

# Is 'Tudor England' a myth?

May 29 2012

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'The Family of Henry VIII: An Allegory of the Tudor Succession' - an anachronistic portrait of the 'Tudor dynasty'

(Phys.org) -- The term 'Tudor' was hardly used in the 16th Century and its obsessive modern use by historians and writers generally gives us a misleading impression of the period, an Oxford historian has found.

Cliff Davies of Oxford University's History Faculty and Wadham College scoured official papers, chronicles, poems, plays and pamphlets for the 'Tudor' name but found it hardly used as a designation of the monarchy until the last years of Elizabeth's reign, and even then sparingly.

Of the many poems written to mark the death of Elizabeth and the accession of James I in 1603, only one talks of a change from 'Tudor' to

‘Stuart’.

Davies suggested that terms like ‘Tudor England’ and ‘Tudor monarchy’ used by historians and in TV and film dramas give a false impression of glamor and unity to the period from Henry VII to Elizabeth I, and that historians need to rethink many assumptions about 16th Century England.

He said: "The word ‘Tudor’ is used obsessively by historians, often as a quite unnecessary reinforcing adjective to add an appropriate ‘period flavor’ to their work, but it was almost unknown at the time.

"While the Tudor name was celebrated in Welsh language writings, it was considered an embarrassment in England – Henry VII’s paternal grandfather Owen Tudor was played down and Henry VIII boasted instead of the ‘Union’ of the families of Lancaster and York embodied in himself.

"There is no sense in which the ‘Tudor’ monarchs thought of themselves as ‘Welsh’, or took pride in their descent from a Welsh adventurer."

Heavy use of the Tudor name has probably misled historians so that many accepted understandings of the period need to be revised, Davies suggested.

The concept of ‘Tudor monarchy’ is one such misunderstanding, Davies said. "There is very little distinctive or in common between the governments of Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I - not to mention the brief reigns of Edward VI and Mary I," he said.

The view of ordinary people as ‘Tudor men’ or ‘Tudor women’ is also misleading, Davies argued. "‘Tudor subjects’ gives a false sense of people identifying with their monarch,’ he said. ‘The very term implies a degree

of automatic 'loyalty' which is unwarranted."

Davies said the belief that people thought of themselves as living in a new, distinct 'age', different from the preceding 'Middle Ages', is equally unwarranted. He said: "How people of the time thought of themselves and of the times they lived in is profoundly significant, not a mere curiosity.

"Periods' are artificial constructions by [historians](#). What makes the concept of the 'Tudor period' so seductive is that we believe it to have been current at the time. This was not the case. We need to revise our concepts."

Provided by Oxford University

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