A window into the fifteenth century



◁ Caption caption caption

We cannot visit the fifteenth century but we can catch glimpses of it through objects like these which were everyday sights for the people who lived in the time of the Wars of the Roses. These objects help us understand the ideals and interests of those people. The items are a reminder of their intelligence, literacy, wealth and beliefs. It would be quite wrong to think of them as 'thugs in armour'.

Figs 01_05

△ Fashionable courtiers in the 1460s



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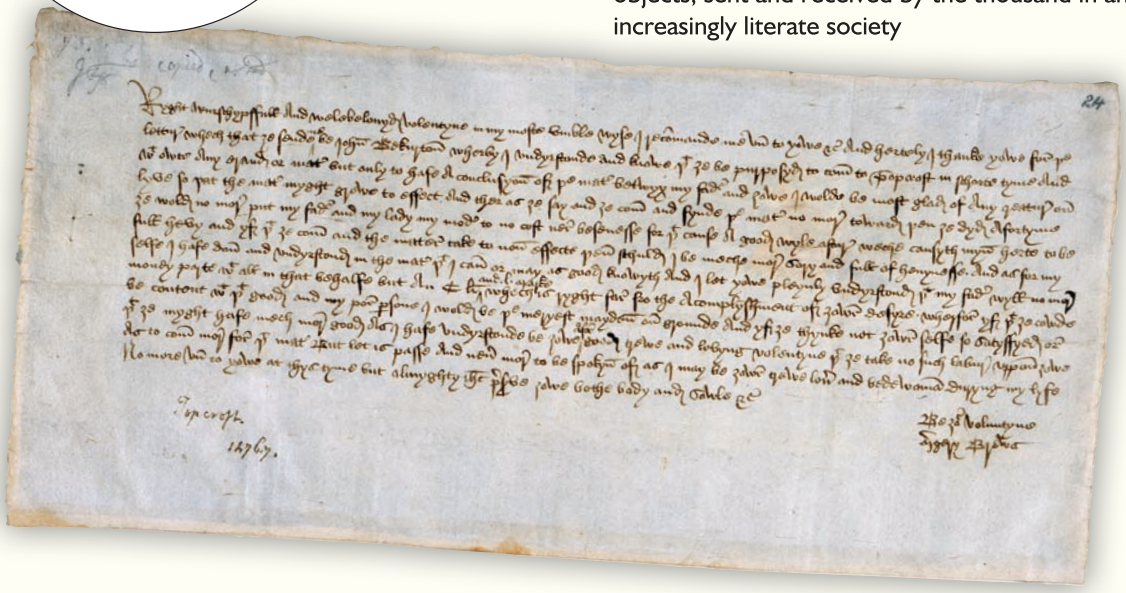


△ The effigy of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick who died in 1439: not just armour but a beautiful work of art

Figs 01_03

◁ Caption

▽ An extract from a letter. Letters were everyday objects, sent and received by the thousand in an increasingly literate society



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1 The Wars of the Roses: The essentials

22 August 1485 – early morning.

Cannonballs hurtled through the air. Arrows arced into the sky, then screamed down into armour, flesh, bone. Foot-soldiers advanced, killing and maiming with sword or poll-axe, battle-lines blurring into a mass of fighting, desperate men. Suddenly, audible above the screeching clash of weapons, the shouted orders, the curses and screams, came the sound of hooves – hundreds of them, perhaps more – drumming on sun-hardened ground. Maybe the foot-soldiers paused, mid-combat, to watch the nerve-jangling, thrilling onrush of highly trained horses and armoured knights. At their head, now at full gallop, rode King Richard III, his banner displaying the royal Cross of St George and his personal badge, the white boar.

Crash! Richard and his knights sliced into the bodyguard of their enemy, Henry Tudor. Richard's own lance killed William Brandon, Henry's standard-bearer. John Cheney, 'a giant of a man', blocked Richard's path but was hurled to the ground. Now Henry himself was desperately parrying Richard's blows. A few seconds more and Henry would be dead or a prisoner and then ….

And then Richard and his knights realised they too were under attack as a third force charged in to defend Henry. Suddenly Henry was surrounded by protectors and out of reach of Richard's attack. Now it was Richard fighting for his life. Around him his knights were isolated and killed – his long-time friend, Robert Percy, his close advisers, Richard Ratcliffe and Robert Brackenbury, and other northern supporters. Then Richard himself was dragged or knocked from his horse. No surrender. No mercy. The thrust of a dagger or a crushing blow from a poll-axe ended the life of Richard III.

And far away from the battlefield, families waited, not knowing if they would ever see husbands, fathers or sons alive again. The battle of Bosworth did not simply add a new name to the list of English kings, it transformed the lives of wives, mothers, sons and daughters, friends and lovers – and ended the lives of those left lying in the bloody dust of the battlefield.

One of those waiting for news was Anne Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, portrayed here at her home at Raglan Castle, Gwent. The news, when it came, was bad but could have been far worse. Anne's brother, Walter Devereux, had died fighting for Richard III but her sons, William and Walter, were alive.

If that sounds as if Anne experienced a rare mix of emotions in August 1485 there's more to come! Anne and her husband, William Herbert, had been guardians of the new king, Henry VII, when he'd been a boy and they'd planned for him to marry one of their daughters. Friendship with Henry may explain why Anne's sons did not fight for Richard at Bosworth, even though the eldest, William, was married to Richard III's daughter.

These glimpses into one family's life show why the Wars of the Roses are so fascinating – it's the story of real people facing tough situations and difficult decisions. It's also an intriguing period because the fragmentary evidence creates many puzzles. To take just the example of Bosworth: was Richard III a murderous tyrant or a good, principled king or …? And why did men like Ratcliffe fight for Richard when others, like Cheney, risked life and lands by rebelling on behalf of Henry Tudor, a man even his own supporters hardly knew? There are many more such questions to come!

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Anne Herbert



△ *Reverie* by Graham Turner, an imagined modern portrait of Anne Herbert, Countess of Pembroke.

Anne Herbert was born *c.* 1433 and died sometime after 1485, so lived through the entire Wars of the Roses. Her husband, William, was executed after the battle of Edgecote in 1469, having fought for King Edward IV against the rebellious Earl of Warwick. The coat of arms on the window combines the Herbert lions and the coat of arms of Anne's family, the Devereux.

Why have we used an imagined portrait? It's not usual to include such a picture in this kind of book as we have no evidence of what Anne looked like. It's here as a reminder that the Wars of the Roses was a real event for people like Anne and to give you a sense of the period through her clothing, her book and the building itself.

Anne is shown in the Great Tower at Raglan Castle (see the picture of Raglan on page 53), probably in the 1460s when she was aged about 30. The artist, Graham Turner, bases his paintings on careful research, even taking up jousting to gain first-hand experience of weapons and armour to inform his paintings of battles and tournaments.

On pages 53 and 138–9 we will continue the story of the Herbert family during the 1400s.

Fig 02_02

◁ The Raglan Ring, found in 1968 near Raglan Castle. The design on the ring is of a lion – the Herbert badge – between the initials W and A, with an inscription 'Faithful to you'. To whom did it belong? The ring dates from c. 1440–75 so it's tempting to say that it belonged to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke whose wife, Anne, is shown above.

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The Wars of the Roses: an outline, up to 1461

How long did the Wars of the Roses last and what was the overall pattern of events? Pages 6–9 help you understand the outline of the whole topic, perhaps the most important four pages in the book!

The boxes tell the story of events, while the graph shows how successful kings were in achieving the objectives on the gold bar. If the line of the graph is high on the page then a king was successful; England was united and peaceful. If the graph falls to the bottom of the page then a king was a failure; war or rebellion had broken out.

Just reading these pages isn't enough to understand them. You need to transfer this information into your own version of the story. For example, can you tell this outline story aloud in your own words in 1 minute?

SIGNS OF A KING'S SUCCESS

STRONG, DECISIVE LEADERSHIP

UNITED NOBILITY

IMPRESSIVE, WEALTHY COURT

SUCCESS

DECLINE

FAILURE

SIGNS OF A KING'S FAILURE

WEAK, INDECISIVE LEADERSHIP

DIVIDED, REBELLIOUS NOBILITY

FEW SIGNS OF WEALTH AND SPLENDOUR AT COURT

1. 1413–22 King Henry V: the ideal king

Henry V was extremely successful. He beat the French at the battle of Agincourt, conquered northern France and there was peace and order in England. He was seen as the ideal king – but could his successors recreate his success?

2. 1422–37 A child king: surprising success

Henry VI became king at 9 months old, so the council of nobles ruled England until Henry was 16. There were quarrels amongst the nobles and some defeats in France but overall the nobles did a successful job, putting loyalty to the young king before personal ambitions.



Henry VI

In 1445 **Henry VI** married the French princess, Margaret of Anjou. Their only son, Edward of Lancaster, was born in 1453 but never became king.

3. 1437–50 Henry VI: failure as an adult

Henry VI was never an effective king. He always remained childlike, unable to take decisions and uninterested in war and government. The nobles tried to govern in his name but serious problems developed – the French lands were lost and violent disorder increased. In 1450 there was a major protest rebellion because people were so angry with these failures. This was falling a very long way from Henry V's success.

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Essentials up to 1461

1. England was ruled successfully by the nobles while Henry VI was a child.
2. Henry VI completely failed to provide effective kingship when he grew up.
3. The first battle was about who would be Henry's chief councillor. It was NOT a battle for the crown.
4. In 1461 many nobles still wanted to keep Henry as king despite his failures but he was finally deposed by Edward of York.

STRONG DEFENCE AGAINST FRANCE AND SCOTLAND

LOW LEVELS OF CRIME AND DISORDER

Henry VI was the third **Lancastrian** king. They are known as the House of Lancaster because Henry, his father (Henry V) and grandfather (Henry IV) were descended from the Dukes of Lancaster.

The **Yorkists** were supporters of Richard, Duke of York (1411–60) and his son, Edward, who became King Edward IV.

Richard, Duke of York was Henry VI's cousin. He always swore loyalty to Henry until, in 1460, he said that he had a better claim to the crown than Henry. When Richard was killed at the battle of Wakefield (1460) his son, Edward, became Yorkist leader. He was crowned King Edward IV in 1461.

SUCCESS

DECLINE

FAILURE

5. 1455–59 A phoney peace

There were no more battles for four years. Nearly all the nobles wanted peace and to stay loyal to Henry VI despite his failures. However, in 1459 war broke out because of distrust between the leaders.

4. 1455 The first battle

The first battle was a fight between the Dukes of Somerset and York over who should be King Henry's chief councillor. York won and Somerset was killed. Everyone hoped that this would be the only battle and they could rebuild England as a strong, united country.

6. 1459–61 The fight for the crown

The Lancastrians (supporters of Henry VI) feared that York wanted to depose Henry. York feared that the Lancastrians would attack him. Their mutual fears led them to build up armies and six battles were fought in 18 months. York was killed but his son, Edward, won the battle of Towton, deposed Henry and became King Edward IV. Henry and Margaret fled to Scotland. This was the period of greatest violence – England had sunk a long way from the successes of Henry V.

DANGER OF ATTACK FROM FRANCE AND SCOTLAND

HIGH LEVELS OF CRIME AND DISORDER

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The Wars of the Roses: an outline, 1461–85

Essentials 1461–85

1. Twice Edward IV made England more peaceful – in the 1460s and the 1470s.
2. Twice England plunged back into warfare (in 1469–71 and 1483–85) because of the actions of a small number of individuals.

SIGNS OF A KING'S SUCCESS

STRONG, DECISIVE LEADERSHIP

UNITED NOBILITY

IMPRESSIVE, WEALTHY COURT

SUCCESS



Edward IV twice restored peace, making England more peaceful. Tall, fair and handsome, Edward was the best-looking man to be King of England.

DECLINE

8. 1464–68 Edward's first successes

The battles seemed over and England was more peaceful. However Edward did not give Warwick the influence he wanted and disagreed with him over foreign policy. Edward also made a very surprising marriage, in secret, to Elizabeth Woodville.

7. 1461–64 Edward IV takes control

Edward gradually restored peace, working closely with his powerful supporter, the Earl of Warwick. They defeated the remaining Lancastrians by 1464 and captured Henry VI who was imprisoned.

9. 1469–71 Warwick's rebellion briefly topples Edward

In 1469 Warwick rebelled, failed, then tried again in 1470, forcing Edward to flee abroad to Burgundy. Warwick made Henry VI king again but Edward returned with the Duke of Burgundy's help. Edward killed Warwick at the battle of Barnet, killed Henry's son at the battle of Tewkesbury and had Henry VI murdered in the Tower of London.

FAILURE

SIGNS OF A KING'S FAILURE

WEAK, INDECISIVE LEADERSHIP

DIVIDED, REBELLIOUS NOBILITY

FEW SIGNS OF WEALTH AND SPLENDOUR AT COURT

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3. Almost everyone, including the nobles, wanted an end to violence and civil war.
4. The periods of fighting were quite short but they created great uncertainty and made further rebellions more likely.

STRONG DEFENCE AGAINST FRANCE AND SCOTLAND

LOW LEVELS OF CRIME AND DISORDER

Henry VII (Henry Tudor) had no chance of becoming king until Richard III deposed young Edward V. Many Englishmen now distrusted Richard and wanted to depose him. They chose Henry Tudor as their leader and alternative king because he was distantly related to Henry VI. However no-one knew much about him as he'd lived in exile abroad since childhood.



10. 1471–83 Edward IV's next successes

Again Edward made England more peaceful and again people thought the battles were over.



King for only three months in 1483. **Edward V** and his brother, the 'Princes in the Tower', then disappeared.

11. 1483 Richard III becomes king; Edward V disappears

Edward IV died suddenly in 1483. His 13-year-old son became King Edward V. To everyone's surprise, young Edward's uncle Richard seized the crown and became King Richard III.



Richard III was the younger brother of Edward IV and son of Richard, Duke of York. Until 1483 he was loyal to Edward so everyone was shocked when he deposed Edward's son (young Edward V) in 1483 and became king himself.

12. 1483–85 Richard III killed at Bosworth

Richard's seizure of the crown created enemies. One rebellion failed in 1483 but plots continued. The rebels fled to France to join Henry Tudor who was now Richard's rival for the crown. In August 1485 Henry Tudor invaded England and killed Richard III at the battle of Bosworth, helped by French troops and many men who had supported Edward IV. Now it was Henry's turn to try to restore England to the success of Henry V's reign 70 years earlier.

DANGER OF ATTACK FROM FRANCE AND SCOTLAND

HIGH LEVELS OF CRIME AND DISORDER

SUCCESS

DECLINE

FAILURE

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History on the move: why are the Wars of the Roses so fascinating?

historiography
The history of what historians have said about a historical topic

J.R. Green's *A Short History of the English People* was a 'best-seller'

Occasionally I make the mistake of telling people I write History books. It's a mistake because people usually reply, 'Why? There can't be anything new to say. History doesn't change.' If that's what you think then you're in for an enjoyable surprise! As you read this book you'll regularly find examples of historians challenging old ideas and putting forward new interpretations. This page gives you an overview of the major changes in the **historiography** of the Wars.

In the 1870s J.R. Green wrote of the Wars of the Roses: 'There are few periods from which we turn with such weariness and disgust.' Green and other Victorian historians saw the Wars of the Roses as a time of complete lawlessness when nobles, motivated by greed and lust for power, hired bands of thugs to destroy kings. Battles, these historians said, destroyed villages and towns and led to countless deaths, all because the medieval system of monarchy had failed. They believed that the Tudors ended the Wars by introducing a stronger system of monarchy in 1485.

That view of the Wars is long out of date. Interpretations began to change because historians did what they're supposed to do – ask questions. Asking good questions is one of the most important and valuable historical skills. Historians began asking, 'Were the Wars of the Roses really like that?' In the 1920s C.L. Kingsford suggested that the wars had little impact on ordinary people. Then, from the 1940s, K.B. McFarlane set out new interpretations of the Wars based on his extensive, painstaking research into a wide range of historical records. McFarlane argued that:

- the problems were created by poor individual kings, especially Henry VI, and not by the failure of the system of government. England needed not just a new, stronger monarchy but good kings.
- many nobles were capable, thoughtful and influenced by chivalric values. They were concerned with the good of the country as well as their own good.
- this was a time of growing wealth and achievement. War wasn't wanted and was slow to develop. There was no widespread destruction.
- the year 1485 was not a new start with the Tudors. Instead there was great continuity before and after 1485.

McFarlane also focused on the periods of peace, asking not just why war broke out in 1455 or 1459 but why war was so slow to start in 1455 and why it took so long to begin again later. McFarlane's work revolutionised thinking about the Wars of the Roses. More historians followed, turning the fifteenth century into one of the liveliest research areas instead of the neglected period it had been. McFarlane's followers explored the careers of individual lords and the patterns of their family connections in their counties – the political relationships between people. This research built a fuller, more sophisticated understanding of the Wars of the Roses.

However, since the 1980s historians such as Professor Christine Carpenter and Dr John Watts have been asking new questions. These

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historians have examined fifteenth century people's thinking about the way England should be governed and about how people should behave politically. This research has developed more complex explanations for the behaviour of nobles and gentry, treating treat them as responsible, intelligent people. Victorians historians saw nobles as motivated by greed and ambition whereas historians today argue that many nobles took their decisions for more principled reasons. Yes, they were influenced by their own interests but also by the good of the country, by public pressures and values and by public expectations of how the country should be governed. This has led to research into the influence of the common people, especially in towns, and how they saw politics.

So, our understanding of the past doesn't stand still – it's always on the move. It's vital for you to understand that the study of History is **a continuing conversation between historians**. What we know and understand is the result of that developing 'conversation' (even if it takes place in books and articles, not in speech). Each generation of historians builds on the work of previous historians, challenging but also deepening previous understanding. That's one major reason why the Wars of the Roses are so fascinating – there's always new knowledge and understandings to think about.

So, what key ideas should you have in your mind as you begin to study the Wars of the Roses? Here are three important ideas that are the product of recent research:

1. **There was not constant warfare from 1455 to the 1480s**. Battles took place at intervals over a period of 30 years, sometimes many years apart.
2. **Nobles were not constantly plotting rebellions; they wanted a strong, successful king to give them a stable, peaceful country**. Peace and stability were to the advantage of the nobles. Peace meant they could enjoy their wealth. If they charged into civil war they put their wealth and lives at risk.
3. **Loyalty was one of the most important ideals in the 1400s**. The nobles and gentry prided themselves on their loyalty to their king and did not swap sides easily and frequently. This is vital in helping us understand why people were reluctant, not eager, to fight.

These three ideas show the importance of respecting the people of the Wars of the Roses. They were not 'as thick as their armour', ever-eager to ride into battle. Far from it; they did not welcome war, tried hard to avoid it and when it broke out they wanted it to end as soon as possible. Yet war did break out and kings were deposed. This paradox has led to the central question running through this book, a question about people's decisions and why events turn out in ways people do not intend: **If loyalty was so important and people did not want civil war, why did the Wars of the Roses – with all the battles and changes of king – take place at all?**

One more point about History is vital to remember if you are to enjoy and understand your study of the Wars of the Roses. History is the story of real, individuals, people who weren't just involved in battles and politics but who laughed and sang, told jokes and fell in love. If, by chance, we had been born 600 years ago, we'd have been facing the decisions they confronted. The Wars affected these individual people in all kinds of ways. Anne Herbert, whom you met on page 4, is just one example amongst thousands.

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Nobles and gentry: what did they do?

Titles and places
A title such as Duke of York did not mean that the duke was based or even owned land in York. Richard, Duke of York's main castles were at Ludlow in Shropshire and Fotheringhay in Northamptonshire. This mismatch of names and areas of power applied to many nobles.

This book has already mentioned 'nobles' without explaining who they were. You know roughly what the word means but to understand the Wars of the Roses you need to know more precisely who the nobility were and what their role was. You need to know more about another group of people, the gentry, who played an important part in government, and about an idea that was very important to both groups, that of 'service'.

Nobles had one of the titles shown on the left. There were around 60 nobles, the wealthiest landowners, who had land in several parts of the country. They were expected to be the King's leading advisers, to deal with serious outbreaks of crime and disorder and to be his leading commanders, bringing their men to fight in wartime. Nobles expected to do these tasks as signs of their importance. They could resent being left out of such tasks by a king.

Gentry were the next layer down in society. Many were knights so had the title 'Sir'. There were about 3000 gentry families, less wealthy than the nobles, but many still owned land in several counties. Local government was organised county by county and the King depended on the gentry to keep government running effectively in each county. The gentry acted as judges in courts and held posts such as county sheriff. Most welcomed these tasks as a sign of their local importance.

Hierarchy of titles

Duke
(mostly royal family)
↓
Marquis
(a rare and new title)
↓
Earl
↓
Lord

Moving up from gentry to nobility
A good example of promotion comes from the Herbert and the Devereux families you met on page 5. They were gentry families but in 1461 they joined the nobility when Edward IV created Sir William Herbert Lord Herbert and Sir Walter Devereux Lord Ferrers as rewards for their support.

magnates
Word often used for the most powerful nobles, the dukes and earls

barons
Another term for 'nobles'

'If you've got it, flaunt it!'

Nowadays people can resent the rich parading their wealth but the opposite was true in the 1400s. The King was expected to put on a great display of wealth and grandeur to show off England's wealth and power – a king who looked poor looked powerless. The same was true of nobles. They were expected to show off their riches by wearing fashionable, expensive clothes, building grand homes and having lots of servants. The *Great Chronicle of London* described how the Earl of Warwick was very popular with the common people in the 1460s:

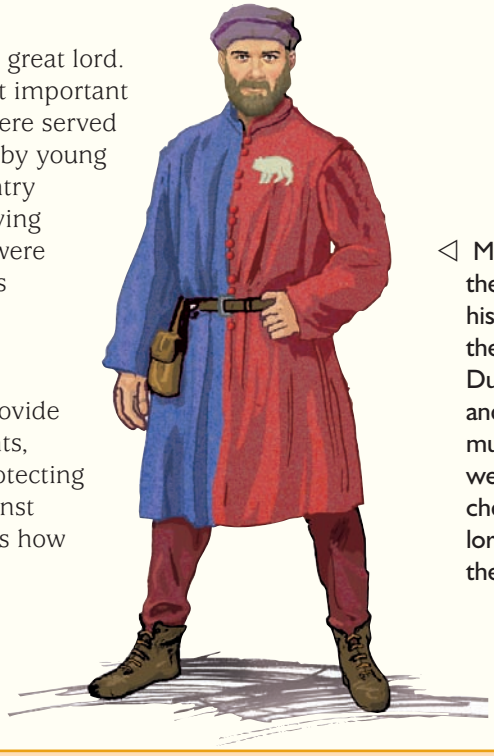
> The earl was ever in great favour with the commons of this land because of the exceeding household that he daily kept wherever he stayed. When he came to London he held such a household that 6 oxen were eaten at breakfast and every tavern was full of his meat for whoever had acquaintance in the earl's household should have as much roast meat as he might carry away on a long dagger.

Clearly Warwick was not being condemned for showing off or mocked as a soft touch. He was being praised for his generosity and as a model for how all noblemen should behave.

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The idea of service

People were proud to serve a great lord. 'Service' was one of the most important ideas in the 1400s. Nobles were served their food or helped to dress by young men from other noble or gentry families. These men saw serving their lord as an honour and were proud to be seen as the lord's servants. In return the lord (whether he was the king, a nobleman or a gentleman) believed it was his duty to provide 'good lordship' for his servants, helping them do well and protecting them and their property against rivals. The panel below shows how the idea of 'service' worked.



◁ Members of an affinity wore their lord's badge and clothes in his livery colours. This man wears the white boar badge of Richard, Duke of Gloucester (Richard III) and his colours of blue and murrey (a shade of red). Badges were made of cloth or pewter, a cheap metal alloy. Occasionally lords gave badges of silver to their most trusted followers.

How did 'service' work?

The Duke has lower-ranking nobles and gentry as members of his affinity. They act as his councillors, advising on politics and managing his lands. Some of the local gentry are his lawyers and managers of his estates. They wear his badge and **livery** colours. Many will fight for him if needed. The size and quality of the Duke's **affinity** increases his prestige. His record as a 'good lord' attracts others to join him.

The members of the Duke's affinity gain prestige and security by being part of a great man's affinity. They earn money working for him and he rewards them with lands and gifts. He may help them in legal disputes and help them to good marriages by recommending them to fathers of possible brides. They will be grateful to the Duke for his 'good lordship'.

A **Lord** has the same kind of affinity as a Duke but fewer members. He uses them in similar ways, to help run his estates and provide advice and they wear his badge. Men want to serve this Lord because he's well connected to the Duke, but if the Lord loses influence with the Duke then men may not be keen to serve him.

The members of the Lord's affinity receive the same kinds of good lordship as the Duke's followers, but not such rich rewards and prestige. The Lord can also protect them but not against the power of a Duke.

Gentlemen also have a small group of advisers who help run their estates, sometimes clever young men from poor backgrounds. Gentlemen are expected to provide 'good lordship' to these servants and gain a good reputation by doing so.

affinity
The followers of a lord, men who served him whenever needed or worked for him as lawyers or estate managers. They wore their lord's badge to display their allegiance

lord
Lord, with a capital L, is a title, e.g. Lord Ferrers, but 'lord' describes anyone who provides patronage, so a duke was described as a man's lord

patronage
A lord provided patronage by giving rewards (jobs, money, influence, titles) to his supporters and protecting them (in court or by force) from rivals after their land or property

livery
The badge and colours of a lord worn by his servants

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How to be an effective king

Henry VI became king at just nine months old. He was expected to take control and rule as king from his mid-teens. This page summarises the things young Henry had to understand about ruling England. It's written in a different style, as if giving advice to the young king. Why? To help you concentrate, because it can be very tempting to skip 'background information' pages. This information is really important for understanding the Wars of the Roses, so please don't skip it. You do need to know:

- what a king was expected to do
- what kinds of support he received from nobles, gentry and officials
- the resources he did NOT have compared with modern governments.

As King: what you are expected to do



You need to be a good 'man-manager', uniting your nobility behind you. Concentrate on three things:

- Consult your leading noblemen but make all the important decisions yourself
- Lead your army in war, providing inspirational leadership
- Punish law-breakers severely, make fair judgements, show no mercy to traitors.

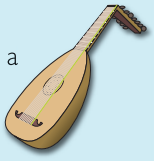
Remember, in theory you can do whatever you wish as king but in practice you are limited by expectations of what a king should do. You must follow tradition and custom, not innovate or change the role of king.

The royal household

The royal household consists of the people who look after you wherever you travel. They range from commoners who work in the kitchens (you'll hardly ever see them) to the noblemen and gentry who are your closest companions and organise your household. They attend you from waking to sleeping, including helping you wash and dress. They also keep you informed about what's happening in the counties where they have land and make sure your orders are carried out there. Reward them well for their service but don't give them so much land that you make yourself poor or look overly influenced by them.

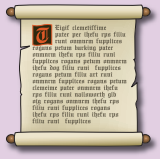


The royal court



The court and the household overlap a great deal. The court is not a place but a group of people: you, the King, and your courtiers. Courtiers are there to entertain you with music, chess, gossip, hunting, dancing, maybe a little light flirting. Remember to display English wealth and power through the magnificence of your dress, buildings and court, especially when you greet foreign visitors.

Royal officials



You are supported by around 250 highly trained, educated officials, grouped into departments of which the two main ones are:

- Chancery (headed by the Chancellor) which sends out your letters, commands, grants of land and offices
- Exchequer (headed by the Treasurer) which collects and spends royal income.

This system has been in place for over two hundred years and is very efficient. You'll be amazed at the detailed, meticulous records. They keep copies of everything!

Remember, finance isn't as important now as it will be later in history. A king can be successful without having lots of money in his treasury. Merchants and foreign banks are always keen to lend you money. Just don't get into too much debt or tax your people too often or too heavily. That is unpopular!

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The Council

The Council contains the men you choose as your advisers and the heads of government departments, such as the Chancellor and the Treasurer. The Council's role is to make government work and make sure your decisions are put into action. Council meetings (they can be dull) are usually chaired by the Chancellor but you must lead the most important discussions such as decisions about war. Councillors come from the nobles, gentry and bishops (who were often appointed as bishops from among the senior government officials). There can be up to 50 councillors at any one time but only a handful attend most meetings.

Parliament



Parliament meets only when you summon it and closes when you wish it to close – it rarely lasts longer than six weeks. You won't need to call a Parliament every year and you can go for several years without a Parliament if you're not fighting wars. Parliaments consist of the Lords and the Commons, which includes knights and wealthy merchants. The Lords are more influential but you do have to listen to the Commons. They are the people you have to persuade to agree to taxation, usually to pay for war and defence. You'll soon learn there are times to charm them and times to intimidate them.

If there are problems (war going badly, gentry or nobles breaking laws in their counties) the House of Commons will complain to you on behalf of the commons, the ordinary, very common people. The common people aren't stupid and they're usually well informed, so don't think they can be ignored.

Local government: how you as King control each county



How do you control what's happening in far away counties like Devon and Yorkshire? Local government is organised by county. The nobles and gentry who own land in each county play a crucial part in making local government work. They are the judges in county law courts and if there's a rebellion or major crime they take the lead in stopping it. You must choose one of them as Sheriff, your senior representative, whose job it is to oversee law courts, arrest major criminals and other vitals tasks. You must select the right people as officials. If there's really serious law-breaking you have to go to the area and be seen to deal with it yourself.

Remember, these county communities don't like strangers from other areas getting involved in their local business, so take care whom you appoint as local officials.

As King: what you do NOT have

- A full-time royal army. You depend on nobles and gentry bringing their men to form your royal army
- A full-time police force. Catching criminals is the work of county sheriffs and local constables who are unpaid, part-time officials in each community
- Annual taxation on people's incomes. Your income as King (to pay for your family costs and the royal household) comes mostly from rents from your own lands and customs duties on imports and exports
- Speedy communications. It takes five days for an urgent message to reach York from London.

As King: what NOT to do

- Do NOT lose wars against France or Scotland (though it's better to fight bravely and lose than not to fight at all)
- Do NOT ignore high-born noble advisers. Listen to their advice but take the decisions yourself
- Do NOT appear lenient to criminals, especially anyone charged with treason.
- Speedy communications. It takes five days for an urgent message to reach York from London.

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Henry V and the legacy of Agincourt

The timeline graph on pages 6–9 begins with Henry V, even though he died thirty years before the Wars of the Roses began, so why include him? The answer is that Henry's victory at Agincourt and his conquest of France had an immense impact on the rest of the fifteenth century. To understand later events you have to understand Henry's achievements and the problems they created for his successors.

The conquest of France began with the miraculous victory at Agincourt on 25 October 1415. Henry had invaded France in August, then took a month to capture the port of Harfleur. By then 2000 of Henry's 9000 soldiers had died, most from disease. Many others were ill with dysentery. But instead of sailing home, Henry led his army out of Harfleur on 8 October, heading for Calais. His cross-country march was a display of disdain for the French and quite possibly designed to provoke a battle. If so, he succeeded!

Henry's army had food for eight days but the march took twice as long. The English trudged on, hungry, exhausted by illness, soaked by heavy rain, and shadowed by a much larger French army. On 24 October the English made camp and confessed their sins to God, expecting to die next day. Laughter floated across from the enemy camp where the French were gambling over the English prisoners they'd take in the battle.

Next morning, the Feast of Saints Crispin and Crispinian, King Henry chose a narrow battle line with woodland either side so the French could not encircle his army. He set out a line of knights interspersed with archers but, when the French did not attack, Henry moved his men forward and ordered his archers to open fire. Provoked and insulted, the French charged but the ground, boggy after heavy rain, slowed their horses. The English archers, each man loosing ten to twelve arrows a minute, sent 60,000 arrows hammering down every minute onto the French knights.

The arrow-storm destroyed the French belief in an easy victory and, as the armies clashed in hand-to-hand fighting, the narrow battlefield prevented them making their greater numbers count. French attacks withered and failed. Henry V, his knights and his archers had won. We don't know how many men died (maybe 6000 Frenchmen and a few hundred Englishmen) but the exact numbers are less important than the huge difference between them.

Four days later the church bells rang out in London to proclaim the news of Agincourt. Late in November London's streets were filled with cheering crowds as Henry, simply and soberly dressed, rode to St Paul's to give thanks to God for the victory. The crowds, far less restrained, sang the Agincourt Carol which began:

Fig 05_01

△ Henry V (1413–22) was a deeply serious man whose life was built round war. At the battle of Agincourt in 1415 he showed excellent generalship and led his men in the fiercest hand-to-hand fighting. At home he showed the same decisive leadership. Summoning two knights whose quarrel had caused deaths among their supporters, Henry told them to sort out their quarrel before he'd finished a plate of oysters, or he'd execute them both. No one doubted he'd keep his word.

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Our King went forth to Normandy,

With grace and might of chivalry;

God for him wrought marvelously

Wherefore England may call and cry Deo Gratias:

Deo gratias Anglia redde pro victoria.

Miraculous though Agincourt was, it was only the beginning of Henry's success. Between 1415 and 1420 he led siege after siege, winning control of more and more French territory. The French nobility, morale weakened by Agincourt and divided amongst themselves, could not stop him. In 1420 France agreed to the humiliating Treaty of Troyes, which not only united England and France, through Henry's marriage to Princess Katherine of France, but also stated that Henry or his son would be the next king of France, thus disinheriting the French heir to the throne.

However, only two years later in 1422, Henry V died of dysentery on another campaign in France. He left his 9-month-old heir a legacy that was both an inspiration and a burden, as shown below.



△ This map shows (in red) just how much of France was conquered by the English by 1429. The lands marked in yellow were those of the Duke of Burgundy (see chart below for his importance).

Henry V's legacy to Henry VI

The challenge

Henry V had set an inspiring standard of kingship. His successors were expected to match this standard by strengthening English control over France. Losing the lands in France gained under Henry V would be a terrible failure, an insult to those who'd died winning those lands.



The difficulties

Henry V's success had partly been built on an alliance with the Duke of Burgundy and on France's lack of leadership, as the King of France was elderly and insane, believing he was made of glass and would break if anyone touched him. What if Burgundy changed sides to ally with France, leaving England isolated? What if France revived under new leadership? Continued war in France was expensive, requiring heavy taxation: would the English keep paying if their success ended?

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