The Coinage of Henry VII

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The coins of Henry VII were briefly touched on by me in an article published in a previous issue of this journal (Cuddeford 2015, 16-21). This note is intended to expand on the historical background to his reign and also the coinage, of which I have attempted to provide a broad overview. It is not however intended to be a comprehensive catalogue of every variation, as that has already been achieved by others and thus it would be an unnecessary duplication here

Historical background

The reign of Henry VII has never received the same amount of attention from historians, Elizabethan playwrights or film-makers as Henry's predecessor, Richard III, or Henry's son, who succeeded him as Henry VIII. In recent years a number of novelists have joined the popularist bandwagon covering the period and have produced works which, whilst colourful, are sometimes questionable as historical accounts, although they often come to be accepted as such by their readers. Henry VIII played down his father's fiscal acumen lest it emphasise his own profligacy. The reign of Elizabeth I was marred by political corruption and religious persecution, yet thanks to Shakespeare, Spenser, Tallis and others it is seen as a 'golden age'. As far as Henry VII's British ancestry is concerned, that has been virtually airbrushed out of history. None of his forebears is even mentioned by writers such as Weir (Weir 2002) or Morgan (Morgan 1984) and Stubbs (Stubbs 1877) deliberately glamorised the Anglo-Saxons to give legitimacy to the regal aspirations of the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (Breverton 2013, 7). As Voltaire famously wrote, *'There is no history, only fiction of varying degrees of plausibility'* and this is certainly worth bearing in mind when examining the Plantagenet and Tudor dynasties.

Henry VII took the crown from Richard III at Bosworth and, ever since, debate has raged over the legality of the succession and the culpability of the two rulers in various murders and disappearances. After half a millennium, such deliberations are surely now irrelevant, particularly if one considers that monarchy has never been about altruistic rule

for the masses, but rather power-gathering and wealth management by a social elite. Enough documentary evidence exists to demonstrate that both the Houses of York and Lancaster slaughtered numerous rivals as they saw fit (e.g. ibid. 2015, 294-300) and if Richard's reign seems bloody and Henry's more lenient, it is most likely because of the latter's pragmatism in securing his position, although it must be said that he did demonstrate a remarkable lack of vindictiveness with several miscreants and pretenders (e.g. ibid. 204). But overall, medieval monarchs behaved much like gangland bosses in present-day criminal cartels and it is futile to expect modern mores to apply.

Henry VII came from a long line of British nobles based in the North-West of Wales, which during the early medieval period was the Kingdom of Gwynedd. Ptolemy gives this region as the tribal land of the Ordovices, who first appear in history as providing aid to Caratacus in his resistance to the invading Romans (Tacitus XII.33). How far back Henry's ancestry stretches is unknown but he was certainly of direct paternal lineage to other notable resistors such as Ednyfed Fychan ap Cynwrig (d. 1246), seneschal to Prince Llywelyn the Great and his son Dafydd ap Llywelyn. It was Ednyfed who cut off the heads of three Franco-English knights whilst fighting for Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and they were added to his coat of arms - one is reminded of Classical accounts of Gaulish and British head-hunting! Ednyfed's son Goronwy ab Ednyfed fought alongside Llywelyn the Great and was the first of the Tudors of Penymynydd in Anglesey. His son Tudur ap Goronwy fought in the Madog ap Llywelyn revolt. However, pragmatism seems to have featured early in the actions of the Tudors and Goronwy ap Tudur Hen is said to have fought alongside the English against the Scots at Bannockburn. Tudur ap Goronwy married Marged ferch Tomos, the sister of the mother of Owain Glendŵr and one of their sons, Maredudd ap Tudur, fought with his two brothers against Henry IV in the Glendŵr War. One brother, Gwilym ap Tudur, was killed in battle and the other, Rhys, was executed, but after the war Maredudd was pardoned and moved to London to make a fresh start. He changed his son's name from his own patronym, Owain ap Maredudd, to that of his father, styling him simply Owain Tudor; had he not chosen to do so, what we now call the Tudor period would have been that of the Merediths!

Owain fought for Henry V at Agincourt and was made a squire. He continued to work his way up in the royal household to the extent

that he eventually married Henry V's widow, Catherine de Valois, with whom he had a number of children, including Edmund and Jasper Tudor. Owain went on to command Henry VI's forces at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross, in which the Lancastrian forces were defeated and Owain captured and executed. Fighting alongside his father, Jasper managed to escape and went to France, continuing to raise support for the Lancastrian cause. His brother Edmund had married Margaret Beaufort, a descendant of Edward III and this was the main claim to royal lineage made by their son Henry, to become Henry VII. Imprisoned by Henry VI in Carmarthen Castle, Edmund died of plague three months before Henry's birth in January 1457.

In 1470 a rebellion of Yorkist troops allowed Jasper to return briefly to Wales accompanied by his nephew Henry, but after the Battle of Tewkesbury both fled back to France, which at that time looked favourably on the Lancastrian cause; however, they were blown off course and actually landed in Brittany, which was then independent of France and where a version of the British language was still spoken, being very similar to Welsh and Cornish. In Brittany they were detained but granted asylum by François II, Duke of Brittany, only to become pawns in the political manoeuvring that was going on between the three states. Following the death of Edward IV and the disappearance of Edward V, Richard III became King of England. Henry's life was now in more danger than ever and hearing of collusion between François's Treasurer, Pierre Landais and Richard III's main advisor Richard Catesby to have them extradited, Henry and Jasper fled across the border into France. Here they received support from several exiled English nobles as well as money from Anne de Valois, acting as regent for the thirteen-year-old King of France, Charles VIII. In August 1485 Henry left France with an army of around 2000 soldiers of mixed backgrounds and nationalities and, after a week, made landfall in Pembrokeshire. Back in his native Wales, Henry lost no time in raising more troops, including a significant force led by Rhys ap Thomas, one of the most powerful lords in South Wales. Richard undoubtedly underestimated the support that Henry could call upon and the Tudors' long history of Cymric martial involvement was to play a key role in bringing Henry's supporters to the field at Bosworth – without the Welsh, Henry would not have prevailed. Until Henry came to the throne, the indigenous British people had always been subjected to racial discrimination by invaders, first by the Anglo-

Saxons and then by the Anglo-French. Even the term 'welsh' is in a sense derogatory, meaning as it does simply 'foreigner'. Saxon *wirgeld* was set at a lower rate for a Briton and many other rights were also less than those allowed to Englishmen. The outcome at Bosworth needs no further description here, but once crowned king, Henry sought to correct past injustices and under his rule Welsh and English subjects shared equality in law.

Henry reigned for a total of fourteen years, during which time England and Wales enjoyed a period of relative stability. Henry's foreign policy was to try and maintain peace, although this foundered in 1492 when he was drawn into the conflict between France and Brittany and ended up sending a force to aid the Bretons, followed by a much larger force that besieged Boulogne. This conflict concluded with the defeat of the Bretons and the withdrawal of the English following the signing of the Treaty of Étaples, with terms most favourable to Henry. Henry also sought closer ties with Spain and this led to the marriage of his son Arthur to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, bringing with it a sizeable dowry. The death of Arthur in 1502 was a potential problem, but this was overcome by betrothing Arthur's brother Henry to the widowed Catherine. However, following the death of Isabella in 1504, Ferdinand married Germaine de Foix, the niece of the French king Louis XII, which forged a closer link between France and Spain, to the detriment of Henry's aspirations.

The other main diplomatic problem for Henry was Scotland. The Scots had supported Perkin Warbeck, who claimed to be the younger son of Edward IV and thus the rightful King of England. Warbeck even married a cousin of James IV of Scotland, so the Scots seemed to pose a real threat to Henry. Following Warbeck's failed rebellion, Henry signed a treaty with the Scots and in 1503 Henry's daughter Margaret was married to James IV, bringing the two countries closer together.

On the domestic front, Henry sought to consolidate his position by undermining the power of potential rivals. Some of his main opponents had already met their end at Bosworth, but there remained others who Henry brought into line through Acts of Attainder, in which property and even lives could be forfeited. Henry's marriage in 1486 to Elizabeth of York united the houses of Lancaster and York and this gave Henry a more secure base upon which to build. He enacted laws that curtailed the maintenance by the nobility of bodies of liveried retainers,

which were in effect private armies and he also used the issue of bonds and recognisances to secure loyalty. In many cases this amounted to little more than extortion but Henry, who took a personal interest in meticulous book-keeping, pursued this strategy with enthusiasm. Henry also invested in trading alum, a substance used in wool production. It was mined in Italy and exported to Britain and to the Low Countries, and he also gained further trade advantages over Flemish wool traders following the signing of a treaty known as the *Magnus Intercursus* in 1496, which ended a period of English and Flemish trading dispute. The result of all this was to greatly enrich the royal coffers.

The death of Henry's wife Elizabeth in 1503 deeply affected the king. Two years later he did tentatively court Joan, the widowed Queen of Naples, but nothing came of it and he remained alone for the remainder of his life. A few years later he contracted tuberculosis and died at Richmond Palace on the 21st April, 1509, aged 52.

The Coinage

Following the accession of Henry VII, coins continued to be minted to the same fineness and weight as were fixed during the reign of Edward IV (Ruding 1840, vol. 1, 293). The Master of the Mint, Robert Brackenbury, was a Yorkist supporter and he became an early victim of Henry's use of attainder, paying with his life. He was replaced with two loyal acolytes of Henry's, Giles Daubeney and Bartholomew Reed. For the first few years of Henry's reign, no significant changes were made to the coinage with the exception of name and mintmarks; some coins were struck using dies altered from those of Richard III. Scholars have subdivided Henry's coinage into five chronological groups containing further sub-groups, identified by different mintmarks and stylistic details. The earliest mintmarks were sun and rose, halved lis and rose, lis on rose or sun and rose and a lis on its own. The lis, a Lancastrian emblem, may well have been used as a political statement (Stewartby 2009, 386). The lis was used again later in the reign. The following schedule is a summary of the coins issued by Henry, in descending order of value.

Sovereign. The appearance of this spectacular coin was one of several new innovations introduced in 1489. Clearly based on the 1487 *réal d'or* (01) struck by Maximilian I (Grierson 1991, 200), it was tariffed at twen-

ty shillings and featured a depiction of the king enthroned (02). It was even more splendid in ornament and detail than the German prototype and double and treble-sovereign piedforts are also known, which were probably intended as diplomatic presentation pieces. The reverse of Henry's coin featured a central shield depicting the royal arms of England and France, set within a rose. This coincided with a reassertion by Henry of title to the French Crown, which had long been a matter of dispute between the two countries.

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Ryal: These were last issued by Edward IV in 1470 and although the obverse follows the king-in-ship design, the reverse features the shield of France alone within a rose (03), which, it is speculated, may have been struck to coincide with Henry's French expedition of 1492 (Challis 1978, 52). The ryal seems to have been discontinued after 1492.

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Angel: Tariffed at six shilling and eight pence, the angel (04) was issued throughout Henry's reign. The basic design remained unchanged but there are two different depictions of the obverse angel as well as a number of stylistic varieties; there are also many mules within certain groups.

Half-Angel: As with the angel, the half-angel (05) was struck throughout Henry's reign and followed a similar pattern of stylistic variety changes.

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Testoon: Introduced probably between 1502-4 and valued at one shilling, the testoon was a remarkable coin, featuring a profile bust for the first time on an English coin since the twelfth century (06). It was undoubtedly intended to mirror the profile *testons* then being struck by Louis XII of France, who in turn was copying the *testoni* of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan (07). For reasons which are unclear to us today, Henry's issue was discontinued after a very short production run but the fact that at least three different dies were used suggests that the coin was intended for circulation and was not simply a pattern, although to date none has been recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

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Groat: The first groats of Henry VII continued the design of his predecessor, with facing bust and open crown (08) but quite early on a new arched crown is introduced for the first time (09). The arched crown is thought to be a deliberate allusion to imperial dominion (e.g. Grierson 1964, 127-134). In all six different styles of crown were used on the facing bust issues (e.g. Buck 2000, 49) along with a number of stylistic variations. At around the same time that the testoon was introduced, a new profile bust groat was issued to replace the facing bust issues (10). Unlike the testoon, the new groats continued to be issued throughout the

remainder of Henry's reign. London was the only mint employed in striking full groats. Presumably coincidental with the introduction of the gold sovereign was a unique sovereign-type groat (11) with cinquefoil mintmark, which can be linked in its details to the IIb series and also to a unique cinquefoil sovereign (Stewartby 2009, 390). Unlike the gold sovereign, this type of groat never went in to production and some doubt has been cast on its authenticity, although Winstanley considered it in some depth and could see no obvious reason to doubt it (Winstanley 1971, 161-4).

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Halfgroat: These followed a similar pattern to the full groat, commencing with open crown, progressing to arched crowns (12) and finally adopting the profile portrait (13). There are also many stylistic variations but unlike the groat, both Canterbury and York struck halfgroats as well as London. There are references in some accounts to underweight or base coins known colloquially as 'dandyprats' and these have been identified as halfgroats deliberately produced for the French expedition. Apparently they were to be passed off to unsuspecting French traders, but many found their way into the English monetary pool and so they were swiftly recalled and demonetised in 1493 (Stewartby 2009, 342).

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Penny: As with the groats, Henry continued to strike old-style pennies with facing portraits, initially only at London and these in limited numbers, making them very rare. Slightly later on Canterbury, Durham and York all struck facing-bust ecclesiastical issues until 1489 (14), when the pence too adopted the 'sovereign' depiction of the king enthroned (15). London issues of these are quite prolific, along with ecclesiastical issues from Durham and York, but none were struck at Canterbury. There are many stylistic variations across both types of penny.

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Halfpenny: Halfpennies were struck at London, Canterbury and York with facing bust only (16), utilising open, single and double-arched crowns. There are a number of stylistic variations covering the London and Canterbury issues.

Farthing: Farthings were only struck at London and are very rare (17); these have a single-arched crown. Although most farthings have no mintmark, one at least was recorded as having an anchor mark, dating it to not long after 1500 (Stewartby 2008, 245-6).

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