

PART I

Government and Politics

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INTRODUCTION

The study of government and politics in sixteenth-century Britain has been stood on its head since the days of G. R. Elton and J. D. Mackie. In the mid-twentieth century historians were emphasizing the processes of centralization from the top down. Classically spelled out in Elton's *The Tudor Revolution in Government* of 1953 and adumbrated in terms of 'rising' monarchies, these arguments held that the intentions of monarchs and ministers were key. Currently, as the scholars writing here suggest, the emphasis has shifted from the top and the centre to the peripheries. We are now asking how government and politics worked in practice, day to day, in the hands of the thousands of men who made the state work. This mystery is caught in the phrase 'self-government by royal command,' a seeming contradiction that made sense on the ground more than in theory.

The historiography of English royal government has been evolving, changing our understand of how Henry VII actually ruled and undermining the assumption that Henry VIII and his ministers were the great innovators. David Grummitt, writing on Henry VII, and Joe Block, writing on Henry VIII, show us an early Tudor system of governance that was less 'modern' than once thought, and yet still innovative.

Forms of government and political processes varied widely across the Isles and across time. Of course, the national governments of Scotland and England had separate political systems, varying within themselves as well as between one another. Consequently, there are times when it is appropriate to make the unit of government the level of analysis, so that corporate towns are treated as distinct from counties, the royal courts as distinct from the law courts. Catherine Patterson demonstrates that towns throughout the two realms had similar governmental issues and that town governors were depended upon and empowered by their crowns to maintain control. The work on English county government has been so intense over the last few decades that the English counties were deemed worthy of a chapter of their own. However, we asked Steven Ellis to delineate rule and politics in the home counties from rule and politics in the Marches and Borders. Foreign relations are, of course, very important to understanding national politics. Because the main site of international conflict in sixteenth-century Britain was the border running from Carlisle to

Newcastle on Tyne, we deemed it important to have Jane Dawson's distinct chapter on Anglo-Scottish relations. British relations with the rest of the world were as much economic as military and political, and, as the Reformation progressed, those relations were increasingly influenced by ideological values. David Potter's exploration of these topics demonstrates the rapid and important changes occurring across the century, including the Plantation of Ireland and the first stirring of North American settlement.

One way to think about government and politics is to explore structures. This still useful approach was exemplified by the work of G. R. Elton, whose 'points of contact' argument, stressing the roles of court, parliament, and privy council, has been a starting-point for many scholars. There is, however, another way to look at government and politics. Using the lens of political culture we can explore the values, intellectual assumptions and social forces that underlie political behaviour. In the sixteenth century two important value systems operated in conjunction with politics and governmental systems, religion and the law. Religion is taken up in the 'Belief' section of this collection, but the law and the men of the law are DeLloyd Guth's brief because their way of construing the possible set bounds around the politically feasible. Just as importantly, the places of political interaction operated according to values that shaped the politically possible. Retha Warnicke's article on royal Courts exemplifies this: methods of access to the royal person, the power of ministers and favourites, gender, where and when one ate, whom one knew, concepts of honour and myriad other things shaped the political life of courtiers and of countries. David Dean's exploration of Elizabethan politics shows us how political decisions were deeply connected to small things like the jewellery worn by ladies-in-waiting.

When seen through the lens of political culture, the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish experiences come into bolder relief. Scotland and England had different royal Courts, putting the monarch in a different relation to the courtiers and demonstrating differing cultural influences. Ireland, of course, had no Court at all, which, one suspects, made monarchical government even more dependent on the willing co-operation of local magnates. As Steve Ellis suggests, Henry VIII's failure to grasp this contributed to many of the Tudor regime's problems in Ireland and the North. If monarchical rule required points of contact, the more isolated parts of both realms had poor connections.

Differing legal systems created different political and governmental cultures, too. The imposition of English law on Wales through the Act of Union (1536–43) integrated it into the realm in ways that Ireland, which had its own parliament, never experienced. And, once again, the legal reach of the central courts in both nations became weaker the further people were from Westminster and Edinburgh. As Steven Ellis notes, London was a logical capital for the Angevin kingdom with all of its French possessions, but it was an inefficient place from which to rule the North, Wales and Ireland. By the same token, ruling the Western Isles from Edinburgh was not easy, either.

The picture of government and politics that emerges here is like meeting a long-lost family member. There is something familiar about it, but it is a stranger nonetheless. It is our hope that these chapters will encourage readers to continue comparing and contrasting political communities in the British Isles, moving political history away from *res gestae* toward things done in the web of values and social systems. It

was, after all, their political value systems that held nations together despite religious revolutions, despite child monarchs and childless queens, despite economic crises, and all the rest.

CHAPTER ONE

The Establishment of the Tudor Dynasty

DAVID GRUMMITT

On 1 August 1485 Henry Tudor, earl of Richmond, led a small group of followers from exile in France to lay claim to the English throne. He landed at Milford Haven in South Wales on 7 August and three weeks later defeated Richard III at the battle of Bosworth and was proclaimed Henry VII, the first Tudor king of England.

Henry Tudor was an unlikely king.¹ He had been an exile in Brittany and later France since June 1471 when he and his uncle, Jasper, had fled England on the collapse of the restored monarchy of Henry VI. Henry Tudor's Lancastrian credentials, through his mother's Beaufort blood and the fact of his grandfather Owen's marriage to Katherine of Valois, widow of Henry V, made him a potential rallying-point for opposition to the Yorkist Edward IV. In exile Henry had been the plaything of princely diplomacy. In 1471 he and Jasper had probably planned to go to the court of the French king, Louis XI, where Jasper was a pensioner, but storms had forced them to the coast of Brittany. In Brittany Henry proved a useful bargaining counter for Duke Francis II, who sought English help against his feudal overlord the king of France. In 1475 Edward IV had requested the return of the exiled Tudors, ostensibly to marry Henry to one of his own daughters, and Henry had even been put aboard a ship at St Malo bound for England. At the last minute he feigned illness and escaped capture and an uncertain fate in England.

The death of Edward IV on 9 April 1483 transformed Henry's position. Soon after the king's death the throne, which had passed to his nine-year-old son Edward V, was usurped by Edward IV's brother Richard, duke of Gloucester. Richard, whose own grasp on the throne was less than secure, was keen to gain control of Henry Tudor as a potential rival but was unable or unwilling to offer the military assistance that would induce Francis to hand him over. When, in October 1483, Richard's ally in the usurpation, the duke of Buckingham, led a rebellion, mainly comprised of former servants of Edward IV, against the king, Duke Francis gave Henry assistance in assembling a fleet to return to England to make his claim. The expedition was a disaster and Buckingham's rebellion a fiasco: Henry failed to make landfall and Richard redoubled his efforts to secure the most dangerous threat to his throne. The Buckingham debacle did, however, have one important and positive outcome. Henry

was joined by a new group of Yorkist exiles, men like Sir Giles Daubeney, and this gave his opposition to Richard a new and powerful dimension. In September 1484, however, he was again forced to flee Brittany. The Breton government had brokered a deal with Richard and so Henry was forced to flee to France, disguised as a servant, to escape being returned to England.

There Henry was able to forge an unlikely coalition between die-hard Lancastrians and disaffected Yorkists that made his claim a real threat to Richard III. At Rennes cathedral on Christmas Day 1483 Henry solemnly promised to take Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV, as his queen and was acclaimed king of England by the exiles. Nevertheless, Henry's position was far from assured and his accession to the English throne as distant as ever. The new French king, Charles VIII, played an ambiguous game: while he encouraged Henry to use the English royal title it is now clear that he did little in practice to assist his claim to the throne. When Henry and the exiles set sail to claim the English throne they did so at the head of a motley army paid for not by the French king but by money borrowed from a French nobleman.² Equally, when Henry faced Richard III across the fields of the Leicestershire/Warwickshire border on the morning of 22 August he did so not at the head of a large group of individuals who had flocked to his banner to oust a usurping tyrant but as a fugitive whose time for flight had ended. Henry Tudor won the battle of Bosworth more by luck than by judgement: Richard III's ill-advised adherence to chivalric practice and the skill of Tudor's French pikemen won the day against all the odds.³

Few English kings can have been as ill-prepared for kingship as Henry Tudor. He had, he told the French chronicler Commynes, been on the run since the age of five; he had had none of the training in English government, justice and war that had, for instance, been Henry V's kingly apprenticeship. What he did have, however, was a hard upbringing in the realities of fifteenth-century diplomacy and politics. He had studied the kingship of the French kings at first hand. His models were, therefore, continental: one commentator would later observe that he 'would like to govern in the French fashion'. But this is to confuse Henry VII's character and style of kingship. The personal nature of Henry's rule, his suspicion of others and the absolute trust he placed in those who had stood by him in exile were distinctly his, products of his unique upbringing. Moreover, Henry had to innovate to survive; to establish the Tudor dynasty he had to redefine the English medieval system of monarchy and governance.

The sense that Henry VII's accession heralded the beginnings of a new age of peace, reconciliation and stable and effective government has been reflected in the historiography. Equally, however, there is confusion: was Henry the last medieval or the first early modern king of England? This is compounded by the fact that the sources for the reign are more scattered and 'medieval' in character than for the later Tudors. Early perceptions of the reign were dominated by Francis Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, published in 1622 for the future Charles I. However, Bacon's picture of an apolitical and bureaucrat king was written to reflect his own disappointment at a failed career at court. Bacon's account, devoid of high politics, reinforced the impression that Henry's reign was distinct from those of his Lancastrian and Yorkist predecessors, whose reigns were dominated by dynastic confrontation and noble rebellion. This was reinforced by the largely institutional nature of the first serious studies of Henry's reign: writing in the early twentieth century, A. F. Pollard argued that Henry VII distanced himself from the petty squabbles of

the nobility that had characterized the disastrous rule of the Henry VI and, by asserting princely power, laid the foundations for the 'despotism' of Henry VIII. The 'new monarchy', therefore, was based upon bureaucratic innovation and a desire to make the nobility subservient to the royal will.

From the mid-1950s, however, this orthodoxy was gradually eroded away and the first Tudor was relocated within a late-medieval context. First, Geoffrey Elton suggested that the real transition to a modern state took place during the 1530s and that Henry VII still governed an essentially medieval realm in an essentially medieval way. Later, Bertram Wolffe argued that many of Henry's fiscal innovations actually had their origins in the estate management of the Yorkist kings. Henry, then, was transformed from the dynamic founder of the 'new monarchy' into a lacklustre medieval king. The standard biography of the reign, S. B. Chrimes's *Henry VII*, first written in 1972 but reissued as recently as 1999, struggles to identify exactly what it was that Henry achieved: 'His was not an original mind; he was no great innovator. He was rather a highly skilful builder on existing foundations . . . In the ultimate analysis, the quality of Henry VII was not that of a creator, but rather of a stabiliser, for lack of whom ships of state are apt to founder'.⁴ Anyone reading this account will be struck by how little Chrimes appeared to know of what actually happened during the reign. The interaction between the king and the political nation – that is, the landowning classes, nobility and gentry – has become accepted by historians of the fifteenth century as the acid test of the success of any reign. Studying Henry VII by this criterion one can judge the novelty of his reign and his success in establishing the Tudor dynasty. Historians who study Henry's reign in these terms can be placed in two very distinct categories. First, there are those who see Henry's reign as part of a process of state-building, started under Edward IV and largely completed by the end of Elizabeth's reign.⁵ Although local stresses did occur, Henry brought strong kingship and through that exorcised many of the ghosts of the fifteenth century. On the other hand, Christine Carpenter has argued that Henry fundamentally misunderstood the nature of late medieval political society and the need to govern with and through the land-owning elite. Judged by these standards, she asserts, Henry was an incompetent monarch who was lucky to pass on the throne intact to his son.⁶

Thus recent historiography has tended to play down the novel aspects of Henry Tudor's accession. Nevertheless, it did mark the beginning of a new dynasty that would rule England for over a century. This chapter, therefore, will consider five areas and determine to what extent Henry's policies were new and laid the foundations of the Tudor monarchy. These are:

- 1) the ideas and influences behind Henry's kingship;
- 2) his relationship with the nobility;
- 3) the impact of Tudor rule on local political society;
- 4) administration and change in the machinery of government; and
- 5) his last years and the legacy of his reign.

Ideas and Influences

Henry's victory at Bosworth was undoubtedly against the odds. It was therefore important for him to assert quickly the foundations of his claim to the throne and define the nature of his kingship to the political nation.⁷ After the battle, Henry

marched to London and in a service at St Paul's Cathedral gave thanks for his victory. However, the banners presented here asserted a hereditary right to the throne rather than the more obvious divine judgement in battle: first, the arms of St George, a traditional English symbol; second, the red dragon, not a narrowly Welsh symbol but a banner employed by previous English kings from Richard the Lionheart to Edward III; and, finally, the dun cow, a banner which highlighted Henry's Beaufort, Lancastrian blood but which also had Neville associations. This was a dubious claim but one which became the foundation of the Tudor title. The hereditary claim to the throne was also apparent in Henry's first parliament, summoned to meet at Westminster on 7 November 1485. In parliament the new king addressed the Commons and proclaimed his right to the throne, not only by divine right as revealed by his victory at Bosworth but also by hereditary title. An act of attainder was passed against King Richard and his closest followers which, crucially, dated Henry's accession to 21 August, the day before Bosworth. This, in theory, could have important ramifications for landowners who supported their king in battle, risking forfeiture if their then lord was defeated in battle; and was thus a controversial and potentially unpopular move. Nevertheless, it demonstrated Henry's desire to assert his authority over the political nation. Henry's first parliament lasted until the beginning of March. Before it closed the new king had made good his promise and married, on 18 January 1486, Elizabeth of York. Henry had therefore established a claim to the throne based on right inheritance, united the houses of York and Lancaster through marriage, and symbolically lifted the crown above the warring factions of the Wars of the Roses.

These priorities were reflected in several demonstrations of Henry's concept of kingship. In the first five years of the reign he ordered a new coinage and built a new warship, the *Sovereign*, making much use of the arched imperial crown which signified more than mere kingly power. He also emphasized the sacral nature of kingship: his proposed effigy at the heart of Westminster Abbey on top of the shrine of Edward the Confessor would have shown him receiving the crown from God. Henry was able to juxtapose various images of kingship in an attempt to broaden the appeal of the new Tudor monarchy. For example, the symbol of the crown in a hawthorn bush, evidence of God's judgement on the field at Bosworth, was not forgotten and became one of the standard Tudor icons, adorning the architecture commissioned by the king and his followers, books and other visible media. Similarly, a chorus of Welsh poets heralded Tudor's accession as the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies concerning the vanquishing of the Anglo-Saxons by the British, drawing attention to Henry's Welsh ancestry.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to make too much of a new symbolic rhetoric to define Tudor kingship. The English use of the arched imperial crown had its origins in the Lancastrian dual-monarchy of Henry V. Similarly, the house of York had frequently employed 'British' propaganda for its own ends and Edward IV's 'British' credentials, established via genealogies linking him, through the Mortimers, with Llewellyn, Prince of Wales, and eventually to the mythical founder of Britain, Brutus, were equal to Henry's. Other Tudor icons therefore drew attention to more tangible and immediate justifications of the dynasty. The Beaufort portcullis, the Richmond greyhound and Tudor Rose, for example, stressed Henry's dynastic legitimacy and the conciliation with the Yorkist polity achieved through his marriage to Elizabeth. When on 19 September 1486 an heir, Arthur, was born his birth was

celebrated as the guarantee of dynastic security and confirmation that the realm would never again fall into civil war. Despite this strong emphasis on continuity and legitimacy, however, it is clear that Henry brought a new sense of direction to the English crown. This was most apparent in his dealings with the landowning classes. The remainder of this chapter will, therefore, deal with how Henry's policies towards the political elites established the Tudor dynasty firmly on the throne of England.

Crown and Nobility

To the historians writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries one of Henry Tudor's greatest achievements was to rescue England from the damage caused by noble factions and the 'over-mighty subject' during the Wars of the Roses. S. T. Bindoff considered that the principal problem facing Henry in 1485 was 'how to suppress the magnates' and J. R. Lander stated that the first Tudor was so successful in achieving this end that, by 1509, the parliamentary peerage had been cowed into the impotency that would characterize them throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁸ Although the nobility continued to enjoy a role both in the government of the localities and at court there nevertheless remains the feeling amongst historians that Henry was somehow less inclined to see the nobility as his natural partners in government than were his Lancastrian and Yorkist predecessors. In reality the situation was less clear-cut. What Henry was concerned with primarily was the augmentation of the crown's authority and the security of the Tudor dynasty on the English throne. At times this clashed with the interests of not only the nobility but the landed classes as a whole. However, other factors, not only royal policy, were also at work in explaining the apparent decline of noble fortunes between 1485 and 1509.

First, it is far from clear that the majority of the nobility saw themselves as having a national political role. The nobility as a whole had largely remained aloof from the events of 1470–1, when Edward IV had been deposed by his erstwhile ally, the Earl of Warwick, and the Lancastrian Henry VI briefly restored to the throne, and had also acquiesced in Richard III's usurpation in 1483. At Bosworth only five of the fifty-five nobles summoned to parliament in 1484 turned out for Richard III, while Henry was accompanied on the battlefield by only one peer, that die-hard Lancastrian loyalist the earl of Oxford. Similarly at Stoke two years later, apart from the attainted earl of Lincoln and Viscount Lovel, only two peers supported the pretender Lambert Simnel (posing as Edward, earl of Warwick, the son of Edward IV's brother, George, duke of Clarence), while only seven members of the nobility took the field for Henry. It seems as if Lord Mountjoy's deathbed advice to his son in 1485 not to seek to be 'great about princes' was a sentiment with which the nobility generally had some sympathy. Indeed, when noblemen did exercise power at a local level it was only with the king's approbation or even at the king's command. For example, on Henry's accession Lord Stanley, instrumental in the victory at Bosworth and related to the new king by marriage, was made earl of Derby and he and his family rewarded with new influence in the North-West and North Wales; Jasper Tudor became duke of Bedford and enjoyed the 'rule' of the South Wales and the Marches; equally, Giles Daubeney, a supporter of Henry in exile, was made Lord Daubeney and given the command of Calais and, later, regional power in the South-

West through the grant of royal offices there. In many ways this can be seen as a continuation of the policies of Edward IV but the scale of the influence enjoyed by Derby, Daubeney or Bedford cannot really be compared to the independence that Edward IV allowed the duke of Gloucester in the North or even Lord Hastings in the Midlands.

Equally, circumstances also militated against independent noble power-bases in the localities. The 4th earl of Northumberland, for instance, had been imprisoned in the Tower for his support of Richard III at Bosworth and was only slowly allowed to recover his family's traditional lands and offices in the North. However, when he was murdered in 1489, attempting to collect a royal tax, he was replaced by the earl of Surrey as the king's lieutenant of the North. Surrey, who had also supported Richard in 1485, needed the king's favour to recover his family's position in their traditional region of influence, East Anglia, and thus proved a subservient, yet effective, royal representative in the North. Although Henry employed the nobility in their traditional role as the links between the localities and the centre, their power was increasingly made dependent upon royal favour or replaced altogether by royal servants. Perhaps the clearest example of the way in which Henry attacked entrenched noble power was in Lancashire and Cheshire where, from the 1490s, the Stanley family and their servants were systematically excluded from duchy and palatinate offices.

Moreover, Henry did not significantly add to the ranks of the nobility; at the same time the existing nobility was allowed to dwindle through attainder and natural wastage. In the first years of the reign there was a small rush of peerage creations – six new barons, for example, between September 1485 and November 1488 – but these were mainly rewards for service at Bosworth and, with the exception of Daubeney, were revivals of titles in abeyance. Similarly, amongst the higher peerage only Jasper Tudor was raised to the rank of duke while Philibert de Chandee's creation as earl of Bath was merely a recognition of the Frenchman's service at Bosworth and was not accompanied by grants of lands in England. This was in contrast to Edward IV who had created a new nobility to serve him as leaders of local society. Also under Henry VII those peers, like the earls of Lincoln, Warwick and Suffolk, who were attainted were not replaced. Other peers, like the 5th earl of Northumberland, the earls of Kent and Thomas, Lord Burgh, were either minors, lunatics or not equipped with the skills which enabled them to command influence in political society, making them neither a threat nor a tool of royal government.

As well as an apparent reluctance to create new nobles, Henry also demonstrated that he was inherently wary of the aristocracy as potential rivals for local power and influence. This was apparent in his use of financial bonds to regulate his relations with the nobility and the greater gentry. This device, a form of suspended fine for the performance of some agreed task or as an insurance against bad behaviour, was a commonplace in late-medieval society but their use under Henry VII multiplied greatly. It was apparent from the beginning of the reign but was restricted to those who were obvious potential threats to the new regime: in the North, for instance, old Yorkists like Sir John Conyers were almost immediately placed under heavy bonds for good behaviour, while Thomas Grey, marquis of Dorset, whose loyalty had always been in question despite him being a companion in exile, was required in 1492 to provide sureties for his good behaviour to the tune of £10,000. From about 1500, however, Henry extended the system to those who did not pose any ostensible threat.

In 1507 George Neville, Lord Abergavenny, one of Henry's key lieutenants in Kent, was fined the enormous sum of £100,000 for illegal retaining, although the king agreed to commute this to a £5,000 fine. By 1509 some 75 per cent of the nobility had entered into a bond of some sort. Some historians, notably J. R. Lander, have taken this as part of a deliberate policy by the king to have his greatest subjects in his financial power. While these bonds fulfilled a primarily political purpose, Henry also showed a ruthless determination to exact all the crown's rights as feudal overlord and to acquire more land under the crown's direct control. Henry's reign, therefore, witnessed a change in the political role and importance of the ancient nobility *vis-à-vis* the rest of the political nation and that, in part, was due to deliberate royal policy. This is apparent by the fact that Henry's first parliament was attended by thirty-four of the fifty-five lords eligible to be summoned (although six were minors); by the time of the first parliament of his son's reign there were only forty-one lords eligible to be summoned. The bare figures point to the decline of the nobility under Henry VII and corresponding rise in the importance of the crown and royal affinity that would be a defining feature of the early Tudor polity.

Centre and Locality

Some of the changes apparent in the government of the localities and the dynamic between locality and centre have already been touched upon. It is in his management of local political society that Henry VII might be seen as most distinct from his predecessors and this has come in for most of the recent criticism of him. Traditionally the crown relied primarily on the nobility to enforce its will in the localities but in counties where there were no resident magnates, for example in Kent or Nottinghamshire, the gentry had taken the lead and the crown had established direct links with them by recruitment into the royal household or by using the offices available on the crown lands, such as on the duchy of Lancaster estates. As the fifteenth-century political commentator Sir John Fortescue noted: 'the myght off the lande, aftir the myght off the grete lordes theroff stondith most in the kynges officers. Ffor thai mowe best rule the contreis wher as ther offices ben . . .'⁹ It was the spread of rule through the 'kynges offices' to areas usually under the sway of 'grete lordes' which was, crudely speaking, one of the defining features of Henry's reign and an important stage in the establishment of the Tudor dynasty.

Office on the crown lands, therefore, was of prime importance in establishing a greater royal authority in the localities. Stewardships of land conferred the right to command the service of the tenants (the *manraed*). Crucially, it was this system that allowed the crown, through its office-holders, to raise armies both for defence against rebels, as in 1497, or for wars against France and Scotland, as in 1492 and 1496. As the crown's landed estate was increased by feudal accident, forfeiture or purchase so the potential for the crown, through its estate officers, to intervene more directly in local affairs also increased. Moreover, new laws against retaining – that is, the handing out of livery and badges and payment of fees to any who were not immediate household servants – in 1487 and 1504 made it illegal for anybody to retain either the king's officers or his tenants. The number of special licences the crown granted to its officials to hand out the king's livery and by these means extend the crown's authority became instantly more visible and apparent in the shires. The epitome of

the licensed retinue is the 1,300 or so men in the retinue of Thomas Lovell, Henry's first treasurer of the chamber and a leading councillor throughout the reign. Lovell's retinue was built around crown office. About a third of the retinue came directly from crown tenants, while a fifth were from monastic and episcopal stewardships, which had been granted to Lovell by those eager to exploit his position as somebody influential with the king and whose favour in local affairs was sought after. A further portion was from the followings of individual gentlemen already members of the retinue, some of whom also enjoyed crown office, while a sixth of the retinue was comprised of the tenants of the Roos estates in Lincolnshire. Lovell's marriage to Isabel Roos, a royal ward, was doubtless facilitated by the king in his desire to bring the Roos lands and their tenants under royal influence.

There was, of course, a tendency for crown officials to use their local influence to their own ends, just as the retinues of magnates in the fifteenth century had taken advantage of the protection of their lords for their own good, and this explains partly the unrest in some areas that has triggered recent scholarly criticism of Henry's policies. William Sandes in Hampshire, Sir Edward Darell in Berkshire and Edward Belknap in Warwickshire have all recently been highlighted as crown officials who abused their positions and thus destabilized local society. Perhaps the most damning example of this tendency, however, is Henry's grant to Lord Daubeney of a near monopoly of crown office in the South-West. This excluded the local gentry from influence and the backlash was apparent in their failure to turn out for the king and fight against the Cornish rebels in 1497. Henry's natural tendency, unlike Edward IV, was to support the royal official rather than the local interest in these cases. This may have damaged local harmony in the short term but, crucially, in the long term reinforced the view that the crown was the ultimate authority. Moreover, it is by no means apparent that the growth of the royal affinity in the localities was a bad thing for local order and government everywhere. In Kent, for example, it was the weakness of the crown's agent there, Sir Richard Guildford, that caused unrest rather than the crown's policies *per se*.

Rather than seeing Henry's policy towards the localities as a ham-fisted attempt to go against the established norms through which local political society operated, we should perhaps see the growth of the royal affinity as part of a deliberate policy to strengthen the crown and establish the Tudor dynasty. In the same way as Henry attempted to maximize the financial yield of the crown lands, so he sought to exploit fully their human potential. If this at times trampled on existing local structures of power it was a price the king, and it seems most of local society, was willing to pay. Tudor policy was successful in as much as it ensured that more force was mobilized for the king than for his enemies in the two significant tests of Henry's kingship: at Stoke in 1487 when he defeated the pretender, Lambert Simnel; and at Blackheath ten years later when the king faced the Cornish rebels.

Finance and Administration

While the present state of our knowledge about the effect of Henry's governance on local political society is limited, the same cannot be said of the institutions through which he ruled. Traditionally, the study of the council and financial machinery has been the main focus of Tudor historians. Paradoxically it has now become accepted as a commonplace that it was in his bureaucracy that Henry was most like his Yorkist

predecessors. However, the most recent work on the king's counsel and royal finances suggests that there was something distinctive and new in Tudor rule.

The process of counselling the monarch – that it was done effectively and, more importantly, seen to be done effectively – was one of the necessary lubricants for the proper functioning of political society. The importance to Henry of the king's council has never been beyond doubt. Chrimes saw Henry's council as conventionally medieval. There were no council committees, no court of Star Chamber nor Council Learned in the Law in an institutionalized sense. Councillors met in the Star Chamber at Westminster or 'learned counsel' (the contemporary term for lawyers) deliberated over legal matters but they were not committees as we, or indeed later sixteenth-century governments, would understand them. Henry VII's council was large and amorphous: 227 men were styled king's councillors during the reign, including two-thirds of the nobility, although the council usually met as a working party of about two dozen.

We can identify four levels on which counsel operated during Henry's reign. First, in the seven parliaments (in 1485, 1487, 1489, 1491, 1495, 1497 and 1504) and the five Great Councils (in 1485, 1487, 1488, 1491 and 1496) he summoned, Henry took counsel from and sought the approbation of the community of the whole realm. Henry's Great Councils, assemblies of the nobility not constrained by the formality of summoning and convening a parliament comprised of king, lords and commons, in particular became a forum in which the king appealed to the realm for assistance. Grants of taxation made in Great Councils were later confirmed and legalized in parliament. All but the parliament of 1504 were summoned in times of domestic or international crisis and were linked to the accepted necessity of asking approval for the granting of taxation.¹⁰ Second, there were meetings of the council proper where the principal office-holders and sometimes the king met to discuss the everyday business of government. It was in these circumstances that the key royal officials, the treasurer, chancellor, keeper of the privy seal, and advisers, Sir Reginald Bray (d. 1502), Sir Thomas Lovell and, later in the reign, Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, saw to the execution of the royal will. Thirdly, there was the informal counsel which characterized effective government in a personal monarchy. This could happen at a number of levels: for example, in 1492 Henry took informal counsel on a very grand scale by calling an impromptu meeting of the commanders of his army outside Bologna to discuss terms for the settlement of the war with France, or in a very private context by taking counsel from courtiers and attendants in the King's Chamber or on a hunting trip. The individuals closest to the king offered counsel by means of all these methods; the process of counselling the monarch was not yet fully institutionalized as it would be later in the sixteenth century. The men denounced by Perkin Warbeck (who claimed he was Richard, duke of York, Edward IV's younger son) in 1497 as evil counsellors and 'caitiffs and villains of low birth' – Bishop Fox, the keeper of the privy seal, Sir Reginald Bray, Sir Thomas Lovell, Sir John Risley, Oliver King, Henry's secretary, Sir Richard Empson, Sir Richard Guildford and Sir John Turberville – represented a mix of high officers of state, household servants and companions in exile, demonstrating that the principal determinant of who counselled Henry lay with the king himself.

The final way in which counsel was given in Henry's reign, however, is the most interesting and reveals a significant innovation in the way in which government operated. John Watts has argued that Henry's reign saw a removal of much of the

personal character of late-medieval government. Using the blueprint for government given by Sir John Fortescue in the 1470s, the lawyers in Henry's counsels – individuals like Dudley, Empson, Bray and Risley – exploited the king's unfamiliarity with the norms of government and took over much of the day-to-day business, allowing government to function with a minimum of interference from the king. The Council Learned in the Law and, in financial matters, the general surveyors epitomized this development. They met regularly without the king's supervision – the general surveyors met at Blackfriars or in the Prince's chamber at Westminster – to interpret and implement the king's will. Unlike the barons of the exchequer the general surveyors were not constrained in their dealings by the cumbersome process of common law. Although Watts is correct to identify the growth of largely independent conciliar courts later in Henry's reign, his explanation for its cause is probably mistaken. Henry did not relinquish any aspect of the royal prerogative nor did the king's will cease to be the principal motor of central government. Any examination of the documents which Henry's government created leaves no doubt that it was the king who was behind the formulation and execution of policy: his sign manual, annotations and notes in his own hands are a commonplace throughout the administrative records of the reign. Royal government expanded its ambitions and responsibilities massively during the reign to intervene at every level of national and provincial life, and thus the conciliar committees represented the fact that in the burgeoning Tudor state the king was forced to delegate certain aspects of the princely role in government. Nevertheless, despite these bodies, government remained primarily an instrument of the king's will throughout the reign.¹¹

Changes in the priorities of government, driven by Henry's own will, are perhaps most apparent in matters of national finance. The regime's policy was summarized by Geoffrey Elton and his appraisal remains valid today. He observed how Henry exploited every possible source of income open to the crown, including feudal rights, fines on penal statutes and the chasing up of royal debts. 'Henry', it seems, 'was not only calling for his dues but pressing hard upon all landowners'.¹² The extent to which he pursued the crown's prerogative rights and sought to increase its wealth was unquestionably novel. However, historians have, in the main, accepted the view that there was nothing new about the means and methods of administration that the king employed. Henry's 'chamber system' – in which the crown's income was augmented and based primarily upon the revenues of the crown lands paid directly to the king's chamber rather than the exchequer, the ancient body which handled national finance – was nothing more than a utilization of the system of estate management used by most magnates and introduced on a national level by Edward IV during the 1460s.

Nevertheless, it seems that the way in which Henry Tudor perceived national finance was fundamentally different to his late-medieval predecessors. The survival of Henry's chamber accounts and a mass of other related accounts allows us to reconstruct in detail the machinery by which the royal revenues were expanded and strengthened. Between 1461 and 1485 the Yorkists had essentially continued, albeit in an extended form, the normal practice of late-medieval state finance. Edward IV used his private wealth, in the form of the crown lands and especially the lands of March and York, alongside the public revenue as an additional source of royal authority much as the Lancastrian kings had in times of crisis. This, however, did not

represent a financial re-foundation of royal government. Many royal estates were alienated in the 1460s; wardships, such as that of the future Talbot earl of Shrewsbury, were not exploited financially but used to foster royal authority in the localities; acts of resumption, which aimed to return royal land granted by the profligate Henry VI, were tempered by the need to maintain the support of the aristocracy. Furthermore, the Yorkist kings conspicuously failed to employ these private resources effectively for national expenditure, for example the war with Scotland in the early 1480s, or transfer those funds effectively from king to king.

When compared with these precedents it is clear that the role of the chamber in national finance under Henry VII was very different. The commonplace distinctions between ordinary and extraordinary revenue and expenditure, and the public resources of the crown and the king's private revenues, were gradually undermined during Henry's reign. Similarly, the functions of the Exchequer, which handled the public revenues derived principally from taxation and the customs, and the king's chamber, which collected and spent his private wealth (mainly in the form of the crown lands), were merged. This change may have been caused partly by the king's lack of experience of the usual patterns of English medieval government, and may have been linked to his exposure to continental forms of royal authority. It was also recognition, however, of more deep-rooted inadequacies in the fiscal resources of late-medieval monarchy. Henry effectively combined his private sources of income with those that pertained to the crown, such as feudal prerogatives, the crown's ancient demesne lands, the profits of justice and national taxation to provide a consolidated royal revenue. Once under the control of the king's chamber, all these sources were applied equally to whatever expenditure Henry felt increased the authority and security of the Tudor dynasty.¹³

Henry VII's Last Years

Perhaps the most frequent charge levelled against Henry VII is that his policies became, as the reign wore on and especially after 1504, increasingly avaricious, unjust and resented. Polydore Vergil and the London *Great Chronicle* considered the king's greed as a vice which threatened to nullify all his greatest achievements. This theme was taken up with great vigour in a debate between Geoffrey Elton and J. P. Cooper. Elton refuted the chroniclers' claim while Cooper maintained that Henry's policies were rapacious and prejudicial to the liberty of the subject. Central to these arguments was the role of the king's ministers, especially the Council Learned and its most infamous members, Edmund Dudley and Richard Empson. Dudley and Empson have been largely exonerated by modern historians and indeed, Dudley's so-called 'petition' makes it clear that it was Henry himself who formulated and drove policy, especially from about 1500 when his own failing health and the reality of possible dynastic failure hit home. As Dudley himself noted, the king's purpose was to 'have as many persons in his danger at his pleasure' through his use of bonds and exploitation of feudal rights and penal statutes.¹⁴

Of course, in a personal monarchy government policy was primarily determined by the king's character. Henry VII was, it seems, an unusually cautious man even for an age where political events were often determined by treachery and sudden volte-faces. In exile he had been a pawn of European power politics and his primary loyalty

was to those who had stood by him in exile. Almost to the end of the reign those who had been his companions in France and Brittany – Guildford, Daubeney, Bray and Lovell – were his most trusted companions. Those whom he had any reason to distrust – for example, the marquis of Dorset, who had tried to contact Richard III in 1485 – remained under a cloud for the rest of reign (as it turned out an eventually fatal cloud for Dorset). Traditional loyalties and chivalric values, it seemed, were also dangerous under Henry: in 1495 Sir William Stanley, the chamberlain of Henry's own household, whose intervention had been decisive at Bosworth, was executed for his complicity in the Perkin Warbeck conspiracy. His was said to have in his possession a Yorkist livery collar, granted to him as steward of Edward, prince of Wales's household, and to be foolish enough to state that if a son of Edward IV was really still alive his loyalty to Henry would be compromised. There is no evidence, however, that Stanley had ever acted treasonably. Henry's natural suspicion also acted in the opposite way: in 1504 the treasurer of Calais, Hugh Conwey – another of Henry's companions in exile – reported that the king was prone to believe that reports of treasonable activities were made 'but of envy, yll wille and malis'. That belief saved Conwey's skin the following year when Henry dismissed a report, probably correctly, by one John Flamank of treasonable words by members of the Calais garrison.

There is undeniable evidence, however, that Henry became increasingly suspicious and that his policies to augment the financial security of the crown did, at times, compromise good government and the liberty of the subject. This is shown clearly by the list of those who 'had a hard end' in Dudley's petition and by the king's policies in Calais, where the wool merchants, who paid for the defence of the town, were chased for the payment of their debts to the crown to the detriment of their ability to pay the town garrison's wages. Several historians have attributed this change of policy to the king's sense of dynastic insecurity, apparent from 1502 with the death of his eldest son, Prince Arthur, and, in the following year, of his queen. However, these policies were also apparent earlier in the reign: for example, the defection of Edmund de la Pole, earl of Suffolk to the continent and his emergence as a Yorkist claimant to the throne in 1501 had its roots in Henry's financial exploitation of the de la Pole family.¹⁵

More important than Henry's domestic disaster in the apparent change of direction in royal policy around the turn of the century may be the king's failing health. It is clear, from the so-called 'Flamank Information' (a report of an alleged conversation in September 1504 between the officers of the Calais garrison concerning the succession), that the king had been close to death in 1499 and during the next few years he suffered from bouts of recurrent incapacity. The chamber accounts show that for weeks at a time the Court stopped its regular perambulations around Henry's southern hunting lodges and other sources confirm that Henry was close to death in the springs of 1507 and 1508 before his demise in April 1509. Changes in royal policy, therefore, may represent the gradual shift from the king personally directing government to ministers interpreting what they perceived to be the royal will. Vergil notes as well that the king's physical illness was accompanied by a mental decline in the last three years of his life so it may be that the royal will was more ambiguous in these last years.

There are indeed signs that there were tensions at Court and around the king's person during the last years of his reign. In 1505 Sir Richard Guildford was dismissed from his role as comptroller of the household, thus losing his role at Court

and proximity about the king, for unknown reasons. He left for pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he died the following year. In the same year Lord Daubeney was disgraced, ostensibly because he had embezzled funds while lieutenant of Calais; in his will he complained of the king's decision to force him into hefty financial penalties for his supposed misdemeanour. In 1507 Sir James Hobart, the attorney-general and one of the king's closest counsellors, was also dismissed for an unknown cause. At the same time, the chamber accounts reveal the growing influence of Empson and Dudley, Sir John Hussey, master of the wards, and Edward Belknap, surveyor of the prerogative, about the king: in March 1508, for example, all the payments made by the treasurer of the chamber were annotated with Empson, Dudley or Hussey's name suggesting their influence at the heart of power.

The tensions of Henry's last years were soon revealed in the wake of his death. The king's death was kept secret for thirty-six hours to enable a court coup in which the king's older and aristocratic counsellors, led by the treasurer, the earl of Surrey and Bishop Fox, keeper of the privy seal, engineered the arrest and subsequent execution of Empson and Dudley. This led to the establishment of a broad, noble-led council to advise the young Henry VIII.¹⁶ In the first year of the new reign a general pardon was issued and many of those who had been subject to bonds under Henry VII successfully petitioned to have them cancelled – in all, 175 were cancelled up to 1515. Nevertheless, many of Henry VII's policies survived, albeit in modified form. His financial policy continued almost intact: the series of acts of parliament between 1510 and 1512 which named John Heron, Henry's treasurer of the chamber, as the general receiver of the crown's revenues and established the auditing activities of the general surveyors in law were a peculiarly English attempt to recognize the significance of the change that had occurred in the nature of royal government. The expansion of the royal household's role in government and greater intervention in local affairs remained a constant feature of Tudor government. This must have been so because those who had a stake in royal government, including, significantly, men like Thomas Howard, earl of Surrey (whose father the duke of Norfolk had been killed fighting for Richard III at Bosworth) recognized their benefit for the good government of the realm: 'Henry succeeded because his leading subjects wanted him to succeed; he did not govern in despite of them'.¹⁷

K. B. McFarlane once pronounced that 'The only New Monarchy that England ever had came in with William the Conqueror' but, as Steven Gunn has reminded us, 'neither a man nor a monarchy need be completely or uniquely new to be significantly new'.¹⁸ There were enough aspects of Henry VII's rule to make the advent of the Tudor dynasty in 1485 a significant new start in English history. That is not to say that things changed overnight: we know that there were significant continuities of personnel and institutions, men like John, Lord Dynham, Henry's first treasurer of England between 1486 and 1501, were inveterate survivors who moulded themselves successfully to the very different politics of Edward IV's, Richard III's and Henry VII's reign. Nevertheless, the fact that Henry was an outsider without first-hand experience of the nature of the late-medieval English polity made some change inevitable. Moreover, the nature of that change was permanent and provided the foundations for a distinctly Tudor political culture. Politics, especially in the last years of the reign, became more court-centred; the crown succeeded in intervening and imposing its will on local political society more effectively; and the efficiency of

government was increased by the new developments in the financial administration and the way in which the council interpreted and implemented the king's will. These were all features that characterized Tudor government throughout the sixteenth century. If we accept that strong central government is a good thing, then we might concur with S. T. Bindoff who concluded that Henry was 'the most uniformly successful of English kings';¹⁹ however, if we perceive no inherent problems in the way in which medieval England was governed then we might consider Henry's rule disastrous for landowning society and his survival, and that of his dynasty, more due to good luck than good judgement. Good king or bad king, Henry VII's reign had, in many ways, prepared the British Isles for the more momentous changes of the remainder of the sixteenth century.

NOTES

1. For Henry Tudor's early life see Griffiths and Thomas, *Making of the Tudor Dynasty*, pp. 39–86.
2. Jones, 'The myth of 1485'.
3. Jones, *Bosworth 1485*, esp. ch. 6.
4. Chrimes, *Henry VII*, pp. 319, 322.
5. See especially Gunn, *Early Tudor Government* for this approach.
6. Carpenter, *Wars of the Roses*, ch. 11.
7. The symbolism of Henry's reign is discussed in Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, ch. 2 and Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, ch. 4.
8. Bindoff, *Tudor England*, p. 66; Lander, 'Bonds, coercion and fear'. For discussions of the role of the nobility see Pugh, 'Henry VII and the English nobility' and the case studies by Luckett ('Crown patronage and political morality') and Cunningham ('Henry VII, Sir Thomas Butler and the Stanley family').
9. Quoted in Luckett, 'Crown office and licensed retinues', p. 237.
10. For Henry's Great Councils and their link with parliament see Holmes, 'The Great Council in the reign of Henry VII'.
11. Watts, '"A New Ffundacion of is Crowne": monarchy in the reign of Henry VII'.
12. Elton, 'Rapacity and remorse', pp. 23–4, 32.
13. Grummitt, 'Henry VII, Chamber finance and the "New Monarchy"'.
14. Harrison, 'Petition of Edmund Dudley', pp. 88–94. For the debate in the *Historical Journal* over Henry's character see Elton, 'Rapacity and remorse', countered in J. P. Cooper, 'Henry VII's last years reconsidered', with Elton's reply in 'Henry VII: a restatement'.
15. Grummitt, 'For the surety of the Towne and Marches'; Jones, 'Sir William Stanley'.
16. Gunn, 'Accession of Henry VIII'.
17. Horrox, 'Yorkist and early Tudor England', p. 489. McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England*, p. 283.
18. Gunn, 'Sir Thomas Lovell', p. 153.
19. Bindoff, *Tudor England*, p. 66.

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FURTHER READING

The standard biography of Henry VII's reign remains S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (1999), but R. L. Storey's *The Reign of Henry VII* (1968) is also useful. Two recent textbooks on late-medieval England offer interesting but opposing views of Henry from a medievalist's point of view: Tony Pollard's *Late Medieval England, 1399–1509* (1999) is reasonably positive about the reign while a hostile account of Henry can be found in Christine Carpenter's *The Wars of the Roses* (1997). A proper assessment of Henry's achievements can only be achieved by an understanding of the late-medieval polity. Essential to this are the essays by G. L. Harriss 'Medieval government' (1963) and D. A. L. Morgan, 'The king's affinity in the polity of Yorkist England' (1973). Most recent accounts have stressed the continuities through the period 1450–1509; important in this regard is the work of B. P. Wolffe, especially his *The Royal Demesne in English History* (1971), but see also S. J. Gunn, *Early Tudor Government* (1995). However, for recent suggestions that the reign had important, distinctive features see Grummitt, 'Henry VII, chamber finance and the "New Monarchy"' (1999). For Henry's relationships with the elites see Margaret Condon, 'Ruling elites' (1979) and Pugh, 'Henry VII and the English nobility' (1992). More local studies are needed but see Cunningham, 'Bonds of allegiance' (1996), 'Henry VII and the Stanley family' (2000), Lockett, 'Crown patronage' (1995) and the final chapter of Carpenter's *Locality and Polity* (1992). For the politics of Henry's reign and especially the rebellions of the 1480s and 1490s see Ian Arthurson's *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy* (1994) and Michael Bennet's *Lambert Simnel and the Battle of Stoke* (1987). The nature of Henry's court and its role in politics is explored in Gunn, 'The courtiers of Henry VII' (1993).