

Medieval Fact Sheet

King Edward IV: Traitor, War Criminal, Murderer and Thief



Edward of Rouen, otherwise known as King Edward IV of England

Preface

In March 2004, the Red Wyvern Society presented the trial of Edward of Rouen, also known as King Edward IV, at Saxton Village Hall in Yorkshire as part of the commemoration of the Battle of Towton. Edward was charged with treason, war crimes, murder, and theft. Re-enactors played the parts of the Judge, Defendant, Prosecution Counsel, Defence Counsel, and witnesses in front of a packed hall. I played the part of William Percy, Bishop of Carlisle, who brought the prosecution case. What follows is the case for the prosecution.

At the end of the trial the audience was asked to act as the jury. Unfortunately, Edward's supporters had packed the hall and he was acquitted. However, I would ask you to read the evidence and come to your own conclusion!

Introduction

Edward of Rouen is the greatest villain of English history. He was born in 1442 in Rouen in Normandy, the product of a brief affair between Cecily Neville, Duchess of York, and an archer called Blaybourne. He was brought up in the household of the Duke of York but at the age of eighteen he deposed King Henry VI, ordered the massacre of 20,000 men, and made himself King. As King he ordered executions and confiscations of property on a massive scale and adopted a scandalous lifestyle. He was deposed by members of his own court but returned from exile to reign again. Before his sudden death at the age of 41 he added the name of his own half-brother to those whose executions he had ordered.

Yet for over five centuries the truth about Edward of Rouen has been concealed. His own propaganda, that of his successors and the mists of time have combined to conceal his treason, war crimes, thefts, and murders. Now, with the benefit of recent archaeological discoveries and historical research the truth is again beginning to emerge.

Now, 521 years after his death, Edward of Rouen can finally be exposed as England's greatest villain - responsible for treason, war crimes, murder and theft.

Treason

Edward of Rouen makes war on his rightful King and usurps the throne

Edward of Rouen was born on 28th April 1442, supposedly the eldest son of Richard, Duke of York. The twenty-year old King Henry VI was King of England, having succeeded his father, King Henry V in 1422. Richard, Duke of York also had a claim to the throne, having been descended from King Edward III on his mother's side through his second son, Lionel Duke of Clarence, and on his father's side through his fourth son, Edmund of Langley.

England in the fifteenth century was an 'absolute' and hereditary monarchy. Once a King had been crowned, he was King for life. At his coronation all the peers of the realm would swear loyalty to the new King, and anyone who succeeded to a peerage would swear loyalty to the King as part of the ceremony.

The laws through which the crown passed from one King to another were not as precise as they later became. When Parliament decided to crown Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI as Kings, they passed over the claim of the descendants of Lionel of Clarence because they were descended through the female line, and the descendants of John of Gaunt were given precedence over the descendants of his younger brother, Edmund of Langley. However, the important constitutional point is that at the coronation the chosen King is anointed and cannot be replaced until his death. To attempt to do so or to resist his authority is treason.



King Henry VI who was deposed by Edward of Rouen.

As King Henry VI himself was to observe after he was deposed by Edward:

“My father was king. His father also was King. I myself have worn the crown forty years from my cradle. You have all sworn fealty to me as your sovereign, and your fathers have done the like to mine. How then can my right be disputed?”

The first reference to Edward of Rouen as Earl of March comes in 1454 at the age of twelve. No record has survived of his elevation to the peerage – but at the ceremony Edward would have sworn an oath of loyalty to King Henry VI. Only the King could have created Edward Earl of March, and the ceremony always included the swearing of an oath of loyalty.

Despite King Henry VI being the anointed King of England, Edward of Rouen joined with Richard Duke of York in revolt against King Henry, first in 1452 at the age of ten! Later he played a major role at the Battle of Ludford Bridge in 1459. After this he fled the country, and in his absence was attainted as a traitor by the parliament that sat at Coventry in November 1459.

However, in June 1460, Edward of Rouen returned to England and again took up arms with Richard Duke of York against King Henry VI – claiming though, that he did not actually wish to depose King Henry VI himself. He led rebel armies against the King at the Battle of Northampton in July 1460 and again at the Battle of Mortimer’s Cross in February 1461.

Richard, Duke of York was killed at Wakefield in December 1460 along with his eldest legitimate son, Edmund, Earl of Rutland. However, Edward of Rouen took possession of the Duke of York’s estates and proclaimed himself Duke. After his victory at Mortimer’s Cross, Edward of Rouen entered London in March 1461 and proclaimed himself King. However, King Henry VI was still alive, as was his heir, Prince Edward.

Edward of Rouen then raised an army and advanced north to attack King Henry’s army. The result was the defeat of King Henry’s army at the Battle of Towton in March 1461, after which King Henry was forced to flee into exile.

In 1464 Edward of Rouen had King Henry VI imprisoned in the Tower of London.

Edward of Rouen was neither rightful King nor rightful Duke of York

In 1483, King Edward of Rouen died, and his brother had himself crowned as Richard III rather than allowing the throne to pass to Edward’s son. His reason for these actions was that Edward of Rouen had been an illegitimate son of his mother and of an archer. In the words that Shakespeare gave to Richard III:

“When my mother went with child of that insatiate Edward, my princely father then had wars in France; and by true computation of the time, found that the issue was not his begot, which well appeared in his lineaments, being nothing like the noble duke my father.”

It had been thought that this accusation had been made by Richard III to justify his seizure of the throne, and that it had been without foundation. However, recent research has provided supporting evidence that this was true, and that Edward of Rouen not only dispossessed King Henry VI of his crown, but also dispossessed his half-brother, George, of the Duchy of York. In particular, the archbishopric records at Rouen Cathedral that have been studied by the historian, Michael Jones, establish that Edward of Rouen was conceived at a time when his supposed father was away at Pontoise, and that his christening was a quiet affair in a side chapel in contrast to the glamorous christening that filled the Cathedral when another son was born to the Duchess of York the following year.

However, rumours of the illegitimacy of Edward of Rouen abounded during his lifetime. It is known that in 1441 it was rumoured that the Duchess of York was having an adulterous affair with an archer in the Rouen garrison named Blaybourne. We learn from the testimony of Dominic Mancini, an Italian visitor to London in the summer of 1464, that Cecily Neville herself 'fell into a frenzy' and in her rage, made the astounding accusation that Edward of Rouen was not her husband's son, adding that she would be willing to testify before a public enquiry that it was indeed the case. She made the same statement in 1483. Slanders of this kind attached themselves more easily to a birth outside the country. But for the mother herself to make the acknowledgment is unprecedented.



**Richard III (formerly Duke of Gloucester),
Edward's half-brother who declared that Edward was illegitimate**

Shakespeare was also correct to point out that the tall and fair-haired Edward who became corpulent in middle age did not resemble either his father or his half-brothers who were of average height, thin and dark.

Edward of Rouen attempted to counter rumours of his illegitimacy, claiming that he had been conceived at Hatfield in Yorkshire. However, a study of the itinerary of the Duke and Duchess of York at that time shows that they left Hatfield for France in May 1441, eleven months before the birth of Edward of Rouen.

In 1470, Edward of Rouen was deposed by his former ally, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, and his half-brother George, Duke of Clarence, who restored King Henry VI to his throne. They maintained that Edward of Rouen was illegitimate. Edward of Rouen fled to Burgundy, but in 1471 returned to England, landing at Ravenspur in Yorkshire.

When in York, Edward of Rouen swore loyalty to King Henry VI, wore a white ostrich feather (the symbol of King Henry's son – Prince Edward) and maintained that he had returned to claim, not the throne, but the Duchy of York.

Edward of Rouen orders the murder of King Henry VI

After the defeat of the Lancastrian army at Tewkesbury in 1471, King Henry VI met his death in the Tower of London. The official account of his death was released by Edward of Rouen in the 'Arrivall' which said that:

"Of pure displeasure and melancholy he died".

However, independent contemporary chroniclers wrote:

“And in the same night that King Edward came to London... King Henry, being in ward in prison in the Tower of London, was put to death, between eleven and twelve of the clock, being then at the Tower the Duke of Gloucester... In his lying he bled on the pavement; and afterwards at the Blackfriars was brought, and there he bled new and fresh.” (Warkworth).

“(Edward of Rouen) caused King Henry to be secretly assassinated in the Tower.” (Milanese Ambassador).

“(Richard of Gloucester) killed poor King Henry with his own hand, or else caused him to be killed in his presence.” (Commines)

“Gloucester killed him with a sword.” (Vergil)

“The common fame then went that the Duke of Gloucester was not all guiltless.” (Great Chronicle).



The Chapel in the Wakefield Tower at the Tower of London where King Henry VI was murdered.

The order for the murder of Henry VI can only have come from Edward of Rouen. Gloucester could not have acted alone in such a matter.

Archaeological evidence also supports the fact that this was a murder. In 1911 Henry VI's body was exhumed and examined and it was found that his skeleton was in pieces and his skull had been broken. The full report is in 'Archaeologia' which even states that:

“To one of the pieces of skull there was still attached some of the hair, which was brown in colour, save in one place, where it was much darker and apparently matted with blood.”

Perhaps the final word should go to Croyland, a contemporary chronicler, who wrote:

“I shall pass over the discovery of the lifeless body of King Henry in the Tower of London. May God have mercy upon, and grant sufficient time for repentance to him, whoever he may be, who dared to lay sacrilegious hands on the Lord's Anointed! Let the doer merit the title of tyrant, and the victim be called a glorious martyr.”

The 'doer' is clearly Edward of Rouen.

Conclusion – Treason

King Henry VI was clearly the legitimate King of England. Edward of Rouen was illegitimate and not of royal descent. However, he represented himself as the son of Richard, Duke of York; made war against Henry, deposed him, imprisoned him, and murdered him. This was despite Edward of Rouen swearing an oath of loyalty to King Henry in 1454.

War Criminal

It has been shown that Edward of Rouen took command of the rebel army at the Battle of Northampton in July 1460. Before this battle he gave specific instructions that his men should kill all nobles, knights and esquires who were in the King's army. This order was contrary to the laws of chivalry. These orders were carried out both during and after the battle – amongst those being unlawfully killed being the Duke of Buckingham, Earl of Shrewsbury, Lord Beaumont, and Lord Egremont.

Upon returning to London after his victory at the Battle of Northampton, Edward of Rouen ordered the execution of every member of the garrison of the Tower of London because they had shown loyalty to King Henry VI.

After the Battle of Mortimer's Cross in February 1461, Owen Tudor was captured by the rebels and beheaded on the orders of Edward of Rouen and his head put on display in the Market Place at Hereford.

Upon arriving in London in February 1461, Edward of Rouen offered a bounty of £100 to anyone who would kill any of a list of 22 people. These included Andrew Trollope, Sir Thomas Tresham, Thomas Fitzharry, William Grimsby and two illegitimate sons of the Duke of Exeter. All of these were civil servants who had served King Henry's government.

The Battle of Towton was the bloodiest battle ever to have been fought on English soil. Estimates of the number of men who were killed vary – but most historians now accept that 28,000 men died, 20,000 of whom were Lancastrians fighting for King Henry.



The Battlefield of Towton where 28,000 men were killed.

The cause of the Battle of Towton, fought on Palm Sunday 1461, was the treason of Edward of Rouen in rising against King Henry VI and usurping his throne. Edward of Rouen is therefore responsible for all the deaths at Towton.

However, it is also clear that one of the main reasons for the size of the death toll was the decision of Edward of Rouen to order the killing of as many as possible of his opponents – whether nobles or common men.

The evidence for this is threefold:

- First, how were so many men killed if the victors had not pursued a policy of genocide?
- Second – the contemporary documentary evidence.
- Third – the archaeological evidence.

The Croyland Chronicle records that:

"For their ranks being now broken and scattered in flight, the Kings army eagerly pursued them, and cutting down the fugitives with their swords, just like so many sheep for the slaughter, made immense havoc among them for a distance of ten miles, as far as the City of York."

Edward Hall recorded that the Lancastrians:

"Like men amazed, fled towards Tadcaster Bridge to save themselves, but in the mean way there was a little brook called Cock, not very broad but of great deepness, in the which, what for haste of escaping, and what for fear of followers, a great number were drent and drowned, in so much that the common people there affirm that men alive passed the river upon the dead carcasses, and that the great river of Wharfe, which is the great sewer of the brook, and of all the water coming from Towton was coloured with blood."

George Neville, Bishop of Exeter, and Edward of Rouen's Chancellor wrote that:

*"There was a great conflict, which began with the rising of the sun and lasted until the tenth hour of the night, so great was the pertinacity and boldness of the men, who never heeded the possibility of a miserable death. Of the enemy who fled, great numbers were drowned in the river near the town of Tadcaster, eight miles from York, because they themselves had broken the bridge to cut our passage that way, so that none could pass, **and a great part of the rest who got away who gathered in the same town and city, were slain and so many dead bodies were seen as to cover an area six miles long by three broad and about four furlongs.** In this battle, eleven lords of the enemy fell... with some knights, and from what we hear from persons worthy of confidence, some 28,000 persons perished on one side and the other. O Miserable and luckless race."*

Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury reported that:

"The Heralds counted 28,000 slain, a number unheard of in our realm... without counting those wounded and drowned."

The Croyland Chronicle records:

"Those who helped to inter the bodies, piled up in pits and in trenches prepared for the purpose, bear witness that eight and thirty thousand warriors fell on that day besides those who were drowned in the river before alluded to, whose numbers we have no means of ascertaining. The blood too, of the slain, mingling with the snow which at this time covered the whole surface of the earth, afterwards ran down in the furrows and ditches along with the melted snow, in a most shocking manner, for a distance of two or three miles."

Gregory's Chronicle records that 42 knights were taken prisoner after the battle and were executed at the end of the day on the orders of Edward of Rouen. The Earl of Devon was captured and executed at York. The Earl of Wiltshire was captured and executed at Newcastle.

An insight was gained into the manner of the deaths sustained at Towton, when building work at Towton disturbed a mass grave found to contain the remains of 37 men, 29 complete with skulls, who had perished at the Battle of Towton. All had been stripped naked before burial and had been tumbled into a pit in layers and covered with twenty inches of soil. The only possession discovered was a small silver ring.

The men were aged between sixteen and sixty, and their skeletons showed that they had followed a regime of strenuous exercise since childhood rather like that of a professional athlete. This is unusual among fifteenth century skeletons, and so it is thought that they were professional soldiers. Three or four of them showed evidence of having drawn heavy war longbows.

The injuries that they had sustained were far more numerous and serious than would have been required to kill them. Furthermore. The bodies had been mutilated either before or after death. Shannon Novak, who reported on the 'battle related trauma' of the skeletons that were found concluded that:

"28,000 men were killed on this single day. If the skeletons from this mass grave attest to at least a facet of the battle, these men died in a frenzied killing that involved numerous blows to the head, often after they were incapacitated and unable to defend themselves."

Archaeologists, Christopher Knusel and Anthea Boylston add:

"The extent, number, positioning and sequencing of their cranial injuries suggest that some were primary and others subsequent injuries some of these of a coup de grace variety, whilst others appear to represent attempts to disfigure and mutilate. Whether received in a rout or massacre, these injuries came at close quarters – at a hand-held weapon's length – to individuals who show relatively few severe defence injuries. The extremes of violence experienced by a number of these individuals seems excessive even when compared to other mass graves and historically documented sites of massacre...One is left to wonder when a rout ends, and a massacre begins.

"Facial disfigurement has been associated with a desire to depersonalise victims. Assaults to the face in modern forensic situations often involve a frenzied attack on a victim. The cropping/removal of ears and noses and general disfigurement of the face and head takes on a more sinister tone when one realises that this treatment may have been intended to jeopardise the individual's chance of resurrection. Bodies that had been treated in this manner were to be denied Christian burial ...The numerous facial injuries at Towton, and particularly the multiple injuries to the left ear region of Towton 32 and nasal region of Towton 12, may suggest deliberate disfigurement... The general disposition of these bodies is more similar to those found in recent massacres and in examples of ethnic cleansing. These show an equal and intended disregard for the dead in the same way that the injuries sustained show a disregard for the living."

The inference is obvious. These men had not been killed fighting or defending themselves. They had been taken prisoner, stripped of their armour and possessions, and then tortured and murdered. The reason for the torture is likely to have been revenge. The reason for the removal of the ears and noses of the men can be found in Papal Bulls of the time that "suggest that disfigurement like this would put the soul in danger of not being resurrected; that it marked the victim out as a rebel not worthy of salvation."

The unprecedented number of deaths at the Battle of Towton can therefore be attributed not only to the scale of the battle and the adverse conditions of the rout, but also to a deliberate policy of genocide on the part of Edward of Rouen

Murderer and Thief

Upon winning the Battle of Towton, Edward of Rouen confiscated the property of 113 of those who had fought for their lawful King.

They were:

“Henry, Duke of Exeter; Henry, Duke of Somerset; Thomas Courtney, Earl of Devonshire; Henry, Earl of Northumberland; William, Viscount Beaumont; Thomas Lord Roos; John, Lord Clifford; Leo, Lord Welles; John, Lord Neville; Thomas Grey, Knight; Lord Rugemond-Grey; Randolf, Lord Dacre; Humphrey Dacre, Knight; John Morton, of Blokesworth in Dorset, clerk; Rauf Makerell, of Ryseby in Suffolk, clerk; Thomas Manning, of New Windsor in Berkshire, clerk; John Whelpdale, of Lichfield in Staffordshire, clerk; John Nayler of London, squire; John Preston, of Wakefield in Yorkshire, priest; Philip Wentworth, Knight; John Fortescue, Knight; William Tailboys, Knight; Edmund Moundford, Knight; Thomas Tresham, Knight; William Vaux, Knight; Edmund Hampden, Knight; Thomas Findern, Knight; John Courtney, Knight; Henry Lewes, Knight; Nicholas Latimer, Knight; Walter Nuthill of Ryston in Yorkshire, squire; John Heron of the Forde, Knight; Richard Tunstall, Knight; Henry Bellingham, Knight; Robert Whitingham, Knight; John Ormond (otherwise called John Butler), Knight; William Mille, Knight. Simon Hammes, Knight; William Holland, Knight – called the bastard of Exeter; William Joseph of London, squire; Everard Digby of Stokedry in Rutland, squire; John Mirfin of Southwark in Surrey, squire; Thomas Philip, of Dertington in Devon, squire; Thomas Brampton of Guines, squire; Giles Saintlowe of London, squire; Thomas Claymond; Thomas Tunstall, squire; Thomas Crawford of Calais, squire; John Audley of Guines, squire; John Lenche of Wich in Worcestershire, squire; Thomas Ormond (otherwise called Thomas Butler), knight; Robert Bellingham of Burnalshede in Westmorland, squire; Thomas Everingham of Newhall in Leicestershire, knight; John Pencycock of Weybridge in Surrey, squire; William Grimsby of Grimsby in Lincolnshire, squire; Henry Ross of Rockingham in Northamptonshire, knight; Thomas Daniel of Rising in Norfolk, squire; John Doubigging of Rising in Norfolk, gentleman; Richard Kirkby of Kirkby Ireleth in Lancashire, gentleman; William Ackworth of Luton in Bedfordshire, squire; William Weynsford of London, squire; Richard Stuckley of Lambeth in Surrey, squire; Thomas Stanley of Carlisle, gentleman; Thomas Litley of London, grocer; John Maidenwell of Kirton in Lincolnshire, gentlemen; Edward Ellesmere of London, squire; John Dawson of Westminster, yeoman; Henry Spencer of Westminster, yeoman; John Smothing of York, yeoman; John Beumont of Goodby in Leicestershire, gentleman; Henry Beaumont of Goodby in Leicestershire, gentleman; Roger Wharton (otherwise called Roger of the Halle) of Burgh in Westmorland, groom; John Joskin of Branghing in Hertfordshire, squire; Richard Lister the younger of Wakefield, yeoman; Thomas Carr of Westminster, yeoman; Robert Bolling of Bolling in Yorkshire, gentleman; Robert Hatecale of Barleburgh in Yorkshire, yeoman; Richard Everingham of Pontefract in Yorkshire, squire; Richard Fulnaby of Fulnaby in Lincolnshire, gentleman; Laurence Hill of Much Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, yeoman; Rauff Chernok of Thorley in Lancashire, gentleman; Richard Gaitford of Estretford in Nottinghamshire, gentleman; John Chapman of Wimborne Minster in Dorset, yeoman; Richard Cokerell of York, merchant.



Lord John Clifford, who was attainted as a traitor and stripped of his property and whose sons were disinherited.

Also confiscated were the revenues of colleges such as Cambridge and Eton that had been founded by King Henry VI.



Kings College at Cambridge was founded by King Henry VI but had all its revenues confiscated by Edward of Rouen.

The property that was unlawfully confiscated in this way was used to reward the closest associates of Edward of Rouen. For example, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick received the chamberlainship of England, the captaincy of Calais, Guines and Hammes; constablership of Dover Castle and wardenship of the cinque ports; the wardenship of the Scottish east and west marches; the stewardship of the Duchy of Lancaster including the honours of Lancashire, Cheshire, Pontefract, Knaresborough, Pickering and Tutbury; the high admiralty of England Ireland and Aquitaine; Eight manors and lordships formerly belonging to the Earl of Northumberland; the Westmorland estates of Lord Clifford; and land in Buckinghamshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

During his rise to power and in the process of maintaining himself in power, Edward of Rouen ordered the murder of numerous of his opponents and many of his erstwhile supporters.

In 1462 Edward of Rouen ordered the executions of Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford; and of Sir Thomas Tuddenham.

In September 1463 Edward of Rouen made a special visit to Bristol to preside in person at the trial of Sir Baldwin Fulford who was later executed on his orders.

April 1464 saw the execution of Sir Ralph Percy, followed in May by the execution of the Duke of Somerset and four others at Hexham in Northumberland. Two days later Lord Roos, Lord Hungerford, Sir Thomas Findern and two others were executed at Newcastle. This was followed by seven executions at Middleham and fourteen at York. In July Sir William Tailboys was executed at Newcastle and Sir Ralph Grey at Doncaster.

The regime that was established through this treason, war crimes, thefts and murders was a regime devoted to the pleasure of the King. Mancini reported that:

“He was licentious in the extreme; moreover, it was said that he had been most insolent to numerous women after he had seduced them, for, as soon as he grew weary of dalliance, he gave up the ladies much against their will to the other courtiers. He pursued with no discrimination the married and the unmarried, the noble and lowly.”

The Croyland Chronicler reported on Edward of Rouen's:

“Boon companionship, vanities, debauchery, extravagance and sensual enjoyments.”

This lifestyle was financed by further thefts. For example, in 1468 Sir Thomas Cook, former Lord Mayor of London was imprisoned for treason. He was later released, but during his imprisonment, Sir John Fogge, Treasurer to the Royal Household and his men, ransacked Sir Thomas Cook's house, drinking all they could from the wine in the cellars, and carrying away 200 broadcloths, jewels, and plate worth £700, and an arras worth £800. Despite being found innocent of treason – Sir Thomas Cook was still fined 8,000 marks.

Already Parliament had complained to Edward of Rouen in 1467 of the increases in murders, riots, and other outrages, and 'great riots and oppressions' caused by 'heavy lordship'.

In 1468 Edward sent yeomen of the royal household 'into divers counties to arrest men that be appeached.' These were essentially spies and provocateurs. Their activities resulted in more arrests, executions, and confiscations of property. This resulted in several executions including Richard Stairs a former servant of the Duke of Exeter who was 'one of the cunningest players of the tennis in England'. Henry Courtney esquire and Thomas Hungerford were also condemned to die by being hanged, drawn, and quartered.

In 1469 his formerly loyal associate Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, issued a manifesto against Edward of Rouen. The manifesto was also supported by George, Duke of Clarence, Edward of Rouen's half-brother. It complained of:

- Heavy taxation – despite Edward of Rouen having 'as great livelihood and possessions as ever had King of England'.
- Prevalence of disorder.
- Malignant effect of the power of the King's men in the country. Those who the King favoured were beyond the law.
- Impeachments for treason were brought against anyone to whom the King's favourites 'owe any evil will'.
- Borrowing and purveyance for the royal household without payment.
- Money raised for the Pope confiscated by the King.

A further proclamation by the Earl of Warwick and the Duke of Clarence in 1469 stated that Edward of Rouen's government:

"Have caused our said...realm to fall in great poverty of misery, disturbing the ministration of the laws, only intending to their own promotion and enriching".

Edward responded to this criticism with more repression – executing Lord Welles and Captain Richard Warin on a visit to Doncaster, and then offering rewards of £1,000 in cash or land worth £100 a year to anyone who would capture the Duke of Clarence or the Earl of Warwick.

By 1470, Edward's government was so discredited that:

"So then there drew to them (Clarence and Warwick) much people or they came to Coventry they were thirty thousand. King Edward lay at Nottingham, and sent for Lords and all other men, but there came so little people... to him that he was not able to make a field against them... and then he...went to Lynn (and fled the country)" (Coventry Leet Book)

The Duke of Clarence and Earl of Warwick then restored King Henry VI to his throne, much to the approval of the people:

"All his good lovers were full glad, and the more part of the people". (Warkworth)

However, as we have seen, Edward of Rouen returned to England in 1471 claiming that he recognised King Henry VI as King and wished to claim the Dukedom of York. However, he soon abandoned this pretence and took the field against the Earl of Warwick at Barnet, killing both him and Lord Montagu. Afterwards Edward of Rouen had both their bodies displayed in St. Paul's Cathedral.



Edward of Rouen watching the execution of Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset

This was followed by the Battle of Tewkesbury at which Edward of Rouen secured the deaths of Prince Edward, King Henry VI's son; John Courtney, Earl of Devon; John Beaufort and John, Lord Wenlock. After the battle fugitives reached sanctuary in Tewkesbury Abbey, but Edward of Rouen broke into the abbey, dragged out a dozen men and executed them in the street. These included Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset; Sir John Langstrother, prior of the hospitallers; and Sir Gervase Clifton. Queen Margaret was imprisoned.

We have seen how Edward of Rouen's return to London led to the murder of King Henry VI. However, there were others. Lord Fauconberg was executed, and his head placed on London Bridge. Two Essex captains – Spicing and Quint - were also beheaded. In Canterbury, Mayor Nicholas Faunt was hanged, drawn, and quartered in the Buttermarket opposite the Cathedral gate.

Edward of Rouen appointed commissions to tour the country to assert the royal authority. It was reported that:

“Such as were rich were hanged by the purse, and the other that were needy were hanged by the necks, by means whereof the country was greatly impoverished and the king's coffers some deal increased.” (Great Chronicle)

“The King had out of Kent much goods and little love.” (Warkworth)

Money was also extorted from the towns. For example, Coventry had to pay 400 marks for the restoration of its traditional liberties.

Archbishop George Nevill was another victim of Edward of Rouen's theft. On 25th April 1472 he was arrested and imprisoned at Calais without charge. While there, Sir William Parr and Sir Thomas Vaughan, two royal officers visited his house at The Moor in Hertfordshire. There they appropriated all the treasure that they could find, including the archbishop's jewelled mitre that was broken up and made into a new crown for Edward of Rouen.

It is no wonder that parliament complained of:

“The great abominable murders, robberies, extortions, oppressions, and other manifold maintenances, misgovernances, forcible entries... affrays... committed and done by such persons as either be of great might or else favoured under persons of great power, in such wise as their outrageous demerits as yet remain unpunished.”

In 1475 the Milanese ambassador reported on:

“The number of people complaining of the unfair management of the resources of the kingdom, in consequence of such quantities of treasure being abstracted from the coffers of everyone and uselessly consumed.”

Edward then committed an act of fratricide – the murder of his half- brother, George, Duke of Clarence.

The process started with the arrest of a member of Clarence’s household, Thomas Burdett, who was accused of using the magic arts to bring about the deaths of Edward of Rouen and his son. Also accused were Dr John Stacey and Thomas Blake, a chaplain, both of Merton College, Oxford. Burdett and Stacey were both hanged at Tyburn. George, Duke of Clarence protested about this action at a meeting of the council.

In June 1477, George, Duke of Clarence, was arrested and incarcerated in the Tower. In January 1478 he was put on trial for treason. Edward of Rouen himself conducted the prosecution. Parliament found George, Duke of Clarence, guilty. He was subsequently killed, it is believed, drowned in a butt of malmsey wine.

The accusations against George, Duke of Clarence, had hardly been proved. They included that he had:

- Aimed to destroy Edward of Rouen and his family.
- Alienated Edward of Rouen from his subjects.
- Complained at the execution of Burdett.
- Said that Edward of Rouen was a bastard.
- Attempted to send his son overseas for safety.
- Preserved an ‘exemplification’ made under the great seal in 1470 that stated that George, Duke of Clarence was the heir to King Henry VI if he died without a direct heir.

Bishop William Stubbs, in the nineteenth century said that:

“The death of Clarence was but the summing up and crowning act of an unparalleled list of judicial and extra-judicial cruelties.”

The Croyland Chronicle states that:

“After the perpetration of this deed, many persons left King Edward, fully persuaded that he would be able to Lord it over the whole Kingdom at his will and pleasure, all those...being removed (to whom) the multitude...had been in the habit of turning in times past. The King...after this period performed the duties of his office with such a high hand, that he appeared to be dreaded by all his subjects, while he himself stood in fear of no one.”

One person who suffered from this style of rule was the five-year-old Ann Mowbray, who became her father’s heiress in 1475. Edward of Rouen lost no time in ensuring that she was married to his son Richard, in 1478. However, the unfortunate Ann Mowbray died in 1481 at the age of nine. Her property should have reverted to her cousins Lords Berkeley and Howard, but instead it was seized illegally by Edward of Rouen.

Edward died in 1483, at the age of 41 – worn out by luxurious living. In 1484, the Duke of Buckingham described Edward thus:

“The King’s greedy appetite was insatiable, and everywhere all over the realm intolerable. For no woman was there anywhere, young or old, rich or poor, whom he set his eye upon...but without any fear of God, or respect of his honour, murmur or grudge of the world, he would importunately pursue his appetite, and have her, to the great destruction of many a good woman... and all were it that with this and other importable dealing, the realm was in every part annoyed.”

In the nineteenth century, Bishop William Stubbs, studied the life of Edward of Rouen, and concluded that:

“He was a man vicious far beyond anything that England had seen since the days of John; and more cruel and bloodthirsty than any King she had ever known: he had too a conspicuous talent for extortion...Edward far outdid – in fierce deeds of bloodshed – all that his forefathers and his enemies together had done.”

Conclusion

It can be shown, with reference to contemporary and archaeological evidence that Edward of Rouen gained the throne through treason and war crimes. As King he committed murders and thefts as a means of increasing his power and wealth and maintaining a luxurious lifestyle. His excesses appalled, not only his enemies – but also many of his original allies. If anyone was ever guilty of treason, war crimes, murder, and theft, it is Edward of Rouen.

*Adrian Waite
February 2021*

Further information:

- I will be holding a webinar on ‘The Battle of Towton 1461’ on 29th March 2021. For further information or to book a place, please click here: <https://aw-history.co.uk/events>
- I have written a fact sheet about the Battles of Ferrybridge and Towton that can be viewed or downloaded from: [https://aw-history.co.uk/files/module_document_pdfs/battles_of_ferrybridge_and_towton_1461 - fact sheet.pdf](https://aw-history.co.uk/files/module_document_pdfs/battles_of_ferrybridge_and_towton_1461_-_fact_sheet.pdf)
- I have a photograph gallery for the Towton Battlefield at: <https://aw-history.co.uk/photograph-gallery-towton-battlefield>

About the Fact Sheets

These fact sheets are written by me (Adrian Waite) unless otherwise stated. Their purpose is to provide basic information and some analysis and comment on medieval historical subjects. They therefore do not provide information about events prior to the fifth century unless this is needed to set events in the medieval period in context and do not cover events after the early sixteenth century. The subjects may be historical buildings, events, people; how medieval history is researched, managed or presented today or other subjects. They are published on the ‘AW-History’ website and are freely available. I hope that people enjoy reading them and that they encourage readers to explore medieval history further. Feedback about the fact sheets is always welcome and should be addressed to me at adrian.waite@awics.co.uk.

About AW-History

The address of AW-History is www.aw-history.co.uk

If you are interested in medieval history between the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century and the reformation in the sixteenth, this is the website for you! It contains information about the Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Normans, Plantagenets, early Tudors and much more!

The website contains:

- Information about medieval history that can be freely downloaded
- Publications that can be bought by mail order
- Other historically related items that can be bought by mail order
- Information about events that you can attend - organised by "AW History" and by other organisations
- Links with other websites containing information about medieval history

We welcome visitors and hope that they enjoy the website. Feedback about the website is always welcome and should be addressed to me at adrian.waite@awics.co.uk.
