

1457 – 1509

Henry VII

The king who won his crown through battle and had to fight throughout his reign to keep it, and in doing so established the mighty Tudor dynasty

An invasion force set off from France and landed in Wales before heading into the heart of England itself. The year was 1485 and at the head of this ragtag army was a man who, for most of his 28 years on Earth had been on the run, had been constantly looking over his shoulder and unable to find peace. This man was called Henry Tudor and when he first set foot on the wet sand of Wales, he is said to have fallen to his knees and uttered, "Judge me O Lord and favour my cause." It was unsurprising that he was praying, for the odds seemed stacked against him; his claim to the throne was weak and the army of the King of England, Richard III, was much stronger than his own.

There were two reasons why the force landed in Wales – Henry wanted to remain undetected for as long as possible to give him time to build up support and it was also the land where he had been born in 1457, at Pembroke Castle. The man who would go on to found the Tudor dynasty was born to an earl and a countess and had a minor claim to the throne through his mother, Lady Margaret of Beaufort, a descendant of Edward III. Despite this tenuous royal lineage, by the early 1470s he was the main Lancastrian claimant remaining, as the Wars of the Roses – a battle for the crown between the houses of Lancaster and York that began in 1455 and saw the fortunes of the two rival houses ebb and flow – had resulted in the deaths of the rest.

When the course of the Wars of Roses changed again in 1471 with the reclaiming of the throne by the Yorkist king Edward IV, Henry fled to Brittany

for safety. He would not set foot in England again for 14 years and this life of constantly being under threat, of never feeling safe, would affect how he ruled when he became King of England. In Brittany (a duchy independent of both France and England) Henry was under the protection of Francis II, who resisted Edward's attempts to send Henry to England and in the process probably saved his life. It was Edward himself who died unexpectedly in

1483 and Richard of Gloucester, who would

become Richard III, took control and imprisoned Edward's two sons in the Tower of London. To this day, debate still rages about what exactly happened to them, but there was no doubt that Richard was now in control of England.

Richard was now king, but many were unhappy that Edward's sons wouldn't get the chance to succeed their father. This increasing political division in England

meant that, after years in the wilderness,

Henry was thrust back into the political spotlight with many believing he should assert his claim to the throne. This situation was managed with what would become typical political cunning by Henry, who announced that if he did return and become king then he would marry Elizabeth of York and thus unite the two warring houses. When he learned that Richard was exerting pressure on Francis to release his rival to him, Henry escaped to France dressed as a servant. It was in Paris that his supporters gathered around him and made their plans for an invasion of England and to put to an end to the Yorkist king who had only been sitting on the throne for two years. On 7 August 1485 Henry landed at Milton Haven Waterway in

Henry and Elizabeth had eight children, but only four survived through to adulthood

