
LOYAULTE ME LIE

Inside the mind of Richard III

What made England's most controversial king tick? Was he vain, voluble, a spendthrift? And did he love his wife? **Chris Skidmore,** who's been investigating Richard's secret life for a forthcoming book, reveals all

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JONTY CLARK

Richard liked the finer things in life

Details that survive from Richard's court suggest that the king was no po-faced ascetic but a spendthrift who enjoyed life's luxuries.

Richard had his own troupe of players and minstrels, while he ordered that one of Edward V's own servants be retained, for "his expert ability and cunning in the science of music," ordering that he "take and seize for us and in our name all such singing men and children".

Richard also seems to have appreciated good fashion sense. In 1484 he sent the Irish Earl of Desmond a parcel including gowns of velvet and cloth of gold "to show unto you... our intent and pleasure for to have you to use the manner of our English habit and clothing".

The king's extravagance excited comment from the most unlikely of sources. Thomas Langton – who served as bishop of St David's, Salisbury and Winchester – praised the king in a letter written shortly after his accession to the throne in the summer of 1483, describing how "he contents the people where he goes best that ever did prince... on my troth I liked never the conditions of any prince so well as his: God hath sent him to us for the weal of us all". However, in the final line, the bishop added a note of caution: "Sensual pleasure holds sway to an increasing extent, but I do not consider that this detracts from what I have said."

He was generous (when the mood took him)

The Crowland Chronicle – written in Lincolnshire's Crowland Abbey from the 7th to 15th centuries – describes how Richard intended to "pass over the pomp of Christmas" in 1483. Yet this terse assessment contradicts surviving contemporary records, which tell us that the king spent £764 17s 6d (the equivalent of over £380,000 today) for "certain plate... for our year's gifts against Christmas last past and for other jewels," while he gave £100 (£50,000) to "our welbeloved servants the grooms and pages of our chamber... for a reward against the Feast of Christmas".

At a Whitehall banquet to mark the epiphany celebrations of 6 January 1484, Richard gave the mayor and aldermen of London a gold cup "garnished with pearls and other precious stones" to be used in the chamber of the Guildhall. These were displayed at a council meeting a week later, where it was also declared how Richard "for the very great favour he bears towards this city, intended to bestow and make the borough of Southwark part of the liberty of the City, and also to give £10,000 (£5m) towards the building of walls and ditches around the said borough".

Intriguingly, this huge financial gift never materialised – and the aldermen of London failed to raise the matter again. Did the evening's festivities inspire Richard to make this magnanimous gesture – only to conveniently forget about it in the cold light of day?

He regarded himself as a man of York

The dispute over where Richard's remains should be interred has made it all the way to the high court this year. But can contemporary sources shed any light on where the king himself wished to be buried?

Perhaps they can. Though the king is known to have supported several religious institutions – including St George's Chapel at Windsor, and his own foundations at Middleham in Yorkshire and Queen's College, Cambridge – he does seem to have placed particular emphasis on his relationship with York, and its famous Minster.

In one document, Richard described the "great zeal and tender affection that we bear in our heart unto our faithful and true subjects the mayor, sheriffs and citizens of the city of York".

Shortly after his coronation, he travelled northwards to the city, holding a spectacular ceremony in the Minster, to which he donated a "great cross standing on six bases… with images of the crucifixion and the two thieves, together with other images near the foot and many precious stones, rubies and sapphires".

Richard's greatest display of affection to the city came on 23 September 1484, when he unveiled plans for a chantry foundation at York Minster, which would house a hundred priests to support the Minster, and practise the "worship of God, our Lady, Saint George and Saint Ninian". The massive project involved the construction of six altars for the king's chaplains, together with a separate building to house them.

Several months after his original grant, however, Richard was forced to write a letter to the authorities of the Duchy of Lancaster. Unpublished and unremarked upon by historians who have written on Richard's plans for a foundation at York, the letter states that in spite of giving to the dean of the Minster and its authorities "our special power and authority to ask, gather and levy all and any sum of money for the time" in order to "sustain and bear the charge of the finding of a hundred priests now being of our foundation," the priests still remained unpaid for their services.

Richard now demanded that they be paid from the Duchy of Lancaster. "We not willing our said priests to be unpaid of their wages, seeing by their prayers we trust to be made the more acceptable to God and his saints." The connection between Richard's establishment of the foundation at York and the salvation of his own soul could hardly be any clearer. Could this indicate that Richard's real intention in creating this new religious institution was to follow the growing trend for 15th-century aristocrats across Europe to establish their own chantry foundations and ultimately mausoleums? Richard, Duke of York, had done just that at Fotheringay, Northamptonshire, and Edward IV was to follow suit at Windsor.

After Richard's death, the archbishop there remembered fondly how "our most Christian prince, King Richard III… founded and ordained a most celebrated college of a hundred chaplains, primarily at his own expense". The foundation was not to last long, however. By 1493, "timber from the house constructed by King Richard III from the establishing of chantry priests" had been broken up and sold.

He loved his wife (at least, that's what he claimed)

Unlike his brother Edward IV, famed for his debauchery and mistresses, Richard seems to have been a devout family man. He was fond of his only legitimate son, Edward, whom he described as "our dearest first born son Edward, whose outstanding qualities, with which he is singularly endowed for his age, give great and, by the favour of God, undoubted hope of future uprightness".

Edward's premature death in April 1484 proved devastating to both Richard and his wife, Anne. The news clearly came unexpectedly, for, according to the Crowland Chronicle, "on hearing news of this, at Nottingham, where they were then residing, you might have seen his father and mother in a state almost bordering on madness, by reason of their sudden grief".

Several months later, in September 1484, when wrapping up payments for the prince's disbanded household, Richard continued to describe Edward as "our dearest son the prince". When Anne herself died on 16 March 1485, rumours swirled that Richard had planned to poison his wife. Yet the records show a very different side to the king who, just days before her death, refers to her as "our most dear wife the queen".

The king professed in his proclamations his distaste of "horrible adultery and bawds, provoking the high indignation and displeasure of God," instead preferring "the way of truth and virtue," and even declared to his bishops that "our principal intent and fervent desire is to see virtue and cleanness of living to be advanced, increased and multiplied, and vices and all other things repugnant to virtue… to be repressed and annulled".

Yet this did not prevent Richard himself from fathering at least two illegitimate children. One was John of Gloucester, whom Richard evidently thought highly of, appointing him captain of Calais, on account of his "liveliness of mind, activity of body and inclination to all good customs". The other was Katherine Plantagenet, who Richard married off to William, Earl of Huntingdon, making a generous financial provision to the couple.

> When Anne died, rumours swirled that Richard had **planned to poison her**. Yet just days before her death he refers to her as '**our most dear wife** the queen'

He was convinced of his right to rule

Upon the birth of Edward IV's eldest son, Edward, in 1470, Richard had sworn publicly that the young baby, "first begotten son of our sovereign lord," was "to be very and undoubted heir to our said lord as to the crowns and realms of England and France and lordship of Ireland... In case hereafter it happen you by God's disposition to overlive our sovereign lord; I shall then take and accept you for the very true and rightwise king of England."

Richard was, of course, to break this solemn vow in spectacular style – but how did he justify going back on his word to himself and his peers? The archives provide some clues.

According to a lengthy explanation set down in parliament in 1484, Richard proved that Edward IV had already been contracted to marry Lady Eleanor Talbot before his union with Queen Elizabeth Woodville. As a result, his son Edward V was in fact illegitimate, so unable to take the throne. Two days after he had seized the crown, Richard wrote how men had wrongly sworn an oath to Edward V that had been "ignorantly given".

In early January 1484, Richard had no qualms in repaying a Cambridgeshire bailiff for wildfowl purchased for Edward V's aborted coronation, merely describing the planned ceremony as "the time we stood protector of this our realm while Edward bastard son unto our entirely beloved brother Edward IV was called king of this realm".

In another document in the archives, Richard merely described how he was now the "true and undoubted king of this realm of England by divine and human right," having "taken the royal dignity and power and the rule and governance of the same realm for himself... from Edward the Bastard, formerly called Edward the fifth... the same Edward legitimately having been removed by usurpation". It seems that Richard, for one, was absolutely convinced of his right to rule.

He was a formidable warrior

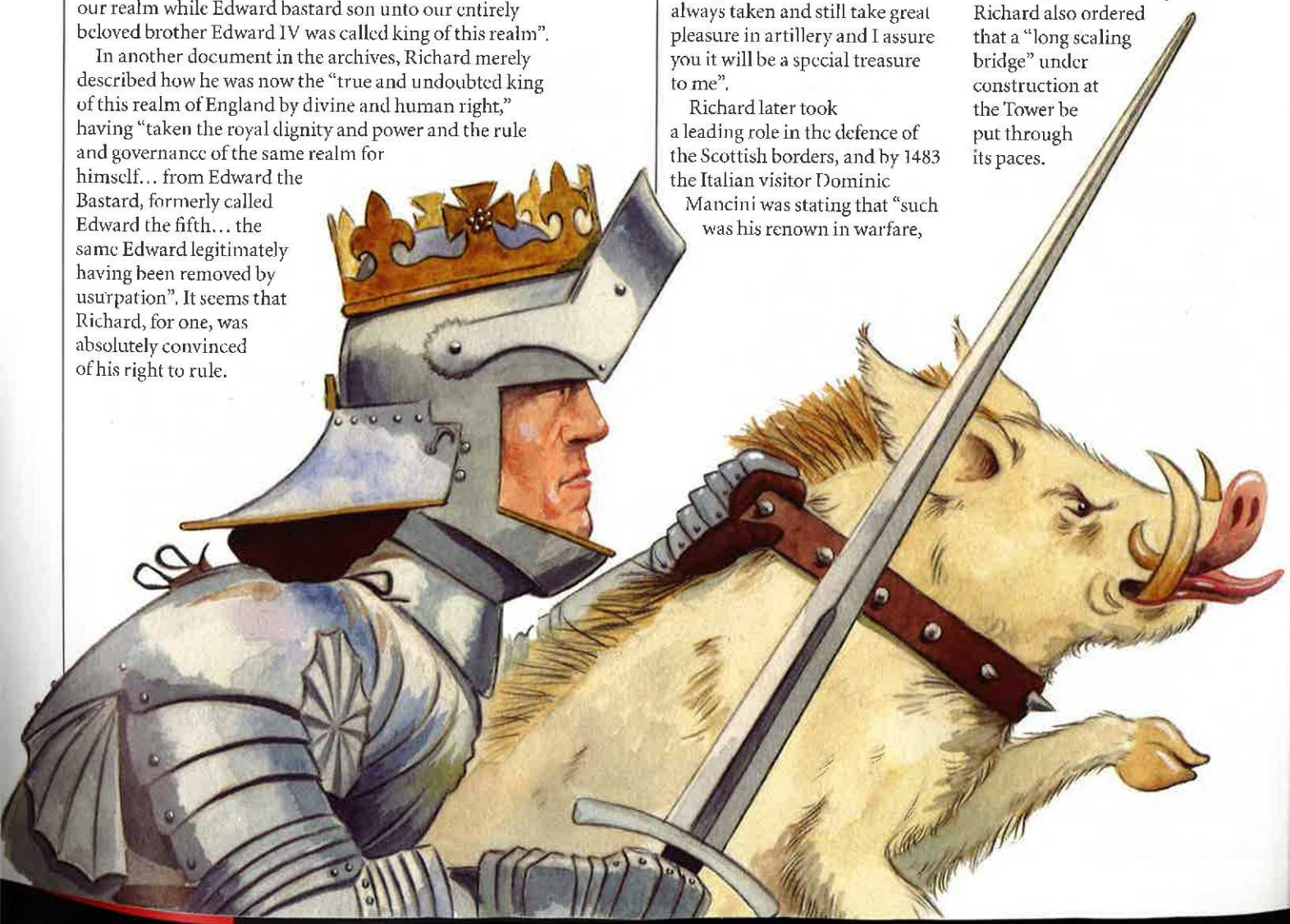
The records reveal that Richard had begun his military training at an early age. In March 1465, his brother Edward IV spent over £20 (£10,000) for "sheaves of arrows" and bows, "to the use of our brethren the dukes of Clarence and Gloucester".

Richard first saw military action in the battles of Barnet – where one source indicates he was wounded – and Tewkesbury. His fighting skills were praised by one poet, who described Richard as a young Hector. In 1480, Richard wrote to the French king Louis XI, thanking him for "the great bombard which you caused to be presented to me, for I have always taken and still take great pleasure in artillery and I assure you it will be a special treasure to me".

Richard later took a leading role in the defence of the Scottish borders, and by 1483 the Italian visitor Dominic Mancini was stating that "such was his renown in warfare, that whenever a difficult and dangerous policy had to be undertaken, it would be entrusted to his discretion and generalship".

The records of Richard's reign are littered with payments for military weapons and equipment: for instance, he spent £560 (£280,000) on 157 complete suits of armour, and a further £64 19s 1d (£32,000) on 2,228lbs of saltpetre for making gunpowder.

In 1485 Richard ordered that Edward Benstead, a gentleman usher of the chamber, was sent to the Tower to "shoot certain our guns we have been making there for their prove and assay". Richard also ordered that a "long scaling bridge" under construction at the Tower be put through its paces.



He threw a good party

Details of the receipts for Richard III's coronation banquet survive, and they suggest that the king's accession to the throne in the summer of 1483 was celebrated in some style. The banquet comprised 75 different dishes over three courses, to be served to 1,200 "messes" (shared tables) that would feed around 3,000 people in total.

The guests tucked into 30 bulls, 140 sheep, 100 calves, six boars, 12 fatted pigs, 200 suckling pigs, eight hart deer, 140 bucks, eight roe deer and fawns. In addition, the lower ranks at the banquet would be treated to 288 marrow bones, 72 ox feet, and 144 calves' feet.

For the fish dishes, the caterer ordered 400 lampreys, 350 pikes, four porpoises, 40 bream, 30 salmon cut into thin slices, 100 trout, 40 carp, 480 freshwater crayfish, 200 cod and salt fish, another 36 other 'sea fish', 100 tench, and 200 mullet.

The banquet also included 1,000 geese, 800 rabbits, 800 chickens, with another 400 chickens 'to stew', in addition to 300 sparrows or larks, 2,400 pigeons, 1,000 capons, 800 rails (a large, fat bird), 40 cygnets, 16 dozen heron, 48 peacocks, eight dozen of both cranes and pheasants, six dozen bitterns, 240 quails, three dozen egrets, 12 dozen curlews and 120 'piper chicks' – probably young pigeons.

To spice the dishes, 28lbs of pepper, 8lbs of saffron costing 48 shillings, 28lbs of cinnamon costing 60 shillings, 4lbs of fresh ginger and 12lbs of powdered ginger were employed, though the most popular seasoning seems to have been the sweet variety, with 150lbs of Madeira sugar imported from Portugal, 150lbs of almonds and 200lbs of raisins making up the largest of the orders for spices in the kitchen. Dessert included 300lbs of dates, 100lbs of prunes, 1,000 oranges and 12 gallons of strawberries, decorated with 100 leaves of "pure gold".

He was hell-bent on crushing his foes

The most detailed description of Richard III and his court comes from an eyewitness account left to us by Niclas von Popplau, a Silesian knight who visited the king while he was staying at Middleham Castle in North Yorkshire in May 1484. Popplau's text, still only available in its original German, deserves a full English translation, as it gives us our best understanding of Richard by someone who met him face to face. Popplau suggested that Richard was "three fingers taller than I, but a bit slimmer and not as thickset as I am, and much more lightly built. He has quite slender arms and thighs, and also a great heart".

Popplau was entertained by the king in his royal tent, where he witnessed Richard's bed, "decorated from top to bottom with red Samite [luxurious silk fabric] and a gold piece" with a table "covered all around with silk cloths of gold embroidered with gold. The king set himself at the table and he wore a collar of an order set with many large pearls, almost like strawberries, and diamonds. The collar was quite as wide as a man's hand," Popplau noted.

Richard requested that his German visitor sit next to him at dinner, where the king was so engrossed in conversation that "he hardly touched his food, but talked with me all the time. He asked me about his imperial majesty [Maxmillian I], all kings and princes of the empire whom I knew well, about their habits, fortune, actions and virtues. To which I answered everything that could add to their honour and high standing. Then the king was silent for a while, and then he began again to ask me questions, about many matters and deeds."

When Popplau began to discuss a recent defeat of the Ottoman Turks in Hungary, Richard suddenly became "very pleased" and answered: "I would like my kingdom and land to lie where the land and kingdom of the king of Hungary lies, on the Turkish frontier itself. Then I would certainly, with my own people alone, without the help of other kings, princes or lords, properly drive away not only the Turks, but all my enemies and opponents." For Richard, it was a dream that proved impossible to fulfil.

> At the banquet Richard was so **engrossed in conversation** that 'he hardly touched his food, but **talked with me all the time'**

Chris Skidmore MP is an author and historian who also serves as Conservative MP for Kingswood. His forthcoming book *The Lives of Richard III* will be published in 2015. He will be talking about Richard III at *BBC History Magazine*'s History Weekend in October – see *historyweekend.com*

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BOOK

▶ **Bosworth: The Birth of the Tudors** by Chris Skidmore (Orion, 2014)

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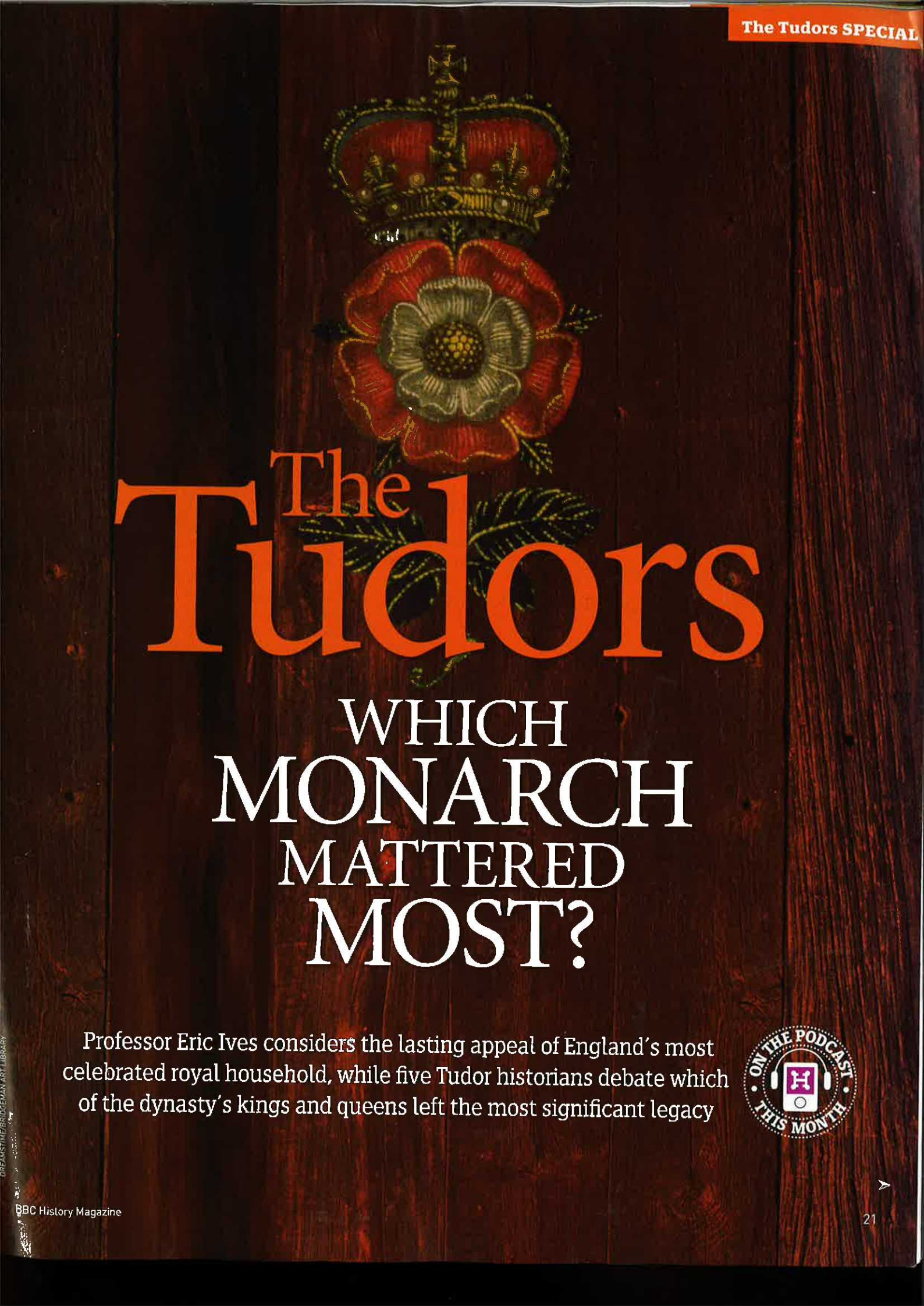

The Tudors

WHICH MONARCH MATTERED MOST?

Professor Eric Ives considers the lasting appeal of England's most celebrated royal household, while five Tudor historians debate which of the dynasty's kings and queens left the most significant legacy

ON THE PODCAST THIS MONTH

Why the Tudors grab us

Eric Ives asks what it is about the Tudors that encourages academics, writers, filmmakers, television producers – and, of course, the general public – to keep coming back for more

EVER SINCE 1900, more than two books or articles have appeared on average every day on the history of the British Isles between 1485 and 1603, and that's only the scholarly ones. Add in popular material, plus fiction and film, and totals soar. TV investment in the Tudors has gone through the roof. But why?

The obvious answer is romance – Good Queen Bess, Bluff King Hal, Bloody Mary, 'the sea dogs of Devon', the block and the scaffold. Fiction, film and TV feeds on it. Bluff and genial Henry VIII could be, but Thomas More was right to say the king would have no qualms in cutting his head off if it would win him a castle in France.

Fascination about Elizabeth ignores an England where a woman in labour might be dragged into another parish to avoid her pauper brat becoming a charge on the rates. Romance is today's celebrity cult in costume. The excuse is offered, "it's drama, not history", but why then spend thousands on historically accurate costume and scenery? Shakespeare didn't.

A better reason for the fascination is that Tudor England has a high density of 'memorable people', not least its monarchs. However this was no 'flowering of the English spirit'. Quite simply, we know more. We visit Tudor houses. Portraits show what Tudor people were like – more than that, the image they wanted to present. Holbein 'airbrushes' his sitters. Most important of all, personal papers and modern public records first survive in quantity – letters, accounts, memoranda, narratives; evidence of all sorts multiplies. The Paston Letters are famous because similar 15th-century collections are few. Not so in the 16th.

The new sources do not simply provide personalia such as Henry VII's susceptibility to dancing girls. They let us see the Tudors in a fresh way. New questions – who did this and why. New understandings – of business, society, law and order. New areas of study – gender, family, folk belief.

For earlier centuries such knowledge is hard-won; as the 16th progresses, the problem can be too much data. Books poured from the presses, ideas proliferated, our speech took shape. The King James Bible we celebrate this year is substantially a Tudor achievement: 'sheep's clothing', 'fleshpots', 'the powers that be', and 200 other expressions in use today. We don't read Chaucer and Langland in the original, but we can and do read More and Shakespeare.

The new sources appear to reveal a familiar scene: parliament, an established church, England emerging to European status, overseas interests, class, inflation, poverty. Familiarity does, however, bring danger. The environment of Tudor England is alien as well as similar. We must not make assumptions which are only valid for today. The biggest need for caution is over religion. Think of the position Islam appears to have in certain eastern communities today – not only prescribing ritual observance, and required behaviour, but also providing a matrix of thought and ideas. Religion in 16th-century England was similarly embedded in society and similarly formative. The axiom was 'one nation one faith' and hence controversy. Which faith? Toleration was not an option. Today it would be monstrous to burn someone because of their views. The Tudors thought otherwise; the disagreement was over who to burn.

This miniature from the British Library shows a Tudor rose flanked by lions

BRITISH LIBRARY

There are other traps for the unwary. The significance of Tudor rule may

The BBC series *The Tudors*: one example of the modern fascination with the era

REX FEATURES

appear to be a series of seminal developments, for instance the Church of England. But the Tudor church only lasted a century. What we have today effectively dates from 1660 and it calls itself Anglican precisely because it is not the Church of England. Parliaments became more important, but only a name and tradition links them to the current institution.

Tudor rulers wielded more personal power than any before or since. None would recognise modern monarchs as monarchs at all. National identity was strengthened by the 1588 victory over Spain, but in Tudor parlance, 'country' is as likely to mean 'county'; after all, in terms of travelling time, England was 25 times larger than it is today. The colonies, the church and the law written about by Ralegh, Hooker and Coke, are not the colonies, church and law we know. England in the 16th century and England today are "two countries separated by a common language".

Zest for living

Notwithstanding the dangers of empathy, Tudor England does have a good feel about it, an ebullience and a zest for living. The truculence of the age is one facet of that, the attitude to martyrdom another. It is the great age of English music and drama, notable architecture, widening horizons and for many a measurable advance in comfort and civility. In the 1570s William Harrison listed the changes in his Essex village: "the multitude of chimneys nowadays" (better warmth and comfort), "the amendment of lodging" (beds and bedding) and "the exchange of vessel" (pewter instead of wood).

The explanation is not a 'golden age' but 'the economy, stupid'. From the mid-14th century, western Europe's population shrank because of plague and war. A century later plague began to recede in England and the population increased. In other words, the Tudors arrived with, or were soon followed by, an economic boom, another example of their phenomenal luck everywhere except in the bedroom. Particularly from the 1540s, the expanding labour force made sustained growth possible: consumer goods such as stockings, pots and pans, new or enlarged industries – mining, glass and paper-making, the 'new draperies', luxury trades including theatre. And all was underpinned by political stability. Religious changes did not lead to civil war. Mary Tudor's was the only successful rebellion; otherwise the elite stayed loyal.

As always there was a downside, a vicious downside. Harrison noted higher rents, the pressures of a money economy and less concern for the poor. The increase in population meant that

> Tudor rulers wielded more personal power than any before or since

prices rose and this was made worse by currency manipulation. The gap between the comfortable and the poor widened significantly. A village economy had always needed resident poor to provide seasonal labour. Now structural unemployment became endemic. The 1590s were horrendous as the cost of the war fed inflation.

Suffering was made infinitely worse by bad harvests; in some years paupers died in the streets. Nevertheless, the England of 1600 was enormously wealthier than in 1500. An insular, agricultural country was becoming a country with a growing trade and industry sector. New families – Russells, Spencers, Cecils, Cavendishs – were forging ahead to lead the country and would do so until the 20th century. Tudor England was exciting to live in, and that makes it exciting to study, warts and all. H

Eric Ives is an expert on the Tudor period. He is emeritus professor of English history at the University of Birmingham. His new book *The Reformation Experience* will be published by Lion Hudson

ON THE PODCAST THIS MONTH

All about the Tudors on the podcast

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1 Steven Gunn discusses Henry VII, the survivor and stabiliser
available to download from 15 July

2 George Bernard on Henry VIII, the scourge of papal power
available to download from 22 July

3 Ralph Houlbrooke on Edward VI, the boy king and religious zealot
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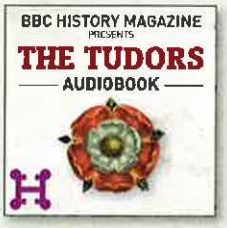

The Tudors audiobook gets down to serious detail on the dynasty

HENRY VII
1485–1509

A portrait of Henry VII in 1505. His claim to the throne was tenuous and he had to see off a posse of pretenders, yet he proved a canny and competent ruler, modernising the justice system and filling the crown's coffers

The *survivor* and *stabiliser*

He may not win many popularity contests but, says **Steven Gunn,** Henry VII set the blueprint for a dynasty that was to make England a global power

ON THE PODCAST THIS MONTH

HENRY VII is the inscrutable Tudor. Less charismatic than Henry VIII or Elizabeth, less tragic than Edward or Mary, he stands no realistic chance in a Most Famous Tudor competition. But that is no reason to forget him.

We should admire Henry first for his tenacity. When he was propelled from exile to the English throne in 1485 by the sudden death of Edward IV, Richard III's seizure of the crown and the bloody battle of Bosworth, six of the last nine English kings had been deposed. And the average was getting worse: each of the last four had lost the crown; one of them, the hapless Henry VI, twice.

One quarter French, one quarter Welsh, one quarter descended from John of Gaunt by his mistress, Henry's claim to the throne of England was hardly compelling. Yet he defeated pretender after pretender – Lambert Simnel, Perkin Warbeck, Edmund de la Pole – and clung onto power. He made a virtue of healing old divisions by marrying Edward's daughter Elizabeth of York – a match symbolised by the red and white Tudor rose – and breeding sons to succeed him. And even when two sons out of three died, he saw Henry VIII safely onto the throne, the first king to pass the crown on successfully to his son in nearly a century.

No laughing matter

Henry was not just a survivor but a stabiliser. He was less trusting, less generous and less relaxed than many of his subjects might have liked: he is only recorded as laughing in public once. He put more faith in those he had seen tested in the crises of 1483–89 than in young noblemen who thought they ought to govern because of their titles and blood. He took more advice than previous kings from lawyers and financial administrators, men who told him what the crown's powers were and how he might use them to tighten his grip on the kingdom. He used fines for disobedience or for offences against his rights as a means of political control. His richer subjects did not like it, but losing your money to Henry VII was better than losing your head to Henry VIII.

He strengthened the crown both financially and in its ability to do justice. Wealth could not guarantee the safety of an incompetent king, but it could make domestic and international politics easier to navigate for a competent one. Henry expanded the crown's lands, drove up the customs by encouraging trade and attacking smuggling, and began to reform the taxes voted by parliament in time of war, tapping economic growth without retarding it in a way many governments might envy.

The demands of the royal conscience and those of troubled subjects combined to make justice a key to good kingship. Henry offered his people faster and more effective decisions in their lawsuits at the centre, through the expanding judicial activity of the king's council, which would develop into the courts of Star Chamber and Requests.

He did the same in regions far from Westminster, with revivified councils to oversee Wales and the north. In the counties, justices of the peace were more numerous and better supervised. In small towns and villages the urge for stability coming up from below – stirred by patchy population growth, industrial development and the mobile, restless youth that came with them – met the determination to enforce order coming down from the king and his councillors.

> Henry VII was the first English king to pass the crown on successfully to his son in nearly a century

Henry's achievements may not be as spectacular as those of his son and grandchildren, but he laid the foundations for every aspect of later Tudor rule. The calculated magnificence of Richmond Palace and his chapel at Westminster paved the way for Hampton Court and Nonsuch.

He spread everywhere the family badges that would brand English kingship for the next century and survive to mark coins, tourist board signs and parliamentary buildings to the present day. His patronage both of church reformers like Bishop John Fisher and the Franciscan Observants and of lawyers who attacked the church's jurisdiction and skimmed off its wealth foreshadowed the mix of piety and power-play in the coming Reformation. His use of parliament to address problems in government and society prepared it for its role in the bigger changes ahead. His low-born but talented ministers – Reynold Bray, Thomas Lovell, Richard Empson, Edmund Dudley – were the forerunners of the meritocratic statesmen to come: Cromwell, Paget, Cecil, Bacon and the rest. He tied his family by marriage into the network of European dynasties, had his say in the politics of Italy, France and the Netherlands, and pursued alliances that favoured English trade, above all the cloth exports on which so many of his peoples' jobs depended.

It used to be said that the Middle Ages ended with Henry's reign. That is a gross simplification but we should not lose sight of the changes afoot. Henry's government first made widespread use of printing, first welcomed Italian renaissance artists and gave the heirs to the throne a classical education and first sent permanent diplomatic representatives to multiple foreign courts. His was the first administration to establish the navy with big new warships as a permanent arm of the state, the first to legislate against enclosure to defend the common people at a time of economic change and the first to patronise voyages of discovery to claim England's place among the European global empires.

Henry made the first secure peace with France after the Hundred Years' War and the first secure peace with the Scots after the Scottish Wars of Independence. The marriage alliance by which his daughter Margaret married James IV of Scots would lead to the union of the crowns a century later in the person of his great-great-grandson James VI and I, and beyond that to the making of the United Kingdom. How's that for a long-term achievement? H

Steven Gunn teaches British and European history between 1330 and 1700 at Merton College, Oxford

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Books

- **Henry VII** by Sean Cunningham *(Routledge, 2007)*
- **Early Tudor Government, 1485-1558** by Steven Gunn *(Macmillan, 1995)*

On the podcast

Steven Gunn discusses Henry VII in our new weekly podcast (in the edition that's live 15 July)
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HENRY VIII
1509–47

Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of Henry VIII, c1537. Henry's clash with the church was, says George Bernard, the most significant episode of the Tudor era and transformed England's relationship with continental Europe

The *scourge* of *papal power*

Henry VIII was a warrior king in every respect, says **George Bernard,** taking the fight to Frenchmen, Scots, his counsellors, wives and, above all, Rome

ON THE PODCAST THIS MONTH

HENRY VIII's most striking action and his lasting legacy was his break with Rome. In the 1530s he threw off papal jurisdiction, declared himself supreme head of the church on earth under Christ and denounced the usurpation of the pope and the superstitions of his church.

Of course, in many ways the church in England was already monarchical, with bishops long nominated by the crown from the monarch's circle of counsellors and diplomats. But so boldly, persistently and vigorously to proclaim the royal supremacy was something new.

Henry's daughter Mary reverted to papal obedience during her brief reign. Yet following Mary's death in 1558, her half-sister, Elizabeth, pursued Henry's policy of rejecting the authority of the papacy. Since then the Church of England has remained independent. And that has hugely affected English relations with, and attitudes to, the rulers and peoples of continental Europe. Nothing any other Tudor monarch did mattered as much.

Henry did not just break with Rome. He saw himself as an Old Testament prophet king, called upon by God to purify the church. And in the 1530s the monasteries were dissolved and the practice of pilgrimage – journeys to the sites of shrines of saints – was brought to an end. Both measures had immense consequences. A society with men and women who, at least in principle, turn their face from the world and devote themselves exclusively to the worship of God is qualitatively different from one which has no monks and nuns.

Immense consequences

Henry was also much involved in the codification of what Christians should believe. Although he had broken from Rome, dissolved monasteries and effectively abolished pilgrimage, he rejected the Lutheran doctrine of justification-by-faith-alone and remained devoted to the mass. Henry also authorised the publication and the reading in church of the Bible in English translation, a measure which over time has had immense consequences.

Henry's was thus a remarkably hybrid church. Probably very few agreed fully with the king; most would have preferred to remain Catholic while a minority wholeheartedly accepted the changes but wanted much more far-reaching reform.

In many ways, Henry's influence proved decisive when it fell to Queen Elizabeth to determine the church of *her* realm. True, the liturgy would now be in English; but the ambiguities and ambivalences of liturgy and doctrine were not unlike those of the church of Henry's later years, just when Elizabeth was growing up. A Church of England that is, uniquely, no longer Catholic but not Protestant in any full sense, is very much Henry's legacy.

Henry was also a warrior king. In 1513, 1523 and in the mid-1540s he launched invasions of France and continued to claim that he was rightfully king of France. Bold in ambition, cautious in practice, he was prepared to spend a fortune, not least the windfall of the dissolved monasteries' lands, on military campaigns which achieved little, both in France and in Scotland. And he left an appalling financial legacy to those who ruled the realm in the minority of his son, Edward.

> Henry was very astute at diverting public responsibility for unpopular policies to his ministers

Henry was a passionate builder. Few monarchs have invested so much in grand palaces and hunting lodges. The hall of Hampton Court, which he largely rebuilt in the early 1530s, testifies to his ambitions. And his extraordinary collection did not merely leave its mark on contemporary architecture. The design of Nonsuch Palace, in which Henry was closely involved, had a huge influence on the great 'prodigy houses' of Elizabethan England, and is reflected in the eclectic style of Wollaton, Hardwick and Kirby halls.

Henry was also much interested in painting, and attracted to England Hans Holbein, one of the greatest artists of the age. Holbein's image of Henry VIII has had an immense impact: no English king is more recognisable.

And then there are Henry's six wives, a real-life soap opera that writers of fiction would be hard-pressed to surpass. First, Catherine of Aragon, loyal to the end, but repudiated by Henry after he had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn; secondly, Anne, who three years after her marriage to Henry would be executed for treasonably committing adultery; thirdly, Jane Seymour, dying soon after giving birth to Edward; next, Anne of Cleves, a marriage arranged for diplomatic reasons but annulled as soon as foreign policy allowed since Henry found her physically repellent; then Catherine Howard, much too young, and also destroyed because she had committed adultery; and finally a more harmonious marriage to Katherine Parr.

Too often, the popular image of Henry VIII has been of bluff king Hal, affable and pleasure-loving. Yet there was a darker side. Henry was exceptionally skilled in attracting the devoted service of remarkably capable counsellors – Thomas Wolsey, Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell. He was very astute at allowing his ministers to take public responsibility for unpopular policies – from taxation to the dissolution of the monasteries. In fact, no other Tudor ruler was as successful in leaving the impression that others were responsible – so much so that many have been deceived into thinking that he was a weak man manipulated by factions. Yet that he repeatedly destroyed his closest advisers, when in his eyes they had served their turn, argues that it was indeed Henry who brought them down.

When facing opposition – or simply refusal openly to comply – no other Tudor ruler was quite so ruthless as Henry. Far from being a feeble monarch open to exploitation, he was an implacable king who, by the end of the 1530s, had turned into a tyrant. H

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THE GALLERY COLLECTION-CORBIS

JOURNEYS

Books

- **The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Making of the English Church** by GW Bernard *(Yale University Press, 2005)*
- **Henry VIII** by JJ Scarisbrick *(Yale University Press, 2011)*
- **Henry VIII** by Lucy Wooding *(Routledge, 2008)*

On the podcast

George Bernard discusses Henry VIII in our new weekly podcast (in the edition that's live 22 July)
www.historyextra.com/podcast-page

EDWARD VI

1547–53

Guillaume Scrots' portrait of Edward VI. The young monarch's support for a trade venture through the North-East Passage laid the foundations for the Elizabethan age of exploration

Boy king and religious zealot

He may have ruled for just six years but, as **Ralph Houlbrooke** explains, Edward VI found ample time to steer England towards Protestantism

ON THE PODCAST THIS MONTH

AT EDWARD VI'S Westminster Abbey coronation in February 1547, archbishop Thomas Cranmer supposedly urged the nine-year-old supreme head of the church to follow the example of Josiah, the young king of ancient Judah, in seeing God truly worshipped and idolatry destroyed.

Cranmer's exhortation was a sign of things to come: far from reversing Henry VIII's break with Rome, Edward would go on to quicken the pace of his father's religious reforms. The result was that England would, for the first time, become an officially Protestant country during the six-year reign of the boy king.

Henry VIII had ended the pope's ecclesiastical supremacy, but he kept the mass. Edward didn't share his father's devotion to a rite that, for Protestants, was the prime example of idolatry, and in 1547, the Chantries Act condemned intercessory masses for the dead. Then, the 1548 Order of Communion and the two prayer books of 1549 and 1552 cut the heart out of the mass and finally abolished it altogether. English replaced Latin in parish church services, while the removal of a host of 'idolatrous' religious images, abolition of many 'superstitious' ceremonies, and replacement of stone altars by communion tables transformed the outward face of religion.

Fervent reform

Edward remained a minor throughout his reign. His maternal uncle, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, was protector of the king's realms from 1547–49. He combined strong support for religious reform with a resolve to address social and economic ills such as the supposedly widespread enclosure of land for conversion to pasture. His 1547 invasion of Scotland resumed the 'rough wooing' begun by Henry VIII in order to achieve Mary Stewart's marriage to Edward. Seymour also tried to enlist Scottish support for an ambitious vision of a united and Protestant Britain. However, French help for the Scots ensured its failure.

Unsettling religious changes and economic grievances triggered a formidable wave of rebellions in 1549. Somerset's sympathetic response to some economic demands, coupled with his arrogance towards his fellow councillors, led in October to his arrest at Windsor and removal from the protectorship. John Dudley, created Duke of Northumberland in 1551, led the government as lord president of the privy council from February 1550.

Edward's now fervent Protestantism encouraged Northumberland to support reformers more militant than Cranmer, especially John Hooper, who wanted to get rid of surviving elements of Catholic priestly dress, and John Knox, who bitterly criticised the retention of kneeling to receive holy communion in the 1552 prayer book.

In March 1551 the 13-year-old king told his Catholic elder sister Mary that he could no longer bear her disobedience in having mass celebrated in her household. His strong feelings on the issue embarrassed his advisers when the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Mary's cousin, allegedly threatened war if she were not allowed her mass. Needing insurance against Charles's hostility, the government

> Edward told his Catholic elder sister Mary that he could no longer bear her disobedience in hearing the Mass

agreed in July 1551 a treaty with France providing for Edward's eventual marriage to one of King Henri II's daughters. It now seemed safe to try once more to end Mary's mass, and then arrest Somerset, who was tried for treasonable plotting and executed in January 1552. But Henri II was not a close or trusted ally. There were soon renewed fears of French schemes against England.

A sharp fall in English cloth exports during the early 1550s – when England's relations with Charles V, overlord of Antwerp, London's main trading partner, were already frosty – prompted the formation of a partnership between London merchants and the court under Northumberland's patronage to finance a quest for new markets by way of the North-East Passage (along the Russian Arctic coast). The expedition that set off in May 1553, watched by Edward from Greenwich Palace, never reached China as intended, but resulted in the opening of a profitable trade with Russia. This venture, and the stimulus it gave to English advances in navigation and cartography, played a key part in launching the Elizabethan age of exploration.

After the marriage treaty with France, Edward was encouraged to attend the privy council. In 1551–53 he wrote various papers demonstrating his close interest in the making of policy. In January 1553, however, he began to suffer from the illness that caused his death on 6 July. At some stage he wrote a "devise for the succession" that omitted his sisters Mary and Elizabeth and, in its final form, made Lady Jane Grey his successor. Mary Tudor's fervent Catholicism was widely thought to be Edward's chief reason for altering the succession. However, the illegitimacy of both Mary and Elizabeth was the chief pretext mentioned in letters patent that gave effect to the devise.

We shall never know for certain whether Edward, Northumberland or some other adviser first planned the succession scheme. But the king clearly made it his own, and insisted upon it in face of strong objections.

Had Mary Tudor lived longer as queen, Edward's reign might have come to seem a disruptive but ultimately rather unimportant interlude in English history. In the event, Mary died in 1558 and Elizabeth succeeded her.

Elizabeth did not share the hopes of further reform that the Puritans inherited from the Edwardian radicals. However, the Elizabethan religious settlement was a modified version of Edward's legacy. Urged by Sir William Cecil – her principal secretary who had served under Northumberland – Elizabeth helped the Scottish lords of the congregation who threw off French tutelage and introduced a Calvinist Reformation. John Knox, exile in Edward's England, was its leading architect. ■

Ralph Houlbrooke taught history at the University of Reading. His books include *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (OUP, 1998)

JOURNEYS

Books

▶ **Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation** by Diarmaid MacCulloch *(Allen Lane: The Penguin Press, 1999)*

▶ **Edward VI: The Lost King of England** by Chris Skidmore *(Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007)*

On the podcast

Ralph Houlbrooke discusses Edward VI in our weekly podcast (in the edition that's live 29 July)
www.historyextra.com/podcast-page

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Queen Mary I of England and Ireland. Her legend speaks merely of burning Protestants, yet her time on the throne featured many great achievements, not least establishing that a woman had the right to reign

The *forgotten trailblazer*

Anna Whitelock explains how the popular perception of 'Bloody Mary' hides a pioneering monarch who achieved great things during her reign

ON THE PODCAST THIS MONTH

MARY WAS the Tudor trailblazer. Never before had a queen worn the crown of England. She won the throne against the odds, preserving the Tudor line of succession and establishing precedents for female rule. Her significance has long been overlooked.

Until recently Mary has been the forgotten Tudor – overshadowed by her famous sister, Elizabeth. She has been condemned as one of the most reviled women in history. 'Bloody Mary' is regarded as a bigoted, half Spanish tyrant whose reign was an unmitigated failure notable only for the burning of nearly 300 Protestants and her unpopular marriage to Philip of Spain.

Mary was of course never meant to be queen, and her father, Henry VIII, had gone to great – infamous – lengths to guard against her accession. While Henry finally acknowledged Mary's claim to the throne in the last years of his reign, Edward VI ignored his father's will and, determined to preserve a Protestant church, wrote his Catholic sister out of the succession. Upon his death in July 1553 Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed queen. Ten days later and against extraordinary odds, Mary won her rightful throne. The scale of her achievement is often overlooked. Mary had led the only successful revolt against central government in 16th-century England and was the only Tudor, save for Henry VII, who had to fight for the throne. She had eluded capture, mobilised a counter-coup and in the moment of crisis proved courageous, decisive and politically adept.

Setting precedents

Yet despite her triumphant accession, Mary's status as England's first crowned queen was a matter of great speculation and uncertainty. Many questioned whether indeed a woman could wear the crown. The language, image, and expectations of English monarchy and royal majesty were unequivocally male. So, in the following months the practice and power of a queen regnant were hammered out. It was a debate over which Mary presided and her decisions would become precedents for the future. The status of a queen regnant was laid out in a highly significant statute passed in the parliament of April 1554: "*An Acte declaringe that the Regall power of thys realme is in the Quenes Maiestie as fully and absolutely as ever it was in anye her mooste noble progenytours kynges of thys Realme.*" The act made Mary's queenship equal to that of a king in law.

And so in statute, in ceremony and in ritual, Mary drew on the precedents of her male predecessors and fashioned them for queenship. There was no guidance for the coronation of a woman as a ruler in her own right but Mary's ceremony invested her with all the power exercised by her ancestors. Mary notably revived the tradition of touching a sufferer of scrofula (known as the king's evil) and followed other practices such as blessing cramp rings (also used for healing) as well as washing the feet of the poor on Maundy Thursday. Such rituals had never been performed by a woman and were considered priestly acts that only God's representative on earth, a male monarch, could perform.

Although inhabiting what was traditionally a male world of monarchy, the personality of the monarch continued to be the key to the determination and execution of policy. The Marian regime was, in short, an emphatically personal monarchy. Mary was closely involved in government and the key policies of the reign – the marriage, the reunion with Rome and war with France. Far from being distanced from politics and policy making as has been claimed, Mary was at its heart. As the Venetian ambassador described, she rose "at daybreak when, after saying her prayers and hearing mass in private, she transacts business incessantly until after midnight".

> The most notorious aspect of the reign – the burnings – proved devastatingly effective

Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain has long been seen as a failure, exemplified by the loss of Calais, England's last territory in France in 1558. In spite of this, Mary's marriage can be seen as a calculated and successful political act. She chose a husband distant from English disputes and intrigues and his powers were carefully circumscribed by legislation and a highly favourable marriage treaty. While more work needs to be done on the role in government of Philip and his Spanish entourage, Mary did remain legally and effectively sole queen throughout her reign.

Mary defeated a rebellion against the Spanish marriage, again securing popular support in a moment of crisis. She refused to leave London and, in a speech at the Guildhall, attacked Thomas Wyatt, the rebel leader, as a wicked traitor, defended her religion and choice of husband, and called on Londoners to stand firm in support. "I doubt not but we shall give these rebels a short and speedy overthrow." The rebels were compelled to lay down their arms and to sue for mercy. In her speech Mary promised to submit the treaty before the people for ratification – a step her male predecessors had never taken.

Mary's reign is of course most noted for the burning of nearly 300 men, women and children. While this cannot and should not be expunged from accounts of her reign, it is important to consider the wider context and her religious policy more generally.

The restoration of Catholicism was neither inept nor backward-looking. Cardinal Reginald Pole succeeded in reinstating the papacy and launched an effective propaganda campaign through pulpit and press and, as has been recently argued, the most notorious aspect of the reign – the burnings – proved devastatingly effective. If Mary had lived or if she had managed to produce a Catholic heir, there seems little doubt that England would have been successfully recatholicised and the historical judgement on Mary would have been very different.

Mary ruled with the full measure of royal majesty and achieved much of what she had set out to do. Her reign redefined the contours of the English monarchy. She made it possible for queens to rule as kings and established the gender-free authority of the crown. H

Anna Whitelock is a lecturer in early modern history at Royal Holloway, University of London. She wrote *Mary Tudor: England's First Queen* (Bloomsbury, 2009).

JOURNEYS

Books

▶ **Mary Tudor: England's First Queen** by Anna Whitelock *(Bloomsbury, 2009)*

▶ **Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives** by Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman *(Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)*

On the podcast

Anna Whitelock discusses Mary in our new weekly podcast (in the edition live on 5 August)

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NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

ELIZABETH I

1558–1603

The Kitchener portrait of Elizabeth I, 1585–90 – one of many contemporary paintings to cultivate the image of the queen as "alone, majestic, expressionless, and imperial"

The great unifier

Susan Doran examines the life of a queen beset by enemies on all sides, who somehow emerged to unite her country as a Protestant martial power

ELIZABETH I faced more difficulties as a monarch than any other Tudor. Born the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn on 7 September 1533, Elizabeth's right to rule as queen of England never went unchallenged. Protestants (notably John Knox) initially claimed female rule was unnatural or monstrous, while Roman Catholics judged Elizabeth a bastard since they refused to recognise her father's marriage to her mother. Unlike her father and brother, whose legitimacy was never questioned, Elizabeth had to confront dynastic challenges at her accession which continued almost until her death.

Another difficulty for Elizabeth was that she inherited a realm ill at ease with itself. The religious persecution under her sister, Mary, had divided communities and traumatised English Protestants and their sympathisers. The economic recession, dreadful harvests, and devastating epidemics of the mid-1550s created uncertainties and shattered the lives of many ordinary people. The humiliating French capture of Calais (England's last continental possession) in January 1558 punctured confidence in England's military power and international prestige.

From these problems Elizabeth emerged triumphant. She confounded her Catholic enemies, imposed her will on the political scene, turned England into a strong Protestant state, presided over a glittering court culture, and died in her bed at the age of 69. Her unusual situation as an unmarried queen – the only one in British history – created a mystique around her that has survived to the present. Unsurprisingly, scholarly studies and biographies of the queen come regularly off the press, easily outnumbering those devoted to the other Tudors.

Flexible and moderate

Elizabeth's dominant place in British history is above all assured by the establishment and defence of the 1559 Protestant settlement – the English Prayer Book and Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion – which remains the basis of the Church of England today. Due to her determination the Church of England remained sufficiently flexible and moderate. Elizabethan parishioners, for example, could take communion standing, sitting or kneeling, depending on the preferences of the community and its minister. Elizabeth would have no truck with those zealous Protestants who attempted to introduce the more austere discipline of Calvinist Geneva into England. In consequence, notwithstanding the strength of Catholic opinion at the outset of her reign, the Protestant form of worship imposed by her Act of Uniformity gained in popularity over time and became embedded in English lay culture. When Puritans tried to outlaw the Prayer Book's use in 1645, there was extensive passive resistance, and it was speedily restored (with amendments) at the Restoration of Charles II.

Protestantism in England also survived because Elizabeth was successful in seeing off the Catholic threat. At home she prevented or suppressed Catholic rebellion, conspiracy and disobedience without descending into tyranny or intense religious persecution. It is of course true that she signed the death warrant of Mary Queen of Scots, but her reluctance to do so is legendary. It's also true that Jesuits, seminary priests and their harbourers were imprisoned or executed under Elizabeth, but these prosecutions mainly occurred in the 1580s when Spain and the pope were thought to be using Catholic priests to destabilise the realm. By the standards of the age – and compared to her father and siblings – Elizabeth was a model of religious tolerance. Thanks to her, English history was not scarred by massacres and the country did not descend into civil war.

> Elizabeth had to confront dynastic challenges at her accession which continued almost until her death

Elizabeth's importance in British history is also a result of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Memorialised in later paintings and film, the English victory of 1588 saved England from Spanish rule and preserved the Protestant church. Furthermore, as the most notable military success since the battle of Agincourt, it restored confidence in England's martial reputation and pointed to the future when England would become a major naval power. Henry VIII may be generally viewed as the founder of the English navy, but his navy was for show, whereas Elizabeth's was for use. Elizabeth's sailors and ships were also employed in voyages of exploration, thereby beginning the process which would eventually lead to the establishment of the British empire.

Of course Elizabeth's fame also rests on her virginity. Admittedly, during the reign the fact that she remained single was a source of political anxiety as well as strength. However it had two important positive results. The first is that her heir was to be James VI, who united in his person Scotland and England, a crucially important event in the development of British history. The second is that it transformed the queen into a cultural icon. Her portraits of the 1580s and 90s depict the archetypal Elizabeth: alone, majestic, expressionless, and imperial, her virginity on show through a variety of symbols whether pearls, cherries, a sieve, a crescent moon, or an ermine.

This Virgin Queen is not only immediately recognisable; it has made Elizabeth a source of fascination for centuries. Biographers and psychologists have felt the need to investigate how she could dismiss social and political norms and refuse marriage. The prurient want to know if her courtiers – Leicester, Essex and Hatton – were her lovers. Early (mainly male) biographers and historians sought to explain how her rejection of love and motherhood affected her character. Feminists were attracted to the sight of a woman defying conventions and ruling alone. Everyone wants to know how Elizabeth could rule successfully in a man's world without a husband. Her sister, Mary, may have marked out a new path as England's first queen regnant; but Elizabeth broke entirely new ground as an unmarried one.

Susan Doran teaches at Oxford University and is the author of *Elizabeth I and Religion 1558-1603* (Routledge, 1993)

BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

JOURNEYS

Books

- **Queen Elizabeth I** by Susan Doran *(British Library, 2003)*
- **Elizabeth I** by Christopher Haigh *(Longman, 1988)*
- **Elizabeth I** by Judith Richards *(Routledge, November 2011)*

On the podcast

Susan Doran discusses Elizabeth I in our new weekly podcast (in the edition live 12 August)
www.historyextra.com/podcast-page