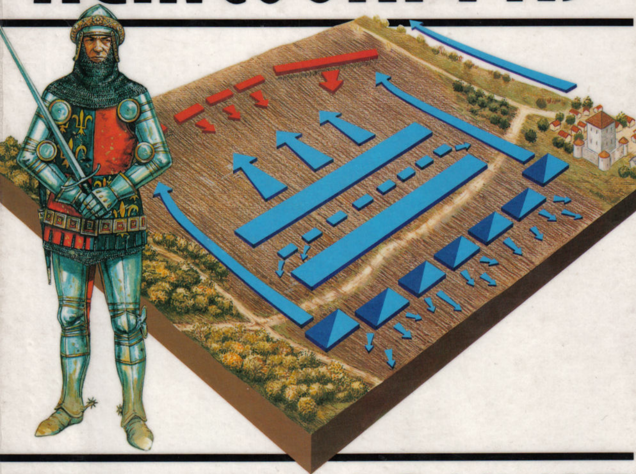
OR DAVID G. CHANDLER

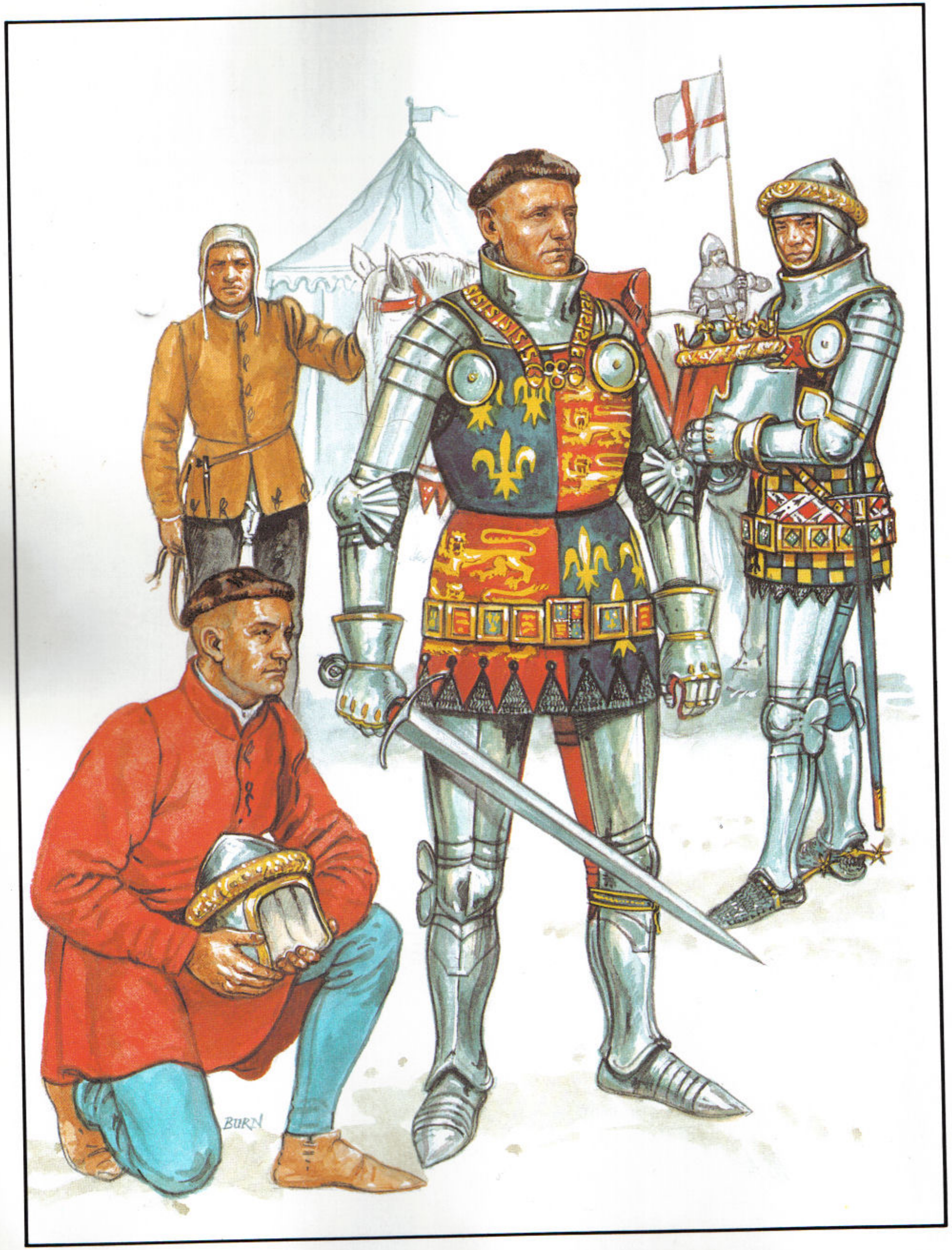
GN SERIES 9

AGINCOURT 1415



TRIUMPH AGAINST THE ODDS

MATTHEW BENNETT



GENERAL EDITOR DAVID G. CHANDLER

OSPREY MILITARY
CAMPAIGN SERIES 9

AGINCOURT 1415

TRIUMPH AGAINST THE ODDS

MATTHEW BENNETT

◀ *Henry V preparing for battle at Agincourt. He wears full plate armour except for the head. A servant kneels with his open-faced bascinet while the king's body squire, John Cheyney, stands ready with the great helm circled by a golden crown. In the background a groom holds the head of the grey palfrey from which the king made his speech before the battle. The helmet, sword and saddle may still be seen in Westminster Abbey.*

First published in 1991 by Osprey, an imprint of Reed Consumer Books Limited Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, London SW3 6RB and Auckland, Melbourne, Singapore and Toronto

Reprinted 1994

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Bennet, Matthew
Agincourt 1415; triumph against the odds.
1. Great Britain. France. Wars, history, 1328–1498
1. Title
944.025
ISBN 1-85532-132-7

Produced by DAG Publications Ltd for Reed Consumer Books Ltd

Colour bird's eye view illustrations by Cilla Eurich.
Colour figure illustrations by Jeffrey Burn.
Drawings based on manuscript illustrations by V. Bennett.
Cartography by Micromap.
Wargaming Agincourt 1415 by Paul Stevenson.
Wargames consultant Duncan Macfarlane.
Typeset by Ronset Typesetters Ltd, Darwen, Lancashire.
Mono camerawork by M&F Reproductions, North Fambridge, Essex.
Printed and bound in Hong Kong.

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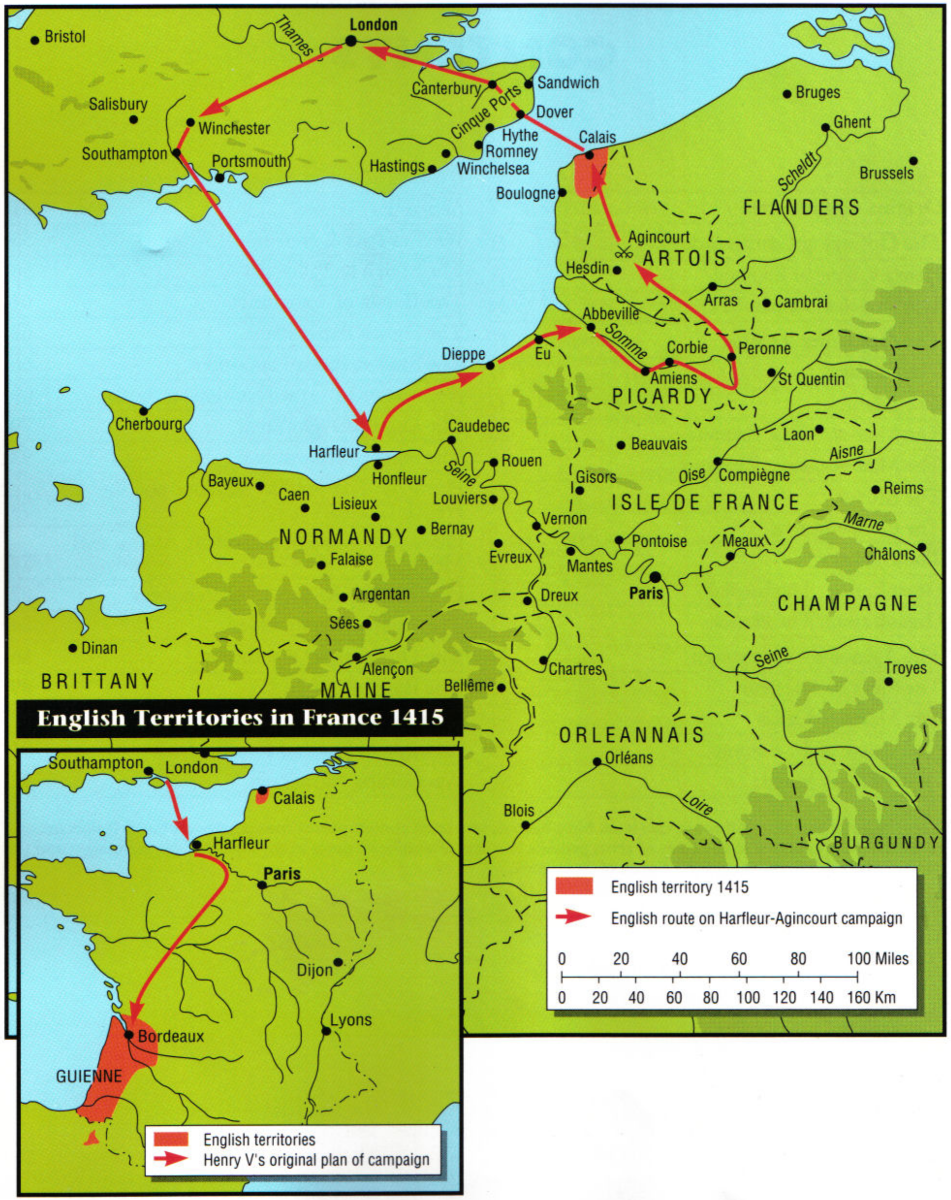
Note: Many of the illustrations in this book have been drawn from contemporary manuscript pictures. References to retinues in the captions to the coats of arms provide two sets of numbers: those at the outset of the campaign; and (in parentheses) those present at the Battle of Agincourt.

Northern France and Southern England in the Early 15th Century



English Territories in France 1415

ORIGINS OF THE BATTLE

On the evening of 24 October 1415, 28-year-old King Henry of England faced his greatest test. His small army was sick and exhausted and trapped by at least three times its number of fresh, confident French troops. Henry had tried to avoid fighting but he knew that next day it was inevitable. Against all expectations the battle that followed would turn out to be a decisive victory for the English, fought in a field near the village that was to give it its name – Agincourt.

At Agincourt, Henry V was fighting to recover what he believed to be his birthright: the Duchy of Normandy. This had last been in English hands more than two hundred years ago, before the French king took it from King John, his vassal. The intense rivalry between the French and English crowns dated back to 1066, when William the Bastard, Duke of Normandy, conquered England. But the dukes of Normandy had always been the vassals of the French Crown, and their elevation to royalty in one part of their realm did not change this relationship. In the mid-twelfth century the Norman kings were replaced by another dynasty, the counts of Anjou, who held extensive lands in the west and south-west of France. The new king, Henry II, actually ruled an 'empire' more powerful than that of his overlord. But his weak younger son, John, was not able to hold on to it in the face of a determined assault, both legal and military, by the French king, Philip II. In 1204, Normandy was overrun, England retaining only its possessions south of the River Loire. The minority of Henry III (1215-70) ushered in a period of political instability in England. This led to the disadvantageous Treaty of Paris in 1259, by which Henry gave up his rights to Normandy, Anjou and other territories, and agreed to do homage to the French king for his southern possessions of Aquitaine and Gascony. His son, Edward I (1270-1307), was a more powerful ruler and wished to redress the balance in favour of England. But he was preoccupied with extending his power within the British Isles, and, apart from hostilities between 1294 and 1298, he made no attempt to enforce his claims against the French.

His reign was followed by another period of confusion when domestic concerns dominated English politics. A resurgent Scotland under Robert the Bruce inflicted a series of defeats, which led eventually to the deposition and murder of Edward II in 1327. There had been a brief conflict with France in 1324-5, known, after the town being fought over, as the War of Saint Sardos; but this was inconclusive. Edward III was only fifteen when he succeeded to the throne. In the following year the French king, Charles IV, died, leaving no male heir. Edward had a claim to the French throne through his mother, Charles's sister, but the French were not about to allow him to inherit. They invoked the Salic Law, an ancient custom that the crown should not pass through the female line. The French king's cousin, Philip of Valois, was the preferred choice, and – given the political and military situation at the time – there was nothing that Edward could do about it.

With every new reign the French king required homage for the English Crown's French possessions. This had been a problem since the beginning of the fourteenth century as it led to extensive legal wrangling, and homages had to be negotiated in rapid succession: in 1314, 1316, 1322 and now in 1328. The evident reluctance of Edward II to perform homage, aggravated by the conflict over Saint Sardos, meant that he only came into his Continental inheritance after paying £60,000 feudal 'relief' and handing over the territory of the Agenais. But it was his young son who actually performed homage to Charles IV. As king, Edward III performed homage twice more, in 1329 and

1331. Such ceremonies were far more than legal niceties. They helped to establish the justness of a ruler's cause should it come to war – and Philip VI had clear intentions to win England's rich southern French possessions. He devised an invasion plan for Gascony in 1329. The actual cause for war was Edward's refusal to hand over the renegade Count Robert of Artois, so that in 1337 Philip declared Gascony forfeit. Edward's response was to claim the French throne himself.

This is not the place to go into a detailed history of the ensuing conflict, now known as the Hundred Years War, up until 1415. Several issues need to be considered, however. English and French fortunes had fluctuated over the intervening eighty years. Edward's land campaigns in 1339 and 1340 were inconclusive, although a great victory was won at sea, off Sluys. The English tactic was that of chevauchée, literally rides through French territory to inflict damage, win plunder and undermine Philip's authority. When Edward's force was caught at Crécy in 1346, and his son the Black Prince was trapped at Poitiers ten years later, they both inflicted signal defeats on the French. In 1356, King John and many of his nobles were actually captured, giving the English the upper hand in the subsequent ransom and territorial negotiations; these resulted in the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360, which assured Edward's possessions in western France, and some (excluding Normandy) in the north.

But in the same year a French fleet landed on the English coast, sacked and burned Winchelsea. This sort of destructive naval raid continued at intervals for the rest of the century. What is more, the English strategy of chevauchée began to fail.

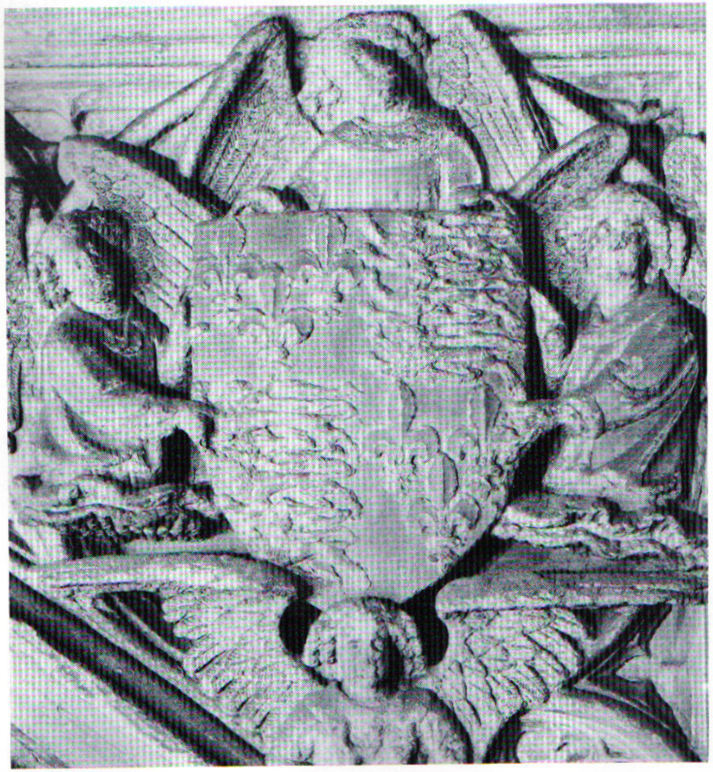
◀Richard II knighting the 12-year-old Prince Henry in 1399 (the same year in which he became Prince of Wales). (Harl. MSS 1319)

▶ Henry V armed cap-à-pie and mounted on his warhorse, from his chantry chapel in Westminster Abbey. This was how rulers liked to portray themselves, as warriors, in a self-glorifying style that bore no relation to the realities of war.

The Dauphin, who became Charles V in 1364, advised by his wily Constable Bertrand du Guesclin, declined battle in favour of a 'scorched earth' policy. English raiders were harried through devastated land by French forces that would not stand and fight. In 1370, Sir Richard Knolles, and three years later, John of Gaunt, conducted expeditions that were humiliating failures. In 1375, the Truce of Bruges was established, and within two years both Edwards were dead, leaving a minor on the throne.

Richard II's reign was a troubled one, but he did have a genuine desire for peace, which was achieved for the last decade of the fourteenth century. Richard's overthrow and murder by Henry of Lancaster in 1399 changed the political situation again. French naval raids and attempted intervention in England were matched by English expeditions in 1405, 1410 and 1412. These were neither large nor particularly successful, however. In 1415 the English were looking back on a generation of defeats.

Three factors made Henry's invasion something more than a desperate gamble. One was the undoubted superiority of English arms in battle. English archers, if properly deployed, constituted one of the most formidable fighting forces in Europe. Second, in Henry they had a commander of energy and determination. Third, and most important, the French were riven by personal and political disputes that extended as far as civil war. Charles VI was insane, and in the absence of his authority, two groups of nobles, known as the Burgundians and the Armagnacs, vied for supremacy. It was this disunity that was to prove fatal for the French in the 1415 campaign.



◀ *The Royal Arms of England, quarterly 1&4 France Modern azure three fleurs de lis or, 2&3 gules 3 lions passant guardant or, borne by Henry V. The angels symbolize divine aid. Chantry chapel Westminster Abbey.*

▶ *Henry V, King of England. This modern reconstruction is based upon an early sixteenth century copy of a contemporary portrait. This is probably a good likeness and may be compared with a head carved in 1971 to restore Henry's tomb in Westminster Abbey. He was a handsome, well-built and athletic man, every inch a king, whom even his enemies respected.*

THE OPPOSING COMMANDERS

Henry V, King of England

The formal beginning to young Henry's military career was in 1399, when at the age of twelve, he was knighted. In fact he was knighted twice. On the first occasion this was by Richard II who had taken him that summer on his Irish campaign, as a hostage for his exiled father's good behaviour. He was then knighted again by his father, Henry Bolingbroke, the day before his coronation as Henry IV, having deposed Richard in a coup d'état. Twelve was an unusual, though not exceptionally early, age to be knighted. What was unusual, and what gave Henry an invaluable apprenticeship in the career of arms, were the circumstances of the usurpation that made the second knighting necessary. By deposing, imprisoning and later secretly murdering Richard, Henry IV had, whatever his justification, acted contrary to the laws of God and Man. This legitimized rebellion against his rule, and more than half his reign was spent in dealing with the results of his seizure of power.

The first campaign during which Henry saw service was against Scotland in 1400. Then, as Prince of Wales, he was faced with a full-scale and determined revolt by Owain Glendwr (who also claimed that title). The young prince was only the nominal leader at first, working with the powerful 'Marcher' lords who wielded effective power in the area. The Welsh used guerrilla tactics, relying upon raids and a swift retreat to mountain hideouts. So the 1402 campaign, when 'night after night the army lay in the open, drenched to the skin and half-starved' in pursuit of an elusive enemy, taught Henry the dreary realities of warfare. He also received military instruction from two members of the Percy family. Harry Hotspur was his first tutor; and in 1403 Thomas, Earl of Worcester, took over the role. Ironically, later in that year Henry was to face both of them in battle.

The Percies, with the Earl of Northumberland at their head, had helped Henry IV to the throne. Now the family wanted full control. So they made an alliance with Glendwr, and Percy forces marched to unite with him in the summer of 1403. By swift marching, King Henry was able to prevent their junction. At Shrewsbury, on 21 July, with Prince Henry leading the left wing, the rebels were soundly defeated. Hotspur was killed and his army dispersed. But it was a far from easy victory. The Royalists had to advance uphill into a hail of archery from some of the best bowmen in the kingdom, notably those of Cheshire. Young Henry was himself wounded in the face by an arrow, but bore the pain until victory was won. This was truly a baptism of fire. Henry proved his courage and determination in the teeth of the most fearsome tactical weapon of his time, one that he was to turn on the French a dozen years later.

Already Henry was unusual – he had a fought a battle. In fact he was to fight two in the twenty-odd years of his military career; Agincourt was the other. For battles were rare events at this time. Warfare was mainly given over to long sieges of castles and towns. Accordingly, the reconquest of Wales dragged on for another five years. In 1405 a great rebellion involving Glendwr, the Percies and the Mortimers was crushed at Bramham Moor, the Earl of Northumberland being killed. There was even a French expeditionary force landed at Milford Haven to link with the Welsh in a southern thrust; but it sailed home with nothing achieved.

So, when his father died in 1413, Henry was already an experienced warrior after a military education of the most harsh and practical kind. He had endured long marches in appalling weather conditions. He had suffered the tedium and discomfort of the siege-lines. As well as seeing many skirmishes, he had commanded men in formal, open battle. Above all, he had been taught the need for attention to detail in war. His preparations for the Agincourt campaign were massive and meticulous, to ensure the necessary numbers of men and sufficient amount of weaponry and ammunition.

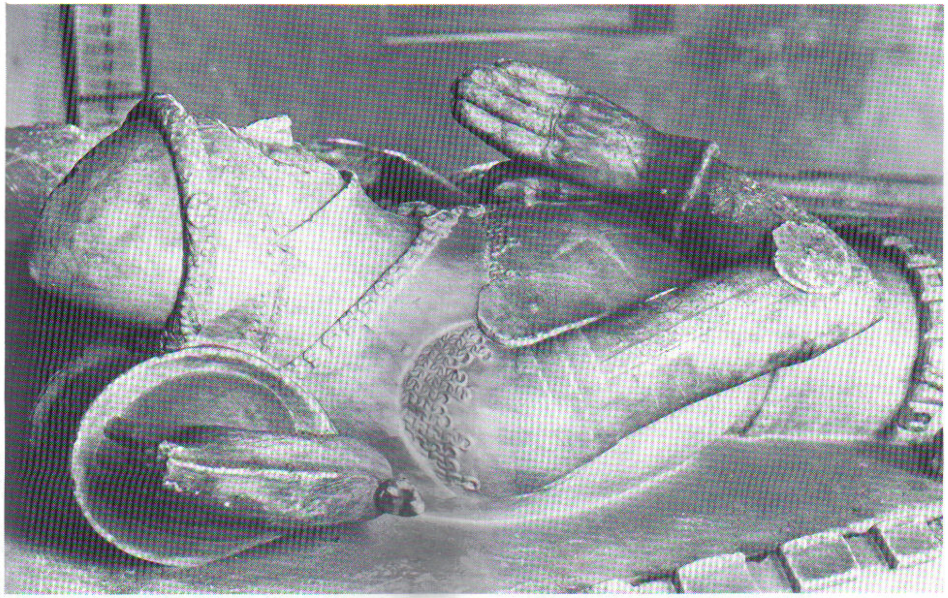
In order to do this he needed about him men of competence and honesty. Bishop Henry Beaufort, his uncle, as well as providing or arranging the huge loans necessary to fund the expedition, oversaw the recruitment of his army. The Earl of Arundel, his treasurer, organized the payment of sailors and the provision of supplies for the voyage. The Earl of Dorset, his admiral, gathered together the invasion fleet. Richard Courtenay, Bishop of Norwich, was involved in diplomatic and intelligence-gathering activities (we know this because his agent in Paris was later arrested and tried for treason). Nicholas Merbury, Master of the Ordnance, provided ammunition and other equipment of war.

On campaign, Henry surrounded himself with experienced and trusted subordinates – for the most part. He also took with him Edward, Earl of March, who had been involved in the plot that was uncovered only a few days before the departure for France. Admittedly it was Edward himself who had confessed, but he was a dangerous man (his claim to the throne was in fact stronger than Henry's) and it is a mark of the King's confidence that he pardoned and continued to employ the Earl. For the rest, there were Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and Thomas, Duke of Clarence, the King's brothers; the Earls of Suffolk, Cambridge and Oxford; the Duke of York, the king's uncle; and numerous subordinates such as that old warhorse Sir Thomas Erpingham, the King's Steward; Sir John Holland and Sir John Cornwall. An important aspect of Henry's success as a leader was his ability to win respect from everyone, whatever their age or experience – and even from his enemies.


▼Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester; an exact copy of a contemporary sketch.


◀Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. Note the organization of plates around the face, and the protection for shoulder and elbow.

In summary, Henry was the complete medieval military man and model king. This is not to say that he was perfect in all things. There is no doubt that he took his responsibilities very seriously. He had inherited rights in France, especially in Normandy, and he felt a responsibility to enforce them. Similarly, on the larger issue of the French crown, he had a family responsibility to his great-grandfather, Edward III, to achieve this, if possible. A very pious man, he was acutely aware of the sanctity of Church property and of his duty to his subjects. Accordingly, he strictly enforced ordinances controlling the behaviour of his troops on campaign. The discipline he demanded paid him back in full at Agincourt. In addition he possessed both moral and physical bravery; his confidence never appeared to be shaken even in such desperate circumstances as at Agincourt. Above all, he knew his trade as a soldier. He appreciated the


▼Effigy of the Earl of Oxford, his head resting on his great helmet. Note the chain mail beneath the metal gorget and the roundel at the elbow.

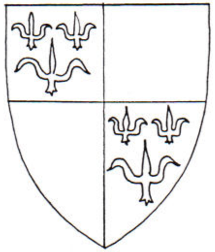
importance of the sea and the need for a strong fleet (although this was not created until after Agincourt). He accepted no bounds to the campaigning season and later was to prosecute what is known as the 'War of the Sieges' (1417-22), which firmly established his rule in Normandy, with unrivalled determination. Rouen, the province's capital, was taken after a seven-month siege (July 1418 to January 1419). Meaux took as long and this mostly in the winter months. It was after the capture of the town that he died, exhausted, probably of dysentery, that most common and disgusting of soldiers' diseases. His death, two months before that of Charles VI of France, meant that he never held the Joint Crown he strove for. He was a victim of his own success,

There is a side to his character little dwelt upon. French commentators noted that he was a harsh and arrogant man, assured of his own rectitude. His single-mindedness made him ruthless. And his ruthlessness made him cruel. It was this that made him hang prisoners after a siege. He oversaw a massacre at the taking of Caen in 1417. During the long siege of Rouen he refused food to the women and children expelled from the city and trapped between the siege-lines and the city walls. Technically he was within his rights according to the 'laws of war' at the time; but he need not have stuck to their letter. So it is with the massacre of the prisoners at Agincourt. He had justification for what he did, but it was a horrific act. Constant war from an early age had brutalized him. He was a cold and heartless warrior, which made a mighty king.

▲Charles VI, King of France, based upon his tomb effigy at St. Denis. He is shown wearing a remarkable gold parade helmet discovered in the courtyard of the Louvre in an old well in 1987. It is decorated with symbols of the French monarchy, notably the fleur de lis, and is encircled by his motto 'En bien', constantly repeated. This seems a suitable depiction of a king whose madness made him think he was made of glass, an unsatisfactory delusion for a soldier, and which made him incompetent to command in war.

The French Commanders

In contrast to the English, who were led, as we have seen, by a commander of the first rank, the French were in a mess. Their king, Charles VI,



▲Charles d'Albret, Constable of France, arms quarterly 1&4 France Modern 2&3 gules. He was killed leading the first line at Agincourt.

▶ Charles d'Albret, Constable of France, stands beneath his banner in the first rank at Agincourt. He is dressed for combat, with a mail aventail and open-faced bascinet in preference to a heavy, vision-inhibiting closed helmet. He has drawn his sword and left off his scabbard, which could prove an encumbrance while fighting.

◀ The jupon or coat armour of Charles VI dating to the late fourteenth century and now in Chartres cathedral in perfect condition. It was originally a plain bright red.

was subject to fits of insanity to which he had been victim for over twenty years. Despite his undoubted bravery and moments of sanity, he was unfit to command. His son, the Dauphin Louis, was an unhealthy and unmilitary lad of nineteen with no experience of war. This crucial weakness at the top had resulted in a situation of near civil war in which the Burgundian and Armagnac factions struggled for supremacy. In such a situation there was no possibility of undivided command.

The King (or his advisers) preferred not to call upon either John, Duke of Burgundy, or Charles, Duke of Orleans to lead the army. They could not work together: John had assassinated Charles's father in 1413 (and was to be murdered in revenge in 1419) while Burgundy was equivocal about whether to oppose the English or to ally themselves with them. John did allow his subjects to serve in the French army, but declined himself and forbade his son's presence.

Next in seniority came Charles, Duke of Orleans, aged only 24 and with little military experience; John, Duke of Bourbon, a 33-three year old who had won a victory over an Anglo-Gascon force during a chevauchée at Soubise in 1413; and John, Duke of Alençon, who, at thirty, had proved himself a failure as a military leader in the Bourges campaign three years earlier. They were asked to work in cooperation with the military officials of the Royal household: the Constable, Marshal and Master of the Crossbows.

In theory, this was a good solution. Charles d'Albret had held the post of Constable since 1402 and was an experienced and cautious warrior. John le Maingre, known as Boucicault, the Marshal, had an international reputation. A stalwart crusader, he had taken a leading part in the Burgundian Crusade so disastrously defeated at Nicopolis in 1396. Captured and ransomed from Sultan Bayezid, he had returned to defend Constantinople against Ottoman attack in 1399. He was already a hero of literature, his 'words and deeds' having been recorded in a book celebrating him as a model of chivalry. He was a legend in his own lifetime.

Had these two vastly experienced soldiers been able to exercise command, the result of King Henry's chevauchée might have been very different. For they advocated extreme caution: by avoiding battle and employing a 'scorched-earth' policy they planned to starve the English force into submission. They also devised a tactical plan by which the English might be defeated should it come to a fight. As we shall see, this was certainly the right strategy and these were probably the best tactics to employ. But when the day of battle came they were overruled by the arrogant young dukes, Princes of the Blood, over whom career soldiers such as they were could claim no authority.

D'Albret and Boucicault managed the campaign very well up to a few days before the battle. On the fateful day itself, if one were to ask who commanded the French army, the answer must be: no one. This, along with the evident, and contrasting, tactical competence and cohesion of the English, is the root cause of the French defeat.

▲John le Maingre, Marshal Boucicault, from a contemporary portrait. This is the battered 'prize-fighter's' face of a veteran of many wars fought over three decades. Boucicault advised avoiding battle with the English but was overruled.

THE OPPOSING ARMIES

The Cavalry

Armies of the early fifteenth century were based on the man-at-arms: that is to say, someone clad in a complete suit of armour, trained to fight both on horse and foot. He could be a knight, if he possessed the necessary social standing and had undergone a formal ceremony; but more often he was not. While all important men were knights, many men-at-arms were simple esquires (the rank below and technically denoting a man suitable for knighting) or ordinary soldiers with no such pretensions. A man-at-arms was principally a cavalryman, by training and ethos, although, as we shall see, most fighting of the period was carried out on foot. He usually led a 'lance', a group of retainers who were also mounted, so he needed enough wealth to sustain the cost of several horses.

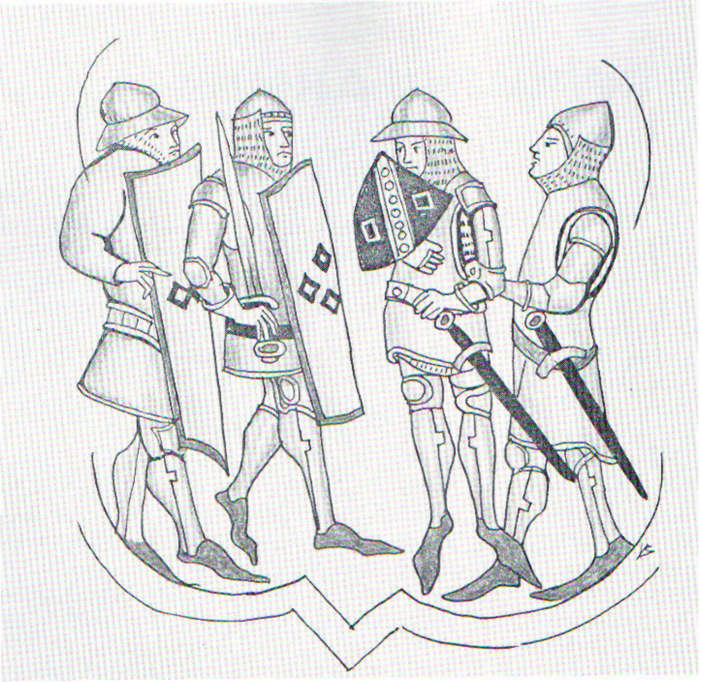
There were other types of cavalry, more lightly equipped, known since the time of Edward III as 'hobilars', although they played no role in the Agincourt campaign. A third to a half of English archers also rode horses, although they should be seen only as mounted infantry, gaining increasing mobility for the strategy of chevauchée.

The Infantry

The most common form of infantry soldier was the ordinary spearman. His weapon might be a halberd, with an axe-like head rather than a spear point, and he was armoured according to his means, usually with a helmet and brigandine. As well as filling the back ranks on the battlefield, his job involved the hard slog of siege work, which occupied so much of medieval campaigns.

The missile-men were of three types: archers, crossbowmen and gunners. The success of the

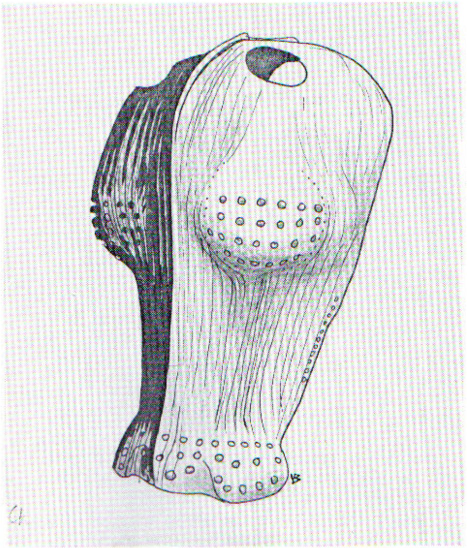
▶ Arming a knight, from an early fifteenth century manuscript. As well as showing details of armour for man and horse, it makes the point that each man-at-arms needed the support of a team of servants to support him and his mounts – usually one or two warhorses, a riding horse for every member of the 'lance' and a packhorse.

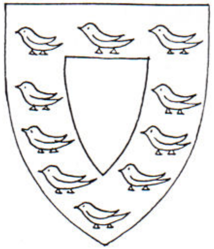


◀ *French infantrymen. This French manuscript shows the kinds of soldiers provided by the urban communities. The equipment is varied: with bascinets and pot helms, more mail than a man-at-arms was wearing in 1415, and shields. The long shield on the left looks like a pavise, with a pointed base for holding it firm in the ground usually serving as protection for crossbowmen. Such shields were decorated with the coat of arms of the town.*

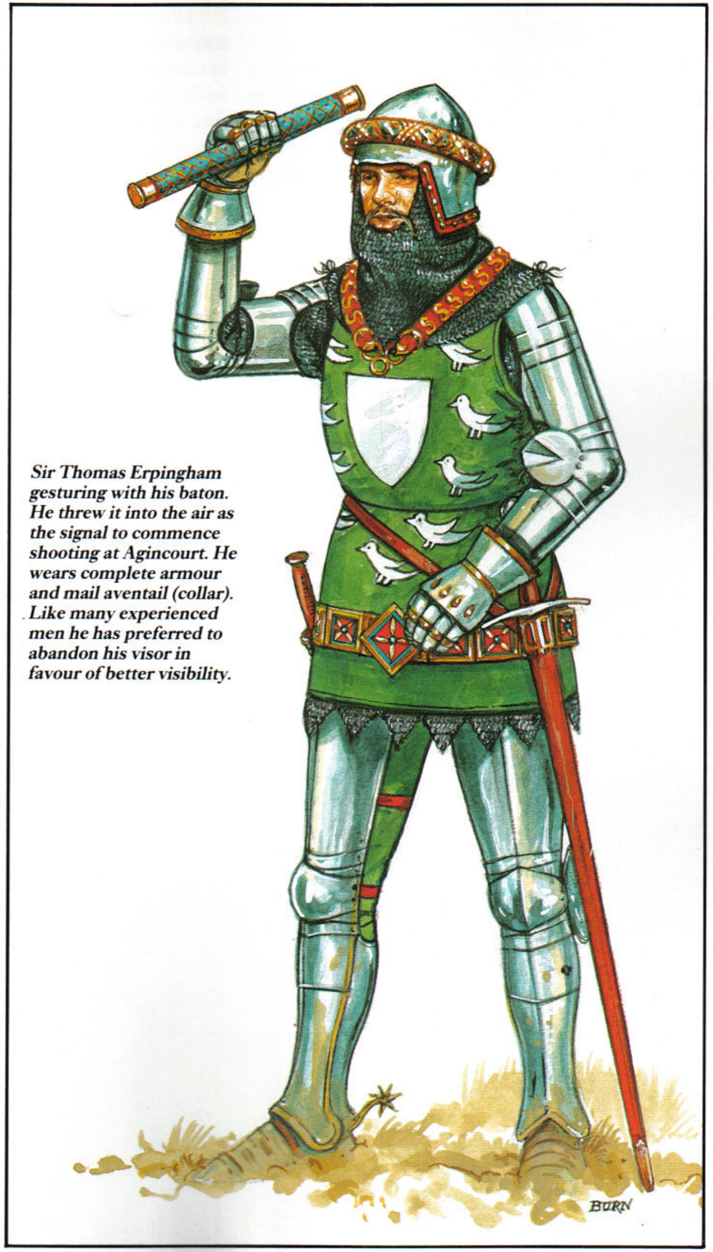
English longbow meant that archers habitually made up two-thirds of England's armies (and at Agincourt more than four-fifths). Their rapid shooting and destructive effect will be examined later. The French also possessed archers but did not use them so effectively. They relied more on the crossbow, which shot a heavier missile, or quarrel, but took much longer to reload. A crossbowman was usually accompanied by a companion bearing a large shield, a pavise, to protect them during reloading. This made the crossbow more useful in sieges than on the battlefield. The gunners, employed by both sides, were also more often engaged in siege work. There was already a wide range of types and sizes of artillery pieces, developed in the three-quarters of a century since their first appearance in Western Europe. They ranged from small, hand-held weapons to massive bombards used for battering down fortifications. It should be stressed that there was no proper, mobile, field artillery at the time of Agincourt.

▼ *The Warwick Chamfron. Men-at-arms' horses were expected to be protected frontally, at least, to justify their rider's place in the battle line. At Agincourt it was as the cavalry charge was repulsed that the horses became maddened by arrows striking their unprotected flanks and rumps.*





▲ ***Sir Thomas Erpingham** (b. 1357) KG 1401, arms vert an inescutcheon within an orle of martlets argent. An old warhorse, Steward of the King's Household, he commanded the archers at Agincourt. Retinue: 20 (16) men-at-arms, 60 (47) horsed archers.*



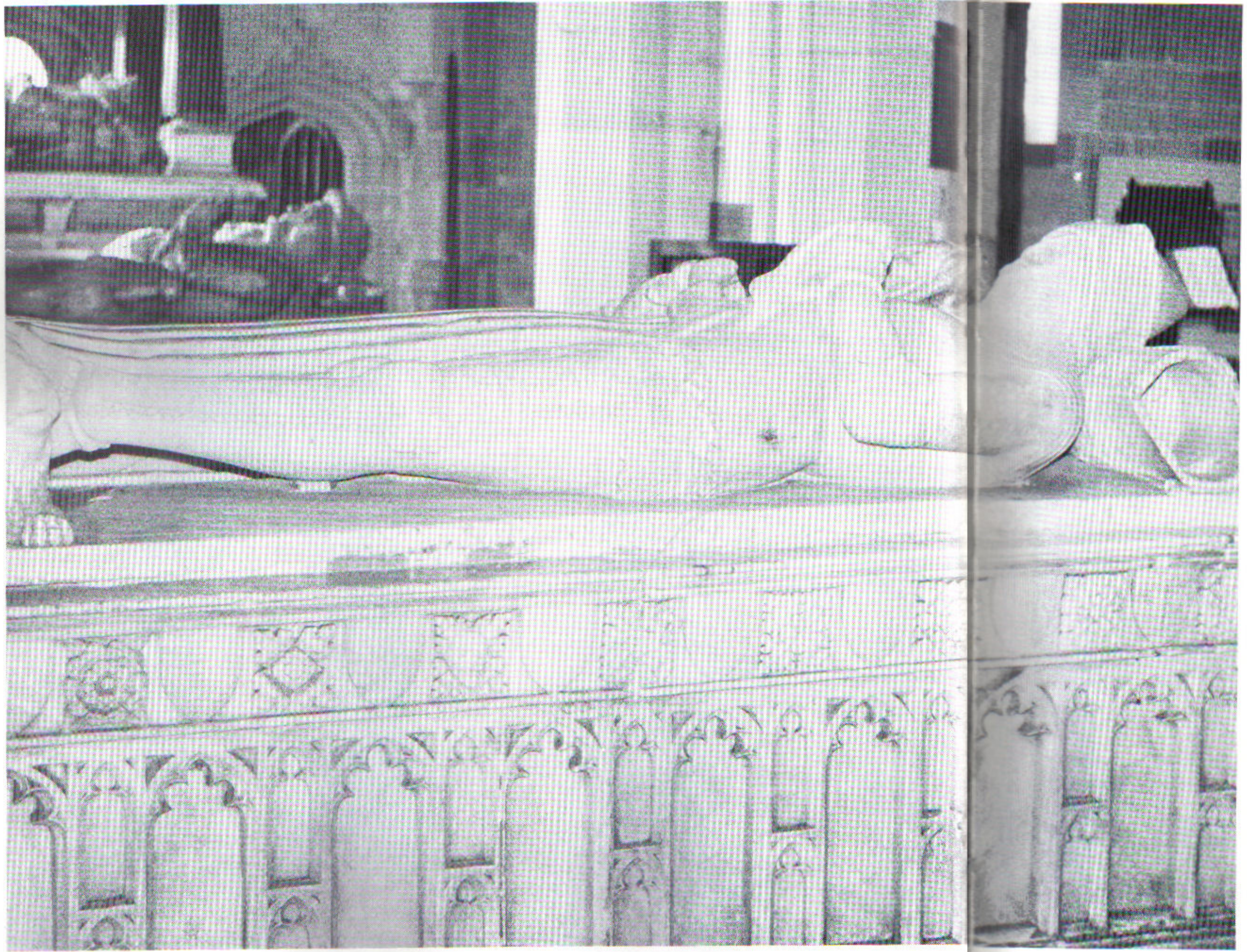
Sir Thomas Erpingham gesturing with his baton. He threw it into the air as the signal to commence shooting at Agincourt. He wears complete armour and mail aventail (collar). Like many experienced men he has preferred to abandon his visor in favour of better visibility.

The Man-at-Arms: Armour

Until the mid-thirteenth century, armour had been made of mail – closely interlocking rows of iron rings – but gradually pieces of steel were added to afford extra protection against blows and missiles. By 1415, the suit of plates, or complete armour, had almost reached its final state. A man-at-arms was covered 'cap-à-pied', from head-to-toe, in polished steel.

Under the armour a padded jerkin (akheton) was worn, both to prevent the metal rubbing and to absorb some of the force of an arrow. Until 1400 many men-at-arms wore a mail hauberk over this, and then a coat of plates. Such apparel was undoubtedly heavy, but a greater problem was the threat of heat exhaustion under all that armour. The development of the complete 'white armour' (so-called because every piece was solid, polished metal) helped to alleviate this. No man could arm himself unaided; it needed at least one assistant. A complete suit was not impossibly heavy: at about 60-80lb (28-35kg), the weight of a complete harness did not exceed the load of a modern infantry pack. Furthermore, the weight was distributed around the body, each piece strapped on and articulated to suit the wearer's movements. So knights did not need to be lifted on to their horses by cranes as Olivier's film Henry V erroneously shows. A fit man could easily vault into the saddle.

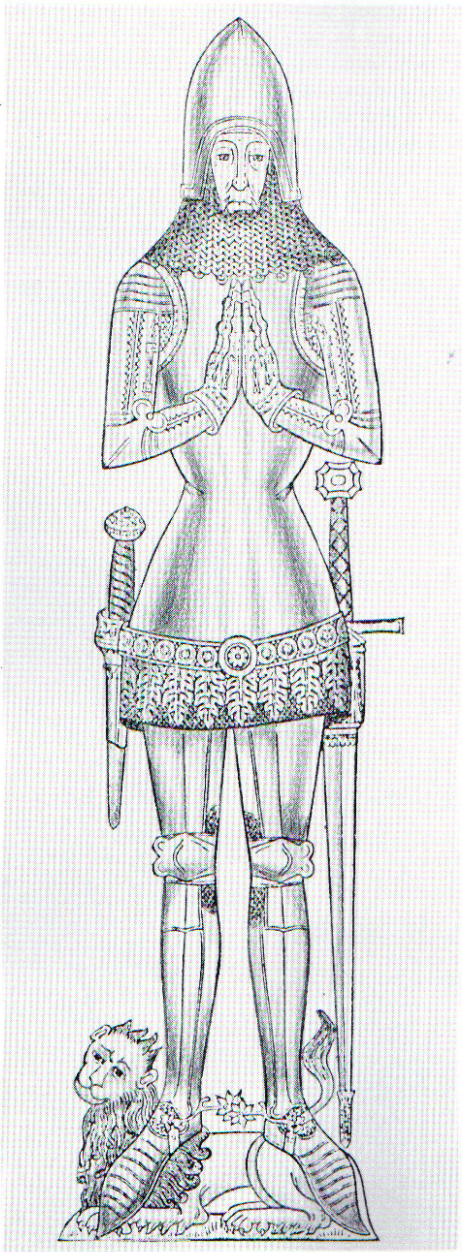
▼An early fifteenth century armour from the tomb of Fulk de Pembrugge IV, Tong church, Shropshire.



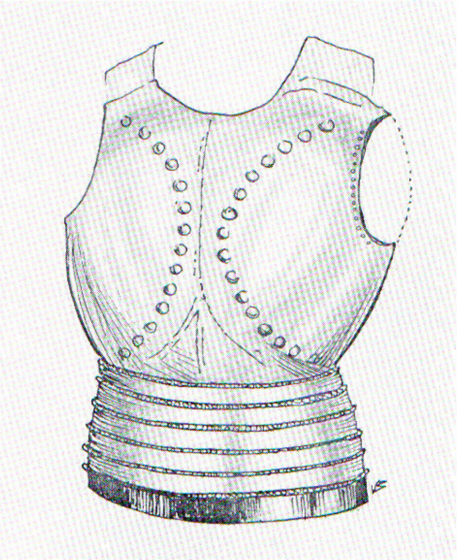
▼A close-up of the Tong tomb, showing a bascinet with mail aventail, and the great helm supporting the figure's head.

Nor were they unable to rise from a prostrate position, unless totally exhausted, stunned or otherwise injured.

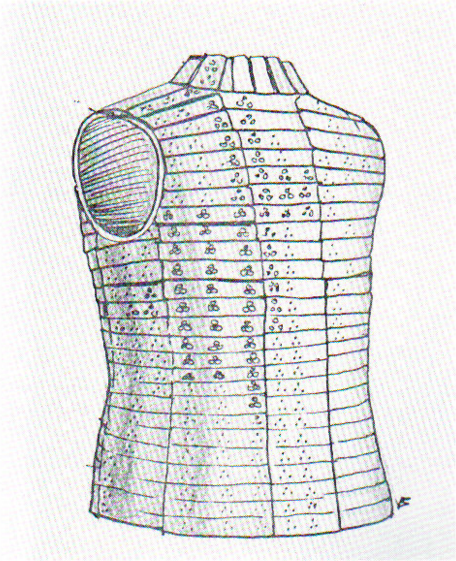
The heaviest and probably most uncomfortable piece of armour was the helmet, and so it was the most frequently removed when action seemed distant or unlikely. The torso was covered by a back- and breast-plate hinged on the left side, buckled on the right and across the shoulders. The arms and legs had tubes similarly attached, elbow and knee covered respectively by 'couter' and 'poleyn' pieces to allow movement. Between waist and mid-thigh hung a skirt of hoops of steel (lames). Articulated gauntlets protected the hands and sabatons the feet. A recent development was the small, circular plate covering each armpit, a vulnerable area when the arm was raised for a blow. Another innovation, replacing the mail aventail, was a solid neck guard (gorget), which was attached to the helmet. This was known as the bascinet and was so ubiquitous that contemporaries used the term to denote men-at-arms (for example, 8,000 bascinets in the French van at Agincourt). It was close-fitting and sloped to a point at the back of the head. The face was protected either by a visor, or another helmet worn over it. The sharply-pointed visor gave rise to the term 'dog-faced bascinet' and could be hinged or slid open for better vision and ventilation. The bucket-like 'great helm' afforded neither comfort. It tended to be used in the tournament rather than in war, but Henry V wore one at Agincourt, and the double-protection it afforded probably saved his life.



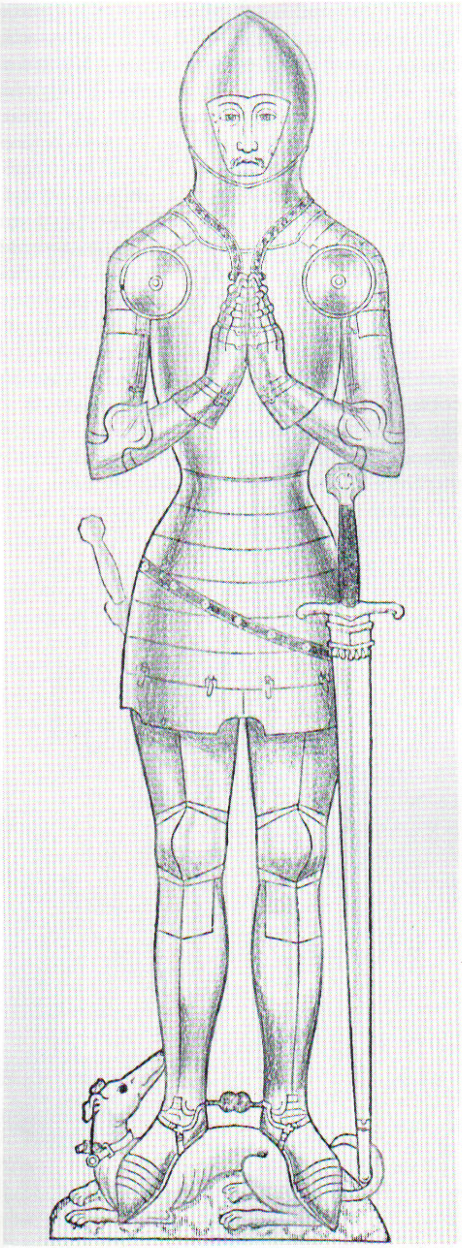
◀ Brass of Sir Nicholas Dagworth at Blickling, Norfolk, 1401. This shows the style of armour worn at the beginning of the fifteenth century, featuring much chain mail, which was to reduce rapidly during Henry V's reign.



▲ A late fourteenth century breastplate and fauld (strips of armour below the waist) covered in cloth. This would be worn by a man-at-arms or possibly a wealthy crossbowman.

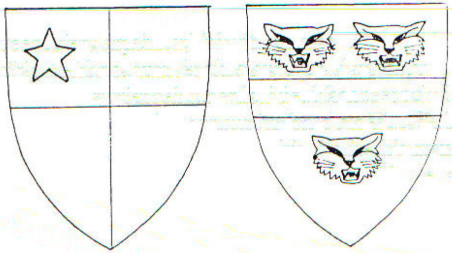


▲ Brigandine. This was a common and cheaper form of armour than plate. It was covered in cloth so that only the rows of rivets showed on the surface. This example from the Musée de l'Armée in Paris shows its construction.



▶ Brass of John Leventhorpe Esquire, in Sawbridgeworth Church, Hertfordshire, c.1433, illustrating armour typical of the latter period of Henry's reign, fully armoured with little visible chain mail.

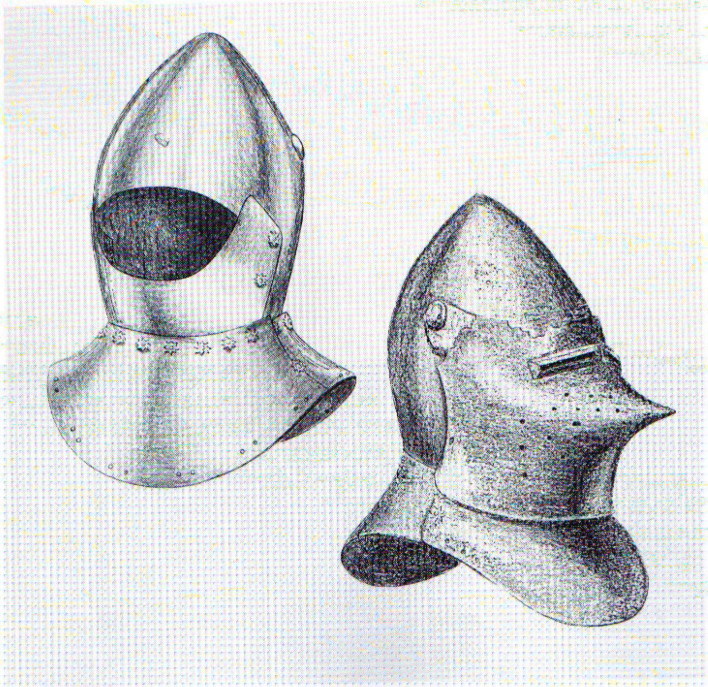
Rich men had bands of brass or gilded brass to decorate their suits. Those with heraldic arms displayed them on a close-fitting garment called a 'cote d'armes' (literally, coat of arms). This made identification possible in battle and had great symbolic significance. When, a few days before Agincourt, Henry V vowed to wear his 'cote d'armes' at all times, he meant by this that he was constantly ready for battle. A late arrival at Agincourt actually improvised one from his trumpeter's banner. For the coat of arms also had the effect of declaring that its wearer was worth a ransom, a valuable insurance policy if threatened with death. It is commonly believed that the 'cote d'armes' was abandoned in the early fifteenth century, in favour of the all-steel 'white armour', but these two examples would seem to argue otherwise. Shields were falling out of fashion, so there was no other way of self-identification, and it is likely that all knights and nobles wore their 'cote d'armes' at Agincourt.



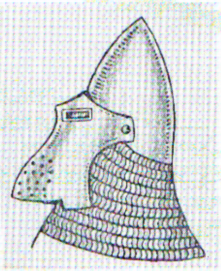
Coats of arms: two English examples.

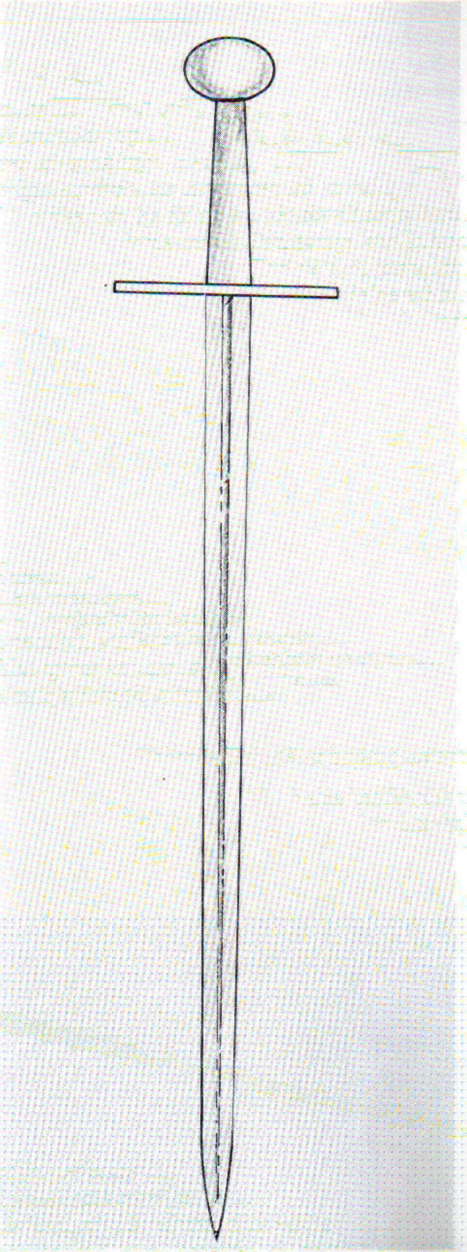
▲John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, arms quarterly gules and or in the first quarter a mullet argent. Joint rearguard commander with the Duke of York. Retinue: 40 (29) men-at-arms, 100 (79) foot archers.

▲Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, arms azure a fess between three leopards' heads or. Michael senior died of dysentery at Harfleur, and was succeeded by his only son, also Michael, who was killed at Agincourt. Retinue: 40 (14) men-at-arms, 120 (44) horsed archers.



◀ Visored bascinets: left, an example about 1400 in the Royal Armouries at the Tower of London; below, from Roy. MS 20, C. 7.▼





▶ An Italian great sword, c. 1400. This simple, functional, but beautiful weapon of about three feet in length (1m) was used by all types of soldiers.

Other important items were the spurs, worn by all horsemen, but gilded in the case of knights to symbolize their higher status, These were removed for fighting on foot, as Henry V did.

The Man-at-Arms: Weapons

As a cavalryman, the man-at-arms learned to wield lance and sword. The lance was about 12 feet (4m) long, a stout piece of ash (usually) thickening towards the grip and with a long, slender point. On horseback it was tucked firmly under the arm while the legs were braced against stirrups and saddle, making man and horse a projectile to unhorse or pierce the armour of an opponent. On foot it was shortened by half to make it more wieldy. Increasingly favoured was the poleaxe, a wicked weapon with an axe-head on a four- to six-feet shaft bound with metal so that it could not be lopped off. It could used to bludgeon, transfix or cleave an opponent.

The queen of weapons was the sword – the symbol of knighthood and nobility. Made of the finest steel (that of Bordeaux was highly prized), most were some three feet long with a simple cross-guard and heavy pommel. Some specialist weapons were slim, with a diamond section, for piercing armour, but most had a broad, doubled-edged blade for cutting. Longer swords, wielded in both hands, were also popular (although they had not yet reached the monster proportions-of the sixteenth century). Finally, on his right hip the man-at-arms carried a dagger of 'ballock' or misericord style. Not really a combat weapon, it could be used to dispatch a wounded opponent, or as a last resort. It could slip through a visor or gaps in armour to wound or kill an otherwise invulnerable man.

Not all could afford the equipment described, but substantial numbers of men-at-arms were armed to this standard.

The Archer

Armour was not the primary concern of the archer; flexibility and mobility were. Accordingly, they wore either padded jerkins or brigandines (which contained metal plates) but little other body

d'Agincourt, assisted by Robinet de Bournonville, Riflart de Clamasse and several other men-at-arms, leading 600 peasants, of their own volition launched a raid on the camp. Certainly several precious items, a crown, some silver and a precious sword were looted from the camp. It was later a condition of the ransom of Ralph de Gaucourt that he recover these items. He was successful in part. The story also goes that d'Agincourt and Bournonville were afterwards imprisoned by the Duke of Burgundy for this disgraceful act, despite their making a present of the sword to his son. But all this may be no more than an after-the-event justification to blame somebody for the ensuing tragedy.

The second action that spurred the massacre was the attempted counter-attack by a remnant of the third division. Amid all the confusion, several lords, named as the Counts of Marle and Fauquembergh and the Lords of Louvroy and Chin, managed to gather together six hundred men-at-arms. With them they made a mounted charge, which, according to Monstrelet, ended as disastrously as all the others. To the Chaplain it seemed as if this was the moment that Henry ordered the prisoners to be killed. To Monstrelet, as we have seen, the cause was the unsanctioned rear attack. Both actions were used to blame their participants for the carnage that followed. Both, had they turned the course of the battle, would have doubtless been recorded as strokes of brilliance.

The English, although victorious, were very vulnerable. They had by no means secured all their prisoners or accepted their surrender. There were still more than enough heavily armed Frenchmen at liberty to overwhelm the English should they recover their morale. So Henry gave the order to kill the prisoners. Only the most prominent were to be spared, such as the Dukes of Orleans and Bourbon. But, as we have seen, high birth was no guarantee at such a moment. The knights and men-at-arms considered it an ignoble act and beneath their dignity to engage in killing defenceless men, so the task was carried out by a squire commanding two hundred archers. Even compared with the mayhem of battle it must have been a grim sight. How were the French killed? St Rèmy, who witnessed the massacre, describes them as 'cut in pieces, heads and faces'. Indeed that was the only place where a knight in full armour was truly vulnerable. Only if they removed a man's helmet or lifted his visor could he be killed easily. Those who resisted even this would have been stabbed through the eye-slit in their bascinet. Such cold-blooded killing appalled contemporaries, not so much for how it was done, although that did matter, but for whom it was done to. The men killed were noblemen and gentlemen, not the low-born who were expected to die in a battle. The men who wrote the accounts came from these upper classes, and such brutal realities clashed with the image of war as a gentlemanly pursuit, which they generally promulgated. But, as we have seen, they did not blame Henry for carrying out this brutal necessity, but rather those leaders who so alarmed him as to bring the situation about.

The French Plan Revisited

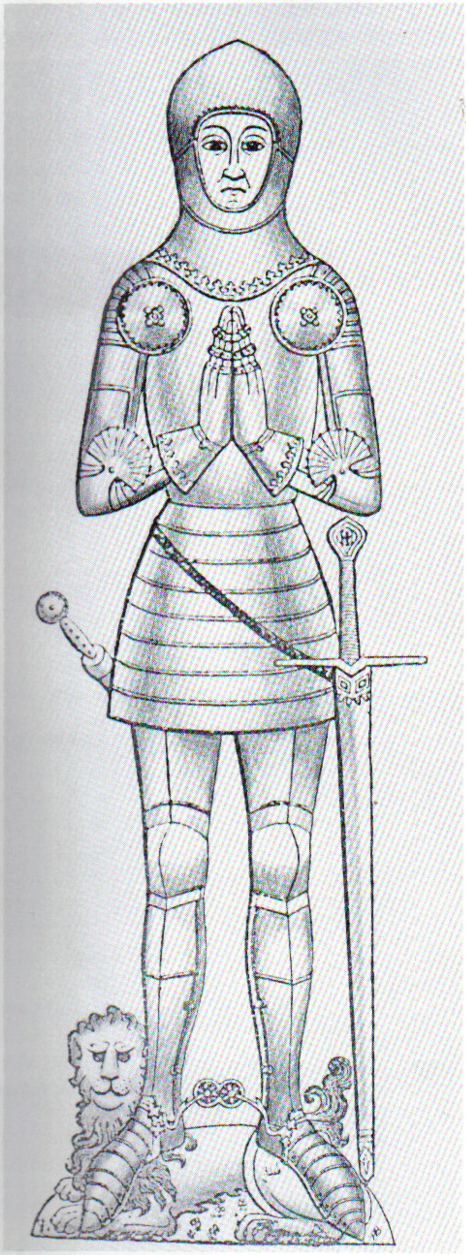
So far the description of the rear attack at Agincourt has been taken at face value from the contemporary chroniclers: that it was an extemporised attack by a greedy local lord. But it also fits well into the original French plan. This had envisaged an attack sweeping around on to the left rear of the English army, in conjunction with the cavalry charge on to its right flank. We do not know when the attack on the camp took place. Some accounts suggest that it happened early in the battle; others link it with the counter-attack from a part of the mounted third division. If it had been designed to coincide with frontal assaults, then it reproduced the French tactics in full. After all, who better to lead such an assault than the local lord who knew his way through the woods? Remember too that, on the evening before, Henry was alarmed by the thought of just such a flank attack delivered behind cover of the trees on either side of the eventual battlefield.

If this interpretation is accepted, and it is the one proposed by Chris Philpotts, the young scholar who found the manuscript containing the plan, then we must credit the French at Agincourt with a great deal more sense than has previously been thought possible. This is true in part, at least. For contemporaries are quite right in blaming the French for the carelessness that comes from over-confidence. The very same men who made the battle plan that could have defeated the English proved incapable of putting it into effect. The fault here lay once more with the lack of a single leader in the French camp.

Experienced and important though they were, the Constable and Marshal, as the King's officers, could not outrank Princes of the Blood. Operating on their own with a small command and amenable companions, they might have got the plan to work. But once they were lumbered with a huge force and all the competing jealousies and arrogance of the French higher nobility, they had no chance. D'Albret and Boucicault were in the front rank of the van along with all the nobles whose ambition for military glory they admittedly shared. Meanwhile lax discipline allowed men to wander out of the ranks and led to the crucial undermanning of the two cavalry wings; Furthermore, since everyone could see (with hindsight) that the battlefield was too narrow for the number of men with them, could they not have redeployed elsewhere?

Once again the problem was one of a cumbersome force that could scarcely be manoeuvred. But also the army had been raised to combat the King's enemies in a trial by battle on ground that had been selected by the French commanders out of several possible sites. There could be no retreat from such a position. As a result of a combination of tactical and mental inflexibility, the English won the day. And they won by displaying virtues that were the reverse of the French coin: dogged resilience and initiative in the face of danger, provided in large part by the genius of their commander.

After the last trace of any French threat had ended, leaving Henry the master of the field and all the enemy's food and equipment, he withdrew once more to camp at Maisoncelle. The following day he resumed the march to Calais.



▶ Brass of Sir John Lysle in Thruxton Church, Hampshire. He died in 1407, but the brass was not laid until some thirteen years later, so that it shows armour typical of the end of Henry V's reign, all plate and here with ornamental elbow-pieces.

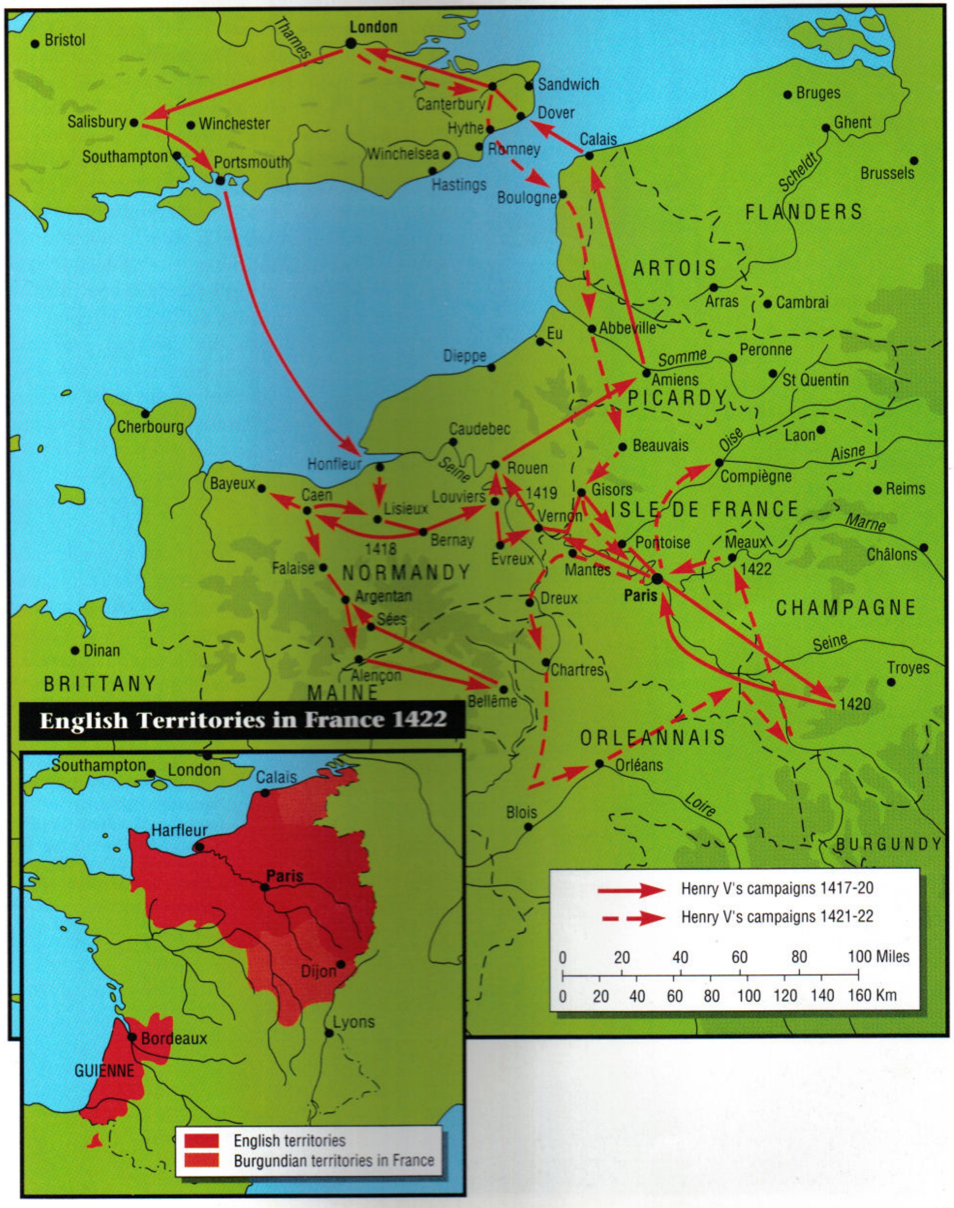
THE OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE

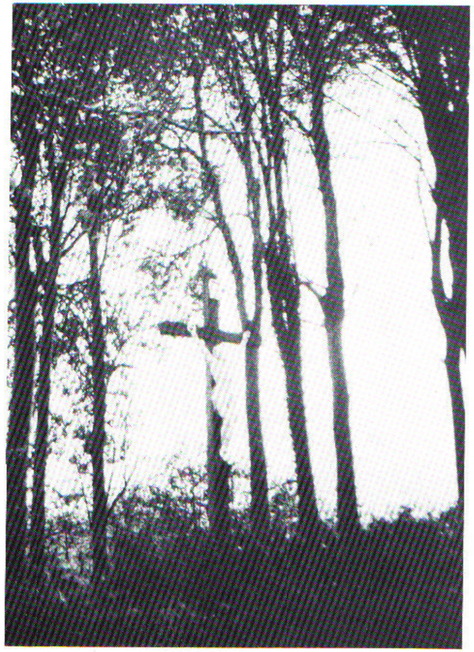
Henry did not, and could not, move to the immediate exploitation of his victory. He took his exhausted and bedraggled army, together with its magnificent haul of prisoners, on a slow, three-day march to Calais. Here he remained for a fortnight, arranging the crossing and awaiting a favourable wind. He landed at Dover on 16 November, and a week later was greeted at London with an elaborate and lavish pageant. A victory song repeated the refrain: 'Deo gratias Anglia redde pro victoria' – it was by God's will that Henry and the English had triumphed. Henry had justified his claim to be called 'King of England and of France'.

Why then had he not marched straight to Paris to enforce his claim? Simply, it was late in the campaigning season and his army was battered and out of supplies. True, the French had suffered a disastrous defeat, but cities did not fall to a few thousand men without siege equipment. In fact, it took another five years to bring Charles VI to the Treaty of Troyes, by which Henry married his daughter Katherine and was recognized as the heir to the French throne. Territory was not won by open battle, but by long sieges, such as those of Caen and Rouen. Agincourt aside, the main result of the 1415 campaign was the capture of Harfleur as another base from which to attack Normandy, the necessary foundation for a long-term strategy of conquest. The town was besieged by the French in the following year, but they were driven off largely as a result of an English naval victory below its walls.

▼The clump of trees surrounds the Calvary, a monument erected to the French dead in the last century. It marks the site of some of the extensive grave pits and is a hundred yards from the small road linking Agincourt and Tramecourt. French men-at-arms would have been easy targets for archery at this range.

Northern France to 1422



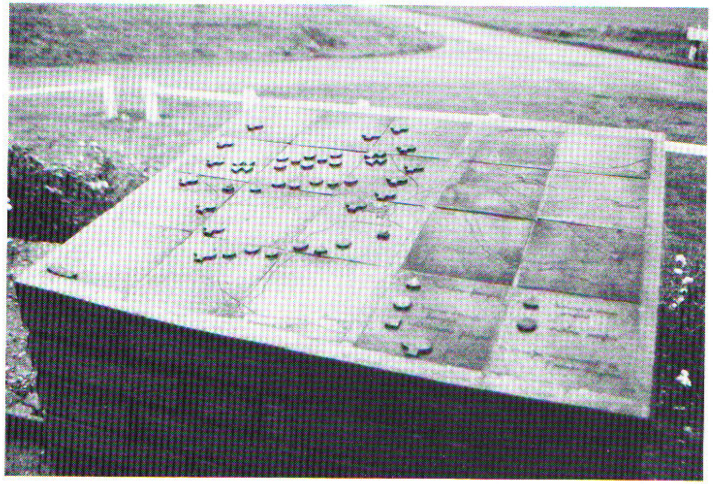


▲*The Calvary, surrounded by its clump of trees, is an important landmark for reconstructing the battle, as it probably stands in the centre of the French position.*

Yet Agincourt was a grievous blow to French morale and to Charles VI's capacity to resist. First, the outcome suggested to everyone that justice lay with the English. One chronicler ascribed the defeat to divine revenge. For the battle fell on the feast day of Saints Crispin and Crispianus, closely associated with the city of Soissons, sacked by the Armagnac faction a year earlier. The physical loss was immense too. Some 600 members of the baronage and knightly class fell at Agincourt. Five dukes, twelve counts and numerous other social and political leaders were in captivity. A French historian, Françoise Autrand, has calculated that one third of King Charles's 1,400-strong political supporters were swept away by the catastrophe.

They all came from the northern provinces where the King recruited his military and civil servants. This 'decapitation' of the royal military structure and disorganization of its economic resources seriously reduced the French Crown's capacity to resist English aggression. So, in that respect, it made Henry's eventual victory the easier to achieve.

Ironically, the young King was to predecease his elderly father-in-law by seven weeks. He was never to hold the dual monarchy, which fell instead to his infant son. The Hundred Years War was not over, but Henry V had initiated a period of English supremacy that was to endure for a generation.



◀*The ceramic model at the battlefield today, showing the campaign (right) and battle (left). Note especially the suggested boundaries of the woods. The square block on the left of the English line represents Agincourt castle.*

THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The village of Azincourt lies just off the D928 some 45 miles (75km) south-east of Calais. There is a museum in the village hall in the centre, opposite the church. This contains an audio-visual display evoking the battle, reconstructed arms and armour, and a few floor tiles from the long-gone castle. It also provides leaflets in English and French, a poster and other literature. A three-mile battlefield walk takes the visitor through the main battle area, via a Calvary near the grave pits and a monument with a battle map, through Maisoncelle and back to Azincourt.

▶*Agincourt church. The monument to the left of the crucifix bears the portraits of four village men killed in the much greater conflict of the First World War. On the opposite side of the square is the small but interesting visitor centre, which has a slide-and-tape display about the battle. The key is held at the Mairie nearby.*

CHRONOLOGY

1392 Charles VI's first attack of insanity.
1399 Henry IV usurps throne; young Henry becomes Prince of Wales.
1403 Battle of Shrewsbury.
1404 John the Fearless becomes Duke of Burgundy.
1405 English land in the Côtentin Peninsula; French land in Wales.
1407 Assassination of Louis, Duke of Orleans.
1409 Peace of Chartres between French princes.
1410 English attack on Fécamp.
1411–13 Conflicts and disorder in Paris.
1413 Henry V becomes King of England.
1414–15 Embassies exchanged between England and France.

1415 English invasion of Normandy:
11 August English fleet sails from Southampton.
14 August English disembark near Harfleur.
18 August Harfleur completely surrounded.
3 September Dauphin Louis takes French force to Vernon on borders of Normandy.
10 September Charles VI raises the war-standard at St Denis.
14 September (approx.) Constable d'Albret to Honfleur; Marshal Boucicault to Caudebec.
15 September French sally burns siege castle opposite Leure Gate.
16 September Main bastion captured by the English; French agree to surrender if no relief comes within a week.
23 September English enter the town.
27 September Henry offers personal combat to the Dauphin Louis.
8 October English set out from Harfleur for Calais; French covering forces march to River Somme.
9 October English near Fécamp.
11 October English encounter resistance at Arques.
12 October English reach Eu.
13 October Henry discovers the Somme is blocked at the ford of Blanchetacque.
14 October English at Hangest.
15 October English arrive opposite Amiens and spend night at Pont de Metz; main French force sets out from Rouen.
16 October English spend night at Boves.
17 October Skirmish at Corbie; Henry force-marches south.
18 October English arrive near Nesle; French main body arrives at Amiens.
19 October Henry slips his force over the Somme at Voyennes and Bethencourt fords.
20 October Henry rests his exhausted army.
21 October English advance to near Albert.
22 October English reach Forceville, shadowed by the united French force to their right.
23 October English cross the River Ternoise at Blangy.
24 October French block the English route to Calais at Agincourt-Tramecourt; English spend the night at Maisoncelle.
25 October Battle of Agincourt.
28 October English arrive at Calais.
23 November Victory parade in London.

1416 English naval victory off Harfleur.
1417 English besiege and capture Caen.
1419 English besiege and capture Rouen, securing Normandy; assassination of John the Fearless; Anglo-Burgundian alliance.
1420 Treaty of Troyes: Henry V marries Katherine of France and becomes heir to the French throne.
1421 French victory at Baugé; Thomas, Duke of Clarence, killed.
1422 Siege and capture of Meaux; Henry V falls ill and dies; Charles VI dies; Henry's one-year-old son becomes King of England and France.

A GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Bradbury, J. *The Medieval Archer*, Woodbridge, 1985. Excellent history of archery tactics.
Burne, A. H. *The Agincourt War*, London, 1956. Dated and quirky, but some useful insights.
Contamine, P., trans. M. Jones. *War in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1984. A general survey, but detailed and scholarly with an excellent bibliography.
Harriss, G. L., ed. *Henry V: the practise of Kingship*, Oxford, 1985. Collection of articles; see especially C. T. Allmand on Henry as a soldier.
Fowler, K. *The Age of Plantagenet and Valois*, London, 1980. Lavishly illustrated, but scholarly, thematic survey of the Hundred Years, War.
Jacob, E. F. *Henry V and the Invasion of France*, London, 1947. Old but very accomplished study.
Keegan, J. *The Face of Battle*, London, 1976. Fascinating analysis of the realities of war.
Nicolas, Sir H. *History of the Battle of Agincourt*, London, 2nd ed. 1832, repr. London 1970. An invaluable collection of translated documents and chronicles.
Philpotts, C. 'The French plan of battle during the Agincourt campaign' in *English Historical Review*, pp.59-68, London, 1984.
Taylor, F. and Roskell, R. S. trans/ed. *Gesta Henrici Quinti (The Deeds of Henry the Fifth)* Oxford, 1975. Excellent modern edition of the 'Chaplain's' account.
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WARGAMING AGINCOURT

Wargames that seek to recreate historical events are not unlike theatrical performances: both attempt to suspend disbelief, to involve participants in a visual spectacle and an emotional or intellectual conflict and – of course! – to entertain. The game designer or organizer is the director; the players are the stars who will take the leading roles; and the miniature lead or plastic troops are the non-speaking parts or 'extras'. It seems appropriate, therefore, since the popular view of Agincourt is largely derived from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, to present the wargame as a play in four acts, whose several scenes will portray the different aspects of the campaign.

Act I: 'Once More Unto the Breach'
The Siege of Harfleur

The progress of the siege falls into three separate, distinct types of scene: the initial blockade and bombardment or mining of the walls to create a practicable breach, which may be interrupted by sorties by the garrison to destroy the besiegers' works and engines; the storming of the outworks (and, should the garrison refuse to surrender, of the town itself); and the summons to surrender and negotiations between the representatives of the besieging forces and those of the garrison and/or inhabitants of the town. Players will take the roles of Henry V, his master engineer, responsible for construction and siting of siege engines, mines and bombards, and Lord de Gaucourt, the commander of the Harfleur garrison, while other roles may be created on either side to occupy additional participants. An umpire will be responsible for recording their actions, the consumption of supplies, the outbreak of disease in the besiegers' camp or starvation in the town, and will resolve the effects of bombardment, mining and counter-mining.

The French players and the umpire should have a detailed, scale plan of the town and its immediate surroundings. The English players, however, must draw their own map from perspective views of Harfleur, drawn as if from various vantage points around the town, presented to them by the umpire. King Henry's master engineer must then advise his sovereign on the town's weak points and the correct siting of mines, engines or bombards. If sufficient players are available, several rival engineers may present opposing theories in a short committee game, dominated by technical discussion, victory going to the engineer entrusted with the control of the siege by the King – though the subsequent progress of the siege may show this trust to have been misplaced! Engineers' briefings will need to contain plenty of abstruse Latin terms and arcane theories to baffle the simple soldiers: works such as Contamine's *War in the Middle Ages* will provide inspiration.

Once the English have positioned their engines and planned the routes of their mines on their sketch map, the umpire can transfer the information to his scale plan to determine their effectiveness. In the early stages of the siege, each game turn might represent a week; later the tension may be heightened by adopting daily turns, as the walls crumble and mines creep towards their targets. The umpire can determine the damage caused by bombardment by simple mathematical calculations, based upon the number and weight of projectiles and the strength of that part of the wall, informing the French of the exact damage but telling the English only what they would perceive from their siege lines. Thus, for example, only the garrison would be aware of deaths caused by random stone projectiles landing on buildings inside the town walls, the exact nature of the damage caused to the fortifications and the time or number of labourers required to effect repairs.

Tunnels dug by both besieger and besieged will be plotted on transparent sheets, which the umpire can overlay on his master map to determine whether the miners are close enough to detect each other's presence, and when tunnels are intercepted. The resulting subterranean conflicts may be resolved by a simple die roll, chance cards, or fought out with model figures on a plan of the tunnels. Players, taking the roles of individual miners, would each have an individual display, representing what they could see or feel in the dark, and inform the umpire of their actions in secret. The umpire would determine which players had come into contact, and place appropriate figures on their personal displays. Combat would be resolved quickly and brutally: both players would simultaneously present cards from a selection listing various blows, thrusts or parries (or even panic-stricken flight!) comparison of which would determine the victor and the infliction of wounds or death.

Space precludes a more detailed explanation of this game structure, but those who wish to try it will find a full description in my article 'Wargaming Night Actions' in *Miniature Wargames*, number 15, page 17.

The besiegers will have no difficulty foraging for food in the countryside around Harfleur, but as the siege continues they will run an increasing risk that disease will break out in their insanitary camps. The umpire will dice to discover whether disease afflicts the English army and the number of deaths each day; English players will draw chance cards to discover whether their characters fall sick and, if so, for how long they are incapacitated. Chance cards or dice will also be used to introduce random events, such as the bursting of guns or the flooding or collapse of mines.

The garrison will, once the town has been invested, have to husband its supplies of food carefully if it is to withstand a long siege. At the start of the game the umpire will inform the garrison commander how many days' food is in store for his troops. De Gaucourt must decide whether to expel the civilian population in order to save food, thereby losing a source of labour with which to repair damage to the walls and incurring considerable unpopularity, or to reduce the rations, risking an increased likelihood of disease and reducing the effectiveness of his troops in combat.

The French may make sorties in an attempt to destroy the besiegers' works, or simply to delay the inexorable progress of the siege in the hope that relief arrives in time. These sorties may be resolved by dice and their effect upon the siege calculated by the umpire, or fought as small skirmishes using the system for gaming hand-to-hand combat described below, or as conventional wargames with figures.

Outworks or the town itself – if negotiations fail – may have to be stormed. Players will take the roles of individual men-at-arms on each side, and move their personal figures, accompanied by others representing their retinues, sundry varlets and peasant scum, on a model of the breach, ideally in the same scale as the figures, strewn with expanded polystyrene 'rubble', balsa wood or matchstick planks and other debris. Movement over the breach will be determined by die rolls, to reflect the troops' difficulty in clambering over the rubble, and casualties. Players who throw a 1 are assumed to have fallen over and will have to throw more than 1, or 2 if armoured, in order to regain their feet in a subsequent turn. The umpire will throw dice to discover if anyone is hit by random arrows or other projectiles: armoured warriors will have a greater chance of surviving unwounded but may be knocked down and temporarily stunned by a blow. Personal combat will be resolved using the adaptation of the 'Chivalry' system described in the final Act, the Battle of Agincourt.

Although the garrison may attempt to send messages through the English lines requesting urgent relief, encouraged by the umpire to devise cunning schemes or diversions for this purpose, and may receive replies, no actual relieving army will appear. Messages the umpire determines would fall into enemy hands will by given to the English players.

Once a practicable breach has – in the opinion of the master engineer – been made, by bombardment or mining, King Henry will summon the town to surrender. His objective is to secure Harfleur quickly, before relief can arrive, with the least possible casualties and damage – so the town can be garrisoned and defended against French forces. He can afford to offer generous terms. The commander of the garrison, de Gaucourt, will be determined to hold out as long as he can, but will only refuse to treat if he is sure that his forces can repulse an attempt to storm the town. Negotiations may be conducted by the players, face-to-face, while the umpire records the number of days that elapse, informing each side secretly of the number of troops fit for service, their morale and the supply situation, changes to which may alter their negotiating position. Victory is achieved by the English if Harfleur accepts terms no more generous or harsher than those originally granted by the same date as, or earlier than, the historical surrender. The French win if they can secure better terms by the same date, or hold out longer before accepting those obtained historically.

Act II: 'We Band of Brothers' Council of War

The scene shifts from the English siege lines to the King's War Council. In this Act, the umpire plays Henry V and the players the principal English commanders – the Dukes of Gloucester and York, the Earl of Oxford, Lord Camoys, Sir Gilbert Umfraville, Sir John Cornwall, John Holland and the commander of the English garrison of Harfleur, the Earl of Dorset. Their task is to discuss the future course of the campaign and advise the King. It is now late in the year to undertake a campaign, so the English have only three choices:

1 to leave a strong garrison in Harfleur and ship the rest of the army, greatly reduced by sickness, to England for the winter;
2 to establish a Harfleur Pale, like that at Calais; or
3 to undertake a march to Calais, a chevauchée to demonstrate that the King can go where he will in the lands he claims as his own.

Each player will be given a Personal Briefing explaining his character's views on the possible strategies above; in addition, some characters may have their private rivalries or loyalties, which may outweigh strategic considerations when it is time to vote, so that, for example, no character will vote the same way as his deadly rival, while others may be open to persuasion by debate. The King will act as chairman.

Victory is achieved either by persuading the War Council to support one's favoured strategy or – if the King chooses to overrule the Council's recommendations – by being a dissenter who voted in favour of that choice afterwards made by the King. Conversely, the minority who both lose the debate and support a view contrary to that of the King will suffer a severe loss of prestige and Royal confidence. Players will also gain prestige for entering into the spirit of their roles and acting in a manner appropriate to their characters. Prestige points could be awarded to rank the players' performances in the War Council and determine their roles or combat ratings in the final battle. The King will, of course, reject his War Council's advice if it does not recommend a chevauchée – though this should be concealed from the players – in order that the game may follow the historical course of the campaign.

A similar game could be created to portray the discussions of the French commanders, though problems might be encountered in endeavouring to avoid changing history!

Act III: Chevauchée – The March to Calais

In *The Agincourt War*, Lieutenant-Colonel Burne suggests that Henry V may have had a map of the region, perhaps even the identical one used by his great-grandfather, Edward III. If the game organizer accepts this proposition, he must remember that mediaeval maps or army itineraries were not drawn according to the principles of modern cartography, and produce a suitably illuminated, naively executed document to 'assist' the players. Towns will be indicated by vignettes; distances in terms of day's marches. The English commander will issue his marching orders to the umpire, who will record the army's actual progress on his accurately scaled master-map and impart appropriate news of the enemy – either pre-programmed to manoeuvre historically, or played by another participant using a similarly archaic, but more accurate, map – and intelligence of the countryside through which the English army passes.

Alternatively, King Henry, if not permitted a map, must rely upon local guides to discover the most practicable route to the next town or river crossing. To represent the hazards of using such guides, the King or his commanders must select them from cards showing portraits and brief descriptions – the accuracy of which the players will have to guess! – of prospective guides. The umpire has a definitive list of all the guides, indicating each one's reliability, which will determine the English army's actual progress: incompetent guides may take the army to its desired destination by a roundabout route, losing much valuable time, or become completely lost! Treacherous guides may lead the English towards the gathering French army or to fords which they know to be defended, for example; while reliable guides will take the most speedy route. Reconnaissance by both sides may be simulated by placing overlays, in which circular holes have been cut to represent the scouts' range of vision from a vantage point, such as a hill-top, or across open country, over a pictorial rendition of the terrain. As the scouts ride onward, the umpire advances the overlay so that the hole shows what they can see at any one time. Players may not make notes or sketches until the end of their reconnaissance – after all, most mediaeval soldiers would have been only semi-literate at best, and untrained in the art of military sketching. The use of modern Ordnance Survey or tactical symbols must be forbidden!

The English army begins the march with eight days' supply of food (though the soldiers no doubt either consumed their rations more quickly than their commanders would have wished, or jettisoned what they considered to be an unnecessarily heavy burden, as did the Redcoats of the Peninsular War) which may be exhausted earlier than the players anticipate, at the umpire's discretion. Arrangements must then be made to requisition supplies from the local inhabitants, or troops dispersed to forage, if the army is not to suffer losses from exhaustion or starvation.

The English objective is to reach Calais without being intercepted, or to have to offer battle no earlier than was the case in the historical campaign, without losing a great number of men from the hardships of the march. The French aim to bring the English to battle quickly with their main army, or to harry them across country to Calais, inflicting heavier losses from attrition and the capture of stragglers than were actually suffered. The umpire will, if at all possible, contrive an interception at some stage so that the final Act may be performed . . .

Act IV: Saint Crispin's Day – The Battle of Agincourt

It is extremely unlikely that using the historical forces and terrain as a scenario for a conventional wargame will result in a convincing recreation of Agincourt, however much the participants may enjoy such games. Hindsight will surely dissuade the players commanding the French from committing their men-at-arms to an attack in the manner of their historical counterparts. However, those who wish to choose this approach will find it easy to recreate the terrain of the battlefield by spreading a thick cloth or blanket over miscellaneous household flotsam to form the shallow depression between the two armies and the slopes which fell away on either flank, and placing model trees or clumps of lichen to indicate the edges of the woods surrounding the villages of Agincourt and Tramecourt on opposite sides of the table top.

Suitable figures are available in all the popular sizes for wargaming: 25mm, 15mm and 6mm from numerous manufacturers. The game organizer will also be able to select from several sets of commercial rules, of which the Wargames Research Group's Seventh Edition Ancient Period rules and those published by Newbury Rules are most likely to be familiar already to prospective players. Such rules tend to be rather complex and to produce slow-moving games when administered by only two opposing players: they are best suited to a multi-player game in which participants command individual 'battles' or divisions of the rival armies. A much simpler, but very stylized, set of rules, which would suit two players and small-scale figures, is 'De Bellis Antiquitatis' or DBA for short, published by the Wargames Research Group. These rules will enable even inexperienced wargamers to fight a complete battle to a finish within two hours, and would be ideal for those with no previous knowledge of the period.

A radically different approach would seek to recreate the individual's experience and perception of Agincourt by concentrating upon hand-to-hand combat between the French men-at-arms and their English opponents (both men-at-arms and archers) assuming that both armies deploy and act historically. In such a game each player would take the role of an individual man-at-arms or peasant infantryman; his objectives would be, first, to survive (or, in the case of a nobleman only, to achieve glory in battle, even at the cost of his life); to defeat opponents in personal combat; and to take prisoners for subsequent ransom. Non-played characters on either side would be moved by a team of umpires, who would also control such figures when engaged in personal combat with players (combat between non-played characters would be resolved by a 'sudden-death' comparison of die rolls). The game could accommodate as many wargamers as wished to participate – the more the better!

Such a game would consist of a display of 25mm or 15mm figures on a model terrain to the same scale as the miniature troops. Players would move their own personality figures and accompanying retinues; umpires would control the rest. Random blows, wounds or death inflicted by archery would be resolved by die rolls, administered by umpires, individuals wearing armour having a greater chance of surviving unscathed than peasants. The behaviour of horses would also be determined by the umpires, though mounted men-at-arms who beat their assigned Horsemanship Rating with the die could bring their mounts back under control – at least until struck by another shaft! – and continue to move their figures themselves. Players whose horses fell, stampeded or impaled themselves on the archers' stakes would draw chance cards or throw dice and consult a table to discover their fate.

Personal combat involving at least one played character would be resolved using an adaptation of the 'Chivalry' system published by Games Workshop in *White Dwarf*, number 130, October 1990. This system requires two decks of cards: Attack Cards, which indicate the areas of the body aimed at; and Defence Cards showing the areas protected by the defender's reactions. After dicing to determine which is the Attacker, the players draw cards from one or both decks up to the number of their initial Combat Values. The Attacker plays one of his cards face up, whereupon the Defender must produce the appropriate counter from his hand or – if he has no suitable Defence Card – take a chance and draw the top card from the Defence deck to block the blow; if he fails to do so, he is wounded and his hand is reduced by the number of cards equivalent to the severity, shown as a number rating, of the attack. If the Defender does parry or dodge the blow successfully, he becomes the Attacker in the next round of combat. Play continues until one player is either incapacitated by wounds and unable to defend himself or killed outright by certain deadly attacks. This system, in its present form, is designed for combat between evenly matched mediaeval knights but could easily be adapted with a little ingenuity to cater for encounters between men-at-arms on horseback and on foot, and archers armed with daggers, axes and mallets. Fatigue could be simulated by reducing the hand by one card for a given number of turns of combat; armoured men would have little chance of being killed outright, but might be beaten to the ground, or trip in the press of combatants, and then be at the mercy of a *coup de grâce* from a dagger through the visor or armpit; archers could be allowed more Defence Cards to represent their greater agility, but fewer Attack Cards than men-at-arms; individual nobles could have different Combat Values, and so on. Players unable to defend themselves might cry 'Quarter!' and thus surrender for subsequent ransom.

Victory conditions for English archers might include amassing the highest sum of money in potential ransoms and looted armour or weapons! The cunning player who takes the role of King Henry in such a game will, no doubt, negotiate appropriate contracts with those commanding his miniature troops, whereby he will take a share of any ransoms they may secure from prisoners. Mercenary wargamers may care to recast the whole campaign to emphasise the financial aspects of mediaeval campaigning!

AGINCOURT 1415

Immortalized by Shakespeare, Agincourt is an epic of courage and hard fighting. Brought to bay after the long siege of Harfleur, Henry V's army was soaked, starving and riddled with disease, and facing a French army at odds of more than 3 to 1. How the English beat off their attackers and slaughtered the flower of French nobility is vividly described in this volume. Matthew Bennett is a lecturer at the RMA Sandhurst and a specialist in medieval military history.

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