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Tudor: What's in a Name?

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Abstract
The 'Tudor' name for the royal family was hardly known in the sixteenth century. The almost obsessive use of the term by historians is therefore profoundly misleading about how English people of the time thought of themselves and of their world, the more so given the overtones of glamour associated with it. The royal surname was never used in official publications, and hardly in 'histories' of various sorts before 1584. Monarchs were not anxious to publicize their descent in the paternal line from a Welsh adventurer, stressing instead continuity with the historic English and French royal families. Their subjects did not think of them as 'Tudors', or of themselves as 'Tudor people'. Modern concepts such as 'Tudor monarchy' are misleading in suggesting a false unity over the century. Subjects did not identify with their rulers in the way 'Tudor people' suggests. Nor did they situate themselves in a distinct 'Tudor' period of history, differentiated from a hypothetical 'middle ages'. While 'Tudor' is useful historian's shorthand we should use the word sparingly and above all make clear to readers that it was not a contemporary concept.

In 2008 I published in the *Times Literary Supplement* an article suggesting that the word 'Tudor' was hardly used or known in sixteenth-century England.[1] Monarchs, after all, had no occasion to use family names. Official documents – statutes, proclamations, letters patent and so on – and coins broadcast the designated name and style of the king or queen, but did not include surnames. Where one might expect to find dynastic surnames would be in chronicles and other contemporary histories. Even here they were conspicuously absent during the 'Tudor period'. A diligent enquirer could read about the marriage *c.*1430 between Queen Catherine, the widow of Henry V, and her gentleman Owen Tudor; but there was little or no pointer forward in the text to the outcome of this marriage, the creation by Henry VI of his half-brothers Edmund and Jasper Tudor as earls of Richmond and Pembroke respectively, and of Edmund's marriage in 1455 to Margaret Beaufort, sole heir

[1] 'A Rose by any Other Name', *Times Literary Supplement* [*TLS*], no. 5489, 13 June, 2008, 14–15. The argument was substantially repeated in my 'Representation, Repute, Reality', *English Historical Review*, cxxiv (2009), 1432–47 [hereafter Davies, 'Representation'], at pp. 1437–41. This was an extended review of Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy* (2009) [hereafter Sharpe, *Selling*].

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to John, duke of Somerset (d. 1444), resulting in the birth of the future Henry VII. The Catherine–Owen Tudor marriage itself was condemned as shameful in fifteenth-century chronicles, and this tradition continued well into the sixteenth century.[2] When in turn the grandson of that marriage featured as the leading opponent of Richard III, invading England from France and winning the battle of Bosworth in 1485 to become King Henry VII, he described himself by his peerage title 'Richmond', not as 'Henry Tudor'. He was always called Richmond in subsequent sixteenth-century accounts of his life before becoming king, including Shakespeare's *Richard III*. 'Tydder' was indeed used of him by Richard, and subsequently by Perkin Warbeck, to draw attention to his allegedly low social origins; that no doubt explains why Henry himself and his successors avoided using the word.[3]

I was surprised at my own discovery, suspected that I had overlooked some obvious source and fully expected a torrent of refutation. This has conspicuously not materialized, and I therefore conclude that I was right. The word 'Tudor' is used obsessively by historians, often as a quite unnecessary reinforcing adjective to add an appropriate 'period flavour' to their work; but it was almost unknown at the time.

While the Tudor name was indeed celebrated in Welsh-language writings, it was considered an embarrassment in England. Henry VII's claim to the throne was left conspicuously vague, but it was evidently as a 'Lancastrian' claimant by his mother through the (originally illegitimate) Beaufort line, by descent from John of Gaunt. He also emphasized that through Queen Catherine he was the nephew of Henry VI; logically, of course, that could have no bearing on a claim to the English throne, but was useful dust-in-the-eyes of the general public, in France as well as in

[2] See, for instance, the so-called 'Giles Chronicle' of the 1450's (*Incerto Scriptoris Chronicon Angliae de Regnis Trium Regum Lancastrensium*, ed. John Allen Giles, 1848, in series *Scriptores Monastici*), 4th pt., p. 17, on Catherine's 'inability to restrain her carnal passions'. See too Edward Hall, *The Vnion of the Two Most Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548); I cite the edition edited by Henry Ellis as *Hall's Chronicle* (1809). Hall, generally taken as the epitome of 'Tudor propagandist', writes of the Queen as 'young and lusty, following more her own appetite than friendly counsel', 184–5. Hall was following Polydore Vergil, writing by 1513, who was more charitable; Catherine was 'but young in years and thereby of less discretion to judge what was decent for her estate'; *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis, Camden Series, 1st ser., 29, 1844, 62. Holinshed was to repeat Hall's words; *Holinshed's Chronicles* (6 vols., 1807–8, using the 1586 edn.), iii. 190. Ellis Gruffydd, a soldier of the Calais garrison in Henry VIII's reign, wrote in his manuscript Welsh-language chronicle of Catherine spying on the naked Owen as he was swimming, and then disguising herself to meet him. The chronicle, at the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth (2 vols., MS 5276 and Mostyn MS 158) is largely unpublished, but see Ralph A. Griffiths and Roger S. Thomas, *The Making of the Tudor Dynasty* (rev. edn., Stroud, 2005) [hereafter Griffiths and Thomas, *Making*], 37–8. A Colchester citizen, Nicholas Fox, was in trouble in 1541 for describing Catherine as 'baying like a very drunken whore' while making love to 'Ewyn Tedder'; the offence compounded in his case by confusing Catherine with her daughter-in-law, Henry VII's mother, Margaret Beaufort. See Michael Bennett, 'Table Tittle Tattle and the Tudor View of History', in *People, Places, and Perspectives; Essays in Honour of Ralph A. Griffiths* (Stroud, 2005), pp. 155–65. Bennett's article began my interest in perceptions of the Tudor story.

[3] *The Reign of Henry VII*, ed. A. F. Pollard (3 vols., 1913–14), i. 4 and 150.

England.[4] He also drew attention to Queen Catherine's being a daughter of Charles VI, king of France, and that therefore through her son Edmund Tudor Henry could claim descent from the generality of European royal families, and ultimately from Charlemagne. All this was useful in countering accusations of lowly origins. Nothing, however, was made specifically of Henry's paternal grandfather Owen Tudor. Interestingly, Edmund Tudor's fine tomb, erected at an unknown date, probably by his widow, in the Carmarthen Greyfriars, was moved at the dissolution of the friary, presumably at Henry VIII's instigation, to a prominent position in St David's cathedral. By contrast, Owen Tudor only acquired a tomb, in the Hereford Greyfriars, through the efforts of his bastard David Owen (1459–1542, three years the junior of his nephew Henry VII), and nothing was done to preserve it at the dissolution.[5] Even Queen Catherine's corpse, having been dug up to clear the way for the building of the Henry VII chapel at Westminster, was not reinterred there but remained a tourist attraction until 1778, famously kissed by Samuel Pepys.[6]

Henry VII of course strengthened his position by marrying Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Edward IV, the most plausible 'Yorkist' claimant to the throne if the allegations of bastardy made against Edward's family (and Edward himself) by Richard III are discounted; Yorkist theory, after all, depended on the right of a woman, if not to reign herself, at least to transmit a claim to a son. But once he was reasonably securely established, Henry preferred not to make too much of his wife's claim, for fear that he might be held to have only a crown matrimonial, rather than reigning in his own right. It was left to his son, Henry VIII, to boast of the 'Union' of the families of Lancaster and York embodied in himself. Indeed it seems as if both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I were happier with their 'Yorkist' ancestry than with the somewhat dubious Lancastrian line.[7] Of the various lines of descent which came together in Henry VIII,

[4] C. S. L. Davies, 'Information, Disinformation, and Political Knowledge under Henry VII and Early Henry VIII', *Historical Research*, lxxxv (2012) [hereafter Davies, 'Information, Disinformation']; Michael K. Jones, *Bosworth, 1485: Psychology of a Battle* (new edn., Stroud, 2010), p. 145.

[5] For Edmund's tomb, see Griffiths and Thomas, *Making*, ill. 12. It evidently did not exist in 1472, when his widow made plans, unfulfilled, to move the body to Bourne in Lincolnshire; Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 137–8. For Owen's tomb see Ralph A. Griffiths in online *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *ODNB*], 'Owen Tudor'.

[6] Philip Lindley, 'The Funeral Tomb Effigies of Queen Catherine Valois and King Henry V', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, clx (2007), 165–77; *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (11 vols., 1970–83), ix. 457.

[7] Davies, 'Representation', 1442–3, for Henry VIII's wish to be buried near Edward IV at Windsor rather than near his father at Westminster, and for Elizabeth's provision of monuments to her Yorkist ancestors; Sydney Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship* (1992) [hereafter Anglo, *Images*], p. 103. For a vivid description of Henry VIII's intended tomb, based on a Jacobean account, see Lucy Wooding, *Henry VIII* (2009), pp. 278–80. The red-and-white rose, usually called the 'Tudor rose', seems never to have been so-called at the time; it is obviously symbolic of the 'union', not of the specifically 'Tudor' descent (ibid., pp. 74–97). 'Tudor Rose' is therefore historian's coinage. Anglo's book is unusual among works on 'Tudor representation' in adopting a sceptical rather than an

the least was made of the specifically 'Tudor' element, the descent from Owen Tudor with its Welsh connotations.[8] Far from flaunting 'Tudor' origins, Henry VII, his son and grandchildren were anxious not to draw attention to them.[9]

Admittedly, there had been some emphasis, at the beginning of Henry VII's reign, on a connection through Welsh princely lines to the world popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth; Cadwaldr, last king of the Britons, Arthur, and ultimately back to Brutus. The connection was, however, made in the most general terms, without drawing specific attention to Owen Tudor, or even naming him. The narrative was soon dropped, except for the continued and striking presence of the Red Dragon as a supporter for the royal arms.[10]

Of course, Henry VIII commissioned from Holbein, probably in 1537, the famous mural painting of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York and Henry VIII and Jane Seymour for Whitehall Palace.[11] This is a striking image, and does suggest a proud sense of family, and of roots in the older king. (But it also suggests an unusual concentration on the person of the two queens, perhaps an affirmation on Henry VIII's part of his Yorkist ancestry, and the significance of a legitimate wife who had given birth to a male heir.) Otherwise, Henry VIII seems to have displayed little or no sense of pride in his paternal antecedents. For instance, Henry VII had chosen to found what has become known as the 'Henry VII chapel'

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exuberant attitude to its subject. For the continued popularity of the 'union' image see David Matthews, 'Public Ambition, Private Desire and the Last Tudor Chaucer', in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 74–88, at 78–80. In their interpretation of the fifteenth century, Hall, Foxe, Holinshed, and Shakespeare are united in believing the Yorkist claim superior to the Lancastrian one; see H. A. Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), *passim*, summarized pp. 297–306.

[8] For a corrective to the view that Henry VII favoured the Welsh, see J. Beverley Smith, 'Crown and Community in the Principality of North Wales in the Reign of Henry Tudor', *Welsh History Review*, iii (1966), 145–71. The findings of a commission established by Henry to investigate his Welsh ancestry (Griffiths and Thomas, *Making*, pp. 217–18) were not revealed, and may well have been intended to counter possible aspersions rather than to serve as a source of pride. I cannot forebear quoting once more John Davies, *A History of Wales* (Harmondsworth, 1994), p. 219: 'it was not a matter of the Tudors identifying themselves with the Welsh, but rather of the Welsh identifying themselves with the Tudors'.

[9] The line that Elizabeth was somehow 'Welsh' because Owen Tudor was her great-great-grandfather will, I hope, come to seem as odd as the once fashionable view that she was 'middle-class' because Sir Geoffrey Boleyn, another great-great-grandfather, was lord mayor in 1457; see J. H. Hexter, 'The Myth of the Middle Class in Tudor England', in his *Reappraisals in History* (1961), pp. 71–116, at 73. The latter view was urged by no less a historian than A. F. Pollard, *Factors in Modern History* (1907), p. 43.

[10] Anglo, *Images*, pp. 40–9, 56–60, 100–1. Anglo (p. 59) queries the closeness of a connection between the dragon badge and Cadwaladr. See Bernard Burke, *The General Armory* (1884), pp. lvii–lviii for the royal arms. They were unchanged from Henry V's reign to 1603; therefore the common designation 'Tudor arms' is erroneous.

[11] John Rowlands, *Holbein: The Paintings of Hans Holbein the Younger* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 224–6. Rowlands reconstitutes the inscription, which asks whether father or son is the greater, concluding in favour of Henry VIII. See too Susan Foster, *Holbein and England* (2004), pp. 175–90, which suggests that the image of Jane Seymour was posthumous.

(actually the Lady Chapel) at Westminster Abbey as a prolongation of the space around the high altar containing the shrine of Edward the Confessor, of English kings and queens of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and of Henry V and Queen Catherine. The chapel housed a chantry for himself, his queen and his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort. It was also intended as a shrine for Henry VI, for whom Henry was trying to procure canonization. Presumably Henry intended it to serve for his descendants, as a memorial to his family and to his own position as the transmitter of the historic royal line. Henry VIII did little to have his great-uncle canonized. He also determined to have himself buried at Windsor, along with Jane Seymour and close to the tomb of his grandfather Edward IV (and, ironically, of Henry VI), as indeed he was.[12] Henry VIII certainly invoked the memory of Henry V when he invaded France in 1513, but did not thereafter draw too much attention to his Lancastrian predecessor, perhaps because the military comparison was hardly flattering to himself. Nor, given the humiliating way Henry had been treated by his father as a teenager, coupled with his own massive ego, may he have wished to play second fiddle to the victor of 1485.[13]

Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I (or their advisers) all made great play with their being the children of Henry VIII; in Edward's case, no doubt, because of his youth, in that of his sisters because of their gender, but also because of their technical illegitimacy and special inclusion in the succession by act of parliament.[14] In that sense, at least, some feeling for 'family', if not for dynasty, is palpable, but with Henry VIII, not Henry VII, as the essential founding figure.[15] The sheer scale of change in his reign, coupled with his colourful personality and memorable appearance, helps explain this, as does the great expansion of print. Notable, above all, is the multiplication of his image in the *Great Bible*, available, in theory at least, for consultation in every parish church, in a way not previously attempted, and in his relatively personalized image on the

[12] Davies, 'Representation', 1441–2. Canonization of Henry VI was sought in 1528, but apart from that occasion Henry VIII, in contrast to his father, seems to have displayed little interest; Anglo, *Images*, pp. 66–72.

[13] Steven Gunn, 'The French Wars of Henry VIII', in *The Origins of War in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jeremy Black (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 28–51. C. S. L. Davies, 'The English People and War in the Early Sixteenth Century', in *War and Society*, vi: *Britain and the Netherlands*, ed. A. C. Duke and C. A. Tamse (The Hague, 1977), pp. 1–18, esp. 15; 'Henry VIII and Henry V: The Wars in France', in *The End of the Middle Ages?*, ed. John L. Watts (Stroud, 1998), pp. 235–62, esp. 237–8. For Henry's relations with his father see J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (new edn., 1997), pp. 6–7; David Starkey, *Henry VIII* (2008), pp. 239–41, for a different interpretation of the father–son relationship.

[14] Robert Wingfield in his 'Vita Mariae Angliae Reginae' does refer to the 'Tyderiarum genus', but far from indicating common usage he had to explain the reference to his readers; see Davies, 'Representation', 1437. While historians almost universally call Mary I 'Mary Tudor' there is no contemporary warrant for the appellation. Henry VII (interestingly once more jointly with Elizabeth of York) featured in Elizabeth's coronation procession; Sharpe, *Selling*, p. 420.

[15] It is interesting that the picture of *c*.1570 attributed to Hans Eworth or Lucas de Heere is routinely described as 'Allegory of the Tudor Protestant Succession', although it depicts a seated Henry VIII, with Edward VI, Mary and her husband King Philip, and Elizabeth, with no reference to Henry VII. The only 'Protestant' feature is the association of Philip and Mary with war, and Elizabeth with plenty. See John F. King, *Tudor Royal Iconography* (Princeton, 1989), p. 223.

coinage.[16] In the case of Elizabeth, however, her own image soon became so powerful as to swamp that of her father. It was Elizabeth's accession day which was to be popularly celebrated in the seventeenth century.[17] Henry VII has a relatively subdued role in sixteenth-century historiography; prudent, peace-loving, a second Solomon, avaricious, but not primarily an institutional innovator; knitting together a fractured polity, rather than founding something essentially new.[18] Arguably it was James I's dislike of Henry VIII which made it expedient for Francis Bacon to adumbrate the long-enduring image of Henry VII, James's great-great-grandfather, as the statesmanlike innovator, the founder of the modern monarchy, 'a wise man and an excellent King'. Bacon's achievement was to depict the reign as a whole through the prism of Henry's personality, his capacity to mould his realm, and to compare him in this respect with Louis XI and Ferdinand of Aragon, 'the *tres magi* of kings of those ages'. Even so, there was no concept in Bacon of social change in the reign. It was left to James Harrington in 1656 to drive home the picture of Henry as the initiator (though less so than Henry VIII through the dissolution of the monasteries) of a profound social change, of a curbing of aristocratic power and a corresponding rise of the gentry, a picture which was to dominate interpretations until the middle of the twentieth century.[19] Ironically, James I was to reinvent the Henry VII chapel as a royal mausoleum, with equal lack of long-term success.[20]

The first intrusion of a full-scale Tudor genealogy in English, connecting Cadwaldr with Owen and Edmund Tudor through 'Idwal' and 'Tewdr Mawr' in a total of twenty-one generations, seems to be that by Arthur Kelton in 1547. Originally intended as a thank-offering to Henry VIII, it was dedicated to Edward VI. Kelton was a Welshman, a citizen

[16] Sharpe, *Selling*, pp. 141–4; C. E. Challis *The Tudor Coinage* (Manchester, 1978) [hereafter Challis, *Tudor Coinage*], figs. 11–23.

[17] David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells* (2nd edn., Stroud, 2004), pp. xi–xii, 50–63. See, too, the absence of references to Bosworth or to Henry VII.

[18] Sydney Anglo, 'Ill of the Dead: The Posthumous Reputation of Henry VII', *Renaissance Studies*, i (1987), 27–47; S. J. Gunn, 'Henry VII', *ODNB*.

[19] Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of Henry VII*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge, 1998). See too Stuart Clark, 'Bacon's *Henry VII*', *History and Theory*, xiii (1974), 97–118. James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, repr. in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 155–359, at 196–8. For attitudes to Henry VIII in James's reign, see the preface to Walter Ralegh, *The History of the World* (1614), conveniently available in an edition by C. A. Patrides (1971), pp. 56–9: 'if all the pictures and patterns of a merciless prince were lost in the world, they might all again be painted to the life out of the story of this king'; among his crimes were 'causeless and cruel wars . . . upon his own nephew', James V, James's grandfather. Ralegh goes on to see the union of the roses by Henry VII as completed by the union of the kingdoms by James I. For a more general survey of Jacobean attitudes, see Daniel R. Woolf, *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England* (Toronto, 1990) [hereafter Woolf, *Idea of History*], pp. 55–64. See, however, below for some anticipation by Samuel Daniel of the Harrington thesis.

[20] Witness the monuments to Lady Margaret Douglas (James's paternal grandmother), Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth and James's infant daughter Sophia. Extraordinarily, although his son Henry Prince of Wales was buried at Westminster, no monument was erected; Peter Sherlock, 'The Monuments of Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stuart: King James and the Manipulation of Memory', *Journal of British Studies*, xlvi (2007), 263–89, and James M. Sutton on Prince Henry in *ODNB*.

of Shrewsbury, and used Welsh sources.[21] His work appears to have had no impact in England. In 1573 Thomas Twyne, translating the unpublished Latin of Humfrey Lluyd, wrote of Henry VII 'lineally descending from his grandfather, Owen Tudyr, a Welshman born in the Isle of Anglesey'; though without pushing the genealogy further back, and not using 'Tudyr' directly as a royal surname.[22] Possibly the first significant rehearsal in English of a descent from post-Roman Britain to Owen and Edmund Tudor was the translation, by David Powel, of *The Historie of Cambria*, also by Humfrey Lluyd, with a dedication to Sir Philip Sydney, in 1584. Significantly Powel found it necessary to counter the 'reproachful and slanderous assertions' of historians about Owen Tudor's parentage.[23]

This was followed in 1586 by the first edition of William Warner's verse-history *Albion's England*, which included a defence of the discredited 'British History' tradition: the foundation of the realm by Brutus and the line of 'British' kings to Cadwaldr. The 1589 edition added a romantic account of Owen Tudor's courtship of Queen Catherine by which,

> Began that royal line that did, doth, and may still succeed
> In happy Empire of our throne a famous line indeed[24]

Warner's lead was to be followed more generally,[25] owing, I would suggest, to the increased resort of sons of Welsh gentry to the universities and Inns of Court, and their presence on the London literary scene.[26] The

[21] *A Chronycle with a Genealogie* (1547); Philip Schwyzer on Kelton in *ODNB*. Regrettably, Kelton's name was misprinted as Ketton in my *TLS* article.
[22] *The Breuiary of Britayne* (1573), fos. 59–60. My thanks to Dr Paulina Kewes for this reference.
[23] David Powel, *The Historie of Cambria* (1584), facsimile repr. (Amsterdam and New York, 1969), p. 371. Powel is an 'augmentation' of Humphrey Llwyd (=Humfrey Lluyd), *Cronica Walliae*, written in English in 1559, which does not mention Owen Tudor; see the edition by Ieuan M. Williams (Cardiff, 2002). See 'Humphrey Llwyd' by R.Brinley Jones, *ODNB*.
[24] William Warner, *Albion's England* (1589 edn.; English Books On Line), book 3, chs. 14–8, book 6, ch. 29; Katherine A. Calk on Warner in *ODNB*.
[25] See, for instance, Hugh Holland, *Pancharis; the first Booke. Containing the Preparation of the Love betweene Owen Tudyr, and the Queene . . .* (1603), repr. in *Illustrations of Old English Literature*, ed. J. Payne Collier, ii (1866). See Colin Burrow on Holland in *ODNB*, and Katherine Duncan-Jones, 'A Feather for the Black Swan's Wing: Hugh Holland's "Owen Tudyr", 1601', *English Manuscript Studies*, xi (2002), 93–108. Holland was from Denbigh, educated at Westminster School under Camden, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, and was an associate of Philip Sidney; the influence of the Sidney–Essex connection among these authors seems notable. The story seems light-hearted, possibly ironic. Venus and Cupid, annoyed at the queen's chastity, cause her to take pity on Owen after he stumbles in a dance; he enters her chamber while she is asleep, and successfully seduces her. Although written in 1601, the book was published in 1603 and dedicated to 'The Invincible James', the 'Image of God', with further dedications to Queen Anne, Prince Henry, Arabella Stuart and William Camden, and contains a letter to Sir Robert Cotton explaining the circumstances of its composition. George Owen of Henllys, *The Dialogue of the Government of Wales* (1594), ed. John Gwynfor Jones (Cardiff, 2010), pp. 80–1 and 158–9. Michael Drayton, *England's Heroicall Epistles* (1597), in *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. J. W. Hebel and Kathleen Tillotson (5 vols., Oxford, 1961), ii. 201–14, contains fanciful epistles between Catherine and Owen which show how the incident was now sufficiently distant to be treated as light romance.
[26] Peter Roberts, 'Tudor Wales, National Identity, and the British Inheritance', in *British Consciousness and Identity*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 8–42, esp. 33–5.

turn of the century was to see a distinct 'British' nostalgia, implicit for instance in *Cymbeline* and *King Lear*, and in the resurrection, not necessarily as serious history, of the discredited 'Brutus' tradition.

Samuel Daniel in his *Panegyrike Congratulatorie* to James I makes much of Henry VII, James's '[great-] great-grandfather', while his epistle-dedicatory to his *Collection of the History of England* (1626) talks of 'the succession of five Sovereign Princes of the line of Tewdor'. Indeed Daniel remarkably promulgates the modern picture of profound social change during those reigns, albeit largely disapprovingly; the 'opening of a new world', the consequent 'induction of infinite Treasure', 'Common Banks erected', the undermining of 'virility' by commercial values and the spread of corruption, as well as of 'a greater improvement of the Sovereignty, and more came to be effected by wit than the sword'. Even the 'strange alterations in the State Ecclesiastical' had had the deleterious consequence that 'Religion [was] brought forth to be an Actor in the greatest Designs of Ambition and Faction'.[27]

There was, then, a distinct flurry of interest in Welsh origins and the Tudor name in the later years of Elizabeth and in James I's reign. It is all the more surprising that the large number of writings on Elizabeth's death and James's accession do not highlight a change from 'Tudor' to 'Stuart' dynasties. Katherine Duncan-Jones cites Henry Chettle, *Englandes Mourning Garment* (1603), writing of Henry VII, 'in him began the name of Tewther, descended from the ancient British Kings, to flourish'.[28] But this instance seems to be unique.[29] Nor do almanacs, the most important means of spreading some sense of history among the population at large, normally include 1485 among their significant dates.[30] Far from serving as the proud title of a 'dynasty', let alone as the self-description of an 'age', the word 'Tudor' had little resonance in the sixteenth century, extraordinary as that may seem in retrospect, and only a subdued presence in the seventeenth. It was not until the publication of David Hume's *History of England under the House of Tudor* in 1759 that 'Tudor England' became an inescapable historian's cliché.[31]

[27] Samuel Daniel, *Complete Works*, ed. A. B. Grosart (5 vols., 1885–96), i. 156–7, iv. 77. On Daniel see May McKisack, 'Samuel Daniel as Historian', *Review of English Studies*, xxiii (1947), 226–43; and Woolf, *Idea of History*, ch. 3, pp. 77–104. See too John Speed, *The History of Great Britaine* (1611), p. 746: the civil wars 'let in thereby the surname Tydder, being but two descents English, and which now after three descents and five princes is also vanished'.

[28] *TLS*, no. 5546 (17 Sept. 2009), 6; Henry Chettle, *Englandes Mourning Garment* (1603; facsimile repr. Amsterdam and New York, 1973), A iii, v.

[29] I am grateful to Dr Duncan-Jones for reassurance on this point.

[30] Bernard Capp, *English Almanacs 1500–1700: Astrology and the Popular Press* (1979) [hereafter Capp, *Almanacs*], pp. 218, 220–1. Oddly, Henry VIII's ill-fated and ruinously expensive capture of Boulogne in 1544 features frequently.

[31] Part of his *History of Great Britain*, the first parts of which, subtitled *History of Great Britain under the House of Stewart*, were published in 1754 and 1757. John Robertson, on Hume in *ODNB*, quotes his dictum 'It is properly at that Period [1485–1603] modern history commences'. For Hume setting the tone for his successors, see F. Smith Fussner, *Tudor History and the Historians* (1970), pp. 43–5.

While my argument about the non-use of the word 'Tudor' appears to have been tacitly accepted, to judge by the absence of any refutation, the implications, which I thought far-reaching but obvious, seem not to have sunk in. The general reaction seems to be that my point is a curiosity, with no implications for practice; that the concept of a 'Tudor period' must have existed if not the word; that in any case the concept is too well-entrenched and too useful to be abandoned. I share some of the frustration eloquently described by the political columnist Matthew Parris when he pointed to the nonsense of the term 'will of the people' as supposedly expressed in parliamentary elections:

> Failure to convey an argument that I'm sure is important and right has been frustrating. But this is the fate of advocates of theories that challenge the very terms of a debate . . . Advocacy struggles when central to its logic is the submission that something we take for granted, and around which a great web of related reasoning has been built, simply doesn't exist. Even if forced to accept that the missing entity has not been usefully described, let alone proved, people will resist the conclusion that it doesn't exist, preferring to protest that, though we all suspect it's there, and though it must surely be there if there's a perfectly good English word for it, it's proving difficult to tie down.[32]

The same situation seems to apply in both cases: a general reluctance to abandon a mode of thought which is well-entrenched and useful, even well-nigh indispensable; a tendency to believe that there must be an answer somewhere, that the 'concept' must have existed even if the word did not. A related response (beyond, 'what did they call themselves then?', which misses the point) is to argue that it is difficult to write intelligible history without using anachronistic terms. I accept the last point. My own use of 'sixteenth century' is a case in point. It carries with it the false implication that people of the time classified themselves in terms of their 'century' in the way that their modern successors, prompted by the media, automatically do. But if the use of anachronistic terms is unavoidable, the greater, surely, is the obligation on historians to warn their readers when they are doing so. That is especially the case when the natural assumption among readers is that the term was contemporary usage, that it forms part of the reality of the scene being studied. The case is compounded in the 'Tudor' case by the pervasive overtones of glamour, of highly coloured costume drama, which the term has come to convey, almost in spite of itself; widespread among the general public, but something to which even professional historians do not seem totally immune. It is also worth noting, as Dr Lotte Hellinga has recently remarked, that:

Dynastic periodization was of course natural to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians. Its widespread persistence into the twentieth century, not only in the English case, may perhaps be ascribed to institutional inertia.

[32] *The Spectator*, 22 May 2010.

> 'The Tudor period' is a notion that is not helpful in the discipline of the history of the book. The developments that took place in the production of printed books between 1485 and 1603 are so far-reaching and diverse that books printed in its early years and those at the end of the period have very little in common in appearance, in subject matter, and in readership and dissemination.[33]

Her comment is particularly apposite given how much of my argument centres on 'publication' in some form, whether in manuscript or print.

To counter what seems to be a state of 'denial' by historians, it may be appropriate, therefore, to explore some implications of my original contention. I am sure subsequent debate will uncover others. I would emphasize here that I am tackling persistent and invidious underlying tendencies implicit in the use of the 'Tudor' term rather than arguments specifically advanced by historians; it is that very unconsciousness which constitutes the danger. When historians write as if a 'Tudor dynasty' reigned over self-consciously 'Tudor' men and women the impression created is misleading in terms of perceived reality at the time; the more surprising given the increased sensitivity by recent historians to questions of identity.[34]

One example of the false trails so suggested is the concept of a 'Tudor monarchy': a classic case of reification, of the transformation of a purely mental construct into a supposed natural entity.[35] The monarchs are said to be concerned about establishing 'Tudor monarchy', or even 'selling Tudor monarchy'.[36] So Henry VII is commonly said to 'lay the foundations', while 'Tudor monarchy' flourished, in somewhat different forms, under Henry VIII and Elizabeth. (I pass over for the moment the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I, not because they were unimportant, but because, too easily, they can be treated as special cases.) Obviously the

[33] Lotte Hellinga, 'Prologue: The First Years of the Tudor Monarchy and the Printing Press', in *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, ed. John N. King (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 15–22, at 15. Cf. also the editor's 'Introduction', pp. 1–14, at 1–2, in which he differentiates between the 'long Tudor period' as against three distinct periods, roughly 1485–1530, 1530–80 and 1580–1603.

[34] One recent example is the multi-authored *Companion to Tudor Britain*, ed. Robert Tittler and Norman Jones (Oxford, 2004). The framework here obviously derives from the plan of the series as a whole. The editors apologize for the self-evident absurdity of the title (p. 1). Nevertheless chapters on 'The Establishment of the Tudor Dynasty', by David Grummitt, and 'The Rise of the Tudor State', by Joseph S. Bloch (pp. 13–28, 29–43) ring alarm bells. If the 'dynasty' was established by 1509, how can the 'Tudor state' still be in the making by 1558? These definitional problems unfortunately obscure the excellent content of the contributions by the particular authors; although I would take issue with David Grummitt's discussing Henry VII in terms of 'the last medieval or the first early modern king of England' (p. 14). I have confined my citations to academic works. The misuse of 'Tudor' is of course even more prevalent in supposedly reputable works of popularization, let alone in television productions.

[35] I am indebted to the powerful argument of Elizabeth A. R. Brown, 'The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and the Historians of Medieval Europe', *American Historical Review*, lxxix (1974), 1063–88. I owe this reference to Professor G. W. Bernard. Her demonstration that a number of historians from Maitland onwards who begin by pouring scorn on the concept of 'feudalism' then proceed to offer a 'correct' definition is enlightening. See also Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984).

[36] Sharpe, *Selling*.

three monarchs shared certain aims: the primacy of the crown, a distrust of assertive nobles, a wariness of possible challengers to the throne, a fear, too, of popular rebellion, and, from Henry VIII's time, of the potential for religious division to produce civil war. All that may be taken for granted, but is not in any sense specific or unique to the years 1485–1603. In one sense, all three governments were 'conciliar': what governments are not? In all three the 'court' was fundamental; again, that seems to be a perennial situation, even if we have to talk about the 'court' of a modern prime minister, in which the question of access to the decision-maker remains fundamental. None of the three regimes directly challenged the existing English system of government: that legislation and taxation needed the approval of parliament, even if that body could be, if not coerced, at least heavily leant on, to produce the desired outcome; or, on occasion, bypassed. But again, with the possible exception of the 1630s and 1680s, this remained true, within wildly different circumstances, until in effect the crown was to give up, and then only slowly and hesitantly, the claim to control the executive at all.[37]

These common characteristics are surely 'banal', not unique to the 'Tudor period', insufficient in themselves to characterize a specific 'Tudor monarchy'. It is perhaps worth quoting an apposite, surprising and little-noticed remark in Geoffrey Elton's preface (dated 1954) to the first edition of *England under the Tudors*:

> The fundamental difficulty arises from the attempt to treat the century as a unity, which it was not. In many ways the date 1485 matters less than almost any of the dates picked by historians as landmarks . . . 1485 is the beginning of Tudor rule and 1603 the end of it, and since the dates so conveniently circumscribe the life of one dynasty they have proved long-lived illusions.

Perhaps Elton's unease stemmed from his having published in the previous year his thesis, originally 'Thomas Cromwell: Aspects of his Administrative Work', under the more eye-catching title of *The Tudor Revolution in Government*, in spite of its argument that the supposed 'revolution' both began and was accomplished in a period of ten years of Henry VIII's reign.[38] More specifically, I find it difficult to find very much in common between the fiscal terrorism of Henry VII, the more bloody deterrence of opposition and massive reallocation of property by Henry VIII, and the more relaxed, more subtly ordered and socially conservative polity of Elizabeth I. In short, 'Tudor monarchy' is in the eye of the beholder; take away the presumption that there is a specific 'dynasty' with a specific concept of kingship, and there seems no reason to bundle these different methods of government into a conceptual unity. The term

[37] Perhaps the care taken after the 'hung parliament' election of 2010 not to involve the queen in negotiations for a solution may signal a final abandonment by the crown of any vestigial claim to independent political action.

[38] *England under the Tudors* (1st edn., 1955), preface; *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (Cambridge, 1953). Elton's thesis was a London University PhD of 1948.

'dynasty', indeed, was not used in an English context in the sixteenth century, and gives too sharp an impression of novelty and distinctiveness.[39] Rather, Henry VII and his descendants represented, as I have argued, the reunification of the historic royal line which had been split into the rival 'houses' of Lancaster and York. I see little evidence that they tried to publicize their 'house', as opposed to their own particular regimes; still less that they prided themselves as representing a new beginning in the history of the monarchy.

The danger here is that of teleology: the assumption that later developments are implicit in earlier ones. An example was a recent article in *The Times* about the battle of Bosworth.[40] The battle was important, it is claimed, because 'the future of England changed course'. 'If Richard had killed Henry there might have been no English Reformation, no Church of England, and no Elizabethan golden age'. This is of course true, at least in the case of the Reformation in the form in which it actually took place. But, logically, it is equally true that if the battles of Towton (1461), of Tewkesbury (1471) or of Stoke (1487), had gone differently, the particular problem of 1529 would not have arisen. And the same is true of such unpredictable events as the death of Prince Arthur or of Catherine of Aragon's son by Henry VIII. In a monarchical system any single event affecting the succession to the crown is transformative of the story which follows. That does not mean that any one single event is especially determinative. I am reminded of Kingsley Amis's novel *The Alteration*, set in a twentieth-century England as it might have been had the Henrician Reformation been successfully reversed shortly after it had occurred (by no means an unthinkable outcome, as recent studies of Mary I's reign remind us). A set of choirboys speculate intriguingly and creatively on what might have been had this reversal actually not happened, and England had become Protestant.[41]

Historians, one would hope, would be less crass than journalists in this respect. Nevertheless, such formulations as Henry VII 'founding his dynasty' are all too common, carrying with them an insidious suggestion of foreknowledge, of our 'owing' to Henry the alleged glories which were to follow.[42] Let us take perhaps a more down-to-earth example, that of the 'Tudor poor-law'. This is supposed to reach its final form in the legislation of 1601, to survive, with important qualifications, to 1834. The rather modest legislation of Henry VII is given attention as the 'first stage' of this process. Further 'stages' are ascribed to developments under the aegis of Thomas Cromwell, or in Edward VI's reign, or in the 1560s.

[39] *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn., 20 vols., Oxford, 1989; also online), v. 9.
[40] *The Times*, 19 Feb. 2010, by Ben Hoyle.
[41] Kingsley Amis, *The Alteration* (1976).
[42] 'Founding his dynasty' is a *leitmotiv* of Sean Cunningham, *Henry VII* (Abingdon, 2007). Even the austere S. B. Chrimes could be betrayed into writing in his epilogue, manifestly a commentary on Bacon, that 'it was not the union of the Roses that mattered, symbolic enough though that was; what mattered most in the long-run was the spadework without which the springs of national genius would not be freed' (*Henry VII* (1972), pp. 321–2).

Looking back from 1601, this is defensible: the process of legislation was cumulative, acts building on what had gone before. Looking forward, however, the concept of a 'Tudor poor-law' is misleading; those who framed particular pieces of legislation did so in response to particular problems of their own day in the hope that they were producing a viable solution for those problems, not as a building-block for some eventual all-embracing system. What is perhaps legitimate in one historical concept (looking back from 1601) may not be so in others. The all-embracing 'Tudor' adjective erodes this fundamental distinction.[43]

If concepts such as 'Tudor monarchy' or 'Tudor poor-law' are insidious and misleading, so too is the wider concept of a 'Tudor period' or 'Tudor era', implying as it does a self-conscious classification by contemporaries, a means of self-reference, of 'identity'. The general assumption that people believed themselves to be 'Tudor men' or 'Tudor women' living in a 'Tudor age' opens the way to various misconceptions. The first relates to an unstated suggestion, difficult for that reason to document, but insidiously ever-present, that this supposed self-identification involved an exceptional degree of loyalty to the ruling family, in supposed contrast to the years immediately before and after. That point is at least arguable. But the case needs to be argued from evidence, not assumed without examination from a supposed and erroneous semantic identification.[44]

Moreover, we need to remind ourselves that we cannot assume the existence in the past of the modern preoccupation with situating ourselves in time, our habit of automatically classifying ourselves in terms of 'periods', 'ages' and so on; that we live in the 'twenty-first century'; even that decades have their own peculiar characteristics, an attitude assiduously, almost obsessively, urged upon us by the media. There is a modicum of truth in these modern classifications. The very fact that we are accustomed to think in terms of decades produces something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, a reality that shapes itself to fit the mental stereotype. While this is perhaps especially pronounced in the electronic age, the habit, at least as regards centuries, was well under way with the

[43] Specialist studies in recent years have taken a welcome 'from below' rather than a 'monarchical' point-of-departure, and have adopted a date in the second half of the century as their starting point. See, for instance, Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (1982); James A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England* (1987; 2nd edn., 1997); Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement* (Oxford, 1999); Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c.1550–1640* (2000) [hereafter Hindle, *State and Social Change*] and his *On the Parish? The Micro-politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c. 1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004). Hindle, *State and Social Change*, p. 4, is especially trenchant on the insignificance of 1603 from this perspective. Unfortunately the gap between social history and more popular political history has so widened as to reduce the general impact of these works. Googling 'Tudor Poor Laws' shows the concept alive and well in the electronic world.

[44] 'The relationship between a Tudor monarch and his subjects was a family affair, a relationship at the same time emotional, financial, coercive, volatile, unequal and unbreakable' (Wooding, *Henry VIII*, p. 10). This remark seems to me to be based on fantasy, not reality. Such concepts as 'Elizabethan' seem equally elusive in contemporary writing. But they would at least have been comprehensible, given the widespread publicization of the rulers' Christian names.

advent of reasonably cheap newspaper and periodical literature in the nineteenth century. Indeed, one can produce examples from the late eighteenth century; I noticed recently, for instance, the heterodox Scottish Catholic priest Alexander Geddes asking in 1800: 'what, pray, have we of the Eighteenth Century to do with the ignorance of the Ninth, the superstition of the Twelfth, or the fanaticism of the Sixteenth?'.[45] And perhaps, although less 'century specific', the origin of this mode of thinking, of a pressing 'modernity' measured by reference to the calendar, can be traced back to the 'Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns' of the late seventeenth century.[46] We need, for any period, to try to establish what temporal parameters were meaningful at a given time.

In the sixteenth century classification by reign was common. Official documents were dated by regnal years and chronicles were often arranged by reigns. The monarch's image circulated on coins, and he or she was prayed for by name in churches; royal images or arms were displayed in churches and other buildings.[47] On the other hand classification by 'dynasty' or by century was almost entirely unknown. This is not to suggest an indifference to historical change. Humanists, clearly, thought that they had restored the 'pure' Latin of the classical era in place of the 'barbarism' of their predecessors. Much was made of technical changes, in almanacs as well as in Bacon's influential formulation, 'printing, gunpowder and the magnet [the magnetic compass]', with its implicit recognition of the sudden extension of geographical boundaries.[48] A much-quoted proverb coupled religious and material change:

> Turkey, heresy, hops and beer
> Came into England all in one year.[49]

There was a widespread impression that, for the 'middling sort', farmers, some artificers and so on, there had been a striking improvement in living standards in recent years, coupled with an increased emphasis on commercial rather than social values.[50]

The knowledge of a fundamental reordering of religion was probably the most widespread indicator of change. Luther's challenge at Witten-

[45] Quoted by Mark Goldie, 'Alexander Geddes and the Limit of the Catholic Enlightenment', *Historical Journal*, liii (2010), 61–86, at p. 78.
[46] Richard Foster Jones, *Ancients and Moderns* (2nd edn., St Louis, 1961; repr. New York, 1982.)
[47] John P. D. Cooper, *Propaganda and the Tudor State* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 40–6, 231–3; Anglo, *Images*, pp. 118–19, 129–30; Challis, *Tudor Coinage*.
[48] Capp, *Almanacs*, pp. 221–4, for chronology innocent of any 'medieval–modern' division. Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, bk 1, aphorism 129; in *Collected Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding (rev edn., 7 vols. in 12 parts, 1879, repr. 1996), iv. 114. See also Louis Leroy, a contemporary of Bodin, discussed by Victor Harris, *All Coherence Gone* (Chicago, 1949), pp. 101–3.
[49] *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, ed. Elizabeth Knowles (7th edn., Oxford, 2009), p. 645.
[50] William Harrison, *The Description of England* (originally published in 1577 as part of Holinshed, *Chronicles*), ed. George Edelen (New York, 1994), pp. 123–48, 195–204. Harrison cites the memories of his parishioners in Radwinter, Essex. Interestingly he doubts if his generalizations hold for 'some parts of Bedfordshire, and elsewhere further off from our southern parts' (p. 201). For Harrison as much more than a commentator on material conditions, see G. J. R. Parry, *A Protestant Vision: William Harrison and the Reformation of Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1987).

berg, Henry VIII's defiance of the Papacy, the destruction of the monasteries and provision of an English Bible, and the restoration of 'true religion' by Elizabeth all became staples of popular history. Committed Protestants and Catholics could alike recognize and rejoice or lament the dawn of a 'new age', while the merely nostalgic could bemoan the passing of a time when eggs were 'twelve or more a penny' (up to twenty-four in some versions).[51] The Protestant Reformation was undoubtedly a landmark. But that is not to argue that the expression 'Tudor period' is given legitimacy. To equate the 'Tudor period' with the English Reformation, to ignore the forty-five years after Bosworth, or to treat them merely as preparation for a series of events which were to follow, is both to fail to do them justice in their own terms, and to imply an inevitability which no serious historian would now defend.

More important, however, may be the absence in much popular culture of any sense of meaningful distinction between the then contemporary world and what we term the 'middle ages' (significantly no term corresponding to the latter was in use). One example might be the popularity in print of the Robin Hood ballads.[52] Another might be the plays of Shakespeare. *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* have a distinct 'Roman' air, derived no doubt from their classical sources, while such works as *Cymbeline* or *King Lear* are set in a vaguely timeless world (although allowing in the latter the intrusion of a king of France and duke of Burgundy as rival suitors). The sequence of English history plays, however, shows little sense of anachronism, of distinction from the 'present' in which they were performed, with the possible exception of *King John*. Take, for instance, the two parts of *Henry IV*. Hotspur's contempt for a 'certain lord . . . perfumed like a milliner' who claimed

> that it was a great pity, so it was,
> This villainous saltpetre should be digg'd
> Out of the bounds of the harmless earth,
> Which many a good tall fellow had destroyed
> So cowardly, and but for these vile guns
> He would himself have been a soldier . . .

has a distinctly sixteenth-century resonance. So, too, has the scene in which the country justices, Shallow and Silence, reminisce about their supposedly wild youth at the Inns of Court.[53] Falstaff and his low-life friends could be transplanted, with no sense of incongruity, to the apparently Elizabethan setting of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.[54]

The lack of much distinction between what we tend to classify as the distinct 'medieval' and 'Tudor' worlds is, oddly, most apparent in

[51] Keith Thomas, *The Perception of the Past in Early Modern England* (Creighton Trust Lecture, London University, 1983) [Thomas, *Perception*], p. 12.
[52] R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood* (1976; rev. edn., Stroud, 1997), pp. 36–53.
[53] *I Henry IV*, I. iii; *II Henry IV*, III. ii.
[54] *Merry Wives*, I. i. 1: 'I will make a Star Chamber matter of it'; ii. I. 49, 'the Hundreth Psalm to the tune of Greensleeves'; V. v. 39: 'Our radiant Queen hates sluts and sluttery'.

Shakespeare's case in the treatment of religion. Priests, friars and monks populate the histories and the Italian plays, going about their normal business, objects neither of Protestant ridicule nor of Catholic veneration; there seems little sense of their sacramental functions, whether for good or ill. But a generally Catholic scenario is taken for granted.[55] Above all, Shakespeare and his characters seem entirely untouched by the fundamental Protestant doctrine of Justification by Faith.[56] Equally they seem to display little trace of that all-pervading 'piety' which historians of the immediate pre-Reformation now find so ubiquitous.[57] The question of whether and in what sense Shakespeare himself was a 'Catholic' is hotly disputed.[58] The point here, however, is what Shakespeare assumed to be the reactions of his audience. Set pieces in the plays feature, whether from conviction or political prudence, anti-papal or anti-clerical topics; the anti-papalism of *King John*; the bishops urging Henry V to war in France to divert him from the possible confiscation of church lands; Henry VIII's shielding Cranmer from Bishop Gardiner and his associates on the Council. But by and large bishops, even cardinals and papal representatives, are treated in a matter-of-fact way.[59] The general impression is of a detached, take-it-or-leave-it attitude to religion, accepting its social function but with little interest in divinity as such. To theatre-goers, at least, the chronological gulf symbolized by the Reformation to many of their contemporaries seems to have hardly

[55] Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Shakespeare: An Ungentle Life* (2010; originally published as *Ungentle Shakespeare*, 2001) [hereafter Duncan-Jones, *Shakespeare*], pp. 224–5: Shakespeare is 'entirely conventional in showing prayer and churchgoing as vital, props of a civilized and "gentle" way of life'. She instances Orlando and the Duke in *As You Like It*: 'both respect the rituals of a Christian culture, and both, above all, honour the needs of their common humanity, embodied in the frail and aged "Adam" '.

[56] David Wormsley, *Divinity and State* (Oxford, 2010) [hereafter Wormsley, *Divinity of State*] argues otherwise, but appears to elide the distinction between the normal Christian insistence on inner authenticity as against mechanical observance, and the much more rigorous Pauline–Augustinian–Lutheran–Calvinist view of God's grace as operating independently of man's worth; e.g. p. 333, in which he cites as 'authentically Protestant doctrine, that every man must take responsibility for working out [sic] his own salvation', or, more generally, pp. 335–6. Contrast Duncan-Jones, *Shakespeare*, p. 226: 'we find a widespread endorsement of devotion, charity and kindness, and an equally widespread condemnation of impiety, selfishness and greed'. Shakespeare can deride those who use Lutheran language about good works to absolve themselves from practical charity, characterized as a 'stock gag' by C. S. Lewis, *Oxford History of English Literature in the XVIth Century, excluding Drama* [hereafter *OHEL*] (Oxford, 1954), pp. 36–7. Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* is a striking affirmation of free will on Faustus's part as against predestination, in that he enters knowingly and willingly into a contract with Lucifer; while the play also features crude anti-papal ribaldry (scenes 5, 7). For the indifference, even hostility, of many parishioners to Protestant doctrines of salvation see, classically, Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 283–91, and now his *The Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven: Kinds of Christianity in Post-Reformation England, 1570–1640* (Oxford, 2007).

[57] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (2nd edn., 2005) for perhaps the fullest statement of that case.

[58] For a useful summary of the controversy see A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (2007), pp. 12–14.

[59] Wormsley, *Divinity of State*, passim, for sixteenth-century writers as a whole, and pt. III for Shakespeare.

existed. Continuity, not disruption, characterized their view of English history.

More generally it is common to describe such works as Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Sydney's *Arcadia* as deliberate 'revivals' of a 'medieval' chivalric outlook now safely dead.[60] Certainly there seems a conscious archaism about them. But could not the same be said about Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, too often regarded as the last authentic expression of 'medievalism'? Nor was the lack of a sense of a 'medieval–modern' distinction confined to popular or literary culture. What is remarkable is the extent to which legal and constitutional debate, to the end of the seventeenth century or even beyond (with the exception, perhaps, of Harrington and Hobbes) also assumed an essential continuity. Lawyers might dispute the significance of 1066 as a decisive date; but they did not invoke 1485, or even, by and large, the Henrician Reformation, in comparable terms.[61] As Keith Thomas observed, 'There was thus no single perception of the medieval past in early modern England and no unchallenged custodian of popular memory'.[62] We could similarly claim that there was no consolidated view of various changes cohering into a single 'medieval–modern' or 'Plantagenet–Tudor' divide, as is so often assumed.

A further point may be made here. It seems odd that a generation of historians who, following their literary colleagues, pride themselves on their close attention to texts, who attempt to strain out of every poem or painting the utmost shade of meaning, who proclaim the 'linguistic turn', seem to pay little attention to what is *not* stated or represented.[63] I have, for instance, recently argued that, during the reign of Henry VII, and for much of that of Henry VIII, even the literate and politically concerned could gather only a very sketchy and inaccurate account of Richard III's reign; still less could they learn very much about Henry VII's family background, or of his experiences in Brittany and France, or of Breton

[60] Anthony Esler, *The Aspiring Mind of the Elizabethan Younger Generation* (Durham, NC, 1966), passim; e.g. p. 108: 'the old idealization of the military life which was undergoing a full-scale, if purely romantic, revival in England in the 1580's and 90's'. Esler comments that 'the chivalrous gestures and reckless heroism of Elizabethans at war does not sit well with the thirst for gold that drew those same Elizabethans to church-looting and brutality'. I would suggest that the story of 'chivalry' was ever thus. Penry Williams, *The Later Tudors: England 1547–1603* (1995), p. 416, comments similarly, 'knightly warfare was by then a thing of the past, and the Elizabethan revival of chivalry was an exercise in make-believe', although 'the ideals of a transformed chivalry, softened by humanism and mixed with the conventions of pastoral, served to protect traditional aristocratic values for a time'.

[61] The classic study is J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge, 1957; many later edns.), which has generated a very large literature. A useful schematic analysis and bibliographical guide is to be found in Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 78–82. Again I must emphasize that I am not arguing for an absence of important change, only for a lack of a perception of a single transformational change. See, for instance, Christopher W. Brooks, *Law, Politics and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2008), esp. 'Conclusion', pp. 423–32.

[62] Thomas, *Perception*, p. 23.

[63] Davies, 'Representation', e.g. 1442–3, on the failure by his successors to provide a monument for Henry VIII.

and French support for his attempts at invasion. No thorough investigation of either theme was carried out before Polydore Vergil and Thomas More set to work in the 1510s; there is little evidence of widespread circulation of their manuscripts; and print had to wait for the Basel edition of Vergil, in Latin, in 1534, and for Grafton's plagiarizing of both authors, in English, in 1543. Our comfortable assumption, that a reasonably competent working knowledge of the recent past was available to anybody who wanted it, has to be proved in any given circumstance. So, too, we are so much the victims of today's information overload that we overlook the vital function of the modern media in constantly reinterpreting events, providing a usable (and changing) narrative without which we could not hope to make sense of the recent past. Again, we need to pay attention to how far this was true at any given moment in the past. We all too often assume that once a particular event was reported in print (or even in manuscript) it was in principle 'known' and generally available. The debate on Habermas's *Public Sphere* has been useful in drawing attention to such issues. But the tendency of historians to seize on the positive, to promote the 'sophistication' or 'modernity' of the age they are studying, results in the pushing back of the concept of a 'public sphere' in such a way as to erode differences of perception, different levels of consciousness in different periods. We need to establish the general level of political consciousness in any given era, rather than unthinkingly assuming its existence.[64] To that end attention to what was *not* articulated – like the concept 'Tudor' – is important. I blame no-one for blindness in this respect; I spent fifty years as a historian of the period myself before stumbling over the point. But it may well be that standing back from a subject, paying attention to what is missing from the record, may be necessary to achieve a balanced and accurate view.

Practicality dictates that historians use 'periods'. Not to do so produces only a useless parade of events. Generalization is necessary to make some sense of the past. But there can be no 'correct' or 'preferred' period. Each attempt at periodization carries with it its own potential fallibility. The only solution is to let different periods play off against each other, to test the results achieved by using the 1485–1603 concept against, say, beginning in 1370 or 1450 or 1509 or 1529, and perhaps cutting short in the sixteenth century or going boldly on to 1640 or 1660 or later. A number of books have done this, with good results.[65]

Nevertheless, the concept of a 'Tudor period' remains firmly in place, dominant, inescapable, natural to the generality of readers, and indeed to historians when they are not thinking specifically about the issue. It could

[64] Davies, 'Information, Disinformation'.

[65] e.g. J. A. F. Thomson, *The Transformation of Medieval England, 1370–1529* (1983); C. S. L. Davies, *Peace, Print and Protestantism, 1450–1558* (1977); D. M. Loades, *Politics and the Nation, 1450–1660* (Brighton, 1974); J. R. Lander, *Crown and Nobility, 1450–1509* (1976); Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments: English History 1509–1660* (Oxford, 1971); Alan G. R. Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State: The Commonwealth of England 1529–1660* (1984).

be argued that no 'dynastic' or regnal label has quite the grip of the 'Tudor' one; 'Elizabethan' or 'Victorian' possibly, but not 'Stuart' or 'Hanoverian' or 'Georgian'. 'Medieval', of course, although full of traps, has at least the advantage that it cannot be mistaken for a contemporary term. It is the very power, the seduction, of the 'Tudor' label which should send up warning signals. I would suggest that historians have a duty to use the word less frequently, and when they are forced to do so, to warn their readers of the hazards of the term. As Herbert Butterfield memorably wrote some eighty years ago, 'the most fallacious thing in the world is to organize our historical knowledge upon an assumption without realising what we are doing, and then to make inferences from that organisation and claim that these are the voice of history'.[66]

Inevitably, this article has been broad-brush in its approach. I hope it may stimulate more detailed discussion of the issues raised, and perhaps help to free historians from the tyranny of an imaginary concept. The 'Tudor' label may be a convenient short-hand. It is a booby-trap for the unwary.[67]

[66] *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), pp. 23–4. I would also instance as a parallel C. S. Lewis's refusal to use the word 'Renaissance' (*OHEL*, pp. 55–6). Citing Bacon, he observes: 'Where we have a noun we tend to imagine a thing . . . "Renaissance" becomes the name for some character or quality supposed to be immanent in all the events and collects very serious emotional overtones in the process'.

[67] For a much more detailed attempt to discuss problems of periodization, see Phil Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: Vernacular Origins of Some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge, 2010).