

MODULE: 29

THE WARS OF THE ROSES

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1.0 OBJECTIVE:

Our study material will tell us briefly about the War of the Roses, a civil war in England that lasted from 1455-1487. In this module we will learn about:

- England in the Fifteenth Century, its people, with an emphasis on the structures of society.
- The name of Wars of the Roses
- Prelude to Conflict: The Reign of Henry VI

The reign of Henry VI and the causes of the Wars of the Roses. We will consider the role of important personalities, as well as discussing some of the long term factors (including social and economic issues) that may have pushed England towards civil war.

- The First War: 1455-61
- Reconstructing a Medieval Battle: Towton, 1461
- Fortune's Wheel: 1461-71
- The Second Reign of Edward IV

1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

ENGLAND IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Fifteenth century England was basically a rural and agricultural country. The main economic activity was production of food and the most important event of the year was the harvest. To most of the economic historians fifteenth century appears to be a period of prosperity and ease. However, the harvests were bad in the late fifteenth century. Wages became high, because prices were low. Yet this era brought fortunes to the landlords as a class. People with large farms were able to make huge profits taking advantage of rising food prices. Agricultural innovations increased productivity per acre. On the other hand the introduction of new crops and their periodic rotation on land increased its long-term effect. For the first time in the history of England, the first enclosures were formerly introduced. Previously plowed fields of nearly empty villages were fenced in to be used for sheep runs.

In this period the main economic activity was agriculture, and not industry. Most of the industrial production was not in factories but in the home. The cloth production was England's main industry and its major export. Other important industries included lead-mining (Derbyshire), coal-mining especially in the North of England. London was vastly larger than any

other English city. It played a crucial role in the development of an integrated national economy of England.

The upper class of the British society became more confident because they were mostly educated. Even the commoners started going to the universities, some to take degrees, without any intention of becoming clerics. English social structure was hierarchical, but it was somehow possible (although difficult) to move up and down the social scale.



1.2 THE NAME: THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Why is the Wars of the Roses so called? The name Wars of the Roses (sometimes mistakenly referred to the War of the Roses) is based on the badges used by the two warring groups, the red rose for the Lancastrians and the white rose for the Yorkists. It was a struggle of both the sides to claim the throne between the descendants of Edward III and Henry IV. The descendants of Edward III hailed from North of England, particularly the House of York and Richard York. They are known as the Yorkists. The descendants and supporters of Henry IV are the Lancastrians. A pertinent question that arises in our mind in this context is what's all this stuff about flowers? In Renaissance literature each rose is a factional symbol. In this context, we refer to Shakespeare's *Henry VI* (1592) where Shakespeare depicts the minor lords choosing their allegiance as well as their factions by plucking either white roses or red roses from a garden:

Warwick: And here I prophecy: this brawl today,

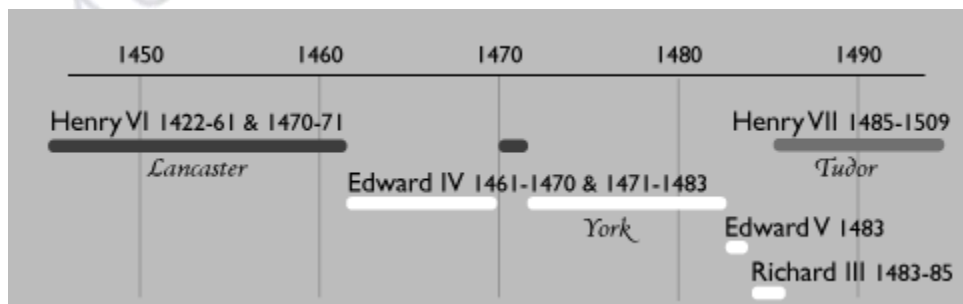
Grown to this faction in the Temple garden,

Shall send, between the Red Rose and the White,

A Thousand souls to death and deadly might. (ll 124-128).

In reality, red and white roses were only worn as insignia worn by the lords of the House of York and Lancaster. They were never part of the official coat-of-arms.

1.3: PRELUDE TO CONFLICT: THE REIGN OF HENRY VI



In the year 1411 Anne Mortimer wife of Richard the fifth Earl of Cambridge, gave birth to Richard Plantagenet. Richard, fifth Earl of Cambridge was the son of Edmund, the first Duke

of York. Edmund was the fourth son of Edward III. Richard Plantagenet was thus a strong contender to the throne. He would have been undoubtedly crowned the King of England as there was no one else from the royal lineage. Henry VI's uncle and heir Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester had already died in 1447.

In 1436, Richard was appointed as the Lieutenant of France. Throughout his life he was a key player in tuning the government and politics of England. He became the sole benefactor of the childless Edmund Mortimer, who had died of plague in Ireland in 1425. Thus he was a wealthy man. He became more wealthy by marrying Cicely Neville in 1438 (who is better known as 'the Rose of Raby'). Cicely happens to be the daughter of Ralph Neville, Earl of Westermoreland. Richard of York, had to pay for the services of his men and finance the army in France from his own coffer. By the time he left for France he had already spent thirty eight thousand pounds from his own funds to safeguard the English interests in France. In 1445, on Somerset's (Henry VI's cousin) advice, the Duke of York was replaced as Lieutenant of France. Somerset was Henry VI's favourite and York disliked him from the core of his heart. Henry VI appointed York, Lieutenant of Ireland. Unfortunately York was forced to forward a sum of twenty five thousand pounds to sustain the King's army in France. York was reduced to a marginal position.

York was an able soldier. Somerset was weak. York's fears over the management of the English campaign in France became true. Somerset's inability as a soldier proved costly for England. France began to exert its power. Somerset's strategy on the warfront proved fatal and he was solely responsible for the surrender of the town of Rouen. He became unpopular in his own home turf. As he was Henry VI's favourite, he still retained his power and position in the court. In 1451 England lost Bordeaux and Gascony to the French. It was a great setback for the English and Henry VI, the King of England. York accused Somerset solely for the English failings in France. Taking opportunity of England's sinking position he tried to usurp the King, and arrest the Duke of Somerset for his miserable blunder. He ultimately became successful in removing Somerset from the position of King's senior advisor too.

The latent fear in York's mind (that Somerset might take the position of heir to Henry, in the absence of the King having his own children) forced him to take this desperate move. He then wanted to consolidate his own position, as the only contender to the throne. He sailed from Ireland and landed with his troops in North Wales, and then travelled straight for London and marched towards Blackheath. Shakespeare has echoed these thoughts in his play, *Richard II*.

"My Lord of Hereford [Henry IV] here, whom you call king,
Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king [Richard II]:
And if you crown him, let me prophesy:

The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act;
Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;
Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
O, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woe fullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth."

(Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 4.1)

1.4 THE BEGINNING OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Peace followed soon after York's release from custody. However, by 1453, England was swept over by a political storm that was already brewing. This year signaled the end of England's possession in France with the disastrous end of the Hundred Years War. Henry VI was clouded by the First bout of madness. Historians record this form of illness in different dialogues, none is sure about what happened exactly but it took a serious turn. Henry VI became paralyzed. York was made Protector of England. He made the best use of the tumultuous situation. Seeking revenge on his earlier enemies, he took this golden opportunity to send Duke of Somerset to the Tower in 1453. On the other hand the Earl of Salisbury, Richard Neville along with his eldest son Richard, Earl of Warwick, began to seek their revenge against the Earls of Northumberland. England was plunged into a series of minor wars. In 1455 there was a dramatic turn of events with the King recovering from his bouts of madness. He immediately gave orders to release Somerset from the Tower. He formed a natural alliance with the earl of Northumberland, Henry Percy against the Duke of York. York was reduced to a minor figure. The King took away all his powers as Protector--- and his supporters, namely the Earl of Salisbury and the Earl of Warwick. The battle lines for the "War of the Roses" were drawn.

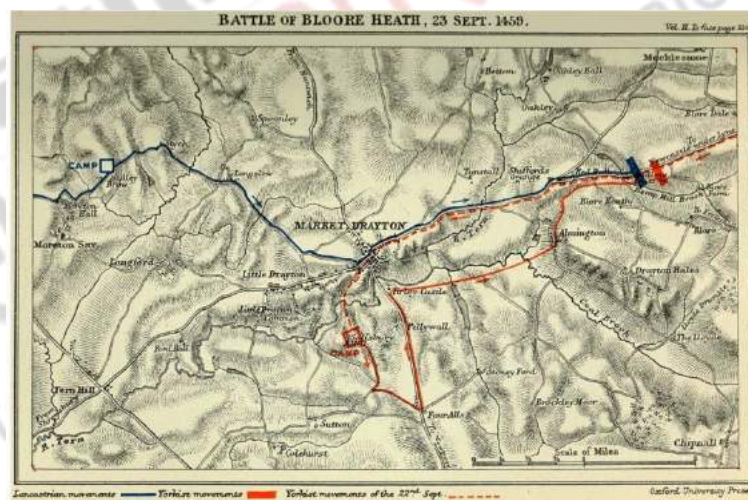
THE FIRST WAR 1455-61.

The First Battle of St. Albans, took place on May 22, 1455. This was the first engagement in the Wars of the Roses. As we have already discussed, in 1455, Henry VI

recovered from the first bout of insanity. This brought about the termination of York's Protectorate. Somerset and his allies were again in power. Realizing his marginal position, York was determined to secure by force of arms the downfall of Somerset. He collected a troop of about three thousand soldiers and marched towards London. In anticipation Henry VI moves from London and tries to intercept the Yorkist army. He halts his march in the town of St. Albans. A battle follows which left the King wounded. The Queen and her young son Edward flee into exile. Somerset, the primary supporter of Henry VI was slain and York was victorious.

BATTLE OF BLORE HEATH : 1459

In the fifteenth century Blore Heath was an area of wood land and rough heath, miles away from large towns or cities. In September 1459, the Yorkists and the Lancastrians met on a damp Sunday morning at Blore Heath. Thousands of men both the sides died in this bloody battle. From the nearby Mucklestone church tower, Queen Margaret Anjou watched the battle. Later she fled, when she anticipated that the Lancastrians are going to lose. The Yorkists won.



BATTLE OF LUDFORD: 1459

This battle marks an early setback for Richard, Duke of York and his allies in the Wars of the Roses. The two combating forces squared up to each other across the river Teme. The Captain of the Calais troop switches side. A significant number of the Yorkist forces deserts. Richard along with his son Edmund, Earl of Rutland, flees to Ireland. Whereas the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick goes to Calais, taking Edmund Earl of March, York's younger son with them.



BATTLE OF NORTHAMPTON: 1460

At the end of June 1460, the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick along with their supporters returned to England. The Yorkist troops and nobles approached London and set to confront the King's army before he had time to muster his full strength. The Lancastrian army learns of the Yorkists plans. They stop at the town of Northampton to build a defensive position. The Archbishop of Canterbury tries to negotiate. However, his attempts at negotiation become unsuccessful. The battle becomes inevitable. During the middle of the battle Lord Grey, a commander of Henry VI's army joins the Yorkist forces. This is the turning point of the battle. The Yorkist attempts to control the King becomes successful. He somehow agrees to accept the Yorkists as the rightful heir to the crown in an Act of Settlement. However Queen Margaret Anjou refuses to accept this agreement that disinherited her son. She becomes busy in assembling an army in Wales, the war continues. Warwick, the Kingmaker captures London and hands it over to the Yorkist faction.



BATTLE OF WAKEFIELD: 1460

This battle was an important Lancastrian victory. York along with Salisbury meets the threat of a large Lancastrian force assembling near the city of York. Richard somehow leaves his own comfort zone, the Sandal Castle, and directly attacks the Lancastrian force; knowingly that it is twice the size of his army. He dies during the battle. York's sons along with the Earl of Salisbury are captured and executed.



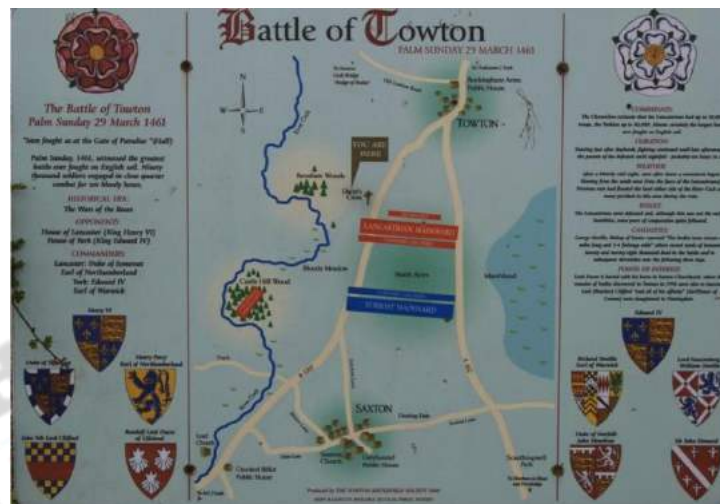
BATTLE OF MORTIMOR'S CROSS: 1461

The battle of Mortimer's Cross took place when the Yorkist army comprising of Edward, Earl of March, intercepted a Lancastrian force under Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke, marching towards England from South Wales. The details of the battle are not known in details. After the battle, the Earl of March joins Warwick near London and within a short span of two months he was to be crowned the King of England.



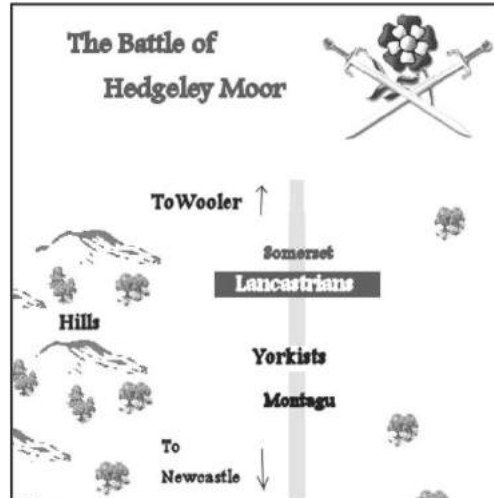
BATTLE OF FERRYBRIDGE AND TOWTON: 1464

Towton was the largest and longest battle fought on British soil during the Wars of the Roses. Ferrybridge is a small engagement before the larger battle of Towton. The Yorkist army is pushed back and during the battle, Lord Fitzwalter, their leader is slain. After this the Yorkist army caught and defeated the retreating Lancastrians. The two armies met in the open fields between the villages of Saxton and Towton. The Yorkist army defeats the Lancastrians. Edward IV, Richard's son marches into the city of York. Henry VI, the Queen along with their son flee to Scotland for nine years. Edward IV is formally crowned King at Westminster.



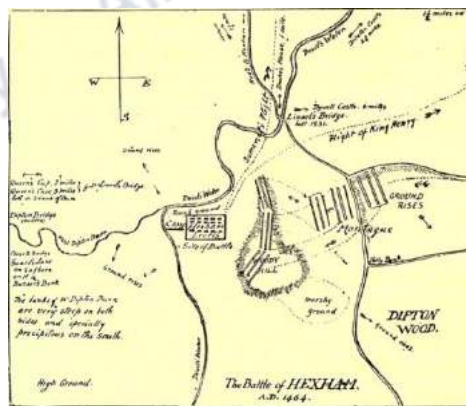
BATTLE OF HEDGELEY MOOR : 1464

The battle of Hedgeley Moor was fought between Queen Margaret Anjou and the Yorkists under the leadership of Lord Montague (John Neville, brother of Warwick). The Lancastrian force under the Queen was crushed by Montague and his forces. Sir Ralph Percy, the only holding force of the Lancastrians was beheaded at Hedgeley Moor, a place some miles south of Wooler in Northumberland.



BATTLE OF HEXAM: 1464

This battle was fought only after twenty days after the battle of Hedgeley Moor. Somerset and his remaining force has already moved farther south in Northumberland and camped in Hexam Levels by the sides of the river popularly known as Devil's Water. Montague, is trapped by the Lancastrian force with the river at their back and flanks. The Lancastrian resistance was put off, they fled. Somerset was caught and executed at Hexam. Lord Hungerford and Lord Ross, were captured the very next day, and put to death. King Edward IV was happy with the services of Montague. Henceforth Montague was known as Earl of Northumberland.

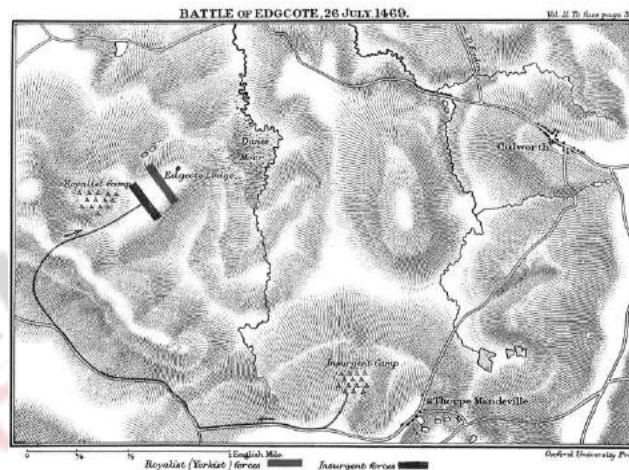


In the following year (1465), Edward IV imprisons Henry VI. Another storm brews up. From the very beginning of 1466, the Earl of Warwick tries to exercise his control over the King. Since he was instrumental in helping Edward IV to the throne, he wants to keep the reins in his hand. Edward refuses to become a puppet King under Warwick. Warwick then forms an alliance with Louis XI of France and tries to usurp the King. Warwick becomes a *de facto* supporter of the Lancastrians. In the following year (1467), Charles the Bold becomes

Duke of Burgundy. He is the chief rival to Louis XI. In 1468 Margaret of York marries Charles the Bold.

BATTLE OF EDGEWOTE MOOR: 1469

Edgewote is in Northamptonshire, a few miles from Banbury. A Lancastrian force intercepts Edward IV. The insurgents are led by “Robin of Redesdale”. Warwick and Edward’s brother, George Duke of Clarence joins him. Warwick and his brother, the Archbishop of York captures King Edward. Warwick switches sides and allies himself with the Lancastrian faction, he now wages war against the Yorkist factions. Edward IV is defeated, Henry VI becomes the King. Warwick the Kingmaker, becomes successful in his vicious mission.

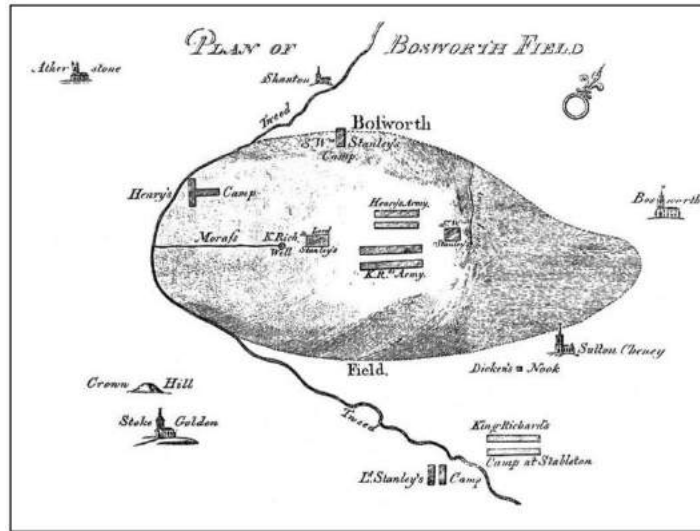


However, Edward IV waits for another opportunity to restore his claims to Kingship. In the early 1470, Edward IV bounces back and puts things under his control. Warwick and George flee to France to join hands with Margaret of Anjou. A battle follows. In the Battle of Barnet 1471, Warwick is captured and killed by Edward IV. Henry VI dies, probably murdered. In 1474, in a tangled web of alliances, Louis XI, who still has connection with the Yorkists, declares war against Charles the Bold in France. Edward IV supports Charles the Bold. He invades France to protect Charles the Bold. In 1483 Edward IV dies. Richard, Duke of Gloucester puts the child-king, Edward V to the throne of England. Richard becomes King Richard III and rules England till 1485. Edward V and his brother are murdered in the Tower of London.

BATTLE OF BOSWORTH FIELD: 1485

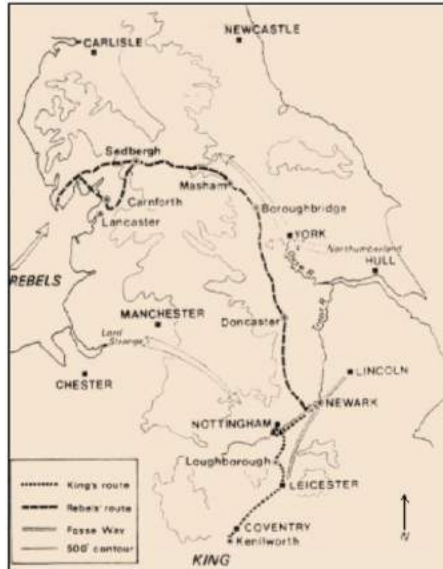
In 1485, Earl of Richmond, Henry Tudor challenges Richard III for the crown. The two armies meet at the south of the village of Market Bosworth. Tudor defeats the King Richard III and kills him. After the battle, Henry Tudor is crowned as King Henry VII. This

marks the beginning of the century old reign of the Tudor dynasty in England. He marries Elizabeth of York. This marriage is an attempt to bridge the gap between the two rival factions---the Lancastrians and the Yorkists. Henry creates the Tudor Rose, a fusion of the White Rose of York and the Red Rose of Lancaster. Except for various efforts during Henry's reign to place the Yorkist pretenders on the throne, the Wars of the Roses end.



BATTLE OF STOKEFIELD: 1487

The last battle between the arch rivals the Yorkists and the Lancastrians was fought in a small village near Newark. The Yorkist faction was fought was led by Lambert Simnel and Henry VII. Henry VII quickly brought things under his control after a conflict of about three hours. Simnel was imprisoned and the royal forces thoroughly suppressed the rival forces.



The Last Battle 1487

1.5 IMPACT OF THE WARS OF ROSES:

As civil conflicts the Wars of the Roses were notable in that they did not produce economic recession and widespread destruction. The Wars of the Roses left little mark on the common people of England but the nobility incurred heavy losses. A large part of the aristocracy was killed. It was an implicit rule of the war to kill the nobles and not the common people in England. The nobility of England thinned down. Some of the noble families disappeared forever from the map of England. The royal dynasty changed. There rose a new class in the English society---the merchants. The Wars of the Roses heralded the end of the medieval period in England and ushered in the new movement known as Renaissance. The Wars of the Roses (some call it the Wars of the two roses) eventually established a strong dynasty on the throne of England----the Tudors---on the throne which took England out of the Middle Ages and brought it to a more modern era. We are to remember that during the wars England ceased to be an important player in the European affairs. It is also a very important period for British culture and history. The Wars of the Roses has also been a vast source of inspiration for English authors like Shakespeare. Quite a number of his plays---*Henry VI*, *Richard II* are based on this era. This period has been a turning point in the history of England and will forever remain one of the most important period in the history of England.

Let us sum it up by giving an outline of the major events:

OUTLINE OF THE MAJOR EVENTS OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES:

Outline of Key Dates	Outline of the Wars of the Roses Key events
1455	May 22, 1455: The First Battle of St Albans is the starting of Civil war in England called the Wars of the Roses.
1455 - 1460	There were constant clashes between the Lancastrian faction of King Henry VI, his wife Queen Margaret of Anjou and the Yorkist forces led by Richard, Duke of York and the Earl of Warwick.
1460	Battle of Northampton, on July 10, 1460: The Yorkist army under Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, the Kingmaker captures King Henry VI.
1460	King Henry VI suffers a bout of madness and Richard Duke of York is appointed Regent of England.
1460	October 1460 the Act of Accord: Richard, Duke of York is named as successor to the throne, keeping aside the claim of Henry's six year old son Prince Edward.
1460	The Battle of Wakefield: Richard takes a strong position at Sandal castle and far out numbers the Lancastrian army. Due to some unknown reasons Richard leaves Sandal castle, his stronghold and is defeated by the Lancastrian army. Richard is killed in the battle. His son, Edward of York, now put forward his claim to the throne of England.
1461	March 4: Edward of York is declared King Edward IV in London.
1470	A rebellion led by Warwick and Clarence fails and they are forced to flee to France where they join hands with Queen Margaret of Anjou.

1470	The French supports an English invasion led by Margaret, Warwick and Clarence.
1470	King Edward IV is forced to flee when Warwick's brother, John Neville switches his allegiance to the Lancastrian side.
1470	3 October 1470, Henry VI is briefly restored to the throne of England.
1470	December 1470: Prince Edward marries Anne Neville, Warwick's younger daughter.
1471	March: King Edward IV lands with an invasion force in England.
1471	Battle of Barnet -14 April: King Edward IV wins the battle and Warwick is killed.
1471	King Henry VI is imprisoned in the Tower of London.
1471	Battle of Tewkesbury - May 4: King Edward IV wins a decisive victory and the Lancastrian male lines are virtually destroyed. Edward, Prince of Wales is one of those who were killed in the war.
1471	May: Queen Margaret and her daughter-in-law, Anne Neville, are taken as prisoners by King Edward IV.
1471	May 22, 1471: The death of King Henry VI at the Tower of London. The cause of his death remains a mystery, but he is believed to have been murdered.
	King Edward IV reigns as King of England from March 4, 1461 - Oct 31, 1470 and April 11, 1471 - April 9, 1483.
1471	King Edward IV continues as King of England.
1483	Easter: Edward suddenly fell ill during Easter 1483. He therefore names his brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester as Protector after his death and entrusts his young sons and little princes, Edward and Richard, to his care.

1483	King Edward IV dies: April 9, 1483 at Westminster.
1483	The young prince ascends the throne as Edward V when his father dies on 9th of April 1483. Edward V is joined by his brother Prince Richard at the Tower of London to await his coronation.
1483	16th June 1483: The coronation of Edward V is cancelled due to unknown reasons.
1483	June 25 1483: Parliament declares the two little princes illegitimate and, as next in line to the throne, their uncle and Protector, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, is declared the true King. The two little princes were never seen again in England.
1483	26 June 1483: Richard, Duke of Gloucester is declared King Richard III.
1484	April 9 1484: Edward of Middleham, also known as Edward Plantagenet the only son of King Richard III of England dies suddenly, cause is entirely unknown.
1485	Battle of Bosworth Field 22 August 1485: King Richard III is killed and his supporters defeated at the Battle of Bosworth Field in Leicestershire against Lancastrian forces led by Henry Tudor.
1485	Richard III is the last king of the Plantagenet family, who rules over England for more than three hundred years. Richard's defeat at Bosworth Field by Henry Tudor ends the Plantagenet dynasty and the War of the Roses and heralds the Tudor dynasty
1485	The reign of the Tudor Dynasty begins.