

Charismatic, insatiable and cruel, Henry VIII was, as John Guy shows, a king who became mesmerized by his own legend – and in the process destroyed and remade England.

Said to be a ‘pillager of the commonwealth’, this most instantly recognizable of kings remains a figure of extreme contradictions: magnificent and vengeful; a devout traditionalist who oversaw a cataclysmic rupture with the church in Rome; a talented, towering figure who nevertheless could not bear to meet people’s eyes when he talked to them.

In this revealing new account, John Guy looks behind the mask into Henry’s mind to explore how he understood the world and his place in it – from his isolated upbringing and the blazing glory of his accession to his desperate quest for fame and an heir and the terrifying paranoia of his last, agonising, 54-inch-waisted years.