

West Yorkshire Playhouse presents

# Richard III

By William Shakespeare  
Director Mark Rosenblatt

25 September – 17 October 2015

## Warring Kings and Family Quarrels

A brief guide to the battles for the crown which took place in the lead-up to Richard III .

To give a sense of the historical context of Richard III, it is helpful to have an understanding of how the infamous wars of the roses were so much part of the lives of characters in the play and why these battles happened.

When the play opens, the houses of York (represented by a symbol of a white rose) and Lancaster (represented by a symbol of a red rose) have been in battle for possession of the crown for over 100 years. What's unusual is that both houses are united by blood: they are all distant cousins and descended from **King Edward III...**

### King Edward III 1327 – 1377

Reigned from the age of fourteen from 1327. By all accounts, he was a well liked, liberal and ambitious King. He had 12 children in total but to understand the context of the wars of the roses, it's best to keep things simple and focus on his four eldest sons.



In order of birth:



Edward the Black Prince  
Heir to the throne



Lionel of Antwerp  
Duke of Clarence



John of Gaunt  
Duke of Lancaster



Edmund of Langley  
Duke of York

1376 – Edward, the Black Prince dies of the Plague so his son, Richard, 10 years old, ascends to the throne



### King Richard II (reigned: 1377 – 1399) House of Plantagenet

Son of Edward, the Black Prince. His Uncle John of Gaunt (Duke of Lancaster) acted as Lord Protector until he came of age. According to accounts, a well read and intelligent King but not known for bravery in battle. When he came of age, he caused a family feud by rebelling against his Uncle John of Gaunt and on John's death he confiscated his Lancastrian estates, which rightfully should have been passed to John's son, Henry of Bolingbroke. Henry (Richard's first cousin) invaded England to seize the crown from Richard. Richard surrendered and was imprisoned.

### 1399 – 1413 Henry IV: House of Lancaster

Henry spent much of his reign defending himself against plots, rebellions and assassination attempts. The king's success in putting down these rebellions was due partly to the military ability of his eldest son, Henry of Monmouth, who later became king.



### 1413 – 1422 Henry V: House of Lancaster

Son of Henry IV and a very strong leader who conquered Normandy. He also united England and France by marrying the French King's daughter.

### 1422 – 1461 Henry VI House of Lancaster

Came to the throne at nine months old. When he came of age he proved to be an ineffective ruler and a weak King, dominated by his wife, Queen Margaret of Anjou (Queen Margaret in the play). He had lost all English lands in France by 1450.





### 1453 – FIRST BATTLE OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Richard, Duke of York (descended from Edwards III's fourth son, Edmund, Duke of York) had a good claim to the throne and led an army against Henry VI – marking the first battle of the wars of the roses between the Houses of Lancaster and York. Many other battles (big and small) were fought afterwards between the two houses for possession of the crown.

### 1460 – BATTLE OF WAKEFIELD Lancaster v York (Lancaster wins)

Richard Duke of York is killed in battle against Henry VI's army.

### 1461 – BATTLE OF TOWTON Lancaster v York (York wins)

Described as the largest and bloodiest battle ever fought on British soil, Richard Duke of York's eldest son, Edward, Duke of York, leads an army against King Henry VI and wins. Henry and his family flee to Scotland.



### 1461 – 1470 King Edward IV: House of York

Edward was known as Earl of March until his accession. After his father's death he occupied London 1461, and was proclaimed King in place of Henry VI by a council of peers.

### 1470 – 1471: King Henry VI House of Lancaster

After raising an army against Edward IV, King Henry VI is restored to the throne. Edward flees to Flanders.

### 1471 – BATTLE OF TEWKESBURY

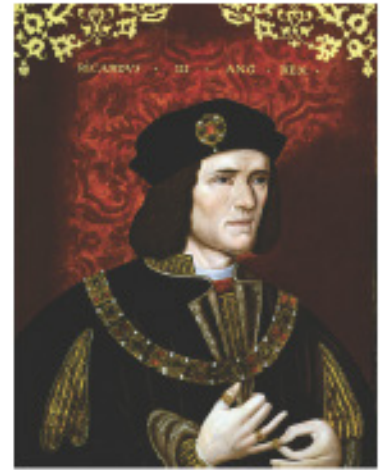
Edward IV raises an army against Henry VI and wins the crown back again. In the battle, Henry's son and only heir, Edward Prince of Wales is killed. Henry VI is imprisoned and dies under suspicious circumstances in the Tower of London.

### 1471 – 1483 King Edward IV House of York

Edward did not face any future rebellions or battles during the rest of his reign as the most vital part of the Lancastrian line had all but been distinguished after the death of King Henry's only son Edward at the battle of Tewkesbury. Edward gained a reputation as a daring, bold and brilliant military commander.

## 1483 – 1485 King Richard III

The last King of the House of York and Edward IV's youngest brother. When his brother died, Richard was named Lord Protector for Edward's eldest sons Princes Edward and Richard. Richard arranged for the young princes to lodge in the Tower of London for their protection but the young princes were not seen again in public and accusations began to circulate to suggest that they had been murdered on Richard's orders so he could be crowned King.



## 1485 BATTLE OF BOSWORTH – LAST BATTLE OF WARS OF THE ROSES

Henry Bolingbroke (descended from the line of the House of Lancaster) raises an army against Richard III, murders him in battle and seizes the crown.

## 1485 – 1509 King Henry VII (descended from the House of Lancaster and founder of the House of Tudor)

Marries Elizabeth Woodville (King Edwards IV's daughter), uniting the houses of Lancaster and York, bringing peace between the two warring households after years of battle.

