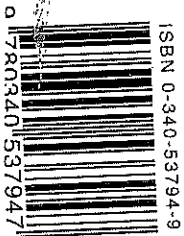
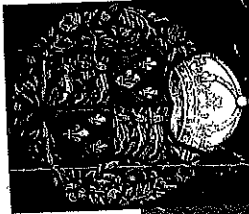


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basis for everything the historian says. It is important to answer the questions that follow each document so that its significance becomes clear and the points being made in the text are linked, supported – or amended according to your own interpretation.

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THE WARS OF THE ROSES



Richard III, anon.

1 INTRODUCTION

The appeal of the Tudors

Thou elvish – marked, abortive and rooting hog! . . .
Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb!
Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins!
Thou rag of honour! . . .

(*William Shakespeare, Richard III Act 1, Scene III*)

THE reputation of certain English kings is so notorious that they are familiar even to those with no serious interest in history. One such figure is Richard III. His image as the evil hunchback who murdered his

nephews, seized the throne and was then killed at Bosworth Field in 1485, is secure in our national mythology. Richard's notoriety seems strange. Many kings have been accused of murder and died violent deaths and they are not widely remembered.

It is not in fact difficult to establish why such controversy surrounds Richard III. First of all, William Shakespeare drew an unforgettable portrait of him as a tormented hunchback which may not bear much resemblance to his looks or deeds, but is familiar to countless people who have never read a serious history book. The quotation with which this book opens illustrates the venom constantly directed at Richard III by Shakespeare.

Richard's overthrow led to the establishment of the Tudor dynasty, which ruled the country until 1603. Henry Tudor, who became Henry VII, had a very questionable claim to the throne and his family needed to have the legitimacy of their right to rule established. One obvious way was to blacken Richard III's name and reputation. Tudor historians, such as Polydore Vergil and Sir Thomas More, were not paid government propagandists, but they certainly understood the need to justify the current regime.

For different reasons, historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to attach great importance to 1485. It came to be seen as the turning point between the medieval and modern worlds. In particular, it was in the sixteenth century that the English Church became free from control by the Pope. Moreover, the Tudors were an unusually talented dynasty. Henry VIII and Elizabeth I are amongst England's best known rulers. Events such as the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 have associated the Tudors with some of the more stirring episodes in English history. More recently historians have become interested in the extent to which policies and practices of the Tudors were based on their Yorkist and Lancastrian predecessors.

The problem of the fifteenth century

Traditionally historians have neglected the fifteenth century in favour of the sixteenth century. Until the 1950s it was usually portrayed as a dark period of endless civil war – the so called 'Wars of the Roses', which followed the humiliating loss of the Hundred Years War against France. In contrast, it was argued that Henry VII established a 'new monarchy' in England which brought stable and effective government to the country. Historians were further put off by the lack of good contemporary sources. The century did not produce many historians and this leads to excessive reliance on official documents which are dry and often difficult to use.

Over the last thirty years, however, professional historians have shown a growing interest in the fifteenth century. J R Lander challenged existing assumptions after a close examination of the official

records. Amongst his 'revisionist' arguments was that the amount of fighting in the Wars of the Roses was actually very small and that in this supposedly barbaric century the English peasantry achieved a degree of prosperity not to be equalled for another three centuries.

It has also become common to view Edward IV, who ruled the country for nearly twenty-five years, and Henry VII as men with similar aims and methods. The fall of the house of York and the establishment of the Tudor dynasty after 1485 can, on the basis of this view, be seen as no more than a change of personnel. By extension it becomes difficult to see 1485 as the beginning of some ill-defined 'modern' age.

Many of the revisionist arguments of historians, such as Lander, are now accepted. No historian would now deny the limited effect of the Wars of the Roses on much of the population. The relative prosperity of the peasantry is also accepted and the Church is certainly no longer seen as decadent and in desperate need of reform. This does not mean that the debate is over; it has simply become more refined and sophisticated.

For example, Charles Ross, the author of the standard modern biography of Edward IV, argues that Edward's reputation has risen too far. He may have been far superior to the inept Henry VI, but he was impulsive and over-confident. For Ross, Edward was neither as ingenious, nor as ruthless, nor as consistent as Henry VII.

Other recent historians such as Alexander Grant and A J Pollard agree that there is now too much stress on the continuity between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They argue that between the 1450s and 1480s the monarchy was weaker than at any time since 1066. Henry VI, Edward V and Richard III all lost the throne during this period, while Edward IV was temporarily dethroned. After 1485 there may have been many rebellions, but all of them failed. Henry VII's great achievement, therefore, was to restore dynastic and governmental stability after a period of chaos. In this sense 1485 was to be a turning point.

Outline of the Wars of the Roses

The Wars of the Roses lasted from the early 1450s until 1487. There was only sporadic violence and the symbolism of the White Rose of York and the Red Rose of Lancaster which Shakespeare utilised so effectively, would not have been familiar to contemporaries.

Indeed, there is a case for arguing that there were four very distinct episodes, each of which had its own causes and did not necessarily directly relate to previous events. In 1455, there was a skirmish at St Albans. Between 1459-61, there was serious fighting, leading to the bloody battle of Towton and the overthrow of Henry VI by Edward IV. Further conflict between 1469-71 saw the temporary return of Henry VI and the eventual triumph of Edward IV. In 1485, Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at Bosworth Field and then survived the final military challenge to his throne at Stoke in 1487.

Major Battles of the Wars of the Roses

- May 1455: St Albans – Yorkist victory
- September 1459: Blore Heath – Indecisive
- October 1459: Ludford Bridge – Lancastrian victory
- July 1460: Northampton – Yorkist victory
- December 1460: Wakefield – Lancastrian victory
- February 1461: Mortimer's Cross – Yorkist victory
- February 1461: St Albans – Lancastrian victory
- March 1461: Towton – Yorkist Victory
(Edward IV wins the throne)
- July 1469: Edgecote – Lancastrian/Neville victory
- March 1470: Lose-Coat Field – Yorkist victory
(October 1470: Re-adeption of Henry VI)
- April 1471: Barnet – Yorkist victory
- May 1471: Tewkesbury – Yorkist victory
(Return of Edward IV)
- August 1485: Bosworth Field – Tudor/Lancastrian victory
(Henry VII wins the throne)
- June 1487: Stoke – Tudor victory

Two separate issues need to be examined. First of all the events that brought about the overthrow of Henry VI, Edward IV and Richard III. Second any general causes that underlay the instability of this period must be established.

2 HENRY VI AND THE CRISIS OF THE 1450S

Henry VI was one of the most unfortunate and unsuccessful of English monarchs. The circumstances of his birth suggested otherwise. His father, Henry V, had destroyed the French army at Agincourt in 1415 and established a huge English empire in France. The Treaty of Troyes (1420) made Henry V heir to the French throne and the French King's daughter became his wife.

Henry VI inherited this vast empire in 1422, but within thirty-five years Lancastrian power in France was confined to the port of Calais and English rule was never to return. It would be easy simply to blame

Henry VI for these catastrophic disasters. It certainly did not help the English that Henry V's death (31 August 1422) followed the birth of his son (6 December 1421) by only a few months. However, the government of the country during Henry VI's childhood was relatively stable and competent and the English were able to maintain their grip in France.

France was a much more populous and wealthy country than England and English influence was always likely to decline if a stronger and more capable French government emerged. Despite the coronation of Henry VI as King of France at Paris in 1431, the French claimant to the throne, Charles VII, began to consolidate his position in the 1430s. The English had always depended for their success on alliance with the Dukes of Brittany and Burgundy. The Dukes of Burgundy were wealthy and powerful rulers who controlled much of eastern France and the Low Countries. In 1435, the French and Burgundians allied. The destruction of the Lancastrian empire in France was now simply a matter of time.

Nonetheless, Henry VI's reaction to these events was inept. By 1437, he had taken personal control of the government of the country. His marriage, in 1445, to Margaret of Anjou, was a typical error. She brought with her no dowry (land or money) and, therefore, no political benefit to the English Crown. Despite the lingering reputation of military invincibility, by August 1450 Normandy was lost to the King of France.

Even more devastating was the collapse of English power in Gascony in the south-west of France. This had belonged to the English monarchy for 300 years, but in July 1451 Bordeaux fell to the French. Dissident Gascons invited the English back the next year and an army was sent under the veteran Sir John Falbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, the most able and feared English-General. In July 1453 his army was utterly defeated at Castillon and he was killed. The Hundred Years War had ended in ignominious defeat. Only Calais remained of the English possessions in France.

It would be absurd to blame Henry VI entirely for this. It might even be argued that the campaigns of his father had been foolish and ill-conceived and that it was unrealistic for England to challenge France. But Henry VI can possibly be blamed for the devastating rapidity and finality of the French victory. Traditionally war with France had been a popular policy in England, which was invariably supported by Parliament. The completeness of the English defeat was a devastating blow. With the exception of Calais, the coastline facing England was now in enemy hands and there was growing fear of French raids. To compound the problem in the summer of 1453 Henry suffered a complete nervous breakdown, possibly caused by defeat at Castillon.

Defeat in France was not Henry's only problem. Another major source of complaint was his method of governing the country. It was

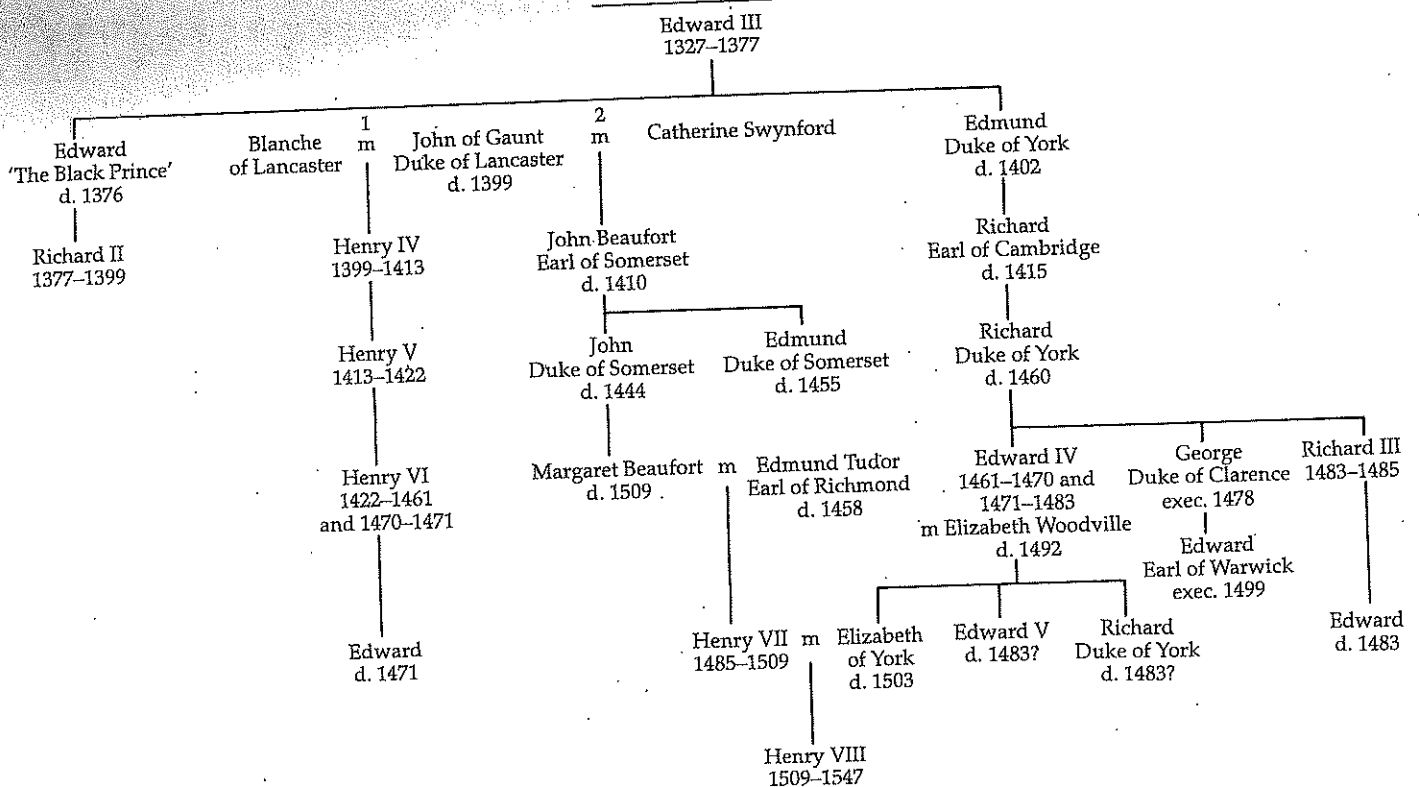
essential that any monarch should attempt to gain support and popularity from all sections of the aristocracy, on whom he was so dependent for assistance in governing the country. There were few paid royal servants and the aristocracy was the main agent of government in the provinces. The main technique for gaining their support was the use of patronage. This meant no more than the distribution of titles, land, and government office to the great landowners of the realm. In return, they would enforce royal authority in the shires and provide manpower for the king.

It was essential that patronage should be distributed evenly and fairly. It was in this task that Henry proved singularly inept. In the 1440s he came to rely on a small group of favourites attached to the Royal Household. In particular, he favoured the Beaufort family. They were of royal blood and descended from John of Gaunt, Edward III's third son. Originally, their line was illegitimate, but the family was legitimised in 1397 and quickly became prominent. By the 1440s the Beaufort family, who became Dukes of Somerset, had accumulated vast amounts of patronage and influence. Even more important was the Duke of Suffolk. He owed his ascendancy to his influence over the King. He and his close allies, Adam Meleyns and Lord Saye and Sele were given land, money and office by the King in a thoughtless and extravagant fashion. They became particularly prominent in East Anglia and the South-East. It seemed that the only criterion for gaining royal patronage was to be a member of the King's Household.

This might not have mattered if these had been men of ability, but they were mostly closely associated with the disastrous events in France. In particular, Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, was - with some justice - held responsible for the defeats in Normandy. At home there was further strong criticism of these men. The support of the aristocracy was vital if law and order was to be maintained in the shires. Quite often rival families would contest for power and influence. A growing number of people began to believe that the King's Household was unduly favoured and that royal justice was being manipulated in the interests of a faction. Lord Saye and Sele, for example, was entrusted with vast amounts of land and influence in Kent by the King. He became Constable of Dover Castle and Warden of the Cinque Ports. The county, however, was notorious for its disorder and Henry was blamed for this. Ralph Griffiths summarises Henry's failings excellently in his biography:

To ensure social stability and public order, a circumspect government needed to avoid antagonising prominent magnates. Wise, and as far as politics allowed, impartial patronage was the key to regional control. This is precisely what Suffolk's regime did not appreciate.

Rival Royal Houses



3 OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT 1450-53

The great favours granted to the house of Beaufort were bound to offend other families of royal blood. By far the most important was the family of Richard, Duke of York. He was descended from the second son of Edward III and was one of the greatest landowners in the country. His estates were widely scattered throughout England and also in Ireland. He was particularly well endowed with land on the Welsh borders.

Richard was ten years older than Henry and there seems always to have been some mutual antagonism. In July 1440, he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Normandy for five years. There is no evidence that he made much of what was admittedly a very difficult position. It is clear that Henry favoured the Beauforts over him and that Richard left his position owed a large amount of money by the Crown. He was then sent to Ireland for ten years to recover lands lost to the Irish, further emphasising his isolation from the centre of affairs. It seemed likely that Henry would choose a Beaufort in preference to him as his successor should he remain childless.

As for Parliament at this time, it was the King's servant and generally very obedient. The King could summon and dismiss Parliament entirely at his own convenience and parliamentary (or statute) law gave authority to royal policies. However, under normal circumstances, the King was expected to 'live of his own' on the revenues of his own estates and customs dues which were traditionally granted for life. Additional taxation had to be approved by Parliament and this was rarely possible, except for a popular military campaign.

The Parliament which assembled in November 1449 was not compliant. The disastrous situation in France was becoming clear, while foreign trade was at a standstill thanks to an embargo by Philip, Duke of Burgundy. This reduced cloth exports to the Low-Countries, which were the basis of English wealth, by one-third.

Parliament blamed these disasters on the clique which surrounded Henry VI. The Duke of Suffolk was sent to the Tower. He was released in May 1450 and then murdered as he went into exile. His close supporter, Adam Moleyns, had already been murdered the previous January by unpaid and mutinous soldiers at Portsmouth.

Finally, a genuinely popular rebellion broke out in Kent. Disaffection was understandable in this part of England; there was a growing fear of French invasion and trade with the Low Countries had virtually ceased. Kent was a county with a large number of independent farmers, who were not closely dependent on a particular lord, and there was resentment at the patronage granted to Lord Saye and Sele, one of Henry's most unpopular supporters.

The rebellion broke out in May 1450 under the leadership of Jack Cade who claimed to be connected with the family of Richard of York.

The rebels' demands were very specific: first of all that the King's Council should include all the great aristocrats of the country and second they supported Parliament in demanding Acts of Resumption. Acts of Resumption would return to the King all lands that he had granted to his supporters. In this way he would be able to live of his own and would require no parliamentary taxation. A first Act of Resumption was passed in May 1450, but a mob still executed Lord Saye and Sele in July after Henry had fled from London.

There is no evidence that the Duke of York inspired Jack Cade's rebellion. Moreover, despite the King's weakness, his wife, Margaret of Anjou, proved a formidable figure and helped to organise the dispersal of the rebels. But Richard of York did return in September 1450 from Ireland. He was not seeking the Crown, but he wanted to consolidate his position as heir to the throne. He also resented Henry's continued favouritism towards his rival, the Duke of Somerset.

Despite its problems, Henry's regime survived. In part this reflects the power of the monarchy in the fifteenth century. A man like Richard of York may have associated himself with popular discontent, but was clearly essentially a self-interested and disappointed intriguer. Henry also now asserted himself more effectively than ever before in his reign. Parliamentary grievances were responded to by a second and more effective Act of Resumption later in 1450. Henry also made a concerted effort to deal with problems of law and order at a time when, throughout the country, violence was believed to be increasing dramatically. In 1451, he toured Kent and in 1452/3 there were further tours to other areas in which he acted as judge and used his power and influence to enforce the law.

Richard of York did mount a half-hearted conspiracy, but was forced to back down in March 1452. By 1453, the restoration of royal authority was so complete that a Parliament at Reading voted sufficient funds to raise 20 000 men to re-conquer France.

4 ROYAL MADNESS AND THE DRIFT TO CIVIL WAR 1453-59

The events of 1449-53 demonstrated the weaknesses of Henry's government. The war in France, the favouritism towards a small circle of courtiers, the irresponsible distribution of land and office, and the failure to maintain order had caused a sustained challenge to royal authority. But, by early 1453 it seemed not inconceivable that Sir John Talbot would re-conquer Gascony, the most unpopular royal servants were dead, and Richard of York could be seen as no less selfish than his aristocratic rivals. Acts of Resumption had been passed and the King had toured the south of England in a fairly successful attempt to restore order.

Contd.

Two events shattered this progress. In August 1453, news arrived of the disaster at Castillon, which destroyed for ever the chance of re-establishing an English empire in France. At the same time, and possibly as a direct result, Henry VI suffered a complete breakdown which lasted for eighteen months. Certain diagnosis of his condition is of course impossible, but it seems likely that it was some form of schizophrenia. For the rest of his life, his mental health was always fragile.

The incapacity of the King meant that government of the country had to be re-organised with some urgency. A further complicating factor was the birth of an heir to the throne, Prince Edward, in October 1453. Margaret of Anjou possessed the energy and strength of character that her husband increasingly lacked. Her determination to ensure that their son succeeded Henry as king was to be at the centre of the struggle for power over the next two decades.

Richard of York was an obvious candidate to become Protector, but there were other claimants, such as the Duke of Exeter and Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset. Success in the struggle for power would depend on the attitude of the other great aristocrats. Most important of these was Richard Neville, who became Earl of Warwick in 1449. The Nevilles had risen to prominence largely by virtue of their ability to produce children and make successful marriages to great heiresses. Originally their power was concentrated in the north of England. The North was thinly populated and economically backward compared with the South. The need, however, to defend the border against the raids of the Scots created a warlike atmosphere and a large number of experienced fighting men. It was the policy of the government to give responsibility for defence of the border to the local aristocratic families.

Traditionally the Percy family had been dominant, but they had rebelled against Henry IV and by 1450 the Nevilles surpassed their influence, especially in Yorkshire. The Nevilles' great castle at Middleham, in north Yorkshire and their possession of large estates gave them a loyal following. In particular, many retainers attached themselves to the Nevilles. A retainer agreed a contract, or indenture, with a great lord and agreed to serve him in return for his patronage and protection.

Richard Neville's marriage to Anne Beauchamp, heiress to the Earl of Warwick brought him great estates throughout England. In 1453, he was disputing possession of the lordship of Glamorgan with the Duke of Somerset, to whom it had been granted by Henry.

Neville's grievances against Somerset and Henry ensured that he would support Richard of York. In November 1453, Somerset was sent to the Tower and on 27 March 1454 Richard of York was finally appointed Protector and Defender of the Kingdom of England and Chief Councillor of the King.

York did not govern the country badly, but he could not pretend to have the support of all the great aristocrats. In particular, the Duke of Somerset and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, were bound to be foes of a Yorkist/Neville alliance and Margaret of Anjou would be suspicious that Richard of York sought the throne.

Everything was thrown into confusion by the recovery of Henry by Christmas 1454. Somerset was released from prison and restored to the vital position of Captain of Calais which gave him control of a garrison of 1000 men. York and Warwick (Richard Neville) fled to the North and were then summoned to a Great Council at Leicester in May 1455. The estates of the house of Lancaster were concentrated in this area of the Midlands, which increasingly became the centre of royal power.

The reaction of York and Warwick was to raise an army and the two sides met at St Albans on 22 May 1455. This was a skirmish rather than a battle with only a few casualties. But two of the dead were Somerset and Northumberland.

St Albans may have seemed a triumph for Richard of York and some benefits were gained. The Earl of Warwick became Captain of Calais and turned it into a Yorkist stronghold. For a few months between November 1455 and February 1456 Richard again acted as Protector as Henry, presumably, relapsed into insanity.

But there is no evidence of widespread support for the Yorkists and Nevilles. Indeed, they had shed blood and earned the hostility of many other peers. Moreover, Henry may have been in serious decline, but Margaret of Anjou was a formidable and determined antagonist, anxious to protect her son's right to the throne.

The years between 1455 and the outbreak of serious fighting in 1459 are not well documented by contemporary historians and the pattern is not always clear. Some attempts were made to reconcile the opposing factions. In March 1458, there was a 'Loveday' when the victors of the Battle of St Albans met the sons of the men who had been killed and performed a public act of reconciliation.

This seems to have been an isolated incident. More important was the exclusion of the Yorkists and Nevilles from government. The Earl of Warwick used his base at Calais to raise funds by piracy, while York withdrew to his estates. Meanwhile, Margaret of Anjou increasingly governed the country from the Midlands, where there was the greatest concentration of Lancastrian estates. The city of Coventry was her main base. Coventry was a centre of clothmaking and the fourth largest city in the country; its population was loyal to the King. The move to Coventry suggested a lack of confidence amongst the Lancastrians that they could be sure of the loyalty of the people of London and of those aristocrats who were not their personal followers.

In the summer of 1459, a Lancastrian council at Coventry finally decided to accuse the Yorkists and Nevilles of treason. Their response was to raise armies. Richard of York raised a force in the Welsh

Why Nevilles
were for York

Marches while the Nevilles drew on their strength in north Yorkshire and Calais. After a skirmish at Blore Heath, they moved to Ludlow and shadowed by a larger royal army. The troops from Calais were led by Andrew Trollope, an able veteran of the wars in France. They were shocked to discover that they were expected to fight the King and changed sides. York and Warwick had no option but to abandon the struggle. On the night of 12 October with the armies drawn up at Ludford they decided to flee; York escaped to Ireland and Warwick returned to Calais.

The rebels had attracted very little support, but their resources were so vast that this had not really mattered. Understandably Margaret of Anjou was determined to follow up the Lancastrian triumph. A Parliament was summoned to Coventry known to Yorkists as the Parliament of Devils. Acts of Attainder were passed against the rebels. This legal procedure effectively combined an accusation of treason with the loss of civil rights. The Yorkists and Nevilles were faced with permanent legal condemnation and the confiscation of their estates. Inevitably they would try to reverse this situation.

5 THE FIRST WARS 1459-61

These two years saw the most sustained fighting of the Wars of the Roses. In June 1460 after consulting with Richard of York in Dublin, Warwick landed in Kent. Accompanied by York's son, the Earl of March (the future Edward IV), he marched to Northampton where the Lancastrian army was defeated and the hapless King captured. The Yorkists then marched to London and summoned a Parliament to meet in October. Its main purpose, of course, would be to reverse the Acts of Attainder.

However, when Richard of York returned to England for the first time he laid claim to the throne. There is no evidence that this had always been his aim. Indeed, he seems to have surprised his closest supporters. It was agreed that he should succeed Henry VI on the latter's death.

This was an unworkable compromise and particularly unacceptable to Margaret of Anjou whose son would be denied the throne. Further fighting was inevitable. In December at Wakefield Richard of York and Warwick's father, the Earl of Salisbury, were killed. In February 1461 there was a Yorkist victory under the leadership of Edward (now Duke of York) at Mortimer's Cross but it was cancelled out by defeat for Warwick at the second Battle of St Albans and the recovery of Henry VI by his supporters.

Margaret of Anjou now had Henry as her figurehead and a clear road to London. She failed to seize this outstanding opportunity and withdrew to the North. This seems an inexplicable decision, but her

army had mainly been recruited in the North and Yorkist propaganda had convinced the population of London that a band of uncontrollable barbarians was approaching the city. It was, therefore, likely that the Lancastrians would be resisted.

This hesitancy enabled Warwick and Edward of York to seize London and in March 1461 Edward was proclaimed King. Edward IV was a formidable opponent for the Lancastrians. His energy and appearance - he was a notably handsome man and well over 6 feet tall - contrasted starkly with the enfeebled Henry VI. He quickly raised an army and marched to meet the Lancastrians.

By far the bloodiest battle of the Wars of the Roses took place at Tewkesbury near Pontefract in south Yorkshire on 28/9 March 1461. Estimates of the numbers involved in battles of this period are notoriously unreliable, but the armies at Tewkesbury were certainly huge by the standards of the day and may have reached 25 000. The battle was fought in a blizzard and brought complete victory to Edward IV. Margaret of Anjou and Prince Edward fled to Scotland.

Until his capture and imprisonment by the Yorkists in 1465, Henry VI wandered as a fugitive in northern England. He has been treated harshly by historians. There is no evidence of mental instability before 1453, but he did govern the country through a coterie of favourites and showed no sensitivity in his dealings with the Yorkists and Nevilles. Great aristocrats expected great influence, especially if they had royal blood, and this was repeatedly denied Richard of York. After 1453 it was Margaret of Anjou who was the effective leader of the Lancastrian cause and Henry became a mere figurehead. The degree of Henry's personal responsibility for the outbreak of war has been much debated. How far others were to blame and how far the wars reflected weaknesses in the social and political system will be discussed later in this chapter.

6 EDWARD IV: THE EARLY YEARS 1461-69

Edward had the appearance and physical dynamism of a true king. His record has been much debated. He undoubtedly made serious mistakes leading to the loss of the throne between 1469-71. His methods of government, especially after 1471, anticipate the vigorous and effective approach of Henry VII. On the other hand much of his success appears to be the result of good luck rather than wise policies and his failure to secure the peaceful accession to the throne of his son after his death must be accounted a great failure.

Edward started his reign facing major problems. In the words of his biographer, Charles Ross, 'Tewkesbury had discredited but not destroyed the Lancastrian cause'. Margaret of Anjou and Prince Edward would be invaluable figureheads for any foreign power or discontented aristocrat.

crat who wished to challenge the King. There were still Lancastrian strongholds in remote corners of the kingdom. In Northumberland Lancastrians retained control of Alnwick, Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh castles. Twice they were driven out only to return until their final defeat in the summer of 1464. Harlech Castle remained in Lancastrian hands until 1468.

What rewards Warwick had received.

In order to retain the throne, Edward needed broad based aristocratic support. The Earl of Warwick's reputation as the 'Kingmaker' is something of an exaggeration; he was less successful in battle than Edward. But his influence was still vast. In the South, he was Captain of Calais, Constable of Dover Castle, and Warden of the Cinque Ports. In the North, Warwick now held the Wardenships of both the eastern and western Marches on the Scottish border for the Neville family and so had sole responsibility for the defence of northern England against the Scots. The gentry of north Yorkshire provided a strongly loyal band of personal retainers with a tradition of violence.

upheaval due to his marriage partner.

During the 1460s, Warwick became estranged from Edward IV. This was partly a consequence of his arrogance and ambition and dislike of other courtiers, such as Sir William (later Lord) Hastings who was Edward IV's most loyal supporter. Edward was, however, the sole author of some of his difficulties. In particular, his marriage was a crucial and avoidable error. Romantic considerations played no part in the marriages of fifteenth-century kings and aristocrats. A well chosen bride could bring a beneficial foreign alliance, or valuable land and wealth. The power of the Nevilles was based above all on their marriages to wealthy heiresses. In April 1464, Edward IV married Elizabeth Woodville. He was an impulsive and sensual man, and it does seem that romantic considerations determined his decision. Although Elizabeth Woodville's mother, Jacquetta of Luxembourg, came from a great European aristocratic family, her father, the first Earl Rivers, was a minor aristocrat, and the new Queen with her family were disdained as upstarts.

The marriage was to bring Edward no political or economic benefits. The great magnates of the realm had not been consulted at a time when Warwick was actively negotiating a French marriage alliance and he was entitled to feel aggrieved. A further cause of grievance was the huge Woodville family. Elizabeth had two sons, five brothers and seven sisters. The simplest way to advance their position was to find wealthy marriage partners for them. This cut across the Earl of Warwick's own ambitions. He had two daughters, Isabel and Ann, and wanted suitable husbands for them. Edward IV seems to have opposed Warwick's plan for Isabel to marry his younger brother, the Duke of Clarence. There was also a growing division over foreign policy between the King and Warwick. Warwick favoured an alliance with France, while Edward IV and the Woodvilles looked to Burgundy. The Low Countries, ruled by the Dukes of Burgundy, were the most important

market for English cloth and economically crucial. Yet French politics were universally popular and it does seem that Edward's strategy was sounder than Warwick's. In 1467 a trade treaty was signed with Burgundy and Edward's sister, Margaret of York, married Charles of Burgundy. Warwick's own negotiations with Louis XI of France failed completely and his brother George Neville, the Archbishop of York, was dismissed as Chancellor. Warwick retreated to the North and used his influence amongst his retainers to foment uprisings against Edward. Meanwhile, his daughter, Isabel was married to the Duke of Clarence, Edward's volatile and untrustworthy younger brother.

did not use his reputation

7 POLITICAL CRISIS 1469-71

The next two years saw a return to political chaos. Warwick and Clarence initially used Calais as a base. On their return to England they quickly gathered support, many were attracted by Warwick's habitual and calculated generosity. Victory at Edgecote (26 July 1469) was followed by the capture of Edward IV and the ruthless execution of two Woodvilles, Lord Rivers and Sir John Woodville.

Warwick's lack of widespread aristocratic and popular support was soon exposed. He was forced to release Edward from Middleham Castle. Edward took steps to counter Warwick's influence in the North, by restoring Henry Beaufort to the Earldom of Northumberland and returning many of his family estates lost after rebellion fifty years previously. Edward next returned to London in October 1469. Neither side was strong enough to defeat the other and uneasy stalemate ensued.

Warwick now proclaimed the Duke of Clarence as his candidate for the throne. They inspired a rising in Lincolnshire in March 1470, but it was easily suppressed by Edward at 'Lose Coat' Field and in May 1470 they fled to France.

Louis XI of France was nicknamed 'the universal spider' and was a cunning and unprincipled intriguer. It was he who inspired a most unlikely alliance between Warwick and Margaret of Anjou at Angers in July 1470. They agreed to restore Henry VI and marry Prince Edward (Henry's son) to Ann, Warwick's younger daughter.

In September 1470, Warwick landed in Devon. He was joined by Clarence and Jasper Tudor, who was the staunchest supporter of the Beaufortian cause. Edward IV has been accused of complacency in the face of these events, but he was unavoidably detained by continued disaffection in Yorkshire. What is strange is the speed with which his authority collapsed. This can be partially explained by the defection of John, Marquis of Montagu, who was Warwick's brother and had lost both land and influence as a result of the restoration of the Percies.

In October, Edward was forced to flee virtually penniless to the Low Countries. In the legal phraseology of the day the 're-adeption' of Henry VI followed. Henry's new regime was always unstable. The Lancastrians and Nevilles were only united in their opposition to Edward IV, while the Duke of Clarence had gained little power and patronage from his selfish actions. In order to survive, Henry needed a vigour and unity which he was unlikely to find. He also needed an effective foreign policy for it was only with foreign help that Edward could return.

Charles the Bold of Burgundy was a wealthy and ambitious ruler married to Edward IV's sister. He was naturally worried by Warwick's links with France and the political debts that the Lancastrians owed to Louis XI. In 1471, Henry VI's government made a treaty with France and looked set to fight Burgundy. This was neither a popular, nor a sensible policy. Burgundy was England's greatest trading partner and popular opinion was always anti-French. Charles of Burgundy's response was to give Edward 50,000 florins and some ships.

On 14 March 1471, Edward landed at Ravenspur on the Yorkshire coast. Initially, he found little support, but at least Henry Percy remained neutral and did not hinder him. Edward now displayed his undisputed qualities of boldness and energy. He claimed to be only concerned with recovering his duchy and built up a following from the vast estates of his close ally Lord Hastings in the Midlands. He was joined by the unreliable Clarence who had gained little from Warwick and the Lancastrians.

Edward marched straight to London. If he gained control of London, it would be hard to dislodge him and it is significant that the citizens who consistently seemed to have favoured Edward over Henry admitted him without a struggle. On Easter Sunday (14 April) Edward's forces joined battle with Warwick's at Barnet. In a confused encounter in fog Warwick and Montagu were killed and the power of the Nevilles was broken.

Meanwhile, a Lancastrian army landed at Weymouth and, hearing of Warwick's defeat, began to march to Wales where the Lancastrians had a strong following. Edward IV again showed his decisiveness as a military leader and marched rapidly west. At Tewkesbury on 4 May the Lancastrians were crushed and Prince Edward, the real hope of the Lancastrian dynasty, was killed. On Edward's return to London Henry VI was almost certainly murdered in the Tower.

Edward's recovery of the throne owed something to good luck, but he must be given great credit for seizing the initiative and taking well-calculated risks. Although there was some sporadic activity by Lancastrians over the next two years, there was now no really convincing Lancastrian claimant to the throne. Henry Tudor, who became the most active Lancastrian leader had only a remote claim and there seemed no reason why the Yorkist line should not establish itself permanently.

Edward IV was still a young and vigorous man in 1471. He quickly adopted a conciliatory policy towards his former opponents. There were only thirteen Acts of Attainder, six of which applied to the estates of dead men. Twenty-three earlier attainders were reversed. Able men, who had served the Lancastrian cause, entered Edward's service. A good example was John Morton. He had followed Margaret of Anjou into exile, but by 1478 was both Master of the Rolls (a leading judge) and Bishop of Ely; he later became one of Henry VII's most trusted servants. Special favour was given to Edward's younger brother, Richard of Gloucester. He succeeded Warwick as Great Chamberlain of England (controller of state occasions) and in 1471 was given Warwick's estates in the North. Richard's marriage to Warwick's daughter, Ann Neville, confirmed him as the King's representative in the North and the inheritor of Warwick's great influence.

Edward's government of the country in these years has been closely scrutinised by historians. Many of his actions have been seen as the precursors of the so called 'new monarchy' of Henry VII so that continuity of aims, methods, and personnel between the two men is now often stressed. It is perhaps hardly surprising that two men with similar problems adopted similar policies. It is also clear that no grand strategy lay behind Edward's methods of government. He had no conscious political philosophy, but simply a desire to govern more efficiently.

Wales

Although the government of England was relatively centralised compared to that of many European countries, effective government of the more remote regions remained difficult. (This is dealt with in depth in Chapter XII 'The Frontier Regions'.) The whole of Wales had been conquered by the English only relatively recently and its administration was particularly confused. The remote north and west had been divided into shires, but the border between Wales and England was still ruled by the Marcher Lords. 'March' simply means border and in this traditionally violent region, all powers of law and administration had been delegated to the Marcher Lords and the King's authority was only nominal.

Edward IV was himself a great Marcher Lord and in 1471 he created the Council in the Marches primarily to administer his own estates. But it was also necessary to combat the lawlessness of an area where no single authority responsible for law and order existed. In 1473, it was decided that the Prince of Wales should live in Ludlow in the heart of the Marches and his council became the centre of royal authority. Power was gradually consolidated in the hands of this council in

Ludlow. In 1476, the Prince of Wales was given extensive legal powers in Wales and the Marches by what was known as a General Commission of Oyer and Terminer. In 1477 he was given direct control of the Earldom of March and in 1479 of the Earldom of Pembroke.

Edward's policy was no more than a series of improvisations dictated as much by the need to find a role for his son as by any desire to improve the administration of the area. He was not prepared to abolish the Marcher lordships and create new shires as eventually happened in the reign of Henry VIII. The Prince's household was run by a Woodville, Anthony, Earl Rivers, which created suspicion amongst many other great aristocrats. On the other hand, a serious attempt had been made to co-ordinate and improve the administration of a notably violent region.

The North

Northern England presented special problems to any monarch at this time. There was a continued threat from Scotland and traditionally the local aristocrats had been given the task of organising the defence of the border. Many of the gentry felt a stronger loyalty to local magnates, such as the Nevilles and Percies, than to the King. Any great aristocrat in the North was guaranteed a large retinue of retainers.

Edward's policy in the North was conservative and arguably shortsighted. First of all, Henry Percy was restored to the Earldom of Northumberland in 1470. The Percies had a great following and an effectively became the King's Lieutenant in Northumberland and an influential figure in Yorkshire.

Even more important was the role given to Richard of Gloucester. All the estates, offices, and influence of the Earl of Warwick passed into his hands. The wardenship of the West March, for example, was to be hereditary in his family. Effectively, Edward was not extending a royal power, but creating an over-mighty subject and concentrating a vast amount of power in the hands of Richard of Gloucester. Richard had his own private council and a vast following inherited from the Nevilles. It was this regional influence that enabled him to seize power on Edward's death. It might also be argued that the favouritism given to Richard was one factor in the continued disaffection of Edward's other brother, the Duke of Clarence, which led to his execution in 1478.

Administration and law and order

Edward's government was intensely personal. He aimed to improve efficiency not through a visionary programme of reform, but by improving the vigour and quality of the government's personnel. One important example of this was the growing number of letters

and warrants issued under the signet, which was the seal carried by the King's secretary. This meant that there was a growing amount of administration carried out by the King and his personal servants. Government was becoming increasingly centred on the King's Household and less use was made of the inefficient bureaucracy.

The King's Council retained its importance and its functions changed little. There is no doubt that many of Edward's personal servants were capable and effective, but he did lack a strong personal following in the provinces, such as that built up by Richard of Gloucester in the North, and there was always suspicion and jealousy of the Woodvilles. Edward made no consistent effort to restrain the power of the aristocracy. He still relied on the support of great families in the shires, such as the Stanleys in Lancashire and Cheshire. His failure to restrain aristocratic power can be contrasted unfavourably with the far more assertive Henry VII. If the country was not as lawless as in the reign of Henry VI, this simply reflected Edward's more powerful personality. No legal checks were placed on the aristocracy and their followings of retainers. In particular, nothing was done to control livery (the practice of wearing some badge of loyalty to a great lord), or maintenance (the intimidation of juries by aristocratic retainers). These practices are often seen as examples of excessive noble power used irresponsibly in the provinces.

There is a shortage of good primary source material for this period to illustrate the unchecked power of the aristocracy. However, the Paston Letters are a series of documents written by members of an important gentry family in East Anglia. They are amongst the earliest surviving family letters in English and give an unrivalled insight into the problems and preoccupations of a gentry family of this period.

The Pastons became involved in a complicated legal dispute over property which brought them into conflict with the Duke of Suffolk, who was one of the most powerful men in East Anglia. In 1465, he sent a force of armed men against their property. Margaret Paston reported the incident in a letter a few days later.

1465, 27 October.

I was at Halesdon upon Thursday last past and saw the place there, and in good faith there will be no creature think how foul and horribly it is arrayed but if they saw it. There cometh much people daily to wonder thereupon, both of Norwich and of other places, and they speak shamefully thereof . . .

The Duke [of Suffolk]s men ransacked the church and bare away all the good that was left there, both of ours and of the tenants, and left not so much but that they stood on the high altar and ransacked the images, and took away such as they might find, and put away the parson out of the church till they had done, and ransacked every man's house in the town five or

six times ... If it might be, I would some men of worship might be sent from the King to see how it is, both there and at the lodge, ere than any snows come, that they may make report of the truth ...

And at the reverence of God, speed your matters now, for it is too horrible a cost and trouble that we now have daily, and must have till it be otherwise; and your men dare not go about to gather up your livelihood, and we keep here daily more than three hundred persons for salvation of us and the place ...

It is thought here that if my Lord of Norfolk would take upon him for you, and that he may have a commission for to inquire of such riots and robberies as hath be done to you and others in this country, then all the country will await upon him and serve your intent, for the people love and dread him more than any lord except the King and my Lord of Warwick.

1 *When Margaret Paston uses the term 'country' (line 25), what does she mean?*

2 *Why do you think that the Duke of Suffolk was able to organise such extensive acts of violence?*

3 *To whom did the Pastons look for assistance? What is the significance of this?*

4 *The letter makes direct reference to the power of the Earl of Warwick. With whom is his power compared and to whom was it passed on?*

5 *Why do you think that the 'Paston Letters' are so valued by historians of the fifteenth century?*

Parliament and finance

Because disputes between monarchs and Parliament eventually came to assume such significance in English history, it is easy to misunderstand the role of Parliament. There is no evidence that Parliament either increased or decreased in importance in the reign of Edward IV. Parliament met six times in twenty-three years for a total of eighty-four and a half weeks. Its major task was to carry out the King's business. For example, a Parliament was summoned to secure the attainder of Clarence in 1478. Fifty-four parliamentary statutes were passed in Edward's reign, mostly concerned with economic matters. In 1463, he was granted tannage and poundage (customs revenues) for life. Apart from this he was expected to 'live of his own' on the revenues of his estates and only ask for further taxes if war threatened.

The kings of England possessed limited resources compared with their continental rivals. Edward IV was the first king for 200 years to die solvent, which was an impressive achievement possibly owing more to good luck rather than good judgement.

Edward inherited a financial crisis. Henry VI's irresponsible distribution of royal lands and patronage had been a major cause of his unpopularity. A trade recession worsened matters in the middle of the century and greatly reduced customs revenues. Henry VI's annual revenues eventually dropped to £24 000 compared with £90 000 in the reign of Henry IV.

Edward IV boosted revenue by a series of practical measures. Better foreign relations created a better climate, for trade and customs revenues increased from an average of £25 000 at the start of his reign to £34 000 at the close. After the Treaty of Picquigny with France in 1475 (see *next section*) a valuable pension of 50 000 gold crowns was paid annually by the French King. A commercial treaty with Burgundy in 1478, which smoothed relations with England's most important trading partner, was only one of many successful trading agreements with foreign powers.

Another important source of revenue was the royal estates. Edward's own estates were extensive. Acts of Attainder added the estates of two dukes, five earls, one viscount and six barons. Edward also made money from the profits of wardships. Wardship gave the king the revenues of great estates when the heir was a minor. Early in Edward's reign, this included the lands of the Duchy of Buckingham and the Earldom of Shrewsbury.

The most significant development in financial policy lay in the use of the King's Chamber rather than the Exchequer in the administration of the royal estates. The Exchequer traditionally ran the finances of the government, but its methods had become inefficient and cumbersome. The Chamber was the main state room at Court and housed the Lord Chamberlain's department within the Royal Household. Edward adopted a system that had been used on the Yorkist estates. Receivers and surveyors were appointed and made directly responsible to the King's Chamber. This meant that money now went directly to the King and not through an inefficient bureaucracy.

Again matters were improved by a more direct and personal approach, which anticipated methods adopted by the Tudors. By 1475 Edward was solvent and did not need financial help from Parliament.

He can, however, be criticised for distributing rather than keeping forfeited estates. Although the French pension was valuable, it did cost him his freedom of action in foreign policy. Moreover, not all the administrative improvements were effective. On royal estates, such as the Duchy of Lancaster, it proved particularly difficult to implement new ideas. Henry VII was a far more efficient and vigorous administrator.

As a financier Edward was outstanding in comparison with Henry VI. Annual revenue rose from £25 000 to more than £65 000, but it is interesting to note that it reached more than £104 000 in the last year of Henry VII. It was, nonetheless, an impressive achievement to attain.

solvency and to establish many of the procedures later adopted by Henry VII.

Foreign policy

There was an intimate connection between foreign policy and financial stability throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. No monarch in any country was able to finance a war without borrowing vast sums and acquiring huge debts. One of the chief reasons for Edward's solvency was his avoidance of major foreign wars. However, luck and chance seem to have played a greater part in this than planning and foresight.

Edward was born at Rouen in Normandy and his father played a major role in the wars with France. He remained attached to the idea of military success in France. Throughout the fifteenth century France increased in power. Its population and resources greatly exceeded England's and Louis XI was a formidable ruler. Traditionally England had allied with Burgundy and Brittany against France, while Louis harboured territorial ambitions against both these states.

In 1472, Edward negotiated the Treaty of Châteaugiron with Brittany and promised to invade France, but the Bretons were defeated before any English invasion could take place. Despite the traditional popularity of war with France, Parliament was notably unenthusiastic about financing the war and in many ways Edward had a lucky escape. This did not prevent further diplomatic and military planning. The Treaty of London (25 July 1474) united England and Burgundy in a plan to repeat Henry V's destruction of the French monarchy; Brittany then joined the alliance and even Scotland — so often a useful ally for France — was neutralised. Parliament provided substantial financial support and an army of over 11 000 was raised. This would be the largest force ever sent from England to France and by July 1475 Edward was established in Calais.

The seriousness of Edward's invasion plans has been questioned. He may simply have been trying to intimidate the French. Again, he was possibly saved by the lack of commitment of his allies. Charles the Bold of Burgundy had territorial ambitions to the east of his duchy and was reluctant to invade France. Edward's army lacked the experience of previous expeditions and was unlikely to have won great victories.

When the French offered a truce it was quickly accepted. In 1475, the Treaty of Picquigny followed the truce. In many ways this was very favourable to Edward; it gave him 75 000 crowns to be followed by an annual pension of 50 000 crowns and freedom of trade with France. In return there was to be a seven-year truce and Louis' son was to marry Edward's daughter. This French pension ensured that Edward no longer needed substantial grants from Parliament and contributed significantly to his solvency.

On the other hand it does seem that Edward had actively been seeking war and was only saved by good fortune. The death in battle of Charles the Bold at Nancy in 1477 enabled Louis XI to capture territory in Artois and Picardy in northern France. This directly threatened the vital English base of Calais and English trade with the Low Countries. Edward decided not to intervene and it can be argued that Louis' combination of cunning diplomacy and bribery had completely neutralised England. It was felt that Edward now cared too much for money and a life of ease and luxury.

In his last years Edward further limited his freedom of action on the continent by his decision to invade Scotland. There had been a series of Scottish raids possibly encouraged by the French, to which Edward responded by sending an army to Edinburgh in 1482. Apart from the recovery of Berwick, little was gained. Meanwhile at Arras in 1482, Burgundy and France made peace. One result of this was that Louis stopped paying Edward his annual pension. In addition, French possession of Artois was confirmed and the threat to Calais made real. The marriage alliance with France never took place. Things did not in fact turn out as badly as it seemed they might; Louis died in 1483 and Burgundy had not collapsed completely. On the other hand, there is no sign of coherence or effectiveness in Edward's foreign policy.

The end of the reign

Edward IV died on 25 August 1483 at the age of 41. The cause of his death was probably a stroke and an increasingly self-indulgent private life may have contributed to this. In many ways he can be regarded as a capable ruler. In his youth he had proved daring and decisive and his audacious recovery of the throne after the 'Re-adeption' of Henry VI was a remarkable personal achievement.

Much has been made of his financial success, but his major concern seems to have been personal extravagance at the expense of the country as a whole. On the other hand, despite his generally unimpressive conduct of foreign policy, he did understand the importance of developing overseas trade.

There was an attractive side to his character. He was the first English king to possess a library and Court circles encouraged the Caxton printing press. His physical presence and youthful dynamism enhanced the prestige of the monarchy. But he must be blamed for the consequences of his marriage and the succession crisis that followed his death. One major task for any king was to ensure a peaceful succession. The unpopularity of the Woodvilles and Edward's own lack of support amongst the aristocracy as a whole ensured that this would not happen.

9 THE REIGN OF RICHARD III

The period between Edward's death and the Battle of Bosworth Field (August 1485) exemplifies the political instability of fifteenth-century England. Edward's brother, Richard of Gloucester, was able to seize the throne and declare himself King Richard III only to be defeated in battle by Henry Tudor, a remote and virtually unconsidered claimant to the throne.

Richard had been well rewarded for his support by Edward IV. He had married the Earl of Warwick's daughter Ann and taken control of the vast Neville estates in the north of England. Richard resided in Warwick's castle at Middleham in north Yorkshire and Edward made him the effective governor of the whole of the North. Contemporary historians were not kind to Richard, but they were mostly southerners; he was undoubtedly popular in the North with a strong personal following. He could offer much patronage and draw on a reservoir of experienced fighting men. Edward had created an exceptionally 'over-mighty' subject with a strong regional base. After 1478, Richard rarely came to London and he established his military reputation in the campaign against Scotland.

It is not difficult to explain why Richard III was able to seize the throne. Edward V was still a child and had lived in Ludlow on the Welsh border under the protection of his Woodville relation, Earl Rivers. The unpopularity of the Woodvilles cannot be overstated. They were regarded as ambitious upstarts and would clearly dominate the young King. Virtually all the great aristocrats disliked them and even Edward IV's most loyal supporter, Lord Hastings, had a grievance against them.

Richard's seizure of Edward V on 30 April and appointment as Protector on 4 May should not be seen as unpopular moves. It is not certain that he initially intended to declare himself King, but it is worth remembering that Edward IV had overthrown his predecessor and was responsible for the deaths of Henry VI and his own brother the Duke of Clarence. Politics in fifteenth-century England was cruel and violent.

The executions of Lord Hastings (13 June) and Earl Rivers (25 June) suggest that by this time Richard was undoubtedly aiming for the throne. His coronation swiftly followed on 6 July. He could count on fervent support in the north of England and the passivity of many of the great nobility, who had learned to avoid political commitment after thirty years of instability.

It was not Richard's seizure of the throne that shocked contemporaries, but his murder of Edward's two sons. Despite the persistent attempts to acquit Richard of this crime that still continue today, the evidence points to his guilt. Richard had a motive and custody of the children. His responsibility was widely believed at the time and it is surely significant that he could not produce the children during the

rebellions of the autumn of 1483. Their mother, Elizabeth Woodville, supported Henry Tudor on condition that he married her daughter and her behaviour makes most sense as revenge against the murderer of her sons.

Dominic Mancini was a distinguished Italian scholar who spent some time in England in the early 1480s probably working for the French. His account of the background to the usurpation of the throne by Richard III is an attempt by an intelligent outsider to make sense of these complex events.

By reason of his marriage some of the nobility had renewed hostilities against Edward, and revived hope amongst King Henry's party of regaining the crown, but after their defeat and the complete overthrow likewise of King Henry [VI] and his faction, Edward's power in the kingdom was re-affirmed. The queen then remembered the insults to her family and the calumnies with which she was reproached, namely that according to established usage she was not the legitimate wife of the king. Thus she concluded that her offspring by the king would never come to the throne, unless the Duke of Clarence were removed; and of this she easily persuaded the king...

Accordingly whether the charge was fabricated, or a real plot revealed, the Duke of Clarence was accused of conspiring the king's death by means of spells and magicians. When this charge had been considered before a court, he was condemned and put to death. The mode of execution preferred in this case was, that he should die by being plunged into a jar of sweet wine. At that time Richard of Gloucester was so overcome by grief for his brother, that he could not dissimulate so well, but that he was overheard to say that he would one day avenge his brother's death. Thenceforth he came very rarely to Court. He kept himself within his own lands and set out to acquire the loyalty of his people through favours and justice. The good reputation of his private life and public activities powerfully attracted the esteem of strangers. Such was his renown in warfare, that, whenever a difficult and dangerous policy had to be undertaken, it would be entrusted to his discretion and his generalship. By these arts Richard acquired the favour of the people, and avoided the jealousy of the queen, from whom he lived far separated.

1 Why might Elizabeth Woodville not have been regarded as Edward's legitimate wife (line 8)?

2 What does this passage suggest about Edward IV's character and personality?

3 How convincing is the explanation of Richard's behaviour? (lines 18-19)

4 What are Mancini's weaknesses as a source for this period?

For all his crimes, Richard was an energetic and capable ruler, but his position was never secure. In late 1483, rebellion broke out in southern England. Its ostensible leader, the Duke of Buckingham, proved ineffectual and was executed, but the antagonism towards Richard in southern England was made plain. The appointment of northerners, such as Sir Richard Ratcliffe, to positions in the South was bitterly resented. English society was intensely parochial and outsiders were always unpopular.

Despite lavish distribution of office and land and tours of the country, Richard was not able to broaden his political base. The deaths of his son and his wife were further blows. A handful of great men could dramatically shift the political balance. In particular, he could not rely on the Percies in Yorkshire and Northumberland and the Stanleys in Lancashire and Cheshire. The Percies were traditional rivals of the Nevilles and Thomas, Lord Stanley, was married to Margaret Beaufort, Henry Tudor's mother.

There was a surprising continuity of personnel in government. Of Richard's 54 councillors, 24 had served Edward IV and 9 were to serve Henry VII. The one innovation of Richard's reign was forced upon him. He had had his own council in the North, but on his assumption of the throne, a separate Council of the North was created as a branch of the Royal Council in 1484. This met four times each year in York and was to last until 1641. Richard did not choose a local grandee as its head, but John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, who was an outsider.

Richard also needed to neutralise the threat of Henry Tudor, who at Rennes Cathedral in Brittany on Christmas Day in 1483 pledged to marry Elizabeth of York. The rise of the Tudor dynasty is one of the more unlikely events of the fifteenth century. The family were originally minor Welsh gentry at a time when to be Welsh was to be considered a foreigner. Henry's grandfather, Owen Tudor, married Katherine, Henry V's widow. One of their sons, Jasper, became Earl of Pembroke. The other, Edmund, became Earl of Richmond and married Margaret Beaufort, whose father was Duke of Somerset. She was descended from Edward III's son, John of Gaunt. Henry Tudor was their son and inherited his claim to the throne from his mother.

The Tudors became important Lancastrians mainly because Henry VI had few close relatives. Jasper was amongst the most tenacious and loyal Lancastrians. Edmund Tudor died in 1456 and Henry was born in early 1457. Jasper acted as Henry's guide and protector. For most of the next twenty years, Jasper and Henry were landless exiles, whose estates had been confiscated by Edward IV. Jasper intrigued actively in Wales, where the Tudor name was an advantage.

It would have been impossible for these exiles to have recovered the

throne without foreign help. Throughout the 1470s, they depended on the protection of Duke Francis of Brittany. After the execution of Buckingham in 1483, Henry was the only other claimant to the throne of royal blood and he did have support in England. The Woodville family saw a marriage alliance with Henry as their only means of recovering influence. A final link was Henry's mother, Margaret Beaufort. Her second husband Thomas, Lord Stanley, was probably aware that a conspiracy was being hatched. After his pledge to marry Elizabeth of York, Henry could present himself as the unifier of Lancaster and York.

The Duke of Brittany abandoned Henry in 1484 and he was forced to flee to France. France was in some disarray after the death of Louis XI. Charles VIII was only 13 years old and his court was divided. But the French were aware that an invasion of England would preoccupy Richard III and prevent English assistance being sent to Francis of Brittany, whose duchy was coveted by the French Crown.

French money enabled Henry to raise 4000 troops, only 400 of whom were English. On 7 August 1485, they landed at Milford Haven in the west of Wales.

As is often the case with decisive battles, it is by no means clear why Richard was defeated. His northern following largely supported him and, while it is true that many great peers did not fight, it may simply be that they did not have time to get to Bosworth. The turning point at Bosworth was Richard's own death. It seems that he recklessly charged Henry and was killed as a result. Almost as important was the desertion of the Stanleys, whose influence in the north-west was vast and whose family links with Henry have been explained. The Percies also did not fight. This may have been because of the cramped battlefield, but might also suggest an element of disloyalty.

Richard's death robbed the country of an effective, but cruel monarch. He was not the uniquely evil figure of Tudor propaganda, but in the words of Charles Ross, his biographer, 'a violent man in a violent age'.

10 CONCLUSION: THE WARS OF THE ROSES

No-one would now suggest that the Wars of the Roses were marked by unprecedented violence and disorder. Revisionist historians have rightly drawn attention to the disappearance of town walls, the growing aristocratic practice of building houses rather than castles, the prosperity of the peasantry, and the outstanding quality of the churches of this period.

Despite this, historians, such as Charles Ross and A J Pollard are right to stress the excessive instability of this period. Two kings were murdered and there were constant complaints about aristocratic disorder.

12 DISCUSSION POINTS AND EXERCISES

A This section consists of questions or points that might be used for discussion (or written answers) as a way of expanding on the chapter and testing understanding of it:

- 1 What are the arguments for and against 1485 as a turning point?
- 2 How far was defeat in France the fault of Henry VI?
- 3 Why did faction become a particular problem under Henry VI?
- 4 Why was Parliament not as compliant as normal in 1449?
- 5 What was the significance of Jack Cade's rebellion?
- 6 How did Henry VI restore his authority by 1453?
- 7 What were the most important consequences of the royal madness?
- 8 'The responsibility for the outbreak of war must lie firmly with Margaret of Anjou.' Do you agree?
- 9 Why were the Lancastrians defeated by 1461?
- 10 How did Warwick become so great a threat to Edward IV by 1469?
- 11 Why was the 'Re-adeption' of Henry VI a failure?
- 12 What were the strengths and weaknesses of Edward IV's government of Wales and the North?
- 13 In what ways was the aristocracy a threat to law and order?
- 14 What lay behind Edward IV's financial success?
- 15 'Edward IV was just lucky that his foreign policy was not a disaster.' Do you agree?
- 16 What made Richard of Gloucester's usurpation of the throne so easy?
- 17 Why did Richard III lose his throne?
- 18 'Over-mighty subjects' or 'under-mighty kings': which was the greater cause of instability in the years 1450-85?

B Essay questions

- 1 Is the 'Wars of the Roses' an appropriate term for the years 1455-71?
- 2 Account for the deposition of Henry VI in 1461.
- 3 How successfully did Edward IV re-invigorate royal authority during his reign?
- 4 'His only real achievement was solvency.' Discuss this view of Edward IV.
- 5 Why was Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick so important?
- 6 Why did Richard III take the throne in 1483 and why did he lose it in 1485?

der. The traditional explanation for this was the existence of a following of liveried retainers attached to great aristocrats known to historians as 'bastard feudalism'. These 'retainers' provided an armed following loyal to their lord and not to the Crown. The greatest twentieth-century historian of the fifteenth century, K B MacFarlane, rejected this view. He argued that the number of retainers rarely exceeded eighty and that they were 'an expression of the Lord's need for service in peace rather than in war'. Rather than promoting instability, retaining created loyalty and helped to organise the social, political, and administrative life of the counties. In his own words: 'On the whole, hierarchical bonds of loyalty and service which bound kings, lords, and retainers, made for social and political stability.'

For MacFarlane the cause of the civil strife was simply the incompetence of Henry VI. Only an under-mighty king had anything to fear from over-mighty subjects. Henry VI allowed dynastic struggle, factional conflict, and private vendettas to develop.

Many of MacFarlane's views are still accepted, but the degree of civil strife is not now seen as derisory. In 1965, J R Lander estimated that there had been only thirteen weeks of fighting in thirty-two years; A J Pollard in the most recent study of the Wars of the Roses raises the figure to nearly two years, while conceding that continental wars were far more destructive.

Pollard sees the root cause of the wars as the excessive influence of the upper nobility, whose wealth and power increased from the fourteenth century onwards as many married into the royal family. This did not matter when the war with France was going well, but after 1340, Edward III 'allowed the gap in power and influence [between the King and aristocracy] to narrow'. He argues that this made the government of the country much more difficult unless the monarch was unusually able. It is certainly true that at crucial times, the Nevilles, Stanleys and even Woodvilles determined the course of events.

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