



***The House of Dudley: A New History of
Tudor England***

By Joanne Paul

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Reviewed by: Johanna Strong



The House of Dudley: A New History of Tudor England. By Joanne Paul. London: Michael Joseph, 2022. ISBN 978-0-241-34982-3. xiii + 506pp. £25.

The Tudors are an ever-fascinating family and regime in English history, but behind every throne are those whose machinations ensure the continuation of political power. For the Tudors, those figures included the Dudleys. In her debut book, Joanne Paul effectively demonstrates the fluctuating power of the Dudley family, from Edmund Dudley's (c.1452-1510) devoted service to Henry VII to the family's relative disgrace under Mary I to their turbulent re-ascent to power and influence under Elizabeth I, which ended with the death of Robert Dudley in 1588. Separated into four parts, reflecting the Dudleys' rises and falls from grace, the book begins in 1500 and concludes in 1588. These sections do not align with Tudor monarchs' regnal years, emphasising the work's focus, which is not on how the Dudleys fit into the Tudor dynasty but how the Tudors fit—for better and for worse—into Dudley ambitions.

The first full-length biography of the Tudor-era Dudley family, Paul's work adds another layer of nuance to the reigns of the Tudors and contributes to the growing field of work on figures adjacent to the monarchy. Using well-known Tudor monarchical history to shed light on a family whose fortune was so tied to the monarch's, Paul's examination of the Dudley family also better illuminates historians' understandings of the seemingly well-known figures of the period, with Dudley ties to the Boleyn, Parr, and Seymour families further demonstrating the interconnectedness of personal and political power in the Tudor world (75).

Paul's collation of primary sources, both printed and manuscript, sheds new light on the house of Dudley. Ranging from administrative sources to contemporary books, political and religious treatises, and material and visual sources, Paul's critical analysis of the primary sources lends an academic lens to this trade work while nevertheless maintaining an accessible and approachable history for a general audience. Conscious of the need to both "tell a good story and to write a good history" (469), Paul's integration of the source material into the narrative of her work at once tells the story of the Dudleys

while pointing to the sources which have informed these insights, all while leaving definitive interpretation of the sources and their nuance open to the individual reader, as Paul intended (469). For the most part, this engages the reader in an active reflection on the primary sources and encourages reader participation in the analysis and interpretation of the historical sources, rendering this family biography more captivating and thought-provoking.

Despite this, there remain some points at which further analysis would have been beneficial, particularly for readers not immersed in the intricacies of the Tudor monarchy. In discussion of the mid-Tudor crisis—the death of Edward VI, the accession of Jane, and Mary I's ultimate claiming of the throne—claims of rumours about the duke of Northumberland John Dudley's attempt to seize power for his son and daughter-in-law are sustained with less proof from the sources than desired (199). The narrative relies on the reader's understanding that John Dudley amassed power and influence through, for example, the marriages of his family members, but little tangible proof is given to substantiate this beyond the imperial ambassador's observations (203). Given that understanding of John Dudley's manoeuvres to claim power after Edward VI's death are widespread, perhaps infamous, in Tudor historical circles, this could have been an opportunity for Paul to further elucidate Dudley's role. This critique, though, should be tempered with the acknowledgement that this quibble is largely due to a piqued interest in the topic and the desire to know even more, demonstrating the extent to which Paul's work sparks further interest in the influence and power of the Dudley family.

This work sheds immense light onto this often-overlooked family and Paul's narrative focuses intently on the actions of the Dudleys themselves without becoming side-tracked in a re-examination or re-analysis of the Tudors themselves or the well-known events of their reigns. With that in mind, there are points where readers less familiar with Tudor history would benefit from summaries of events occurring when the Dudleys are less politically active, especially considering some of the chronological jumps in this work. Readers who are particularly interested in the wider significance of the Dudley family would benefit from reading Paul's work in relation to new research on the mid-Tudor crisis, such as Valerie Schutte's examination of John Dudley in Marian

accession literature. *The House of Dudley*, however, strongly complements existing works on the Tudors and effectively illustrates the history-making role of the Dudley family in Tudor politics.

In short, Paul's *House of Dudley* captures and maintains the reader's interest from the outset, using well-known English history to explain the rise and fall of the Dudley family and using its lesser-known members to humanise the ascent and descent of the Tudor dynasty itself. Though one to be read in conjunction with other biographies of significant Tudor figures, Paul's narrative charm, use of primary sources in a new light, and attention to detail firmly establishes the importance of the Dudley family in the complex political and personal ties of Tudor England's domestic and international affairs.

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