

Battle of Barnet Easter Day, April 14th, 1471

Background

Edward, in power since 1461, had in 1470 been driven into exile when his main supporter, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, changed sides and restored Henry VI. Returning in March 1471, Edward seized London and Henry VI and then moved north to meet Warwick.

- Warwick arrived first and chose his positions on April 13th.
- Edward, with his brother the Duke of Gloucester (afterward King Richard III), arrived later that day and spent the night close to the enemy.
- During the night the Lancastrian cannons fired right behind the Yorkist positions. The night fog, heavy rainfall and the Yorkist campfires made calculating distance difficult. Neither side slept.
- The next morning a heavy fog covered the battlefield.
- Edward's forces attack first.
- The Earl of Oxford (Lancastrian) then attacks Edward's left flank (commanded by Hastings). It retreats and is chased off the battlefield and past Barnet.
- Oxford returns to the battlefield but as he marched through the fog, Montagu's (Duke of Somerset) men mistook his flag (a star with rays) for that of Edward IV (a rising sun) and opened fire.
- Oxford thought that whilst he was away from the battle, Montagu had changed sides, and shouted 'treason'.
- Richard Duke of Gloucester used the cover of the fog to cross Dead Man's Bottom and climbed a steep hill at the top of which he fought Exeter for two hours.
- Edwards middle flank advanced and many Lancastrians deserted and retreated unwilling to die for Warwick. Montagu (Warwick's brother) was killed.
- Warwick who had fought on foot to avert suspicion that he would desert his men, now fled towards Wrotham Wood, but was killed as he prepared to mount his horse.
- As Edward saw Warwick's body, he said "There lies the last of the barons."
- Fog and a lack of trust had given a great victory to the Yorkists, but their greatest joy was the death of the Earl of Warwick. For the time being Edward was able to relax as there was no longer any major player who could swing the pendulum of power to suit his own ends.

Later in the year, Margaret and Prince Edward were defeated at the Battle of Tewkesbury. Prince Edward was killed on the orders of George, Duke of Clarence. Henry VI was taken to the tower, where he died, believed to have been murdered. Edward IV was now safe on the throne.



