The Wars of the Roses: England’s Bloodiest Battles
Julia Cruse PhD

4 weeks
14, 21, 28 November; 5 December
Thursdays
10.30 – 12.30

Course code: 19TON400
Course fee: £62

This course is an updated and in-depth version of a study day held in March 2017.

The years from 1455 until 1485 saw some of the bitterest battles ever to have occurred on English soil, when the Lancastrian and Yorkist factions fought for supremacy in a dynastic war. Explore the historical evidence behind this turbulent period, from contemporary sources alongside recent research and battle-field archaeology.

The battle of Towton in March 1461 has been described as the bloodiest conflict to have taken place in England: allegedly 28,000 men lost their lives, and it is where a ‘Bridge of Bodies’ in a flooding river enabled men fleeing the field to clamber over the dead to escape.

This was just one of many brutal encounters in what has become known as ‘The Wars of the Roses’. The causes of the Wars are complex – the poverty of the crown and the mid fifteenth century economic crisis, the weakness of Henry VI, a lack of royal authority, an escalation of private noble feuds: long-term political and economic problems set alongside personal rivalries are arguably the foundation of these conflicts. Historians debate both the causes and the conflicts themselves, questioning the numbers involved in the battles and the wider impact on society.

Using both contemporary sources, recent historical secondary writing and the evidence gained from archaeological exploration of the battle field sites, this course will consider the political background and historical context. We will also examine the main adversaries involved - Henry VI, his dominant queen Margaret of Anjou, the Kingmaker Warwick, Edward IV, Richard III and finally the triumphant Henry VII.

We will debate how history has interpreted this period. Was it really the weakness of Henry VI that led to the escalation of the dynastic conflict? Were the consequences a new-style monarchy under Henry VII moving away from the chivalric medieval royal structure with the growth of court politics?

Suggested reading
Additional information

- This course is suitable for all levels; no prior knowledge is assumed.
- This course allows you to spend time exploring a subject for interest, among like-minded people, without formal assessment.
- There may be optional research/discussion activities during the course.

Intended learning outcomes

- To learn about the background to this period and the political and economic context in which the battles took place.
- To separate the fact from the fiction which surrounds these momentous battles.
- To discover the many varied sources that are available to aid the study of these three decades, including the written primary and secondary sources, alongside the enquiry into archaeological evidence and battle-field sites.
- To enable students, if they wish, to embark on their own research and exploration of the Wars of the Roses.

About the tutor

Julia Cruse has a PhD in Medieval and Early Modern Studies and has taught undergraduates at the University of Kent. As a mature student she graduated from the University of Kent with a degree in History; her BA dissertation focused on the Paston letters. Her doctoral thesis continued her research into late medieval letter-writing and looked at gentry identity and the politics of letter-writing. She is currently continuing her exploration into the Tudor period with a focus on the Tudor palaces and the lives of the courtiers who lived in them. An ambition is to write her first novel based on her discoveries.
Short Course Programme

General information, terms & conditions

How to book a place
These courses are usually very popular so you are advised to apply as soon as possible. Places cannot be held without payment of the course fee.

- Online Booking is preferred. Please visit www.kent.ac.uk/tonbridge
- By post to us at the address below, using the application form in the programme booklet. Please note that you will not receive an acknowledgment of your paper application; your payment will usually be processed when the course becomes financially viable, otherwise we will notify you of cancellation approximately seven days prior to the course. A paper application affirms acceptance of our terms & conditions.

Course cancellation
As these short courses are self-financing, each course can only proceed if there are sufficient enrolments. Therefore, if a course is cancelled due to insufficient enrolments we aim to notify applicants approximately one week before the course start date; if there is no suitable alternative course, we will refund the appropriate course fee in full. The University of Kent reserves the right to cancel a course for this or any other reason in which case the relevant course fee will be refunded in full. We advise that you do not buy books or other course materials until that particular course has been confirmed as taking place: please contact us if you are unsure.

If you find it necessary to cancel your place on a course, please let us know as soon as possible. Refund requests, including the reason, should be made by email or in writing to us at the address below. We reserve the right to retain all or part of the course fee if you request a refund after 14 days of your online booking being made or paper application being received. Discretionary, partial refunds may be made, after the deduction of an administrative handling fee as follows:

- a course fee of up to and including £42 will incur an administrative handling fee of £10.00
- a course fee of £43 and over will incur an administrative handling fee of £12.50.

The University reserves the right to:

a) exclude any student if the student’s presence is making it difficult for the class to function properly
b) cancel or amend the length of any course if the circumstances so warrant.

Neither the University of Kent, nor its staff, can be held responsible for any damage, loss or injury, however sustained, suffered by participants attending courses. Insurance is the student’s responsibility.

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- Parking. There is plenty of public pay and display car parking locally, but please note that only selected car parks permit parking in excess of four hours; detailed information is available from www.tmbc.gov.uk . No parking is available here on site.
- Refreshments are not provided; food and drink can be purchased from any of the nearby café outlets - we are closely situated to the High Street and town centre. A hot drink vending machine is usually available on the ground floor of this building.

Mailing List and data protection
Those attending our courses are automatically included in our postal mailings, to update you about new courses. This information is not released to outside organisations. Please write to us if you do not wish your details to be kept on our database.

Please contact us if you have any queries or would like to register your email address to receive our course information updates. We look forward to welcoming you here soon.

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