

## **Additional Dramaturgy for Part II of Henry VI**

### **Significant Characters, Events, and Places**

#### **Cade's Rebellion**

Jack Cade's rebellion was a peasant revolt against the government of England in April – July 1450. The revolt began in Kent, in the southeastern part of the country, and eventually marched on London. Its leader, Jack Cade, along with approximately 5,000 people, demanded a reform of the government's administration and the removal of those in government who were seen as responsible for corruption, abuse of power, and military failures in France. Kent, located on the coast, was experiencing attacks by French armies, and citizens felt unprotected and abandoned by the crown and government. Although the rebels were mostly peasants, they were joined by shopkeepers, tradesmen, and some local landowners. However, once the rebel forces entered London, they began to loot, and Londoners fought back, finally expelling them from the city in a battle on London Bridge. Jack Cade escaped, but was later caught by Alexander Iden, who would later become High Sheriff of Kent. He was wounded while being captured by Iden and died before reaching London for trial. The rest of the rebels were pardoned by the king and allowed to return to Kent. Jack Cade, about whom very little is known, was a distant relative of Richard, Duke of York through the Mortimer line, and Cade took the name "John Mortimer" as an alias during the rebellion, attempting to align himself genealogically with King Henry VI's primary rival. This connection also fed rumors that the Duke of York conspired with Cade to provoke a rebellion to undermine the King's authority. Cade's Rebellion, historically, also happened nearly five years before the battle of St. Albans, rather than shortly before it.

#### **Cade's Rebellion and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381**

In Henry VI Part II, Shakespeare conflates Cade's rebellion with an earlier rebellion: the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, and specifically the descriptions of it in Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548) and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587). This Peasants' Revolt was a large uprising across much of England, largely provoked by social instability related to the Black Death throughout the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century and popular resentment of the high taxation instituted to fund the Hundred Years War. The conflict was sparked when a royal official, John Bampton, attempted to collect unpaid taxes in a town in Essex, which led to violence that quickly spread as far as the southwest of England, and was supported by peasants, as well as tradespeople, artisans, and local rural officials. The rebels sought an end to the practice of serfdom, a decrease in taxation, and the removal of officials they considered corrupt and incompetent. Several details from Hall and Holinshed's descriptions of this rebellion are included in Act 4's scenes depicting Cade's Rebellion –including, according to the Oxford Shakespeare edition, a proposal for a moneyless society and the idea of putting people to death for being literate.

#### **Dame Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester and Charges of Necromancy**

Dame Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, was the second wife of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. In about 1422 Eleanor became a lady-in-waiting to Jacqueline d'Hainault, the first wife of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. In 1425 Eleanor became his mistress, and in 1428, the Duke's marriage to Jacqueline was annulled and he married Eleanor. In c. 1441, Eleanor consulted astrologers Thomas Southwell and Roger Bolingbroke to try to divine the

future, and they predicted that Henry VI would suffer a life-threatening illness in July or August 1441. Eventually, rumors of this “necromancy” reached the king and palace authorities, who interrogated Southwell, Bolingbroke and Eleanor’s “confessor” John Home. The palace then arrested Southwell and Bolingbroke on charges of “treasonable necromancy.” The astrologers named Eleanor as the instigator, and she quickly sought sanctuary in Westminster Abbey, where she was questioned by a panel of religious officials. She denied most of the charges but confessed to receiving potions to help her conceive. She and her conspirators were eventually found guilty; her conspirators were executed, but Eleanor was treated far more leniently. Beginning in 1442, Eleanor was imprisoned at a succession of castles, before being eventually relocated to the Isle of Man.

### **Battle of St. Albans**

The First Battle of St Albans took place on 22nd May 1455, marking the beginning of the Wars of the Roses. Richard Duke of York and Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick assembled their private armies and marched south to confront King Henry VI at St Albans, a town about fifty miles (two days journey) north of London. The Lancastrian army, fighting on the side of the King, was under the command of the Duke of Buckingham and consisted of about 2,000 men. After a failed attempt at negotiation, the slightly larger Yorkist army began an assault on the town. Eventually, a small force of Yorkists under the Earl of Warwick was able to surreptitiously make its way through side streets to the center of town, where they were able to launch an assault on the main body of Henry’s army, who soon realized they were outnumbered and abandoned their posts, fleeing the town. Warwick’s men succeeded in wounding the king, who was taken back to London by York and Warwick. York was restored as Lord Protector of England, and Queen Margaret and Henry’s young son Edward went into exile.

### **Glossary**

**Alderliefest:** most beloved

**Conjuro te:** I conjur you, I summon you