

Year 12 Transition Work

Tudors

INITIAL RESEARCH TASKS



Please complete the following research tasks as a starting point to your Summer work. These readings will help demonstrate the historical period the course follows on from and provide you with some core contextual knowledge. Your Main Task, see separate document, will help test your note taking skills. Both sets of tasks should be ready to submit to your teacher in September.

1 - Pre Reading:

May gracious God now save our king,
His people and his well-willing;
Give him good live and good ending,
That we with mirth may safely sing,
Deo gracias! (Thanks be to God)



This was a popular song during the rule of Henry V.

What made Henry V so popular during his rule? Read the pages called '*Henry V and the Legacy of Agincourt*.' This will allow you to answer the question:

'Why was Henry V an effective king?'

2 - Timeline Task:

Create a timeline of England during the Wars of the Roses. You can use the textbook pages included in this document as a starting point. You should look in more depth at individuals and events. Try here for further depth of detail: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/The-Wars-of-the-Roses/>

3 - Research Task:

What happened to the Princes in the Tower? Who were they? Why were they imprisoned? What theories do historians have?

Start your research with the article later in this document called: "*The Princes in the Tower*" Why was their fate never explained"

4 - Further Reading Task (Optional):

Henry V is celebrated for his victory in the Battle of Agincourt. But should we really be celebrating it? Read the article called "*Henry's Hollow Victory*" and consider if that fateful day in Bosworth did more harm than good....

Henry V and the legacy of Agincourt

The timeline graph on pages 6–9 begins with Henry V, even though he died thirty years before the Wars of the Roses began, so why include him? The answer is that Henry's victory at Agincourt and his conquest of France had an immense impact on the rest of the fifteenth century. To understand later events you have to understand Henry's achievements and the problems they created for his successors.

The conquest of France began with the miraculous victory at Agincourt on 25 October 1415. Henry had invaded France in August, then took a month to capture the port of Harfleur. By then 2000 of Henry's 9000 soldiers had died, most from disease. Many others were ill with dysentery. But instead of sailing home, Henry led his army out of Harfleur on 8 October, heading for Calais. His cross-country march was a display of disdain for the French and quite possibly designed to provoke a battle. If so, he succeeded!

Henry's army had food for eight days but the march took twice as long. The English trudged on, hungry, exhausted by illness, soaked by heavy rain, and shadowed by a much larger French army. On 24 October the English made camp at Agincourt and confessed their sins to God, expecting to die next day. Laughter floated across from the enemy camp where the French were gambling over the English prisoners they'd take in the battle.

Next morning, the day of the Feast of Saints Crispin and Crispinian, King Henry chose a narrow battle line with woodland either side so the French could not encircle his army. He set out a line of knights interspersed with archers but, when the French did not attack, Henry moved his men forward and ordered his archers to open fire. Provoked and insulted, the French charged but the ground, boggy after heavy rain, slowed their horses. The English archers, each man loosing ten to twelve arrows a minute, sent 60,000 arrows hammering down every minute onto the French knights.

The arrow-storm destroyed the French belief in an easy victory and, as the armies clashed in hand-to-hand fighting, the narrow battlefield prevented the French making their greater numbers count. French attacks withered and failed.



△ Henry V (1413–22) was a deeply serious man whose life was built round war. At the battle of Agincourt in 1415 he showed excellent generalship and led his men in the fiercest hand-to-hand fighting. At home he showed the same decisive leadership. Summoning two knights whose quarrel had caused deaths among their supporters, Henry told them to sort out their quarrel before he'd finished a plate of oysters, or he'd execute them both. No one doubted he'd keep his word.

Henry V, his knights and his archers had won. We don't know how many men died (maybe 6000 Frenchmen and a few hundred Englishmen) but the exact numbers are less important than the huge difference between them.

Four days later the church bells rang out in London to proclaim the news of Agincourt. Late in November London's streets were filled with cheering crowds as Henry, simply and soberly dressed, rode to St Paul's to give thanks to God for the victory.

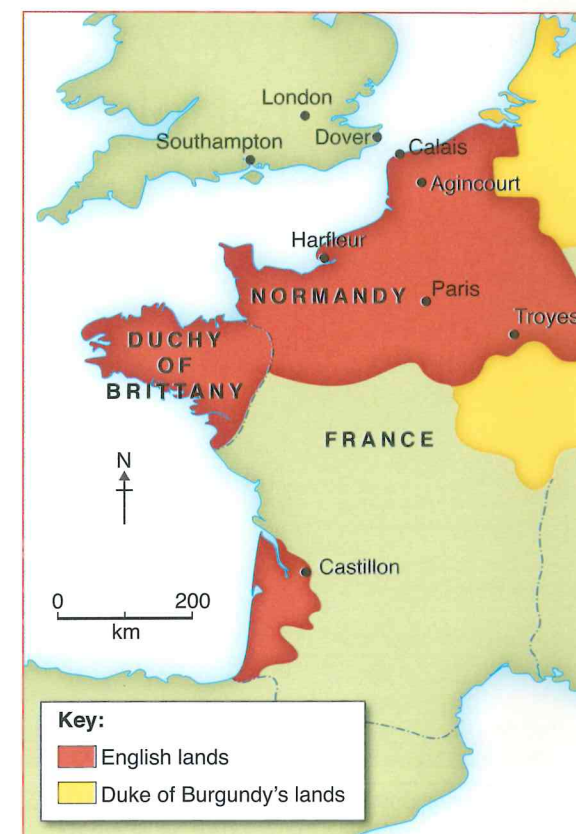
The crowds, far less restrained, sang the Agincourt Carol which began:

Our King went forth to Normandy,
With grace and might of chivalry;
God for him wrought marvelously
Wherefore England may call and cry Deo
Gratias:

Deo gratias Anglia redde pro victoria.

Miraculous though Agincourt was, it was only the beginning of Henry's success. Between 1415 and 1420 he led siege after siege, winning control of more and more French territory. The French nobility, morale weakened by Agincourt and divided amongst themselves, could not stop him. In 1420 France agreed to the humiliating Treaty of Troyes, which not only united England and France, through Henry's marriage to Princess Katherine of France, but also stated that Henry or his son would be the next king of France, thus disinheriting the French heir to the throne.

However, only two years later in 1422, Henry V died of dysentery on another campaign in France. He left his 9-month-old heir a legacy that was both an inspiration and a burden, as shown below.



△ This map shows (in red) just how much of France was conquered by the English by 1429. The lands marked in yellow were those of the Duke of Burgundy (see the box below for his importance).

Henry V's legacy to Henry VI

The challenge

Henry V had set an inspiring standard of kingship. His successors were expected to match this standard by strengthening English control over France. Losing the lands in France gained under Henry V would be a terrible failure, an insult to those who'd died winning those lands.



The difficulties

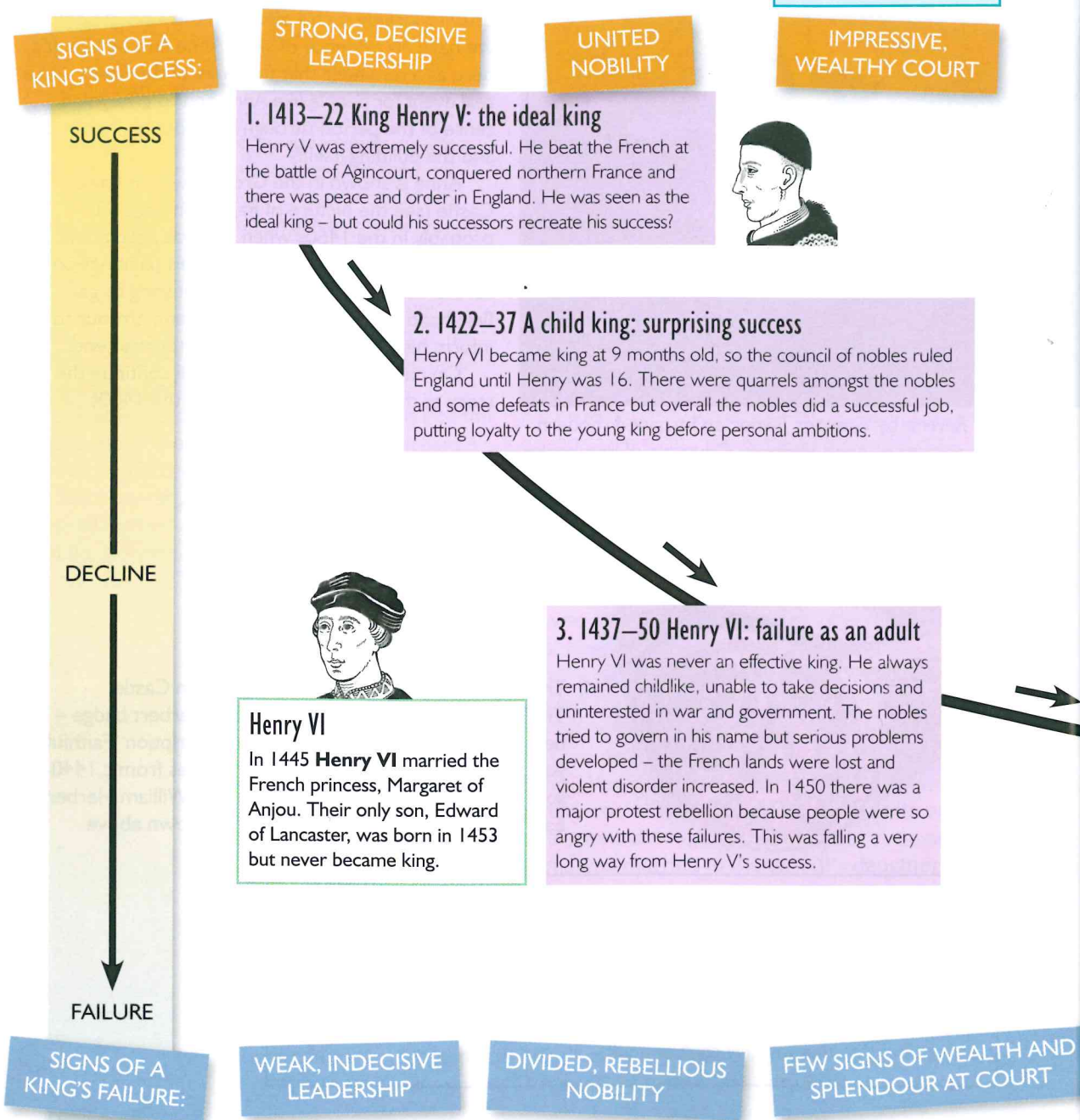
Henry V's success had partly been built on an alliance with the Duke of Burgundy and on France's lack of leadership, as the King of France was elderly and insane, believing he was made of glass and would break if anyone touched him. What if Burgundy changed sides to ally with France, leaving England isolated? What if France revived under new leadership? Continued war in France was expensive, requiring heavy taxation: would the English people keep paying if their success ended?

The Wars of the Roses: an outline, up to 1461

How long did the Wars of the Roses last and what was the overall pattern of events? Pages 6–9 help you understand the outline of the whole topic, perhaps the most important four pages in the book!

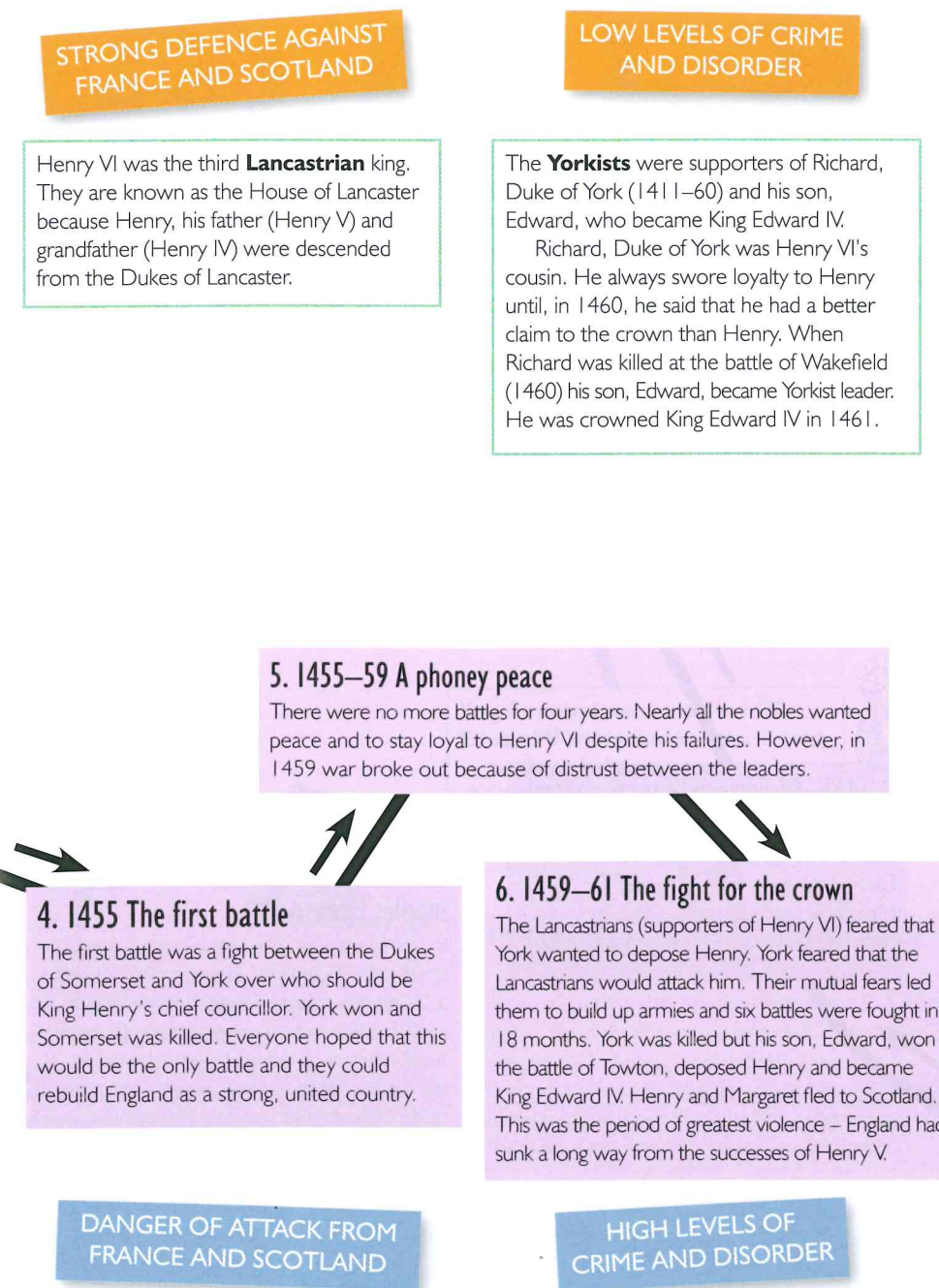
The pink boxes tell the story of events, while the graph shows how successful the kings were in achieving the objectives in the gold bars. If the line of the graph is high on the page then a king was successful; England was united and peaceful. If the graph falls to the bottom of the page then a king was a failure; war or rebellion had broken out.

Just reading these pages isn't enough to understand them. You need to transfer this information into your own version of the story. For example, can you tell this outline story aloud in your own words in 1 minute?



Essentials up to 1461

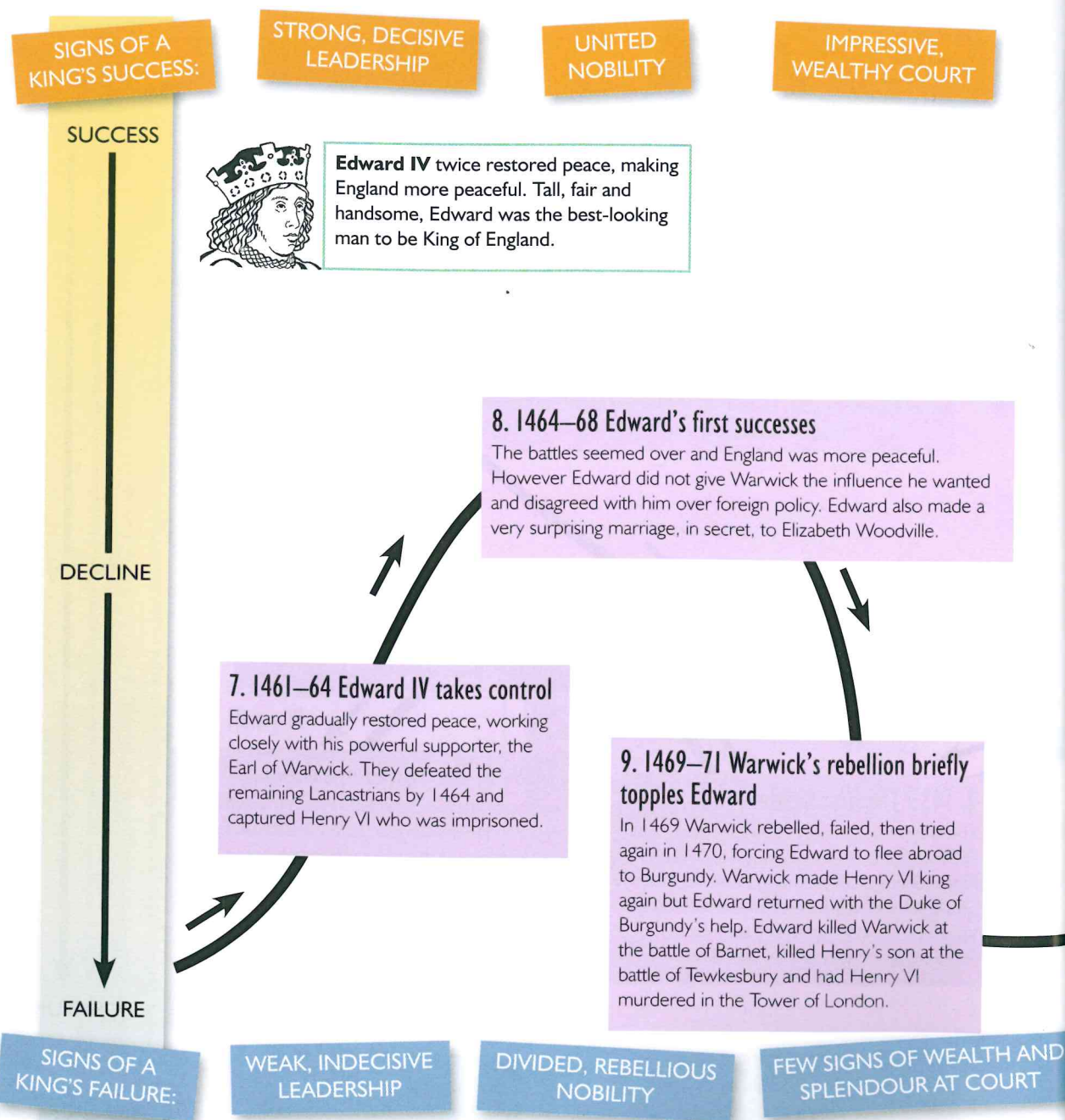
1. England was ruled successfully by the nobles while Henry VI was a child.
2. Henry VI completely failed to provide effective kingship when he grew up.
3. The first battle was about who would be Henry's chief councillor. It was NOT a battle for the crown.
4. In 1461 many nobles still wanted to keep Henry as king despite his failures but he was finally deposed by Edward of York.



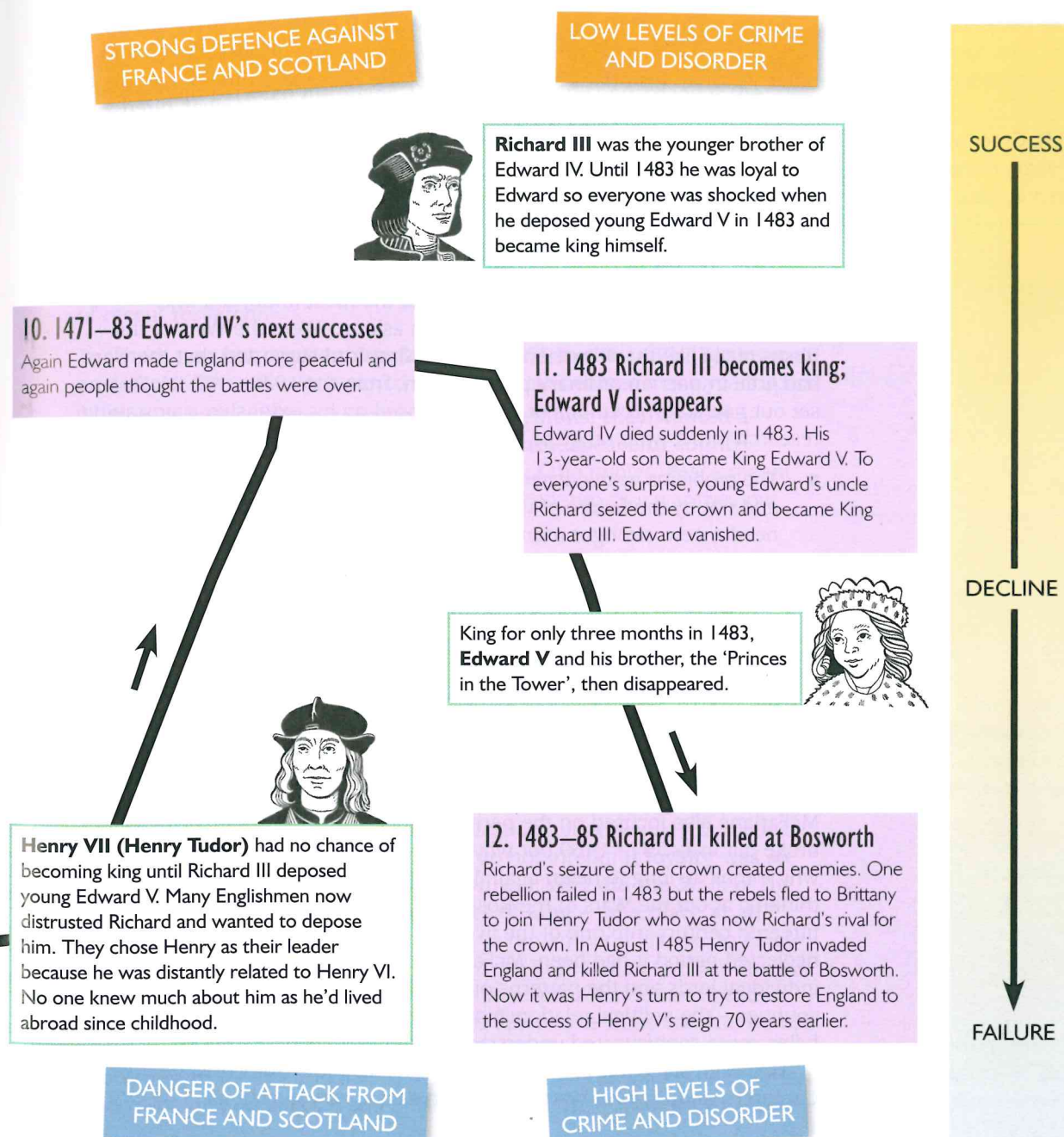
The Wars of the Roses: an outline, 1461–85

Essentials 1461–85

1. Twice Edward IV made England more peaceful – in the 1460s and the 1470s.
2. Twice England plunged back into warfare (in 1469–71 and 1483–85) because of the actions of a small number of individuals.



3. Almost everyone, including the nobles, wanted an end to violence and civil war.
4. The periods of fighting were quite short but they created great uncertainty and made further rebellions more likely.



THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER

WHY WAS THEIR FATE NEVER EXPLAINED?

A deafening silence surrounded the disappearance of Edward V and his brother, Richard, Duke of York. But why? As **Leanda de Lisle** writes, both Richard III and Henry Tudor had good reasons not to talk publicly about the princes



"There was a **high risk the dead princes would attract a cult**, for in them the religious qualities attached to royalty were combined with the purity of childhood"

Paul Delaroche's 19th-century painting shows King Edward V and the Duke of York in the Tower of London. What happened to them next has puzzled historians for centuries



The monument to Henry VII and Elizabeth of York at Westminster Abbey. The princes' bones may lie close to those of the king who sought to hide their memory

Locked in the Tower in June 1483 with his younger brother, the 12-year-old Edward V was certain "that death was facing him". Two overthrown kings had died in suspicious circumstances already that century. Yet it was still possible their uncle, Richard III, would spare them. The princes were so very young, and if it were accepted that they were bastards, as their uncle claimed, they would pose little threat.

The innocent Richard, Duke of York, only nine years old, remained "joyous" and full of "frolics", even as the last of their servants were dismissed. But the boys were spotted behind the Tower windows less and less often, and by the summer's end they had vanished.

It is the fact of their disappearance that lies at the heart of the many conspiracy theories over what happened to the princes. Murder was suspected, but without bodies no one could be certain even that they were dead. Many different scenarios have been put forward in the years since. In the nearest surviving contemporary accounts, Richard is accused of ordering their deaths, the boys having been either suffocated with their bedding, drowned, or killed by having their arteries cut. Other theories suggested that one or both of the princes escaped.

In more modern times, some have come to believe that Richard III was innocent of ordering the children's deaths, and instead spirited his nephews abroad or to a safe place nearer home, only for them to be killed later by Henry VII who feared the boys' rival claims to the throne. None

of these theories, however, has provided a satisfactory answer to the conundrum at the heart of this mystery: the fact that the boys simply vanished.

If the princes were alive, why did Richard not say so in October 1483, when the rumours he had ordered them killed were fuelling a rebellion? If they were dead, why had he not followed earlier examples of royal killings? The bodies of deposed kings were displayed and claims made that they had died of natural causes, so that loyalties could be transferred to the new king.

That the answer to these questions lies in the 15th century seems obvious, but it can be hard to stop thinking like 21st-century detectives and start thinking like contemporaries. To the modern mind, if Richard III was a religious man and a good king, as many believe he was, then he could not have ordered the deaths of two children.

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But even good people do bad things if they're given the right motivation.

In the 15th century it was a primary duty of good kingship to ensure peace and national harmony. After his coronation, Richard III continued to employ many of his brother Edward IV's former servants, but by the end of July 1483 it was already clear that some did not accept that Edward IV's sons were illegitimate, and judged Richard to be a usurper. The fact that the princes remained a focus of opposition gave Richard a strong motive for having them killed – just as his brother had killed the king he deposed.

The childlike, helpless Lancastrian Henry VI was found dead in the Tower in 1471, after more than a decade of conflict between the rival royal houses of Lancaster and York. It was said he was killed by grief and rage over the death in battle of his son, but few can have doubted that Edward IV ordered Henry's murder. Henry VI's death extirpated the House of Lancaster. Only Henry VI's half nephew, Henry Tudor – a descendent of John of Gaunt, founder of the Lancastrian House, through his mother's illegitimate Beaufort line – was left to represent their cause.

Trapped in European exile, Henry Tudor posed a negligible threat to Edward IV. However, Richard was acutely aware of an

"For Richard III, the vanishing of the princes was a case of **least said, soonest mended**. Without a grave, there could be no focus for a cult"

unexpected sequel to Henry VI's death. The murdered king was acclaimed as a saint, with rich and poor alike venerating him as an innocent whose troubled life gave him some insight into their own difficulties. Miracles were reported at the site of his modest grave in Chertsey Abbey, Surrey. One man claimed that the dead king had even deigned to help him when he had a bean trapped in his ear: said bean purportedly popped out after the afflicted man prayed to the deposed king.

Edward IV failed to put a halt to the popular cult, and Richard III shared his late brother's anxieties about its ever-growing power. It had a strong following in his home

city of York, where a statue of 'Henry the saint' was built on the choir screen at York Minster. In 1484 Richard attempted to take control of the cult with an act of reconciliation, moving Henry VI's body to St George's Chapel, Windsor. In the meantime, there was a high risk the dead princes too would attract a cult, for in them the religious qualities attached to royalty were combined with the purity of childhood.

An insecure king

In England we have no equivalent today to the shrine at Lourdes in France, visited by thousands of pilgrims every year looking for healing or spiritual renewal. But we can recall the vast crowds outside Buckingham Palace after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Imagine that feeling and enthusiasm in pilgrims visiting the tombs of two young princes and greatly magnified by the closeness people then felt with the dead. It would have been highly dangerous to the king who had taken their throne. For Richard, the vanishing of the princes was a case of least said, soonest mended, for without a grave for them, there could be no focus for a cult. Without a body or items belonging to the dead placed on display, there would be no relics, either.

Nevertheless, Richard needed the princes' mother, Elizabeth Woodville, and

The players in the princes' downfall

Henry VI (1421-71)

Lost his life in the Tower

Succeeding his father, Henry V, who died when he was just a few months old, Henry VI's reign was challenged by political and economic crises. It was interrupted by his mental and physical breakdown in 1453, at which time Richard, 3rd Duke of York, was appointed protector of the realm. Both men were direct descendants of Edward III. In 1455, Richard's own claim to the throne resulted in the first clashes of the Wars of the Roses, fought between supporters of the dynastic houses of Lancaster and York over the succession.

Richard died at the battle of Wakefield in 1460, but his family claim to the throne survived him, and the following year his eldest son became King Edward IV. Richard's younger son would also be king, as Richard III. Henry VI was briefly restored to the throne in 1470 but the Lancastrians were finally defeated at Tewkesbury in 1471, and Henry was probably put to death in the Tower of London a few days later.

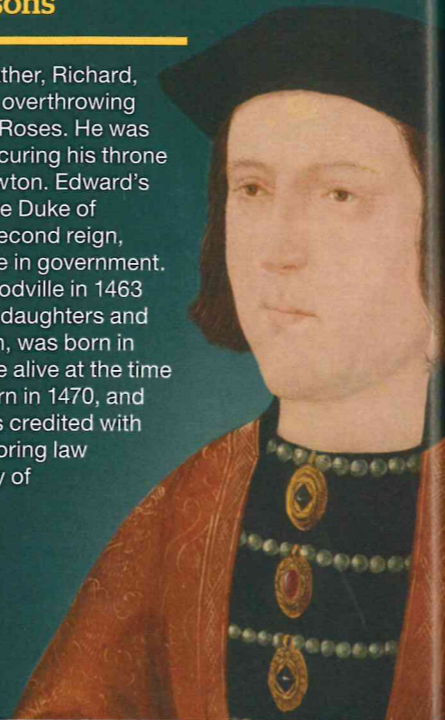


Edward IV (1442-83)

Died before his young sons

Edward succeeded where his father, Richard, the third Duke of York failed – in overthrowing Henry VI during the Wars of the Roses. He was declared king in March 1461, securing his throne with a victory at the battle of Towton. Edward's younger brother Richard became Duke of Gloucester. Later, in Edward's second reign, Richard played an important role in government.

Edward married Elizabeth Woodville in 1463 and they had 10 children: seven daughters and three sons. The eldest, Elizabeth, was born in 1466. Two of the three sons were alive at the time of Edward's death – Edward, born in 1470, and Richard, born 1473. Edward IV is credited with being financially astute and restoring law and order. He died unexpectedly of natural causes on 9 April 1483.



Edward V (1470-83)

Richard, Duke of York (1473-83)

Deposed and disappeared

Edward IV's heir was his eldest son, also named Edward. When the king died unexpectedly, his will, which has not survived, reportedly named his previously loyal brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as lord protector. On hearing of his father's death, the young Edward and his entourage began a journey from Ludlow to the capital. Gloucester intercepted the party in Buckinghamshire. Claiming that the Woodvilles were planning to take power by force, Gloucester seized the prince.

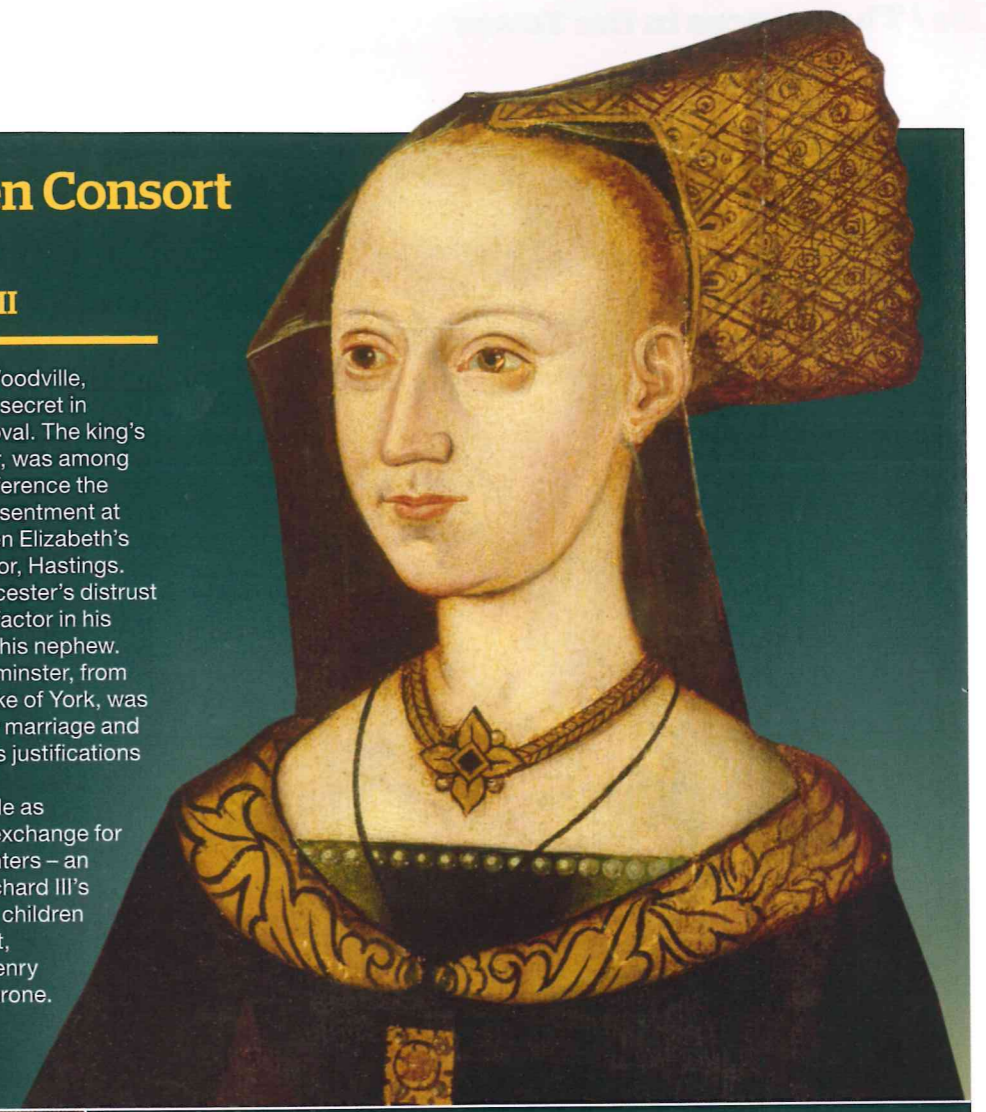
On 4 May 1483, Edward entered London in the charge of Gloucester. Edward's coronation was scheduled for 22 June. On 16 June, Elizabeth was persuaded to surrender Edward's younger brother, Richard, apparently to attend the ceremony. With both princes in his hands, Gloucester publicised his claim to the throne. He was crowned as Richard III on 6 July and a conspiracy to rescue the princes failed that month. By September, rebels were seeing Henry Tudor as a candidate for the throne, suggesting the princes were already believed to be dead.

Elizabeth, Queen Consort (c1437-92)

Had to submit to Richard III

Edward IV's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville, a widow with children, took place in secret in 1464 and met with political disapproval. The king's brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, was among those allegedly hostile to it. The preference the Woodville family received caused resentment at court, and there was friction between Elizabeth's family and the king's powerful advisor, Hastings. On Edward IV's death in 1483, Gloucester's distrust of the Woodvilles was apparently a factor in his decision to seize control of the heir, his nephew. Elizabeth sought sanctuary in Westminster, from where her younger son Richard, Duke of York, was later removed. The legitimacy of her marriage and her children was one of Gloucester's justifications for usurping the throne on 26 June.

Once parliament confirmed his title as Richard III, Elizabeth submitted, in exchange for protection for herself and her daughters – an arrangement he honoured. After Richard III's death at the battle of Bosworth, her children were declared legitimate. Her eldest, Elizabeth of York, was married to Henry VII, strengthening his claim to the throne.



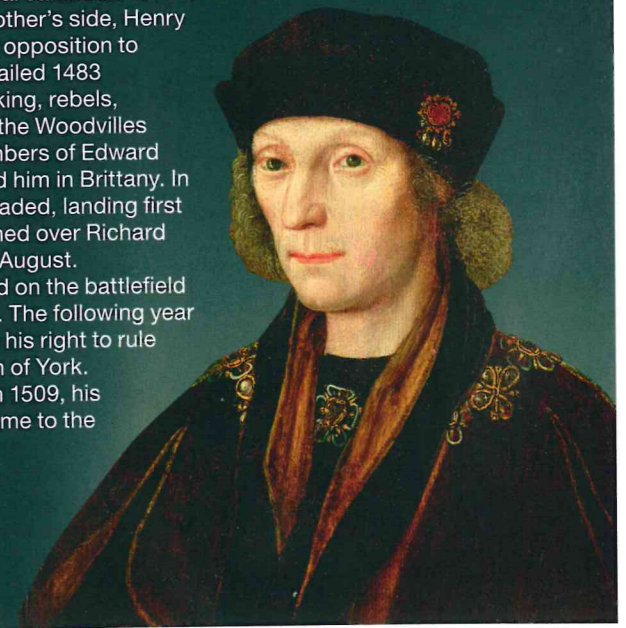
ALAMY/NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY/ART ARCHIVE/BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

Henry VII (1457-1509)

Battled his way to the throne

Henry Tudor was the son of Margaret Beaufort (great-great-granddaughter of Edward III) and Edmund Tudor, half-brother of Henry VI. In 1471, after Edward IV regained the throne, Henry fled to Brittany, where he avoided the king's attempts to have him returned. As a potential candidate for the throne through his mother's side, Henry became the focus for opposition to Richard III. After the failed 1483 rebellion against the king, rebels, including relatives of the Woodvilles and loyal former members of Edward IV's household, joined him in Brittany. In 1485 Henry Tudor invaded, landing first in Wales, and triumphed over Richard III at Bosworth on 22 August.

Henry was crowned on the battlefield with Richard's crown. The following year he further legitimised his right to rule by marrying Elizabeth of York. When the king died in 1509, his son with Elizabeth came to the throne as Henry VIII.



others who might follow Edward V, to know that the boys were dead, in order to forestall plots raised in their name. According to the Tudor historian Polydore Vergil, Elizabeth Woodville fainted when she was told her sons had been killed. As she came round, "She wept, she cried out loud, and with lamentable shrieks made all the house ring, she struck her breast, tore and cut her hair." She also called for vengeance.

Elizabeth Woodville made an agreement with Henry Tudor's mother, Margaret Beaufort, that Henry should marry her daughter, Elizabeth of York, and called on Edwardian loyalists to back their cause. The rebellion that followed in October 1483 proved Richard had failed to restore peace. While he defeated these risings, less than two years later – at the battle of Bosworth in August 1485 – he was betrayed by part of his own army and killed, sword in hand.

The princes were revenged, but it soon became evident that Henry VII was in no hurry to investigate their fate. It is possible that the new monarch feared such an investigation would draw attention to a role in their fate played by someone close to his cause – most likely Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham. The duke, who came from a Lancastrian family, was a close ally of Richard in the overthrow of Edward V, but later turned against the king. Known as a "sore and hard dealing man", it is possible he encouraged Richard to have the princes murdered, planning then to see Richard killed and the House of York overthrown. In November 1483 Richard executed Buckingham for treason, but Buckingham's name remained associated at home and abroad with the princes' disappearance.

Rival saints

What is certain is that Henry, like Richard, had good reasons for wishing to forestall a cult of the princes. Henry's blood claim to the throne was extremely weak, and he was fearful of being seen as a mere king consort to Elizabeth of York. To counter this, Henry claimed the throne in his own right, citing divine providence – God's intervention on earth – as evidence that he was a true king (only God made kings). A key piece of evidence used in support of this idea was a story that, a few months before his murder, 'the saint' Henry VI had prophesied Henry Tudor's reign.

It would not have been wise to allow Yorkist royal saints to compete with the memory of Henry VI, whose cult Henry VII now wished to encourage. In 1485, therefore, nothing was said of the princes' disappearance, beyond a vague accusation



The pretender Perkin Warbeck (1474–99) claimed to be Richard, Duke of York

"There appeared, as if 'raised from the dead one of the sons of King Edward... a youth by the name of Richard'. He was said to be a Dutchman – but who could be sure?"

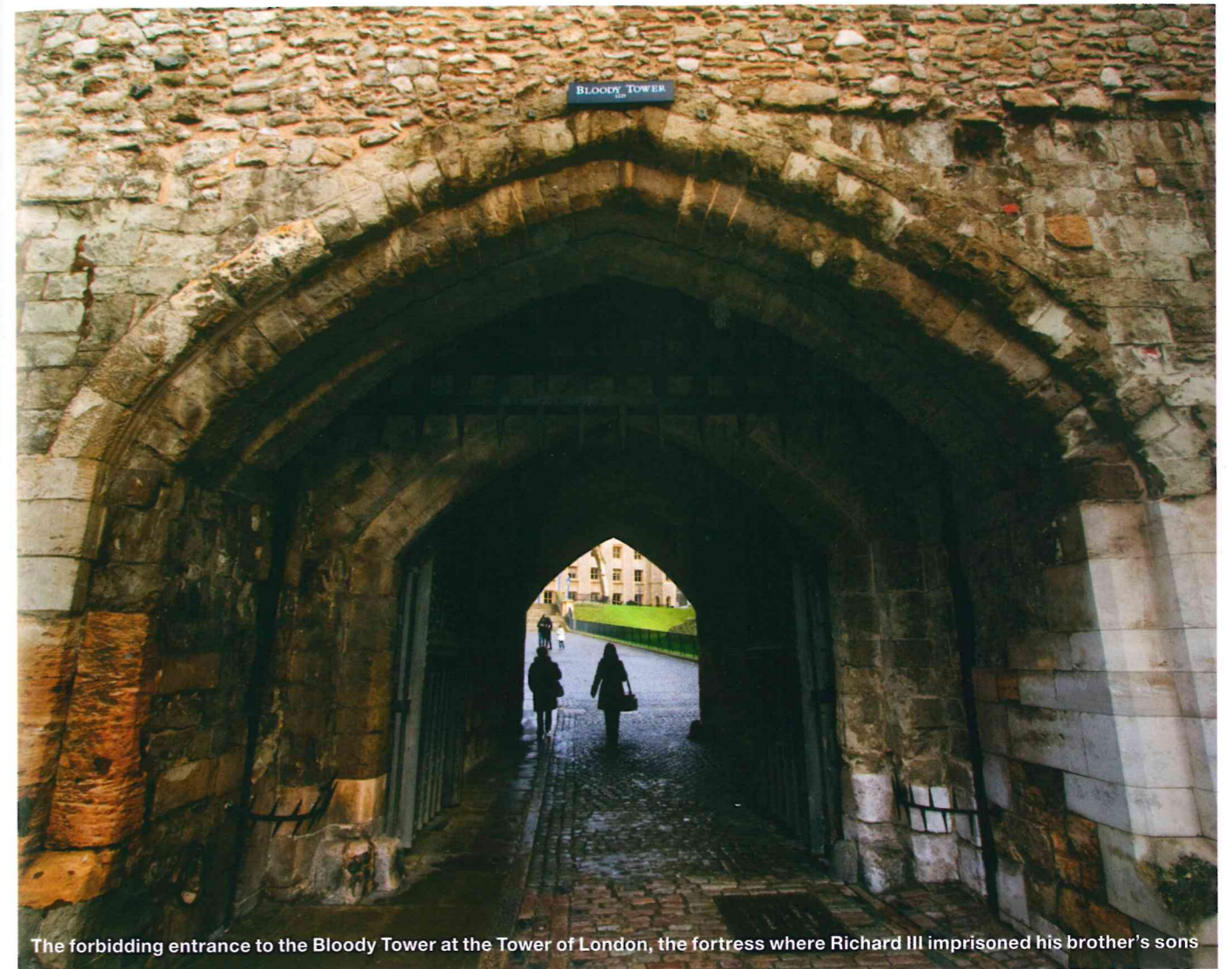
in parliament during the autumn that Richard III was guilty of "treasons, homicides and murders in shedding of infants' blood". No search was made for the boys' bodies, and they were given no rite of burial. Indeed even the fate of their souls was, seemingly, abandoned.

I have not found any evidence of endowments set up to pay for prayers for the princes that century. Henry may well have feared that the churches where these so-called 'chantries' might be established would become centres for the kind of cult he wanted to avoid. But their absence would have struck people as very strange. Praying for the dead was a crucial aspect of medieval religion. In December 1485, when Henry issued a special charter refounding his favourite religious order, the Observant Friars, at Greenwich, he noted that offering masses for the dead was, "the greatest work of piety and mercy, for through it souls would be purged". It was unthinkable not to help the souls of your loved ones pass from purgatory to heaven with prayers

and masses. On the other hand, it was akin to a curse to say a requiem for a living person – you were effectively praying for their death.

The obvious question posed by the lack of public prayers for the princes was: were they still alive? And, as Vergil recalled, in 1491 there appeared in Ireland, as if "raised from the dead one of the sons of King Edward... a youth by the name of Richard". Henry VII said the man claiming to be the younger of the princes was, in fact, a Dutchman called Perkin Warbeck – but who could be sure?

Henry was more anxious than ever that the princes be forgotten. When their mother, Elizabeth Woodville, died in June 1492, she was buried "privily... without any solemn dirge done for her obit". It has been suggested this may have reflected her dying wishes to be buried "without pomp". But Henry VII also asked to be buried without pomp. He still expected, and got, one of the most stately funerals of the Middle Ages. Elizabeth



The forbidding entrance to the Bloody Tower at the Tower of London, the fortress where Richard III imprisoned his brother's sons

Woodville emphatically did not receive the same treatment. Much has been made of this in conspiracy theories concerning the princes (especially on the question of whether she believed them to be alive) but Henry's motives become clear when recalled in the context of the period.

This was an era of visual symbols and display: kings projected their power and significance in palaces decorated with their badges, in rich clothes and elaborate ceremonies. Elizabeth Woodville, like her sons, was being denied the images of a great funeral with its effigies, banners and grand ceremonial. This caused negative comment at the time. But with Warbeck's appearance, Henry wanted to avoid any nostalgia for the past glories of the House of York.

It was 1497 before Perkin Warbeck was captured. Henry then kept him alive because he wanted Warbeck publicly and repeatedly to confess his modest birth. Warbeck was eventually executed in 1499. Yet even then Henry continued to fear the power of the vanished princes. Three years later, it was given out that condemned traitor Sir James Tyrell had, before his

execution, confessed to arranging their murder on Richard's orders. Henry VIII's chancellor, Thomas More, claimed he was told the murdered boys had been buried at the foot of some stairs in the Tower, but that Richard had asked for their bodies to be reburied with dignity and that those involved had subsequently died so the boys' final resting place was unknown – a most convenient outcome for Henry.

While the princes' graves remained unmarked, the tomb of Henry VI came to rival the internationally famous tomb of Thomas Becket at Canterbury as a site of mass pilgrimage. Henry ran a campaign to have his half-uncle beatified by the pope, which continued even after Henry's death, ending only with Henry VIII's break with Rome. The Reformation then brought to a close the cult of saints in England. Our cultural memories of their power faded away, which explains why we overlook the significance of the cult of Henry VI in the fate of the princes.

In 1674, long after the passing of the Tudors, two skeletons were recovered in the Tower, in a place that resembled More's

description of the princes' first burial place. They were interred at Westminster Abbey, not far from where Henry VII lies. In 1933, they were removed and examined by two doctors. Broken and incomplete, the skeletons were judged to be two children, one aged between seven and 11 and the other between 11 and 13. The little bones were returned to the abbey, and whoever they were, remain a testament to the failure of Richard and Henry to bury the princes in eternal obscurity. **II**

Leanda de Lisle is a historian and writer. Her book *Tudor: The Family Story (1437–1603)* was published by Chatto and Windus in 2013

DISCOVER MORE

BOOKS

- **Blood and Roses** by Helen Castor (Faber & Faber, 2005)
- **The Last Days of Richard III and the Fate of his DNA** by John Ashdown Hill (History Press, 2013)
- **Bosworth: The Birth of the Tudors** by Chris Skidmore (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2013)

FREE DISPLAY
From 1 September 2015

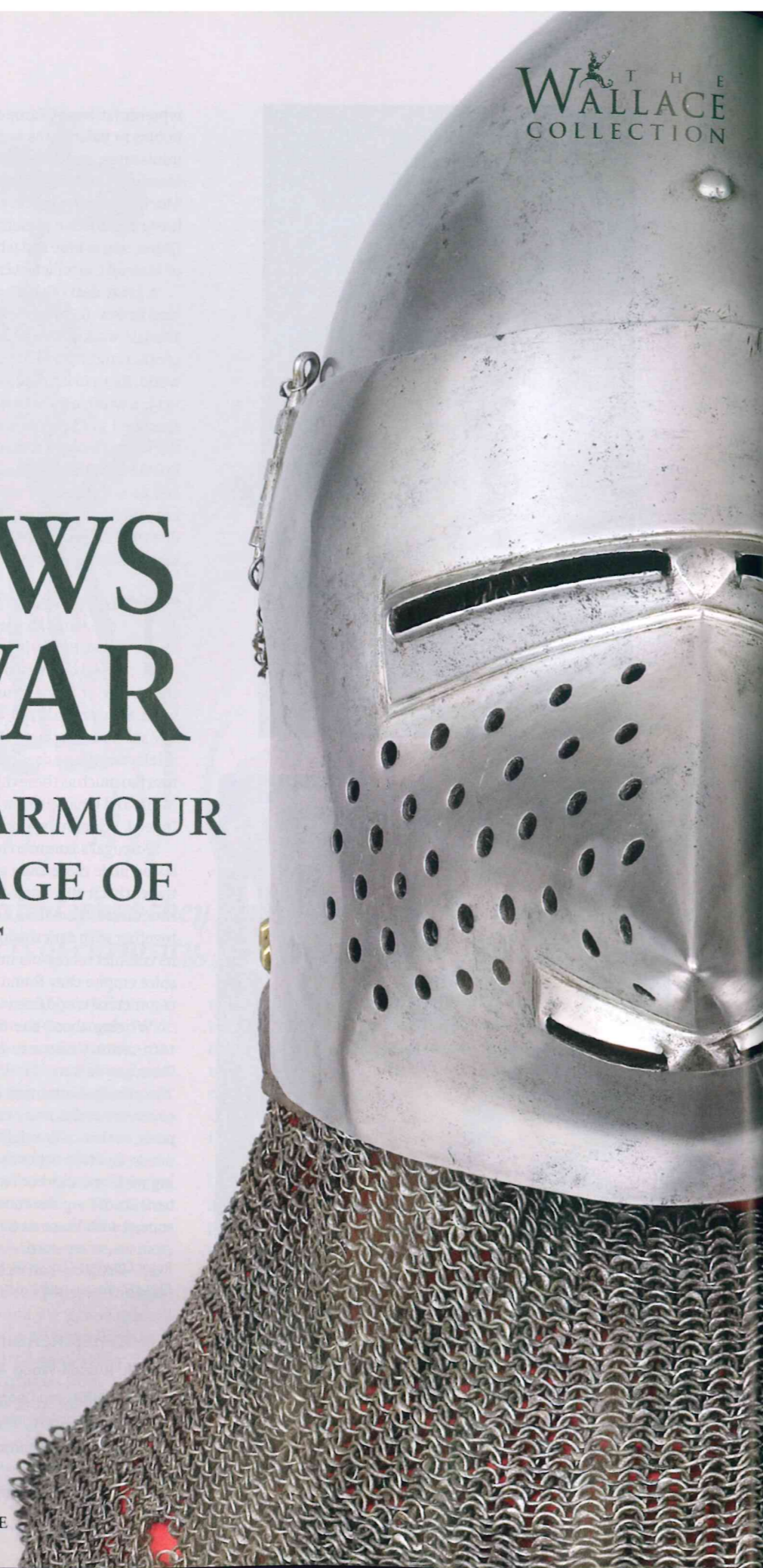
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THE SINEWS OF WAR

ARMS AND ARMOUR
FROM THE AGE OF
AGINCOURT

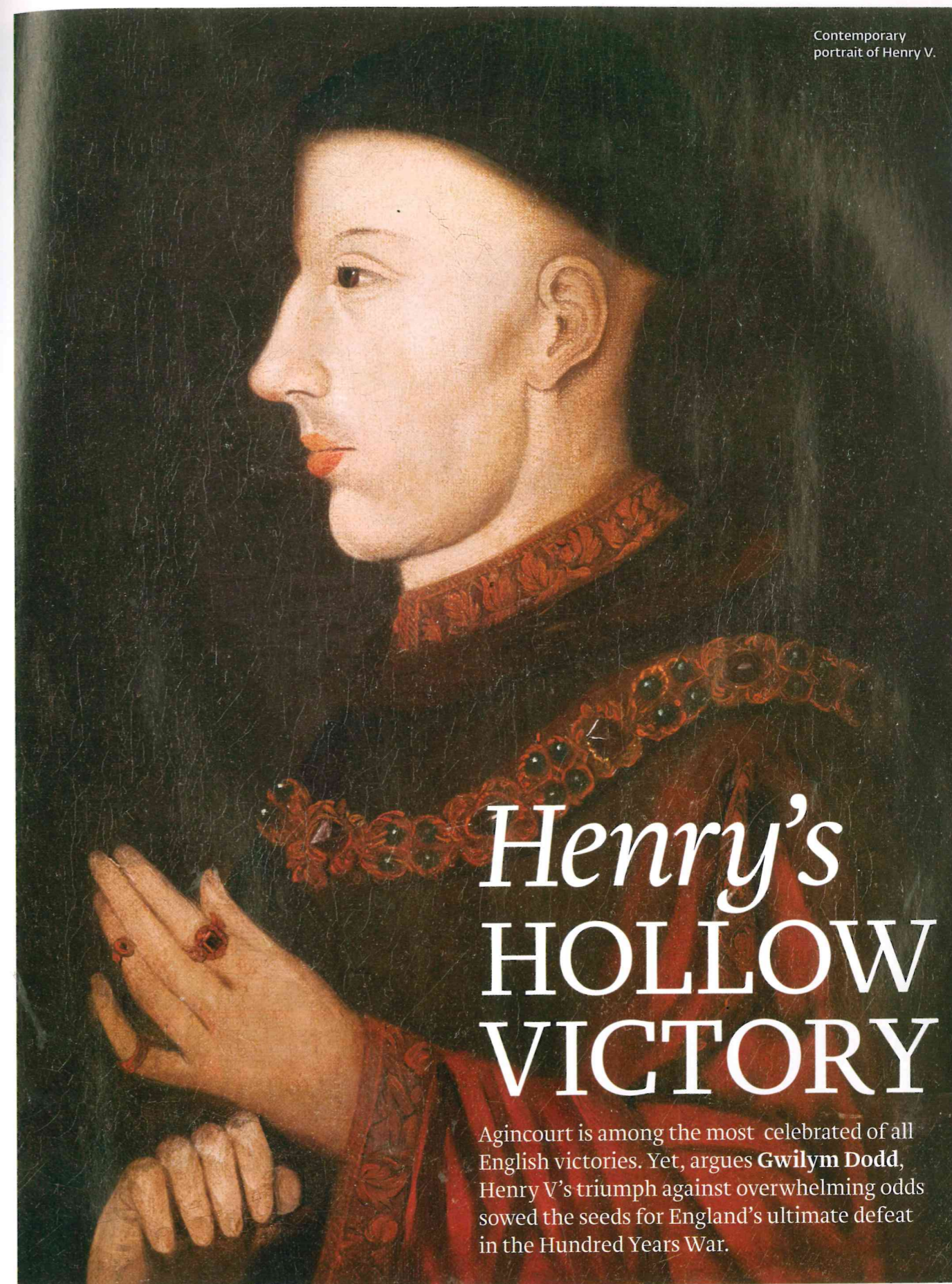
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A FAMILY COLLECTION
A NATIONAL MUSEUM
AN INTERNATIONAL TREASURE HOUSE



AGINCOURT

Contemporary
portrait of Henry V.



Henry's HOLLOW VICTORY

Agincourt is among the most celebrated of all English victories. Yet, argues **Gwilym Dodd**, Henry V's triumph against overwhelming odds sowed the seeds for England's ultimate defeat in the Hundred Years War.



The Battle of Agincourt, from the *Chronique d'Enguerrand de Monstrelet*, 15th century.

TIRED AND EXHAUSTED after a two week march, on October 25th, 1415 an English army inflicted a crushing defeat on the flower of French chivalry near a village in Picardy called Agincourt. It was a victory that seemed to sum up the indomitable spirit of the English nation: steadfastness, tenacity and pluck in the face of severe adversity. The focus of Shakespeare's play on Agincourt reflected the pivotal moment the battle held in the reign of Henry V (r. 1413-22). It also ensured that his reputation as one of England's most capable and successful monarchs came to be defined to a large extent by the victory he achieved on St Crispin's Day, 1415. Yet, on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of Agincourt, there is room to question the quality of leadership that Henry displayed and the unblemished reputation which he has subsequently enjoyed. On the surface, Agincourt was a great victory, but history shows that great victories often lead commanders into self-delusion, enticing them to pursue over-ambitious and ultimately unrealisable political and military goals.

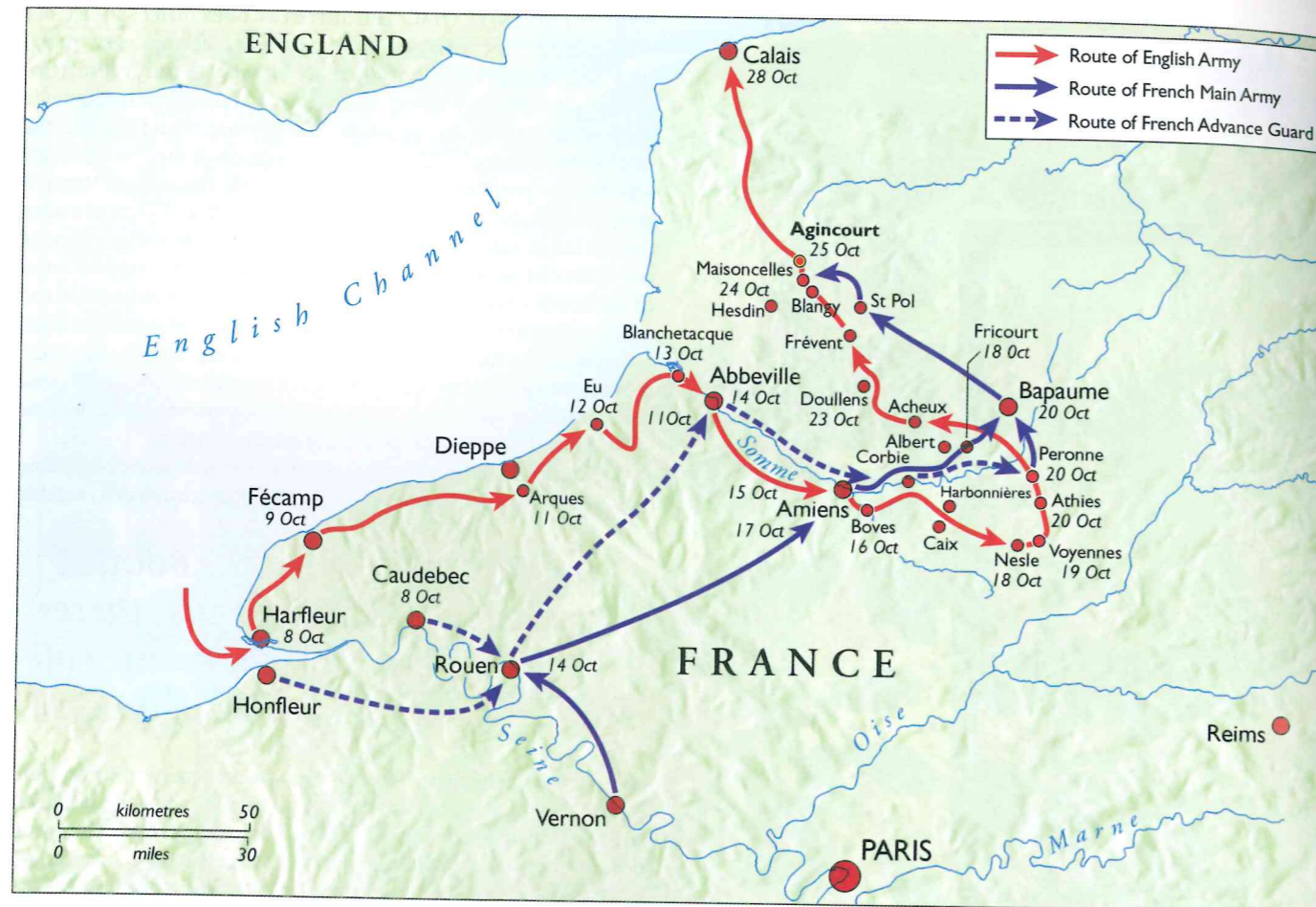
In three main respects credit can be given to the English for winning at Agincourt. First, the English army had in its king a dynamic, capable

On the occasion of the 600th anniversary of Agincourt, there is room to question the quality of leadership which Henry displayed

and experienced tactician. Henry V, at 29 years of age, was in the prime of his life when Agincourt was fought. His early adult life had been spent fighting to secure the crown for his father, initially at the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403 (when he had been in the thick of the action and was wounded in the face by an arrow) and latterly in command of the English forces which successfully pacified Wales. Henry was no remote, armchair general: his presence, with his army, at Agincourt inspired confidence and respect among his troops. Shakespeare's celebrated scene depicting the king addressing his army on the eve of battle is almost certainly grounded in historical truth. He had been with his army since it had landed on French soil on August 14th and in that time he had also established a reputation as a disciplinarian: he famously had a soldier hanged for stealing from a French church.

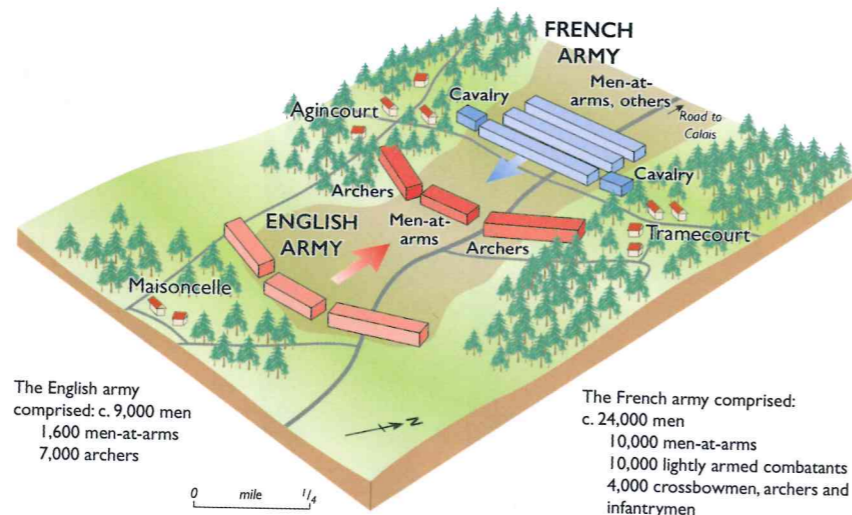
SECOND, HENRY AND HIS CAPTAINS displayed considerable acumen in the way they prepared the English army for battle. Although it was the French who had selected the general location for the clash of arms, the English were still allowed some initiative in how they deployed their forces. Crucially, the true strength of the archers, positioned mostly on the flanks of the main body of English men-at-arms, was obscured from the French, partly because of the favourable lie of the land and partly because the woods and scrubland on the edges of the battlefield could be used for concealment. The English archers were, as is well known, a decisive factor in securing victory for their side, but they were also vulnerable, especially to cavalry charge. Henry and his advisers recognised this and duly ordered that each archer prepare a stake, measuring six feet long, to be driven into the ground to form a protective barrier. Whether or not this was decisive in blunting the French cavalry during the battle itself is unclear, but it would have given the archers enough sense of security to allow them to concentrate on their deadly fire.

Third, the decisive factor which handed victory to the English at Agincourt was the combined use of archers and men-at-arms (the former comprising yeomen, the latter knights and esquires). It is often thought that the English archers won the day on their own, but this is not true. Their sustained fire into the ranks of the French vanguard as it advanced towards the English positions did not stop it but signif- ▶



icantly blunted its effectiveness as a fighting force. They were thus easy prey for the relatively fresh lines of waiting English men-at-arms, who can take equal credit with the archers for breaking the back of the French army. But the archers were still vital. What made the English force distinctive was the overwhelming preponderance of archers to men-at-arms – a ratio of 5:1 in an army comprising around 6,000 men altogether, according to the latest estimates. The French suffered grievously at the hands of the English archers because there were so many of them, perhaps as many as 5,000. It has been estimated that the French army, in comparison, totalled around 24,000 men, of whom at least 10,000 were men-at-arms, 10,000 lightly armed combatants and 4,000 a mixture of crossbowmen, archers and infantrymen. This gave the English army the advantage in terms of its ability to kill or wound from a distance, but it put it at a disadvantage in the event of close quarter, hand-to-hand fighting.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION arises: did the English really win the battle, or did the French lose it? While it is important to acknowledge the martial achievements of the English, it is worth asking whether any of this would have made a difference had the French played their hand differently. The answer must be 'no'. The French had it within their grasp to inflict a decisive defeat on the English, but a number of ill-considered decisions, their overconfidence and bad luck combined to let victory slip through their fingers.



Top: Henry's Agincourt campaign. Above: the battle of Agincourt.

THE SITE OF THE BATTLE was not selected with due care. As we have seen, the narrowness of the battlefield allowed the English army to use the terrain to its advantage, in particular by using the woods to hamper outflanking movements. Second, the French army was still assembling when battle was joined, which meant that it was not up to strength and lacked cohesion. Third, and crucially, the French plan to attack the English archers with cavalry ahead of the advance of the dismounted French men-at-arms, foundered for lack of

numbers. Had these attacks been pressed home, inflicting substantial losses on the archers, it is highly doubtful whether the English men-at-arms would have been able to withstand the onslaught of the French vanguard. The important point is that the French *knew* how to beat the English, even if on the day their plan did not work. Finally, it rained the night before. This made the ground soft and difficult for the French men-at-arms, clad in heavy armour and dismounted, to traverse the field quickly and easily.

On balance, then, the French should have won the battle. They were the stronger military power. The French were overconfident not because they were arrogant, but because they had every reason to think it would be an easy win. They were not alone in thinking this: Henry himself understood it. It should be remembered that the English army had been trying to escape from French forces when its path was blocked at Agincourt and battle was forced upon it. At one point in the march Henry had been approached by French heralds inviting him to do battle at Aubigny in Artois. According to some sources, Henry had accepted the challenge and began marching due north to the rendezvous, but soon changed his mind and diverted his army onto a more direct route towards Calais, steering clear of Aubigny. One English source says of the English at this point that 'their hearts were quaking with fear' at the prospect of fighting the French, and another that prayers were said that God might 'turn away from us the violence of the French'. They knew

The French were overconfident not because they were arrogant, but because they had every reason to think it would be an easy win

that the advantage lay with their adversaries. Perhaps it was in some way an acknowledgement of just how unexpected the victory had been and how close the English had come to catastrophe that so much emphasis was placed on the victory at Agincourt as a sign of God's approval. How else was the victory to be explained when the odds were stacked so heavily against the English?

WHY, THEN, DID THE ENGLISH ARMY find itself in such a perilous position? It is here that we confront an unpalatable truth, for the situation which confronted Henry's army – of trying to reach Calais without being caught by the enemy, of being unable to cross the Somme at the preferred location of Blanchetaque near the coast, of then having to march inland deeper and deeper into enemy territory to find a suitable crossing and of then being trapped by a far superior enemy and forced into battle – was entirely avoidable. Henry's initial intention had been to seize the strategically vital port of Harfleur, situated on the mouth of the Seine, before marching southwards to Bordeaux. Yet the siege and eventual capture of Harfleur took longer than expected and by the beginning of October it was clear that Henry had left it too late for his planned march southwards. But what to do instead? The siege had taken its toll on Henry's force: it is estimated that over 2,000 men had died of dysentery and a further 2,000 men had been invalided home. With another 500 men-at-arms and 1,000 archers needed to garrison Harfleur, the force which Henry had at his disposal was drastically weakened. By any measure, the sensible thing would have been to set sail for England and return the following year. This is what Henry's advisers wished to do, but Henry would not countenance the idea and it was at his personal insistence that the army struck out northwards to try to reach Calais overland. A contemporary English chronicler, writing in about 1417, recorded the key moment:



English soldiers escort captured French men-at-arms from the battlefield at Agincourt, illustration from the *Vigil of Charles VII*, c.1484.

Although a large majority of the royal council advised against such a proposal as it would be highly dangerous for him in this way to send his small force, daily growing smaller, against the multitude of the French, our king – relying on divine grace and the justice of his cause, piously reflecting that victory consists not in a multitude but with Him ... who bestows victory upon whom He wills, with God affording His leadership ... did nevertheless decided to make that march.

It seems then that the king could not bear the idea of restricting his military achievements of that year to the siege and capture of Harfleur. He needed more to show for the huge expense and trouble that the expedition of 1415 had cost. Moreover, Henry's reputation and pride were at stake. But the very notion that the English could march all the way to Calais, 144 miles distant, without encountering a sizeable French force was at best optimistic and at worst hopelessly misconceived. Such a decision could not be justified on its own terms, so writers resorted to the image of divinely inspired leadership to explain the king's actions. Above all, it was victory at Agincourt which retrospectively justified Henry's most extraordinarily risky dalliance with Fortune's wheel.

RECENT work on the 1415 campaign has argued that, from the outset, Henry was motivated by a strong religious zeal and an unbending faith in God's support. It is more likely that Henry was simply a strong-willed, impetuous young man intent on action and adventure. He was a born soldier, wholly immersed in the martial culture of the day and impatient to make a name for himself. Following the English deliverance at Agincourt, both Henry and his subjects were nevertheless quick to conclude that such an improbable victory would never have occurred had the English cause not met with the approval of God. This set of circumstances, in which the military and strategic ambitions of a forceful young king were nourished by an absolute conviction in divine providence as a result of the victory at Agincourt, had a profound impact on the course of the rest of Henry V's reign.

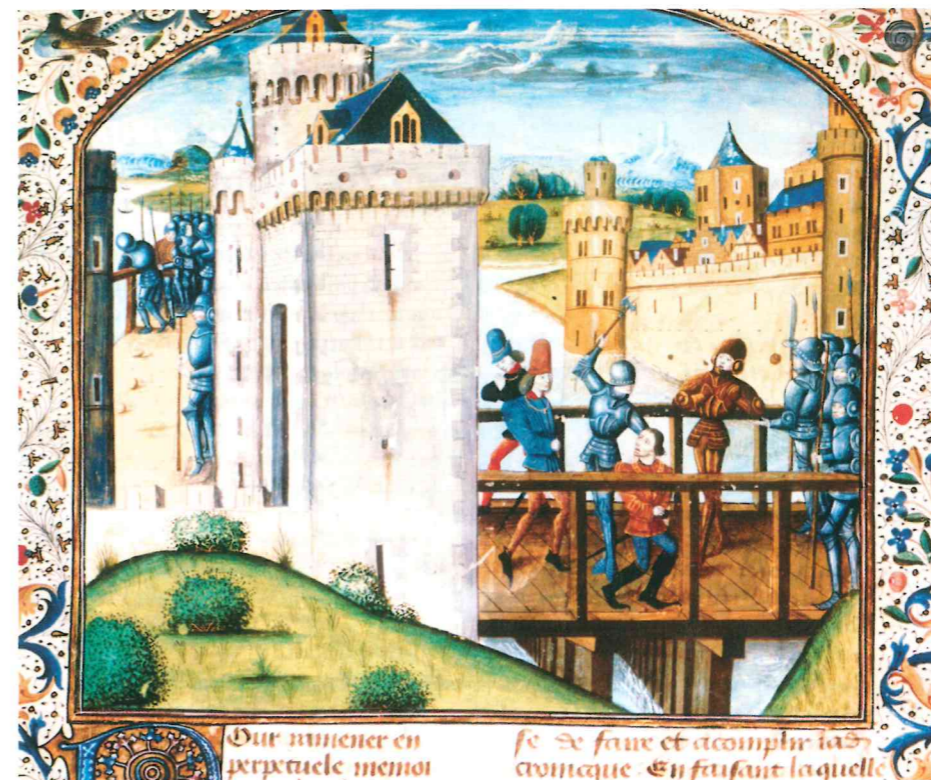
There were two immediate legacies of Agincourt. First, in practical terms, the English were now unquestionably the stronger military force. The French army had been decimated on the battlefield: estimates put their losses in the region of 6,000 men, with some 2,000 of those being princes, nobles and men-at-arms. In comparison, English losses were minimal: the Duke of York and young Earl of Suffolk were the only casualties of note. No fewer than seven senior members of the French royal family had been killed, including the dukes of Bar, Brabant and Alençon. In spite of Henry's infamous (but entirely understandable) order to kill those French prisoners in English hands at the closing stages of the battle, when he feared a renewed French assault, numerous important French captives were taken, including the dukes of Orléans and Bourbon. These men were to wait many years before their release and their absence further depleted France of its military commanders. In contrast, the English star was ascendant and within months plans were afoot for a new expedition to cross the Channel. This was the second legacy of the Agincourt campaign: the great wave of enthusiasm and confidence which swept over the land after the victory

John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, by anonymous Flemish artist, 15th century.



in 1415 gave added impetus to the plans of Henry and his commanders to extend English control in France. Their target was Normandy. In a campaign that lasted over two years, between 1417 and 1419, the English succeeded in doing what they had never done before: conquering and occupying new territory within the kingdom of France. Caen was captured in September 1417, then Alençon, Mortagne and Bellême; in January 1418 Falaise fell; and, finally, after six months under siege, the biggest prize of all, Rouen, capitulated in January 1419. These years appeared to confirm Henry's reputation as England's greatest king.

BUT ALL THIS disguises the fundamental weakness of the English position and the deeply flawed nature of Henry's strategy. The ultimate success of the English in France rested not on the conquest and occupation of Normandy, but on persuading the French that their situation was so hopeless that they had no choice but to seek terms and accede



Clockwise from above: the assassination of John the Fearless on the Montreuil bridge by men loyal to the future Charles VII, 1419, from the *Chroniques d'Enguerrand de Monstrelet*, early 15th century; Philip, Duke of Burgundy, by Rogier van der Weyden, c.1445; 'English archery wins at Agincourt', an illustration from Rudyard Kipling and C.R.L. Fletcher's *A History of England*, 1911.



The king of France had been forced to the negotiating table and had agreed in principle to hand his country over to be ruled by the Lancastrian dynasty



parchment at least, Henry had won the war. The king of France had been forced to the negotiating table and had agreed in principle to hand his country over to be ruled by the Lancastrian dynasty. Not even Edward III had come close to this in the days of English success in the mid-14th century. But the triumph of the treaty of Troyes, like the victory at Agincourt, was mainly illusory. The treaty could say what it liked. The reality was that half of France was still controlled by the Dauphin and he remained implacably hostile to an agreement which effectively barred him from his inheritance. Little had changed, except that the treaty now placed an explicit obligation on Henry to challenge the Dauphin and overrun Armagnac territory. Far from heralding a new era of peace and prosperity, the treaty of Troyes committed England to a war with no end in sight.

to the English demands. For Henry the only realistic way this could be achieved was by exploiting the split that existed within the French nobility between the Burgundians and Armagnacs and persuading one of the two sides to join him. In October 1416 Henry had reached an accord with John 'the Fearless', Duke of Burgundy, who agreed to recognise Henry as king of France once a sizeable part of the kingdom had fallen under English control. But John's commitment to Henry was unreliable and in September 1418 he drew closer to the Dauphin, son of Charles VI and leader of the Armagnacs. When Henry attempted to negotiate with the French in May 1419, now having conquered Normandy, Burgundy walked away from the talks. It was a key moment, for it showed that, even in the face of internal division and the loss of territory and with an ineffective king and little immediate hope of military revival, the French were still confident enough to resist making significant concessions. For the English, too, it was at this moment that the realisation must have dawned that winning a major battle and conquering Normandy had not necessarily brought overall victory any closer.

THEN a most extraordinary event occurred that entirely transformed the situation for Henry. On September 10th, 1419, when the Duke of Burgundy met the Dauphin at Montreuil, Burgundy was cut down and killed by one of the Dauphin's attendants. It is not clear whether this was pre-planned or a terrible misunderstanding, but the result was the same. The duke's son, Phillip, became the sworn enemy of the Dauphin and immediately joined the English. The treaty of Troyes (May 21st, 1420) was the direct outcome of this new Anglo-Burgundian partnership. It was unquestionably a diplomatic triumph for Henry: by its terms, Charles VI agreed to the marriage of his daughter Catherine to Henry; once Charles died, the French crown would immediately devolve upon Henry and his heirs. On



IT IS TELLING THAT when news of the treaty of Troyes filtered through to Henry's subjects there was no spontaneous rejoicing. The reception was distinctly lukewarm. When Parliament met in December 1420 concerns were expressed about what status England would have once Henry ruled over the two kingdoms. More importantly, MPs asserted that, with the settlement of France on Henry and his heirs, England no longer had any obligation to fund the continuation of the war. The hearts of Englishmen were no longer in the fight: they no longer shared their king's dream for a cross-Channel empire. When Henry returned to France in June 1421 he did so without having secured a grant of taxation to fund his campaigning. More seriously, it became clear that a Herculean effort would be needed to defeat the Dauphin. These were bitter months. Henry marched south to seize Orléans, but after three days surveying the city's defences he withdrew, realising that its capture lay beyond his capabilities. He then directed his efforts at reducing Armagnac-held towns to the south-east of Paris, but quickly discovered that even capturing small places required huge outlays of treasure, material and time. Nowhere was this clearer than in the siege of Meaux, which lasted between October 6th, 1421 and May 10th, 1422. If a town of even modest size took seven months to take, what hope was there that English forces could roll up the vast hinterland of Armagnac-held territory south of the Loire? There are signs that even Henry understood the hopelessness of his task when he allowed those members of the garrison of Meaux who remained loyal to the Dauphin to pass unmolested through his lines to rejoin their own side. It was at Meaux that Henry contracted the illness that would kill him. It was probably just as well that it did, for his untimely death saved him from confronting the fact that his designs on France could never be realised.

The wedding of Henry V and Catherine of Valois, French, 1487.

The victory at Agincourt gave Henry the initiative, but in the end he became a prisoner of his own ambitions

Agincourt was a hollow victory because it engendered unrealistic expectations and, in particular, it blinded Henry and his advisers to the strategic impossibility that England could ever subdue its neighbour across the Channel. At no point in the Hundred Years War was France as weak as it was in the period 1415-21 and yet Henry was no closer to winning the conflict in 1415 or 1420 than any other English king in the 14th or 15th centuries. This harsh truth was evident to contemporaries. In the late 14th century, Charles V is reported to have commented that:

England was only a little country by comparison with France, for he had ridden the length and breadth of it several times and had given much thought to its resources. Of the four or five regions into which one could divide the kingdom of France the poorest would offer more revenue, more towns and cities, more knights and squires than the whole of England. He was amazed at how they had ever mustered the strength to achieve the conquests they had.

IN THE NEGOTIATIONS which preceded the long truce of 1396 the French had also pointed out that 'they did not have sufficient strength to conquer the kingdom of England, and ... the English were in no way strong enough to subjugate France'. It was this plain fact which persuaded Henry's predecessor, Richard II (1377-99), that England's interests were best served by peace. But Henry was a soldier, not a peacemaker. He wanted to prove himself a capable military commander. It was in pursuit of this goal that he recklessly risked the lives of his soldiers in an ill-conceived march to Calais from Harfleur. For sure, he led his soldiers bravely in battle, but a responsible commander should never have put his forces at such risk in the first place. The victory at Agincourt gave Henry the initiative, but in the end he became a prisoner of his own ambitions and in the process of trying to realise them he subjected both England and France to one of the most intensive periods of fighting seen in the war. The greatest tragedy for England, however, lay in the twin legacies which Henry left after his death, for he not only lumbered the kingdom with foreign policy goals impossible to fulfil, but also an infant son whose mental deficiencies – almost certainly inherited from his grandfather Charles VI – were to prove catastrophic and were to lead to the sort of ruinous divisions in England that had existed in France during the 1410s. In a number of different ways, Henry had sown the seeds of England's final defeat in the Hundred Years War 30 years later.

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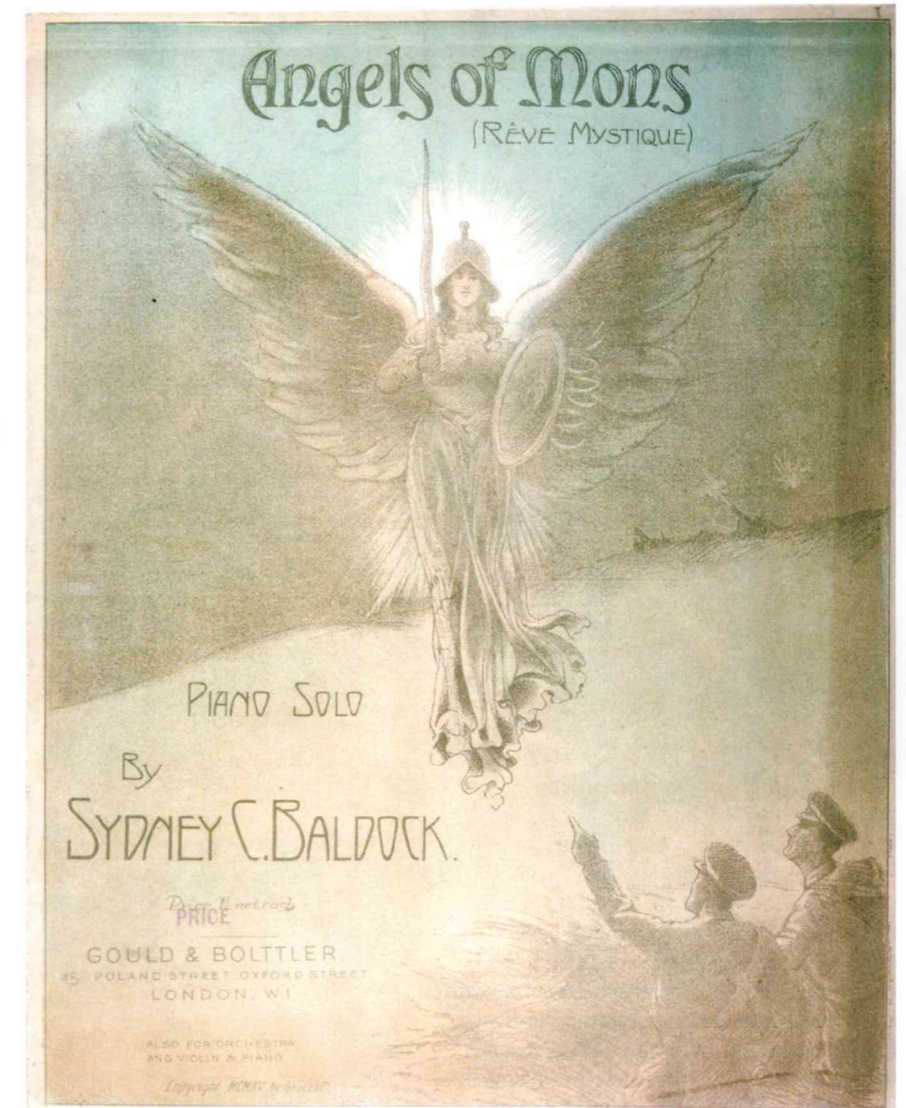
FURTHER READING

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Anne Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations* (The Boydell Press, 2000); *Agincourt: A New History* (Tempus Publishing, Stroud, 2005).

Ian Mortimer, *1415: Henry V's Year of Glory* (The Bodley Head, 2009).

The cover of sheet music for a song inspired by rumours of angelic intervention on the Western Front, 1915.



By the time of the 500th anniversary of Henry V's victory, British troops were once more struggling against overwhelming odds in northern France. **Stephen Cooper** looks at how Britons of the Great War found inspiration in the events of St Crispin's Day, 1415.

The Legacy of Agincourt

HOW WAS THE 500th anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt celebrated? An inspection of the British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) for October 1915 provides several answers; but first we should look back to August 1914 and the opening of the Great War, when a short story by Arthur Machen entitled *The Bowmen* was published in the *Evening News*. Ostensibly, it was about the Battle of Mons, when 80,000 men of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF)

encountered approximately 300,000 Germans around 70 miles from the village of Azincourt in Picardy. The story was that the British were assisted by a ghostly line of figures that appeared on the horizon. These were the bowmen of Agincourt, arriving to help their beleaguered descendants, and they duly proceeded to shoot the Germans down in droves. Machen's story was pure fiction, but many readers took it for reportage and, as it was told and retold, it became the foundation for the legend of the Angels of Mons.