Mapping the State: English Boundaries and the 1832 Reform Act. By MartinSpychal. London: University of London Press/Royal Historical Society: New Historical Perspectives. 2024. xviii, 348 pp. Hardback. £90, paperback £29.99, e-book open access. ISBN 9781915249258 [Book Review]

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Historians have long known that boundary reform was and is an integral part of parliamentary reform, but very few have bothered to look very closely at the small print, or – and this is the central point of departure for Spychal's impressive book – the processes by which this small but hugely significant print was produced. It has been far easier to decide, almost a priori, what the argument is going to be, and then find evidence in support. The most influential of these interpretations – and it is the main one that Spychal has in his sights – is D.C. Moore's concept of deferential communities: that is, the ways in which the Whig framers of the 1832 Reform Act were concerned to implement parliamentary reform gave a new lease of life to the politics of aristocratic influence and electoral deference in the constituencies. As Spychal shows from a variety of perspectives – county division, borough boundary reform, parliamentary debate, the long-term electoral profile of the new constituencies (traced, incidentally, through an extensively compiled dataset) – this was not really the objective of either the Whig politicians who created the parameters, or the bureaucrats charged with remapping the electoral system. In this respect, *Mapping the State* is perhaps the final nail in the coffin for the old but surprisingly enduring model of electoral sociology. Their starting point was the view that parliament should represent communities of interest.

That parliament should represent communities of interest, and that serious rebalancing was needed by the late 1820s, is not a novel argument (though thanks to Spychal we now have a systematic linguistic analysis of the rise of the concept of interest in parliament since the 1780s). But what *is* novel about Spychal's book is that the ways in which this was realised in the 1832 Reform Act was a pivotal moment in the making of the modern, disinterested, scientific, technocratic state. In some respects, this chimes with a much older historiography on the so-called 'revolution in government', but for all the attention to the latter, no one has ever really appreciated until now that it was the boundary commission established during the reform bill episode that would serve as the blueprint for the most widely known commissions of this period, and beyond – such as those connected to the poor law, factory reform and later public health.

At the centre of *Mapping the State* is the relatively unknown bureaucrat, Thomas Drummond (1797-1840), a Scots army officer, civil engineer and later public official, who died at the relatively young age (for a gentleman) of 42. Though given a relatively wide brief by his Whig masters to redraw the electoral map of England, his appointment was no random coincidence. Like many a serious, aspiring public servant – especially strong on the Whig-Liberal side of politics – Drummond was part of the march of mind, Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, application of rational and scientific principles to government current, which was so influential from the 1820s. Most, though by no means all, the other commissions shared a similar outlook. Under Drummond's tight, almost micro-managed at times, oversight, the commission redrew the electoral map of the kingdom along disinterested, rational lines. In other words, the kinds of political motivations that historians and, it has to be

said, many contemporary politicians, assumed had (or should have) animated boundary reform were largely kept at bay. Indeed, as Spychal shows, it was precisely when this disinterested stance was threatened by parliamentary manipulation that the reform bill was derailed, but similarly, it was the overall success with which Drummond and co were able to adhere to this disinterested approach that explains why boundary reform was, ultimately, enacted swiftly and with minimal parliamentary interference and resistance. This was a shrewd, though potentially, electorally risky move by Grey's Whig government, but they appreciated early on that it was the only way in which swift and decisive reform would be enacted. In fact, although the Whigs ultimately did well electorally out of the boundary reforms in 1832, they very nearly did even better to the extent that Spychal speculates that they might have dominated government for a generation after 1832. That they didn't was testament, not to party-political horse-trading with the Tories, but due to the triumph of the disinterested ethos that Drummond espoused and practised. This also speaks to the recent dethroning of party which has been such a central feature of revisionist scholarship on Victorian political culture over the last couple of decades.

But *Mapping the State* also looks forward, historiographically-speaking, as well as backwards, and this is an instance of just how well contextualised and wide-ranging Spychal's analysis is, that he also connects this bureaucratic innovation to new debates about the techniques and technologies of liberal systems of rule, associated with historians such as Patrick Joyce. But, once again, Spychal takes off in a different direction and advances a much more subtle and complex argument than teleological ones about the rise of governmentality. As he shows, what really stands out in redrawing the electoral map is the interaction between the local and national

state, an interplay that was and is a lot more complex: the kind of knowledge about the governed that agencies like the boundary commission actually created knowledge that was more widely dispersed and used by a whole range of actors, sometimes to contest the very spaces which had been created.

These broad conclusions and wider resonances are eloquent testimony to a work of impressive scholarship which deserves to be widely read, and not just by political historians, but all those interested in the making of the modern state.

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