

1809: Between Hope and History - Hugh Gault

Synopsis

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This book brings together information on many aspects of a world in flux. The key transition year of 1809 provides a focus for the larger transformation of British society that was to follow it. The year was marked by major political, military, economic and social events. Many of these were unforeseen and unanticipated. They set the conditions for Britain's industrial and social, rather than political, revolution. Political growth and instability were inter-twined. There were inquiries into corruption and bribery. Canning and Castlereagh as Cabinet Ministers allowed their enmity to escalate into a duel and result in their resignation from the government. As Prime Minister, Portland was seen to be past it. His replacement Perceval was thought mediocre. Parliamentary reform was possible because of the unstable tenor of the times. Some MPs sought to exploit this opportunity.

The country was in the midst of the Napoleonic wars. Wellington's victories in the Peninsula were sandwiched between the humiliation of the Cintra treaty and the debacle of the Walcheren adventure. George III required a second inquiry report on the former, but was said to have been misled on the latter. The war had economic and social ramifications, as well as political and military ones. A number of economic pressures and social trends continued, such as riots and strikes. Others started afresh. The trends included increasing urbanisation, improvements to the welfare of workers and a platform for the government's views with the start of the *Quarterly Review*. This book addresses the implications, describing the Regency, Britain's assumption of a new place in the world and the impact of Robert Owen as trade unions and socialism developed.

People still had hope, but they were aware of history. Their optimism was tempered by recent revolutions in America and France, by war in Ireland, by continuing concerns over Napoleon's intentions, and by growing upheaval at home as the Industrial Revolution took hold. Expectations had changed, but would they be fulfilled?

This book takes the view that, while people had drawn some lessons from the past, they were still in the process of adapting to the future. Change would be constant after 1809, so the search for stability was doomed. It was replaced by a preference for predictability. Evolution was a more attractive option than revolution. After all, the alternatives had been experienced. In this context it was **between hope and history**.

