



The Journey to Bosworth

England, 1400's – for almost 30 years a vicious civil war raged across England. Many 1000's of people laid down their lives as two families, the House of York and the House of Lancaster fought for the throne of England, each believed they had the better claim to the throne.

On the 22 August 1485 in the heart of rural Leicestershire, two armies faced each other; neither side could have known how important this fight would be. This decisive battle would witness the death of the King and the birth of a dynasty that would last for 122 years. It was the last time that an English King was killed in battle.

King Richard III had ruled the land for only 2 years and 1 month when he found his claim to the throne challenged by Henry. Henry, who started the day as the Earl of Richmond, was crowned nearby, becoming Henry VII.

Henry had been living in exile in France since the age of 14, but at 28, was encouraged by his Lancastrian family and friends to fight for the chance to become England's King. He sailed to Milford Haven in Wales, with a small army of English exiles and French mercenaries. He was born in Wales, and used this connection to gain more support for his cause. His army finally numbered around 5000 men.

Henry requested help from Lord Thomas Stanley, and his brother Sir William Stanley, based in the North West of England. Lord Thomas was married to Henry's mother (Henry's father had died previously), but more importantly, was a wealthy man, and could command a great private army. Henry and Lord Thomas may have communicated on the march down the country, as they would have followed a similar route. However it is not known if Henry was successful in gaining Lord Thomas's support prior to the battle.

Meanwhile Richard III, on hearing of Henry's landing, sent out a summons to his supporters, requesting them to meet the King equipped for war. He also wanted Lord Thomas's support and took his eldest son hostage in an attempt to guarantee it.

Richard marched out from Leicester with around 12000 men, with the intention of cutting Henry off from his march towards London. The exact location of where they met is still the subject of much debate, and modern technology is allowing us to do more research in the area around the villages connected to the battle.

The King's army was on higher ground, with Henry's men strung out in a line below. Henry's men encountered a marsh, and had to circle around it to face Richard. It also became apparent that the Stanleys had turned up but had not decided which side to join. They spent most of the morning watching the battle unfold.

Richard ordered his friend, the Duke of Norfolk, to attack Henry's men, who were strung out in a long line after negotiating the marsh. Henry had never fought in battle before, but had the Earl of Oxford with him, who was an experienced soldier. Oxford placed two banners in the ground, and encouraged Henry's men to form up between them. This created a solid wedge of men and when Norfolk charged, he found Oxford's Wedge difficult to attack. During the fierce fighting Norfolk was killed, however, the advantage of numbers was still with Richard and the Yorkists.

Henry decided to ride out with a small bodyguard to appeal to Lord Thomas, who was still uncommitted. Richard, from his higher vantage point, intended to stop Henry from reaching his step father. As the King and his cavalry charged towards Henry, the force was so great, that one of his knights' lances pierced through Henry's standard bearer, and snapped in half.

At this point William Stanley finally committed to support Henry and his men attacked Richard and his cavalry. Richard suddenly found himself outnumbered, and was cut down and killed.

Later that day, Richard's crown was recovered, and Henry was crowned on a nearby hill. Richard was buried in the monastery in Leicester. Years later, when England's monasteries were being destroyed by Henry VIII, Richard's bones were dug up and thrown in the river - he is one of the few English Kings not to have a grave.

Henry VII, the new King of England married Richard III's niece, Elizabeth, which joined the Houses of York and Lancaster together and eventually brought the civil wars to an end.