

# What were the Wars of the Roses?

Families can be very complicated. They can be very large and full of people of different ages and personalities. Sometimes certain people in the family don't get on with each other – and there are often step-parents and half-brothers and sisters to deal with too! Also, families usually have different 'sides' to them. There's often a 'mother's side' and a 'father's side' which have different surnames. And sometimes one side might fall out with the other side.

## Mission Objectives

- Recall why England went to war with itself in the fifteenth century.
- Discover why England came to be ruled by Henry Tudor.

### A right royal row

Don't think for a minute that royal families are any different to ordinary families when it comes to falling out with each other. Throughout history, kings have argued (and even fought) with brothers, half-brothers, cousins, wives, and sons. Edward II, for example, was murdered on the orders of his own wife so that their son could be king. And Richard II was put in prison and starved to death by his cousin. The cousin then became King Henry IV!

### Lancasters and Yorks

In the early 1400s, members of England's royal family began arguing amongst themselves over who should be king. The argument involved two different sides of the same family – the York side and the Lancaster side. Both sides of the family were directly related to King Edward III (who ruled England between 1327 and 1377) and both felt they had good reason to rule.

The argument began when Henry VI was King of England. Henry was from the Lancaster side of the family. He was a gentle, religious man who struggled to control the country – and he was a poor military leader too. Tragically, he also suffered from bouts of madness and memory loss, and would sit silently for hours on end in a dark room.



### An opportunity for the Yorks

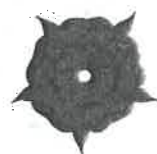
During one of Henry's bouts of insanity, a distant relative from the other side of the family (the Yorks) was chosen to be England's 'Protector' in Henry's place. His name was Richard, Duke of York, and he ruled England until Henry recovered.

When Henry was well again, Richard lost his power... but he wanted it back! So, he gathered an army to fight King Henry. Henry was beaten and Richard became 'Protector' again. Henry was forced into hiding but his wife, Margaret, gathered her own army and beat the Yorks. Richard was killed and Henry was now in control again.

However, Richard's son, Edward, was devastated by his father's death and swore revenge. And so began a series of violent and bloody battles between two sides of the same family – Edward and the Yorks versus Henry and the Lancasters.

## FACT!

The fighting between the York family and the Lancaster family later became known as the Wars of the Roses. This is because the two families chose different coloured roses as emblems for their shields and banners. The Lancasters chose a red rose and the Yorks chose a white one.



### The Wars of the Roses

The two sides fought each other for over 30 years. First one side would win a battle and choose a king to rule the country, then the other side would win and choose their own king. **Source B** shows how each side won lots of different battles.

## Hungry for More?

The Lancaster and York families fought many battles with each side winning their fair share. Pick a battle from the map below. Research it, using the library and the Internet, and produce a brief fact file on it.



**SOURCE A:** King Henry VI came from the House of Lancaster.



**SOURCE B:** A map showing the locations of battles in the Wars of the Roses.

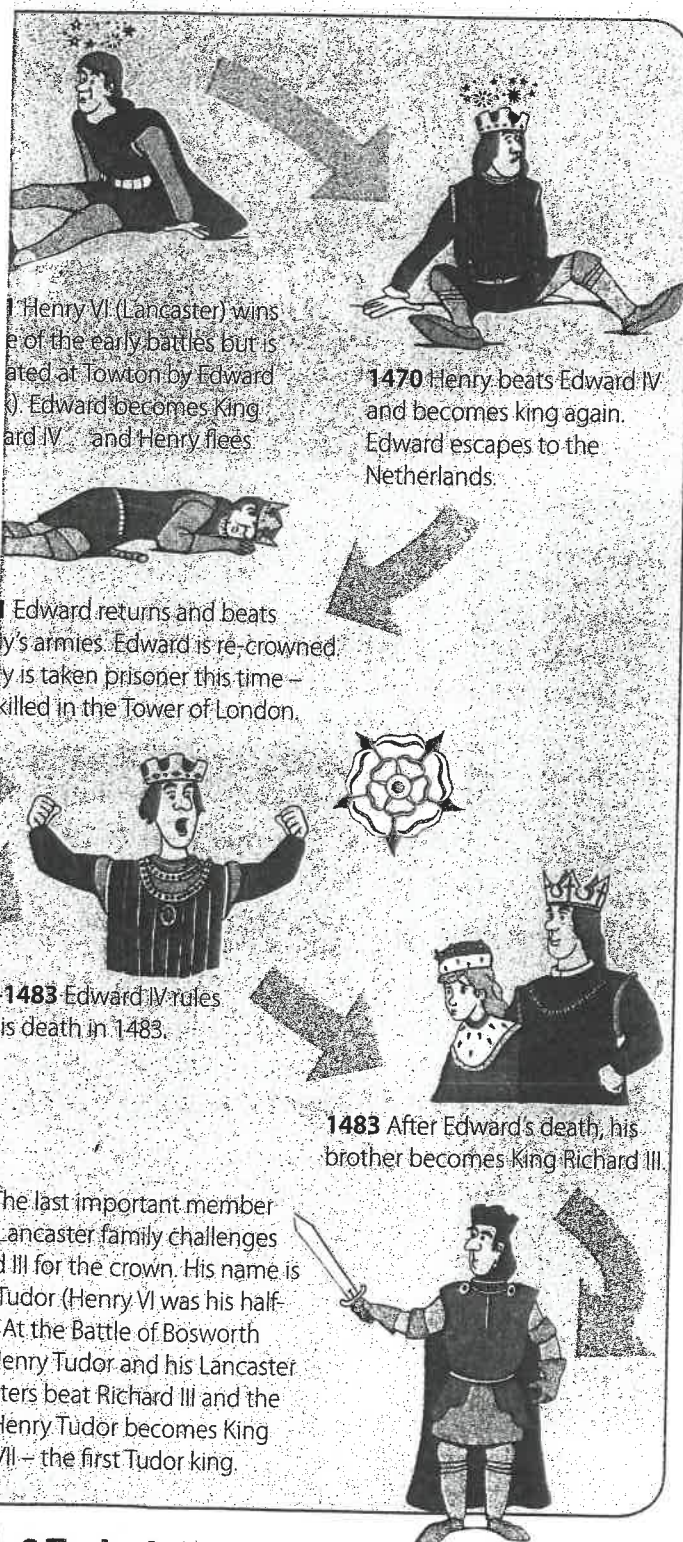
## Work

- Who were the Lancasters?
  - Who were the Yorks?
  - How did the Wars of the Roses get their name?
  - According to the map (**Source B**), how many battles made up the Wars of the Roses?
- In your own words, explain the role played by each of the following people during the Wars of the Roses:
  - Henry VI
  - Richard, Duke of York
  - Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI's wife
  - Edward, Richard of York's son

# B What were the Wars of the Roses?

## I change

a result of each side winning different battles, the throne changed hands many times. Look at the diagram below. It illustrates how the job of 'King of England' swapped between the York family and the Lancaster family during the period known as the Wars of the Roses.

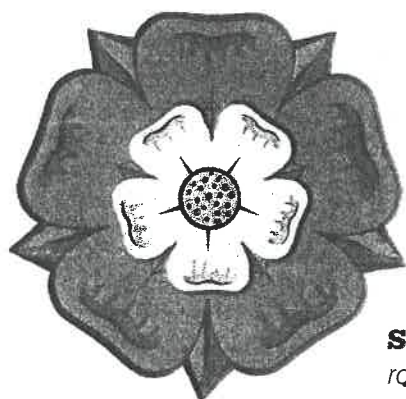


**SOURCE A:** Edward IV was king from 1461 until 1483.



## So what happens next?

Most people thought Henry VII – who was a Lancaster – would soon be attacked and killed by supporters of the York family. But Henry held onto the throne and went on to rule England well. One reason why Henry was able to do this was because he cleverly married Edward IV's daughter, Elizabeth! This meant that the king was from the Lancaster family and the queen was from the York family, so their children would be both Yorks and Lancasters (see **Source C**). The marriage united the two families and ended the wars. The new king even united the York and Lancaster roses to create a new national symbol – the Tudor rose! (See **Source B**.)



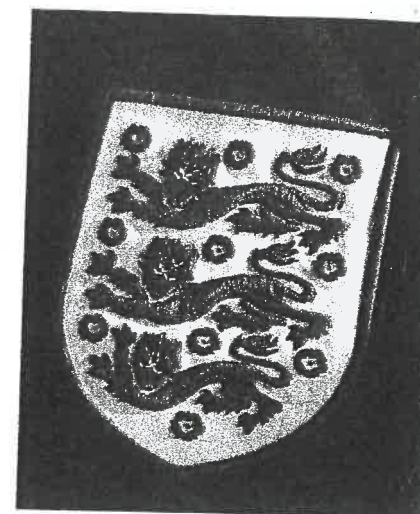
**SOURCE B:** The Tudor rose is a combination of the roses of Lancaster and York.



**SOURCE C:** This double portrait of Elizabeth of York and Henry VII shows the red and white roses of Lancaster and York uniting because of their marriage.

## FACT!

King Richard III's bones were found in 2012, buried underneath a car park which was built on the site of an old church. The bones showed that Richard suffered from a crooked spine and was probably killed by a heavy blow to the head (the back of his skull was sliced off). There were eight wounds on his skull in total. Analysis of the soil around the body showed that he probably suffered from ringworm (a parasite that gets inside your body).



**SOURCE D:** The Tudor rose can still be seen today in all sorts of places. You probably didn't realize that there are ten of them on the England football badge.

## Work

- Copy out and complete the sentences below. You will find the words in the box, but some words won't fit!

The Wars of the \_\_\_\_\_ is the name given to a series of \_\_\_\_\_ for the English. The wars were fought between two families, the \_\_\_\_\_ and the Yorks. Over the years, depending on which family was winning, the throne changed hands many times. The \_\_\_\_\_ who ruled as king during the majority of the wars were \_\_\_\_\_ VI (from the Lancaster family) and \_\_\_\_\_ IV (from the \_\_\_\_\_ family).

Henry	chair	Lancasters	York
Roses	battles	Daffodils	throne
women	Edward	Richard	men

- Who was Henry Tudor?
  - Which battle did Henry Tudor win?
  - Which king did Henry Tudor defeat?
  - After Henry Tudor was crowned King Henry VII, how did he end the fighting between the families of York and Lancaster?
- In 2012, researchers found the body of King Richard III, the York king killed at the Battle of Bosworth by Henry Tudor's army in 1485. This renewed interest in the Wars of the Roses and there were many news reports on the wars on TV. Imagine you've been asked to produce a short report for a children's news programme on the Wars of the Roses. The report is scheduled to last no more than 60 seconds and must contain everything a young historian would need to know.