When the news of Richard's death became known a number of nobility and gentry began to question the new king's right to rule. Some thought they had exchanged one tyrant for another, while others wished to revenge themselves on the man they blamed for the late king's death. On the other hand, just as many supported the new regime and were content to be rid of Richard. In this increasingly unstable and uncertain atmosphere, Duke Henry assumed power. According to the chronicler Thomas Walsingham, 'Henry Bolingbroke was crowned King Henry IV at Westminster by Thomas, archbishop of Canterbury, on 13 October [1399], a year to the day after he had been sent into exile. This was thought to be a miracle sent by God.' Henry IV was to find that the crown was more easily won than held.

**Summary diagram: The deposition of Richard II**

![Diagram showing the deposition of Richard II]

**The troubled reign of Henry IV**

> Why was Henry IV's reign so troubled?

**Henry IV**

Henry IV was the son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who in turn was the youngest son of Edward III. This royal connection did not protect Henry IV from those who sought to challenge his kingship. By usurping the throne Henry had set a dangerous precedent. Other ambitious noblemen might do as he had done and mount a challenge for the crown. Henry's action had led to the throne losing some of its mystique, its majesty and more importantly, its authority. Henceforth, the power and authority of the Crown would come to rely heavily on the skill, strength and personality of the monarch. Henry possessed the attributes necessary to rule effectively but he was hamstrung by the consequences of his usurpation. Although many nobles were opposed to Richard, few were wholeheartedly for Henry.
Challenges to Henry IV

The deposed Richard II proved an immediate focus of opposition to the usurper. The death of the king did not deter the ambitious from pursuing their dreams of wealth and power. Among the first to conspire against the new regime were those nobles who had been closely linked to Richard and whom Henry had demoted on his accession to the throne:

- John Holland, Duke of Exeter, was demoted to Earl of Huntingdon.
- Thomas Holland, Duke of Surrey, was demoted to Earl of Kent.

John and Thomas Holland, half-brother and nephew, respectively, of Richard II, were joined in the conspiracy by former supporters of the former king, John Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, and Thomas le Despenser, Earl of Gloucester. The conspiracy was quickly quashed by Henry IV, who had the nobles involved tried and executed. Henry had successfully overcome the first serious threat to his kingship but he would face many more.

Besides complaints from Parliament over his extravagant spending, Henry endured a decade-long rebellion (1400–10) by the Welsh under their charismatic leader, Owain Glyndŵr (see page 19). The most serious opposition to his kingship came from a number of powerful noble families such as the Percy Earls of Northumberland and the Mortimer Earls of March. These families kept the flame of rebellion alive in England between 1403 and 1408. To add to his troubles, Henry also suffered periodic bouts of ill health; from 1410 he ceased to rule effectively after a series of strokes incapacitated him.

Conflict with France, Scotland and Wales

The difficulties facing Henry IV encouraged the French and Scots to try their luck against what they thought was a weakened England, led by an unpopular monarch. Before the Scots had a chance to invade England, Henry led an army north to confront his enemies. His invasion, in the autumn of 1400, proved successful and he reached Edinburgh but he failed to bring the Scots to battle. Having made his point and unable to sustain an occupation of the country – he lacked the funds and resources to do so – Henry returned to England.

Henry’s successful military expedition to Scotland deterred the French from mounting an attack on English territory in France. Apart from demanding the return of Richard’s widow, Queen Isabella, whom Henry was keeping in ‘honourable confinement’, the French simply confirmed the truce they had signed with Richard II. Unfortunately for Henry, his triumph in ensuring there would be no resumption of the Hundred Years’ War was short lived. On his way back from Scotland news reached him that the Welsh had risen in rebellion. To make matters worse, Parliament refused to grant Henry the additional monies he had requested to equip and sustain an army in the field. Fearing a popular rebellion if he tried to raise taxation without Parliament’s approval, Henry decided to try to live within his means. Shortage of money was to be an enduring problem for Henry throughout his reign.
**SOURCE D**
Adapted from an entry in Walsingham’s *Historia Anglicana* dated September 1402. Walsingham describes the invasion of England by the Scots and the resulting Battle of Homildon Hill.

At that time the Scots, made restless by their usual arrogance, entered England in hostile fashion; for they thought that all the northern lords had been kept in Wales by royal command; but the Earl of Northumberland, and Henry his son, with an armed band and a force of archers, suddenly flung themselves across the path of the Scots who, after burning and plundering, wanted to return to their own country, so the Scots had no choice but to stop and do battle. They chose a hill near the town of Wooler, called Homildon Hill, where they assembled with their men-at-arms and archers. When our men saw this, they left the road in which they had opposed the Scots and climbed a hill facing the Scots. Without delay, our archers, shot arrows at the Scots to provoke them. In reply the Scottish archers directed all their fire at our archers; but they felt the weight of our arrows, which fell like a storm of rain, and so they fled.

**Owain Glyndŵr**
The Welsh rebellion, begun in the autumn of 1400, proved to be the most enduring problem facing Henry throughout his reign. Led by the accomplished and charismatic Welsh prince, Owain ap Gruffudd Fychan (known as Owain Glyndŵr, a name taken from the district in which he was born), the Welsh fought a long campaign that lasted for over a decade. Beginning as a guerrilla campaign, the Welsh gained in strength and confidence and within eighteen months of the start of the rebellion they were able to challenge the English in open combat. Two early battles, at Hyddgen in 1401 and Pilleth in 1402, cemented Glyndŵr’s reputation as a brilliant military strategist and commander when he defeated superior English forces. Further victories and the capture of the strategically important castles of Aberystwyth and Harlech meant that by 1404 Glyndŵr was in control of virtually the whole of Wales. Successive royal expeditions led by Henry IV failed to find, let alone defeat, the Welsh leader. As English-held castles and garrison towns such as Carmarthen fell to the Welsh, Henry IV appeared powerless to help.

**SOURCE E**
Adapted from an entry in Walsingham’s *Historia Anglicana* dated August 1404.

All through the summer, Owain Glyndŵr and his Welshmen looted, burned and destroyed the lands of the English. He captured and killed many Englishmen, took many castles and razed them to the ground through treachery, ambush or open warfare, and kept some for himself as protection. John Trevor, bishop of St Asaph, when he saw that the Welsh cause was prospering, became a traitor and went over to Owain’s side.
Mortimer, Percy and the Battle of Shrewsbury

The repeated failure to crush the rebellion led some disaffected English nobles, particularly those with extensive estates in Wales, to desert Henry. Among the first to do so was Sir Edmund Mortimer, uncle of the young Edmund, Earl of March, who, as the great-grandson of King Edward III, had a claim to the throne. Mortimer’s defection in 1402 sent shockwaves through the English establishment, the ripples of which encouraged other noblemen to challenge Henry. In 1403 Henry Percy (known as Hotspur), the son and heir of the Earl of Northumberland, and his uncle, Thomas, Earl of Worcester, rebelled against Henry IV. Their defeat and death at the Battle of Shrewsbury in July 1403 gave the king a breathing space but he was soon confronted by an even bigger problem. Encouraged by the success of the Welsh against Henry IV, the French decided to intervene and they forged an alliance with Glyndŵr.

The Franco-Welsh alliance

In the summer of 1405 a French army landed in Wales and joined a Welsh army under Glyndŵr. Later that year the Franco-Welsh army, some 13,000 strong, invaded England and confronted the royal army, led by Henry IV, north of Worcester. Fearful of the consequences of defeat, the armies did not engage in battle, and after a week the Welsh and their French allies retreated back to Wales. Undeterred by this setback, Glyndŵr and Mortimer planned future campaigns against Henry IV. They were joined by Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, who rose in rebellion against the king. In 1405 the allies signed the Tripartite Indenture whereby they agreed to partition England and Wales between them following the defeat and death of Henry IV. In the event, nothing came of the plan and thereafter the Welsh rebellion began to falter, Glyndŵr suffered a number of heavy defeats in battle and his French allies returned home. Nevertheless, it took the English nearly a decade to finally suppress the rebellious Welsh, who had returned to employing guerrilla tactics after the recapture of Aberystwyth and Harlech castles in 1409. The successful campaigns against Glyndŵr after 1406 were led by Henry IV’s son and heir, the future Henry V.

Further conspiracies and rebellion

As Henry dealt with the French invasion of England through Wales, he received news that Hotspur’s father, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, together with Thomas Mowbray, Earl of Norfolk, and Richard Scrope, Archbishop of York, had risen in rebellion in the north of England. The rebellion was suppressed and Mowbray and Scrope were tried and executed. Percy escaped to Scotland. Following the beheading of Archbishop Scrope at York, Henry IV fell ill with what was rumoured to be leprosy. Many contemporaries regarded this as a sign from God that the usurper king was being punished for his many sins. In 1408 Percy returned from exile in Scotland and joined Thomas, Baron Bardolf, in leading an army to confront the king. They were overtaken by a force led by the
The Parliament of 1406

In the midst of his problems coping with conspiracies, rebellions and the French invasion, Henry IV endured a difficult relationship with his Parliaments. The Parliament of 1406, known as the Long Parliament, was the most contentious. It lasted, with two adjournments from March until December, longer than any other Parliament in Henry IV's reign. It also witnessed one of the most sustained confrontations between king and commons in English medieval history. Having
made a generous grant to the king in the Coventry Parliament of October 1404, neither the financial nor the military situation showed any significant signs of improvement during the subsequent year. A frustrated Commons was unwilling to subsidise a king who appeared unable to defend the kingdom. The following issues were cited by the Commons and presented to the king in a petition:

- The continued defiance of the Welsh.
- The presence of French troops in Wales.
- The French threat to the English province of Gascony.
- The threat posed by pirates terrorising English shipping.
- The high levels of taxation.
- The misappropriation of Crown revenues.
- The high cost of maintaining the royal household.
- The composition and powers of the royal council.

The real importance of the Long Parliament lies not in its legislation but in the political achievement of the Commons, which was arguably more substantial than that of any other medieval Parliament. The triumph of the Commons in 1406 was the culmination of several years of bitter wrangling with the king. By refusing to grant taxes until Henry IV had agreed to acknowledge the petition, followed by a promise to address their concerns, the Commons had managed to curb the power of the Crown.

**The Lancastrian dynasty established**

By the beginning of 1410 Henry had finally secured his dynasty. He had defeated the Scots, Welsh and French, and suppressed numerous conspiracies and rebellions. Given the obstacles that faced him, Henry IV’s achievements are impressive, but he was also the recipient of some good fortune:

- After 1404 the Scots no longer posed a threat owing to political differences within the kingdom. The death of King Robert III in 1406 was followed by the capture and confinement of his heir, the twelve-year-old James I, by Henry IV. James I was held captive in England for eighteen years before he was released by Henry VI on payment of a £40,000 ransom (nearly £19 million today).
- After 1407 the French were in no position to threaten Henry IV because of political infighting at court. Owing to the weak rule of the mentally ill Charles VI, the kingdom descended into civil war between two rival groups: the Duke of Orléans (Armagnac faction) and the Duke of Burgundy (Burgundian faction).
- By 1408 the English nobility had been cowed into submission, and there were to be no more conspiracies or rebellions after the defeat of the Earl of Northumberland at Bramham Moor.
- By 1410 the Glyndŵr rebellion was all but over. Although the Welsh continued to fight the English using guerrilla tactics for another two or three years, they no longer posed a threat to the English crown.
Death and succession

Despite Henry's achievements, the stresses and strains of ruling such a dangerous and unstable kingdom had taken their toll on his health. A sick Henry withdrew from public life and he invested his son and heir, Prince Henry, with the power to rule the kingdom. For nearly two years Prince Henry ruled with the assistance of a group of close advisers, chief among them was Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester. Winchester suggested that, given the seriousness of the king's debilitating illness, the prince should persuade his father to abdicate. When Henry IV heard this he roused himself from his sickbed and, in November 1411, returned to take charge of the government. Prince Henry and Bishop Beaufort were dismissed from the royal council and replaced by men trusted by the king. Henry ruled for a further fourteen months before he finally succumbed to his illness and he died in March 1413. Shortly before he died Henry IV confirmed Prince Henry, the eldest of his four sons, as his successor.

Summary diagram: The troubled reign of Henry IV

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Chapter summary

England's relationship with Europe developed significantly during the fifteenth century. Trade, diplomacy and war dominated this developing relationship, especially with France, which witnessed a century-long conflict for control of the kingdom. The usurpation of Richard II was a significant event that ended the succession of the direct line of Plantagenet kings. The usurper, Henry IV, endured a troubled reign. Besides complaints from Parliament over his extravagant spending, Henry endured a decade-long rebellion (1400–10) by the Welsh under their charismatic leader Owain Glyndŵr. The most serious opposition to his kingship came from a number of powerful noble families who wished to remove him from the throne. The Percy Earls of Northumberland and the Mortimer Earls of March kept the flame of rebellion alive in England between 1403 and 1408. To add to his troubles, Henry also suffered periodic bouts of ill health; from 1410 he ceased to rule effectively after a series of strokes disabled him. Yet, in spite of the considerable obstacles placed before him, Henry IV succeeded in firmly establishing the Lancastrian dynasty on the English throne by the time of his death in 1413.