

# Wars of the Roses

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Presented by Vadim Melentiev of 15.06D-L03/19b group



- One of the series of wars in the history of Britain were The Wars of Roses, which took places from 1455 to 1485. Those dynastic civil wars whose violence and civil strife preceded the strong government of the Tudors. Fought between the houses of Lancaster and York for the English throne, the wars were named many years afterward from the supposed badges of the contending parties: the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster.





- Both houses claimed the throne through descent from the sons of Edward III. Since the Lancastrians had occupied the throne from 1399, the Yorkists might never have pressed a claim but for the near anarchy prevailing in the mid-15th century. After the death of Henry V in 1422 the country was subject to the long and factious minority of Henry VI (August 1422–November 1437), during which the English kingdom was managed by the king's council, a predominantly aristocratic body. That arrangement, which probably did not accord with Henry V's last wishes, was not maintained without difficulty. Like Richard II before him, Henry VI had powerful relatives eager to grasp after power and to place themselves at the head of factions in the state. The council soon became their battleground.



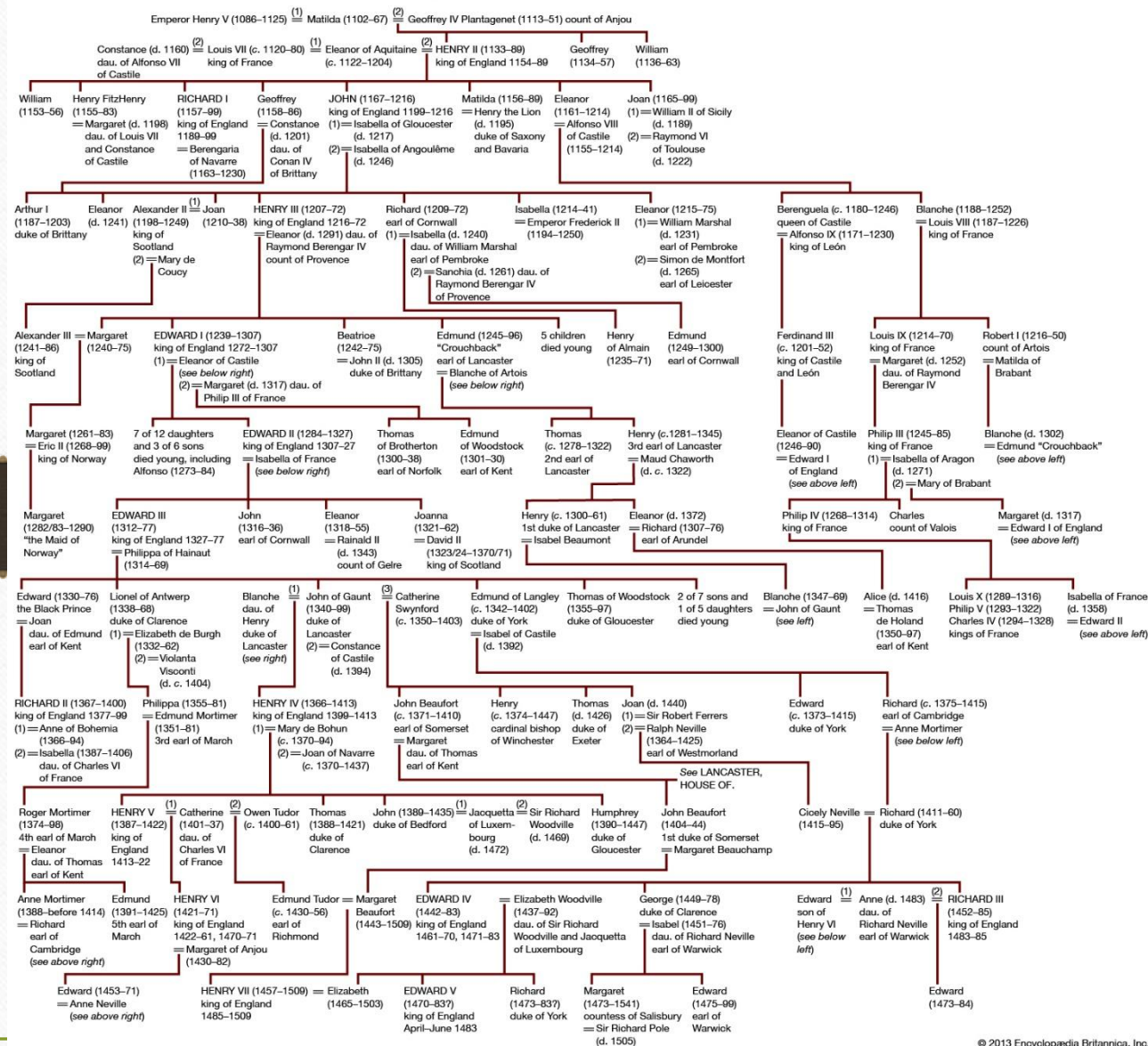
Henry VI, oil painting by an unknown artist; in the National Portrait Gallery, London

Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London



## House of Plantagenet

(Showing connections with the royal houses of France, Scotland, etc.)



# House of Plantagenet



- Great magnates with private armies dominated the countryside. Lawlessness was rife and taxation burdensome. Henry later proved to be feckless and simpleminded, subject to spells of madness, and dominated by his ambitious queen, Margaret of Anjou, whose party had allowed the English position in France to deteriorate.



Margaret of Anjou.  
Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries,  
The University of Texas at Austin



- Between 1450 and 1460 Richard, 3rd duke of York, had become the head of a great baronial league, of which the foremost members were his kinsmen, the Nevilles, the Mowbrays, and the Bourchiers. Among his principal lieutenants was his nephew Richard Neville, the earl of Warwick, a powerful man in his own right, who had hundreds of adherents among the gentry scattered over 20 counties. In 1453, when Henry lapsed into insanity, a powerful baronial clique, backed by Warwick, installed York, as protector of the realm. When Henry recovered in 1455, he reestablished the authority of Margaret's party, forcing York to take up arms for self-protection. The first battle of the wars, at St. Albans (May 22, 1455), resulted in a Yorkist victory and four years of uneasy truce.



Drawing of Richard, Duke of York  
Courtsey of Talbot Master



- A new phase of the civil war began in 1459 when York, goaded by the queen's undisguised preparations to attack him, rebelled for the last time. The Yorkists were successful at Blore Heath (September 23) but were scattered after a skirmish at Ludford Bridge (October 12). York fled to Ireland, and the Lancastrians, in a packed parliament at Coventry (November 1459), obtained a judicial condemnation of their opponents and executed those on whom they could lay hands.



- Gathering forces in northern England, the Lancastrians surprised and killed York at Wakefield in December and then marched south toward London, defeating Warwick on the way at the Second Battle of St. Albans (February 17, 1461). Meanwhile, York's eldest son and heir, Edward, had defeated a Lancastrian force at Mortimer's Cross (February 2) and marched to relieve London, arriving before Margaret on February 26. The young duke of York was proclaimed King Edward IV at Westminster on March 4. Then Edward, with the remainder of Warwick's forces, pursued Margaret north to Towton. There, in the bloodiest battle of the war, the Yorkists won a complete victory. Henry, Margaret, and their son fled to Scotland. The first phase of the fighting was over, except for the reduction of a few pockets of Lancastrian resistance.



Edward IV, portrait by an unknown artist; in the National Portrait Gallery, London. *Photos.com/Thinkstock*



- The next round of the wars arose out of disputes within the Yorkist ranks. Warwick, the statesman of the group, was the true architect of the Yorkist triumph. Until 1464 he was the real ruler of the kingdom. He ruthlessly put down the survivors of the Lancastrians who, under the influence of Margaret and with French help, kept the war going in the north and in Wales. The wholesale executions that followed the battle of Hexham (May 1464) practically destroyed what was left of the Lancastrian party, and the work seemed complete when, a year later, Henry VI was captured and put in the Tower of London.



**Warwick, Richard Neville, 16th earl**  
of Richard Neville, 16th earl of Warwick, 6th  
earl of Salisbury.



- Warwick made an equally vigorous effort to put the government of the realm in better shape, to restore public order, to improve the administration of justice, and, by confiscations and economies, to make the crown solvent. At the same time, both Warwick and his master were caught in the diplomatic schemes of the astute Louis XI, who had succeeded Charles VII as the king of France in 1461. He was still preoccupied with the power of Burgundy, and the English were to be the pawns in the game he intended to play for the humbling of Charles the Bold.



- Warwick's power was insecure, however, for the Lancastrians found it difficult to trust one who had so lately been their scourge, while many of the earl's Yorkist followers found the change more than they could bear. There was thus little real opposition to Edward, who, having secured Burgundian aid, returned from Flushing to land at Ravenspur (March 1471) in a manner reminiscent of Henry IV. His forces met those of Warwick on April 14 in the Battle of Barnet, in which Edward outmaneuvered Warwick, regained the loyalty of the duke of Clarence, and decisively defeated Warwick, who was slain in the battle. On the same day, Margaret and her son, who had hitherto refused to return from France, landed at Weymouth. Hearing the news of Barnet, she marched west, trying to reach the safety of Wales, but Edward won the race to the Severn. In the Battle of Tewkesbury (May 4) Margaret was captured, her forces destroyed, and her son killed. Shortly afterward Henry VI was murdered in the Tower of London. Edward's throne was secure for the rest of his life (he died in 1483).



**Edward V; Edward IV; Elizabeth Woodville** Edward V (lower right) with his father, Edward IV, and mother, Elizabeth Woodville, illumination from *Dictes and Sayenges of the Philosophers*, 1477; in Lambeth Palace Library, London.



- In 1483 Edward's brother Richard III, overriding the claims of his nephew, the young Edward V, alienated many Yorkists, who then turned to the last hope of the Lancastrians, Henry Tudor (later Henry VII). With the help of the French and of Yorkist defectors, Henry defeated and killed Richard at Bosworth Field on August 22, 1485, bringing the wars to a close. By his marriage to Edward IV's daughter Elizabeth of York in 1486, Henry united the Yorkist and Lancastrian claims. Henry defeated a Yorkist rising supporting the pretender Lambert Simnel on June 16, 1487, a date which some historians prefer over the traditional 1485 for the termination of the wars.



## Sources :

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