



The Wars of the Roses

Author: Desmond Seward
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The 1400s were one of the most interesting periods in British history. An ongoing war with France provided the backdrop to a civil war in England. Both lasted decades.

In 1399, King Richard II of England, who had ascended to the throne as a nine year old, was over-thrown by the new Henry IV, Richard's cousin and Duke of Lancaster. After a bit of 'trouble', things settled down and the country stabilized with the glory of Agincourt under Henry's son Henry V. But when he died at the age of just 35, the infant Henry VI came to rule and a power vacuum ensued.

This is the story about the rise and fall of a third set of branch of the Plantagenet dynasty the Yorkists, who (arguably) had a stronger claim to the throne than young Henry, and a far better candidate to be king in Henry's cousin, Richard, Duke of York. For decades, the two sides fought until eventually the Tudors stepped in to pick up the pieces, and every battle and other incident of note is recorded in this very interesting 300 page text by Desmond Seward. From the first battle of St. Albans where it all began, through to Richard III's downfall and beyond, events are fully footnoted and complimented with a good deal of illustrations many of which are in colour. The 'plot' revolves around 5 people who hail from various places throughout the kingdom and are of various ranks, with their fates converging as the war develops. We have social climbers like William Hastings, merchants like John Lambert, women of the time like Jane Shore (who would become the king's mistress) and Elizabeth Woodville who became his wife. As the great story comes to a close, one may find oneself hoping for a different less bloody ending as I did. But, of course, as this all really happened, the fate of the characters is just as unescapable for the reader as it was for the people themselves.

Simply put, I really really like this book. It discusses a great and interesting period in our history and does it well. The narrative manages to be informative without being boring and I found myself reading it non-stop for hours at a time. So, if you want to learn something new, or are (like me) a bit of a medievalist already, you could do a lot worse than to give this a try.

10 sausages out of 10

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