

## Tudor Times

I was wondering why people want to know about history, especially kings and queens and that kind of thing. History is a great experiment by people. Sometimes the things they try to do fail and sometimes they succeed. It's really interesting just knowing about the people who try anyway, but we can also learn a lot from mistakes people in the past made. One of those is government. If government tries to do too much it stifles everything. There are a lot of smart guys in the world beside leaders of countries. And in Tudor times those smart guys were merchants. They made a fortune for themselves, yes, but they also brought wealth to the whole of England, and that is because the Tudors gave businessmen a free hand. So let's see how it worked out.

As we said, you can learn a lot from history. The main thing is not to get bogged down in the stall but to see the bigger picture. So here is a skim over some main events so you can have a framework in your head in case you want to research more for yourself.

We are going to be talking about the English Tudors, right. So what would that have to do with the United States, for example? Surely American colonial history started with Columbus?

Columbus may have been the first European to have arrived in the Americas, but his journey was, in the long run, pretty irrelevant to United States history compared to the Tudors, for it was the Tudors that set up the first colonies that eventually became the United States.

Actually the importance of English Tudor times was kick-started when a long-running war was ended.

Interested?

You bet I am, now I know it is such an important time.

Well, it all started in a particular year four hundred years ago - to be exact 1485. That was when the first of the Tudors was crowned. Up to then England was a poor country compared to its neighbours, France and Spain. There are all kinds of reasons for

this, but the most important is probably the fact that two branches of the royal family were struggling for control to be king, and each raised an army and began a Long, drawn-out war. Well, we all know what that is by any other name. It's a Civil War. It completely stops a country growing, and often drains it of money, as all the money goes into fighting.

It's a shame in a way, because, hundreds of years before, when William the Conqueror brought a tiny army over and won control of England from the Saxon king Harold, at the famous Battle of Hastings, William and his heirs brought with them half of France, making England a much wealthier and powerful kingdom.

But here's the rub. Success, wealth, growth and power are often a result of having a bright, or powerful leader. And certainly a strong one. That's even true today. Look around the world and find strong leaders. But those same leaders have to fight to stay in control or to control others.

Well, down the centuries, England had had a few very powerful and strong leaders, and a bunch of weak ones. And it's when the weak ones came to power that things started to fall apart.

In England, the ruling class divided up into two groups called the House of Lancaster and the House of York. Both lots wanted to put their choice of leader on the throne as king. And that's what started the Civil War. Each house had a rose as an emblem: the House of Lancaster had a white rose, and the House of York a red one. That's why the Civil war got called the Wars of the Roses.

Well, for centuries it was wars unending, until an army led by Henry Tudor, who was from the House of Lancaster, led an army to crush the House of York in 1485. Well winning a battle had happened before, but Henry, now crowned Henry the seventh, was smart. He married Elizabeth of the House of York. So one House had a king and the other House had. Queen. And with that power sharing in place the wars stopped. Henry even showed the unity of the new kingdom by making his emblem a combination of red and white roses. That's where the name "Tudor Rose came from'.

Henry the seventh was very smart. But he had a lot to do. He had

to put a nearly bankrupt country back on its feet, and sort out many laws that needed reforming. And he actually got a long way with that before he died.

Henry had two sons, but the older one died before he could take up the throne, and so it was the younger son who succeeded his father and became Henry the eighth.

Everyone, but everyone, has heard of Henry the eighth, right. And why is that? Because he was smart, and a bit of a revolutionary himself. Henry is famous for having six wives and chopping off the heads of some of them. But it could only have happened because of another event. All over northern Europe people were breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church and setting up a new branch of the Christian Faith. They were 'protesting' against Roman Catholic ceremony, and wanted something simpler. So these protesting people became Protestants and they set up a new branch of the Christian faith.

Henry stayed married to his first wife for many years, but she only had one daughter. Mary. At that time it was important to have sons, and as his wife went past child-bearing age, that was a problem. In any case, Henry had an eye for pretty young women in his court. So when he took a fancy to one of them, he decided he wanted to divorce his first wife. For that he had to ask the Pope's permission, because England was part of the Roman Catholic church. And when the Pope said no, his advisers - and they were smart guys - took advantage of the new Protestant thinking and told him he could break away from the Roman Catholic church and set up his own Church of England.

After that, as head of the new church Henry could divorce whenever he liked. And, as a bonus, he could confiscate all the Roman Catholic lands - and as England was short of money as usual, that was a big plus.

So that was quite a revolution. But there was more. Henry was also worried about protecting England from invasion, so he got the English Fleet properly organised and equipped - and called it the Royal Navy.

You all know how Henry went through wives after that, but importantly, he did get a son, Edward, as well as another daughter. Sons took precedence over daughter in succession, so when Henry died, the son took over. But he died young, and so the throne passed to his eldest daughter Mary. She was a Roman Catholic and tried to turn the clock back. But then she died and the throne passed to protestant Elizabeth, who became Elizabeth the first.

Lots and lots of things happened in the time of Elizabeth. First, she allowed her senior captains, such as Sir Francis Drake, to go and plunder the Spanish treasure ships coming back from the Americas. That brought money into the treasury.

But Elizabeth was very worried that Spain was getting stronger and stronger as it took over the lands of South America, and she started to want England to have its own colonies. It became a time of colony mania, and a race between European countries. In the long run that would reshape the world.

As part of this, she let Drake travel right round the world seeing what he could find. But she also listened to Sir Walter Raleigh, who had an idea about setting up colonies right down the north east coast of North America – and calling that new land Virginia as well, – after the Queen.

But Spain had other ideas, and soon Elizabeth was faced with a Great Spanish Navy, and threatened with a Great Spanish Army across the English Channel, too. That is where Henry the eighth's Royal Navy came in. It showed the values of better commanders, and better ships. The Spanish fleet was called the Armada. But it was poorly led, and seen off by the English using fire ships. Invasion was touch and go, but after that defeat of Spain England was much safer.

Tudor times only lasted for a century because Elizabeth had no children to succeed her. But what a tumultuous century it was. We have already spoken of the break of the church and wars. But the country was beginning to look more prosperous, especially due to the kings and queens letting the businessmen – at that time called merchants – have a free hand. And the wealth they got trickled down. New houses were built and old ones improved. Those

were sturdy - and built well enough to have lasted - and you still see them in the small towns and the countryside of England today.

All in all Tudor times ended with England being in a much better shape. Sure, it was tumultuous, but a little time of revolution is a healthy thing now and again, don't you agree?