

The reasons why in
1485 Henry Tudor was
easily able to
overthrow Richard III



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The relative ease with which Henry seemed to overthrow Richard III at the battle of Bosworth was down to a combination of Henry's weaknesses and the military strength of Henry, who was an extremely determined character after many years languishing in exile having fled the Yorkist Kings. Years of conflict were to end in the final showdown between the Lancastrian and Yorkist houses at Bosworth. Firstly, Richard's position as King was becoming increasingly untenable. He had had the uncertainty and therefore controversy surrounding the missing princes throughout his short reign and also I think the fact that he was a usurper of the throne sparked some distrust amongst his subjects.

Richard's over reliance on his northern subjects also provoked resentment amongst those in the south. Soon into his reign, Henry faced revolts, the first being led by Henry Stafford, the second Duke of Buckingham. This was a great blow to Henry's stability on the throne, as Stafford had until this point been a close and loyal friend and ally. The fact that Buckingham was descended directly from Thomas of Woodstock adds credence to the theory that Buckingham may have been attempting to secure the throne for himself, excluding the infamous Yorkist and Lancastrian houses. Richard managed to defeat Buckingham's ill timed attack, and went on to execute his former ally showing his tight grip on power. I think Richard was right to execute Buckingham as it asserted his authority and was a warning to any other people considering an attack.

After his crucial victory over Buckingham, it wasn't long before tragedy struck for Richard as he lost his son Edward of Middleham in March 1484; this of course left the continuation of the Yorkist line even more uncertain.

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The failure of Buckingham hadn't ended the threats to Richard's throne, but in fact it paved the way for an attack from Henry Tudor, who was now the leading Lancastrian contender for the throne. When he landed at Milford Haven in August 1485, Henry had a fairly small force, yet he was bolstered by the support of the in-laws of the late Yorkist King Edward IV and his uncle Jasper Tudor. Henry also managed to gather many Welsh sympathisers due to the influence of Lord Rhys.

Henry's final force numbered around 5,000, but this was still smaller than that of the King, whose army reached 8,000 after help from John Howard, the Duke of Norfolk, the troops of the Duke of Northumberland, and Lord Thomas Stanley who would ultimately turn the battle in favour of Henry Tudor. It is probable that the likes of Northumberland and Stanley turned up to the view the battle and then join forces with the winning side, to avoid the penalty of fighting on the losing side. I think Henry's route to victory was made a lot easier by the defection of many of the King's supposed men along with the fact Northumberland's men never even joined in. The decision of Stanley to switch sides joining Henry was the major turning point in the battle and the determinant of the eventual winner.

Richard had little chance of clinging to his throne and his determined, brave attitude probably resulted in his bloody end. He vowed to "die King of England", so this shows he must have known the end was near.