

The brief, eventful reign of James II was one of the most catastrophic in British history. Powerful and popular when he came to the throne, James managed, despite great reserves of good will and deference, to so alienate his supporters that he had to flee the country.

And yet, as David Womersley's lucid account shows, most of James's life was spent not as king but first as Duke of York (after whom New York is named) and later, after attempting to convert his realm to Catholicism, in exile, thereby creating the spectre of a Jacobite restoration that would haunt the monarchy for generations.

Ultimately, James II was a man whose blindness to subtlety and lack of understanding of political reality brought about his downfall.

