



# The Wars of the Roses

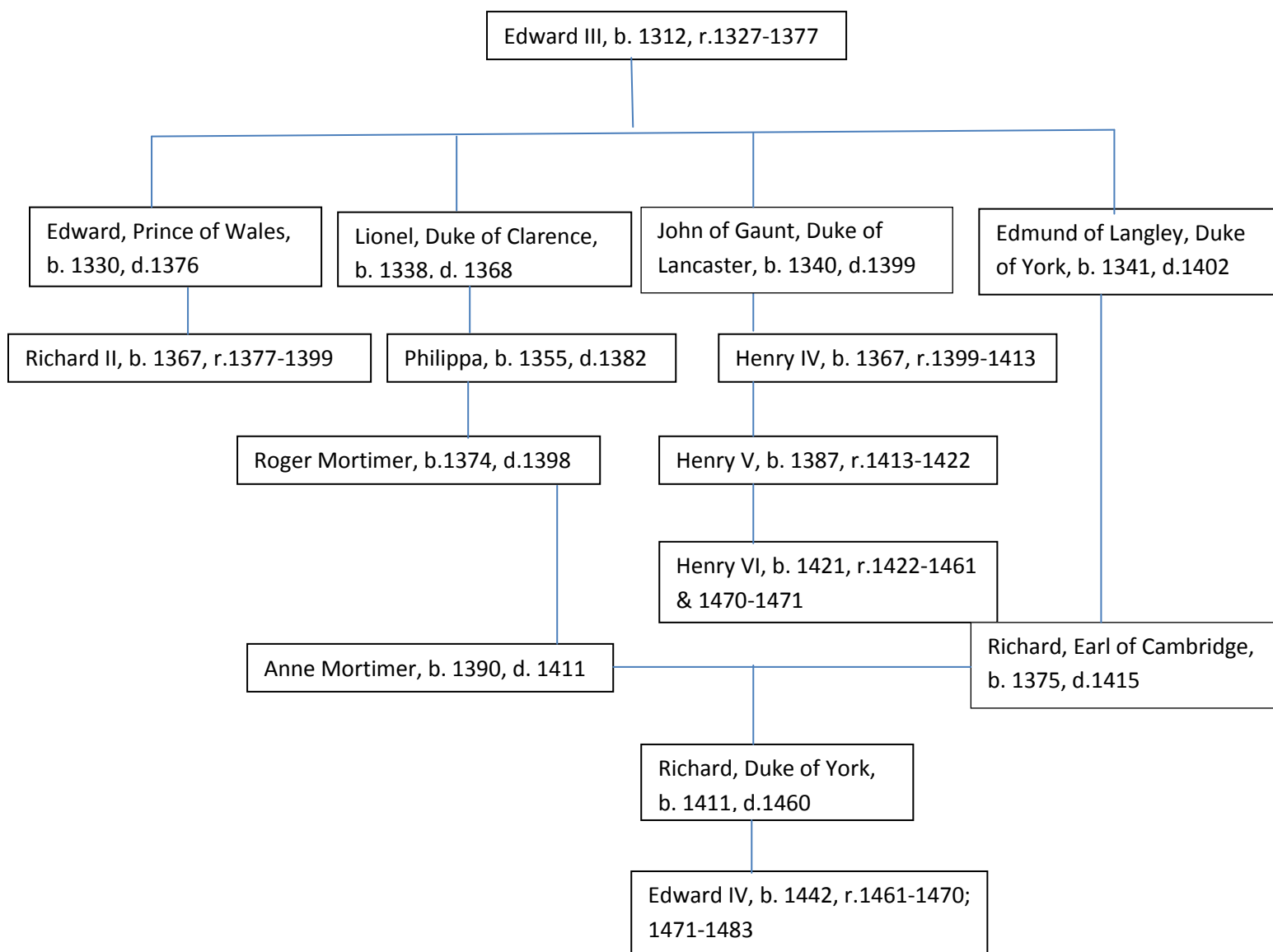
The Wars of the Roses were a series of civil wars (wars between citizens of the same nation) fought in medieval England from 1455 to 1487. For thirty-two years a bitter struggle for the English throne was waged between two branches of the same family, both descended from Edward III and both claiming that they were the rightful kings.

The two houses were the House of Lancaster, descended from Edward III through his second son John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and the House of York, descended from Edward III through his fourth son, Edmund of Langley, Duke of York.

As the burial place of two of the key participants in the Wars of the Roses, Edward IV and Henry VI, St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, is a useful focus for studying this period and this lesson uses visual and written documentary evidence held at St George's Chapel Archives and Chapter Library to investigate this further.

Details of opening times and access arrangements are available on the College of St George's website ([www.stgeorges-windsor.org](http://www.stgeorges-windsor.org)). Guided school visits to the Chapel may be arranged through the Windsor Castle Education Centre ([www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk))

## Family tree showing the descendants of Edward III



## Source 1



Portrait of Edward III in St George's Chapel

Edward III was the common ancestor of the two warring families. In 1348, he established the Order of the Garter, to be made up of close friends and allies who would uphold knightly and brotherly ideals and help support his claim to the throne of France. Although no battles were actually fought until 1455, the problems between the two families started a long time before, soon after the death of Edward III in 1377.

### Questions

- 1) Edward III is represented in this portrait with 3 crowns. What countries do you think they represent?
- 2) He is also shown wearing the badge of the Order of the Garter, which shows St George killing the dragon. Why would Edward have chosen St George as the patron saint of the Order?
- 3) How does the portrait painter show that Edward III was a powerful King?

## Source 2



Portrait of Richard II taken from the Black Book of the Order of the Garter, SGC G.1

Edward III died in 1377. He had five adult sons - Edward the Black Prince (heir to the throne), Lionel of Antwerp (Duke of Clarence), John of Gaunt (Duke of Lancaster), Edmund of Langley (Duke of York) and Thomas of Woodstock (Duke of Gloucester). As the Black Prince had died in 1376, his son Richard came to the throne at just 10 years old as King Richard II. At first his uncles John of Gaunt and Thomas of Woodstock helped him rule. However in 1389, at the age of 22, Richard took control of government himself. Events which followed saw the breakdown of the family relationship.

### Questions

- 1) Compare the portraits shown in sources 1 & 2. Pick out 2 similarities and 2 differences.
- 2) What does Richard II's portrait reveal about him?
- 3) What difficulties would have been faced by the young king?
- 4) How do you think his uncles may have felt about him taking control?
- 5) Why might this have caused further problems in the family?

Richard II was not a popular King, and he was accused of being cruel, irresponsible and obsessed with power. Many believed that he was mad. In 1399, he was overthrown by Henry Bolingbroke, eldest son of John of Gaunt, the second son of Edward III. Henry became the first king of the House of Lancaster, ruling for 14 years as Henry IV. He was succeeded by his son, Henry V, who was succeeded by his son Henry VI. But the family of Edmund of Langley never forgot that they too had a claim to the throne.

### Source 3

Henry VI was born at Windsor Castle on 6 December 1421, the son of King Henry V and Catherine of Valois, daughter of Charles VI, King of France. His father suddenly died in France in 1422 and as a result, at the age of just nine months old, Henry became King of England. Two months later he also became King of France, when his grandfather, Charles VI, died. As with Richard II, until he was considered old enough to rule by himself Henry was advised by his uncles. England was ruled by a council led by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, whilst France was governed by John, Duke of Bedford. Henry assumed personal rule in 1437 at the age of just 16.

Henry VI was a great believer in education and building. He established Eton College in 1440, and in 1449 he assigned their arms, three silver lily-flowers on a black background, with the arms of France on a blue background, and those of England on a red background, above. These arms can be seen being held by the panther on the roof of St George's Chapel. In heraldry, the panther is a gentle, spotted beast of many colours; only the dragon is its enemy. King Henry VI used the panther for his badge, to indicate that "a Kinge should have so many excellent and severall vertues as there are diversities of spottedes and most beautifull Coullors in this Beast, and then his People will love and followe him for his vertues as all other Beastes love and follow the Panther for his sweete smell and glorious coullors" (Coll. Arms MS. L. 14, pt 2, f. 380).



Image of the beast on the roof of St George's Chapel, showing the panther holding a shield with the arms of Eton.

### Questions

- 1) Why did Henry choose the panther as his emblem?
- 2) What does it tell us about Henry?
- 3) Do you think these are good qualities for a king?
- 4) How does this beast show that Henry was interested in education?

#### Source 4

Henry VI was a gentle, kind and generous king, who was deeply religious. He was however also considered a weak king, and during his reign, he suffered from a number of spells of illness. During those times the kingdom was ruled by Richard, Duke of York. Indeed, Richard was seen by many as the rightful king since he was descended from two sons of Edward III: Edmund of Langley, Duke of York (on his father's side), and Lionel, Duke of Clarence (on his mother's side). In 1455, following the battle of St Albans, Richard took over the government of the country. This was to mark the beginning of the Wars of the Roses, and the start of 30 years of war.

Although Richard, Duke of York, never became king, his son Edward took the crown in 1461, becoming Edward IV, the first of the Yorkist kings. Edward IV was a warrior king, who had won and later regained his crown on the battlefield against the Lancastrian Henry VI. Louis XI of France had assisted Henry VI against Edward IV, leading Edward to declare war on France. In 1475, Louis and Edward signed the peace Treaty of Picquigny, which would see the French paying Edward not only an immediate payment of 75,000 crowns but also a yearly payment of 25,000 crowns. It was the highpoint in Edward's fight against the French. He chose to depict the treaty as the theme for his own royal seat at St George's Chapel.



Photograph of the carving (misericord) underneath the Sovereign's seat in the Quire, showing Edward IV and Louis XI meeting at Picquigny. On the right hand side, Edward waits in his tent while on the left Louis waits in the town. They meet in the middle of the bridge.

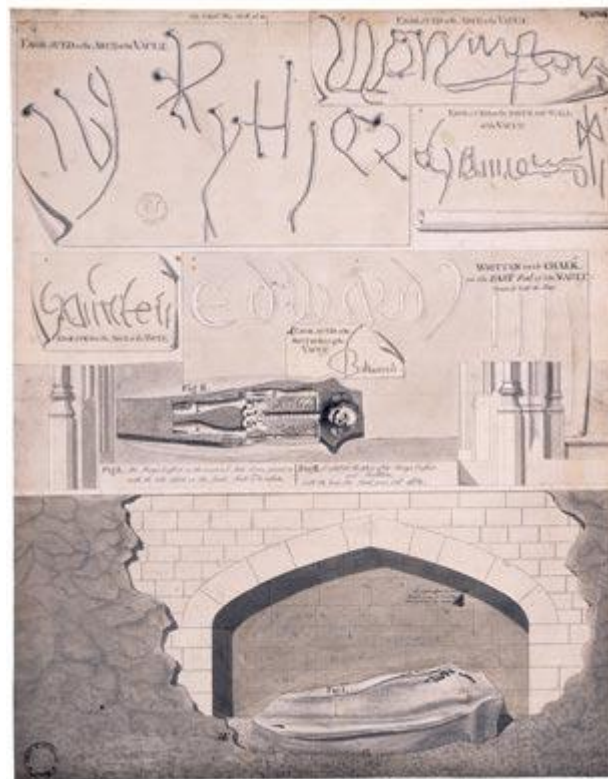
#### Questions

- 1) Using the family tree, how was Edward IV related to Edward III?
- 2) Why might people have preferred Edward to Henry?
- 3) Why would Edward IV have been in a tent, as shown in the carving?
- 4) How does Edward show the importance he places on this event?



## Source 5

St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, was the home of the Order of the Garter, the band of noble knights founded by Edward III. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the chapel was considered small and old-fashioned. On June 12 1475, Edward IV instructed Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury, 'to build and construct a new chapel in honour of the blessed Mary and St George the martyr within our castle at Windsor'. Using the money obtained from the peace treaty with Louis, it was to be a grander, more splendid home for the Order and a suitable burial place for the Yorkist family. Many historians believe Edward deliberately aimed to build something better than his rival Henry VI's chapel at Eton, just across the Thames. Edward IV desired to be buried in a vault with a small internal chapel or closet over it with space for an altar, and a tomb with his figure of silver and gilt (gold); or at least of copper and gilt. Edward died on 9 April 1483, and he was buried as requested on the north side of the high altar.



In 1789, the tomb of Edward IV was opened during the restoration of St George's Chapel. This diagram shows the excavated tomb.

### Questions

- 1) Who was the new chapel to be dedicated to? Why do you think they were chosen?
- 2) Why did Edward IV want to build a new chapel?
- 3) To what extent does the diagram show that Edward's wishes were carried out?
- 4) Who do you think made the graffiti around the tomb?

## Source 6

When Edward IV died in 1483, once more the heir to the throne was a young child. Edward IV's eldest son, also called Edward, was just 12 years old and again an uncle stepped forward as Protector. Two months later Edward's uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, had himself crowned king as Richard III, declaring that his brother, Edward IV, had not been lawfully married, and so his son could not be king. Edward V and his younger brother Richard were kept in the Tower of London, and never seen again. However, Edward V's portrait appears on a panel of kings painted to decorate St George's Chapel.



Panel of Kings, in the South Quire Aisle of St George's Chapel, showing from left to right Henry VII, Edward V, Edward IV and Edward, son of Henry VI

## Questions

- 1) What is different about the image of Edward V from the others?
- 2) Why might the crown be shown in this way?
- 3) Why was Edward V declared unable to be king?
- 4) Do you think Richard was right to crown himself king?



## Source 7

Richard III reigned for a very short period of time, from 1483 to 1485. Many people believed that he had murdered his nephews (later known as 'the Princes in the Tower') and, in addition, that he and Edward IV had previously been involved in the death of Henry VI, who had died in mysterious circumstances in the Tower of London in 1471. In 1483, Richard ordered that Henry VI's body be reburied at Windsor and, in August 1484, his remains were brought from their original burial place in Chertsey to Windsor, where they were buried on the south side of the high altar.



Painting of the decoration of the vault and walls over the tomb of Henry VI.

## Questions

- 1) What Royal badges can you see in the illustration?
- 2) Where else in these sources have these badges been displayed? Why?
- 3) Why do you think Richard might have ordered Henry VI's reburial?
- 4) Looking back to source 5, why do you think the south side of the high altar was chosen?

The two key opponents in a war which divided the country now lie buried opposite each other in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. The nobility rose up in rebellion against Richard III and, in 1485 at the battle of Bosworth Field, he was defeated by Henry Tudor, a Lancastrian and distant relative who also had a claim to the throne. In 1486, Henry Tudor, by then crowned king as Henry VII, married Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV, uniting the Houses of Lancaster and York and bringing to an end the Wars of the Roses.

### Source 8

At the time that they took place, the civil wars between the Houses of Lancaster and York were generally referred to as the 'Cousins' Wars' – they were not known as 'The Wars of the Roses' until some time later. Although the early Yorkists, including Edward IV, made use of the white rose as a royal badge, it was not until the reign of Henry VII that the Lancastrian kings were to adopt the red rose as a symbol. When Henry VII married Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV, he brought together the two coloured roses to form the Tudor rose.



Tudor rose decoration in the vaulting of the Quire

### Questions

1. Why did Henry VII choose to marry Elizabeth of York?
2. What was the Tudor rose emblem supposed to signify?
3. Why do you think the Tudor rose was used to decorate St George's Chapel?