

Chronology of the Wars of the Roses

There were three distinct phases of civil war, involving some eighteen battles or skirmishes.

The first phase 1455–64

What began as a political struggle for control of royal government eventually led to outright war for possession of the crown. Between 1455 and 1464 eleven battles or skirmishes were fought between Lancastrian and Yorkist armies.

1455

In 1455 the aim of Richard of York and his supporters had been to control the king and his government. York achieved his aim after the First Battle of St Albans and the civil war might have ended there had the warring parties agreed to resolve their differences. However, the antagonism and distrust between York and the king's advisers and allies, principally the queen, Margaret of Anjou, ran too deeply to be healed. When, four years later, the Lancastrians felt strong enough, they tried again to rid the kingdom of York and so, war flared up again.

- *The Battle of St Albans, May 1455.* This skirmish marks the beginning of the civil or dynastic war. By confronting the king, Henry VI, with an armed force, the Duke of York had set in motion the means by which the nobility of England would settle their quarrels by fighting.

1459–61

York responded by challenging the king directly for possession of the crown. The battles fought between 1459 and 1461 were aimed at overthrowing Henry VI. York was killed at the Battle of Wakefield and was succeeded by his son and heir, Duke Edward of York. The most decisive battle of the period was that fought at Towton, after which Edward deposed Henry VI and took the crown for himself. This period of the civil war was the most intense, bloody and decisive, and resulted in a change of dynasty (see page 10).

- *The Battle of Blore Heath, September 1459.* This was a victory for the Yorkists, who killed the Lancastrian commander Lord Audley.
- *The 'Rout' of Ludford, October 1459.* This marked a defeat for the Yorkists, who fled Ludford when Henry VI turned up to confront them.
- *The Battle of Northampton, July 1460.* The Lancastrians were heavily defeated by the Yorkists. Henry VI was captured and Buckingham, the Lancastrian commander, was executed. Queen Margaret and her son Edward escaped.
- *The Battle of Wakefield, December 1460.* The Yorkists were crushed by a much larger Lancastrian force. York was killed and his severed head was stuck on the walls of York with a paper crown on it.
- *The Second Battle of St Albans, February 1461.* The Yorkists under Warwick suffered another decisive defeat at the Second Battle of St Albans.
- *The Battle of Mortimer's Cross, February 1461.* The Lancastrians were routed in a significant Yorkist victory that had been planned and led by the teenage Edward, son and heir of the Duke of York.
- *The Battle of Ferrybridge, March 1461.* Ferrybridge was a skirmish that took place a day before the much larger and bloodier Battle of Towton.
- *The Battle of Towton, March 1461.* Towton was the largest and bloodiest battle of the war, with more than 50,000 men involved. The Lancastrians were routed by the victorious Yorkists.

? SOURCE QUESTION

Study Source A. Why was the chronicler unsympathetic in his opinion of Henry VI?

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SOURCE A

The French chronicler Jean de Waurin reported the deposition of Henry VI in 1461.

The changes that took place in the kingdom were due to the simple-mindedness of the king who was neither intelligent enough nor experienced enough to manage a kingdom such as England. It is a true proverb which says, 'Very afflicted is the land whose prince is a child or rules like one'.

King Henry himself and his wife Queen Margaret were overthrown and lost that crown which his grandfather Henry IV had violently usurped and taken from King Richard II, his first cousin, whom he caused to be shamelessly murdered. Men say that ill-gotten gains cannot last.

1464–5

The battles fought in 1464 represent a last-ditch attempt by the Lancastrians to restore Henry VI. They failed and Edward IV remained king until 1469. In 1465 Henry VI was captured and imprisoned by Edward IV. This period, and the later one between 1469 and 1471, witnessed an upsurge in local rivalries where the great magnates such as Percy and Neville in the north and Bonville and Courteney in the south-west took advantage of the chaos of war to strike at each other.

- *The Battle of Hedgeley Moor, April 1464.* The Lancastrians were soundly beaten by a tactically better Yorkist army.
- *The Battle of Hexham, May 1464.* The Lancastrians were cut to pieces by a ruthless and victorious Yorkist force.

The second phase 1469–71

The period between 1469 and 1471 marks the bitter rivalry between two competing Yorkist factions that led to a civil war within a civil war. The Yorkists were turning on each other rather than fighting the Lancastrians. Edward IV's close friend and ally, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, was not satisfied with the position and power the king had given him. Warwick was a rich and powerful nobleman who had used his power to help make Edward king in 1461. He is a good example of what historians have called an 'over-mighty subject' – a nobleman with too much power who was a threat to the king. His power was such that Richard Neville earned the nickname 'Warwick the Kingmaker'.

1469–70

Warwick's rebellion succeeded in toppling Edward IV and restoring Henry VI. Exiled Lancastrians returned to England in the belief that their cause had triumphed. Henry VI was king in name only, for the real power lay in Warwick's hands. Warwick's triumph was short lived: Edward IV returned from exile in France to challenge for the throne a second time.

- *The Battle of Edgecote, July 1469.* Edgecote marks the beginning of the Yorkist feud in which one Yorkist faction turned on another. Warwick and Clarence

turned against Edward IV and his chief ally, the Earl of Pembroke. Pembroke and his largely Welsh army were heavily defeated at Edgecote. Pembroke was captured and executed. Edward IV was captured by Warwick.

- *The Battle of Losecoat Field, March 1470.* Edward IV succeeded in defeating a rebel force under the command of Sir Robert Welles, an ally of Warwick.
- *The Battle of Nibley Green, March 1470.* Nibley Green was caused by a private quarrel between the Berkeleys and Talbots (see page 94) which resulted in armed conflict.

1471

With the support of Burgundy and in spite of the interference of France, Edward IV launched his bid for the throne. Victory at Barnet secured the crown while Tewkesbury put paid to the remnants of the Lancastrian party, many of whom fled again into exile.

- *The Battle of Barnet, April 1471.* This was a Yorkist victory which enabled Edward IV to secure the throne and re-establish himself as king. Warwick was killed.
- *The Battle of Tewkesbury, May 1471.* This was a Yorkist victory which resulted in the death of the Lancastrian Prince Edward, the capture of his mother, Margaret of Anjou, and the eventual murder of Henry VI.

The third phase 1483–7

This period began with a *coup d'état* when Richard, Duke of Gloucester, usurped the rightful heir to the throne, his young nephew Edward V. The fact that the king was the son of his brother, Edward IV, whom he had pledged to protect, did not deter Richard or his chief ally, the Duke of Buckingham, in ruthlessly killing off enemies. Buckingham's rebellion in late 1483 was a sign that all was not well with the regime, but Richard III held the crown until 1485. Challenged by a Lancastrian with a distant claim to the throne, Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, Richard brought his enemies to battle at Bosworth (see family tree diagram, Figure 2.5, page 17).

- *The Battle of Bosworth, August 1485.* This battle settled the question of who would be king of England. Richard III was defeated and killed; Richmond took the throne and was crowned King Henry VII.
- *The Battle of Stoke, June 1487.* Henry VII's tenure of the throne was perilously weak in the first few years and he, like Richard III, was forced to fight for the survival of his regime. Unlike Richard, Henry succeeded and thereby established the Tudor dynasty. Stoke is regarded by many historians as the final battle of the Wars of the Roses.

KEY TERM

Coup d'état French term used to describe the overthrow of a monarch or government.