

5 The Plantagenets 1154-1485

Though he was the great-grandson of William I, **Henry II** was not a 'Norman' in the way that his four predecessors were. His father had been Count of Anjou and his family called themselves 'Plantagenet' after the yellow 'broom' or *planta genetica* which grows profusely in Anjou. A man of exceptional intelligence, education and energy he was the ruler of many different lands, while his wife Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine in her own right, was recognized to be one of the most able as well as beautiful women in Europe. They were a formidable couple, though jealous of each other and quarrelsome. Henry proved himself to be a ruthlessly determined ruler as well as an administrator of exceptional talent and within a very short time he restored England to good order, punished rebels and destroyed unauthorized baronial castles. With a series of royal pronouncements (Assizes) he made important additions to English law, strengthening the concept of 'the king's peace' which criminals broke at their peril. Though he gave much time and attention to English affairs Henry was constantly on the move and he spent more time in his continental dominions than he spent in England. It was all the more necessary, therefore, that he should be served by reliable administrators.

One of these was **Thomas Becket**, fifteen years older than Henry, who appointed him Chancellor at the age of 39, in 1157. Becket served his master so loyally that in 1162 Henry insisted that he should become Archbishop of Canterbury, assuming that Becket would be sympathetic to the king's drive to reduce the power of the church courts. Though he became Archbishop reluctantly, once in the post Becket decided that his loyalty lay with the church, whose rights he defended against the king at every opportunity. Friendship between the two soon evaporated and when in 1164 Becket opposed the Constitutions of Clarendon, Henry's detailed plans for church reform, the king forced Becket into exile in France. There Becket stayed for six years, excommunicating Henry's English officials from time to time, to no great effect.

In December 1170 the king permitted Becket to return to Canterbury as part of a move towards reconciliation, but in his Christmas Day sermon Becket provocatively excommunicated the senior English bishops who had taken part in the coronation of Henry's eldest son in the summer, against the wishes of the archbishop. When he heard this news the king gave vent to a public outburst of temper, wishing himself rid of Becket. Without the king's knowledge four knights left his court in France, travelled to Canterbury and entered the cathedral at dusk on December 29th. Becket could easily have slipped away but he chose to stand his ground close to the high altar, where he was brutally hacked to death.

The murder of an archbishop in his own cathedral stunned the Christian world and Becket was hailed as a martyr and officially declared a saint in 1173, his tomb at Canterbury soon developing into one of the great pilgrimage destinations of the Middle Ages. Though Henry had not actually ordered his murder he saw the need to accept responsibility, to humble himself before the Pope and to offer penance to avoid the drastic penalties of excommunication or interdict. This illustrates the extent to which papal authority had grown by this time : however great or powerful a Christian prince might be, he was subject in almost all respects to the ultimate authority of the Pope. Henry's formal penance was performed very publicly at Canterbury in July 1174, when, before the tomb of Becket, he was flogged by seventy monks. On the issues that had caused dispute between the king and Becket - whether

or not clergy should be tried for alleged crimes in the royal courts - Becket in death proved the victor and separate church courts remained part of English life until the sixteenth century.

In 1154 Pope Adrian IV (the only English Pope) formally granted to Henry the title 'Lord of Ireland' (another example of the Pope's power) and in 1171 Henry landed at Waterford with an army of 4,000 men, determined to put the papal grant into effect. Though the kingdoms of Connaught, Leinster and Munster were by then the most important in Ireland, stable dynasties of rulers had never been established and authority throughout the land was continually disputed between petty chiefs and greater lords. Occasionally individuals emerged as temporarily dominant throughout the whole land, such as Brian Boru in the late 10th century or Muirchertach O'Brien from 1089 to 1114. During the first half of the twelfth century Turlough O'Connor of Connacht built himself a strong power base in the west, and on his death in 1156 his son Rory challenged the King of Leinster, driving him out of Dublin, where Rory was proclaimed High King in 1166. The King of Leinster offered homage to Henry II in return for his assistance and Henry sanctioned the departure of a force of knights led by Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, who proved to be more interested in establishing a lordship for himself by gradually conquering most of Leinster.

It was chiefly to prevent the unauthorized growth of Pembroke's power that Henry went to Ireland himself in 1171. Pembroke was quick to do homage to the king, receiving in return the grant of Leinster. Other Irish chiefs also swore fealty to Henry who appointed a Justiciar, Hugh de Lacy, to represent him in Dublin. When Henry sailed from Ireland after six months he left the mechanisms in place for the establishment of a feudal Irish state which recognized his overlordship. In 1177 he conferred the title 'Lord of Ireland' on his youngest son, John, then aged ten, even requesting permission from the Pope to crown him King of Ireland with a diadem of peacock's feathers. The request was granted but the ceremony never took place. In 1185 Henry entrusted the adolescent John with his first large-scale task - to cross to Ireland and govern as his father's viceroy. Accompanied by advisors John spent eight months in Ireland, building castles in the south, making grants of land to his supporters and attempting, though without much success, to force the Irish chiefs to accept his overlordship.

Perhaps the most ill-advised decision of Henry's reign was the coronation of his eldest son, also named Henry, in the summer of 1170. This caused offence on many fronts. It was a German tradition, not an English one, to crown an heir in his father's lifetime; the ceremony was performed by the Archbishop of York, which infuriated Becket with fatal results; Henry's young wife was not crowned at the same time, offending her father the King of France; and most important of all the mere title of King did not satisfy the young Henry who demanded power as well. Henry's immediate family became a source of disaffection, led by his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine who resented his interest in other women. In 1174 she engineered a grand alliance against her husband consisting of all her sons, Louis VII of France and William, King of Scotland. Henry acted decisively, capturing Eleanor and sending a force which defeated and took prisoner William of Scotland, forcing him to do homage. Then he confronted Louis outside Rouen and drove him from Normandy. By the autumn of 1174 Henry's enemies were defeated and he pardoned his sons, though their mother remained a prisoner at Chinon. For the rest of the decade Henry was at the height of his powers, dominant throughout his own possessions and a respected force in European politics. During these years the issue of more 'Assizes' in England reformed the law and administrative procedures under the influence of the royal Justiciars Richard de Lucy and Ranulf de Glanville.

In 1180, Louis VII, a mediocre ruler, was succeeded as King of France by his young but scheming and ruthless son Philip Augustus whose life's ambition was to reduce the power and influence of the house of Plantagenet. He proved a dangerous opponent to Henry II - half a friend, half a foe who made the most of the English king's increasing difficulties with his four sons Henry, Richard, Geoffrey and John. In 1183 the young Henry died, leaving Richard heir to England and Aquitaine, and Geoffrey died in 1186. Richard was his mother's favourite while Henry championed John (a serious misjudgement of character). Jealousies between the two brothers, encouraged by Philip Augustus, led to a revolt by Richard in 1188 in alliance with Philip. In the summer of 1189 they forced Henry to submit to their demands and he died, aged 56, at Chinon in July, weakened by illness and humiliated by defeat. It was an inglorious end to a remarkable reign. **Richard I** had always feared that his father's lands and titles would be divided between himself and John, but he now inherited everything. Moreover, he was the first King of England for two centuries to succeed to the throne unopposed. He was crowned at Westminster with great splendour in September 1189 and immediately began preparations to go on **Crusade** with Philip Augustus.

The prophet Mohammed, founder of the Islamic religion, died in 632 and according to Islamic tradition was received into heaven in Jerusalem which was therefore a holy city to Islam as well as the Jewish and Christian faiths. In the spectacular wave of Islamic conquests which followed Mohammed's death, Jerusalem was captured in 638, though Jews and Christians were allowed access to the holy places. In the eleventh century, however, Turkish Islamic forces gained control of the city and closed the holy places to other religions. The Turks also threatened the Christian city of Constantinople whose ruler in 1095 appealed to the Pope for help. Urban II responded by urging the Christian princes of Europe to 'take the cross' and a large army which included William I's son Robert of Normandy marched to the Holy Land and recaptured Jerusalem, setting up a western-style feudal kingdom based on the city. In 1144 Turkish forces captured the northern part of this kingdom, prompting Bernard of Clairvaux to urge a second 'crusade'. This was led by Louis VII of France and the Emperor Conrad of Germany but it failed to recover the lost territories. In 1174, **Saladin**, an able commander of Turkish forces, became ruler of Egypt and Syria and proved a constant menace to the kingdom of Jerusalem, eventually capturing the city in 1187. Early in 1188 Henry II, Richard, Philip Augustus and the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa all pledged themselves to lead a third crusade which was delayed because of the family squabbles of the Plantagenets.

By the winter of 1189, however, Richard was ready to go. His realms were at peace and he raised money for his army by selling lands, offices and titles to add to the 100,000 marks left by his father. King William of Scotland paid 10,000 marks to be released from the position of vassal imposed on him after his capture by Henry II. Richard's brother John, who did not volunteer for the crusade, was given lands and titles on the continent in return for a promise that he would stay outside England, where government was entrusted to Justiciars. Richard left England in December 1189 and after several adventures in Sicily and Cyprus he reached the Holy Land in June 1191. He and Philip together captured Acre in July but Philip then returned home. Richard marched south, defeated Saladin at the battle of Arsuf and occupied Jaffa. In April 1192 he received news that John was causing problems in England and in June he came within sight of Jerusalem, but realized that he could not capture it. Instead he signed a three-year truce with Saladin and sailed for home. His ship was wrecked near Venice and he travelled north on foot with only a few companions. In Vienna he was arrested by the Duke of Austria and held on trumped-up charges of being involved in the murder of another

Crusader, Conrad of Montferrat. While he awaited trial by the Emperor of Germany he was held prisoner in the castle of Durrenstein. This was outrageous treatment for a king and a crusader, but it suited the political aims of Richard's many European enemies.

All did not go smoothly in England during Richard's absence. The Bishop of Ely, his choice as Justiciar, proved incompetent and unpopular which encouraged John to break his promise and involve himself in English affairs. After the Justiciar quarrelled with the Archbishop of York he was deposed and John used his royal status to assume a powerful position among the small group of Richard's officials who governed the country. When he learned that Richard was a captive in Germany John did everything possible to prolong his imprisonment, including bribing the Emperor and hindering the collection of money demanded as a ransom for the king. This is the time when, according to a powerful English legend, **Robin Hood**, a dispossessed nobleman loyal to Richard attempted to thwart the treacherous activities of John and his henchman the Sheriff of Nottingham. Scholars have failed to find any historical foundation for this collection of romantic stories which first appeared among troubadours a hundred years later. The Robin Hood stories do, however, emphasize the heroic status Richard came to enjoy in England, which was not in any sense his native land and which he visited as king for a total of only six months.

In 1193 the Emperor accepted Richard's denial of complicity in the death of Conrad of Montferrat and his release was ordered on payment of a ransom of 100,000 marks, a colossal sum raised with difficulty throughout Richard's dominions. He reached England in March 1194 and solved the problem of John by forgiving him and restoring him to his lands and titles. This strategy worked because John stayed loyal for the rest of his brother's lifetime which was mainly spent in Normandy, successfully defending the duchy from attacks by Philip Augustus and building the spectacular Chateau Gaillard at Les Andelys. In the spring of 1199 Richard was hit by a poisoned arrow while attacking a small castle at Chalus and he died in April, aged 41. He had married Berengaria of Navarre in 1191 but they produced no children. Folklore has given Richard I a high place as one of England's most heroic kings, a reputation that he also enjoyed among European contemporaries. However, because he died so young he did little for his English kingdom except drain it of financial resources for his Crusade and his ransom.

Richard's death resulted in the disruptions of a disputed succession, because though **John** was determined to seize Richard's lands, the best legal claim to them was held by Arthur, the son of John's deceased elder brother Geoffrey by Constance, Duchess of Brittany. Despite the fact that Arthur was only a boy he was recognized as Richard's heir on the continent and by Philip Augustus. In England an unknown foreign youth had less appeal than the thirty-two year-old John, and he had enough influential support to be crowned king in May, 1199. He then attempted to win back control of the continental lands and succeeded in capturing Arthur in 1202 and putting him in prison. By April 1203 Arthur was dead and though there was no proof most contemporaries believed that he had been killed on the orders of John, or even murdered by the king himself in a drunken rage. After this support for John on the continent dwindled, even in Normandy where Richard's great fortress of Chateau Gaillard surrendered to Philip in March 1204. By then, of all his father's continental lands John was left with only the southern part of Aquitaine (Gascony), and the Channel Islands, which had been part of the Duchy of Normandy.

The effect of this was to make the English kingdom more self-contained, as it had been

before 1066 and the Norman Conquest. John was by no means lacking in ability and he had a genuine interest in administration, but he was vindictive, he made sexual advances to the wives of his barons, he levied taxes excessively and arbitrarily and he could never be relied upon to keep his word. To make matters worse, from 1205 onwards he became involved in an escalating dispute with Pope Innocent III over the appointment of a new Archbishop of Canterbury. The monks there failed to elect John's candidate to the office and in 1207 the Pope, after lengthy legal disputes, consecrated a compromise candidate, Stephen Langton, without John's agreement. John refused to allow Langton into England and expelled the monks of Canterbury. In 1208 the Pope countered with an Interdict, which meant that no church services could be held throughout England. John replied to that by confiscating some church property and revenues and in 1209 the Pope took the drastic step of excommunicating the king, which in theory released his subjects from the duty of obedience. This time John confiscated all church property, drawing thereby an annual revenue estimated at about 100,000 pounds.

However, John's excommunication played into the hands of his enemies. Philip Augustus prepared for an invasion of England to dethrone him with papal blessing, the Scots planned a northern attack and the Welsh a revolt. Worse still, a growing number of English barons were on the point of rebellion against John's arbitrary rule. Under these circumstances John cleverly made a complete submission to the Pope in 1212, agreeing to hold England in future as a papal vassal. At a stroke this made the Pope his ally against all rebels and made his enemies abandon their plans to attack him. In 1214 John attempted a counter strike at Philip Augustus by sending an English force to fight him in France in alliance with John's nephew the German Emperor Otto, and with the Count of Flanders. The result was one of the most decisive battles of the Middle Ages - **Bouvines** - where Philip's victory confirmed the emergence of a powerful France and the reduction of England to a small island kingdom.

The defeat of English forces at Bouvines strengthened the resolve of John's enemies in England. In January 1215 a group of barons met John in London to complain of his arbitrary rule and to propose that he should govern in future according to the principles set down in Henry I's 'Charter of Liberties' issued at his coronation in 1100. With typical guile John took the oath of a Crusader on March 4th thus making his person and possessions immune from attack. After the failure of another meeting with John at Oxford in April about 45 rebel barons assembled with arms at Stamford and Archbishop Stephen Langton conveyed their demands to the king, who refused them. The rebels then formally renounced their allegiance to John, chose their leader Robert Fitzwalter as their lord and captured the royal castle at Bedford.

On May 10th the rebel barons met John at Reading with a list of grievances and he offered arbitration which they refused. On May 17th, after negotiation with the citizens, the rebels occupied London, which placed them in a strong bargaining position. John asked Langton to arrange a truce with the rebels and he met them on Monday, June 15th on an island in the Thames at Runnymede, near Staines. They produced a series of disorganized written complaints known as 'The Articles of the Barons', together with their suggested remedies, and it is probable that John ordered the royal seal to be attached to these demands on that day. Therefore he did not, strictly speaking, *sign* '**Magna Carta**' on this famous occasion. Only later was a formal document produced in the style of a royal charter, containing specific promises that the king and his successors would in future govern according to the agreement made with the rebel barons. The Charter was written by a scribe with very neat handwriting

who managed to cram all its sixty-three provisions on one piece of parchment hardly bigger than a modern tabloid newspaper. It was a 'Great Charter' in importance, not size. Copies were in due course sent round the country so that all might know what had been agreed. Of these copies, four survive today, one in Lincoln cathedral, one in Salisbury cathedral, and two in the Public Record Office at Kew.

The provisions of Magna Carta range from fundamental constitutional and legal issues to comparatively trivial matters only relevant at the time. The king promised to respect the rights and property of the church and to govern the kingdom according to its ancient laws and customs. There was a guarantee that no free man would be 'taken or dispossessed or outlawed or exiled or in any way destroyed; nor will we go against him, nor will we send upon him, unless by the lawful judgement of his peers, or by the law of the land'. It was also stated that 'to none will we sell, to none will we deny, right or justice'. Other provisions banished John's unpopular mercenary soldiers, while in its final clauses the Charter set up a committee of barons empowered to force the king to observe his promises, should he fail to do so. However, well before he gave his agreement to the issue of Magna Carta John knew that the Pope (who since 1212 had been his overlord) intended to annul its provisions and excommunicate the rebels : so as far as he was concerned John was only making false promises to play for time. The papal annulment of Magna Carta reached England towards the end of September 1215, and the result was a civil war.

At no point in his reign was John faced with a rebellion of all his barons, and about half remained loyal to him in 1215. He had well- equipped mercenary armies, he controlled 149 out of 209 major castles and he was the anointed and rightful king, while all his enemies were excommunicated rebels. They, in an attempt to avoid the status of rebel, pronounced Philip Augustus' son Louis the rightful king and transferred their allegiance to him. The only real advantage the rebels enjoyed was their control over London. John fought a vigorous campaign throughout 1216 but could not prevent Prince Louis landing with a French army, to which many of John's supporters deserted. In October, while attempting to cross the treacherous sands of the Wash John's baggage mules, carrying his treasure and exceptional collection of jewels, gold and silver, were swamped by the incoming tide. Six days later John himself died at Newark, the victim of dysentery.

Seldom has an English king's death been more timely. John's undoubted heir was his nine-year old son Henry who immediately received the protection of the Pope as well as the support of influential English barons, led by William the Marshal. When it became clear that the new king would govern according to the provisions of Magna Carta support for Prince Louis fell away and by the Treaty of Kingston in 1217 he renounced his claim to the throne. An amnesty was given to rebels and Magna Carta was formally re-issued, to take its place in English law as a guarantee of individual liberties and a defence against arbitrary or tyrannical government. As such it has a fundamental importance in the evolution of British democracy and the world-wide political systems subsequently influenced by the democratic process.

The rule of a child can be a dangerous time but the minority of **Henry III** was generally peaceful, partly because he had the protection of the Pope, the guidance of Archbishop Stephen Langton and the support of an influential baron, Hubert de Burgh. The young king developed a pious loyalty to the church as well as an enthusiasm for architecture and in 1220 he laid the foundation stone of an ambitious re-building scheme at Westminster Abbey, a project that came to dominate his life. In 1224 the French attacked Gascony, the only part of

France still under English rule, and an English force was sent to assist in its defence. Three years later Henry declared himself to be old enough (at 20) to rule by his own authority and for several years he attempted unsuccessfully to curtail the influence of his powerful advisor Hubert de Burgh. In 1230 he responded to further French threats against Gascony by leading an expedition to Bordeaux, the chief city: this achieved little of military significance and proved to be very expensive.

By 1234 Henry was in full control of the government, but in the exercise of power he proved to be stubborn, impulsive, naive and prone to make serious misjudgements. In 1236 he married Eleanor, daughter of the Count of Provence, a marriage very unpopular among Henry's subjects though it brought him personal happiness. The problem was that the Count of Provence was relatively poor despite the fact that three of his daughters became the Queens of France, Castile and England. Eleanor's impoverished relatives flocked to England after her marriage and Henry proved willing to shower them with titles and honours. In 1238 another unpopular royal marriage took place when Henry's sister married **Simon de Montfort**, Earl of Leicester, to the annoyance of his jealous peers. The marriage also displeased the king, who in an extraordinary scene the following year publicly accused Simon of seducing his sister.

Meanwhile Henry gave high office to no less than four of his wife's uncles - William, Bishop of Valence; Thomas, who built the Savoy palace by the Thames in London; Boniface, who became Archbishop of Canterbury; and Peter, who was created Earl of Richmond. Henry's entourage was dominated by faction and intrigues, and according to the chronicler Matthew Paris 'the king changed his decisions from day to day, quarrelling with his relations and raging against his most powerful subjects'. In 1242, despite strong opposition from his Council Henry led another expedition to Gascony. He had been promised support by his stepfather Hugh de Lusignan, a great lord in Poitou, but he let Henry down and the king was only saved from capture in the ensuing battle with the French by the intervention of Simon de Montfort.

Henry remained in Bordeaux for a year, partly because he was short of money, having incurred huge expenses on this expedition and gained nothing in return. When he reached England late in 1243 he had to appeal to his Council for money because his natural extravagance had led him into great debt. In response the Council, led by the king's brother Richard of Cornwall, Simon de Montfort and the saintly bishop Hugh of Lincoln, demanded reforms in Henry's manner and methods of government, which he ignored. In 1248, as a response to a need for firm government in Gascony, Henry appointed Simon de Montfort Governor there, partly to be rid of him. So effectively did Simon repress revolts that the Gascons complained to the king of his conduct and Henry recalled Simon to London to answer the charges. This humiliation led to a formal breakdown of cordial relations between the two men.

In 1253 Henry sailed again to Gascony, spending eighteen months in France where little was achieved except that he arranged a marriage between his young son Edward and Eleanor, daughter of the King of Castile. He returned by way of Paris where he was entertained by King Louis IX and shown the magnificent *Sainte Chapelle* which had just been completed. In 1254 this king of little judgement made the most serious mistake of his life when without baronial consent he accepted the Pope's offer of the crown of Sicily for his second son Edmund, in return for promising to send an army against the existing King of Sicily (an

enemy of the Pope), and agreeing to pay off the Pope's debt of 135,541 marks under penalty of excommunication. In 1257 Henry was deprived of the wise advice and support of his loyal brother Richard of Cornwall who left for Germany on his election as heir to the Holy Roman Emperor, and in 1258 the great lords, led by Simon de Montfort, met at Oxford and forced the king to abandon the Sicilian venture and agree to the '**Provisions of Oxford**' which set up a committee of twenty-four barons to advise the king. The 'Provisions of Westminster', issued the following year, extended the reform of government to royal officials and baronial estates. Late in 1259 Henry agreed to the Treaty of Paris by which he formally gave up any claims to the lands in France held by his grandfather Henry II, except for Gascony.

The Provisions of Oxford had been forced upon Henry against his will and like his father before him he turned to the Pope to release him from his promise to abide by them. This was achieved in 1261. Henry also built up a party which would support him against Simon de Montfort who, in disgust, went into voluntary exile. Nevertheless Simon remained a hero to some of the younger barons, who, exasperated by the king's continuing incompetence, urged him to return in 1263 and again lead the demand for reform. Henry suggested arbitration by the King of France, who decided unconditionally in his favour, a verdict rejected by the reformers. In May 1264 this long-running dispute at last turned into civil war and Simon de Montfort's forces defeated the king at the battle of Lewes, where he was taken prisoner and agreed to allow Simon to govern in his name.

In June 1264 Simon called a **parliamentum** or baronial council, consisting of barons and also knights from each shire. In January 1265 he called another of these meetings, but as only four earls and eighteen barons responded to the invitation he also summoned representatives from each town as well as knights from every shire, seeking in this way to claim popular support for his policies. He also produced plans for a form of government that would reduce the powers of the king in favour of more consultation with the barons. Unfortunately many barons were by then as jealous of Simon as they were critical of the king and a new faction arose in support of Henry led by his exceptionally able young son and heir, Edward. Simon's forces were brought to battle at Evesham in August, where de Montfort was killed in the action. Henry was restored to his full powers though by the Statute of Marlborough in 1267 Magna Carta was re-issued together with the provisions of Westminster, a compromise made under the influence of Prince Edward. As a result of this important concession there was peace for the remaining five years of Henry's life, during which he gave much of his time and attention to the work of rebuilding Westminster Abbey, which he hoped would outshine the *Sainte Chapelle* in Paris. He died in 1272 after a long reign of fifty-five years which underlined the weakness of a monarchical system which gave too much power to a mediocre ruler.

Henry III's death in 1272 brought to the throne his eldest son, named **Edward** in honour of Henry's patron saint Edward the Confessor but nicknamed Longshanks because he was very tall. In view of his father's veneration for the Confessor, it is interesting that Edward disregarded the three Anglo-Saxon kings of that name, choosing to style himself Edward I rather than Edward IV. Clearly he regarded the Conquest of 1066 as a clean break. Edward proved to be a ruler more in the mould of his great-grandfather Henry II rather than his two undistinguished predecessors, combining outstanding qualities as a military leader with administrative skill and good political judgement. Like his great-uncle Richard I he was also a Crusader who helped to relieve Acre from Islamic attack in 1271. Indeed he was in Sicily returning from the Crusade when he received news of his father's death, but so secure was his

position in England that he spent a year suppressing revolts in Gascony before he returned home in 1274 to be crowned at Westminster.

In the same year Edward instituted a nationwide enquiry to determine by what authority - *Quo Warranto* - any man or town or institution held its privileges. If a royal charter granting the privileges could be produced it was accepted on payment of a fee. If not, the privileges were withdrawn to be re-granted, also on payment of a fee. In this way Edward solved some of the financial problems of the crown and also strengthened his own authority. In 1275 he showed himself to be a constitutional reformer in the tradition of Simon de Montfort when he summoned a **parliament** (meaning 'an opportunity to speak') which consisted not only of barons, but also knights from the shires and citizens from the towns. Over a period of twenty years it increasingly became accepted that representatives from the 'Commons' (i.e. the knights and citizens) should have a say in the raising of taxes. About 140 towns were founded between 1100 and 1300 and it was essential for the king to tap the wealth of the merchants who operated within them. Edward's parliament of 1295, summoned because he was in dire need of money, specified that two knights from each shire should attend, together with two citizens from each city and borough, confirming that the 'Commons' had a right to be consulted over taxation at the same time as the barons and higher clergy.

Early in his reign Edward turned his attention to the problem of **Wales**, which had so far managed to avoid being incorporated into the English kingdom. After the death of Hywel the Good in 950 a succession of strong local rulers established control over much of Wales for their own lifetimes, though no overall ruling dynasty was created because of the Welsh laws of succession which required the land and possessions of a dead man to be divided equally among his children. After his conquest of England, William I did not concern himself with Wales until 1081 when he decided to secure the Welsh frontier by creating the three powerful earldoms of Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford and giving extensive powers to their holders. William Rufus invaded Wales in 1095 and was able to set up the lordships of Cardigan, Pembroke, Brecon and Glamorgan which consisted of some territory formerly ruled by the Welsh. By 1100 as many as 500 motte-and-bailey fortifications had been constructed in the Welsh 'March', or borderland, but the heart of Wales had not been conquered.

Henry I attempted to colonize South Wales with Flemish settlers, but the experiment did not survive his death, and the Flemings were massacred by the Welsh. From 1100 onwards the local rulers of North Wales were increasingly successful in withstanding the English and even driving them back, with the kingdom of Gwynedd taking the lead under Gryffyd ap Cynan (d 1137) and his son Owain Gwynedd (d 1170). In mid-Wales Madog ap Mareddud (d 1160) increased the extent of Powys by capturing even territory east of Offa's dyke while in Deheubarth (South Wales) Rhys ap Gruffudd (d 1197) withstood attacks by Henry II who eventually recognized his authority in the region. At Henry II's death in 1189 it was accepted that Gwynedd, Powys and Deheubarth were Welsh princedoms whose rulers enjoyed autonomy under the nominal overlordship of the King of England.

By 1200 the princes of Gwynedd were advancing a claim to rule all Wales, and in 1206 Llywellyn ap Iorwerth, prince of Gwynedd, married Joan, an illegitimate daughter of King John. This did not prevent John invading in 1211 and taking hostage 28 sons of Welsh chieftains, all of whom were hanged a year later. Brutality of this sort made easier Llywellyn's task of uniting the Welsh against English aggression, and Llewellyn not only withstood this attack but long outlived John, dying in 1240. His son Dafydd succeeded him in

Gwynedd but Henry III made strenuous efforts to prevent him from extending his control to the whole of Wales. When Dafydd died childless in 1246 authority passed to his three brothers, Llewellyn ap Gryffyth, Owain and Dafydd, and Henry did his best to create dissension among them.

In 1255 Llewellyn imprisoned his two brothers and embarked upon a campaign to establish himself as the ruler of all Wales, helped by the fact that Henry III was distracted by the civil war in England. In 1258 Llewellyn was hailed as **Prince of Wales** by local rulers, and in 1264 he allied with Simon de Montfort two months before his defeat of Henry II at Lewes. In 1265 Simon recognized Llewellyn as 'Prince of Wales', a title he was to hold as a vassal of the English king. Despite Simon's subsequent fall, Henry III confirmed Llewellyn as Prince of Wales at the Treaty of Montgomery in 1267. This was an important legal framework upon which to base the development of a principality of Wales with strong cultural and political claims to nationhood.

Edward I was well aware of this risk and Llewellyn played into his hands in 1274 when he refused to attend Edward's coronation in that year and refused to do him homage, thus emphasizing his claims to be an independent ruler. This proved to be a costly mistake. Assembling a large army and fleet Edward marched from Chester along the north coast of Wales, forcing Llewellyn to agree to recognize him as his overlord at the Treaty of Conwy. Calling upon his knowledge of Crusader castles in Syria and making use of his outstanding architect James of St. George, Edward ordered the construction of formidable castles at Flint and Rhuddlan, safeguarding his route from Chester into North Wales. These castles soon saw action in 1282, when Llewellyn's brother Dafydd, dissatisfied with the policy of appeasing the English, rose in rebellion on his own account. Edward again marched from Chester along the Welsh coast, Llewellyn was killed fighting in the mountains and Dafydd was captured. Edward then ordered the construction of three gigantic castles at Conwy, Harlech and Caernarvon, the magnificent walls of the latter resembling those of Constantinople. It was at Caernarvon that Queen Eleanor gave birth to her fourth son, Edward, in 1284.

In 1284 Edward issued the great **Statute of Rhuddlan** which proclaimed his conquest of Wales and set out detailed provisions for its administration. These included the establishment of counties on the English model and the enforcement of English as well as Welsh law. A further rebellion in 1294 was ruthlessly suppressed and the last of Edward's great ring of fortifications, Beaumaris Castle, rose by the Menai Straits on Anglesey. In 1301, Edward of Caernarvon, by then heir to the throne on account of the premature deaths of his three older brothers, was proclaimed Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester, symbolising the annexation of Wales to the English crown. The insistence of the Welsh on the maintenance of their local identities and their rejection of primogeniture had retarded their development as a coherent nation under strong leadership, and against the exceptional determination and skill of Edward I and his iron ring of castles the natural mountainous defences upon which the Welsh had relied for so long proved inadequate.

Having succeeded in Wales Edward turned his attention towards **Scotland** where a succession of deaths in the royal house presented him with a rich opportunity to involve himself in the affairs of the northern kingdom. David I died in 1153 to be succeeded by his eleven year-old son Malcolm IV who died unmarried in 1165 leaving the throne to his younger brother **William 'The Lion'** who enjoyed a reign of fifty-nine years. In 1174 he supported Henry II's sons in their rebellion against their father, paying for this by his defeat

and capture that year. He was released, but only after doing homage to Henry for the kingdom of Scotland. This significant event gave successive English kings a claim to be overlords of the kings of Scotland even though William paid Richard I to be released from the status of vassal in 1189 when Richard needed money for his Crusade. The rest of William's reign was spent peaceably founding new religious houses and establishing 'burhs' or self-governing towns.

William's son Alexander II (1214-1249) married a daughter of King John and like his father-in-law was much in conflict with his barons. He also had to contend with attacks on the Hebrides and the Western Isles by Norwegian forces. His son Alexander III became king at the age of eight and in 1251 he married Margaret, a daughter of Henry III of England, at a great ceremony in York Minster. On this occasion he did homage to Henry for his English lands but refused any suggestion that he should do homage for his kingdom. An able and diplomatic ruler, Alexander was successful in stimulating agriculture and trade, in particular the commercial activities of Berwick-on-Tweed. He also managed to survive a determined invasion in 1263 by King Haakon of Norway who captured towns on the west coast before his fleet was driven ashore by strong winds at Largs, there to be attacked by the Scots. The Treaty of Perth (1266) ended hostilities with Norway and gave Scotland control over all the Western Isles. In 1281 Alexander's daughter married Eric Magnusson who had recently come to the throne in Norway.

Alexander travelled to England to do homage to Edward I for his English lands though he steadfastly refused to do homage for the Scottish kingdom despite pressure from Edward. However, the deaths of three of Alexander's children between 1281 and 1283 left only a baby girl, Margaret. When Alexander died in 1283 she was proclaimed Queen and Scotland was governed in her name by 'Guardians of the Kingdom'. In 1290 they accepted the suggestion of Edward I that Margaret should marry his son and heir, Edward of Caernarvon, but this promising plan collapsed when Margaret died later that year. Because Scottish law gave rights to illegitimate children born in Scotland, and also to females, twelve individuals were able to lay claim to the throne when Margaret died. The Guardians were prepared to accept Edward as arbitrator but he insisted that it was his right as overlord of Scotland to decide who should be king, and he threatened to enforce that right with troops if necessary.

In these circumstances Edward's overlordship was reluctantly recognized and in 1292 he pronounced in favour of **John Balliol**, the great-grandson of King William 'the Lion's' brother David. Inevitably this did not please the supporters of the other claimants, in particular **Robert Bruce**, who accused Balliol of being the puppet of the English king. In 1295 Edward prepared for hostilities against France and summoned Balliol to accompany him with troops as a feudal vassal. Balliol responded by rebellion and rejection of his oath of allegiance. He also made a treaty with France, the beginning of the long-lasting '**Auld Alliance**' between the two countries which persisted into Tudor times. Edward's response in 1296 was dramatic - a march to Berwick where the town was destroyed and citizens massacred, followed by the defeat of Balliol's army at Dunbar, and his deposition. In a deeply symbolic gesture, the **Stone of Scone**, upon which Scottish kings had sat at their coronations for many centuries, was packed up and sent to London.

For the time being Edward appointed English officials to administer Scotland in his name, and this led to the emergence of **William Wallace**, a young Scottish laird whose skills as a warrior and whose force of personality galvanized his countrymen into resistance. An

English army was defeated at Stirling in 1297, after which Wallace was declared Guardian of Scotland. Edward responded by leading a massive English army across the border and defeating Wallace at Falkirk in July 1298. However, Wallace escaped capture for the next seven years, acquiring legendary status as a Scottish freedom fighter until he was betrayed in 1305, tried in London and hanged, drawn and quartered in a gruesome execution. In 1306, John Comyn, Edward's regent in Scotland, was murdered and the Scots declared Robert Bruce king and had him crowned at Scone. Though suffering from dysentery Edward accompanied his army in a litter as far as Lanercost where he was forced to rest while his troops moved forward to defeat Bruce at Methven. Edward hoped to resume command of the army in 1307 but he died in July at Burgh-by-Sands. He was buried in Westminster Abbey where his tomb famously describes him as *Scottorum malleus*, 'Hammer of the Scots'.

There is a sense in which Edward I was the first effective ruler of the British Isles because, in addition to his being King of England and Lord of Ireland, he was the conqueror of Wales and, from 1296 until his death, the ruler of Scotland. He also managed to retain control of Gascony, where he built 'bastides', fortified towns designed to withstand the French. Ultimately the King of France made peace and agreed to a marriage between his daughter Isabella and Edward of Caernarvon. Edward's military activities involved great expense and in England his chief problem was the outcry caused by his heavy taxation, especially the infamous 'maltote' on wool in 1294. This led to a constitutional crisis similar to the ones faced by both John and Henry III, when between 1297 and 1300 Edward was presented with the 'Monstraunces', a set of formal objections by Parliament to his excessive taxes, with subsequent demands that the provisions of Magna Carta should be observed. Unlike John and Henry III, however, Edward was a statesman who knew when and how to make concessions, and he managed to avoid civil conflict. Moreover, throughout his reign he and his Chancellor, Robert Burnell, issued through Parliament a series of statutes which codified and clarified existing laws across a wide spectrum of issues. Like his ancestor Henry II, Edward cared little for the outward show of royalty but his determination to be obeyed knew few bounds. Scotland and Wales may have little to thank him for, but he was an outstanding king of England.

By stark contrast his son **Edward II** was a disaster. He was the last of the nine children born to Edward I and Eleanor of Castile but he became king because though his five sisters all survived into adulthood his three elder brothers all died in infancy. As a youth he was left very much to his own devices and he spent much time in the company of a boy of his own age, Piers Gaveston, the son of a Gascon knight. In due course Edward developed a slavish affection for Gaveston which many assumed to be sexual though both men married and sired children. Edward's wife, whom he married shortly after his accession, was Isabella, daughter of Philip IV of France, and she bore him two sons and two daughters. Edward's chief mistake regarding Gaveston was to promote him far above his station, which enraged the high nobility. He created him Earl of Cornwall and arranged his marriage with Margaret of Gloucester, Edward's niece and a rich heiress. He also appointed Gaveston Regent of the kingdom in his absence and Deputy of Ireland. Faced with this reckless behaviour the barons closed ranks behind the king's cousin Thomas, Earl of Lancaster and forced the king to delegate his authority to 21 'Lords Ordainers' who would govern in his name. He was also forced to agree to exile Gaveston. However he soon reneged on these agreements and pardoned Gaveston, which sealed the latter's fate. In 1312 Gaveston was captured by the barons and beheaded on the orders of Thomas of Lancaster.

Edward was shocked and outraged at Gaveston's murder and far from making him turn for advice to his traditional baronial councillors it resulted in him putting his trust in another young favourite, Hugh Despenser. In 1314 the king had the opportunity to retrieve his reputation when he marched into **Scotland** at the head of an army to re-impose English authority there. He had made a treaty with Robert Bruce soon after he became king but had led an invading force into Scotland in 1311 without making much impact. After this Bruce gradually captured English strongholds in Scotland and by 1314 he had taken Edinburgh and was besieging Stirling, whose commander agreed to surrender unless a relief force arrived from England by midsummer. Edward rose to this challenge and attacked the Scots at **Bannockburn**, near Stirling, on June 24th 1314. All accounts agree that Edward personally fought with skill and courage but he was unable to prevent his superior force from being routed by the Scots in a confused encounter. This was a fatal blow to English control over Scotland : as the Scottish Declaration of Arbroath announced to the Pope in 1320 'For as long as one hundred of us shall remain alive we shall never in any wise consent to the rule of the English, for it is not for glory we fight, for riches or for honours, but for freedom alone, which no good man loses but with his life'.

In the years following Bannockburn the authority of Thomas of Lancaster and the Lords Ordainers was confirmed by parliaments at York and Lincoln but Thomas failed to give a strong lead and the king was able to strike back in 1322 when Lancaster was captured and executed and parliament declared the authority of the Lords Ordainers to be at an end. Aided by his favourite, Hugh Despenser, and other allies Edward was able to re-assert his authority and in 1323 he made a truce with the Scots for 13 years. He was eventually brought low not by foreign powers or even a united baronage, but by the plotting of his wife Isabella, estranged by her husband's affection for Gaveston and then Despenser, who with her own lover Roger Mortimer captured the king and executed many of his friends and supporters. Parliament declared Edward deposed in January 1327 and he abdicated soon afterwards. He was imprisoned in an unhealthy dungeon in Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire, where it was hoped he would die of disease. When he did not, he was murdered there on September 21st, the notorious method used being the insertion of a red-hot iron into his anus, so that no apparent mark was made on his body when it lay in state after his 'natural' death.

Edward's eldest son, **Edward III**, was only fourteen when his father was deposed and for a time he was firmly under the control of his mother and Mortimer. They decided to make an expensive truce with France before invading Scotland in the hope of avenging Bannockburn. After unsuccessful campaigns they were forced to sign the **Treaty of Northampton** (1328) which recognized Robert Bruce as the independent King of **Scotland**. By October 1329 Edward felt strong enough to strike at his mother and her lover: Mortimer was hanged at Tyburn and Isabella spent the rest of her life in close confinement. The young king, recently married to Philippa, daughter of the Flemish Count of Hainault, then firmly took over the control of the kingdom and proved to be an able and ambitious ruler. The death of Robert Bruce in 1329 and the succession of his five-year old son David led to a challenge from the rival house of Balliol, which Edward supported, defeating a Scottish army at Halidon Hill in 1333. He led armies to Scotland in 1335, 1336 and 1337 but, despite garrisoning many towns, he could not subdue the countryside or overcome the spirit of Scottish resistance.

In 1340 Edward turned his attention to a greater prize, the kingdom of France. As his mother had been the daughter of the late King Philip IV and there had been a disputed succession in France since 1328, Edward formally claimed the throne of France for himself and set out to

enforce it by conquest, thereby initiating the misleadingly named '**Hundred Years War**' with France which actually lasted until 1453. In June 1340 he had an early success in a naval battle off Sluys and in 1346 he won the landmark victory of **Crecy** in Normandy with the help of his newly-organized longbow men. He then moved on to besiege Calais which held out for a year before surrendering. Edward condemned six of the townsmen to death but relented when his wife went on her knees to plead for their lives. While Edward was in France, David of Scotland invaded the north of England but was defeated at the battle of Neville's Cross in 1346 and held prisoner in the Tower of London. The year 1347 was therefore the high point of Edward's reign and he returned to England to be feted as a hero.

Exhilaration soon turned to despair in 1348 when an unprecedented killer disease swept through Europe. Within hours victims would succumb to fever and boils which typically appeared in the groin and under the armpits and soon oozed black pus. The population of England had steadily risen to about four million people by 1300 but the disease, known at the time as 'the great mortality' and only since the 1580s as '**The Black Death**' carried off about a third of them, leaving towns depopulated and causing many villages to be abandoned. Medical researchers are still attempting to identify the disease, which was not necessarily (as previously thought) a bubonic plague carried by the fleas of the black rat. There were further drastic outbreaks of disease, notably in 1360, 1361, 1362, 1369 and 1375, and as a result the population of England declined to about 2.5 million by 1450. The Scots, Welsh and Irish were not spared and suffered in proportion. The sudden reduction in manpower made labour a more highly valued commodity and helped to break down the feudal dependence of a villein on his lord. In time this led to the payment of money wages and more freedom of movement for workers.

Edward III and his Queen survived the plague and of their eleven children only one, Joan, was a possible victim, dying aged thirteen in September 1348. In the early 1350s Edward's eldest son, Edward, Prince of Wales, known from the colour of his armour as '**The Black Prince**' spearheaded most of the fighting in France and in 1356 won an outstanding victory at **Poitiers** after which the French King John was held prisoner and taken to England where he joined David of Scotland in captivity. In 1359 Edward decided to release them both in return for huge ransoms which were needed to pay off his own mounting debts. These were caused not only by the continual expense of the war but by elaborate building projects, especially at Windsor Castle, the centrepiece of Edward's enthusiasm for chivalrous jousts and entertainments, and for his knights of the **Order of the Garter** which he founded in 1348. Edward fairly won a reputation for chivalry, enhanced by the chronicler Froissart, while the fortunes of humbler folk were vividly depicted by the poet **Geoffrey Chaucer** whose '*Canterbury Tales*' were written in the 1380s in the emerging English language.

In the 1360s Edward entered into a premature decline, delegating campaigns to his sons and spending more time at leisure with a succession of mistresses. The conflict with France did not go well and by 1374 England was left in possession of only Calais, Bordeaux and Bayonne. At home the king struggled with financial problems while the 'heretical' teachings of the church reformer **John Wycliffe** and his 'Lollard' followers led to popular criticism of the rich and powerful. In this climate parliament was able to establish important precedents. Since 1346 the Commons had met separately from the lords and bishops, and in 1376 they elected a Speaker for the first time to make their complaints known to the king. The so-called 'Good' Parliament of that year formally accused some of Edward's advisors of corruption

and placed them on trial, thus instituting the parliamentary right to ‘impeach’ unpopular servants of the king.

In 1376 the Black Prince died, to be followed by Edward III in 1377 so that the throne passed to his grandson **Richard II**, a child of ten menaced by powerful uncles. Richard was the only surviving son of the Black Prince, was born in Bordeaux in 1367 and because he was a child at his accession a Council of eleven was chosen to govern in his name. The expensive but unsuccessful struggle to retain a hold in France continued and to pay for the war the Council levied a series of unpopular ‘poll’ taxes (on every head). The tax of one shilling in 1381 sparked off ‘**The Peasants’ Revolt**’ when thousands of country people from the southern and eastern counties marched on London and caused chaos in the city for several days during the month of June. The Tower of London failed to withstand a mob which sought out and killed the Archbishop of Canterbury and several others, while the magnificent Savoy Palace, the property of the king’s uncle John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, was sacked and burned down. The king, though only fourteen, kept remarkably calm while many of his advisers panicked, and he was not afraid to confront thousands of the rebels at Mile End, promising to grant their demands and urging them to go home. He also overcame another potentially disastrous situation at Smithfield by calming the mob after Wat Tyler, the rebel leader, was killed by royal supporters. In due course the authorities regained control, the leading rebels were punished, and the revolt achieved little other than the abolition of the poll tax. A youthful king had, however, been impressed by the reverence shown even by rebels to his person, and the faith they placed in his royal word.

In 1382 Richard married Anne of Bohemia, the daughter of an outstanding Czech king who later became the Emperor Charles IV, and she encouraged her husband in his love for architecture and painting. They were a devoted couple but childless, while Anne’s Bohemian relatives and followers were deeply unpopular among the nobles. Between 1386 and 1389 Richard was locked in a struggle with a baronial party dominated by his uncle the Duke of Gloucester and his cousin the Earl of Derby : calling themselves ‘The Lords Appellant’ they succeeded in 1388 in persuading the ‘Merciless Parliament’ to place the king under their control, but he struck back in 1389, declared himself (at 22) to be of full age and dismissed the Lords Appellant. Truces were made with France and Scotland and for the next few years, supported by his uncle the Duke of Lancaster Richard governed peacefully, devoting much time and expense to the elaborate decoration of his palaces at Westminster and Sheen. In a deliberate attempt to enhance the prestige of the monarchy Richard surrounded himself with a large and extravagant court and encouraged deferential rituals, all of which excited strong criticism. In 1392 he unwisely quarrelled with the City of London over finance and temporarily withdrew their civic liberties, which was considered provocatively high-handed. The Queen, one of Richard’s wisest advisers, did much to patch up this quarrel, but in 1394 she died, leaving the king alone and distraught.

Partly as an antidote to his grief Richard led a large army to **Ireland** in September 1394, the first visit there of an English king since 1210, when in a nine-month campaign King John destroyed his enemies and established firm royal control. Henry III never crossed to Ireland though he ordered the construction of a new great hall for Dublin castle in preparation for a visit that never took place. In 1254 a royal charter stated clearly that the land of Ireland should never be separated from the crown of England, an important principle for the future. Edward I sent some strong governors to Ireland and Anglo-Irish troops fought with his armies in Wales, Flanders, Scotland and Gascony.

Throughout the 13th century Ireland was gradually established as a feudal lordship dominated by Anglo-Irish lords governing according to English common law. Counties were established and royal charters were granted to major towns such as Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick, while the development of smaller towns was left, as in England, to the local lords. A parliament developed at much the same time as its English counterpart, with representatives of counties joining the lords and bishops in 1297, and representatives from the towns in 1300. Growing prosperity led to the building of castles and churches, with two cathedrals for Dublin. Ireland was not, however, internally at peace because there was constant conflict between the Anglo-Irish settlers and traditional Irish chieftains dedicated to driving out the English. In 1262 the High Kingship was offered by Irish chiefs to the King of Norway, though to little effect. However, when it was offered to Robert Bruce of Scotland half a century later he sent his brother Edward with an army to Ireland and Edward Bruce was declared High King in 1316, though he was defeated and killed by Anglo-Irish forces two years later.

Serious problems beset Ireland in the 14th century, notably the famines and plagues (especially 1348) that affected other parts of Europe. There was continued tension between English settlers and the Irish people, most of whom by then were treated as aliens not subject to English law. Between 1361 and 1376 Edward III sent high profile governors to Ireland (starting with his son Lionel), and they were backed with an army and given the task of subduing discontent and undertaking reforms. Richard II continued this policy, appointing his favourite Robert de Vere Marquis of Dublin in 1385. Richard's campaign of 1394 was intended to establish royal authority throughout Ireland and he spent vast sums on raising and equipping an army of five thousand men to take with him. He was so successful in his campaign in Leinster that most of the Irish chiefs submitted to him, receiving pardon for past acts of rebellion.

Richard returned to England in 1395 and the following year he signed a truce with France which was sealed by marriage to a child bride, Isabella, the six-year old daughter of Charles VI of France. His position looked strong and the kingdom was at peace but in 1397 Richard embarked on a series of despotic acts which led to his downfall. To start with, his former enemies Gloucester, Arundel and Warwick were all arrested and charged with treason. Warwick was exiled, Arundel beheaded, and Gloucester quietly murdered. Then when the Duke of Hereford (another former enemy) confessed to a treasonable conversation with the Duke of Norfolk, Richard staged an elaborate tournament at Coventry at which their guilt was to be decided by single combat. At the last moment, however, the king cancelled the contest and exiled both men.

In February 1399 Richard's uncle the Duke of Lancaster died and his title and inheritance was due to pass to his eldest son, the exiled Duke of Hereford, who, as Richard had not yet produced a son, was the next heir to the throne. In a highly provocative move, Richard announced that Hereford had been disinherited and extended his exile to banishment for life. He then foolishly left England to lead another expedition to Ireland, giving Hereford the chance to return to England to claim his father's lands and titles and rally support against Richard whom he denounced as a tyrant. Richard hastened back from Ireland, landing at Milford Haven, where he received little help from the Welsh. Lacking support, Richard was forced to surrender to the new Duke of Lancaster at Flint and was then taken prisoner to London where in September he abdicated, having been formally deposed by parliament

which declared Lancaster to be king as Henry IV. Richard was held prisoner in Pontefract Castle and by February 1400 he was dead, aged thirty-three.

Henry IV was the first King of England since the Conquest to have been born in England of an English father and mother. Short and red-haired, he did not share the Plantagenet good looks but he was intelligent and ambitious and in his youth he had travelled as far as Vilna in Russia, and Jerusalem. His seizure of the throne was not without provocation, but he was nevertheless a usurper who bore the ultimate responsibility for Richard's death and he paid the price by having to deal with many rebellions as well as face his own sense of personal guilt. In 1400 his enemies hatched plots in Scotland and Wales, causing Henry to undertake indecisive campaigns across both borders. In Wales the deposition of the legitimate king provided the excuse for a resurgence of Welsh nationalism from 1400 under the leadership of **Owen Glendower**, an aristocrat from North Wales who claimed descent from the ancient Welsh princes. Aided by the Percies and the Mortimers Glendower successfully renounced the authority of Henry IV and he was recognized as Prince of Wales by the King of France. He was able to fight off English attempts to destroy his rebellion until 1414 and was the effective ruler of most of Wales until then.

In 1401 there was a plot to kill Henry IV in which Lollard priests were implicated, and this led to the burning of the first heretic in England. In 1403 Henry married Joan, daughter of the King of Navarre, in an attempt to find an ally against France. In 1404 he fell out with the powerful Percy family who had supported him in 1399 but now switched their loyalty to the young Earl of March who had been Richard's designated heir. A dangerous rebellion broke out, led by the Earl of Northumberland and his son 'Hotspur', but Henry defeated them at Shrewsbury, where Hotspur was slain. The following year Northumberland, in league with Archbishop Scrope of York, rebelled for a second time but was again defeated by the king, Scrope being beheaded not far from his palace at Bishophthorpe. This was the last major threat to Henry's throne but the strain told upon him and from 1408 onwards he was more or less an invalid. Parliament made the most of Henry's dubious claim to the throne and the insecurity caused by the revolts against him by demanding a greater share in the administration of the kingdom so that the 'Lancastrian' style of government placed appreciably less emphasis on the prerogatives of the crown than Richard II had done.

Henry died prematurely in 1413 wracked by illness and - by his own admission - a sense of remorse, so that his 26-year old son **Henry V** succeeded to a crown low in power and prestige. The new king had already distinguished himself as a soldier fighting rebels at home and he decided to unite his kingdom and win glory for the house of Lancaster by renewing Edward III's claim to the throne of France, a nation weakened by internal factions since 1392 when Charles VI had the first of many subsequent lapses into insanity. In July 1415 Henry crushed another rebellion in favour of the Earl of March before sailing to Harfleur in August with 30,000 troops. The town surrendered after six weeks but Henry lost half his men from sickness and dysentery. Rashly, in the view of many contemporaries, he marched on towards Calais with only 15,000 men and on October 25th he encountered a French army of 60,000 at **Agincourt**. Chiefly by the cunning use of his longbowmen Henry won a remarkable victory, losing only 1,600 men to the French 8,000. A second campaign in 1417 and 1418 led to the conquest of Normandy and capture of Rouen and in 1420 Henry concluded the triumphant Treaty of Troyes at which it was agreed that he should be Regent of France until the death of the mad Charles VI, after which he would succeed to the French throne himself. The agreement was sealed by his marriage to Charles' daughter, Katherine. Tragically, Henry fell

ill with dysentery and died in August 1422 leaving the throne to his baby son aged seven months.

When Charles VI died two months later, the baby **Henry VI** became, by the Treaty of Troyes, King of France also. His uncle the Duke of Bedford was appointed Regent of France while the government of England came under the control of another uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. In 1429 Henry was crowned King of England at Westminster and in 1431 he was crowned King of France in Paris. Whether even Henry V would have been able to rule both kingdoms successfully is open to doubt : under Bedford English control of France gradually loosened in the face of a patriotic French movement led initially by the unlikely figure of a young peasant girl, **Joan of Arc**, who persuaded Charles VI's disinherited son that she had been sent from heaven to restore him to his rightful throne. After successes at Orleans and Patay she saw her dream realized when Charles VII was crowned at Reims in 1429. Soon after this she was captured and burned to death by the English, but the French fought on.

In 1435 Charles VII made peace with Burgundy, hitherto an ally of England, after which the English were always on the defensive. In 1450 an English army was crushed near Bayeux and soon afterwards Bordeaux fell after 300 years of English rule. By 1453 only Calais still held out, and 'The Hundred Years War' was over. Edward III's ambitious claim, made 118 years before, had led to more than a century of conflict between the two kingdoms. France emerged from this contest strengthened and enlarged, ready to become a powerful European nation-state. England, whose kings throughout the Middle Ages had been mostly French as well as the rulers of much of southern France, was left to develop as a small island kingdom, searching for an 'English' identity.

Henry VI grew up to be pious, scholarly and peaceable and his greatest delights were his twin foundations of Eton College and King's College at Cambridge. During his youth power struggles took place at court between the Duke of Gloucester, Cardinal Beaufort and the Duke of York. In 1444 Henry married **Margaret of Anjou**, whose father the Duke of Anjou claimed many grand titles but had neither real power nor money. With Gloucester's death in 1447 Henry's cousin the Duke of York became heir to the throne and opposed the king's inclinations towards peace with France. About this time supporters of York began to wear a **white rose** while those of the Lancastrian royal party sported a **red rose**. In 1453, the same year in which the war effectively ended in France, Henry fell into an incurable trance, remaining silent and incapable of conducting business. Parliament appointed York Protector of the realm in 1454 and he governed for nearly a year until the king recovered from his illness.

At this point Margaret of Anjou emerged as the power behind her weak husband, aggressively championing both his rights and those of her baby son. York was deprived of his role as Protector and even his place on the Council. He decided to rebel and marched on London, defeating the royal troops at St Albans in May 1455. The king was taken prisoner and again lapsed into insanity. For a time York ran the government but in due course the king recovered and the Queen manoeuvred York out of power once more. In 1459 she persuaded Henry to attack the Yorkists at Ludlow, and York was forced to flee to Ireland and his son to Calais. There they regrouped, crossed the Channel and defeated the royalist forces at Northampton in July 1460, taking Henry prisoner and forcing the Queen to flee to Scotland. It was now proposed that Henry should remain nominal king for the rest of his life but that York should govern in his name and succeed him when he died.

The Queen would not hear of this and raised an army in the north and won a major victory at Wakefield where York was killed. Margaret then marched on to St Albans, defeating the Yorkists in a second battle there and releasing the king from captivity. However, York's son and heir, with the help of the Earl of Warwick, took the bold step of marching to London and in March 1461 proclaimed himself king as **Edward IV**, after which he attacked the Lancastrians at Towton, shattering their army and driving Henry and Margaret to take refuge in Scotland. In June 1461 Edward IV was crowned in London and he then spent several years mopping up pockets of Lancastrian resistance. Henry VI was captured in 1465 and kept a prisoner in the Tower of London, while Margaret fled abroad.

Edward's chief supporter, the Earl of Warwick, planned a diplomatic marriage for him with a foreign princess but was shocked to discover that Edward had already secretly married Elizabeth Woodville, a commoner who was a widow with five sisters and two sons. Influenced by his wife, Edward showed signs of wishing to be free of Warwick's influence but Warwick, 'the Kingmaker', struck back in 1469 when his forces captured Edward. For a time both Henry VI and Edward IV were Warwick's prisoners and he even contemplated offering the throne to Edward's younger brother the Duke of Clarence, who had married his own daughter. In the end he made peace with Edward in return for favours but rebelled again in 1470, crossing to France where he came to a cynical arrangement with Margaret of Anjou and the exiled Lancastrians to invade England and restore Henry VI. At the news of this invasion Edward fled to Flanders and for a few months Henry VI was brought out of the Tower and proclaimed king again, with Warwick governing in his name.

Edward IV was, however, a born fighter, at his best in adversity, and he crossed from Flanders in 1471, defeating Warwick (who was killed in the battle) at Barnet in April. He then marched west and destroyed Margaret and the Lancastrians at Tewkesbury in May. Henry VI was quietly murdered in the Tower and the seemingly endless **Wars of the Roses** came to a halt with York triumphant over Lancaster. Little was ever at stake in this conflict other than the personal ambitions of great lords and princes and though there were many battles and acts of brutality these took place mostly in a localized way between professional armies of baronial retainers, leaving the ordinary people of England largely untouched.

Confiscation of the lands and money of his enemies made Edward IV both rich and secure at home and in 1474 he concluded the Treaty of Picquigny by which the King of France agreed to pay him handsomely not to wage war. In 1477 Edward quarrelled with his brother Clarence who was imprisoned in the Tower and allegedly drowned in a cask of Malmsey wine. Edward's able younger brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, then became his chief supporter and for a few years the kingdom was quiet while Edward spent his time building up a power-base of newly-created lords, and in patronizing the arts. The peace and security of the realm was threatened again when he died without much warning in April 1483, leaving the throne to his twelve-year old son, **Edward V**. Gloucester, who was not the hunchback of Shakespearean drama, was declared Protector of the realm but he knew perfectly well that under the young king his mother Elizabeth Woodville and a powerful faction of her friends and relatives would threaten his own position, so he took the drastic step of executing the Queen's leading supporters and encouraging reports that both Edward V and his younger brother the Duke of York were illegitimate. On these grounds he accepted the crown himself on June 25th 1483 as **Richard III**. Within weeks Edward V and his brother had been murdered in the Tower and buried there beneath a staircase.

Richard's actions were indeed desperate and served only to invite the rebellions that soon faced kings with dubious claims to the throne. Opposition to Richard centred on Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, whose mother Lady Margaret Beaufort was the senior representative of the Lancastrian line. As early as October 1483 Richard's former ally the Duke of Buckingham deserted him to plan an invasion by Henry Tudor but this was postponed when Buckingham was captured by Richard and executed. However in August 1485 Henry landed in Wales and, collecting supporters on the way, he met Richard's army at Bosworth Field in Leicestershire. Though Richard fought with great bravery his chance of success was destroyed by Sir William Stanley, supposedly his ally, whose troops attacked and killed him as he rode unsuspectingly past them. Stanley then picked up Richard's crown from where it had fallen on the field and placed it on the head of Henry Tudor.