

Commentary from a Courtier: An Insider's Perspective on the Last Years of George II, 1756-1760

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Nigel Aston revealed the existence of a vital new source on the Hanoverian court: forty volumes of journals written by John, 5th Baron Berkeley of Stratton. Formerly an MP and Captain of Yeoman of the Guard in 1743-6, in 1756 he became Captain of the Gentlemen Pensioners. Proud of his pedigree, divorced from his wife, he was devoted to the King, the court and his diary, which he wrote every day. He intended to report 'the conversation of the times' and the views of 'the good old king', for whose safety he felt responsible. The journals show the importance of the court; the King's jealousy of Pitt's popularity; and his peevishness. Annoyed, like many other British monarchs, by his courtiers' insularity, he said: 'You all here think of nothing but your little islands.' Lord Berkeley records details of the King's health and inability to dissimulate: 'So little master of himself is our great master.' There is also much on court life, the privy council, and Princess Amelia. The journals were probably not intended to be published, although he was anxious that they be inherited by his descendents. They may have become a means for account-settling, and a substitute child. In the subsequent discussion, Patric Dickinson stressed the importance of the Berkeleys, an example of the continued wealth of noble families in England and the London property market.