

A CLOSER LOOK

Wars of the Roses

The term 'Wars of the Roses' was not used at the time. Indeed both the red and white roses of Lancaster and York, which combined into the Tudor Rose, were minor emblems of the two lines of descendants of Edward III.

KEY TERMS

Privy Chamber: the private quarters of the monarch only accessible by those closest to the monarch. This area was heavily guarded in the reign of Henry VII and staffed by nobles whom he could trust

Privy Council: a group of advisers, usually members of the nobility and the higher clergy, chosen to help the monarch with governing the country

clergy: all those who were responsible for the running of the Church and taking church services were known as clergy

shires and boroughs: the administration of England was organised into counties, such as Leicestershire and Norfolk, and towns, or boroughs, such as Doncaster and Bristol. Shires and boroughs would be allocated a number of seats in the House of Commons, which electors would vote for

feudal: this was the system of government established in England after 1066 by which the king secured obedience and military service through grants of land

The monarchy

At the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 Henry Tudor defeated the reigning monarch, Richard III. This was the final battle in what is now known as the **Wars of the Roses**, the bitter conflict between the House of York and the House of Lancaster. Henry claimed to be the true Lancastrian heir of Edward III; a more secure claim to the throne was that of Elizabeth of York, the eldest surviving child of Edward IV, the Yorkist king and elder brother of Richard III. The marriage between Henry VII and Elizabeth of York is often portrayed as bringing to an end the Wars of the Roses, although that term was not coined at the time.

In fact, the coronation of Henry VII did not bring to an end challenges to the throne. The Pretenders Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, backed by foreign powers and promoted by nobles, some close to Henry VII, were not finally defeated until 1499. More serious were the challenges from male Yorkists, the White Rose faction, who had stronger and more legitimate claims to the throne than Henry VII. The continued existence of these claimants was a serious concern to Henry VII, but also to Henry VIII, especially when his wife failed to produce a male heir. Henry VIII was personally very aware of the vulnerability of the Tudor dynasty; as Henry VII's second son, he was suddenly propelled into the line of succession by the death of his brother Arthur, in 1502. As late as 1541 Henry dealt savagely with Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, the last remaining sister of Edward IV; his execution of the Earl of Surrey in 1546 was related to Surrey's outspoken statements about his bloodline. Concern about the succession was a predominant concern in the reigns of all the Tudors.

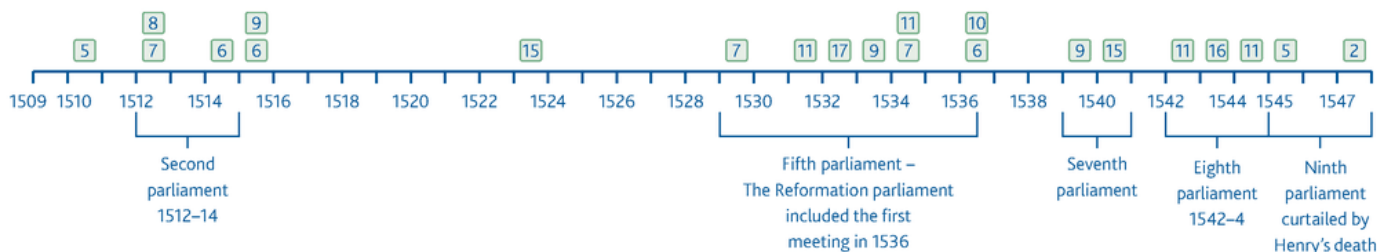


Fig. 2 *Choosing the Red and White Roses* by Henry Payne (c1908)

The nobility

A major reason for the instability which dominated the fifteenth century was not simply the competing claims to the throne, but the military and political strength of the higher nobility. Henry VII became king as the first amongst equals; by the time of his death he had restricted the power and influence

of those nobles who had destabilised previous reigns. Although Henry was helped by the death in battle of some of the powerful nobility, he achieved his pre-eminence through a shrewd combination of reward and punishment.



Numbers in squares = no. of weeks for which parliament met
In some years there were two sittings of parliament

Fig. 3 Parliamentary sessions 1509–47

In addition to their role as adviser to the king, informally through the **Privy Chamber** and more formally as **Privy Councillors**, the nobility had a political role in Parliament. Parliament was divided into the House of Lords in which the major nobility and leading **clergy** sat, and the lesser chamber, the House of Commons, which included both representatives of the **shires** and **boroughs** and Members of Parliament (MPs) from the towns and cities. Parliament was called infrequently and sat for short periods of time; its primary function was to grant the monarch the right to collect taxes, necessary only when England was threatened by foreign powers. The remainder of the time the king had to 'live of his own', using his crown lands and **feudal** dues. Under Henry VII and previous monarchs, legislation was rarely passed and such laws that were passed mainly concerned local issues. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians argued that the role of Parliament was transformed by Henry VIII through the legislation passed to secure the break with Rome. More recently, the declining frequency of parliamentary sittings under Elizabeth has been stressed. However, the importance and function of Parliament underwent significant change in the years between 1529 and 1570.

The monarch maintained his authority through the presence of the nobility in the localities. These nobles were active in courts bringing criminals to justice. Legal cases relating to property were growing and were dealt with by lawyers working from the Inns of Court in London and, from Henry VII's reign, through the **Court of the Star Chamber**.

The Church

For good government and the maintenance of law and order the monarch was also dependent on the Church. The changing relationship between the monarch and the Church is the central theme of this course. England was part of wider **Christendom**; English monarchs in common with those in Europe swore obedience to the Pope in Rome. Henry VII had claimed legitimacy having been anointed with Holy oil by the **Archbishop of Canterbury** at his coronation at Westminster Abbey. Popes in Rome claimed to be the successors to Saint Peter, whom Christ had commanded to be the rock on which his Church would be built. As a result of the pressure which had been brought by Henry II in the twelfth century, the control of the Pope over England was somewhat less than in other European countries. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church was very powerful:

- The Church collected taxes which were sent to Rome.
- The law of the Church (**canon law**) was decided by the Pope and **cardinals** in Rome.

KEY TERM

The Court of the Star Chamber: this took its name from the ceiling decoration of the room in which it was held at Westminster Palace. The Court supervised the lower courts and could be appealed to directly. It gained much greater power under Henry VII

Christendom: the group of nations in which the Catholic Church was the established religion and in which the monarchs swore obedience to the Pope in religion

Archbishop of Canterbury: England was divided into two Provinces: York and Canterbury. The Archbishop of Canterbury was traditionally the senior cleric in England and was the Pope's representative in England

cardinal: a position appointed directly by the Pope. Cardinals were, and still are, responsible for the election of subsequent Popes and advised the Pope on the laws and doctrine of the Church

CROSS-REFERENCE

The role of **churchmen**, and in particular Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, is discussed in Chapter 1, page 2.

KEY TERM

abbey, monastery and priory: large rural monastic houses were known as abbeys, smaller ones as monasteries, and urban houses were most commonly known as priories

- Church courts, which offered the ultimate right of appeal to Rome, operated in England to try religious matters.
- Abbots and bishops sat in the House of Lords with a right to determine secular legislation.
- Churchmen wielded great power and influence as church advisers.

The power of the Church was present throughout England. Each settlement had its own priest and parish church. These had considerable local authority and were the recipients of tithes paid by all the community. In most areas there would have been an **abbey, monastery or priory** from where monks, friars, priors and nuns worked with communities to provide help for the poor and the sick, and education, particularly for the sons of the gentry. The power of the Church was extensive and for many was more tangible and present than that of the monarch. The omnipresent power and authority of the Church was a fundamental issue in the changes which took place between 1529 and 1570 and the cause of the widespread dislocation which followed.



Fig. 4 A procession of the clergy and nobility in 1512. How are the two groups linked?

CROSS-REFERENCE

The state of **purgatory** and its significance in sixteenth-century religious life is examined in greater detail in Chapter 2, page 13.

The importance of **religion in people's daily lives** is especially evident in the Liturgical Year, outlined in Chapter 2, page 12.

Religion was the medium through which sixteenth-century men and women viewed the world. On a basic level, all things were explained by God's will or 'the work of the devil'. Much more significantly, for the majority of people the eternal life to come was more important than time spent on earth. People's lives were determined by religious expectations and ceremonies. The fear of an eternity spent in hell was very real, with vivid images reinforced by wall paintings and stained glass in the parish church. The requirements of a godly life would be made clear by the teaching of the priest and the means of reducing time spent in **purgatory** would be very clear to all. Purgatory was an immediate state after physical death in which those destined for heaven 'undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven'. Masses for the dead, gifts to the church, membership of guilds were all means by which an individual's name could be remembered and prayers said to hasten the soul's passage through purgatory to heaven. Pilgrimages, the acquisition of indulgences, praying to saints and viewing holy relics were central to people's everyday lives. So fundamental were these beliefs that attempts to challenge the doctrine and liturgy of the Church was to result in serious unrest, particularly in areas distant from London.



Fig. 5 Stained glass from Fairford Church

New religious ideas

The majority of the population did not question religious belief at all, although there would be criticisms of individual clergy and the disparate wealth of the poor and the higher clergy. However, towards the end of the fifteenth century those who were educated and could read were affected by the intellectual change which was taking place throughout Europe. This might loosely be termed the Renaissance. The Renaissance, which means 're-birth', was a **cultural movement** that began in Italy in the **Late Middle Ages**. The development of a realistic approach to painting was clearly evident in Art, but the movement also led to widespread educational reform.

The emphasis on learning based on **classical** sources and the desire to return to original Latin and Greek texts had, in its turn, a profound impact on religion. Initially, those who were able to access Greek religious texts and translate the Bible, such as Erasmus, wanted to transform the Church from within to restore what they saw as the original views of Christ. Many members of the nobility bought and followed **Books of Hours** and other religious texts so that they could aspire to greater spirituality.

In Europe the demand for religious change began to raise questions about fundamental principles of religious doctrine. The leading reformer **Martin Luther** argued that Christianity was fundamentally a phenomenon of the inner world of human beings and had little to do with the outer world. This was stressed in his *Sermon on Good Works* in which he argued that good works do not benefit the soul; only faith could do that. Luther also argued that faith was the gift of God to the individual; salvation could not be earned by doing good works approved by the Catholic Church. In 1521 Luther was excommunicated from the Church. The Pope was prompted to take this action after Luther's publication of *On The Freedom of a Christian*. This book was the basis of a new movement in which people first challenged belief and religion and went on to challenge political and economic beliefs and to assert a view of individualism which was very different from the community-based ideas of Catholicism.

KEY PROFILE

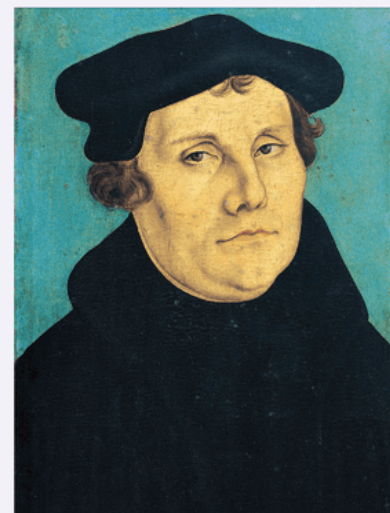


Fig. 6 Martin Luther is attributed with the first serious challenge to Papal Authority

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

promoted the translation of the Bible into a language that common people could understand. He challenged the papacy with his ideas by nailing them to the door of the cathedral at Wittenburg in 1521. His criticisms were welcomed by many, especially in areas of trade and manufacture, who were able to read and write and had begun to criticise the Church's interpretation of biblical scriptures.

KEY TERM

Book of Hours: Books of Hours enabled people to follow the services which formed the pattern of a monk's day; they were lavishly illustrated

A CLOSER LOOK

The Printing Press

The printing press, a system of moveable type, was invented by Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz in 1450. The press, which could produce 3600 pages a day, transformed communication and gave access to new ideas to people who previously could not have afforded books. The importance of printing is discussed in Chapter 2.

Challenging Church teaching was *heresy*, the punishment for which was death by fire. In some respects, questioning of the authority of the Church was not new. In the late fourteenth century a religious movement known as Lollardy had formed in England to translate the Bible into English and question the role of the priest. Trials for heresy had driven this group underground and, until the advent of the printing press, there were limited methods of communication. By 1529 communication had improved, and the new ideas from Europe were gaining a stronger foothold particularly in London and East Anglia. Those influential members of society who could read and wanted to effect serious reform were key supporters of the attacks on the Church.

England and Europe

The spread of new religious ideas was aided by merchants involved in the woollen cloth trade. Indeed Europe was important to England not only for trade but in many other respects. Although England was an island, it was an integral part of Christendom and its widespread diplomatic network. The expectations of merchants dependent on trade, and the views of the clergy looking to Rome, were important. Most significant of all was the perspective of the monarch himself. Throughout his reign Henry VIII claimed the title of 'King of France'; not only the king but members of the nobility sought to reclaim the French territories which had been lost by Henry VI in the Hundred Years War. In fact, Henry VIII had squandered the substantial financial legacy of his father in two failed invasions in the first ten years of his reign. His failure to persuade Parliament to grant him taxes to invade again in the 1520s can be seen as a motivation to find more secure funding streams in the 1530s. By 1529 England held only the French town of Calais and had had to watch from the sidelines as the forces of the two most powerful leaders: Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and Francis I of France, met at Pavia in 1525. The success of Charles V and the defeat and subsequent incarceration of Francis I could have allowed Henry to invade France and regain the territory lost by 1453 had he had sufficient resources. As it was, Charles V carried on unchecked through the Italian States to occupy Rome and control the papacy.

CROSS-REFERENCE

The spread of **new religious ideas** under Henry VIII will be the subject of Chapter 3.

The state of the Church in 1529

In 1529 the Church in England was relatively unchallenged. New religious ideas were developing on the continent of Europe and criticisms of the behaviour of clergy were being stimulated by the printing of books. However, for the monarch the Church was a critical ally; the monarch was given legitimacy through the coronation ceremony and this power was used to enforce law and order down to the level of the parish. The inter-dependence of King and Pope was clearly demonstrated in 1521 when Pope Leo X awarded Henry VIII the title of Defender of the Faith (in Latin, *fidei defensor*) in recognition of the work Henry had produced defending the seven sacraments of the Church against the challenge from the new religious ideas of Martin Luther. The initials FD are still used on British coinage today.

In this book you will be introduced to a period of major change in the English Church and Government. You will be able to examine the importance of piety, the influence of the new Humanism, and consider the conflicting values of Protestantism and Catholicism. These developments promoted conflict in turn between the Church and state with issues such as authority and conformity presenting major difficulties for the Tudor monarchs. How matters of faith were addressed and the degree of pragmatism employed will be prominent themes of this study.