

## Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales: Life, Death and Commemoration

**Review Number:**

1006

**Publish date:**

Wednesday, 1 December, 2010

**Editor:**

Steven Gunn

Linda Monckton

**ISBN:**

9781843834809

**Date of Publication:**

2009

**Price:**

£50.00

**Pages:**

214pp.

**Publisher:**

Boydell and Brewer

**Place of Publication:**

Woodbridge

**Reviewer:**

Simon Lambe

Tudor scholars and enthusiasts alike marked a significant anniversary on 21 April 2009: the quincentenary of Henry VIII's accession to the English throne.<sup>(1)</sup> While this historical milestone highlights Henry VIII's seemingly unassailable position in England's national consciousness and its romantic imagination, it also marked the conclusion of an equally important – but perhaps overlooked – reign in Tudor historiography. As Gordon Marsden has recently argued, we ought to spare a thought for Henry Tudor, the 'miracle king', without whom the cult of Henry VIII would not have been possible.<sup>(2)</sup> Within this reign, we find the 'forgotten prince': Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales, the subject of this collection of essays edited by Steven Gunn and Linda Monckton. Seven years prior to this anniversary, on the afternoon of Thursday 2 May 2002, a simple wooden coffin made its way in procession from Ludlow Castle towards Worcester Cathedral as part of a re-enactment of Prince Arthur's funeral. The intention of this event, the 'brainchild' of the late Iain MacKenzie, Canon Residentiary of Worcester Cathedral (to whom this book is dedicated), was to mark the quincentenary of Arthur's death and to raise awareness of his life. This book, essentially the proceedings of an associated conference, offers ten chapters from authors from a range of historical disciplines: art, architectural, political and archaeological. This interdisciplinary approach is perhaps best exemplified in chapters six to nine which investigate the iconography, archaeology, architecture and contextual significance of Arthur's tomb and chantry chapel at Worcester Cathedral. Chapters five and ten address Arthur's funeral itself, while the first couple of chapters contextualise Prince Arthur's life and political career before chapters three and four discuss the art, poetry and iconography relating to Prince Arthur. On its sleeve, the book claims to be 'richly illustrated' which is something of an understatement in every sense. Not only is the richness of scholarship evident, but the accompanying images number no fewer than ten colour and 55 black and white plates.

Gunn and Monckton's introduction highlights two of the key themes within the book: Arthur's public and private life, from the intensely personal to ostentatious ceremonial. Indeed, the book suggests that it was perhaps Henry VII's moments of calculated ceremony and strategic concealment that resulted in Arthur's 'forgotten' status. Gunn then opens proceedings with his own contribution, 'Prince Arthur's preparation for kingship', which, rather than opting for a counter-factual examination of what sort of king Arthur Tudor was likely to have been, explores Henry VII's political influence on his son and the courtly culture and society around him. This includes surveying the education received by the young prince, from his time in nursery under the watchful eye of Lady Elizabeth Darcy to his more sophisticated tutorials with John Rede, the renowned intellectual. Indeed, Arthur's personal curriculum, covering classics, languages, martial virtues, music and poetry, was held in such high regard that the likes of Thomas Linacre came in search of employment, albeit unsuccessfully. For Gunn, however, Arthur's most profitable education came from his time spent in Ludlow where he learnt the practicalities of kingship. Gunn spends a large chunk of this chapter highlighting Arthur's learned (or perhaps inherited) ability to reward those most loyal to him to create a royal 'affinity'. For example, Sir Thomas Englefield, Robert Frost, Sir Richard Pole, Thomas Poyntz, William Smith, bishop of Lincoln, and Sir William Uvedale were installed as councillors on gaol delivery commissions for Shropshire and Herefordshire, both regions being within Arthur's sphere of political influence (pp. 11–3).

In the second essay, 'The King of Spain's daughter came to visit me: marriage, princes and politics', Ian Arthurson provides an engaging revisionist approach to the negotiations and diplomatic discourse around Arthur's marriage to Katherine of Aragon. Despite a slightly choppy ride across the fast-moving rapids of historical narrative in the opening stages, Arthurson's contribution soon takes shape and suggests that Anglocentric historians view these negotiations through the 'wrong end of the telescope', thereby overstating the importance of Henry VII's role. Indeed, when placed in a wider European context, the 'events in England reflect the playing out of Spanish diplomacy in Italy', particularly in relation to the Breton Wars (1485–91) and the Italian Wars (1494–1504) (p. 22). Arthurson reminds us that Ferdinand and Isabella had far more experience in such affairs than Henry, detailing earlier negotiations with Edward IV over an unsuccessful marital alliance between the future Edward V and the Infanta Isabel and the subsequent smoothing over of Anglo-Spanish tensions with Richard III as Isabella's 'good and faithful kinsman' (p. 24). After establishing a chronology to explain the political machinations and tactical delays prior to the

marriage, Arthurson concludes by stressing the importance of portraiture in marital and diplomatic negotiations. This leads conveniently to Frederick Hepburn's contribution, 'The portraiture of Prince Arthur and Katherine of Aragon'. This chapter offers a refrain of the book's recurring themes of display and privacy, its purpose being, as outlined by Hepburn, to establish what Katherine and Arthur looked like and to explore the use and meaning of such portraiture. Hepburn initially surveys three images of Arthur: the *Magnificat Window* in the priory church at Great Malvern, Worcestershire, a frontispiece to a book of ordinances and, lastly, a panel painting of Arthur and his family kneeling in prayer. For Hepburn, these examples demonstrate that the purpose of such images was to 'function as emblems of souls' (p. 33) rather than to display an actual physical likeness, although Hepburn also examines a panel painting which does attempt to present a likeness of Arthur (featured on the cover of the book).

This contribution, however, offers a rather unbalanced appraisal of this aspect of royal portraiture, for Arthur is explored in relative depth (over approximately seven pages) while Katherine receives minimal coverage (about two pages). While the author does explain that portraiture of Katherine is limited, it might perhaps have been advisable to revise the title of the chapter to its focus: Prince Arthur. There seems to be a further flaw in Hepburn's contribution. Hepburn suggests that a rather ambiguous looking portrait of an unknown sitter in the Royal Collection portrays Arthur rather than his younger brother, the future Henry VIII, as commonly assumed. Hepburn draws this conclusion by comparing the unknown sitter (c.1515–20), an identified panel portrait of Arthur (c.1515–20) and a confirmed panel portrait of Henry (c. 1515–18) and contrasting the placing of the sitter, the pose of the hands, the black cord around the sitter's neck and the similarity of eye shape. While Hepburn argues with conviction, I am not convinced due to the disparity in size of the portraits, the headwear (the unknown sitter is wearing a near identical hat to that donned by Henry in his portrait), the similarity of hand posture (the unknown sitter adopts the same pose as that of Henry VIII), the size and shape of face of the unknown sitter and the shape of the sitter's nose, which seem to bear more resemblance to Henry. Hepburn also suggests that the necklace in the 'unknown' portrait has more in common with the panel portrait of Arthur. However, the portrait of Henry is almost identical and does not necessarily suggest a definitive conclusion one way or the other. Moreover, the unknown sitter is adorned by a chain which is very similar to that of the panel portrait of Henry. While all this could simply amount to a cunning piece of Tudor propaganda, the portrait seems more likely to be Henry than Arthur.

The next chapter continues the theme of the image as John Morgan-Guy discusses 'Arthur, Harri Tudor and the iconography of loyalty in Wales'. Morgan-Guy's chapter focuses primarily on the building work and iconography of Sir Rhys ap Thomas in his seat of power in south Wales, but also explores Tudor iconography more generally in Wales (particularly the Prince of Wales's feathers, the pomegranate of Katherine of Aragon and the ubiquitous Tudor rose) including the choir stalls at nearby St David's Cathedral, Aberconwy abbey church in Caernarfonshire and the Benedictine priory at Abergavenny. Having gained the trust of the king at Bosworth by furnishing him with some 1,800 men from Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, Morgan-Guy explains the significance of Sir Rhys ap Thomas's extensive building work after 1485 at Llanwenog Church, Ceredigion. This church contains iconography dedicated to Henry VII, Prince Arthur and Katherine of Aragon, including the portcullis badge of the Beauforts above the west door, a 'proclamation of the loyalty of the Welsh to the Tudor family' (p. 50). Moreover, Morgan-Guy points out that Sir Rhys's son, Gruffydd, a member of Arthur's household, and the prince were so close that when Gruffydd died in 1521, he was buried just a short distance from Arthur. For Morgan-Guy, this clear link between Sir Rhys's family and the Tudors explains the building work at Carew Castle which incorporated the arms of Arthur and Katherine over the porch, the suggestion being that Sir Rhys was preparing the castle to house the newlyweds on their journey through Wales. The chapter concludes by exploring the reciprocal loyalty between Henry VII and Wales. While his Welsh subjects were installing Tudor iconography and visual expressions of loyalty, Henry Tudor was 'not unmindful of Wales', commissioning Sir Rhys ap Thomas to create a new tomb for his father, Edmund Tudor, earl of Richmond, which would sit in the church of the Greyfriars at Carmarthen, later removed to St David's Cathedral. Sir Rhys himself was laid to rest near to Edmund Tudor's tomb, just as his own son had been positioned near the tomb of Prince Arthur.

Ralph Houlbrooke then deals with the sobering subject of 'Prince Arthur's funeral'. This chapter, based on a

narrative account by John Writhe, Garter King of Arms, and extant financial accounts of the funeral, outlines a narrative of events covering Arthur's premature death on 2 April 1502, the general procession in London six days later, the placing of Arthur's body at Ludlow Castle on St George's Day and the removal of his body from Ludlow to Worcester Cathedral. This route, as noted by Houlbrooke, was significant as Arthur's body may have stayed overnight at Tickenhall, the site of the young prince's proxy marriage to Katherine just three years earlier. With Arthur's funeral comes the return of public ceremonial and its capacity to provide an opportunity for the political elite to participate in a display of political allegiance. However, perhaps the most important feature of Houlbrooke's research is the comparison between Arthur's funeral and those of his royal contemporaries. Houlbrooke explores the funerals of Prince Henry in 1511, Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland in 1489 and Elizabeth of York in 1503, the last of which being the 'most elaborate and costly of Henry's reign' at which the black cloth alone cost £1,483 15s 10d (pp. 70–1). Houlbrooke concludes that while Arthur's funeral was indeed lavish, it was by no means the most ostentatious. Indeed, Houlbrooke makes the interesting point that Arthur's infant nephew, Prince Henry, was given a funeral not far short of Arthur's in terms of expense and display. While the chapter opens in a rather clinical tone, Houlbrooke closes with a touching reflection on the 'pain and loss' that Henry VII must have felt as he lost four of his children and his wife in a short space of time.

After Houlbrooke's narrative of Arthur's funeral, chapters six to nine offer a guided tour around Arthur's tomb and chantry chapel, starting with Mark Duffy's chapter which contextualises Prince Arthur's funerary monuments at Worcester Cathedral. However, as it progresses, Duffy's chapter develops the feel of an introduction to the second half of the book. Indeed, it soon feels as though the book could easily have been divided into two separate volumes: historical analysis and architectural examination. If this was the case, the earlier chapters, which had a rather truncated feel at times, may have been afforded an extended word length and could have been allowed to explore the life of the prince in greater detail. In particular, Ian Arthurson's and John Morgan-Guy's complex contributions may not have been quite so curtailed. However, that is not to dismiss the quality of research. In 'Prince Arthur's chapel and tomb: an archaeological analysis', Christopher Guy and John Hunter offer more than just a detailed description of the location, appearance and style of Arthur's chantry chapel. The authors provide a technical archaeological assessment of the tomb, the chapel and its surroundings through six distinct sections: Arthur's location; the tombs of Bishop Godfrey Giffard and his sister, Matilda; the structure of the chapel itself; the floor; the undecorated east end and the 'squint' in the south west corner rather than the conventional north east. One of the most keenly stressed points (it must be said, to the point of repetition) in the second half of the book is that a lack of documentary evidence relating to the creation of Arthur's chantry chapel has caused 'problems of interpretation' (p. 90).

The book's co-editor, Linda Monckton, then moves the path of discussion from the archaeological to the architectural in her 'Regional architecture or national monument? The architecture of Prince Arthur's chantry chapel'. Monckton offers further context and comparison, before moving on to address memorial 'fashions' in a wider historical context and their 'reinvention' in contrast to the technical assessment in Guy and Hunter's conclusion. Nonetheless, Guy and Hunter agree with Monckton's theory that Arthur's chantry chapel was positioned in the space left behind by the removal of the tombs of Bishop Giffard and his sister, Matilda. Monckton also notes that while there are precedents for the removal of chantry chapels to make way for other chapels, Arthur's stone cage style itself was unique among its royal equivalents, although Monckton stresses that the complexity of the site necessitated an ingenuity of design to accommodate the uneven floor levels on each side. In terms of the construction of the chapel, Monckton argues that Arthur's tomb was 'a royal commission, but delegated locally' to masons from the Midlands and West Country. Monckton makes such a conclusion given the similarity in structure, design and iconography with the Beauchamp family monuments which 'proved highly influential in the late middle ages' (p. 131).

To support Monckton's contribution, Phillip Lindley offers a much needed assessment of the figures incorporated into Arthur's chapel in his 'Worcester and Westminster: the figure-sculpture of Prince Arthur's chapel'. Lindley opens by explaining that Arthur's figure-sculpture is significant for three main reasons: its survival, the ability to identify the majority of its figures and because Arthur's chapel is seen, perhaps unfairly, as a 'dress rehearsal' for Henry VII's chapel in Westminster Abbey. After outlining the

iconography and addressing the iconoclasm of the 16th and 17th centuries, the chapter offers a comparative assessment of the sculpture work on the chapels at the two cathedrals. While there is discussion throughout the book about the possible completion date of Arthur's chapel, Lindley suggests that the two chapels were contemporary. However, Lindley suggests not only that the Worcester design was not that of a royal master mason, but that the execution of the figure-sculpture plan was 'not carefully supervised' (p. 160). Moreover, while Monckton suggests the tomb was constructed locally by royal commission, Lindley argues that the master mason responsible for the figure-sculpture hailed from London and, significantly, 'both projects were underway at the same time' (p. 162). In keeping with much of the rest of this book, Lindley includes an extremely helpful visual aid to assist the discussion in the shape of a diagram showing the position and identities of the figure-sculptures (pp. 145–7). However, there are insufficient images of figure-sculpture at Westminster to allow a true visual comparison to be made.

Julian Litten concludes with an engrossing account of 'The re-enactment of the funeral of Prince Arthur', composed in a narrative and reflective style which makes for a refreshing break from the comprehensive archaeological and architectural analysis which immediately precedes it. While the chapter has the feeling of an epilogue, it adds significantly more information to Houlbrooke's earlier exploration of Arthur's funeral, revisiting the financial and narrative accounts to explore the practical and logistical implications of such an event. However, one slight irritation is the minimal inclusion of images to accompany Litten's contribution; for a book so rich in visual accompaniment, there are only four pictures to illustrate the re-enactment. Nitpicking aside, Gunn and Monckton have created a monograph rich in detail which offers a satisfying level of interdisciplinary scholarship and one which succeeds in its purpose: to remember Prince Arthur, the 'forgotten prince'. It must be no coincidence that the editors published this book in the same year as Henry VIII's quincentenary: Gunn also featured in a special edition of *Historical Research* to celebrate the 'alternative' quincentenary of Henry VII.<sup>(3)</sup> Perhaps this book will mark a new direction in Tudor scholarship towards not only the life of Prince Arthur, but the early Tudor period more generally. What better legacy for a book seeking to commemorate a 'forgotten prince'?

## Notes

1. For example, the *Henry VIII and the Tudor Court* conference held at Hampton Court Palace, 13–15 July 2009.[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Gordon Marsden, 'Henry VII: miracle king', *History Today*, 59, 3 (March 2009), 54–60.[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. Steven Gunn, 'Political history, new monarchy and state formation: Henry VII in European perspective', *Historical Research*, 82, 217 (August 2009), 380–92.[Back to \(3\)](#)

### Other reviews:

History Today

<http://www.historytoday.com/blog/news-blog/kathryn-hadley/what-if-arthur-prince-wales-had-been-king> [2]

**Source URL:** <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1006#comment-0>

### Links

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/5166>

[2] <http://www.historytoday.com/blog/news-blog/kathryn-hadley/what-if-arthur-prince-wales-had-been-king>