

Henry II, through a series of astonishing dynastic coups, became the ruler of an enormous European empire that stretched from the Channel almost to the Mediterranean.

One of the most dynamic, restless and clever men ever to rule England, he was brought down by his catastrophic relationship with his archbishop, Thomas Becket, and his debilitating arguments with his rebellious sons Richard and Geoffrey, and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

His empire may have ultimately collapsed, but in Richard Barber's vivid and sympathetic account we see why Henry II left such a compelling impression on his contemporaries. He creates a portrait of a man of great energy and learning, whose zeal for good government left a legacy that survives in Britain today, yet whose fiery temper and desire for control would ultimately destroy him.