

The War of the Roses really started when two brothers each wanted to rule England. They were John of Gaunt Duke of Lancaster and his brother Edmund Duke of York. The House of Lancaster was represented by a red rose and the House of York by a white rose, this is how the war got its name.

For many years the crown swapped hands between the houses of Lancaster and York. In 1453 Henry VI (House of Lancaster) became too sick to rule so his cousin Richard Duke of York, as 'protector', ruled until he was well again. In 1455, Henry was better but Richard did not want to stop being ruler, so he battled with Henry and won. Henry's wife, Margaret, did not give up, she got an army together and battled Richard again. This time Richard lost and was killed with the crown passing back to Henry.

Richard had a son, Edward, who carried on the war, and again the crown changed hands lots of times. In 1471 Edward IV (House of York) became king when Henry VI was killed after the Battle of Tewkesbury. When Edward died in 1483, Richard III (his brother) became king. Two years later Henry VII (House of Lancaster), who was in exile, landed in Wales and travelled to Bosworth Field to fight Richard.

King Richard had a much larger army than Henry, about 12,000 men. His army was positioned on a hill and had archers, spearmen, cavalry (men on horses) and some cannons. The Duke of Norfolk led the frontline, King Richard was in the centre and the Duke of Northumberland at the back. Henry had about 5,000 men, made up of archers, cavalry and spearmen. The Earl of Oxford was the leader at the front and Henry stayed at the side with bodyguards. There was also a third army on the field, Lord Stanley and his brother Sir William Stanley with about 5,000 men. They did not pick a side but were ready to join in if they were needed.

Richard III's army pushed forward first but were then pushed back and some of them fled. As Richard was losing he saw Henry VII on the field and charged forward to attack him. Sir William Stanley and his men decided to join the battle to help Henry. They surrounded Richard and his men and knocked him off his horse, and killed him.

Henry won and was immediately crowned King of England on the battlefield.

Extension: Why Henry married Elizabeth?

Henry wanted to end the war of the roses by marrying Edward IV's daughter Elizabeth to make them one big family. He also merged the two roses together to make the Tudor Rose.