This project engages with English and then British thinking about space, at a time when the spatial and cultural parameters of European experience were being revolutionized. It reflects how closely the texts in question intertwined space and time: no geography without history, or vice versa; no voyage without clockface, and eventually chronometer, as well as compass (and stars). It was partly because history informed politics, and geography history, that geography belonged within the political realm.4 Contemporaries read Thucydides and Livy map in hand.

In the words of Nathaniel Butler, ‘as geography without history seemeth a carkasse without motion, so history without geography wandrereth as a vagrant without certaine habitation’.5 Whether in Camden or Hakluyt, although for different reasons, textual navigation aimed to orient the reader in space and time. For the former, the point of departure was part of the context for explaining the place of arrival. For the latter, voyaging had a chronology essential to the pressing of territorial claims, and the charting of a voyage had to show not only where a traveller had been, but how a reader might get there, vicariously or in practice.

This book has two scholarly purposes. One addresses the early modern English and then British political use of geographical language.6 Here I have drawn upon the work of historical geographers and scholars of English literature as well as that of historians. I have not mastered the field of early modern geography. What I suggest is that geography has been a relatively neglected component of the history of political ideas.

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6 ‘English and then British use’ here refers to a temporal sequence. This does not relate to the user, implying that English people became British, or excluding the Scots and the Welsh. It refers to the thing described, the English and then British state (the latter established in 1707). Most writers discussed happen to have been English or Scottish.
While historical geographers examine the politics and religion of early modern geography, and historians of political thought examine constitutional and moral languages, there has been no general attempt to map the changing geographical language of English and then British politics, despite its crucial role in creating an image of the state.  

My second and related focus is upon how a rural and agrarian English society transformed its government in a mercantile and maritime direction under the extreme pressure of war. This process took centuries, infinite ingenuity, blood and treasure, and remained highly incomplete. Yet as a process capable of being analysed historically it raises the question: what happens to politics when you add water? Although this society depended upon both fresh and salt water, the emphasis in early modern political writing, for reasons of economic and military security, was increasingly upon the challenge posed by the sea. Here I draw upon historiographies concerning state formation, empire, and maritime and naval history. Having previously worked with the first, I am, however, newer to the others. Water is now hot, and in particular ‘[t]he history of the sea has become so complex, so multidimensional, that its potentialities may be lost’. This huge topic cannot here be treated systematically. However, it is an inescapable context for understanding the construction of early modern England’s and Britain’s political and geographical self-image. Related themes include trade and the history and consequences of trade; what contemporaries called the discipline of the sea; and what became the idea of an island nation and empire.

Both of these topics develop earlier work. My *England’s Troubles* discussed contemporary political imagery deploying images of the natural world to depict a tempest-tossed ship of state.12 *Commonwealth Principles* looked in more detail at some maritime components of English republicanism, in writing and practice.13 Both set these themes in a European, and particularly Anglo-Dutch, framework. This book is a sequel to *England’s Troubles* which investigates articulations of early modern England’s European identity from the perspective of geography rather than religion. It examines what English and Scottish writers made of a geography as characteristically European as their religion, and which embroiled them no less inescapably in the sanguinary affairs of Europe locally, regionally and globally. It is a successor to *Commonwealth Principles* in being a study in the history of ideas focused upon primary texts, in this case manuscript as well as published. Returning once more in this context to Anglo-Dutch history is not to suggest that it has been neglected. However, the duration, multifaceted nature and cumulatively transformative impact of Dutch upon early modern English history remains underexplored. The situation is serious: even cricket was a Flemish import.14

Geography and the sea come together here in the figure of the island. Although islands have become another preoccupation of New Zealanders, long before that English and then British people came to describe themselves as islanders.15 An island for early modern Europeans was not what it is for New Zealanders now. While contemporaries never failed to distinguish between water and land, they had an almost endless analytical repertoire for dealing with each, and with their relationship to each other. This book examines development of the idea of Britain as an island nation, state and then empire. For this the sources are voluminous, left by a society whose religious and political debates were saturated with images of the natural world, and whose imperial experience was intertwined with the ambitions and observational practices of natural philosophy. They include works of polemic, counsel, poetry, drama, satire, geography, history, natural philosophy, maritime treatises, political philosophy and travel writing.

This book, largely written at the University of Pittsburgh, bears the imprint of that Department of History in several ways. It had a powerful Atlantic history programme, and some of that salt water rubbed off on me. More generally, Pittsburgh is a department committed to transnational and global graduate training in history. Although this book is not a global, or even transnational history, I benefited enormously from my interaction with students and faculty comparing many parts of the world. Those students included Catherine Balleriaux, Tania Boster, Roland Clark, John Donoghue, Niklas Frykman, Chris Magra, Jake Pollock and Kate Sorrels, all of whom have contributed to this project, or at least tolerated my going on about it (what choice did they have?). My resource base has been especially fortified by Jake, who is working on a related topic. Faculty to whom I am indebted include Reid Andrews, Bill Chase, John Cooper, Pinar Emiralioglu, Alejandro de la Fuente, Janelle Greenberg, Jim and Peggy Knapp, Patrick Manning, Lara Putnam, Evelyn Rawski, Bruce Venarde and Jen Waldron. Paul Millett, John Morrow, Andrew Neill, John Reeve, Jonathan Sawday, Andrew Sharp and Michael Witmore all drew my attention to material I would otherwise have missed. This book could not have been written without the support of the University of Pittsburgh and the resources available there to the Carroll Amundson Professor of British History. These made possible the trips to London and elsewhere for archival work, and time for reading and writing.

Not for the first time I am indebted to Colin Davis, Martin Van Gelderen, Mark Kishlansky and Markku Peltonen. John Morrow, with whom I edited another volume while writing this, read an early draft, discussed, understood and supported the project while scooting across Auckland harbour aboard Swift, amid many other notable acts of friendship. I am most grateful to the two anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press.

During my own graduate education I was exceptionally lucky to fall under the lash of John Morrill. The first-rate Morrill now has many hands, a lot more sprightly around the rigging than myself. John’s command of the period, of its reefs, winds and currents, is only one of the qualities of a remarkable citizen of the republic of life. This book is a miserly return for everything he has done for me. For this reason I have added, at least, some servings of fish, which I offer freshly caught and plainly seasoned with warm affection and gratitude.

When, in Pittsburgh, I began this New Zealand-like study of an aspect of British history, I considered myself to be living in the middle of a world-spanning bridge of English language connecting the three countries. Now that I have moved to Auckland, the book reads like a bridge
leading me home. But one of its implications is that home is not a place, but a process. In any case history, if not kept under the strictest supervision, will govern the historian: “The young [and not so young] are mastered by the Dead.”¹⁶ I am more grateful than I can say to Anne, Sophia and Thomas for being part of our process; for learning their own lessons beside mine.

Abbreviations

| ATL  | Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand |
| BL   | British Library, London                           |
| PL   | Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge      |