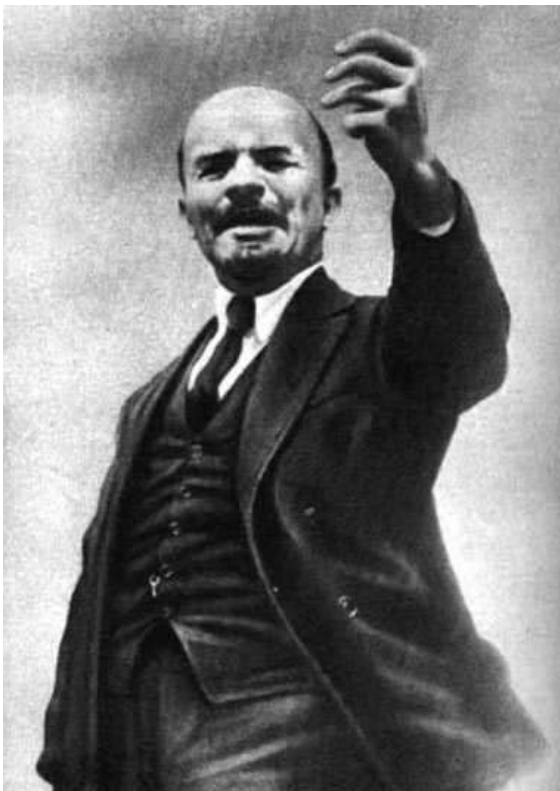
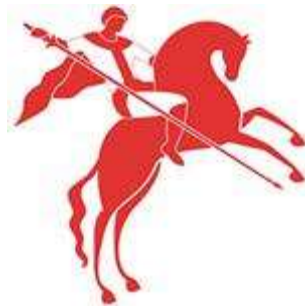


# A-level History Transition Pack

## St George's Academy



## Suggested Reading List

The following are suggested reading for the course. You will be provided with core textbooks for all topics, but should supplement these with additional reading. Some are in the school library; others you should be able to get hold of through your local public library.

### Component One - Breadth Study 1H: Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855-1964

J Bromley, Russia 1848–1917, Heinemann, 2002

G Darby, The Russian Revolution, Longman, 1998

D Evans and J Jenkins, Years of Russia, the USSR and the Collapse of Soviet Communism, Hodder Arnold (2nd edn), 2001

J Hite, Tsarist Russia 1801–1917, Causeway Press, 2004

J Laver, The Modernisation of Russia 1856–1985, Heinemann, 2002

S J Lee, Russia and the USSR, Routledge, 2005

M Lynch, Reaction and Revolutions: Russia 1881–1924, Hodder Murray (2nd new edn), 2005

D Murphy and T Morris, Russia 1855–1964, Collins, 2008

A Wood, The Russian Revolution, Longman (2nd edn), 1986

### Component Two – Depth Study 2B: The Wars of the Roses, 1450-1499

D Cook, Lancastrians and Yorkists: The Wars of the Roses, Longman, 1984

A Crawford, The Yorkists: The History of a Dynasty, Continuum-3PL, 2007

S Gristwood, Blood Sisters: The Women Behind the Wars of the Roses, 2013

D Grummitt, A Short History of the Wars of the Roses, I. B. Tauris, 2012

M Hicks, The Wars of the Roses, Yale University Press, 2012

D Jones, The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses and the Rise of the Tudors, 2015  
***If you only buy one book, make it this one!***

C Pendrill, The Wars of the Roses and Henry VII: England 1459-c.1513, Heinemann, 2004

A Pickering, Lancastrians to Tudors, Cambridge University Press, 2000

A J Pollard, The Wars of the Roses, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

C Ross, The Wars of the Roses, Thames and Hudson, 1986

# A-level History

You are required to complete all the tasks detailed in this booklet. Your knowledge and understanding of this work will be assessed during the first week of the A-level History course.

1. As with other subjects you need to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a range of key terms. These terms form the basis of the historical language that you will become familiar with over the course of year 12, and you will become experienced in using this language in essays.
2. You are required to work your way through the following tasks, completing them by the end of the summer holiday, and submitting them in the first lesson of year 12.
3. This booklet contains tasks for you to complete, the tasks should give you a flavour of some of the areas we will be looking at over the course of the autumn term. Read carefully!!
4. Don't forget – you will sit a short knowledge test near the beginning of the autumn term, so don't think this transition pack work doesn't matter – IT DOES!!!!!!!!!!!!!! You will also be completing two essays in exam conditions based on the work and research you have done.
5. This is a detailed and comprehensive assignment. Don't rush it. Break it down into small tasks and PLAN how you are going to spend your time over the coming weeks. This will provide you with the opportunity to develop excellent study skills in preparation for your A-level studies.
6. You are about to embark upon an exciting stage of your learning – and in 2 short years you may be heading off to University, so EXPECT to be challenged, EXPECT to scratch your head, EXPECT to take longer over these tasks than you may have been used to in year 11. Don't forget, you will now be spending ALL your time doing 3 or 4 subjects – so at first it may seem strange to be spending so long on one thing - but you'll get used to it. It's all part of the learning process and moving you on to be confident, independent 6<sup>th</sup> form learners.

## **Study and examination skills**

### **Differences between GCSE and A-level History**

The amount of factual knowledge required for answers to A-level History questions is much more detailed than at GCSE. Factual knowledge in the A-level is used as supporting evidence to help answer historical questions. Knowing the facts is important, but not as important as knowing that factual knowledge supports historical analysis.

- Extended writing is more important in A-level History. You will be expected to answer questions in essay format, structuring your own argument.
- Reading is absolutely vital – if you don't enjoy reading this is not the subject for you!

### **Similarities with GCSE:**

#### **Source analysis and evaluation**

The skills in handling source historical sources, which were acquired at GCSE, are developed in A-level History. In the A-level, sources have to be analysed in their historical context, so good factual knowledge of the subject is important.

#### **Historical interpretations**

Skills in historical interpretation at GCSE are also developed in A-level History. The ability to analyse different historical interpretations is important. Students will also be expected to explain why different historical interpretations have occurred.

### **Extended writing:**

When faced with extended writing in A-level History students can improve their performance by following a simple routine that attempts to ensure they achieve their best performance.

#### **Answering the question**

*What are the command instructions?*

Different questions require different types of response. For instance, 'In what ways' requires students to point out the various ways something took place in History. 'Why' questions expect students to deal with the causes or consequences of an historical event. 'How far' and 'to what extent' questions require students to produce a balanced, analytical answer. Usually, this will take the form of the case for and the case against an historical question.

*Are there key words or phrases that require definition or explanation?*

It is important for students to show that they understand the meaning of the question. To do this, certain historical terms or words require explanation. For instance, if a question asked 'how far' a politician was an 'innovator', an explanation of the word 'innovator' would be required.

*Does the question have specific dates or issues that require coverage?*

If the question mentions specific dates, these must be adhered to.

### **Planning your answer**

Once you have decided on what the question requires, write a brief plan. For structured questions this may be brief. This is a useful procedure to make sure that you have ordered the information you require for your answer in the most effective way. For instance, in a balanced, analytical answer this may take the form of jotting down the main points for and against and historical issue raised in the question.

### **Writing the answer**

#### ***Communication skills***

The quality of written English is important in A-level History. The way you present your ideas on paper can affect the quality of your answer. Therefore, punctuation, spelling and grammar require close attention. Look at the mark schemes for each unit with show you this.

#### ***The introduction***

These should be both concise and precise. Introductions help ‘concentrate the mind’ on the question you are about to answer. Remember to answer the question and outline briefly the areas you intend to discuss in your answer.

#### ***Balancing analysis with factual evidence***

It is important to remember that factual knowledge should be used to support analysis. Merely ‘telling the story’ of an historical event is not enough. A structured question or essay should contain separate paragraphs, each addressing an analytical point that helps to answer the question. Good A-level essays integrate analysis and factual knowledge.

#### ***Seeing connections between reasons***

In dealing with ‘why’ – type questions it is important to remember that the reasons for an historical event might be interconnected. Therefore, it is important to mention the connections between the reasons. Also, it might be important to identify a hierarchy of reasons – that is, are some reasons more important than others in explaining an historical event?

#### ***Using quotations and statistical data***

One aspect of supporting evidence that sustains analysis is the use of quotations. These can be from either a historian or a contemporary. However, unless these quotations are linked with analysis and supporting evidence, they tend to be of little value. It can also be useful to support analysis with statistical data. In questions that deal with social and economic change, precise statistics that support your arguments can be very persuasive.

#### ***The conclusion***

All structured questions and essay require conclusions. If, for example, a question requires a discussion of ‘how far’ you agree with a question, you should offer a judgement in your conclusion. Don’t be afraid of this – say what you think. Students who write analytical answers, ably supported by factual evidence, under-perform because they fail to provide a conclusion that deals directly with the question.

## **How to handle sources in A-level History**

Source analysis forms an integral part of A-level History. In dealing with sources you should be aware that historical sources must be used in 'historical context'.

In dealing with sources, a number of basic hints will allow you to deal effectively with source-based questions and to build on your knowledge and skill in using sources at GCSE.

### **Written sources**

#### ***Provenance***

It is important to identify who has written the source and when it was written. This information can be very important. If, for example, a source was written by the Yorkists in 1455, this would be of considerable importance if you are asked about the value of the source as evidence of Yorkist motives for fighting the battle of St Albans.

#### ***Tone - is the content factual or opinionated?***

Once you have identified the author and date of the source, it is important to study its content. The content may be factual, stating what has happened or what may happen. On the other hand, it may contain opinions that should be handled with caution. These will bias, it's a question of what they bias is and how biased it is. Even if a source is mainly factual, there might be important and deliberate gaps in factual evidence that can make a unreliable. Usually, written sources contain elements of both opinion and factual evidence. It is important to judge the balance between these two parts.

#### ***Has the source been written for a particular audience?***

To determine the reliability of a source it is important to know whom it is directed. For instance, a public speech may be made to achieve a particular purpose and may not contain the author's true beliefs or feelings. In contrast, a private diary entry may be much more reliable in this respect.

#### ***Corroborative evidence***

To test whether or not a source is reliable, the use of other evidence to support or corroborate the information it contains is important. Cross-referencing with other sources is a way of achieving this; so is cross-referencing with historical information contained within a chapter.

## **Progression in A-level History**

The ability to achieve high standards in A-level History involves the acquisition of a number of skills:

- Good written communication skills
- Acquiring a sound factual knowledge
- Evaluating factual evidence and making historical conclusions based on the evidence
- Source analysis
- Understanding the nature of historical interpretation
- Understanding the causes and consequences of historical events
- Understanding the ideas of change and continuity associated with themes.

Students should be aware that the acquisition of these skills will take place gradually. At the beginning of the course, the main emphasis may be on the acquisition of factual knowledge, particularly when the body of knowledge studied at GCSE was different.

## ***Course aims & content***

You will study three components to receive your A-Level in history.

### **Component One – Breadth Study 1H: Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855-1964**

This component consists of a study of Russian history between 1855 and 1964. The component focuses on your ability to assess key questions in the context of longer periods of history. This component also requires you to judge the validity of different historical interpretations.

### **Component Two – Depth Study 2B: The Wars of the Roses, 1450-1499**

This component focuses on the social and political turmoil brought about by periodic warfare in England during the Wars of the Roses. The component requires you to demonstrate deep knowledge of various concepts such as authority and royal legitimacy. The component also requires you to assess the usefulness of historical sources in relation to specific questions.

### **Component Three – Historical Investigation: Germany 1789-1933 (or alternative area of interest)**

This is a personal study based on a topic of your choice. The History department will prepare you for this with a short, taught overview of the skills necessary to complete this and give support around identifying an area of study and choosing a question. You will need to produce a 3,500-4,500 word essay that answers a question based around an historical issue or idea lasting around 100 years. This component is focused on independent reading and research.

### **A-level assessment**

A-level exams take place after two years and cover the entire chronology of each component.

## **Preparation work**

There are two aspects to the work you need to complete before you start your A-level History course.

**Completion of this preparation work is a pre-requisite to acceptance on this course. It must be handed in on your first History lesson in September. Please write each task separately, as there are two teachers teaching the course and one will go to each teacher.**

The tasks are actual written assignments which you need to complete and hand in to the appropriate History teacher at the beginning of September. This will help you in two ways. It will give you some background information of the historical issues you will be studying and it will also refresh and develop the history skills necessary to be successful on this course.

At the end of this pack **are two textbook extracts** that should help you, although you may wish to consult other books from the reading list.

In addition to these transition tasks, there will be a formal, timed assessment with no notes in September. Details on the questions for this are in the specific sections of this transition booklet.

All components will be taken into consideration in assessing your appropriate placement for A-Level History.



## **Tasks for 1H: Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855-1964**

### **1a. Tasks to be completed before the start of the course:**

Complete the following key words table – these are words relevant to the 1H course and will need to be used in lessons and in essays. You may wish to write directly onto the sheet or create your own version to print. You may use definitions from the internet but must be able to understand what these definitions are stating.

<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Capitalism	
Communism	
Autocracy	
Liberalism	
Marxism	
Dictatorship	
Totalitarianism	
Russification	
Oppression	
Agriculture	
Emancipation	
Industrialisation	
Historiography	
Tsar/Czar	

**1b. Write a response to the following question. Use the guidance and stepped process in this booklet to help you.**

**Using your understanding of the historical context, how convincing is extract 1 in relation to the condition of Russia in 1855. [10 Marks]**

The Russian Empire was deeply divided between the government and the Tsar's subjects; between the capital and the provinces; between the educated and the uneducated; between Western and Russian ideas; between the rich and the poor; between privilege and oppression; between contemporary fashion and centuries-old custom. Most people (and over 90% of the Emperor's subjects were born and bred in the countryside) felt that a chasm divided them from the world inhabited by the ruling elites. [...] Except in times of war, most of them were motivated by Christian belief, peasant customs, village loyalties and reverence for the Tsar rather than by feelings of nationhood.

Adapted from Robert Service, *History of Modern Russia*, 1997

What is this question asking you to do?

This question is asking you to consider whether or not Robert Service makes a 'convincing' or believable argument about what Russia was like in 1855. You should 'test' Service's claims against evidence that you can find.

What is the main argument of this extract? What does Service claim is the 'condition of Russia in 1855'?

---

---

---

Is this convincing?

Research the following quotations from Service's extract by using the textbook pages and article provided as well as the internet to consider if his claims are 'convincing.'

1. 'The Russian Empire was deeply divided' – is this statement convincing?

---

---

---

2. 'Most people felt that a chasm divided them from the world inhabited by the ruling elites.' – is this statement convincing?

---

---

---

3. 'Except in times of war, most of them were motivated by Christian belief, peasant customs, village loyalties and reverence for the Tsar rather than by feelings of nationhood.' – is this statement convincing?

---

---

---

Bring all of these points together to answer the question '**Using your understanding of the historical context, how convincing is extract 1 in relation to the condition of Russia in 1855.**'

This should be written in full sentences and paragraphs. This should be **no shorter** than one side of hand written A4. This should be **no longer** than three pages of hand written A4.

**Checklist:**

I have stated Service's main argument ☐

I have explained why this is convincing ☐

I have used a quotation to support this point ☐

I have used own knowledge to support this point ☐

I have explained why this is **not fully** convincing ☐

I have used a quotation to support this point ☐

I have used own knowledge to support this point ☐

Mark Scheme for task 1b

	<b>Understanding of interpretation</b>	<b>Use of contextual knowledge</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Contextual Knowledge</b>
<b>L5</b> <b>Est. A*+ 10</b>	Very good understanding of the interpretation– clearly outlining each argument using the extract.	Strong awareness of specified context used to analyse and evaluate each interpretation in terms of how convincing it is in relation to the specified context.	Evaluation is well supported and convincing.	Very good understanding of the historical context.
<b>L4</b> <b>Est. A-B 8-9</b>	Good understanding of interpretation –outlining each argument using the extract.	Knowledge of specified context used to analyse and evaluate each interpretation in terms of how convincing it is in relation to the specified context.	Evaluation is mostly well supported and convincing. May have minor limitations in breadth or depth.	Understanding of the historical context.
<b>L3</b> <b>Est. C-D 6-7</b>	Some comment on interpretation using the extract to support points.	Use of historical context to make points about strengths and weaknesses of the arguments.	Some analysis and evaluation but an imbalance in the degree and depth of comments	An understanding of the historical context.
<b>L2</b> <b>Est. E-U 3-5</b>	Some accurate comment on the interpretation.	Some reference to the historical context to discuss points.	Little or no evaluation – comments are generalised, inaccurate or irrelevant	Some understanding of the historical context.
<b>L1</b> <b>Est. U 0-2</b>	Covers in generalised way showing little understanding.	Some general awareness of the context	Generalised comments on strengths and weaknesses likely to be inaccurate or irrelevant	Limited understanding of context.

### **1c. Assessment in September**

Prepare for a formal, timed assessment as part of your transition.

#### **Essay Question:**

**'The Tsar had ultimate power over the Russian Empire in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century.'** How far do you agree?

You should use all resources available in this pack as well as additional research to be fully prepared to answer this question in exam conditions.

There is specific reading at the end of this pack to help with this assessment. You should plan your response before you return to school in September:

**Space to plan:**

**Tasks for 2B: The Wars of the Roses, 1450-1499 - Each of the tasks should be roughly one side of A4**

**2a – tasks to be completed before the start of the course**

1. Create a timeline of the key events 1450-1455
2. Create a profile for King Henry VI
3. Write a summary of the Hundred Year War to include:
  - Causes
  - Key battles
  - Key individuals
  - Consequences
4. Analyse source A to answer the following question:

*“With reference to source A and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of this source to an historian studying the reasons for unrest in England in 1450”*

**Source A – From ‘An English Chronicle’, a continuation of a much longer history of England. It was up-dated to include contemporary events. The coverage of events 1450 to 1461 were written in the early 1460s by an unknown author. This chronicle covers events up to 1461.**

Cade, who at the beginning took upon him the name of a gentleman and called himself Mortimer for to have the favour of the people. And he called himself John Amend-All, for as much as then and long before the realm of England had been ruled by untrue counsel, wherefore the common profit was sore hurt and deceased; so that the common people, what with taxes and tallages and other oppressions, might not live by their handiwork and husbandry, wherefore they grudged sore against those who had the governance of the land.

*Use the questions below to plan your answer, then answer the question in full.*

1. What reasons does the source give for the unrest in England?
2. Which parts of the source support this?
3. What knowledge do you have that might either support or challenge the view the reasons given were valid?
4. What about the provenance (where the source comes from) and tone of the source do you need to take account of when assessing the source as evidence (reliability)?

Level	Contextual Knowledge	Understanding of the content	Understanding of provenance	Argument and judgement
5	Very good understanding of the historical context with specific examples used to answer the question.	Value of source content is very good and used to answer the question.	Value of source provenance is very good and used to answer the question.	There is a balanced argument and this is well substantiated.
4	A good understanding of the historical context that is used to help answer the question.	Value of source content is good and used to answer the question.	Value of source provenance is good and used to answer the question.	Judgement is partial or limited.
3	Aware of the historical context; linked to the question.	There is some understanding of the content (possible imbalance).	There is some understanding of the provenance.	Judgement is not fully convincing.
2	Some understanding of the historical context; link to the question may be limited.	Partial understanding of content and provenance.		Judgement is unconvincing.
1	Limited understanding of context; not all linked to the question.	Something the source, but there may be some inaccuracy.		No judgement on the value of the source for the question asked.

Mark Scheme for this task

**Do not just describe what the source says – evaluate it (for usefulness, reliability, etc.) and make judgements based on the quality of the evidence from an historian’s point of view.**

## 2b. For assessment in September

Prepare for a formal, timed assessment as part of your transition.

**16 mark question (*this will be marked using the same mark scheme you as GCSE History*):**

*"Henry VI's loss of France meant that he had failed as king by 1454" How far do you agree? Explain your answer.*

*You may use the following in your answer:*

- *Final loss of Gascony*
- *Birth of Prince Edward*

You should use all resources available in this pack as well as additional research to be fully prepared to answer this question in exam conditions.

### **Checklist for your first History lesson in September:**

You will be expected to hand in work in your first History lesson so please come prepared.

This work, and your attitude towards it, will be taken into consideration when determining your suitability for the course.

#### **1H Tsarist and Communist Russia**

- ☐ 1a. Complete the key words sheet (page 9)
- ☐ 1b. Write a response to the 10 mark extract question (pages 10-12)
- ☐ 1c. Prepare for an essay in your transition week in September (page 13)

#### **2B The Wars of the Roses, 1450-1499**

- ☐ 2a Part 1 Create a timeline of the key events 1450-1455 (page 14)
- ☐ 2a Part 2. Create a profile for King Henry VI (page 14)
- ☐ 2a Part 3. Write a summary of the Hundred Year War to include:
  - Causes
  - Key battles
  - Key individuals
  - Consequences(Page 14)
- ☐ 2a Part 4. Write a response to the 10 mark source question (pages 14 and 15)
- ☐ 2b. Prepare for an essay in your transition week in September (page 15)



## Textbook extracts to help with Task 1a

### Part One Autocracy, reform and revolution: Russia 1855–1917

1

## Trying to preserve autocracy, 1855–1894

### 1 The Russian autocracy in 1855

#### EXTRACT 1

The Russian Empire was deeply divided between the government and the Tsar's subjects; between the capital and the provinces; between the educated and the uneducated; between Western and Russian ideas; between the rich and the poor; between privilege and oppression; between contemporary fashion and centuries-old custom. Most people (and over 90 per cent of the Emperor's subjects were born and bred in the countryside) felt that a chasm divided them from the world inhabited by the ruling elites. Russia was an empire, but national consciousness was only patchily developed and local traditions and loyalties retained the greatest influence. National consciousness was not a dominant sentiment among Russians. Except in times of war, most of them were motivated by Christian belief, peasant customs, village loyalties and reverence for the Tsar rather than by feelings of Russian nationhood. Christianity itself was a divisive phenomenon; Russian Orthodox teachings were not accepted universally. But the Tsar and the Church hierarchy wanted obedience and they had the authority to secure just that.

Adapted from Robert Service, *History of Modern Russia*, 1997

The well-respected modern historian Robert Service has painted a picture of tsarist Russia as it was in the mid-nineteenth century and was to remain, scarcely changed, until the end of tsarist rule in 1917. His account of the state of the Russian Empire stresses its geographic, social, intellectual, economic and even religious divisions. Above all, he emphasises the **localism** of Russian society and the lack of national consciousness. The empire he describes seems to be held together by a 'reverence for the Tsar', and by the power of that Tsar and the Russian Orthodox Church to demand obedience.

#### The political context

In 1855, Russia was an **autocratic empire**. At its head was a Tsar, who took the title 'Emperor and Autocrat of all Russia'. According to the 'Collected Laws of the Russian Empire' compiled by Tsar Nicholas I in 1832, 'The Emperor of all the Russias is an autocratic and unlimited monarch; God himself ordains that all must bow to his supreme power, not only out of fear but also out of conscience.'

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### Empire

An empire is made up of a number of lesser states ruled over by one monarch. Nineteenth-century Russia was a vast empire of around 21 million square kilometres, twice the size of Europe and a sixth of the globe's surface. It had been acquired through military conquest and colonisation, and was still growing.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the powers of the Tsar of Russia in the mid-nineteenth century
- the way in which Russia was governed and the problems the rulers faced
- the economic state of Russia in c1855
- the social make-up of Russia in c1855.

#### KEY QUESTION

As you read this chapter, consider the following Key Question:  
How was Russia governed and how did political authority change and develop?

#### KEY TERM

**Localism:** loyalty to the local community or local area

#### ACTIVITY

As you read this chapter, see if you can find evidence that agrees with Service's interpretation in Extract 1. Later in the chapter, you will be asked to assess how convincing his argument is.

#### KEY TERM

**Autocratic:** autocracy means having no limits on a ruler's power; such a ruler was called an autocrat

## KEY TERM

**Orthodox Church:** following a split in the Christian Church in the eleventh century, the Eastern Orthodox Church had developed its own beliefs and rituals; in 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Turks, Moscow became its spiritual capital

**Over-Procuration:** appointed by the Tsar from the laity, this was the highest Church official

**Holy Synod:** a group of bishops, which forms the ruling body of the Orthodox Church; it is the highest authority on rules, regulations, faith and matters of Church organisation

**Edict:** (Russian: *ukaz*) an official order issued by a person of authority

## A CLOSER LOOK

## Problems of governing the Empire

Many different ethnic groups lived within the Russian Empire, each with their own culture, customs, language and, in some cases, religion. Less than half the total population of around 69 million people in 1855 was Russian, and three quarters of the total population lived within European Russia – to the west of the Urals – on less than a quarter of the total land mass.

## KEY TERM

**Provincial:** living away from the capital

## CROSS-REFERENCE

One example of the special committees appointed by the Tsar is the committee of nobles that were formed to discuss the issue of Emancipation, or freeing the serfs. This is discussed in Chapter 2.



Fig. 1 The Russian Empire in 1855. What can be learned from this map about the likely problems of governing Russia in the mid-nineteenth century?

Nicholas' statement is a reminder that the Tsar was, in name only, also the Head of the Russian **Orthodox Church** and was regarded by Orthodox believers as the embodiment of God on Earth. The vast lands of the Russian Empire were his private property and the Russian people were his children. Russians were taught to show devotion to their Tsar and to accept their conditions on Earth as the will of God. The Patriarch of Moscow, who worked in close harmony with the Tsar, provided spiritual guidance, while the **Over-Procuration** of the **Holy Synod**, a post created in 1721, was a government minister appointed by the Tsar to run Church affairs. This meant that the structures of Church and State were entwined, as archbishops and bishops at the head of the Church hierarchy were subject to tsarist control over appointments, religious education, most of the Church's finances and issues of administration.

The Tsar's imperial **edicts** (*ukazy* in Russian) were the law of the land. The Tsar did, of course, have advisers and ministers, but these were all chosen by the Tsar himself and no-one could do anything without the Tsar's approval. His main advisory bodies were the Imperial Council or Chancellery, a body of 35 to 60 nobles specially picked by the Tsar to advise him personally and provide their 'expert' opinion; the Council of Ministers, a body of 8 to 14 ministers in charge of different government departments; and the Senate, which was supposed to oversee all the workings of government but in practice was largely redundant by 1855.

The Tsar and the central government were based in the Imperial capital of St Petersburg but the regime also depended on the **provincial** nobility for support. Nobles had not been obliged to serve the State since 1785, although many continued to do so, for example as a provincial governor of one of the Empire's fifty provinces. However, their sense of obligation remained strong and all landowners were expected to keep order on their estates. Furthermore, when circumstances demanded, Tsars might choose to appoint a special committee to carry out an investigation or prepare a report. Such committees were usually headed by trusted nobles but, even so, there was no need for the Tsar to take any notice of their findings.

The **civil servants** who made up the **bureaucracy** were paid noble officials, selected from a 'table of ranks' that laid down the requirements for office.



There were 14 levels, from rank 1, held by members of the Council of Ministers, to rank 14, which covered the minor state positions, for example, collecting taxes or running a provincial post office. Each rank had its own uniform, form of address and status. This bureaucracy was riddled by internal corruption and incompetence, but through it orders were passed downwards from the central government to the provincial governors and, in turn, to district governors and town commandants. It was a one-way operation though; there was no provision for suggestions to travel upwards from the lower ranks.

As well as his civilian officials, the Tsar also had at his disposal the world's largest army of around 1.5 million **conscripted serfs**, each forced into service for 25 years and made to live in a 'military colony'. This huge army and the much smaller navy absorbed around 45 per cent of the government's annual spending. The higher ranks of the military were prestigious posts, reserved for the nobles who bought and sold their commissions, but for the lower ranks discipline was harsh and army life was tough. This army could be called upon to fight in wars or to put down risings and disturbances inside Russia. The Tsar also had the service of elite regiments of mounted **Cossacks**, with special social privileges. The Cossacks acted both as a personal bodyguard to the Tsar and as police reinforcements.



Fig. 2 The Tsar's palace in St Petersburg

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### Cossacks

The Cossacks came from the Ukraine and Southern Russia. They were known for their skills in horsemanship and their strong military tradition. By the nineteenth century, the Cossacks formed a special and prestigious military class serving the Tsar. They were provided with arms and supplies by the tsarist government, but each soldier rode his own highly trained horse.

To maintain the autocracy, the country had developed into a **police state**. The police state prevented freedom of speech, freedom of the press and travel abroad. Political meetings and strikes were forbidden. Censorship existed at every level of government and the police made sure that the censorship exercised by the State and Church was enforced. The secret state security network was run by the 'Third Section' of the Emperor's Imperial Council. Its agents kept a strict surveillance over the population and had unlimited powers to carry out raids, and to arrest and imprison or send into exile anyone suspected of anti-tsarist behaviour. They sometimes acted on the word of informers, and were greatly feared.

Following the **French Revolution**, Alexander I, Tsar between 1801 and 1825, considered setting up an advisory representative assembly and possibly giving it law-making powers, but he never put this into practice. His brother Nicholas I, who ruled between 1825 and 1855, totally rejected such a thought. A military uprising against his rule in December 1825 encouraged him to follow a path of repression, and he deliberately sought to distance Russia from

#### KEY TERM

**Civil servant:** someone working for the government

**Bureaucracy:** a system of government in which most of the important decisions are taken by state officials rather than by elected representatives

**Conscription:** compulsory enlistment of a person into military service

**Serf:** a person who was the property of the lord for whom he or she worked; serfs and serfdom are further discussed later in this chapter (on page 4, in A closer look: What was serfdom?) and will be covered in detail in Chapter 2

**Military colony:** where the conscripts lived (with their families) and trained, all under strict military discipline

**Police state:** a state in which the activities of the people are closely monitored and controlled for political reasons

#### ACTIVITY

Draw a diagram to show the political structure of Russia in c1855.



## CROSS-REFERENCE

Less than half the total population of around 69 million people in 1855 was Russian. Read more in A Closer Look: Problems of governing the Empire on page 2.

the West where the liberal ideas he most feared were spreading. He believed in strict autocracy and severe restrictions were imposed on Russia's other nationalities. While leading intellectuals argued for a civil society based on the rule of law, Nicholas tightened censorship and set up the secret police, or Third Section. His reign ended in military defeat in the Crimea, which finally brought the long-ignored need for change to the new Tsar's attention.

## The economic and social context

## A CLOSER LOOK

## The French Revolution

The French had risen up against their absolutist King in 1789 and a republic had been set up in 1792. The French example of representative government (as already practised in Great Britain) was spread across Europe by Napoleon before 1812. French 'liberal' ideas ignited a demand for greater political freedom in the European states.

## KEY QUESTION

How and with what results did the economy develop and change?  
What was the extent of social change?

## The economic situation

When Alexander II came to the throne in 1855, Britain, Belgium, France and the states comprising Germany were already well advanced industrially. Mills, factories, coal pits, quarries and railways were transforming the landscape and trade was flourishing. However, the Russian economy remained mostly rural with a ratio of 11:1 village to town dwellers, compared with 2:1 in Britain.

There were good reasons for Russia's economic backwardness. Although the Russian Empire was vast, much of its territory was inhospitable (over two thirds lay north of the 50th parallel north), comprising tundra, forests and stretches of barren countryside, especially to the north and east. As a result, both size and climate placed severe strains on economic development. Although mid-nineteenth century Russia was Europe's main exporter of agricultural produce and possessed vast reserves of timber, coal, oil, gold and other precious metals, much of its potential remained untapped and communications between the different parts of the Empire were poor.

However the lack of progress was primarily due to Russia's commitment to a serf-based economy. The landowning aristocracy, the tsarist government and the army were all reliant on the **serfs**. This inhibited economic development by limiting the forces that drive change, such as wage-earners, markets and **entrepreneurs**. The serfs were poor. Most just about managed to survive on the produce they grew for themselves on the land made available by their landlords, and '**cottage industries**' provided the little extra cash they needed for special purchases and taxes. However, they often suffered with starvation in the winter, particularly in years of bad harvest, and systems of land management within the serf communes (*mir*s) meant that individual serf families worked scattered strips and were obliged to follow a communal pattern of farming. There was little incentive or opportunity, therefore, for them to develop into 'wage-earners'.

## KEY TERM

**Entrepreneur:** someone who invests money to set up a business despite the financial risks

**Cottage industry:** work done in the worker's own home or a small workshop, typically spinning, weaving and small-scale wood and metal work; occasionally whole villages specialised in a particular trade, such as making samovars for boiling water for tea

## A CLOSER LOOK

## What was serfdom?

Russian peasants (serfs) were men, women and children who were classified as the 'property' of their owners, rather than as 'citizens' of the State. Serfs could be bought and sold, were subject to beatings, and were not allowed to marry without permission. Serfs were also liable for conscription into the army. There were two main types: a little over half were privately owned, with around 30 per cent of these paying rent (*obrok*) and around 70 per cent providing labour (*barshchina*). The remainder were 'state serfs' who paid taxes and rent. Most serfs worked on the land in village communes (*mir*s) run by strict rules imposed by the village elders. Some performed domestic service.

Markets existed (and indeed were growing) although 'business' was mostly small-scale. The most common peasant purchases were vodka (for celebrations), metal tools and salt (to preserve food), which they bought in the nearest town, or at a fair. However, self-sufficiency meant that comparatively few goods were actually 'purchased' and in peasant markets, money was not the usual form of payment. Exchanges took place 'in kind'; for example some eggs might be given in return for a length of wool. In some areas, particularly near large cities, market forces were beginning to develop as peasants sought wage-work in nearby towns at slack times in the farming year, but for the vast majority, money was simply irrelevant and there was no **internal market demand**.

At the other end of the scale was the small **landowning elite**, who obtained most of what they needed from their serfs in the form of service and feudal dues. They were generally uninterested in how efficiently their estates operated. For many, serf-owning merely provoked idleness. So long as their bailiffs squeezed sufficient amounts out of the peasants for their own benefit, the aristocratic landowners saw little need to do more. There was no opportunity for **capital accumulation**, since income was generally falling. This was thanks to the rural population growth and the **agricultural changes** in Western Europe that had increased the competitiveness and productivity of the European markets. Many landowners had been forced into debt and had to take out **mortgages** on estates which had previously been owned outright by their families. Sometimes they even mortgaged their serfs, but despite their despair, they did not seek alternative ways of 'making money', because money as such was of little use in Russia's under-developed economy.

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### Agricultural changes

Crop rotation, new fertilisers and developments in agricultural machinery had all helped to transform Western agriculture.



Fig. 3 A peasant woman tilling the soil

#### KEY TERM

**Internal market demand:** the desire and ability to buy the products of manufacturing within the country; if a country's inhabitants are poor, there will be little internal demand

**Landowning elite:** those who owned land and who were a privileged minority in Russian society

**Capital accumulation:** building up money reserves in order to invest

**Mortgage:** this involves borrowing money by providing a guarantee; in this case a landowner's serfs provided the guarantee for a state loan, and if the borrowed money and additional interest was not repaid, the State could seize the serfs

#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### Serf poverty

The serfs' working and living conditions were, by Western standards, primitive. It was normal for corn to be cut by hand with sickles and for peasants to share their huts with their animals. In such circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising that most peasants were illiterate but deeply religious, inclined to superstition and deeply hostile to change.



## KEY QUESTION

What was the extent of social and cultural change?

## KEY TERM

**Urban artisan:** a manual worker in a town who possessed some skills, e.g. a cobbler or a leather-maker

**Intelligentsia:** the more educated members of Russian society, including writers and philosophers with both humanitarian and nationalist concerns; many opposed the State for various cultural, moral, religious, philosophical and political reasons

## ACTIVITY

According to Extract 2, what were the consequences of the absence of a middle class in Russia?

## The social context

Socially, Russia was, as Service suggested in Extract 1, starkly divided between the privileged land-owning elite and the serf majority; the non-productive and the productive classes. The former consisted of the clergy, nobility, civil and military officials, army and naval officers and, at the very top, the royal court. In addition to the serfs, there were some **urban artisans**, manufacturers and merchants within the ranks of the 'productive classes', but the striking feature of mid-nineteenth century Russian society was the absence of any coherent 'middle class', as was becoming increasingly dominant elsewhere in Europe. There were a small number of professionals (doctors, teachers and lawyers, for example) some of whom comprised an educated '**intelligentsia**', but these were often the sons of nobles.

## EXTRACT 2

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the late survival in Russia of serfdom, an institution that in Western Europe is associated with medieval times and had begun to decline from the end of the thirteenth century. By tying the bulk of the population to the land and preventing the movement of a free labour force, it acted as an impediment to the development of a middle class. This social gap had a profound effect on political as well as economic development: it accounts for the relative weakness in nineteenth-century Russia of moderate liberal political opinion. It may also explain the lack of sympathy shown by thinkers at both ends of the political spectrum for entrepreneurial activity, the lack of practicality in much of their thought – which tended towards the visionary rather than the concrete – and their disdain, even contempt, for prosperity and material gain.

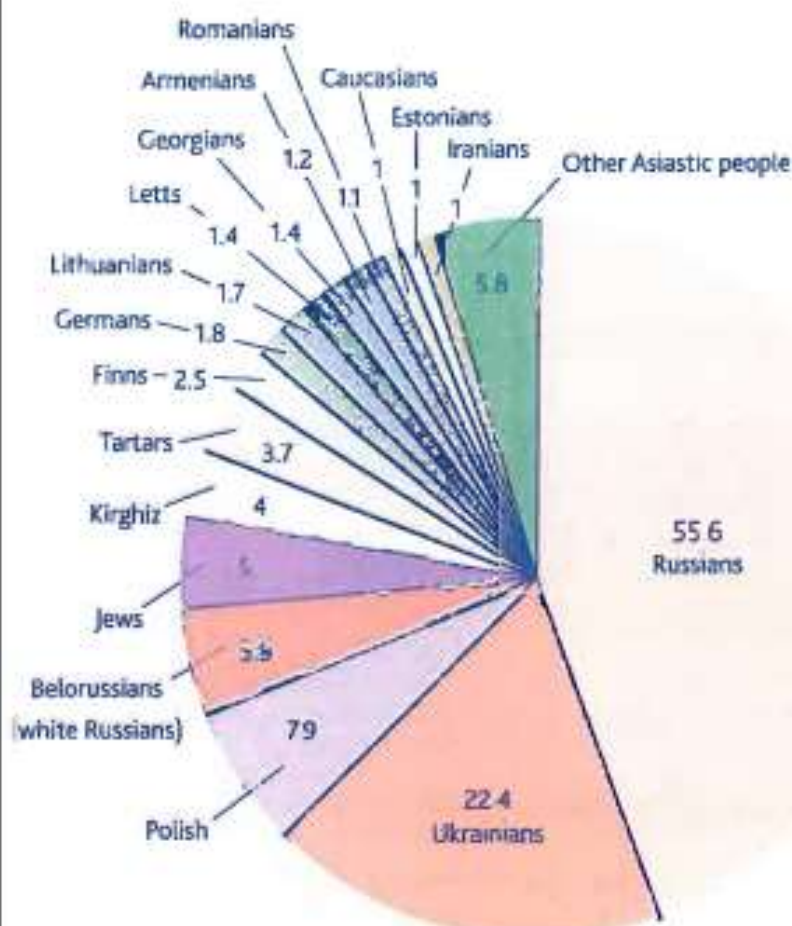
Adapted from Derek Offord, *Nineteenth Century Russia: Opposition to Autocracy*, 1998

The word 'class', with its connotation of 'economic status' is actually a rather modern term to use of nineteenth-century Russian society, which was still based on birth, land and service. As in the past, in 1855 legal barriers still limited social mobility. Serfs were liable for dues, as demanded by past custom, to their masters (from whose bond it was almost impossible to escape). They also paid direct and indirect **taxes** to the government. The nobility and clergy, however, were exempt from the payment of any direct monetary taxes.

## A CLOSER LOOK

## Taxes

The government was financed from taxes and dues. The main direct tax, paid by all except the merchants, was the poll tax, literally a 'tax on heads', which had been introduced in 1719 in order to cover the costs of maintaining Russia's large army. It was levied, at the same rate, on every male peasant in the Empire, no matter what his circumstances. This, together with the *obrok* paid by state serfs in lieu of land and service dues, made up 25 per cent of 'ordinary' government income. Indirect taxes (on services and goods) included a tax on salt, and, even more importantly, on vodka. This had grown during the nineteenth century to represent 30 per cent of ordinary government income by 1855, suggesting that a change was already underway towards a more 'commercial' source for government revenue. Overall, the taxes hit hard at the peasantry who, together with the urban workers and tradesmen, provided around 90 per cent of Imperial finance.



**Fig. 4** Ethnic groups within the Russian Empire, as given in the first national census of 1897 (population in millions)

#### EXTRACT 3

Most of the structures present in mid-nineteenth century Russia were still typical of the pre-modern world. A small ruling group, unified by the structures of autocracy, lived off resources mobilised directly from a large agrarian population through the system of serfdom. Most of the peasant population lived lives little different from those of the Middle Ages. The family, the household and the village were the crucial institutions of rural life. Largely self-sufficient peasants used traditional ways of working the soil, and levels of productivity were little higher than those of the Middle Ages. However, new forces were already beginning to undermine the traditional patterns. In some areas, market forces were beginning to transform village life, while the government's revenues came increasingly from commercial sources. At the upper level of society, the increasingly westernised outlook of Russian elites undermined the autocratic political culture of Russia's ruling group. The government became aware of how threatening these various changes might be to its own power only in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Adapted from David Christian, *Imperial and Soviet Russia*, 1986

So, while Russia was still considered a 'great' power in Europe because of its size and huge army, politically, economically and socially it remained undeveloped and 'backward' in comparison with the West. Small changes were taking place but, as yet, these had been insufficient to promote extensive modernisation.



STUDY TIP

When faced with this type of question, look carefully at each extract and make a note of the arguments it puts forward in your answer. Comment on the overall argument and the specific, lesser arguments, using what you have learned so far to assess how convincing these arguments are.



PRACTICE QUESTION

Evaluating historical extracts

Re-read Extracts 1, 2 and 3. Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing the arguments in these three extracts are in relation to the condition of Russia in 1855.

The impact of the Crimean War 1853–56

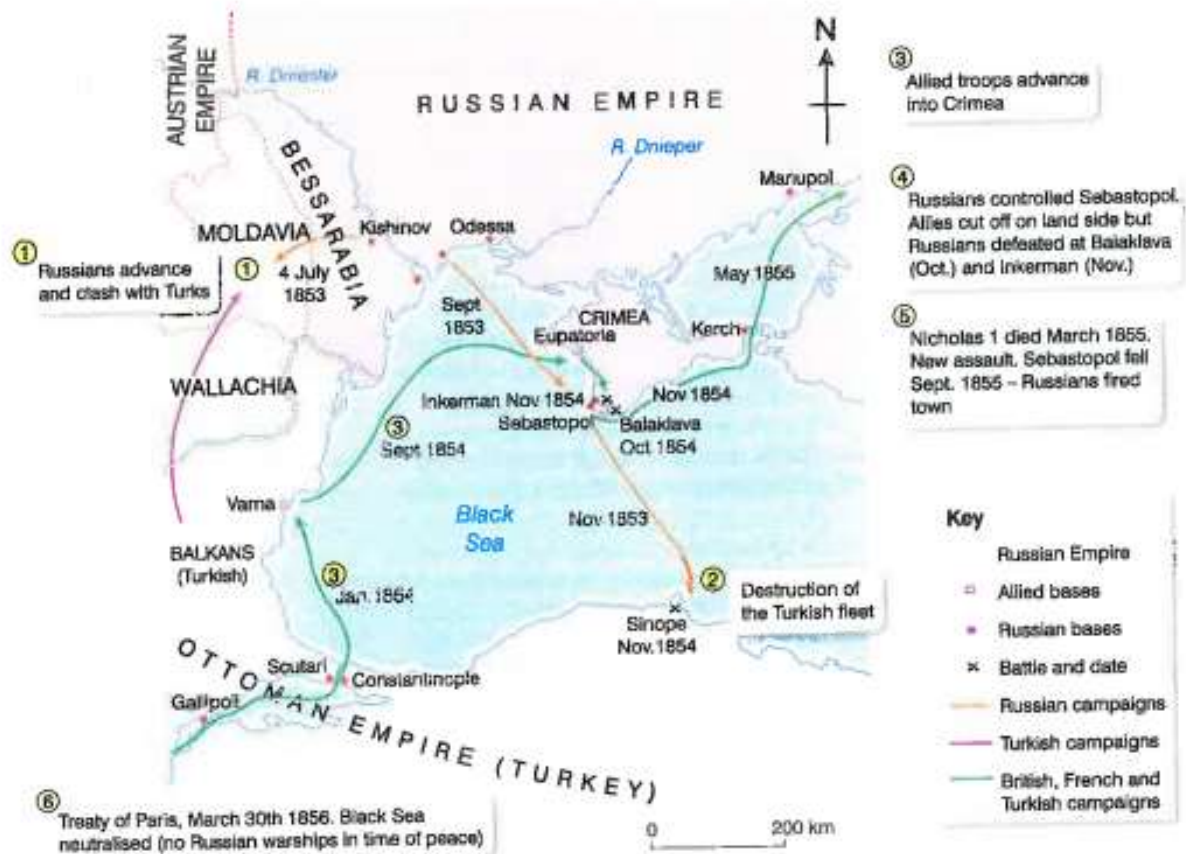


Fig. 5 Map of the Crimean War

In the mid-nineteenth century, the empire of the Ottoman Turks stretched from the Middle East across the Black Sea Straits and into the Balkans. However, ever since the 1820s, the Sultan had struggled to control the Christians in his European dominions and consequently Tsar Nicholas I had seized the opportunity to increase Russian influence in the area by posing as the Protector of Slavs and Christians.

In June 1853, Nicholas sent a Russian army to Moldavia and Wallachia (now part of present-day Moldova). This provoked the Turks into declaring war in October. The Russians were the stronger, and triumphantly sank a squadron from the Turkish Black Sea Fleet, which had been at anchor in Sinope Bay on the Black Sea. This brought the British and French, who were anxious to protect their own trading interests in the area, into the war in



defence of Turkey. They sent a joint expeditionary force of more than 60,000 men to the Russian Crimea, where they mounted a land and sea attack on the major Russian naval base of Sebastopol.

The war was marred by incompetence on both sides, and the death toll was made worse by an outbreak of cholera. Russia suffered badly from outdated technology, poor **transport** and inadequate leadership and while the Russian conscript army was larger in number, it lacked the flexibility and determination of the smaller French and British units. The Russians were defeated at Balaclava in October 1854 and at Inkerman in November 1854.

Shortly before his death in March 1855, Nicholas I addressed his son, the future Alexander II, with the words, 'I hand over to you my command, unfortunately not in as good order as I would have wished'. By September, the fortress of Sebastopol had fallen to its enemies, leaving the tsarist government shocked and humiliated.

Although they had gone to war in a spirit of utmost confidence, the course of the fighting had revealed Russia's military and administrative inadequacies. In every respect, the war was little short of disastrous. Trade had been disrupted, peasant uprisings escalated and the intelligentsia renewed their cries for something to be done to close the gap between Russia and the West. The concluding Treaty of Paris (1856) added the final humiliation by preventing Russian warships from using the Black Sea in times of peace.

#### A CLOSER LOOK

Transport was a major problem for the Russians. It took them longer to get equipment to the front line than it took France and Britain to send soldiers and materials from the channel ports. Russian equipment was also outdated. Their muskets were inferior and there was only one to every two soldiers. The Russian navy still used sails and wooden-bottomed ships, while Western ships had metal cladding and were powered by steam. Furthermore, the inshore fleet contained galley boats, rowed by conscripted serfs.



Fig. 6 The siege of Sebastopol

### ACTIVITY

Write a short newspaper editorial on the death of Nicholas I. Refer to the situation Russia is in and your hopes and/or fears for the future.

Failure in the Crimean War provided the 'wake-up call' that Russia needed. With the death of Nicholas I, decades of stagnation came to an end. In 1855 there came to power not only a new Tsar, Alexander II, but also a new generation of liberal-minded nobles and officials who were to have a major influence on his reign. The dilemma was how to match the other European powers in economic development without weakening the autocratic structure that held the Empire together.



Fig. 7 Alexander II receiving congratulations from his family after his coronation

### STUDY TIP

Don't forget that all essays require balance. So, even if you are going to disagree with this statement, you should also put forward the opposing case, but remember to explain why this is less convincing.

### SUMMARY

#### Activity

1. Draw a chart, as illustrated below, and complete it with bullet point notes, based on what you have learned in this chapter.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Political		
Economic		
Social		

2. Using this chart, assess the validity of the statement, 'The Russian Empire had more strengths than weaknesses in 1855.'



## Reading for Task 1b

### *Chapter 1: The Ideology of Tsarism*

The imperial Russian state was an autocracy, ruled over by a succession of emperors and empresses from the accession of Peter the Great to the throne in 1689 until the abdication of Nicholas II and the end of the Romanov dynasty more than two centuries later in 1917. Each of these rulers had their own priorities and the way in which the state was governed changed significantly as monarchs and times changed. But, the principles on which the Romanov monarchs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries based their rule over the empire remained constant. The rulers of imperial Russia had a fundamental and consistent view of their own position and of the way in which their empire should be ruled. This provided them with a certainty about their own position that made it easier for them to see off challenges to their authority and that enabled them to deal with opposition in a ruthless and forthright manner.

#### *Autocracy*

Russian monarchs believed that they were ordained by God to rule over their empire as autocrats. While the concept of the divine right of kings had been successfully challenged in both practical and theoretical terms in western Europe since the seventeenth century, in Russia it remained supreme. The Russian intellectual climate was to a large extent resistant to accepting ideas that had originated in the West, as Russian elites argued that Russia occupied a special place in Europe. The view that prevailed among Russia's political elites was

that Russia was a part of the broader European world, but that it stood separate and was not destined to follow the western model, either in political or in economic terms. From the reign of Peter the Great onwards, Russia sought to exploit western European technology, but these economic ties were kept strictly separate from politics. Russia was characterised as a society that bore fundamental differences from the rest of Europe. Its population was overwhelmingly rural, and even in 1897, when the first empire-wide census was conducted, more than 80 per cent of the population lived in the countryside. More than this, Russia's huge peasant population was argued to be especially volatile, requiring strong and decisive government to prevent it from erupting into spontaneous and inchoate rebellion. This was the root of Russia's 'otherness': its social distinctiveness required a very different political structure. This sparsely populated, rural society needed, it was believed, strong central control if it was to be able to operate as a coherent political entity. The concept of popular consent to government that had begun to emerge in the West during the seventeenth century found few echoes in Russia. Although Catherine II corresponded with the leading lights of the French Enlightenment and saw herself as being in the mainstream of European thought, she had no intention of seeing these ideas put into practice in the Russian empire. Russian monarchs continued to insist that they gained their authority directly from God, and that the population of the empire was too unsophisticated to play any part in the structures of government. Furthermore, the nature of Russian government had to be entirely different from the character of regimes to Russia's west. The strong central authority that was needed to maintain order in the Russian empire could only be provided by a regime that was all-powerful and could exert absolute authority over the population. Russia's political system was destined to remain an autocracy.

It was clearly convenient for successive Russian monarchs to argue the case for autocracy. None of them wanted to see their own power curtailed, and they were supported by officials whose careers and authority depended on the maintenance of the autocratic system of government. There was, therefore, a powerful systemic inertia that worked against change taking place. However, the reasons for the maintenance of autocracy ran much deeper. The authority of the Russian state rested on what were shaky foundations. It was only in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that a single united Russian state had developed from the Muscovite principedom, centred on Moscow itself.



Since then, Russia had expanded at breakneck speed: the inhospitable lands of Siberia to the east were colonised by Russians, and they succeeded in reaching the Pacific Ocean for the first time in 1639. The Russians did not need to venture overseas to acquire their empire: there were vast tracts of land ripe for the picking in Siberia and in Central Asia. The expansion of the state continued almost unbroken for nearly 200 years from the beginning of the eighteenth century. The rich natural resources of Siberia were a powerful incentive for explorers to put up with the harsh climate and difficult terrain and to stamp Russian authority on the land. Scientific and military expeditions ranged widely across the wilderness areas of northern and eastern Siberia to explore the riches that Russia had acquired. During the nineteenth century, Russia acted to colonise regions to the south. The mountainous Caucasus region was only brought under the control of the empire in the early nineteenth century and it continued to be troublesome for St Petersburg. Central Asia was the final area to be added to the empire's domains, with major military campaigns in the middle of the nineteenth century to subdue the indigenous populations and establish Russian rule. The Russian state did not have the settled frontiers of Britain or France, nor had it undergone the long and gradual process of political development that characterised many of its western neighbours. The Russian empire continued to expand until almost the end of the period of Romanov rule, meaning that the state was permanently in a condition of flux and that consolidation was difficult. This process was very different from the imperial expansion that other European states underwent. For most imperial states, colonies were overseas and physically separate from the metropolitan power, and their acquisition came about as a result of the metropolitan state's political and economic strength. Colonial difficulties could produce problems for the imperial power, but these did not often threaten the integrity of the imperial state itself. The Russian experience was entirely different. Russia's acquisition of empire did not involve explorers venturing overseas and this produced advantages for the Russian state in terms of the ease of the empire's growth. But, it also presented the Russian state with severe problems. Imperial difficulties could not be easily isolated from the heartland of the state, and Russia lacked the protective insulation that oceans and great distances provided for the British and the French when they faced problems with their colonial possessions.



Russian rule was not always welcome to the peoples over whom they ruled. Military campaigns were needed to subdue the Caucasus and Central Asia, and these regions required continual garrisoning to ensure that the Russians could continue their dominance. Other parts of the empire provided even greater challenges: Russia acquired a large part of Poland when the Polish state was dismembered in the 1790s. While Prussia and Austria-Hungary also gained parts of the Polish state, it was Russia that seized the largest share. The Poles loathed their new Russian masters and rebelled against them in 1830 and with even greater ferocity in 1863. Finland had been gained from the Swedes in 1808 and presented the Russians with few problems until the end of the nineteenth century and the advent of attempts to Russify the country and to destroy Finnish autonomy. A determined campaign of sullen civil discontent by the Finns then made life very difficult indeed for the Russians. Russia's empire thus presented its rulers with significant problems that shaped their method of government. Much of the state was, in effect, newly conquered and the Russians had no opportunity to consolidate a region into the empire before embarking on new imperial conquests. The government was continually having to cope with the addition of new areas and seeking ways of creating a coherent state. The challenges to Russian power that were presented by this process of imperial expansion had an important impact on the empire's model of government. The threats that were posed by the ever-expanding empire persuaded its rulers that only powerful central authority could successfully guarantee the survival and coherence of the empire.

This belief was reinforced by the state's need to maintain control over the population of its heartland. Russia was the most populous European state and, in addition, its population was spread thinly across a huge area. The sheer vastness of the state's territory made it imperative for the Tsarist regime to be able to maintain tight control of its population and to be capable of quelling rebellion before the state itself could be threatened. There were successive instances of peasant rebellion that made the state all too aware of its fragile grip on power. In 1606–07, 1670–71, 1707–08 and lastly in the 1770s, there were huge yet incoherent peasant uprisings that made monarchs and their advisers fear for their authority. The Pugachev rebellion in the 1770s was especially disturbing, since Catherine II imagined herself to be an 'enlightened' ruler whose rule should encourage the people of the Russian empire to feel grateful for the benefits that



she munificently bestowed upon them. The apparent ingratitude of the people who rallied to Pugachev confirmed in Catherine and her successors the view that Russia required ruling with an iron fist. This was the attitude that prevailed until the very end of the Tsarist regime. Peasant rebellion was put down with severity whenever it occurred and the state took particular care to be alert to the possibility of rural unrest and to recognise the most practical ways of dealing with it. One of the motives for the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 was an increase in peasant disturbances during the 1850s: although the absolute number of uprisings was small, the increase in unrest that they represented was sufficient to worry the emperor and his advisers and to persuade them that reform was needed to stave off the threat of more serious rebellion in the future. On this occasion, the regime took the view that the most effective method of maintaining control was to recognise that change had to take place. But this was a rare move. The state's more usual response to rural unrest was demonstrated in 1905 when there were more than 3000 separate instances of peasant rebellion across the empire. The government attempted to quell rebellion by force, only making concessions when it was clear that coercion was not succeeding. But, after the announcement of reforms in the autumn of 1905, the government again went on the offensive in the countryside, despatching troops to put down disturbances with great brutality.<sup>1</sup> The supposed predilection of the Russian people for rebellion was a powerful weapon in the regime's continuing espousal of autocracy.

Autocracy was the cornerstone of the principles that governed the way in which Russian monarchs ruled their empire. It invested the monarch with power that was unparalleled among the rulers of the Great Powers and its implications were immense. The Russian sovereign, free from any of the limitations that a parliament could place upon his authority, was able to make law as he wished. Autocracy meant that the monarch possessed unlimited authority and, in effect, that every decision that he made had the effect of law.<sup>2</sup> The nature of law in the Tsarist empire was very different from its status in western Europe. As limitations were gradually placed upon monarchs' authority in the West, it became accepted that the monarch too was subject to the same laws that governed the behaviour of the population of a state. This fundamental concept of modern western political thinking was never accepted in Russia. Law was something that was imposed by the state on its population, but that the state



itself – personified by the sovereign – did not need to abide by. The idea of the rule of law that lay at the heart of western societies from the late eighteenth century did not take root in Russia. The Russian state stood above the law. This was manifested in a number of ways. The monarch's decisions were law and, although imperial Russia possessed a formal system by which law should be made, through the bureaucratic institution of the Senate, in practice the word of the Tsar represented law. This had important implications for the ways in which law was implemented for ordinary Russians. Since the monarch essentially stood above the law, so the ruler's representatives throughout the empire were also able to act with impunity with the same sort of extra-judicial privileges as the sovereign. This was institutionalised through the system of administrative justice that became commonplace in the empire. While western models of justice required that criminal offences be tried by courts, and that punishment could only be imposed in line with formal legislation, these principles never took hold in imperial Russia. Ordinary Russians were subject to the administrative decisions of the state's officials, and local officials could pass judgement on people and impose sentences without reference to any form of judicial authority. Imprisonment and fines were the most common punishments that could be meted out, but Russians could also be sentenced to internal exile and expelled from their home region, if local officials believed that an individual's behaviour warranted it.

It was only in 1864 that the first signs of an independent legal system began to be introduced in the Russian empire, but the Tsarist regime soon realised that these innovations threatened its traditional freedom to act as it wished and it began to find ways to evade the new judicial system. The 1864 reforms introduced jury trials in Russia, and also established an independent judiciary, appointed for life and paid sufficiently well that they had no need to take bribes. These innovations offered a sharp contrast to the underlying traditions of Russian government by establishing an autonomous source of authority in the Russian state, and the regime soon sought to re-establish its control over the legal process. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II by a group of revolutionaries in 1881 provided the impetus for this attempt at reaction: legislation was introduced that allowed the government to introduce a state of emergency in areas of the empire. This effectively allowed the state to bypass the judicial process completely and to revert to its traditional practices of imposing order on its population



as it saw fit. This arbitrary treatment of the population was a direct and logical corollary of autocracy: the sovereign believed that the Russian state and its people were for him to deal with as he saw fit, and this meant that he could not be restricted by law or regulation. The concept of autocracy was not just related to the person of the monarch: it had repercussions for each individual Russian, whether they were a government official or a peasant farmer deep in the heart of the countryside. Autocracy conjures up images of an opulent court in which people fawned upon the emperor, seeking to ingratiate themselves with the sovereign, knowing that decisions and favours could flow their way. But, autocracy was also reflected in the popular experience of ordinary Russians who had no proper recourse against the actions of the regime's officials and who were subject to the arbitrary whims of low-level rural officialdom. The ethos of autocracy stretched right through Russian society from the emperor to the lowliest rural policeman or tax collector. It meant that not just the sovereign, but also each government official, was imbued with the idea that they could act with impunity in their dealings as agents of the state. For the sovereign, this could mean the ability to embark on war without any need to take formal advice from any institution of government. For a rural bureaucrat, it could mean confining a peasant to the cells on the basis of flimsy or non-existent evidence. The practice of autocracy thus touched the lives of every inhabitant of the Russian empire.

Attempts to modify this autocratic model of ruling proved consistently unsuccessful. For most of the eighteenth century, Russian monarchs revelled in the power that it brought them. Peter the Great's dynamic reshaping of the institutions of the Russian state and his desire to give Russian society a western-orientated outlook was accomplished largely through the use of his huge personal power and with the threat of sanctions and retribution against those who challenged or disagreed with him. Catherine II, while presenting herself to the outside world as a monarch who was in the mainstream of the ideas of the Enlightenment that were taking hold in western Europe, ruled Russia in a way that was much more traditional. Even though the ideas that Catherine read and discussed with her intellectual correspondents advanced the concept of human liberty, Catherine would not emancipate the Russian peasants from serfdom. She continued to assert that the ideas that were emanating from the West were not appropriate for Russian conditions: this was



the argument of Russian exceptionalism that was used by each of Russia's rulers to justify the maintenance of very different political and social systems in their empire. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Nicholas I's Minister of Education, Sergei Uvarov, attempted to provide the Russian autocracy with an intellectual justification for its method of government. His theory of 'Official Nationality' attempted to demonstrate that Russia's rulers were not simply motivated by a desire for unlimited power, but that they also had the interests of their subjects at heart. Uvarov believed that autocracy was the only viable form of government for Russia. 'Autocracy', he wrote, 'constitutes the main condition of the political existence of Russia. The Russian giant stands on it as the cornerstone of his greatness', but Uvarov was insistent in drawing a distinction between autocracy and despotism. He described Russia's autocracy as 'strong, humane and enlightened' and placed Russia in an overall tradition of monarchical development.<sup>3</sup> He believed that monarchs came to recognise that they could only rule successfully if they became 'enlightened' and that, far from weakening their authority, this would lead to what Uvarov described as 'maturity' and more effective government.

Right through the nineteenth century, the ideal of autocracy and the power that it bestowed upon the monarch was upheld by successive sovereigns. The only exception to this pattern was during the early part of the reign of Alexander II, who succeeded to the throne during the Crimean War. For the first decade of his reign, Alexander was convinced that Russia had to reform and needed to emulate western models of development. The 'Great Reforms' of the 1860s brought about fundamental change in Russia, but they did not succeed in altering Russia's political culture. Alexander II grew wary of reform, especially after an assassination attempt on him in 1866, and the growth of revolutionary movements during the 1870s made the regime much more ambivalent about the wisdom of political reform. After Alexander II's assassination in 1881, the new emperor – his son, Alexander III – moved decisively away from reform and reasserted the virtues of autocracy. This ethos was continued by Russia's last emperor, Nicholas II, who resisted attempts to encroach on his autocratic authority with extreme stubbornness. Even after the events of 1905, and the establishment of an elected parliament in Russia, the emperor continued to believe that he retained his full powers as an unlimited monarch.



*Orthodoxy*

Autocracy and the preservation of monarchical authority rested at the heart of the Tsarist regime's beliefs. Other elements, however, buttressed this central political dogma. Pure politics alone was insufficient to bind the empire together, and the Romanov regime needed to find other ways of ensuring that its subjects accepted the authority of the monarchy, and preventing them from rebelling. Religion played a crucial role in this process. The ties between the Tsarist regime and the Russian Orthodox Church were very strong and gave the regime a means of communicating with the population of the empire that added significantly to its capacity. The theology of Russian Orthodoxy complemented the political ideas of the Russian autocracy. The Russian church had split away from eastern Orthodoxy in the fifteenth century, taking advantage of the weakness of the Byzantine church and establishing itself as what it believed was the true Christian church. The Russian church reflected the political beliefs of the state; Russia possessed a particular spiritual role inside the Christian world. The Roman Catholic Church, according to Orthodox beliefs, had shown itself to have left the true Christian path and the same was true for the Byzantine church. Russia was destined to be the 'third Rome', the real repository of Christian values and beliefs. In religious terms, the Orthodox Church cultivated the same concept of Russian distinctiveness that the state encouraged. For the church, Russia was entirely separate from the Christian traditions of the remainder of Europe, and the Orthodox hierarchy sought to stamp out other Christian religions within the Russian empire. In the case of Roman Catholicism, this was made easier by the Catholic Church's identification with the empire's increasingly rebellious Polish subjects and the state's desire to see every manifestation of Polish nationalism stamped out. Protestant religions were viewed with rather less disfavour, since there was no significant national group that espoused Protestantism and posed a threat to the integrity of the state. The Orthodox Church made strenuous efforts to convert people to Orthodoxy from other religions, believing that it offered the only true route to salvation. There was, however, a wider motivation at work. The identification of the Orthodox Church with the imperial Russian state meant that the attraction of new adherents to Orthodoxy was an important way of integrating new populations into the empire. Converting new Russian subjects to the Orthodox



religion served the interests of both church and state; the Orthodox Church was able to claim that it had acquired new adherents to the true religion, while for the state, conversion to Orthodoxy symbolised that new believers had accepted the attributes of Russian nationality and the authority of the Russian state.

The Orthodox Church played an important part in the formation of the state's identity. Peter the Great had recognised the utility of the spiritual authority and had sought to integrate the Church into the apparatus of the state itself. Metropolitan Feofan Prokopovich had reciprocated by providing an intellectual justification for Peter's absolutism. In 1721, Peter established the Holy Synod as a collegial body of bishops to run the Church, but tried to ensure that the Church was closely linked to the state by appointing a lay official as the Synod's Chief Procurator – its chief official.<sup>4</sup> For much of the eighteenth century, the Church was able to continue to run itself and found little interference from the state and the Chief Procurator in its affairs. It was able to impose its own canon law and to regulate its own ecclesiastical affairs, while the Church's bishops possessed significant autonomy. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the state began to take a much closer interest in the Orthodox Church as it appreciated its potential utility as a means of sustaining the government's authority over an increasingly troublesome population. The Church appeared to offer the state a means of exerting influence and control over its subjects through an institution that was not tainted with the overt authority of the state itself. Orthodoxy provided a further advantage to the state, as it derived its power from the spiritual sphere. While Russians might balk at obeying the commands of the state and its agents, believing that they were acting unjustly and were simply behaving in the oppressive manner to which they had become accustomed, the Orthodox Church's authority derived from God and the messages that its priests preached from the pulpit each week could have a greater impact on the Church's flock.

The Orthodox Church had to be cautious in the extent to which it became directly involved with the policies of the government, lest it simply become seen by Orthodox believers as an arm of the state, but the Church recognised that its own interests were also served by promoting social stability and obedience to authority. The most obvious example of the Church's links to the state centres on the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. The monumental significance of this measure, and the extreme trepidation with which the government



approached granting freedom to tens of millions of serfs, meant that it wanted to invest the event with a particular gravity. The emancipation proclamation itself was written by Filaret, the Metropolitan of Moscow, and it was read from Orthodox pulpits across Russia in March 1861.<sup>5</sup> The Church did realise that its interests did not always coincide with those of the government, and during the nineteenth century there was substantial conflict between church and state as the Orthodox Church sought to extend its independence and to reform itself. But, despite these tensions, the Church always recognised that its central interest was at one with the state's own priority: the maintenance of order and the preservation of strong central authority. The Church needed the protection of the state if it was to thrive and it was therefore prepared to support the government at times of crisis. During the first decade of the twentieth century, when revolt threatened the stability of the empire, priests were called upon to read messages from the pulpit to encourage their parishioners to obey the legitimately constituted authorities of the state. The Orthodox Church possessed a further advantage for the state; it had a vast network of priests who were in close and frequent contact with the rural population of the empire. Russia had more Orthodox priests than policemen during the nineteenth century and their position as an integral part of rural society gave them access to the population that was denied to the state's own servants.

Orthodoxy also played a significant part in the legitimation of the imperial regime. The monarchs saw religious ritual as playing a vital part in their lives, even if they did not themselves hold deep religious beliefs. Catherine II ensured that she participated fully in all the Orthodox ceremonies that were demanded of a Russian monarch, even though she had no sincere commitment to Orthodoxy herself. She did, however, recognise the importance of the Church in helping to ensure the stability of the Russian state and took steps to ensure that the Church recognised the primacy of the state. Even though the Orthodox Church had helped in cementing Catherine's seizure of power from her husband, Peter III, in 1762, the new empress wanted to make it plain where real power resided. The Orthodox hierarchy had some hope that Catherine might allow them greater autonomy in the way in which they governed the Church, in recognition of the Church's part in bringing her to power. Instead, however, Catherine secularised the Church's lands and dealt severely with Metropolitan Arsenii of Rostov, who emerged as the chief opponent of



secularisation. He was tried for *lèse majesté* and in 1767 imprisoned in conditions of great harshness until he died 5 years later.

Other Romanovs showed a greater personal devotion to the Orthodox faith. Nicholas I displayed a simple religiosity but also demonstrated an abiding interest in the promotion of Orthodoxy across his empire. Conflict with Turkey in the late 1820s helped to intensify Nicholas's religious faith; he began to see Russia as the standard bearer of Christendom in defending the shrines of the Holy Land and to emphasise the links between Russia's present and its past. This was evident in the attention that Nicholas paid to the construction of new churches in Russia: he wanted to see religious buildings that would demonstrate the identification of Orthodoxy with the Russian people. The most substantial example of this was the construction of a new Orthodox cathedral in Moscow. Nicholas wanted to see a cathedral 'in ancient Russian taste' and the building was to be on a monumental scale, combining motifs from Russia's Byzantine past with elements of its more recent heroic present.<sup>6</sup> The building took almost half a century to complete. The two final Russian emperors were the most devout of Russia's monarchs. Both Alexander III and Nicholas II married foreign brides; Romanov tradition required that these women convert to Orthodoxy and take Russian names. Both Empress Maria Fedorovna and especially Nicholas II's wife, Alexandra Fedorovna, embraced Orthodoxy with enthusiasm. Nicholas II and his empress both possessed a genuine and mystical devotion to the Orthodox Church. Nicholas fervently believed that he had been appointed to his task as emperor by God and that it was his duty to ensure that he handed the empire on to his heir in the same condition as he had inherited it from his father. The deep religious springs of Nicholas's convictions help to explain his dogged and stubborn resistance to making reform: the emperor clearly believed that by taking such steps he would be betraying his inheritance and that he would have to answer for this to God.

Russian monarchs continued to believe in the divine nature of their power long after their western European counterparts had abandoned this viewpoint. This reliance on Orthodoxy had important consequences for the development of the Russian state. Successive Tsars believed that their power derived from the Almighty, and they therefore rejected any suggestions that their power could gain any legitimacy from other sources. The commanding place of Orthodoxy in the nature of Russia's statehood, combined with the commitment of the spiritual power to autocracy, made it impossible for sovereigns to contemplate sharing power with any other group or institution. Any recognition of the place of popular opinion in the government of the Russian empire aimed a dagger at the whole ethos of the empire and threatened the fundamental ideas that gave the Romanovs their legitimacy.

## Textbook extracts to help with tasks for the Wars of the Roses

### SECTION 1

---

#### THE WARS OF THE ROSES, 1459–61: THE LIMITS OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY

**How serious was the political instability of the period 1459–61?**

##### KEY POINTS

- Henry VI's weaknesses in the 1450s led to serious divisions within the nobility.
- Richard, Duke of York, who was allied to the Neville family, engaged in a series of battles after 1459 against what he called the king's 'evil advisers'.
- Though York was killed in the struggles, Henry VI was overthrown by York's son, Edward, Earl of March, in 1461. Edward was crowned in London and then defeated Henry VI's forces at the Battle of Towton. The new king styled himself King Edward IV.

##### TIMELINE

- 1453 Henry VI suffers a mental collapse.
- 1455 First Battle of St Albans – York defeats the Lancastrians.
- 1459 Battle of Ludlow – York defeated and flees to Ireland.
- 1460 Battle of Northampton – Lancastrians defeated by Yorkists. Act of Accord – Parliament agrees that York is now Henry VI's heir. York killed at Battle of Wakefield.
- 1461 York's son declares himself king as Edward IV. Battle of Towton – Edward IV defeated the Lancastrians to secure the throne.



## Causes and course of the fighting

### Weaknesses of Henry VI

The origins of the conflicts between the families of Lancaster and York, which are often referred to as the Wars of the Roses, went back many years and revolved around the weaknesses of King Henry VI and the ambitions of Richard, Duke of York.

- Henry VI had succeeded his father, Henry V (who had defeated the French at Agincourt in 1415), in 1422. As a small child, he was crowned king of both England and France. His minority proceeded surprisingly smoothly and showed the innate strength of English medieval monarchy. One of his uncles, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, took charge of England, while another uncle, John, Duke of Bedford, had charge of England's French possessions.
- Problems arose, however, after Henry came of age. He was a rather shadowy figure, a meek and pious individual, with apparently none of the military or political skills needed by a good king. Unlike his famous father, who was a warrior king and the embodiment of strong medieval kingship, Henry VI seemed to possess little will of his own, little appreciation of politics and had no apparent interest in fighting!
- Henry VI was easily dominated by favourites at his court, which annoyed powerful men excluded from favour. At the same time, his government was on the losing end of conflict in France, so that by 1453 the English had been expelled from France, except for the port of Calais. This was a terrible disaster for Henry's regime.

### York's power

The man who felt most excluded from power, and a man not associated with the disasters in France, was the most powerful man in the land after the king himself. Richard, Duke of York held extensive estates in the north, south Wales and Ireland. He was linked by marriage to the powerful Neville family and together these families had the ability to raise whole armies if need be. At the same time,

### KEY TERM

**Minority** Refers to the period when the ruler is a child or a minor.

### KEY THEMES

#### England's French

**possessions** Refers to the fact that ever since the Norman Conquest of 1066, kings of England held substantial lands in France. Indeed, many medieval kings of England were really French rather than English. However, by the fifteenth century, English fortunes in France were on the wane. Although Edward III (ruled 1322–77) had campaigned successfully in France, the growing strength of the French monarchy meant that English influence in France was being eroded. The end came in the reign of Henry VI. After defeat at Castillon in 1453, the port of Calais and a few forts nearby were the full extent of English possessions on the Continent.



## KEY TERMS

**Heir presumptive** The person who is the king's successor or heir but has not been officially named as such. Henry VI at this date had no children, so York, as his closest male relative, thought he would be the king's successor.

**Catatonic schizophrenia** Refers to a medical condition marked by near or total unresponsiveness to the environment or other people.

## KEY PEOPLE

### Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset (1439–71)

Fourth Duke of Somerset since 1464 and son of the second Duke of Somerset, also called Edmund, who was killed at St Albans in 1455. This Edmund Beaufort was only sixteen when his father was killed and 25 when his elder brother (Henry, the third Duke) was killed by the Yorkists at Hexham. The fourth Duke was thus a die-hard Lancastrian and led their forces at Tewkesbury in 1471. He was captured during the battle, tried and beheaded by Edward IV soon afterwards. His younger brother was also killed in the battle.

### Margaret of Anjou (1429–82)

The daughter of the Count of Anjou, Margaret was married to Henry VI in 1445. Her only son was born eight years later and some claimed that the king was not his father. Politically, Margaret was very important, as it was she who allied with Somerset and other lords against York and his allies. After the king's illness, Margaret took control of affairs.

until the birth of Henry VI's son in 1453, the Duke of York was also heir presumptive, since he was Henry VI's closest male relative. At first it seemed unlikely that the tension between the king and York would result in warfare and it was even more unlikely that York would dare to challenge for the throne itself.

## Problems of 1453–5

In 1453, however, a series of events seriously undermined Henry VI's government.

- Quite unexpectedly, Henry VI suffered a mental collapse – now thought to be catatonic schizophrenia – which rendered him helpless and apparently speechless for at least fifteen months and possibly longer. This meant that some kind of protector or regent would have to be appointed to rule in the king's name. This was York's opportunity to gain power. As the king's closest adult male relative, English traditions suggested that York should be protector, in the same way as if the king were still a child. Indeed, in 1454, Parliament petitioned that York should assume this position and offered him the same limited powers as those given to the king's uncles during his minority. It was agreed that York should be protector until Henry recovered. York duly became protector and the previous favourite, Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, was arrested and imprisoned.
- However, York's power was uncertain and was undermined by two other developments. First, in October 1453, Henry VI's French wife, Margaret of Anjou, gave birth to a son, Prince Edward. If the child were indeed Henry's – and there were soon stories that he



**The Duke of Somerset being executed after the Battle of Tewkesbury, 1471.**

was not – then York was no longer heir to the throne.

- Queen Margaret then appealed to French traditions to claim that she, not York, should be protector while her husband was ill. Around Christmas time, 1453, she claimed that King Henry had recovered his sanity. Immediately, the Duke of Somerset was released, York was ousted from the Council and several of his enemies among the nobility were welcomed back to court.
- Stung by this sudden reversal in his fortunes, York resorted to force. Together with his ally, Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, he raised troops and marched menacingly on London. The king's advisers were taken by surprise and the royal forces were defeated at St Albans in May 1455. The battle was little more than a skirmish but the Duke of Somerset and the Earl of Northumberland were killed, leaving their heirs to plot revenge against York and his allies.

### KEY PERSON

#### **Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, (1400–60)**

York's brother-in-law and political ally, since York married his youngest sister, Cecily Neville. He was killed with York at the Battle of Wakefield in 1460. Salisbury was father of the famous Warwick the Kingmaker, who made Edward IV king and then overthrew him in favour of Henry VI.

### KEY PLACE

**Calais garrison** This was the army that defended Calais from French attack. At a time when the king had armed guards but no permanent army, control of the Calais garrison would prove important in the fighting. Luckily for the Yorkists, the Captain of Calais at this time was their ally, Warwick, the Kingmaker.



## The Wars of the Roses: an outline, up to 1461

How long did the Wars of the Roses last and what was the overall pattern of events? Pages 6–9 help you understand the outline of the whole topic.

Perhaps the most important four pages in the book!

The pink boxes tell the story of events, while the graph shows how

successful the kings were in achieving the objectives in the gold bars. If the line of the graph is high on the page then a king was successful; England was united and peaceful. If the graph falls to the bottom of the page then a king was a failure; war or rebellion had broken out.

Just reading these pages isn't enough to understand them. You need to transfer this information into your own version of the story. For example, can you tell this outline story aloud in your own words in 1 minute?

**SUCCESS** **STRONG, DECISIVE LEADERSHIP** **UNITED NOBILITY** **IMPRESSIVE WEALTHY COURT**

### 1. 1413–22 King Henry V: the ideal king

Henry V was extremely successful. He beat the French at the battle of Agincourt, conquered northern France and there was peace and order in England. He was seen as the ideal king – but could the successors recreate his success?



### 2. 1422–37 A child king: surprising success

Henry VI became king at 9 months old, so the council of nobles ruled England until Henry was 16. There were quarrels amongst the nobles and some conflicts in France but overall the nobles did a successful job, putting loyalty to the young king before personal ambitions.



### Henry VI

In 1445 Henry VI married the French princess, Margaret of Anjou. Their only son, Edward of Lancaster, was born in 1453 but never became king.

### 3. 1437–50 Henry VI: failure as an adult

Henry VI was never an effective king. He always remained childlike, unable to take decisions and uninterested in war and government. The nobles tried to govern in his name but serious problems developed – the French lands were lost and without disorder increased. In 1450 there was a major protest, rebellion because people were so angry with these failures. This was failing a very long way from Henry V's success.

## Essentials up to 1461

1. England was ruled successfully by the nobles while Henry VI was a child.
2. Henry VI completely failed to provide effective kingship when he grew up.
3. The first battle was about who would be Henry's chief councillor. It was NOT a battle for the crown.
4. In 1461 many nobles still wanted to keep Henry as king despite his failures but he was finally deposed by Edward of York.

**STRONG DEFENCE AGAINST FRANCE AND SCOTLAND**

Henry VI was the third **Lancastrian** king. They are known as the House of Lancaster because Henry, his father (Henry V) and grandfather (Henry IV) were descended from the Dukes of Lancaster.

**LOW LEVELS OF CRIME AND DISORDER**

The **Yorkists** were supporters of Richard, Duke of York (1411–60) and his son, Edward, who became King Edward IV. Richard, Duke of York was Henry VI's cousin. He always swore loyalty to Henry until, in 1460, he said that he had a better claim to the crown than Henry. When Richard was killed at the battle of Wakefield (1460) his son, Edward, became Yorkist leader. He was crowned King Edward IV in 1461.

### 5. 1455–59 A phony peace

There were no more battles for four years. Nearly all the nobles wanted peace and to stay loyal to Henry VI despite his failures. However, in 1459 war broke out because of distrust between the leaders.

### 4. 1455 The first battle

The first battle was a fight between the Dukes of Somerset and York over who should be King – Henry's chief councillor. York won and Somerset was killed. Everyone hoped that this would be the only battle and they could rebuild England as a strong, united country.

### 6. 1459–61 The fight for the crown

The Lancastrians (supporters of Henry VI) feared that York wanted to depose Henry. York feared that the Lancastrians would attack him. Their mutual fears led them to build up armies and six battles were fought in 18 months. York was killed but his son, Edward, won the battle of Tewkesbury, deposed Henry and became King Edward IV. Henry and Margaret fled to Scotland. This was the period of greatest violence – England had sunk a long way from the success of Henry V.

**DANGER OF ATTACK FROM FRANCE AND SCOTLAND**

**HIGH LEVELS OF CRIME AND DISORDER**

**SUCCESS**

**DECLINE**

**FAILURE**

**SIGNS OF A KING'S FAILURE**

**WEAK, INDECISIVE LEADERSHIP**

**DIVIDED, REBELLIOUS NOBILITY**

**FEW SIGNS OF WEALTH AND SPENDOUR AT COURT**

## Henry V and the legacy of Agincourt

The timeline graph on pages 6–9 begins with Henry V, even though he died thirty years before the Wars of the Roses began, so why include him? The answer is that Henry's victory at Agincourt and his conquest of France had an immense impact on the rest of the fifteenth century. To understand later events you have to understand Henry's achievements and the problems they created for his successors.

The conquest of France began with the miraculous victory at Agincourt on 25 October 1415. Henry had invaded France in August, then took a month to capture the port of Harfleur. By then 2000 of Henry's 9000 soldiers had died, most from disease. Many others were ill with dysentery. But instead of sailing home, Henry led his army out of Harfleur on 8 October, heading for Calais. His cross-country march was a display of disdain for the French and quite possibly designed to provoke a battle. If so, he succeeded!

Henry's army had food for eight days but the march took twice as long. The English trudged on, hungry, exhausted by illness, soaked by heavy rain, and shadowed by a much larger French army. On 24 October the English made camp at Agincourt and confessed their sins to God, expecting to die next day. Laughter floated across from the enemy camp where the French were gambling over the English prisoners they'd take in the battle.

Next morning, the day of the Feast of Saints Crispin and Crispinian, King Henry chose a narrow battle line with woodland either side so the French could not encircle his army. He set out a line of knights interspersed with archers but, when the French did not attack, Henry moved his men forward and ordered his archers to open fire. Provoked and insulted, the French charged but the ground, boggy after heavy rain, slowed their horses. The English archers, each man loosing ten to twelve arrows a minute, sent 60,000 arrows hammering down every minute onto the French knights.

The arrow-storm destroyed the French belief in an easy victory and, as the armies clashed in hand-to-hand fighting, the narrow battlefield prevented the French making their greater numbers count. French attacks withered and failed.



△ Henry V (1413–22) was a deeply serious man whose life was built round war. At the battle of Agincourt in 1415 he showed excellent generalship and led his men in the fiercest hand-to-hand fighting. At home he showed the same decisive leadership. Summoning two knights whose quarrel had caused deaths among their supporters, Henry told them to sort out their quarrel before he'd finished a plate of oysters, or he'd execute them both. No one doubted he'd keep his word.

Henry V, his knights and his archers had won. We don't know how many men died (maybe 6000 Frenchmen and a few hundred Englishmen) but the exact numbers are less important than the huge difference between them.

Four days later the church bells rang out in London to proclaim the news of Agincourt. Late in November London's streets were filled with cheering crowds as Henry, simply and soberly dressed, rode to St Paul's to give thanks to God for the victory.



The crowds, far less restrained, sang the Agincourt Carol which began:

Our King went forth to Normandy,  
With grace and might of chivalry;  
God for him wrought marvelously  
Wherefore England may call and cry Deo  
Gratias:

Deo gratias Anglia redde pro victoria.

Miraculous though Agincourt was, it was only the beginning of Henry's success. Between 1415 and 1420 he led siege after siege, winning control of more and more French territory. The French nobility, morale weakened by Agincourt and divided amongst themselves, could not stop him. In 1420 France agreed to the humiliating Treaty of Troyes, which not only united England and France, through Henry's marriage to Princess Katherine of France, but also stated that Henry or his son would be the next king of France, thus disinheriting the French heir to the throne.

However, only two years later in 1422, Henry V died of dysentery on another campaign in France. He left his 9-month-old heir a legacy that was both an inspiration and a burden, as shown below.



△ This map shows (in red) just how much of France was conquered by the English by 1429. The lands marked in yellow were those of the Duke of Burgundy (see the box below for his importance).

## Henry V's legacy to Henry VI

### The challenge

Henry V had set an inspiring standard of kingship. His successors were expected to match this standard by strengthening English control over France. Losing the lands in France gained under Henry V would be a terrible failure, an insult to those who'd died winning those lands.



### The difficulties

Henry V's success had partly been built on an alliance with the Duke of Burgundy and on France's lack of leadership, as the King of France was elderly and insane, believing he was made of glass and would break if anyone touched him. What if Burgundy changed sides to ally with France, leaving England isolated? What if France revived under new leadership? Continued war in France was expensive, requiring heavy taxation: would the English people keep paying if their success ended?

# 2

## Why was London full of rebels in 1450?

Make sure you read pages 16–17 on **Henry V** before you begin this chapter

The graph on pages 6–7 showed that royal success peaked under Henry V around 1420 but that, over the next thirty years, triumph turned to failure. By 1450 England had so many problems that rebels occupied London for several days in protest. By investigating the reasons behind this rebellion this enquiry helps you understand the background to the Wars of the Roses and also Henry VI's abilities as king.

The year 1449 had been terrible for the English. French ships were attacking English coastal towns and trading ships. French soldiers were close to retaking all the lands conquered by Henry V. In Parliament, the Commons savagely criticised the King's chief councillor, William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, blaming him for all England's failures. No wonder that the anonymous author of *An English Chronicle* (written in London in the 1460s) noted: 'October 1449, on St Simon and St Jude's day, the sun appeared red as blood. People greatly marvelled, saying it signified some harm to come.' He was right. Far worse did come. The chronicler continued:

In May 1450 the king was **Henry VI**, aged **28**

January 1450 – Adam Moleyns, Bishop of Chichester and Keeper of the King's Privy Seal, went to Portsmouth to pay soldiers and shipmen but he tried to cut their wages, arguing with them in boisterous language and they fell on him and cruelly killed him.

May 1450 – The common voice was that the Duke of Suffolk and others had sold Normandy and other English lands to France. At Parliament the Commons accused the Duke of treason and he was arrested and put in the Tower of London. Before this Suffolk had asked an astrologer how he should die. 'A shameful death' answered the astrologer, advising him 'beware of the tower'. The Duke was freed and exiled for five years but when he set sail from Ipswich another ship, the *Nicholas of the Tower*, lay in wait. They captured him, smote off his head and threw his body onto the beach at Dover.

**Cade** – although he is called John in this chronicle, other sources and historians refer to him as Jack

And the Kentishmen rose in rebellion and chose them a captain, John Cade, who called himself John Amend-all because the realm had been ruled by untrue counsel so that the common people, because of all the taxes, could not make a living and groused sore against those that governed the land.

**jack**

A padded jacket reinforced with metal

We don't know who Jack Cade was but he was an effective leader. He gathered several thousand followers, using the government's own system for raising soldiers against French attacks. They were summoned by church bells, bringing at least a bow, sword and **jack**. Those bells now rang to call men to join Cade. Messengers, notices on church doors and news spread at Rochester fair also brought men flocking to Cade.





Early in June the rebels camped at Blackheath, south of London. The King's advisers sent negotiators to Cade, then an army to frighten him off. Cade led his men away, ambushed pursuers, then returned to Blackheath. The King and his nobles then fled to the Midlands, frightened of their soldiers supporting the rebels. As protest spread, Bishop William Ascough, another of the King's advisers, was murdered in Salisbury.

Cade entered London early in July, riding round, says our chronicler, 'bearing a drawn sword in his hand like a king, wearing gilt spurs, a gilt helmet and a gown of blue velvet as if he were a lord or knight'. Cade now punished men whom the rebels believed were corrupt traitors. The royal Treasurer, Lord Saye, was dragged from the Tower of London, his head cut off and his naked body dragged round London behind a horse. A handful of others were executed and their homes looted. Had the protest turned to random violence? The London chronicles say it had, though some victims were targeted for corruption and Cade hanged a looter. The violence led Londoners to turn against Cade, attacking his men in a night-time battle that raged along London Bridge until the Londoners slammed the city gates, locking out the rebels. Even then there were more negotiations. The rebels were pardoned and perhaps promised their demands would be met. Most went home, leaving Cade and his closest supporters isolated. Cade fled but was caught by the Sheriff of Kent and killed.

Cade's rebellion was a startling outburst of public protest. Why did it take place? Are the answers in the petitions so carefully drafted by the rebels or do we have to look elsewhere?



- △ The rebels listed their complaints in petitions to the King, which were also distributed round the south of England. The picture shows most of what was probably the third and last petition. It lists complaints about the King's advisers and defeat in France but the first paragraph is a declaration of loyalty to the King. Cade's followers are usually called 'rebels' but the petitions show they were not rebelling against or criticising King Henry. They repeatedly proclaimed their loyalty to Henry, blaming his

advisers for the problems. Most of Cade's followers were respectable; the leaders in their communities. They had a lot to lose, so probably thought carefully before joining Cade.

#### Chronology of Cade's rebellion, 1450

2 May	Murder of Duke of Suffolk
mid-May	Gathering of rebels
11 June	Rebels at Blackheath, outside London
15–20 June	Negotiations; failed attempt to use military force against rebels; royal army threatened to join rebels
25 June	King Henry and nobles left London
1 July	Cade entered London
3 July	Lord Saye executed
5 July	Battle between Londoners and rebels
12 July	Cade killed



■ Your hypothesis diagram probably looks similar to this diagram. Pages 22–25 help you develop your hypothesis by looking at the rebels' complaints about national problems. As you read pages 22–25 add notes in the National complaints circle of the diagram.



## Which national problems made the rebels angry?

As the rebellion continued the rebels rewrote their petition, focusing less on local complaints in Kent and more on national problems. This was to widen support but also because they believed their protests were for the good of the country and the King. They continually stressed they wanted the King to reign like a 'king royal' and declared they would 'live and die' his loyal subjects. Their target was the punishment of the supporters of the dead Duke of Suffolk, men still in power as royal councillors and in the royal household. They included Lords Saye, Dudley, Beaumont and Sudeley and Bishop Ascough. Those who fell into the rebels' hands were killed. The others would have met the same bloody fate if the rebels had caught them.

The four major charges against these 'false councillors' were that, led by Suffolk, they had:

- **robbed the King and enriched themselves**, taking advantage of his youth and generosity to take royal lands and income for themselves, while leaving the King impoverished
- **hijacked the law courts for their own benefit**, intimidating or bribing judges and juries to make judgments in the favour of them and their supporters
- **prevented nobles closely related to the King from acting as his councillors** and were responsible for the death of the King's uncle, the Duke of Gloucester
- **betrayed England by losing the English empire in France** so that all Henry V's conquests were back in French hands.

What were the details behind the rebels' accusations against the King's advisers?

### William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk (1396–1450)

Suffolk was the dominant politician of the 1440s and the focus of hatred in 1449–50 as England's lands in France were lost. It's tempting to go along with the rebels' view of Suffolk as a 'false traitor', giving away English lands in return for French money, except that Suffolk had a long and respectable career as a soldier in France. Aged 19, he took part in the Agincourt campaign in 1415, fighting alongside his father (killed at Harfleur) and his brother (killed at Agincourt). Suffolk then continued to fight in France until 1430 when he was captured at the battle of Jargeau and held prisoner until he paid a large ransom. Returning to England, he became a member of the royal council from the early 1430s. His fall from power was sudden in 1449, with treason charges leading to his murder in 1450. Cade's rebels thought Suffolk used his influence over the King entirely for his own benefit. Historians have agreed with the rebels but new interpretations suggest that Suffolk may have been less selfish, spending the 1440s trying to do his best for king and country to make up for Henry VI's failings. You'll find out more on historians' views about Suffolk on pages 30–31.



### Robbing the King and enriching themselves

Royal income had found its way into the pockets of members of the royal household instead of into the King's treasury. King Henry gave lands to new lords such as Lords Saye and Sudeley, more than was needed to match their new rank. This meant that income from this land went to the lords, not to the King. The Duke of Suffolk was given lands throughout the country but especially in East Anglia and the Thames Valley; Saye built up lands in Kent and Lord Beaumont in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. Again this meant less income for the King because he no longer held this land. As a result, the King was too poor to pay local communities for food and drink taken for the royal household and ordinary royal servants, such as the washerwomen and stable-hands, went unpaid. By 1448 the crown jewels had to be sold to meet royal debts.

### Hijacking the law courts for their own benefit

In 1448 John Paston's manor house in Norfolk was attacked in his absence by a gang of men armed with bows, spears, guns and battering rams. They drove out John's wife and servants and stole his property. Paston was a comparatively wealthy man but all his attempts to take his attackers to court failed because they were protected by the Duke of Suffolk and others who had the power to ensure courts made decisions in their favour. Stories like this were told in many counties. In Kent royal officials collected fines for non-existent crimes or threatened imprisonment to force people to hand over land; they knew that Lord Saye would defend them against complaints.



Preventing nobles closely related to the King from acting as his councillors

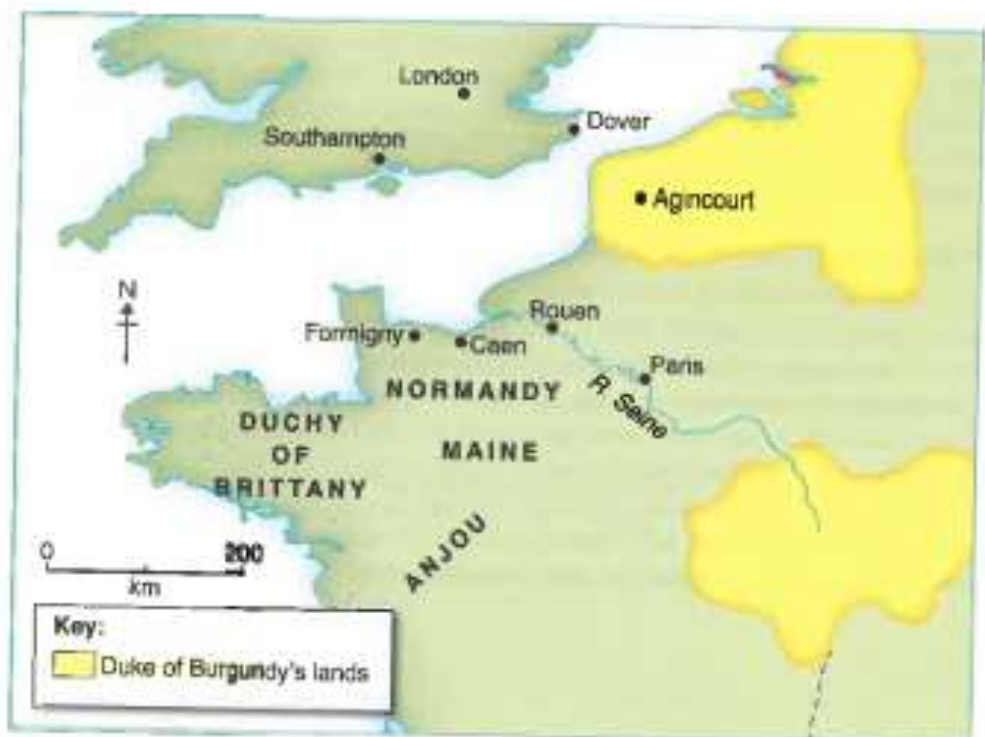
People believed that the most important qualification for being one of the king's closest advisers was royal blood, to be closely related to the king. The rebels accused Suffolk and his supporters, who lacked royal blood, of plotting to exclude from power the two men most closely related to King Henry and therefore most qualified to be his advisers – the Dukes of Gloucester and York.

Gloucester was Henry VI's uncle (the last surviving brother of Henry V). The rebels believed Gloucester would have successfully defended Normandy but he had died in 1447 after being arrested and accused of treason. Rumours spread that he'd been murdered on Suffolk's orders to silence his criticism of the lack of war effort. However there is no clear evidence that Gloucester was murdered. York was the King's cousin, a former commander in France. According to the rebels, York had been appointed Lieutenant of Ireland in 1447 to exile him and stop him criticising Suffolk. Again, there is no evidence for this. On the contrary, in the 1440s York had shown no signs of opposing Suffolk's policies.

Betraying England by losing the English empire in France

This was the most serious failure of all. Henry V's successes had left a difficult legacy for his successors: could they hold onto the land he'd conquered? In fact, even after Henry V's death, English forces, led by Henry V's brothers and by nobles who'd fought alongside Henry, won more territory in France. During the 1420s English soldiers settled in northern France, especially Normandy, buying or being granted lands there. Some married French girls; others took their families to live there. Many English children grew to adulthood in Normandy, never having seen England.

- > Defence of the French empire became harder and harder. English Parliaments were reluctant to pay taxes for a war that was no longer glorious. The noblemen who'd won the campaigns of the 1420s grew older and there was less to attract younger men to take their place. The defensive strategy meant there was less chance of glory or winning wealth through ransoms and captured land.





The English survived the French revival led by Joan of Arc in 1429 but the war turned against them in 1435 when the Duke of Burgundy changed sides, allying with France against England. France was also now led effectively by her new king, Charles VII. In contrast, the English received no morale boost from Henry VI when he grew to adulthood. He never led an army to France and, in 1445, when he married the French princess, Margaret of Anjou, he even agreed to give back Maine as a goodwill gesture, a promise of peace.

Despite events moving in France's favour, the sudden loss of Normandy in 1449 came as a horrific shock to the English. French forces tore through a defenceless Normandy, the very core of English possessions. Rouen was surrendered in October 1449. An English relief army landed in Normandy, only to be beaten at the battle of Formigny in April 1450. Caen was surrendered in June 1450. How could this have happened? Simple, said the rebels and the English settlers in Normandy: defeat was caused by treachery. Suffolk and his allies had sold Normandy to the French in return for bribes.

The loss of France shattered national pride. It also had important practical effects in south-east England. Belated attempts to send reinforcements to Normandy, followed by their defeat, had led to:

- soldiers being quartered near the coast while waiting to cross the Channel. Food, drink and lodgings were taken without payment and having so many men crammed together led to disturbances and petty crime
- a slump in the cloth trade because merchants could no longer trade easily with markets in towns in northern France. These towns were no longer in English hands
- an increase in French attacks on the coast. The towns of Rye and Winchelsea in Sussex and Queenborough Castle in Kent were attacked
- a refugee problem, as people who had settled in Normandy now found themselves homeless. One London chronicle recorded, 'they came in great misery and poverty and had to live on hand outs from local people. Many fell to theft and misrule and sore annoyed the common people.'

■ Revise your hypothesis, using the diagram below as a guide. Take time to do this carefully before reading on. Think about:

- links between the local and national complaints
- whether any causes were more important than others
- distinguishing between the event that triggered the rebellion and its longer term causes





Faced with extreme pressures, the ruler of England suffered a complete breakdown. But beware modern diagnoses of medieval mental health.

# THE MADNESS OF KING HENRY VI

*Lauren Johnson*

March 2019 | History Today | 29



In the summer of 1453 the 31-year-old king of England, Henry VI, bade farewell to his pregnant wife Margaret of Anjou and set out on a judicial tour of the West Country. Pausing at Chertsey hunting lodge in Wiltshire, the king suddenly was taken and smitten with a frenzy and his wit and reason withdrawn.

The symptoms of this sudden mental breakdown were horrifying. Initial frenzy passed into a paralyzing physical and mental catatonia. Henry could neither talk nor walk. He was barely able to hold up his head, sitting slumped and silent like a rag doll in front of his attendants. His only child, Edward of Westminster, born three months into his illness, was brought to the king for a blessing; Henry merely glanced unseeingly upon the baby and then lowered his eyes again. There was no telling when – or if – he would recover.

Few kings have so amply fulfilled the medieval concept of Fortune's Wheel as Henry VI. The son of Henry V, the victor at Agincourt, Henry ascended to the throne of England and France before he was one year old, making him the youngest monarch in English history and the only ruler ever crowned in both realms. Yet 50 years later he was murdered in the Tower of London, having twice been deposed from his English throne during the Wars of the Roses, while a slim patch of land around Calais was the last vestige of his French kingdom.

The illness that Henry endured from the summer of 1453 has overshadowed our understanding of this unfortunate king, associating his failures as a ruler with his mental health. Some modern studies have reduced the complex contemporary issues that Henry faced, which undoubtedly contributed to his illness, in favor of a modern medical diagnosis. But, if we are to make sense of Henry's illness, we must understand it in the context of his own time.

The cause of Henry's devastating psychological breakdown – as we would term it today – has inspired debate ever since it afflicted him.

Henry was sparsely attended when he fell ill and the details of his condition were suppressed by his advisers, of whom Queen Margaret and Henry's unpopular councillor, Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, were chief among them. As a result, there are few eyewitness accounts of the illness, which lasted until Christmas 1454. One was provided by a delegation of lords, which reported a visit to the stricken king during the Parliament of March 1454; another by a servant of Margaret's, who witnessed the queen's attempt to present Prince Edward to him in December 1453.

#### In the family?

Despite the paucity of contemporary accounts, it has become common to assert that Henry had some form of schizophrenia, possibly inherited from his maternal grandfather, Charles VI of France. (Charles' daughter, Catherine Valois, had married Henry V in 1420.) Charles, too, suffered a serious mental breakdown one sweltering summer in his early adulthood (he was 24, Henry 3). But the pattern of Charles' illness and its symptoms were radically different from Henry's.

Charles often believed himself to be surrounded by assassins. During his first illness in 1392 he murdered five of his attendants and attacked his brother in the erroneous belief that they were trying to kill him. Charles suffered repeated episodes of mania, interspersed with periods of apparent recovery, reported in considerable detail by eyewitness chroniclers. He would mnas hard as he could from one end of his palace to another, believing enemies pursued him, until the entrances had to be bricked up to prevent him from running into the street.

He refused to be washed or to change out of his soiled, vermin-infested clothes and wore an iron rod close to his body, probably to deflect assassins' blades. Like Henry, Charles did not recognize his wife or children, but his response to evidence of their existence was more violent: he pulled down his wife's heraldry and tried to

Previous spread:  
Henry VI, c.1535  
(detail, English).

Margaret of Anjou  
seated with her husband  
Henry VI in the Talbot  
Shrewsbury Book,  
French, c.1445.







emise his own coat of arms, insisting that he was really called George and that his arms included an impaled lion. Charles' illness caused him considerable distress. Babelyng it to be the result of his enemies' witchcraft, he openly wept in front of his advisers, pleading with whoever was behind this torture to release him. He would rather die, he said once, than continue to suffer as he was.

Almost none of Charles' medical history matches that of Henry, beyond the sudden onset of illness and an inability to recognise those around them. The two kings' different personalities could have affected the presentation of their illness, but it is probable that they did not share the same condition. The brief schizophrenia is a satisfyingly neat explanation for Henry's illness from summer 1453, but history is seldom neat.

The fullest recent examination of Henry's alleged schizophrenia was provided by Nigel Bark in 2002, using the criteria for classifying mental disorders provided by the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Bark found it particularly suggestive that Henry's confessor, John Blacman, reported the king experiencing religious hallucinations or visions in later life, hearing 'an audible voice' of the saints and seeing Jesus and the Virgin Mary appearing in mass.

Yet catatonias such as Henry suffered in 1453-4 occurs in numerous mental disorders and medical conditions and the DSM states that hallucinations are a normal part of religious experiences in certain cultural contexts, of which Henry's is one. To the medieval mind, mystical visions were an accepted part of religious experience and could be described in a literal way without any suggestion of mental illness.

We should, in any case, treat Blacman's claims cautiously. Writing in the aftermath of Henry's death, as a popular cult developed around Henry's grave, Blacman desired to cast the king as a saint. He even claimed that during

'We may find the roots of Henry's illness in the horrors that befell him three years earlier in 1450'

Henry's exile to the north of England, he had miraculously multiplied loaves of bread for his supporters. But, if we reject the diagnosis of schizophrenia, what else might have been the cause of Henry's illness?

#### Tough times

Henry may have been suffering a particularly severe episode of depression, exacerbated by traumatic events and near continuous physical exertion. We may find the roots of Henry's illness in the horrors that befell him three years earlier in 1450. A resurgent French force had driven the English from France with horrifying efficiency. As one gleeful French herald put it, 'the whole duchy of Normandy was conquered ... within one year and six days; which is a very wonderful thing'.

It was not so wonderful for Henry's subjects. As Norman refugees poured across the Channel in search of sanctuary, violent unrest broke out in England. Henry's disgruntled subjects focussed their ire on his chief minister, William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, who had been at the forefront of politics for at least a decade, helping transform Henry's backstrebe leadership into a concrete policy. Having served in Henry's household since the monarch was 11 years old, Suffolk may have become something of a father figure to the young king.

Henry managed to protect Suffolk from a parliamentary campaign to indict him for treason, but as the duke escaped into exile he was seized by sailors, subjected to a mocking trial and summarily beheaded. His body was

Henry VI visits the shrine of St Edmund, from *The Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund*, 1434-44.



tossed ashore at Dover Sands, his head impaled on a spike like a traitor.

Subtlety was one of four royal advisers murdered by Henry's vengeful subjects in 1450. In July, the city of London fell to a rebel army led by Jack Cade, also known as 'John Mortimer'. Amazingly, Cade's Mortimer moniker insisted on an association with Henry's cousin and heir presumptive, Richard, Duke of York (whose mother was a Mortimer). It took considerable effort to suppress Cade's rising and restore peace. Perhaps in the midst of his exertions Henry did not fully process the grief of losing men who had served him, in some cases, all his life.

The return of the Duke of York to English politics in autumn 1450 unleashed further chaos that Henry struggled to suppress.

By summer 1453 the king had spent three years in near constant physical and mental exertion to regain control of his realm. His efforts were rewarded: the English retook the ancient patrimony of Gascony, Parliament had grown compliant and, for the first time in their eighty-year marriage, Margaret was pregnant.

But even among this joy there was cause for anxiety. Margaret's pregnancy might be a source of comfort to the nation but there was no certainty of the child's safe deliverance, nor of Margaret's survival. Henry's father had died soon after the birth of his first child in his thirties. Might this association of fatherhood and mortality have played on Henry's mind?

It seems Henry could endure these anxieties and physical and mental exertions while his efforts yielded results, but on 17 July 1453, at the Battle of Castillon, an English army was annihilated by the French and the Duchy of Gascony was lost, ending four centuries of English rule. News of this military disaster may have been the 'sadden shock' that one contemporary chronicler reported precipitated Henry's illness.

The reversal of Castillon threatened to incite domestic bloodshed such as had occurred in 1450. It may be wiser to see Henry's breakdown

## By summer 1453 the king had spent three years in near constant physical and mental exertion to regain control of his realm'

as a result of a combination of the stresses and strains that, in the summer of 1453, overwhelmed him.

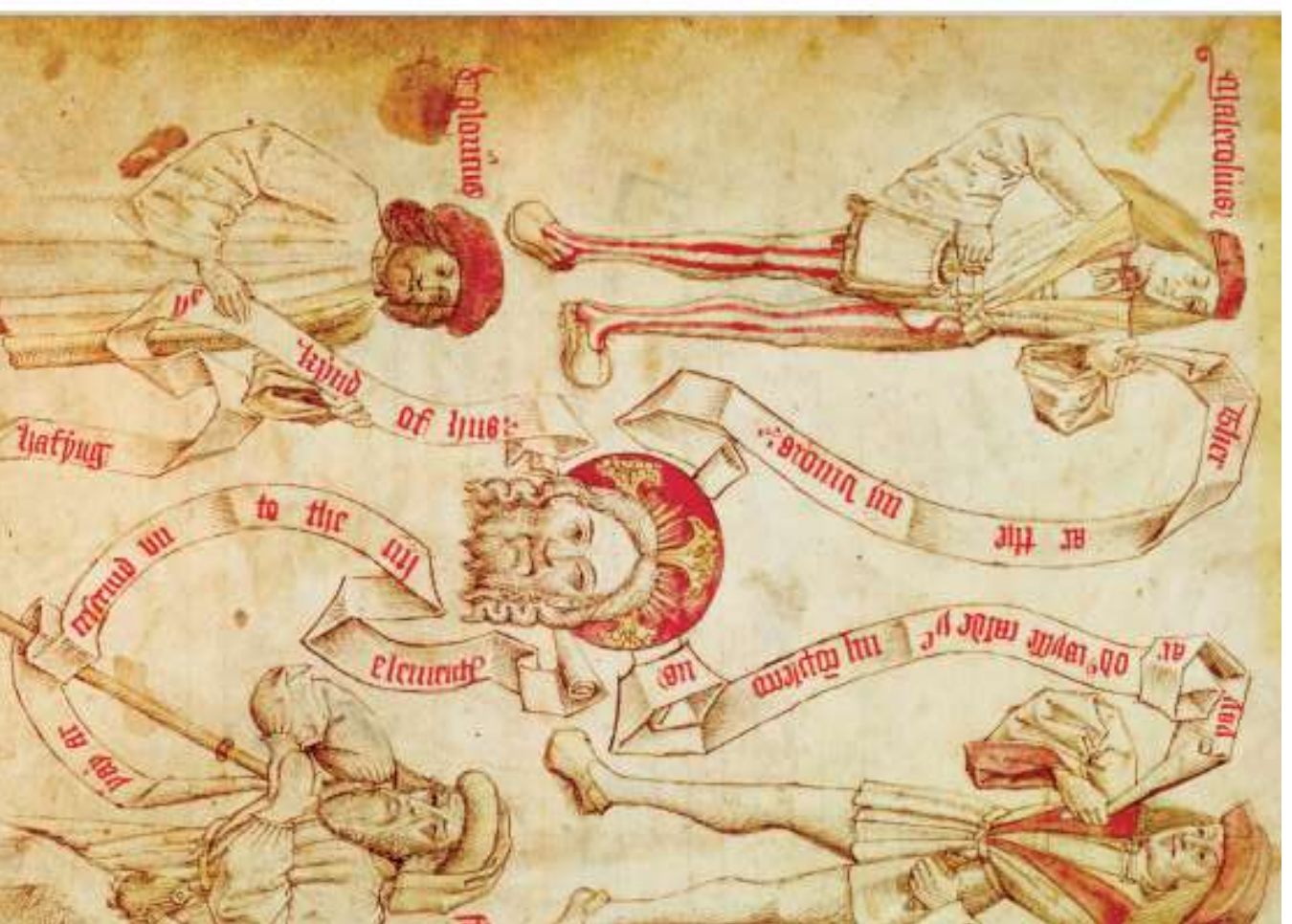
### Bad humour

Henry's condition confounded his contemporaries. Until 1453 he seemed to enjoy good mental and physical health; confronted with his collapse, even Henry's own doctors were uncertain how best to proceed. A commission provided by the royal council to Henry's medical team in March 1454 contains a list of treatments they could attempt, which is extensive to the point of

scattershot, permitting everything from baths and gorges to bloodletting and head purges. Medieval medicine was heavily dependent on classical theories deriving from the works of the Greek physicians Hippocrates and Galen. Relating humanity to the four elements of Nature, it was believed that humours were made up of four humours: blood, phlegm, cholera (or yellow bile) and black bile.

Unbalanced humours caused illness. Every individual inclined towards a particular humour. Born in December, in the depths of wet and cold winter, Henry inclined towards the phlegmatic; he was vacillating, pacific and weak-willed. As the historian Carole Rawcliffe has noted, his winter birth also rendered him 'vulnerable to the influence

The Four Humours, from the Guild Book of the Barber Surgeons of York, 15th century.







of the moon, which had long been associated with mental troubles. ('Lunacy' derives from the Latin word for moon.) Henry, like many of his educated contemporaries, took astrological theory seriously. When he was still a teenager, a court-sponsored plot to replace him as viewed around a horoscope that foretold his imminent demise. Those involved were imprisoned or executed for their conspiracy.

Henry's subjects were aware of this association. Throughout the 1440s, as Henry's regime mined itself deeper in debt and diplomatic incompetence, disengagement against Henry focused on his alleged simple-mindedness. In 1442 a Kentish yeoman was summoned to appear before the Court of King's Bench for calling Henry 'a lunatic'.

'Reasonable denunciations notwithstanding, there is little evidence that Henry suffered from mental health problems

until 1453. He was sufficiently cogent to found two colleges to celebrate his attainment of adult power by 1441, making alterations to their plans in the hope they would rival the architectural works of his forebears. Henry's failings as a king before 1453 were a result of nurture and nature, not mental illness. His long minority rule, surrounded by waiting uncles, had incited in him an almost pathological desire to avoid confrontation, rendering him over-generous in his patronage, granting estates on little more than a petitioner's appeal to the detriment of his finances and occasionally even to law and order.

Because of his propensity to rely on chief councillors such as Suffolk to promote his policies, Henry has been accused of lacking a policy of his own, but his overriding aim until 1460 was clear: he sought international peace. He was appalled by the expense and bloodshed

**Murder of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, engraving, 19th century.**

of the Hundred Years War, which he may have witnessed first-hand as he progressed slowly towards Paris for his French coronation aged ten. For the cause of peace he defied his father's will and the noisy opposition of his uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. In order to release the Duke of Orleans from English captivity in 1441. He also married Margaret of Anjou and surrendered (pointlessly, it transpired) the territory of Maine. His peace policy was often unpopular, bungled and futile. But it was his, all the same.

### Treatments

Henry's apparent good health before his collapse in 1453 made his physicians' task all the more delicate. Under the circumstances, the first recourse of his medical team was probably cautiously holistic: a change of diet, the preparation of herbal baths and specially brewed syrups. Musicians may have been provided, as it had been for Charles VI. The French king's case was a warning to Henry's doctors, however, for Charles grew to despise his physician, Beignault Perrou, and eventually banished him. Even worse awaited the friars, Pierre and Laurens, who treated Charles with a medicine distilled from powdered pearls. When they fell from grace they were beheaded and quartered, their dismembered corpses displayed across Paris.

As the efforts yielded no results, the two royal surgeons were probably called upon to attempt some of the more invasive treatments permitted by their council commission. To treat Henry's 'frenzy', caused by an excess of choler destabilising his naturally cold and moist brain, they needed to cool the fevered brow with shaving, drenching with water or even blood-letting from the scalp. This would draw hot blood away from the brain and restore it to its normal state.

However, the extreme therapy that defined Henry's illness required completely different care. Stupor was associated with an excess of cold, wet phlegm – a humour that Henry

already had in dangerous abundance.

Excess phlegm could affect the brain's memory faculty, as memories were stored as imprints on wet matter at the back of the brain, which explained why Henry could neither recognise nor respond to those around him. Heating and drying were essential to rebalance the royal humours. Among the remedies believed to relieve and repair the wit's entangled by a stupor was 'barbic' or treacle, a hot medicine derived from roasted snake flesh that was so potent royally appointed apothecaries inspected its quality on import.

### Waking nightmare

It was 17 months before Henry fully recovered. At Christmas 1456 he appeared to revive overnight (although he had been slowly improving since autumn). He spoke, moved and recognised his advisers again, but had no memory of the events of his illness.

He met his infant son with delight. There was every indication he would make a full and permanent recovery.

Unfortunately, during Henry's illness the political realm had fractured once more. Rival parties vied around the incapacitated king for control of government. York was eventually appointed protector, but when Henry awoke to the realities of 1456, he was distressed to learn that York had used his pre-eminence to imprison two of his rivals, the senior dukes of the blood royal, Somerset and Exeter. Like all medieval kings, Henry was acutely sensitive to questions of aristocratic honour. He swiftly released the pair, an implicit challenge to the ambitions of York and his allies, the earls of Salisbury and Warwick.

On his recovery, Henry declared himself 'in charity with all the world', but his nobility could not agree. Tensions escalated as the rival factions manoeuvred to eliminate their opponent's, reaching a bloody denouement in the first Battle of St Albans in May 1455. For the first time in Henry's life, aged 33, he found himself in battle. He saw members of his





household butchered in front of him and was dragged to safety after being wounded by a stray arrow. The battle was a resounding success for the Yorkist lords, who killed Somerset, assumed control of Henry and dominated government once more.

For Henry, this traumatic experience impeded the recovery he had made since Christmas. A fortnight after the battle, the physician and alchemist Gilbert Kynner was summoned to Windsor to treat Henry's 'skynne and infirmities'. Perhaps the wound he had received in battle troubled him, but it is also likely that Henry was again suffering from problems with his mental health. He slept more often after the battle, suggesting depression. Though not in the paralyzing stupor that had afflicted him throughout 1453-4, he was lethargic and passive, apparently incapable of resisting Yorkist demands. He was puppeteered through a parliament that vindicated Yorkist actions and sidelined Henry, bringing about a brief second protectorate under the Duke of York.

### The end

Inertia and submission became the defining features of Henry's kingship after 1455. Before he fell ill in 1453, he had been inattentive, vacillating and averse to conflict – but he had exhibited occasional flashes of independent will. Despite these risks of his 'monkish' tendencies, the young Henry demonstrated a capacity for personal magnificence and an enjoyment of hunting and plays.

After 1455 he was dominated by one powerful puppet-master after another: Margaret, York, the Earl of Warwick. When he was deposed by York's son, Edward IV, in 1461 he left little Margaret to fight for his crown. As he retreated from one refuge to another, Margaret travelled widely in search of international aid for the Lancastrian cause. In 1465 Henry was captured in Lancashire and imprisoned at the Tower of London. Surviving records of Henry's activities

and health are scarce after 1461. When he was briefly restored to the throne in 1470-1, a northern chronicler reported that he was 'not worshipfully arrayed as a prince and not so clearly kept'. London chronicles similarly described his shabby appearance, pointing through the street in a blue velvet mourning gown in an attempt to win support, but winning only pity.

By the time he died, in May 1471, his only child had been killed in battle, he and Margaret were Yorkist prisoners and he had lost the vast majority of his servants and supporters to the bloodshed of the Wars of the Roses. He was almost certainly murdered on Edward IV's orders. If he had anticipated this outcome – his own Lancastrian forebears had similarly disposed of Richard II, the king they usurped – it would have been another worry. When Henry's body was exhumed in 1910, his teeth were discovered to be ground down, testament to years of anxiety.

When considering the mental health of Henry VI we should not seek a simplistic diagnosis but recognise a complex interplay of grief, bereavement, trauma and anxieties. He was not just a 'mad king', but a sensitive, well-intentioned man enduring distressing circumstances. In later life they proved too much for him. We might wonder who among us would prove wholly ' sane' under the same conditions.

Lauren Johnson is the author of *Shadows King: The Life and Death of Henry VI* (The Owl of Zeus, 2019).

### Further reading

**Ralph Griffiths** *The Reign of King Henry VI: the Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422-1461* (Sutton, 1998)

**Carole Rawcliffe** 'The Insanity of Henry VI', *The Historian* (May, 1998)

**R.C. Farnham** *The Royal Intimacy: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI, 1392-1420* (AMS Press, 1986)

**Richard of York**  
supporting part of the  
Genealogy of Henry VI in  
the Talbot Shrewsbury  
Book, French, c.1440.