

# Late Medieval England

England was a small kingdom, which goes far to explain its precocious transition from the state based on personal relations to the institutional-territorial state. Bordered on the west and north by Celtic populations, and with substantial Scandinavian settlement in northern England since the ninth century, its rulers and their continental lands were French. While the English economy was directed mainly toward Germanic Europe, the kings' dynastic interests after the Norman Conquest of 1066 meant political and diplomatic orientation toward France. This involved them in lordship bonds with the French crown and fostered a "traditional Anglo-French paradigm" (Huffman 1998, ix) in historical writing. England's kings were dukes of Normandy until 1204. Through the marriage of Henry II (1154–89) to Eleanor duchess of Aquitaine, the English monarchy also ruled considerable territory in southern France. Thus Philip II "Augustus" (1180–1223) of France used the pretext of the defiance by King John (1199–1216) of a summons to his court to confiscate his fiefs. This was followed by more piecemeal losses in the desultory wars of Henry III (1216–72) with Louis IX of France (1226–70). The Treaty of Paris (1259) left only Gascony (the part of Aquitaine centered on Bordeaux) to the English crown.

The loss of Normandy made John the first English king since 1100 who resided mainly in England. Not coincidentally, he was also the first who warred with his subjects over domestic issues. The English rulers had experimented with broad-based taxation even in the twelfth century, for monetary inflation was eroding the real purchasing power of the incomes that they derived from land rents and other domain sources. A sense of English national identity was developing in the thirteenth century, and the nobles resented Henry III for the favorites on whom he lavished patronage. They were less concerned with the domination of England's export trade by foreign merchants, but they were upset that the king took loans from

them that were secured on English assets. Henry promised enormous sums to the papacy for aid in securing the crowns of the Holy Roman Empire and Sicily respectively for his younger brother Richard of Cornwall and his younger son Edmund (Huffman 2000, 277–311; Roche 1966). Pro- and anti-royal factions developed in the major cities in the early 1260s, making the noble quarrel with the king a national matter. The nobles' leader was Simon de Montfort, the king's brother-in-law and a first-generation immigrant from France. For fifteen months in 1264–5 Montfort had custody of the king and ruled in his name. Montfort's defeat and death at Evesham (August 4, 1265) was followed by a gradual abatement of hostilities.

### **Edward I (1272–1307)**

Prestwich 1980, 1–78; Prestwich 1988

Few today would accord Edward I the accolades of a previous generation of historians. His statutes, which have been the basis of most laudatory evaluations of his reign, will be discussed in chapter 6. His heritage in foreign policy was problematical. English diplomacy with the German emperors remained active through the period of Henry III, and Edward, like his successors, was under the misperception that the imperial title conveyed power as well as authority. He negotiated for a marriage of his daughter with a son of the German king Rudolf of Habsburg, and other daughters were married in the 1290s to Rhenish princes; but by then the emperors were south German and politically impotent in anything of major concern to the English, whose interests in Germany were increasingly commercial and thus were directed toward individual cities (Huffman 1998, 38; Huffman 2000, 302, 306–7; Trautz 1961, 181).

Edward I involved England in wars with the Welsh, the Scots and the French. His attempt to centralize Britain under English dominance was revolutionary. English settlement and cultural influence proceeded, generally peaceably, in a basically southeast to northwest direction through the 1260s, but the strategy changed as Edward attempted to hasten the process and bring Wales and Scotland directly under the English crown (Davies 2000). Edward was generally successful in Wales, where the Statute of Rhuddlan (1284) placed the country under English control and introduced the shire system and English law, making some exceptions for Welsh tradition (Musson 2001, 12). The English founded towns in Wales that were restricted to English colonists, who were to control the natives, not assimilate with them. The campaigns cost immense sums.

The Welsh language persisted, and Welsh rebellions occasionally embarrassed the English later (Walker 1990).

While the conquest of Wales was a qualified success, and the country annexed as a “land” to England, the campaigns against the Scots antagonized a neighbor with whom England had generally enjoyed friendly relations. Although King Alexander III (1249–86) maintained correct bonds with the English, he also rekindled diplomatic links with Norway that went back to the Viking age. He made good Scottish claims to the Isle of Man and the Hebrides and married his daughter to King Eric II of Norway. When Alexander was killed in 1286, his heiress was a granddaughter, Margaret, the “maid of Norway.” Eager to link the Scottish and English crowns, Edward I insisted on his right as the Scottish heiress’ overlord to determine her marriage. He accordingly affianced her to his son, but she was killed in 1290 in a shipwreck en route to England. Had it happened, this marriage would have involved England, Scotland and perhaps eventually Norway in a union that would have changed north European dynastic orientations fundamentally.

With the ruling house of Scotland extinct, Edward I claimed the right to decide which claimant to the throne was most suitable. In 1292 he opted for John Balliol, who was considered an English puppet in Scotland. To consolidate his position at home, Balliol distanced himself from the English and in late 1295 entered what in Scottish history would be known as the “Auld Alliance” with the French. In 1296 Edward devastated southern Scotland. Balliol abdicated, and Edward declared himself king of Scotland. But he was unable to seize the Scottish leaders, and in 1297 he resumed the attack with an immense army, perhaps half of whom were Welsh mercenaries. A Scottish force led by the squire William Wallace decimated the English at Stirling Bridge, but the English won a major victory at Falkirk in 1298. Wallace was betrayed to the English and executed in 1305. But the English were never able to defeat the Scots decisively. Leadership of the resistance passed to Robert Bruce, who proclaimed himself king in 1306. From 1311 he systematically raided northern England, and in 1314 a Scottish force defeated an English army twice its size at Bannockburn. By the Treaty of Northampton (1328) Edward III’s regents recognized Bruce as king. The English were not reconciled to the loss of Scotland. Although later Scottish kings spent considerable time in English prisons, there was constant raiding on the frontier. Berwick changed hands thirteen times before it finally fell to the English in 1482. The Scots usually coordinated efforts against the English with their French allies. The English won most battles but were only able to control the Scottish lowlands (Barrell 2000; Barrow 1981; Grant 1984).

Relations with the French were also troubled. Since the right of vassals to call on an overlord to reverse a judgment of an immediate lord was generally conceded, the French encouraged appeals from English courts in Gascony to the royal court at Paris. War erupted in 1294, and in 1297 Edward I allied with the count of Flanders, who simultaneously renounced his homage to the French, and promised military aid. By autumn a French army had occupied Flanders. A truce confirming the *status quo ante* was made with the French, then extended until a “peace” in 1303. Good relations were supposedly sealed with the marriage in 1308 of Isabelle, daughter of Philip IV the Fair of France (1285–1314) to Edward II of England, one of the most catastrophic exercises in hymeneal diplomacy of the entire medieval period.

The wars of the 1290s in Scotland, Gascony and Flanders, a Welsh rebellion and money fiefs to German princes probably cost about £750,000 (Prestwich 1988, 400). Except for Wales, no firm result was in sight. On November 5, 1297 a group of dissident nobles forced Edward I to issue the “Confirmation of the Charters” (Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest of 1217) and agree that a subsidy once accepted did not become a permanent authorization by the “community of the realm.” The specific tax mentioned was the wool subsidy, which had been levied in 1275 at an assembly called a “parliament,” but Edward I had unilaterally sextupled it to 40s. by 1297. Although the precise breadth of the Confirmation is debated, it was a major step toward limiting the king’s right to take extraordinary taxation.

## **Edward II (1307–1327)**

Fryde 1979; Prestwich 1980, 79–114

Edward I left a military debacle and an empty treasury for his successor. Edward II was distrusted by the English nobles, who imposed a restrictive coronation oath on him, requiring him to abide by laws and customs as determined by the “community of your realm.” They objected to his bisexuality and liaisons with and financial patronage of French “favorites.” In 1311 nobles led by Thomas of Lancaster, the king’s first cousin and his heir apparent until the birth of the future Edward III in 1312, forced Edward II to accept ordinances that required the king to use established organs of government, not bypass the Exchequer, and remove foreign favorites. The Ordinances of 1311 required two “parliaments” per year and forced the king to obtain the consent of the barons in Parliament for major matters such as declarations of war and the appointment of high officials. After the English defeat at Bannockburn in 1314, however, the king slowly regained leverage, used Lancaster’s volcanic personality to drive a wedge between

him and the other nobles, and in 1322 defeated the barons at Boroughbridge. The Statute of York, issued by Parliament in late 1322, nullified the Ordinances of 1311 as an illegal restriction on royal sovereignty and declared that all statutes had to be approved by Parliament.

Edward II had sired four children by his wife Isabelle, but his preference for males now reasserted itself. He bestowed attention and grants on his new favorites. Hostilities continued with France, expressed in trade embargoes, piracy and occasional skirmishes on the Gascon frontier. In 1324 Edward sent his queen to Paris to negotiate with her brother, King Charles IV (1322–8). The crown prince joined her, and she soon became the mistress of the Welsh exile Roger Mortimer. Isabelle and Mortimer invaded England with troops from Hainault in September 1326 and were joined by enough English nobles to make the king's position untenable. There was no legal precedent for removing a king. Articles of deposition were read in Parliament in January 1327, but the rebels decided that abdication was a more prudent course and convinced the king to renounce his throne voluntarily. A regency was established for young Edward III, which he ended by a coup in 1330 (Musson 2001, 240).

### **Edward III (1327–1377)**

Prestwich 1980, 165–300; Waugh 1991

Edward III's reign is associated with the "Hundred Years War" (1337–1453), which ended with the surrender of all English-held land in France except Calais. The Capetian dynasty in France died out in the male line in 1328. The only nephew of the late king who was of age to be considered for rule was Edward III of England. To preclude this, an assembly of nobles awarded the crown to Philip of Valois, son of Philip IV's younger brother. The coup was justified after the fact by a forged "Salic" law, which held that a crown could not be held by or transmitted to a male through a female, although this did not hold for other titles or forms of property. The English initially accepted this, but tensions mounted during the 1330s. A break came in 1337, when Philip VI (1328–50) of France announced the confiscation of Aquitaine.

Although the Hundred Years War dominated English foreign policy for over a century, it is peripheral to the theme of this book. First, it was not fought continuously. There were open hostilities between 1337 and 1360, but even this period was punctuated by truces. Nine years of peace and French recovery followed, then a rapid French reconquest between 1369 and 1375. For the next forty years, until Henry V invaded France

in 1415, the two were at sword's point but rarely in open combat. After 1415 the hostilities were more or less continuous until the English capitulation. Yet England had to be on a defensive footing at all times. The French threat, complicated by the Scottish presence on England's northern border, was a constant danger, particularly in the late 1380s.

As early as 1337 Edward III was building an alliance network in the Low Countries and sending troops there. Flanders was the key to the English strategy. By the late twelfth century the links between the two were based on massive Flemish purchases of English wool, which was used in the textiles on which the economies of the major Flemish cities except Bruges were largely based. The counts of Flanders and many nobles held money fiefs of the English crown, as a pro-English party was built in Flanders. Although self-interest thus favored cooperation with the English, western and southern Flanders was a fief held of the French crown, and Count Louis of Nevers (1323–46) was a French partisan. To force Louis into an English alliance, Edward III in 1336 imposed an embargo on English wool exports to Flanders. In early 1338 Jacob Van Artevelde came to power as chief captain of Ghent, the largest city of Flanders, and moved toward an English alliance. The count left Flanders for Paris, the embargo was lifted, and Ghent dominated Bruges and Ypres. In early 1340 Edward was crowned king of France at Ghent. His Low Country coalition then mounted a siege of Tournai. Its failure forced the truce of Esplechin (September 1340), which was prolonged to 1346.

The diplomatic preparations for the war strained the resources of the crown. The English kings had the most sophisticated system of tax assessment and collection in Europe, but they could not support an endeavor of this magnitude. Parliament approved several subsidies between 1336 and 1341, which were supplemented by tithes on clerical incomes and enormous loans from Florentine banking houses, on which Edward defaulted in 1343. In 1336 he had given the wool export to a group of native English merchants in return for a loan of £200,000. They were to be repaid by assignments on the wool excise, which was now raised to 40s. per sack. When collections were slow, Edward seized the wool export, then double-crossed the merchants by the Flemish embargo, which prohibited them from selling to their normal best customers. When they could not pay the sums that he insisted on, he prosecuted several of them. By 1347 his English lenders were bankrupt. Unrest in Parliament mounted, but with the truces taxation after 1341 returned to more normal levels, and Edward had good relations with Parliament until the mid-1370s.

The failure of the campaign of 1340 dissolved the alliance system in the Netherlands. In 1341 Emperor Lewis of Bavaria allied with Philip VI and

revoked Edward's imperial vicariate in the Low Countries (Trautz 1961, 305–9). In 1348 several German electoral princes chose Edward III as king of the Romans (on this title, see chapter 4) against the pro-French Charles IV of Luxembourg/Bohemia, but Edward did not pursue his candidacy (Arnold 1994, 77). The next major military engagement in the war came in 1346. After the truce expired, the French cornered a small English force, led by Edward III himself, at Crécy-en-Ponthieu and forced a battle on August 24, 1346. The English fought dismounted and decimated the mounted French knights with longbows. But the English were so over-extended that they were unable to capitalize on their victory. They simply fought their way back toward the coast, taking Calais. Another truce followed, and the "Great Death" of 1348–50 stopped most fighting. Hostilities were resumed in late 1355, followed by another English victory at Poitiers (September 19, 1356), under the command of the king's eldest son, Edward "the Black Prince." The French king John II (1350–64) and many nobles were captured and held for ransom.

At some point, probably shortly after the bankruptcy of 1341, Edward III realized the impossibility of becoming king of France, although he continued to use the claim as a bargaining tool. His new war aim became clear with the Treaty of Brétigny (May 8, 1360). Ransoms for the French captives were negotiated, but most importantly, Edward agreed to relinquish his claim on the French throne in return for the cession of a much-enlarged Gascony in full sovereignty, without the complication of a feudal link to the French crown. The treaty was never implemented: neither side wanted to "go first." The terms of the treaty, however, remained a benchmark to which the English would return as their war goal into the period of Henry V (Curry 1993, 54–69).

The treaty had awarded the English lands that they did not yet control. The king invested the Black Prince with the title "Prince of Aquitaine," with an administration in Bordeaux. His often brutal regime cost the English support in southern France. Parliament voted no lay subsidies between 1359 and 1371. The French continued to campaign, and rebuilt their armies. Diplomatic changes favored the French. The English backed the losing side in a civil war in Castile. More importantly, Edward III lost a bid to gain the hand of the heiress of the Flemish count for his younger son, Edmund of Langley (chapter 2). Instead of a pro-English beachhead on the northern frontier of France, a cornerstone of English diplomacy since the late twelfth century was in ruins.

When the French reopened hostilities in 1369, the English offered little resistance. The truce of 1375 left the English with Calais and Gascony in roughly its borders of 1327, not 1360. The immense war

effort had gained little else. Edward III's position at home deteriorated. After the death of his queen in 1369 he had come under the domination of a mistress who had ties to the court party dominated by John of Gaunt, Edward's third son and the rival of his elder brother the Black Prince. In 1376 the "Good" Parliament impeached several royal advisors, but later in the year, after the death of the Black Prince, the Gaunt party returned and controlled the court until the king's death (June 21, 1377).

## **Richard II (1377–1399)**

Saul 1997

The new king, the elder son of the Black Prince, was aged 10 and thus subject in his early years to forces over which he had little control. England was still on a war footing despite the truce, and taxation remained high. The Scottish frontier was a problem; particularly in the 1380s Richard campaigned there frequently. Although John of Gaunt, the oldest surviving royal uncle, was unpopular and was rumored to have designs on the throne, he was Richard's strongest supporter. John was excluded from the regency, but he and his numerous clients remained very important behind the scenes. He also had dynastic interests in Castile, which he pursued with financial help from the English crown (Goodman 1992).

The first half of Richard II's reign was defined by the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 (Dobson 1981; Dunn 2002; Hilton and Aston 1984). The rebellion was ostensibly provoked by an important experiment with the tax structure. The "lay subsidy," whose rates were finalized in 1334, was a parliamentary percentage tax that was broadly similar to regional taxation throughout the north (chapter 5). England was exceptional only in its high level and frequency of taxation. Parliament supplemented this with poll or head taxes in 1377, 1379 and 1380. That of 1377 was the most "regressive," taxing every married couple and single person over age 14 *4d.* regardless of income or wealth, exempting only beggars. The tax of 1379 provided an elaborate scale based on social rank. The poll tax of 1380 was similar to the formula of 1377, save that it ended the division of liability for married couples and tripled the rate.

The poll tax not only hit the poor disproportionately but also the densely populated counties of the southeast, where the revolt was concentrated. The young king displayed remarkable bravery in negotiating with the rebels, even if only to set them up for defeat. Although initially inclined to support repression, the Commons in 1382 agreed with the king on a general



amnesty except for the leaders of the rebellion, as local communities had become so divided by the judicial condemnations. Thereafter Richard's fortunes deteriorated. The Commons pressed for reform of corruption, including court venality, livery and maintenance (chapter 6) and lords' disrespect for the law. Richard alienated Commons and Lords alike by elevating a group of younger nobles who were friendly to him but lacked appropriate family and military credentials. Richard was much younger than the greater nobles, and, in contrast to his grandfather, he was a non-fighter by nature who handled them badly. Factional rivalries erupted at London within the merchant oligarchy led by the fishmongers and the grocers.

In 1382 Richard married Anne of Bohemia, sister of the Bohemian and German king, Wenceslas, probably to gain an alliance that would be useful in the Low Countries and to present a united front against religious "schismatics," since both England and the empire supported the Roman Pope Urban VI against his rival in Avignon in the "Great Schism" of the papacy that began in 1378. The English pursued diplomatic initiatives, but negotiations were discontinued in 1383. The English in that year used the pretext of a "crusade" against adherents of the Avignon pope to intervene in a civil war that had raged in Flanders since 1379, but they were unable to help the cities against the count, whose death in 1384 brought Philip duke of Burgundy to power (chapter 2). Never again would even a major Flemish city, let alone the count, ally with the English, although trading ties remained strong.

In 1385 Richard II led an inconclusive expedition against the Scots. John of Gaunt left for Spain in early 1386. Late that year the "Wonderful" Parliament impeached several royal councilors and appointed a committee to oversee reform of the government. Its commission would expire in November 1387. Richard had to accept it and was warned that a king who tried to govern contrary to law and the advice of Parliament could be deposed. In late 1387 Richard perambulated the realm, raising troops. He established his own band of retainers, the Society of the White Hart, since the crown did not have a standing army. He got legal opinions from sympathetic justices that the restrictions imposed on him by the Wonderful Parliament had been illegal. This led to a military confrontation, which Richard lost at Radcot Bridge on December 20, 1387.

The "Merciless" Parliament of 1388 was dominated by lords and particularly by five "Lords Appellant," so called because they "appealed" the actions of the king and his advisors. Their leader was the king's youngest uncle, Thomas duke of Gloucester, and their number included the earls of Arundel and Warwick and Henry Derby, the eldest son of John of Gaunt. New threats of deposition forced the king to acquiesce in the

impeachment for treason and execution of his advisors and other supporters, including some wealthy Londoners whose only crime had been lending money to the crown. The Lords Appellant did their cause no good by taking a gift from Parliament of £20,000 to compensate them for in saving the realm from traitors. They were also unable to control the military situation; the Scots defeated the English at Otterburn in August 1388.

The Good Parliament of 1376 had not opposed the monarchy *per se*, for it was concerned with individual acts of corruption. The Commons initiated the proceedings, and the Lords cooperated. In 1386 and 1388, by contrast, it was a power struggle between the king and certain nobles. There was no claim that the king was weak or incompetent, but rather that he was wrong. The magnates, not the Commons, held the initiative (Goodman 1971). Given this, the king's rapid recovery was remarkable. On May 3, 1389 Richard without incident announced that he would appoint his own councilors in the future and dismissed the Lords Appellant. Eight years of personal rule began. The king's personality had always been an issue, and from the 1390s he acted and spoke increasingly in terms suggestive of despotism. He continued to rely on the Society of the White Hart, which by 1397 had several hundred men, most of them substantial persons in their communities. He confiscated the liberties of the city of London in 1392 on grounds of an invented infraction, then required the city to pay a fine to get its privileges restored.

Richard seems to have understood the weakness of England's position in regard to the French crown, but he linked a change of direction to domestic concerns. John of Gaunt had returned to England in late 1389. In 1392, evidently to pressure the French government, Richard enfeoffed John with Aquitaine. In 1394 Anne of Bohemia died, and Richard began negotiations with Rupert, Count Palatine of the Rhine, whose allies would depose his brother-in-law Wenceslas in Germany in 1400, and other west German princes who were threatened by the growth of Burgundian power (Reitemeier 1999, 183). In 1396 he married Isabelle, the 7-year-old daughter of King Charles VI (1380–1422) of France. A secret clause obligated the French to give Richard military support should he need it against his enemies in England. A twenty-eight-year truce was declared, and the parties agreed simultaneously to withdraw obedience from "their" popes to end the schism.

Richard was mentioned as a candidate for the imperial throne in 1397, taking the prospect seriously enough to give White Hart badges to all non-Luxembourg electors. Yet the king stopped negotiations before year's end, realizing that he needed Rupert's alliance against Burgundy and France (Reitemeier 1999, 199–212). In 1397 Richard struck at his enemies. After rejecting a Commons petition criticizing expenditures of

the royal household, he reinstated judges who had been condemned in 1388 for their judgments of the previous year. Three Appellants, including Gloucester, were either exiled, imprisoned or killed. The others, Derby and Mowbray (now the duke of Norfolk), remained at liberty until 1398, when Richard exiled them for ten years. Richard called a parliament that annulled all actions of the Merciless Parliament. When John of Gaunt died in early 1399, Richard converted Derby's exile into perpetual banishment and confiscated the Lancastrian inheritance. Seeing a threat to their position and property from an arbitrary king, the nobles joined Henry when he returned to England from France with a small force. Richard inexplicably went to Ireland to campaign during this crisis. When he returned, he was imprisoned and put on trial.

The trial and deposition of Richard II contains several interesting and not entirely consistent features. First, when presented with a bill detailing his malfeasance, Richard admitted the abuses and abdicated. Parliament then, to avoid allegations that it was condemning an innocent man, listed the abuses and declared that the king should be deposed on the basis of them. The throne was declared vacant, and Henry Derby, first cousin of the childless king, claimed the throne by hereditary right. He was then acclaimed king by the Parliament. Richard II died a few months later, allegedly by self-starvation. The language of the texts left unanswered questions. Was the king deposed by Parliament or did he abdicate? Was Henry Derby made king by Parliament or did he inherit the crown? If the former, the English Parliament was continuing its tradition of arrogating rights over its prince that no other assembly in Europe had. If the latter, Henry's dynastic claim was unclear.

## **Henry IV (1399–1413)**

Allmand 1992; Kirby 1970

Henry IV was the leader of a noble faction. The rivalries of the Neville and Percy families troubled northern England, diverted the attention of the king and the Prince of Wales, and gave the new Stuart dynasty in Scotland opportunities for border raiding. The two families were still feuding in the 1450s, with the Nevilles supporting York and the Percies Lancaster. The Welsh uprising of Owain Glendower was a serious problem for several years after 1405.

Even after nearly a century of heavy taxation the kings still depended to a great extent on income from their domain. The extent of Henry IV's personal possessions was less than those of Richard II, and expenses

continued high. The French war remained in abeyance. In return for subsidies, Henry IV had to promise to appoint his officials with the consent of Parliament (a concession that did not survive his reign), and that money bills would originate in the Commons rather than the Lords (a concession that did). Henry suffered the onset of a debilitating illness in 1408. The royal council was dominated by Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury and chancellor, and Prince Henry, who wanted more money for the war with France. In 1409 Thomas Beaufort, the king's half-brother, replaced Arundel as chancellor.

Henry's diplomacy was conditioned by maneuvers against the French. Seeing an opportunity presented by the Union of Kalmar of 1397 (chapter 3), he married his daughter Philippa in 1406 to Eric of Pomerania, king of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Henry hoped to gain leverage against the Hanse, the league controlled by north German cities, and obtain unimpeded access for English merchants in the Baltic. England and Denmark remained broadly allied, but England gained no significant diplomatic advantage. Philippa died in 1430, never returning to England (Ferguson 1972, 86).

The English initially hoped that the future Henry V would marry Katharina, Eric's sister, and if the marriage of Eric and Philippa produced no children, one of Henry V's and Katharina's children would become king of the Scandinavian Union. This was part of a broader effort to draw the Nordic countries into a coalition against France. But Katharina married the son of the new German king, Rupert of the Palatinate. Henry and Rupert shared the problematic distinction of titles of dubious legality and undertook negotiations that eventuated in the marriage in 1402 of Henry's daughter Blanche to Rupert's son Lewis; but the Germans refused to confirm this with a political alliance, probably because Henry never paid her dowry completely (Reitemeier 1999, 212–50). When Rupert died in 1410, the archbishop of Cologne hoped to entice Henry IV or one of his sons to seek the German crown, but the other princes knew that only a Luxembourg had sufficient prestige to take the position (Hoensch 1996, 148).

During Henry IV's period the deterioration of the domestic situation in France presented the English with a splendid opportunity. Piracy in the English Channel became a major strain on relations with the French. Since 1392 King Charles VI had suffered intermittent periods of insanity. Factions formed around the king's younger brother, Charles duke of Orléans, and his uncle, Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy. Rivalry became vendetta in 1407 with the assassination of Orléans on orders of Philip's heir John the Fearless. Both sides sought allies at the English court.

## Henry V (1413–1422)

Allmand 1992; Curry 1993, 94–109

Henry opened his reign by demanding implementation of the Treaty of Brétigny, to be sealed by his marriage to Charles VI's daughter Catherine. Her dowry would consist of all the lands promised in 1360, together with the major provinces of northern France under the same terms and the unpaid residue of King John II's ransom. When this was rejected, Henry invaded. But although conditions at the French court remained chaotic, he could not move far inland. On October 25, 1415 a French force trapped the English at Agincourt, near Calais. The French again made a cavalry charge across a rain-soaked battlefield against dismounted English longbowmen. Although the French army was at least three times the size of the English, Agincourt was a total English victory. At least 5,000 French troops died, and the prisoners included Charles duke of Orléans.

The battle of Agincourt has entered English legend, but its short-term impact was muted. The English lacked enough troops to besiege Paris and accordingly retreated through safe territory to Calais, whence Henry V returned to England. The German king Sigismund hoped to arbitrate between the sides in 1416, going first to Paris and then to England for several months. In the Treaty of Canterbury (August 15, 1416) Sigismund and Henry pledged to aid each other regarding land now occupied by the French and gave reciprocal rights to each other's subjects. Sigismund's real reason for shifting from arbitration to an English alliance was to get English support for church reform before the election of a new pope at the Council of Constance; Henry V's aim was to get German military help against France. Both were disappointed; the French understandably saw this as directed against them, and Sigismund's mediation ended (Ferguson 1972, 108–19; Hoensch 1996, 231–43; Kintzinger 2000, 96–112, 118–35). Thereafter the English had little contact with the German court. Richard III in 1484 made a point of sitting at table with the German visitor Nicholas von Popplau, bombarding his guest with questions about the emperor and German lords and their customs, behavior and virtues (Radzikowski 1998, 55).

Henry campaigned inconclusively in France in the following years, but after 1417 only one of the many sons of Charles VI remained alive. If he died, the heir to the throne would be Charles of Orléans, who languished in prison in England. Since Charles refused to recognize Henry V as king of France, his potential prominence in France precluded English acceptance of a ransom for him. John the Fearless of Burgundy became *de facto*

ruler of France by seizing Paris on May 29, 1418, but the dauphin escaped. The English took Rouen, the capital of Normandy, on January 19, 1419, but Burgundy and the dauphin did not make common cause against the English until July. But John the Fearless was assassinated on September 19, 1419 on the orders of the Armagnac (Orléans) party, evidently with the collusion of the dauphin, in retaliation for the killing of Louis of Orléans in 1407. John's young successor, Philip the Good of Burgundy, made an open alliance with Henry V.

As late as June 1419 Henry V was willing to renounce his claims to the French throne in return for implementation of the Treaty of Brétigny, but the assassination of John the Fearless gave him such an opportunity that he raised his demands to include the throne. Since the Burgundians controlled Paris, the English entered the city peacefully in early 1420. The Treaty of Troyes (May 21, 1420) provided for the marriage of Henry V and Catherine of Valois, stipulating that at Charles VI's death Henry V would become the new French king, to be succeeded by his heirs by Catherine.

The Treaty of Troyes ignored several problems, not the least of which was that the dauphin set up a separate government at Bourges, although he did not attempt to expand his base until 1429. Henry V spent the next year trying to consolidate his power in northern France, specifically Normandy; south of the Loire he could count only on Gascony. English rule in France depended on the Burgundian alliance, with a power base in the north and east and in the Low Countries. The optimistic anticipations of the Treaty of Troyes came to naught when Henry V died on August 31, 1422, followed by Charles VI of France on October 21. The supposed heir to both kingdoms had been born December 6, 1421.

## **Henry VI (1422–1461/71)**

Griffiths 1981; Storey 1986

The accession of a baby to the throne created an emergency at home, but the defeat of France was so total that only from 1429 were English problems abroad critical. A regency was established, led by the king's two uncles. The duke of Bedford, the elder and more astute, was England's best general and handled foreign affairs, while the duke of Gloucester managed the domestic side. Bedford fought the French for control in the north but won no major victories after the battle of Verneuil in 1424. He married the sister of Philip the Good of Burgundy, undoing some of the damage to the Burgundian alliance done by Gloucester (chapter 2). Bedford had

consolidated control sufficiently that by 1428 the English besieged Orléans, the key to the Loire valley, as a prelude to further campaigns in the south. French military fortunes were revived by Joan of Arc. After being given a military command by Charles VII (1422–61), Joan lifted Bedford's siege of Orléans, then cut a path through the English-held north to Reims, where a coronation of Charles VII as king was held. In response, the English rushed Henry VI to Paris for a coronation in 1431.

The tide of military operations had turned. The Burgundians made peace with Charles VII at Arras (September 21, 1435), and Paris fell to the Valois in 1436. After Bedford's death in 1435 the erratic Gloucester dominated the English court. With Burgundy now an enemy, Gloucester made a successful raid into Flanders in 1436 that gained him prestige at home. English diplomacy in the eastern Low Countries and the Rhineland was directed toward neutralizing Burgundy (Ferguson 1972, 59–74).

In late 1436 Henry VI attained his majority. He was well educated and a patron of education, but he lacked discretion and acceded to all requests made of him. The English had raised troops since the beginning of the war by, among other techniques, granting pardons to convicted felons who would serve in the armies. Henry VI granted pardons for no discernible reason (Bellamy 1973, 196–7). Disorder mounted in the countryside as troops returned, particularly after 1450. Henry bestowed patronage lavishly, alienating crown revenues while commanders were paying their troops out of their own pockets; Richard duke of York was £38,000 in debt on behalf of the crown for his service in Normandy in 1446 alone. By 1443 the royal council rarely met. Two parties developed: Gloucester wanted to pursue the war in France with vigor, while the duke of Suffolk saw that the English were overextended in France and should take the best terms they could get. Although Suffolk was right, his undistinguished ancestry (from a merchant family of Hull) and his penchant for enriching himself through access to the impressionable king made him a target for malcontents. Gloucester died in 1447 while under indictment for treason, in a conspiracy evidently engineered by Suffolk.

In 1445 Suffolk arranged the marriage of Henry VI with Margaret of Anjou, Charles VII's niece. The English secretly agreed to withdraw from the county of Maine by 1448. When they did not, the French seized it. This was followed by an invasion of Normandy, which offered very little resistance before falling in 1450. Gascony, where there was more support for the English cause, held out until 1451. Thereafter the English recovered the city of Bordeaux for a year; but after it fell in October 1453 the English were left only with Calais, the location of their wool staple, which they held until 1558.

By 1450 the crown was nearly £400,000 in debt, several times its normal annual income. Tempers were raw over the military catastrophe. In March 1450 the king, after refusing to entertain a parliamentary petition accusing Suffolk of treason, agreed to a five-year exile for misdeeds that were not criminal. The ship carrying Suffolk to France was intercepted, and he was summarily executed. A rebellion erupted in Kent led by the squire Jack Cade. His men drew up a manifesto on June 4 calling for a return to the rule of law, demanding that the king dismiss unworthy advisors and that he be governed by the advice of his natural councilor, the duke of York. The document added that the king was unable to rule without good advice, for his mental incapacity was an open secret by this time. The manifesto was couched in language suggesting a parliamentary petition, but the rebels were stopped before they could present it. Cade lost control of his bands, and he was killed in July while resisting arrest (Carpenter 1997; Loades 1973, 29–40).

The English court descended into chaos. Suffolk's successor in the royal favor was the duke of Somerset. Richard of York felt threatened by the ascent of the Suffolk–Somerset party, which had links to the Beaufort family. The Lancastrian dynasty was descended from the eldest legitimate son of John of Gaunt, the fourth son of Edward III. John had also sired four children, whose family name was Beaufort, by his long-term mistress Katherine Swynford. He married Katherine in 1396, and the Beauforts were legitimized in 1407 by Parliament, but it excluded them from the royal succession. Their most powerful member was Henry Beaufort, bishop of Winchester, who amassed enormous wealth that he used to make loans to the crown and in other ways to advance his family. The granddaughter of his elder brother John Beaufort, duke of Somerset, married Edmund Tudor and was the mother of King Henry VII.

On the legitimate side, the Lancastrians' claims to the throne were being called into question. Richard of York was descended on his father's side from the fifth son of Edward III but on his mother's side from the second, and thus from the elder brother of John of Gaunt, progenitor of the royal Lancastrians. Neither party was associated with a program of government or an ideology: they were family-based factions whose interests were personal and whose goals were patronage and control of royal policy.

As rivalries intensified, Henry VI had a mental collapse in August 1453, only recovering his senses around Christmas 1454. In October 1453 the queen gave birth to their only child, Edward. In 1455 open warfare erupted at the first battle of St. Albans, where the duke of Somerset was killed. As his mantle passed to the Beauforts, Richard of York became Protector of the Realm. His initial goal was to reform the court while



preserving his personal interests, but in 1460 he was recognized as heir to the throne. He was killed on December 30, 1460 at the battle of Wakefield. Fortunes fluctuated rapidly in early 1461, but the Yorkists won a definitive victory at Towton on March 29. Henry VI was confined in the Tower of London, while the queen and their son escaped to the north. They continued resistance until withdrawing to France in late 1464.

## **Edward IV (1461–1483)**

Ross 1997

The new king, the eldest son of Richard of York, was 19. Although nothing in his background or character would have predicted it, he was one of the more successful late medieval English kings. Edward owed his throne in large measure to the support of his first cousin Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, who became known as the “kingmaker.” The Nevilles’ power in the north was consolidated further in wars between 1461 and 1464 with the Percies, who supported the Lancastrian resistance. Despite the site of their duchy, the Yorkists were stronger in the south, the Lancastrians in the north.

Warwick hoped to repair relations with the French by marrying Edward IV to a Valois princess. The king had other ideas. In 1464 he became the first English king since the eleventh century to marry one of his own subjects: Elizabeth Wydeville, daughter of Earl Rivers and a widow with two sons. This precluded dynastic marriage diplomacy, which was the standard way of gaining one’s foreign objectives peacefully. Edward completed Warwick’s disenchantment in 1468 by marrying his sister Margaret to Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, the major rival of the Valois. Warwick began intrigues with George duke of Clarence, the king’s younger brother. Edward seems to have known what was going on but not to have realized its danger. His firm ally was his youngest brother Richard, whom he made duke of Gloucester and married to Anne Neville, the kingmaker’s daughter.

In 1470 Warwick went to Paris, reached agreement with Margaret of Anjou and Prince Edward and invaded England. They forced Edward IV into brief exile at Bruges. Henry VI was restored briefly to the throne, but by now he was irremediably insane. Edward IV returned, and at the battle of Barnet (April 14, 1471) killed Warwick, with the aid of Clarence, who switched sides on the eve of the battle. On May 4 at Tewkesbury the remaining Lancastrians were routed, and Prince Edward was killed. Henry VI was executed shortly afterward, and Margaret returned to France. The Lancastrian party was now represented only by collateral kin

and the Beauforts, whose leader was Henry Tudor, earl of Richmond, son of Edmund Tudor and Margaret Beaufort.

The rest of Edward IV's reign was peaceful. He fought a commercial war (1468–74) with the German Hanse over the refusal of the German cities to grant the same privileges in their hinterlands that the Germans enjoyed in England (chapter 11). Technically the English lost the war, and the issues were not resolved, but trade continued to expand. The king reorganized his council, diminishing the role of magnates and giving more influence to knights and commoners. He resumed the long-established practice of channeling funds from the Exchequer into the Household, making the government more personally responsible to the king. Petitions to the king went through the royal Secretary, also called the Master of Requests, and much of Edward's success was in giving the impression of being a "hands-on" ruler.

Edward IV's relations with the nobles were generally quiet in the last half of his reign. In 1462 he got Parliament to pass bills of attainder, which allowed him to confiscate some noble properties. Most importantly, Edward made the crown financially independent of Parliament. The king still needed income from his domain, for which he was not answerable to Parliament, which regulated customs and the lay subsidy, the major sources of "extraordinary income" (chapter 5). The crown had sustained massive alienations of the domain under Henry VI. Some magnates profited in the short run by four acts for resumption of the royal domain that the king issued between 1461 and 1473. Fair prices were paid when the holder could prove a legitimate title. Edward also added the confiscated Lancastrian patrimony to the crown domain. Domain revenues nearly trebled over two decades, a policy continued by Henry VII.

Edward IV also regularized relations with the French. He realized that Charles of Burgundy was an undependable ally and thus subtly distanced himself from him after 1471. In Parliament, however, pressure mounted to resume the war with France. In 1475 the king led a force to France, where after a skirmish he made a truce at Picquigny with Louis XI (1461–83). The English withdrew, but secret clauses gave Edward IV a French pension if he would keep English troops out of France in the future. The pension and additional incomes from the domain and customs funded the royal government, and for the rest of his reign Edward IV did not have to ask Parliament for a subsidy. Until Henry VIII (1509–47) the English kings avoided foreign wars and were able to survive with minimal parliamentary taxation, which both freed them from the sorts of problems that had plagued their predecessors and left more money in their subjects' purses.

## **Richard III (1483–1485)**

Ross 1981

Edward IV's unexpected death on April 8, 1483 left a succession problem. After another foiled plot by the duke of Clarence in 1478 Edward had signed his brother's death warrant. Edward had foreseen the possibility of a minority, but he left conflicting instructions for a regency. The ensuing story is best known through the distortions of Shakespeare's play. Richard of Gloucester or Richard III, Edward IV's youngest brother, was responsible for several homicides, probably including his nephews, but not his wife and son or his brother Clarence. He evidently feared that his life would be in danger under a government in which his rivals the Wydevilles controlled young Edward V. Thus he intercepted the royal party en route to London after Edward IV died. After allegations that Edward IV's marriage was invalid and his own birth illegitimate failed to generate support for a coup, Richard seized the crown. By the end of 1483 he had eliminated most noble opposition. By the time of his only Parliament, in 1484, conditions had stabilized superficially. In 1485 Henry Tudor led an army from France to England. Despite the general distaste for Richard, the military outcome was not assured. Had Richard not made himself a target by charging into the battle wearing his crown, he might have escaped.

## **Henry VII (1485–1509)**

Cunningham 2007; Storey 1968

With Henry VII we encounter diplomatic realignments that are more properly a feature of the modern period. His genealogical claim to the throne, through the Beauforts, was the weakest since William the Conqueror. He consolidated his position by marrying Elizabeth of York, sister of the presumably murdered princes. He ended the threat to his crown of imposters claiming to be members of the house of York. He continued the administrative policies of Edward IV, notably resumption of the royal domain, and tried to avoid asking Parliament for aid. Economic prosperity was fueled by a major expansion of cloth exports, which brought customs revenue into the royal coffers. Like Edward IV, Henry VII generally kept the nobles at bay by a combination of inducements. The diplomatic opportunities of the spectacularly spendthrift and personal policies of Henry VIII were forged by his despised father.