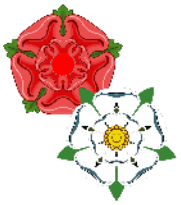
A Battle and a Ring
A Story of The Wars of the Roses



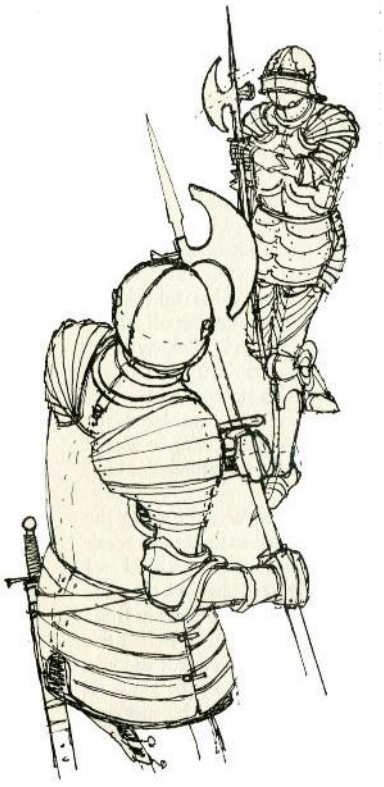
Anne Herbert sat down in the comfort of her favourite room in Raglan castle and stared out of the window. What did the next weeks hold for herself and her family? Anne's husband, William, earl of Pembroke, one of the most powerful men in the country, had just ridden away from the castle, leading his men to fight for King Edward against a rebel army.



William was one of the King's most trusted advisers and he had been very well-rewarded for supporting King Edward. William and Anne now owned many lands in Wales and they'd rebuilt Raglan Castle, ploughing their wealth into creating a palatial home. The best rooms had large, glass-filled windows, tapestries hung on the walls and the castle was surrounded by fruit orchards, gardens and a deer park.

With William often away fighting or at the King's court, Anne had played a major part in supervising the rebuilding, buying building materials, paying the bills and checking the accounts. But Anne had also spent time at the royal court, especially for the ceremony and festivities when their son had been married to the Queen's sister. Since that day, William and Anne had been related to the royal family! In time, they also planned to marry their daughter to a wealthy boy called Henry, Earl of Richmond, who was living with them at the castle.

Then came the news of the rebellion, putting all their hopes in danger. It was a threat, no doubt, because the man plotting the rebellion was the powerful Earl of Warwick. Warwick had been King Edward's main supporter only a few years earlier when Edward had fought his way to the crown. Now Warwick had shocked everyone by changing sides.

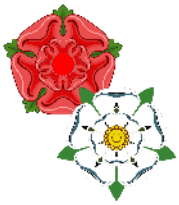


Still, Anne had good reasons to be confident. William had fought in battles before and won – and he and his men were riding to meet up with the rest of the royal army. They would be certain to outnumber the rebels.

It was over a week before Anne heard the news. Something had gone badly wrong. Historians can't be sure but there seems to have been a quarrel between William Herbert and the earl of Devon, the other commander of the royal army. Devon and his men rode away, leaving William and his Welsh soldiers to fight the rebels alone at the Battle of Edgecote in July 1469.

They lost. Many Welshmen were killed, shot down by arrows, beaten with poll-axes or hacked by swords.

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As the news reached their homes, their wives and families went into mourning. Welsh poets also mourned the dead. Elen, wife of Thomas ap Roger Vaughan, was said to be 'weeping drops of dew, as drops of rain' and the wife of Rhys ap Dafydd Llwyd could not believe the news:

'Margaret doesn't believe, Rhys,

That you are not alive and well – come home!'



What happened to William Herbert? He and his brother, Richard, were captured and taken to the Earl of Warwick – who ordered their execution.

Before he died, William added a new section to his will, asking Anne to 'pray for me, and never marry again. You had in life my heart and love'.

When the news of William's death reached Anne at Raglan Castle, she and her family rode for safety to the home of her brother Sir Walter Devereux. There they also met 12 year old Henry Earl of Richmond who'd been with William Herbert at the Battle of Edgecote. As the battle ended, young Henry had been rushed away for his own safety.

And so Anne and her family and her brother Walter waited, wondering what would happen next.

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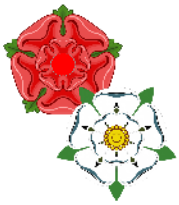


Almost exactly five hundred years later, in 1968, a large gold ring was found near Raglan Castle. It is delicately decorated with a pattern of flowers and a lion. There are also three words - 'to yow feythfoull' – 'faithful to you' - and the initials W and A.

When the ring was examined, experts said it had been made between 1440 and 1475. They also pointed out that the Herbert badge was a lion. And in his will, William had written to Anne 'I love and trust you.'

Could it be that, once upon a time, this ring belonged to William and Anne Herbert?

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Notes for Teachers about 'A Battle and a Ring'

1. I've assumed that you will tell the story, adapting words and phrases to suit you and the class. Treat this as a base to work from!

2. We've designed it and added pictures in case you want to give this to pupils to read. The pictures are taken from Ronald Welch's children's novel *Sun of York*, published by OUP in 1970.

3. I chose this story because it links to the later section that re-tells the story of the Wars through Walter Devereux's decisions. Hopefully it will help students feel more confident if they spot the link.

4. The PowerPoint sequence contains a set of images you could use as backdrop to your story-telling. I haven't tried to put them in a 'correct' sequence – it's for you to decide which ones and how many you want to use.

The picture of Anne Herbert by Graham Turner is called *Reverie* (a framed edition hangs on my wall!) Anne isn't named in the picture title but the coat of arms in the window is hers, combining the Herbert and Devereux arms – she was Anne Devereux before marriage.

Graham Turner's medieval art can be seen here:

https://www.studio88.co.uk/acatalog/The_Medieval_Art_of_Graham_Turner.html

5. Some information about individual slides:

> Slide 5: William and Anne are shown kneeling before Edward IV (or Henry VI – there are disagreements!). The Herbert and Devereux coats of arms are visible on their clothing – for comparison see the coat of arms on the window in slide 3.
>
> Slide 8: Walter Devereux's home was at Weobley castle. I have not included the name Weobley or Walter's title Lord Ferrers to reduce the quantity of names in the story.
>
> Slide 9: the Herbert coat of arms. The Devereux coat of arms appears again in the later section on Walter Devereux's decisions

6. For more on Anne Herbert's life and the Raglan Ring see this article I wrote for The Historian:

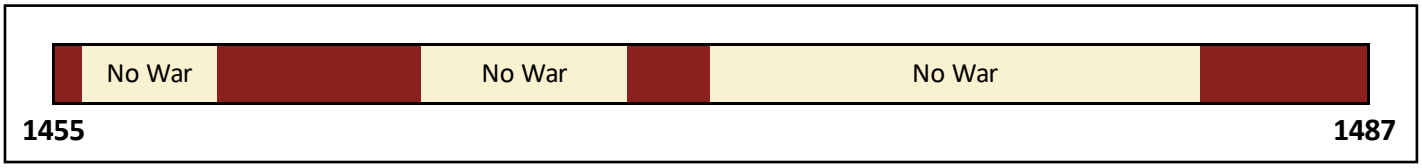
https://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/downloads/AnneHerbertArticle.pdf

7. I have checked the events against the most recent biography of William Herbert in *The History of Parliament: The Commons 1422-1461* (2020) which is not yet online on The History of Parliament website but should be by 2022. The exact date of Edgecote is much disputed – 24th or 26th – hence my avoidance of an exact date.

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The Wars of the Roses: War and Peace

The wars had four phases of fighting.



1455. The battle of St Albans was fought by small armies led by the Duke of York and Duke of Somerset. They were not fighting to decide who would be king but who would be Henry VI's leading adviser.

Then there were four years without battles. People hoped there would be no more battles.

Then 1459-1464. This was when there was most fighting. The Duke of York and his son, Edward, fought against King Henry VI and his supporters to decide who would be king. York was killed but Edward became king (as Edward IV) after the Battle of Towton in 1461. There were more battles in 1464 when Henry's supporters tried to make him king again but they failed.

Then there were five years without battles. People hoped the Wars were over.



Then 1469-1471. The Earl of Warwick rebelled against Edward IV and forced him to escape abroad. Warwick made Henry VI king again. Then Edward invaded England and won back his crown in battle. Henry VI and his son were killed.

Then there were twelve years without battles. People hoped the Wars were over.

Then 1483-1487.

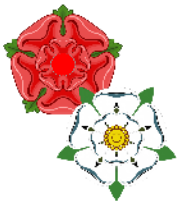
1. Richard III became king when he took the crown from his nephew, Edward V. After young Edward and his brother (the 'Princes in the Tower') disappeared a rebellion broke out against Richard but it failed.

2. In 1485 Henry Tudor invaded England and killed Richard at the Battle of Bosworth. Henry became king as Henry VII.

People wanted to live in peace but could they be certain the Wars were really over?

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Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses
Two myths – or are they true?



The soldiers all came from Lancashire and Yorkshire

Nowadays we often hear of 'The Wars of the Roses' when Lancashire play Yorkshire at cricket and commentators talk about the game being 'a Roses clash'. It's the same when football or rugby teams from Lancashire and Yorkshire play each other. This can trick people into thinking that the real Wars of the Roses was fought only between soldiers from Lancashire and Yorkshire – but this isn't true.

Think back to the story '*A Battle and a Ring*'.

Does it help bust this myth?

The wars were fought between two families and their supporters. When the wars began, one family was led by the Duke of York. The other was led by King Henry VI who was also Duke of Lancaster, and also called Henry of Lancaster.

These families had lands all over the country, not just in Lancashire or Yorkshire. The Duke of York had lands in the south of England, in Wales, in the Midlands as well as some in Yorkshire. The Lancastrians also had lands all over the country, including in Yorkshire. Therefore their soldiers came from their lands all over the country.

Everyone wore red and white roses as badges

All noblemen had badges which were worn by their servants and followers. Many families used several different badges. The Yorkists did use the white rose as a badge but the Duke of York also used the falcon and fetterlock badge and his son, Edward IV, used the Sun in Splendour as his badge.



The Duke of York's Falcon and Fetterlock badge

The Lancastrians also used several badges. The red rose was one of their badges but it was also used by their relatives, the Beaufort family. When Henry VII became king he combined the red and white roses into one badge because his mother was a Beaufort (red rose) and his wife was Elizabeth of York (white rose).



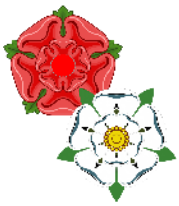
Warwick's Bear and Ragged Staff badge

Making this more complicated – and interesting!

The Wars of the Roses did not just involve English soldiers. The King of France helped Henry VI win his crown back in 1470 and later, in 1485, sent soldiers to help Henry VII invade England. The Duke of Burgundy helped Edward IV in 1471. Can you think why other rulers were interested in who was king of England?

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Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses



Six Statements (A-F) are about the Wars of the Roses.

Two statements are TRUE but four are MYTHS

1. Write T or M in the boxes to show which statements you think are True and which are Myths.

2. Now read the information about each statement and decide if it alters your answers.

For the two statements that are True, you do not need to do anything else.

For the four statements that are Myths, rewrite them so they become True statements about those topics.

Six Statements About The Wars of The Roses

	T or M?	
A. Soldiers in full armour could move easily and quickly in battles.		A
B. The armies badly disrupted people's lives and damaged many homes during the wars.		B
C. People were violent and keen to join in the wars. They didn't try to stop battles taking place.		C
D. The nobles thought it was important to be loyal to the king. They did not change sides easily.		D
E. Women played no part in the Wars of the Roses		E
F. The wars ended as soon as Henry Tudor became king in 1485.		F

Who were the Nobles? – they were the dukes, earls and lords. They were the wealthiest and most powerful families in England. There were 60 to 70 noble families at this time.

Making this more complicated – and interesting!

You may find yourself thinking 'This statement is mostly true but …' or 'this is true for some people but not for others …'. If so, you are thinking like a good historian. Good historians do not assume that everyone thought or behaved in exactly the same way. They always look for differences in people's ideas or in how they behaved. So if you think a statement is mostly true or mostly false – make this part of rewriting a statement! And jot down the evidence that supports your conclusion.

The information pages 7-12 have a section to help you think about this headed

'Making this more complicated – and interesting!'

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Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses

A. Soldiers in full armour could move easily and quickly in battles.

If you wore armour in battle would you want to be able to move easily and quickly – either to attack your enemies or escape if the battle was going badly? And what about if you slipped on mud? You'd want to get up onto your feet again or you'd be easily killed or captured.

Soldiers in the Wars of the Roses were just as intelligent as we are and so wanted the best armour. They wanted armour to protect them from weapons but would also allow them to move easily. This modern illustration gives you a good idea how armour helped soldiers to move.



Look at the way the plates of metal overlap around the elbows and shoulders, the knees, feet and ankles. These over-lapping plates help the soldier move easily. This man would have been very mobile, able to run, bend down, move backwards and to get up from the ground if he fell or was knocked over.

He could also climb onto his horse while wearing his armour although almost all the fighting during the wars took place on foot. Horses were too easy a target for archers. The only battle where a cavalry charge played an important part was at Bosworth in 1485.

This knight is armed with a poll-axe, an extremely effective weapon – the spike could be used to attack the joins in armour, the axe-head had a wicked cutting edge and the hammer head (opposite the axe-head) could be used to batter an opponent's armour. The shaft was so long it could be swung with great force.

Making this more complicated – and interesting!

There was a problem with full armour. It was very hot and men quickly became exhausted and dehydrated during a battle – so the fitter they were the better. If they could, soldiers drew back from the fighting at intervals to drink but in some battles heat and dehydration were more likely to cause casualties than arrows.

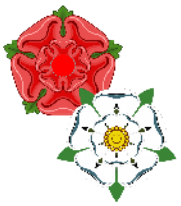
Most of the battles were short which reduced the danger from heat. Most were between just half an hour and a couple of hours long, or sometimes half a day. Only the Battle of Towton lasted all day. Lord Dacre was killed by an arrow at Towton when he took off his helmet to have a drink. Battles usually ended when the losing leaders were killed. Ordinary soldiers were able to escape.

Armies were small too. Towton was the largest battle by a long way – about 25,000 Lancastrians fought about 20,000 Yorkists. All the other battles were fought by much smaller armies. It was very rare to have 10,000 men in an army. Sometimes the armies were as small as 2000 to 3000 men.

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Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses

B. The armies badly disrupted people's lives and damaged many homes during the wars.



> 'Many of the towns were plundered and burned by the rival armies … A great part of the land was no longer farmed because there was no-one to farm it … villages had disappeared … all the towns in the kingdom, with the exception of London, had been well-nigh ruined.'

This is an extract from *England in the Fifteenth Century*, a book by J. Denton, published in 1888, well over a century ago. Here are two pieces of evidence that seem to support Mr Denton's description:

- In 1459 the two armies faced each other outside the town of Ludlow. The Yorkist army fled without fighting and then, according to Gregory's Chronicle, the Lancastrian army 'drank all the wine in the taverns and robbed the town and took away bedding, cloth and other stuff.'
- In 1461 the Lancastrians won the battle of Wakefield in Yorkshire and headed south towards London. According to The English Chronicle, the soldiers robbed 'all the country and people, spoiling abbeys and churches and bearing away gold and silver cups, books and other ornaments.'

Historians have done a lot more research since Mr Denton wrote his book. Nowadays they believe the armies did NOT do much damage to homes and did NOT badly disrupt people's lives. Historians cannot find other examples of serious damage to villages and towns. However there were times when crops were damaged by armies and work on farms and in towns was interrupted because men were recruited for armies. We know there was damage in 1485 because Henry VII paid compensation to the owners of farmland around the battlefield of Bosworth.

In his book *The Wars of the Roses* (published in 2013) Professor A J Pollard says 'for most of the time the wars caused little suffering to most of the people'.

Professor Pollard uses the word 'most' twice.

Why is this word important?

There are two main reasons why there was little damage:

- Armies were on campaign for a few weeks at most, and often just for a few days, marching quickly to fight their enemies so did not have time to raid towns.
- In a civil war, looting and damaging homes pushes people to support the other side so leaders try to stop their soldiers causing damage.

Think back to the story '*A Battle and a Ring*'.

What was Raglan Castle like? Does this suggest people worried about being attacked?

Making this more complicated – and interesting!

Historians now believe that life went on as normal for most of the time during the Wars of the Roses. Many working people were paid higher wages than their grandparents and great-grandparents and so were much better off. They spent their money on better clothing and food and built larger houses. Churches were expensively rebuilt with money donated by local people. In fact, ordinary workers were better off in the 1400s than workers in the centuries that followed. It wasn't until the late 1800s that ordinary workers were so well off again!

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Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses

C. People were violent and keen to join in the wars. They didn't try to stop battles taking place.

We've all seen computer games, films and television programmes that show life in the Middle Ages as extremely violent. However, historians who have researched the evidence have reached very different conclusions.

Here is some evidence about the three parts of this statement:

1. People were violent: Research by Professor Philippa Maddern who wrote a book about violence in East Anglia during the years between 1422 and 1442. She concluded that 'the surviving legal records provide little evidence of a high level of violent crime.'

Professor Sara Butler has also concluded that there is no evidence that the Middle Ages was especially violent compared with other periods of history, including today.

2. Soldiers were keen to join in the wars: Soldiers took part in battles for a variety of reasons. Some probably did enjoy fighting but for many it was just a job, their way of earning money. Many soldiers were fighting for the king or their lord out of loyalty. Lords also felt it was their duty to take part to support the king against his enemies - and to win so they could put an end to fighting.

3. They didn't try to stop battles taking place: They did. Hardly anyone wanted war because they could lose their lives, lands and families. After the first battle in 1455 the king, queen and nobles tried to live peacefully. They even held a 'loveday' in 1458 when they swore to keep the peace. And in 1460, after fighting did break out, most of the nobles made an agreement called the Act of Accord to try to stop the fighting between the Lancastrians and the Yorkists. It didn't work but it showed how keen they were to avoid more fighting.

Everyone knew the cost of wars – deaths. Every man who was killed was part of a family and had friends. Wives, children, parents, brothers and sisters, and friends were left mourning those who were killed in battle.



Making this more complicated – and interesting!

There were times of extreme violence. In battles soldiers were so afraid for their lives that they lost control. Skeletons buried on the battlefield at Towton show that many men were hacked down when trying to escape. The leaders of armies were ruthlessly targeted during battles. There was no mercy if they were captured. They were quickly executed. This had not happened during wars with France. In 1483 Richard Duke of Gloucester imprisoned and executed without warning the men most likely to stop him becoming king as Richard III.

There was also violence which wasn't caused by ambition. Some people rebelled against Richard III because they thought that Richard had killed Edward and his brother (the Princes in the Tower). Murdering children was just as terrible a crime then as it is today. These rebels risked losing lives, families and wealth but rebelled as a moral protest against Richard's actions.



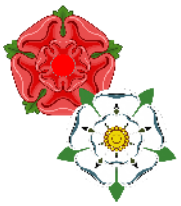
Edward V



Richard III

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Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses



D. The nobles thought it was important to be loyal to the king. They did not change sides easily.

Imagine a new manager at a football club. The previous manager won the Premier League three times in a row but then fell ill and his son took over. What happened next? The club was relegated in the manager's first season, then relegated again and again – and again. They are still losing but the club's owners haven't sacked the manager. They say it's important to be loyal to him.

Why was that paragraph about football? It's because it may help you understand the nobles' attitude to their kings.



Henry V

King Henry V was the equivalent of the very successful manager. Henry V was a great king and soldier who conquered much of France. However he died young and his son, 9 months old Henry VI, took over – the equivalent of the new and very unsuccessful manager. When he was 17, Henry VI started to rule the country himself but lost all the French lands that his father had conquered. Quarrels broke out between the nobles and Henry couldn't stop them. Henry was a disaster as king – but the nobles stayed loyal. They did not try to appoint a new manager!



Henry VI

In 1450 there was a rebellion because everything was going so badly. Did the rebels demand a new king instead of Henry? No! They blamed his advisers for the problems. They wanted to keep Henry as king because they believed God had made him king. Despite the failures, they stayed loyal to him.

Ten years later, in 1460, the nobles had another chance to get rid of Henry. By then the Wars of the Roses had started and Henry was often sick. The Duke of York said that he should take over king but the nobles decided to keep Henry as king for his lifetime because they had always been loyal to him and would not turn against him. That would be like turning against God!



Here are 3 important things to remember about people's ideas at this time:

1. They wanted a strong king who could defend the country from enemies and protect the people from law-breaking.

2. Nobles were <u>not</u> constantly plotting rebellions. They wanted a peaceful country so they could enjoy their wealth. If they fought battles then their wealth and lives were at risk!

3. Loyalty was one of the most important ideals in the 1400s. The nobles prided themselves on being loyal to their king and did not swap sides easily.



Edward V



Richard III

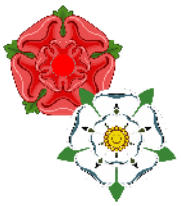
Making this more complicated – and interesting!

Later in the Wars two powerful nobles did put their own ambitions before loyalty to the king. The wars would not have broken out in 1469 or 1483 if the Earl of Warwick had not been so ambitious. There would have been no fighting after 1483 if Richard, Duke of Gloucester had not taken the crown from his nephew. By the end of the Wars it seemed easier to rebel and challenge the king than it had been at the start.

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Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses

E. Women played no part in the Wars of the Roses.



1. Women soldiers?

There is no evidence of women fighting in battle as soldiers. Some women did travel with armies. They were the wives of soldiers and helped out by cooking and finding and nursing the injured.

2. Women as peace-makers?



A peace-maker was a woman who acted as a go-between or mediator, trying to stop a quarrel or war breaking out. This was a role women were expected to carry out and was the most important role women played in the Wars. There are many examples. Queen Margaret and Queen Elizabeth (Edward IV's wife) both tried to prevent war by talking to nobles and their wives, trying to persuade them not to rebel.

Here is another example:

> In 1471 King Edward IV and his brother the Duke of Clarence had quarrelled. Clarence then joined the Earl of Warwick's rebellion against his brother. It looked as if Clarence would fight against his brother in battle. Then King Edward asked their mother and sisters to talk to Clarence and persuade him to end their quarrel. The ladies succeeded and Clarence did not fight against his brother Edward.

3. Women as managers?

Lords and nobles were often away from home, at the royal court or parliaments or in wartime. When they were away their wives managed their lands, often very efficiently.

If you remember the story '*A Battle and a Ring'* you will remember that Anne Herbert, the countess of Pembroke, supervised the rebuilding at Raglan castle while her husband, William, was away and also bought building materials, paid the bills and checked the accounts. After William died, their son was too young to take over, so Anne continued to be in charge of the family's lands and her writing can still be seen in the family records where she checked the details of payment and income.

Making this more complicated – and interesting!

Women as scapegoats? Women were praised for being peace-makers but, if they became too involved with politics, they were often blamed for problems that developed. Queen Margaret was blamed by the Duke of York when war broke out in the 1450s. She was trying to defend King Henry and her son, Prince Edward. However, because she was a woman, she was criticised for interfering in things women should not take part in. Later, Queen Elizabeth, the wife of Edward IV, was also blamed for problems because it was easier to blame a woman than blame a king.

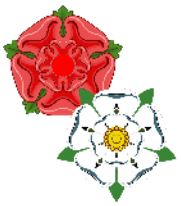


Queen Margaret

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Myth-busting the Wars of the Roses

F. The wars ended as soon as Henry Tudor became king in 1485.



In 1485 Henry Earl of Richmond (better known as Henry Tudor) became king after his army won the Battle of Bosworth and killed Richard III. Was it peace at last?



Richard III

Nobody knew – and they didn't know much about the new king Henry VII either! Henry was 28 but had lived abroad since he was 14. He was not trained to be king.

So what happened next?



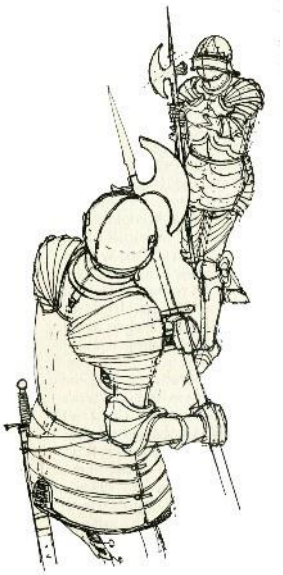
Henry Tudor
(Henry VII)

1486: angry supporters of the dead Richard III plotted to depose Henry but were quickly rounded up or escaped.

1487: English rebels led by the earl of Lincoln (Richard III's nephew) invaded England, supported by soldiers from Burgundy and Ireland. The invasion looked threatening. Henry was very worried but the invaders got little support. Henry's army had twice as many soldiers as the rebels at the battle of Stoke – and won.

1489: Local people, angry at high taxes, rebelled in Yorkshire but did not try to depose Henry. They just wanted to pay less tax!

1491-97: More supporters of the dead Richard III made trouble for Henry. They pretended that a young man, Perkin Warbeck, was one of the Princes in the Tower who had disappeared when Richard became king. They said Warbeck ought to be king instead of Henry and got support from other countries. Henry was often worried that there would be another invasion but nothing happened until 1497.



1497: People in Cornwall rebelled, angry at having to paying taxes for a war against faraway Scotland. The Cornish rebels marched towards London and weren't stopped – the King and his army were in the north for the war against Scotland. In the end they were defeated but it had been another alarming time. Warbeck also invaded England in 1497 but he had very little support. Henry captured him and later had him executed

Gradually the wars did fade away, though there was no clear date when everyone knew they had ended.

Making this more complicated – and interesting!

Why did the wars eventually fade away? One reason is that people wanted peace, not war. The other reason is that by 1485 Lancaster and York were on the same side. Richard III had split the Yorkists when he seized the crown from his nephew. Many Yorkists rebelled against Richard and then fought alongside Lancastrians for Henry at Bosworth. Henry then married Elizabeth of York so there was a Lancastrian king and Yorkist queen – so both sides had won the Wars of the Roses.

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