

British History Series: Episode 19: A Very English Coup

While Henry VIII and Elizabeth I often dominate discussions of the Tudor dynasty, this summary highlights the stories of three other monarchs who ruled during this tumultuous period: **Edward VI**, **Mary I**, and **Lady Jane Grey**.

Edward VI: The Boy King and Protestant Reformer

- **1547:** Henry VIII dies. His 9-year-old son becomes **King Edward VI**, the only legitimate child of Henry and **Jane Seymour**.
- **Regency Council:** A group of 16 nobles was appointed to govern until Edward reached the age of 14.

Edward Seymour's Rise

- **Edward Seymour**, Duke of Somerset and Edward's uncle, became **Lord Protector**.
- His brother, **Thomas Seymour**, married Henry's widow **Catherine Parr** and lived at **Sudeley Castle**.
- Thomas also brought in **Lady Elizabeth** (future Elizabeth I) and **Lady Jane Grey**.

Thomas Seymour's Fall

- Developed an "unhealthy interest" in young Elizabeth.
- After Catherine Parr's death, Thomas was arrested and **executed for treason in 1548**, largely due to his brother's actions.

War with Scotland: The Rough Wooing

- Attempted to force marriage between **Edward VI** and **Mary, Queen of Scots**.
- Victory at the **Battle of Pinkie** (last between England and Scotland as nations), but the war was expensive.

Unrest at Home

- **Economic depression** and **religious tensions**.
- **Kett's Rebellion (1549):** Norfolk uprising over land enclosures.
- **Prayer Book Rebellion (1549):** Resistance in Devon and Cornwall against Protestant reforms.

Political Shifts

- **Somerset** was removed and **executed in 1549** due to mismanagement.

- **John Dudley**, Earl of Warwick (later Duke of Northumberland), rose as the new **Lord Protector**.

Edward VI's Reformation Legacy

- **Act of Uniformity (1549)**: Church services must be in **English**, not Latin.
- **Book of Common Prayer (1549)**: Standardised Anglican worship — still influential today.
- Edward reigned **just six years**, but firmly advanced Protestant reform.

The Device for the Succession & Lady Jane Grey

Edward's Final Move

- **1553**: Edward falls ill with tuberculosis.
- Wants to **prevent his Catholic half-sister Mary** from reversing Protestant reforms.
- Bypasses Parliament and drafts a "**Device for the Succession**", naming **Lady Jane Grey** as heir.

Why Lady Jane Grey?

- Protestant and great-granddaughter of **Henry VII**.
- Recently married to **Guildford Dudley**, son of John Dudley.
- Dudley engineered this move to secure power for his family.

Queen Jane Proclaimed

- **July 10, 1553**: Jane is declared Queen by the Privy Council.
- Jane (age 16 or 17) was **highly educated** and devoutly Protestant.
- Moved into the **Tower of London** to await coronation.

Mary I's Counterclaim and Victory

Mary's Response

- Fled to **Framlingham Castle**, Suffolk.
- Declared herself rightful Queen under **Henry VIII's Act of Succession**.
- Gathered **20,000 supporters**, including some Protestants who respected her legal claim.

Dudley's Defeat

- Marched out of London with 3,000 men to face Mary.

- Outmanoeuvred and politically isolated.

Privy Council Switches Sides

- **July 19, 1553:** After just 9 days, the Council declares **Mary** Queen.
- **Public celebration** in London — cannons fired from the Thames and the Tower.

Dudley's Fate

- Tried to save himself by proclaiming Mary Queen in **Cambridge**.
- Arrested and **executed** within a month.

Lady Jane Grey's Downfall

- **The Tower becomes her prison**, not her palace.
- **November 13:** Jane, Guildford Dudley, and **Archbishop Cranmer** are **tried for treason**.
- All found guilty. Jane's fate (burning or beheading) left to **Queen Mary**.

Reflection

Lady Jane Grey, the "Nine Days Queen," symbolises the **intense power struggles** and **religious divisions** of the Tudor era. Despite Edward VI's careful plans to preserve Protestant reform, the English public and nobility ultimately sided with **legitimate royal succession**. Mary's swift triumph demonstrates how **dynastic loyalty**, not religious preference, often shaped political outcomes.