

Henry IV, Part I – About the Play

Further Reading – English History according to the textbooks

Now that we know Shakespeare's take on these figures, we can look at them in an historical context. Who were they really? Did Shakespeare paint them differently than they actually were?



Edward III

Edward III
(November 13, 1312 — June 21, 1377)

Edward III was one of the most successful monarchs of the Middle Ages. His father's reign had been a disaster and Edward took it upon himself to transform England's military machine into the most powerful in Europe.

Edward was born at Windsor Castle in 1312 and crowned at the age of fourteen after his father was deposed by his Queen Isabella (from whom he was estranged) and her consort, Roger Mortimer. Because Edward was underage, he was king in name only and the country was ruled instead by Roger Mortimer as regent. Mortimer treated the young king very badly and subjected him to constant humiliation and disrespect so at the age of seventeen, Edward led a coup against Roger Mortimer in which Mortimer and Isabella were arrested. Mortimer was sent to the Tower and hanged and Isabella was forced into exile.

One of Edward's greatest threats was from Scotland, which was a separate kingdom and not part of England. Edward chose to renew the military conflict there and claims of sovereignty over Scotland, however the Scottish forces were strong and so Edward's dream of conquest changed to settling for containing the troops within Scottish borders.

Edward also had problems across the channel in France. The French provided support to the Scottish during Edward's campaign there and the French also attacked several English coastal towns leading to rumors of an overall invasion. The French also threatened the English king's property in France and in 1337 Philip VI confiscated the duchy of the Aquitaine and the county of Ponthieu. Instead of seeking a peaceful solution to the

French situation, Edward declared himself King of France as the only living male descendent of his maternal grandfather, Philip IV. The French rejected the claim, invoking the Salic law of succession which stipulates that inheritance is only through the male line. This episode kicked off the Hundred Years' War.

Edward's popularity at home declined due to the financial pressures caused by expensive wars. Even after borrowing from the treasury, things were still uneasy and a conflict with the church, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury ensued.

Even though Parliament finally forced the king to put a cap on his spending, Edward staged a major offensive in France in 1346. He sacked the city of Caen, won a major victory at Crècy and laid siege to Calais, capturing it in 1347.

In 1348 Edward had the backing of the Holy Roman Emperor, Louis V to compete against the German king, Charles IV for the crown of Germany, but decided against it. There were more pressing matters back in England.

The Black Death struck Europe killing a third of England's population. Loss of manpower and revenue put a stop to major conflicts at home and abroad. Landowners struggled with the shortage of manpower and the cost of labor skyrocketed. The king responded by trying to limit wages with the Ordinance of Labourers (1349) and the Statute of Labourers (1351). Fortunately, the plague did not lead to a full-scale breakdown of government and recovery was fairly swift.

In 1356, the king's eldest son, The Black Prince, won a great battle at Poitiers in France

and captured the French king, John II. The English held large tracts of land in France and the French crown finally seemed in reach for Edward. In 1360, following an inconclusive campaign, Edward accepted the Treaty of Bretigny and renounced all claim to the French throne, but kept his French properties.

The energy that marked Edward's early reign was waning and the latter years were filled with political and military strife. Edward was more intent on fighting than on running his country efficiently and relied on his subordinates to do his work. The plague had taken many of Edward's elder statesmen and in their place was new, young blood that related more to the younger princes than to the older monarch.

A string of bad luck ensued. Edward's second son, Lionel, failed to forcibly subdue the lords in Ireland, while his younger son, John of Gaunt failed to make his mark in renewing the conflict in France, resulting in England losing all of its French assets with the exception of Calais, Bordeaux and Bayonne.

Gaunt virtually controlled the Government when the king and the Black Prince were incapacitated by illness. The Black Prince died in 1375 and Edward died in 1376. He was succeeded by his grandson, Richard, the son of the Black Prince.



Richard II

Richard II
(January 6, 1367 — February 14, 1400)

Richard was the son of Edward, Prince of Wales (The Black Prince) and Joan "The Fair Maid of Kent" and was born in Bordeaux in France. Because he was born at Epiphany and three kings were present at his birth, a legend arose that he was destined for greatness.

His elder brother had died in infancy and therefore he was named the Prince of Wales when his father died in 1376. In 1377 his grandfather, Edward III died making Richard the king at aged ten.

Because Richard was underage, three continual councils ruled the country from June of 1377 to January 1380. Richard's

uncle, John of Gaunt had considerable control especially in the department of foreign policy, even though he was not a member of any of the councils.

At the age of 14, Richard personally dealt with the Peasants Revolt and even though he promised to pardon the leaders of this 1381 rebellion, those men were arrested and executed. It is a matter of conjecture whether Richard intended to go against his word or was pressured by members of the nobility to do so.

As Richard grew up, he revealed himself to be an indecisive and uncompromising leader able to deal with issues typical of fourteenth century politics. This would lead to his eventual downfall in 1399.

Richard married Anne of Bohemia in 1383. She was the daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor. They had no children and she died in 1394. In 1396 he married the seven-year old daughter of Charles VI of France, Isabella of Valois. This marriage was also without issue.

Throughout his reign Richard sidelined many important nobles including Thomas de Beauchamp the 12th Earl of Warwick, Richard FitzAlan, 11th Earl of Arundel and Thomas of Woodstock, 1st Duke of Gloucester. These people formed the head of a group called the Lords Appellant and played a role in Richard's downfall. However, Richard did have his favorites including Robert de Vere, 9th Earl of Oxford, and Michael de la Pole. It is possible that Richard had a homosexual relationship with de Vere.

In 1386 Parliament under pressure from the Lords Appellant, forced Richard to remove his favorites from court. When he refused, he was told that as he was still a minor, a Council would rule in his stead. Richard had Arundel arrested, but Richard was subsequently imprisoned in the Tower and agreed to hold a Parliament to resolve the grievances of the Appellants. Richard was forced to dispose of his unpopular favorites and accept new councilors. He was temporarily stripped of nearly all of his authority.

He recovered power in 1389 and, having learned the lessons of the previous years, began to improve his relationships with his subjects. In 1390 when Richard came of age, a great tournament was held to celebrate this event and the newfound harmony. He became a great patron of the arts (Richard was a collector of precious objects), architecture and literature (Geoffrey Chaucer was the Clerk of The Kings' Works and Richard granted him many gifts), but as a peace-loving king, he did not have the military know-how of his ancestors. This made him increasingly unpopular.

Probably out of some inferiority complex instilled on him since childhood, Richard was a traditionalist and was a firm believer in the ideal of the Divine Right of Kings feeling that he should be unquestioned in the way he ran his kingdom. He insisted on being called 'Majesty' and 'Highness' and sat alone for hours wearing his crown. Those addressing him were not allowed to look at him directly and he began to order his subjects around. Anyone challenging his authority was punished. Richard lived life on a grand scale and enlarged the court.

Although he promised his subjects that he would lower the burden of taxation, this promise was never kept and his subjects continued to be heavily taxed. For the average person, it appeared that Richard was milking his subjects to finance his luxurious lifestyle.

In 1397 Richard decided to get rid of the Lord Appellant and had the Earl of Arundel executed, Warwick exiled while Gloucester died in captivity. He got rid of anyone whom he deemed as not totally committed to him, thus fulfilling his own ideal of being God's chosen prince.

As Richard was childless, his heir was Roger Mortimer, Earl of March who was the grandson of Lionel of Antwerp. The next in line was Edmund Mortimer. Richard was however, very concerned with Henry Bolingbroke, whom he had exiled to France for a decade. When John of Gaunt, Henry's father died, Richard

confiscated Henry's huge landholdings. Many historians believe that this was done to bring greater harmony to England. It was not unheard of for a monarch to seize the lands of a powerful noble in order to centralize power, Henry II and Edward I had both done this. Henry's estate was so big that it could have been seen as a small state within England and Richard could have been preventing any chance of that happening.

Richard left for a campaign in Ireland, giving Bolingbroke ample opportunity to return to England and reclaim his inheritance with an army supplied by the King of France. Bolingbroke quickly gained the support of discontented nobles in both the south and east of England. When Richard returned from his Irish sojourn, he found that Bolingbroke had gained so much support that he was urged to take the crown himself.

Richard was captured at Flint Castle in Wales and taken to London where he was pelted with garbage by crowds who had gathered along the route. He was held in the Tower and forced to abdicate. Eventually, he was brought before Parliament where he was forced to renounce his crown and thirty-three official charges were made against him for which he was not allowed to answer. Parliament then accepted Henry Bolingbroke as their new king.

Richard was sent to Pontefract Castle where it is believed that he starved to death in 1400. Perhaps it was because he refused food or was deprived of it on the orders of the new king.

His body was displayed in St Paul's Cathedral for all to see that he was really dead. He was buried in Kings Langley Church. His coffin was so badly made that it was easy for disrespectful visitors to place their hands through and interfere with its contents. Henry V decided to have the remains re-interred in Westminster Abbey in 1413.



Henry IV

Henry IV

(April 3, 1367 — March 20, 1413)

Henry was born at Bolingbroke Castle in Lincolnshire. His father was John of Gaunt, 1st Duke of Lancaster (1340 — 1399), third and oldest surviving son of King Edward III; his mother was Blanche Plantagenet (1341 — 1369), heiress to vast Lancaster estates. She was a beautiful and gracious woman who was much admired by Geoffrey Chaucer who dedicated his *Book of the Duchess* to her.

Henry's mother died when he was only two years old and John married Constance of Castile, daughter of Pedro 'the Cruel' of Castile who had claim to the throne of Castile. Through his marriage John pursued this claim. Although it was a loveless marriage, it produced two children: Catherine, who married Henry III of Castile and ruled as co-consort; and John, who died in infancy. The family connection to the Iberian Peninsula also included the marriage of Henry's elder sister, Philippa who married John I of Portugal.

Henry also had four half-siblings by Katherine Swynford, his father's mistress and eventual third wife. Henry was resentful that his former governess had taken his mother's place. When he became king and after his father's death, he revoked his half-brother's marquessate and passed legal measures barring him from the line of succession. However, Thomas Swynford, Katherine's son from her first marriage was one of Henry's closest companions.

Henry's first cousin Richard II became king in 1377. The two were childhood playmates, indeed they were admitted to the Order of the Garter together in 1377 and Henry had the honor of holding the Sword of Mercy during Richard's coronation.

In 1380 Henry married Mary de Bohun. They had seven children: Edward (who died in 1382); Henry (the future Henry of England); Thomas, Duke of Clarence; John, Duke of Bedford, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester; Blanche of England (married Louis III, Elector

Palatine); and Philippa of England (married Eric of Pomerania, king of Denmark, Norway and Sweden).

The Lords Appellant

Henry fell out of favor with Richard when he participated in the Lords Appellant's rebellion against the king in 1387.

The Lords Appellant were a group of powerful barons who came together to seize political control from Richard II. It was so called because its members claimed to be "appealing" to the king for good government. Their main complaint was that Richard wanted to make peace with France. The Lords were led by the Duke of Gloucester (youngest son of Edward III and Richard and Henry's uncle), the Earl of Arundel, The Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Nottingham and Henry. In 1387 The Lords Appellant launched an armed rebellion against Richard and defeated his army at Radcot Bridge in Oxfordshire. Although they kept Richard on as a figurehead, they eliminated most of his court. In 1389, John of Gaunt returned from Spain to support his nephew. Richard gradually got his powers back and the Lords Appellant were outlawed by Richard in 1397.

Ironically, when Richard regained power, he did not punish Henry (others involved were exiled or executed), rather he elevated Henry from Earl of Derby to Duke of Hereford.

Henry and Thomas de Mowbray

Thomas de Mowbray (1366 — 1399) had succeeded his brother as 6th Baron Mowbray and 7th Baron Segrave in 1382 and was subsequently created the Earl of Nottingham. In 1385 he was appointed Earl Marshal of England and as such fought against the Scots and the French. He was one of the Lords Appellant. The King's uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, 1st Duke of Gloucester was imprisoned at Calais where Nottingham was Captain. Gloucester was killed in 1397, probably on Richard's orders and with the help

of Nottingham. Shortly thereafter, Nottingham was created Duke of Norfolk and, upon the death of his grandmother was also named 3rd Earl of Norfolk.

In 1398 Henry and Thomas came to blows stemming from mutual suspicions surrounding their roles in the conspiracy against Gloucester. To avoid a bloody mess between Henry and Thomas, Richard banished Henry from the kingdom for ten years, and Thomas was exiled for life. Henry's father supported the king in this decision. When Henry became king, Norfolk was stripped of the Dukedom of Norfolk, although he was able to keep his other titles. He died of the plague in Venice in 1399.

When John of Gaunt died in 1399, Richard cancelled the legal documents allowing Henry to inherit Gaunt's estates. Henry would have to ask for the lands from Richard. Henry met with the exiled Thomas Arundel.

Arundel was Archbishop of Canterbury in 1397 and from 1399 to his death in 1413. He was the younger son of Richard FitzAlan, the 10th Earl of Arundel. He was an example of the political "aristocratic clergyman, and had no ecclesiastical training. Before becoming Archbishop of Canterbury, Arundel was Archbishop of York from 1388 — 1397. He was removed from his position as Archbishop of Canterbury by both King Richard II and the Pope and was exiled in Florence where he plotted his return to England and to power.

Usurping the Crown

While Richard was on military campaign in Ireland, Arundel returned to England and advised Henry on a military campaign to confiscate lands from those against him in Cheshire. Richard was unpopular with landowners who were tired of Richard's tyranny and Henry quickly gained enough power to have himself declared King Henry IV and imprisoning the deposed monarch. Tudor scholars saw this as the start of what would become known as The Wars of the Roses. Although this was a factor, it wasn't until 1460

when York first claimed the throne outright. And today's scholars regard the Wars of the Roses as taking place between 1455 and 1485.

Henry's first problem was what to do with the deposed king. An early assassination attempt was foiled so there is the probability that Henry ordered Richard's death by starvation in early 1400. At any rate, Richard's body was displayed at St Paul's Cathedral to show his supporters that he was dead. The heir-presumptive, Edmund de Mortimer, was overlooked in favor of Henry.

King Henry IV

Henry's coronation on October 13, 1399 was the first occasion following the Norman Conquest that a monarch made his address in English. Henry consulted with Parliament regularly, even though they clashed on occasion over ecclesiastical matters. Henry restored Arundel as Archbishop of Canterbury and on his advice Henry passed the *de heretico comburendo* allowing the burning of heretics.

Henry's queen, Mary, died in 1394 and in 1403 Henry married Joanna of Navarre, daughter of Charles d'Evreux, King of Navarre. She was the widow of John IV of Brittany. Although she had four daughters and four sons with John of Brittany, she and Henry had no children. Joanna was very unpopular and was rumored to perform the black arts. She was convicted of witchcraft in 1419.

As the new king, Henry was relatively popular with both the common folk and the aristocracy. Many were sympathetic to his cause because Richard II had wrongfully taken his father's lands from him. However, with continual rebellions and wars, they did not appreciate the heavy taxation forced upon them.

As a result of his usurpation, Henry spent a lot of his time defending himself against plots, rebellions and assassination attempts. In 1400 the Welsh leader, Owain Glyndwr

declared himself Prince of Wales and captured Conwy Castle. In 1403, Henry Percy, 1st Earl of Northumberland along with his son, Henry (Hotspur) conspired against the king in favor of Edmund de Mortimer. This latter rebellion ended when Hotspur was killed in battle with the king's forces near Shrewsbury. Henry Percy did not directly participate in these rebellions although he was a mastermind behind them. Therefore, he was not convicted of treason and was merely stripped of his office as Constable. The success of quashing these rebellions was due in large part to the military prowess of the king's eldest son — Henry.

In 1405 Edmund de Mortimer and his brother Roger were rescued from Windsor by opponents of the House of Lancaster but were recaptured in 1409 and put into the care of Henry of Monmouth, Prince of Wales.

In 1405 Richard Scrope, Archbishop of York, proclaimed his opposition to Henry's right to the throne. He was supported in his efforts by Henry Percy. Scrope was executed, which did not help Henry win friends and influence people. Percy was stripped of his estates and fled to Scotland.

In 1408 Northumberland invaded England and was killed at the Battle of Bramham Moor. Henry also had to fight raids along the Scottish borders and a conflict with the French. These conflicts were not cheap and Henry relied heavily on government grants to finance them. From 1401—1406, Parliament repeatedly accused him of fiscal mismanagement and as a body, acquired power over royal expenditure and appointments.

Henry hosted the visit of Manuel II Palaiologos, the only Byzantine Emperor to ever visit England, from December 1400 to January 1401 at Eltham Palace. Henry sent monetary support back to Constantinople to aid the Emperor's defense against the Ottoman Empire.

In 1406, English pirates captured the future James I of Scotland off the coast of Flamborough Head as he was enroute to

France. James remained a prisoner of Henry for the rest of Henry's reign.

Final Years

Henry's final years were marked by serious health issues. He had a disfiguring skin disease (perhaps leprosy, psoriasis, or a symptom of syphilis) and he also suffered attacks of some illness (perhaps epilepsy or cardiovascular disease) in June 1405, April 1406, June 1408, during the winter of 1408—09, December 1412 and a fatal bout in March of 1413. Many thought that it was God's punishment for executing an Archbishop. For the final two years of Henry's life, Prince Henry (Hal) controlled the government.

Rafael Holinshed, in his *Chronicles of England* said, and it was taken up in Shakespeare's play, that there was a prediction that Henry would die in Jerusalem. Henry took this to mean that he would die on crusade, but in fact, he died in the Jerusalem Chamber of the house of the Abbot of Westminster.

Henry was not buried at Westminster Abbey as were his predecessors, rather he was buried at Canterbury Cathedral on the north side of the transept as close to the shrine of Thomas à Becket as was possible. Canterbury Cathedral was a popular place at the time with thousands making a pilgrimage to Becket's shrine as evidenced in *The Canterbury Tales* written by Richard's and Henry's court poet, Geoffrey Chaucer. Henry was a devoted member of Becket's cult - supposedly the oil used to anoint him at his coronation was given to Becket by the Virgin Mary.



Henry V

Henry V (September 16, 1367 — August 31, 1422)

Henry was born in Monmouth, Wales 1367.

When Henry's father was banished in 1398, King Richard II took young Hal under his wing and treated him well. When his father usurped the throne in 1399, Henry became the heir presumptive and was created Duke of Lancaster. By 1403 Henry was in command of the English forces at Shrewsbury. During this battle, Henry was nearly killed by an arrow which had become lodged in his face. An ordinary soldier would have died from such a wound, but as the Prince, Henry received the best medical attention available at that time. The royal surgeon made a special tool to extract the tip of the arrow without doing too much cosmetic damage and saved the life of the sixteen-year old prince.

In 1408 Henry began to play a bigger role in the politics of England. From 1410, aided by his uncles, Henry and Thomas Beaufort, he had control of the government. In 1411, Henry IV excused the Prince from the council due to political differences. When the king died in 1413, Henry succeeded the throne.

Henry's aim was to rule England as the head of a united nation. He honorably re-buried King Richard II, Edmund de Mortimer was taken into favor and the heirs of those who had suffered under Henry IV were given their titles and estates back.

With the exception of a minor coup in 1415 to put Mortimer on the throne, Henry V's reign was free from serious domestic trouble and the King was able to turn his attention to foreign affairs. In August of 1415 Henry sailed for France where his forces took the fortress at Harfleur. Henry then intended to capture Calais but met with the French forces at Agincourt. His men were outnumbered and tired, but Henry led his men into battle brilliantly defeating the French.

He gained control of the English Channel by pushing the French out of it and paved the way to end the schism of the church.

In 1417 he conquered Lower Normandy and headed for Rouen. At this time in France, the Burgundians and the Armagnacs were fighting between themselves. Henry used this to his advantage and played them off against each other. It took two years for Rouen to fall, but in 1419, the city fell to the English. By August of that year the English reached the city walls of Paris. After six months of negotiation, Henry was recognized as heir and regent of France and on June 2, 1420 he married Catherine of Valois, daughter of the French king. In June and July of that year Henry took Montereau and later Melun. Henry returned to England victorious.

In June of 1421 Henry returned to France capturing Dreux. In October his army lay siege to Meaux and captured it in May of 1422. Henry died suddenly on August 31, 1422 at Bois de Vincennes from dysentery. Before he died, he named his brother John, Duke of Bedford, regent of France in the name of his one-year old son, Henry VI. Henry V did not live to be crowned King of France. Catherine took Henry's body to London and he was buried at Westminster Abbey on Nov 7, 1422.

Following his death, Catherine married a Welsh Courtier, Owen Tudor. They became the grandparents of Henry VII of England.

Henry is best remembered for his victory at Agincourt and for his choice of wife, which ultimately united two countries that had been at war for over eighty years. After his death, the power struggle between France and England resumed.



Henry VI

Henry VI (December 6, 1421 — May 21, 1471)

Henry was the only child of King Henry V. He was born at Windsor and acceded to the throne on 31 August 1422 when he was only nine months old. His mother was then only twenty-years old and as she was the daughter of Charles VI of France, she was viewed with great suspicion (some even doubted Henry's paternity) and was not allowed to play a full role in her son's upbringing.

In 1423 nobles pledged their allegiance to Henry VI and summoned a Parliament in the king's name to establish a regency council.

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the youngest son of Henry IV and therefore uncle to the young king, was appointed Protector and Defender of the Realm and the Church until the King came of age. He was however, under the control of the Council and his duties were limited to keeping the peace and summoning and dissolving Parliament. Other important members of the council included Bishop Henry Beaufort who was Henry V's half-uncle; John Duke of Bedford (the elder surviving son of Henry IV) who was the senior regent and was also appointed the Regent of France. He also replaced Gloucester as Regent of England whenever he was in England.

Henry's tutor was the Earl of Warwick whose father had been a key player in usurpation of the throne by Henry IV. Other great influences included William de la Pole, 1st Duke of Suffolk who encouraged Henry to strive for peace in France.

Henry had two half-brothers, Edmund and Jasper, the sons of his mother's relationship with Owen Tudor. Both were given earldoms. Edmund was the father of Henry Tudor who later gained the throne as Henry VII, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster and starting the great Tudor dynasty.

Henry was crowned at Westminster Abbey in November 1429, just before his eighth

birthday. He was crowned King of France at Notre Dame in Paris in December 1431 but was not able to assume control of government until he came of age in 1437.

After his successes in the Hundred Years' War, Henry V had left England in control of some very lucrative properties in France. After he died, the momentum waned and because England was ruled by a Regency while Henry VI was still a child, much of that property was lost. The French revived their fortunes starting with Joan of Arc's military victories and the French Dauphin was crowned in Reims, effectively ending England's control of the country.

Henry VI was a very spiritual man but lacked in worldly wisdom and the necessary skills to rule a country. He spent the majority of his reign fighting to keep both or at least one of his crowns. He allowed his court to be dominated by a few favorites who wanted to end the war in France. Those supporting war included Richard, Duke of York and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, they however, were ignored.

Cardinal Beaufort and Suffolk persuaded the king that marriage to Charles VII's niece would be good for Anglo-French relations. When Henry heard of the incredible beauty of Margaret of Anjou he agreed and sent Suffolk to France to work out the details. Charles agreed to the marriage with the condition that he would not have to provide a dowry and instead would receive the lands of Maine and Anjou from the English. This agreement, known as the *Treaty of Tours*, was kept a secret as it would have proved extremely unpopular with the English parliament and people.

In 1445 Henry married Margaret of Anjou. She was a great match for Henry as she was decisive where he was the opposite. She showed leadership where he was content to be led by her. She was determined that the agreement made at the time of their marriage should be seen through and made public.

Most of the public anger was directed at Suffolk as it was he who negotiated the Treaty, but Henry and Margaret protected him, even though they were themselves vulnerable.

In 1447, the king and queen summoned Gloucester before them on a charge of treason. He died before he could be executed. Gloucester's death left York as Henry's heir presumptive, but Henry never officially acknowledged this and York was sent to Ireland to govern, therefore removing him from the court circle. Henry and Margaret gave dukedoms to both Suffolk and Edmund Beaufort (these titles are normally reserved for relatives of the monarch).

The government of Henry VI was unpopular, primarily due to a breakdown of law and order, corruption and nepotism as well as the loss of French territories, which had been so hard won by Henry V, and the poor state of the crown's finances. In 1447 the Commons campaigned against the Duke of Suffolk, deeming him a traitor and Henry was forced to send him into exile. Suffolk's ship was intercepted in the English Channel and he was murdered.

By 1452, public discontent was high and York was persuaded to return from Ireland and claim his place on the council. He was popular and raised an army at Shrewsbury. The king raised an army in London and south of the capital a standoff took place with York presenting a list of grievances and demands to the king. By 1453, the king had restored his influence with his people and York was again isolated.

Meanwhile in France, the English had retaken Bordeaux, but this was short-lived and the English were driven out. As a result, Henry suffered a mental breakdown and became completely unaware of what was going on around him. This lasted more than a year and he did not even respond to the birth of his son, Edward.

York had allied himself with Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick. Warwick was perhaps the richer than York himself and very influential.

York was eventually named regent in 1454 and he went to work tackling the problem of government overspending. Henry regained his senses on December 25, 1454. Henry's mental ailment was most likely inherited from his maternal grandfather, Charles VI of France who battled insanity for the last three decades of his life.

Unhappy nobles had grown in power during Henry's reign and backed claims to the throne by the House of York. After the Wars of the Roses, Henry was deposed in 1461 by his cousin, Edward of York who became King Edward IV of England. Henry and Margaret escaped and lived in exile abroad. Henry was eventually captured in 1465 and held in the Tower of London.

Margaret who continued to lead Lancastrian resistance to Edward's reign was determined to win back the throne on behalf of her husband and son. With the help of King Louis XI of France she formed an alliance with Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick who had fallen out with Edward IV. Warwick married his daughter to the Prince of Wales and returned to England to defeat the Yorkists in battle. He liberated Henry VI and restored him to the throne on October 30, 1470. This lasted only a short time as Henry was suffering from another mental breakdown. Warwick declared war on Burgundy whose ruler happily assisted Edward IV in regaining the throne by force. Henry and Margaret's only son was killed in the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471.

Henry languished in the Tower of London where he was murdered on 21 May 1471. Popular legend has it that Richard, Duke of Gloucester was the culprit who also murdered Edward of Westminster. Henry was originally buried at Chertsey Abbey, but his body was eventually moved to St George's Chapel in Windsor.

He was succeeded by Edward IV, son of Richard, Duke of York.

Henry's one positive achievement was the founding of Eton College and King's College, Cambridge.

Edward IV
(April 28, 1442 — April 9, 1483)

Edward was born on April 28, 1442 at Rouen and was the second son of Richard Plantagenet, 3rd Duke of York and Cecily Neville. He was the eldest of the four sons to survive to adulthood. His father's claim to the throne was the key catalyst to the conflict known as the Wars of the Roses. When his father was killed at the Battle of Wakefield, Edward inherited his claim to the throne of England.

Edward was declared king in 1461 after defeating the Lancastrians in a series of battles. While Henry VI was campaigning in the north of England, Warwick gained control of London. Hoping to rule the country himself in Edward's name, he pressed the king into marrying into a major European power, but Edward alienated him by marrying Elizabeth Woodville, a girl from a relatively poor but ambitious Lancastrian family. They had three children: a daughter, Elizabeth and two sons, Edward and Richard. In retaliation, Warwick allied himself with Edward's younger brother George, Duke of Clarence and led an army against Edward. Edward was captured and Warwick attempted to rule England in Edward's name, but the nobility staged a counter rebellion and Warwick was forced to release Edward.

In 1470 Warwick and Clarence rebelled again. They were defeated and forced into exile in France where they allied themselves with Margaret of Anjou and agreed to restore Henry VI in return for the French support in an invitation taking place in 1470. Edward was forced to flee when he learned the John Neville, 1st Marquess of Montagu and Warwick's brother had switched to the Lancastrian side.

When Henry VI was briefly restored to the throne in an act known as the *Redeption of Henry VI*, Edward sought refuge in Burgundy which was ruled by his brother-in-law, Charles and his sister, Margaret of York. Charles was

initially unwilling to help Edward, but the French declared war on Burgundy. Charles relented and helped Edward raise an army to win back his kingdom.

Edward returned to England with a relatively small force, but said he desired merely to reclaim his dukedom — an act reminiscent of Henry Bolingbroke two generations earlier. The city of York closed their gates to him, but he gathered support as he moved southward. Clarence reunited with him. Edward defeated Warwick at the Battle of Barnet and eliminated the rest of the Lancaster forces at the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471. Edward of Westminster, Prince of Wales and son of Henry VI was killed and a few days later Henry VI himself was murdered.

Edward's two younger brothers, George Duke of Clarence and Richard, Duke of Gloucester married Isabella Neville and Anne Neville respectively.

Richard III
(October 2, 1452 — August 22, 1485)

Richard was born at Fotheringay Castle, the youngest of eight children and the fourth son of Richard Plantagenet, 3rd Duke of York and Cecily Neville. Richard spent much of his childhood at Middleham Castle in Wensleydale and was tutored by his cousin, Robert Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick. When Richard's father and elder brother Edmund were killed at the battle of Wakefield, Warwick took the young boy under his wing.

Richard served loyally as a military commander during the reign of his brother, King Edward IV. As a reward, he was given large tracts of land in northern England and styled Duke of Gloucester. He was also appointed as his brother's Governor in the North. This made him the richest and most powerful noble in the country. Richard's other elder brother, George Plantagenet, 1st Duke of Clarence, was executed for treason by Edward IV.

Richard controlled the north of England until Edward IV died. He was considered a fair and just administrator endowing universities and church.

After a Yorkist victory over the Lancastrians at the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1472, Richard married the younger daughter of the Earl of Warwick, Anne Neville. Anne's first husband had been Edward of Westminster, son of Henry VI.

When Edward IV died on April 9, 1483 he left two sons, King Edward V, and Richard of Shrewsbury, 1st Duke of York, aged twelve and nine respectively. Under Richard's orders, the new king's guardian and maternal uncle, Anthony Woodville was taken to Pontefract Castle along with other advisors and promptly executed, supposedly for planning to assassinate the young king and take control of the throne. The young king and his brother were then taken to the Tower of London.

On the June twenty-second of that year a statement was read outside of St Paul's Cathedral on behalf of Richard claiming that he was taking the throne for himself on the grounds that Edward IV's marriage had been illegitimate. Parliament passed a bill supporting this on the evidence of a bishop who testified that Edward's marriage was a bigamous one. Richard was crowned at Westminster Abbey on July sixth.

Richard and Anne had one son, Edward Plantagenet, born in 1473. He died at the age of eleven, shortly after being created Prince of Wales. Richard had a number of illegitimate children, but it is believed that they did not have any descendents. So when Richard rode to what would be his final battle in 1485, he was a widower without a legitimate heir. When his son died, he had initially named his nephew, Edward, Earl of Warwick (son of George, Duke of Clarence) as his successor. After the death of his queen, Richard named as his heir another nephew, John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln as his heir.

On August 22, 1485, Richard met the forces of Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field. During the battle, Richard was abandoned by his top supporters, the Earl of Derby and Henry Percy, 4th Earl of Northumberland. Richard supposedly fought bravely throughout the battle until he was surrounded and killed. His body was paraded through the streets before its burial at Greyfriar's Church in Leicester.

There is a story that Richard had consulted a psychic in the town of Leicester before the battle and was told that "where your spur should strike on the ride into battle, your head shall be broken on the return. On the ride into battle his spur struck the bridge stone at Bow Bridge and the legend says that as his dead body was being carried from the battle on the back of a horse, his head struck the same stone and was broken open.

Richard was the last English king to die in battle and his death brought an end to the Plantagenet dynasty that had ruled England since 1154. The last male Plantagenet, Edward, Earl of Warwick was executed by Henry VII in 1499.

Henry VII **(January 28, 1457 — April 21, 1509)**

Henry was born at Pembroke Castle in Wales in 1457 and was the only son of Edmund Tudor and Lady Margaret Beaufort. His father died two months before he was born and young Henry spent his childhood under the tutelage of his uncle, Jasper Tudor. When Edward IV returned to the throne in 1471, Henry was forced to flee to France where he spent the next fourteen years.

Henry's mother remarried Lord Stanley, a Yorkist and supporter of Richard III; however she worked hard to promote her son as a viable alternative to King Richard whose unpopularity was growing. Henry made an attempt to return to England with the support of Francis II, Duke of Brittany. This attempt failed and Henry's co-conspirator the Duke of

Buckingham was executed as a result. Richard tried to have Henry extradited to England, but Henry was very welcome at the French court and they were very happy to supply him with troops and equipment for another invasion.

Henry finally was able to make another attempt to land on British soil and with support from the French and the Scottish; he landed in Pembrokeshire and marched into England. He was accompanied by his uncle Jasper and John de Vere, 13th Earl of Oxford.

Henry knew that in order to seize the throne he would have to act quickly and defeat Richard in battle before he could escape and raise an even bigger army. Henry's forces numbering 5,000 defeated Richard's Yorkist army at the Battle of Bosworth Field. This success was partly due to the defection of two of Richard's key allies: The Earl of Northumberland (Henry Percy) and William and Thomas Stanley.

Henry's main claim to the throne was through his mother and based upon an illegitimate line of succession. He also overlooked the fact that the Beauforts had been disinherited by Henry IV. Margaret Beaufort claimed royal blood as the granddaughter of John of Gaunt and his third wife Katherine Swynford. Katherine had been Gaunt's mistress for nearly a quarter of century and given him four children by the time of their marriage in 1396. John of Gaunt had his nephew King Richard II issue Letters Patent legitimizing these four children. Richard's successor, Henry IV (John of Gaunt's son by his first marriage) ordered this to be overturned and his half-siblings disinherited never to ascend the throne. Ironically, it was not only Henry VII who was a descendent of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford, but the Yorkist kings as well as Joan Beaufort, the only daughter of this union was the mother of Cecily Neville, wife of Richard, Duke of York and mother of Edward IV and Richard III.

It did not hurt that after Richard's death, there were few (if any) claimants to the throne and Henry could ascend relatively easily. His main concern were "pretenders" such as Perkin Warbeck who claimed to be Richard, Duke of York the younger of the Princes in the Tower.

Henry married Elizabeth of York, thus uniting the houses of York and Lancaster. Elizabeth was the daughter and only surviving heir of Edward IV. This marriage also ensured that Henry's children would have a solid claim to

the throne. Henry had the document declaring Edward IV's children illegitimate repealed soon after his accession.

One of Henry's first acts was to declare himself king and backdate that to the day before the Battle of Bosworth, ensuring that anyone who had taken up arms against him would be guilty of treason. He did however, spare Richard's heir, John de la Pole. However, de la Pole rebelled a few years later and he was killed at the Battle of Stoke.

Henry's goal as king was to maintain peace and create economic prosperity. He was a prudent king who introduced ruthless mechanisms of taxation in order to restore the financial coffers of the country. (Following the death of Edward IV, the treasure had been emptied by his greedy relations.) Henry was not a military man and was not interested in regaining those French properties that had been lost by his predecessors. But he did begin the foundation for a mighty navy that would serve both his son, Henry VIII and his granddaughters. He subsidized the navy and commissioned Europe's first dry dock at Portsmouth. This not only strengthened his control of England's surrounding waterways, but also established trading opportunities.

Henry overhauled the English legal system and established a special court that would work through the legal system and act quickly called, the Court of Star Chamber. Serious disputes involving the use of personal power threatening royal authority were dealt with here. Henry used Justices of the Peace on a large scale. They were appointed for every county to ensure that national laws were obeyed.

In 1502, Henry's eldest son and heir, Arthur, died followed soon after by the death of Elizabeth of York. Arthur had recently married Catherine of Aragon and Henry did not want to lose this powerful match with Spain. He arranged for Papal dispensation allowing his younger son, Henry to marry his elder son's widow. Also included in that dispensation was the proviso that Henry VII himself could marry his daughter-in-law. After receiving this dispensation from Pope Julius, Henry began to have second thoughts and refused to allow the marriage of Catherine to his son to happen during his lifetime. He himself made some effort to re-marry and have more children, but this never came to fruition. He died in 1509 and was succeeded by his son, Henry VIII.

Other players in the race for the throne of England

John of Lancaster, 1st Duke of Bedford (June 20, 1389 — September 14, 1435)



John of Lancaster

John was also known as John Plantagenet, or John “Soft Sword” Plantagenet. He was the third son of Henry IV by Mary de Bohun. He was created Earl of Kendal, Earl of Richmond and Duke of Bedford in 1414 by his brother, Henry V.

When Henry V died in 1422, Bedford vied with his younger brother, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester for control of the crown. Bedford was declared Regent of France as the baby Henry VI was technically heir to that country as well as England.

In 1423 he married Anne, daughter of John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy. When Anne died in 1432, he married Jacquetta of Luxembourg.

Bedford defeated the French on several occasions until Joan of Arc rallied the opposition. In 1431 Bedford had Joan tried and executed at Rouen. He then arranged for Henry VI to be crowned King of France.

He died in Rouen while negotiating the Treaty of Rouen.

Bedford was a very important commissioner of both French and English illuminated manuscripts. Three of his commissioned pieces survive today: the Bedford Hours (located in the British Museum), the Salisbury Breviary (located at the Bibliotheque Nationale Francais) and the Bedford Psalter and Hours (located in the British Museum).

Henry Percy, 1st Earl Northumberland (November 10, 1341 — February 20 1408)

The Percy family had come over from Normandy with William the Conqueror in 1066. They settled in Northumbria and were kept busy keeping the Scots out of England.

Henry Percy was the son of Henry de Percy, 3rd Baron Percy. His mother was Mary of Lancaster, daughter of Henry Plantagenet, 3rd Earl of Leicester, son of Edmund Crouchback, son of Henry III of England.

Percy supported Edward III of England and held high offices in the government during his reign. Percy went on to support King Richard II and was given the title of Marshal of England and created an Earl upon Richard's accession in 1377. When the king granted Percy's chief rival, Ralph Neville, the title of 1st Earl of Westmorland in 1399, Percy defected and supported Henry Bolingbroke in his bid to usurp the throne. When Henry was crowned King Henry IV, Percy was made Constable of England and granted the lordship of the Isle of Man.

However outwardly supporting the King, inwardly Percy was craving rebellion. In 1403, Percy sided with Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March in his rebellion to take over the crown. Percy also conspired with Owain Glyndŵr against the King. This rebellion failed at the Battle of Shrewsbury in which Percy's son, Hotspur, was killed. Since Percy did not directly participate, he was not convicted of treason and executed; rather he lost his job as Constable. In 1405 Percy supported Richard le Scrope, Archbishop of York in yet another rebellion. This time Percy fled to Scotland and his estates were forfeit to the crown. In 1408 Percy invaded England and was killed at the Battle of Bramham Moor.

The current Duke of Northumberland is His Grace Ralph George Algernon Percy, 12th Duke of Northumberland who succeeded to the title in 1995 upon the death of his elder brother. The family's main residence is Alnwick Castle which was built in 1309 by the third Henry Percy and was rebuilt by the fourth Henry Percy. The castle has been used as a film location for Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* movies.

Henry (Hotspur) Percy
(1366 — 1403)

Hotspur was born in Alnwick Castle was the son of Northumberland and Mary Plantagenet, making him a cousin of both Richard II and Henry IV. He was eight years old when he saw his first battle and was knighted at the age of eleven.

Hotspur got his nickname through bravery in battle. But he was hot-headed and had a tendency to act first and think later. He lived in the saddle, diplomacy was not a strong point and he was quick to settle disputes with a broadsword.

In 1388 Hotspur led an attack on a Scottish army and killed its leader, Earl Douglas at the Battle of Otterburn in one-to-one combat. He then took off in pursuit of the Scottish forces and was captured. The Scots ransomed him back to England.

Henry IV realized early on that it was better to keep the Percy family busy fighting for the crown than sitting in their estate plotting a rebellion. He put Hotspur in charge of Cheshire and North Wales so that he would be busy putting down Welsh rebellions. Hotspur and the Percy family became a bit miffed with Henry ignored their pleas for money to cover costs in running armies all over the northwest.

When Hotspur captured five Scottish earls in the Battle of Homildon Hill, Henry refused to allow him to ransom them off and use the money to cover his costs. Henry needed the money for himself and demanded that they be handed over to the crown. The final straw came when Hotspur's brother-in-law, Edmund Mortimer — a claimant to the throne was captured and held ransom by Owain Glyndŵr. Henry refused to pay the ransom.

Hotspur and his Scottish earls marched south to meet Glyndŵr to form an alliance and try and topple Henry IV from the throne. Hotspur met his death on the Battlefield at Shrewsbury. It is said that Henry IV cried when he heard of the death of the young Percy.

In *Henry IV Part 1*, Shakespeare makes Hotspur the same age as Hal when in fact Hotspur was thirty-seven years old and already a national hero at the time of the Battle of Shrewsbury.

Owain Glyndŵr
(1354 — 1416)

Glyndŵr was a Welsh hero and almost mythical figure. Glyndŵr was lord of Glyndyfrdwy, near Corwen. He was a descendent of Welsh princes. Glyndŵr was a member of a prominent English family and lived in London for a while, serving in the king's army.

Richard II was very popular with the Welsh so when Henry took over, Welsh loyalty to the English in Wales faltered.

When Glyndŵr had a tiff with Lord Grey of Ruthin who was a close friend of Henry IV, the king refused to intervene. Glyndŵr took matters into his own hand and made himself a fugitive. Glyndŵr's revolt manifested itself in a series of hit and run raids on English settlements in North East Wales in 1400. The Welsh retreated into the mountains. In 1401 the Tudors, allies of Glyndŵr took Conway Castle and Harry Hotspur besieged it for month before getting it back.

King Henry sent an army into Wales in 1402 to search for Glyndŵr, but the Welsh chieftain evaded them until they went away. Glyndŵr continued to take over more and more of Wales until his peak in 1405.

Within a few years, his success began to dwindle and he lost key strongholds at Aberystwyth and Harlech in 1408-9. It is probable that Glyndŵr was a fugitive in the mountains and is thought to have died in 1416.

Edmund Mortimer
(November 6, 1391 — January 18, 1425)

The heir-presumptive to Richard II's crown was seven-year old Edmund de Mortimer. Edmund was the son of Roger Mortimer, 4th Earl of March - a direct descendent of Edward III through Edward's second surviving son, Lionel of Antwerp. His mother was Eleanor Holland, daughter of Thomas Holland, 2nd Earl of Kent and Alice FitzAlan (daughter of the 10th Earl of Arundel).

The line of succession through King Richard II had no issue, therefore, Edmund's father was next in line for the throne and was named heir presumptive in 1385. Edmund's father died



Owain Glyndŵr

in Ireland in 1398. Mortimer succeeded his father's title at the age of six. Along with the title, he inherited his father's estates and was the new heir to the throne of England.

When Henry usurped the crown in 1399, Edmund (now Earl of March) and his younger brother Roger were kept in custody in Windsor Castle by the king who treated them honorably.

In 1405 they were rescued from Windsor by those opposing Henry's rule. Their uncle, Sir Edmund Mortimer and his brother-in-law, Henry (Hotspur) Percy were in league with Owain Glyndŵr to overthrow Henry IV.

March and his brother were recaptured in 1409 and placed in the care of Henry of Monmouth, Prince of Wales. When Henry became King Henry V in 1413, March was freed and restored to his estates. Roger died several years prior.

March enjoyed the favor of the king even through various plots trying to place him on the throne. The 1415 rebellion known as the Southampton Plot was led by March's brother-in-law and cousin, the Earl of Southampton. March was not even aware of the plot to overthrow the king until the late stages of the preparations. He personally informed the king of the threat against him. Cambridge was ultimately tried and executed for treason.

March; along with the Earl of Cambridge's brother, Edward, Duke of York accompanied Henry V in a campaign of the Hundred Year's War. When Henry V died in August of 1422 and was succeeded by his one-year old son Henry VI of England, Mortimer was a member of the council of the regency.

March died in Ireland in 1425. He left no issue so his titles and estates went to his nephew, Anne Mortimer's son, Richard Plantagenet (later named Duke of York, but styled Earl of March as was his son). When Richard's son was crowned King Edward IV, the earldom was merged into the Crown.

Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester (1344 — 1403)

Thomas Percy was the brother of Henry Percy, 1st Earl of Northumberland and uncle to Hotspur. He was a successful commander having fought valiantly in the wars in France and Spain as admiral of the Northern Fleet to which he was appointed in 1378. He was also a talented diplomat and headed the English embassy to France to work for peace in 1392. Richard II named him Earl of Worcester in 1397 and he accompanied the king to Ireland in 1399 as admiral.

When Thomas returned to England later that year, he joined his brother Henry Percy and his nephew Hotspur in supporting the seizure of the throne by Henry Bolingbroke. In recognition, Henry appointed Thomas *seneschal* or steward, lieutenant of South Wales and tutor to the young prince Henry in 1402.

Worcester surprised the king and joined his brother and nephew in rebellion against Henry IV. He was captured in the Battle of Shrewsbury on July 21st 1403 and was beheaded two days later. ❖

THE FIRST PART of Henry IV's story according to Shakespeare, *Richard II*, deals with Richard II and Henry Bolingbroke and ends with the murder of Richard and the crowning of Bolingbroke as Henry IV. *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* continue the story of Henry's reign as he faces rebellions by those who do not support his claim to the throne.

The second part of the story (which Shakespeare wrote prior to *Henry IV* and *Richard II*) deals with the son of Henry V and Katherine, Henry VI. Henry's claim to the throne is disputed by the Yorkist members of the family led by Richard Plantagenet. Much of *Henry VI Part 1* deals with the quarrels among the English lords leading to the loss of the French territories.

To understand Shakespeare's histories, it is important that we go back a few generations to a character that does not appear in Shakespeare's plays, but is referred to on a regular basis.

Edward III was a legitimate, powerful and greatly loved king who had seven sons. The eldest was **Edward, Prince of Wales** (known as the Black Prince). He predeceased his father and left a son, who became the legitimate king, **Richard II**. It is important for us to realize for both historical reasons and in understanding Shakespeare's history plays, that Richard was lawfully the king. This is never disputed by historians and likewise Shakespeare never disputes this fact in his plays.

Edward III's second son, **William of Hatfield**, died without issue. The third son, **Lionel of Antwerp, Duke of Clarence** had a daughter, **Philippa**, who married **Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March**. This is important as the Mortimer's had a very real claim to the throne when Richard II died. (Because the second son died without having any children, the third son and his heirs are rightfully next in line). Many people believe that the usurpation of the throne by Henry Bolingbroke and the rebellions

that followed his coronation are considered part of the Wars of the Roses — they are not. However, they are the basis for the Yorkist claim to the throne.

Edward III's fourth son, **John of Gaunt** (a character in *Richard II*) started the House of Lancaster. His eldest son, **Henry Bolingbroke**, rebelled and usurped the throne as **Henry IV**. The legitimacy of that claim is the main storyline of *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* and *Henry VI* histories. We must understand that legal justification for the family fight concerned the legitimacy of Henry IV's claim to the throne. If he was not lawfully the king, then the House of Lancaster was not entitled to the throne.

Edward III's fifth son, **Edmund of Langley, Duke of York** started the House of York. When this branch of the family married into the Mortimer family, they established a claim to the throne through **Philippa**, daughter of **Lionel**, the third son.

The sixth son, **William of Windsor**, died in infancy and the seventh son, **Thomas of Woodstock** was the first Duke of Gloucester.

Shakespeare's *Henry V* celebrates the triumphs of Henry IV's son. In this play, **Henry V** married **Katherine of Valois**, daughter of the French king. This woman is a minor character in Shakespeare's version of the story, but she played a major role in the overall history. After Henry V's death, she married Owen Tudor. Their grandson, **Henry Tudor** overthrew **Richard III** ending the Wars of the Roses. He married Elizabeth of York and thus united the Houses of Lancaster and York.

Henry Tudor's claim was questionable. His grandfather was a commoner and his grandmother was a royal widow with no blood ties to the English Royal Family. His mother, Margaret Beaufort was, however, related to the royal family, but through an illegitimate line and therefore not able to stake a claim to the throne.

Richard Plantagenet's (Richard, 3rd Duke of York) claim to the throne was through both of his parents. On his father's side, he was the grandson of Edmund Langley the fifth son of Edward III. His mother was Anne Mortimer, daughter of Philippa and granddaughter of Lionel, third son of Edward III. When Richard II died, the throne should have passed to the eldest heir or surviving family of that heir. As we know, Edward, The Black Prince and his son Richard II were dead and Edward III's third son, Lionel, Duke of Clarence was also deceased, legitimate royal candidates (according to the Yorkists) were the successors of Lionel, Duke of York — third son of Edward III. Since the mother of Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York was a member of the Mortimer family he had a stronger claim to the throne than Henry VI, who is a descendent of John of Gaunt — fourth son to Edward III.

During the Wars of the Roses, Henry VI and his son Edward, Prince of Wales were killed. Richard Plantagenet was also killed; however, the Yorks claimed victory and Richard's eldest son became **Edward IV**. Shakespeare's *Richard III* begins with the coronation of Edward as King.

Edward IV had three brothers: **Edmund, Earl of Rutland** (killed in the fighting); **George, Duke of Clarence** and **Richard, Duke of Gloucester**. Richard wanted to become king and arranged for the murder of his elder brother and the two sons of Edward IV, thus eliminating any male heir who might contest him once Edward IV, who was very ill, died. Richard became **Richard III** — the last Plantagenet king.

Richard wooed **Anne Neville**, the widow of Edward, Prince of Wales, and son of Henry VI. During the course of the *Henry VI* plays, Richard kills Anne's husband, her father and her father-in-law, but she still marries him. They have no children and Richard has no heir.

Richard's chief enemy was **Henry Tudor**. His claim to the throne was pretty weak, but he defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field and married **Elizabeth**, the only living child of Edward IV and is the last member of the Yorkist branch of the Royal Family. He claimed that through his marriage he would unite the two houses of York and Lancaster.

Why does Shakespeare paint **Richard III** to be such a bad guy if the one taking over has only a slight claim to the throne? The reason behind this is simple: Elizabeth I is the queen and Henry Tudor was her grandfather. Henry had to be seen as the great redeemer so the worse Richard could look, the better Henry VII would seem and people would forget that he really had a very weak claim to the throne. This is now known as the 'Tudor Myth'.

Shakespeare had to tread very softly on some issues. To question royal legitimacy could be dangerous. Remember, Elizabeth's claim to the throne was repeatedly challenged on the grounds that her parent's marriage was bigamous and she was illegitimate. Depicting the usurpation of the crown by a noble was also not advised. One performance of *Richard II* just prior to the Essex rebellion led to a serious investigation of Shakespeare's company.

If all this is confusing, consider in a nutshell what Shakespeare is trying to say through his history plays: to usurp legitimate authority through violence and murder may create confusion. ❖