

The Lancastrian Claim to the Throne

JOHN ASHDOWN-HILL

The first clue leading me towards this article came to my attention several years ago, in the words of Eustace Chapuys, a gentleman from the Low Countries and ambassador from Emperor Charles V to the court of Henry VIII. The emperor was the nephew of Catherine of Aragon, and one of Chapuys' chief interests was to defend the queen in the face of Henry VIII's annulment of his marriage to her. In an interesting and illuminating letter written to the emperor on 16 December 1533 Chapuys, a well-informed diplomat, made reference to Edward IV's marriage to Lady Eleanor Talbot. He began with implicit criticism of Henry VIII, praising the virtues of Margaret Plantagenet, Countess of Salisbury (the daughter of George, Duke of Clarence) and her conspicuous loyalty to Catherine's daughter, Mary, whom the king had set aside as a bastard. Then, warming to his theme, he continued:

You cannot imagine the grief of all the people at this abominable government. They are so transported with indignation at what passes, that they complain that your Majesty takes no steps in it, and I am told by many respectable people that they would be glad to see a fleet come hither in your name . . . [for] they say you have a better title than the present King, who only claims by his mother, who was declared by sentence of the bishop of Bath [Stillington] a bastard, because Edward had espoused another wife before the mother of Elizabeth of York.¹

¹ *Letters and Papers HVIII*, vol. 6, p. 618. This is not the only occasion on which Chapuys mentioned Edward IV's precontract and its consequences for Elizabeth Woodville's children. He was unequivocal that the effect of Edward's marriage with Lady Eleanor was that his children by Elizabeth were bastards. On 3 November 1534, seeking to clarify to his master the claim to the English throne of the Pole family (descendants of the duke of Clarence) he explained 'that Richard III declared by definitive sentence of the bishop of Bath that the daughters of king Edward, of whom the king's mother was the eldest, were bastards, by reason of a precontract made by Edward with another lady before he married their mother', *ibid*, vol. 7, p. 519. Chapuys was, of course, quite correct: the *Titulus Regius* of 1484 set out the fact of Edward IV's marriage with Lady Eleanor clearly, and pronounced that the 'pretensed marriage, as all England hath cause soo to say, made betwixt the said King Edward and Elizabeth, some tyme wife to Sir John Grey, Knight' was invalid. The act concluded 'that the said King Edward during his lif, and the seid Elizabeth lived together sinfully and dampnably in adultery. . . . Also it appeareth evidently and followeth that all th'Issue and Children of the seid King Edward been Bastards and unable to inherit or to clayme anything by Inheritance, by the Lawe and Custome of England', *RP*, vol. 6, 1472–1503, pp. 240–241. It was precisely because the *Titulus Regius* established the bastard

Chapuy's motive for bringing up this piece of ancient history more than 60 years after Lady Eleanor's death was to disparage the Tudor claim to the English throne. Edward IV's precontract with the Lady Eleanor made all his children by Elizabeth Woodville bastards and incapable of inheriting or transmitting rights to the throne, including, as Chapuy's observed, Henry VIII's mother, Elizabeth of York. It was thus Henry VIII's maternal, Yorkist, inheritance upon which Chapuy was casting doubt. In his letter he did not mention Henry's paternal – Lancastrian – claim. In fact, he dismissed it entirely, going so far as to remark that Henry's claim to the throne was only through his mother. However, he included in his letter the curious observation that many people considered that his master, Emperor Charles V, actually had a better right to the English throne than Henry. At first sight this assertion may look like nonsense – just diplomatic flattery, perhaps. In point of fact, however, his statement proves to be well-founded, as I shall demonstrate.

My second starting point is an object which is to be found at Bosworth. In the battlefield exhibition centre, there is displayed on the wall a genealogical chart which purports to show the rival claims to the throne of the houses of York and Lancaster. Similar family trees abound in publications on the so-called 'Wars of the Roses', exhibiting varying degrees of accuracy, but the Bosworth family tree is a particularly misleading example, and it has occasioned protests, albeit so far to no avail.

The problem with the Bosworth genealogy is that it shows only two lines of descent from Edward III: the Lancastrian line, springing from his fourth son, John of Gaunt, and the Yorkist line, springing from his fifth son, Edmund of Langley. The claim to the throne which Richard, Duke of York, laid before parliament in 1460 was based not upon his paternal descent from Edmund of Langley, Duke of York, but upon his maternal descent *via* the house of Mortimer from the third son, Lionel of Antwerp, Duke of Clarence.² By omitting this vital fact, the Bosworth genealogy appears to give the house of Lancaster a better claim than the house of York, whereas in the matter of seniority of descent from Edward III there can be no doubt that the house of York, by

status of Edward's children by Elizabeth that Henry VII, whose own claim to the throne was so weak, hastened to have it repealed without allowing it to be quoted (except for its innocuous opening 14 words – just sufficient to identify it) before he married Edward's eldest daughter. For the same reason he ordered it to be 'brente and utterly destroyed', forbidding anyone to keep a copy, 'so that all things said and remembred in the said Bill and Acte thereof maie be for ever out of remembraunce, and also forgott. And over thys be it ordeined and enacted . . . that thys Acte, ne any thing contained in the same, be anie way hurtfull or prejudicall to the Acte of stablishment of the Crowne of England to the Kinge [Henry VII] and to the Heyres of hys body begotten'. *RP*, vol. 6, p. 289. Chapuy's letters prove that Henry VII's attempt to obscure the truth had failed.

² J.S. Davies, ed., *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI*, London 1856, p. 101, gives the agreement between Richard, Duke of York, and Henry VI, setting out York's claim in detail; for the full text *RP*, vol. 5, 1439–1467/8, p. 375.

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virtue of its maternal, Mortimer inheritance, had the superior claim. The Yorkists were strict legitimists:

Legitimacy – the doctrine that the crown can descend only to one man at any given time and that this succession is determined by primogeniture – was the centre of the Yorkist position.³

Most published royal pedigrees better the Bosworth example by giving the Yorkist claim to the throne correctly, but few people have thought to question whether such genealogies do justice to the Lancastrian claim. Recently I have come to realise that they do not, which means that not only does the Bosworth family tree misrepresent the Yorkists, it also misrepresents the Lancastrians, as do many published pedigrees.

The problem is that normally the published family trees showing the rival Yorkist and Lancastrian claims start with Edward III. I had never thought to question this. Most students of the Yorkist period probably tend to concentrate upon the events of the second half of the fifteenth century. But of course these events were dependent upon what had gone before. The rivalry for the throne had its source and origin in the deposition of Richard II in 1399. My enlightenment on the matter of the Lancastrian claim to the throne only came when I looked up Henry IV in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, where I found the following: the scene is set in parliament, on 30th September 1399. Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster, banished from the kingdom by his cousin, Richard II, has returned without permission. Supporters have flocked to him, deserting the king, who has himself surrendered to his cousin, and parliament is meeting to decide what shall now be done:

[The duke of] Lancaster was in his place, and the throne was left empty. Richard's resignation was accepted, and his deposition voted. The duke then read an English declaration, claiming the crown on the grounds of his being in the right line of descent from Henry III.⁴

The last words struck me as very odd. Why Henry III? Of course Henry Bolingbroke was descended from Henry III, but so were lots of other people. Why should Henry IV want to claim the throne by right of descent from his father's grandfather's grandfather – a king who had died more than 120 years earlier – when everyone knew that his father's father had been the late king Edward III. If the *DNB* was correct, whatever could have been the point of going back so many generations?

³ G.R. Elton, *England under the Tudors*, London 1955, p. 18; the Lancastrians were also legitimists, however, or at least maintained that appearance, though their interpretation of the dynastic data was different.

⁴ *DNB*, vol. 26, p. 35. It was 'the illicit joys of fiction', in the form of Brenda Honeyman's novel, *Harry the King*, London 1971, p. 20, which sent me to the *DNB* to look up Henry IV's claim to the throne, which she details correctly in her book.

I sought confirmation from the parliamentary records, hoping to see what exactly Henry IV had said and they showed that the *DNB* was correct. Parliament had accepted Henry IV as king in virtue of the fact that he was 'desended by right line of blood coming from the good lord Henry III'.⁵ A contemporary chronicle confirms what occurred in parliament:

Thanne aros the said duke of Lancastre and of Hereford, and blissid him, and redde in a bill how he descendid and cam doun lynealli of Kyng Harri the sone of King Johan and was the nexte heir male of his blod, and for that cause he chalanged the crowne; and alle the lordis and comunez assentid therto.⁶

I was still intrigued, however. I noticed that both the *DNB* and the parliamentary records insisted on the fact that Henry was in 'the *right* line of descent', which seemed to imply that there was also a *wrong* line of descent from Henry III. Also I was no clearer as to why Henry IV had felt it necessary to go back to such a remote ancestor to make his point. The key clearly lay somewhere in the documentation surrounding the deposition of Richard II, and Henry Bolingbroke's accession. So I searched further and lighted upon Adam of Usk.

Adam was a chronicler (1377–1421), who lived through the reigns of Richard II and the first two Lancastrian kings and had absolutely no doubt as to who was the rightful king. His chronicle is highly sympathetic to Richard and he viewed Henry IV's accession as a clear case of usurpation. Adam had known Richard personally and had been with him during some of his imprisonment. He had also heard, first hand, some of the debating amongst the victorious Lancastrian supporters as to who should replace Richard. Adam gives the following account of what took place in 1399:

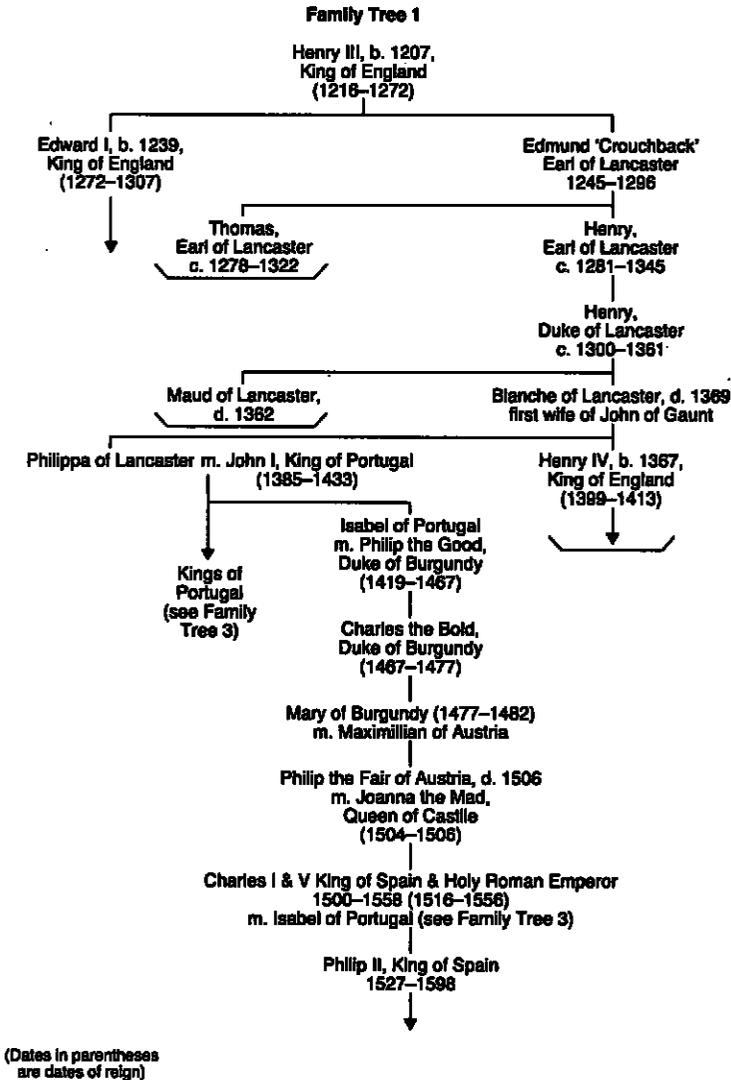
One day in a council . . . the point was raised by some that by the right of descent from the person of Edmund, Earl of Lancaster (they declared that the same Edmund was the eldest son of king Henry III, but that on account of his mental weakness, his birthright had been set aside and his younger brother, Edward, preferred in his place) Richard's succession in the direct line was barred. As to this, see the history in the pedigree, known throughout England, that Edward was first-born son of king Henry, and that after him, and before Edmund, Margaret, who was afterwards queen of Scotland, was born to the same king.⁷

⁵ Spelling modernised; the full text reads: 'In the name of Fadir, Son, and Holy Gost, I Henry of Lancastr' chalenge yis Rewme of Yngland and the Corone with all y^e membres and y^e appurtenances, als I y^e am desendit be right lyne of the Blode comyng fro the gude lorde Kyng Henry therde, and thorghe yat ryght yat God of his grace hath sent me, with helpe of my Kyn and of my Frenedes to recover it: the whiche Rewme was in poynt to be undone for defaut of Governance and undoyng of the gode Lawes', *RP*, vol. 3, pp. 422–423.

⁶ Davies, *English Chronicle*, p. 18.

⁷ A. R. Myers, ed., *English Historical Documents* vol. 4, London 1969, p. 180. Adam does not mention that Edmund's 'weakness' was not sufficient to prevent him from claiming, with his father's support, another crown: Sicily.

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The Lancastrian claim to the throne put before parliament by Henry IV in 1399 is set out in Family Tree 1. As this shows, the Bosworth family tree – and all the usual published family trees which show the Lancastrian claim to the throne as being based on Henry IV's descent from Edward III – is completely and utterly misleading. The Lancastrian claim of Henry had nothing to do with descent from John of Gaunt or Edward III. Like Richard, Duke of York, subsequently, Henry claimed the throne not by virtue of his paternal, but of his maternal descent, his mother having been Blanche of Lancaster, the great-granddaughter and ultimately sole heiress of Edmund Crouchback, Earl

of Lancaster. Henry IV was further asserting that Edmund Crouchback had been the eldest son and legitimate heir of his father, Henry III, but that he had been passed over because of his infirmities. Henry was not interested in his own, or anyone else's, descent from his grandfather, Edward III, because his official view as stated before parliament was that Edward III, his father, Edward II, and his grandfather, Edward I, not to mention his grandson, Richard II, were all impostors and usurpers.⁸ Adam of Usk dismissed this claim as rubbish, and it does indeed appear to have been without foundation, for in his chronicle William de Rishanger, a contemporary of Edmund Crouchback, refers to him as *Dominus Edmundus, filius regis junior*.⁹ On 16 October 1460, when Richard, Duke of York, came to lay his claim to the throne before parliament, he showed he was well aware of the basis on which Henry IV had claimed the kingship, and he took great pains to give the lie to the Lancastrian version of the royal pedigree, protesting against the 'violent intrusyonne of kyng Harry the iiiijth, whyche unryghtefully, wrongfully, and tyrannously usurped the crowne', and declaring:

that the ryghte noble and worthy prince Harry kyng of Englonde the iij^de had issew and lawfully gate Edward hys furst begoten sone, borne at Westmynstre the xv kalendis of Juylle in the vygyl of Seynt Marc and Marcelliane, the yere of oure Lorde M^l.cc.xxxix (1239).

To make his point clear the duke had gone on to observe pointedly that Edmund Crouchback was King Henry's 'seconde gotten sone which was born on Seint Marcell day, the yere of oure Lord Mccclv (1245)'.¹⁰

To suppose that Henry Bolingbroke simply invented the story would be doing him an injustice. The story came in very handy, but it seems he did not invent it. I have not yet been able to determine where and when the story that Edmund Crouchback was the true heir of Henry III originated, but it had been

⁸ It is interesting to review in the present context the royal arms as borne by Henry and his descendants. The arms of Henry III had been England only (gules, three leopards passant guardant or). Not until Edward III were these quartered 2 and 3 with France 1 and 4, reflecting Edward's claim to France. Richard II impaled Edward III's arms with the supposed arms of Edward the Confessor. Henry IV and his heirs dropped Richard II's innovation, but used the arms as borne by Edward III, not Henry III, despite the fact that ostensibly they viewed Edward as a usurper. They also maintained Edward III's claim to France, which they could only have inherited through him, from his mother, Isabel of France. Yet they knew they did not represent Edward III's senior line of descent and must have known they could not have inherited his claim to the French throne. In short, the Lancastrian position is full of inconsistencies.

⁹ 'Lord Edmund, the king's younger son', J.O. Halliwell, ed., *The Chronicle of William de Rishanger*, London 1840, p. 118. Rishanger (1250–1322), a Benedictine monk of St Alban's Abbey and historiographer to Henry III, was well-placed to know the facts. The correct dates of birth of both Edmund and Edward I are in Family Tree 1.

¹⁰ Davies, *English Chronicle*, pp. 99, 100; *RP*, vol. 5, 1439–1467/8, p. 375.

heard earlier than 1399. The *Complete Peerage* states that 'there was a contemporary tradition that Edmund was born before his brother Edward',¹¹ but unfortunately fails to make clear whether 'contemporary' means contemporary with Edmund himself, or contemporary with John of Gaunt. It dismisses the claim as roundly as did Adam of Usk and William de Rishanger, stating that '[Edward] was in point of fact six and a half years [Edmund's] senior'. It goes on to recount a

contention in Parliament on this subject in 1394 between John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and the earl of March. The duke moved that his own son Henry (afterwards Henry IV), who was in right of his mother, heir of line of the said Edmund, should be accepted as heir to the throne. A motion which treated the then king and the three Edwards, his predecessors, as impostors'.¹²

Richard II must have been furious! Although he himself had accepted the claim of the Mortimers to be next in line to the throne, he could not have relished the assumption that he would fail to produce progeny of his own, which lay behind the debate.¹³ When his uncle publicly told him, in effect, that he was an impostor he must have been nearly apoplectic. It is hardly surprising to learn that he forbade any further discussion of the topic

So far I have not traced any earlier references to the story of Edmund Crouchback and with the exception of Thomas, second Earl of Lancaster, executed in 1322 for rebellion against Edward II, the successive holders of the earldom (later dukedom) of Lancaster down to 1361 seem to have been loyal subjects of their cousins, the reigning monarchs.¹⁴ Nevertheless, if John of Gaunt was talking about this tale in the reign of Richard II, Henry IV could well have been brought up on it, and we should not overlook the possibility that he believed it.

Either way, we are faced with the fact that the three Lancastrian kings based their claim to the throne not on their descent from Edward III *via* John of Gaunt, but from Henry III *via* John of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche of Lancaster. Although most compilers of rival Yorkist and Lancastrian geneal-

¹¹ *CP*, vol. 7, p. 378, n. b.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The subject may have been a delicate one: despite his two marriages, or rather because both marriages remained childless, Richard's sexuality has been regarded as equivocal, and the nature of his friendship with young men such as Robert de Vere and Thomas Mowbray has been questioned. He had acknowledged Roger Mortimer as his heir in October 1385, *DNB*, vol. 29, p. 425.

¹⁴ Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, was beheaded for leading the opposition to Edward II's favourites, the Despensers. There is no indication he ever thought of claiming his cousin's throne. His younger brother, Henry, although not executed, had also opposed Edward II over the Despensers. He was allowed to succeed to the title, however, and was later appointed chief guardian of the boy king Edward III *par comun assent de tut le realm*. G.J. Augier, ed., *Croniques de London depuis l'an 44 Hen. III jusqu'à l'an 17 Edward III*, London 1844, pp. 62, 43-44, 56.

ogies seem to have ignored this important fact completely, in some quarters it has long been well-known.¹⁵ Setting aside for the moment all question of the rights and wrongs of the Lancastrian claim, let us turn to the Tudor usurper who overthrew Richard III, and consider where his claim to the throne stands. Henry VII stated in parliament that the basis of his claim to the throne was twofold – by right of conquest and by right of blood. As the *Crowland Chronicle* put it:

In hoc Parlamento confirmatum est Regnum domino Regi, tanquam sibi debitum non ex uno sed ex multis titulis, ut non tam sanguinis quam victoriae bellicae conquaestusque jure rectissime populo Anglicano praesidere credatur.¹⁶

Henry VII was well-advised not to depend exclusively on his Lancastrian claim, for it is widely recognised that this was very weak – based upon his mother's descent from John of Gaunt's legitimised Beaufort offspring. Argument about it has always tended to centre around whether or not the Beauforts acquired, when legitimised, rights to the throne, and this point is complicated, because in fact Richard II, who originally legitimised them, did not exclude this possibility, but Henry IV, who later re-enacted Richard's legitimisation, specifically did exclude the right to the throne.¹⁷

What now emerges clearly is that neither Henry VII nor his Beaufort ancestors could have inherited any Lancastrian claim to the throne as they were not, of course, descended from Blanche of Lancaster, but from John of Gaunt by his mistress, later his third wife, Catherine Roet, better known under the name of her first husband, as Catherine Swynford. There is, in fact, no

¹⁵ Elton, *England*, p. 18: 'Henry IV, in 1399, had put forward a claim compounded of the (false) assertion that he represented the true line of succession, the proof of divine favour contained in his actual victory, and the duty of removing a lawless monarch like Richard II'.

¹⁶ 'In this Parliament the king's royal authority was confirmed as due him not by one but by many titles so that he may be considered to rule rightfully over the English people not only by right of blood but of victory in battle and of conquest', N. Pronay and J. Cox, eds, *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459–1486*, London 1986, pp. 194–95. Despite his 'many titles', the justifications for Henry's accession which the chronicler adduces are only two: inheritance and victory. The act of parliament which formally vested the royal power in Henry was actually very short and vague (unlike the detailed act which set out the claim of Richard III, see n. 1, above). Henry VII's parliament, having no good case to put, simply said 'by auctoritee of thys present Parliament . . . the Inheretance of the Crounes of the Roialmes of England and France . . . be, rest, remaine and abide in the most Royall persone of our now Sovereaigne Lord King Henry the VIIth, and in the heires of hys body lawfully comen, perpetually with the grace of God so to endure, and in noon other'. *RP*, vol. 6, p. 270.

¹⁷ Of course, in Henry IV's eyes, as we can now clearly see, his Beaufort half-siblings may have had little or no right to the throne in any case, because they were not descended from his mother, who, as Henry contended, was the only rightful heiress of the legitimate royal line.

way that Henry VII could legitimately claim to be the heir of the Lancastrian kings. He profited from the fact that he was closely related to Henry VI in another way, his father having been the king's half-brother, and his first parliament made reference to this relationship when referring to 'the most Blessed and Christian Prince Kinge Herrie the VI, your uncle'.¹⁸ This connection, based upon a common descent from Henry VI's mother, Katherine of Valois, conveyed no claim to the English throne.

If Henry VII had no Lancastrian claim to the throne, one might be tempted to suppose that this claim to the English throne became extinct following the childless death of Henry VI, but there were, and indeed are, rather a lot of Lancastrian claimants, all with superior rights to those of Henry VII. Henry VI was the last living legitimate male descendant of Henry IV in the male line, and when he died without living issue, that line of descent came to an end. But Family Tree 1 shows that Henry IV had a sister, Philippa, who became queen of Portugal. All the subsequent Portuguese kings have been of her blood line and inherited the best claim to be the heirs of the house of Lancaster. Today their most senior line would be represented by the house of Orléans-Bragança, pretenders to the imperial throne of Brazil, closely followed by the house of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, pretenders to the Portuguese throne.¹⁹ However, a good claim also passed, *via* Philippa of Lancaster's daughter, the Infanta Isabel of Portugal, wife of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, to her son, Charles the Bold, whose daughter and heiress, Mary of Burgundy, was the grandmother of Emperor Charles V.

This takes us back to the letter written in the 1530s by the emperor's ambassador, Chapuys, in which he asserted that his master had a better claim to the English throne than Henry VIII – a claim which, from a Lancastrian point of view, now proves to be justified. We can be certain that the claim advanced by his ambassador on his behalf came as no surprise to the emperor. His ancestors of the house of Burgundy were well aware of their Lancastrian heritage, for on 17 June 1471 Isabel of Portugal, dowager Duchess of Burgundy, had formally registered her claim as the heir of her cousin, Henry VI, in respect of the English succession.²⁰

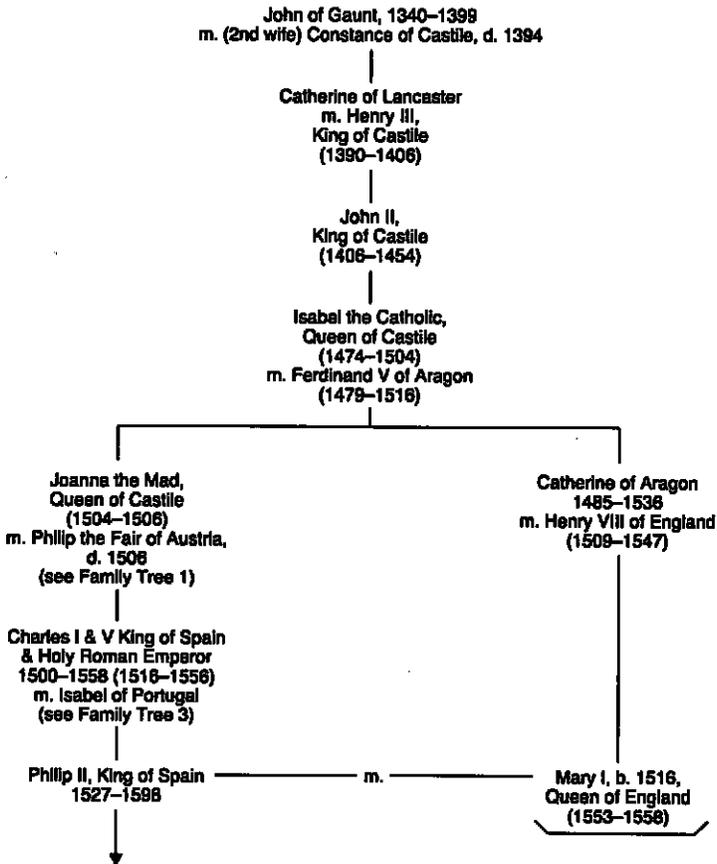
¹⁸ *RP*, vol. 6, p. 280.

¹⁹ J.E. Morby, *Handbook of Kings and Queens*, Ware 1989, pp. 120–21, p. 243; M.C. Clawsey, 'York and Lancaster, 1588', *The Ricardian* vol. 3, no. 46, September 1974, p. 16; W.K. Norman, 'Genealogical Complexities, part 2', *The Ricardian* vol. 3, no. 49, June 1975, pp. 18–19; A.H. de Oliveira Marques, *History of Portugal*, 2 vols, London 1972, vol. 1, p. 129; Burke's *Royal Families of the World*, vol. 1, London 1977.

²⁰ BL Add. Charter 8043. The charter is mentioned in *Prince Henry the Navigator and Portuguese Maritime Enterprise*, catalogue of an exhibition at the British Museum, September – October 1960, p. 2. The timing of the dowager duchess in making her claim in mid June 1471 is logical, for she would then just have received the news that Henry VI had met his end in late May, but it is a little odd that she should at that time have represented herself as the legitimate Lancastrian heiress. Although in due course the direct male line of the Portuguese royal family was to become extinct, leading, for a time, to disputes

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Family Tree 2



(Dates in parentheses
are dates of reign)

Had there been no descendants of Henry IV's sister, Philippa of Lancaster, Queen of Portugal, the Lancastrian claim of Henry IV would have died out with Henry VI, but this would not have helped Henry VII. His Lancastrian claim, as we have seen, was non-existent, and even if we charitably assume that he was labouring under a misapprehension and thought – as apparently many modern historians still think – that the Lancastrian claim was based upon descent from John of Gaunt himself, rather than upon descent from his first wife, that would still not improve the Tudors' chances. Family Tree 2

among its descendants in female lines, and although Isabel's eldest brother, King Duarte, had died in 1438, her nephew, Alfonso V was still living and reigning in Portugal in 1471 and he was then the legitimate Lancastrian heir.

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shows that, in addition to Philippa, his daughter by his first wife, Blanche of Lancaster, John of Gaunt also had other legitimate offspring: his daughter, Catherine of Lancaster, whose mother was John of Gaunt's second wife, Constance of Castile. While she lacked the key descent from Blanche of Lancaster, which conveyed the Lancastrian claim to the throne, Catherine was indubitably John of Gaunt's legitimate child and as such she did inherit from him a claim – of sorts – to the English throne which did not place her very high in the order of succession, but was untainted and indisputable, unlike that of her Beaufort half-sister and brothers. Catherine's line of descent ultimately coalesces with a line of descendants of her better placed half-sister, Philippa, and leads to the house of Habsburg and Emperor Charles V.

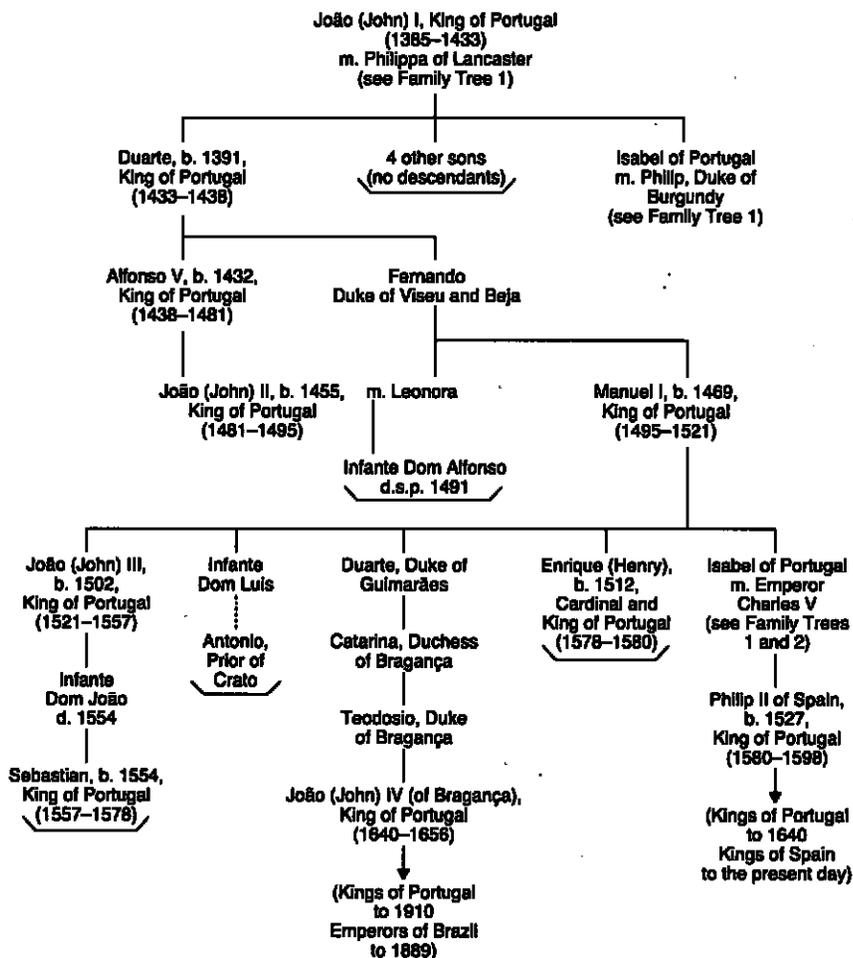
Charles V never actually asserted his claim to the English throne, and the fleet which Chapuys had proposed to him in 1533 never set out for England in *his* name. However, it is interesting to note that his son was King Philip II of Spain, husband of Queen Mary I and, for a while, king consort of England. In 1588 Philip launched his Armada against England, seeking to make good his claim to the English throne, and still hoping, perhaps, that the welcome from the people which Chapuys had promised to his father fifty-five years previously, would be accorded to him. Philip's claim was not, as is sometimes supposed, by virtue of his earlier marriage to Mary Tudor. He believed that Mary, Queen of Scots, executed the previous year, had acknowledged him as the rightful heir to the English crown,²¹ and he must have known that he was a descendant of the house of Lancaster on his father's side. Moreover, through his mother (another Isabel of Portugal) he had acquired a claim to the Portuguese throne which he had recently (in 1580) advanced successfully. As the descendant of Philippa of Lancaster on both his father's and his mother's side, and given that in 1588 he was actually the reigning king of Portugal as well as king of Spain, Philip had good cause to see himself as *the* legitimate Lancastrian heir to the English crown, and one earlier writer has consequently suggested that the defeat of the Spanish Armada was, in truth, the last battle of the 'Wars of the Roses'.²² Family Tree 3 shows the Portuguese royal pedigree and sets out Philip II's maternal descent from Philippa of Lancaster.

There is, finally, one other fascinating and delightful fact which emerges from the family trees. It can clearly be seen that, from a Lancastrian point of view, at least, Queen Catherine of Aragon had a claim to the English throne which was rather superior to that of her husband, King Henry VIII, since she was at least a legitimate descendant of John of Gaunt. This is, I think, a superb piece of irony. It may also partly explain why Henry VII had so eagerly sought marriage ties for his *parvenu* dynasty with the offspring of the 'Catholic Kings'.

²¹ A. Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, London 1969, p. 645, who states that Philip was in error in believing that Mary, Queen of Scots, had designated him as her heir, but in the present context that is of no importance. Philip clearly *believed* that Mary had called on him to assert his rights *and* that he had a valid claim to the throne.

²² Clawsey, 'York and Lancaster, 1588'.

Family Tree 3



(Dates in parentheses are dates of reign)