Revision Hand-out 1: Background and causes of the Wars of the Roses 1421 - 1455



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|  | **Event** | **Significance** |
| **1399** | **Henry IV usurped the throne by removing Richard II** | **This weakens the position of king and opens the way for later claims against the throne. It means the Lancastrians have to be seen to be strong kings to keep order.** |
| **1415** | **Henry V renews the war against the French and wins at the Battle of Agincourt** | **Henry V is seen as an example of a strong English king, however this leaves a lot for his son to live up to** |
| **1421** | **Henry VI is born** |  |
| **1422** | **Henry V dies, Henry VI becomes king** | **Henry VI is only 9 months old when he becomes king and Henry V’s brothers John Duke of Bedford and Humphrey Duke of Gloucester rule for him** |
| **1437** | **Henry VI’s minority ends** | **Henry VI takes over the rule of England and the French territories.** |
| **1440** | **York made Governor of France and Normandy** | **York given responsibility and power in France. He has also acquired land in France which gives him a personal stake in its defence.** |
| **1444** | **Truce of Tour is made with France; Henry VI is betrothed to Margaret of Anjou.** | **Gives the French time to consolidate. Shows those who wanted peace (Suffolk) had more influence over the king than those who didn’t (York & Gloucester)** |
| **1445** | **Henry VI marries Margaret of Anjou**  **York loses influence in France** | **Having a French wife leaves Henry open to accusations she is influencing his policy towards the French. He does not get the dowry promised from the French king.** |
| **1447** | **Command in France given to the Duke of Somerset**  **York made lieutenant of Ireland**  **Gloucester is arrested for treason and dies in custody (probably from natural causes)** | **York sees this as being sent out of the way and a weakening of his position.**  **Gloucester was the heir to the throne now it is York. The treatment of Gloucester must have worried York that the same could happen to him.** |
| **1450** | **Normandy is Lost to the French**  **Suffolk is murdered**  **Cade’s rebellion breaks out** | **Losses in France cause widespread dissatisfaction against Lancastrian rule. Somerset is blamed. Cade’s rebellion is evidence of this dissatisfaction. For York stuck in Ireland the loss his French land must have led him to hate Somerset.**  **Henry pays Somerset back for debts run up during the war, but not York, causing further anger.**  **Suffolk’s beheading at sea shows both how badly Henry is failing to control law and order and how much his councillors are hated.** |

**Key Figures:**

**Henry VI 1421 – 1471: King of England. 1421- 1461 then again 1470-71**

A highly pious (religious) man, Henry was prone to indecision a good example being his changing his mind over the building work on the chapel at Eton College. He had favourites in the court and weakened his own position by being overly generous with them. He was increasingly prone to bouts of madness which left him incapacitated and unable to rule. He is said to have watched some of the battles of the wars of the roses without really understanding where he was or what was going on. During his reign most of his father’s gains in France were lost, something which also served to make him unpopular.

**Margaret of Anjou – Henry’s Queen.**

Margaret married Henry as a result of the Treaty of Tours, a strong and decisive woman (as shown by her standing up to York and Cades rebellion). Nevertheless she lacked common sense in her treatment of York and in other dealings. There was a general dislike of her involvement in government by a number of the nobility both because she was French and because she was a woman. Nevertheless her involvement in government increased after the birth of her son probably as a natural desire to protect him and his interests.

**John Duke of Bedford and Humphrey Duke of Gloucester – Henry V’s brothers (Henry VI’s uncles):** Ruled for Henry in his minority (fairly effectively losses in France mostly happened later). Bedford died in 1435 and Gloucester became heir to the throne. Gloucester died in 1447 after being arrested. This caused some anger in the nobility against Suffolk who was thought to be behind this.

**Richard Duke of York:** A powerful member of the Royal family and next in line to the throne after Gloucester’s death and before Henry had a child. York was responsible for the French lands between 1440 – 45 and was angered when these were given away in attempts at peace with the French. York was also angered to be sent to Ireland and to not have the money he spent campaigning returned by the king especially when Somerset’s money was returned.

**Duke of Suffolk:**

A favourite of Henry VI Suffolk’s rise to power angered others as he was not a member of the royal family like Somerset, York or Gloucester. He was given power by Henry and was blamed by many others for the losses in France and the break down in law and order in England. Parliament impeached him with treason in 1450, a sign of how much Henry had lost control. Henry saved him from execution but exiled him for 5 years, probably for his own protection. His ship was intercepted in the Channel and he was beheaded at sea.

**Edmund Beaufort Duke of Somerset:**

Another powerful member of the royal family, The Beaufort’s were descended from John of Gaunt’s(Henry IV’s father) mistress Catherine Swynford who later became his wife. They were accepted into the royal family but were barred from inheriting the throne. They were all die hard Lancastrians due to the family links. Enemy of York.

**Earl of Salisbury & Earl of Warwick:**

Father and son both these earls are called Richard Neville. They were part of a family which was in conflict with the Percy’s, another great family. Due to this the Neville’s supported York. Initially for protection but later to further their own ambitions. Warwick is a key figure later in the course and becomes a very powerful member of the nobility.

**The Stafford’s and the Holland’s**: Other members of the Nobility who, like Henry, were descended from John of Gaunt and supported Henry VI (Lancastrians)

**The Earl of Northumberland:** The Percy family. Powerful nobility who traditionally controlled the North. Involved with a feud for land and prestige with the Neville family. Supported Somerset and the king against York due to his later connections to the Nevilles.

**Jack Cade:**

Kentish man who led a rebellion against Henry’s advisors in 1450. Probably this was due to the high taxation caused by the wars and Henry’s financial weakness. Cade was pro York so there are possible links there.