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At war with the French: the Hundred Years Transcript

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THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR 1337-1453

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L'HOMME ARMÉ

(Anonymous - 15th century)

L'homme armé doibt on douter.
On a fait partout crier
Que chascun se vingue armer
D'un haubregon de fer
L'homme armé doibt on douter.

The armed man is to be feared.
Everywhere has the cry gone out,
That each one should arm himself
With a coat of armour.
The armed man is to be feared.

I am beginning this lecture with one of the most popular songs of the fifteenth century, a song so widely known that its melody acted as a theme for masses written by composers of several countries. For me it conveys terror, and serves to emphasise the context of my lecture this evening: the terror felt not only by soldiers, but by helpless civilians caught up in the war, particularly in the lands which now make up France. But the fact that this song crossed national boundaries also emphasises that this was not just an Anglo-French war: rather, it embroiled other territories, and even the papacy. But that having been said, the focus this evening is on the repeated attempts of the kings of England to safeguard and then to expand their lands in French territory; to claim the crown of France; to fight to retain these gains; and the final French victory in driving the English as rulers out of France for good.

The course of the war is unusually complicated. Therefore, I will set out, briefly, the background to the conflict, the resources of the two sides, and the main military weapons each had to hand. First of all, the background is the gain and loss of land in France by English kings during the previous three centuries. William the Conqueror, of course, was also the Duke of Normandy. By the time of Henry II, who reigned from 1154 to 1189, the king of England controlled Normandy, Maine, Anjou, Touraine, Poitou and the duchy of Aquitaine - in short, the so-called 'Angevine empire' stretched from the Channel to the Pyrenees. Succeeding kings, however, especially King John, lost Normandy, Maine, Anjou, Touraine and Poitou. Henry III, who reigned from 1216 to 1272, in 1259 surrendered his claim for the lost lands in exchange for confirmation by the French king, Louis IX (St Louis), of his tenure of Bordeaux, Bayonne and Gascony; but crucial for the future, he in turn confirmed his acceptance of the king of France as his liege lord with regard to these possessions: this meant that for these lands, the king of England was henceforward the vassal of the king of France.

A very brief word about what this meant. In the hierarchical feudal system, there were two main types of homage. Simple homage would be given to any man from whom one held land, so that it was possible to be a vassal of more than one man. Liege homage, however, was different: it overrode all other obligations to all other lords. The king was always a subject's liege lord. The subject had to give military aid whenever it was demanded, and he could not give any help to, nor act with, his liege lord's enemy. In the case of the king of England, for his lands in France, the king of France was his liege lord. This relationship would be the direct and immediate cause of war.

The resources of the two sides were distinctly unequal. In the first place, by about 1328, the French population at 12.25 million was more than twice England's population of 6 million. This meant that the French had a much greater potential for larger armies, as well as a much larger tax base. Secondly, the English had to bring their troops over the Channel, often a distinctly unsafe voyage, thanks to pirates as well as to enemy fleets; the French had the advantage of being on home territory. The French had their own navy, as well as access to the Genoese navy; the English, on the other hand, relied on requisitioning

merchant ships, which were then provided with fighting platforms and defensive structures - and when the ships went to war, they lost out on the wool trade on which England greatly depended. As for the money required to finance war: at the beginning of the war, the French king could finance his armies primarily from his lands, which brought in 26 tonnes of silver per annum, in addition to which he had the right to levy a tax for defence without the need to consult with any assembly; the English king, however, had only 5 tonnes of pure silver each year from his lands, and he was thus dependent on taxation. The lay subsidy, which was a tax on moveable property, required the consent of the Commons. This was not necessarily a bad thing, because war tended to stimulate national unity, and the king could use the meeting of the Commons to publicise the causes of the war and mobilise support. But nevertheless, he had to ask, and support was not always forthcoming. Finally, because of the Scottish alliance with France, the English needed to keep a defensive military presence near Scotland, and this lessened the number of soldiers available for fighting across the Channel.

Finally, before turning to the events of the war, I want to say something about English military resources and tactics. First of all - as emphasised in the song - there were the men-at-arms. These referred to mounted, armoured, soldiers, who might, but need not, be knights. In the 1340s, they were still armoured mainly in 'chain mail', which were interlinked metal rings. A shirt of this mail - which weighed thirty pounds and was carried entirely by the shoulders - was worn over a padded tunic, covered the man-at-arms from neck to knees, and was topped with a conical helmet either open or covered with a visor. He had steel breastplates, plates on his arms, and articulated foot-guards over mail stockings. On top of this, he wore a short linen surcoat. By the early 15th century, however, chain mail had been largely replaced by plate, which could weigh up to seventy pounds. Men-at-arms provided mobility. They might act as cavalry, particularly useful for charging the line of the enemy or chasing those enemies fleeing a battle, but increasingly, men-at-arms rode into battle, dismounted and, drawn up in ranks, fought on foot. During the 14th century, men-at-arms made up a significant portion of the *chevauchée*, which I'll talk about in a moment. The French also had their shoulders and limbs covered by plate, and their horses were also armoured. The basic weapons of both the English and the French in the 14th century were a long straight sword on the left and a short dagger on the right. On horseback, a ten-foot lance was carried, and a small shield; some also carried a short battleaxe. On foot, the principal weapon was usually the pole-axe, a five- to six-foot pole with an axe head on the top, supplemented in the early 15th century by weapons which smashed, such as maces or battleaxes. It is clear why *l'homme armé* struck such terror.

The second, and very important, element was the archer. There were two types, mounted and foot. The mounted archer, carrying a long-bow and a lance, was first found in English armies in 1334. Indeed, their ability to achieve rapid movements not only in battle but before it, and their ability to act in concert with men-at-arms, arguably made them the most important element in the armies which fought in France. The foot archer was armed with the long-bow, which varied from about 5'8" to 6'4" in length, and had a draw-weight of 80 - 100 pounds. This was of Welsh origin. The English had discovered it most forcibly in the 12th century during their conquest of Wales, since it could send an arrow through a church door. From then on, each village in England was required to supply one or more archers, and by law, all countrymen had to practice shooting at butts on Sundays. In battle, each archer could carry as many as two dozen arrows, each about 30 inches in length, which he could shoot at ten a minute - massed archers could darken the sky - to a range of 150 yards; from 30 to 60 yards, he could pierce armour. The drawback was that such power sacrificed absolute accuracy. The French also used the long-bow, but preferred the cross-bow, which had greater accuracy, was easier to shoot, and required less training, and thus it was the common weapon of the urban militias. However: it was heavier - it weighed up to 20 pounds - and had a much slower rate of fire: to draw it, the crossbowman had to place his foot in the stirrup at the front end of the bow, fasten the string on to a hook on his belt, which meant crouching down by bending his knees and back, and then stand up, pulling the string until it could be engaged in the trigger mechanism. At best, it could only fire four times a minute. It also worked best behind some shelter, so that he survived whilst re-stringing the bow. It should be noted that the longbow man also carried a hand-to-hand weapon, either a sword or billhook or axe or a maul, which was a leaden mallet with a five-foot-long wooden handle. The English army also had other types of fighter, including the 'kern' or knifeman, whose speciality was creeping beneath the men-at-arms' horses and stabbing them in the belly, or cutting the throats of the enemy wounded.

It was the combined force of men-at-arms and archers which was to prove so lethal to the French at Crécy in 1346, at Poitiers in 1356, and at Agincourt in 1415. In attack, the archers could break up those massed together in defensive positions, and they could - as at Agincourt - destroy those cavalry which had begun to charge at their own defensive position, both by shooting the men and by wounding the horses, which then - frightened and maddened with pain - turned on their own side. Furthermore, in defence, the dismounted archers and men-at-arms provided a density of resistance, with the men-at-arms receiving protection from the archers, who were able to shoot their arrows at a considerable distance from the advancing enemy, thereby disrupting them and, if desired, giving the men-at-arms time to mount their own horses and counter-attack.

Now a word about tactics. The most terrifying was probably the *chevauchée*, or mounted raid, carried out by the English. Essentially, a group of mounted men-at-arms and archers rode through the countryside, burning, killing, pillaging and plundering. Large or fortified towns were avoided: rather, the abbey, the château, the farmhouse, the village, and the isolated hut were the targets. Those caught without warning were raped and/or killed, or both, or - if rich enough - taken away to be ransomed; those possessions worth taking were taken; and everything else was burnt. Those working in the fields learned to station one of them on the church tower to warn of approaching soldiers, giving them the chance to flee to the woods or marshes or caves. The *chevauchée* had two main purposes: the first was to make it clear to the inhabitants that their lord could not protect them and thereby to undermine their loyalty; the second - and for many, without a doubt, the primary purpose - was to gain booty, which would be divided up by strict rules. This was not conquest, since land could not be held unless the fortified towns and castles were also held.

It was the siege which conquered the towns and castles. It could take months or even years, depending on the strength of the fortifications and the provisions held by the besieged. It also depended on the siege engines. The battering ram had been used since the Bronze Age - an example can be seen in the Assyrian section of the British Museum - and catapults date at least from the 4th century B.C., but the defenders had rocks, pots of quick-lime, boiling oil, and fiery arrows, as well as the usual arrows and lances. Sieges in the 14th century could be protracted and often unsuccessful. However, by the final quarter of the 14th century, gunpowder artillery was becoming more widely available, because wrought- and cast-iron pieces could now be manufactured. This meant that for some years thereafter, sieges were more likely to be short and successful, because it took time for fortifications to be strengthened against cannonballs.

Battles, as it happened, were rather less frequent than might be assumed. Indeed, the French commanders spent rather a lot of time evading battle with the English: rather, they preferred to lure them and then avoid them, costing the English king hundreds of thousands of pounds which he usually could not afford and leaving him with nothing to show for it. But when a battle did take place, it could change control of a duchy or of a kingdom.

And so to the war; this is a map of France in 1337, showing the lands of Edward Plantagenet, the English king Edward III. As you can see, far from there being a block of English-held land from the Channel to the Pyrenees, there was only Ponthieu in the north-west and the duchy of Guyenne in the south-west, the latter comprising Bordeaux, Gascony and Bayonne. This was Aquitaine, and it was for this that Edward III owed liege homage to Philip VI. Edward III had become king in 1326 at the age of 14, when his mother Queen Isabel, who had been a French princess, and her lover Roger Mortimer, Earl of March, had forced his father, Edward II, to abdicate; a year later Edward II was murdered in Berkeley Castle by means of a red-hot poker thrust up his backside, thereby ensuring that no bruises would show as his body lay in state. Edward III had his revenge against his mother, the so-called 'She Wolf of France', and her lover in October 1330. On a dark night, the eighteen-year-old Edward, accompanied by a group of young lords, quietly entered Nottingham Castle through a secret passage. Edward broke down the door to Isabel's bedchamber with a battleaxe, and although the pregnant Queen Mother pleaded, 'Fair son, fair son, have pity on gentle Mortimer', the earl was dragged away and hanged, drawn and quartered on the Common Gallows at Tyburn. Edward's ascension to the throne and the power of kingship, in other words, had been somewhat unusual.

Philip VI of France's coming to power at the age of thirty-five had also been by an unusual route. On 1 February 1328, Charles IV of France, the last of the Capetians, lay dying. He was childless, but his wife was soon to give birth. On his deathbed, Charles apparently said that 'if the Queen bears a son he will be King, but if she bears a daughter then the crown belongs to Philip of Valois', who was Charles' first cousin. On All Fool's Day 1328 the Queen gave birth to a daughter. Philip immediately summoned to Paris an assembly of peers - he had chosen the members well - and they swiftly acknowledged him as the king of France.

For the first years of their reigns, the two kings consolidated their positions, and then began to try to extend their realms. Late 1336 saw French raids on Orford and the Isle of Wight, and [according to Jonathan Sumption] the English political community accepted that war with France was going to happen. Edward looked for allies for an attack on northern France, whilst Philip began to plan an invasion of Gascony. In December 1336, Philip provoked the beginning of formal war. His brother-in-law, Robert of Artois, who had been charged with murder, had fled to England and found refuge there - Edward was thus giving aid to an enemy of his liege lord. Philip ordered Edward to surrender him. However: he did not send this demand to England; rather, he had it delivered to Edward's seneschal in Aquitaine. This was because Philip's legal authority over Edward was only valid where Edward was duke, because it was for Aquitaine that Edward had sworn liege homage to Philip. Edward refused. In February 1337, one of Philip's officials made a failed attempt to seize St Macaire on the Garonne River, and by March, Edward was making formal preparations for war: at the meeting of Parliament, he created six new earls, in effect a new group of military commanders, given that he would probably need armies for both Scotland and Gascony. On 30 April 1337, Philip issued

an *arrière-ban*, or call to arms; this would apply not only to his own territories, but also to the semi-independent counties. This was because soldiers were supplied by the nobility, and by the towns under royal control. Thus by the call-to-arms, he made it clear that war would be waged by large armies on a national scale. On the 24th of May, Philip declared that Edward's lands in France were confiscated by the French crown, and by June 13th, letters had been delivered to Edward's seneschal to notify him of this. A few weeks later, French troops launched an invasion of Gascony.

In August 1337, Edward distributed a manifesto to his magnates and to royal officials, which they were to explain to meetings which he ordered to be held in the shires. In this manifesto, the king gave his reasons for going to war. First of all, the French king had offered his assistance to the Scots in their conflict with the English - and it is useful to remember that the English had always to watch their backs whilst fighting in France. Secondly, Philip had usurped Edward's rights in Gascony. And thirdly, he had maliciously accused Edward of hindering his plans for a crusade. This manifesto underlines the fact that this was in effect a war between kings over their feudal rights, and from about 1340 to 1360, success went to Edward and England.

The first three years of the war, however, did not go well for Edward. He put together a group of allies, but this was problematic: it was very expensive, and allies might follow their own desires, not his. In September 1339, they invaded northern France, but there was no conclusive battle, and Edward withdrew, having accomplished nothing at very great expense. Meanwhile, the French attacked Aquitaine from different points, and made great inroads; there were many damaging French raids on south coast ports, the coasts of Devon, Sussex and Kent were harried, and Guernsey was conquered and occupied; and there were problems in Scotland. Nevertheless, on 26 January 1340, Edward declared himself king of France, based on his claim through his mother. It is unclear whether he actually meant it, but he was probably driven to it by the importunities of some of his allies in Flanders. The Count of Flanders was loyal to the French king, but the cities of Ghent, Antwerp and Bruges, which depended on English wool for their cloth manufacture, were Edward's allies; if he was the king of France, they could fight with him as their lawful liege lord, bypassing the Count's liege homage to Philip and their own homage to the Count. Complicated.

The tide began to turn at the naval battle of Sluys on 24 June 1340. Now, fighting a naval battle before cannon were widely used required a different approach from what we would now expect. Ships tried to ram each other: one of the most fearsome was the Mediterranean galley, used by the Genoese and the Castilians, a fast, flat-bottomed, purpose-built battle-craft armed with a ram and a stone-throwing catapult, whose oars gave it superior speed and the ability to manoeuvre. Many of the English ships were 'cogs', basically small merchant ships with high sides, which were designed for the transport of goods, animals or humans. With its single square sail and rudimentary rudder, it was slow to manoeuvre. When requisitioned by the king, cogs were converted into war ships by building special fighting tops, as you can see from the picture. Their tactics basically consisted of moving windward of an enemy ship and then ramming it or running it aground. Troops then leapt onto the enemy ship and engaged in fierce hand-to-hand combat.

Philip had assembled a fleet of some two hundred vessels, French, Castilian from their ally Castile, and Genoese mercenary craft, whose intent, Edward feared, was an invasion of England. This was probably the case, but Philip also planned to intercept the English fleet carrying soldiers to fight in France. The French fleet, which did possess four cannon, was led by 'right good and expert men of war', but they were not seamen. The French massed their fleet in three squadrons, one behind the other, with the ships lashed together with chains and fronted by small boats weighed with stones. They planned, effectively, to fight a land battle, and carried 20,000 men, but many of these had been press ganged and were innocent of battle. There were only four hundred archers and at most 150 knights, with the rest fishermen, and loaders and unloaders of ships. The Genoese captain was not sanguine, and urged the French to put to sea, so that he could use his three galleys to attack the English, but they refused.

That night, Edward divided his 147 ships into four squadrons: the centre one filled with men-at-arms, the ones on either side filled with archers, and a fourth, also full of archers, in reserve. At 5 am, he moved into the wind and waited for the tide to turn: thus, when the English ships set off, they had the tide running with them, and the wind and sun behind them, with the sun shining in the eyes of the French. The Genoese captain realised what was happening, and urgently warned the French, telling their leader that 'the King of England and his fleet are coming down on us. Stand out to sea with your ships, for if you remain here, shut in between these great dykes, the English, who have the wind, the tide and the sun with them, will hem you in and you will be unable to manoeuvre.' [Quoted by Desmond Seward] He was ignored, so his three galleys slipped anchor and escaped.

At 9 am, the English fleet sailed straight into the French ships. The English archers rained arrows onto the French, whilst their crews grappled the English to the French ships. Then the men-at-arms poured over with swords and axes, the archers continued to shoot, the seamen threw heavy stones and iron bolts from the mast-tops, and divers tried to sink enemy ships by

boring holes in their hulls below water. The King was in the thick of the fighting, even after he was wounded in the leg, and the battle surged back and forth and from ship to ship. But the archers gave the advantage, and when the French Admiral was captured and hung from the yardarm of Edward's flagship, panic ensued amongst the French, many of whom leapt overboard. That night, thirty ships from the French fleet slipped anchor and escaped, but they were the lucky few. The following day, it was discovered that except for the Genoese galleys and these thirty ships, the entire French fleet had been captured or sunk, with the loss of 18,000 men. The so-called Grand Army of the Sea was no more, and the threat of a French invasion of England had, for the present, disappeared.

Meanwhile, war - formal and informal - continued on land. The balance of control in Aquitaine fell to the French, but a disputed succession over the dukedom of Brittany opened that to the fighting as well. This was all inconclusive. But, at the same time, Edward was making fundamental changes in the organisation of English forces. There was no more dependence on allies: rather, an organised approach was now made to raising English troops, based on a military assessment of landowners which was in turn based on income. Thus in 1346, when Edward landed in France on the 12th of July, he led forces estimated as between 7,000 and 15,000. Caen was besieged, and fell on the 26th of July; it was plundered and burnt, and 3,000 put to the sword. The army then moved swiftly towards Paris, stopping within sight of the capital - they had no intention of besieging it, having no proper siege engines with them, as well as being wildly outnumbered by the near-by French army. Instead, having devastated the countryside, the English crossed the Seine, with the French army stalking them. Edward had his army camp for the night near the little town of Crécy, on rising ground. In front was a valley; both his front and his right were protected by a little river, the Maie; his flank was guarded by the wood of Crécy, ten miles long and four miles deep; if the French attacked, they would have to come up a slope into the line of fire of the archers. The French were close, so Edward drew his troops in the order of battle - 11,000 of them, whilst the French had 30,000, including 20,000 men-at-arms - and rode amongst them, encouraging them; they then broke up to eat and rest, lying down near their helmets and weapons.

During the day - Saturday, the 26th of August - the French army continued to arrive. During the day four French knights reconnoitred the English position; based on this, Philip decided to camp for the night, and attack the following day. However: the men-at-arms tried to halt, but those behind kept moving forward, and Philip realised that he had to attack, ordering the Genoese crossbowmen to go in front. The bowmen had marched many miles that day, carrying their crossbows, and they were tired. It was 5 pm. They advanced to within 200 yards of the English, when there was a short but violent thunderstorm. They then began to shoot, but the English archers, who had been placed on the flank, then stepped forward and began to shoot with such rapidity that it hailed arrows. The crossbowmen were cut down, and then trampled by the horses of the men-at-arms, whilst those soldiers behind continued to move forward. The arrows pierced the knights and their horses, which trampled and bolted. Knights encumbered with their armour, who fell off their horses, were trampled and pressed into the wet mud, where they died either from drowning or from the Welsh and Cornish knifemen. Edward III also had three cannon, and their noise and smoke terrified the horses, not to mention those men who had never before experienced them. The French made fifteen charges, the final one in pitch blackness, but all were subject to disorganisation and showers of arrows. Philip had been shot in the neck by an arrow, and had had a horse shot from under him, but when he tried for a final, desperate, charge, he found that he had only 60 men-at-arms left - the rest had been killed or fled. In the morning, as Edward looked out over the battlefield and saw the thousands of bodies, he ordered a count to be made: over 1,500 French nobles and knights, including a duke and eleven counts, had died, along with over 10,000 commoners. The cost to the English was fewer than one hundred.

On 30 August, Edward set off to the coast to capture a port. He chose Calais, the port nearest to England. It was surrounded by sand dunes and marshes on the land side, where it was impossible to set up the siege engines, and by the sea. Edward settled down to starve it out, using a fleet of ships to blockade it. The citizens expelled 500 of their poor to save food, but by early August starvation drove them to surrender. Edward was enraged at the long resistance he had encountered, but rather than put the town to the sword, he commanded that six burgesses had to appear before him with halters around their necks. He ordered them beheaded, but his Queen, Philippa, begged him for mercy. What he did do was to turn all of the townspeople out and re-populate it with Englishmen.

The French defeat prompted a Scottish invasion of England, but this was defeated at Neville's Cross, near Durham. Unfortunately for the Scots, their king, David II, was captured and imprisoned in the Tower of London. In due course, he would be joined by another king, this as a result of the leadership of King Edward's son, Edward the Black Prince, so-called because of the colour of his armour. Prince Edward had shown his heroism as a sixteen-year-old at Crécy, but it was in 1355 and 1356 that he made his enduring reputation for valour and ruthlessness. You will remember my description of the *chevauchée* as a pitiless mounted raid: in 1355 the Black Prince led an army of 2,200 men to Bordeaux, from where they rode through the Languedoc almost to the Mediterranean, and back. The level of success was phenomenal: there was no French counterattack, the booty

was tremendous, and the countryside was laid waste. They then went up the Dordogne and towards the Loire, where they planned to meet another English army also engaged on *achevauchée*, this through Lower Normandy. They did not meet, and the Black Prince turned back towards Bordeaux. At Poitiers, he found the French blocking his route: he had no choice but to fight, since if he did not, there was grave danger of an attack on his rear as he moved towards Bordeaux. On 19 September 1356, he took up a defensive position on a hill; he was protected in the rear by a wood, and in front by various hazards, including a marsh and a hedge. The French began to advance, and again, they were mown down by the English longbowmen. What was crucial, however, was a feigned retreat by the Earl of Warwick, which drew the French knights into the marsh. Those French men-at-arms who retreated collided with those who were advancing. The French had at least 10,000 more men than the English, but that was part of the problem: there were too many of them trying to fight in a confined space.

The true significance of the battle, however, was the capture of the French king, John II, known as John the Good, who joined the King of Scotland in the Tower of London, although he was soon moved to the luxury of the Savoy palace. This ended formal military action. However, many of the soldiers without regular employment plundered and killed on their own account, and large areas of France suffered. France also now saw civil war between John II's heir, the Dauphin Charles, and Charles of Navarre. On 8 May 1360, at Brétigny near Chartres, a treaty was signed giving Edward full sovereignty in Calais, Ponthieu, Poitou, and a greater Aquitaine; in return, he would no longer call himself king of France. The English had won this phase of the war: the map of France in 1360 shows the result.

Unfortunately for the English, the next fifty years saw a sharp downward turn in their fortunes. Edward III died in 1377, although it must be said that by this date he was nearly senile and under the control of an avaricious mistress, Alice Perrers. This was a primary reason for the very weak position of the English: by 1374 they had lost many of their holdings, while the year of Edward's death saw the south coast of England subjected to fierce raids. Another reason for the English weakness was the long illness of Edward's son, the Black Prince, ill for a number of years before his death in 1376, the year before that of his father.

Edward III was succeeded by his ten-year-old grandson, Richard II, and although Edward's brother, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, did his best as Regent, this was not very good. During much of the period until Henry V, there were various defeats, and much land was lost - indeed, in March 1389, when a truce was agreed between England and France, England held only Calais and the Gascony of 1337, the date of the beginning of the war. The truce was cemented by a marriage between Richard and Isabel of France, daughter of the French king, now Charles VI. This truce - or stalemate - might have signified the end of the war, had not civil war broken out again in France, conflict encouraged by the fact that Charles VI became increasingly insane. It also encouraged the new English king, Henry V, to begin a new campaign to recover the English lands in France.

The childhood and young manhood of Henry V was spent in a turbulent period in English history. Richard II's increasingly autocratic rule, combined with his preference for listening to his favourites rather than to his natural advisers, the nobility, and his unlawful confiscation of lands, finally sparked a rebellion and his dethronement in 1396, when he was encouraged to abdicate and replaced by the first of the Lancastrians, Henry IV. Henry IV's son, Henry V, ascended the throne in 1413 at the age of 26, already a seasoned campaigner. Once he had established domestic peace, he turned his attention to France, where he wanted a 'just settlement' of English claims to France. First he tried a diplomatic offensive in a search for allies; then he attempted to negotiate a marriage to Katharine of Valois, daughter of Charles VI of France. Neither was successful.

Encouraged by the internal divisions in France, Henry decided to invade. He raised an army of over 15,000, which was notable for the large number of men who not only decided to join him, but also brought along troops: his brothers, the Dukes of Clarence and Gloucester, each brought a thousand men, but even many esquires and yeomen brought along a handful of archers. The army was also notable for the ratio of one man-at-arms to three archers, a much higher proportion of archers than had been the case in the 14th century English armies. This was possibly due to the realisation of their potency, but at least as likely was the fact that an archer cost half the daily wage of a man-at-arms. In any case, they were to prove their worth.

Henry V decided to invade Normandy, and on 11 August 1415, the English fleet set sail to Harfleur. They besieged the town, which took nearly two months to surrender, but at the cost of a third of the army from wounds and disease. Henry expelled the inhabitants and filled it with Englishmen. He then marched out with the intention of crossing the Seine and making for Calais. However, the forces of the Dauphin Charles decided to intercept the English, who did not at first realise that they were being pursued. But on 24 October, through relentless rain, English scouts saw the French army advancing. Henry took up battle positions along a ridge near the town of Agincourt, his flanks protected by woods. By now, the English soldiers numbered fewer than 6,000, about 5000 archers and perhaps 800 men-at-arms; many were suffering from dysentery, whilst those who were not ill nevertheless suffered from the exhausting march through the rain and from the lack of enough food. Facing them were

40,000 French men-at-arms.

By dawn the rain had stopped, but the ploughed land had turned into slippery mud, in some places knee-deep. Many of the French men-at-arms would find the mud a death-trap. Henry waited for the French to advance, and when they did not, he ordered his troops to do so, marching steadily and in good order. They halted just within arrow range of the French, stuck 6-foot high pointed stakes in the ground in front of them, and began to fire. The arrows flew thick and fast, and those men-at-arms who charged the archers found their horses impaled on the stakes. Yet the French kept coming, and the archers grabbed their swords and mallets and went to the aid of the men-at-arms. The French were slaughtered, those underneath the piles of corpses being suffocated or drowned in the mud, if they had not already been stabbed or had their throats cut by the English knifemen. Another assault never materialised: the remaining French men-at-arms were so horrified by the butchery that they rode off the field. In less than four hours, the English had won. The French lost 10,000 men, including three dukes, seven counts, 120 barons and 1,500 knights; the English lost the Duke of York and the Earl of Suffolk, and half a dozen knights, with a total loss of perhaps 300 men. They marched to Calais from where, being too exhausted for further fighting, they sailed for England.

Over the next several years, Henry formed military alliances, and the English navy gradually destroyed the French navy; by 1417, the English controlled the Channel. That year, Henry again invaded France, this time with the intention of conquest. He besieged Caen, as Edward III had done, and took it by fire and sword, and then proceeded to conquer Lower Normandy. On the night of 29 July, Henry pitched camp outside of Rouen; he starved the city, and on 19 January 1419, it surrendered. By the end of the year, the English were the masters of Normandy. The French were still divided in civil war, and the French king, Charles VI remained insane. Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy signed an alliance with Henry, promising to help him conquer France; it is likely that he was hoping to divide the kingdom between them.

Negotiations took place between the English and Burgundians on one side, and Charles VI on the other. On 21 May 1420, Henry and Charles signed the Treaty of Troyes, by which the English king became heir to the French throne and Regent of France. The treaty also committed Henry to making war until all France accepted the Treaty. There were also negotiations for Henry to marry Charles's daughter Katharine, whom Henry had tried to marry several years earlier. According to the French writer Enguerrand de Monstrelet, 'it was plainly to be seen that King Henry was desperately in love with her', whilst the black-haired Katharine 'had longed passionately to be espoused to King Henry'. [Quoted by Desmond Seward] On the 2nd of June 1420, Henry and Katharine were married.

It is worth pausing a moment to compare the two treaties, that of Brétigny of 1360 and that of Troyes of 1420. The earlier treaty between Edward III and John II had been a feudal treaty, in which the two had divided lands between them. The later one between Henry and Charles was of a different sort: now France, as a nation and country, was to remain united - the only thing to change was the ruling dynasty. There is no doubt that the war had stimulated a real growth in national feeling in England; by this period in France as well, the concept of France as a nation had triumphed, as Joan of Arc would soon demonstrate.

Meanwhile, the conquered territory had to be administered and governed. Henry now required an oath of allegiance to him, and those who refused were deprived of their lands and forced into exile. The lands thus confiscated were given to his French supporters and to Englishmen who would settle in France. He thereby changed the nature of the conflict, since many now shared in the profits of conquest and would fight to maintain and extend it. On the 1st of September 1420, Henry V, Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy and the mad king Charles VI made a ceremonial entry into Paris, beginning an English occupation which would last for fifteen years.

The English advance was to continue for the next nine years, but Henry V would not live to see it. On the 31st of August 1422, he died, probably of dysentery, and was succeeded by his infant son, now Henry VI; six weeks later, Charles VI also died, and the young Henry VI, now also Henri II, was king of both England and France. This cut Charles VI's heir, the Dauphin Charles, out of the succession, and Henry V's brother, the Duke of Bedford, became Regent of France on behalf of the infant monarch. The English advance continued through Maine and thence to the Loire, culminating in the siege of Orléans, which began in October 1428. But now comes a turning point. In 1428, a young peasant girl of seventeen decided that the voices which she had heard from the age of thirteen were now telling her to go and rescue Orléans. Her first attempt to convince the supporters of the Dauphin was rebuffed, but in February 1429 she met Charles and told him that God had ordered her to fight the English and to see that he was crowned King of France at Reims cathedral. It was decided that she might as well try, and she led 4,000 troops to Orléans, where under her leadership the siege was lifted in May 1429. She then determined that Charles had to be crowned; an army of 12,000 was assembled and marched through English territory to Reims. On the 17th of July 1429, Joan stood near him throughout the ceremony, and afterwards addressed him as Charles VII. She continued to campaign against the English,

but on 24 May 1430 she was pulled from her horse by a Burgundian soldier; in November she was handed over to the English at Rouen, where some of the soldiers tried to rape her. Put on trial as a witch, she was burned at the stake in the marketplace at Rouen on 30 May 1431. She died quickly, but to ensure that people would realise that it was a woman, the executioner pulled the charred corpse out of the fire and showed it to the crowd.

This is France in 1429, showing the final extent of the English-controlled lands. The period from now until the end of the war in 1453 demonstrated an apparently ineluctable downhill slide. Over the following two years, the English experienced increasing financial strains, as well as strains from the need to hold so much territory. Defence became more difficult, and the French made an increasing number of successful incursions even into Normandy. The year 1435 was bad: there was a peasant uprising in Normandy, which was put down with great ferocity; the French recaptured the ports of Dieppe and - with historical resonance - Harfleur; the English Regent, the Duke of Bedford, who had been holding things together, died; and a week thereafter, the Duke of Burgundy met Charles VII and changed his alliance from England to France. Paris fell to Charles the following year.

The English raised an army of 10,000 in 1436, and recovered much of what they had lost in Normandy, but they were increasingly undermined by financial pressures. The lands they held in France had suffered so much war damage that tax income fell drastically, while the French probes around the borders kept increasing. In 1443 the English made their last expedition to France, intended to take the war to the frontiers of Brittany; it was a complete failure, and in May 1444 a truce was agreed. Henry VI was now King of England in reality, but he was a fatally weak king. In 1445 he agreed to surrender Maine: the intention was to assist in peace negotiations, but in fact it weakened both his diplomatic position and the morale of his subjects - some of his military commanders could hardly believe that he had done it. Increasingly Parliament refused to vote money. In the end the loss of Normandy was swift and unchallenged: fiscal and military reforms in France, and a notably increased nationalism, combined to render the French unstoppable, and by 1453, all that the English had left was Calais. That summer, Henry VI descended into madness.

What had the war been about? Why is it more than of antiquarian interest, full of fighting and costumes? First of all, although it began as a dynastic war - would Plantagenet or Capet, and then Plantagenet or Valois, rule France? - by the 15th century, it was also a war between peoples: the inhabitants of France became the French, whilst the English became even more English. As one example, the use of the English language triumphed: Edward III, who spoke broken English, decreed that English would replace French in all the law courts in England, whilst English was Henry V's first language. In France it was a war of national unity, as the feudal structure broke down and independent lands more and more became incorporated into the entity called France. Historians have emphasised the effect which war had on the growth of the modern state: the administrative systems required to levy and administer taxation and to govern effectively were developed, although this was the case much more in France than in England, since England had had organised and country-wide legal and administrative systems since the 12th century. It was also a war of geography: France needed to bring the maritime provinces, Flanders - at that time under the control of the dukes of Burgundy - Normandy, Brittany and Aquitaine, under control, so that she could control the ports for both military and commercial purposes; England, for the very same reasons, wanted to control these territories herself. This is a reminder that it was also a war to control the lucrative wool and wine trades, for both countries prime sources of taxation. In short: the war was about more than Shakespeare has suggested, although for many he does provide the dominant images of the war, especially that of Henry V.

But I do not want to end this lecture on a whimper - rather, we will go out on a note of triumph, with the Agincourt Carol, written soon after the battle:

Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.

Our king went forth to Normandy
With grace and might of chivalry;
There God for him wrought marv'lously,
Wherefore England may call and cry:
Deo gracias!

Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.

He set a siege, forsooth to say,
To Harfleur town with royal array;
That town he won and made affray

That France shall rue till Domesday:
Deo gracias!

Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.

Then went him forth our king comely,
In Agincourt field he fought manly;
Through grace of God most marv'lously
he had both field and victory:
Deo gracias!

Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.

There lordes, earles and baron
Were slain and taken and that full soon,
And some were brought into London
With joy and bliss and great renown:
Deo gracias!

Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.

Almighty God he kept our king,
His people and all his well willing,
And gave them grace without ending,
Then may we call and safely sing:
Deo gracias!

Deo gracias, Anglia, redde pro victoria.