

Why was it such a surprise to have a Tudor king?

By the end of August 1485 the news had spread far and wide. King Richard III had been killed in battle and the new king was Henry VII. The question many must have asked was 'Henry Who?' Very few people knew anything about King Henry, the first Tudor monarch. Henry hadn't been brought up to be king and he'd been living abroad for 14 years. It seemed a miracle that Henry had become king. This is the story of that miracle.



Henry VII

1405: A Tudor disaster

If we turn the clock back eighty years to 1405 no-one could have imagined that a member of the Tudor family would ever be King of England. The Tudors had been an important family in their home area of north Wales but in 1405 Maredudd ap Tudor joined a Welsh rebellion aiming to throw the English out of Wales. Maredudd's decision was a disaster for the Tudors. The rebels were beaten. Maredudd's brother was executed and the King took the Tudors' lands and gave them to his supporters. The Tudors were no longer important, even in their home area.

1405 to the 1450s: From disaster to the royal family

The Tudors went from losing everything to being part of the English royal family – thanks to two marriages.

Firstly, the Tudors became related to the English royal family when Owen Tudor (Maredudd's son) married a young Frenchwoman called Catherine. Catherine had been married before – to the great English king Henry V who had died young. Their young son was now the king, Henry VI.

Owen and Catherine had three sons of their own. They became the King's half-brothers because they had the same mother as the king. However no-one thought that a Tudor could become king. They were not related to past kings of England and so had no right to be king. Everyone imagined that King Henry would one day marry and have his own sons.

When Owen Tudor's sons grew up, their half-brother, King Henry gave the two eldest boys lands and wealth and made them Earls (the other brother became a monk). Then came another important marriage. Edmund Tudor, the eldest brother, married Lady Margaret Beaufort. Margaret was descended from King Edward III (1327-1377) so any children she had would have royal blood. In 1457, 14-year-old Margaret did have a son who she called Henry. This baby, Henry Tudor, was the first Tudor to have royal blood – but still no-one expected baby Henry would be king because King Henry VI now had a son to inherit the crown.

Henry V and Henry VI were part of the Lancastrian dynasty (family of kings).

Henry V won the battle of Agincourt and conquered northern France

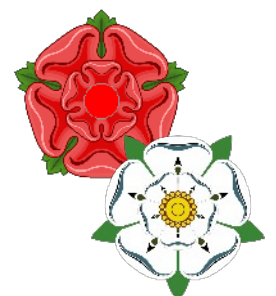


Henry VI

The Wars of the Roses change everything

The Wars of the Roses was a civil war between the Lancastrian royal family and the family of the Duke of York. The wars changed young Henry Tudor's life completely but it was a long time before anyone thought he might become king.

The first big change for Henry Tudor came when the Lancastrian king Henry VI and his son were killed in 1471, along with other members of the Lancastrian family. That left Henry Tudor as the only living member of the Lancastrian royal family. Henry could not fight back – he was only 14 years old – so his uncle Jasper took him abroad to keep him safe from enemies.



The new king of England was Edward IV, a great soldier who had two sons. It seemed certain that Edward's eldest son would be the next king but then King Edward died unexpectedly in April 1483. His son was never crowned as Edward V. Instead the boy's uncle Richard intervened. He executed young Edward's strongest supporters and became king himself as Richard III. Young Edward V and his brother (the 'Princes in the Tower') disappeared. Many people thought Richard had murdered them and so began to plot a rebellion.



Edward IV

However these rebels had a problem. If young Edward V was dead who would be their new king? Their answer was Henry, Earl of Richmond, Henry Tudor, who had royal blood as the last member of the Lancastrian royal family. Richard tried to have Henry captured but Henry was warned and rode through the night to get help from the French king.



Richard III

in August 1485, Henry Tudor and his allies landed in Wales, ready to fight Richard for the crown. Richard was expected to win. He was an excellent soldier and had a large army. In contrast nobody knew Henry because he'd lived abroad for so long and they had no idea if he'd make a good king.

The Battle of Bosworth

The battle began very early on the morning of 22nd August. Arrows and cannonballs flew through the air. The main parts of the armies fought on foot, each trying to push the other back. Then suddenly came the immense sound of hooves, of armoured knights on horseback at full gallop. At their head rode King Richard III, determined to kill his enemy, Henry Tudor.



Richard and his knights careered into the bodyguard surrounding Henry. Richard hurled Henry's standard-bearer, John Cheney, to the ground. Now Henry himself was desperately parrying Richard's blows. A few seconds more and Henry would be dead ...

And then another group of soldiers led by William Stanley charged in to defend Henry. Now it was Richard fighting for his life. Around him his knights were killed. Richard himself was dragged or knocked from his horse. No surrender. No mercy. A crushing blow from a poll-axe ended the life of Richard III.

The miracle had happened. Henry Tudor was now King Henry VII.



Henry VII

There have been many times in history when the unexpected happened. Nowadays the Tudors are the most famous dynasty of kings and queens in English history but in 1485 hardly anyone had heard of the Tudors. Henry didn't call himself Tudor. Before he became king he called himself the Earl of Richmond, his title. Richard III called him Tudor as an insult because it showed that Henry was from an unimportant Welsh family who had no right to be king. Yet now everyone knows the name Tudor. What a miracle!