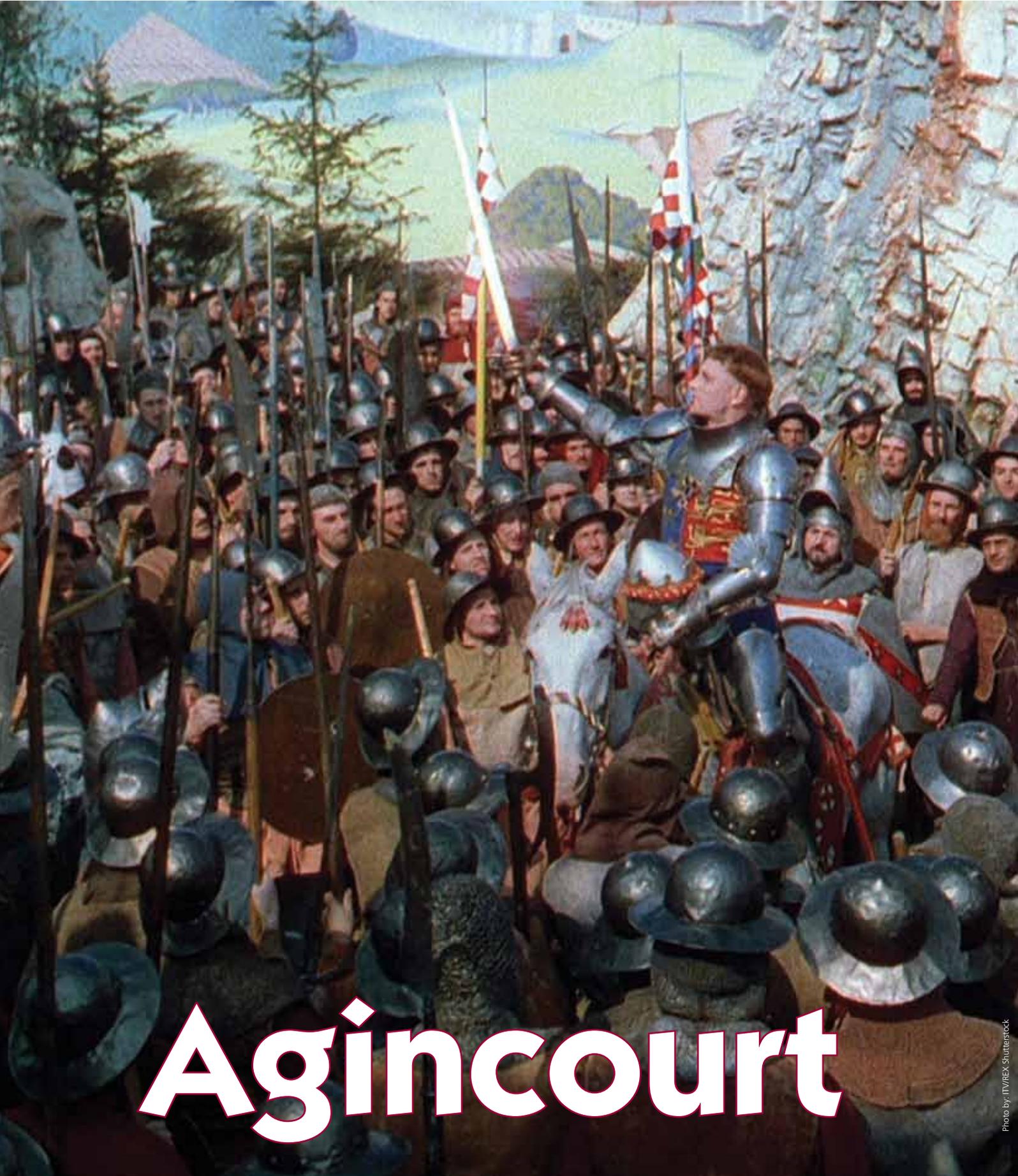


# THE HISTORIAN

Number 127 | Autumn 2015

The magazine of the Historical Association



# Agincourt

# New history writing competition

The Historical Association and Amberley Publishing are excited to announce the launch of a brand new competition to find the best unpublished, non-fiction history book and are seeking both aspiring and established authors to submit interesting and original proposals.

Whether you have a completed manuscript or just a good idea, we want to hear about it. This is your chance to become a published history author.

Jon Jackson, publishing director at Amberley, says, 'This competition taps into the massive grassroots interest in local and personal history and the unique elements of British heritage. We are looking for a new, exciting, untold story.'

Proposals can cover any aspect of history and the competition is free to enter and open to everyone. The winning author

will receive a £1,000 advance and a contract with Amberley Publishing, who will publish, promote and distribute the finished book. The winner will also have the opportunity to write an article about their book for *The Historian*.

The judging panel for the competition will include the bestselling author and Historian Michael Pye, the Historical Association's President Professor Justin Champion, Amberley's publishing director Jon Jackson, chairman of the Book Trade Charity and authors Amy Licence and Lesley McDowell.

Amy Licence says, 'This is a fantastic opportunity for a new author to debut their talent, just the sort of competition I wish had been around when I was starting out. I'm very excited about this chance to help discover the authors of the future.'

## How to enter

You should include:

- A 200-word synopsis.
- A chapter plan with a brief description of what will be covered in each chapter.
- A 50-word biography of yourself including any relevant experience.
- 2,000 words of sample writing from the opening of the book.
- Some sample images, if images are integral to the book.

Deadline for entries:  
1 November 2015.

The winner will be announced in the January 2016 issue of *The Historian* magazine.

Please email your submissions to [competition@amberley-books.com](mailto:competition@amberley-books.com)

or post them to:

Competition,  
Amberley Publishing,  
The Hill, Merrywalks,  
Stroud, Gloucestershire,  
GL5 4EP  
[www.amberley-books.com](http://www.amberley-books.com)

**The winning author will receive a publishing contract with Amberley Publishing and a £1,000 advance**

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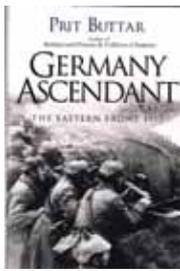
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**Germany Ascendant: the Eastern Front 1915**  
Prit Buttar

Osprey Publishing, 2015, 448p, £20-00. ISBN 978-1-4728-0795-3

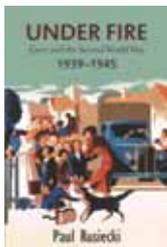
In this book Prit Buttar continues his analysis and narrative on what was happening on the Eastern Front in the Great War from his previous *Collision of Empires: The War on the Eastern Front in 1914* [Osprey, 2014].

He continues to make the point that most scholars focus on the dreadful suffering and stalemate on the Western Front without any consideration of what was happening on the Eastern Front. This meticulous survey reveals that the Central Powers were making measurable progress to the east with the Golicie-Tarnow Offensive which led to the retreat of Russian forces from Poland and the occupation of Serbia, being two examples of their advances. These successes were achieved at the expense of massive human losses, basically unreported in the west. However, amidst this success, Prit Buttar does stress that leadership weaknesses

on the part of the Central Powers balanced mismanagement on a massive scale by the Russians, leading to an absence of a final success for either side.

Prit Buttar communicates his narrative and associated analysis in a very clear manner. This is a book for scholars with a focused interest. By contrast the enormity of the detail will deter the casual enquirer unless they are carefully guided to begin by exploring the opening and concluding chapters. These very carefully both set the scene and also explain what had happened over that year. With that preparation the interested reader might then explore some or all of the key events of the 1915 campaigns in the east.

Trevor James



**Under Fire: Essex and the Second World War 1939-1945**  
Paul Rusiecki

University of Hertfordshire Press, 2015, 320p, £18-99. ISBN 978-1-909291-28-7

Paul Rusiecki has explored what happened to Essex during the Second World War in a remarkable manner. This book is in many ways more about the experience of the people who lived in Essex than it is about the conduct of the war itself.

With Essex geographically on the front line of defence and adjacent to the River Thames, it would have been easy just to examine the

role and experience of the county from a strategic perspective. Instead in exploring a number of themes, Paul Rusiecki also emphasises for us that, whatever its strategic location, Essex continued to be an important and essential part of the national agricultural output; and he also helps us to recognise that there are different ways to identify Essex as a geographical entity. Obviously there is an open agricultural area with its important market towns but, in addition to its defensive role, many people who identified as being from Essex lived, as they still do, in the expanding conurbation to the east of London. So Essex is a region of complexities.

This book is strongly focused on how the varying populations, and age groups, coped with the challenges of war. What he does extremely well is to reveal to us how the

people of Essex experienced, and reacted to, war. Two examples will reflect their behaviours. The famous Maldon by-election of 1942 resulted in the Independent Tom Driberg being elected against the huge electoral machine mounted by Churchill's Coalition Conservatives, a sign of local determination. Equally, in chapter 5, the manner in which local opinion shifted after Soviet Russia joined the Allies in 1941 is also explored at the important micro level.

What we are offered is an insight into the Essex society of those critical war years but those of us whose heritage lies elsewhere can use this book as a very valuable template to pursue our own investigations into our areas of choice.

Trevor James



**Armies of the Greek-Turkish War 1919-22**  
Philip S Jowett

Osprey Publishing, 2015, £9.95, 48 pages, ISBN 978-1-4728-0684-0

excellent booklet in the Osprey *Men-at-Arms* series covers one of these conflicts, the Greek-Turkish War of 1919 to 1922 that led to the establishment of the modern Turkish state.

Philip Jowett has packed in a great deal of information, while remaining eminently readable. He recounts the support that the Entente/Allied nations gave to Greece for its invasion of Anatolia and the parlous state of Turkish resistance. Once Allied support was reduced in 1921, on the return of Constantine to the Greek throne, it was only a matter of time before the Turkish Nationalists triumphed, under the leadership of Gallipoli hero Mustapha Kemal.

British soldiers were sent to Thrace and Constantinople in late 1922 to help oversee the armistice and the peace treaty, including the resulting massive population movements that were a feature of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, such as the 'Armenian Genocide'. Jowett doesn't ignore the widespread civilian atrocities but space doesn't allow him to dwell on them.

This is part of a series of Osprey booklets on near-eastern armies of the period, including one on *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk* by Edward Erikson, the American historian who has done much to open up later Ottoman archives.

Ted Green

In his introduction to the *New Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* Sir Hew Strachan noted that warfare didn't end neatly because an armistice was agreed with Germany on 11 November 1918, as many peripheral conflicts began or continued. This

# editorial

As we approach the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt, we are delighted that Professor Anne Curry, as our guest editor, offers us in this edition a range of fascinating explorations into the variety of aspects of an event which, as she herself demonstrates, has assumed an iconic status in the popular mind. Remembering one of her presidential addresses to an Annual Conference, we hope that she will not be inundated with comments from members of the public pointing out that any new interpretations provided by her team conflict with information panels at the battlefield! We are deeply grateful to her and her team for what they have prepared for us.

Thinking about people who have supported this journal, it is with great sadness that we record the unexpected death of Dr John Springhall, who was a great supporter of *The Historian*. A retired Reader from the University of Ulster with a strong interest in contemporary cultural issues, he was uniquely awarded an Historical Association Fellowship in 2012 in recognition of his conspicuous and unparalleled contribution to *The Historian*. At that stage we had already published eight of his articles and his contributions continued to appear, with his most recent being 'Guilty pleasures: moral panics over commercial entertainment since 1830' which appeared in 2014. We mourn his passing but we also celebrate what he has done for us – and we still have at least one more of his articles awaiting publication!

Publishing articles in *The Historian* and other journals produced by the Historical Association is just one facet of what a complex organisation such as this offers to its members and the wider community. As a very different example of where our tentacles reach, this week I attended a Spirit of Normandy Trust event at Imperial War Museum Duxford. The event was a reunion for Normandy veterans, now rapidly diminishing in numbers. Because the winning primary school in the Spirit of Normandy Trust-sponsored Young Historian Award, St Andrew's Church of England Primary School in Hitchin, was located relatively near to IWM Duxford, the whole Year 4 class had been invited to receive their award in the midst of this reunion. What I witnessed was the best of inter-generational sharing of knowledge and enthusiasm: despite the veterans basically being three generations distant from the children, with a total lack of self-consciousness both generations shared their time together very purposefully. Clearly the children had been carefully prepared to participate in conversation and dialogue with the veterans, as one would expect, but the teachers had full confidence in how they would conduct themselves and left them to pursue their own enquiries. This was a wonderful occasion. It occurred because the Spirit of Normandy Trust had taken a chance the previous year by doing the same for the 2014 primary school winner at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas in Staffordshire. They were so pleased with the inter-generational sharing that they were determined to repeat the experience.

One of the roles that our professional staff at Kennington provide for us all is to monitor how successfully the various component parts of the Historical Association are performing. As we have previously reported, recently the trustees were able to celebrate a substantial increase in membership numbers, something for which we have worked hard over the years, and it is now apparent that subscriptions for *The Historian* have themselves begun to rise. This is extraordinarily good news because, since *The Historian* is a journal that has a significant following among the concessionary membership, this means that we have 'bucked an inevitable trend' in a measurable way.

Please do remember that we actively invite proposals for possible articles, especially at the moment for our continuing series 'Aspects of War', 'My Favourite History Place' and 'Out and About'. I hope to be at the forthcoming Harrogate Annual Conference and will be pleased to discuss ideas with any of you. In any event, please do consider enrolling for what is increasingly a very important and significant event in the national historical calendar.

As we move into an era when so much will be expected of the voluntary sector, we are fortunate to be participants in one of the most robust components of that sector.

Trevor James

# Agincourt 1415-2015

Agincourt has become one of a small number of iconic events in our collective memory. **Anne Curry** explores how succeeding generations have exploited its significance.



The Battle of Agincourt, 25 October 1415. Miniature from the manuscript "Vigils of King Charles VII" by Martial d'Auvergne, 1484. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

In his budget statement of 18 March 2015 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, announced £1m had been awarded to commemorate the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Agincourt. He used the opportunity to make a political jibe, claiming that the victory showed a strong leader defeating 'an ill-judged alliance between the champion of a united Europe and a renegade force of Scottish nationalists'. The Scots did indeed send troops to France on several occasions in the 1420s. Many Scots fell fighting for the French at the battle of Verneuil on 17 August 1424, a battle which has been termed 'a second Agincourt' because it was won, as Agincourt itself had been, thanks to the power of English longbows. But no

Scots were at Agincourt. Nor did the French in 1415 symbolise a united Europe. Indeed, the battle was fought at a time of major divisions within French political society between the Burgundian and Armagnac factions. Such divisions played a role in undermining the French response to Henry V's invasion in 1415 and in contributing to the defeat.

The 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Agincourt prompts us to reflect on how the battle has been remembered since. In the modern age we are accustomed to officially-orchestrated celebration of anniversaries. Commemoration of the victory at its first anniversary on 25 October 1416, however, seems to have been private to Henry's chapel. The *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, a text

written by a priest who had been present on the campaign, tells us that 'there came round in due course the feast of St Crispin and Crispinian on which feast the year before God had shown his clemency to England in her resistance to the rebellious people of France at Agincourt. The king, not unmindful of God's goodness, renewed praises to Him in the hymn *Te Deum laudamus*, solemnly chanted in his chapel before Mass'.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of 1416, attention had been given to more public celebration. In December the archbishop of Canterbury ordered that commemorative collects in churches on 25 October should henceforth be shared between martyrs generally, Crispin and Crispinian, and St John of Beverley. The Lancastrian dynasty had a particular devotion to the latter. His tomb had expressed oil on the day Henry Bolingbroke (later Henry IV) landed at Ravenscar in 1399 en route to usurping the throne, and did so again on the day the battle of Agincourt was won. Rather conveniently, 25 October was already one of his feast days, therefore it was wholly appropriate, as the archbishop noted, to celebrate 'the gracious victory granted by the mercy of God to the English on the feast of the translation of the saint to the praise of the divine name and to the honour of the kingdom of England'.<sup>2</sup>

To what extent these orders were observed is yet to be discovered. Only in the immediate aftermath of the Reformation do we find a reference to any other form of public commemoration of Agincourt. In 1538-39, Richard Morrison urged Henry VIII to inaugurate annual triumphs against the pope. He cited as a precedent the celebrations of Agincourt at Calais, although historians have so far been unable to find evidence of these in the Calais records.

For the victory that God gave to your most valiant predecessor, King Henry the Fifth, with so little a number of his countrymen against so great a multitude of the Frenchmen at the battle of Agincourt, your retinue at your noble town of Calais and others over there yearly make a solemn triumph, going in procession, lauding God, shooting guns, with the noise and melody of trumpets and other instruments, to the great rejoicing of your subjects who are aged, the comfort of those who are able, the encouraging of young children.<sup>3</sup>

There was no 'war memorial' for Agincourt. None of the 45 or so surviving tombs of those who fought

there makes any reference to the battle in their inscriptions. The only mention of the campaign is found on a memorial of a soldier who did not make it to the battle: the brass of Sir John Phelip at St Mary's Kidderminster recalls his death at the siege of Harfleur.

## Remembering Agincourt in time of war

Agincourt was largely forgotten once English lands in France were lost in the 1450s. In later centuries, however, its memory was invoked at time of war, especially war with the French. *The First*

of Austrian Succession. A letter in the *General Advertiser* in 1744 brought to mind 'Agincourt! O glorious day!'. The frequency of Anglo-French war over the rest of the eighteenth century brought the battle into the public domain. Agincourt epitomised the continuity across the centuries of English (or now more properly British) military supremacy over the French. Crécy and Poitiers were also alluded to but Agincourt emerged supreme because of the popularity of Shakespeare's play. In 1757, during the Seven Years War, we find the first commemorations in newspapers of the anniversary of the



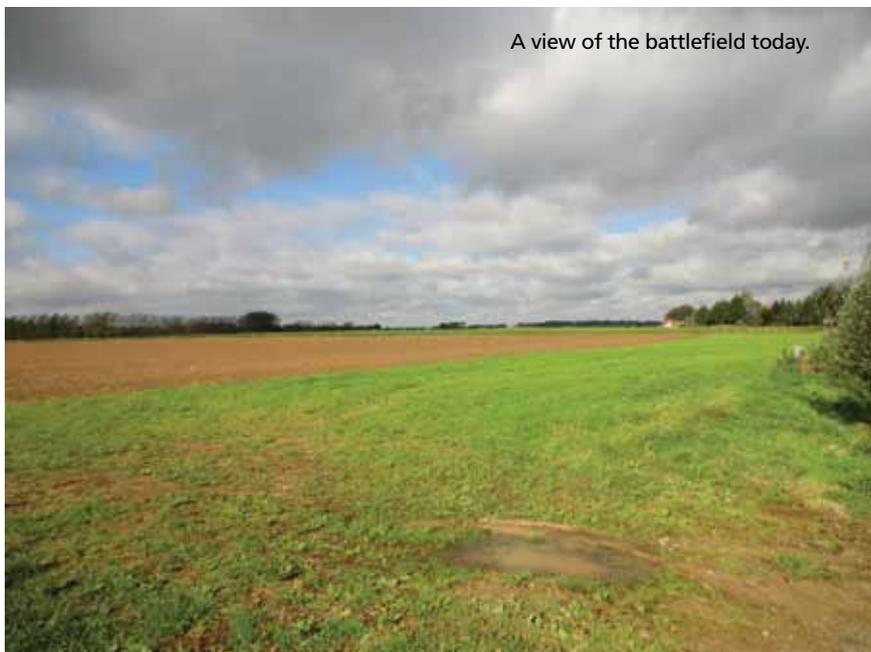
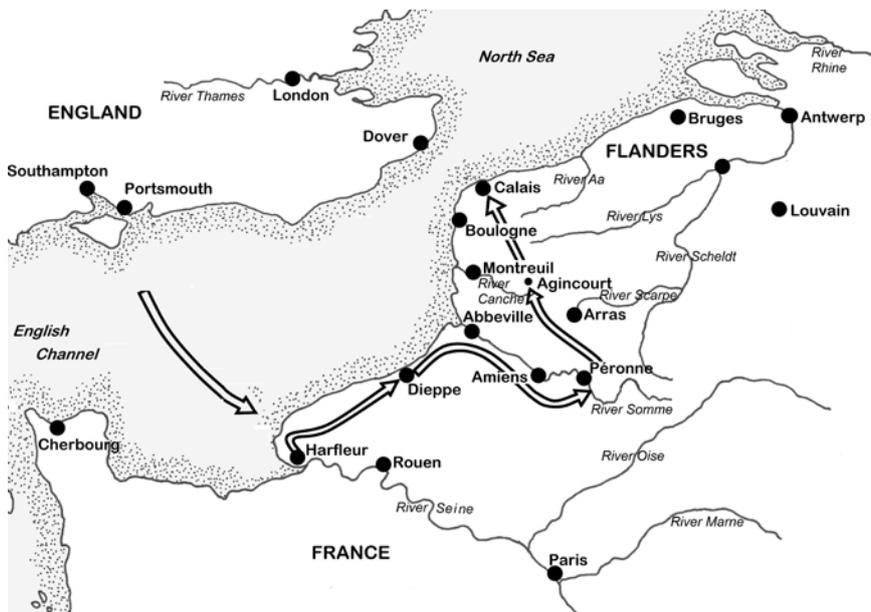
Battle of Agincourt (1415). Chroniques d'Enguerrand de Monstrelet.

*English Life of Henry V*, written in 1514 for presentation to Henry VIII, aimed to encourage the king in his war with France to emulate his noble progenitor. Shakespeare's *Henry V*, first performed in 1599, may have been prompted in part by fears of French invasion but also by the campaigns of the earl of Essex in Ireland. In Act 5 scene 1 of the Folio edition, Chorus compares Essex to Henry V on his triumphant return from France as a 'conquering Caesar'. Ben Jonson added adulatory verses to Michael Drayton's poem, *The Bataille of Agincourt* of 1627, calling the work 'a catechisme to fight'.

It is no coincidence that the first serious study of the life of Henry V was published by Thomas Goodwin in 1704 during the War of Spanish Succession, nor that Shakespeare's *Henry V* enjoyed its first real revival in the 1740s when the English were once again at war with the French, this time in the War

battle on 25 October. At this stage, the battle was also invoked to suggest a falling away of patriotic duty and martial success. Commemoration in the *London Evening Post* declared that since the period of Agincourt 'corruption had chased away all the glorious spirit of this nation'. But for other commentators, the same 'radical fortitude' which had inspired the heroes of Agincourt was still at large.

The fact that the accession of George III in 1760 occurred on 25 October fanned the recollection of the battle as an auspicious day for Britain. During the Revolutionary wars, Agincourt was used to emphasise continuing French degeneracy and British resilience. A letter to the 'People of England' published in *The Times* on 16 October 1794 began 'Countrymen, remember Agincourt!'. The battle was also the subject of a 100 foot long painting by Robert Ker Porter displayed in the



Lyceum in 1805, the year of Nelson's triumph at Trafalgar. For one shilling visitors could see this invocation of an earlier success against the French.

## Waterloo and Agincourt

By 1815 there were new successes to parallel those of the past. Although the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Agincourt on 25 October 1815 was not emphasised in the press, when the duke of Wellington was thanked in the Commons for his victory, Sir Thomas Ackland remarked 'we saw renewed the splendid days of Cressy and Agincourt'.<sup>4</sup> The link between past and present victories was powerful. The publication of the first serious study of the battle in 1827, Harris Nicolas's *History of the Battle of Agincourt*, was dedicated to George IV, Prince Regent during the recent wars with France, 'under whose auspices the splendour

even of that victory has been rivalled, if not eclipsed'.

After Waterloo British troops occupied the area of the Pas de Calais in which Agincourt was fought. A link across the centuries was achieved by the presentation of Waterloo service medals at the battlefield in May 1816. One of the recipients, John Gordon Smith (1792-1833), a Scottish surgeon attached to the 12th Lancers, was aware of the reputation of the battle fought 400 years previously which he described, in comparison with Waterloo, as 'the scarcely less glorious triumph of Harry the Fifth of England'. Smith was not particularly impressed with the area ('a most un-interesting collection of farmers' residences and cottages') but he believed that he had managed to identify the location of the wood where 'the King concealed those archers whose prowess and valour contributed so eminently to

the glorious result', a reference to the 200 archers whom Henry had sent behind enemy lines. Another Waterloo veteran, Lieutenant Colonel John Woodford, conducted excavations where he believed the Agincourt grave pits to lie, until he was stopped by the complaints of the local inhabitants to the duke of Wellington.

During the Crimean War Britain and France were allies. The *Cheshire Observer* noted that the battle of Inkerman on 5 November 1854 'for the first in rank to the last, was a prodigy of valour scarcely inferior to the miracle of Agincourt'. It was in the Victorian period that the archer began to emerge as the hero of the day. He represented the gallant but socially humble Britisher, now represented by the rifleman, who was often portrayed as the true descendant of the archers of 1415. In his *Child's History of England* (1853), Dickens contrasted the high proportion of Henry V's army 'who were not gentlemen by any means but who were good stout archers for all that' with the 'proud and wicked French nobility who dragged their country to destruction'. Agincourt was therefore an early demonstration of British 'democratic' supremacy, something to be proud of as well as a key part of the collective past. In Preston a fund had been set up in 1850 so that the 'working man' should be able to visit the Great Exhibition and be as proud of 'the simple share of the laurel wreath gained by proving ourselves to be the first nation of the world for industry, skill, talent and ingenuity, than if the triple coronet of Agincourt, Trafalgar and Waterloo encircled his brown alone'.<sup>5</sup>

Fears of invasion in the time of Napoleon III prompted newspapers to claim that the contemporary Frenchman 'is the self same being as at the period when Agincourt was fought. Our boastful neighbours treated their antagonists as an undisciplined rabble easily swept away by the armed chivalry of France until ignominious defeat proved the contrary'.<sup>6</sup> But in general, peace prevailed between Britain and her neighbour. The first formal battlefield tour can be dated to 1886 when Thomas Cook advertised a visit to the battlefields of Agincourt and Crécy open to 'any gentlemen who feel a real interest in inspecting the scenes of British prowess and in fighting over again the great battles recorded in English history'.

## The twentieth century

That Agincourt had an undisputed place in the long list of British military achievements by the turn of the nineteenth century is witnessed by its

inclusion in the Army Pageant held at Fulham Palace in 1910 to raise funds for military charities, probably the first time any re-enactment was attempted. The Master of the Pageant was the well-known Shakespearean director, F. R. Benson. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the assigned dialogue was dominated by Shakespeare, peppered with a little Drayton. Shakespeare continues to dominate popular ideas about Agincourt even today. The link with war also persists, and not simply in the UK: an edition of the play was issued to US soldiers going to Afghanistan and Iraq. Richard Inverne's article in this issue of *The Historian* reminds us of the significance of Olivier's film of the play in 1944 as a landmark both in British cinema and in Britain's wartime spirit. The material issued by Eagle-Lion distributors 'for use in factories and schools in connection with the Laurence Olivier presentation of Henry V' includes a lecture text which drew analogies between the archer of 1415 and the 'Tommy Atkins' of 1944.<sup>7</sup>

As we commemorate the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, we also remember the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1915 when the British and French were allies against a common German foe. The place of the battle lay well behind the front lines but saw much coming and going, being used as a place of rest and recuperation, as well as preparation. For the anniversary, the French stationed at the Château de Tramecourt just to the east of the battlefield invited British officers stationed locally 'to join them on the scene of the battle and to commemorate the day in unison', as the report in the *Illustrated London News* of 11 December 1915 put it. Agincourt was now 'an ancient battle-day of honourable memory to both'. Appropriately, this meeting will be recalled in the commemorations of 25 October 2015. But the event reminds us that a historian should always check his or her sources. While the joint commemoration in 1915 was planned for the 25 October, the records of the battalion of *chasseurs à pied* stationed at Tramecourt indicated that it rained too heavily that day so it was moved to the following day,<sup>8</sup> a point not noted in either the British or French press reports. No one wanted to spoil a good story.

In 1917 on their visit to 'the Battlefield of France', King George V, Queen Mary and Edward, Prince of Wales stayed at the Château de Tramecourt along with the king and



queen of the Belgians, as a film reveals.<sup>9</sup> We can only assume that they saw the battlefield of Agincourt. George V was at the château again in August 1918. The Germans heard of his presence and even attempted, but failed to put into effect, an aerial bombardment of the place.

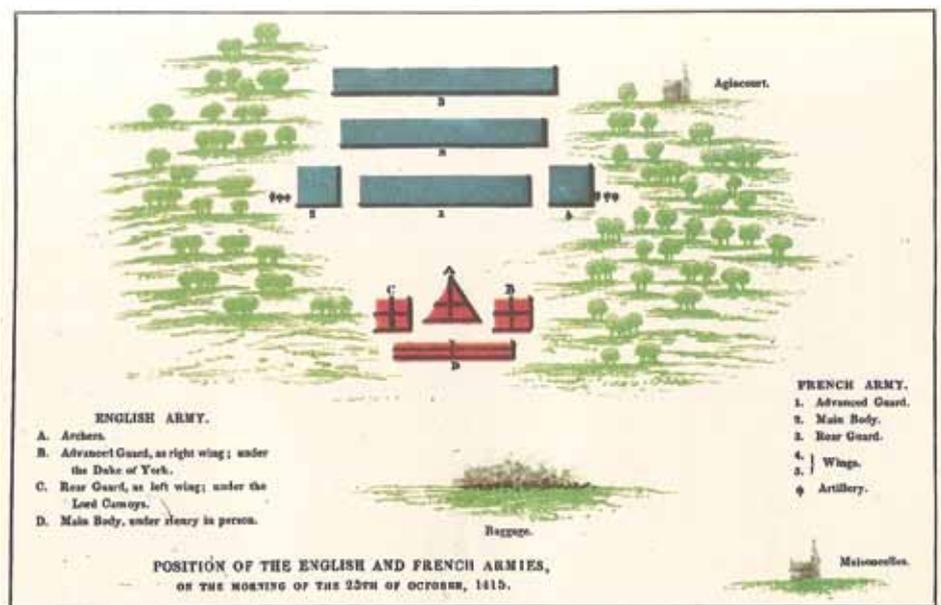
## Memory and history

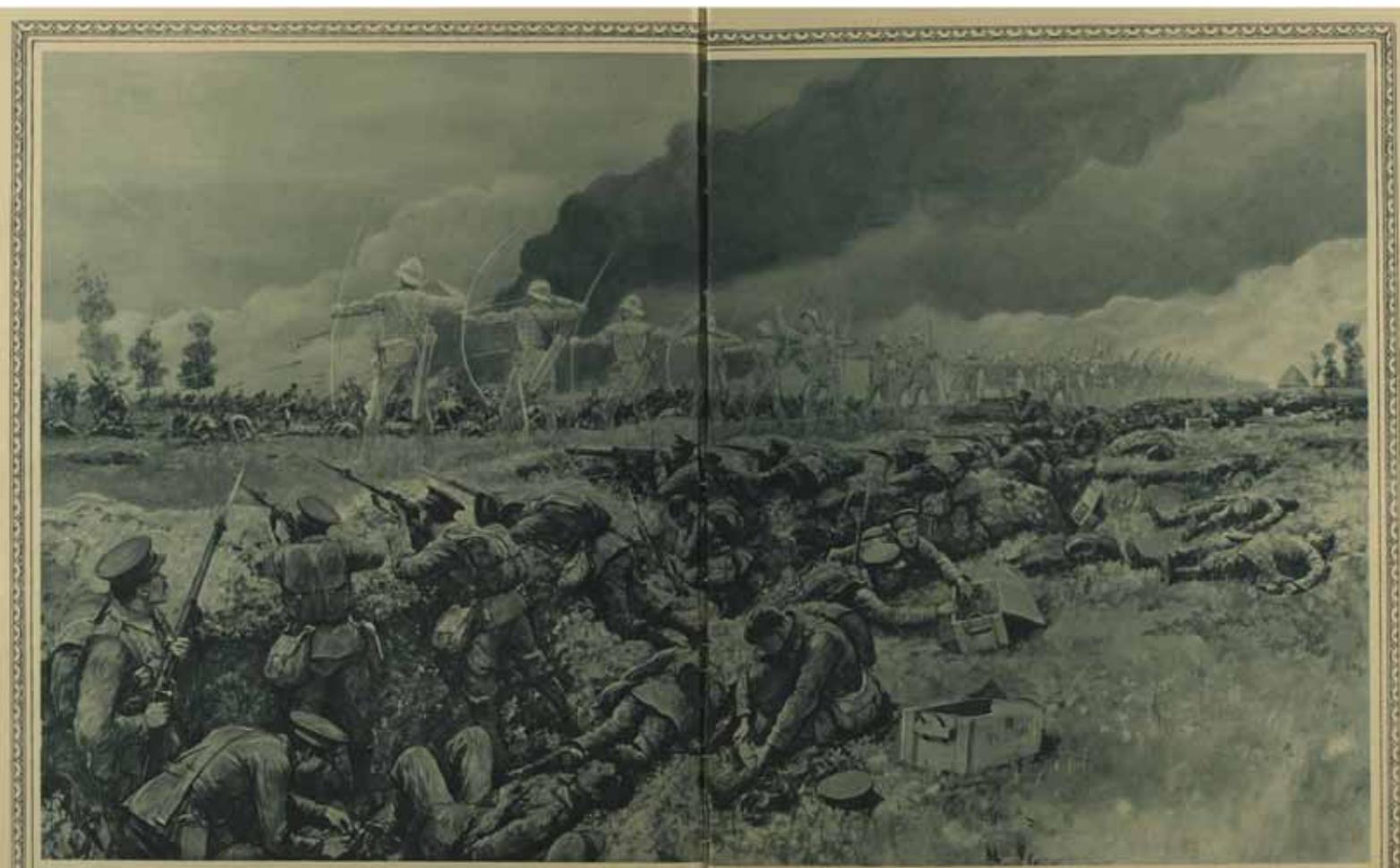
This brief review of how the battle of Agincourt has been evoked across the centuries provides several lessons about the nature of history. It shows that each age makes its own history influenced by the events of the time. Sometimes these warp the actual original event: in no way, for instance, was England a democracy in 1415 even though the king needed the consent of the Commons in parliament in order to levy taxation for war. A study of the cultural

legacy of Agincourt also shows that invocation has often been of Shakespeare's Agincourt rather than the Agincourt of 1415. Shakespeare did write, or at least collaborate in the writing of, a play entitled *Edward III*, which contains the battles of Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356). But it is a comparatively poor play and relatively little performed in comparison to *Henry V*. That difference goes a long way to explaining why Agincourt is remembered and the other English victories largely forgotten.

Agincourt has become the stuff of which legends are made: one of the most famous myths also links to the First World

The earliest known attempt to show the deployment of troops in pictorial form, from Harris Nicolas's *History of the Battle of Agincourt* (2nd edn, 1832)





War. On 29 September 1914, Arthur Machen, a journalist on the *Evening News*, published in his newspaper a short story, 'The Bowmen'. In this imagined account of the retreat from Mons in the previous month, British soldiers saw St George and the ghostly archers of Agincourt fighting for them.<sup>10</sup> What is fascinating is the response which the article triggered, with some claiming they too had seen the vision and others seeking to discredit Machen as a liar. For the historian, it is equally fascinating to see a similar story in English chronicles written within 60 years of the battle. 'On that day the French saw St George in the air over the host of the English fighting against them...thus almighty God and St George brought our enemy to the ground and gave us victory that day'.<sup>11</sup> Both stories were inventions but they remind us of the powerful emotional response which historical events can produce as well as how the boundaries between literature and history are often blurred.

The 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Agincourt provides a wonderful opportunity to recall and clarify the actual events of 1415, but also to reflect on why the battle has continued to be remembered and why it still means so much in the English-speaking world today. It has become a battle for all time and all people.

### Further reading

S. Cooper, *Agincourt: myth and reality 1415-2015* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2014)

A. Curry, *Great Battles: Agincourt* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

A. Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt: sources and interpretations* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000, 2009)

S. Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: war, remembrance and medievalism in Britain and Germany 1914-1940* (Cambridge, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> *Gesta Henrici Quinti. The Deeds of Henry the Fifth* (1975), ed. F. Taylor and J. S. Roskell, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1414-1443* (1943-47), ed. E. F. Jacob, 4 vols, London: Canterbury and York Society, iii, pp. 28-29.

<sup>3</sup> Anglo, S. (1957) 'An Early Tudor Programme for Plays and Other Demonstrations against the Pope' in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 20, p. 178.

<sup>4</sup> *Morning Post*, 24 June 1815.

<sup>5</sup> *Preston Guardian*, 4 May 1850.

<sup>6</sup> *Reynold's Newspaper*, 20 November 1859.

<sup>7</sup> British Library Additional Manuscript 80475B.

<sup>8</sup> Archives Nationales de France, 26N916/2. I am very grateful to Christophe Gilliot, Director of the Centre historique médiéval at Azincourt, for this reference and for all his help and friendship over many years.

<sup>9</sup> [www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060008209](http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060008209). The relevant section is at the end of part 2 and beginning of part 3.

<sup>10</sup> Machen, A. (1915) *The Angel of Mons: the bowmen and other legends of the war*, 2nd edn, London.

<sup>11</sup> Curry, A. (2000, 2009) *The Battle of Agincourt: sources and interpretations*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, p. 95

Anne Curry is Professor of Medieval History and Dean of Humanities at the University of Southampton, and a past president of the Historical Association. She has published many books on the battle: her latest, *Great Battles: Agincourt* (2015), considers the cultural legacy of the battle between 1415 and 2015. She is historical adviser at the Centre historique médiéval at Azincourt as well as for a Royal Armouries exhibition on the battle at the Tower of London between October 2015 and January 2016. She is also Chair of Trustees of Agincourt 600.

The £1m funding provided by HM Government will facilitate many other activities and generate an abiding legacy for the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Full details of events and news of funding awards can be found on the web site: [www.agincourt600.com](http://www.agincourt600.com).

# The President's Column

It would be a pretty good bet to claim that many people in the UK – young and old – have heard of the sinking of the *Marie Rose* in Southampton Waters in mid-July 1545, its recovery, and now the splendid reconstruction and display in Portsmouth. I would also bet that very few of those same people know about Black African pearl-diver from the South Seas, Jacques Francis, who was critical to the original salvage operation. Francis had been brought to Europe from Guinea as a slave to the Venetian salvage expert Piero Corsi who had experience with other sunken treasure. Although Francis may have found the waters off the southern coast inclement compared with those of the Mediterranean or his home climes, his expertise allowed the recovery of an extensive and expensive range of naval ordnance (worth some £1,700) as well as the goods of various merchants. We can reconstruct Francis's work from the payments made to his master over the course of two years.

A legal case ensued in the High Court of Admiralty which allows a powerful glimpse both of the Black presence in Tudor England and the complicated attitudes this prompted. The judges were very ready to accept the testimony he presented; the Italian merchants, for their own self-interest, attempted to use his racial status against the integrity and authenticity of his witness statements. Francis's deposition, given on 8 February 1548, was delivered in a confident and powerful manner, with clear expertise and accuracy. He defended his master Corsi from the accusations of other Italian merchants that items of tin and other goods had been removed without permission from other wrecks.

Francis did not describe himself as a slave (*servus*) but as a member of Corsi's household. Nevertheless, here is early evidence of the notorious slave trade, but at the same time an example of the potential for exploring the historical record to recover the experiences of Black lives. Francis was regarded by the Court of Admiralty as having equal legal status with other participants, despite the claims of the Italian merchant that his ethnicity compromised his voice. Corsi purchased appropriate dress for the diver, and he was presented as a powerful figure in the Court. Despite attempts to diminish this status with remarks about his ethnicity and by

calling him a non-Christian 'infidell', Francis showed (and it is preserved in the court reports) that a Black African could be eloquent, expert and accomplished.

This little-known story first came to my attention a while ago when I was asked to make a short radio programme on *Black Elizabethans*. In the absence of any massive historical literature I had the opportunity to explore the archives to search for records of a Black presence. Much work has been undertaken into the elite world of the court, the theatres and musicians in high society but less on everyday lives in Tudor England. With the help of the London Metropolitan Archives we discovered that it was possible with only a little effort to recover details of 'ordinary' men and women of colour in the period and indeed into the Stuart Age. Of course historians of slavery have made much progress in the structures and profits of the trade, but until recently less attention has been devoted to non-elite histories.

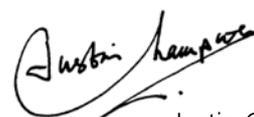
This dimension of the history of the Black presence in the British Isles has been addressed in the recent publication of a beautifully illustrated and important book, *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England* (2013) by Onyeka. The work itself is testimony to the lack of historical enquiry devoted to the issue. The struggle against the lack of interest in academic institutions meant that the author had to plough a lonely furrow. The results are remarkable, and should be a starting point for all historians of the early modern period. *Blackamoors* shows what could be done. Indeed now with many archives becoming digital and with open access the possibilities of recovering these lost histories is ever more possible, and therefore ever more important.

Although it is possible to recover the roots of some fundamental prejudices about non-Europeans, these should sit alongside the deep hostility to the French and the Spanish too. While some Black and Asian individuals were regarded as pagans and much of the way they were regarded was driven by theological prejudice, on the streets of London, and in the alehouses and theatres, there is some evidence of a form of social tolerance. After all many of them lived in intimacy with local

families they served. There is some evidence for inter-marrying too. It is clear that the encounter with peoples from around the globe (literally from all over the world) brought a fantastic diversity to English culture: it's an aspect of our history that is often forgotten or denied. There has been a Black presence in the country for centuries, so in one sense 'English society' as we know it has been shaped by their contribution too. The key thing to underscore here is that Black and Asian communities have been part of the history of these islands since Roman times: the idea that this is a recent development is simply wrong. If we can all explore this shared heritage (and the important contribution of other communities such as the 'refugees' from religious persecution in the seventeenth centuries) it will be possible to appreciate the diversity of our collective history, rather than the rather narrow celebration of traditional histories.

Earlier in the year a conference took place under the title of *History Matters* to discuss why there are so few black history students and teachers in the UK. While history in the UK remains popular among those of African and Caribbean heritage in Britain, in schools many black students regard history as a 'white middle-class pursuit'. One important factor is a school curriculum that under-represents and overlooks the histories of those of African and Caribbean heritage. Curricular reforms which omitted key British historical figures of African and Caribbean heritage such as Mary Seacole and Olaudah Equiano did not help. In 2013/14 only three black applicants won places to train as history teachers, and statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency for 2012/13 show admission of 'Black British' students was just 1.8% (1,340) of the total at undergraduate level and just 0.5% (25) of the total at post-graduate level in 2013/14.

*History Matters* aims to launch a public investigation into what a group of black historians called in a recent letter to *Times Higher Education* 'this dire situation'. A documentary film will be launched very soon.



Justin Champion  
President of the Historical Association

# Welsh archers at Agincourt:

## myth and reality

**Adam Chapman** debates the evidence for a Welsh presence among Henry V's highly-successful force of archers at Agincourt in 1415.

Michael Drayton, in his poem of 1627, *The Bataille of Agincourt*, described the Welsh presence in Henry V's army: 'who no lesse honour ow'd To their own king, nor yet less valiant were, In one strong re'ment [regiment] had themselves bestowed'.<sup>1</sup> Drayton was not privy to the surviving administrative sources for the 1415 campaign. His 'record' of the Welsh in Henry V's army in 1415 was part of a county-by-county praise of the shires of England and Wales. In fact, it was the archery talents of the men from Lancashire not of those from Wales which Drayton celebrated: 'not as the least I weene, Through three crownes, three Arrows smear'd with blood.'

Drayton was writing anachronistically. No fifteenth-century chronicle or sixteenth-century history which includes a narrative of Agincourt mentions Welsh archers at the battle at all. Yet in the popular imagination, Agincourt has been co-opted as a great patriotic achievement, the victory of Welshmen, in knitted Monmouth caps, over the French army. For much of the six centuries between 1415 and the present, however, Agincourt is actually the silent battle in Welsh culture. Among the large extant corpus of Welsh language poetry dating from the fifteenth century – the work of around a hundred poets and several thousand poems praising the Welsh gentry – there is not one mention of the battle of Agincourt. References to English wars in France are common, however, and these poems regularly reinforce the expectation that a gentleman should be proficient in arms and participate in war.

### Henry V and Wales

The principal reason for this lack of mention of Agincourt was probably

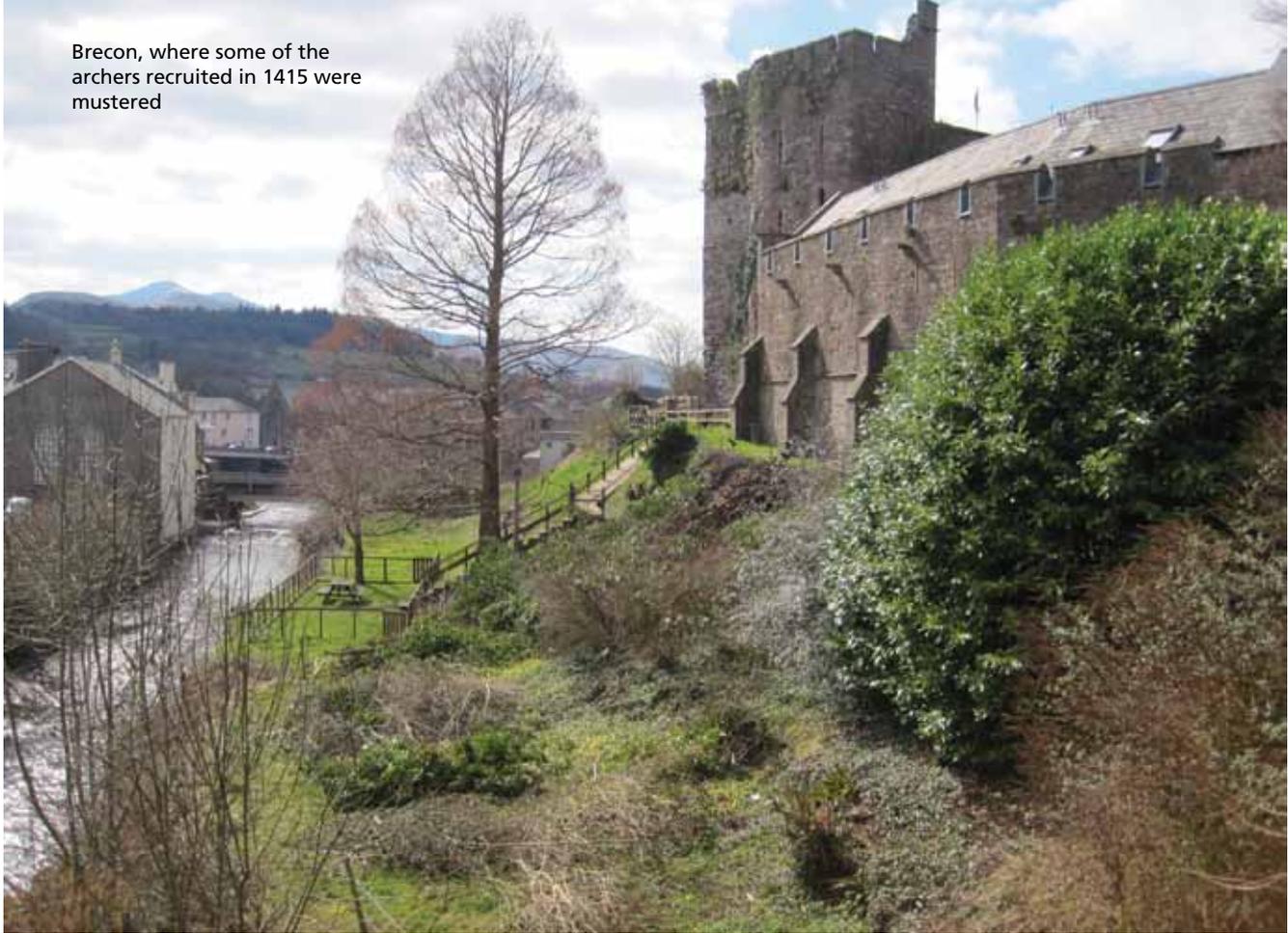


the failure of the decade-long national rebellion, led by the Welsh esquire, a descendant of Welsh princes and the self-proclaimed prince of Wales, Owain Glyndŵr. At the height of Owain's rebellion, all Wales was involved. Owain even enjoyed the support of the king of France and English rebels against Henry IV and his son, Henry 'of Monmouth' Prince of Wales.<sup>2</sup> The rebellion began on 16 September 1400 – indeed Glyndŵr seems to have chosen Prince Henry's birthday to proclaim himself prince

– and gradually petered out about a decade later. Glyndŵr remained at large and retained his supporters, so that large parts of Wales were beyond the reach of royal government. In this light it might be wondered that any Welshmen fought with Henry V in 1415 at all and this is a question we shall return to.

The burdens of military recruitment on the lands of Wales in 1415 were far from novel. English kings had employed Welshmen in their armies for centuries, but the factors surrounding

Brecon, where some of the archers recruited in 1415 were mustered



this particular campaign were decidedly unusual. The recruitment process played a significant part in the government's response to the end of the Glyndŵr rebellion in the shires and in the March of Wales. The shires of Carmarthen, Cardigan, Merioneth, Anglesey and Caernarfon were the property of the crown, while the March consisted of 40 or so quasi-independent lordships forming a crescent from the south-west to the north-east of Wales. While most of Wales was more or less at peace by the time of Henry V's accession in 1413, order and governance were far from fully restored, especially in north Wales. That said, in territorial terms, Henry V's position in the March of Wales was far more significant than that of any earlier English monarch. As king, he retained control of the royal shires in North Wales (Caernarfon, Merioneth and Anglesey), and of South Wales (Cardigan and Carmarthen), which he had held as Prince of Wales. With the lands of the Duchy of Lancaster inherited from his father, Henry dominated southern Wales: in addition to Brecon, one of the largest Marcher lordships which had come through Henry IV's marriage to Mary de Bohun, Henry V held the lordships of Monmouth and Three Castles, Hay and Huntington on the River Wye, Ogmore west of Cardiff, and Cydweli with Carnwyllion with all their dependent liberties west of Swansea, all of which he incorporated into the royal demesne. As such, and unusually for the army recruited in 1415, the Welshmen

within it were recruited directly by the king rather than by contractors – the peers, knights and esquires of Henry's realm who raised the bulk of the army.

With these royal estates came significant responsibilities, not least of ensuring that the rebellion, once extinguished, was not reignited. The task was accomplished through a combination of judicial action, communal fines and subsidies, and, as we shall see, unusual military demands. In the March of Wales, where the rights of individual lords were generally fiercely protected, Henry IV's direct levies of fines on the communities of Marcher lordships were exceptional. The justification was simple: the revolt in Wales was an act of treason against the crown and therefore only the crown could pardon the offenders for their treason. Henry IV levied fines of 180 marks (£108) and £50 on the tenants of the Lancaster lordships of Cydweli and Ogmore, and £500 and £300 on the Marcher lordships of Glamorgan and Abergavenny immediately before his death. The accession of Henry V in March 1413 brought new and greater demands upon his own lands. By the end of 1414 the new king had raised over £5,000 in collective fines from Wales and the March.

The process of personal accommodation following the end of the rebellion was more complicated and more varied. While some rebels were executed or had their property redistributed, the policy of Henry IV and

Henry V tended towards reconciliation, albeit on tough terms. Men like Henry Don, a member of the gentry from the lordship of Cydweli and who had led the rebels there, were bound over for enormous fines on their release from royal custody intended to ensure their good behaviour. In Don's case his release only provided the opportunity to settle scores: at the judicial sessions in 1413 he was indicted for terrorising the locality and for going as far as levying fines on those of his neighbours who had not risen in rebellion with him! His grandson, Gruffudd, however, fought at Agincourt and was an important captain in Henry V's armies in France after 1417. Military service, as we shall see, formed a key step on the road to pardon and for some, favour.

## Recruitment in Wales in 1415

Wales in 1415, then, was far from a peaceful, settled country. Owain Glyndŵr himself remained a free man and, though no longer a threat, was protected by those loyal to him. North-west Wales in particular was still more or less beyond the reach of Henry's government and remained a problem for the rest of the fifteenth century. In February 1415, with the king's plans to launch a new expedition to France taking shape, his council advised that special attention be given to securing Wales. Sixty men-at-arms and 120 archers led by the sheriff of Merioneth served for three months from 4 March.

Half were stationed at the Cistercian abbey of Cymer near Dolgellau and half at Bala. More archers were based at another Cistercian abbey, Strata Florida (Welsh: *Ystrad Eflur*), near Aberystwyth. In June, attempts were made to contact Glyndŵr and to offer him pardon. This he seems to have declined. More soldiers were deployed around the borders of Merioneth and remained until the end of December. Meanwhile, the lords of the Welsh March were ordered to garrison their castles and the king himself invested in supplies of guns and gunpowder for his Welsh castles.

By April 1415, the king's preparations for his campaign had turned to the recruitment of men. While the nobility and members of the king's own household entered into contracts with the king to supply soldiers, the king, owing to his enormous personal estates, concentrated in the north-west of England – Lancashire and Cheshire – and in Wales was able to use these resources to bolster the size of his army.

In common with the royal and duchy estates in Wales, the English royal shires – Cheshire, and, under the Lancastrian kings, Lancashire – provided companies of archers for the royal army. In 1385, Richard II recruited 70 Welsh foot archers to serve in Scotland and again in Ireland in 1394. Foot archers had not formed a regular part of English

Wales in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.



In 1385, and possibly in Irish campaigns, Richard's armies were intended to impress. Henry IV's expedition may have had a similar intent and, if this is so, such companies of archers bolstered

to one man-at-arms to every four archers. In percentage terms an army with 75% archers became one with 80%. In 1415, Henry V intended to be abroad for at least a year; the additional archers recruited from his personal estates (his demesne) were intended to facilitate conquest since they would be as useful in siege and garrisons as in the field.

### The South Welsh contingent in 1415

We know about the men raised from the royal demesne in Wales from a set of muster rolls preserved in the National Archives at Kew. They are attached to documents acknowledging receipt of money from the Crown to the soldiers up until the point they joined the army. They record three sets of payments apparently reflecting separate musters

made at Brecon, Carmarthen and Cydwelli.<sup>3</sup> The money was paid out to groups of men-at-arms, five each from Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire, ten from the Marcher lordship of Brecon

We might ask, from a military perspective, what it was that such large numbers of relatively less mobile foot archers were intended to do.

expeditionary armies since the resumption of the war in the 1360s. Archers were generally mounted so as to move quickly but fought on foot; the longbow did not lend itself to being used on horseback. Richard had, infamously, retained archers from his earldom of Chester as his personal bodyguard during the final years of his reign. For his fateful second Irish campaign of 1399 he attached to his household a company of ten knights, 110 men-at-arms and 900 archers from the county. In 1400, when Henry IV campaigned in Scotland, he recruited heavily from Cheshire, in part, no doubt, as an expression of his authority over the county most closely associated with Richard. Unfortunately, there is no evidence from the surviving documentation relating to this campaign that Henry IV used men from his Welsh estates in 1400. We might ask, from a military perspective, what it was that such large numbers of relatively less mobile foot archers were intended to do.

the size of armies. In 1385 Richard was proclaiming himself a martial king, and also an adult. The campaign, however, was brief and the two Irish campaigns in the 1390s were meant to demonstrate the effectiveness of Richard's power as monarch, both in England and Ireland.

Most of the retinues in Henry's army in 1415 had one man-at-arms for every three archers. This was obviously felt to be the optimum ratio and is first seen in the Welsh wars in 1406. It was a marked increase on the common ratio of one man-at-arms to one archer in the armies which the English had sent to France in the late fourteenth century. It also shows an appreciation of the military value of archers. Furthermore they were cheap (costing half as much as a man-at-arms) and easy to recruit, given that all adult males had to practise the longbow on Sundays. The archer companies from the royal lands in Cheshire, Lancashire and Wales which Henry raised in 1415 altered that ratio for his army as a whole

and three from the lordship of Cydwelli by John Merbury, Henry V's chief official in the area, who was also chamberlain of his lands of the principality in South Wales.

These documents are exceptionally detailed, recording the particular divisions of counties and lordships from which the men were recruited. The muster of the royal counties of Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire was taken at Carmarthen on 26 June. That for the Lancaster lordships of Brecon, Hay and Huntington, as well as other minor lordships then in royal hands, including Llanstefan, St Clears, Oysterlow and Talacharn was apparently made at Brecon. The men-at-arms were presumably responsible for co-ordinating the recruitment of the archers and by their seals accepted responsibility for payment. Only two of these seals survive in good condition and only one can be identified with its owner, Richard Boys of Brecon, because it bears his

initials. A curious feature of the muster from the royal counties of Cardigan and Carmarthen is that many men were serving as substitutes for another. This curious fact suggests that these men were summoned in person: those who provided substitutes were presumably too old, ill or – in the case of those who held local government offices at the same time – too busy to fight. These personal summons were almost certainly a consequence of their involvement in the rebellion: as named rebels the price of forgiveness was joining the king's army when they were required.

Brecon and the smaller lordships provided ten men-at-arms, 14 mounted archers and 146 foot archers. The royal shires of South Wales and their dependent lordships yielded ten men-at-arms, 13 mounted archers and 326 foot archers. Cydweli provided three of each type of soldier, nine men, a total of 528 men, paid for 45 and a half days, long enough for them to march to the coast of England and to join Henry's army. The men-at-arms were paid at the usual rate of the time, 12*d.* per day, while the archers were paid 6*d.* per day whether mounted or not. This was a good wage since in the fourteenth century foot archers had tended to be paid only 4*d.* per day. In contrast, at least 247 archers were raised from Cheshire, although 650 may have been intended, and 500 archers were recruited from Lancashire and were divided into groups of 50, each under the command of a local knight or esquire, each with a personal retinue: this was a more significant, and higher status, contribution.

Not all of the men who assembled at Carmarthen went to France, however. Some did not even leave west Wales. Nine men-at-arms with nine mounted archers and 38 foot archers served in Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire between 6 July and 11 November. Four of the nine men-at-arms had been named in John Merbury's financial account as chamberlain of South Wales. One of these, Dafydd ab Ieuan ap Trahaiarn, who had intended to go to France as a man-at-arms from Carmarthenshire, was a former rebel. His lands in Cantref Mawr (Carmarthenshire) had been forfeited to Dafydd Gam, an esquire from the lordship of Brecon, in November 1401. Another two, Ieuan Teg and Llywelyn ap Gwilym Llwyd had enlisted to serve as archers in France so it is probable that the men serving under them had also intended to leave for France, meaning that the Welsh archers who sailed with Henry V could not have numbered more than 460. They reached Warminster in Wiltshire around 24 July, a week before the expedition was due to sail. We know this from a complaint that English and Welsh soldiers were

Sycharth, the seat of Owain Glyndŵr in North Wales



reported as not paying for food they had acquired from the local population.

Other Welshmen were present in the 1415 army but only in small numbers. Thomas, earl of Arundel, had extensive estates in north-east Wales but no Welshmen were included in the retinue that Arundel brought to France. The earl, however, fell ill at Harfleur and returned to England, dying at Arundel castle at the end of October. Perhaps for this reason, the surviving records of his retinue are far more detailed than most others. They show that many of the earl's men fell sick too but that the overall strength of Arundel's retinue was maintained by the use of substitutes. Interestingly, almost all the replacements were Welshmen.

### Dafydd (Davy) Gam

Welshmen are wholly absent from English narrative accounts of the battle from the same period. The South Wales chronicler, Adam Usk, however, claims the death of two men at the battle. One, Sir John Scudamore of Kentchurch, Herefordshire, had enlisted in Henry's army but was almost certainly part of the garrison left at Harfleur after the surrender of the town, and was still in that garrison in February 1416. He did not fight at Agincourt and he certainly could not have died there, since we know that he in fact survived until 1435; Scudamore's prolonged absence as a garrison soldier probably caused rumours of his demise. The second, Dafydd ap Llywelyn ap Hywel Fychan, Usk describes as 'David Gam of Brecon'. Other contemporary and near-contemporary commentators noted his

death: the chronicle of Peter Basset and Christopher Hanson call him 'Davy Gam esquire, Welshman'.<sup>4</sup> Although the chronicle of the monk of St Albans, Thomas Walsingham, and the Great Chronicle of London also list Gam among the dead, they do not mention his origins and, by the time he appears in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599), these seem to have been forgotten, at least in England. Although Gam is mentioned in the play as among the dead he is not called 'Welshman'.

So who was he? Dafydd or Davy Gam (his 'nickname' indicates that he had some form of visible disfigurement, perhaps a squint), was a life-long servant to the Lancastrian cause. He had served Henry V's grandfather, John of Gaunt, and with his brother Gwilym and son Morgan, was appointed a king's esquire by Henry IV. His loyalty to the English cause during Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion was important to both Henry IV and Henry V, then Prince of Wales, but totemic to his Welsh opponents. During the rebellion, Dafydd gained estates confiscated from rebels and, despite damage to his property, benefited from his loyalty. In 1412, after the rebellion was over, however, Gam was abducted and ransomed by Glyndŵr's supporters. Gam had benefitted financially from supporting Henry IV throughout the rebellion but the scale of the ransom demanded by the rebels outweighed

Monument in Abergavenny church of Gwladus, daughter of Dafydd Gam, and her second husband, Sir William ap Thomas.



his resources. The regard with which he was held by the English regime, however, meant that he was granted permission to levy taxation on the Marcher lordship of Brecon to recover his liberty.

In 1415, Dafydd entered into an indenture on 29 April to serve as a man-at-arms with three archers, his retinue reflecting the optimum ratio.<sup>5</sup> Although the documents do not tell us who the archers were, a tradition has developed that one was the husband of his daughter, Gwladus. This man, Roger Fychan or Vaughan of Bredwardine, Herefordshire, fathered three sons with Gwladus, Walter (or Watcyn), Thomas and Roger (d. 1471), who all played important parts in support of the Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses. Sixteenth-century heraldic visitations intended to confirm the genealogies of the gentry state that Roger Fychan also died at Agincourt though the presence of an esquire of that name in the retinue of the earl of Warwick for Henry V's campaign to Normandy in 1417 casts doubt on those stories, even if he did not survive long after 1417. Gwladus's second husband was Sir William ap Thomas, who built the magnificent Raglan Castle. He is another who is supposed to have served at Agincourt but, once again, there is no contemporary evidence. Nor are there any references to Dafydd Gam's death at Agincourt in any Welsh source of the fifteenth century.

Why not? Agincourt had a contemporary fame throughout the English realm that has only grown since. In the context of Wales, as we have seen, it came at the end of a decade-long revolt which for a time had genuinely national aspirations and whose shadow

was a long one. Fighting in France was something which the Welsh gentry came to celebrate by the 1430s and this was fully expressed in praise given to them by poets. Mathew Goch (often given as Matthew Gough) of Maelor in Flintshire, for example, enjoyed great success in Normandy as a soldier where he served from at least 1425 to 1450. He finally died defending London Bridge against Jack Cade's Kentish rebels in 1450. Lewys Glyn Cothi, Huw ap Dafydd and Guto'r Glyn all praised him and the latter, a soldier himself, may have served alongside him in the 1430s. Guto'r, without exaggeration, noted that he was 'A man from Maelor, delightfully civilized/a man who shattered spears/ a famous man from Trefor as far as Rouen ... /he is a man of distinction for the Crown.'<sup>6</sup>

Agincourt, as the greatest battle of the age, was too close to the great disappointment of the failure of the rebellion and the upheaval this created. Even praise composed to Dafydd Gam's grandsons failed to mention the specific incident at Agincourt which has come to define him. The earliest writer to suggest Gam's place in the battle was Sir Walter Raleigh, whose *History of the World* (1614) has Gam, allegedly sent out to spy the French, return with the fanciful report: 'that of the *Frenchmen*, there were enough to be killed; enough to be taken prisoners; and enough to run away.'

## Conclusion

The documentary record cannot tell us how many of Henry V's Welsh archers actually fought at Agincourt. As we saw, 528 were recruited, but perhaps 50 of these never left Wales,

and another 50 or so fell ill at Harfleur and were given leave to return home; their names are recorded on lists of the sick.<sup>7</sup> So perhaps 400 survived to fight at Agincourt. Henry V's army at that battle numbered 8,000 to 8,500: therefore in no way did the Welsh predominate. It is impossible to be sure what effect these Welshmen had or how they were deployed on the field of battle. When the author summarised his research into Welshmen and the battle of Agincourt on BBC Radio Wales a few years ago he was reminded that he had forgotten something – that one Welshman was worth three Englishmen. Who am I to argue?

## Suggestions for further reading

A. Chapman, 'The King's Welshmen: Welsh Involvement in the Expeditionary Army of 1415', *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 9 (2011), 41–64.

R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyndŵr* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

A. O. H. Jarman and G. R. Hughes, *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, vol. 2 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992).

For more on the culture of fifteenth-century Wales and the praise poetry of Guto'r Glyn, see [www.gutorglyn.net](http://www.gutorglyn.net)

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- <sup>1</sup> M. Drayton, *The Battaile of Agincourt*, ed. R. Garnett (London, 1893), stanza 74. The whole poem is available on line as part of the Project Gutenberg ([www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/27770](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/27770)).
- <sup>2</sup> Henry V was not known as 'of Monmouth' in his lifetime but was referred to as such in two Welsh poems by Lewys Glyn Cothi later in the fifteenth century. As 'Henri Mynwy', (Monmouth is 'Trefynwy' in Welsh), Lewys used him as a point of comparison for two of his patrons, both named Henry. See Dafydd Johnston, ed., (1995) *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, poem 21, lines 1–2 and poem 156, lines 47–48.
- <sup>3</sup> TNA E101/46/20. All of the names have been entered onto [www.medievalsoldier.org](http://www.medievalsoldier.org).
- <sup>4</sup> Curry, A. (2000, 2009) *The Battle of Agincourt: sources and interpretations*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, p. 88.
- <sup>5</sup> TNA E 101/69/4/404.
- <sup>6</sup> This theme is more fully examined by Glanmor Williams, in his *Renewal and Reformation: Wales c. 1415–1642* (Oxford University Press, 1987, 2002), ch. 7. For fuller biographical details of Mathew Gough/Mathau Goch see also: <http://www.gutorglyn.net/gutoswales/persondb.php?ref=nm02>
- <sup>7</sup> TNA E 101/45/1 m. 12.

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# Historical Association Tours



Tours have been an important part of the HA's activities for nearly 80 years and we are delighted to advertise this exciting and engaging tour. Over the years changing regulations that govern the organisation of tours and holidays have meant we no longer run tours directly but they are still organised by HA volunteers for HA members and run by fully-accredited tour companies. We are grateful to our tour organisers.

## Tour of Gloucestershire: both sides of the Severn

Wednesday 1 June to Wednesday 8 June 2016



### Tour leaders: Elizabeth Yarker and Kathleen Morris

Gloucestershire has got it all – and knows it. The rich Cotswolds, the ancient Royal Forest of Dean, with the River Severn sauntering between them, mostly unseen, through the Vale of Gloucester. And then there are the unexpected characters; bold, inventive and downright eccentric. We meet the Romans at Chedworth and Cirencester, the Anglo-Saxons at Deerhurst, Edward II at Berkeley Castle and again at Gloucester Cathedral and free miners in the Forest of Dean.



In Gloucester we see the Docks as well as the Cathedral and Tewkesbury has far more than just an Abbey. Regency Cheltenham has charm and elegance. Along our journey we will encounter quirky museums – the Jet Age, Dr Jenner's House, the Wilson and the Museum in the Park – explore the Arts and Crafts movement in Chipping Campden and discover utility furniture at Broadway. We expect to visit Sudeley Castle at Winchcombe and the nearby Hailes Abbey, Stanway House and Newark Park as well as the incredible Snowhill and the incomparable Woodchester Mansion. We hope that we will have time to fit in visits to the unusual gardens at Westbury and Painswick.

**Accommodation:** We will be staying on the edge of Cheltenham, at the 4-star Golden Valley Hotel close to the station and near the M5.

**Cost:** £800 with £175 single supplement. The price includes dinner, bed and breakfast, coach travel, entry fees (but NOT to National Trust properties) and guide tours.

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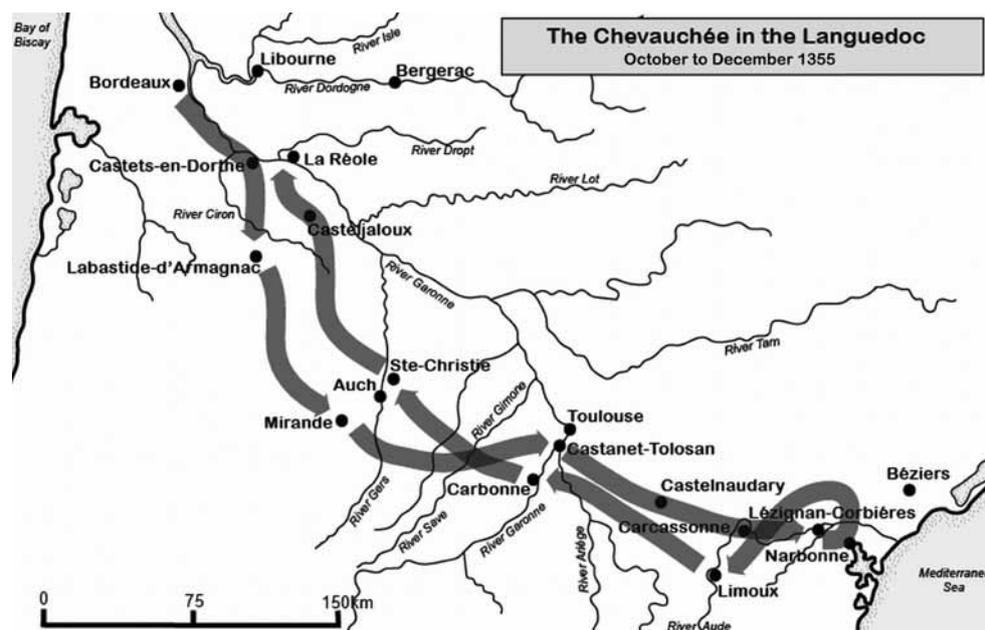
# On the campaign trail:

## walking the Hundred Years War

In the tradition of landscape historians, **Peter Hoskins** has explored some of the route marches taken by English armies during the Hundred Years War.

After the battle of Crécy in 1346 and the capture of Calais by Edward III in the following year the Hundred Years War settled into an uneasy truce which was due to end in the summer of 1355. Early in that the year there were signs of a return to war with French incursions into English Aquitaine. Edward III sent his eldest son, Edward of Woodstock, the Black Prince, to Bordeaux with around 2,600 men to reinforce loyal Gascons. In the autumn of 1355 the prince led a *chevauchée*, a mounted expedition generally characterised by the devastation and pillaging of towns, villages and crops, as far as Narbonne on the Mediterranean coast and back to Aquitaine. The following year he led a further *chevauchée* north to the Loire and on his way south back towards Bordeaux won his great victory over the French at Poitiers on 19 September 1356.

These *chevauchées* attracted my interest and in 2005 I started on a project to follow the itineraries of the expedition, taking me eventually on foot across 1,300 miles of France. During the second week of my project, on a clear, crisp morning in November 2005, I set out with my walking companion, Richard, from the small town of Nogaro in the south-west of France. After several days of walking in grey, cold, wet weather we were looking forward to a fine, clear day with some interesting sites to visit in glorious countryside. I had been planning the walking for some months and I should not have been surprised when, as we crested a ridge, the Pyrénées suddenly came into view:



soaring, snow-clad ramparts stretching across the horizon more than 120km away.

Even though I knew that our route approached the mountains, I had not expected to see them. The effect suddenly revealed to me something intangible that I knew I was looking for, but which I had not been able to formulate clearly: some sense, however imperfect, of the impact of the terrain and the experience of the adventure in which they were engaged on the men in the prince's army all those centuries ago. While I was mildly surprised to see the mountains, Richard was amazed. He is an old friend and he came along to keep me company, enjoy the walking

and make the most of the food and drink as we progressed through the Languedoc. He did not bother to carry a map or show much interest in mine as we went along, and, frankly, he had no idea where we were, other than a vague impression that we were somewhere now well to the south-east of Bordeaux. Since he had had to bring his passport he at least knew he was in foreign parts. I was struck by how similar his experience could have been for an English or Welsh archer with the Black Prince's army, away from his native land perhaps for the first time and never having seen anything higher than Snowdonia. He would not have had a map, and would probably have had only the sketchiest

notion of where he was. Only 70 years before a representative of the sovereign of Persia had visited Bordeaux and, considering it to be the English capital, had returned home without bothering to visit England.<sup>1</sup> If an educated man could have such an imperfect knowledge of geography, how much more so would this be the case for our archer? Was he going to be asked to cross the mountains? What lay beyond? No doubt there would be muttering in the ranks and questions asked of those who were more experienced and senior.

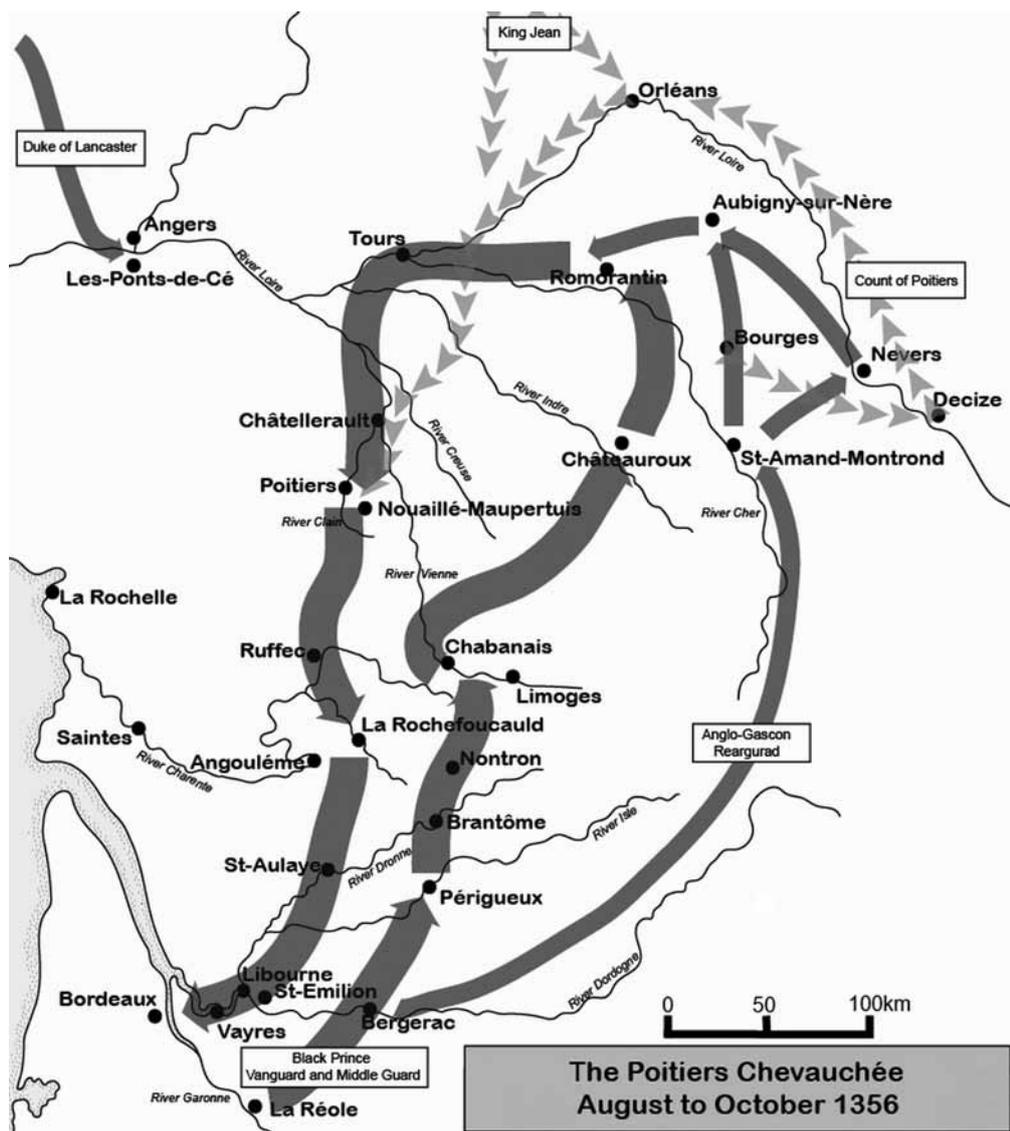
### Walking the ground

I had embarked on the project to follow the Black Prince's expeditions having read the general histories of the period and the detailed contemporary itineraries.<sup>2</sup> Looking at even small-scale maps in some detail made it clear that in the general histories of the expedition some sweeping assumptions had been made about the route followed and the conduct of the operations. Although an RAF pilot by profession, I had always recognised the importance that my army friends attached to 'walking the ground' and their maxim that 'time spent on reconnaissance is seldom wasted.' It seemed to me that by walking the routes I would have a greater appreciation of the impact of the terrain on the campaigns and gain an understanding of the decisions taken by the prince. It would also help to resolve some of the uncertainties over the route and place-names.

I generally walked between 25 and 35km a day. This was representative of the progress of armies of the period which, even though many men were mounted, were still constrained by the speed of those on foot and the wagons of the baggage train. Could I have achieved my objectives travelling by car or from detailed studies of large-scale maps? Possibly, but the beauty of walking is that you have time to reflect on the topography you are crossing and there is also no doubt that you get a different perspective at walking pace as the terrain slowly unfolds before you, revealing towns and castles which, although close in terms of distance, are an hour or more away on foot.

Approaching a town on foot, often on a minor path or track, gives an entirely different perspective to arriving by car on a busy road through built-up areas. The approach to Narbonne on the Black Prince's 1355 itinerary was a case in point. The modern road into the town is busy with traffic moving rapidly along a valley between the hills of the Minervois and Corbières, and the old town emerges eventually after

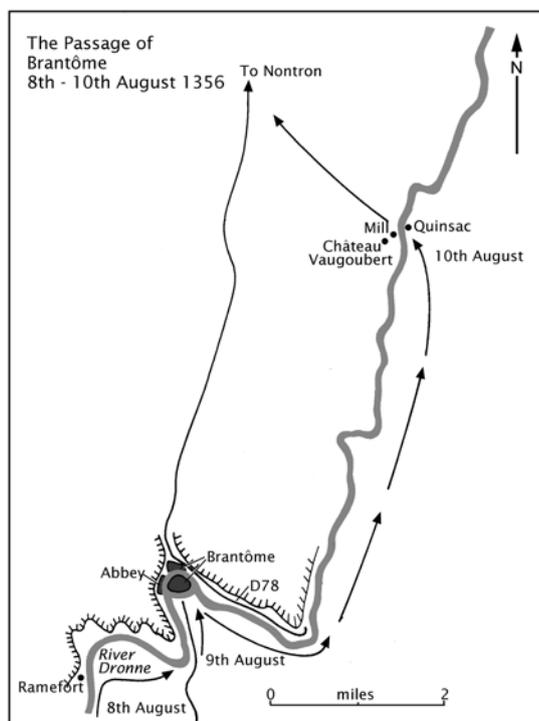
The incomplete cathedral of St Just and St Pasteur in Narbonne



Ramefort castle



Looking north to Nontron across the river Bandiat.



November 1355 the Black Prince lodged at the Dominican monastery of Prouille. This visit had been planned and during his stay the prince was admitted to the brotherhood. To mark his visit the prince donated the considerable sum of £32 in alms, delivered by the hand of a Dominican in the prince's service, Richard of Leominster. We also know that while the prince was at the monastery his men were burning the nearby town of Fanjeaux and earlier that day had burned the Dominican monastery at Limoux. These somewhat dry facts are thrown into sharp relief when you stand on the site of the monastery at Prouille and realize that Fanjeaux is only 1.5km away, standing 150m above the monastery, and that the destruction and burning of the town would have been

wisdom is of the crossing being from west to east with the prince's army having passed through Brantôme. However, the prince's army had stopped for the night of 8 August 1356 about 5km south-west of Brantôme near the castle of Ramefort. The following day they moved on to Brantôme and then the next only a further 10km to Quinsac and crossed the Dronne. As I approached the town the questions that came to mind were: why did the army take two days to cover 15km when the average speed of marching during the Poitiers campaign was close to 25km per day, and why, if the army had passed through Brantôme, would they then cross the river at Quinsac which would have taken them away from the line of advance? Brantôme is a natural choke point on the route north, standing on an island in an oxbow of the river, surrounded by ramparts and with high ground to the west and the east. It was in French hands and even if lightly garrisoned it would have presented a formidable obstacle for the prince's army. It is likely that the pause here and the slow progress was due either to an attempt to negotiate a passage of the town or to assess the prospects of taking the town to secure the army's passage. When a safe passage could not be secured then a march up the left bank of the Dronne to cross at Quinsac where there were known to be fords was the logical step to take, resulting in a crossing of the Dronne from east to west and not as the assumption has generally been from west to east.

passing through sprawling suburbs. The army of the Black Prince generally advanced on a broad front to maximise foraging and pillage, and thus many of the troops approaching Narbonne would have been on the higher ground above the main road. My approach through vineyards over this ground resulted in a remarkable difference in perspective. Narbonne has relatively few high-rise buildings, and approaching in this direction shows the town much as it would have looked in the fourteenth century with the cathedral, unfinished then and still incomplete, dominating the sky line.<sup>3</sup>

There are occasions when standing and looking at the landscape can tell a story that will not stand out from a written account. On Sunday 15

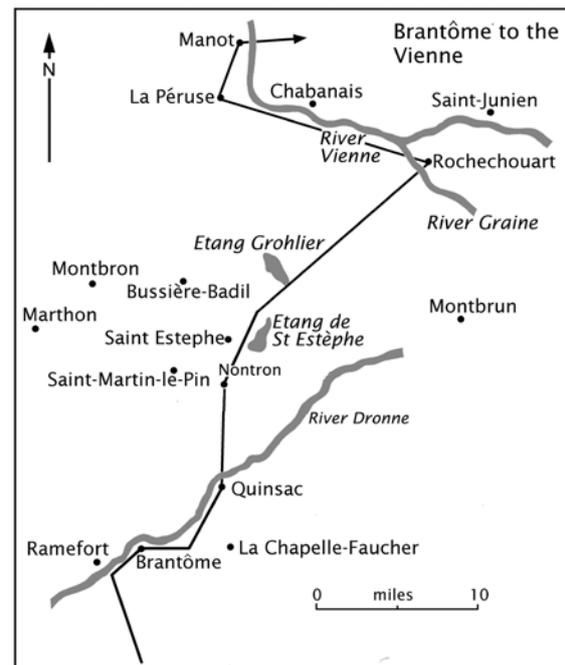
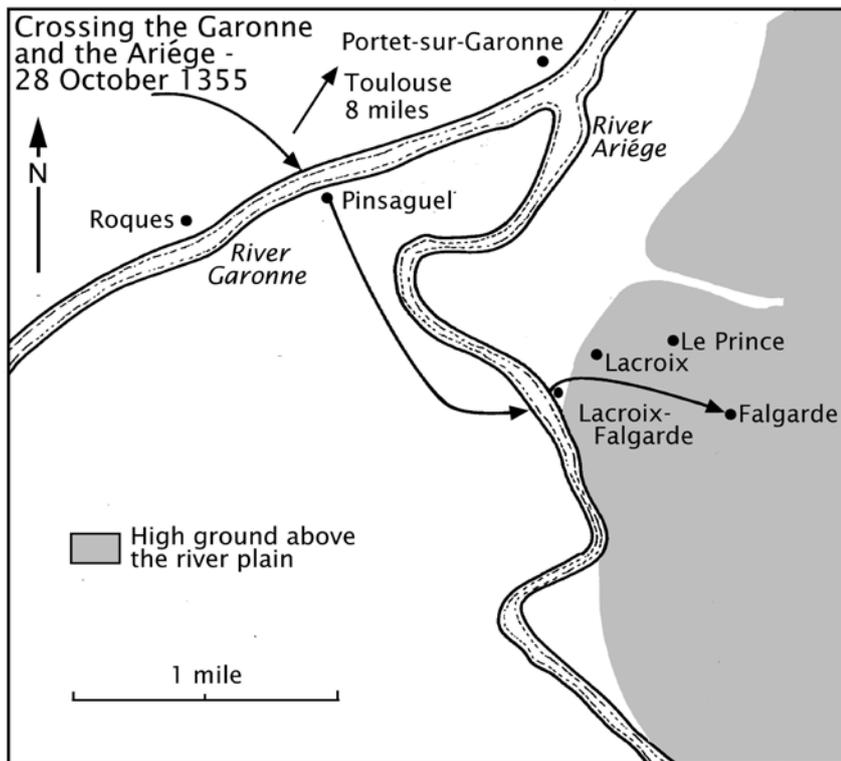
clearly visible by those welcoming the prince.

### Retracing events through the terrain

An important aspect of the walking was to see what the route across the countryside could tell me about events. There were numerous minor examples where accounts in secondary sources did not make sense, simply it seems because a small-scale map had been used and the places on the itinerary joined by straight lines. Often this related to a purported river crossing. Advancing at walking pace and seeing the landscape unfold encouraged an analysis of the terrain and events.

An example was the crossing of the Dronne in 1356, where the conventional

The next town of any importance on the itinerary north of Brantôme was Nontron. The town stands on high ground above the river Bandiat on a spur of ground in the shape of an upturned boat hull. It was fortified in the fourteenth century. The Bandiat is a very minor river and not a significant obstacle in its own right. Having said that, it runs in a deep valley just to the south of the town. Considerable effort would have been required to force a



passage through both the river and the town. Approaching from the south on foot the challenge that the town would have represented is immediately apparent. The day before stopping near Nontron the army advanced only 15km from the river crossing at Quinsac, but the next day they moved on 40km. There was not a deviation from the direct route on this occasion, and the question this time as I approached the town was: is there any evidence that they negotiated a safe passage, which could explain the rapid progress? The archives of the Dordogne showed that in early 1357 letier de Maignac forfeited 'all his goods, either in the manor of Nontron or elsewhere, since the said de Maignac is accused of having delivered the castle of Nontron into the hands of the enemy.'<sup>4</sup> The connection with the passage of the prince six months earlier is not explicit but it is likely from the circumstances that forfeiture relates to the passage of the prince.

### The problem of crossing rivers

The countryside itself has a story to tell. A look at the map of the 1355 *chevauchée* will show you a series of relatively minor valleys running across the route, and if you drive the tour you may notice the undulating terrain. But walking the route, with successive climbs and descents and crossings of rivers, even with modern bridges, gives you some idea of the physical challenge facing armies of the period. One example is the significant feat during the prince's

expedition in the Languedoc in 1355 of his crossing of the rivers Garonne and Ariège south of Toulouse. The primary sources name the crossing points, and maps can help refine our interpretation of where the rivers were forded. But approaching the rivers on foot gives an appreciation both of the nature of the river banks and the position of relatively shallow water to enable a much more precise assessment of the crossing points and of the difficulties faced by the army. Indeed, approaching the Garonne on foot and contemplating wading into the swirling, fast-flowing waters, broken as they flow past rocks, of a river some 125m wide, puts into perspective the prince's laconic report that: 'we took our march and crossed in one day the two rivers of Garonne and Ariège, one league above Toulouse, which are very stiff and strong to pass, without losing scarce any of our people.'<sup>5</sup>

The crossing of the Vienne the following summer was less a question of where but why? On the approach to the river there is a sharp dog-leg in the route, adding a day or more to the march of the army which, up to this point, had been generally north. None of the accounts of the campaign discusses this diversion, but there is nothing quite like a deviation adding an extra 50km of walking to make one question the route taken. There were bridges across the river at Chabanais and St Junien which could have allowed the army to maintain this direction and avoided the diversion, so why did they not attempt to use them? The most likely reason

is that in both cases the bridges were defended. In Chabanais the road over the bridge passed through a castle on the north bank. At St Junien, although the town stood back a little from the north bank of the river, the army would have had to pass within bowshot of the town ramparts. In both cases an opposed river crossing would have been necessary. With an army 6,000 strong, these crossings could have been made successfully, and the two towns would no doubt have provided welcome plunder for the prince's men. There would undoubtedly have been losses, however, and the route chosen tells us something of the prince's strategy. The dog-leg in the route added time but it saved resources and carried less risk with a crossing of the river at the ford at Manot. In a post-campaign letter the prince reported that he had set out with the objective of intercepting the count of Poitiers at Bourges.<sup>6</sup> For such an engagement he would need his army to be at maximum combat strength. He would not have wished to fritter away irreplaceable men in unnecessary actions, and hence the route via Manot.

A further aspect of the walking was evidence of the cultural impact of the English in France in the medieval period. A local historian in the small town of Ouveillan told me how in the 1930s, if he was complaining, his grandfather would rebuke him with the words: 'Don't moan, little lad, you'll see how bad it gets when the English army comes through.' The one and only time an English army had been in Ouveillan had been for one day in 1355: its passage had clearly had a profound impact. Contacts with local people also showed how the English involvement

The castle at Arques-la-Bataille



in Aquitaine between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, when English kings were also dukes of Aquitaine, was still felt. Some inhabitants of Toulouse, on learning that I had come from Bordeaux, exclaimed that the Bordelais were dull, boring and uninteresting with no sense of fun. This was attributed to their English heritage. A few days later an historian from Bordeaux told me that the people of Toulouse were brash and uncultivated, without the interest in the finer things in life of the Bordelais, which he attributed to their English heritage.

## The Agincourt campaign

With the approach of the 600th anniversary of the battle of Agincourt the logical next step was to extend my walking to cover Henry's itinerary from landing near modern Le Havre, which did not exist in 1415, to Harfleur and on through Agincourt to Calais.

It is worth noting at this point that the marches of the Black Prince and Henry were essentially different in character. The Black Prince's campaign of 1355-56 had had the objectives of damaging the economic power of France and, if the circumstances were right, bringing the French army to battle. Henry V's objective was different: on leaving Harfleur after the capture of the town, his aim was to take his army safely to Calais to return to England. His great victory at Agincourt was the result of the French intercepting him and cutting the route to Calais rather than an active attempt by Henry to bring them to battle. By and large Henry's army did not destroy towns and pillage the countryside, but restricted itself to foraging for supplies and to negotiate for supplies with local communities,

which were keen to buy themselves out of attack. He did not attempt to besiege or conquer any places en route.

Much of Henry V's route to Agincourt took him across the flat plains of the Somme and Picardy. The essential aspect of a sparsely populated landscape with scattered villages, with their church towers and spires standing out from the plains, remains much as it was in the fifteenth century. A moment's reflection brings home to the walker the problem of feeding many thousands of men in such countryside, where the French had adopted a scorched earth policy and in any case the reserves of an area of such low population density would not have been great, even in October 1415 when the harvest would have been recently gathered. Similarly, approaching on foot the castles of Arques-la-Bataille and Boves along Henry's route gives a much stronger impression of their well chosen sites than that which can be gleaned either from study of the map or driving past in a car.

As with Narbonne during the Black Prince's expedition of 1355, the approach to Amiens on foot is revealing. Henry V's army skirted to the south of the city. In a car you speed past Amiens in a matter of minutes, but moving on foot at the speed of a medieval army approaching from the west and passing to the south the city and its cathedral are in view for several hours. It is impossible not to reflect on the thoughts of the inhabitants as they apprehensively watched Henry's army pass. Within line of sight of Amiens is Boves castle, standing high on a ridge 10km to the east. No doubt the progress of Henry's army would have been signalled to the garrison of Boves, and walking at 5kph demonstrates clearly, in a way that passing in a car cannot, the value of such vantage points for tracking and communicating the passage of the invaders.

On foot the most direct route is often on poorly surfaced tracks which will not be used by the tourist in a car. To use some of these tracks after wet weather evokes the conditions faced by foot-soldiers and carters of Henry's army day in and day out as they trudged towards Calais and safety. Due to the changes in the river brought about through construction of a canal and railway, it is difficult to judge the challenge of the

View from Blanchetaque on to the high ground beyond the ford.





crossing of the Somme at the ford of Blanchetaque, used by Edward III in 1346 on the eve of the Battle of Crécy but rejected by Henry in 1415. It is certainly difficult in a car, but descend into the valley on foot and cross the wide flood-plain with its narrow raised causeways across the marshland; look up and contemplate the prospect of fighting your way on to the high ground beyond defended by French men-at-arms. This gives some idea of what a daunting obstacle this must have been.

Having failed to cross the Somme at Blanchetaque Henry still needed to find a crossing of this river if his army was to reach Calais safely. There are a number of possibilities for the crossing place, but the most likely is close to the village of Béthencourt-sur-Somme near the town of Péronne. Approaching the river on foot, and walking along the bank, shows just what a challenge crossing such a river must have been. It is not simply a single water course, but a river with a patchwork of flooded ground and small lakes on both sides creating an obstacle of considerable width.

Walking campaign routes today cannot, of course, give a true sense of the terror and the devastation inflicted on the local population by the marauding English armies in the Hundred Years War, but it has introduced me to many interesting people and has helped me to discover some wonderful parts of

France away from the tourist trail. More importantly, it has given me a depth of understanding and a unique perspective on events during the great campaigns of the reigns of Edward III and Henry V.

### Suggestions for further reading

Richard Barber's *Edward, Prince of Wales and Aquitaine, a Biography of the Black Prince* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1978), has stood the test of time and his *Life and Campaigns of the Black Prince* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1979), reproduces chronicle extracts and letters relating to the Prince's campaigns. For the Crécy campaign Barber's *Edward III and the Triumph of England: The Battle of Crécy and the Company of the Garter* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), is recommended. For a general study of Edward III's strategy and the use of *chevauchées* see C. J. Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp, English Strategy Under Edward III, 1327–1360* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000). The best walking maps for the campaign routes are at 1:25,000 scale published by the Institut National de l'Information Géographique et Forestière. They can be purchased on line from [www.ign.fr](http://www.ign.fr).

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> J. M. Tourneur-Aumont, *La Bataille de Poitiers (1356) et la Reconstruction de La France* (Poitiers, 1943), p. 31.
- <sup>2</sup> The primary sources for the Black Prince's

itineraries for 1355 and 1356 are respectively Galfridi Le Baker de Swynebroke, *Chronicon*, ed. E. M. Thompson (Oxford, 1889) and *Eulogium Historiarum*, vol. 3, ed. F. S. Haydon (London: Rolls Series, 1863).

- <sup>3</sup> The consuls of Narbonne had resisted attempts by the Church authorities in 1344 to compel demolition of part of the town walls to enable the cathedral to be completed. The result was that the walls were intact when the Black Prince arrived. The transept and nave were never completed.
- <sup>4</sup> R. Laugardière, 'Essais topographiques, historiques et bibliographiques sur l'arrondissement de Nontron', *Bulletin de la Société Historique et Archéologique du Périgord*, 12 (1885), p. 431.
- <sup>5</sup> Robertus de Avesbury, *De Gestis Mirabilibus Regis Edwardi Tertii*, ed. E. M. Thompson (London: Rolls Series, 1889), p. 436.
- <sup>6</sup> H. T. Riley, *Memorials of London and London Life, in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries* (London: 1868), p. 285 for the Black Prince's post-campaign letter to the City.

Peter Hoskins is the author of *In the Steps of the Black Prince: the road to Poitiers 1355-1356* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011); *Following the Black Prince on the road to Poitiers 1355-1356: a handbook and guide for tourists* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014) and, with Anne Curry, of *Agincourt 1415: a tourist's guide to the campaign* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2014). He is working, with Richard Barber, on a guide book to the Crécy campaign of 1346 and on a study of siege warfare during the Hundred Years War.

# Henry V in the cinema:

## Laurence Olivier's charismatic version of history

Public attitudes to Henry V are very much influenced by William Shakespeare's interpretation. **Richard Inverne** discusses how Shakespeare's version has been translated into cinematic form by Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh.

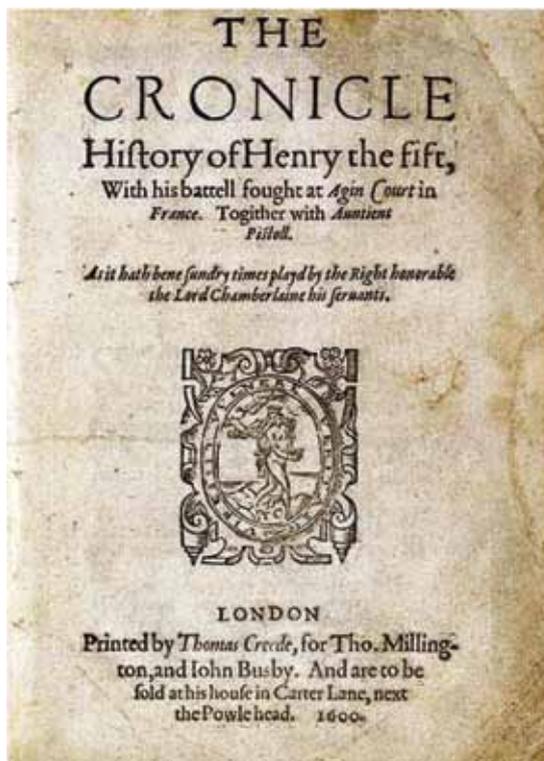


Shakespeare indulges himself considerably with his own relatively recent history – Richards II and III, Henrys IV, V and VI, for example. Subsequently he even presents his own late Queen, Elizabeth I, as a baby in the play he co-wrote around 1613 with John Fletcher, *Henry VIII*. In *Julius Caesar* (the play which is believed to come straight after *Henry V*), *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, there appear his dramatic yet often fanciful takes on dozens of real people from Plutarch's records of Roman history. He also happily adapts mythological or semi-historical characters, for example: Theseus and Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, numerous gods and goddesses in *The Tempest* or *Cymbeline*, or some very human and uncharacteristically fallible versions of Greek and Trojan heroes in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Research into Shakespeare's sources will prove interesting and productive. Try, for example, Holinshed (e.g. *Macbeth* as well as *Henry V*), More (*Richard III*), Saxo (*Hamlet*), Plutarch (*Julius Caesar*), Plautus (*The Comedy of Errors*), Virgil (*The Tempest*) or Boccaccio (*Cymbeline*); listed are only a few of the sources and plays influenced by these writers. Brief exploration will provide much more information about his characters – real or mythological – enriching knowledge and enjoyment of the text. If Shakespeare could make such fascinating drama out of past historical or mythological characters, what might he do with the life of a ruler, about whom plenty had been written and verbally passed down since his death in 1422? Henry V had died only about 175 years before the play was written and was – according to contemporary sources but not precisely in these words – 'quite a legend'!

## Shakespeare's Henry V

Unlike many of Shakespeare's plays *Henry V* can be accurately and almost certainly dated to between March and September of 1599, because of obvious references to the earl of Essex and Elizabeth I in one of the richly poetic speeches of Chorus. The play was first performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the company of which Shakespeare was a member, at either the Curtain playhouse, or their new home the Globe Theatre. Research carried out by scholars such as T.W. Craik and A.R. Humphries suggests that although the Lord Chamberlain's Men occupied the Globe early in 1599, it may have taken some time to become ready as a performing space, and the company was



therefore still using the Curtain during the transition.

However, tradition – if not incontrovertible fact – has it that *Henry V* was indeed the very first play to be performed at the Globe, during the spring of 1599. It was thus a very neat trick for the reconstructed Globe Theatre, known as Shakespeare's Globe, to present this play as its opening production in 1997. Since 1949, the reconstruction had been the brainchild of charismatic American film star and director Sam Wanamaker. Although able to oversee the first stages of rebuilding, Wanamaker died in 1993, but his daughter, the equally well-known actor Zoe Wanamaker, actually spoke the first words as Chorus in that first production. The play itself seems to attract Hollywood-style stars and star quality all around it; more of that to come.

Shakespeare's own sources include Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* of 1577 and 1587, Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York* of 1548, and the anonymous 1594 play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*. *Henry V* is the last in a tetralogy of Shakespeare's historical dramas, following *Richard II*, and *Henry IV parts 1 & 2*. It is popularly entitled *Henry V* – or, to be more accurate and taking a look at the first Quarto copy from 1600, which could then be bought for sixpence, *The Cronicle History of Henry the Fift with his battell fought at Agin Court in France. Together with Auntient Pistol*.

## Pistol and Falstaff

'Auntient' (or Ancient...or Ensign... or Lieutenant) Pistol, given almost as much prominence as the king in the Quarto frontispiece, is one of the hugely popular comic characters in the play and would probably have been played by either Robert Armin (who replaced the famous Will Kemp as company clown in 1599), or by another comedian, John Heminge (who later went on to create the role of Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*). Treated in the Quarto frontage to publicity worthy of a soap star appearing in a Christmas panto, Pistol – played by one of the stars of the company – would have been a huge draw for the audience and, subsequently, readers of the Quarto text. The character is described by Peter Quennell and Hamish Johnson, the authors of *Who's Who in Shakespeare*, as 'a dedicated coward'; always a popular comic device and audience-pleaser.<sup>1</sup> (Compare Parolles in *All's Well that Ends Well*.) An interesting premise is to consider Pistol himself to be an extension of Sir John Falstaff.

Falstaff, based on another historical figure, Sir John Oldcastle, is the tragicomic knight who constantly leads Prince Henry astray in the *Henry IV* plays, and is finally disgraced and banished when Henry ascends the throne at the end of the second play. In the rarely-performed epilogue to *Henry IV part 2*, thought to have been performed in 1598, the year before *Henry V*, Shakespeare had originally suggested to his audience that Falstaff might appear in the next play: 'Our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it.'

To the modern eye, the epilogue to *Henry IV part 2*, actually reads something like a film trailer, with Falstaff as one of the A-list stars! In fact, further references in the epilogue suggest that Shakespeare was very enthusiastic about continuing the adventures of his great comic creation into the sequel; it almost has the feel of a film franchise with proven popular characters signed up for 'the next instalment'. Thus it becomes somewhat relevant to the 1944 Laurence Olivier film version that the great variety star George Robey appears (silently) as the dying Falstaff. In the play's text his death is reported; the character is not seen.

In fact by the time Shakespeare gets round to actually writing what might well be – in filmic franchise terms – the third part of a blockbuster trilogy entitled '*Henry IV Part 3 – the son rises*', he has changed his mind about another

appearance by Falstaff. According to T.W. Craik, in his introduction to the Arden edition of *Henry V*, this happened because 'A reformed Falstaff, if that were thinkable, would be worse than no Falstaff; an unreformed Falstaff could not be allowed near Harfleur or Agincourt; and, with the action transferred from England to France, Falstaff could not have independent adventures at home.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Falstaff had to die, which he does *offstage*, beautifully and (well) cinematically reported by Mistress Quickly. Falstaff's comic potential is replaced by that of Pistol, a much more shallow and less interesting comic character, but one who does not unbalance the play as Falstaff would undoubtedly have done. Shakespeare presumably realised that the king in *Henry V* needed to be 'the star', a very classical Hollywood filmic quality. And so, 300-odd years later, did Laurence Olivier, of whom more shortly.

### Shakespeare's cinematic quality

The almost-filmic references in this play are quite extraordinary. It is as if Shakespeare, realising the inadequacies of the Elizabethan stage, is searching for something more epic, something 'cinematic'. For example:

...can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques

That did affright the air at  
Agincourt? (Prologue Act I)

And later...

And so our scene must to the  
battle fly,  
Where – O for pity! – we shall  
much disgrace  
With four or five most vile  
and ragged foils  
Right ill-disposed in brawl  
ridiculous  
The name of Agincourt.  
(Chorus Act IV)

In Anne Curry's authoritative *The Battle of Agincourt: sources and interpretations*, she informs us that 'Agincourt was not a decisive battle'. She also says, however, that 'much historical interpretation of Agincourt has been influenced by sentiments of national identity and pride.'<sup>3</sup>

If this was so as much in 1599 as in 1944 when Laurence Olivier made the first film version (released five months after the D-Day landings), then Shakespeare might well have been worried about successfully portraying such a huge piece of *propaganda*-victory on the stage. How could he let down his audience, a public which had been steadily fed information – 'sentiments of national identity and pride' – about just how important the battle of Agincourt had been? Portraying on stage, in the



earlier plays, the battles of Shrewsbury, Tewksbury, Bosworth, not to mention about half-an-hour's-worth of 'alarms and excursions' in the first part of *Henry VI* was apparently no problem. The embarkation for France, the siege of Harfleur, the gathering of the heavily-armoured French knights, *and then* the battle of Agincourt, the greatest English victory to date, posed quite another difficulty.

Shakespeare thus uses the character of Chorus as a kind of spin-doctor, a propaganda machine to inspire and manipulate the imagination of the audience. And it works. Shakespeare's wonderful poetry takes the audience on beautifully descriptive tours of the theatre, preparations for war and the reactions in the French court, the setting-up of the invasion fleet and its journey across the channel, the siege of Harfleur, night-time preparations at Agincourt, 'soundbites' of the battle and mention of Henry's triumphant return to London. And it is very cinematic.

Shakespeare avoids the necessity for large-scale pageantry by means of descriptive poetry. The siege of Harfleur and the battle of Agincourt actually barely happen on stage. Like so many of Shakespeare's plays *Henry V* actually – and rather cleverly – contains very little on-stage fighting, mainly that identified by Andrew Gurr as occurring when the direction 'Excursions' occurs in the text. Anne Curry mentions the oft-discussed argument of practicalities, or the possibility that Shakespeare wished to 'play on the imagination of the audience, to have them think about war, and to conjure up its image by words rather than actions.'<sup>4</sup>

Leslie Banks as Chorus in the Olivier film.



If Shakespeare could portray epic, 'film-worthy' events on stage mainly by means of his words, this in itself paradoxically seems to render the play absolutely ready for the cinema, which can take those words and support them – at last – with pictures hopefully worthy to complement the original. It is worth noting that in 1936 the critic Allardyce Nicoll commented that 'the expressive potential of cinema "may merely be supplying something that will bring us nearer to the conditions of the original spectators for whom Shakespeare wrote"<sup>5</sup>. This is an interesting opinion in view of the general feeling, then as now, that cinema extends the theatrical experience as well as being an entirely different medium.

### The making of Olivier's *Henry V*

In 1939, Great Britain declared war on Nazi Germany and, as in Cromwell's time, the theatres were (albeit temporarily) closed. The British film industry, however, went into overdrive, producing an annual average of no less than 40 feature films during the 1940s, including many made as propaganda for the war effort. And although America did not enter the war until late 1940, the large ex-pat British theatre and film community living in Hollywood made many films for the war effort, often thinly-disguised slices of anti-Nazi propaganda. H. Mark Glancy refers to them as "The Hollywood "British" films."<sup>6</sup>

Laurence Olivier had been one of the ex-pats who had gone to Hollywood in the late 1930s, finding international fame in *Wuthering Heights* (1939), *Rebecca* (1940) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1940). Among his films which can be classed as propaganda for the war effort, both in England and America, are *Fire Over England* (1937), *Clouds Over Europe* (1939), *That Hamilton Woman*, and *49th Parallel* (both 1941).

At this point Olivier takes centre-stage...or screen; an actor whose film version in 1944 renders him hugely important in any discussion of *Henry V*, whether of the historical king or of a dramatised version.

The actor had returned to England late in 1941 to serve his country and enlisted in the Fleet Air Arm. Actually, he wasn't a very good pilot, crashing a test-plane at one point, and was usually relegated to bureaucratic assignments. He did however perform excerpts from Shakespeare on the radio – very popular at the time – and from this came the invitation, in 1943, to direct and star in a film version of *Henry V*.

Enter flamboyant producer Filippo del Giudice, an Italian who had fled



fascist Italy in 1933 and was now living and working in Britain. Del Giudice persuaded the government and the Fleet Air Arm that the man later referred to by critic and author Kenneth Tynan as 'the greatest stage actor of his time', by journalist Harold Hobson as 'the towering Olivier', and by director Peter Hall as one of the two 'legends of my lifetime' (the other being Charlie Chaplin), simply *must* make the film which would rouse the minds and hearts of a demoralised British people.

Prime Minister Churchill's government, with invasion plans in place – although of course that information was classified – saw the wisdom of what del Giudice was saying. A really large-scale, *patriotic* British film, with an excellent scriptwriter called William Shakespeare, directed by and starring the greatest and most flamboyantly-charismatic English actor of his day, was bound to inspire a country now poised, as part of the Allied movement, to defeat the Nazis and emerge victorious. The film was quickly completed and released in British cinemas in November 1944, just five months after the Normandy invasion.

It is surely not enough to say that Olivier was chosen simply because at the time he was regarded as the greatest British stage and screen actor. What Olivier had, and what marks him out on screen from his excellent contemporaries like John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson, was *star persona*. This is something indefinable, something which lifts a performer to the greatest heights. Arbitrarily-chosen 'candidates' in the performing arts might include Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra,

Maria Callas, Sean Connery, Nicole Kidman, Helen Mirren, Diana Rigg, Maggie Smith, Denzel Washington and Chris Rock. Readers can fill in their own favourites.

Why Olivier? Appearance is one reason: American critic Foster Hirsch refers to 'his chiselled profile, his thin, sensual mouth and glowering eyes, his mellow voice, and his tall, trim build.'<sup>7</sup> Add to that Olivier's proven acting skills and charisma in an already wide variety of stage and screen roles – the actor had also previously played *Henry V* at the Old Vic in 1937, as well as performing some of the great speeches on BBC



Radio in 1942 as part of a patriotic programme entitled 'Into Battle'.<sup>8</sup> Perceive most definitely, therefore, the *star persona* required and absolutely ready to present Shakespeare on the screen to a battered nation needing heroes and charismatic figures.

## Olivier as Henry V

At this point it is worth examining exactly how Olivier presents himself as star in *Henry V*, for which he won 'a Special Oscar for his "outstanding achievement as an actor, producer and director in bringing *Henry V* to the screen".<sup>9</sup> As the film's director as well as star, the first indication is the ingenious device of setting the first act of the play in the confines of the Globe Theatre in 1599, cleverly linking the theatrical origins within cinematic devices as the film runs its course.

At his first entrance, Olivier plays *the star actor* (who was probably Richard Burbage) playing the role of King Henry and receiving a round of applause on his entrance, as did Olivier on many occasions in the theatre. Looking at the scene, one wonders if Olivier is indeed playing Burbage. Or is he brilliantly announcing *Olivier's* presence as *star* to the cinema audience? Furthermore, it is interesting that at the very end of the film, Olivier brings the setting back to the Globe Theatre. Perhaps this neat device was really so that Olivier the director could remind the cinema audience that *he*, Olivier the actor, is the star of the film, and that they should be applauding *him* alongside the audience of the mock-Globe!

In 1944, stars were exactly what this country needed. It had them in Winston Churchill and General Montgomery, so why not in Laurence Olivier and the character he was portraying, Henry V? One simply needs to watch the siege of Harfleur scene containing the 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends' speech, to observe the brilliant combination of actor and character achieved by Laurence Olivier. Later, the St Crispin speech – not dissimilar to a tenor's rousing 'call to arms' in a Verdi opera such as *Ernani* or *Il Trovatore* – is another of many examples throughout the film.

## Olivier's Agincourt

The famous battle sequence – itself a very exciting, stylised, Hollywood-epic-type set-piece – does *not* appear in the original play apart from the occasional, mild 'Alarms and Excursions', so beloved of Shakespeare in his Histories. Wisely considered to be central to a film of the scope of *Henry V*, it was filmed in Ireland, took 39 entire days to do so, cost

£80,000 out of the total budget of £300,000, and the finished version lasts for ten minutes – a large portion of screen time!

In his book *Laurence Olivier on Screen*, Foster Hirsch informs us that Olivier studied the famous battle scene in Sergei Eisenstein's 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky*, and that 'his symmetrical arrangement of the archers, his long shots of soldiers silhouetted against the horizon, and his dynamic cutting, acknowledge his debt to Eisenstein's epic'.<sup>10</sup>

Yet there's a caveat to Olivier's Agincourt which should here be considered. In accord with the sensibilities of audiences alive to the horrors of two world wars, British stage productions during the 1920s to 1940s, including Tyrone Guthrie's 1937 Old Vic production with Olivier and the 1944 film directed by and starring the actor – showed little of the *realism* of the battle of Agincourt. The pain, blood and suffering were all glossed over. Roger Lewis infers that to take such an antiseptic attitude to war, to avoid reality, especially at that time, was wrong. He informs us that the film 'quite ignore[s] the lessons of modern combat: no cold, no trenches, no deaths of multitudes. Olivier's vision of England is untouched by what the Great War did to it, or what the Second World War was doing to it'.<sup>11</sup> The D-Day landings took place on 6 June, and Allied victory was in sight after five gruelling years. Perhaps the cinema-going public did not need to be reminded of 'the lessons of modern combat'?

Despite Lewis's comments the battle scene, including the firing of a huge salvo by the English archers into the air and down on the French knights, has become iconic in movie history and a template for many subsequent epic films.

Not everyone was impressed, however. In James Agee's 1946 *Time* review of the US premiere in Boston, he amusingly recounts to his readers how, at the English premiere at the Carlton Theatre in London, one woman was disappointed in the battle scene, because she insisted that all the horses at Agincourt would have been stallions and that the film – using whatever horses were available in Ireland at the time – was therefore completely inaccurate! Subsequent research shows that

there was, in fact, minimal French cavalry at Agincourt, and that the famous charge was not as effective or substantial since the French found it difficult to find volunteers willing to ride into the arrow storm.

Olivier's brief from his producer Filippo del Giudice (and the film's creation was carefully observed by the government) was to present a great, faultless English hero, a shining role-model to the British people. It



is interesting that, apart from the expanded battle scene, the film differs from the textual version mainly in its *omissions*, which were necessary if Olivier, aided by his literary collaborator Alan Dent, was to keep the government happy:

Excised are the traitors and Henry's ruthless treatment of them; the idea of an English traitor was untenable in such a propaganda film. Cut are Henry's extremely nasty threats of the atrocities to come if the city of Harfleur is not surrendered; the king (for whom, conceivably read WWII Allied military leaders) must be presented as faultless and beyond criticism. Perhaps for that reason the king's callous condemnation to death of his old friends Bardolph and Nym is omitted, as is Henry's ruthless order to slaughter all the French prisoners, followed sometime later by the command to

...cut the throats of those we have,  
And not a man of them that we shall take  
Shall taste our mercy (IV: 7)

It is interesting to consider just how important these textual alterations are; in many ways they completely alter the focus of the film. It is also quite intriguing to note that most of these more complex sides to the king's character are restored when, in 1989, Kenneth Branagh made his ultra-realistic, anti-war version – a sign of the times within each film.

## Branagh's Henry V

Film critic Mark Dujsik is of the thoughtful opinion that 'Olivier's Harry comes across a hero while Branagh's comes across a human being' and that the latter 'is the result of post-Vietnam cynicism and mistrust with

government and allows Harry's less admirable qualities to show through.<sup>12</sup>

Branagh's king is uncertain, almost boyish, growing into a purposeful leader, perhaps by circumstance and experience. Olivier is older, *always* the leader, ever in charge; manipulating, even when consulting his courtiers at the beginning of the film.

The character as played by Branagh is fleshed out by the restoration of some of the subjects cut by Olivier. The traitors are back in (and – contrary to text – they are a ruthless, unrepentant bunch); so is the condemnation of the king's friends, so are the threats to the people of Harfleur. Yet, Branagh also cuts the slaughter of the French prisoners; dramatically a wise decision, according to Dujsik, as the scene in the text occurs 'during the height of the point when the audience's sympathies must lie entirely with Harry and the English'.<sup>13</sup>

Branagh himself, in an interview with Michael Billington for the *New York Times*, has criticised Olivier's version, including the cuts: 'I feel it has been unjustly treated as a jingoistic hymn to England. Olivier's film, because it was made in 1943, inevitably became a propaganda vehicle and cut out the less amiable aspects of Henry's character'.<sup>14</sup> Yet it is notable that Olivier himself, in his book *On Acting*, refers to 'Shakespeare's brilliant jingoism'.<sup>15</sup> Thus it would seem that Olivier was not just swayed by the propaganda needs of a country at war, but influenced by what he himself read in the text.

Both directors cut and amend the text considerably, and their performances are very, very different. It is interesting to consider which one – Olivier or Branagh – comes closest to Shakespeare's vision of the king as evidenced in the text.

Olivier's film was a huge success, after the war being nominated for four Oscars, and winning the honorary 'Outstanding Achievement' award for Olivier, as well as several other awards in America and Europe. Writing in 1946, John Mason Brown in the *Saturday Review of Literature* thought that Olivier's filmed Henry 'was a performance of superlative merit. He shone with spiritual splendour, a quality as rare in actors as it is in other human beings'.<sup>16</sup>

Whether one prefers the theatrical, jingoistic, often-fantastical composition of Olivier's version – described by Levy as 'experimental and stylised'<sup>17</sup> – or the more modern take on the story by Kenneth Branagh, Shakespeare's drama and poetry when transferred to the screen must speak loudly and directly to cinema audiences of any particular time,



Photo by: IVREX Shutterstock

whether of the 1940s, 1980s or today. Olivier's *Henry V* has indeed stood the test of time and emerges triumphant.

## Suggestions for further reading

The Olivier Archive in the British Library includes much fascinating material on the making of the film of *Henry V*, especially the script and synopsis in Additional Manuscript 80463 and the educational materials produced for its circulation in Additional Manuscript 80475 B.

K. Branagh, *Beginning* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989)

T. Coleman, *The Old Vic: The Story of a Great Theatre from Kean to Olivier to Spacey* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014)

A. Davies, *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook and Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge University Press, 1990)

K. Ewert, *Henry V: A Guide to the Text and its Theatrical Life* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

S. Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources* (London: Continuum, 2004)

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- ibid.*
- Michael Billington, in the *New York Times*: 'A "New Olivier" Is Taking On Henry V on the Screen' [8/1/89]: [www.nytimes.com/1989/01/08/movies/a-new-olivier-is-taking-on-henry-v-on-the-screen.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1989/01/08/movies/a-new-olivier-is-taking-on-henry-v-on-the-screen.html) (accessed 7 July 2014).
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- Levi, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

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A re-enactment of English archers of the latter part of the Hundred Years War with their stakes.  
Sir John Savile's Household

# Playing for high stakes: the archer's stake and the battle of Agincourt

Our perspective on how archers performed in battle is enhanced by **Mark Hinsley's** research into their use of protective stakes.

**O**n the approach to Agincourt in 1415 a small skirmish took place at Corbie, on the Somme. A force of French men-at-arms sallied out from the town and cut up some of the English archers, but were driven back by English men-at-arms, and several French prisoners were taken. From these it was learned, according to an account of the campaign (*Gesta Henrici Quinti*) written by a chaplain with the army:

That the French had appointed many companies of horsemen, in hundreds, on armed horses, to break through the battle and strength of our archers...<sup>1</sup>

Such tactics were not new; two elite cavalry contingents had attacked at the battle of Poitiers (1356). Their attacks down the roads in the centre of the English position were intended to break through the hedge and ride down the archers behind, as a precursor to the main attack on foot. Similar tactics had been tried at the battles of Mauron (1352) and Saintes (1351), but had been unsuccessful, as had earlier mass mounted attacks, at Crécy (1346).

English commanders knew that unsupported archers were vulnerable to cavalry: the Scots had ridden down unsupported English archers as far back

as the battle of Bannockburn (1314). They took care to fight from well-chosen positions utilising natural obstacles, such as slopes and rough ground (Crécy, Poitiers), hedges (Poitiers), woods and brambles (Mauron) and marshes (Poitiers). Where such natural obstacles did not exist, artificial obstacles could be created, including hand-dug pits and trenches, as at Crécy and Aljuburotta (1385).

The problem with these features was that they were static. From the intelligence gained at Corbie, it seems that the French intended to strike the army on the march, at a time and

The oldest surviving plate horse armour, a Milanese armour of about 1450, now in the Vienna Museum.

place of their choosing. Furthermore, Henry's army was short of men-at-arms, who were outnumbered five to one by the archers.

The chaplain's account also specifically refers to a select French force on 'armed' horses. The end of the fourteenth century had seen major changes in the smelting of iron, allowing the construction of larger steel plates. This led to improved plate armour for men, but also extended its use to horses. At this stage its use was not widespread and was limited to the most vulnerable areas of the horse – the head (protected by the shamfron), the neck (by the crinet) and the chest (by the peytral). Such armour, supplemented bardings of mail or brigandine construction, leather and fabric padding gave horses a better chance of surviving archery, particularly from the front.

Even with the armour of their day, the cavalry attacks at Poitiers and Mauron had come close to success. At Poitiers the attack of the Comte de Clermont was only defeated by the prompt action of the Earl of Oxford, who deployed archers in a marsh to their flank, directing them to shoot at the unarmoured sides of the horses. At Mauron French horsemen broke the English archers on the right flank: the English commander Walter Bentley subsequently executed several archers for cowardice.

## The solution

Henry realised that he needed a defence that was portable and could be placed quickly. The chaplain continues:

...therefore the king gave orders that each archer should provide himself with a pole or staff, six feet in length of sufficient thickness, and sharpened at each end; directing that whenever the French should approach to battle with troops of horse of that sort, each archer should fix his pole before him in front and those who were behind other poles intermediately; one end being fixed in the ground before them, the other sloping towards the enemy higher than a man's waist from the ground.

Henry may have got his inspiration for the stake from the French themselves, as stakes had been routinely used in the Hundred Years War to block fords or roads, as at the ford at Blanchetaque where Henry had attempted to cross the Somme a few days earlier. Medieval military manuals, based on earlier Roman texts, may also have referred to the stake that each legionary carried for the construction



of their camp. Stakes had also been used by the Turks to protect their own archers at their crushing victory over the French, Burgundian and Hungarian crusaders at Nicopolis in 1396. Over 10,000 crusaders were captured and the majority executed, causing a sensation across Europe.

## How were the stakes deployed?

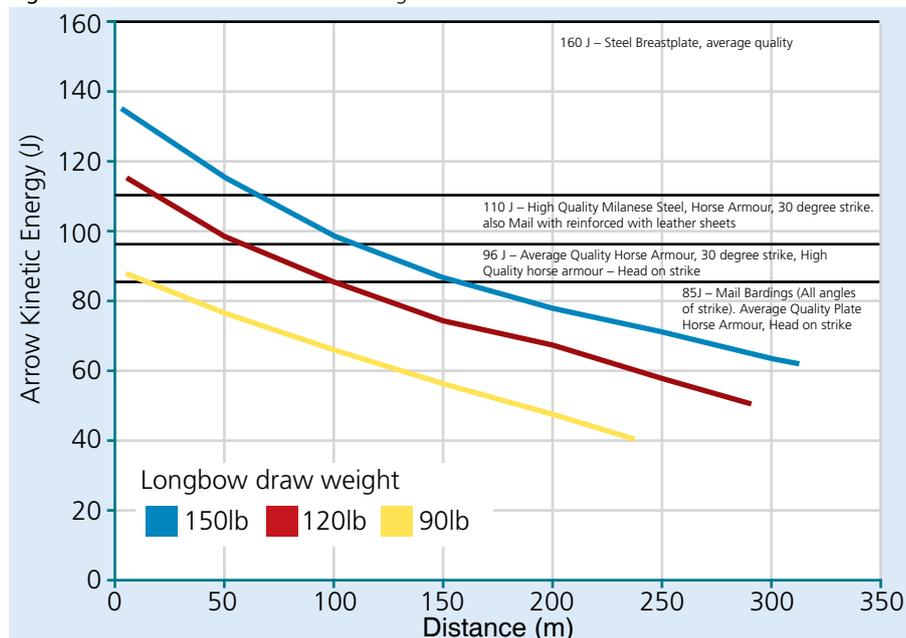
The optimum stake thickness is between two and three inches in diameter, sufficient to allow it to be hammered in without breaking, but light enough to

carry. From practical trials using period tools, a maul or mallet to hammer in the stake, and a handbill or large knife to re-trim the point, a stake can be placed in soft ground in less than two minutes. These tools also make handy improvised weapons.

The chronicles give differing descriptions of the stake barrier, referring to it variously as hedge or fence. The chaplain's comments have been interpreted by modern historians in different ways.

Col. A. H. Burne postulated in *The Agincourt War* (1956) that the stakes were placed to form a continuous fence,

Figure 1: Penetration of Armour with Range





a view challenged by John Keegan in his account in *The Face of Battle* (1976). Keegan made the practical point that such a continuous barrier made it difficult to place the stake as this would have involved standing on the 'enemy' side to hammer it in, with the result that you would then not be able to return to your own side. He suggested a chequerboard arrangement of stakes, easy to move through for the archers, whom we know sallied out from the stakes during the battle. Clifford Rogers in his account of the battle in 2008 suggested a mixture of the two.

### The use of the stakes at Agincourt

Henry V drew up his army with his men-at-arms, probably about 1,500, in the centre, flanked by two wings of archers each about 3,000 strong. Time was not on Henry's side and accordingly he advanced his army from its initial position to within extreme bow shot of the French (~250m), re-planted the stakes and pushed forward his archers to

shoot the French, with the desired effect of provoking them to attack.

The French plan was to attack primarily on foot with their first two battles – the vanguard and main body (6,000-9,000 men-at-arms). These were flanked by two bodies of mounted men, each 600 strong. The purpose of the latter was specifically to attack and disrupt the archers on the English flanks, preventing them shooting at the French foot as it advanced. Unfortunately for the French, both of these bodies of cavalry were under strength, with less than half the required men-at-arms being present.

The main advantage of a mounted attack was that it could cross the danger zone from archery (~262 yards, 240m), in a short period of time. Assuming that the French cavalry were charging at an average speed of 13mph (6 m/s) they could cross this distance in approximately 40 seconds. An archer shooting with a heavy bow could loose approximately 6-8 aimed shots in a minute, approximately six shots in this time at 220m, 186m, 143m, 100m, 57m and 14m respectively.

It is generally accepted that the variation in draw weights of medieval warbows fell between 90 and 150lbs. Figure 1 shows the arrow energies for an 'average' 120lb longbow and the two extremes, as they decline with range. Compared against these are the energies required to penetrate different armours to a depth sufficient to cause a serious injury or kill (a penetration of 40 mm into flesh), for a variety of armour combinations and qualities. The energies are measured at both a 30° angle of strike (typical of an arrow at longer ranges, where the arrow is 'lofted' or shot in a parabola) and at 0°, a head-on impact, only likely to be achieved at very close ranges (where the arrow is shot directly at the target, in a flat trajectory). Arrows would start to penetrate the armour, possibly causing minor wounds at approximately two-thirds of these values; even arrows that did not penetrate would cause severe bruising, so-called 'blunt trauma', through flexible armours such as mail, cumulatively debilitating.

From this we can see that even if the first four shots at the French cavalry at

Archers at Agincourt, French men-at-arms being brought down by the stakes.  
Painting by Graham Turner © the artist, www.studio88.co.uk

230m, 186m, 143m and 100m were lucky enough to hit (less than 3% probability), an arrow from our average bow is unlikely to cause a serious injury or kill. The fifth shot at 57m would still have a relatively low probability of hitting, approximately 16%, but the energy of the arrow at 95J (joules) would penetrate mail bardings causing serious injury, and partially penetrate plate causing a galling minor wound.

The final shot delivered from 14m would have the highest chance of hitting the target (about 50%) and the archer would be flat shooting, making a head-on shot more likely. The energy of the arrow at this point would be 110J: this would penetrate armour for the horse, inflicting a serious or fatal wound and partially penetrate a man-at-arms' breastplate, though probably not fatally. It would need a confident archer to shoot at this range, however, as if he missed, the men-at-arms would be on him in less than three seconds. The temptation to run must have been very great, but the psychological security of the stakes may have tipped the balance, allowing this final, most effective, shot.

On the receiving end, those men-at-arms in the front ranks of the French cavalry, with several ranks behind them, may have had little choice but to charge home into the stakes (particularly if these were hidden from them in their approach by archers standing before them). We know that at least three French knights did penetrate the stakes (several of which fell down, due to the softness of the ground, so their protection may have been more illusory than real). These included Guillaume de Saveuse, one of the French commanders of the left wing: all were speedily dispatched by the archers.

Those men-at-arms in the rear ranks were able to pull up and turn, but this slowed them, increasing the time that the defending archers would have to shoot them. As they turned, they exposed the flanks of their horses, presenting a larger and less well-protected target, within the optimum 30m killing zone. Further shots would be directed at their rear as they fled.

The fleeing French horses, maddened by arrow wounds, crashed into the flanks of the advancing French infantry, disordering them and causing them to shy in towards the centre.

The archers now shot their arrows into the flanks of the French foot. While they may not have been able fully to penetrate the breastplates, the chronicles refer to arrows penetrating the limbs and visors where the armour was thinner, causing numerous wounds. The rain of arrows into their flanks caused the



French men-at-arms subconsciously to move towards their centre, away from the archers, creating the 'crowd-crush' conditions which were to contribute to the English success.

Finally, having exhausted their arrows, the archers erupted from the stakes, with whatever weapons were at hand (including stakes as improvised clubs) to assail the French flanks.

### Later use of the stake

Following Agincourt, stakes became a standard feature of English tactics. The earl of Salisbury, before the battle of Cravant (1423), stated that each archer, both English and Burgundian, should carry a stake. John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, 'The English Achilles,'

is said to have commanded each of his archers to carry two stakes 11 feet in length. Sir John Fastolf used stakes and a wagon laager to defeat the French and Scots at Rouvray (1429).

Without stakes English archers fared badly; at Verneuil (1424) the archers were slow to place their stakes, perhaps because of the hardness of the ground, and were swept away by the heavily armoured French and Lombard cavalry. At Patay (1429) the English archers were surprised and the whole army overrun in a matter of minutes. Finally at Formigny (1450) the initial French attacks made no impression on the English line (furnished with stakes), but a fresh force of French cavalry attacked their (unstaked) flank, leading to their defeat.

Stakes continued to be used in the early battles of the Wars of the Roses. The Yorkists at Blore Heath (1459) are known to have placed stakes before the battle and defeated two mounted attacks by a larger Lancastrian force. The Yorkists are known to have deployed stakes at Ludford Bridge (1459) and the Lancastrians at Northampton (1460), but thereafter their recorded use declined, perhaps because of their ineffectiveness in these battles and the prevalence for both sides to fight on foot, without, in the main, using cavalry charges.

The stake was also used abroad by those armies exposed to English archers: the Burgundians and French. At the battle of Bulgneville (1431), the Burgundians imitated the formation of Agincourt, with equal success. Before the battle of Montlhery (1465), Philippe de Commines, in his memoirs, records Burgundian archers, possibly English mercenaries, taking their ease with a barrel of beer, their boots off and their stakes set before them. The French 'franc archiers' were using stakes before 1444.

The destruction of the Burgundian army at the battles of Grandson (1476), Morat (1476) and Nancy (1477) by the Swiss, using pikes, led to the abandonment of the use of archers on the continent in favour of pikemen supported by crossbows and handguns in the Swiss fashion. Only in England did the bow remain in widespread use.

In his younger years Henry VIII was a fine Bowman, who did much to encourage archery; bowmen were a prominent part of early Tudor armies. When Henry VIII invaded France in 1513, his army took 5,000 stakes with them, carried in wagons. A year later, 300 stakes were recorded in the inventory of the *Mary Rose*, suggesting that its soldiers and sailors were expected to act as marines, as sailors of the fleet had done at the battle of Flodden the year before.

The stake had now become 'an issue item' rather than the improvised defence at Agincourt. In 1529 we hear that one Richard Rowley, blacksmith of London, was to provide 2,500 sockets, rings and staples of iron to garnish archers' stakes and provide a further 5,000 stakes 'ready garnished with heads, sockets, rings and staples', presumably to allow them to be chained or roped together.<sup>2</sup> An Italian commentator in 1531 describes the English as 'fighting in the old fashion, with bow, sword and buckler, celata (sallet) and a two pronged iron stake.'<sup>3</sup>

At Henry's death in 1547, the inventory of his possessions records 15 bundles of archers' stakes at Pontefract and 150 at Hammes castle in the Calais Pale. Three years later the stock at



English Archers of the latter part of the 100 years war placing stakes. Sir John Savile's Household

Pontefract had reduced to eight bundles (perhaps through use in the war with Scotland) and 350 are recorded at Berwick.

Despite Henry's support of the bow, the proportion of men armed with guns and pikes in the continental fashion increased inexorably, the musket replacing the bow and the pike replacing the stake's defensive function against cavalry, the 'shotte' sheltering within the pike formation. In addition, further improvements in the production of iron allowed mass production of cheap 'munition' plate armours, proof against arrows. Consequently, in 1588 the Elizabethan government was encouraging the county militias to phase out the 'country weapons' (the bill and the bow), in favour of handguns and pikes.<sup>4</sup> There were various proposals to revive the bow, including the ingenious 'Double Armed Man', a combined bow and pike-armed soldier, as late as 1625, but nothing came of them.<sup>5</sup>

The last documented issue of stakes is in the reign of Charles I in 1627 when 300 stakes were issued to 200 Highland archers. These men were reinforcements for the army led by the duke of Buckingham, besieging the Isle de Ré, in support of the French Huguenot rebels in the nearby city of La Rochelle (an event which figures prominently in Dumas' novel *The Three Musketeers*). The siege collapsed before they arrived, however. In 1635, just eight years later, only '48 palisadoes, three without heads' remained in the Tower of London. The day of the archer, and his stake, was over.<sup>6</sup>

## Further reading

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- <sup>4</sup> Harris, P.V. (1976) 'The Decline of the Longbow' in *The Journal of the Society of Archer Antiquaries*, 19, p. 24.
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Mark Hinsley has been a re-enactor of the Wars of the Roses for over 25 years. He is the Research Officer for the Blore Heath Heritage Group and Battlefield Custodian for Blore Heath for the Battlefields Trust. His 'day job' is as a consulting civil engineer specialising in the remediation of contaminated land.

# Obituary

Irene Collins, 1925-2015



It is with sadness that we report the death on 12 July of Irene Collins, our most senior Past President, but it is important that we celebrate her life, well spent as it was in the study, research and promotion of history.

Irene Collins was a Yorkshire-woman who achieved her undoubted academic reputation across the Pennines in Lancashire. She was born near Halifax on 16 September 1925, won a place at the Brighthouse Girls' Secondary School and then proceeded to study at St Hilda's College, Oxford, graduating with first-class honours in 1946. Quite quickly her researches added an Oxford B. Litt to her qualifications. She was appointed to the University of Liverpool History Department in 1947, rising to be Reader and also Dean of the Arts Faculty.

She was celebrated for her research and her teaching and lecturing. Those who remember her lecturing as early as the 1960s recall that she regularly spoke without notes, a strength which became more significant in much later life when her eyesight began to fail. Her accessible lecturing style made her popular with academics and also with audiences of enthusiasts. Her first book, *The Government and Newspaper Press in France 1814-1881* (1959), met with wide acclaim, as did her later *Government and Society in France 1814 to 1848* (1970) and her *Napoleon and the Parliaments 1800-1815* (1979), as well as her popular textbook *The Age of Progress* (1964).

The obituarist in the *Daily Telegraph* drew attention to the fact that Irene's personality revealed echoes of Napoleon, in that she preferred to be decisive and to reach firm conclusions rather than to sit on the fence.

This latter characteristic is central to the way that we remember her kindly ways at the Historical Association. At branch and national level she was an invigorating and decisive presence. When she became our President in 1982 many believed that she was our first woman President. In fact our first woman President, Alice Stopford Green, had served as early as 1915-18. Irene shared two particular characteristics with her illustrious predecessor. As Professor Donald Read observed in our Centenary edition of *The Historian*, Alice Stopford Green had earned her nomination on merit and was formidable in debate. When Irene Collins became President it was entirely because she was pre-eminent among the scholars at the heart of the Historical Association and those who had to work and negotiate with her will confirm that her small stature hid a determination matched by her female predecessor.

Her work for the Historical Association, not just during her Presidency, was tireless. She was an enthusiastic lecturer to branches for many years and she was heavily engaged in promoting the role of the Historical Association in support of Higher Education and in the school sector. When the Historical Association undertook a major exercise in re-organisation in the 1990s, it was Irene Collins from amongst the Past Presidents who was called in to assist. She also played her part in supporting our publishing programme, with pamphlets on Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Revolutionaries in Europe 1815-48, Recent Historical Novels and a very influential analysis of Napoleon. As well as making her President, we have honoured Irene Collins further by the award of the Medlicott Medal for Service to History (1996), a Centenary Fellowship (2006) and a Jubilee Fellowship (2014).

We also recognise that *our* Irene Collins was only part of a wider picture. In retirement she also became a distinguished scholar of the life and work of Jane Austen; and she was always a very active member of her local Anglican church in Brooklands.

We also give our heartfelt thanks for the support that Rex Collins, her husband, gave to her in what she did for us.

In offering our condolences to her family and friends, we are so grateful that this forthright and generous-spirited scholar devoted herself to the cause of history and the Historical Association in particular.

# My Favourite History Place

**Elisabeth Davies** introduces us to Magdeburg's Altstadt, a German city which still venerates the memory of an Anglo-Saxon princess.



Magdeburg Cathedral from the River Elbe



Aedgyth's sarcophagus



13th century statue of the royal couple

The Landeshauptstadt Magdeburg is gratefully acknowledged as the source of the images.

Magdeburg, the 1,200-year-old city of surprises ('Magdeburg überascht') is situated on the banks of the River Elbe in the state of Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany. First mentioned by Charlemagne in 805, Magdeburg today attracts much attention by being a major historic venue on the *Straße der Romanik* or Romanesque Route that has opened up a large number of medieval monasteries, cathedrals, churches and castles to thousands of inquisitive visitors. It was through my research on Aedgyth, the granddaughter of England's King Alfred the Great, that I travelled this fascinating route to Magdeburg.

My first impression on approaching Magdeburg was the silhouette of the magnificent Gothic cathedral, the 'Symbol of Magdeburg' that dominates the skyline of the old centre or *Altstadt*. Located in the centre of Magdeburg the once heavily-fortified *Altstadt* nestles between the lovely River Elbe on the eastern side and the tracks of the mainline railway station to the west. In my favourite quarter of the *Altstadt* a wealth of medieval culture can be explored on foot within easy reach of its surrounding roads, the *Schleiufer*, *Ernst-Reuter Allee* and *Breiter Weg*.

Just a stroll from the *Schleiufer* is Magdeburg's stunning cathedral that dates back to 955 and, built by King Otto, holds the reputation of being the first basilica in Gothic style in Germany. Beneath the cathedral lies the Romanesque church of St Mauritius' monastery that was founded by Queen Aedgyth and her husband King Otto in 937. Its precious remains can be viewed via access from the cathedral cloister. Aedgyth played a major role in the monastery's foundation since the town of Magdeburg was her dowry (*Morgengabe*) when she married Otto in 929. It was here on Aedgyth's property that the royal couple established their splendid palace and, driven by his ambitious intention of creating 'a third Rome' here, King Otto moved his centre of power from Quedlinburg to Magdeburg. The presumed site of this grand palatium or *Kaiserpfalz* can be seen, outlined in bronze, adjacent to the cathedral in the corner of the *Domplatz*.

When Queen Aedgyth died in 946 she was first buried in the Romanesque church and eventually laid to rest in 1510 in the Gothic cathedral where her ornate sandstone sarcophagus can be viewed today in the *Scheitelkapelle*. There the 'first lady of Magdeburg' lay undisturbed and forgotten. Magdeburg Cathedral was to hold the secret of the whereabouts of its precious Anglo-Saxon queen for 500 years. Early in the new millennium, however (2008), Magdeburg awoke to the amazing discovery during excavation work of a silk-clad skeleton that was scientifically identified as that of its beloved lost Queen Aedgyth. Ceremoniously, on 22 October 2010, the elegant titanium and silver coffin bearing the remains of Aedgyth, 'one of the oldest members of the English royal family' was

re-interred under the heavy stone lid of the sixteenth-century sarcophagus. This important event in Magdeburg was recorded by the international press and attended by the German Minister for Culture, a representative of the Queen of England and the highest officials and citizens of the city.

But the memory of Ædgyth lives on in Magdeburg, as does the memory of her husband King Otto, and their vital presence fascinates as one wanders around the *Altstadt*. From the cathedral, a short walk by the river along the Schleinufer and Fürstenwallstraße in the direction of Große Klösterstraße brings into view the twin towers of the oldest Romanesque building extant in Magdeburg, the monastery of Unser Lieben Frauen. This beautiful example of Romanesque architecture now functions as an art museum, providing a delightful romantic setting for sculpture, art exhibitions and concerts. The sacredness of the crypt that remains tranquil and holy is an experience not to be missed. Continuing in a northerly direction across Ernst-Reuter Allee the visitor reaches the Alter Markt, famous for Magdeburg's old Town Hall and

the golden Magdeburger Reiter. Claimed to be Kaiser Otto, the original thirteenth-century figure, probably the first equestrian sculpture north of the Alps, stands proudly in the Kulturhistorisches Museum in Otto-von-Guericke Straße. But Magdeburg takes greatest pride in guarding the remains of the bona fide Kaiser Otto, the first Emperor of Germany (d.973), whose simple white marble tomb stands close to Ædgyth's in Otto's impressive Gothic cathedral in the centre of my favourite history place.

Elisabeth Davies is an amateur historian and a member of the Cambridge branch of the HA and the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists. She is currently writing a book on Aedgyth, the Anglo-Saxon Queen of Germany.

If you would like to tell us about your history place in a future edition of *The Historian*, in about 700 words, please email: [alf.wilkinson@history.org.uk](mailto:alf.wilkinson@history.org.uk)

# Mary Seacole, nurse and campaigner, in ten tweets

Why Mary Seacole? As most of this issue is about white men in the medieval period, I thought, Let's have something completely different. And October is Black History Month.



© National Portrait Gallery, London

Summarising an event or person using ten statements of only 140 characters (including spaces!). Compiled by Paula Kitching

-  Seacole was born Mary Jane Grant in Kingston, Jamaica in 1805. Her father was a Scottish soldier, and her mother a Jamaican.
-  Mary was of mixed race and therefore 'free', but as slavery wasn't abolished until 1838 her family had few civil rights.
-  Mary's mother taught her daughter nursing in their home, which was a boarding house for invalid soldiers.
-  1836: Mary married Edwin Seacole, who died in 1844. After that she pursued her interest in travel, a passion from before her marriage.
-  1854: Seacole travelled to England to ask the War Office to go as an army nurse to the Crimea war – she was turned down.
-  Undeterred set up the British Hotel nr Balaclava to provide 'a mess-table and comfortable quarters for sick and convalescent officers'.
-  She became known as 'Mother Seacole' by the troops. Her reputation then and now rivalled the nurse Florence Nightingale.
-  She returned to Britain after the war bankrupt. Some of those she had helped and the British press raised money on her behalf.
-  She died in London on 14 May 1881. In 2004 she was voted the greatest black Briton.
-  Her autobiography, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857), is one of the earliest autobiographies of a mixed-race woman

Follow the HA on Twitter @histassoc

# Out and About

## in Montreuil-sur-Mer

**John Painter** explores a strategically-important French boundary town, over which neighbouring powers have competed for over 1,200 years.



The ramparts on the western side of the town



Queen Bertha's Tower in the castle

Montreuil in Picardy is one of the most interesting small towns in northern France and a good base for visiting the battlefields of Crécy and Agincourt as well as the Somme Western Front. It was Haig's headquarters from 1916 and his statue still takes pride of place in the main square (Place du Général de Gaulle), despite the original, erected in 1931, having been used for target practice and destroyed by the German armies which occupied Montreuil during the Second World War.

### A strategic history

Montreuil lies on a high chalk bluff rising out of the marshy lands in the valley of the River Canche. It is called 'sur-Mer' because until the river silted up in the middle ages, the estuary came inland as far as the town, making it an important seaport of the Capetian Kings. For much of its life, Montreuil was on the edge of France, which explains why it was fortified from the end of the ninth century, when the count of Ponthieu built the first wooden fort. The town passed into royal hands a century later under the first Capetian king and a separate royal castle was founded, one tower of which still exists. Philip Augustus granted the town a charter in 1186 and built a new castle with stone walls and circular towers. In the thirteenth century, a new outer wall with ramparts was built around the town, much of which is still in situ today.

During the later middle ages Montreuil was uncomfortably placed between the county of Ponthieu – the lands to the south around the mouth of the Somme claimed by the English – and the Burgundian lands in Artois north of the Canche. It was recovered by the French crown, but in the sixteenth century Artois was ruled by the Emperor Charles V. This was a turbulent time for Montreuil, with the town being besieged by Imperial and English forces in 1522; captured and sacked by Imperial forces in 1537; and again besieged for three months, unsuccessfully, by English forces in 1544 as part of Henry VIII's campaign to capture Boulogne.

Following the peace treaty of 1559 between France and the Empire, Charles IX of France replaced the castle of Philip Augustus by a citadel and upgraded the town walls based on the Italian bastion method (*trace italienne*), re-designing the ramparts both to withstand and to facilitate cannon fire. More strengthening of the walls took place in the early seventeenth century.

The military successes of Louis XIV eased Montreuil's position as a frontier town. By the Treaty of the Pyrenees of 1659, France gained the county of Artois, to the north of the Canche, and the frontier was moved further north by the Treaty of Nijmegen in 1678. The French continued to recognise the strategic importance of Montreuil, however. Vauban further improved the defences in the 1670s and the town remained garrisoned throughout the eighteenth century to protect it against seaward incursions by the British. This role continued through the Napoleonic wars, when in 1804 marshalls Ney and Soult were in Montreuil for a planned invasion of England. The fortifications were not declassified until 1867 and the citadel was garrisoned until 1929 when it was bought by the town.

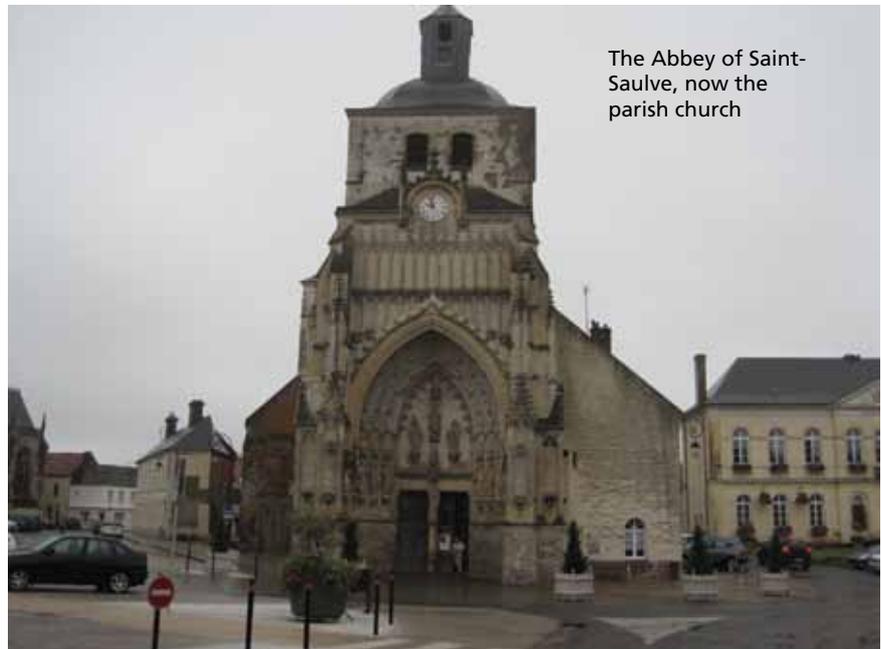
General Haig moved the British Army's General Headquarters from St Omer to Montreuil in March 1916 to be nearer to the hub of the Western Front on the Somme. The casemates under the citadel were again put to military use. Montreuil became an important centre for Belgian refugees and for a war hospital. Haig lived at the Château de Beaufort, a little outside the town, where in August 1918 he hosted King George V and President Poincaré.

During the Second World War, Montreuil fell to the German Second Panzer Division on 22 March 1940, and was occupied by German troops until it was re-taken by the Canadians on 13-14 September 1944. Its location gave it strategic relevance to Hitler's planned invasion of Britain in 1940 (Operation Sea Lion) and later the construction of the Atlantic Wall. The German Army dug new barracks in the chalk under the town from 1943, which later caused local subsidence.

## What to see

The strategic fortified hilltop location, tightly restricted by its defensive walls, has defined the town. The main road from Paris to the north ran through the walled town and, until 1699, through the Citadel. Walled Montreuil (the Haute Ville) had only two gates accessible by vehicles – the Porte de France at the south and the Porte de Boulogne at the north. The former was removed in the

Les Hauts de Montreuil, the supposed home of Jean Valjean



The Abbey of Saint-Saulve, now the parish church

1820s; the latter still exists, accessed by a steep hill with a sharp hairpin bend. Within the walls, the cobbled main street, now called the Rue Pierre Ledent, was previously the Grande Rue – the royal road from Paris to the Channel. Montreuil has a tight pattern of streets radiating from two public squares: the Place Gambetta, at the north end; and the larger, Place du Général de Gaulle, at the south end, where the Grande Rue widened out to form the market place.

## Religious buildings

In the middle ages Montreuil was also a religious centre of some significance. Its name is a corruption of 'Monasteriolum' ('place of the monasteries'), based upon a monastery believed to have been founded on the hill in the sixth century by Saulve, Bishop of Amiens. In the

The church of the abbey of St Austrebertha



The entrance to the citadel



The rue du Clape-en-Bas

early tenth century, Breton monks fled from Norman invaders to seek refuge in the town and built a monastery dedicated to St Winwalow (or Walloy), the founder of their original Breton Abbey. It was to this site that, in 1111,

the remains of St Saulve were removed. The Abbey of Saint-Saulve, in what is now Place Gambetta, was a centre of pilgrimage but it suffered much in later centuries. It was burned down by the invading Imperial army in 1537 and

rebuilt in a much curtailed manner, with only the nave remaining. From 1801 it became the only parish church in the town and has been refurnished with fittings from other town churches.

Medieval Montreuil had seven other churches and religious houses, traces of some of which can still be seen. To the north of the Place Gambetta is the nineteenth-century hospital, now converted into the Hotel Hermitage. Built on the site of the Hôtel-Dieu, the attached St Nicholas Chapel was rebuilt in the mid-fifteenth century in flamboyant Gothic style following an earthquake. It was restored in the 1870s but with baroque fittings from the reign of Louis XIII.

Behind the hospital was the Abbey of St Austrebertha, a seventh-century Merovingian nun and saint. The chapel was rebuilt in the eighteenth century in Renaissance style. Also close to the Place Gambetta are the transepts and chancel of the church of St Wulphy (fifteenth century) and the Chapel of the Hospital of the Orphans (founded in 1596).

### Castle

The castle/citadel is on the west side of the town and is open to visitors. It retains buildings and features from most of its historical periods, the oldest surviving being Queen Bertha's tower, where Bertha of Holland, the estranged wife of Philip I, ended her days in the late eleventh century. The site includes the casemates underneath the ramparts, accessed by steep stairs, built by Louis Philippe in the mid-nineteenth century in fear of Prussian attack. Between 1916 and 1919 they housed the British Army Communications Centre and today they contain an exhibition of Montreuil during the First World War. The Musée de France Roger Rodière, based in an eighteenth-century chapel within the citadel, contains local archaeological finds and sculptures.

### Ramparts

There is a complete circuit of ramparts around the Haute Ville which offer a walk of around three miles, giving good views of the fortifications and outer ditches, and the valley of the Canche. The ramparts date from between the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries and can be accessed from various parts of the town through postern gates and alleyways. They are higher than the surrounding housing, which backs on to them.

The northern gate, the Porte de Boulogne, is wide enough for one car to pass through at a time. A separate pedestrian passageway was cut next to it in 1886, as an alternative to its

## Statue of General Haig



demolition. It was widened in 1955, but to date, with local support, has withstood the efforts of town planners ever to get rid of it.

Running south from the Porte, to the east of the main street is the Cavée Saint Firmin, a picturesque but steep cobbled street, which originally formed part of the Royal Route until the Porte de Boulogne was built. It was the location of several scenes from the 1925 silent film, *Les Misérables*.

## Architecture

The town does not have vernacular dwellings which pre-date the attacks of the sixteenth century. Look out for the restaurant Les Hauts de Montreuil, two combined buildings in the main street – the Rue Pierre Ledent – which is a half-timbered house dating from the sacking of 1537. English troops were stationed here during the First World War. A sign on the house claims it to have been the home of Jean Valjean, hero of Hugo's *Les Misérables* and Mayor of Montreuil-sur-Mer.

Also in the Rue Pierre Ledent, just to the north and on the other side of the road, is a seventeenth-century staging inn, the Hôtel de France. Laurence Sterne stayed there, and mentions the town in *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768). As with a number of Montreuil buildings, the ubiquitous external render has been stripped away to reveal a fascinating amalgam of local building materials – brick, chalk and tile.

The Haute Ville is made up of a jumble of streets linked by alleys called *venelles* which act as shortcuts. Close to the eastern ramparts are the Rues du Clape-en-Bas and du Clape-en-

Inscription below statue of General Haig



Haut. Again cobbled, these are lined with single storey houses. They take their name from the sewers that line them: a *clapet* was the metal flap that stopped water flowing back. The Rue du Clape-en-Bas is now home to artisan restaurants.

The peaceful years of the eighteenth century brought prosperity and new residential buildings in the style of Louis XV. Particular examples are the Mansion de Longvilliers in the Rue de la Chaîne, and the Hôtel St Walloy in the Rue Saint-Walloy. The Mansion d'Acary de la Rivière, in the Rue du Petit Sermon near the Porte de Boulogne, dates from the early nineteenth century and is now the Musée de l'Espoir de Franck et Mary Wooster, which Madame Wooster, an Englishwoman, left to the town on her death: it includes a collection of furniture.

In the Place du Général de Gaulle, the early nineteenth-century grain hall is now the town theatre. The statue of General Haig is in front of it. The theatre was actively used by British troops in the First World War, and by German troops in the Second.

## Culture

The connection to *Les Misérables* followed Victor Hugo spending half a day in the town, on a trip north with his mistress in 1837. Every year, the townsfolk stage an outdoor *son et lumière* performance of the book (not the musical) in the citadel at the end of July and the beginning of August, with all 600 parts played by local people.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, Montreuil, as the nearest picturesque French town to Calais, became a focus for impressionist painters from America and Britain. Their legacy is promoted in signs across the Haute Ville. At this time too, as surviving railway posters demonstrate, the town was promoting itself as a *ville pittoresque* which was only three hours away from both Paris and London by train. Montreuil is today a small town of 2,500 people but its location near to the Channel ports has meant that it has hotels, restaurants and shops that promote themselves to a tourist trade from Britain, Belgium and Holland. Another insight into modern tourism is its status as an official *ville fleurie*. Flowers are much in evidence, in particular the banks of red roses around the citadel.

John Painter is a History and Politics graduate from the University of Warwick, and current Secretary of the Friends of Reading Abbey. As Anne Curry's husband, he is a regular visitor to Picardy and Azincourt!

A typical house in the Place Gambetta



# WWI and the flu pandemic:

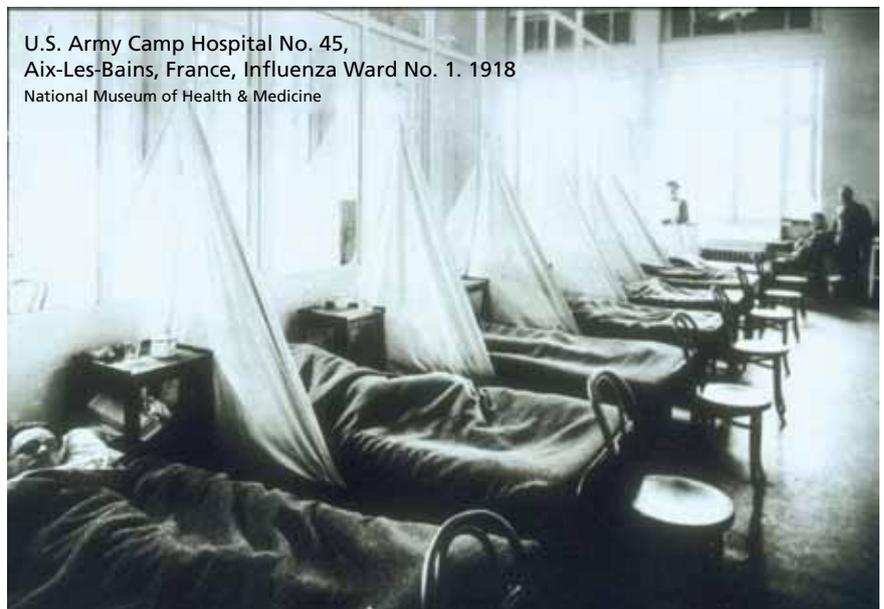
## life, death and memory

In our continuing Aspects of War series **Hugh Gault** reveals that the flu pandemic, which began during the First World War, presented another danger that challenged people's lives and relationships.

**W**ounded in the neck on the first day of the battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, Arthur Conan Doyle's son Kingsley eventually recovered but was to die of flu in St Thomas' Hospital, London on 28 October 1918, two weeks before the armistice.<sup>1</sup> About 10 million people in Britain were attacked by this flu outbreak and nearly a quarter of a million of them died. Yet like the war itself it was a worldwide phenomenon that added considerably to deaths in 1918 and 1919, killing 50 million in total – as Honigsbaum labels it, 'the mother of all pandemics and a continuing enigma'.<sup>2</sup> A mild primary wave was followed by a severe secondary one, which in Britain took place in the last months of 1918, and then the least severe third wave. This was the normal course of influenza, but the outbreak was unusual in that mortality was greatest among those aged 20 to 40, in other words the fittest rather than older people or the very young as might be expected. Nor was it any less prevalent among the wealthy than the poor.

According to Martin Wainwright in his book on the English village, 'the flu pandemic seemed to threaten scenes reminiscent of the Black Death', recounting the experience of Colin Coote, a future editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, immediately after the war:

Standing as a Conservative candidate in that year's general election, [he] canvassed farmhouses in the Isle of Ely where he found the entire household dead. As he toured other villages in Cambridgeshire, he noted that not one was without its limbless or shell-shocked victims of the trenches.<sup>3</sup>



Both the war and the flu pandemic left few families, and even fewer communities, untouched. Mark Honigsbaum gives a grisly description of its swift onset:

... [it] struck suddenly and without warning: one moment a person was up and about, the next they would be lying incapacitated coughing up greenish-yellow sputum. As pneumonia set in their temperature would soar to 40 or 41 [degrees] C and they would slip into a delirium. The final stage came when their lungs filled with fluid prompting their heart to leech oxygen from the blood vessels supplying head and feet. It must have felt like drowning.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps because of the horrific symptoms, or possibly because it came on the back of four years of carnage,

the flu pandemic seems either to have escaped public memory or been suppressed.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the nursery rhyme Ring-a-ring o' roses, for example, alleged to date back to the plague,<sup>6</sup> there is no such verse that commemorates the flu, even though one purpose of such rhymes is to enable children to quell their fears and give them a feeling of exemption, if not control.<sup>7</sup>

People's accounts of their experience were gathered in 1972 and Honigsbaum cites some of these in his 2009 book. But it is another story that I want to recount, having stumbled across it more than five years ago. It is by no means unique but underlines the tragedies that were commonplace at that time and the redemption that some people found even while this could not diminish their suffering.

William Robert Bruce-Clarke was born in Harley Street in 1885, the son

of a surgeon at St Bartholomew's Hospital (also called William) and his wife Effie. He was educated at Harrow School and was already aged 20 when he went to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1906 to study engineering, obtaining a third-class ordinary (rather than Honours) degree in 1909. In May 1912 he joined the Trinidad Lake Asphalt Paving Company of Fulham and was still working for them when war broke out. Meanwhile, he and Ethel Cox, whose father was also a doctor, married in July 1913 at her local church in Cottenham, living with her parents at their home in the village.

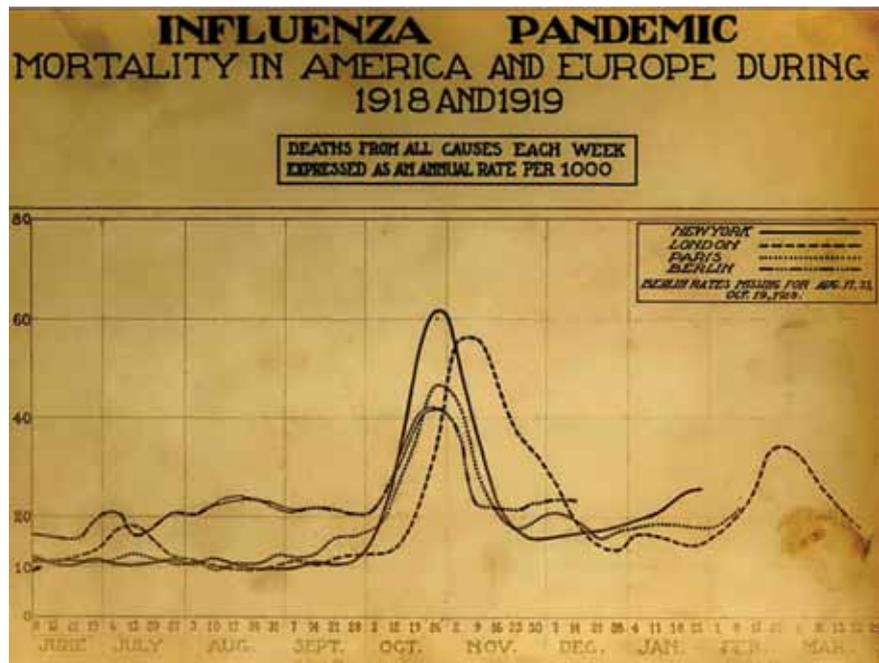
A month after the war started Bruce-Clarke joined the 14th County of London Battalion (London Scottish), a territorial force. Although the 1st/14th Battalion fought at Messines, Ypres and Loos in 1914-1915, the 2nd/14th did not reach France until 1918 and the 3rd/14th never did, ending up in Wisbech in Cambridgeshire. Meanwhile, Bruce-Clarke had transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in December 1915 repairing aeroplanes as an Assistant Engineering Officer. Eighteen months later he had worked his way through the engineering grades to the rank of Captain. He was subsequently included in Field-Marshal Haig's despatch of 7 November 1917 naming those conspicuous for their 'distinguished and gallant services and devotion to duty'.

He had been in France for about three years when he came home on 48 hours' leave in November 1918 to visit his wife Ethel who had succumbed to the flu. She recovered but he caught it. When it then turned to pneumonia he was admitted to the 1st General Eastern Hospital in Cambridge on 28 November 1918, dying there three days later.<sup>8</sup> He was buried with full military honours in Cottenham and awarded the MBE on 1 January 1919. Two Generals wrote to his wife:

We were all so terribly sorry to hear about poor B.-C. He had worked with us for so long that I shall hardly know how to get on without him. He was one of those invaluable people whom one could put on to any job with the certainty that it would be carried through.

General R. Brooke-Popham

I knew your husband intimately all the time he was in France, and, in common with us all, I had the greatest admiration and affection for him. Whatever he did he did with all his might. One knew that what he undertook would be carried through right to the end. The Air Force has



lost a very fine Officer and a good friend.

General F. Festing, Air Ministry<sup>9</sup>

Ethel's mother died in January 1919, adding to her grief, and as well as a young daughter she now had her father to look after as well. A year after Bruce-Clarke's death his wife placed an In Memoriam notice in *The Times* 'in proud and loving memory'.<sup>10</sup>

Two months later on 7 February 1920 her forthcoming re-marriage to Major Robert Ellis was announced in *The Times*. He had studied medicine at Cambridge University and was also the son of a doctor (from the neighbouring village of Swavesey). A month later she ceased to be Bruce-Clarke's widow and became Mrs Ellis at the Chapel Royal, Savoy.<sup>11</sup> Whether for tactical or other reasons her father was absent, supposedly because of ill-health, and she was given away by a Mr Livingston Oakley of Esher in Surrey.

This is not the end of the story though. Bruce-Clarke's headstone in Cottenham cemetery, erected by his wife, is pictured right. Tellingly, though, her life is commemorated on the reverse. She may have been Ethel Ellis since 1920 but she clearly remained Ethel Bruce-Clarke for longer.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83 for other reasons.

<sup>6</sup> Iona and Peter Opie, eds (1951) *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, pp. 364-65.

<sup>7</sup> Opie, I. and Opie, P. (1969) *Children's games in street and playground: chasing, catching, seeking, hunting, racing, duelling, exerting, daring, guessing, acting, pretending*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

<sup>8</sup> The history of this hospital, on the site of what is now Cambridge University Library, has only recently been uncovered by Philomena Guillebaud. She tells the story in *From bats to beds to books: The First Eastern General Hospital (Territorial Force) Cambridge - and what came before and after it*, Haddenham, Cambs: Fern House, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Both recorded in Harrow memorials of the Great War.

<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 1 December 1919.

<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, 11 March 1920.

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