

British Monarchs of the Fifteenth Century

House of Lancaster

Henry IV, 1339-1413

Henry V, 1413-1422

Henry VI, 1422-1461, 1470-1471

House of York

Edward IV 1461-70, 1471-1483

Edward V, 1483

Richard III, 1483-1485

Tudor Sovereigns

Henry VII, 1485-1509

Henry VIII, 1509-1547

Edward VI, 1547-1553

Mary, 1553-1558

Elizabeth I, 1558-1603

Selected Capsule Summaries:

Henry IV

Born at Bolingbroke, Lincolnshire, in 1367. Well educated, able to write in English and French. He was extremely pious. In 1380 he married Mary Bohun. In 1387, in the absence of his father, John of Gaunt, Henry joined the opposition to Richard II, however with the return of his father he was forced to withdraw. From 1390-92 he was in Prussia on a campaign with the Teutonic Knights, and after a brief return to England he left for the Holy Land. Henry was created Duke of Hereford for his excellence in service.

In 1398 he cast doubts on Richard II, his cousin, as a king; Norfolk called him a liar and the Court of Chivalry ordered the two should meet at Coventry in September in a joust. Henry had built up a good deal of popular support in London, and Richard decreed that the joust should not take place; Norfolk was banished for life, Henry for ten years..

Gaunt died in February 1399, and the King confiscated all of his Lancastrian estates. While Richard was in Ireland, Henry landed at Ravenspur, marched to Bristol, and usurped the throne. Richard was taken to London where, on September 29, 1399, he resigned the throne, and Henry was acknowledged as king. While the general public supported Henry, he immediately had trouble with people who favored Richard. In September 1400 Owen Glendower raised a revolt in Wales that did not end until 1408. The strong families of Percy and Mortimer (the latter possessing a stronger claim to the throne than Henry) revolted from 1403 – 1408. The French were a constant source of trouble; Plymouth was burnt in 1403, and they marched with Glendower into Worcestershire. In 1405, Richard Scrope, the Archbishop of York, rearing that Henry's anti-clerical ideas were gaining ground, proclaimed his opposition to the Lancastrian line, and was soon executed by the King.

Amidst this political turmoil, Henry became ill; leprosy, epilepsy, and nervous disorders were marring his ability to govern. Parliament was worried about the massive expenditures Henry called for to fuel his battles, and government routinely held up grants by attempting to impose controls on the crown. In 1411, Chancellor Beaufort, who, unknown to Henry, forced Arundel to resign, and managed to send an English expedition to the aid of Burgundy. Upon hearing this, Henry replaced Beaufort with Arundel, and sent an

expedition to aid the Armagnacs, sworn enemies of the Burgundians. Some said the King was senile and that Henry Beaufort should replace him in a coup with the Prince. However, in 1413, Henry V died, leaving his son as heir and replacement.

Henry V

Born in 1387 at Monmouth, spent much of his time in sport. Richard II was very fond of him as a child, and when Henry Bolingbroke was exiled the King kept him at court. Against his father's wishes, he launched an expedition to aid the Burgundians in 1411. Henry ascended the throne with the death of his father in 1413, and his first actions showed him to be serious-minded. In early 1414 he quelled a Lollard rebellion led by his friend Sir John Oldcastle.

Henry's plans turned to France. His great-grandfather, Edward III, had made a claim there, and Henry followed up this claim, which he saw as a religious right. He proposed to marry Catherine in 1415 and demanded Normandy and Anjou as dowry; Charles VI refused and Henry readied his troops for an invasion. To do so, Henry pawned his jewels and raised loans, and ordered 1,500 ships, 15,000 horses, 2,500 men-at-arms, and 8,000 archers. In October 1415 Henry defeated the French at Agincourt and by 1419 had captured Normandy. As a result of the Treaty of Troyes, in May 1420, Henry married Catherine, daughter of Charles VI of France.

Henry was to become King of England and France, however after a Dauphinist attack on Burgundy in 1422, Henry fell ill and was taken to Vincennes. While away, Catherine bore their only son who was to inherit a troubled kingdom.

Henry VI

At nine months old, Henry inherited two kingdoms; however he was also grandson, on his mother's side, of a mad king – Charles I of France. As a child, Henry did not govern, and even as a teen, or an adult, his effectiveness as a ruler problematic. His guardians, uncle Bedford who was busy with insurgents in France, uncle Gloucester who was busy fighting with Beaufort for supremacy in England, took little notice of him; he was even given a coronation until 1429 where, at Reims, he was crowned as Charles VII after rescuing the French Dauphin Charles. Henry's court meanwhile began to mount debts, and with Bedford's death in 1435 there was no able member of the royal house to direct military operations.

By 1437 Henry began to take a minimal interest in royal affairs. Two of his noted accomplishments were the founding of the educational institutions of Eton and King's, Cambridge. Cardinal Beaufort, meanwhile, began to remove most of the burden of government from the King's shoulders. Beaufort retired in 1443 and was replaced by his second-in-command, William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk. Suffolk was able to negotiate a two-year truce with France in order to recuperate the lost capital, and arranged the marriage of Henry VI to the French princess, Margaret of Anjou, daughter of the King of Sicily, in 1445.

Suffolk, meanwhile, was becoming a target of disdain in England. Suffolk moved to defeat his two rivals, Gloucester, who was impeached and died five days later, and Richard Duke of York, nephew of the Duke of York who was killed at Agincourt. The Duke of York was, next to Henry, the largest land-owner in England and at the time the probable heir to the crown. Suffolk accused the Duke of York of misdirecting the war in France and banished him to Ireland. Still, the debt increased, and new taxation was required, however this would cause an upheaval among the landed classes. Henry banished Suffolk in 1450, however marauders caught his ship and he was beheaded.

In mid 1453 Henry V lapsed into his first bout with mental illness. York, since returned from Ireland, established himself as Protector – assumedly with an eventual claim to the kingdom. Margaret, however, remained loyal to her husband, and by 1554 Henry recovered, and York was forced to give up his protectorship. York withdrew to his estates in the north and began forming an army. At St. Albans, the Lancastrian forces were defeated, Henry was captured, and he soon relapsed into illness. Margaret helped Henry escape, only to be defeated once again in March 1461 at Towton. Richard's son, Edward Earl of

March, a descendent of the Mortimer branch and a more rightful heir to the throne than the Lancastiran line, was proclaimed king in 1461.

Henry VI, Margaret, and their son fled to Scotland, but soon left for the continent. Henry was captured in 1465 and was sent to the Tower. Henry was briefly restored to power in September 1470. By 1471, however, Edward IV reclaimed the throne and Henry was again sent to the Tower where he was murdered the following day.

Edward IV

Born at Rouen in 1442, and as Earl of March served his father Richard Duke of York in prosecuting his claim to the throne as a descendent of the third son of Edward III, whereas the Lancastrians descended from the fourth son. With Warwick and Salisbury, Edward defeated the Lancastrians at Northampton in 1460, and on his father's death at Wakefield he took over the Yorkist cause, eventually forcing Henry VI out. On May 2, 1464, he married Elizabeth Woodville.

Edward was a fine dresser, handsome, and friendly to all. Yet, he was also a shrewd businessman and a quick thinker. Richard Neville, "the kingmaker", Earl of Warwick, was beginning to press relations with France and their King Louis XI, and in 1468 a 30-year treaty was made with Burgundy. In 1469 Warwick too the King's brother, George Duke of Clarence, to Calais to marry his daughter, and together the two plotters returned to London forcing Edward to withdraw to Nottingham. Warwick suggested that Edward was illegitimate, and the northern and southern forces converged to capture the King; Edward, too popular to be deposed, quickly raised an army and Warwick soon left for France. Warwick, however, managed to return Henry VI for a brief period in 1471, however, neither Warwick, nor his policies were popular. Edward returned from Burgundy with a small army; at Barnet Warwick was killed, and soon after, at Tewkesbury, Edward, Prince of Wales, was killed. Edward once again banished Henry VI to the Tower where he was killed.

In 1475 Edward set off to France again, in pursuit of lost domains and in support of Burgundy. Edward extorted a non-aggression treaty with Louis XI amounting to a payment of 75,000 crowns and an annuity of 20,000. His final years were marked with periods of self-indulgence and recklessness. In 1478 he had his brother, George, Duke of Clarence, murdered on a charge of treason. He died suddenly in 1483, leaving two sons and five daughters.

Edward V

Eldest son of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville, borne in 1470. He ascended the throne in 1483 at the age of twelve, only to rule for two months before being deposed by his uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester. The Duke of Gloucester was to be Edward's Protector when his father, Edward IV died in 1483. The Duke had Edward and his younger brother, Richard, imprisoned in the Tower of London and had them declared illegitimate. The two boys never emerged from the Tower, apparently murdered by their uncle who had since ascended to the throne.

Richard III

Born in 1452, the eleventh child of the Duke of York, and before he was seven he was involved in the Wars of the Roses, as a captive of Henry VI. In 1461, his elder brother took the crown as Edward IV and Richard was made Duke of Gloucester and Admiral of the Sea, he was nine years old.

Richard stood by his brother while he was exiled and fought beside him at Barnet and Tewkesbury. He was implicated in the murder of Henry VI, and possibly with the murder of Clarence in 1478. During Edward's final years, Richard ruled the north of England. When his brother died in 1483, Richard was made Protector of the new King, Edward V. However, Richard feared that the Queen's family, the Woodvilles and the Greys, who were numerous, wanted to take control, and Richard feared another internal struggle. The nobility, led by Buckingham, also feared the Queen's family. Richard caught up with Grey who was leading the young Edward V to London, and finding them with arms, joined Buckingham in their arrest. Edward soon had Edward's councilor, Hastings, executed, and the Queen was persuaded to give up

Richard of York, and now the two princes were in the Tower, never to emerge. Richard had his circle of friends spread word that both youths were illegitimate.

On July 6, 1483 Richard was crowned King. He quickly promised justice, morality, and kindness to the poor and the Church, and he would reduce taxes. However, news began to leak that the princes were dead, and that Richard had some involvement in their possible murder. Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, who once supported him, began to shift his allegiance. Soon, messages were sent to Henry Tudor, now the leader of the Lancastrian party, that if he came, rebels would support him. Buckingham was soon executed for this maneuver, but the writing was on the wall.

Henry Tudor landed in Wales and Richard moved down to Leicester to face him. On August 22, 1485 Richard III and Henry Tudor's forces met on Bosworth Field. Richard III was killed, his body taken to Leicester where it was exposed to the public for two days. Henry erected a tomb, however it was destroyed and the body thrown into the river.

Henry VII

Born in 1547, son of Edmund Tudor and Margaret Beaufort. Henry descended from John of Gaunt and his affair with Catherine Swynford, and therefore a Lancastrian.

Henry was persuaded to return from exile to England to restore the crown, and after his victory at Bosworth Field, he was determined to bring order after eighty-five years of civil war. His marriage to Elizabeth of York combined the two rival factions, and ceased any questions about succession. During his reign Henry VII faced to minor insurrections, each one masquerading as a rightful heir to the throne. Lambert Simnel posed as the Earl of Warwick, and Perkin Warbeck posed as Richard of York, Edward V's younger brother who was imprisoned in the Tower. Simnel's army was defeated and its leader was eventually pardoned and forced to work in the King's kitchen, while Warbeck was imprisoned and executed, his main support coming from the continent.

Henry was a monarch who strengthened the crown by taking away much of the nobility's power. Henry created the Committee of the Privy Council as an executive advisory board, he established the Court of the Star Chamber to increase royal involvement in civil and criminal cases, and instead of revenue tax disbursement from Parliament, and he imposed forced loans on the nobility.

Henry arranged the marriage of his eldest son Arthur to Catherine of Aragon, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella. Arthur, however, died within a couple of months, and Henry secured a papal dispensation for Catherine to marry Arthur's brother, the future Henry VIII. Henry also married his daughter, Margaret, to James IV of Scotland, thereby connecting the two royal families, and eventually leading to the Stuart Dynasty.

Henry's reign can be seen as the start of the modern age. Law and trade replaced feudal obligations, and Henry ruled at a distance, keeping the nobility in check.