

The Wars of the Roses

1: Orientation to 15th C England

**Leanne Ulvang
leannemu@hotmail.com
Spring, 2026**

Class Plan

- 1 Orientation to 15th C England
- 2 Edward III and his legacies
- 3 First maneuvers (1444 - 1455)
- 4 First Battle of St Albans (1455 to 1460)
- 5 Battles & Weaponry (1455 - 1461)
- 6 Edward IV -- king/not king (1461 - 1471)
- 7 Death of last Lancastrians (1471)
- 8 Reign of Richard III (1483 - 1485)
- 9 Henry VII's early reign (1485 - 1500)
- 10 Aftermath and historical perspectives

The past never changes.

History does.

“It is a period that has not been popular with historians partly because of its confusion of motivations and personalities.”

— Wikipedia on the Wars of the Roses

Alternative course description:

Dysfunctional family engages in domestic violence in order to sit on an overly ornate and uncomfortable chair while wearing a gaudy headpiece.

— Chico OLLI member Howard Nathan

Getting Started

- **Goals**
- **General knowledge of period?**
 - **class responses needed**
- **Sources and recent discoveries**
- **“Game of Thrones” effect**
- **How historical perspective is shaped by contemporary events**

Goals

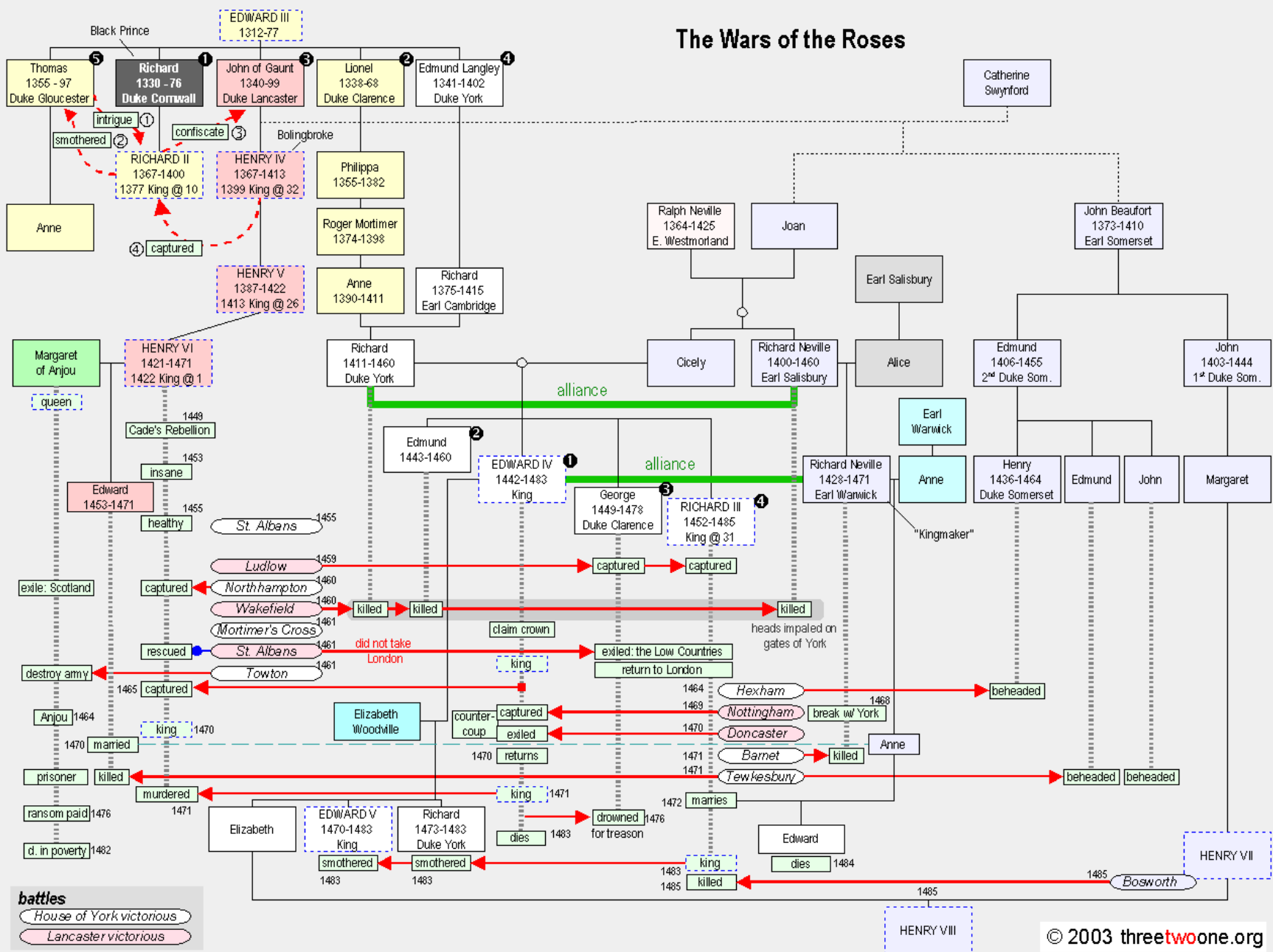
- **Provide historical narrative of events of Wars of Roses**
- **In a manner that is engaging and memorable**
- **While keeping the complex and tangled relationships as clear as possible**
- **And evaluating what techniques/ploys are used to obtain and retain political power**

**Even in the Middle Ages
people found the
“Struggle for the Throne
by Edward III’s Descendants”
confusing!**



Medieval roll depicting the struggle for the throne by Edward III's descendants: BL MS Harley 7353 (detail)

The Wars of the Roses



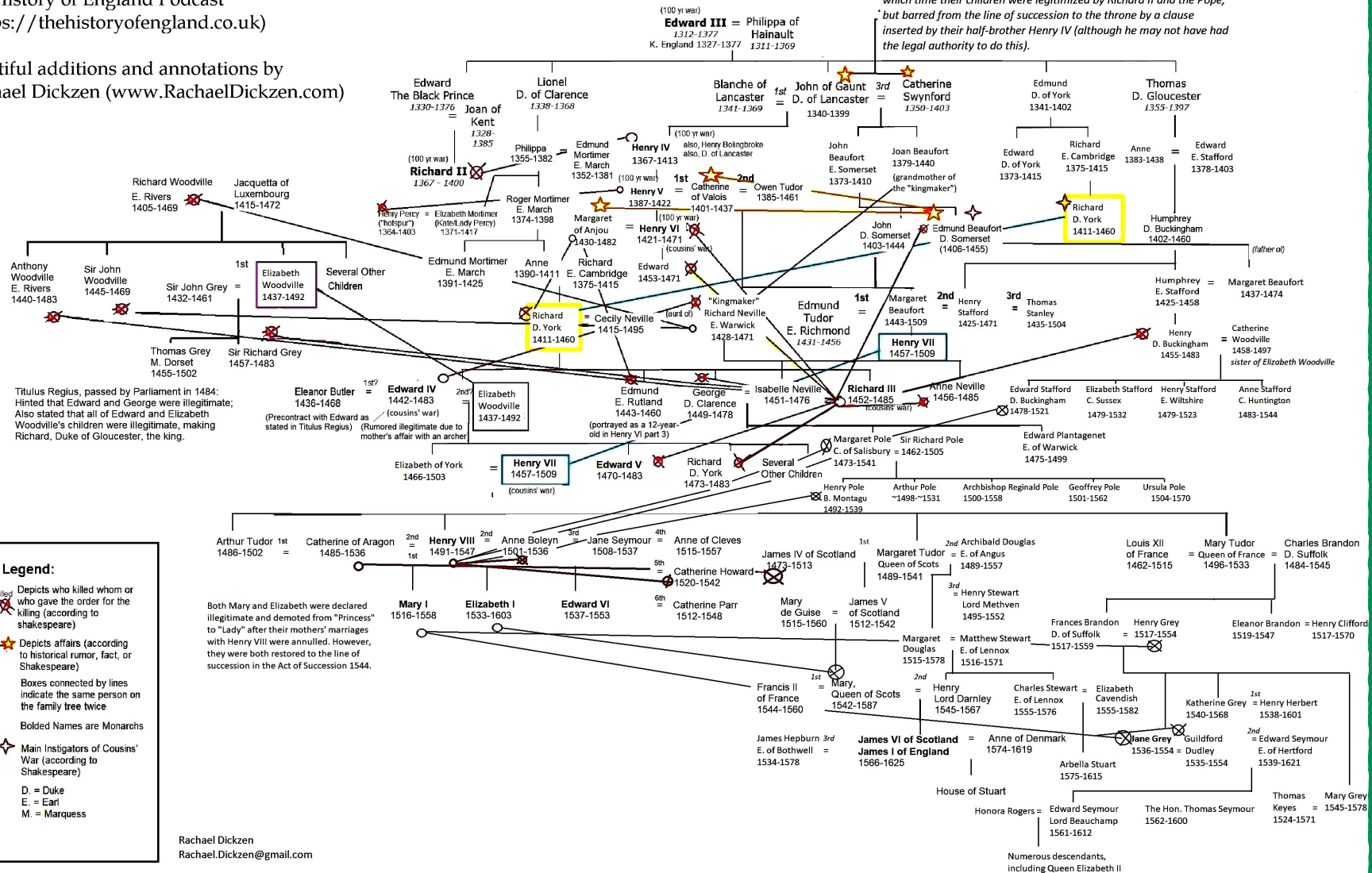
The Shakespeare English History Royal Family Tree

As Portrayed in Edward III, Richard II, Henry IV parts 1 and 2, Henry V, Henry VI parts 1, 2, and 3, Richard III, and Henry VIII.

Original Family Tree from the History of England Podcast (<https://thehistoryofengland.co.uk>)

Plentiful additions and annotations by Rachael Dickzen (www.RachaelDickzen.com)

After a years-long affair, Gaunt and Swynford were married in 1396, at which time their children were legitimized by Richard II and the Pope, but barred from the line of succession to the throne by a clause inserted by their half-brother Henry IV (although he may not have had the legal authority to do this).



Factors of Change in Medieval England

14th C: Great Famine and Black Death

Effects on land, language and labor

- Plague reduced population by about half, especially in cities
 - contemporary name: The Great Mortality
- Killed high proportion of educated clerics
 - contributed to growing use of English as official language, instead of French or Latin
- Undermined structure (and assumptions) of the feudal system
 - “peasant revolts” and local uprisings against feudal lords contested continued constraints on serfs even in the face of labor shortages

Factors of Change in Medieval England (cont)

Rise of Merchant Class and “Gentry”

- Wool trade a major source of revenue for England
- Growing role of House of Commons
 - met separately from Lords from 1341
 - venue for airing grievances with government
 - venue for negotiating change, using power of the purse as leverage
- Merchants' interests not necessarily congruent with those of nobility
 - prime example: disruption of trade because of wars

“Chancellor’s Woolsack”

**Seat of the Speaker of the
House of Lords**

**Edward III required his Lord
Chancellor to sit on a wool
bale while in council to
emphasize importance of
wool trade to English
economy**



Follow along with the family trees ...
use the roster as a guide

- **Red** = Lancastrian
- **Blue** = Yorkist (because white doesn't show up on white)
- **Greens** = turncoats, wafflers or somewhere in the middle
- **Black** = not directly involved

E = Earl; M = Marquis; D = Duke

Sometimes I refer to some people by their eventual titles as opposed to the titles they held at the time of events described

- Edward IV was successively E of March and D of York before becoming king
- Henry VII was called E of Richmond or Henry Tudor

Yorkists

Key [York](#) titles and families (unless they changed sides)

- Dukes of York
 - Dukes of Buckingham
 - Earls of March
 - Earls of Warwick
 - Earl of Salisbury
 - Marquess of Montague
-
- Neville
 - Beauchamp
 - Hastings
 - Mortimer
 - Stafford
 - de la Pole (depending on generation)

Lancastrians

Key Lancastrian titles and families (unless they changed sides)

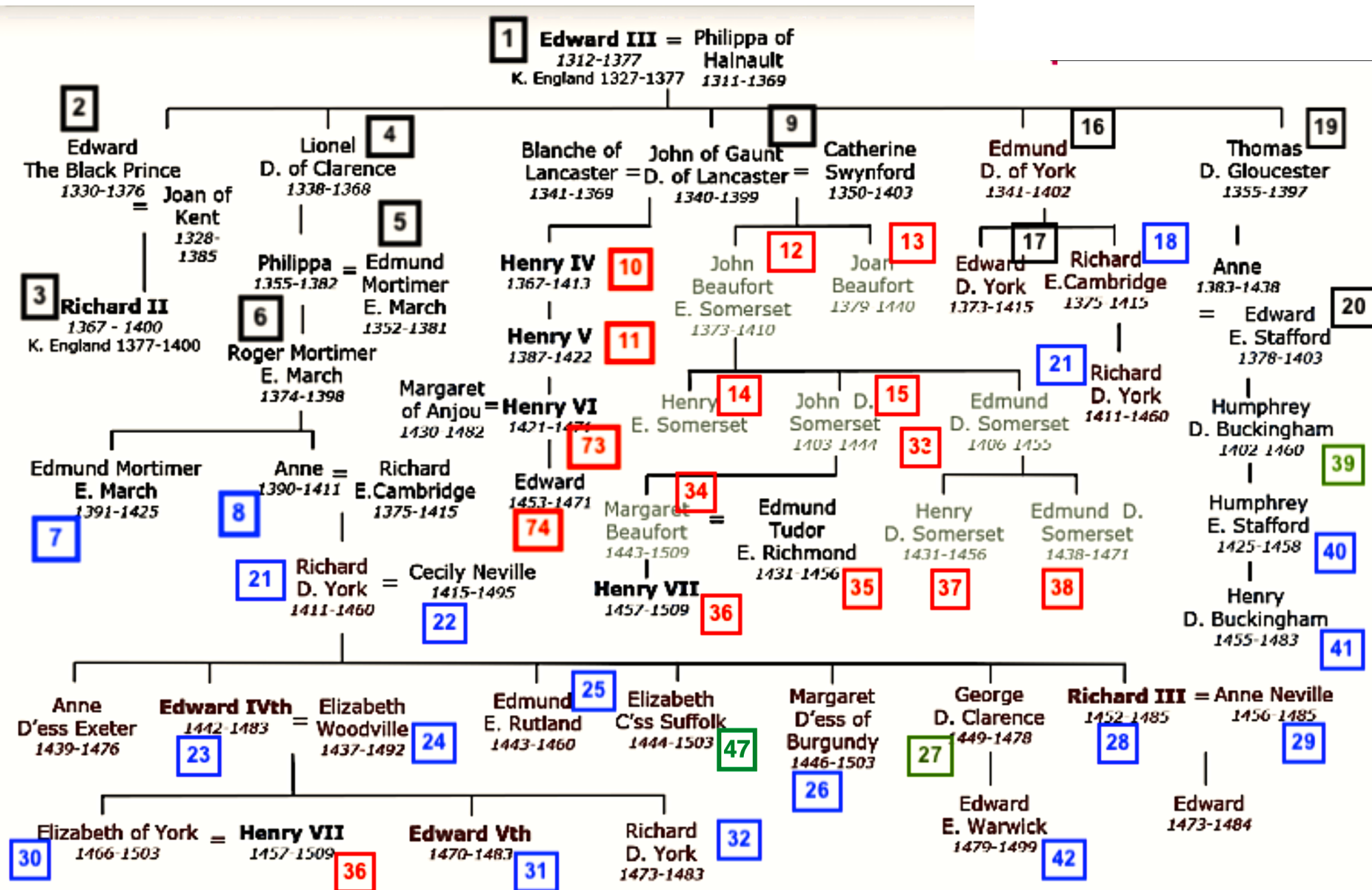
- Earls/Dukes of Somerset
 - Earls/Dukes of Suffolk
 - Earls of Northumberland
 - Earls of Westmoreland
 - Earls of Richmond
 - Earl of Pembroke (Jasper Tudor)
 - Earls of Oxford
-
- Beaufort
 - Clifford
 - de Vere
 - Percy
 - de la Pole (depending on generation)
 - Tudor

With a special mention of the Stanleys
— both sides or neither side

Sample page of roster

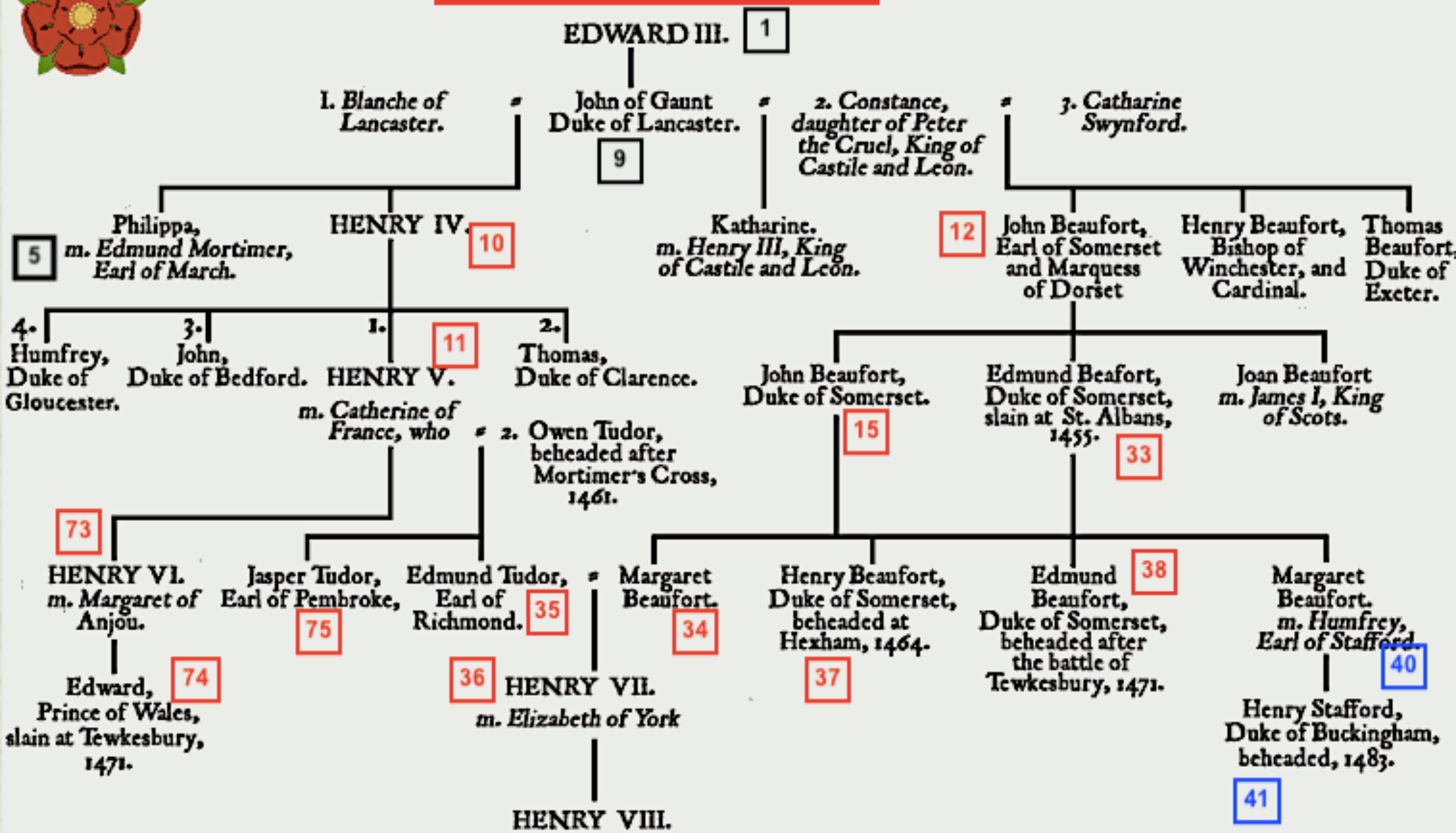
No.	Name	Titles	Dates	Family	Also known as	Other notes
46	John de la Pole	2nd Duke of Suffolk	1442-1492	m Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's (23) sister	Son of 1st D of Suffolk (45)	
47	Elizabeth Plantagenet	Duchess of Suffolk	1444-1502	sister of Edward IV (23) and Richard III (28)	Elizabeth of York	NOT Henry VII's (36) wife, but her aunt
48	John de la Pole	1st Earl of Lincoln	1464-1487	Son of 2nd D of Suffolk (46)		Richard III (28) named him as his heir
49	Edmund de la Pole	3rd Duke of Suffolk	1471-1513	Son of 2nd D of Suffolk (46)		beheaded by Henry VII (36) when his brother Richard (50) went to fight for the French king
50	Richard de la Pole		1480-1525	Son of 2nd D of Suffolk (46)	"White Rose"	died at Battle of Pavia fighting for Francis I of France in Italy
51	Richard Neville	Earl of Salisbury, 16th Earl of Warwick	1428-1471		"The Kingmaker"	turncoat
52	Isabel Neville	Duchess of Clarence	1451-1476	daughter of E of Warwick, "the Kingmaker" (51)		m George, Duke of Clarence (27)
53	John Neville	1st Marquess of Montague	1431-1471	brother of E of Warwick, "the Kingmaker" (51)	Given title E of Northumberland after Henry Percy (68) was attainted	Joined E of Warwick, "the kingmaker" (51) when Edward IV (23) took Northumberland title away

Descendants of Edward III — thehistoryofengland.co.uk

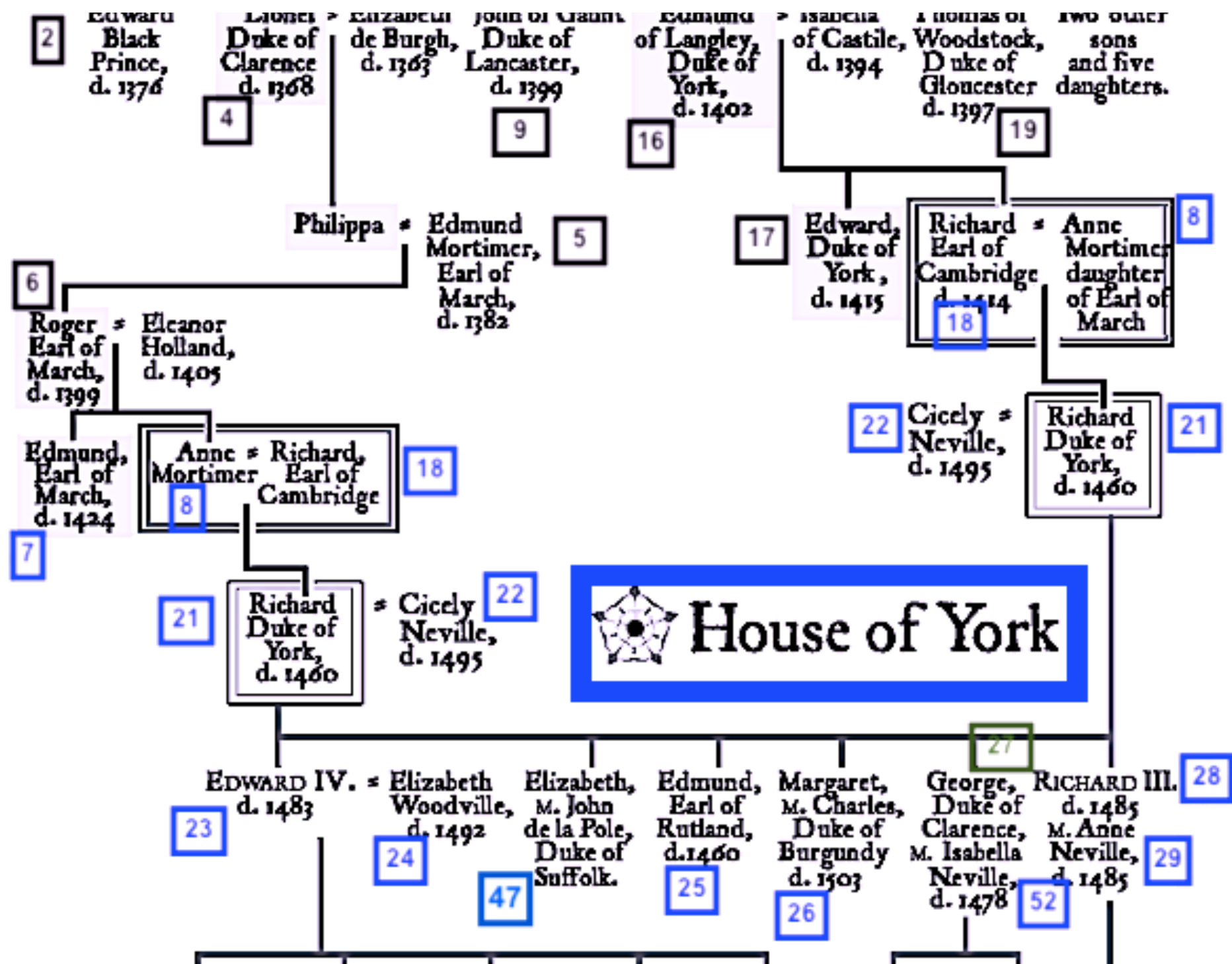




HOUSE OF LANCASTER.

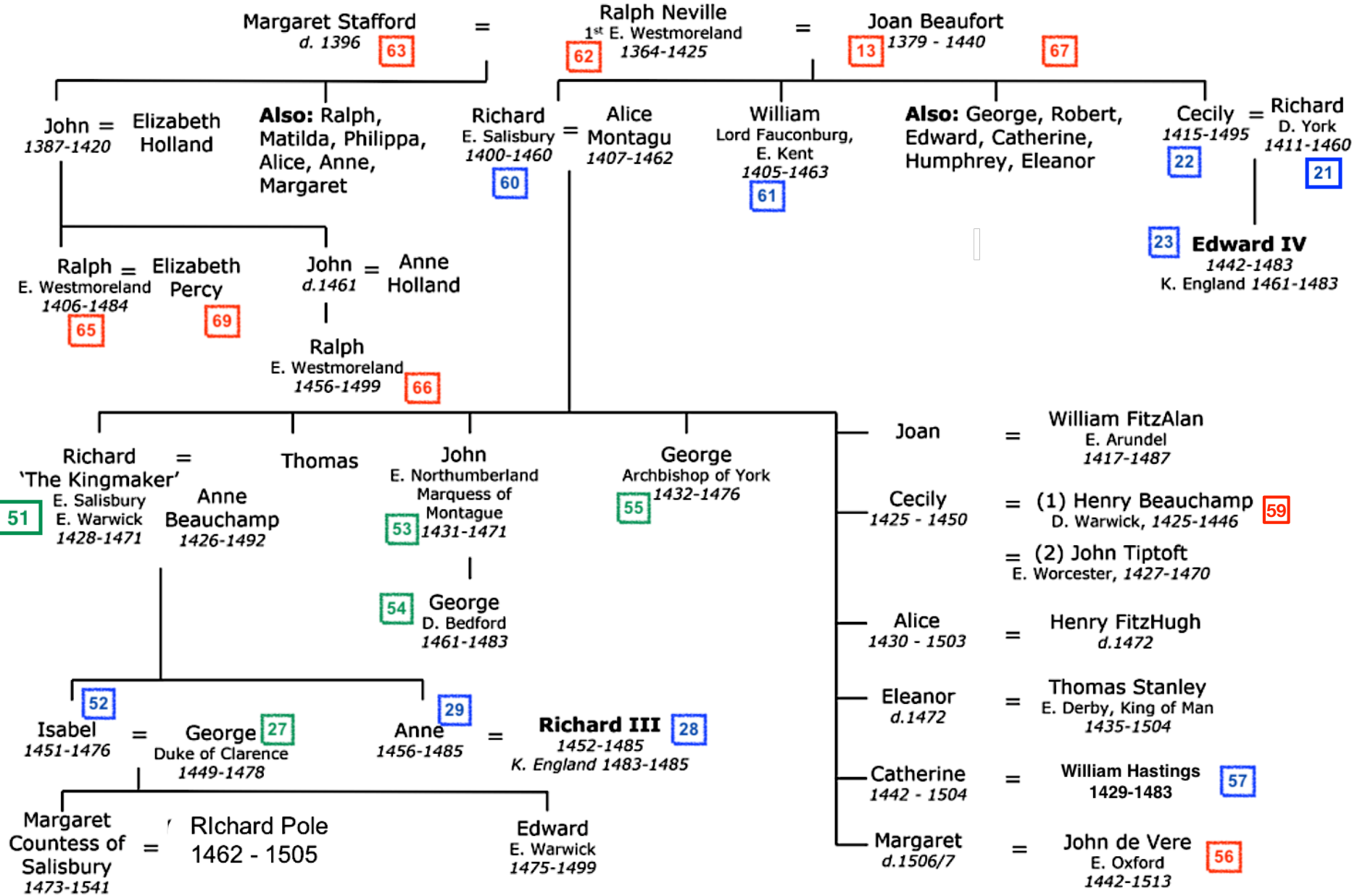


Genealogical chart of the royal House of Lancaster and its descent from King Edward III.

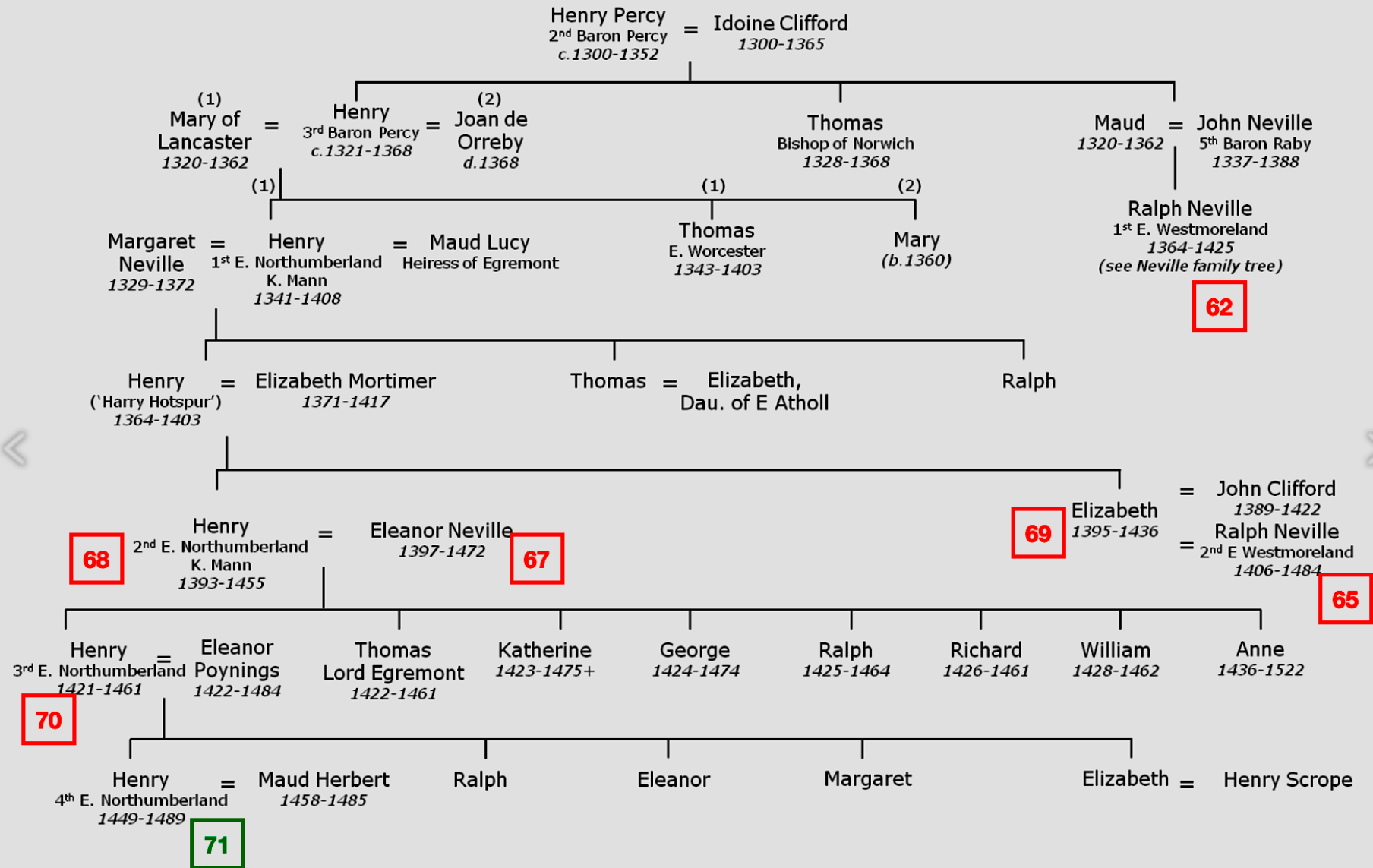


The History of England Podcast Family Trees

The Wars of the Roses: The Neville Family

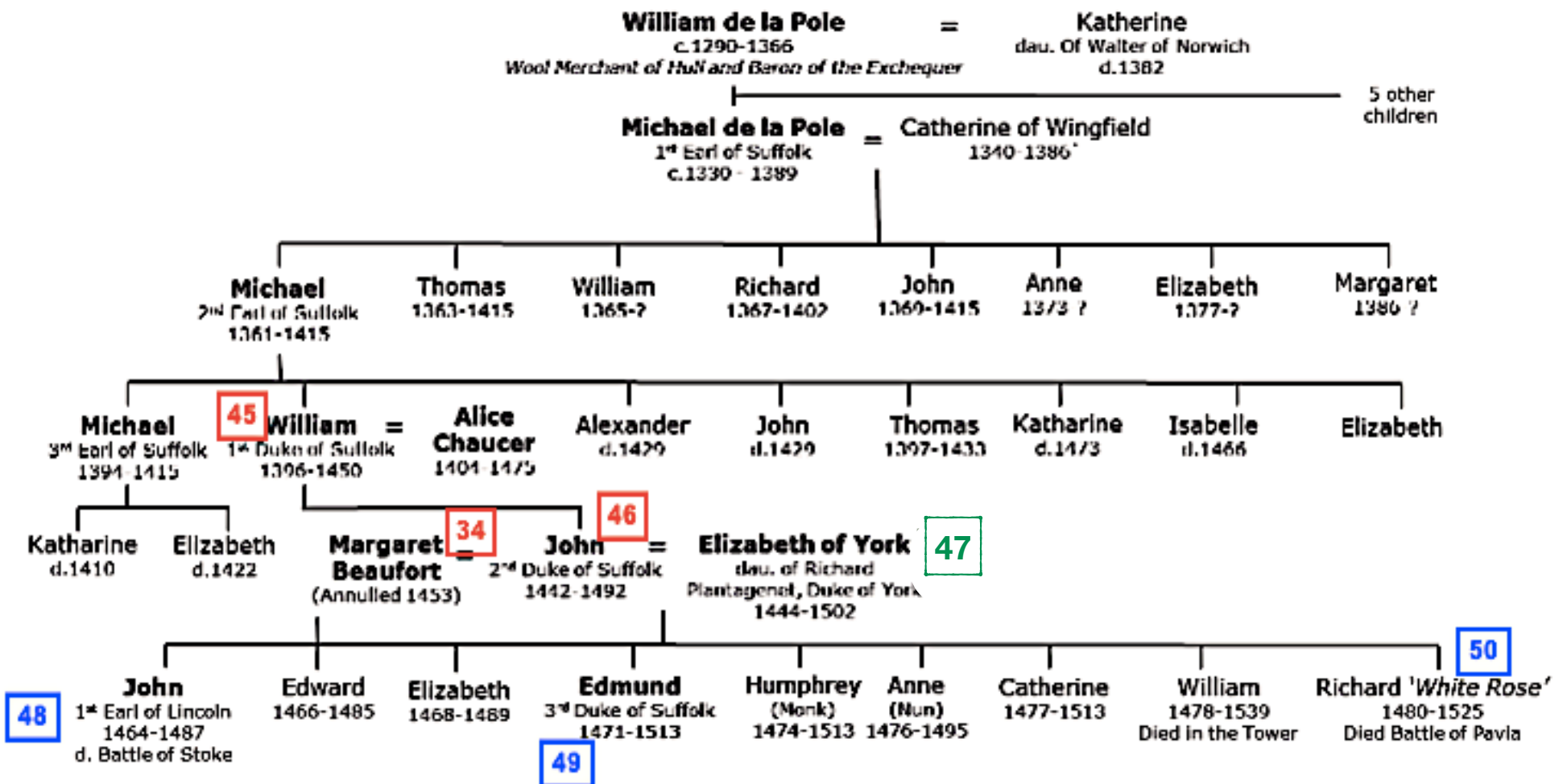


The History of England Podcast Family Trees The Wars of the Roses: The Percy Family



The History of England Podcast Family Trees

The Family of de la Pole, 1290-1539



Class Plan

- 1 Orientation to 15th C England
- 2 **Edward III and his legacies**
- 3 First maneuvers (1444 - 1455)
- 4 First Battle of St Albans (1455 to 1460)
- 5 Battles & Weaponry (1455 - 1461)
- 6 Edward IV -- king/not king (1461 - 1471)
- 7 Death of last Lancastrians (1471)
- 8 Reign of Richard III (1483 - 1485)
- 9 Henry VII's early reign (1485 - 1500)
- 10 Aftermath and historical perspectives