

A Level History Paper One  
step up work

The Tudors: England 1485-  
1603

## Background.

Henry VII came to the English throne at the end of the Wars of the Roses. The Wars of the Roses were a 30 year long civil war, in which the House of Lancaster and the House of York fought over who would be the next King. It was a time of lawlessness, fear and uncertainty. No King had managed to pass the crown on successfully to his son.

In the fifteenth century, 90% of English people lived in the countryside. The kingdom of England was split into different localities; each was ruled by a local land owner called a noble or a magnate. The noble would be rich and most of them were ambitious. Many nobles wanted to gain more land and a better promotion by working closely to the king in London. The nobles were responsible for administering the king's laws in their localities. They were responsible for justice and law and order. The king also relied upon Justices of the Peace (JP's) to act like a police force and check that people were following the law. This position was unpaid and carried out with varying efficiency across the kingdom. In short, the king needed the support of the nobles to keep law and order in England and to collect taxes. Royal power was not strong enough throughout the kingdom for the king to administer his wishes himself. The North and Wales especially were remote, barren provinces, where no-one really took any notice of the king and only knew their local landlord.

During the Wars of the Roses, all respect and authority for the crown had disappeared. The nobles were keeping illegal armies called "retinues" - this was known as retaining. (Retaining was where great lords recruited those of a lower social status as their followers or servants and a retainer's job was to advance their lord's position within the land and this included the use of arms if this was felt necessary. They were given a uniform (livery) to show who their master was and it also served to reinforce that a retainer was under the control of his lord. Retaining had been allowed in the past as kings accepted that a noble needed a strong retinue of a certain social class serving him if he was to assert his authority within his locality. By allowing retaining a king could all but guarantee social stability in his kingdom. Retaining also served another purpose - the king frequently needed a large army at short notice to fight foreign campaigns and retaining effectively allowed a king to gather around him a sizeable number of trained men at short notice.) During this period these were often used to threaten the King or another noble. Many nobles had become "supernobles." (A supernoble is a noble who has inherited lots of land and titles through marriage and inheritance.) There was no respect for royal law and order. The nobility were ruling like kings in their own localities.

Henry VII became King through battle in 1485. (This is called usurping the throne.) He managed to pass the throne on successfully to his son. He controlled the nobles and their retainers. He provided a period of peace that England so desperately needed.

**Task: answer the questions below using what you have just read**

What were the Wars of the Roses?

Give two facts about fifteenth century England.

What were the nobles responsible for?

Give two facts about the JP's.

Give two facts to explain why the King needed the support of the nobles.

Explain retaining in a paragraph. Include why it could cause a problem for the king.

What does "usurping the throne" mean?

**Task: Read the paragraph below and look at the family tree.**

Highlight all the Kings in a highlighter.

How could Henry's claim to the throne be described as weak?

## Henry becomes King

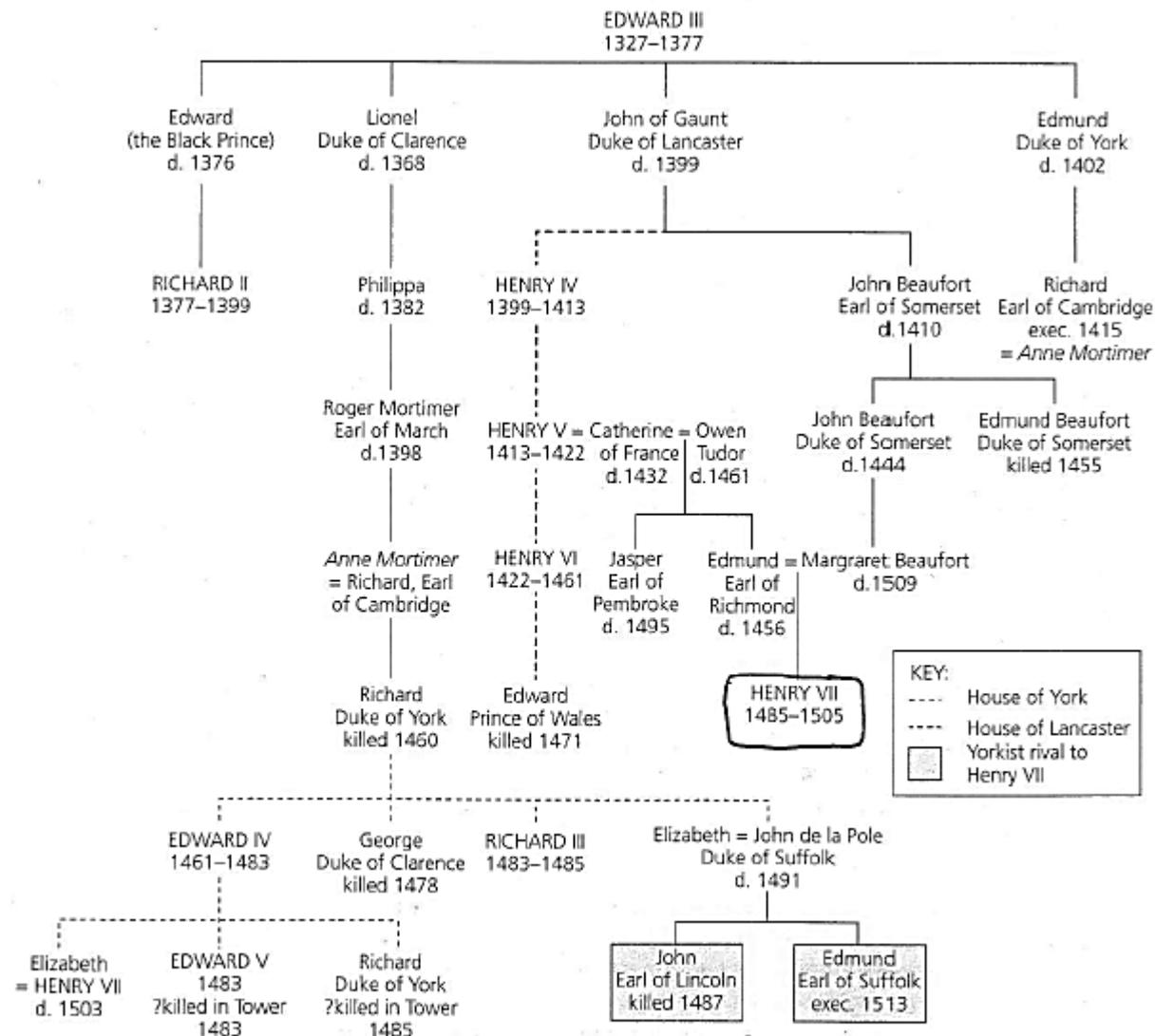
How was Henry able to move rapidly from a 'claim' to being crowned King of England?

### Background of Henry Tudor

Henry did not have a strong claim to the throne of England. His claim lay through his mother, Margaret Beaufort, who was a direct descendant of Edward III by the marriage of his third son, John of Gaunt, Margaret's great grandfather. However, this claim was weakened by the fact that John of Gaunt and Catherine Swynford were not married when John Beaufort, Margaret's grandfather, had been born. Henry was also linked to royalty on his father's side. His grandmother, Catherine, had been married to the King of England, Henry V, before she married Owen Tudor, his grandfather. Because of this marriage, Henry's father and brother, Edmund and Jasper, were half-brothers to Henry VI and had been created Earls.

Henry was born in 1457, the son of Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, who had died a few months before his son's birth. As a young boy, Henry grew up with his mother and uncle, Jasper Tudor. After various deaths (both natural and in battles) during the Wars of the Roses, Henry unexpectedly became the main Lancastrian claimant to the throne. His uncle, Jasper, took Henry to safety in France. Most of the next fourteen years was spent in Brittany, which at that

time was still independent from the government of France. King Edward IV felt threatened by a potential claimant living abroad and possibly gaining support. Edward attempted negotiations to secure his return, but these failed. It is also true that there is no evidence that Henry attempted to challenge Edward's right to be King.



▲ Figure 2 Henry Tudor's family tree.

Read the paragraph below and write a paragraph explaining why Henry decided to attempt to seize the throne.

Include the following:

The circumstances following the death of Edward IV

The rebellion of the Duke of Buckingham

Richard's lack of an heir

Influential supporters

In 1483 the situation changed suddenly. Edward IV died. His brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, was supposed to become Regent, ruling on behalf of Edward's sons. But then he proclaimed himself King, thus denying the succession of his nephew, the young Edward V. The young princes, Edward and Richard, were put in the Tower of London and disappeared. It is not surprising that Richard has been widely held responsible for their deaths. Richard's seizure of the throne led to more disunity in the country, and his ruthless methods provoked more opposition. An unsuccessful rebellion by the Duke of Buckingham further weakened Richard's authority. It was at this point that Henry Tudor, until then a distant claimant living in exile in France, decided to

invade – initially in support of Buckingham. However, after the defeat of that rebellion, he decided to seek to become king himself. Whereas Henry had been a distant claimant living in exile in France against the strong rule of Edward IV, now he had become a potential rival to the unpopular Richard III.

Henry had been living in Paris and quickly built up a following there with support from those who disliked Richard's rule, especially after Richard's son died, leaving no direct heir. Richard's wife had also died, and there were rumours that he intended to marry his niece, Elizabeth of York. By 1485 Henry had attracted several influential and experienced men to his cause. The Earl of Oxford, a loyal Lancastrian, and Jasper Tudor, his uncle, were both experienced soldiers. Others had experience of government. Henry was persuaded that it was the right time to attempt to seize the Crown.

Henry VII received financial support from the French King, Charles VIII. By providing this, he hoped to distract Richard III from offering assistance to the Duke of Brittany, thus allowing Charles to assimilate the territory as part of France.

### The Battle of Bosworth, August 1485.

Read the accounts below.

#### **Battle of Bosworth, August 1485**

Henry set sail from France on 1 August 1485 with a small army of English supporters and French soldiers. They landed near Pembroke in Wales and marched north and then east towards the English border. He gained the support of Rhys ap Thomas, one of the most powerful landowners in Wales, by promising to make him the Lieutenant of Wales and thereby gained more soldiers. He gained more supporters still as he marched towards Shrewsbury and then further into the Midlands. Even then his forces could not match those of Richard III who was based at Nottingham Castle.

On the morning of 22 August 1485 the five thousand-strong army collected together by Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, met the royal army commanded by King Richard III in battle at Bosworth Field, near Leicester. The battle was fought in the area on and around a hill near the village of Bosworth. Richard III's forces had arrived first and had gained the better position. The King had put most of his archers, protected by foot soldiers, on the hillside from where they could fire down on Henry's advancing men. Richard himself led the cavalry. However, he had not been able to count on the loyalty of all of his commanders.

Crucially, Lord Thomas Stanley (Henry's stepfather) and his brother Sir William Stanley were positioned at the north of the battle site with 4,000 men. Both men were reluctant to support Richard, who had taken Thomas Stanley's son hostage to ensure their loyalty, but they were also afraid to support Henry openly in case he lost the battle and they were ruined along with him. For the time being, they stood off to one side, weighing up what was happening. The Earl of Northumberland was also at the battle, but he too had refused to take part until the outcome was clearer.

When the battle began, Henry's foot soldiers ran towards the hill while the royal forces fired arrows at them and Richard's cavalry cut into them from the sides. Henry's forces grouped together to defend themselves and in the midst of the confusion the Duke of Norfolk, one of Richard's commanders, was killed. At this point the two sides disengaged and Henry assessed the situation. He knew that it was only a matter of time before Richard's superior forces wore his men down, so he decided to approach the Stanleys to ask them to join him.

Richard saw what was happening and led his personal guard to attack Henry as he rode out to the Stanleys. Richard came very close to success: his men killed Henry's standard bearer and nearly reached Henry himself. However, at that moment Sir William Stanley decided to take action. He ordered his cavalry to attack Richard, who was caught completely by surprise. The King was thrown

from his horse, but he ordered that another should be brought to him. Meanwhile, the Earl of Northumberland still remained off to the side of the battlefield, choosing not to protect his King.

Richard rejoined the fight, but was cut down and killed, the last English king to die in battle. Once their leader was dead, the royal forces broke up in confusion and fled.

According to the legend surrounding the battle, a soldier found Richard III's golden crown in a thorn bush near where the King had fallen. He brought it to Thomas Stanley who placed it on Henry's head, crowning him 'Henry VII, King of England' amid the fallen bodies and blood. Now that the 28-year-old Earl of Richmond had seized the crown, the Tudor family replaced the House of York as the ruling dynasty in England and Wales.

### Historical Background

By 1483 the Wars of the Roses had seemingly burnt itself out; the Lancastrian faction had effectively been annihilated in 1471 with the death (or murder) of Edward Prince of Wales at the Battle of Tewkesbury and the murder of his father, Henry VI, in the Tower of London. Only one real claimant remained - Henry Tudor who was descended from Edward III through the marriage of his third son John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster to Katherine Swynford. By contrast England's Yorkist King, Edward IV, was secure on his throne with two young sons and heirs; 12 year old Edward and 10 year old Richard. Moreover Edward IV himself was still comparatively young at only 40 years of age. But on 9 April 1483 Edward IV unexpectedly died and although his eldest son, the 12 year old Edward, was initially proclaimed as Edward V he was never to be crowned. The late King's brother - Richard, Duke of Gloucester - saw his nephews declared illegitimate and he was then crowned as Richard III. But his actions caused significant discontent amongst the aristocracy. His prompt execution of William, Lord Hastings and several members of the Woodville family (relatives of Edward IV's queen) did little to cement support whilst his favouring of men from his northern estates alienated other key factions. The unknown fate of Edward V and his brother Richard, the two 'Princes in the Tower', also harmed his reputation. All this led to a rebellion in 1483 which was supported by many former Yorkists. Whilst unsuccessful it effectively drove a number of powerful magnates to Brittany where they joined the 'court in exile' of Henry Tudor.

To cement the support of the former Yorkists, Henry Tudor promised to marry Elizabeth of York, eldest daughter of Edward IV, once he was King; an offer that promised to unify the two families and bring to an end the hugely damaging dynastic struggle that had plagued the country for over twenty years. But the death of Richard III's wife, Anne Neville, in March 1485 led to rumours that Richard would marry Elizabeth himself. Notwithstanding the incestuous nature of this proposal (Elizabeth was Richard's niece), the claim was taken seriously by Henry Tudor for it had the potential to unravel his alliance. Seizing the initiative he sailed from Harfleur with 2,000 mercenaries ('of the worst sort') landing near Milford Haven in South West Wales on 1 August 1485.

### Prelude

Upon arrival Henry veered north via central Wales hoping to recruit more support before facing Richard's forces. Meeting Lord Thomas Stanley on his journey, presumably to lobby for support, Henry proceeded down Watling Street towards London. Meanwhile Richard, who had expected the arrival of Henry Tudor that Summer, had moved to Nottingham in order to be ready to deploy against him. Upon hearing of the landing, Richard moved his forces to Leicester before proceeding down the Fenn Lane to intercept him on Watling Street. Overnight on the 21 August Richard camped around Ambion Hill near Sutton Cheney (the site of the visitor centre). Both forces were eager for battle.

A third force - that of the Stanleys - was also nearby. Lord Thomas Stanley had shadowed Henry's army but had not made his intent clear. He held the position of Lord High Constable of England but Richard also had good reasons to suspect his loyalty for he was married to Henry Tudor's mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, and had much to gain by being the King's father-in-law. Richard had attempted to mitigate this risk by holding his eldest son, Lord Strange, hostage.

### Numbers

Richard's forces were believed to be between 10-15,000 strong and were formed into two battles; the vanguard under the Duke of Norfolk and the rear-guard under the Earl of Northumberland. The vanguard comprised of a mix of archers and billmen as well as a significant array of field artillery. Richard was to the rear with around 100 heavy cavalry.

Henry's force was smaller - believed to be in the region of 5,000 soldiers - and was divided into three battles with the veteran soldier John de Vere, Earl of Oxford in command. Henry was to the rear of his forces with a small lifeguard.

The third force, around 5,000 troops under Lord Thomas Stanley, was deployed to the side of both forces. This was in two formations; the first under Lord Stanley himself, the second under his younger brother William Stanley.

### The Battle

The battle was fought on 22 August 1485 across a part cultivated, part moorland landscape over which ran a Roman road (still in use). The fight was known to contemporaries as the battle of Redemore, meaning the place of reeds.

### Stage 1: Deployment

Oxford deployed in battle array along the road but the vast difference in numbers meant he couldn't match the entire Yorkist frontage. Instead he chose to advance solely towards Norfolk's vanguard relying on the marshy ground to protect his right flank.

### Stage 2: Artillery Exchange

As he advanced Henry came under intense artillery and arrow fire - a fact that has been confirmed by the recent archaeological evidence which has now conclusively placed the battle in vicinity of Stoke Golding. Indeed the Bosworth battlefield has now produced the largest known collection of cannon balls found in Europe consisting of shot of numerous sizes suggesting significant quantities of artillery were present at the battle. Whether these were exclusively from Richard's force is uncertain - it is possible Henry also had ordnance. As Oxford advanced, he spread his men out to reduce the impact of the artillery.

### Stage 3: Oxford Attacks

Utilising Roman military tactics, Oxford formed his forces into a series of wedge formations aimed at punching through Norfolk's line.

### Stage 4: Northumberland Holds

Oxford's advance seems to have placed pressure on Norfolk who slowly gave ground. It is possible Richard may have now ordered Northumberland's forces to attack presumably to envelop Henry's force. But Northumberland didn't move and, assuming he was so ordered, the reason is unknown. It is possible he was constrained by the marshy ground or perhaps he had suspicions about the loyalty of the Stanleys and didn't want to commit his force with them to his back. It has also been mooted that a secret deal had been struck between him and Henry Tudor. Whichever was true, he held his position. Also at this time Richard ordered Lord Stanley to support him or else he would execute his son. Stanley coldly replied "Sire, I have other sons". Richard ordered the immediate execution of Strange but this was never implemented.

### Stage 5: Henry Tudor Isolated

Undoubtedly now concerned about an imminent betrayal by Lord Stanley, Richard received intelligence that Henry Tudor was some distance behind his troops and was now seemingly making his way to the Stanley lines, presumably to entreat them to commit to his side.

### Stage 6: Richard Charges

Confident of his own skills, Richard personally led a small detachment of heavy cavalry and charged the small force surrounding Henry Tudor.

### Stage 7: Richard Attacks

Richard was very nearly successful in his attempt. He smashed through Henry's lifeguard and killed his standard-bearer, Sir William Brandon, and unhorsed John Cheyne, Edward IV's former standard-bearer. Fierce fighting followed as Henry's bodyguards surrounded him.

### Stage 8: William Stanley Commits

Seeing the desperate plight of Henry Tudor, William Stanley now committed to the battle on Henry's side. He led his men into the fray attacking Richard and his small force which was swept aside.

### Stage 9: Richard Killed

Richard found himself bogged down in the marshy ground and lost his horse, or was forced to dismount, at which point he was surrounded by the combined forces of Henry Tudor and William Stanley. Fighting on foot, refusing an opportunity to flee and declaring he would live or die as a King of England he was cut down possibly by Rhys ap Thomas. Concurrently,

perhaps as a result of the Stanley charge, Norfolk's vanguard broke and fled whilst the rear-guard under Northumberland also retreated without engaging.

### Aftermath

Royalist casualties were around 1,000 including Richard III and the Duke of Norfolk. Lord Thomas Stanley, who had played no part in the battle personally, rode to congratulate Henry Tudor producing a Golden Crown he 'found in a thorn bush'; an act that would see him rewarded with the Earldom of Derby. The body of Richard III was taken to Leicester where it was displayed as proof of his death. Thereafter Richard was buried, with little dignity, at the Church of the Greyfriars where he would remain until discovered in 2013 and re-interred in Leicester Cathedral. The Earl of Northumberland surrendered and was ultimately pardoned. Despite the crucial role he had played in the battle, William Stanley didn't prosper for long; he was executed by Henry VII in 1495.

### **Write an answer to the following question:**

Why did Henry Tudor win the Battle of Bosworth in 1485?

Key factors to use:

French support and landing in Wales

The role of the Stanleys and Earl of Northumberland

Richard's mistake (trying to attack Henry)

**Challenge/conclusion** - Which do you think was the main reason?