

Henry I Penguin Monarchs The Father Of His People

Part of the Penguin Monarchs series: short, fresh, expert accounts of England's rulers in a collectible format Henry VII was one of England's unlikeliest monarchs. An exile and outsider with barely a claim to the throne, his victory over Richard III at Bosworth Field seemed to many in 1485 only the latest in the sequence of violent convulsions among England's nobility that would come to be known as the Wars of the Roses - with little to suggest that the obscure Henry would last any longer than his predecessor. To break the cycle of division, usurpation, deposition and murder, he had both to maintain a grip on power and to convince England that his rule was both rightful and effective. Here, Sean Cunningham explores how, in his ruthless and controlling kingship, Henry VII did so, in the process founding the Tudor dynasty.

The acclaimed Penguin Monarchs series: short, fresh, expert accounts of England's rulers - now in paperback Edward I (1272-1307) is one of the most commanding of all English rulers. He fought in southwest France, in Wales, In Scotland and in northern France, he ruled with ruthlessness and confidence, undoing the chaotic failure of his father, Henry III's reign. He reshaped England's legal system and came close to bringing the whole island of Great Britain under his rule. He promoted the idea of himself as the new King Arthur, his Round Table still hanging in Winchester Castle to this day. His greatest monuments are the extraordinary castles - Caernarfon, Beaumaris, Harlech and Conwy - built to ensure his rule of Wales and some of the largest of all medieval buildings. Andy King's brilliant short biography brings to life a strange, complex man whose triumphs raise all kinds of

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questions about the nature of kingship - how could someone who established so many key elements in England's unique legal and parliamentary system also have been such a harsh, militarily brutal warrior?

On Christmas Day 1066, William, duke of Normandy was crowned in Westminster, the first Norman king of England. It was a disaster: soldiers outside, thinking shouts of acclamation were treachery, torched the surrounding buildings. To later chroniclers, it was an omen of the catastrophes to come. During the reign of William the Conqueror, England experienced greater and more seismic change than at any point before or since. Marc Morris's concise and gripping biography sifts through the sources of the time to give a fresh view of the man who changed England more than any other, as old ruling elites were swept away, enemies at home and abroad (including those in his closest family) were crushed, swathes of the country were devastated and the map of the nation itself was redrawn, giving greater power than ever to the king. When, towards the end of his reign, William undertook a great survey of his new lands, his subjects compared it to the last judgement of God, the Domesday Book. England had been transformed forever. 'The experience of insecurity, it turned out, would shape one of the most remarkable monarchs in England's history' In the popular imagination, as in her portraits, Elizabeth I is the image of monarchical power. But this image is as much armour as a reflection of the truth. In this illuminating account of England's iconic queen, Helen Castor reveals her reign as shaped by a profound and enduring insecurity that was a matter of both practical politics and personal psychology. Henry VI, son of the all-conquering Henry V, was one of the least able and least successful of English kings. His long reign, which started when he was only nine months old, ended in catastrophe, with the loss of England's territories in

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France and a bankrupt England's long decline into civil war: the wars of the Roses. Yet, failure though Henry undoubtedly was, he remains an enigma. Was he always, as he became in the last disastrous years of his rule, a holy fool, simple-minded to the point of insanity and prey to the ambitions of others? Or was he more active and, as some have suggested, actively malign? In this groundbreaking new portrait, James Ross shows a king whose priorities diverged sharply from what England expected of its monarchs, and whose fitful engagement with government was directly, though not solely, responsible for the disasters that engulfed the kingdom during his reign.

'A reputation as a ruthless ruler was sealed that would last beyond his lifetime. In that respect, at least, Cnut had succeeded...' Cnut, or Canute, is one of the great 'what ifs' of English history. The Dane who became King of England after a long period of Viking attacks and settlement, his reign could have permanently shifted eleventh-century England's rule to Scandinavia. Stretching his authority across the North Sea to become king of Denmark and Norway, and with close links to Ireland and an overlordship of Scotland, this formidable figure created a Viking Empire at least as plausible as the Anglo-Norman Empire that would emerge in 1066. Ryan Lavelle's illuminating book cuts through myths and misconceptions to explore this fascinating and powerful man in detail. Cnut is most popularly known now for the story of the king who tried to command the waves, relegated to a bit part in the medieval story, but as this biography shows, he was a conqueror, political player, law maker and empire builder on the grandest scale, one whose reign tells us much about the contingent nature of history.

Charismatic, insatiable and cruel, Henry VIII was, as John Guy shows, a king who became mesmerized by his own legend - and in the process destroyed and remade England.

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Said to be a 'pillager of the commonwealth', this most instantly recognizable of kings remains a figure of extreme contradictions: magnificent and vengeful; a devout traditionalist who oversaw a cataclysmic rupture with the church in Rome; a talented, towering figure who nevertheless could not bear to meet people's eyes when he talked to them. In this revealing new account, John Guy looks behind the mask into Henry's mind to explore how he understood the world and his place in it - from his isolated upbringing and the blazing glory of his accession, to his desperate quest for fame and an heir and the terrifying paranoia of his last, agonising, 54-inch-waisted years.

Henry VI, son of the all-conquering Henry V, was one of the least able and least successful of English kings. His long reign, which started when he was only nine months old, ended in catastrophe, with the loss of England's territories in France and a bankrupt England's long decline into civil war - the wars of the Roses. Yet, failure though Henry undoubtedly was, he remains an enigma. Was he always, as he became in the last disastrous years of his rule, a holy fool, simple-minded to the point of insanity and prey to the ambitions of others? Or was he more active and, as some have suggested, actively malign? In this groundbreaking new portrait, James Ross shows a king whose priorities diverged sharply from what England expected of its monarchs, and whose fitful engagement with government was directly, though not solely, responsible for the disasters that engulfed the kingdom during his reign.

Henry IV (1399-1413), the son of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, seized the English throne at the age of thirty-two from his cousin Richard II and held it until his death, aged forty-five, when he was succeeded by his son, Henry V. This comprehensive and nuanced biography restores to his rightful place a king often overlooked in favor of his illustrious

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progeny. Henry faced the usual problems of usurpers: foreign wars, rebellions, and plots, as well as the ambitions and demands of the Lancastrian retainers who had helped him win the throne. By 1406 his rule was broadly established, and although he became ill shortly after this and never fully recovered, he retained ultimate power until his death. Using a wide variety of previously untapped archival materials, Chris Given-Wilson reveals a cultured, extravagant, and skeptical monarch who crushed opposition ruthlessly but never quite succeeded in satisfying the expectations of his own supporters.

Known as 'the anarchy', the reign of Stephen (1135-1141) saw England plunged into a civil war that illuminated the fatal flaw in the powerful Norman monarchy, that without clear rules ordering succession, conflict between members of William the Conqueror's family were inevitable. But there was another problem, too: Stephen himself. With the nobility of England and Normandy anxious about the prospect of a world without the tough love of the old king Henry I, Stephen styled himself a political panacea, promising strength without oppression. As external threats and internal resistance to his rule accumulated, it was a promise he was unable to keep. Unable to transcend his flawed claim to the throne, and to make the transition from nobleman to king, Stephen's actions betrayed uneasiness in his role, his royal voice never quite ringing true. The resulting violence that spread throughout England was not, or not only, the work of bloodthirsty men on the make. As Watkins shows in this resonant new portrait, it arose because great men struggled to navigate a new and turbulent kind of politics that arose when the king was in eclipse.

When Henry IV seized the throne from his cousin Richard II, some commentators saw it as a hopeful new beginning for England. The first monarch to have English as his mother

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tongue since the Norman conquest, Henry seemed to embody the ideals of chivalric kingship: mercy, piety, military prowess and learning. Yet deposing a crowned monarch was not a stable foundation on which to build a reign, and Henry IV found himself challenged from all sides, plagued by conspiracies, rebellions, assassination attempts, and crippling debts. His tense relationships with parliament and with his own son, Shakespeare's Prince Hal, saw his grip on power falter. Nevertheless, he was the first king and founder of a Lancastrian dynasty which would go on to shape England for centuries to come. In this lively study, Catherine Nall reappraises a monarch who weathered upheaval and uncertainty, and held on to the throne through sheer force of will.

Edward VI, the only son of Henry VIII, became king at the age of nine and died wholly unexpectedly at the age of fifteen. All around him loomed powerful men who hoped to use the child to further their own ends, but who were also playing a long game - assuming that Edward would long outlive them and become as commanding a figure as his father had been. Stephen Alford's wonderful book gives full play to the murky, sinister nature of Edward's reign, but is also a poignant account of a boy learning to rule, learning to enjoy his growing power and to come out of the shadows of the great aristocrats around him. England's last child monarch, Edward would have led his country in a quite different direction to the catastrophic one caused by his death.

William II (1087-1100), or William Rufus, will always be most famous for his death: killed by an arrow while out hunting, perhaps through accident or perhaps murder. But, as John Gillingham makes clear in this elegant book, as the son and successor to William the Conqueror it was William Rufus who had to establish permanent Norman rule. A ruthless, irascible man, he frequently argued acrimoniously with his older

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brother Robert over their father's inheritance - but he also handed out effective justice, leaving as his legacy one of the most extraordinary of all medieval buildings, Westminster Hall.

The elder daughter of Henry VIII, Mary I (1553-58) became England's ruler on the unexpected death of her brother Edward VI. Her short reign is one of the great potential turning points in the country's history. As a convinced Catholic and the wife of Philip II, king of Spain and the most powerful of all European monarchs, Mary could have completely changed her country's orbit, making it a province of the Habsburg Empire and obedient again to Rome. These extraordinary possibilities are fully dramatized in John Edward's superb short biography. The real Mary I has almost disappeared under the great mass of Protestant propaganda that buried her reputation during her younger sister, Elizabeth I's reign. But what if she had succeeded?

Henry III was a medieval king whose long reign continues to have a profound impact on us today. He was on the throne for 56 years and during this time England was transformed from being the private play-thing of a French speaking dynasty into a medieval state in which the king answered for his actions to an English parliament, which emerged during Henry's lifetime. Despite Henry's central importance for the birth of parliament and the development of a state recognisably modern in many of its institutions, it is Henry's most vociferous opponent, Simon de Montfort, who is in many ways more famous than the monarch himself. Henry is principally known today as the driving force behind the building of Westminster Abbey, but he deserves to be better understood for many reasons - as Stephen Church's sparkling account makes clear. Part of the Penguin Monarchs series: short, fresh, expert accounts of England's rulers in a highly collectible format

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Richard I's reign is both controversial and seemingly contradictory. One of England's most famous medieval monarchs and a potent symbol of national identity, he barely spent six months on English soil during a ten-year reign and spoke French as his first language. Contemporaries dubbed him the 'Lionheart', reflecting a carefully cultivated reputation for bravery, prowess and knightly virtue, but this supposed paragon of chivalry butchered close to 3,000 prisoners in cold blood on a single day. And, though revered as Christian Europe's greatest crusader, his grand campaign to the Holy Land failed to recover the city of Jerusalem from Islam. Seeking to reconcile this conflicting evidence, Thomas Asbridge's incisive reappraisal of Richard I's career questions whether the Lionheart really did neglect his kingdom, considers why he devoted himself to the cause of holy war and asks how the memory of his life came to be interwoven with myth. Richard emerges as a formidable warrior-king, possessed of martial genius and a cultured intellect, yet burdened by the legacy of his dysfunctional dynasty and obsessed with the pursuit of honour and renown.

James's reign marked one of the very rare major breaks in England's monarchy. Already James VI of Scotland and a highly experienced ruler who had established his authority over the Scottish Kirk, he marched south on Elizabeth I's death to become James I of England and Ireland, uniting the British Isles for the first time and founding the Stuart dynasty which would, with several lurches, reign for over a century. Indeed his descendant still occupies the throne. A complex, curious man and great survivor, James drastically changed court life in London and presided over such major projects as

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the Authorized Version of the Bible and the establishment of English settlements in Virginia, Massachusetts, Gujarat and the Caribbean. Although he failed to unite England and Scotland, he insisted that ambassadors acknowledge him as King of Great Britain and that vessels from both countries display a version of the current Union Flag. He was often accused of being too informal and insufficiently regal - but when his son, Charles I, decided to redress these criticisms in his own reign he was destroyed. How much of the roots of this disaster were to be found in James's reign is one of the many problems dramatized in Thomas Cogswell's brilliant and highly entertaining new book.

Henry II (1154-89) through a series of astonishing dynastic coups became the ruler of an enormous European empire. One of the most dynamic, restless and clever men ever to rule England, he was brought down both by his catastrophic relationship with his archbishop Thomas Becket and his debilitating arguments with his sons, most importantly the future Richard I and King John. His empire may have ultimately collapsed, but in Richard Barber's vivid and sympathetic account the reader can see why Henry II left such a compelling impression on his contemporaries.

Edward the Confessor, the last great king of Anglo-Saxon England, canonized nearly 100 years after his death, is in part a figure of myths created in the late

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middle ages. In this revealing portrait of England's royal saint, David Woodman traces the course of Edward's twenty-four-year-long reign through the lens of contemporary sources, from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Vita Ædwardi Regis to the Bayeux Tapestry, to separate myth from history and uncover the complex politics of his life. He shows Edward to be a shrewd politician who, having endured a long period of exile from England in his youth, ascended the throne in 1042 and came to control a highly sophisticated and powerful administration. The twists and turns of Edward's reign are generally seen as a prelude to the Norman Conquest in 1066. Woodman explains clearly how events unfolded and personalities interacted but, unlike many, he shows a capable and impressive king at the centre of them. The formation of England occurred against the odds: an island divided into rival kingdoms, under savage assault from Viking hordes. But, after King Alfred ensured the survival of Wessex and his son Edward expanded it, his grandson Athelstan inherited the rule of both Mercia and Wessex, conquered Northumbria and was hailed as Rex totius Britanniae: 'King of the whole of Britain'. Tom Holland recounts this extraordinary story with relish and drama, transporting us back to a time of omens, raven harbingers and blood-red battlefields. As well as giving form to the figure of Athelstan - devout, shrewd, all too aware of the precarious nature of his

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power, especially in the north - he introduces the great figures of the age, including Alfred and his daughter Aethelflaed, 'Lady of the Mercians', who brought Athelstan up at the Mercian court. Making sense of the family rivalries and fractious conflicts of the Anglo-Saxon rulers, Holland shows us how a royal dynasty rescued their kingdom from near-oblivion and fashioned a nation that endures to this day.

No English king has so divided opinion, both during his reign and in the centuries since, more than Richard III. He was loathed in his own time for the never-confirmed murder of his young nephews, the Princes in the Tower, and died fighting his own subjects on the battlefield. This is the vision of Richard we have inherited from Shakespeare. Equally, he inspired great loyalty in his followers. In this enlightening, even-handed study, Rosemary Horrox builds a complex picture of a king who by any standard failed as a monarch. He was killed after only two years on the throne, without an heir, and brought such a decisive end to the House of York that Henry Tudor was able to seize the throne, despite his extremely tenuous claim. Whether Richard was undone by his own fierce ambitions, or by the legacy of a Yorkist dynasty which was already profoundly dysfunctional, the end result was the same: Richard III destroyed the very dynasty that he had spent his life so passionately defending.

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Henry III was a medieval king whose long reign continues to have a profound impact on us today. He was on the throne for 56 years and during this time England was transformed from being the private plaything of a French speaking dynasty into a medieval state in which the king answered for his actions to an English parliament, which emerged during Henry's lifetime. Despite Henry's central importance for the birth of parliament and the development of a state recognisably modern in many of its institutions, it is Henry's most vociferous opponent, Simon de Montfort, who is in many ways more famous than the monarch himself. Henry is principally known today as the driving force behind the building of Westminster Abbey, but he deserves to be better understood for many reasons--as Stephen Church's sparkling account makes clear. Part of the Penguin Monarchs series: short, fresh, expert accounts of England's rulers in a highly collectible format

A revisionist new biography reintroducing readers to one of the most subversive figures in English history—the man who sought to reform a nation, dared to defy his king, and laid down his life to defend his sacred honor

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY KANSAS CITY STAR AND BLOOMBERG

Becket's life story has been often told but never so incisively reexamined and vividly rendered as it is in John Guy's hands. The

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son of middle-class Norman parents, Becket rose against all odds to become the second most powerful man in England. As King Henry II's chancellor, Becket charmed potentates and popes, tamed overmighty barons, and even personally led knights into battle. After his royal patron elevated him to archbishop of Canterbury in 1162, however, Becket clashed with the King. Forced to choose between fealty to the crown and the values of his faith, he repeatedly challenged Henry's authority to bring the church to heel. Drawing on the full panoply of medieval sources, Guy sheds new light on the relationship between the two men, separates truth from centuries of mythmaking, and casts doubt on the long-held assumption that the headstrong rivals were once close friends. He also provides the fullest accounting yet for Becket's seemingly radical transformation from worldly bureaucrat to devout man of God. Here is a Becket seldom glimpsed in any previous biography, a man of many facets and faces: the skilled warrior as comfortable unhorsing an opponent in single combat as he was negotiating terms of surrender; the canny diplomat "with the appetite of a wolf" who unexpectedly became the spiritual paragon of the English church; and the ascetic rebel who waged a high-stakes contest of wills with one of the most volcanic monarchs of the Middle Ages. Driven into exile, derided by his enemies as an ungrateful upstart, Becket returned to

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Canterbury in the unlikeliest guise of all: as an avenging angel of God, wielding his power of excommunication like a sword. It is this last apparition, the one for which history remembers him best, that will lead to his martyrdom at the hands of the king's minions—a grisly episode that Guy recounts in chilling and dramatic detail. An uncommonly intimate portrait of one of the medieval world's most magnetic figures, Thomas Becket breathes new life into its subject—cementing for all time his place as an enduring icon of resistance to the abuse of power.

From the bloody Wars of the Roses to Queen Elizabeth I's iconic rule, the Tudor Dynasty was a period of sex, scandal, and intrigue. Monarchs such as Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I have become a part of modern pop culture, resulting in endless parodies, satires, rumors, and urban legends that grace our television screens. But like all urban legends and parodies, facts surrounding the lives of these rulers are greatly exaggerated. In this entertaining guide, Barb Alexander serves to debunk those rumors and educate you about the dynasty. History doesn't have to be dry, boring, and difficult to read. As an educator, Barb knows exactly how to engage an audience. This pocket-sized guide is not only informative, but also filled with cheek, snark, and wit. With 50 beautiful illustrations that depict Tudor monarchs and key players during their rule,

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this book is guaranteed to garner a chuckle or two. So sit back, relax, and enjoy the lesson. Before long, you'll be sharing Tudor history facts that will be sure to impress your less informed peers. Skyhorse Publishing, as well as our Arcade imprint, are proud to publish a broad range of books for readers interested in history--books about World War II, the Third Reich, Hitler and his henchmen, the JFK assassination, conspiracies, the American Civil War, the American Revolution, gladiators, Vikings, ancient Rome, medieval times, the old West, and much more. While not every title we publish becomes a New York Times bestseller or a national bestseller, we are committed to books on subjects that are sometimes overlooked and to authors whose work might not otherwise find a home.

The first in a ground-breaking two-volume history of Henry III's rule "Professor Carpenter is one of Britain's foremost medievalists...No one knows more about Henry, and a lifetime of scholarship is here poured out, elegantly and often humorously. This is a fine, judicious, illuminating work that should be the standard study of the reign for generations to come."--Dan Jones, *The Sunday Times* Nine years of age when he came to the throne in 1216, Henry III had to rule within the limits set by the establishment of Magna Carta and the emergence of parliament. Pacific, conciliatory, and deeply religious, Henry brought many years of peace to England and rebuilt

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Westminster Abbey in honor of his patron saint, Edward the Confessor. He poured money into embellishing his palaces and creating a magnificent court. Yet this investment in "soft power" did not prevent a great revolution in 1258, led by Simon de Montfort, ending Henry's personal rule. Eminent historian David Carpenter brings to life Henry's character and reign as never before. Using source material of unparalleled richness--material that makes it possible to get closer to Henry than any other medieval monarch--Carpenter stresses the king's achievements as well as his failures while offering an entirely new perspective on the intimate connections between medieval politics and religion. Profiles Henry VII as an enigmatic and ruthless king of a country ravaged by decades of conspiracy and civil war, discussing the costs of establishing a Tudor monarchy and the ways he set the stage for Henry VIII's reign.

Henry VIII (Penguin Monarchs)The Quest for FamePenguin UK

Part of the Penguin Monarchs series: short, fresh, expert accounts of England's rulers in a collectible format Queen Victoria inherited the throne at 18 and went on to become the longest-reigning female monarch in history, in a time of intense industrial, cultural, political, scientific and military change within the United Kingdom and great imperial expansion outside of it (she was made Empress of India in

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1876). Overturning the established picture of the dour old lady, this is a fresh and engaging portrait from one of our most talented royal biographers. Jane Ridley is Professor of Modern History at Buckingham University, where she teaches a course on biography. Her previous books include *The Young Disraeli*; a study of Edwin Lutyens, *The Architect and his Wife*, which won the 2003 Duff Cooper Prize; and the best-selling *Bertie: A Life of Edward VII*. A Fellow of the Royal Society for Literature, Ridley writes for the *Spectator* and other newspapers, and has appeared on radio and several television documentaries. She lives in London and Scotland.

King of Britain for sixty years and the last king of what would become the United States, George III inspired both hatred and loyalty and is now best known for two reasons: as a villainous tyrant for America's Founding Fathers, and for his madness, both of which have been portrayed on stage and screen. In this concise and penetrating biography, Jeremy Black turns away from the image-making and back to the archives, and instead locates George's life within his age: as a king who faced the loss of key colonies, rebellion in Ireland, insurrection in London, constitutional crisis in Britain and an existential threat from Revolutionary France as part of modern Britain's longest period of war. Black shows how George III rose to these challenges with

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fortitude and helped settle parliamentary monarchy as an effective governmental system, eventually becoming the most popular monarch for well over a century. He also shows us a talented and curious individual, committed to music, art, architecture and science, who took the duties of monarchy seriously, from reviewing death penalties to trying to control his often wayward children even as his own mental health failed, and became Britain's longest reigning king.

This first comprehensive biography of Henry I, the youngest son of William the Conqueror and an elusive figure for historians, offers a rich and compelling account of his tumultuous life and reign. Judith Green argues that although Henry's primary concern was defence of his inheritance this did not preclude expansion where circumstances were propitious, notably into Welsh territory. His skilful dealings with the Scots permitted consolidation of Norman rule in the northern counties of England, while in Normandy every sinew was strained to defend frontiers through political alliances and stone castles. Green argues that although Henry's own outlook was essentially traditional, the legacy of this fascinating and ruthless personality included some fundamentally important developments in governance. She also sheds light on Henry's court, suggesting that it made an important contribution to the flowering of court culture throughout twelfth-

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century Europe.

Part of the Penguin Monarchs series: short, fresh, expert accounts of England's rulers in a collectible format Henry VII was one of England's unlikeliest monarchs. An exile and outsider with barely a claim to the throne, his victory over Richard III at Bosworth Field seemed to many in 1485 like only the latest in the sequence of violent convulsions among England's nobility that would come to be known as the wars of the roses - with little to suggest that the obscure Henry would last any longer than his predecessor. To break that cycle of division, usurpation, deposition and murder, he had both to maintain a grip on power and to convince England that his rule was both rightful and effective. Here, Sean Cunningham explores how, in his ruthless, controlling and personal kingship, Henry VII did so; in the process founding the Tudor dynasty and, arguably, helping to lay the foundations for modern government. Sean Cunningham is a Principal Records Specialist at The National Archives. A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, he has published widely on late medieval and early Tudor England. His books include, most recently, a historical biography of Henry VII.

'Æthelred's reign of nearly thirty-eight years was the longest of any Anglo-Saxon ruler. If he had died in AD 1000, history would have remembered him more kindly' Few monarchs of the Middle Ages have had a

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worse popular reputation than Æthelred II, 'the Unready', remembered as the king who lost England to Viking invaders. But, as Richard Abels shows, the failure to defend his realm was not entirely his alone. Æthelred was in many ways an innovative ruler but one whose challenges - a divided court, a fragile nascent kingdom, a voracious, hydra-headed enemy - were ultimately too great to overcome.

Henry II, through a series of astonishing dynastic coups, became the ruler of an enormous European empire that stretched from the Channel almost to the Mediterranean. One of the most dynamic, restless and clever men ever to rule England, he was brought down by his catastrophic relationship with his archbishop Thomas Becket, and his debilitating arguments with his rebellious sons Richard and Geoffrey, and later his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine. His empire may have ultimately collapsed, but in Richard Barber's vivid and sympathetic account we see why Henry II left such a compelling impression on his contemporaries. He creates a portrait of a man of great energy and learning, whose zeal for good government left a legacy that survives in Britain today, yet whose fiery temper and desire for control would ultimately destroy him.

Henry V is probably medieval England's most well-known and admired king, famed for victory at Agincourt. Yet Henry's invasion of France in August 1415 represented a huge gamble. As heir to the

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throne he had been a failure, cast into the political wilderness amid rumours that he planned to depose his father. Despite a complete change of character as king - founding monasteries and enforcing the law - little had gone right since. He was insecure in his kingdom, his reputation low. Agincourt was a battle that Henry should not have won - but he did. Within five years, he was regent of France. In this vivid new interpretation, Anne Curry explores how Henry's hyperactive efforts to expunge his past failures defined his kingship, and how his astonishing success at Agincourt transformed his standing in the eyes of his contemporaries, and of all generations to come.

The youngest of William the Conqueror's sons, Henry I (1100-35) was never meant to be king, but he was destined to become one of the greatest of all medieval monarchs, both through his own ruthlessness and intelligence and through the dynastic legacy of his daughter Matilda, who began the Plantagenet line that would rule England until 1485. A self-consciously diligent and thoughtful king, his rule was looked back on as the real post-invasion re-founding of England as a new realm, integrated into the continent, wealthy and stable. Edmund King's wonderful portrait of Henry shows him as a strikingly charismatic and thoughtful man. His life was dogged by a single great disaster, the death of his teenage heir William in the White Ship disaster.

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Despite astonishing numbers of illegitimate sons, Henry was now left with only a daughter. This fact would shape the rest of the 12th century and beyond.

The acclaimed Penguin Monarchs series: short, fresh, expert accounts of England's rulers - now in paperback Henry II (1154-89) through a series of astonishing dynastic coups became the ruler of an enormous European empire. One of the most dynamic, restless and clever men ever to rule England, he was brought down both by his catastrophic relationship with his archbishop Thomas Becket and his debilitating arguments with his sons, most importantly the future Richard I and King John. His empire may have ultimately collapsed, but in Richard Barber's vivid and sympathetic account the reader can see why Henry II left such a compelling impression on his contemporaries. Richard Barber has written for Penguin The Penguin Guide to Medieval Europe, The Holy Grail and Edward III and the Triumph of England. He is a major figure in medieval studies, both as a writer and as a publisher.

'James was a king tragically trapped by principle. Yet was it wise to attempt to change the national religion?' The short reign of James II is generally seen as one of the most catastrophic in British history, ending in his exile after he unsuccessfully tried to convert England to Catholicism, a crisis that

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would haunt the monarchy for generations. Ultimately, David Womersley's biography shows, James was a man whose blindness to subtlety and political reality brought about his ruinous downfall. King John ruled England for seventeen and a half years, yet his entire reign is usually reduced to one image: of the villainous monarch outmanoeuvred by rebellious barons into agreeing to Magna Carta at Runnymede in 1215. Ever since, John has come to be seen as an archetypal tyrant. But how evil was he? In this perceptive short account, Nicholas Vincent unpicks John's life through his deeds and his personality. The youngest of four brothers, overlooked and given a distinctly unroyal name, John seemed doomed to failure. As king, he was reputedly cruel and treacherous, pursuing his own interests at the expense of his country, losing the continental empire bequeathed to him by his father Henry and his brother Richard and eventually plunging England into civil war. Only his lordship of Ireland showed some success. Yet, as this fascinating biography asks, were his crimes necessarily greater than those of his ancestors - or was he judged more harshly because, ultimately, he failed as a warlord?

Foremost medieval historian Anne Curry offers a new reinterpretation of Henry V and the battle that defined his kingship: Agincourt Henry V's invasion of France, in August 1415, represented a huge gamble.

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As heir to the throne, he had been a failure, cast into the political wilderness amid rumours that he planned to depose his father. Despite a complete change of character as king - founding monasteries, persecuting heretics, and enforcing the law to its extremes - little had gone right since. He was insecure in his kingdom, his reputation low. On the eve of his departure for France, he uncovered a plot by some of his closest associates to remove him from power. Agincourt was a battle that Henry should not have won - but he did, and the rest is history. Within five years, he was heir to the throne of France. In this vivid new interpretation, Anne Curry explores how Henry's hyperactive efforts to expunge his past failures, and his experience of crisis - which threatened to ruin everything he had struggled to achieve - defined his kingship, and how his astonishing success at Agincourt transformed his standing in the eyes of his contemporaries, and of all generations to come.

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