

The outbreak of the wars, 1445-1450

Activity

1 How does Source C help to explain the view of England shown in Source D?

Source C A man who served as Lord Chief Justice under Henry VI writes about the limits on the king's power.

The king cannot at his pleasure change the laws of his kingdom. The laws of England are established not only by the prince's will but by the assent of the whole kingdom. The king of England does not by himself or his ministers impose on his subjects any tallage [a tax imposed without consultation] or burden, nor change their laws nor make new ones, without the express consent of his parliament. Adapted from Sir John Fortescue's work, written in the early 1470s.

Source D A foreign contemporary observer's judgement on England during the Wars of the Roses. Comynnes was born in France and served both the Duke of Burgundy and the king of France at various times.

Now, in my opinion, out of all the countries which I have personally known, England is the one where public affairs are best conducted and regulated with least damage to the people. Philippe de Comynnes, *Memoirs*, written between 1489 and 1496.

What was Henry VI like?

As we have seen, the role of a medieval king was extremely important in governing the country and his actions and decisions were vital. How well was Henry VI equipped to take on this role?

Source E A description of King Henry VI by John Blacman. Blacman was Henry VI's confessor and later a monk.

He was both upright and just, always keeping to the straight line of justice in his acts. Upon none would he wittingly inflict any injustice. To God and the Almighty he rendered most faithfully that which was His, for he took pains to pay in full the tithes and offerings due to God and the Church: and this he accompanied with devotion ...

A diligent and sincere worshipper of God was this king, more given to God and to devout prayer than to handling worldly and temporal things, or practising vain sports and pursuits: these he despised as trifling, and was continually occupied either in prayer or the reading of the scriptures or of chronicles ...

I would have you know that he was most eminent for that virtue of humility. This pious prince was not ashamed to be a diligent server to a priest. Celebrating in his presence ... He did so commonly even to me, a poor priest. John Blacman's *Memoir*, written during the reign of Henry VII.

What problems did the nobility cause, 1445-50?

Henry VI did not handle the nobility well. He had his favourites whom he allowed to dictate his actions and then there were those who felt excluded and whose resentment grew.

The major nobles

The nobles, as we have seen, were crucial to the running of the country and none more so than the major noble families who were closely related to the

Activity

2 Use your knowledge of Henry VI to assess how useful Source E is as evidence of the personal qualities of Henry VI. (AS)

3 How far does the information in Source E support the idea that Henry VI was a good king?

4 Blacman's memoir was written during the reign of Henry VII at a time when the king was trying to get Henry VI made a saint. Does this mean that we cannot believe what it says?