

PLANTAGENET KINGS—ERA SUMMARY

BRITISH MIDDLE AGES – 1154 TO 1485 A.D.

HENRY II PLANTAGENET TO BATTLE OF BOSWORTH FIELD

The rule of the Plantagenet dynasty was long and eventful. [Henry Plantagenet](#) (II) came to the throne in 1154, and the last Plantagenet, [Richard III](#), was killed at the *Battle of Bosworth* in 1485, over three hundred years later. During this time, great changes took place in England. In the early years of the Plantagenet dynasty, the barons revolted against [king John](#) and forced him to sign the Magna Carta, which guaranteed certain rights to the towns and nobles. Later, they forced the king to call a Parliament, or group of nobles to advise him in ruling the kingdom. The Plantagenets were involved in two long and ruinous wars. The first was the [Hundred Years War](#) with France, which went well for England at first but in the end proved disastrous. The second was the [War of the Roses](#), a frightful civil war between rival claimants to the throne that nearly wiped out the entire Plantagenet line.



THE MORNING OF AGINCOURT

Henry Plantagenet and Sons – Henry Plantagenet, the founder of the Plantagenet line, was the grandson of [Henry I of England](#), and the great-grandson of [William II of England](#). He inherited the throne through his mother, but had to fight to establish his claim. He married another very powerful monarch, [Eleanor of Aquitaine](#), heir to the duchy of Aquitaine, so between the two they eventually controlled much of France as well as all of England. Henry spent much of his reign in various wars, consolidating his power. He had four sons, two of whom became king. The elder son, [Richard I of England](#), is best known as a crusader. He spent almost his entire reign away from England, leaving the country in the hands of his devious brother [John Lackland](#). John was one of the worst kings that England ever had and managed to lose most of the land in France that he had inherited from his parents. Finally, [Archbishop Langton](#), and the barons forced him to sign the Magna Carta, limiting his power.

Edwards I, II, and III – John's son [Henry III of England](#) supposedly ruled for 56 years, but for much of that time his brother-in-law, [Simon de Montfort](#), governed in his place and orchestrated the Parliament. When Henry III's son [Edward I of England](#) came to the throne the people rejoiced because they finally had a king who was half Saxon and spoke English instead of French, which had been the language of the ruling class since the Norman Conquest. He proved to be a competent king, and brought Wales, Ireland, and Scotland under his sway. His hold on Ireland was never strong though, and shortly after his death Scotland decisively won its

independence from England at the *Battle of Bannockburn*. The Edward I's son was a no-account king with very unpopular favorites. He was deposed in favor of his young son [Edward III of England](#), who ruled for fifty years and got England involved in the [Hundred Years War](#) with France. There were several important battles in the hundred years war, the first two being *Crecy* and *Poitiers*. England won both battles against great odds, but never succeeded in establishing Edward III's claim to the French throne.

The Edward III's eldest son was [Edward the Black Prince](#), a great warrior who was very popular with the people, but who never became king because he died before the long-lived Edward III. The crown then passed to the Black Prince's son [Richard II of England](#), who was unpopular and was eventually deposed in favor of his cousin [Henry Bolingbroke \(IV\)](#). Unfortunately Henry IV was not the next in line for the throne, but his selection was not resisted because his father John of Gaunt had been regent during most of Richard II's reign. The issue was not pressed for two generations but later became the cause of a great civil war.

Lancasters and Yorks – Henry Bolingbroke's son was [Henry V of England](#), famous for his victory over the French at Agincourt. Henry V reopened the Hundred Years War and came close to gaining the French crown, but he died only a few years after his great victory. He left a young son, [Henry VI of England](#), who was a peace-loving and studious man, but a weak leader. During his reign the French rallied under [Joan of Arc](#) and reclaimed all of the land England had won, bringing an end to the hundred year war, and the king became extremely unpopular. Seeing his opportunity, his cousin, the [Duke of York](#), made a claim for the throne. He denied Henry Bolingbroke's claim three generations back, which led to the disastrous [War of the Roses](#), in which the Lancaster and the York lines vied for the throne. The plots turns and reverses of this war are difficult to follow, but the main contenders were not the monarchs themselves, but rather the [Earl of Warwick](#), cousin to the Duke of York, and [Margaret of Anjou](#), Henry VI's wife. The war proved bitter and deadly, and many great nobles lost their lives. It also greatly enhanced the power of the king, since the king was allowed to confiscate the estates of any noble that rose in rebellion to him; as the kingship passed back and forth between the Lancasters and Yorks, almost every house was at some point in alliance with a "rebel".

The Yorks were finally victorious, but they came to a bad end. Edward IV ruled for 22 years, but when he died, his brother [Richard III](#) plotted to usurp the throne by killing his Edward's young sons. This accomplished, he found he had made many enemies, and when [Henry Tudor \(VII\)](#), a distant relative on the Lancaster side brought an army against him, several of his generals deserted him. Richard III, the last of the Plantagenet kings was killed on the battlefield of *Bosworth*, bringing the noble line that had ruled England for three centuries to an inglorious end.