

The Battle of Shrewsbury

21st July 1403

Principal participants

King Henry IV

Henry Percy k/a Hotspur

Prince Henry (later Henry V)

Henry IV

the experienced leader

KING HENRY IV

1367-1413

HENRICVS

III



Henry was the son of John of Gaunt and a cousin of King Richard II. He took the crown in 1399 and reigned for 14 troubled years.

In 1398 King Richard sent Henry into exile. One year later, John of Gaunt died. Henry was told that all his father's possessions now belonged to the crown. Henry, unwilling to see his inheritance lost, returned to England with a small army.

Richard II was not a popular king. As Henry marched towards London other nobles soon joined him. Henry's attempt to snatch the throne succeeded. However, the crown came at a price.

Throughout Henry's reign England suffered from unrest and revolt. Henry had set a dangerous precedent. He had shown that even a monarch could be replaced by a more popular rival.

These tensions came to a head at the Battle of Shrewsbury when Henry came very close to losing the crown. Had the northern rebels, led by Percy, met and joined forces with the Welsh troops under the command of Owain Glyndwr, history could have been very different.

By 1405 Henry was suffering from ill health. He began to rely more and more on his son to help govern the kingdom. Henry finally died in 1413.

Why Henry IV usurped the throne

- Henry Bolingbroke was grandson of Edward III and cousin of Richard II
- Richard II banished Henry Bolingbroke and appropriated Lancastrian property
- Richard was an unpopular king
- Richard was in Ireland in 1399 when Henry returned
- Henry had the support of the Percys

HENRY PERCY

Henry Hotspur Percy was a powerful nobleman. However his feud with King Henry cost him everything.

In the early 1400s Henry Percy was appointed Warden of the East March. As a border baron he was charged with preventing Scottish raids on Northern England. With the title came power, wealth and the authority to raise troops in peacetime. Henry Percy soon became an experienced soldier leading numerous attacks on the Scottish Army. His military success gave him the nickname 'Hotspur'.

However, his revolt against Henry IV proved to be his downfall. At Shrewsbury, in the heat of battle, Percy charged into the fray and was killed.

The rebel army fell into a state of perplexity, not knowing whether they were fighting against the king's party or their own. While they were in this uncertainty Henry Percy was slain... [The king] shouted with all his might 'Percy is dead' as this shout was passed forward, the most eager of the combatants began to retire, seeing that their only hope lay in flight.



HOTSPUR

Reasons for Hotspur's rebellion

- The King failed to repay the Percys – the Earl of Northumberland and his son Hotspur – for their campaigns against the Scots and Welsh
- The King had broken his oath not to take the throne
- The King refused to ransom Edmund Mortimer
- The King rewarded the Earl of Westmoreland and made him Keeper of Roxburgh
- The King made Hotspur hand over the Scottish knights whom he had captured at Homildon Hill

By the time of his rebellion, Sir Henry Percy (b.1364) was one of the foremost knights of the realm and the embodiment of the chivalric ideal.

A distinguished military commander, of Europe-wide esteem, he had fought campaigns both at home and abroad, including against the French, Scots and Welsh. Also, he was a champion of the tournament, having competed at St Inglevert in 1391 alongside the future Henry IV.

Royal favour

The eldest son of the earl of Northumberland, also Henry Percy, Hotspur was engaged in military campaigns from the age of 14, when in 1378 he assisted the recapture of Berwick Castle. Hotspur's warring against the Scots, by whom he was captured at the Battle of Otterburn in 1388, was generously rewarded by King Richard II, who retained him for life in 1396 at a fee of £100 p.a. and made him warden of the east march for a term of ten years.

Despite such royal favour, the Percys were angered by Richard II's increasing despotism, and so in 1399 they supported Henry Bolingbroke's overthrow of the king. They were richly rewarded, including the appointment of Hotspur as justiciary of Wales and Chester, and later lieutenant, complemented by grants of castles at Beaumaris, Caenarvon, Chester, Conwy and Flint.

'the flower and the glory of the
chivalry of Christendom'

(Adam of Usk, d.1421)



A straining of relations

Increasingly, due to the ongoing Scottish wars, which included Hotspur's victory over the Scots at Homildon Hill in 1402, the Percys found themselves financially burdened by the campaigns, for which the king was slow to repay them. In 1401 Hotspur complained to the king that his soldiers 'could no longer endure due to lack of money'. In addition, King Henry IV enraged the victors of Homildon Hill by refusing to allow the captors to ransom their noble prisoners, as was the chivalric norm; instead Henry demanded that they be delivered to London.

Soon after, Hotspur was given news of the Welsh capture of his brother (by marriage), Edmund Mortimer. Henry IV denied Hotspur's request that Mortimer's ransom be paid by the court. This may in part have been because of the Mortimer claim to the throne which, after Richard II's demise, gave the young earl of March, Hotspur's nephew, a stronger lineage-claim than Henry's own. All of these factors, together with the promotion of Lancastrian and Neville interests in the Percy north, seem to have contributed to the breakdown of relations between the family and the king, to the point that in 1403 Hotspur decided to confront the king by force...

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The battle - why Shrewsbury ?

- Hotspur recruited forces in Cheshire
- He hoped to have support of Owen Glyn Dwr
- He planned to attack Henry, Prince of Wales, at Shrewsbury
- The King was marching north but as soon as he learned of the rebellion, he diverted his army to defend Shrewsbury and to confront Hotspur

The battlefield



CAST OF CHARACTERS

The royal army

King Richard II	Richard came to the throne in 1367 when he was just 10 years old. He was to prove an unpopular ruler and in 1399 was replaced by Henry IV.
King Henry IV	Henry Bolingbroke (as he was previously known) took the throne by force from his cousin, the king, as the result of Richard's tyranny.
Henry, Prince of Wales	Henry was the son of Henry IV and the future Henry V. He demonstrated at Shrewsbury the courage and genius that would ultimately lead to the English victory at Agincourt in 1415.
Earl of Dunbar	A close advisor to Henry IV at Shrewsbury, he was the enemy of the earl of Douglas.
Earl of Stafford	A loyal supporter of Henry IV at Shrewsbury who was killed in battle.

The rebel army

Earl of Northumberland	Henry Percy was the head of the powerful northern Percy family. Initially he supported Henry IV, but from 1403-8 rebelled repeatedly against him.
Earl of Westmorland	Thomas Percy was the brother of the earl of Northumberland and uncle to 'Hotspur'. He was an experienced military commander, previously loyal to both Richard II and Henry IV, but ultimately supported his family.
'Hotspur'	Henry Percy was the eldest son of the earl of Northumberland. Celebrated for his chivalrous endeavours, Hotspur was headstrong and impetuous, to the point in 1403 that he confronted Henry IV at Shrewsbury!
Owen Glendower	Owen was the elusive leader of a Welsh rebellion against Henry IV. Hotspur had hoped to join forces with him at Shrewsbury, but the Welsh leader did not arrive!
Earl of Douglas	The Scottish earl made an unlikely alliance with his one-time enemy, Hotspur, to make common cause at Shrewsbury against Henry IV and the earl of Dunbar.

Deployment of Hotspur's army

- Possibly 5,000 but as many as 12,000
- Hotspur took the higher ground on a ridge near Albright Hussey
- Each army in three units, with archers in between men-at-arms
- Hotspur and the Earl of Douglas led the centre, and Thomas, Earl of Worcester led the vanguard
- Worcester had defected from Prince Henry

The King's army

- Perhaps 10,000 men or as many as 14,000
- The King led the main force with the Earl of Dunbar
- The Earl of Stafford led the vanguard on the right
- Prince Henry led the rearguard on the left
- The King sent the Abbots of Shrewsbury and Haughmond to parley; Hotspur sent his uncle, the Earl of Worcester

The battle

- It took place on Saturday 21st July 1403
- It began late in the afternoon
- At first, Hotspur's archers were dominant
- It was the first battle on English soil in which both sides used the longbow against each other
- Hotspur led an onslaught directed at the King
- Hotspur was killed
- Prince Henry led a counter-attack in spite of his wound
- The rebel army was routed

Prince Henry

Prince Henry, given the affectionate nickname 'Hal' by Shakespeare, was 16 when he commanded at Shrewsbury. He went on to become one of the 'most magnificent and illustrious' medieval monarchs of Europe.

*In his short reign (1413-1422)
he won every battle he fought and took
the throne of France at Agincourt in 1415.*



He acquired legendary status in his life time, with the author of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* (c.1417) commenting: 'nor do our older men remember any prince ever having commanded his people on the march with more effort, bravery, or consideration, or having, with his own hand, performed greater feats of strength in the field'.

Despite his military successes, however, he was not a thick-set brute. In 1415 Jean Fusoris, part of a French embassy at the English court, noted that he did not look like a warrior, his appearance suiting him better to the church. Similarly, Tito Livio (c.1437) commented in his biography that: 'he was beauteous of visage with a long neck, slender body and small bones'.

Nor was he born a prince. At the time of his birth, at Monmouth castle on 16th September 1386, he was a minor royal, the great-grandson of Edward III; Richard II then being a 20 year old king with a potentially long reign ahead.

During his father's exile, from 1398, he was brought up at the royal court (perhaps as a hostage, as surety for his father's loyalty). He accompanied King Richard to Ireland in 1399 and was knighted by his uncle there, who declared that henceforth he should 'be gallant and brave'.

Henry Bolingbroke's seizure of the throne in 1399 made him the heir to the crown, and he was appointed also as the duke of Cornwall, duke of Aquitaine, duke of Lancaster, earl of Chester and Prince of Wales. In this new capacity, he may have accompanied the armies his father lead against the Scots and Welsh in 1400, at which point he would have been about 13.

On 16th September 1400, Owen Glendower declared himself Prince of Wales, throwing down the gauntlet to the young Henry, whose official title it was.

In the initial phases of the Welsh rebellion Prince

The aftermath

- The Earl of Douglas fled but was captured (Douglas' leap)
- The Earl of Worcester, Sir Richard Venables and Sir Richard Vernon were captured, and executed on 23rd July
- Hotspur's body was buried at Whitchurch, but disinterred on the order of the King, and then beheaded and quartered
- The Earl of Northumberland claimed not to have been party to the rebellion, but rebelled in 1408 and was killed
- Owen Glyn Dwr's rebellion – highpoint in 1404

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NEAR THIS PLACE
THE EARL OF WORCESTER,
SIR RICHARD VENABLES
AND SIR RICHARD VERNON
WERE EXECUTED ON
MONDAY 23RD. JULY 1403
AFTER THE BATTLE OF SHREWSBURY
(FOUGHT ON THE 21ST.)
AND THE DEAD BODY OF
HARRY PERCY (HOTSPUR)
WAS HERE PLACED BETWEEN
TWO MILL STONES AND AFTERWARDS
BEHEADED AND QUARTERED.

Royal revenge!

Hotspur was buried at Whitchurch after the battle. King Henry, however, had his corpse exhumed. The *Dieulacres Chronicle* records that Henry had it first preserved with salt and then exhibited in Shrewsbury, where he publicly berated it, before ordering it to be disembowelled, dismembered and cut into quarters: his head was sent to York, and the remaining quarters to Bristol, Chester, Newcastle and London.

On Monday 23rd July, the surviving rebel leaders were dealt with:

Earl Thomas, Sirs Richard Vernon and Richard Venables were hung, drawn and quartered, in Shrewsbury Marketplace, Thomas Percy's head then being sent for display on London Bridge.

It was not removed until 18th December.

A town in ruins!

Shrewsbury itself suffered considerably as a result of the battle, with a petition made to parliament in 1407 as to its ruinous and impoverished state, though a plea for tax exemption was not successful. This had resulted from the occupancy of the royal army in 1403, and the subsequent deliberate burning of the town's suburbs beyond the gate, to prevent their capture by Hotspur's army.

Battlefield Church of St Lawrence

- A huge number of dead and wounded – at least 2,000 and perhaps up to 6,000
- Many thought to have been buried in mass grave on site of the church (open to question)
- The king ordered the church to be built to commemorate the slain
- Clergy to say masses for the souls of the dead
- Built in 1409 on Richard Hussey's land
- Now looked after by Church Conservation Trust



