

Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain . By Innes, Joanna . Oxford : Oxford University Press . xviii + 364 p.

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Joanna Innes's new book is much anticipated, a reflection both of the importance of her work and also of the sheer number of historians of society, politics and the law who have benefited from her scholarship and generosity. The author herself notes the book's extended gestation in the acknowledgements, which is a veritable who's who of eighteenth-century studies. *Inferior Politics* republishes five seminal essays that appeared between 1980 and 1998, and since most readers will be familiar with them already, it would be pointless to describe them individually in a short review. Updating has been kept to a minimum, which preserves the integrity of the originals but does not reference work in the field done since (which in some cases is quite a lot, much of it inspired by Innes's pioneering work). Given the origins of these pieces in journal articles or big chapters, the studies feel self-contained, but recurring themes in Innes's work give the book a unifying coherence. She is concerned with the relationship between state and society in the eighteenth century, and in particular the institutions with which ordinary people engaged, and which implemented and formulated policy. The title refers to the 'inferior officers of state' on whom responsibility for the local conduct of government fell: men of various ranks, often acting in an unpaid or part-time capacity, whose roles related to their social position in their communities. Furthermore, the 'politics' of the title 'evokes an idea of an open, participatory, contentious process rather than [...] an image of a professionalised bureaucratic machine' (p.6). *Inferior Politics* therefore sits alongside works by Paul Langford, Michael Braddick and others in exploring the role of propertied amateurs in the running of the British state.

As befits its approach, the book starts with broad, state-wide surveys – of policy, the 'military-fiscal state' and parliament, respectively – and then focuses on case studies. Of the latter, 'The King's Bench Prison in the Later Eighteenth Century' offers a particularly vivid micro-history of that quintessentially Georgian institution the debtors' prison. As with all 'greatest hits', there are a couple of bonus tracks to tempt fans who already own the singles, and in many ways these new chapters are highlights of the book. Chapter 4 is an extended study of empirical enquiry, which rehabilitates the lowly reputation of the eighteenth century in the history of social statistics. Here attention shifts from a history of 'social problems' and 'social policies' – terms of art that, while useful, are admittedly anachronistic – to the history of how we came to think in terms of a 'social' at all. Parliament was increasingly active in the gathering of data about the spheres in which it had to legislate, but again private citizens also participated in the process, discussing

these findings and gathering data of their own. Finally, Chapter 7 tells the colourful story of William Payne, a notably over-zealous (and uniquely well-documented) petty constable who, in addition to rounding up huge numbers of thieves and prostitutes, ran a profitable sideline in persecuting Catholics. By concluding with this chapter, Innes seems to be saying that we need to study men like Payne if we are really going to understand the Georgian state.