

**Lecture six: Troubles of England in the Late Middle Ages (1337-1485)**

1. The Hundred Years' War 1337-1453
2. Black Death 1349
3. Peasants' Revolt 1381
4. Wars of the Roses 1455-1485

**1. The Hundred Years' War 1337-1453**

In 1328, the French king Charles IV died without any son to succeed him. This was during the reign of Edward III (1327-1377) who claimed the throne of France, for his mother, Isabella of France, who was too the French king's sister. Yet, the French nobles rejected to have an English king and crowned a cousin of the dead king. With the new French king, the French nobles attacked Aquitaine in the southwest of France, which had already been ruled by Edward III. In 1337 king Edward declared war on France.

The hundred years' war began with victory for the English. The French fleet was destroyed at Sluys (Flanders) in 1340. Then, after a short truce, the French cavalry was dispersed by the English archers at Crecy (Flanders) in 1346.

In 1349 the Black Death hit England and killed half of the population, that is to say, from 2 to 2.5 million souls. Yet, the war continued and in 1356 the English defeated the French at the battle of Poitiers. Then in 1360 Edward III renounced his claim to the French throne and the French ceded the southwest of France to England. War broke out again later and more battles were fought. However, inspired by Joan of Arc, the French took the offensive and drove the English out of France in 1453. Two years later, the civil war broke out in England between the house of Lancaster and the house of York (1455-1485).

**2. Black Death 1349**

This epidemic plague known as the Black Death in England came from china to Europe and North Africa. It carried away from 2 to 2.5 million of the English population. One of its serious consequences was the big reduction of cultivated lands due to the deaths of thousands of peasants (serfs). This ruined landowners, who were compelled to give farmers high wages. So, by the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, peasants and artisans got high wages along with grain prices.

**3. Peasants' Revolt 1381**

In 1381 the peasants, artisans, and the poor of the south and east of England revolted and marched to London under the leadership of Wat Tylor. This revolt was caused by the high taxes, which King Richard II imposed on the English people. It was also inspired by Lollardism, which was a new religious movement that called for equality. One of the Lollards, John Wycliffe (1320-1384), translated the Bible into English and it became available to the masses. This was also the age of Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400), who wrote the first great literary work in English: **Canterbury Tales** (1387).

The poll tax of 1381 was probably the direct cause of the revolt. King Richard II met the rebels outside London and promised them cheap land, free trade, and the abolition of serfdom. However, a month later, in June the soldiers crushed them and the royal promises were forgotten.

#### **4. Wars of the Roses 1455-1485**

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the throne of England was claimed by the representatives of two rival groups; the Lancastrians, whose symbol was a red rose, supported the Duke of Lancaster, and the Yorkists, whose symbol was a white rose, supported the descendants of the Duke of York. This led to the war between 1455 and 1485. They ended when Henry Tudor (a Lancastrian from Wales) defeated and killed Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field. He became King Henry VII. His reign witnessed strong government and stability, which was welcomed by the people weakened and impoverished by the long war.

Thus, the house of Plantagenet came to an end, because Richard III was the last king of that house. With Henry VII, the Tudor house started to rule England. The Tudors' reign lasted from 1485 to 1603. Their monarchs were: Henry VII, Henry VIII, Queen Mary Tudor I, and finally Elizabeth I.