

## British History Series: Episode 15: The Wars of the Roses

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### Introduction

Welcome to a summary of Episode 15 of our British History series, focusing on the complex and fascinating period known as the Wars of the Roses. This period is often mentioned in English history but may not be well understood. Let's delve into the details.

### What Were the Wars of the Roses?

- **Not a Simple North vs. South Conflict:** It's commonly thought of as a fight between Yorkshire and Lancashire (white roses versus red roses), but it was primarily a dynastic dispute within the House of Plantagenet.
- **Dynastic Dispute:** A civil war erupted within the Plantagenet family, the ruling family of England at the time.
- **Long Civil War:** Lasted for about 30 years.
- **Rival Factions:** The main rivals were the House of Lancaster (associated with the red rose) and the House of York (associated with the white rose).
- **Origin of the Name:** The term "Wars of the Roses" only came into use in the 19th century, popularised by Sir Walter Scott.

### Key Points and Figures

- **Plantagenets:** The longest-reigning royal house in English history (331 years). They were known for internal conflicts and disputes.
- **Trigger Point:** The troubles escalated after the death of Edward III in 1377 and the subsequent usurpation of Richard II by Henry Bolingbrook (Henry IV).
- **House of Lancaster:** Descended from John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, third son of Edward III. Key figures included Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI.
- **House of York:** Descended from Lionel, Duke of Clarence (second son of Edward III) and Edmund, Duke of York (fourth son of Edward III). Key figures included Richard, Duke of York, and his son Edward (later Edward IV).
- **Richard, Duke of York:** Believed he had a better claim to the throne than Henry VI. He was declared Lord Protector during Henry VI's mental breakdowns.
- **Henry VI:** Suffered from mental breakdowns and was often a figurehead rather than a strong ruler.
- **Margaret of Anjou:** Henry VI's wife, who played a significant role in defending her son's claim to the throne. She was a formidable figure in the Wars of the Roses.
- **Key Battles:**

- **St. Albans (First and Second Battles):** Important battles in the early stages of the conflict.
- **Battle of Wakefield:** Richard, Duke of York, was killed.
- **Battle of Mortimer's Cross:** Edward, Earl of March (son of Richard, Duke of York), was victorious.
- **Battle of Towton:** One of the bloodiest battles in English history, resulting in a Yorkist victory.
- **Battle of Barnet:** The Earl of Warwick was killed.
- **Battle of Tewkesbury:** A decisive victory for Edward IV, where Edward, Prince of Wales, was killed.
- **Edward IV:** Son of Richard, Duke of York, who eventually became King of England.
- **Earl of Warwick (The Kingmaker):** A powerful figure who switched sides and played a crucial role in the conflict.

### The Turning Point

- The conflict involved periods where one side gained the upper hand, only for the other to regain power.
- Key events like the Battle of Towton and the Battle of Tewkesbury significantly shifted the balance of power.
- Eventually, Edward IV's victories led to him securing the throne.

### Aftermath

- Even after Edward IV became king, the conflict continued with further rebellions and challenges to his rule.
- Internal disputes and changing allegiances made this a complex and turbulent period in English history.

### Trivia

- The Wars of the Roses are often seen as an inspiration for George R.R. Martin's "Game of Thrones" series.
- Emblems of the white and red roses were not the only symbols used during the battles.

### Conclusion

The Wars of the Roses was a complex dynastic struggle that shaped England's history. It was more than just a simple battle between regions; it was a fight for the crown among the Plantagenet family. This summary offers a brief overview of the key events and figures involved in this dramatic era.