# *Introduction*

The middle Tudor monarchs, sandwiched between the 'greatness' of Henry VIII and the 'glories' of Elizabeth I, often look like the poor relations of the dynasty, occupying (and indeed shaping) a decade beset by crisis and instability. The reign of Mary I presented (and, for historians, still presents) peculiar problems of its own. So did (and, again for historians, still does) the reign of Mary's half-brother Edward, the son of Henry VIII by his third wife Jane Seymour, and, at nine years of age, the only male Tudor heir to the throne after the death of his father in 1547. The five-and-a-half years of Edward's reign were marked by controversial and destructive Protestant Reformation. But they were also profoundly important to the construction and presentation of Tudor monarchy after Edward's death – critical, indeed, for our reading of the queenship and politics of the reign of Elizabeth I, and for our understanding of the men who inhabited the Elizabethan political scene, many of whom had served their apprenticeships between 1547 and 1553. That at least is the argument of this book.

*Kingship and politics in the reign of Edward VI* is, I think, the book I wanted to write. I have just reread the proposal I submitted to Cambridge University Press in 1998, and the projected structure of *Kingship and politics* matches the end result fairly well. The proposal also captures the essence of the book's purpose as I imagined it three years ago, because my intention was to try to look at Edward's reign from a new perspective. It seemed to me that studies of the English polity of the late 1540s and early 1550s were standardly written as high political narratives of a politics conceived institutionally, structurally, and even morally. The key political players of Edward's reign had often been written of as 'good' or 'bad', and this tradition, deeply embedded in the historiography, persisted in new and different forms. Privy Council and 'constitution' dominated

accounts of political life in the 1540s and 1550s.[1] Only a few historians had worked on the culture of Edwardian politics and religion and the visual presentation of monarchy in art and iconography.[2] No real effort had been made to take Edward's kingship expressed both conceptually and practically – and the commitment of the men governing in the king's name – seriously. Two of the other themes I wanted to explore back in 1998 were, first of all, the close relationship between the Edwardian and Elizabethan political elites (here Winthrop Hudson's study of *The Cambridge connection* was influential) and, second, the impact of the 'acephalous' political conditions of Edward's reign on the Elizabethan response to the challenge of unmarried female monarchy (an issue I had scratched the surface of in my doctoral work on the 'succession crisis' of the 1560s).[3]

'What kingship?' is a question that people have been asking me, in a gently critical way, for some time. The point is a fair one. Can we talk about kingship in a personal or possessive sense for the years between 1547 and 1553? Did Edward VI, dead at fifteen, really *have* a kingship? The answer is, I think, yes. The practical dimensions of Edwardian kingship were certainly beginning to form by his middle teenage years, but even more coherent and superficially impressive were the grand claims and aspirations of middle Tudor Protestant monarchy. The Henrician royal supremacy became a vehicle for the evangelical Reformation. Edward was presented as a godly prince, a second King Josiah (2 Kings 22–23) guided by providence to extinguish once and for all the influence of the papal Antichrist of Rome in England. Although this kingship was

[1] The principal texts from the last thirty-five years are W.K. Jordan, *Edward VI: the young king. The protectorship of the duke of Somerset* (London, 1968); W.K. Jordan, *Edward VI: the threshold of power. The dominance of the duke of Northumberland* (London, 1970); Michael L. Bush, *The government policy of Protector Somerset* (London, 1975); and Dale E. Hoak, *The King's Council in the reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge, 1976). More recent additions are David Loades, *John Dudley duke of Northumberland, 1504–1553* (Oxford, 1996); and Jennifer Loach, *Edward VI*, ed. George Bernard and Penry Williams (New Haven and London, 1999).

[2] Margaret Aston, *The king's bedpost: reformation and iconography in a Tudor group portrait* (Cambridge, 1993); John Guy, 'Tudor monarchy and its critiques', in John Guy, ed., *The Tudor monarchy* (London, 1997), esp. pp. 89–91; Dale Hoak, 'The iconography of the crown imperial', in Dale Hoak, ed., *Tudor political culture* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 54–103; Dale Hoak, 'The coronations of Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, and the transformation of Tudor monarchy', in Richard Mortimer and Charles S. Knighton, eds., *Reformation to revolution: Westminster Abbey 1540–1660* (Stamford, 2002); and John N. King, *Tudor royal iconography: literature and art in an age of religious crisis* (Princeton, 1989).

[3] Winthrop S. Hudson, *The Cambridge connection and the Elizabethan settlement of 1559* (Durham, NC, 1980); Stephen Alford, *The early Elizabethan polity: William Cecil and the British succession crisis, 1558–1569* (Cambridge, 1998); cf. Patrick Collinson, 'The Elizabethan exclusion crisis and the Elizabethan polity', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 84 (1994), pp. 51–92.

constructed on Edward's behalf, he understood and accepted its implications: a strong and compelling theme of Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Tudor church militant*.[4] But to what extent was this model of kingship promoted to mask the realities of Edwardian governance? How did the subjects of the Tudor crown cope with the practical and the theoretical implications of royal minority?

The answer is, predictably, rather complex. On one level Edwardians could certainly accommodate a male minor, surrounded and supported by a male political establishment at court and in the Privy Council. The model of the Edwardian court as a factional battleground of the great subjects of the realm, fighting for control of the king and the governance of the kingdom, is profoundly distorted. The men around Edward were fallible and his reign certainly experienced periods of stress and upheaval. But historians have not generally given the Edwardian political establishment the credit it deserves: continuity, effectiveness, service, and cohesion are often missing from accounts of the politics of the reign. And yet, at the same time, there were some serious problems in reconciling royal minority with the core notions of Tudor monarchy. The location of sovereign authority was not really at issue. Few subjects of the crown in 1547 could deny that Edward was legitimate and acknowledged heir to Henry VIII's throne. But the exercise of power was a rather different matter. It was difficult to disguise the essential fact that, before the king's majority, sovereign power had to be exercised collaboratively – a notion that threw into silhouette the behaviour of the men around Edward during six years of active, unsettling, and controversial Protestant Reformation.

After 1558, Elizabeth I and her councillors had to contend with a powerfully stated and distinctive Edwardian inheritance – an inheritance many Elizabethans had helped to shape. The reign of Edward was a bridge between the political establishments of the 1540s and the 1560s – a remarkably stable governing group marked by close associations of family, religion, and political office. Intellectually, the Edwardian legacy was just as formative but rather more ambiguous. Protestant Marian exiles like John Aylmer, Christopher Goodman, John Knox, and John Ponet inherited from the late 1540s and early 1550s strong notions of what those in political authority should and should not do. Tudor monarchy became ideologically measurable, and the monarch, in effect, an accountable public officer. But these ideas were widely held, and established themselves at the heart of the political culture of the second half of

[4] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor church militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London, 1999).

the sixteenth century, articulated by Elizabeth's bishops in parliament in 1572, for example, and embedded in the Geneva Bibles produced by the queen's printer in the 1570s and 1580s. This potentially radical critique of political power grew out of the culture of Edwardian kingship, powerful, providential, and driven by Old Testament texts and exemplars. At the same time, the Edwardian years helped to shape mechanisms for the governance of the kingdom during the effective absence of a king (although the creation of a truly operational king was always the goal of the men around Edward), and, arguably, prepared the way for the notion that Privy Council and parliament had an important part to play in unlocking the power of the Tudor crown and supporting the queen in the governance of her realm.

In his 'devise' for the succession of 1553, Edward VI distinguished between the kingship of a male minor below the age of fourteen and a teenage king between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. For a king younger than fourteen, the realm would be governed entirely on his behalf; older, and the king should participate, working with his Council (see below, chapter 5, pp. 171–3). Edward's 'devise' may have as much to say about perceptions of Elizabeth's (limited and constrained?) queenship as it did about Edward and the nature of his authority. When, in 1559, John Aylmer wrote of the queen's Council at her elbow, supervising the execution of law – and when Francis Knollys, ten years later, told Elizabeth that it was not possible for her councillors to govern her state well until she began resolutely to follow their opinions – was this Elizabethan politics and political culture in an authentically Edwardian context?[5] Did the Edwardian years give courtiers and councillors the confidence and experience to shape (or at least try to shape) female rule? Was the political legacy of Edward's years a powerfully stated, but potentially limited, monarchy?

Many readers will find this book selective and, in places, even speculative. It probably asks too many questions – certainly more than it satisfactorily answers – and it cannot claim to be exhaustive. But if *Kingship and politics* encourages its readers to think more seriously about the nature of the first half of the middle Tudor decade – and goes some way to making the case that the reign of Edward VI is a reign Tudor historians cannot afford to ignore – then it will have achieved much of what I wanted it to achieve.

[5] John Aylmer, *An harborowe for faithfull and trewe subjectes* ([London,] 1559; *STC* 1005), sig. {H3v}; Alford, *Early Elizabethan polity*, p. 33.

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# *Constructing the reign of Edward VI*

> If no man had written the goodnesse of noble Augustus, nor the pitie of mercifull Trajan, how shoulde their successours have folowed ther steppes in vertue and princely qualities: on the contrarie parte, if the crueltie of Nero, the ungracious life of Caligula had not beene put in remembrance, young Princes and fraile governors might likewise have fallen in a like pit, but by redyng their vices and seyng their mischeveous ende, thei bee compelled to leave their evill waies, and embrace the good qualities of notable princes and prudent governours: Thus, writyng is the keye to enduce vertue, and represse vice, Thus memorie maketh menne ded many a thousande yere still to live as though thei were present: Thus Fame triumpheth upon death, and renoune upon Oblivion, and all by reason of writyng and historie.[1]

For Edward Hall, in the dedication of the first edition of *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (1548) to Edward VI, historical writing was a critical point of contact between the past and the present, an active dialogue between princes and governors living and dead, and a mirror for the successes and the failures of historical actors. History was live; it was neither antiseptically academic (Hall himself could be called a journalist as well as a chronicler) nor necessarily rooted in what a modern historian would recognize as 'historical fact'. Since the sixteenth century commentators on the reign of Edward VI had worked with a craft that often had as much to do with rhetoric and polemic as it did with veracity. And understandably so, because the notion of history as a professional discipline committed to 'historical truth' is a comparatively recent one. Modern historians do their best to understand the past, and, in doing so, impose on historical events and forces an order of their own. But even

[1] Edward Hall, *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (London, 1548; *STC* 12722), sig. ¶2r.

the work of a professional historian – ideally sensitive, imaginative, and authentic – bears the complex and unique imprint of personality and environment. Transparent, timeless, 'objective' history is very probably a myth: a historian often bears the medals – and the scars – of his or her own generation, and history as subject is all the richer for the diversity. So exploring the construction and presentation of the reign of Edward VI over 450 years is a serious, surprisingly difficult, but extremely important challenge.

How have Tudor evangelicals, Jacobean courtiers, Reformation polemicists, Anglican clergymen, gentleman antiquarians, and professional historians from the late nineteenth century to the closing years of the twentieth probed, explained, and constructed the reign of Edward VI? To what extent were they influenced by the political and cultural environments in which they wrote or the prevailing notions of how the Tudor polity functioned? What beliefs or preconceptions did they bring to six years of Tudor minority? Unpicking this historiography is vital in a study of the kingship and the politics of 1547–53 because accounts of Edward's reign have served so many different purposes and reflected so many different assumptions. The skill of critically decoding the reign and its historians is certainly still important. The most recent biography of Edward, for example, reconstructs an aristocratic, luxurious, and martial royal court, and uses it to challenge the conventional account of the young king as a 'godly imp', committed, in a serious and rather precocious way, to the Reformation of his kingdom.[2] The distinction was a false one; false too was the assumption that the presentation of Edward was the fault of John Foxe writing in an Elizabethan tradition. Godly kingship was one of the great Edwardian constructions (see below, chapter 2, pp. 50–6; and chapter 4, pp. 112–15). But there are other preconceptions readers and students bring to the reign of Edward. Factional conflict, the manipulation of a boy-king, the sacrifice of Jane Grey in 1553 by the 'wicked' John Dudley, and even the determination of some historians to measure the reign against the constitutional perfection of Thomas Cromwell's 'revolution' – an exercise rather like using a piece of string to measure volume – have all absorbed historians and, in spite of some valiant efforts, continue to feed the imaginations of readers.

[2] Jennifer Loach, *Edward VI*, ed. George Bernard and Penry Williams (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 180–1; cf. Stephen Alford, 'Between God and government', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 Feb. 2000, p. 28.

## FROM POORE PRATTE TO DAVID HUME

Historiography is a complex business, but in the construction and presentation of the posthumous reputation of the reign of Edward VI one thing is certain: it began within weeks, if not days, of the king's death. *The copie of a pistel or letter sent to Gilbard Potter* appeared in the shop of the London printer Hugh Singleton soon after 1 August 1553, eight days after the arrest of John Dudley at Cambridge and the definitive collapse of the Edwardian regime.[3] Its putative author was 'Poore Pratte', who had sent the letter to comfort his friend Potter, a true subject of 'Mary quene of England, not only by wordes, but by deedes'.[4] In July Potter had heard the proclamation of Jane Grey as queen but instead declared his allegiance to Mary. His punishment was public and brutal: Potter's ears were nailed to the pillory in Cheapside and then cut off.[5] So *The copie of a pistel or letter* is a testament to the dangers and uncertainties of the days following the death of Edward. But it is interesting for two other important reasons. The first is that the pamphlet records the instinctive response of the crown's subjects – even Edwardian evangelicals – to declare loyalty to Mary I as the legitimate successor to her brother. Both Singleton and the printer he sub-contracted to produce the book, Richard Jugge, were Protestants. *The copie of a pistel or letter* allowed them, indirectly but clearly, to condemn the Edwardian regime's effort to preserve itself in the name of Jane Grey. The second important feature of the book is even more striking. There was an immediate and violent reaction against the regime of John Dudley – a reaction that scarred his historical reputation for 400 years.

Many commentators in the sixteenth century condemned Dudley, and at times their hatred was visceral.[6] Poore Pratte wrote that the 'great devell Dudley ruleth, Duke I shuld have sayde'.[7] John Ponet called him

[3] *The copie of a pistel or letter sent to Gilbard Potter in the tyme When he was in prison, for speakinge on our most true quenes part the Lady Mary before he had his eares cut of. The .xiij. of Julye* (London, 1 Aug. 1553; *STC* 20188).

[4] *Copie of a pistel*, sig. {A1v}.

[5] For an account of Potter's punishment 'for words speaking at time of the proclamation of ladie Jane', see Raphael Holinshed, *The First and second volumes of Chronicles*, 2 vols. (London, 1597; *STC* 13569), II, p. 1084. The proclamation was printed by Richard Grafton as printer to the queen (*STC* 7846).

[6] Barrett L. Beer, 'Northumberland: the myth of the wicked duke and the historical John Dudley', *Albion*, 11 (1979), pp. 1–14; David Loades, *John Dudley duke of Northumberland, 1504–1553* (Oxford, 1996), pp. vii–ix.

[7] *Copie of a pistel*, sig. {A7v}.

England's Alcibiades, recalling the Athenian general whose actions had led to military defeat by Sparta: an appropriate reference, given Dudley's power, reputation as a soldier, and betrayal of the Protestant cause.[8] That was in 1556. But *The copie of a pistel or letter* suggests that John Dudley became a figure of public hatred only days after the breath was out of the body of the Edwardian regime. In the pamphlet the Dudley arms of the bear and the ragged staff became a coded but clear reference to a regime dominated by one man. Poore Pratte wrote to Gilbert Potter as one who had offered himself 'into the handes of the ragged beare most rancke, with whome is nether mercy, pitie, nor compassion, but his indignation present death'.[9] If Mary 'oure lawfull quene' were taken from her subjects, Dudley would represent the punishment of providence, the 'ragged beare' as a cruel pharoah who would rule, 'pul & pol', spoil, destroy, and bring to calamity and misery the queen's subjects.[10] And even by the beginning of August 1553 the suggestion that John Dudley had benefited from the death of Edward was in the public domain. Mary, wrote Poore Pratte, was 'more sorowful' for her brother than glad that she was queen: 'she would have bene as glad of her brothers life, as the ragged beare is glad of his death'.[11] The ground was well prepared for *Leicester's commonwealth*, the great Elizabethan libel of the Dudley family.[12]

John Ponet's *Shorte treatise of politike power* was, in many ways, a classically Edwardian book written in the context of Marian exile (see below, chapter 6, pp. 177–9). Ponet was an Edwardian insider, a protégé of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury and one of Edward's favourite preachers. His presentation of key moments in the regime's history – moments he experienced, one suspects, in a fairly indirect way – is patchy. But there is still a grittiness to his reconstruction of the events of July 1553, when 'the innocent Lady Jane contrary to her will, yea by force, with teares dropping downe her chekes, suffred her self to be called Quene of Englande'.[13] His account of the behaviour of Cranmer in

[8] John Ponet, *A shorte treatise of politike power, and of the true Obedience which subjectes owe to kynges and other civile Governours, with an Exhortacion to all true naturall Englishe men* ([Strasburg,] 1556; *STC* 20178), sig. 13r.

[9] *Copie of a pistel*, sig. {A1 v}; cf. sig. A4r.

[10] *Copie of a pistel*, sig. {A5r}.

[11] *Copie of a pistel*, sig. {A5v}.

[12] Dwight C. Peck, ed., *Leicester's commonwealth: the copy of a letter written by a Master of Art of Cambridge (1584) and related documents* (Athens, OH and London, 1985); Simon Adams, 'Favourites and factions at the Elizabethan court', in Ronald G. Asch and Adolf M. Birke, eds., *Princes, patronage, and the nobility: the court at the beginning of the modern age c. 1450–1650* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 267–76.

[13] Ponet, *Shorte treatise*, sig. {D7r–v}. For an account of Cranmer's response to the plan to divert the royal succession in 1553, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven and London, 1996), pp. 540–2.

1553 trod on sensitive ground, but it succeeded in balancing his mentor's initial refusal to endorse the Grey claim against the archbishop's eventual subscription – only, of course, 'to content the kinges minde and commaundement, yea in dede to save the innocent king from the violence of most wicked traiterous tirannes'.[14] Ponet also presented perhaps the first high-political narrative of the fall of Protector Somerset in 1549. Thomas Wriothesley earl of Southampton, Henry fitz Alan earl of Arundel, and Richard Southwell had conspired with John Dudley to remove Protector Somerset 'out of his authoritie'. To do this, Ponet explained, they had forged letters and lies to make Edward Seymour hated.[15] Equally, the men who had 'conspired' to kill Lord Admiral Thomas Seymour and his brother Protector Somerset did so that they could rob the king and spoil the realm at their pleasure.[16] Ponet was a bitter man, and it must have seemed to him, writing from Strasburg, three years into Mary's reign, that the godly commonwealth of Edward VI had been subverted and consumed by ambitious men determined merely to secure power and line their own pockets. The same theme was explored in Geneva by the Marian exile Anthony Gilby, who wrote that the Lenten preachers before the king in 1553 were denounced by John Dudley: 'the libertie of the preachers tonges would cause the counsile and nobilitie to ryse uppe against them: for they could not suffer so to be intreated'.[17] Promoting the godly commonwealth, so the argument went, conflicted with self-interest. The true religion had been used to cloak the feeding frenzy of the Reformation.[18]

Noble faction, rapacity, the manipulation of the king: three of the classic themes of accounts of Edward's reign written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emerged in their earliest forms from the polemically charged political environment of the 1550s. The Elizabethan response to the Protestant calamity of 1553 was, predictably, rather different. Sixteenth-century accounts of Edward's reign swung between the brutal polemic of Ponet and relatively neutral, rather formal, narrative. Elizabethan authors naturally lauded Edward's evangelical zeal, highlighted the godliness of his uncle Edward Seymour, and were generally careful when it came to exploring the career, fall, and execution of John Dudley – principally because his son Robert, after 1564 earl of Leicester,

[14] Ponet, *Shorte treatise*, sig. {D7v}.
[15] Ponet, *Shorte treatise*, sig. I3r.
[16] Ponet, *Shorte treatise*, sig. {E1v}.
[17] Anthony Gilby, 'An admonition to England and Scotland to call them to repentance, written by Antoni Gilby', in John Knox, *The appellation of John Knoxe* (Geneva, 1558; *STC* 15063), p. 71v.
[18] Gilby, 'Admonition', p. 71r.

was a major force in Elizabethan politics. John Foxe was a rich source for later writers and editors like Richard Grafton and Raphael Holinshed, but his *Acts and Monuments* reflected the complexity of the Edwardian legacy.[19] In the 1570 edition of *Acts and Monuments* 'the Actes and thynges done in the reigne of kyng Edward the 6' were displayed in dramatic visual and allegorical form. The volume's printer, John Day, presented the Edwardian Reformation in a single woodcut, with images of the purging of the temple and the departure of Catholics from the realm – 'Shippe over your trinkets and be packing ye Papistes' – and the replacement of the altar by a communion table set on a north–south axis. The woodcut emphasizes preaching and sets Edward, handing the Bible to his subjects, at the heart of this kingly Reformation.[20] Foxe's text was just as effusive. The goodness of Christ led him into the mild and halcyon days of Edward 'as into a haven of fayrer and calmer whether'. In the margin of the edition of 1563 he rather neatly summarized the relationship between the reformations of Henry VIII and Edward: 'King Henry unhorsed the Pope: but king Edward toke awaye sadle, trappers and al.'[21]

*Acts and Monuments* was a great resource for later writers but it did not, for the most part, present a narrative account of Edward's reign. The first edition of 1563 reproduced the Edwardian regime's injunctions, instructions to bishops, and correspondence with Bishop Edmund Bonner of London, and recounted Edward's efforts to encourage his half-sister Mary to conform to Edwardian doctrine. Foxe spent well over a hundred pages reconstructing the 'history and the doings and the attempts' of Stephen Gardiner, from the sermon he preached at court on St Peter's Day 1548 to his trial and removal from the bishopric of Winchester (see below, chapter 2, pp. 57–9; and chapter 3, pp. 83–5). Perhaps the most important single contribution Foxe made to the later historiography was 'The tragicall History of the moste noble and famous Lorde, Edwarde Duke of Somerset, Protector of kyng Edward, and of hys Realme'.[22] He accepted that Protector Somerset had colluded in the execution of his brother Thomas in 1549 but blamed the breakdown of their relationship on 'slaunderous tongues'. More strangely, he presented

[19] John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perillous dayes* (London, 1563; *STC* 11222); 1570 (*STC* 11223); 1576 (*STC* 11224); 1583 (*STC* 11225); 1596–7 (*STC* 11226, 11226a).

[20] *STC* 11223 (1570), p. 1483, reproduced in John N. King, *Tudor royal iconography: literature and art in an age of religious crisis* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 97–9; also Margaret Aston, *The king's bedpost: Reformation and iconography in a Tudor group portrait* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 160; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor church militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London, 1999), p. 10.

[21] *STC* 11222 (1563), p. 675. [22] *STC* 11222 (1563), pp. 880–4.