

Not until January 1486 did he fulfil his promise, made in Rennes Cathedral, of marrying Elizabeth of York. By delaying the marriage in this way, Henry was hoping to emphasise that he did not owe his crown to her, but the political realities suggested otherwise. In marrying the sister of Edward V, Henry was paying the price for the Yorkist support that had brought him to the throne.



The Roses united. The red rose (Henry VII) was married to the white rose (Elizabeth of York).

Early defections

Unsurprisingly, there were soon signs that Henry's reign would be continuously troubled by insurrection and instability.

- At Easter 1486, Francis, Lord Lovell, together with Humphrey and Thomas Stafford, sons of Sir Humphrey Stafford of Grafton, broke out of sanctuary in Colchester and raised the standard of rebellion. This was a rather desperate affair undertaken by followers of Richard III and it gained very little support. The elder Stafford was executed, the younger pardoned and Lord Lovell disappeared. Although very limited in its achievements, it told Henry what he feared most: that there were men out there prepared to plot to overthrow him.
- By 1487, Henry was so worried about the possibility of plots within the royal household that an Act of Parliament of that year set up a special court appointing officials to investigate the possibility that members of the royal household had taken part in 'any confederacy, compassings, conspiracies or imaginings' to destroy or murder the king or any of the great officers of state. Of course, by 1487, Henry had good reason to be worried: he had just survived a very serious uprising led by Lambert Simnel.

KEY TERM

Sanctuary Medieval criminals held the right of sanctuary (and therefore freedom from arrest) to gain time for a legal defence of their supposed crime. Sanctuary was provided in churches on a temporary basis – usually a month.

HOW SERIOUS WAS THE SIMNEL REBELLION?

It is easy to underestimate the Simnel conspiracy to overthrow Henry VII because it failed. In reality, it was

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deadly serious and came close to success. Lambert Simnel was a ten-year-old boy, the son of a baker, who was selected by Yorkist sympathisers to play the part of Edward, Earl of Warwick, who was now the surviving male heir of his uncle, Edward IV. The boy was trained by an Oxfordshire priest, Richard Simons. The plot began late in 1486 and rapidly acquired serious backing.

John de la Pole, Margaret of Burgundy and the Irish rebels

An important supporter of the Simnel cause was John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln. In February 1487, de la Pole suddenly fled from court and turned up in the Low Countries at the court of **Margaret dowager Duchess of Burgundy**. As she was, in reality, Margaret of York, sister of both Edward IV and Richard III, she was determined to see Henry VII overthrown and her family returned to power. Operating outside England, with considerable political skills and a lot of money, she was a formidable foe for Henry Tudor. Joining these two came Francis, Lord Lovell, who had escaped from Henry's clutches the year before and now determined to cause more trouble.

Margaret equipped the rebels with some 2000 experienced troops under an equally experienced captain, Martin Schwarz.

- Resisting the temptation to make a swift, direct attack across the Channel, these forces sailed to Ireland to rendezvous with Lambert Simnel.
- In Ireland, a former Yorkist stronghold – indeed, birthplace of George, Duke of Clarence, the father of the real Earl of Warwick – there was strong support for the conspiracy. Although kings of England claimed to be kings of Ireland as well, their power there was minimal.
- The real – if uncrowned – King of Ireland at this time was Gerald FitzGerald, eighth Earl of Kildare, who had built up a strong power base across Ireland. Henry Tudor had upset the earl by refusing to confirm his official position as deputy-lieutenant of Ireland and now the earl decided to throw his considerable political weight, together with a few thousand Irish troops, behind the Simnel conspiracy.
- On 24 May 1487, just nineteen days after the successful landing of Lincoln, Lovell and Schwarz in Ireland,

KEY PERSON

Margaret of Burgundy (1446–1503) The sister of Edward IV and widow of Charles the Bold of Burgundy. She was born at Fotheringhay Castle in Northamptonshire and was the prime mover in the Yorkist plots to overthrow Henry Tudor. She was also a patron of William Caxton, who introduced the first printing press to England. Her marriage to Charles of Burgundy took place in 1468 amid huge festivities, including the Tournament of the Golden Tree.

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ed. The red rose (Henry married to the white rose (Elizabeth of York).

Simnel was crowned and proclaimed as King Edward VI. The Archbishop of Dublin performed the ceremony and crowned young Lambert with a golden circlet taken from the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the cathedral.

A contemporary account of Simnel

This extract is from an Irish book called *The Book of Houth*. The Lord of Houth did not support Simnel!

Soon after, it was blown abroad that Edward the young Earl of Warwick was broken out of the Tower and a priest called Richard Simons sailed with a child into Ireland and there he declared to certain of the nobility there that this child was the young Earl of Warwick. And so they called him king and so sent their letters secretly into England and also to Flanders, to Lady Margaret, sister of King Edward, to further his purpose with all his might and power. Sir Nicholas, Lord of Houth, perceiving all this but a mad dance, sent over to the king and advertised to him of all these matters from the beginning to the ending who was the doers and maintainers of these matters in Ireland and Flanders.

Simnel's invasion of England and the Battle of Stoke, 1487

Able to gather forces in Ireland without opposition, the conspirators then landed unopposed in England on 4 June 1487. They were welcomed near Barrow-in-Furness by Sir Thomas Broughton, one of Richard III's northern affinity. The landing place was deliberately chosen to gather more support from the followers of the previous king, who had built up a powerful body of supporters and clients in the north. Moving speedily, they marched across Lancashire and Yorkshire unopposed and it was here that King Henry's weakness became clear. None of the local nobles made any attempt to stop the invasion. The Earl of Northumberland, confirmed by Henry in his control of the north, did nothing to oppose the malcontents. In a situation reminiscent of the successful invasions by Edward IV (1471) and by Henry Tudor himself (1485), an invading army was allowed to march several hundred miles into England without hindrance.

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KEY EVENT

Battle of Stoke (1487)

Though the Irish troops proved ineffective, Schwarz's mercenaries were a different matter. Oxford's line buckled under their assault and Henry, who was observing the battle from a safe distance, did nothing to help. During the battle, the rebel leader, the Earl of Lincoln, was killed. All the conflicts of the previous 30 years had shown that the outcome of battles was usually down to random or unpredictable factors; for example, Richard's charge at Bosworth, the snowstorm at Towton and the fog at Barnet.

KEY TERM

Turnspit An unimportant member of the kitchen staff in a great household. His main task was to turn the meat as it cooked over an open fire.

In early June, Henry moved north from Kenilworth near Coventry and met up with Stanley forces from Cheshire and the north-west before intercepting the rebels near the village of Stoke, not far from Newark in Nottinghamshire.

- Both sides at the **Battle of Stoke** were similar in scale to those that appeared at Bosworth. The king had the larger army but the rebels, as at Bosworth, had a core of well-trained foreign mercenaries.
- However, the king did not have the outright support of any of the great nobles. His forces were led by the Earl of Oxford and by Lord Stanley's son, who had escaped death at the hands of Richard III at Bosworth.
- The battle was fought on 16 June and the king's forces won the day. The Irish, who were lightly armed, proved easy meat for Oxford's bowmen and they were shot 'full of arrows like hedgehogs'.

Henry could afford to be merciful to the young and bewildered Lambert Simnel. He was taken into the royal household where he acted as **turnspit** in the kitchens, later rising to the rank of the king's falconer. It was a calculated piece of propaganda by Henry, akin to his sarcastic remark, on hearing of Simnel's coronation in Ireland, that the Irish 'would crown apes at last'. However, this should not blind us to the seriousness of the threat posed by Simnel. The Battle of Stoke was close fought and the losses fairly even – 4000 rebels died but so, too, did some 3000 royal troops.

The serious nature of the Simnel threat

It is easy to think that the Simnel conspiracy was not a serious threat because Lambert Simnel was so obviously an impostor. To emphasise the point that Simnel was a fake, Henry VII had the real Earl of Warwick paraded round the streets of London. However, this did not really help Henry's cause. The rebels merely claimed that Henry's Warwick was the impostor! By parading the real earl around London, Henry reminded even those who believed the king's side of the story that a very good Yorkist claimant was alive and well.

- The rebels, even if they knew that Simnel was bogus, wanted merely to use him as a focus for the Yorkist claim to the throne. In this he was brilliantly successful as he gathered support from Ireland, the Low Countries

and England. Once they had defeated and killed Henry VII, the rebels could then free the real Earl of Warwick, or, if rumours of his mental incapacity proved true, they could always substitute the next best Yorkist claimant, John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln.

- The Simnel conspiracy was stronger than it looked because it did not aim to put the impostor on the throne of England. The Yorkists, after all, had two perfectly legitimate claimants whose right to the throne was much clearer than Henry VII's.
- The Simnel conspiracy was also very dangerous because it mirrored exactly Henry Tudor's successful rebellion just two years before. Both of these invasions relied mainly on foreign support, both marched unopposed for several hundred miles across the kingdom, and both forced the king to fight a battle.
- Hindsight – the knowledge that Henry won the battle and defeated the conspiracy – has also tended to blind us to the dangers it posed at the time. No one was in a better position to appreciate the seriousness of the situation than Henry Tudor.

The Northern rebellion of 1489

While nothing like as serious as the Simnel rebellion of 1487, the Northern rebellion of 1489 indicated again that the king's control of the kingdom was far from secure. It was a rebellion against Henry's heavy tax demands.

- The king wished to raise money to pay for men to defend Brittany from French aggression. This seems to have met with widespread opposition, especially in the north.
- Opposition was associated with some new methods the king used in order to increase the yield of his taxes.
- At the same time, the king seems to have acted insensitively in not allowing the north its usual tax rebates.

The rising came to a head when Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland was murdered in Topcliffe in Yorkshire. He was attempting to explain the need for the new taxes to a crowd of people when he was set upon by the angry mob and killed. Interestingly, his own retinue of men stood by as their master was lynched, perhaps indicating the depth

KEY TERM

Tax rebates Refers to a situation where the government decreases the amount of tax demanded, usually to win favour with angry taxpayers.

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