

5 The Downfall of the Yorkist Monarchy, 1483–1486

End notes

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In this section we will examine how Richard III claimed the throne and the reaction against his actions that brought about the accession of Henry VII. We will examine the usurpation by Richard III and the response to his actions, his short reign and decisive removal from power by Henry VII. We will look into the extent of the gentry opposition to Richard III. We will look into:

- The coup d'état by Richard III, Duke of Gloucester: the issue of the Princes in the Tower and Richard III's position as a usurper.
- Factional rivalries; the emergence of Henry Tudor, dissensions among the Yorkist nobility; Buckingham's rebellion.
- The strengths and weaknesses of Richard III's position in 1484: the death of his wife and heir; the problem of the succession.
- The downfall of Richard III: the return of Henry Tudor, Bosworth, the proclamation of a new Tudor dynasty under Henry VII and his marriage to Elizabeth of York.

The coup d'état by Richard, Duke of Gloucester

The crisis of the Yorkist succession in 1483 was purely the making of the Yorkist

excessive favour to Queen Elizabeth and her Woodville family. It was a particular matter of contention that the Woodvilles had all but exclusive control of Edward IV's sons, Edward, Prince of Wales, and Richard, Duke of York. In the north of England, Edward IV was also increasing the power of his brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who held estates and power at an unprecedented level. Gloucester was not alone among the nobility in his hatred and jealousy of the Woodvilles and their influence, but his concern was all the greater as he feared a royal minority dominated by the family. After all, as the king's brother he was the natural choice as regent or protector, but he knew that they would do all they could to oppose this. As summarised by the historian Charles Ross: 'The existence of these rivalries was what made possible Duke Richard's seizure of the throne in June 1483. Probably it was fear for his own safety and future which inspired his action, rather than any deep-laid plan or the determination "to prove a villain" which Shakespeare and the Tudor tradition attributed to him. But in the circumstances his seizure of power could only be achieved by extremely violent means, and these seriously weakened the ruling Yorkist party and heightened the divisions within it'.¹

The events that occurred between the death of Edward IV on 9 April 1483 and Richard III's coronation on 6 July 1483 were complicated and swift, and are outlined in the following timeline of events:

Timeline

9 April	The death of Edward IV.
10–11 April	The Royal Council takes control of government.
14 April	News of Edward IV's death reaches the Prince of Wales, now Edward V, at Ludlow.
16–18 April	Edward IV's funeral cortège travels from Westminster to Windsor.
20 April	Edward IV is interred at Windsor.
23 April	Richard, Duke of Gloucester, starts his journey south from York.
24 April	Edward V and his uncle Earl Rivers leave Ludlow.
29 April	Edward V and Earl Rivers reach Northampton. Edward continues to Stony Stratford while Earl Rivers waits behind to meet the Duke of Gloucester and Duke of Buckingham, with whom he reportedly spends a pleasant evening.
The first coup d'état:	
30 April	Earl Rivers, Richard Grey and Thomas Vaughan are arrested by the Duke of Gloucester and Duke of Buckingham and sent to Yorkshire. Edward V's household is disbanded and he is taken into the custody of Gloucester and Buckingham, who protest their loyalty and that their actions are against traitors who they claim were plotting their destruction.

4 May	Edward V's coronation, originally planned for this day, is deferred. He is escorted into London by Gloucester and Buckingham and housed in the Bishop of London's palace. Queen Elizabeth, the Marquess of Dorset and Richard, Duke of York, have already taken sanctuary at Westminster Abbey.
10 May	Richard, Duke of Gloucester, is appointed Lord Protector.
13 May	A summons is made for Parliament to be held on 25 June.
14 May	Richard sends men to arrest Sir Edward Woodville.
16 May	A summons is made for the convocation of the clergy .
18 May	The new coronation date is set for 24 June (but later changed to 22 June).
By 19 May	Edward V is moved to the Tower of London.
23 May	Gloucester, Buckingham and the archbishops try to persuade Queen Elizabeth to leave the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey, but fail.
10–11 June	The Duke of Gloucester writes to the cities of York and Hull, and to Lord Neville, asking for military support and for the troops to muster at Pontefract on 18 June. The city of York is specifically told of a plot organised by the queen to persuade them to the Duke of Gloucester's cause.
The second coup d'état:	
13 June	Lord Hastings, Archbishop Rotherham of York, Bishop Morton and (perhaps) Lord Stanley are arrested at a council meeting at the Tower of London by the Duke of Gloucester. Lord Hastings is immediately executed without trial, after being charged with treasonable conspiracy with the queen. The other three arrested men are imprisoned.
16 June	Edward V's brother, Richard, Duke of York, is removed from sanctuary at Westminster Abbey to the Tower of London by Cardinal Bouchier. Parliament and the coronation are delayed again until November.
19 June	A new proclamation against plotters is received from the Duke of Gloucester at the city of York, as the troops from York had not yet left there.
22 June	The bastardy of the princes is preached at St Paul's Cross, London, by Ralph Shaa. Earl Rivers makes his will in expectation of execution.
24 June	The Duke of Buckingham urges the Duke of Gloucester's title to the crown at the London Guildhall. Earl Rivers, Richard Grey and Thomas Vaughan are executed at Pontefract.
25 June	The end of Edward V's reign.

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26 June	Richard, Duke of Gloucester, is elected as king by a meeting of estates. He accepts the appointment and his reign as Richard III commences.
6 July	The coronation of Richard III.

In a matter of three short and bloody months the reign of the rightful heir to the throne was cut short and many leading men had lost their lives in order for the Duke of Gloucester successfully to take the throne. Not only had the Duke of Gloucester tried to spread the story that Edward IV's sons were bastards, but he also murdered significant men who had been close to Edward IV. These men included Earl Rivers, Richard Grey and William, Lord Hastings. He also held the usurper Edward V in the Tower of London, along with Edward IV's other son, and next heir, Richard, Duke of York. All of his actions were deeply controversial and problematic for society in general, not least holding Edward V a prisoner.



Key term

Star Chamber: an English court of law that supplemented other courts in both civil and criminal matters.

The situation in London following the execution of Lord Hastings as described in a letter from Simon Stallworthe to Sir William Stonor, 21 June 1483:

'Worshipful sir, I commend myself to you, and for tidings I hold you happy that you are out of the press, for with us there is much trouble, and every man doubts the other. As on Friday last the lord chamberlain was beheaded soon upon noon. On Monday last there was at Westminster a great plenty of harnessed men; there was the deliverance of the Duke of York to my lord cardinal, my lord chancellor, and other many temporal lords. My lord of Buckingham met with him in the midst of the hall at Westminster, my lord protector receiving him at the **Star Chamber** door with many loving words, and so departed with my lord cardinal to the Tower, where he is happy, blessed be Jesus. The Lord Lisle is come to my lord protector and waits upon him. It is thought there shall be 20 000 men of my lord protector and my lord of Buckingham in London this week; to what intent I know not but to keep the peace. My lord has much business and more than he is content withall,



Voices from the past

William Hastings, first Baron Hastings, styled Lord Hastings, c. 1430–83

Lord Hastings was a popular figure of Edward IV's reign and, while he was incredibly powerful thanks to his closeness to the king, it did not affect his general standing in the eyes of many. However, there was friction between him and the Woodville court party, and there was particular tension between him and the queen regarding the division of the lands of the earldom of Shrewsbury. It is not surprising then that Lord Hastings opposed letting the Woodvilles, and in particular, Earl Rivers, have the larger share of power over the young Edward V. He argued for Richard, Duke of Gloucester, to be appointed Protector, rather than

the immediate coronation of the young king. Apparently on good terms during Edward IV's reign, and in April and May 1483, it was a surprising turn of events that the Duke of Gloucester had Lord Hastings summarily executed for conspiring against him. Contemporary chroniclers, including the Croyland Chronicler and Polydore Vergil, believed the accusation had no basis, but rather that Lord Hastings had not supported the deposition of Edward V. Some historians have since suggested that there was a conspiracy between Lord Hastings and the Woodvilles, as unlikely as it seems, and that the Duke of Gloucester panicked in the light of this threat.²

if any other ways would be taken. The Lord Archbishop of York, the Bishop of Ely, are yet in the Tower with Master Oliver King (I suppose they shall come out nevertheless). There are men in their places for sure keeping. And I suppose that there shall be sent men of my lord protector to these lords' places in the country. They are not likely to come out of ward yet. As for Foster, he is in captivity and prison for his life. Mistress Shore is in prison: what shall happen to her, I know not. I pray you, pardon me of more writing, I am so sick that I may not well hold my pen; and Jesu preserve you. From London the 21 day of June by the hands of your servant. Simon Stallworthe.³

The issue of the Princes in the Tower

By 19 May 1483 Edward V had been moved to the Tower of London, and was joined by his younger brother Richard, Duke of York, on 16 June. While there were sightings of the two boys playing in the grounds of the Tower for the next few weeks, after July 1483 they were not seen or heard of again. The fate of Edward IV's sons in the Tower of London is without doubt one of the greatest mysteries of the Middle Ages and their murder is the greatest accusation laid at the hands of Richard III. While it has been a matter of continued debate among modern historians and enthusiasts, particularly with defenders of Richard III anxious to show that he was not guilty of their murder, the important fact is that the king's contemporaries believed he had killed his nephews, and that this belief dogged his short reign.

Physical evidence for the Princes in the Tower

Two sets of bones were discovered at different times in the 17th century, and both sets were claimed to be the bones of Edward V and his brother Richard. One set no longer exists, but the bones were allegedly found in 1647 in a walled-up room in the Tower of London. The suggestion was that they were the bones of two young boys who had been left to die in the room. However, the bones were never properly examined, even by 17th century medical standards, and most historians



Voices from the past

Anthony Woodville, second Earl Rivers, c. 1440–83

Earl Rivers was doubtless in a much stronger position of influence over Edward V than Lord Hastings, causing the tension between them to grow, but his possession of the young king was to be his downfall. Following the death of Edward IV, Earl Rivers set off with his young charge from Ludlow to London, and at the Duke of Gloucester's request he went via Stony Stratford in Northamptonshire. The Earl and the Duke met, and it appears that there was no animosity between the two men, and nor had there been in the previous months. However, in order to gain possession of Edward V, the Duke of Gloucester had Earl Rivers arrested and

imprisoned in the Duke's Yorkshire castle of Sheriff Hutton. A trial of sorts was conducted by the Earl of Northumberland, and Earl Rivers was executed on 25 June 1483. He had written his will two days earlier, in full knowledge that his days were numbered.

Discussion points

On the death of Edward IV, Lord Hastings and Earl Rivers were in opposition as to how the minority of Edward V should be managed.

1. Compare and contrast the politics of Lord Hastings and Earl Rivers.
2. Assess why the two men met similar fates at the hands of the Duke of Gloucester.

have dismissed their significance. The other set are given much more credibility by modern historians. The bones were found in 1674 and were declared to be the bones of Edward IV's sons, and King Charles II ordered their re-interment at Westminster Abbey, where they have remained. These bones were examined by an archivist and an anatomist in 1933 who both agreed that they were the bones of the young princes. Some still doubt whether they were the bones of Edward V and Richard, Duke of York, but further examination has been denied to scientists. Despite some scepticism, the likelihood is that the bones are those of the two princes, but they still do not answer the question of who killed them.

Events of the Wars of the Roses period were certainly bloody, and dangerous opponents of the reigning monarch were dealt with swiftly and ruthlessly. Once Henry VI's heir apparent had been killed at Tewkesbury, it was far safer for Edward IV's reign to do away with Henry VI as well. The death of George, Duke of Clarence, on the orders of his brother was the result of him regularly proving to be dangerous and politically irresponsible. So, considering these precedents, and others dating back to the murder of Edward II at Berkeley Castle in 1327, it is all the more probable that Richard III had a very strong motive for getting rid of Edward IV's rightful successor and his brother. Certainly contemporary writers were unanimous in their accusation of Richard III once the two boys had disappeared from sight after July 1483. Even their mother, Queen Elizabeth, must have believed by the autumn of 1483 that they were dead, as she supported placing Henry Tudor on the throne (see the section on The Emergence of Henry Tudor). It is inconceivable that she would have given her support to any plan that would disinherit her two sons unless she was already sure that they were dead. The same is true for Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, who as a loyal Yorkist supporter would not have turned to Henry Tudor's cause unless he too were convinced that Edward V and Richard were dead.



Figure 5.1: Depictions of Richard, Duke of York (left) and Edward V (right) in the Royal Window at Canterbury Cathedral.

The rebellion against Richard III in 1483 began as a movement to place Edward V back on the throne, but it swiftly changed as the rebels assumed the princes were dead. If they were alive, Richard III would have produced them to quell the rebellion, but he clearly was in no position to do so. Ironically, while keeping the princes alive would have been just as problematic for Richard III, their disappearance and supposed death only added to his problems in 1483.

Richard III's defenders have pointed the blame of the murders to candidates other than the king. John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, has been one such candidate, but this was deftly dismissed by the historian Anne Crawford.⁴ Another candidate has been offered as Henry, Duke of Buckingham, who is more likely to have been involved in the deaths of the boys. However, there is still no possibility that he murdered a deposed king without the usurper king's knowledge and consent. As a close confidant of Richard III up until the summer of 1483, it is quite plausible that Buckingham acted on the king's orders, and if not Buckingham there is little doubt someone else would have been commanded to do it. The consensus is that while Richard III did not carry out the deed in person, it was done on his command. This makes another candidate for the murderer of the princes all the more unlikely, and the accusation that Henry Tudor was their murderer has been dismissed. SB Chrimes has shown that Henry Tudor was unaware of the precise fate of the princes.⁵

The main consequence of the disappearance of the princes was that fuel was added to the fire of the rebels in southern and western England, where support for Richard III was already weak. Yet others were not as disturbed by the disappearance. Richard III's support in the north of England was as strong as ever. Many members of the nobility even supported the usurper king despite his deposition of Edward V and possible murder of the deposed king. However, the murders have been used to much greater effect in historical character assassinations than in any contemporary response to the king.

Richard III's position as a usurper

The grounds on which Richard III justified his usurpation are rather unclear. While one contemporary stated that it was on the basis that Edward IV was a bastard, later sources only state that Edward IV's sons were rumoured to be bastards. The election of Richard III as king on 26 June by his peers suggested that he was the real heir of Richard, Duke of York, all along and that he was therefore the rightful king.

Modern historians, including SB Chrimes and Charles Ross, are doubtful that Richard III had held a long-standing ambition for the throne and are keen to point out the loyalty he showed to his brother Edward IV throughout his reign.⁶ However, it was no secret that his loyalty did not stretch to his sister-in-law Elizabeth, and he doubtless had the belief that he was the only man capable of managing a successful and peaceful royal minority. Yet within the space of a few weeks he became convinced that he should move from being Lord Protector to king, and conspiracy theories still abound as to who or what convinced him to claim the throne. One contemporary, Philippe de Comynes, accused Robert Stillington,

ACTIVITY 5.1

Conduct research into the many conspiracy theories surrounding the princes in the Tower and assess how useful such theories are to the modern historian. Chapter 5 of C Ross's *Richard III* is a useful starting point, but even a general internet search should produce some interesting results.

Bishop of Bath and Wells, of suggesting the possibility of the illegitimacy of Edward IV and his sons to the duke, and called him a 'wicked bishop'.⁷

Richard III's actions in order to claim the throne had immediate consequences, and the reaction against his ruthlessness was far-reaching. It was unsurprising that the remaining members of the Woodville family resorted to active conspiracy, but it was perhaps not so expected, by Richard III at least, that many members of the leading gentry opposed him. This was particularly the case in southern and western England and involved many of Edward IV's former servants who were loyal to the true Yorkist line of succession.

The position of any usurper king was always a difficult one, and opposition was a guaranteed consequence of usurpation. Richard III was the third usurper king of the 15th century, and like his predecessors Henry IV and Edward IV, he was faced with the prospect of rebellion and conspiracy. In the face of doubtless expected opposition, Richard III began a customary **royal progress** through his realm following his coronation on 6 July 1483. He progressed through the Thames Valley and on to Gloucester, where the Duke of Buckingham left his company to return to his estates in the Welsh Marches. Richard III continued on to the Duchy of Lancaster estates, and on to arrive in York on 29 August. There he invested his son Edward as Prince of Wales.

Factional rivalries

The emergence of Henry Tudor

As has been shown in previous chapters, while Henry Tudor did have a tenuous claim to the throne, before 1483 he was in no position to even consider the possibility of staking his claim. He had been living in Brittany with his uncle, Jasper Tudor, since 1471, and they were greatly protected by the Duke of Brittany who saw their value as a bargaining chip in diplomatic relations between England, France and Brittany. After the Treaty of Picquigny in 1475, Edward IV had made more concerted efforts to get the Tudors returned to England, with the support of Margaret Beaufort and her husband Lord Stanley. She had made her peace with Edward IV after the Battle of Tewkesbury and was apparently keen to secure the safe return of her son and find a place for him in the Yorkist regime. It was also suggested that a suitable bride be found for Henry Tudor and that he should be given lands as befitted his status as Earl of Richmond.

Key term

Royal progress: a tour of the kingdom made by a monarch and his household retinue, usually in order to impress the image of the king on his subjects, but also it was often to cut the costs of the household by staying at noble and gentry houses.



Figure 5.2: The tomb effigy of Margaret Beaufort at Westminster Abbey.

In 1476 the Duke of Brittany was persuaded to return Henry Tudor to England, but Henry feigned illness before he embarked his ship. The Duke changed his mind and called for the return of Henry, who escaped his English escort and took sanctuary in St Malo. Edward IV was furious that Henry had returned to the Duke of Brittany's court, but there was little he could do about it. All he could do was continue to exert pressure on the Duke and offer incentives to Henry to return to England. Yet on Edward IV's sudden death on 9 April 1483, Henry Tudor was still in Brittany.

Little is known about Henry Tudor's life in Brittany, where he and his uncle were under the protection of the Duke of Brittany, other than where the uncle and nephew lived. However, these were his formative years, and the historian Sean Cunningham has summed up his time in Brittany as 'a restricted but active upbringing ... He must have received conventional martial training and been possessed of some personal courage since he was prepared to risk his safety on the battlefield when he had very little to lose but his life. In his late teenage years Henry did spend part of his exile with Brittany's elite professional soldiers, such as Bertrand du Parc. It is probable that he received as normal a noble education as possible, and this included physically demanding training in the techniques and tactics of warfare.'⁸

On the death of Edward IV, it appeared to all that Edward V's succession was assured, and the Duke of Brittany was probably certain that the underage king would continue his father's foreign policies. However, Richard III's usurpation dramatically changed the situation and Henry Tudor's position. He was now the

ACTIVITY 5.2

Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby (1443–1509) was a witness to the full course of the events of the Wars of the Roses, and was a staunch supporter of the Lancastrian cause. She was a political survivor and quite an extraordinary woman.

1. Conduct research into her life and produce a timeline of major events in her life.
2. Write a one-page assessment of her role in bringing Henry VII to the throne, with reference to her marriage to Thomas, Lord Stanley.

A recent biography that may be useful is E Norton's *Margaret Beaufort: Mother of the Tudor Dynasty*, but you could also refer to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online Edition* at <http://www.oxforddnb.com> and MK Jones and MG Underwood's *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby*.

biggest rival for the crown, and his position had to be negated by Richard III in order to stabilise his authority. One possible option was for Richard III to secure Henry's return to England and to exert full control of him. In order to discuss Henry's position, among other pressing matters, Richard III sent an embassy to Brittany in July 1483. However, Henry was still a valuable pawn to the Duke of Brittany in his relations with both England and France, and he would not give him up easily.

Dissensions among the Yorkist nobility

On the accession of Edward IV, the Yorkists all but dominated the aristocracy, and there was barely a Lancastrian to be found. However, Richard III's usurpation of the throne revived old divisions between those who supported the king, and those who did not, in effect dividing the Yorkist elite. This division had been prevented by the abilities of Edward IV to manage the discord between leading members of the aristocracy and his wife and the Woodville family, but dissension was inevitable after his death. Many of the elite showed their support and loyalty to Richard III, including the other nobles of the royal blood, including Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick, and John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln. The Duke of Norfolk was perhaps the most loyal of the non-royal blood, and while there were others like him, including Lord Stanley, the Earl of Northumberland and the Duke of Buckingham, their loyalties were certainly not assured.

Overt supporters of Richard III were few and far between, and it quickly became apparent that there were many in the elite who, while not outright opponents of the king, would certainly not come out in support of him. The lack of political activity and support from the elite was a clear response to the bloodletting of the usurpation, in particular the death of Lord Hastings. In the following months, opposition was to come from unsurprising quarters of the elite, including Margaret Beaufort, Queen Elizabeth and the Marquess of Dorset. Yet plotting and rebellion did not bring many of the elite out to show their support to the king. The political silence was deafening.

'Buckingham's rebellion'

Origins of the rebellion
Rebellion was brewing as early as September 1483, as disaffection for Richard III grew out of distaste for the mode of the usurpation and the growing rumours that his nephews were no longer alive in the Tower of London. The rebellion grew out of a complex period of plotting against the new king, involving the name of Henry Tudor, even though he was not present in England when his position as a rival to the throne became the focus of plots against Richard III. The plots that emerged to put him on the throne were orchestrated by his mother, Margaret Beaufort, and Queen Elizabeth, who was still living in sanctuary in Westminster Abbey.

The rebellion itself may not have been much of a surprise to Richard III, but just who was involved did come as a surprise and a terrible blow to his cause. The namesake of the rebellion was the Duke of Buckingham, once Richard III's most loyal ally, who may have been turned against the king by John Morton, who was in the Duke's custody. Other key figures involved had been loyal to

Edward IV, including Sir John Fogg, Sir John Cheyney, Sir Richard Guildford, Sir Giles Daubeney and William Brandon.

Location and leaders

The rebellion had three main centres. One was the south-east of England, where the traditionally rebellious county of Kent was joined by Surrey and Sussex, under the leadership of Edward IV's former household servants and some who were connected to the households of Queen Elizabeth and her sons. A significant feature of this centre of rebellion was that it was not as heavily influenced by magnates and barons, so the gentry was able to wield significant influence and could rely on popular following. The gentry community was also close-knit with networks of inter-marriage and close family loyalties. Fathers were joined by sons and cousins supported cousins.

The second centre of rebellion was in south-central England, in Salisbury, Wiltshire, and Newbury, Berkshire. Support also came from the counties of Hampshire, Dorset and Somerset. As in the South East, many of the leaders were supporters of Edward IV, although there were also men who had been associated with George, Duke of Clarence, including Sir Roger Tocotes and John Harcourt. Edward IV's former household men included Sir William Berkeley and Sir John Cheyne. As in the South East, close family ties strengthened the numbers of the rebellious gentry.

The south-west centre of rebellion was predominantly led by two men, Thomas Grey, Marquess of Dorset, and Sir Thomas St Leger. The Marquess of Dorset was not only a loyal servant of Edward IV, but he was also very closely associated with the Woodville family. The Marquess and Sir Thomas were close associates as their children were contracted to marry. They were supported by members of the gentry who, as in the other areas, had also been Edward IV's servants, such as three members of the Courtenay family.



Key term

Knight of the Body: an attendant on the king's person who had frequent and intimate contact with the king.



Voices from the past

A Surrey Rebel – Sir George Browne of Betchworth

Sir George was one of Edward IV's loyal household servants, even though his father, Sir Thomas Browne, had been executed by the Earl of Warwick in 1460. Sir George's stepfather, Sir Thomas Vaughan, was the likely influence that encouraged Sir George to enter Edward IV's service. His career was typical of the gentry of the period, and he combined royal service with service to his county. He was MP for Guildford in 1472 and then for Surrey in 1478, and was appointed Sheriff of Kent in 1480. Serving the king, he was a **Knight of the Body** and was present as a banner bearer at Edward IV's funeral.

A Kentish Rebel – Sir John Fogg of Ashford

Sir John was a longstanding Yorkist loyalist, having joined the Yorkists when they invaded England in 1460. He served the king as Treasurer of the king's household between 1461 and 1468 and was a trusted councillor until Edward IV's death. He had also served Prince Edward on his Welsh council from 1473 onwards. His other royal connections included his marriage to his first wife, Alice Haute, through whom he was connected to the Woodville family. For his county, he was the MP for Kent in 1478.

As discussed above, the primary motivation for the rebellion was the outrage felt by these men for Richard III's treatment of Edward IV's heirs. At the beginning of the rebellion, according to the Croyland Chronicler, the rebels met and aimed for the release of the princes from the Tower of London, and to take the daughters of Edward IV from sanctuary and send them overseas. As the rumours spread that the princes were dead, the rebels were not deterred. The rebellion was given a fresh cause by the plotting of Queen Elizabeth and Margaret Beaufort to place Henry Tudor on the throne on the condition that he marry one of Edward IV's daughters. It is perhaps a surprise that while the rebellion was led by those loyal to the Yorkist cause, they were prepared to turn to a traditional Lancastrian to headline their campaign.

The Duke of Buckingham becomes involved
The plotting took an unusual turn in that Richard III's 'kingmaker', Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, turned against his master. Through his prisoner John Morton, Bishop of Ely, the Duke of Buckingham was put in contact with Reginald Bray, Margaret Beaufort's agent. She was the Duke of Buckingham's aunt. They made plans for the Duke of Buckingham to raise a revolt in Brecon in South Wales, and in the meantime Henry Tudor was encouraged by envoys and the Duke to return to England to stake his claim. The revolt in Wales was planned to link up with an invasion force from Brittany. Combined with the uprisings in southern England, the timing was absolutely crucial. However, news of the plot was leaked by royal spies and Richard III was able to prepare himself. The Duke of Norfolk was placed in charge of the defence of London, while Richard III and his supporters focused on defeating the Duke of Buckingham. Richard III's supporters were commanded to prepare defences on the English/Welsh border and muster their troops. The royal preparations meant that the rebels could not wait any longer for Henry Tudor to land on English soil, and on 18 October 1483 there were risings at Brecon, Maidstone in Kent, Newbury in Berkshire, Salisbury in Wiltshire and Exeter in Devon.

The capture of the Duke of Buckingham
Richard III went on the attack against the Duke of Buckingham and had him surrounded. The Duke was deserted by his Welsh troops and failed to rally any support in Weobley (Herefordshire). He went into hiding, but was betrayed and captured by Richard III. His execution took place at Salisbury on 2 November 1483. Richard III swiftly moved from Salisbury to meet the south-western rebels in Exeter, safe in the knowledge that the other rebels had been deterred from attacking London by the Duke of Norfolk's forces. Exeter put up no defences against Richard III and he occupied the city, where the rebel leader Sir Thomas St Leger was executed. Henry Tudor's invasion fleet had meanwhile been scattered in a storm, and on arriving near the coast he realised his arrival was too late and he turned back for Normandy. The rest of the rebels, discouraged by the death of the Duke of Buckingham and not trusting the abilities of Henry Tudor, dispersed.

The strengths and weaknesses of Richard III's position in 1484

In early 1484 an Act of Parliament settled the crown upon Richard III and his **issue** in order to assure his position as the King of England. It was very clear in ensuring the illegitimacy of any other possible claims to the throne:

Extract from the 1484 Act of Parliament

'[Wherefore] it appears and follows evidently that the said King Edward during his life and the said Elizabeth lived together sinfully and damnably in adultery. ... Also it appears evidently and follows, that all the issue and children of the said King Edward are bastards, and unable to inherit or to claim anything by inheritance, by the law and custom of England.

'Moreover we consider how that afterwards by the **three estates** of this realm assembled in a parliament held at Westminster, the 17th year of the reign of the said King Edward IV ... George, Duke of Clarence, brother to the said King Edward now deceased, was convicted and attainted of high treason ... by reason whereof, all the issue of the said George was and is disabled and barred of all right and claim which in any wise they might have or challenge by inheritance to the crown and dignity royal of this realm, by the ancient law and custom of this same realm.

'Beyond this we consider how that you are the undoubted son and heir of Richard late Duke of York, truly inheritor to the said crown and dignity royal, and as in right King of England, by way of inheritance; and that at this time, the premises duly considered, there is no other person living but you only who may by right claim the said crown and royal dignity, by way of inheritance, and how that you were born within this land; by reason whereof, as we judge in our minds, you are more naturally inclined to the prosperity and common welfare of the same, and all the three estates of this land have, and may have, more certain knowledge of your birth and filiation abovesaid. We consider also the great wit, prudence, justice, princely courage, and memorable and laudable acts in diverse battles, which as we know by experience you have hitherto done, for the salvation and defence of this same realm; and also the great nobility and excellence of your birth and blood, that is to say, England, France and Spain.

Wherefore ... we ... choose you, high and mighty prince, as our king and sovereign lord, etc., to whom we know for certain it appertaineth of inheritance to be chosen. And hereupon we humbly desire, pray, and require your noble grace that according to this election of us the three estates of this land, as by your true inheritance, you will accept and take upon you the said crown and royal dignity ... and in case you do so, we promise to serve and to assist your highness, as true and faithful subjects and liegemen, and to live and die with you in this matter, and every other just quarrel. For certainly we are determined to adventure and commit ourselves to the peril of our lives and jeopardy of death than to live in such thralldom and bondage as we have lived for long time heretofore, oppressed and injured by extortions and new impositions against the laws of God and man, and the ... laws of this realm, wherein every Englishman has an inheritance ... so that, after great clouds, troubles, storms and tempests, the son of justice and of grace may shine upon us, to the comfort and gladness of all true Englishmen.⁹⁹



Key terms

issue: a person's children.

three estates: the combination of the lords spiritual, lords temporal and the Commons, that is the Houses of Lords and Commons.

ACTIVITY 5.3

Conduct research into the life of John Howard, Duke of Norfolk. Write a one-page biography and summarise why he was a fiercely loyal supporter of Richard III.

The recent biography by Anne Crawford, *John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, c. 1425–1485*, is the most useful resource for this task.

Growing support for Henry Tudor

Richard III may have been victorious against the rebels in late 1483, but the rebellion had promoted a likely claimant to the throne, who had previously been dismissed as no threat at all. One of the most serious consequences of the rebellion that weakened Richard III's position was that many of the rebel leaders fled to Henry Tudor's side abroad, including the Marquess of Dorset and the Bishops of Ely, Salisbury and Exeter. Significant members of the gentry also fled abroad and strengthened Henry Tudor's position, such as Sir John Cheyne, Sir Giles Daubeney and Sir Robert Willoughby. Henry Tudor had therefore been elevated in the political scale to become a real danger to the security of Richard III's rule.

It was perhaps a comfort to Richard III that many more members of the nobility did not join the Duke of Buckingham and the Marquess of Dorset in taking up arms against him. However, few people responded to the rebellion by taking up arms on behalf of the king either. He had strong allies in his immediate circle, including the Duke of Norfolk, Francis, Viscount Lovell, John, Lord Scrope of Bolton, and John, Lord Zouche. Yet the rest of the nobility remained distant and added to the political uncertainty of the reign. Indeed, Richard III's power-base in the nobility was worryingly slim, and he could no longer safely rely on his most powerful allies. His greatest ally, the Duke of Buckingham, was dead. Thomas, Lord Stanley, had become something of an unknown quantity, as he was now married to Margaret Beaufort. Henry Percy, the fourth Earl of Northumberland, was probably harbouring resentment towards Richard III who had dominated the North before the death of Edward IV, and after his coronation had not restored Percy to dominance. However, Lord Stanley and the Earl of Northumberland were 'over-mighty subjects' that could not be destroyed or replaced, and Richard III could only hope for their support. His one remaining powerful ally, John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, was his only reliable supporter. Richard III had to try to gain support elsewhere, which he did by distributing lands and offices, but with mixed outcomes.

Changes to southern England's administration

Not all of the rebels were able to flee England, and the names of 104 individuals were given on an attainder for treason in January 1484. These were many of the leaders and administrators of the counties, and having been stripped of their lands they were no longer in positions of authority. Their loss in the southern counties was keenly felt, and combined with the loss of leading men who went into exile, there remained a dangerous political vacuum in the south of England. As a consequence, Richard III became even more reliant on support from the northern counties, and many individuals from the North were granted lands and offices in the South even before the Act of Attainder had been passed. While it was not uncommon for offices formerly belonging to rebels to be distributed immediately, it was unprecedented to do the same with land and was highly illegal. For example, Sir William Stanley was granted the Duke of Buckingham's lordship of Thornbury in Gloucestershire on 12 November 1483, and Sir Ralph Ashton, the new vice-constable of England, was granted various lands formerly belonging to Sir John Fogge and other rebels on 12 December 1483. These grants did not take into account the rights of widows or others who had rightful claims to the estates,

but Richard III's actions in packing the lands with his supporters demonstrates a keen awareness of the instability of his position in southern England, despite having quashed the rebellion.

The flooding of the south of England with northern men escalated after the Act of Attainder in January 1484, and while Richard III may have believed it would strengthen his position, his policy backfired. In the 15th century there was still the notion of 'the community of the shire', which meant the government of the shire by established gentry families, linked by blood, marriage and common interest, which deeply resented intrusion. Therefore the overt policy of parachuting northern men into the southern shires where they were expected to dominate local government was a deep affront to the native gentry and ensured the complete loss of any sympathy for Richard III among the southern counties' inhabitants. As summarised by Charles Ross: 'It is highly likely that the "colonization" of northerners and other outsiders on these terms finally cost King Richard the allegiance of the southern and western gentry and was equally unpopular with the inhabitants at large.'¹⁰ Indeed, small uprisings continued in the South, demonstrating Richard III's weakened position there. In the summer of 1484 Richard Edgecombe, a recently pardoned rebel of 1483, stirred trouble in the South West, and later in 1484 trouble was awakened in Hertfordshire and Essex by two Knights of the King's Body, John Fortescue and John Risley. Richard III was never to gain any support from the southern and western counties for the rest of his short reign.

It was clearly going to take time for Richard III to win the confidence of his subjects, although as some historians have suggested he might have been able to achieve it because of his character. Despite the efforts of Tudor propagandists, it is now apparent with hindsight that Richard III did have good qualities and was not the personification of evil. He could be charming and had energy and ability, and he worked hard to win popularity. However, memories of the violence of his usurpation and the likely murder of his nephews were still very clear and it would have taken many more years for Richard III to change the minds of his opponents.

The death of Richard III's wife and heir

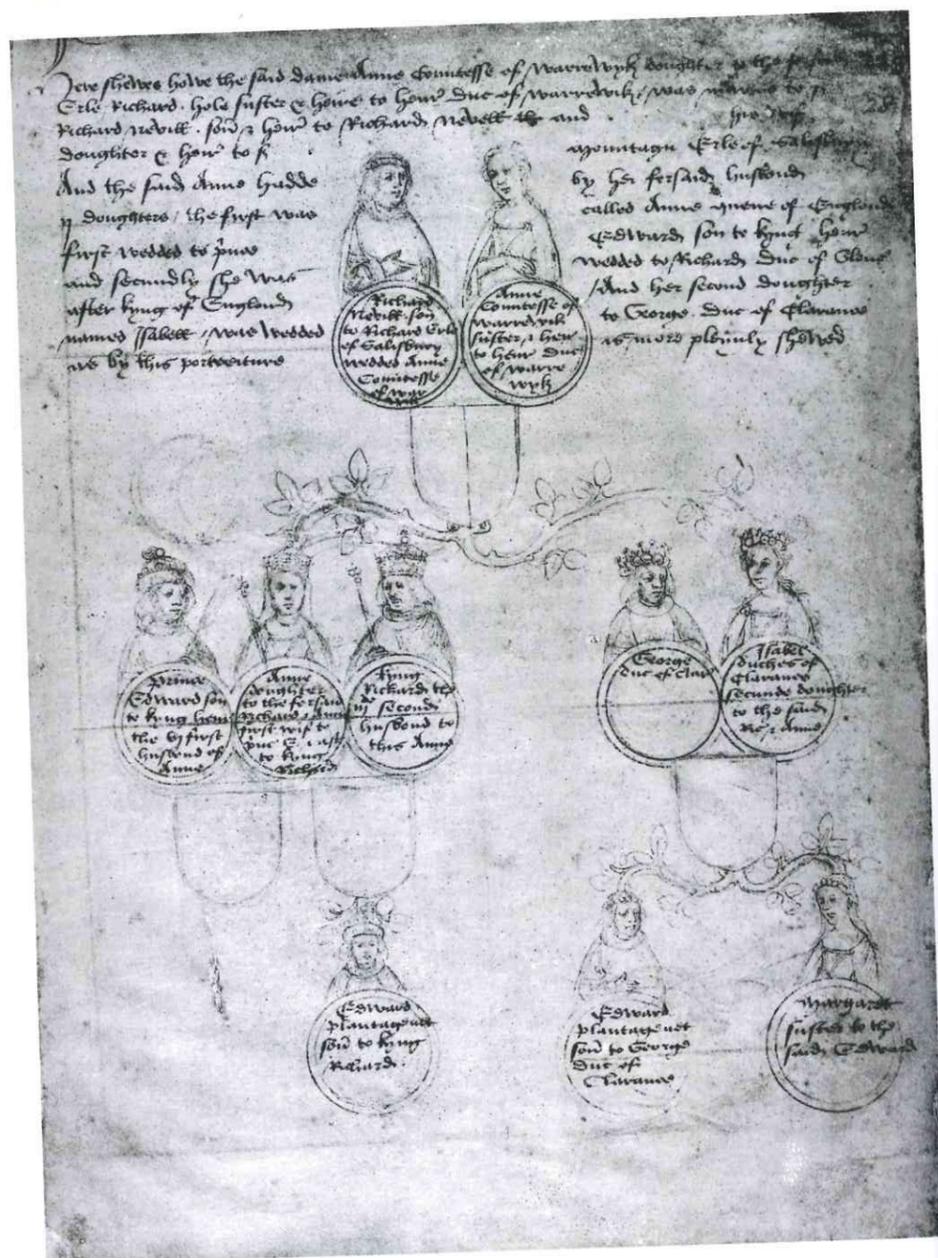


Figure 5.3: King Richard III, Queen Anne and their son, Edward, depicted alongside her first husband, Edward, son of Henry VI, in a contemporary illumination by the Medieval historian John Roux (c. 1411–92). It comes from his book, the *Roux Roll*, a pro-Yorkist view of recent English history.

As remarked by the historian Michael Hicks, ‘if Richard was weak as an individual, his position would be much stronger if he headed a dynasty that would outlast his own life. Unfortunately he had no brothers living and only one legitimate son’.¹¹ Richard III invested all his hopes for the dynasty on his son, whom he had created Prince of Wales in September 1483. Yet Edward of Middleham was a sickly child and at the beginning of April 1484 died, aged ten. It was a devastating blow

to Richard III and Queen Anne, both personally but also politically. The Croyland Chronicler wrote of their utter grief, giving an eyewitness account that: ‘On hearing the news of this, at Nottingham, where they were then residing, you might have seen his father and mother almost bordering on madness, by reason of their sudden grief’.¹²

Queen Anne was only 30 years old at the time of her only son’s death, but there was clearly no possibility of her producing another heir. In ten years of marriage she had only produced one child, and not long after her son’s death she too fell gravely ill. In early 1485 her health deteriorated and she died on 16 March 1485. However, many were suspicious of the circumstances surrounding her death, as rumours were already circulating that Richard III had planned to replace his queen and marry his niece, Elizabeth of York, Edward IV’s eldest surviving daughter. Richard III had to deny the rumours, but the rumours showed the general dislike of the king among his subjects and that his previous acts of violence during the usurpation were still haunting him.

Richard III’s denial of the plans to marry Elizabeth of York was described in the Acts of the Court of the Mercers’ Company of London: ‘Whereas as there have been long discussions and much uninformed talk among the people by evil-disposed persons, who have ... sown these rumours to the very great displeasure of the king, showing how the queen was poisoned by consent and will of the king, so that he might marry and have to wife the Lady Elizabeth, eldest daughter of his brother, late King of England, deceased, whom God pardon ... the king sent for and had before him at St John’s Day, yesterday, the mayor and aldermen. And in the great hall, in the presence of many of his lords and many other people he shewed his grief and displeasure, and said it never came into his thought or mind to marry in such manner, nor was he pleased or glad at the death of his queen but as sorry and heavy in heart as a man would be. ... And he then admonished and charged every person to cease from such untrue talking, on peril of his indignation. Any person who henceforward tells or repeats any of these aforesaid untrue rumours, is to be put in prison until the author be produced from whom the said person heard the said untrue rumour. And in this way the king has given command and charge to the mayor to punish, and to call before him the wardens of all crafts, constables and others, and to show to them the matter of his displeasure’.¹³

The problem of the succession

The death of an heir to any hereditary monarch is always a severe blow, but it was all the more so for Richard III. His throne was extremely insecure, and in 1484 any immediate chance of securing a Yorkist succession was non-existent. Not only had Queen Anne only produced one son in a decade of marriage, she was also from a family that was far better at producing heiresses than heirs. Richard III’s determination to marry into a great inheritance took priority over any thoughts of maintaining a male line, a determination that the historian Charles Ross has regarded as the downfall of many noble families in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ It is not surprising then that rumours quickly spread of his intention to marry Elizabeth of York, as it would have thwarted Henry Tudor’s prospects as a claimant to the throne. The king’s lack of an heir was another factor that weakened his position, and only added fuel to the prospects for Henry Tudor’s claim to the throne.

After the death of his son, some historians have suggested that Richard III named his nephew, Edward, Earl of Warwick, as his heir. He was George, Duke of Clarence's son by Queen Anne's sister, Isabel. This was perhaps an awkward choice. As the son of an attainted nobleman, all of his lands and title were in royal custody, but, as the historian Christine Carpenter has pointed out, more dangerous to Richard III was that Edward had a better claim to the throne than Richard III himself.¹⁵ However, after the death of Queen Anne, Richard III eventually named his heir as a different nephew, John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, who was the son of the king's elder sister Elizabeth. Although Richard III did have two acknowledged illegitimate children who were probably fathered when he was a teenager, and before his marriage to Anne Neville, neither had any claim to the throne. As Richard III faced the very real threat of invasion by Henry Tudor, he was still hoping for marriage to a new bride and the possibility of producing heirs, but his plans to marry the sister of the King of Portugal came to nothing.



Key term

mercenaries: professional soldiers who fight for personal gain in foreign armies.

The downfall of Richard III

The return of Henry Tudor

Henry Tudor had fled to France after the Duke of Brittany and Richard III had come to terms and united against France, and it was from the French court that Henry planned his invasion. He initially had the support of France, as English-backed Brittany threatened France's borders in the spring of 1485. However, Brittany withdrew from France's borders by July and the country's promised support to Henry disappeared. Yet Henry had a new impetus to his invasion plans, as news had reached him of Richard III's reputed plans to marry Elizabeth of York. He managed to raise the finances in the form of loans and not only managed to assemble and arm a small force, but also recruited French **mercenaries** to bolster his invasion force.

Henry Tudor's invasion plans

News reached Richard III of Henry Tudor's planned invasion, which was certainly not unexpected. His response was to leave Westminster and head for more secure support in the North, taking up residence in Nottingham in early June. There he watched and waited for the threatened invasion. While he was waiting he instructed his Chancellor to issue a proclamation in late June 1485, repeating a proclamation already made in December 1484, condemning those he called traitors and calling his subjects to arms against them. This is an extract from Richard III's proclamation against Henry Tudor in 1485:

'... [the] rebels and traitors have chosen to be their captain one Henry Tudor, son of Edmund Tudor, son of Owen Tudor, who of his ambition and anti-social covetousness encroaches and usurps upon him the name and title of royal estate of this realm of England, to which he has no manner of interest, right, title or colour, as every man well knows; for he is descended of bastard blood both of the father's side and of the mother's side. For the said Owen the grandfather was bastard born, and his mother was daughter to John, Duke of Somerset, son to John, Earl of Somerset, son to Dame Katherine Swynford, and born of her in double adultery; from which it clearly appears that no title can or may be in him, who fully intends to enter this realm, purposing a conquest. And if he should

achieve his false intent and purpose, every man's life, livelihood and goods would be in his hands, liberty and disposition, whereby would follow the disinheriting and destruction of all the noble and worshipful blood of this realm for ever, and to the resisting and withstanding of which every true and natural Englishman born must lay to his hands for our surety and welfare.

'And to the intent that the said Henry Tudor might rather achieve his false intent and purpose by the aid, support and assistance of the king's said ancient enemy of France, he has covenanted and bargained with him and all the council of France to give up and release in perpetuity all the right, title and claim that the kings of England have, had and ought to have, to the crown and realm of France, together with the duchies of Normandy, Anjou, and Maine, Gascony, and Guienne, the castles and towns of Calais, Guisnes and Hammes, with the marches appertaining to the same, and sever and exclude the arms of France from the arms of England for ever.

'And in further proof and demonstration of his said purpose of conquest, the said Henry Tudor has given to various of the king's enemies and also to his said rebels and traitors, archbishops, bishops and other spiritual dignities, and also the duchies, earldoms, baronies and other possessions and inheritances of knights, squires, gentlemen, and others of the king's true subjects within the realm, and intends also to change and subvert the laws of the same, and to induce and establish new laws and ordinances amongst the king's said subjects. And besides this and the alienation of the abovenamed into the possession of the king's said ancient enemies, to the greatest destruction, shame and rebuke that might ever fall to this said land, the said Henry Tudor and others, the king's rebels and traitors aforesaid, have intended at their coming, if they should have the power, to do the most cruel murders, slaughters and robberies, and disinheritances, that ever were seen in the Christian realm.

'For the avoidance of these and other incalculable dangers, and to the intent that the king's said rebels, traitors and enemies may be utterly driven away from their said malicious and false purpose, and soon discomfited, if they succeeded in landing by force, the king our sovereign lord wills, charges and commands all and everyone of the natural and true subjects of his realm to call the foregoing to their minds, and like good and true Englishmen to fortify themselves with all their might for the defence of themselves, their wives, their children and goods and inheritances, against the said malicious purposes and conspiracies which the said ancient enemies have made with the king's said rebels and traitors for the final destruction of this land ...'¹⁶

The tone was nothing short of ominous and menacing, and emphasised Richard III's need to be as prepared for war as possible. He had raised forced loans from churchmen, but had also **pawned** plate and jewels to raise the necessary funds for military preparations and action. On leaving London, the king had left Sir Robert Brackenbury in command of a force at the Tower of London, the Duke of Norfolk was put on alert to watch the eastern approach, and Viscount Lovell was sent to Southampton to supervise naval preparations. Around England and Wales, **beacons** were prepared in readiness to signal any news of the invasion.

ACTIVITY 5.4

What can the historian deduce from Richard III's proclamation about the preparations and methods of the king?



Key terms

pawned: the action of depositing an object with a money lender as security for money lent.

beacons: fires or lights set up in a high or prominent position as a warning, signal or celebration. They were used as quick means by which a known message could be sent across land. In this case the message was that Henry Tudor had arrived with his invasion force.

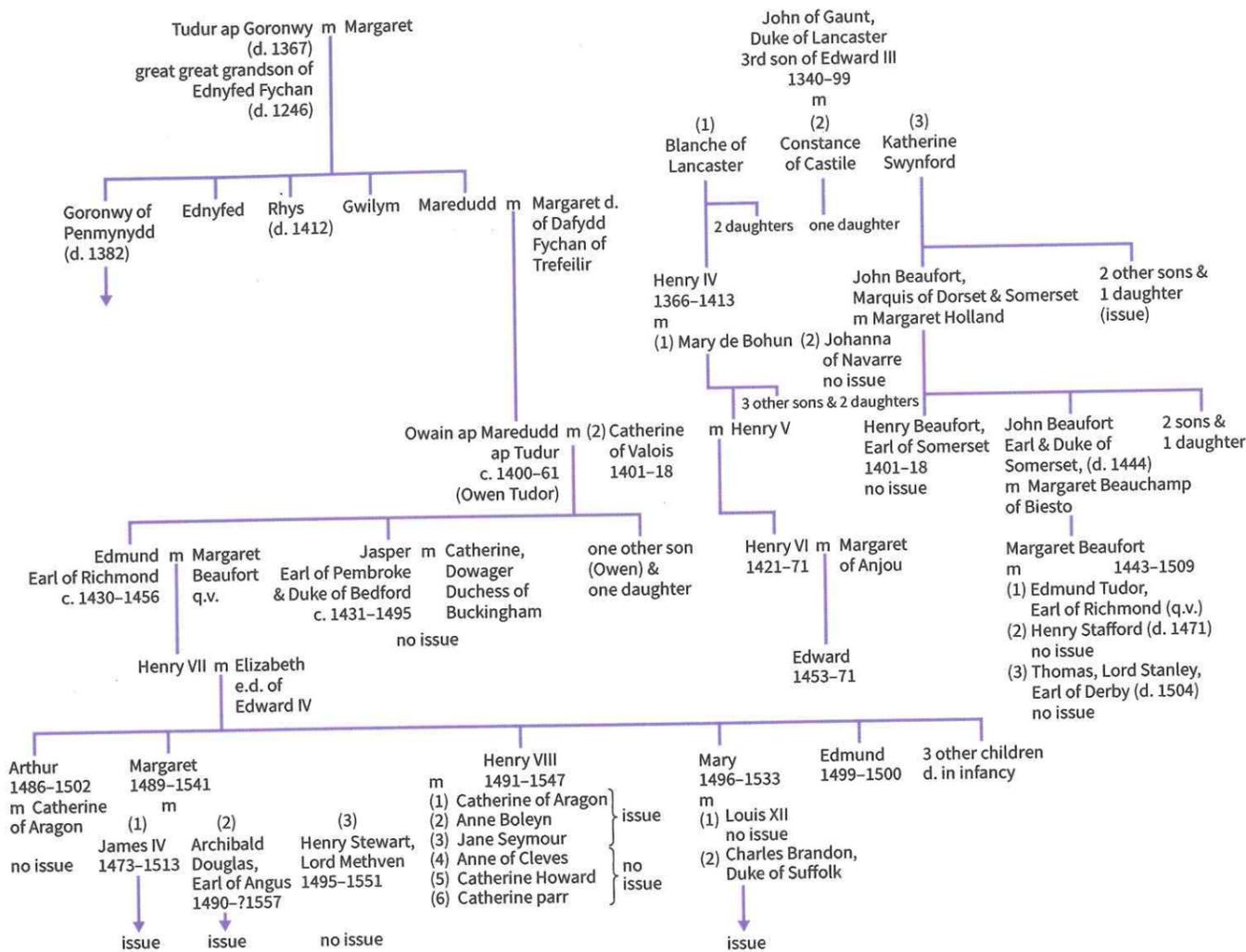


Figure 5.4: The Tudor family tree.

Support for Henry Tudor

While exact dates are not known, Richard III's proclamation at the end of June signalled the belief that invasion was imminent. Henry Tudor's force consisted of those who had fled to exile after the failed rebellion of 1483, and included some very experienced commanders and fighting men. They included the Earl of Pembroke, Sir Edward Woodville, the Bishop of Exeter, Giles Daubeney, Richard Edgecombe and the Earl of Oxford, who had escaped from Hammes Castle in 1484, but the Marquess of Dorset was to remain in France as surety for one of the loans taken out by Henry Tudor. The historian Michael Bennett has suggested that the English contingent numbered no more than 500 men, while the French mercenaries numbered somewhere in the region of 2000 men.¹⁷ With such a small force, Henry Tudor was reliant on the network of sympathisers in England, a network that had been greatly encouraged by his mother Margaret Beaufort.

The invasion

The invasion force planned to land in Wales, not least because this was where Tudor's roots lay. It was certainly hoped that, while the Herbert family were

now dominant in Wales, there would be a great deal of support for the invasion there. With this in mind, the invasion force left France on 1 August 1485, with the expectation of fair summer weather giving the fleet a safer crossing than the one undertaken in 1483. On 7 August 1485 the force landed at Milford Haven on the Pembrokeshire coast. It had been some 15 years since Henry Tudor had set foot on Welsh soil. The force met no resistance there, but then neither were they met by any allies. Undeterred, Henry Tudor began his march through Wales knowing that the beacons would have quickly spread the news of the invasion. Letters were written to kinsmen urging them to rally to Tudor's cause, and some responded positively.

As the invasion force progressed through Wales, the first sign of uncertain loyalties began to emerge, as those apparently loyal to Richard III hedged their bets. Two of the most significant men of Wales, Rhys ap Thomas and Walter Herbert, were flanking the invasion force and giving the appearance that they were containing the invaders. Yet the forces of these men were in reality an addition to the invading force, and when Henry promised Rhys ap Thomas the lieutenancy of Wales, the Yorkist contingent joined the invading force. Not long after, Walter Herbert's force also joined that of Henry Tudor, greatly swelling the numbers of the army that descended on Welshpool. There, the force was enlarged by clansmen from North Wales. This greatly swelled force entered England on 15 August and demanded the surrender of Shrewsbury.

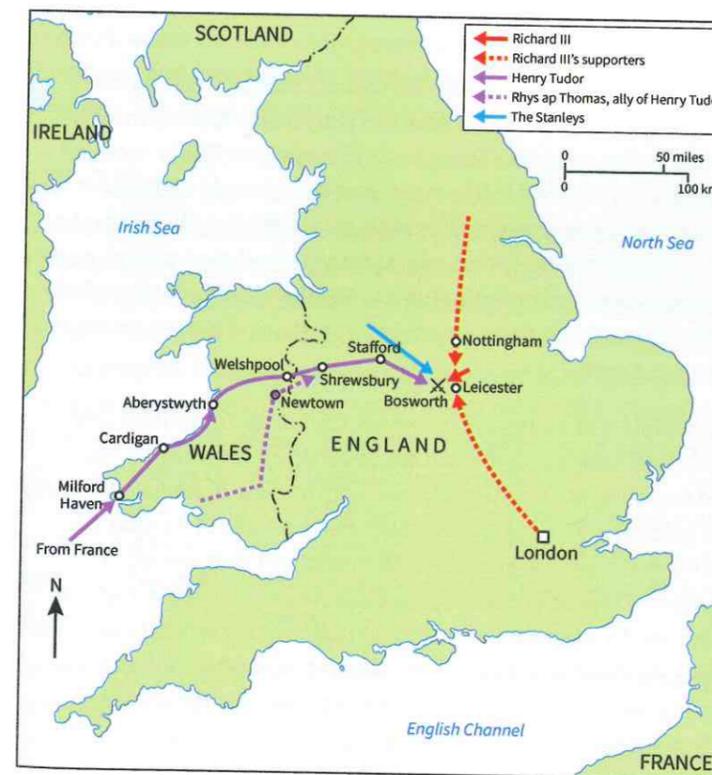


Figure 5.5: Map of the 1485 campaign.



Key term

commissioner of array: an officer who was commanded by the king to muster and array the inhabitants of a given area and to get them in a condition for war.

Richard III's call to arms

News of the invasion had reached Richard III within four days of the landing at Milford Haven. The king immediately acted and sent summonses to lords, gentlemen, sheriffs and **commissioners of array**. Richard III's commanders also called their men to arms, and the Duke of Norfolk ordered his men to assemble on 16 August at Bury St Edmunds. Yet there was also a sense of delay about Richard III's actions, and it may be that the messages he received about the invading force underplayed its size. Former Yorkist loyalists like Rhys ap Thomas probably sent letters to create an illusion of an ineffective invasion force. Richard III was doubtless outraged when news of the taking of Shrewsbury reached him, and treachery was clearly apparent. Other Yorkists were also seen to be dragging their heels to come to the requested support of the king. Both the Earl of Northumberland and Lord Stanley showed little hurry in bringing their forces to the king's side.

The support of the Stanleys

Nevertheless, Henry Tudor's reception at Shrewsbury was lukewarm and there was no popular uprising to boost his cause. He moved his force eastwards in the hope of drawing in support from the Stanleys and others. When he reached Newport he was joined by Sir Gilbert Talbot with an additional force of 500 men and the potential to influence other Englishmen to Henry Tudor's cause. On reaching Stafford, the invasion force slowed down, to allow time for the Stanleys to push ahead into the Midlands. It gave the force a much needed rest, but also allowed for supporters to be gathered.

Lord Stanley reached Lichfield by 17 August. Sir William Stanley, moving more slowly, then met with Henry Tudor and conducted the invader's entry into the city on 20 August. Unlike the entry to Shrewsbury, this one saw Tudor received with military honours. Lord Stafford in the meantime had already withdrawn from Lichfield as if in retreat, but was actually offering a smokescreen while the rebel force advanced. At Lichfield it is likely that more joined the rebel army, but exact numbers are not known. What is known is that the Stanleys still kept their distance from the rebel army, and while this was an effective strategy, it must have been very demoralising for the men.

Richard III was meanwhile still struggling to get his supporters mobilised and it was not clear what was happening around the rebel army. However, it was certain that he had stayed in Nottingham for too long, and on 20 August he finally moved his army to Leicester, arriving there at sunset. The Duke of Norfolk was already there, and the next day the Earl of Northumberland also arrived. The contemporary Croyland Chronicler claimed that this was the largest army ever mustered on English soil to support one man. *The Ballad of Bosworth Field* makes similar claims, listing all those peers who were present, and while not all took an active role in the fighting, it certainly records a large and distinguished army heavily loaded with members of the aristocracy.

Still uncertain for Richard III was the support of Lord Stanley. This uncertainty greatly weakened the king's position. It was easy to know that Henry Tudor was his enemy; it was not easy being unsure about which side Lord Stanley's company of several thousand men would take. Lord Stanley avoided all of the king's requests

to join the royal army. Yet counter to this, Henry Tudor was also uncertain as to whether he was going to receive the much-needed support of Lord Stanley, and was in just the same predicament as Richard III. However, Michael Bennett is convinced that Lord Stanley was working for the rebel cause, and that 'there can be no doubt that he [Lord Stanley] was deliberately undermining the king's strategic planning, and it seems likely that his manoeuvres were securing political and military objectives vital to the rebel cause. Besides maintaining a screen behind which Henry Tudor could draw breath and rally support, he had also pushed a wedge between the king and southern England, making it possible to disrupt the official musters and give heart to would-be rebels'.¹⁸

Sir William Stanley was also proving to be just as frustratingly elusive as Lord Stanley, and on the evening of 20 August he and his troops left the rebel army, apparently to join Lord Stanley. To make matters worse, Henry Tudor was separated from the army and spent a miserable night with only a handful of companions in hostile countryside. When he returned to his army the next morning it was on the verge of disbanding, but he managed to persuade them to remain.

On 21 August Henry Tudor was near Atherstone, when he finally met with Lord Stanley to secure their alliance. No records survive of the agreement, but there is no doubt that Henry Tudor believed that Stanley's forces would be fighting with the rebel army. That evening, other men and companies from the royal army defected, including those of Sir John Savage, Sir Simon Digby and Sir Brian Sandford. At the same time, Richard III moved his force from Leicester towards Atherstone, and camped near Sutton Cheney, a few miles south of Market Bosworth. The stage was set for the meeting of the forces the next day.

Bosworth

According to the account of Polydore Vergil, Richard III's army was twice the size of Henry Tudor's, and very well equipped with cavalry, infantry and artillery. Yet while Henry's army was smaller, it was boosted with well-paid foreign mercenaries who were not bothered about treason, and it was led by experienced captains and capable knights. Henry's smaller army deployed for battle early on the morning of 22 August. The first setback was that Lord Stanley did not send his soldiers in with Henry's army, but the would-be king had to go on as he was now committed to battle. The Earl of Oxford was sent forward with the **vanguard**, with archers in the front line, while Henry Tudor followed with his troop of cavalry and footmen. They met the king's vanguard that was led by the Duke of Norfolk, which was much larger than the opposing vanguard. Mirroring Henry Tudor, Richard III followed his vanguard with his own troops.

The details of the battle are somewhat confused in contemporary accounts, which suggest that the rebel army's approach was an unusual one, which has since puzzled modern historians. Recent archaeological research has proposed that the location long believed to be the site of the battle is incorrect, and its repositioning has helped to clarify some of the more confusing points given in contemporary accounts. However, the debate surrounding the position of the battle does not affect the history of the course of its outcome.



Key term

vanguard: the foremost part of an advancing army.

Voices from the past

The Stanley brothers and their questionable loyalties

Thomas, Lord Stanley, and his brother, Sir William Stanley, were the sons of Thomas Stanley, first Baron Stanley (1406–59). Both brothers were staunch Yorkists and strong supporters of Edward IV's reign, and held positions of authority under the king. Following the death of Edward IV, Lord Stanley was one of the lords who wanted to see a balance of power between Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and the Woodville family. During the second coup d'état Lord Stanley may have been arrested, but if he was he did not suffer the same fate as Lord Hastings and was at liberty by the time of Richard III's coronation, where he bore the ceremonial great mace, an important symbol of royal authority. This signified Stanley's support of Richard III at the coronation. All appearances were that the Stanleys

acquiesced to the new king, particularly as they helped Richard III suppress the rebellion in 1483 and were greatly rewarded. However, Michael J. Bennett has suggested that they had little choice but to support Richard III at that point in time as they were in his presence.¹⁹ Yet neither brother was in the king's presence when Henry Tudor's invasion force landed, and they then acted upon their own free will.

Discussion points

In groups, assess the relationships of the Stanley brothers with:

1. Richard III
2. Henry Tudor.

What effect did the two brothers have on the events of 1485?

ACTIVITY 5.5

Find copies of the three ballads described in Voices from the past: The ballad tradition of the 15th century and list the key features of each ballad. Critically analyse the different styles and information held within the ballads in order to write a summary of their usefulness to a historian studying the Battle of Bosworth.

The appendices to Michael Bennett's *The Battle of Bosworth* provide useful further information

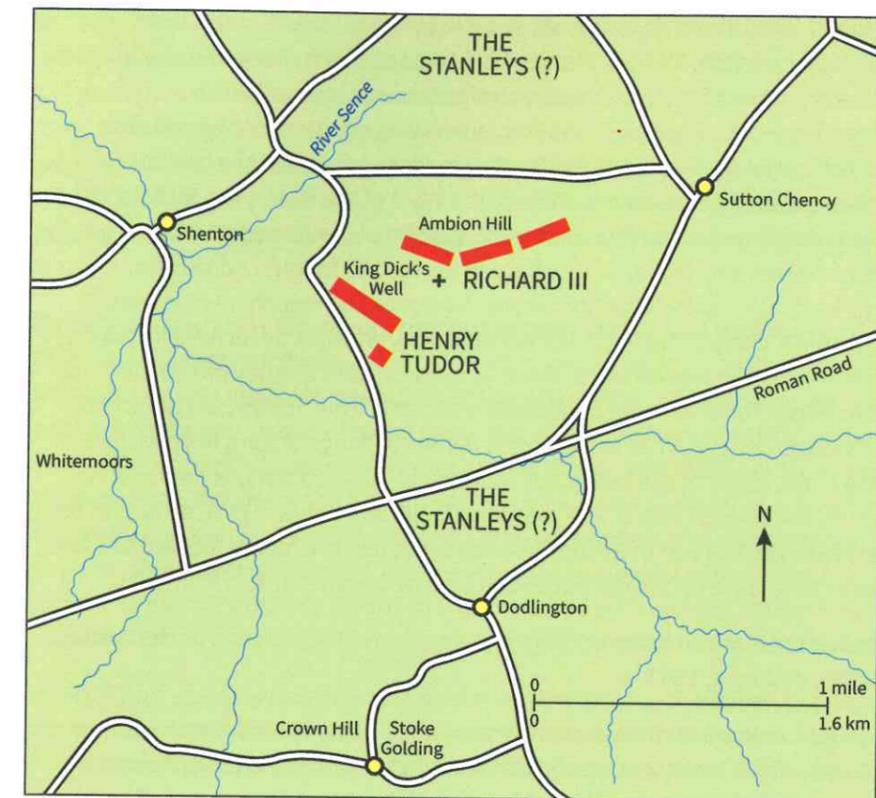


Figure 5.6: A map showing the traditional site of the Battle of Bosworth.

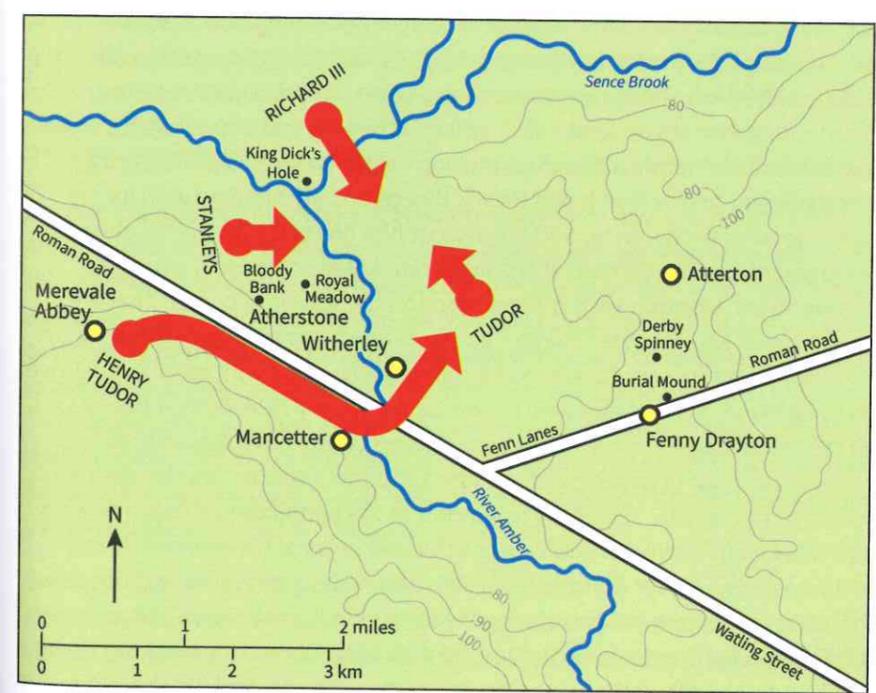


Figure 5.7: The suggested new battle site.

Hidden voices

The ballad tradition of the 15th century

There are three ballads that concern the events of the Battle of Bosworth, and while they need to be treated with caution as a primary source, they are very useful to the modern historian. Perhaps the most well known is *The Ballad of Bosworth Field*, which is certainly the most detailed and comprehensive of the ballads. It was probably written by an eyewitness who was most likely a member of the Stanley retinue, but it was written within living memory of the battle rather than at the time of the battle. Another ballad that was most likely composed in 1485 was *The Rose of England*. It is an allegorical poem, in which England is a garden, where

a rose bush (the House of Lancaster) is disrupted by a white boar (Richard III) who drives the last sprig (Henry Tudor) into exile.

A later ballad, dating from the 16th century, is the romantic ballad *The Song of Lady Bessy*, which as the title suggests focuses on the plight of Elizabeth of York (Lady Bessy). All three ballads describe the actions of the main protagonists of the events of 1485 from different perspectives, and used alongside other contemporary sources, such as chronicle accounts and government records, they reveal a great deal about the contemporary and near-contemporary views of the Battle of Bosworth.

**Key term**

standard: a military or ceremonial flag carried on a pole, and in this case Henry Tudor's flag signified where he was in the battle.

In summary, the Earl of Oxford took the initiative in the battle. His vanguard closed in on the Duke of Norfolk's vanguard, but it was Henry Tudor's troop that was in the thick of the battle. Richard III seized the opportunity to finish the challenge to his throne and led a headlong cavalry charge towards Henry Tudor's **standard**. This manoeuvre was highly unusual because it was extremely dangerous for the leader to make a direct aim for another leader in the thick of a battle. It was an action not seen in the other battles of the Wars of the Roses, but Richard III's decision was almost successful. In the charge, Sir William Brandon, Henry Tudor's standard-bearer, was killed, and Richard III personally fought and killed one of Henry's leading knights, Sir John Cheyne. However, the French mercenaries in Henry Tudor's troop protected their leader from the attack by Richard III, which faltered. Seeing the weakening of the king's attack, Lord Stanley finally made his move in Henry Tudor's favour and joined the battle. This tipped the balance to Henry's cause, and won the battle for the would-be king. Richard III was killed fighting in the midst of the *mêlée*, for which even Tudor historians admired his bravery in the thick of battle. The ever-loyal Duke of Norfolk was also killed in the battle. However, the Earl of Northumberland, holding the rear of Richard III's force, appears not to have joined the battle and watched events unfold from afar.

The Italian scholar and historian Polydore Vergil gave this account of the Battle of Bosworth, written c. 1503–13:

'The king's forces were twice as many and more. ... There was a marsh between both hosts, which Henry purposely left on the right hand, that it might serve his men instead of a fortress; by doing this he left the sun upon his back; but when the king saw the enemies past the marsh, he commended his soldiers to charge against them. They made suddenly great shouts and assaulted the enemy first with arrows; their foes were not at all loath to fight and began also to shoot fiercely; but when they came to hand strokes the matter then was dealt with by blades. ... While the battle continued thus hot on both sides between the vanguards, King Richard understood ... when Earl Henry was afar off with a small force of soldiers about him; then after drawing nearer he knew it perfectly by evident signs and tokens that it was Henry. Wherefore, all inflamed with ire, he struck his horse with the spurs, and ran against him out of his own army ahead of the vanguard. ... King Richard at the first brunt killed some men, overthrew Henry's standard, together with William Brandon the standard bearer. Then he matched himself against John Cheney, a man of much strength, far exceeding the common sort, who strove with him as he came; but the king with great force drove him to the ground, making way with his weapon on every side. But yet Henry abode the brunt longer than even his own soldiers would have thought, who were now almost out of hope of victory, when suddenly William Stanley with 3000 men came to the rescue. Then truly in a moment the remainder all fled, and King Richard was killed fighting manfully in the thickest press of his enemies. In the mean time also the Earl of Oxford after a little skirmishing put to flight those who fought in the van, whereof a great company were killed in the chase. But many more forbore to fight, who came to the field with King Richard for awe, and for no goodwill, and departed without any danger, as men who desired not the safety but destruction of that prince whom they hated. There were about 1000 men killed, and amongst them of warrior noblemen were John, Duke of Norfolk, Walter, Lord

Ferrers of Chartley, Robert Brackenbury, Richard Radcliffe, and many more. ... And of those who took to their feet Francis Lovell, Humphrey Stafford, with Thomas his brother and much more company, fled into the sanctuary of St John, which is at Colchester. ... As for the number of captives it was very great ... amongst them the chief were Henry, Earl of Northumberland, and Thomas, Earl of Surrey. The latter was committed to prison, where he long remained; the former as a friend at heart was received unto favour. Henry lost in that battle scarcely a hundred soldiers, amongst whom there was one principal man, William Brandon, who bore Earl Henry's standard. ...²⁰

Richard III's body was taken from the field and stripped. It was tied to a horse and taken to Leicester and displayed for three days, a gruesome necessity for proving that the king was dead. He was buried in Greyfriars Church in Leicester without pomp or ceremony, and the legend grew that when the friary was dissolved by Henry VIII, Richard III's bones were dug up and thrown into the River Soar. Recent excavations at the site of the Greyfriars Church have concluded that this legend was false, and that Richard III's body had lain undisturbed with many others in the covered-up graveyard since the 16th century. Yet the legend of the destruction of Richard III's grave certainly demonstrates the contempt in which he was held for so many centuries.

Henry Tudor's victory was the most decisive of the Wars of the Roses, but while it was such a momentous event it was one of the smallest of the battles. The number of nobles and commoners involved by no means matched those involved at the Battles of Tewkesbury, Barnet or Towton. As summarised by David Grummitt: 'the disengagement from politics that this suggested was probably the most damning indictment of Richard III's short reign. Henry Tudor, who had been a political nobody in 1483, was able to march across Wales and into England virtually unopposed and defeat in battle a king who should have been able to deploy the loyalty of his subjects and the resources of the realm against the pretender.'²¹

The proclamation of a new Tudor dynasty under Henry VII

Despite the resounding victory at Bosworth, Henry VII had a monumental task ahead of him in securing his throne. Once again a usurper king was on the throne, one who was supported by a small faction. He began by dating his reign from 21 August 1485, which made all those who fought against him traitors. However, as noted by Sean Cunningham, the new king acted with considerable leniency in the weeks following the battle.²² Edward, Earl of Warwick, the heir to the male Plantagenet line, was captured as a precaution against an uprising. The Earls of Northumberland and Surrey were also captured, but the only execution of one of Richard III's followers was that of William Catesby. On 11 October 1485 a general pardon was issued to all but those who had fled.

One week after Henry VII's coronation (30 October 1485) Parliament was summoned to meet at Westminster on 7 November. At this Parliament, Henry VII did not ask for the **ratification** of his title, but rather presented his right and title as a *fait accompli*. As far as he was concerned, the attainder Richard III had passed against him was made null and void when he became king. This was perhaps to set the tone of Henry VII's rule. Significantly, the parliamentary proclamation

**Key term**

ratification: the official way to confirm something, usually by vote. It is the formal validation of a proposed law.

ACTIVITY 5.6

Consider the circumstances of the battle before the Stanleys made their move to support Henry Tudor. How might events have been different had they not joined in at all, or joined Richard III's sources? Write a one-page summary of your thoughts. Consider whether this type of **counterfactual history** is a useful exercise to the historian in general.

confirming Henry VII's right and title made no mention of his pledge to marry Elizabeth of York, which had previously been considered a major term for his claim to the throne.

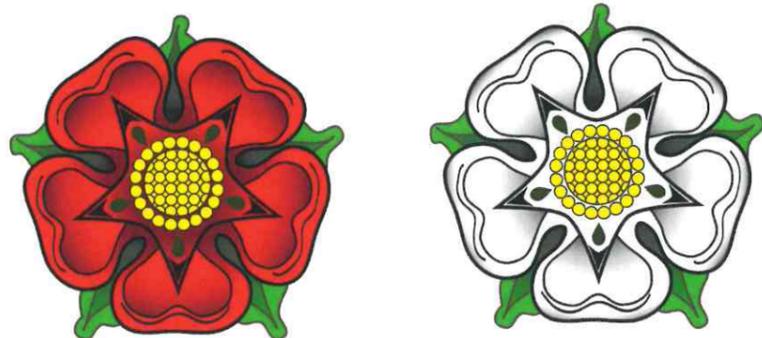


Figure 5.8: Henry VII fused the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster to symbolise the uniting of the two houses.



Speak like a historian

CSL Davies

In recent years, the acclaimed historian CSL Davies has taken issue with the term 'Tudor Dynasty', especially in relation to Henry VII's visions of the future. In a review of Sean Cunningham's biography of Henry VII in 2008 he voiced his concerns about the 'well-established tradition in representing Henry as trying to "establish his dynasty"'.²⁴

The main crux of Davies's argument is that Henry VII had no idea what the future held and that indeed a 'Tudor Dynasty' was in its infancy. He points out that it is a 19th-century style '**Whiggish**' approach to suggest that Henry VII created a future that was unknown to him. Another problem is that the name Tudor was not used by Henry VII himself, but rather by Richard III as an insult to the Earl of Richmond in his proclamations against him in order to emphasise his lowly origins. Indeed, the family name was not used in official documents nor in histories until after 1584. After all, why would the royal family want to remind people of their descent from a Welsh adventurer? However, as CSL Davies has also admitted, the terms "The Tudors", "Tudor period" and so on are so entrenched in the historian's vocabulary that it is clearly impractical to abandon them. But it would be salutary to remind ourselves that these were not contemporary terms, and that this point has implications for how we should see the history of his reign.²⁵

For further reading on this standpoint by CSL Davies, it is worth reading his article published in 2012. Davies CLS. Tudor: What's In A Name? *History* 2012; 97 (325). p. 24–42.²⁶

Henry VII's marriage to Elizabeth of York

Following Henry VII's proclamation as king, he repealed Richard III's proclamation as king from 1484. It was important that he did this, as the proclamation had declared Elizabeth of York illegitimate. The new king could not marry and have heirs with a woman who was illegitimate, and so this matter had to be dealt with before he could confirm his declaration to marry her. Sean Cunningham has also suggested the delay in declaring the marriage plans, which were by no means secret, was in order to allow time to confirm the fate of her brothers.²³ It also gave time to deal with other matters, such as reversing all attainders that were made in 1471, thereby restoring leading Lancastrians to their lands. This included his mother, Margaret Beaufort, Edmund, Duke of Somerset, and Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham. The attainders of 1484 on Henry VII's followers were also reversed.

Henry VII formally announced his intention to marry Elizabeth of York on 10 December 1485, and awaited a papal dispensation to allow the marriage to proceed. This duly arrived, and the couple were married on 18 January 1486. While little is known of the marriage ceremony itself, it was deeply significant to the political state of the country, as its aim was to unite the political supporters of Tudor and York. The Tudor rose that Henry VII devised as his badge was an amalgamation of the white rose of York and red rose of Lancaster which symbolised this union. Eight months after the marriage, on 18 September 1486, Henry VII's heir, Arthur, was born, signifying dynastic security in the form of an heir.

Further reading

The Richard III Society publishes an academic journal, *The Ricardian*, which contains articles on Richard III and late Medieval history and culture. It is worth exploring some of the articles in any of the volumes, but a particularly extensive volume that is worth finding is volume 13.

There are numerous biographies of Richard III, but the most respected is C Ross, *Richard III*. Other biographies that look at Richard III from interesting angles are R Horrox, *Richard III: A Study in Service*, and MA Hicks, *Richard III*.

While Edward V's life and reign were very short, it is worth reading MA Hicks, *Edward V: The Prince in the Tower*. It is a useful study providing an interesting angle on the events outlined in this chapter.

For an in-depth study of the Battle of Bosworth, including a particularly useful guide to the contemporary sources, see M Bennett, *The Battle of Bosworth*. A more provocative study for advanced reading is MK Jones, *Bosworth, 1485: Psychology of a Battle*.



Key terms

counterfactual history: a method by which history can be explored by considering what if something had not happened and how events would have changed.

Whiggish: the outlook of the Whig historians, who saw the past as an inevitable progression towards better things.