

## The Hundred Years' War

### The Dynastic Conflict

The last son of King Philip IV, the Fair, died in 1328, and the direct male line of the Capetians finally ended after almost 350 years. Philip had a daughter Isabelle and she married King Edward II of England and they gave birth to Edward III. He was therefore Philip's grandson and successor in a direct line through Philip's daughter. The French could not tolerate the idea that Edward III might become King of France. French lawyers brought up some old Frankish laws, called the *Salic Law*, which stated that property, including the throne could not descend through a female. The French then gave the crown to Philip of Valois, a nephew of King Philip IV. Nevertheless, Edward III had a valid claim to the throne of France if he chose to pursue it.

1. What is Salic Law?
2. How did this law create a conflict between England and France?

### The English Attempt to Claim the Throne

France was the wealthiest and most populous country in Western Europe with around 20 million people. England, however, with its 4-5 million people had a strong central government, many veterans fighting in the army, a thriving economy, and a popular king. Edward was organized to fight France, and his subjects were more than ready to support their young king.

In 1338 England invaded Northern France under the rule of Edward III. Although the French army heavily outnumbered the English, the English were well prepared. The French had assembled a great fleet to support an army with which they intended to crush all opposition. When the French ships docked in the Netherlands, the English attacked and destroyed the fleet with fire ships. This was a huge early victory for the English. The English now had control of the English Channel and the North Sea. This was a major advantage for the British because they could now control trade and influence the war against France. They were safe from French invasion and could attack France at will. This would ensure that the war would be fought on French soil, and thus be a French expense. In 1343 a three-year truce was signed.

The peace did not last. In 1345 Edward invaded again. A year later the English won the Battle of Crecy. This was in spite of being weakened by the Black Death, and being heavily outnumbered. The French were massacred by the English because of their position on the battlefield. Their army made excellent use of the longbow, which cut the French knights and their horses down from hundreds of yards away. This was a major defeat for the French.

1. How did the gaining the English Channel help the English?
2. What happened at the Battle of Crecy?

### The War Continues

The next thirteen years were characterized by a series of truces and battles. In 1360 the Peace of Bretigny ended the first phase of the war. England got by far the better deal in terms of land. Nine years passed before the French, now under the rule of Charles V renewed the war. At around this time the French began to use guerrilla warfare tactics. They realized that in normal military conflicts they were

likely to come out second best, and so turned to attacking unprotected towns and villages, pilfering what they could, and then burning the habitat. Using this method the French were able to reclaim much of the land they lost in the Peace of Bretigny truce. In 1377, Edward III died, and this coupled with the death of his master military tactician son, the Black Prince, a year earlier, caused England to become weak. Fighting ended in 1386. Ten years later an uneasy truce was signed, with England still having control of the English Channel.

In 1414 Henry V of England, laid claim to the French throne and a year later his forces invaded. The French, weakened by infighting, lost several key battles including the Battle of Agincourt. Consequently, by 1420, England controlled all of France North of the Loire River. In that same year Charles VI of France signed the Treaty of Troyes, which recognized Henry V as his heir. It also declared his eldest son to be illegitimate. Charles the younger, later to be Charles VII refused to recognize the treaty though, and continued to fight the English.

In 1422 Henry V and Charles VI both died. The son of Charles (Charles VII) declared himself king, whilst the English claimed that infant king Henry VI was now king of France. Generally, those South of the Loire recognized Charles as King, whilst those North of the river recognized Henry as King.

1. How did the French change their tactics against the English?
2. What was the Treaty of Troyes?

#### Joan of Arc and the End of the War

The heroine of the Hundred Years' War was a French teenager named Joan of Arc. In 1429, convinced that heavenly voices were directing her to rescue France from the English, Joan of Arc led the French army against an English fort blocking the way to Orleans. Leading the French army in a charge against the English fort, Joan of Arc succeeded in breaking the siege at Orleans. After the battle, she convinced the son of the previous French king, Charles VII, to accompany her to Reims; there he was crowned king, restoring the French throne to the French monarch. Joan of Arc was captured the following year by the English, condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake in 1431. In 1436 Charles retook Paris. For the next thirteen years there was no action from either side. The Hundred Years War ended with France retaking Normandy in 1451, and by 1453 England had small holdings in Northern France.

The Hundred Years' War contributed to the development of the nation-state in Europe by elevating the power of the king and promoting a spirit of nationalism in both England and France. The demise of feudalism, accompanied by the growth of towns and the rise of universities, would lead to an ever-increasing appreciation for learning and the development of self-rule in Western Europe.

1. Who was the heroine who changed the war?
2. What was her fate?
3. What were the effects of the Hundred Years' War?

### An Account during the Hundred Years' War

In his account of the Hundred Years' War, the fourteenth-century French chronicler Jean Froissart described the sack of the fortified French town of Limoges by the Black Prince, Edward, the Prince of Wales.

For about a month, certainly not longer, the Prince of Wales remained before Limoges. During that time he allowed no assaults or skirmishes, but pushed on steadily with the mining. The knights inside and the townspeople, who knew what was going on, started a countermine in the hope of killing the English miners, but it was a failure. When the Prince's miners who, as they dug, were continually shoring up their tunnel, had completed their work, they said to the Prince, "My lord, whenever you like now we can bring a big piece of the wall down into the moat, so that you can get into the city quite easily and safely."

The Prince was very pleased to hear this. "Excellent," he said. "At six o'clock tomorrow morning, show me what you can do."

When they knew it was the right time for it, the miners started a fire in their mine. In the morning, just as the Prince had specified, a great section of the wall collapsed, filling the moat at the place where it fell. For the English, who were armed and ready waiting, it was a welcome sight. Those on foot could enter as they liked, and did so. They rushed to the gate, cut through the bars holding it and knocked it down. They did the same with the barriers outside, meeting with no resistance. It was all done so quickly that the people in the town were taken unawares. Then the Prince, the Duke of Lancaster, the Earl of Cambridge, Sir Guichard d'Angle, with all the others and their men burst into the city, followed by pillagers on foot, all in a mood to wreak havoc and do murder, and killing indiscriminately, for those were their orders. These were pitiful scenes. Men, women, and children flung themselves on their knees before the Prince crying: "Have mercy on us, gentle sir!" But he was so inflamed with anger that he would not listen. Neither man nor woman was heeded, but all who could be found were put to the sword, including many who were in no way to blame. I do not understand how they could have failed to take pity on people who were too unimportant to have committed treason. Yet they paid for it, and paid more dearly than the leaders who had committed it.

There is no man so hard-hearted that, if he had been in Limoges on that day, and had remembered God, he would not have wept bitterly at the fearful slaughter which took place. More than 3,000 persons, men, women, and children, were dragged out to have their throats cut. May God receive their souls, for they were true martyrs.

Source: Jean Froissart, *The Chronicles*

1. What does this account say about the Hundred Years' War?
2. What other account would be necessary to understand both sides of this event?
3. How would the other account help us understand what really happened in the town of Limoges?