

The War of The Roses 1455-1485 (Cousins' War)

1453 may well have witnessed the end of the Hundred Years War but England now faced 30 years of civil war during which time powerful nobles were to fight each other for the ultimate prize - the throne of England.

What were the long term causes of the Wars of the Roses?

1. Dynastic Quarrels

- **Edward III** (1327-1377) had 7 sons and 5 daughters. He had divided much of England into dukedoms. This made some of his sons very powerful and influential. When he died he left **four sons**. However, the throne passed to **Richard II**, the son of the Black Prince (died 1376). The surviving sons were :- Lionel of Antwerp (Duke of Clarence) (3) ,**John of Gaunt (Duke of Lancaster)** (4) **Edmund of Langley (Duke of York)** (5) , Thomas of Woodstock (Duke of Gloucester), (7). Some disputed Richard II right to be king.
 - Even Edward III's daughters had married into noble families and created semi-royal families. By 1453, there were a large number of people who had some claim or other to the throne of England.
 - **Richard II** himself was later **deposed and murdered**. On his death, Henry of Bolingbroke (Henry IV) claimed the throne through his father John of Gaunt (Duke of Lancaster) and became the first Lancastrian king. Henry V, his son followed. 1413-1422. In 1422, Henry VI came to the throne.
 - However, **Richard, Duke of York** felt that he had a **stronger claim to the throne**. Although his father was only descended from Edward III's 5th son, (Edmund), his mother was descended through Edward III's 3rd son. (Lionel). He felt that Henry VI was not the rightful king as his grandfather had usurped the throne.
 - **Richard, Duke of York**, spent much of his time in exile in Ireland and at first appears to have been happy to bide his time. If Henry VI died without a male heir, then he would succeed to the throne.
2. **Henry VI** was a weak, inadequate, ineffective, petulant king. In 1445, he married **Margaret of Anjou**, a strong-minded French princess who completely dominated him.
3. England had lost **The Hundred Years War** and in 1453 all that remained in of Henry II's vast, French empire was **Calais**. Many saw **Henry VI's incompetence** along with **Margaret of Anjou's influence**, to blame for **the defeat**. Without the Hundred Years war to occupy them, nobles formed **private armies** (retainers) that they used to settle private feuds. Soldiers returning from the wars in France had no jobs and found employment as retainers. Each retainer wore the badge or livery of his master, in return the master agreed to look after the retainer. 'Livery and Maintenance'.

4. To add to this **taxation was high** and there was a **breakdown in law** and order. (Murder of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk who was suspected of selling England's defence secrets to the French and delaying troops sailing to France, Murder of Bishop of Salisbury, Murder of the Bishop of Chichester after an argument over soldiers back pay and Jack Cade's Rebellion).

Cade's Rebellion 1450 (Scholars only to read)

In June 1450 Jack Cade emerged as leader of a Kentish rebellion unhappy with the humiliating loss of the Hundred Years War and the high taxes and prices. He assumed the name John Mortimer, supported Richard Duke of York. Cade issued a manifesto (Complaint of the Commons of Kent) demanding the removal of several of the King's chief ministers and the recall of Richard. His forces defeated a royal army at Sevenoaks, Kent, on June 18th, and on July 3rd he entered London, where he executed the hated lord treasurer, James Fiennes, Lord Saye and Sele. Nevertheless, Cade's inability to control his supporters led to lawlessness which quickly alienated the Londoners, who drove the insurgents from the city on July 5-6. (repeat of Peasants' Revolt 1381). The government persuaded most of the rebels to disperse by offering them a pardon, but Cade continued his resistance. Wounded and captured near Lewes, Sussex, on July 12th, he died while being transported to London.

What were the Immediate Causes of the War of the Roses?

- In 1453, **Henry VI**, went mad. Parliament chose, the Duke of York to rule as Protector. Margaret of Anjou (Henry's VI's wife) hated York and wanted the Duke of Somerset elected Protector. York sent Somerset to prison in the Tower.
- Later in 1453, **Margaret gave birth to a son, Edward**. The Duke of York was no longer heir to the throne. Rumour even had it that it was the Duke of Somerset's son.
- Late in 1454, **Henry VI, recovered** from his madness, and Somerset was released.
- Margaret wanted to charge **Richard Duke of York with high treason**.
- **York felt** that he was in some **danger**. In May 1455, York and his supporters (Earl of Salisbury and Richard Neville the Earl of Warwick) **raised an army** and marched towards **St Albans**, outside London. York's army defeated the King and Somerset was killed.

The **first battle** of the Wars of the Roses had been fought. The Wars of the Roses is a modern term applied to a period of fighting that occurred between 1455 -1487. The total fighting time during this period was only about 15 months. The armies were fairly small apart from at the Battle of Towton, and relatively little harm was done in terms of material damage and loss of life. The heaviest casualties were among the leaders of both sides. The Yorkist emblem was the **white rose** and the Lancastrian the **red rose**.

The Wars of The Roses can be divided into three wars

- 1) 1455-1461 2) 1469-1471 3) 1483-1487



Henry VI



Edward IV



Margaret of Anjou

The Wars of the Roses Begin - First Period 1455-1461

- The shock of defeat caused **Henry VI** to suffer another **bout of madness**.
- **York** was once again **elected Protector**, much to the annoyance of Margaret.
- In 1459, **Henry VI recovered again**, **York** was dismissed, and it was Margaret who was ruling the country. She had never forgiven York for the death of Somerset and she wanted revenge. Parliament was summoned and by an Act of Attainder, York and all his supporters were **condemned to death** for treason. York and his supporters fearing for their lives fled England.
- In 1460, **two Yorkist invasions** took place. York invaded from Ireland and Warwick from France. Warwick defeated the Lancastrians at the **Battle of Northampton** (10th July, 1460) and captured Henry VI.
- Duke of York marched to London where he demanded to be crowned King. However, he did not get support and agreed to allow Henry to remain as King so long as he was named heir to the throne.
- On Dec 31st, 1460, Margaret defeated the Yorkist army at **Wakefield**. Richard, Duke of York was killed, his head cut off and a paper crown put on it.
- On 2 Feb, 1461, Edward, the 19 yr. old, new Duke of York defeated the Lancastrians at **Mortimer's Cross**. Edward had all captured Lancastrian nobles executed in retaliation for Wakefield.
- . At the **2nd Battle of St Albans** on 12 Feb. 1461, Warwick was defeated and Henry VI was released from prison.
- Warwick joined Edward, Duke of York and together they marched to London. Warwick had Edward crowned as King Edward IV.
- Margaret defeated at the Battle of **Towton** on 29th March, 1461. Margaret, Henry VI and their son managed to escape into Scotland.
- In 1464, Margaret invaded England with the help of a mainly Scots army.
- At the battles of Hexham and Hedgeley Moor, Warwick defeated Henry VI and Margaret.
- In 1465, Henry was betrayed and handed over to the Yorkists and placed in prison.

King Edward IV and Warwick the Kingmaker (Richard Neville).

- Edward IV was on the throne, with **support** he received from **Warwick** and the Nevilles.
- **Warwick** was **very powerful** and one observer even stated that "They tell me they have two rulers in England, Monsieur de Warwick is one; I have forgotten the name of the second"
- **Edward** was jealous of Warwick's power and popularity. Warwick was the power behind the throne for the first three years but Edward decided that he wanted to be **more independent**.
- Edward and Warwick realised that Foreign Policy and finding Edward a wife were vital.
- **Edward** favoured an **alliance** with **Flanders** that would protect the English wool trade.
- **Warwick** wanted an **alliance** with the powerful **French**. Warwick wanted Edward to marry a French Princess, Bona of Savoy, the sister in law of Louis XI of France. This would mean that the French would no longer shelter Lancastrians.
- **Edward ignored** Warwick's wishes and married **Elizabeth Woodville**. He then proceeded to shower Elizabeth's relatives and friends with gifts and titles.. Warwick was furious and he could see his power and influence disappearing before his eyes. All Warwick's efforts to make himself the most powerful man in England were falling apart.
- In order to **regain** the **upper hand** Warwick tried to arrange the **marriage** between his **daughter Isabella** and **George** (Duke of Clarence), **Edward IV's brother**. Edward IV could see what Warwick was up to and refused to allow the marriage to go ahead. This was the final straw for Warwick. He decided that he would teach Edward a lesson. After all hadn't it been him, the 'Kingmaker' who had made Edward king?
- In 1469 **Warwick** fled to **Calais** where the marriage took place. **Warwick** then invaded England and **captured Edward IV**. All Warwick wanted was a **pardon** and Edward IV was released.
- In 1470, Ed IV accused Warwick and Clarence of further plotting and they fled England.
- Whilst in exile Warwick met his rival Margaret of Anjou. Amazingly, despite what had happened in the past, a **marriage** was agreed between Margaret's youngest son, **Edward**, and Warwick's younger daughter **Anne**. Warwick was now the father in law of two potential kings. (George a Yorkist and Prince Edward a Lancastrian)
- With funds (46,000 gold crowns) and soldiers (2000) from Louis XI of France, **Warwick invaded England** landing at Dartmouth in Sept. 1470. Warwick marched to London and Edward IV fled to Flanders. Henry VI was released from the Tower after 5 years in prison. Parliament declared Warwick and George '**Lieutenants of the Realm**'.
- George, Duke of Clarence thought Warwick would place him on the throne. However, Warwick put his support behind Henry VI. George was an alcoholic wife beater.
- In 1471, Edward IV (with the help of Duke of Burgundy) invaded England. He was joined by Clarence who had deserted Warwick when Henry VI was placed on the throne.
- At the **Battle of Barnet** on 14th April 1471, Warwick was defeated and killed.

After the Kingmaker

- Margaret then invaded but was defeated at the **Battle of Tewkesbury** on the 10th May 1471. Edward, Prince of Wales was killed and Margaret was captured. (4 years in prison then ransomed to King of France)
- Henry VI was returned to the Tower, where he died under suspicious circumstances. Official reports of the time said he died "of pure displeasure and melancholy".
- Edward was now in control. All Lancastrian rivals had been eliminated, except 14 year old, **Henry Tudor**, who had escaped to Brittany after the Battle of Tewkesbury.
- From 1471 to 1483, when Edward IV died, England was relatively peaceful.

Edward V

- Edward IV left the throne to his 12 year old son Edward V. Edward wanted Richard Duke of Gloucester to be the children's protector.
- At the time of Edward IV's death the Princes were in the custody of the Woodville family. Richard distrusted them and acted quickly. Some Woodvilles were arrested and later executed.
- Richard, Duke of Gloucester, persuaded Parliament to make him Regent. Richard then took charge of Edward and his younger brother Richard. What happened to them is as yet unknown but the rumour of the death of the two Princes in the Tower is well known.
- Richard claimed that Edward V's claim to the throne was illegal because his father had broken a previous contract of betrothal. Richard persuaded Parliament to illegitimise both the princess and their sister Elizabeth of York. This barred them from the throne (Titulus Regius)

Richard III 1483-1485

- In July 1483, Richard was crowned King. (Richard III).
- Richard III was certainly an ambitious and ruthless man, but his reputation was definitely damaged by Tudor writers and in particular William Shakespeare.
- On August 7th 1485, Henry Tudor landed at Milford Haven. He marched through Wales gaining support.
- On 21st August 1485, Richard and Henry fought at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Richard was killed and the crown passed to the Lancastrian Henry.