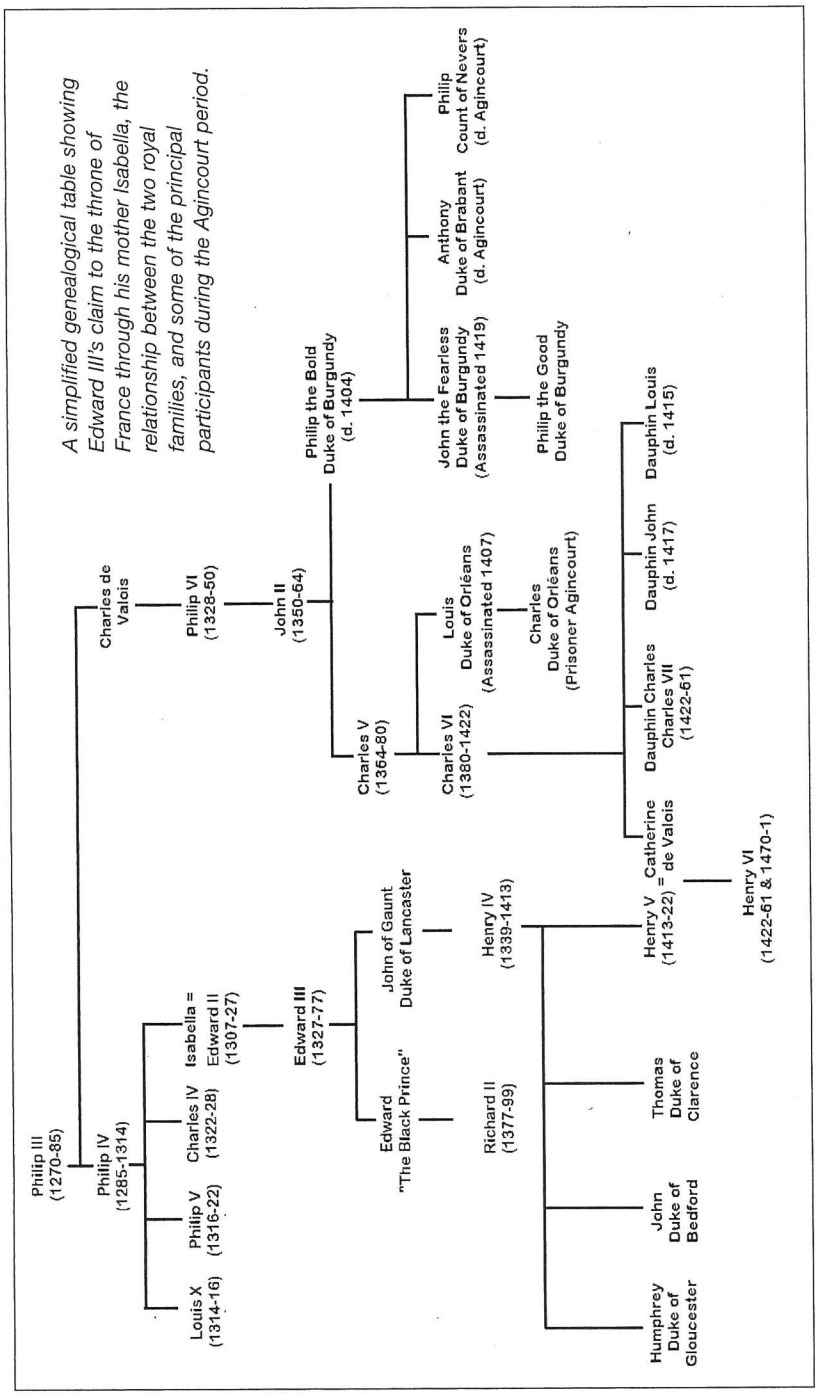
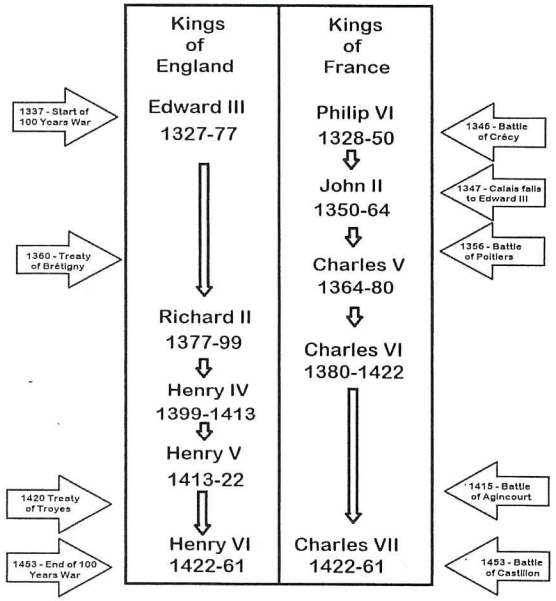


way of encouraging allies and exerting negotiating pressure on Philip VI and his successor John II. With the failure to implement the treaty the issue remained unresolved throughout the rest of Edward III's life and the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV, and the claim to the throne of France was a dominant war aim for Henry V.

The Outbreak of War and the English Ascendancy, 1337–1360

The conflict which broke out in 1337 under Edward III and Philip VI spanned the reigns of five French and five English kings before the war ended in 1453 with the expulsion of the English from all their French lands except the Calais enclave.



The first phase of the war, which was brought to a close by the Treaty of Brétigny in 1360, was marked by two significant English victories. In the first of these, at Crécy-en-Ponthieu in 1346, Edward III defeated Philip VI. The following year Edward took Calais after a protracted siege. The town, which remained in English hands until lost in 1558 during the reign of Mary I, gave the English kings an important foothold in France. A period of truce followed and the impact of the Black Death, which struck both France and England from 1348, also delayed a return to war.

The Protagonists

Henry V was born in Monmouth in 1386, and might well have lived his life out as a nobleman, expecting to succeed to the titles of Earl of Derby and Hereford and Duke of Lancaster. However, in September 1399 his father Henry Bolingbroke usurped his cousin Richard II to become Henry IV. He immediately bestowed the traditional titles for the heir to the throne on his son: Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall and Earl of Chester. He also made him Duke of Aquitaine and Duke of Lancaster. Prince Henry could now look forward to becoming king in the course of time. He gained early experience of war and fought at the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403, but much of his military experience in his youth was of small-scale, low-key operations in Wales. He had not been able to show his prowess against the French, a real enemy, and he felt that he had not been given the role that he deserved. As Prince Henry he may also have had a reputation for a somewhat dissolute lifestyle, immortalized in Shakespeare's plays. His youth was also coloured by an atmosphere of fear and insecurity as his father fought to hold on to the crown, and the young Henry feared for his own succession to the throne when a bad relationship developed with Henry IV in 1412, largely over differences in foreign policy. When Henry acceded to the throne in 1413 on the death of his father, in the words of Anne Curry, his experiences '. . . coloured his own approach to kingship and fanned his ambitions to prove himself and to prove his critics wrong. He was desperate for fame and success and would stop at nothing to achieve it.' He was deeply convinced of divine support for his cause, and he attributed his victory at Agincourt to the will of God and His punishment of the French. Henry's further successes in France in the years after Agincourt brought Henry close to achieving everything that he desired through the Treaty of Troyes in May 1420, which provided for him to become King of France on the death of Charles VI. Henry married Charles' daughter Catherine in June 1420. They had one child, the future Henry VI, and all seemed set fair. Then tragedy struck and Henry, described in Shakespeare's Henry VI Part I as 'too famous to live long', died two months before Charles in 1422. Historians are divided about his character. At one end of the scale he has been described as the greatest man that ever ruled England, while at the other end he has been labelled a deeply flawed individual, undermined by his own pride and overwhelmed by his own authority, lacking compassion, warmth and understanding of human

frailty. However, whatever view is taken of his character, there can be few who would dispute that he was no ordinary man, and that he possessed extraordinary organizational skills, determination, leadership, personal courage and religious conviction.

Monmouth Castle, the birthplace of Henry V. (George Griffin)

Charles VI was born in Paris in 1368. During his childhood, his father Charles V made great progress in driving the English out of the lands that had been ceded to them under the Treaty of Brétigny. He had also begun to reform the French military system and brought order and stability to France. In his later years he made careful arrangements for the succession should he die while his young son was still a minor. But when the old king died in 1380 Christine de Pizan, a shrewd contemporary observer of events, commented that the accession of Charles VI at the age of 11 opened the gateway to French misfortunes. There was considerable reverence for, and obedience to, the king in French political life, and Charles VI was never under threat of usurpation, but the early years of his reign were marked by feuds and rivalry between his uncles: the Dukes of Berry, Anjou, Burgundy and Bourbon. Charles took power for himself in 1388, and there followed a brief period of order and prosperity. However, in 1392 the first signs of mental instability started to emerge. He was never totally incapable of ruling and he remained closely involved in government whenever his condition allowed. Nevertheless, throughout the remainder of his reign he was subject to periods of mental illness, and this, coupled with the rivalries

between senior members of the royal family, led to France suffering from internal weakness and political instability throughout the remainder of his life. He married Isabeau of Bavaria in 1385, and they had twelve children. Their eldest daughter Isabella was Richard II's second wife for the last three years of his reign, and the youngest daughter, Catherine de Valois, married Henry V in 1420 after the Treaty of Troyes and was mother to Henry VI. Charles outlived Henry V by two months, thus denying him the French crown, and was known to posterity as the 'The Well-Beloved', for his success when he took power until the onset of his illness, and 'The Mad'. His fifth son became King Charles VII and brought the war to a successful conclusion for France, earning the nickname 'The Victorious'.

The thirteenth-century north door, known as the Valois door, of the basilica of St Denis in Paris – the final resting-place of French monarchs, including the Valois King Charles VI. (Peter Hoskins)

In March 1413 Henry IV died, and Prince Henry was crowned King Henry V. Because of his father's usurpation of Richard II and the subsequent history of rebellions against him during his reign as Henry IV, the new king could not feel entirely secure on his throne. However, the situation in France was even more precarious. In early 1414 the Duke of Burgundy had fallen from grace and was declared a traitor, and France once more descended into civil war with Charles VI, the dauphin and the Armagnacs launching a war against the Duke of Burgundy in Picardy and Artois between April and September. In January of the same year Henry had agreed a ten-year truce with the Duke of Brittany, declaring the duke to be an ally. Henry V had inherited from his father a campaign in Aquitaine being waged against the Armagnacs. This fighting came to a halt in early 1414, with a truce agreed to last for twelve months and applicable throughout France. Simultaneously Henry was putting out feelers for a lasting peace, with terms that included his marriage to Catherine de Valois, the daughter of Charles VI. This prospective marriage remained a central tenet of Henry's policy in the coming years. At Henry's coronation he had been anointed with oil that was said to carry the promise that kings blessed by it would recover lost English lands in France, including Normandy, and with France in disarray due to internecine fighting Henry felt emboldened enough by May 1414 to start to press his territorial claims on the French king. At about the same time, in parallel with his negotiations with Charles VI, he also appointed ambassadors to start negotiating an alliance with the Duke of Burgundy and a marriage to the duke's daughter. The focus of these negotiations was on an offensive alliance with mutual aid through the provision of men-at-arms and archers. The Duke of Burgundy was prepared to help Henry conquer lands held by the Armagnac lords, but he would not go so far as to enter into an alliance against Charles VI or the dauphin. By August it looked as though the Duke of Burgundy would not now oppose Henry's claim to the French crown and would, after all, be prepared to fight against King Charles, but he subsequently returned to negotiating a peace with Charles.

As Henry's ambassadors were negotiating with the Duke of Burgundy in August, others were pressing his case with Charles. The English opening gambit was to demand all of the rights claimed by Henry V, including the crown of France, but they agreed to discuss lesser

terms without prejudice to Henry's claim to the throne. The main English demands were: the restitution of lands granted under the 1360 Treaty of Brétigny; homage and lordship over Normandy, Touraine, Maine and Anjou; and the homage of Brittany and Flanders. The 1.6 million écus outstanding from the Treaty of Brétigny for John II's ransom were also demanded, along with Henry's marriage to Charles' daughter Catherine with a dowry of 2 million écus. Henry's hope was that with the danger of an Anglo-Burgundian alliance hanging over them, Charles VI and his advisers could be pressured into accepting these terms. The French were certainly concerned over the English negotiations with the Duke of Burgundy, but they were not prepared to go as far as Henry wanted. His ambassadors returned empty-handed to England in October.

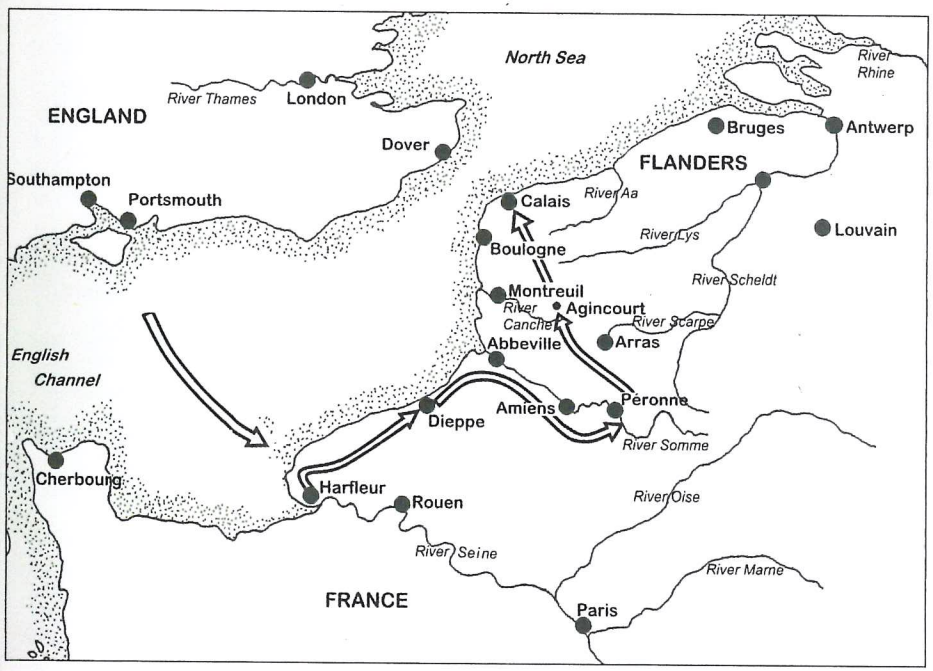
A Return to War, 1415–1444

Meanwhile, Henry had begun to prepare for war. Parliament had agreed to grant taxes to support his policy, but it wanted Henry to continue to negotiate. In pursuit of a negotiated peace, the truce, due to expire in January 1415, had been extended until May, and English ambassadors crossed to France once more in February. By the time of the arrival of the English negotiating team Charles VI and the Duke of Burgundy had come to terms and agreed the Treaty of Arras, which banned any alliances with the English that could be prejudicial to the interests of the French crown. When the negotiations reopened in March, Henry's ambassadors presented much reduced territorial demands and progress was made on the marriage between Henry and Catherine. The French, although their position had been much strengthened by the Duke of Burgundy's accommodation with the king, were ready to move some way towards Henry's demand over territories in Aquitaine. However, they linked this concession to withdrawal of the English claim for the sum outstanding from John II's ransom. The English ambassadors withdrew from negotiations towards the end of March, declaring that they did not have the authority to agree the terms on offer. Henry had so far failed to exploit the French divisions, but he continued to try to come to an accord with the Duke of Burgundy during the spring and summer, and the French continued to harbour fears of an Anglo-Burgundian alliance. They also sought to delay Henry's preparation for war, and French ambassadors crossed to England in June. Negotiations,

which were held with Henry in person, broke down acrimoniously and the ambassadors returned to France in early July.

As the negotiations and preparations for war continued, Henry was acutely aware that his hold on the throne was insecure. Remarks made by the French ambassadors insinuated that not only did he have no right to the French crown, but also that they should be negotiating with descendants of Richard II and not Henry, and there was an apparent plot against him on the eve of his departure from the Solent on 1 August 1415 (the Southampton Plot), which resulted in the summary execution of the Earl of Cambridge, Henry Lord Scrope and Sir Thomas Grey.

Henry had intended to assemble his army by 1 July, but delays in mustering troops and gathering enough shipping delayed departure until 11 August. The landing was to be made in Normandy, probably with the objective of taking the duchy to strengthen Henry's bargaining position. Harfleur was the initial target, a useful bridgehead in northern France that would also deny the French use of an important fortified naval base, which had been used to launch attacks against the coast of England and on English shipping. Having taken Harfleur, Henry marched north-east towards Calais and safety. On reaching the Somme



The Agincourt campaign.

he found the ford at Blanchetaque too well defended by the French and he marched up-river until he was able to cross. He turned once again towards Calais and confronted the French at Agincourt. After his victory he continued to Calais and returned to England. The story of the siege of Harfleur, the subsequent march through France and the Battle of Agincourt are described later in this guide. We now pick up the story after the king's return to England.

The Battle of Agincourt is popularly seen as the greatest English victory in the Middle Ages. However, despite the magnitude of the victory it was not decisive. Henry V's great-grandfather Edward III had been able to follow up his victory at Crécy with the siege and capture of Calais, and his great-uncle the Black Prince had captured John II at Poitiers, thus giving his father perhaps the closest that the English were to come to a decisive victory during the Hundred Years War. After Agincourt Charles VI remained at large, and Henry V did not have the means to follow up his victory that year. However, it did secure Henry's position on the throne so he could pursue his obsession with France unchallenged at home. He could now return to England and capitalize on his success and plan for the future.

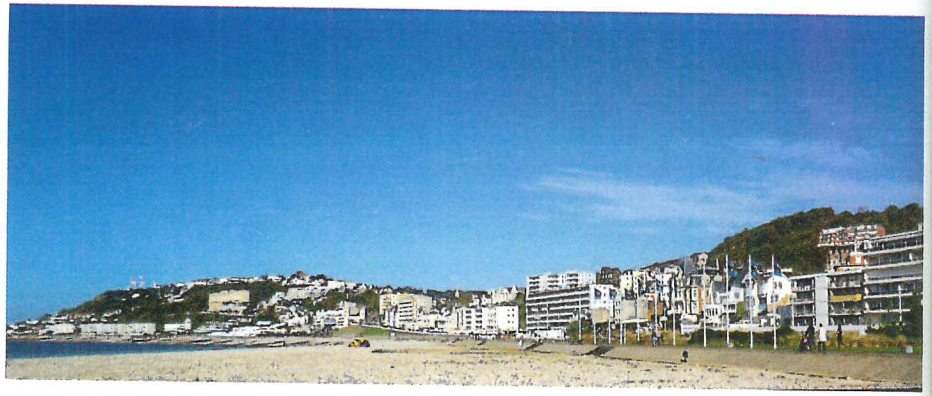
During 1416 the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund, who had initially offered to mediate between the French and the English, recognized Henry's claim to the French throne. Later in the year Sigismund and Henry met the Duke of Burgundy at Calais. Henry was encouraged that, while the Duke of Burgundy would not go so far as to recognize him as King of France, he would not stand in his way, and in August 1417 Henry set off again for France. His aim was to conquer the Duchy of Normandy and use it to enforce his claims. By the end of September Caen was in English hands. Other towns, including Bayeux, fell soon after and the conquest continued with Rouen, the greatest Norman city, falling in January 1419. The Duke of Burgundy was meanwhile taking advantage of the English operations to launch attacks against the Armagnacs. However, there was ambiguity in the Burgundian position and there were occasions when English and Burgundian troops clashed. The French were well aware that their disunity was playing into the hands of Henry V, and attempts were made to resolve the differences between the factions. In September the Duke of Burgundy met the dauphin. Heated discussions ensued and Duke John the Fearless was murdered by a member of the dauphin's party, thus precipitating the

very event that the dauphin wished to avoid: pushing Burgundy, now ruled by the new duke, Philip the Good, into the arms of the English. In December 1419 Henry and Philip agreed to wage war together against the dauphin. They also agreed that if Henry succeeded in his pursuit of his claim to the French crown the Duke of Burgundy would be his lieutenant for his French domains.

Henry now turned his attention to King Charles VI with negotiations that concluded with the Treaty of Troyes in May 1420. Under the treaty the dauphin was declared a bastard and his claim to the succession set aside. Henry was to be heir to Charles VI and to be regent of France during the remainder of Charles's life. He was to retain the Duchy of Normandy by right of conquest in the meantime, and his entitlement to hold Aquitaine without homage was recognized. Little more than a week after the treaty Henry married Charles' daughter Catherine. Henry and Philip then took Sens and Montereau, and besieged Melun, which fell in November 1420. Henry now returned to England leaving the Duke of Clarence as his lieutenant.

The dauphin, who was by no means powerless, had been consolidating his position. In response to the dauphin invoking the 'auld alliance' with Scotland, a number of Scots had entered his service, and at Easter 1421 the Duke of Clarence was killed when he was defeated at Baugé by a Franco-Scottish army. In June Henry V returned to France, and, while the Duke of Burgundy fought the dauphin's forces in Picardy, he marched first to Paris and then to Meaux, which he besieged. In December Henry's heir, the future Henry VI, was born, but before a year had passed Henry V died of dysentery in August 1422. Less than two months later Charles VI followed him to the grave. The infant Henry VI was proclaimed King of England and France.

Henry V's untimely death at the age of 35 left his brother the Duke of Bedford as regent in France. Under his regency there were further English victories, but the duke was faced with a range of problems as he struggled to build on Henry's legacy and consolidate English rule in France. He and the Duke of Burgundy controlled large areas of France, but outside these areas France was loyal to the dauphin, and Bedford struggled to make further inroads into this territory. He also faced growing discontent from Henry VI's subjects in France who were compelled to pay taxes to support the war, and a similar reluctance at home to pay for the continuing fighting. Difficulties with his allies

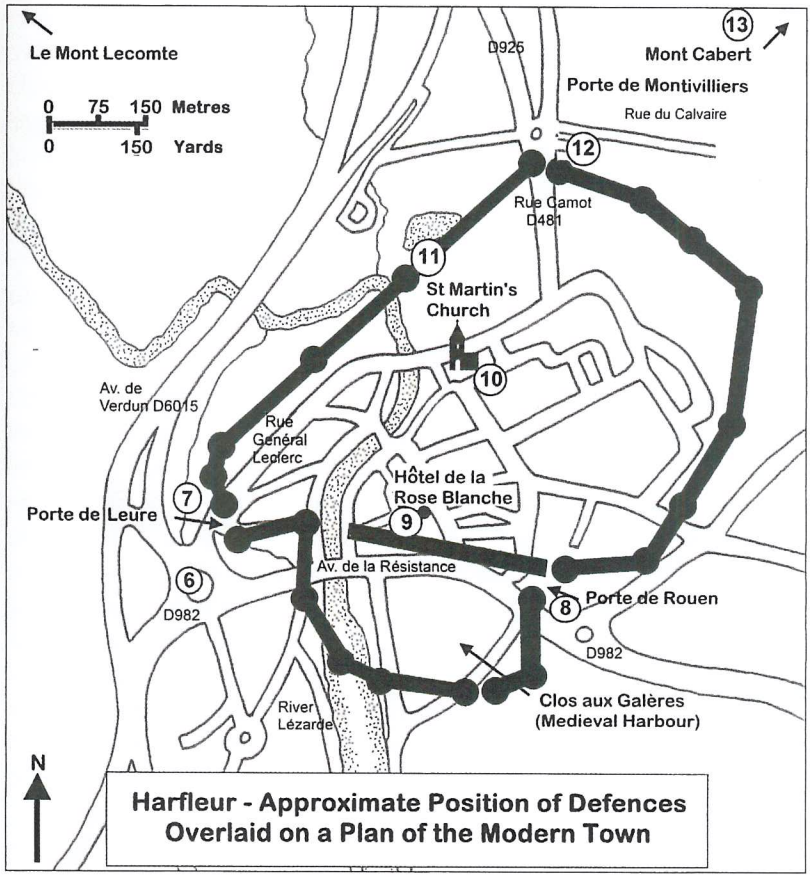


This view looks north from the likely landing beach towards Ste-Adresse. Cap de la Hève is on the extreme left, and the routes onto the high ground climb from just left of the centre of the photograph. (Peter Hoskins)

along two routes inland onto the high ground. Nevertheless, moving the heavy equipment and cannon off the beaches and onto the ridge would have been a laborious and time-consuming process.

As with the shore line of the estuary, the hinterland has been developed a great deal over the centuries. The high ground to the north of the river extends to the east for about 10km from the Cap de la Hève and then falls rapidly into the valley of the river Lézarde and the town of Harfleur. In 1415 the area was largely open with cultivated land, hamlets and orchards, and scrub woodland on the slopes towards the river below the modern Rue Georges Lafaurie, Rue du 329ème Régiment d'Infanterie and Rue Salvador Allende. There were a number of settlements, including Sanvic, Ingouville, Bléville, Graville and Rouelles (Point 3), which have now all been absorbed into the residential areas of Le Havre. At Graville, 2.5km west of Harfleur and just below the crest of the escarpment, stood the church of Ste Honorine and its priory, where Henry V is said to have lodged (Point 4), and there was a castle on the cliffs overlooking the Seine. A similar distance north-east of Graville is Mont Lecomte (Point 5), where Henry V sited his siege camp with a commanding view down into the town of Harfleur 1.5km to the south-east. On the night of 18 August the Duke of Clarence was sent to the east of Harfleur with the vanguard. He set up his camp to the north of the town on Mont Cabert (Point 13), also with a commanding view of the town.

Harfleur lies in the valley of the river Lézarde, between high ground close by to the west and east. There is further high ground just over 1km to the north towards Montivilliers. To the south, towards the Seine, the ground has long since been drained and developed, but in 1415 this was marshland. The river Lézarde runs south through the town from Montivilliers. By damming the river where it entered Harfleur, the townspeople were able to cause it to burst its banks and flood the area between the western walls and the high ground. The sluice gates had been closed when news of the English landings reached the town, and by the time Henry reached Harfleur the water was already thigh deep. As a consequence, Clarence's deployment to the east of the town required his men to skirt round well to the north, covering a distance of



Harfleur - Approximate Position of Defences Overlaid on a Plan of the Modern Town

about 16km. The town was defended by walls 2,900m long with twenty-two interval towers, water-filled ditches perhaps 4.5m deep with steep banks, and three gates. To the west was the Porte de Leure (Point 7), to the north the Porte de Montivilliers (Point 12) and to the south-east the Porte de Rouen (Point 8). All the gates were well protected by outworks. Those protecting the western gate, Porte de Leure, were recorded by a witness to the siege. They were constructed of tree trunks lashed together and driven into the ground, with earth and further wood inside to add strength. They were pierced with embrasures for small guns and cross-bows.

The walls were relatively modern, having been built between 1344 and 1361, and they appear to have been kept in repair. The defences were further enhanced by the fortified port, Le Clos des Galées or Clos aux Galères, to the south of the town. The entrance to the port was defended with chains drawn across the entrance channel between two towers. A Spanish sailor reported in 1405 that the defences included a good wall with strong towers, town gates all protected by draw-bridges flanked by towers, and water-filled ditches with steep sides built of stone. The town was equipped with artillery, and no doubt had stocks of catapults and large crossbows. The townsfolk had also prepared for a possible attack by stockpiling wood and stones, and it seems that they may have torn up the paving slabs from the causeway leading north towards Montivilliers to supplement their materials for maintaining the defences.

Harfleur is likely to have had a militia drawn from the population, and there were also some crossbowmen and men-at-arms. Reinforcements arrived on 18 August, probably entering through the Porte de Rouen, before Clarence could complete the investment of the town. The defence was in the hands of Louis, the Sire d'Estouteville, and Raoul de Gaucourt. Based on accounts relating to the surrender, some 260 knights and men-at-arms were allowed to leave when the town capitulated, and it is probable that this was roughly the number of men-at-arms in the town during the siege.

Harfleur was well known to the English. It was an important commercial and naval port and had been used for piratical raids and operations against English shipping and south coast towns. It had been attacked unsuccessfully by the English in April 1360, but in the following month Edward III had embarked from here after the negotiations

leading to the Treaty of Brétigny. Furthermore, Ste-Adresse had been raided in 1369 by John of Gaunt and Harfleur had been attacked unsuccessfully in 1378 by Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, and John Montague, Earl of Salisbury. More recently Henry V's ambassadors had passed through the port on their return to England in 1414. No doubt they would have taken the opportunity to assess the defences.

Henry had started his investment of Harfleur on 17 August, and by 23 August the siege was sufficiently well established for the inhabitants to send word to Charles d'Albret, the Constable of France, in Rouen that they could no longer make contact by land. They asked for a boat to be provided to help with the provisioning of the town and to enable messages to be passed between the besieged town and the constable. D'Albret arranged for a small galley, which had the advantage of being powered by oars, to be sent downstream on the Seine from Rouen.

At some stage early in the siege Henry offered terms to Harfleur. A chaplain with the army, the author of Gesta Henrici Quinti, a detailed account of the campaign, remarked that these terms were in accordance with the Book of Deuteronomy: either peace in return for surrender or, if the town had to be taken by assault, no quarter for the male inhabitants, with women and property liable to be carried off as spoils of war. The offer was rejected and a bombardment of the town began, which over the duration of the siege caused considerable damage both to the town defences and to the houses – so much so that the repairs to the fortifications took a number of years and the poor state of the buildings within the town proved to be a strong disincentive when Henry was seeking to encourage English people to settle there. It is indicative of the destruction that, although there are a number of domestic buildings in the town surviving from the fifteenth century, their construction is generally attributed to the latter part of the century.

Maintaining a large army besieging a town was always likely to be problematic, because of the risk of disease and the difficulties of feeding men and horses. Raids into the surrounding countryside were necessary. French troops in the vicinity kept the foraging parties under close surveillance, harrying them when they had the opportunity, and they may well also have adopted a scorched earth policy in the surrounding area to hamper English provisioning.

As the siege progressed Henry moved on to enforce a blockade with ships on the Seine and smaller boats in the area flooded by the Lézarde.

By mid-September the cordon around the town by land and water was beginning to bite, and an attempt was made to break the stranglehold between 14 and 16 September with a small fleet sent from Rouen. The attempt was unsuccessful, and by 18 September the town decided to enter into negotiations for surrender. Meanwhile, although it would not prejudice the success of the siege, Henry was having problems due to insanitary conditions brought on by unseasonably warm weather, polluted water, difficulties in disposing of carcasses and other rubbish and the generally humid conditions. The result was dysentery, which had a serious impact on some parts of the army, leading to the deaths, amongst others, of the Bishop of Norwich and the Earl of Suffolk.

At some point during the siege the English had managed to cut off the flow of water from the Lézarde somewhere between Harfleur and Montivilliers. As a result the flood water had subsided, and the besieging forces were able to move closer to the town on the southern and western sides. The English also constructed trenches to defend the besiegers from fire from the town, and hoardings were made which sheltered guns and gunners and were lifted when the guns were to be fired. Clarence's men were approximately where the Rue du Calvaire runs today and isolated from the bulk of the army and, because of the high ground behind them, close up to the walls. Thus, they were particularly vulnerable, and their trenches were especially important. Although the French made no serious attempt to relieve the town, there were engagements between the besieging army and French troops from the garrison, and possibly from nearby Montivilliers. As early as 18 August Clarence and his men had come under attack while they deployed to the east of the town. There was a further sortie by the garrison on 15 September. An attack was made on the English defences constructed to the west of the town near the Leure gate, roughly where the car park now stands at the junction of the Rue de l'Eure and Rue des Remparts. It is possible that this was a diversionary attack timed to coincide with the attempt to break the waterborne blockade. It caused some embarrassment since the French were able to set fire to the English trench works, but the impact was limited. Henry decided on a riposte, and overnight preparations were made for an attack the next day. In the morning the Earl of Huntingdon drove the French back from the barbican and inside the main walls.

During the siege Henry's attempts to wear down the defences with guns and catapults had some success. However, at night the French

carried out repairs using timber and tubs filled with earth, dung, sand and stones, and walls were shored up with faggots, earth and clay. Streets were also covered with sand to prevent stone cannon balls splintering on impact. These efforts could do no more than delay the destruction of the defences, however, and eventually the outer barbicans were abandoned with their guns being repositioned inside. There was also an attempt by Clarence's men to undermine the walls on the eastern side of the town. This may have been a reflection of the lack of effect of the artillery fire, or it may have been due to better conditions for mining on this side of the town. In any case, in the face of French counter-mining and sorties to disrupt the work, the attempt was unsuccessful and the mine was abandoned and subsequently filled in during the English occupation.

Henry made several attempts to negotiate the surrender of Harfleur, but initially the French garrison believed that an army was being mustered to relieve the town. By 17 September it had become clear that the chances of relief were remote. It is not clear whether the garrison then sought to surrender or whether Henry took the initiative and offered terms. Whatever the case, the negotiations collapsed, and Henry made preparations for an assault the following day. This was preceded by a call to arms by trumpet and by an all-night bombardment. The defenders decided that enough was enough, and it seems that a message was passed through Clarence asking for terms. The king sent in the Earl of Dorset, Lord Fitzhugh and Sir Thomas Erpingham to negotiate terms. Henry had wanted the surrender to be made the following day, but he conceded that more time could be given to the inhabitants. The result was that the town would be surrendered if either Charles VI or the dauphin did not come to its relief by 1.00 p.m. on Sunday, 22 September.

Although Henry had left the negotiations to others, he took the surrender in person in his pavilion on Mont Lecomte. In a manner in keeping with the customs of the time, Henry behaved graciously and entertained members of the garrison, including de Gaucourt. The Earl of Dorset was appointed captain of the town, and the next day Henry entered Harfleur, dismounting on entering the town, to give thanks to God in the church of St Martin (Point 10). The French captains were free to go, subject to agreeing under oath to submit themselves at Calais on 11 November. De Gaucourt was despatched to carry a challenge from

the king to the dauphin. Civilians were separated into two groups: those swearing fealty to Henry, and those being retained in custody against payment of ransoms. Women, children, the poor and the helpless, numbering between 1,500 and 2,000, were expelled from the town on 24 September, in part because the town was in no condition to support the population. They took with them their clothing, all that they could carry, and five sous (shillings in English pre-decimal currency). They were escorted by the English to Lillebonne, 32km to the east, where they were handed over to Marshal Boucicaut, who gave them food and water.

Henry wished to establish Harfleur as an English colony on a similar basis to Calais. His first step was to arrange for a garrison of 300 men-at-arms and 900 archers. He also took steps to encourage settlement. Municipal records and title deeds were burned in the market place and henceforth purchase and inheritance of land were restricted to Englishmen, French inhabitants being reduced to the status of lessees. On 5 October the Duke of Bedford, who had remained in England as keeper of the realm, reinforced these provisions, ordering the sheriffs of London to proclaim that all merchants, victuallers and artificers who were willing to reside in Harfleur should go with all speed to the town, where they would be given houses. Orders were also sent out for the repair of the town and for its provisioning from England. The town remained in English hands until it was recaptured by the French in 1435. The English recovered Harfleur in 1440, but finally surrendered it to the French on Christmas Eve, 1449.

The French Response

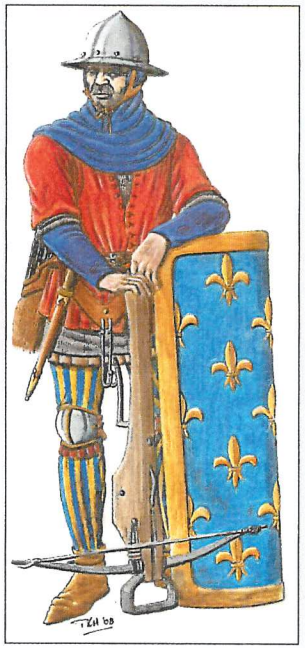
The French had taken some preliminary measures to counter the anticipated English landing, but could not realistically have mobilized a large army before Henry arrived. However, even by the due date for Harfleur's surrender on 22 September the forces available were insufficient to relieve the town.

In June the French nobility, and those others accustomed to bearing arms, had been given notice to prepare themselves to rally to the defence of France. Shortly after the start of the siege of Harfleur the Constable of France, Charles d'Albret, had sent word to the king and the dauphin in Paris of the arrival of Henry. On 28 August the nobility in Normandy and the surrounding areas were called to arms. Rouen

was nominated as the point of rendezvous, and the dauphin was sent to Normandy as the king's lieutenant and Captain General as the French army began to gather. The king indicated his intention to follow soon to raise the siege. Orders were also given to ensure that castles were adequately defended. The first proclamation to communicate these decisions was issued on 30 August in Paris, and over the next ten days it was posted in other places in the Ile-de-France, Picardy and Normandy. Arrangements to raise taxes for the war had been put in place in March, but on 31 August the king's council ordered additional taxes to be raised to cover the costs of the gathering army. The taxes envisaged an army of 6,000 men-at-arms and 3,000 archers. On 10 September the king attended mass in the cathedral of St-Denis and the *oriflamme*, the banner used in battle to signify that no quarter would be given, was entrusted to Guillaume VIII Martel, the Sire de Bacqueville. In the event, since the king was not present at Agincourt, Guillaume did not carry the *oriflamme* at the battle. His lands lay on the route Henry would eventually take when he left Harfleur and Guillaume was to meet his death at Agincourt fighting on the left wing under the command of the Count of Vendôme at more than 60 years of age.

In early September news reached the dauphin that Harfleur was in desperate need of reinforcement. By 13 September he had reached Vernon on the river Seine, and here he received envoys carrying news of the plight of Harfleur. The envoys were assured that the king was gathering his army and would come to their aid. This was partially true, to the extent that the king was indeed assembling his army, but by the date of the agreement of terms for the surrender of Harfleur there were no more than a few thousand men available. Furthermore, they were dispersed across several locations to enable the French to respond to possible English movements, and were not in a position to relieve Harfleur before the due date for its surrender. Once the terms of the surrender had been agreed on 18 September, the Sire de Hacqueville set out to notify the dauphin and ask for assistance. When he arrived at Vernon, the dauphin broke the news that the assembly of the army was not complete and assistance would not be forthcoming. However, given that Hacqueville probably took two days to reach the dauphin at Vernon, even if the French army had assembled, relief of the town before 22 September would not have been possible.

means of drawing the string, ranges increased to around 360m. The crossbow was an effective weapon. It had the advantage that it could be held in a cocked condition which enabled more deliberate aiming. However, its disadvantage compared to the longbow was its slow rate of shooting, around two bolts per minute. While drawing the bow the crossbowman was vulnerable and in need of protection by a shield or pavise. *Its steel construction also made it a heavy weapon to hold and handle.*



An artist's impression of a crossbowman with his pavise. (Paul Hitchen)

Beginnings

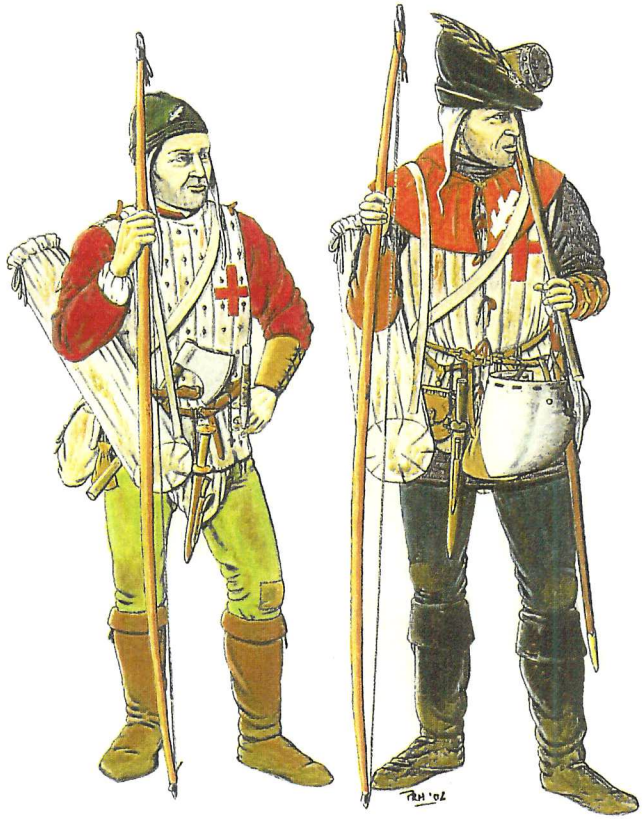
Sunrise on the day of battle would have been around 6.40 a.m., and since neither army could afford to be taken by surprise they were arrayed early in the morning. Henry is said to have heard mass three times, already dressed in his armour save for his helmet, and to have enquired as to the time as the army was drawn up. He was told that it was time for the service of Prime, typically held between 7.00 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. in winter. Henry is then said to have addressed his men, encouraging them to acquit themselves well for England and invoking the aid of God and St George. The king believed in the divine justice of his cause and the victory when it came would be attributed to the intervention of God in support of Henry.

It had been a standard tactic of English armies since the time of Henry's great-grandfather Edward III to fight on foot in a strong defensive position, and wait for the French to attack. With the French blocking the way to Calais, Henry was on the defensive and he initially adopted these Edwardian tactics and awaited the first move by the

French. However, much as had been the case with his great-uncle Edward the Black Prince at Poitiers in 1356, he could not wait indefinitely. The French numbers would be growing all the time, and Henry's army would, as time wore on, be subject to increasing problems in finding sufficient victuals. In addition, although drawing up his army had the advantage of minimizing the risk of being taken by surprise and allowed his men to focus on the task in hand, the longer they stood in position but inactive the more fragile their morale might become.

The French seem to have moved into position somewhat later than the English, which they could afford to do since the initiative lay with them. They are said to have been in position by the time of the service of Tierce, between 9.00 a.m. and 10.00 a.m. So by the time the French were arrayed, the English may already have been standing in their positions for perhaps as long as three hours. At some point before the battle, either on Thursday evening or on the Friday morning, negotiations are reported to have been held, aimed ostensibly at a peaceful settlement. Such negotiations were common in the period, and often were motivated by a sense of self-justification to demonstrate that all had been done to avoid the unnecessary spilling of Christian blood. It is unlikely that either side took them seriously on this occasion, but they served a useful purpose for the French, for whom delay was very much in their interest as they awaited the arrival of more contingents of men. The reported negotiating positions of the two sides were, in any case, irreconcilable in the circumstances. The French were prepared to allow Henry to proceed to Calais and to retain the town and the surrounding march-lands and Guienne, but he was to renounce his claim to the crown of France and surrender Harfleur. Henry's terms were similar to those his ambassadors had laid down in the spring: he wanted the Duchy of Guienne, five cities with links to the duchy, the County of Ponthieu and marriage to Catherine de Valois with a dowry of 800,000 *écus*.

The English took advantage of the delay to eat and drink. Scouts were sent out to check on the English flanks. To the left, behind the village of Agincourt, they found that there were no French present, and contented themselves by burning a house and a barn in the village belonging to the priory of St George in Hesdin. On the right they also found an absence of French troops, but located a suitable place to position archers in a meadow near Tramecourt close to the French rear-



An artist's impression of English archers. Archers wore a range of protection. If they were fortunate this could include mail, but more often than not they had to rely on some form of padded and reinforced jacket. Those who had protective headgear might wear steel helmets, including bascinets, or hats made of boiled leather over a wickerwork frame reinforced by steel strips. Archers would also carry weapons in addition to their bows, often a dagger, a sword or an axe. If they carried mallets for driving stakes into the ground, then these could also be used in close combat. (Paul Hitchen)

guard. Henry sent forward 200 archers to take advantage of this position. The French are also reported to have sent out mounted scouts, but they were driven off by archers.

There cannot be absolute certainty over the positions of the armies, but it is likely that the English were initially between the D71E and the D104, roughly aligned with the chateau and church of Tramecourt on the right where the Rue de Tramecourt joins the D104. The most

noticeable feature of the terrain is the fall of the land away to the west, but looking back on the position from the advanced English position close to the D71, it is clear that Henry had chosen his position well to take advantage of a slight ridge running across the battlefield. The French at this stage were probably about 1km in front of them, just beyond Agincourt and well outside the range of the archers. In the fifteenth century woods on both sides of the battlefield came in closer than today. They would have provided some protection for the English from attacks on the flanks, and created a funnel narrowing towards the English position, giving Henry a strong defensive position.

First Moves

The time of the start of the battle is also uncertain, but it was unlikely to have been before 10.00 a.m., by which time the English would have been standing in their ranks for three hours or more. As the day wore on, the French advantage was steadily increasing as their numbers grew. Henry therefore elected to move his men forward. The king would have recognized that he was taking a risk. The challenge was to hold formation and also to have time to replant the stakes before the French could gather themselves and advance to contact with the English. It is possible that Henry moved forward around 500m and took up position more or less on the line of the D71 between Agincourt and Tramecourt, the modern Rue Henry V. He also ordered the baggage train to move up to the rear of the army from the overnight encampment. This may have been for a number of reasons: to reduce the vulnerability of the baggage train, to provide protection for the rear of the army should the French attempt to outflank the English, and also to bring the horses closer for quick access should a retreat be required. Whatever the motive, the redeployment of the baggage train had not been completed when the battle began.

It is at this point that Henry may have addressed his commanders to reinforce the rightness of his cause and to encourage them in the battle to come, and the order to advance would have been accompanied by a number of rituals. Soldiers would have knelt in prayer and taken a small piece of earth into their mouths, and the saints would have been invoked, probably by priests with the army. Banners were then raised to indicate both to Henry's army and to the French that combat was to begin. The order to move forward was signalled by Sir Thomas

A late fourteenth-century representation of St George and the Dragon in the Musée de la Guerre au Moyen Age, Castelnaud-la-Chapelle. The armour is typical of that worn by both sides at Agincourt, before complete sets of plate armour came into use. A bascinet with a visor is worn over a mail coiffe or cap with the mail also forming a gorget to protect the neck. Steel plate is worn on the chest, over mail and a padded jacket, and on the legs. The mail provides protection for the vulnerable armpits and groin not covered by plate armour. The saddle is made of wood covered in leather and sits high on the horse, giving the rider a stable position and lifting much of his weight away from the horse's spine. (Peter Hoskins)

Erpingham, mounted on horseback. The signal was given visually by Sir Thomas throwing a baton into the air. He is also reported to have shouted 'Nestroque!', which has sometimes been interpreted as an order for the archers to let loose, but since they were still well out of range at this stage the order may simply have been for the advance to begin. Sir Thomas then dismounted to join the king's battle, and as he did so the order to move forward would have been taken up with cries of 'Advance banners!' With a great shout and the sound of trumpets, the English moved forward.

An early fifteenth-century bascinet in the Musée de la Guerre au Moyen Age, Castelnaud-la-Chapelle, typical of the helmets worn by both French and English men-at-arms. (Peter Hoskins)

The French appear to have been taken by surprise, presumably anticipating that the English would remain on the defensive and that the initiative for the start of combat rested with them. They were now compelled to respond, and as they did so it is likely that the 200 archers positioned near Tramecourt would have started shooting into the flanks of the French. At some point the main body of English archers would also have stopped, replanted their stakes and started shooting at the advancing men-at-arms. The effect of the archery, with more than 7,000 archers shooting at the advancing French, would have been very destructive. Whether the fire was continuous or in volleys is unknown, but in any case the impact on the French was considerable, killing and wounding men and disrupting their formation as they advanced. It was reported that the French initially advanced in line abreast, but then divided into three columns. This may have been to try to reduce the effect of the arrow fire, and secondly to concentrate force to break the English line. The momentum of the French advance on foot was diminished by the shooting of the archers, and the situation became worse the closer they came, as the English were now shooting at point-blank range from the front and the flanks. The French on the flanks were forced towards the centre by this shooting, and any attempt to maintain separate columns would probably have been futile. The lie of the land and the woods also funnelled the French into an ever-narrowing front, exacerbating their situation further. The effect of the shooting combined with the topography meant that the men in the very large vanguard were compressed into an unmanageable mass.

The French battle plan had envisaged the use of up to a thousand heavily armed and armoured cavalry to ride down and neutralize the archers. If the French had initiated the start of the battle, then the cavalry, setting off with the men-at-arms on foot, would have been in contact with the archers well before the men-at-arms closed with the

English. It seems that they did set off as the French men-at-arms moved off, but they had lost the initiative and their charge was probably not as well ordered as it might have been. The shooting of the archers was effective and horses stumbled, fell and wheeled about to escape the arrows. The horses who fell or turned hindered those who came after, and out-of-control cavalry disrupted the men-at-arms of the vanguard advancing on foot. Those of the cavalry who made it as far as the archers were confronted by the stakes, which further disrupted what was left of the cohesion of the charge and increased the vulnerability of the cavalry to point-blank shooting by the archers. The attempt to neutralize the archers with the cavalry charge failed, possibly in part because there were fewer mounted men than had been planned. These reduced numbers probably reflected the preference of the French nobility and gentry to engage in the *mêlée* against their English counterparts.

Crossbowmen and archers provided the French with a potential counter to the English archers, but they seem to have had little impact. They may have fired an initial ineffective volley, but it is more likely that they were positioned behind the men-at-arms and thus were never in a position to shoot effectively. A crossbow is armed by placing one foot in the stirrup and then drawing the bowstring. At the Battle of Crécy in 1346 the Genoese crossbowmen had found great difficulty in finding sufficient purchase to load their weapons, due to the slippery conditions with rain on chalky ground. It is possible that the crossbowmen at Agincourt faced similar difficulties because of the rain and mud.

At some stage while the battle was under way, probably during the early stages, there was an attack on the English baggage train by a group of some 200 men-at-arms supplemented by pages and servants. There is uncertainty about the leadership of the raid, but it may have been commanded by some local men: Isambard d'Azincourt, Robert de Bourneville and Rifart de Clamace. The objective was to distract the English and create fear of an attack on their rear. In the event the attack degenerated into little more than a search for booty, with the French falling on the tail of the baggage train as it moved forward to take up position behind the English army. Unfortunately for Henry, his baggage and bedding were among the items pillaged and his losses included a ceremonial sword and crown. A number of stories were told in the aftermath of the battle concerning Henry's losses. According to one tale

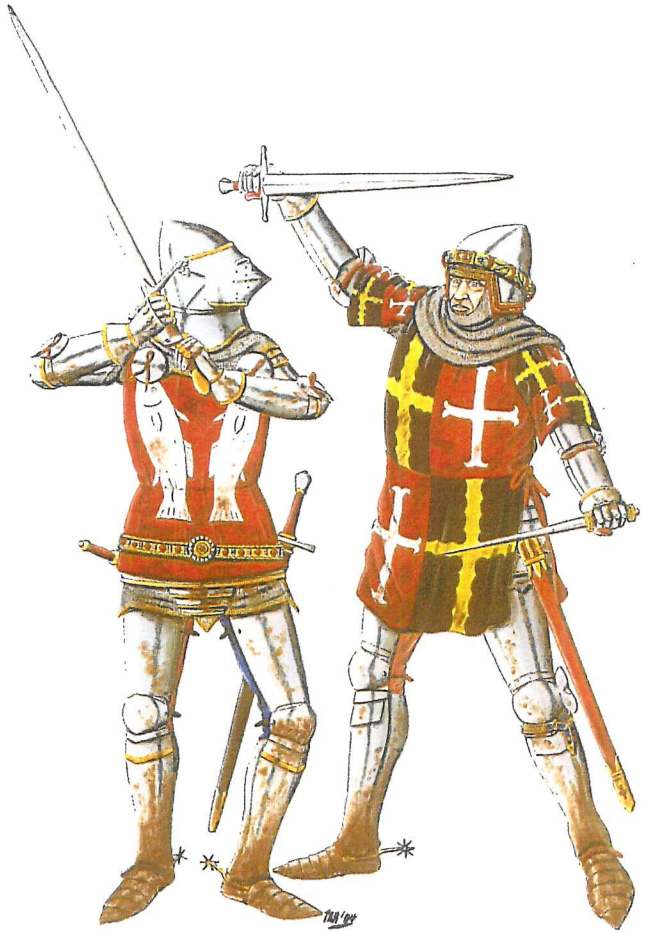
the crown was taken to Paris to show that Henry had been defeated, but problems with timing make this no more than a story. The number of crowns also grew to two, according to some, one of which Henry intended to use for his coronation in Rheims, while the sword was said to be King Arthur's and so valuable that no one knew what to do with it. Some pack-horses were taken, but there were no recorded English casualties as a result of the attack. The raid had no impact on the course of the battle, and the only result was some personal inconvenience for the king and the loss of the horses.

The Clash of the Men-at-Arms

The archers had inflicted heavy losses on the French vanguard of men-at-arms on foot and on the cavalry, but they could not halt the oncoming French completely and at some point the men-at-arms of the two armies would clash in hand-to-hand combat. Before this could happen, the archers deployed in front of the English men-at-arms needed to disengage and move to the flanks to join the other archers behind their stakes. Since they were unencumbered by heavy armour and equipment, they would have been able to move relatively quickly.

Initially the English had been on firm, unploughed land, while the French were on soft ground sodden because of the heavy rain and newly sown with wheat. The English had moved forward onto this soft ground and now found that it was difficult to stand or advance. However, having advanced to precipitate the battle, the English could now hold their ground and wait for the French. For the French men-at-arms on foot the situation was far worse than for their English counterparts. They were advancing across muddy ground that had been churned up both by the initial charge of the cavalry and by the routed out-of-control horses. The sheer weight of numbers also worked to their disadvantage as those behind piled up on those in front. Furthermore they had to contend with the dead and the wounded obstructing their passage, and they were hampered by the need to keep their visors closed and their heads down in the face of the shooting which continued to come from the archers.

It is not clear whether or not the three English divisions were closed up into a single body or separate. In either case they were clearly identifiable from their banners, and the French divided into three columns to make for the standards and the centre of each battle. By the



An artist's impression of men-at-arms, showing the mix of mail and plate armour typical of the period before the general appearance of suits of plate armour in about 1420. Men-at-arms fought with lances, swords, axes, maces and battle hammers. At Agincourt the French, as they had at Poitiers, shortened their lances to make them easier to handle. The English did not do so, which gave them a significant advantage in the first contact with the French men-at-arms. (Paul Hitchen)

time the French made contact they were close to exhaustion. To add to their problems, they had shortened their lances to make them easier to handle in close combat, but the English had not done so and were able to thrust at the French and inflict wounds, particularly it seems to legs and groins, before they could strike at Henry's men. The French were

Ground near the English advanced position. This photograph was taken in October after two wet days following a prolonged dry spell. (Peter Hoskins)

also being funnelled together both by the nature of the battlefield and by those on the flanks moving inwards to try to avoid the arrows of the English archers. With the congestion, men not in the front rank crowded into those in front, and as men fell killed or wounded, others stumbled and fell. Bodies piled upon others, further hampering those who came on behind, who were so closely packed that they had great difficulty closing with the English and even raising their weapons. Nevertheless the combat was ferocious, and Henry was closely involved. He is said both to have stood over the wounded Duke of Gloucester to protect him and to have attempted to come to the aid of the Duke of York. Before he could do so, the Duke of Alençon had already killed him. The Duke of Alençon is then reported to have turned his attention to the king and struck him a blow to the head with an axe, which is said to have broken the crown on Henry's helmet. Seeing himself surrounded by the king's bodyguard, Alençon offered to yield but he was struck down and killed.

As the French became increasingly vulnerable, the archers joined in the hand-to-hand fighting from the flanks, encircling the men-at-arms as they crushed closer together. They used their own weapons and those taken from the fallen to deliver blows with axes, maces, pole-axes, mallets, hammers and stakes. Those of the French who had fallen wounded were also vulnerable to stabbing wounds through gaps between pieces of armour and through visors, and many of them suffered wounds to the neck and head. In addition, the archers continued to strike where breaks appeared in the French line, and the English men-at-arms exploited any gaps that appeared. The battle was going in favour of the English. When the French main battle was engaged, Henry drove forward into them with his own men-at-arms and further diminished the momentum of the French attack.

An artist's impression of Henry V with plate armour worn over mail. (Paul Hitchen)

The duration of the battle is uncertain, but we do know that the Duke of Brabant arrived close to the end. Since he had covered 48km that morning from Lens, he could not have arrived before 1.00 p.m. He arrived in haste ahead of most of his men and equipment. Seizing a banner from a trumpeter, he cut a hole in it for his head and wore it as a surcoat. He plunged straight into the fight but was immediately killed.

The Final Act

The defeat of the vanguard had been a great blow to the morale of the main battle. Not only was the defeat unexpected, but also the greater part of the leadership of the army had been killed or taken prisoner. Thus, although some at least of the second French battle had closed to engage the English, part of this division fled, along with whatever rear-guard remained. The battle was apparently won and the English could start to gather prisoners together, identify the dead and tend the wounded.

However, at some point Henry gave the order for the French prisoners to be killed. The reasons for the order, and its morality, have been the subject of debate over the centuries. It was a very unusual

action; normally prisoners, certainly those of gentle birth who would have had a monetary value if ransomed, would be spared. Henry may have judged that able-bodied prisoners, perhaps in large numbers, at the rear of his army posed a significant threat, and it is probable that the order was given because he believed that the French were rallying, perhaps reinforced by those arriving late at the battlefield. This seems to be borne out by Ghillebert de Lannoy, who recalled later that when the Duke of Brabant arrived on the battlefield a shout went up that everyone should kill his prisoners. Lannoy had been among the prisoners but was one of those who survived, despite the English setting fire to the house in which he was held with ten or twelve other prisoners. Whatever the reason for it, many prisoners were killed. Nevertheless, some were not, and it is probable that the order was rescinded when the renewed threat did not materialize.

The Aftermath

Henry and his exhausted men had won the day, but much needed to be done before they could move on once more towards Calais. There are numerous, sometimes conflicting, accounts of the events that followed the battle, but it seems that the piles of bodies on the battlefield were searched by the English. They were looking for their own dead and wounded, but also removing coats of arms from the French dead to enable identification of those men of rank who had died. The English army also took armour and weapons from the dead. Henry ordered that men should not take more than they needed for their own personal use, and the rest was placed in a barn and burnt.

Henry kept the French away from the battlefield in the immediate aftermath, although they were allowed to come and collect their dead the next day. The battlefield was not guarded overnight and it seems that some French people came to remove bodies under cover of darkness. At some stage, probably after the departure of Henry's army, when the French returned to the battlefield, they found that a great deal of armour still remained. It also seems that there had been little looting of valuables by the English soldiery, but local peasants returned to strip the dead of remaining clothing, leaving them naked where they lay. At some stage the *bailli* of Amiens sent men to recover equipment left after the French defeat. He had to be content with just two cannon, two damaged *pavises* and parts of tents.