

— 1455–1487 —

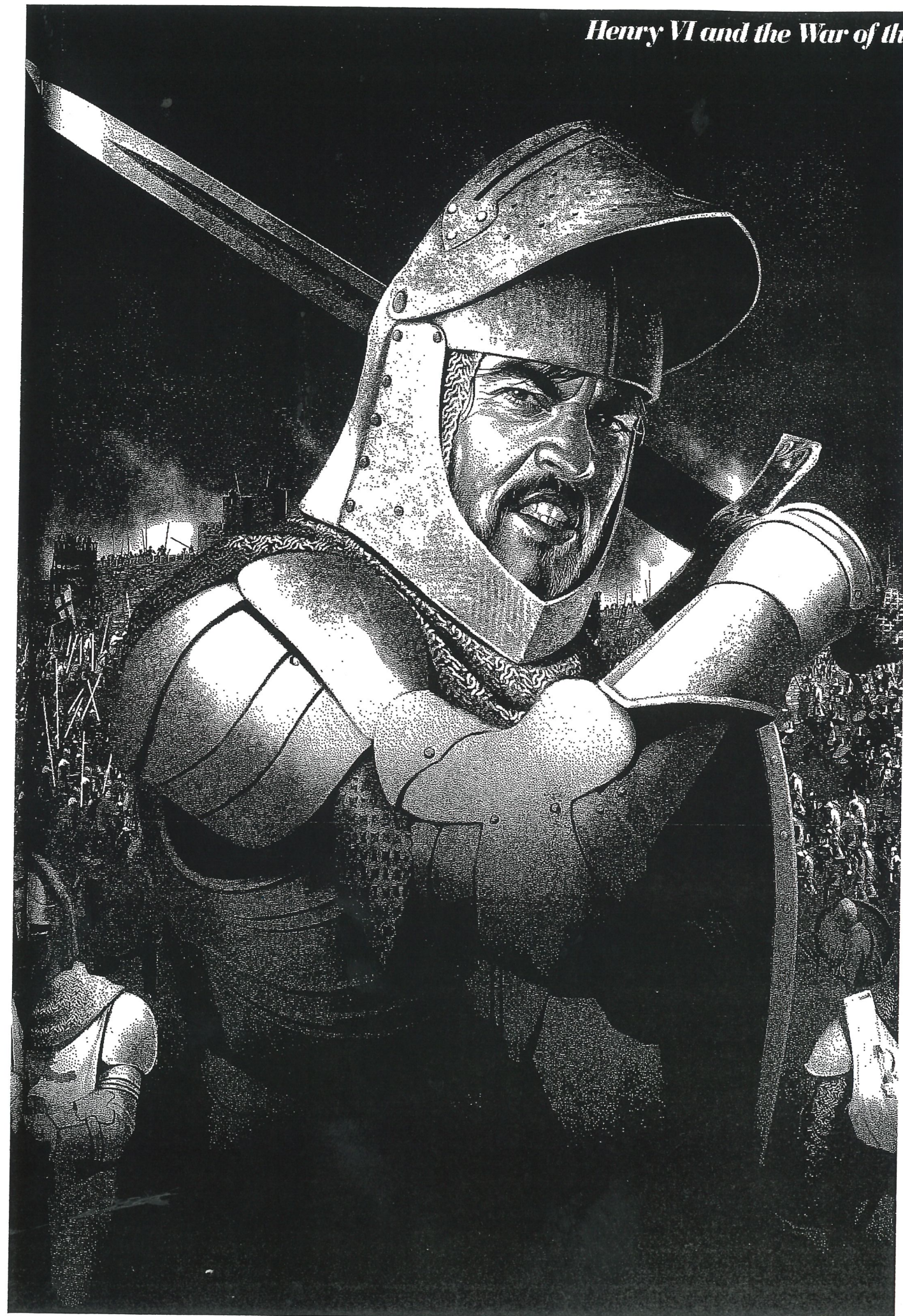
Henry VI and the War of the Roses

In war, blood is power, blood is family, blood is everything. England's War of the Roses split a country in two and saw the rise and fall of no less than four monarchs

It was 1453 and England was still at war with its old enemy France. Since the legendary days of King Henry V, the warrior king who spilled the blood of the noble enemy in spades at Agincourt and secured England's claim to the tactically important province of Normandy, both great western powers had been fighting nonstop, with England slowly but surely being pushed back toward the English Channel. English King Henry VI's military affairs were being overseen by the Duke of Somerset Edmund Beaufort, an experienced military commander who was about to suffer the ignominy of losing Bordeaux and leaving Calais as England's only remaining territory on the shores of mainland Europe.

Back in England, Henry VI – shy, pious and noncombatant – was busy being dominated by his powerful and ruthless wife, Margaret of Anjou, the niece of the French King Charles VII, as well as his feuding court nobles, with Henry cowering to both and leaving the affairs of England and his estate in a paralysing limbo. Amid this turmoil, a year previously the Duke of York, Richard Plantagenet, had travelled to London with an army to present the court with a list of grievances that they and the king were failing to address. This potentially explosive situation had been handled by Margaret and with the news that she was now pregnant, it helped to re-isolate York and force him to leave the capital with his tail between his legs.

Henry VI and the War of the



When King Henry VI was told of the final loss of Bordeaux he suffered a mental breakdown. Completely unaware of who he was, what was going on around him and how to act toward people, Henry finally let the last tentative grip of control he had over England slip through his fingers. No longer was Henry the softly spoken and pious king of old, but instead a dazed half-man, stumbling around his home and court, unable to speak cogently and liable to sudden bouts of hysteria and aggressive confusion.

Henry's ethereal grasp on reality would go on to last an entire year. Margaret dealt with him as best she could, shielding him from the circling vultures at court and making all decisions regarding the rule of the nation for him. However, even she couldn't shield him from his own demons, with the king repeatedly heard screaming in the depths of night and continuously stricken with bouts of amnesia. When Margaret eventually gave birth to their son Edward, Henry's mental state was so deteriorated he didn't recognise him. Due

to this incapacity, even his wilful and powerful wife Margaret was unable to stop the return of the Duke of York and his supporters, a group that now included Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick, one of England's major financial and political powers. A Council of Regency was set up and power taken by Richard as Lord Protector of England. Once installed, he immediately imprisoned his old enemy, the Duke of Somerset, and backed all nobles opposing Henry, shifting the balance of court in his favour. The weak king had seemingly been deposed.

While the king was still alive - even if he was sometimes little more than a gibbering wreck - Richard's position was always perilous and when, on Christmas Day 1454, Henry suddenly and inexplicably regained his senses the balance of power in this game of thrones shifted yet again. The king had gone from not being able to recognise anyone, laughing maniacally on his own to the quiet and shy ruler of old almost overnight. With Henry now recovered, his queen lost no time in challenging York for the throne and quickly re-established Henry and herself at the centre of court. Never one to shy away from a confrontation - and well aware of the danger he presented - the queen began scheming to remove Richard from his

reduced but still influential position, colluding with other nobles to discredit him and undermine his power and influence.

Margaret knew how to work the political system, which relied largely on the noble households. Richard soon found himself increasingly bypassed when it came to decisions, relegated away from London and, harried by Margaret at every turn, he found his allies slipping away. Finally, in early-1455, he decided that enough was enough and anticipating impending arrest for treason, raised an army and marched toward London. By the standards of the military might that was to come, this army of roughly 7,000 men may have been small, but there was nothing small in the statement that it made: the battle lines between the two great noble houses of England and their supporters had been drawn and the country held its breath, preparing to be plunged headfirst into chaos.

Richard Plantagenet was now not just contending for control at court but as the nation's king, and his loyal nobles gathered round him as the leader and figurehead of the House of York. Opposing him directly was Margaret of Anjou and her king, with the former now effectively the leader of the House of Lancaster. While the split in support for the two opposing sides wasn't just decided by geography,

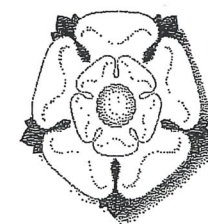
"Completely unaware of who he was, Henry finally let the last tentative grip of control he had over England slip through his fingertips"



A depiction of Henry VI with the Dukes of York and Somerset

Battle for the Throne

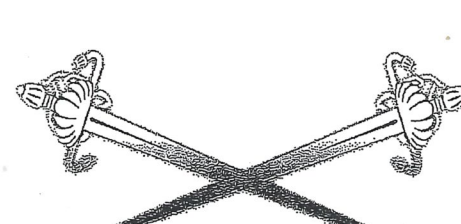
The key players in the bloody quest for ultimate power



York

The first cadet branch of the parent House of Plantagenet, descended down the male line of the house from Edmund of Langley, the 1st Duke of York and the fourth surviving son of King Edward III. Three of its members down the ages became kings of the country. The house came to an end when Henry Tudor established the

House of Tudor at the close of the Wars of the Roses.
Main supporters: Prince of Wales; Lord of Ireland; Dukes of York, Clarence, Gloucester.
Emblem: A white rose.
Claim to the throne: Richard Plantagenet was descended from King Edward III.



Lancaster

The second of two junior branches of the mighty royal House of Plantagenet, the House of Lancaster was created with the establishment of the Earldom of Lancaster by Henry III of England in 1267. From that date the House of Lancaster provided England with three kings, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI before becoming extinct with the

execution of the latter's son, Edward Prince of Wales, by the rival House of York during the Wars of the Roses.
Main supporters: Earls of Lancaster, Leicester, Moray, Ferrers, Derby, Salisbury, Lincoln; Duke of Lancaster
Emblem: A red rose.
Claim to the throne: Its figurehead was Henry VI, the only son of Henry V.



Duke of York Richard Plantagenet

Date of birth: 21 September 1411
Strengths: Powerful and well connected; inherited large estates and influence in England and France.
Weaknesses: A series of military victories led him to overconfidence, ensuring his own death in a crushing defeat at the Battle of Wakefield.
POWER RATING: ● ● ● ● ●



Queen Consort Elizabeth Woodville

Date of birth: 1437
Strengths: Politically slick; married well above her station, aggravating the family's rivals, and was a renowned beauty.
Weaknesses: Not powerful enough to hold the throne for her children; let her power be usurped by Lady Margaret Beaufort in later years.
POWER RATING: ● ● ● ● ●



Earl of Warwick Richard Neville

Date of birth: 22 November 1428
Strengths: A principal politician in England, he deposed two kings to earn the nickname 'the Kingmaker'.
Weaknesses: Let his dominant position at the English court be gradually eroded in later years due to directing his focus toward France.
POWER RATING: ● ● ● ● ●



King of England Henry VI

Date of birth: 6 December 1421
Strengths: Son of the powerful and popular Henry V; married well to the French-born Margaret of Anjou, was generally considered benevolent and pious.
Weaknesses: Bouts of crippling mental illness saw his kingdom ruled by others during his reign for extended periods of time.
POWER RATING: ● ● ● ● ●



Queen Consort Margaret of Anjou

Date of birth: 23 March 1430
Strengths: Passionate, proud and strong-willed, Margaret provided the House of Lancaster the scheming and ruthless ruler Henry VI failed to be.
Weaknesses: Overstepped her power level in the Battle of Tewkesbury, leading to her ultimate fall from grace and power.
POWER RATING: ● ● ● ● ●



Duke of Somerset Edmund Beaufort

Date of birth: 1406
Strengths: Head of one of the most influential families in England. Experienced and respected by his peers.
Weaknesses: Poor temperament, lost more battles than he won; let a personal feud with the Duke of York get violently out of hand.
POWER RATING: ● ● ● ● ●

Two Houses Divided

Follow the family trees of two historic nobles' houses

House of York

House of Lancaster

Anne De Mortimer
1390-1411

The mother of Richard Plantagenet and grandmother of King Edward IV and King Richard III, Anne de Mortimer was descended from royalty through her mother and grandparents. She died of childbirth.

Richard of Conisburgh
1375-1415

The father of Richard Plantagenet and husband to Anne de Mortimer, Richard of Conisburgh was the 3rd Earl of Cambridge and a prominent figure in the Southampton Plot against Henry V. He was caught and executed.

Owen Tudor
1385-1461

A Welsh soldier and courtier, Owen Tudor was descended from a Welsh prince, Rhys ap Igrudd. After fighting at Agincourt he was awarded English rights and went on to serve in the household of Catherine of Valois after Henry V's death. They were possibly married in secret in 1429.

Catherine of Valois
1401-1437

Queen consort of England from 1420 to 1422, Catherine of Valois was the daughter of Charles VI of France. She was married to Henry V in 1420. In December 1421, she gave birth to the future Henry VI. Later, after Henry V's death, she went on to form a relationship with Owen Tudor.

Henry V
1386-1422

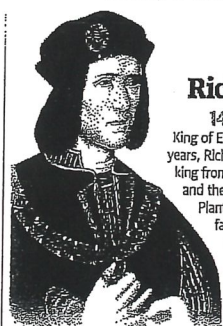
The famous warrior king of England who scored a famous victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt, Henry V was the second English monarch to stem from the House of Lancaster after his father, King Henry IV.

Richard Plantagenet
1411-1460

The son of Anne de Mortimer and Richard of Conisburgh, Richard of York became a key Yorkist leader during the early parts of the Wars of the Roses, winning numerous battles and even becoming Lord Protector for a time.

Cecily Neville
1415-1495

The wife of Richard Plantagenet, Cecily Neville was the Duchess of York and was well known for her beauty and piety. She gave birth to two later kings of England, Edward IV and Richard III. She outlived her husband by 35 years.



Richard III
1452-1485

King of England for just two years, Richard III was the last king from the House of York and the last of the House of Plantagenet. Richard was famously defeated by Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field.

Edward IV
1442-1483

The first Yorkist king of England, Edward IV ruled the country in two spells, from 1461 to 1470 and then after an overthrow and subsequent restoration, from 1471 to 1483. He was succeeded by his younger brother Richard III.

Elizabeth Woodville
1437-1492

Spouse of King Edward IV from 1464, Elizabeth Woodville was one of the most powerful women in England during the Wars of the Roses. She gave birth to the Princes in the Tower and Elizabeth of York, future wife of Henry Tudor, King Henry VII of England.

Henry VI
1421-1471

Henry VI was the third king from the House of Lancaster. He became king at just nine months old. He suffered from periods of madness throughout his life and was deposed by Edward IV and the House of York.

Margaret of Anjou
1430-1482

The wife of Henry VI, Margaret of Anjou was the niece of Charles VII. Widely held to be responsible for the Wars of the Roses after excluding the Duke of York from the Great Council in 1455.

Edward of Lancaster
1453-1471

The only child of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou. After the battle of Tewkesbury he was killed in battle in Tewkesbury.

Edmund Tudor
1431-1456

Edmund Tudor was the first son of Owen Tudor and Catherine of Valois. Henry VI made him the Earl of Richmond in 1452. He married Margaret Beaufort in 1455.

Margaret Beaufort
1443-1509

Margaret Beaufort was the daughter of the Duke of Somerset and the great-granddaughter of King Edward III. She gave birth to the future Henry VII at just 13 years old.

Edward V
1470-1483

One of the famous Princes in the Tower, Edward V was a son of Elizabeth Woodville and King Edward IV. He was succeeded infamously by his uncle and Lord Protector, Richard of Gloucester, later King Richard III of England.

Richard of Shrewsbury
1473-1483

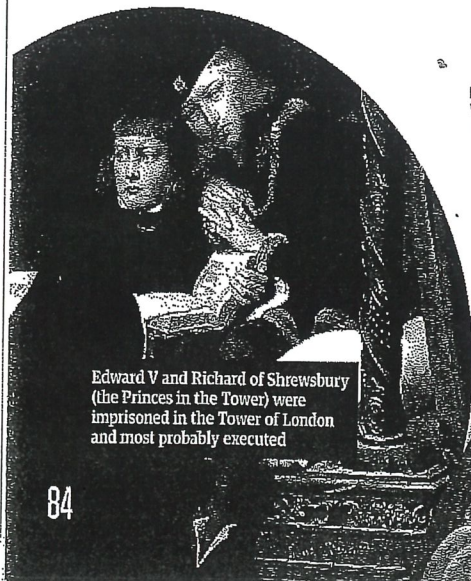
The second son of Elizabeth Woodville and King Edward IV, Richard was the second famous member of the Princes in the Tower. Richard was almost certainly murdered along with Edward and disposed of in secret.

Elizabeth of York
1466-1503

The only daughter of Elizabeth Woodville, Elizabeth of York played a key part in ending the Wars of the Roses, marrying the Lancastrian ally Henry Tudor on 18 January 1486, establishing the Tudor Dynasty.

Henry VII
1457-1509

The only child of Edmund Tudor and Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII spent years in exile before defeating Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. He married Elizabeth of York, thus uniting the Houses of York and Lancaster, ending the Wars of the Roses.



Edward V and Richard of Shrewsbury (the Princes in the Tower) were imprisoned in the Tower of London and most probably executed

Henry VI and the War of the Roses



Margaret Beaufort was a key player in ultimately deposing Richard III and bringing an end to the War of the Roses

with nobles from all parts of the country siding with one house or the other due to a series of complex and often long-standing allegiances, although with Richard marching down from the north where he had recruited much of his army, it seemed like the north was coming to claim what it believed was rightfully its property in the south. To many of the nobles supporting the House of York they were marching on the capital with their knights, infantrymen and archers to remove a weak king from power and restore order to a country on the verge of disintegration and collapse.

Even the staunchest of Henry VI's supporters would have been forced to admit the country had seen better days. Following a series of French victories over the English on the continent, they had grown confident and had begun raiding English supply lines and vessels in the Channel. In addition, due to the years of warfare England was in poor financial shape, while the absence of a strong king had led to London's political scene descending into a series of arguments, squabbles and petty confrontations. A weakened country was slowly bleeding to death from infighting, so in marching on the capital Richard Plantagenet intended to wrestle back some semblance of control over it.

The king might have been largely blind to the threat of the Duke of York but, luckily for the House of Lancaster, the ever-vigilant and ruthless Margaret was not. She quickly drummed up support for a hastily assembled army to counter the threat from Richard's forces. Margaret

dispatched this army under the command of her favourite and a sworn enemy of Richard, Edmund, Duke of Somerset. The king was also sent along with the army and, judging by the comparatively small size of the Lancastrian army (roughly 2,000

"Richard Plantagenet was now not just a contender for control of England but also its kingship, as the leader and figurehead of the House of York"

men), it seemed Margaret expected that there would be no hostilities, with some sort of peace treaty the likely outcome and the status quo maintained. The beautiful and resourceful queen was wrong, though. Spectacularly so.

The two armies came together at St Albans just north of London on 22 May 1455, and after a couple of minor skirmishes, the first battle of the War of the Roses broke out. Richard's Yorkist force quickly cut down the Duke of Somerset as well as Lancastrian loyal nobles Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and Lord Thomas Clifford. Turning a defeat into a catastrophe, Henry VI himself was also captured,

personally apprehended by Richard's key ally Warwick's forces as he hid in a local tanner's shop, abandoned by his advisers and servants and seemingly suffering from yet another debilitating mental breakdown.

The following day, York and Warwick marched with the now-mad-again king in their custody to London. Redepositing the unfortunate Henry with Margaret, Richard retook the position of Lord Protector and he and Warwick began to re-establish themselves. An uneasy truce of sorts followed, with both sides plotting to overthrow the other but failing to act decisively. Warwick became captain of Calais - an important and powerful

Margaret was first married to the Duke of Suffolk's son, John de la Pole, in 1444, then only a year old

The Bloodiest Battle: Towton

Towton was not only the most brutal battle of the War of the Roses but also one of the most decisive. These are its climactic events:



Henry VI and the War of the Roses

position – but once again Henry VI recovered his mental strength and took his royal progress (a tour) into the Midlands in 1456, establishing his court in Coventry. By this point, the country effectively had two different kings, an unsustainable state of affairs. In this court, the third Duke of Somerset, Henry Beaufort was emerging as the favourite, with plans struck by him and Margaret to roll back all the appointments York had made while Lord Protector and to degrade Warwick's influence on state affairs. The situation was balancing on a knife's edge; one sudden move, one perceived threat, and the whole country would rapidly descend into all-out civil war.

It took three years, but that the peace would end was as inevitable as the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening. The move that would shatter the precarious peace came in 1459, when

York and Warwick were summoned to a royal council in Coventry by Henry VI and Margaret and, fearing foul play and a potential threat to their lives, refused to go, instead grouping together with their supporters at the strategically vital Ludlow Castle, right on the Welsh border. This was the starting pistol for the beginning of the bloodiest civil war England had ever seen. The Battle of Blore Heath was first, then the Battle of Ludford Bridge, followed by the Battle of Northampton and the Battle of Wakefield. Each new bloody confrontation saw thousands of men smash into each other, each thrust with a dagger or a sword that hit home a blow to the heart of the House of Lancaster or York. The balance of power shifted fluidly from one house to the other, but sometimes into nothingness, with no real victor or controlling stake identifiable.

The Many Wars of the Roses

30 years of conflict mapped out on a bloody land

St Albans 22 May 1455

St Albans saw Richard of York lead a force of over 3,000 soldiers on a direct course for London to take down Henry VI. Henry rode out to meet the Yorkist army and took up a defensive position at St Albans. Richard attacked the city with a great fury and defeated Henry. Queen Margaret and her young son Edward were forced into exile.

and killed in battle. Richard Neville
and Richard's son are executed.

Towton 29 March 1461
A vast Yorkist force numbering 30,000 men fought the elements and a 35,000-strong force of Lancastrians at Towton. After hours of bloody fighting the Duke of Norfolk arrived with reinforcements at the last moment and the Yorkists won the day.

force was routed, the Prince of Wales killed in battle, Somerset executed and Queen Margaret of Anjou captured.

Bosworth 22 August 1485

Richard III had succeeded Edward IV as king. Henry Tudor had other ideas and landed in Wales on 7 August 1485 to take the crown. Richard heard of the invasion and moved to intercept Henry; the two forces eventually meeting south of Bosworth. During the ensuing battle Lord Thomas Stanley and Sir William Stanley switched sides from the Yorkists to the Lancastrians. As a result, Richard III was killed and Henry became King Henry VII.

Stoke 16 June 1487

The last battle of the War of the Roses, Stoke was a final, wild roll of the dice for the remaining Yorkist forces. Bolstered by German and Irish mercenaries, Yorkist troops started to march toward London, but were met at East Stoke and obliterated. Its leaders were captured and imprisoned. Its men killed and the last remnants of the Yorkist faction destroyed.

Blore Heath

23 September 1459

Despite scoring a victory at St Albans, Richard's advance to London was halted. The Wars of the Roses rekindled themselves four years later when Richard, fearing his campaign was losing momentum, decided to centralise his forces around the town of Ludlow and launch a massive assault on the Lancastrians. Queen Margaret heard of the movement and dispatched her loyal Lord Audley to intercept. Despite Audley having roughly twice as many soldiers, he lost the battle and his life.

Edgcote Moor 26 July 1469

Eight years on from the bloody battle of Towton, in which Edward IV had ruled unopposed, an army sent to put down an uprising was attacked by Lancastrian forces and quickly defeated, with the Earls of Pembroke and Devon killed.

Tewkesbury 4 May 1471

The Lancastrian forces of the 4th Duke of Somerset, Edmund Beaufort, plotted a course for Wales. King Edward IV heard of the move and sent an army to intercept. The two sides met at Tewkesbury and, after Somerset attempted a failed break of the Yorkist lines and was countered, the Lancastrian

Wakefield 30 December 1460

With a large countering army assembled by the Lancastrians near the city of York, Richard took his forces north along with Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury to intercept. Richard took a defensive position at Sandal Castle due to Lancastrians sporting a force close to 20,000, while his own forces numbered only around 10,000. Despite taking Sandal however, Richard decided to ride out and meet the Lancastrian forces directly. He was eventually overwhelmed

The War of the Roses pitted Yorkists against Lancastrians for over three decades

Lancaster

Troops: 35,000
Losses: Unknown
(Total dead across both armies: 28,000)

Leader: Henry VI
Strengths: Strong claim to the throne of England, being the only child to King Henry V.
Weaknesses: Periods of debilitating insanity. Also quiet, shy and unsuited to warfare.

Key supporter: Duke of Somerset
Strengths: Experienced military commander with steady judgement.
Weaknesses: Political amateur; had a habit for switching sides.

Secondary unit:
Footsoldier
Strengths: Numerous and gritty fighters when on the battlefield.
Weaknesses: Not always well trained or equipped enough.

York

Troops: 30,000
Losses: Unknown
(Total dead across both armies: 28,000)

Leader: Edward IV of England
Strengths: Extremely capable and daring military leader. Good fighter on the battlefield.
Weaknesses: Poor foresight and inconsistent political judgement.

Key supporter: Lord Fauconberg
Strengths: Established military commander and knight. Politically savvy.
Weaknesses: Disloyal and mercenary.

Secondary unit:
Longbowmen
Strengths: Fabulous range and stopping power with armour-piercing arrows.
Weaknesses: Vulnerable in melee combat and ineffective in poor visibility conditions.

8. Henry flees

Somerset as well as a few other surviving Lancastrian nobles manage to escape the battlefield and news of the defeat is sent to Henry VI. He flees straight away to Scotland with his wife Margaret of Anjou where he is joined by Somerset.

3. Lancastrian charge

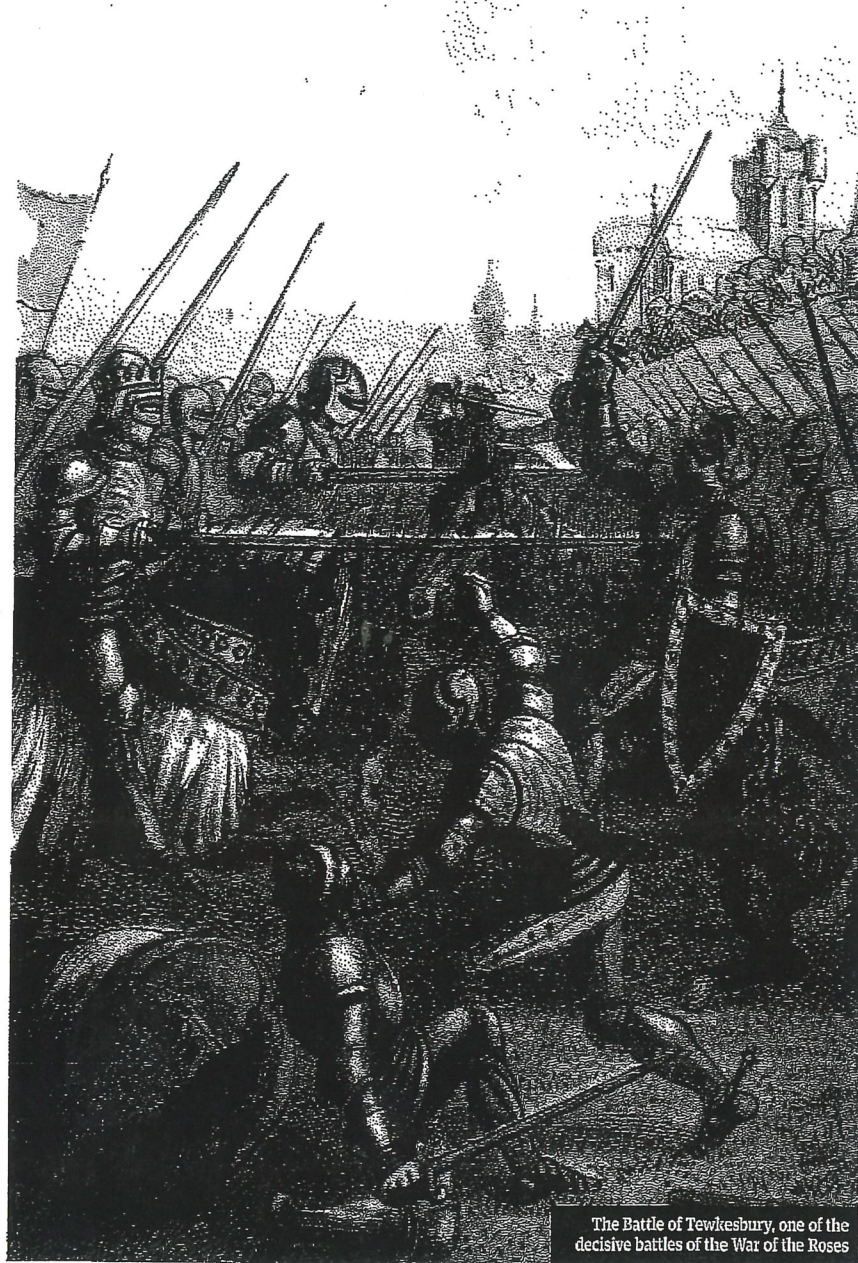
Under assault by Yorkist arrows, Somerset orders his troops to charge up the hill. Advancing through a rain of arrows, the Lancastrians lose many men, but reach the Yorkist lines and engage them in melee combat, cutting down hundreds of soldiers.

War of the Roses in Shakespeare and beyond

How has literature and film portrayed the events?

One of our main sources for information in popular culture on the War of the Roses is William Shakespeare's *Henry VI* trilogy, which charts the political machinations, fights and jealousies that tore the English political system apart in the mid-15th century. Indeed, the current name for the series of battles – War of the Roses – actually stems from Act 2, Scene 4 of the work, where the bickering lords are asked to show their allegiance to either Richard Duke of York or the rival Duke of Somerset by selecting either a red or white rose from a garden. This scene, despite its dubious historical accuracy – historians think it never took place – was later seized on by Sir Walter Scott and popularised through his work *Anne of Geierstein*. The name, 'Wars of the Roses', therefore stuck and has proceeded to be used to describe the conflict since. Up until this point, the conflict had instead simply been referred to as the 'civil war'.

The historically apocryphal scene from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* where supporters of the Yorkists and Lancastrians pick either a red or white rose to show their allegiance



The Battle of Tewkesbury, one of the decisive battles of the War of the Roses

These battles didn't just see commoners cut down in their thousands; for Richard Plantagenet, the Duke of York, Wakefield would be his final resting place. Decades of warfare had finally caught up with him. With Richard slain in battle and his second son Edmund and ally Richard of Salisbury captured and executed, Wakefield was one of the largest Lancastrian victories of the War of the Roses and a boon for the ageing but powerful Margaret of Anjou. Following Wakefield, the House of Lancaster pressed on, with their army returning south,

outmanoeuvring Warwick's Yorkist army and defeating them at the Second Battle of St Albans. By now, all seemed to be lost for the ambitious House of York.

With Richard Plantagenet dead and the Earl of Warwick having suffered a bad defeat, the House of York desperately needed a figurehead to rally around and so Richard's first son, Edward of March, stepped into the breach. He had already defeated Jasper Tudor's Lancastrian army at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross in Herefordshire and,

hearing of Warwick's defeat, joined his father's ally. The two of them and their armies then made a beeline for the capital. Margaret and Henry VI were not in London, as they were travelling northward, so the Yorkists entered the city unopposed and to a rapturous welcome. The welcome was so enthusiastic because Henry VI's incompetence as king had seen popular opinion sway in Edward's favour and the common people had seemingly had enough of being under Lancastrian ruler.

Such was the anti-Lancastrian mood that not only did Edward receive huge support from all the Yorkist nobles around the city but he was unofficially crowned king in an impromptu ceremony held at Westminster Abbey. Edward knew though that while he had enjoyed the ceremony, he would never truly be king until Henry

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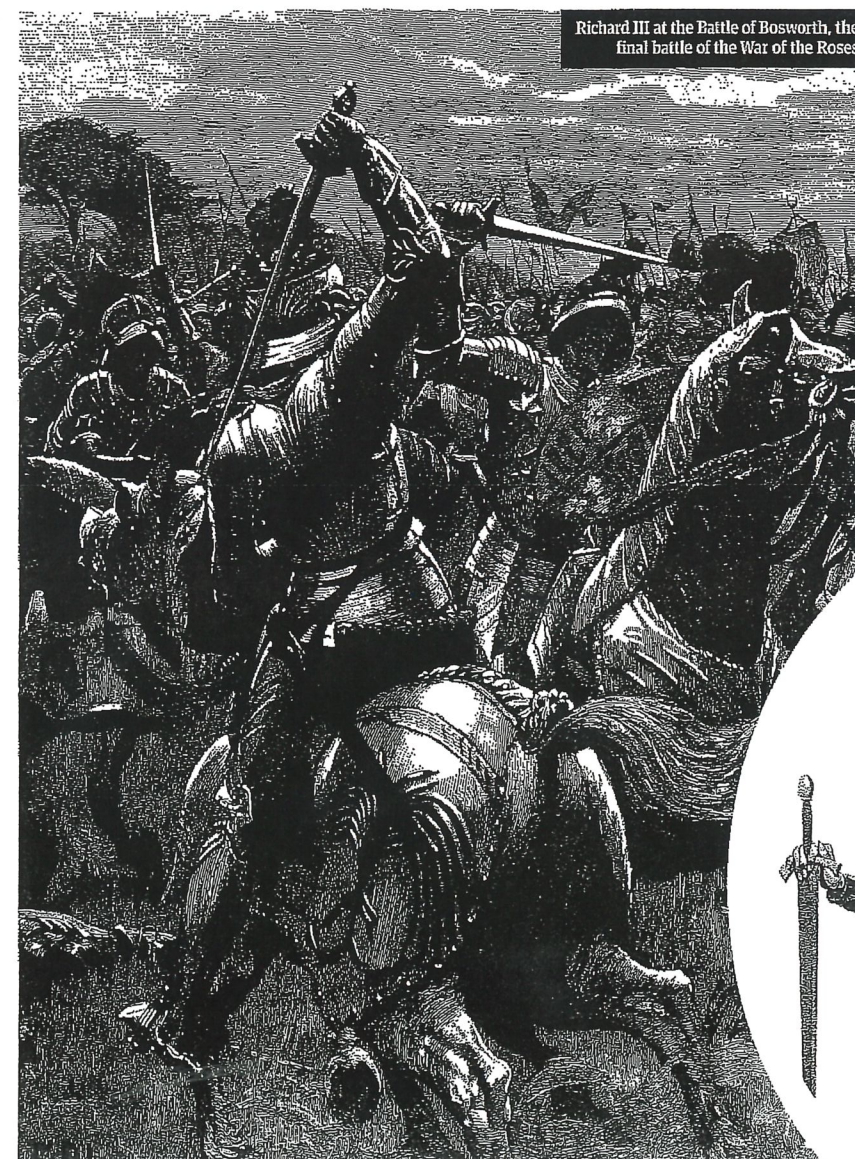
Henry VI and the War of the Roses

VI and Margaret of Anjou had been disposed of. Vowing to Parliament that he would not have a formal coronation until all pretenders to the throne had been crushed, he joined forces once more with his father's old ally, the 'Kingmaker', Warwick. Together they rode forth toward the north, leading a deadly army of over 30,000 men; their mission to take a proverbial hammer to the House of Lancaster and cut the head off its talisman.

This already large army grew even more along the way, with more men and nobles drawn to Edward's cause as he marched toward Henry VI and Margaret, as he headed straight toward what was to be one of the bloodiest and most decisive battles in the entirety of the War of the Roses. Edward and his army was finally met by the House of Lancaster's great military commander Henry Beaufort, third Duke of Somerset, south of York at the village of Towton. Margaret had dispatched Somerset to put down the son of her old nemesis Richard Plantagenet once and for all.

Beaufort turned up to the killing fields of Towton with an army of 35,000 soldiers just as the first snow began to fall and settle on the ground.

When the screams and the drums of war had died away, but the blood still startlingly vivid against the white snow, England had a new king. The House of York had emerged triumphant and Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou had been forced to flee to Scotland. Edward was officially crowned the new king of England in June the same year and slowly, one by one, the remaining pockets of Lancastrian soldiers were hunted down, either killed or forced to leave England. Margaret orchestrated an attack on Carlisle later that year but due to lack of financial power and men at arms, her advance was repulsed by Edward's Yorkist forces. Her loyal Duke of Somerset was later defeated and executed at the Battle of Hexham and her husband, Henry VI was captured and imprisoned yet again. This time he was held at the notorious Tower of London.



Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth, the final battle of the War of the Roses

Bankrupt and no longer in command of any military support, Margaret had only one option left open to her – to return to France with her son. Setting sail from Scotland in mid-1465, Margaret of Anjou, once queen of England and leader of the House of Lancaster, was down for the count. Her position in England lay in ruin and her dream to see her son Edward of Lancaster crowned king was crushed. Importantly though, while Margaret and the House of Lancaster were down for the count, they were not down and out.

The following years of exile did nothing to dampen Margaret's ambitions as she would continue her plotting and scheming to take back the English throne like never before. In an audacious political move, she struck a deal with her former enemy, 'the Kingmaker' Earl of Warwick in an attempt to re-establish her previous control of England. While her husband Henry VI would lose his life in the Tower of London and Yorkist Edward IV would go on to be king along with his younger brother Richard III, by the time the fighting ceased in the climactic Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 and the curtain on the War of the Roses was finally brought down, it was the Henry Tudor who would win this sabahe game of thrones and take the crown as king of England.

The story of Henry Tudor's rise to the kingship of England, 20 years after Margaret's exile, and his subsequent founding of the historic Tudor dynasty is a story for another day. Tudor's meteoric elevation dominated the last years of the Wars of the Roses and his ultimate victory was far from a certainty, with history painting a tale more at home with the concepts of luck and chance rather than those of divine right and martial might. For that was, in the end, the real truism of England's War of the Roses – that all is fair in love and war and that blood is everything.



The crowning of Henry VII, who would establish the Tudor dynasty



The Ultimate Guide to England's Game of Thrones

Follow our comprehensive timeline of the key events that decided the outcome in the Wars of the Roses

Henry VI is born

The son of warrior king Henry V and Catherine de Valois, Henry VI was crowned king of both England and France during infancy. He would proceed to oversee England's final losses in the Hundred Years' War and famously married the strong and powerful Margaret of Anjou.

6 December 1421

The Kingmaker

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick was one of the most powerful figures in the entire war, personally overseeing the deposition of two kings. He was killed at the Battle of Barnet.

22 November 1428

Margaret of Anjou is born

One of the key players in the Wars of the Roses, Margaret of Anjou, the future wife of King Henry VI, is born to René d'Anjou, Duke of Anjou and Isabel de Lorraine.

23 March 1430

Jasper Tudor is born

Son of legendary Welsh warrior Owen Tudor, who fought alongside Henry V at Agincourt, he would become a commander and play an important role in establishing Henry Tudor as king.

1431

Battle of Losecote Field

Edward IV raises a new army and attacks Lancastrian troops at Empingham, winning well.

12 March 1470



The Kingmaker exits

The final curtain for 'the Kingmaker', Barnet sees Warwick die at the hand of Yorkist forces of Edward IV.

14 April 1471

Henry VI dies

After a period of incarceration in the Tower of London, it is reported that Henry VI has died. Edward IV is suspected to have ordered his death mere hours before he himself was re-crowned as king.

21 May 1471

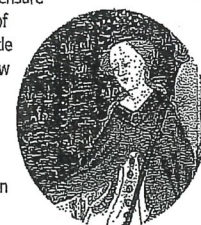
Battle of Tewkesbury

Notable for the death of Margaret of Anjou's only son Edward and her own capture.

4 May 1471

Margaret of Anjou is finally defeated 1475

After spending most of her life caring for her son Edward in an attempt to ensure his succession to the throne of England, his death at the Battle of Tewkesbury is the final blow to the once-powerful queen. With her spirit broken she is exiled back to France, where she spends the remainder of her life living as a poor relation of the French king.



The Battle of Edgecote Moor

After raising an army to put down an uprising in Yorkshire, King Edward IV's forces are intercepted by a Lancastrian one and defeated by Robin of Redesdale.

26 July 1469

Elizabeth of York is born

Elizabeth Woodville and Edward IV's only daughter to be born, Elizabeth of York would proceed to be queen consort of England under Henry VII. She is the Yorkist partner in the eventual joining of houses at the end of the Wars of the Roses.

11 February 1466

The end of Somerset

The final battle of the experienced Lancastrian commander, the Duke of Somerset, Hexham saw a large Yorkist victory and Somerset's capture and execution.

15 May 1464

Henry VI is restored to the throne

After being alienated and shunned by his old ally Edward IV, the Earl of Warwick strikes a deal with Margaret of Anjou to defeat the Yorkist king. 'The Kingmaker' restores Henry VI to the throne.

30 October 1470



Edward IV dies at 40

After over a decade of successful rule as the king of England in two spells, Edward IV dies suddenly and unexpectedly, throwing the country back into political turmoil. His heir, Edward V, is only 12 years old at the time of his father's death.

9 April 1483

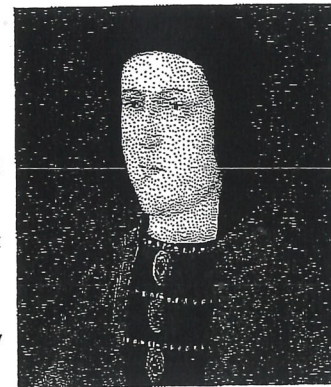
The Princes in the Tower die 1483

The only two sons alive at the time of their father's death Edward IV, Edward V of England and Richard of Shrewsbury are famously incarcerated in the Tower of London during their youth and then mysteriously disappear, likely killed to remove any possibility of them taking the throne at a future point. Who ordered the deaths is not known.

Future Yorkist king of England

Edward is the first son of Richard Plantagenet and Cicely Neville. Following his father's death at the Battle of Wakefield, Edward would famously go on to join forces with his father's old ally, the Earl of Warwick ('the Kingmaker') and take the crown for himself in bloody warfare. He marries the politically savvy Elizabeth Woodville.

28 April 1442



Margaret takes back power

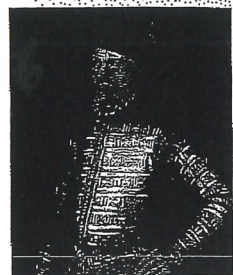
Following Henry VI's miraculous Christmas Day recovery from his madness, his wife Margaret of Anjou wastes no time in reinstating the king as the court's top power and pushes Richard out of the capital.

February 1455

York is Lord Protector

After Henry VI's first mental breakdown, Richard of York returns to London and is named Lord Protector. York imprisons the Duke of Somerset in the Tower of London and forges his legendary warring relationship with Margaret of Anjou.

27 March 1453



Warwick becomes captain of Calais

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, becomes the captain of Calais, a powerful financial and military position that leads him into his apex of power, heavily controlling the affairs not just of England but of parts of France too.

1455

Margaret Beaufort is born

The future mother of King Henry VII is born at Bletsoe Castle, Bedfordshire, England. She would become the influential matriarch that sees the rise and establishment of the Tudor Dynasty.

31 May 1443

Richard marches on London

Disaffected with a list of grievances, Richard of York marches to London from Ireland, demanding Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset, to be removed from office due to perceived failures. He is not supported at court, however, and returns a year later empty-handed.

1452

The French defeat the English at Castillon

Following the disastrous Battle of Castillon, where French forces bring down the Hundred Years' War with a decisive victory over the English, Henry VI is told of the news and has his first mental breakdown.

17 July 1453

First Battle of St Albans

The opening battle of the Wars of the Roses. St Albans is a small and scrappy battle but still leads to the death of three Lancastrian nobles.

22 May 1455

Hostilities resume

After years of strained peace, hostilities break out again, with Richard Neville scoring a victory against a numerically superior foe.

23 September 1459

The Battle of Ludford Bridge

Following a victory at Blore Heath Yorkist supporters regroup at Ludford. However, a large army led by Henry VI arrives and many of the Yorkists flee.

12 October 1459

House of York gain the upper hand

An interesting battle due to the Lancastrian Lord Edmund Grey switching side to the Yorkists mid-battle. The Yorkists won easily and gained the upper hand in the Wars.

10 July 1460

Battle of Hedgeley Moor

The brother of 'the Kingmaker' Warwick, John Neville, clashes with a Lancastrian force on his way to the border of Scotland to arrange a peace treaty.

25 April 1464

Edward's popular coronation

After clearing a path to the throne with a hard-fought victory at the Battle of Towton, Edward of York is crowned king in an official coronation in London. The coronation is well received by the public.

28 June 1461

The bloodiest battle

The most brutal battle of the Wars of the Roses, this clash sees almost 30,000 men die in driving snow near the village of Towton, Yorkshire.

29 March 1461



Battle of Wakefield

The last battle for Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York. Riding out from a defensive position at Sandal Castle, Richard is killed by Lancastrian forces.

30 December 1460

Elizabeth Woodville marries King Edward IV

Coming from a low-ranking family, Woodville is called 'the most beautiful woman in the Island of Britain' and she uses this trait to marry advantageously, walking down the Isle with King Edward IV.

1 May 1464



Battle of Ferrybridge

A small, precursor skirmish before the decisive and bloody Battle of Towton, Ferrybridge sees the Yorkist leader Lord Fitzwater killed in action.

28 March 1461

Second Battle of St. Albans

The follow-up battle to the one that kickstarted the Wars of the Roses, this time there are more men, more deaths and, importantly, a Lancastrian victory.

17 February 1461

Lancastrian army routed

Following his father's defeat at Wakefield, Richard's son Edward routs a Lancastrian army under the leadership of Jasper Tudor.

2 February 1461

Act of Accord signed

As a compromise, it is agreed that Richard of York is the rightful successor to the throne after Henry VI. This deal excludes Henry's son, Edward of Lancaster, from the throne, angering Margaret of Anjou.

October 1460

Richard becomes king

Despite simply being named as Lord Protector by Edward IV, Richard III is crowned king after the infamous affair of the princes in the Tower.

6 July 1483

Buckingham revolts

Richard's ascension is immensely contentious and uprisings take place. One of the largest is a rebellion orchestrated by Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, who is especially disaffected. His rebellion fails, however.

18 October 1483



The king's mother arrives at courts

Following her son Henry's victory at the Battle of Bosworth Field, Henry's mother Margaret Beaufort arrives at court and creates a new title for herself; 'My Lady the King's Mother', ensuring herself legal and social independence.

1485

Henry unites the Houses

18 January 1486
In his marriage to Elizabeth of York, the only daughter of Elizabeth Woodville, Henry VII finally unites the remnants of the two warring Houses of York and Lancaster. The product of this marriage marks the beginning of the House of Tudor and the Tudor Dynasty, which would go on to rule England until 24 March 1603.

Battle of Bosworth 22 August 1485

The decisive and climactic battle of the Wars of the Roses. The Battle of Bosworth sees the Yorkist king Richard III killed in combat, his 10,000-strong force routed and his enemy, the young and charismatic Henry Tudor, carve a direct path to the throne of England. He would be crowned King Henry VII months later.

The War of the Roses end 16 June 1487

Finally, after more than 30 years of turmoil, chaos, warfare, infighting, backstabbing, side-changing, murdering, scheming and plotting, the War of the Roses end with Henry Tudor quashing the last remaining threat to his throne at the Battle of Stoke. Henry proceeds to rule successfully for over 20 years, despite a couple of minor threats to his throne.



Anne Neville dies

The wife of embattled king Richard III dies of what is now believed to be tuberculosis, at Westminster, London. There is an eclipse on the same day, which people see as an omen depicting the impending fall of Richard.

16 March 1485