

## A short history of England from 1422 to 1513

### France.

By inheriting the French throne in 1422, Henry the Fifth, of England, and now also Henry the second of France, became one of the most powerful Monarchs in Western Europe. He commanded the vast wealth of the French and the military competence of the English. Only recently recovered from a bout of dysentery, he set about organising and securing his new domain with more than his usual vigour and efficiency. Declaring the powerful Duke of Orleans attainted, he claimed all his lands and bartered their income for loyalty from his loyal Dukes, Earls and Counts.

Despite his military reputation and fiscal power he created many powerful enemies within France and England. There were many doubts about his right to be King. There were others with better claims in England and the French had despised Henry the fourth as a regicide and usurper. Furthermore there appeared many rumours concerning his miraculous recovery from illness. His personal physician had declared that the King's end was near and there was nothing he could do. Henry then famously received visits from a group of Augustinians monks, a Dominican friar and a knight called Pierre Valin, a crusader from the order of the Black Swan. On the 1st of September 1422 Henry walked from his deathbed looking healthy and well rested. The next day the members of his house hold began to suffer from a new and virulent plague. Henry claimed it was natural justice for believing their lord was dead while he yet lived.

Henry decided to deal with France himself; he appointed Humphrey of Lancaster, 1st Duke of Gloucester, 1st Earl of Pembroke, to be lord Protector of England and Left his Wife Catherine of Valois at Windsor castle. Her later affair with Owen Tudor gave them four children and much gossip and wonder across Henry's domain. Henry himself married again to Joanna of Bouvre, claiming that he needed a wife for each of his kingdoms. Joanna was a daughter of John of Burgundy and acclaimed a great beauty by many and Henry was clearly attached to her as he never travelled without her and never again visited with his first wife. Joanna was referred to as a saint by many of her family and friends but described as a sorceress by her enemies. She certainly had great power over Henry and soon issued orders in his name and took over much of the running of the government during the years of the plagues. Henry's court in Paris were variously appalled or delighted and yet were unable to act to prevent Henry from grasping the reins of power or later preventing Joanna from becoming the effective ruler of France and England.

Henry fought many campaigns through his French territories fighting against rebellious dukes and counts or bringing them to terms and gathering their oaths of fealty.

### England.

He appointed a series of French nobles as Lord Lieutenants for England. Nominally to aid the Lord protector and yet with their own bodies of troops and orders to report directly to Henry (or Joanna). They brought a wealth of French influence to Henry's English court and their labyrinthine politics created a confusion of alliances and plots so that The English lords became increasingly to look to their own parliament as the only consistent voice of power. Henry also created a series of new Duchies, and palatine counties (where the lord or lady could exercise all the powers of a king or queen), and appointed his supporters to rule over these new realms. These new lords had sworn oaths of allegiance and service to Henry directly, but they did not swear to serve the Sovereign of England - or indeed anyone but Henry himself, a fact that caused much grievance later.

## The plague and the New Faiths.

Eight years into Henry's reign of France and England, Plagues swept the land, in fact all lands, with unnatural vigour. Tax revenues dwindled, trade ground almost to a halt and Europe held its breath. It became soon obvious that religious centres seemed to be particularly vulnerable to a kind of disease or condition that drove the victims into a frenzy of depraved and violent behaviour. The more devout the worshipper, the faster they succumbed. Many saw this as, demonic possession or witchcraft, others saw it as the displeasure of the old gods or a fault in the ways that religion was conducted.

The old clergy was soon shunned and feared and, in some places, there were even witch hunts, but while some people despaired, other priests and learned professionals looked to other ways and it seemed that their prayers were answered. Those who looked to the stars and the planets for guidance, who prayed to the saints instead of to one god or turned to even older practices from the times of the ancients triumphed. Those who survived the plagues owed their survival to their new prayers and found themselves able to heal from wounds at an incredible rate. If they did not succumb to disease or infection they would recover in hours from broken legs and punctured lungs. It became a time of joy for those that lived. However different saints and gods had different messages, consequentially, in this re-ordering of belief, much blood was spilt between the religious orders, who, after all, commanded a wealth of economic and military power. Pitched battles were fought regarding the identity of the patron saint of Lincoln. Many churches were razed to the ground and then rebuilt in worship to the new saints as worshippers of different faiths were driven from their lands. Finally, King Henry's troops intervened in these theological battles and although the sovereign always held Saint George in the highest regard, he welcomed all the new religions, and honoured all the saints; as long as they kept the peace, and paid their new taxes. The King's tithe (three parts in ten of all monies taken in by the church or crops grown or goods received) was soon felt to be a terrible imposition by many previously rich churches. The Benedictines (known as the black monks) were the most powerful of these rich churches through their rapid development of new prayer books and methods of worship combined with their vast libraries and newly formed orders of knights. Fortunately for Henry they were united only in their black robes and their worship of St Benedict. They were so disparate in their ambitions that they could not present a united front to Henry and so were brought into the taxation system one by one.

## The battle of Leominster or How King Richard came to Ireland.

Behind an absent Henry's back, the Kingdom of Castille had sent an expeditionary force to support the Welsh. These men and women had encouraged a widespread campaign of raiding against the English western marches. Emboldened by their successes, they raised a great army and took the town of Leominster and claimed the relics stored there. Here, they were joined by a strong force from Cheshire led by Richard of York. Richard was the wealthiest man in England and had in many eyes a better claim to the throne of England than Henry did. At the age of 31, he decided to join his Castilian relatives and wage war against Henry. In the decisive victory at Leominster, Henry won – in no small part because he could support his troops with his newly secured finances – but his forces were unable to pursue the defeated Welsh army through the mountains. Richard, who also claimed victory, through his destruction of the King's right flank and possession of the Relics, fled to Ireland where he found much support for his fight against Henry. Though Richard was attainted and his lands forfeited, his influence and power were such that he received taxes from his lands and raised troops from them till his death in 1478.

## Henry's death.

Henry was called away to the continent and never returned to England again. He led major campaigns against the Swiss, the North Italian states and the Kingdoms in Northern Iberia as well as numerous raids and sieges against rebellious lords and recalcitrant churches and monasteries. When he died in 1453 at the Siege of Turin, he left no living heir. His unruly lords came to blows within weeks, both France and England splintered as central control collapsed with the absence of either a strong church or a strong accepted leader.

France reverted to a mess of minor kingdoms and dukedoms, their political alliances dominated by the influence of Burgundy the Holy Roman Empire and the powerful new churches.

## The Curse of the Kings.

England, on the other hand, was wrecked by a sequence of wars called the "Curse of the Kings". Local feuds burst into bloody conflicts and with no strong central power in the British Isles, it fell to the lords to protect what they could, sell what they had to, and make treaties with their erstwhile enemies. The Peers could raise large armies as not only did the prevailing Livery and maintenance system mean that they could call upon minor Lords and Ladies to come fight on their side, but also many mercenaries and broken men roamed the lands after the French campaigns. It seemed that any great Peer, who had the slightest claim, declared themselves Sovereign, raised an army and fought for their right to rule. The cost of war was excessive and with no quick victory for any one candidate the generals soon turned to looting and pillaging to maintain their army in the field. The political changes made by Henry and his lieutenants and the changes to the control of the churches prevented any one pretender from having enough strength to defeat all the others or to reach a consensus on who should rule. The fickle support of French Nobles, the Duke of Burgundy and the self-serving support of the many different Churches, with their holy orders of knights, simply added to the confusion. The erratic support of the Benedictines as they tried to follow the dictates of their new faiths became a byword for treachery and false promise. Ultimately it seemed that no one knew what they were fighting for, or why, and the great wars descended into raids and brigandage between neighbouring provinces. Mercia in particular became known as a hard country to pass through, or trade with, as each town council and minor lord taxed any who passed through their land and swore allegiance to no one if they could avoid it.

Cornwall became independent with the support of the Kingdom of Portugal and the victory at the Battle of Callington by Lady Jane Cornwall, Duchess of Cornwall, and 3rd Baroness of Fanhope. The Percys withdrew to the North and declared themselves the Lords of the Northern Marches and busied themselves with defending their borders against the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish. The Nevilles claimed the Duchy of Mercia but had to satisfy themselves with control of several castles and the walled cities that they could actually defend. The King's cousins, the Beauforts, divided up the South East. The City of London declared itself a free city and is ruled by a council of the wealthy merchants that profit where they can and defend themselves with their trained bands and mercenary companies. The Welsh resumed raiding all along the English border lands with seeming impunity led by Henry Tudor, the self-styled Prince of Pembroke and Queen Angharad of Glamorgan. Richard of York landed in the Northwest and set about consolidating his holdings in Mercia and Yorkshire, declaring himself King. He ruled several areas of the North before he was slain in the battle of Lincoln fighting the Knights of St Edmund and the Duchess of Suffolk near Lincoln in 1478.

## The Great Council.

For a time, it seemed, there was a Queen or King in every county. Without the means to pay their armies these nobles depended upon their wealthy backers from the continent or reserves built up during Henry's reign. Eventually the lack of money and rebellious troops drove the many Pretenders to the negotiating table. They met in 1485 at a Great Council. Hosted by the archbishops of both York and Canterbury, in a rare moment of cooperation, this Great Council declared that henceforth, the people of this sceptered Isle would no more be slaves to one ruler but that each would rule his or her own realm in accordance with the wishes of their people and their gods in accordance with the natural laws of their said realms. The churches were delighted and declared an end to the time of trouble.

A parliament was established in London where the great leaders of the land could gather at need. The nation was finally at peace.

The peace lasted three years. Border and trade disputes and the influence of foreign nations soon caused breeches to the great accord.

## Scotland.

In June of 1488, a Scottish army led by King James the 3rd and assisted by 1,500 Burgundian mercenaries, headed south over the border in a great raid. They brought with them in excess of 20,000 lowlander soldiers knights, allied clansmen and Irish kerns. They ravaged the North lands, besieged Carlisle and then returned to Scotland after three months of plundering and fighting. Despite their successes the Scots were unable to take any long term advantage. The lord of the Isles, Donald the Black, saw a chance to enhance his own wealth and formed his own army to march on Edinburgh. Several battles were fought but the wild highlanders could not overcome the knights and the Queens Danish guard of the Lowlanders. King James the 3rd was murdered later the same year in Stirling castle, betrayed by his Burgundian bodyguard to the Red Douglas, the younger brother of the Tiger Earl of Crawford and 8th Earl of Douglas. James was a victim of the constant clan warfare and his own perfidy in slaying the Tiger Earl in similar circumstances years before. It is said that it is best to go well armed when dining with the Scots.

Scotland remains divided between the Lord of the Isles, who rules the Highlands and Islands, and Queen Margaret of Denmark who rules the Lowlands. There is constant warfare between the two nations but it is more organised raiding and outright battles between formed troops is a rare occurrence.

## Recent History.

The Great raid of 1488 caused the Wardens of the Northern marches to restructure their organisations and society to better defend themselves. New ways of living evolved and there developed closer cooperation between the clergy and the laity. Mercenaries were employed for specific campaigns which focussed on fast moving raids or the destruction of Scottish castles or fortified villages. Success with this approach led to widespread adoption throughout the North. Some of these chevauchees headed south and west rather than north. The Great raid had led the northerners to believe that they were not going to be helped by the southerners and so treated them much as they treated the Scots. Raids led to counter raids and then larger raids and so the people of England became used to constant war again. Countless battles took place up and down the country which, while famous to those taking part, had little effect on those living in the next county.

## The story of Wessex.

In the year 1439, the Countess of Devon, Lady Katherine Courtney, was raised up to the rank of Duchess after the death of the Duke of Somerset and inherited the expanded realm of Wessex which encompassed Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire, with its much admired capital city of Winchester. The Courtneys proved to be able administrators and excellent diplomats. They managed to avoid war for the entirety of their reign. That is to say they avoided war coming to Wessex. Their navy and army travelled far and wide in support of their allies and they managed to build such a reputation that they were able to force profitable trade arrangements with Brittany and Flanders, the other two main maritime nations in the North Sea. The sight of the Wyvern banner struck fear in the hearts of their enemies and roused the spirits of their allies. The wealth generated by trade and the long internal peace allowed the arts to flourish in Wessex. Exeter Salisbury and Winchester all became known as centres of culture. Southampton and Plymouth grew into bustling ports and forged trade links that stretched across the Mediterranean and up to the Baltic Sea. Artists, philosophers and fine crafters found wealthy patrons at the court at Winchester and the people began to speak with a new hope that Camelot had arisen again.

In 1498, Duke Stephen of Wessex married the Duchess Lady Anne of Brittany in great splendour at the recently completed Exeter Cathedral. When Anne gave birth to a healthy son it seemed inevitable that he would be called Arthur.

With the wealth of Wessex and Brittany combined, the two duchies entered a Golden Age. In 1511, Edmund Earl of Dorchester was given leave to support the Duke of Burgundy in a campaign against the Duchess of Berry. Edmund had a fine reputation as a knight and a commander and took a large portion of the army of Wessex, some 5000 troops, only to find that a campaign deep into the continent created different demands upon an army used to regular supply from the sea. Constant ambushes, poor roads, little or no provisions and a hostile population left the army in tatters. After 16 months, a small force of 1800 returned cursing their Burgundian allies for faithless cowards when it came to pitched battles. They also reported that Edmund had sworn allegiance to Duke Philip the handsome and agreed to rule Wessex as his liegeman. The Duke and Duchess declared Edmund to be exiled from Wessex and to be slain if he ever returned.

Wessex had never been so weak and the enemies of Wessex looked to see how they might benefit from this setback. The Duke and the Duchess travelled far and wide gathering what support they could and trying to reform their battered army. Wessex had refused to use mercenaries before and they had maintained their armies by accepting into them anyone who was fit and willing. Men and women had always fought side by side on all their campaigns. Where previously they had banished warriors who fought for pay it was now assumed by many that they would change their policy to withstand any immediate attack. Indeed many of the free companies were approached by agents and offered generous contracts to fight for Wessex. Many accepted and began to organise their travel to the West Country, though who their employer was to be was not always clear.

Then Duke Stephen went missing. All that is known was that he was travelling east from Winchester and was never seen again.

Edmund did return a few months later, at the head of a new army: Burgundians, and a mixture of French, Iberian, Swiss, German, Italian and even English mercenaries, raiders and bandits. Declaring himself regent and Lord Protector, he called for the people of Wessex to flock to his banner to keep

themselves safe from its enemies. Edmund's veteran Burgundians have, so far, swept aside any resistance loyal to Duke Stephen. Ill equipped to resist, many of the burghers and lords of Wessex have capitulated and sworn fealty to Edmund. His troops began to arrest and execute any who challenged his authority. His reach extended into the Churches and Monasteries insisting they deliver to him several priests who had preached against him. He even closed down the famous Theatre of Winchester.

He sent out emissaries to all parts of Wessex ordering Anne to travel to Winchester with her court and to bring all seals and signs of government with her as well as her son, Arthur.

To the west Lady Anne of Wessex, Duke Stephen's wife is in a perilous position, residing at Glastonbury with her young son Arthur: the rightful heir to Wessex. Recognising that delivering her son to Edmund would be signing the boy's death warrant, and lacking immediate military strength or political support, Lady Anne has fled with a few loyal retainers and taken refuge in the hidden places of the countryside. This is not to say that she is without resources or powerful friends. There are many who would prefer the Duchess to rule, or a regent for the young Duke, than an ambitious militaristic Duke Edmund.

To save her land and the lives of her family, and loyal subjects, she has decided to fight if she can. To this end she has engaged the services of an exiled soldier of fortune Captain Walter Savage who has sent forth a call to arms and undertaken to train such soldiers who will come to resist Edmund's elite Burgundians. Loyal Yeomen of Wessex who know the secret ways of the country; wild gallowglass clansmen from Ireland; soldiers of fortune; erstwhile allies of Duke Stephen's Wessex – who knows who will answer the call? All that is certain is that Lady Anne's rag-tag little force is determined to resist Duke Edmund and defy him with every means at their disposal.

War has finally come to Wessex.