

- While the Crown was solvent, much of its wealth, especially in the final years, was amassed by illegal or at least highly unpopular means.
- Henry overstated the threat posed by the nobility. Had he worked more on the basis of consensus rather than control, he would have had more opportunity to reform local government and keep better control in the localities.
- Henry never established a sense of security. He was a king never sure of his own position, ruling over a country never sure of who its next king would be.
- Henry used patronage excessively, being over-reliant on those men whom he had known in exile.
- Although Henry did pass on his throne peacefully, it was by the skin of his teeth. He was, by 1509, deeply unpopular.

Historians' interpretations

SOURCE 6.1 R. L. Storey, *The Reign of Henry VII*, 1968, p. 216

The reign of Henry VII must still be regarded as one of the great landmarks in England's political development... It is the watershed between the old and new pattern of political life; it divides those centuries when the principal and most constant cause of major disorder had been the aspirations and suspicions of the baronial class from a period which saw the emergence of parties making their stand on issues of religion and constitutional principle.

SOURCE 6.2 M. M. Condon, 'Ruling elites in the reign of Henry VII', in C. Ross (ed.), *Patronage, Pedigree and Power*, 1979, p. 124

[There was] a certain superficiality of achievement despite all the auguries of change: an impermanence, a fragility caused in part by the tensions which Henry himself created.

SOURCE 6.3 S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII*, 1972, pp. 321–22

His steady purposefulness saved England from mediocrity. 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. In the ultimate analysis, the quality of Henry VII was not that of a creator, but rather of a stabilizer for lack of whom the ships of state are apt to founder. For that quality, he stands out pre-eminent among British monarchs.

SOURCE 6.4 J. Guy, *Tudor England*, 1988, pp. 78–79

Henry VII's reign was distinguished by sober statesmanship. Bosworth's victor was a stabilizer: he could be ruthless and severe, but was neither bloodthirsty nor egoistical... In 1492 he personally led his 'army royal' to France in the knowledge that the nobility (and Parliament) exalted kings who defended their honour... Henry also attempted to centralize English politics. The Tudor Court began to exercise magnetic influence, and, if much territorial power still lay in the hands of regional magnates, faction was tamed by recognizance and the exaction of royal prerogative rights by the Council Learned.

SOURCE 6.5 C. Carpenter, 'Henry VII and the English polity', in B. Thompson (ed.), *The Reign of Henry VII*, 1995, p. 30

Yes, he did manage to pass on the throne to his son and, notoriously, Edward IV did not. It seems almost that this is the only achievement which remains intact, certainly the only one that confirms the two kings in the accepted hierarchy: the king who was not quite up to the demands of the modern world and the one who was. But even here we must pause... Henry was extraordinarily lucky in the age of his son, in his son's ability to see immediately what was needed, and in the moment of his death.

SOURCE 6.6 Alexander Grant, *Henry VII*, 1985, p. 50

[As] Henry VII's achievement depended largely on his own incessant personal direction of government, is it possible to suggest that his true successors were not the monarchs who followed him but their great ministers who, like Henry VII, kept close personal control on all the strands of government?... And whether or not that idea is acceptable, the debt which the Tudor regime owed to Henry VII is clear. The most important revolution of the period was surely the restoration of a high degree of peace and stability throughout most of the country, and its architect was King Henry VII. For this reason, his victory over Richard III in August 1485 deserves to be re-established as a major turning-point in English history.

ACTIVITY

Read Sources 6.1–6.6.

- 1 Pick out the positive and negative interpretations of Henry VII's reign.
- 2 'Henry VII's sole achievement was to pass on his throne peacefully to his son.' To what extent is this a fair assessment of Henry's reign?