

# England in the Middle Ages

## ***Germanic Invasion***

In the early fifth century, the Romans had to give up their provinces on the British Isles. Here the Romans had influenced the original Celtic\* population in many ways including the development of towns and the spreading of Christianity. But all the Roman armies were needed to defend the continental empire\* against Germanic tribes from Northern Europe who were being pushed south by the Huns\* or migrating south in search of more fertile lands and a warmer climate. (See chapter on the Migration Period.)

In the course of this migration, some Germanic tribes also moved west and settled in England which was no longer protected by the Romans. Possibly, some of these invaders had even been invited: Hengist\* and Horsa\*, chieftains\* of Anglo and Saxon tribes from the continent, helped a local king to fight against his enemies. But they did not leave. Instead, they invited more Angles and Saxons to follow them. Other chieftains followed this example, establishing Germanic kingdoms throughout the major part of England. In this process of Anglo-Saxon settlement, the Celtic people were gradually driven back to the edges of the British Isles. Since their Christianisation in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Angles and Saxons shared at least the same religious background with the Celts (The Celts had already converted to Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century). But all in all the Celtic culture remained undisturbed only in hilly areas difficult to conquer such as Wales in the west or Scotland in the north. Some Celtic tribes also left the British Isles completely and crossed the Channel to settle in the northwestern part of France which was named after them – “Brittany“ (= Little Britain).

## ***Viking Invasion***

A process comparable to the Germanic invasion took place again when the Vikings\* raided the British Isles in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century. Often seen as the last wave of the Migration Period, these people had probably left their home countries in Norway and Denmark to escape overpopulation, to explore new trade routes or to find wealthier and warmer lands in the South. Norwegian Vikings repeatedly raided Ireland, Scotland, and the North of England, while Danish Vikings attacked England’s eastern shores. Once again, the invaders started to settle on the island, but this time the Angles and Saxons were the defenders of the country they had made their home since the 5th century. Viking attacks were brutal: in 869, a large Danish army plundered the area around York and killed Edmund, the East Anglian\* King. This event shocked all of England as it opened the whole eastern part of the country to the Danes. From here, the Danes turned south towards the West-Saxon kingdom of Wessex\*. At this stage, its king Alfred the Great (849-99) was the last Saxon ruler independent of the Vikings. His triumph over the Danish king Guthrum at Edington in 878 probably saved the British Isles from becoming Viking altogether. In the Treaty of Wedmore, the Danes promised to leave Alfred’s territory. They also accepted Christianity which had become the leading religion of the Anglo-Saxon population at that time. In return, they were allowed to practice their Danish law in the areas northeast of a line running from London to Chester, the so-called “Danelaw.”

Anglo-Saxon codes of law were collected for the first time under Alfred’s guidance within his part of England. Alfred also employed monks to begin with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, England’s first written history. Thus, Alfred not only defended Anglo-Saxon England in a military way. This learned king also fostered the unification of the Anglo-Saxon tribes on a cultural level. Practically, this work was mainly done in the monasteries which were supported by Alfred. Good relations to the Church were a crucial basis of power for medieval kings. The idea that he and his family were chosen to protect Christianity on the British Isles made them special. The kings were still elected by the leaders of the most powerful families, but only descendants of Alfred were anointed from then on. Alfred’s successors managed to win back Danish territory step by step. The most influential of them, King Edgar (959-975), even had himself crowned “ruler of all England” in 973. Vikings and Germanic peoples had started to mix and formed an “English” population.

## **Norman Invasion**

Vikings, or 'Norsemen', had also settled on the French shore of the Channel, in 'Normandy'. The "Norsemen" intermarried with the local French population and also adopted their language and several customs, e.g. the Viking leaders – now dukes\* of Normandy – copied the French dukes' style of ruling their country. French rule was roughly based on the feudal and manorial systems as established in the Frankish kingdoms under Charlemagne.

5 Basically, the king was the highest liege lord\* and made the dukes his vassals\* by granting them a large piece of land (a fief\*). In return, the dukes swore loyalty to the king and had the duty to follow him in war. Within their duchy\*, the dukes then acted as liege lords themselves, granting lesser nobles fiefs. Of course, these fiefs were smaller than the pieces of land the dukes had been given by the king. Usually, the fiefs which the dukes passed on had the size of a "manor" (in this context =village)\*. The lords of those manors were then vassals to their  
10 dukes and often had to serve as the dukes' knights. They could only spare the time to practice the art of war because the work on their manor was done by "villeins."\* These unfree peasants received a strip of land to plant crops for their own living, but they also had to work the land of their lord. Additionally, they had to give a share of their own crops and pay for the use of their lord's mill or bread oven. They even had to pay taxes – often in the form of food – when they got married or had children. Villeins were not allowed to leave the village without  
15 their lord's consent. Although they could not be sold like slaves in ancient Rome, the villeins served at the bottom end of the feudal pyramid. The dukes at the top end, however, could gather wealth and power if they strictly enforced the feudal order. After all, they got taxes from all the manors, and the lords of the manors had to support them in battle. Depending on the size of their duchy, some dukes became as important as – or even more important than – the French kings themselves.

20 The English king Edward the Confessor\* was educated at the Norman court, the home of his mother's family. When he finally returned to England and became king, he had a Norman-style system of government in mind. However, the English nobles were not used to this comparatively strict feudal system. The most powerful among these English nobles were the Earls of Wessex. Although they were Edward's distant relatives, they tried to depose\* him. To solve this problem, Edward did two things: on the one hand, he called his mother's side of  
25 the family, the Normans, for help. His distant cousin William, Duke of Normandy, sent troops in 1051. On the other hand, he tried to create a peaceful union with the Earls of Wessex by marrying Earl Godwin's daughter Edith. Although this dual strategy helped King Edward to secure peace in his country at that moment, it caused an even larger fight after his death: King Edward's marriage to Edith of Wessex remained childless. When he died without an heir, both the House of Normandy and the House of Wessex claimed the throne.

30 William said that Edward had promised him the English crown as a reward for his troops in 1051. But no written document existed. So Harold, the young Earl of Wessex, regarded himself as the new king after Edward's death and let himself be crowned on 6 January 1066. Logically, William of Normandy did not accept this and prepared to invade the country.

35 However, this was not the only trouble the new English king Harold was in. King Harald Hardrada of Norway, as a distant relative, claimed the English crown, too. Indeed, England would have been a nice basis for a new Viking empire at the North Sea. King Hadraada sailed to the north of England and was waiting at a place called Stamford Bridge (north of York) to meet the English. However, by using a trick, King Harold could break the strong Norwegian lines: He made some of his men pretend to run away. The Norwegians – thinking the English were fleeing – ran after them, thus breaking their well-shielded lines. On their own, the Norwegian knights  
40 were killed one by one by Harold's men and King Hadraada himself was killed by an arrow in his throat. The battle lasted a long time and cost many lives on both sides.

King Harold's successful trick was used again only a few days later – but this time against himself! While the king and his army were fighting the Norwegians in the North, his other enemy, William of Normandy, landed on the south coast of England, at Pevensey, close to the town of Hastings. King Harold raced south from Stam-

ford Bridge to Hastings in only seven days, tiring out the English army which had already been weakened by the fight against the Norwegians. Nevertheless, Harold put up his troops on top of Senlac Hill outside Hastings, challenging William to fight. On the morning of 14 October, William's infantry attacked. As their arrows did not get through the English line of shields, the Normans used Harold's previous trick: Some Norman foot soldiers ran away, making the English think they were fleeing. Chasing after the Norman infantry, the English opened their shield wall, letting the Norman knights on their horses get through and easily kill the tired, isolated English knights. King Harold was allegedly hit in the eye by an arrow and then hacked to pieces. William, Duke of Normandy, had conquered England.

### ***England under Norman Rule***

As Harold's brothers had been killed in the Battle of Hastings, too, there was no Saxon left to claim the throne at that time, so William the Conqueror was crowned in Westminster Abbey\* on Christmas Day 1066. This abbey had been finished by the very religious King Edward the Confessor shortly before his death. By celebrating his coronation here, William wanted to underline two things: first, that he was a distant relative of King Edward and therefore the rightful heir to the English crown since William never saw himself as a conqueror. Second, he wanted to show that his reign was confirmed by God. But many Saxon noblemen were not impressed. In the years following William's coronation, they staged many rebellions against the new king. Among them were the sons of King Harold and distant relatives of Alfred the Great. However, the rebellions were not coordinated, and therefore William could crush them one after the other.

But of course, all those rebellions made William feel threatened in his new country. As a consequence, he made the defeated rebels build wooden motte and bailey castles\* for him of which many were later replaced by stone buildings. From these secure places, England was controlled by William or his tenants-in-chief, mainly Norman barons who had fought with William in the Battle of Hastings. As a reward, he granted them a part of his new land and, in return, they promised to remain loyal to him and to provide knights for his army. For their service, those knights again got a piece of land from the tenants-in-chief. The knights then granted pieces of their land to the villeins. So, with William the Conqueror, the strict feudal system finally arrived in England. Roughly, only 10% of the country remained in the hands of English noblemen. William took about 20% for himself and gave 25% to the Church. The largest part, about 45%, was divided among his Norman barons\*. In order to get an overview of his new lands and its riches, William sent officials around the country in 1085. They had to find out how much tax the former Saxon lords had collected within their manors. They also had to ask how many villeins, animals, fields, ploughs etc. the manor had. All the information was written down in the Domesday Book. On the basis of this book, it was determined how much money each baron had to pay the king. Often, the barons taxed their fiefs as much as they could, keeping a large extra part for themselves. This was harsh for the people, but they had no real chance to protest, for the Norman barons also functioned as sheriffs of the king, making sure law and order was kept in their part of the country. Although sheriffs – or “shire reeves\*” – had already existed in Saxon England, their power grew dramatically under William. Since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the shire reeve had to oversee the villeins' work and tax collection in his shire. As the reeve was often elected by the villeins of his shire, he tried to be fair to everybody, but this was not the case with the Norman barons any longer. They had nothing to do with the population. Shortly after the Battle of Hastings and the following rebellions, the Normans' main interest was to make much profit with the land they had won from their enemies. Keeping the population of their fiefs down so mercilessly, the barons fostered William's rule at the same time.

King William's sons made sure that no fight for the crown would break out again after their father died in 1087. Henry I, William's youngest son, finally died in 1135 without leaving behind a son. But Henry had already arranged for his daughter Matilda to become queen. Her son Henry II, inheriting his mother's English possessions and his father's County of Anjou, a large area south of Normandy, became ruler of the largest kingdom in

Europe at that time. His male descendants were to rule England for the next 331 years without anybody else seriously claiming the throne. Later, this dynasty became known as the “Plantagenets” because Henry’s father Geoffery of Anjou had always worn some special flowers (Latin: *Planta Genista*) on his coat or hat.

### **Origins of Parliamentary Monarchy**

As the Plantagenet kings did with the crown, the barons passed on their titles within the family, too. This practice had several effects on the future development of England: one effect was that the invaders, or at least their leaders, did not mix with the inhabitants of the conquered country as quickly as they had after the Germanic and the Viking invasions, e.g. the nobles kept on speaking Norman French at their courts for many generations. This can still be heard in the English language today, as many words of French origin (e.g. “royal,” “peace,” “melody,” “judge”) have survived. It was not until the reign of King Edward III (1327–1377) that English became the official language of the royal court again. The existence of two different languages for about three centuries also shows that it must have been very obvious who the rulers and the ruled were. It must have been clear to everybody which position each person held in the feudal system. Therefore, the barons’ practice of making their sons their heirs also had the effect of consolidating the Norman system of government. William the Conqueror’s appointment of his Norman supporters as barons also strengthened the king’s control of the country. In those early days, the barons were thankful to their king and happy with their new fiefs: they probably possessed more land than they ever had before. However, the fact that the barons’ titles became hereditary also developed into a problem for the kings. Some of these noble families became very powerful themselves. By enlarging their territory either by fighting or marrying into other noble families, they could greatly increase their income and number of knights. Officially, they still had to be loyal to their king, but trying to force these nobles to follow his orders could become very dangerous for a king. This was especially the case when several powerful nobles stood united. Consequently, the English monarchs had to make compromises with their nobles. Probably the best known and most influential of these compromises was the one between King John and his barons in June 1215, leading to the signing of the Magna Carta. King John (1199–1216), as all his Plantagenet predecessors, was not only the king of England but also duke of the French counties of Normandy and Anjou. The question whether the English monarch was only a normal duke in France who had to follow the French king or whether his French territories had a more independent status often led to conflicts between the English and the French kings. When such conflicts erupted between John and his French counterpart King Philip II (1180–1223), John lost most of the battles and finally even lost most of his possessions in France. Of course, King John wanted to win them back, but during his wars with Philip, he ran out of money as wars have always been expensive. Moreover, he no longer got taxes from the French counties he had lost, and therefore he wanted his barons to pay more. Although it might have been his official right to ask for taxes so often, it was not common. In the 50 years before John’s rule, barons only had to send soldiers or pay taxes to finance a war eleven times. Up until then, John had ruled for only 16 years and had already taxed them eleven times as well. Not surprisingly, the barons did not like this which led to some rebelling against the king. As John was obviously not a skilled military leader and as he had lost most of his troops against France, he could not risk a military clash with his own barons. When the rebels marched on London, John sent Stephen Langton, the Archbishop\* of Canterbury, to talk to them. The Archbishop of Canterbury was the head of the English Church and respected by everybody. So the rebels followed his advice to write down their complaints and present this list to King John. The list became quite long, consisting of 63 major complaints, and was therefore called the *Magna Carta\** (Latin for “Great Paper”). This document includes very special rights e.g. who was allowed to fish in the Thames, but it also includes rights which still form the basis of our personal freedoms today, e.g. that no man is to be found guilty of a crime if there is no evidence or witness against him. For the rebelling barons, though, the most important clause was that the king should not collect taxes or enlist soldiers from their counties without their consent. If he wanted to introduce special taxes,

the king had to send letters to all his barons and invite them to a meeting called the “Great Council.” The members of this Great Council then had to agree to the taxes.

Bishops and abbots\* also had to be invited to the Great Council. Since William the Conqueror had not distributed all English land amongst the barons, but had given about 25% to the bishops and big monasteries, they had become part of the feudal system, too. When Archbishop Stephen discussed their complaints with the barons, he made sure that the English Church secured its rights against the king, too. Moreover, Stephen included the clause that the English Church should have its own courts and should be free to choose its own bishops. In the past, making their personal friends bishop or abbot, the kings had often tried to indirectly control the lands officially granted to the Church. The question whether the king or the pope should elect bishops had therefore often led to quarrels between king and Church. The most famous of such quarrels was the one between King Henry II (1154–1189) and Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1170. Archbishop Stephen’s clause in the Magna Carta settled this dispute permanently in favour of the Church.

Although the meetings of the king, his barons and the English bishops and abbots did not take place regularly, they guaranteed the nobles some indirect influence on the way the country was governed. The nobles could not make decisions themselves, but they could practically ‘veto’ some of the king’s decisions by cutting his financial and military support. These meetings are sometimes regarded as the origin of Parliament\*, but since only the higher nobles were involved in the process at that time, they should be regarded more so as the origin of the House of Lords\*. Nevertheless, it would only take less than a century for the lesser nobles and burgesses to follow. Once again, the king needed additional money.

This time it was Edward I (1272–1307). King Edward tried to unite England, Wales and Scotland. Wales and Scotland had developed quite independently of England under Norman rule. The mountainous landscape was a good refuge for the Celtic population that had been driven back by the Angles and the Saxons in the Germanic Invasion. Later, during the Viking Invasion, the Scottish people had partly allied and mingled with the Norwegians in their fight against Germanic England. Both countries repeatedly rebelled against the English crown and Edward wanted to stop this once and for all. He succeeded in Wales where he made his son “Prince of Wales,” the official title for the heir to the English throne ever since. In Scotland, Edward I was victorious in several battles, too, but he could not conquer the country permanently. Scotland was too far away from his capital in London. Furthermore, the Scottish population was often more united than the Welsh in its resistance to the English. The Scots also had brilliant military leaders like William Wallace or Robert the Bruce, so it still took three more centuries until Scotland and England were governed by the same monarch. In 1603 the Scottish king James VI inherited the English throne from his English great-grandmother, eventually uniting the countries peacefully. King Edward’s attempts to govern both countries were less successful – but more expensive. To finance his campaigns, Edward I expelled all the Jews from England in 1290, keeping their property for the Crown. Many hundred Jews were killed in this process, and they were not officially allowed to return to England until 1656. As the Jewish property was not enough, though, Edward I had to ask the Great Council to allow new taxes. In addition to the Great Council, Edward I invited two knights from each county and two burgesses from each city, thus creating the Model Parliament in 1295.

Inviting the knights meant securing their loyalty; including the new social group of burgesses was very profitable. Burgesses\* were the leading inhabitants of the medieval towns. In these newly developing centres of trade, the burgesses could make much money. They often worked as specialised craftsmen whose guilds were organised like monopolies, or they were rich merchants who mainly traded in wool. The importance of these new groups in Parliament became reflected in the woolsack upon which the Lord Chancellor, the king’s most important minister, sat – and still sits today. The chancellor was one of the most important persons in Parliament because he was also part of the Royal Court. Different from Parliament, the Royal Court not only met irregularly, but it also continually gave advice to the king. In this court, the chancellor was originally responsible for keeping

the king's seal and documents and later developed into his most important minister. By placing this official on a sack of wool, the burgesses wanted to make clear to the king that all his decisions and actions were largely based on their money. Since the fourteenth century, kings have rarely been able to successfully govern their country without Parliament's consent. So a unique form of government had developed in England: On the one hand, the king held the highest position in the feudal pyramid, a position giving him much central power. On the other hand, this feudal system only functioned as long as the king was willing to listen to Parliament, and Parliament was basically a union of those people below the king in the feudal system. If those higher and lesser nobles united against the king, his central power was restricted.

### ***The Peasant Revolt of 1381***

Only the people at the lowest level in the feudal pyramid had absolutely no influence on the government: the unfree peasants\*. They were not allowed to leave the village without permission from their lord. Besides that, hardly any of them could read or write, so they could not communicate in written form either. They simply had to believe what they were told – and they had to do what they were told which was hard work on the lord's fields, whereas their own harvest was small. Consequently, the peasants usually had neither spare time nor energy to get involved in conflicts about e.g. taxation. Their situation was even worsened by the plague\*: the Black Death killed many people in the middle of the 14th century, and fewer peasants were left to do the same amount of work. As a result, those people left demanded fewer hours of work and lesser taxes, and sometimes even their own freedom. At first, the lords were willing to fulfill the peasants' wishes because they were happy that they still had people who farmed their land and herded their livestock. But in 1351, King Edward III (1327-1377) passed the Statute of Labourers which said that the landowners should not pay their peasants more than before the Plague and that they should not free them. This was a hard blow to the peasants. Finally, many peasants could not take it any longer: when the king's officials tried to collect the increased taxes in 1381, revolts broke out, especially in the Southeast of England. Led by Wat Tyler\*, the peasants marched to London. On their way they entered manor houses\* and burned documents of the villeins' labour services. As the common people opened the gates of London to the rebels, King Richard II and his followers fled to the Tower. Both sides agreed to meet at Smithfield outside London on June 14 to discuss the peasants' worries. While presenting the peasants' complaints to King Richard II, Wat Tyler was struck down by one of Richard's knights. Richard immediately told the rebels that he was their new leader and promised them the Charters of Freedom to calm them down. Richard's officials even wrote such documents for the peasants to show their lords as proof. But Richard never meant to keep his promise: once the crisis was over and the huge rebel army separated, Richard sent his knights after each peasant group on their way back home. All the leaders were executed and many of the farmers killed. As a result of the revolt, the peasants had to accept their social position for the rest of the Middle Ages – and higher taxes as well. With order restored in England and the financial situation improved, Richard II could take up his war against the French king again.

# France in the Middle Ages

## *The Capetian Dynasty*

In 987, the last direct descendant of the Carolingians died. The nobles elected Hugh Capet hoping for a weak king they could influence easily. Hugh had inherited some land around Paris from his father, Hugh the Great, but this was the only land which he owned personally – his domain. The other parts of “his” kingdom were ruled by other lords. Of course, as their king, he had also become their overlord in the feudal system, but, in reality, Hugh  
5 Capet could not simply force them to follow his orders. As many nobles had more land and knights than Hugh, he decided to make friends with some of them, e.g. the important Dukes of Normandy (q.v. Norman Invasion) who gave him enough military support to fight others, if necessary. In this way, Hugh and his sons could slowly enlarge their domain. Apart from growing personal power, the Capetian\* dynasty was further strengthened by its constant line of male descendants. When Hugh Capet’s son Robert was old enough to rule, Hugh made him vice-  
10 roy. Robert and his sons continued this method of appointing a viceroy\*; thus kingship became hereditary through this procedure. As Hugh and his successors were successful monarchs, the majority of the nobles probably willingly agreed to this practice and over the centuries accepted their inferior position to the Capets.

## *France and England*

Only one vassal repeatedly caused severe problems: the English King. Throughout history many ties had developed between the English monarchs and France. Edward the Confessor was half-Norman and tried to intro-  
15 duce French customs to England. His distant cousin, William the Conqueror, made himself King of England and remained a French duke at the same time. William’s granddaughter Matilda was married to Count Geoffery of Anjou which linked the English throne to yet another important French county. Matilda’s and Geoffery’s eldest son became King Henry II of England and Count of Anjou at the same time. In this double role, Henry acted as overlord of England on the one hand and as a vassal to the French king on the other. Although a king himself, he  
20 had to pay homage to another king. Whereas most other French dukes had accepted the Capet dynasty and were used to doing homage, this must have been a strange situation for Henry II and his successors. Naturally, they regarded themselves as equal to the French kings and therefore did not accept that their French possessions had officially only been granted to them. According to the feudal system, the French kings could have taken Anjou away from the English kings and granted it to another French noble, but the English kings came to see Anjou as  
25 a part of their own empire which, of course, caused conflicts with the French monarchs.

Accepting the Plantagenets’ standpoint would have meant many disadvantages to the Capetians: first, the French kings would have lost an important part of their own realm as Anjou was a comparably large and rich county. Second, they would have had a potential enemy in the middle of their country. Third, allowing the Eng-  
30 lish king to claim the independence of his French county might have set an example for the French counts who might have tried to gain independence for their counties, too. Such a process would have broken up the French kingdom the Capetians had worked so hard to unify. Consequently, driving the Plantagenets out of France was a matter of survival to the Capetian dynasty. Philip II (1180–1223), Henry’s counterpart, realised this immediately: putting all effort into the war, he won Normandy, Maine, and Anjou from Henry II. Philip II even completely drove Henry’s successor, King John, out of France for some time. Obviously, the English monarchs did not ac-  
35 cept this situation since it meant a loss of direct influence on the continent and also a loss of money considering that they had received taxes from the inhabitants of their French counties. English attempts to win back their French losses influenced the relations of the two countries – and the developments within each of them – for the rest of the Middle Ages.

## ***Origins of the Hundred Years' War***

The existing conflict between England and France escalated in 1328 when King Charles IV of France (1322–1328) died without a male heir. His death also put an end to the Capetians' direct line of succession. In this situation, the French nobles quickly elected Philip of Valois (1328–1350), Charles' cousin. They feared they might soon be ruled by their enemy since the English King Edward III (1327–1377) also had claims to the vacant French throne as his mother was Charles' sister. In order to prevent his coronation, the French nobles argued that the French crown could only be passed on by males, thus excluding Isabella and her son Edward III. Obviously, Edward III was not willing to pay homage to the new French king and rather claimed that he was the rightful ruler of France himself.

At first, Edward and Philip reached a compromise: Edward accepted Philip as French king and, in return, Philip promised always to grant the Duchy of Gascony to the English king. This was an area England and France had fought over in the previous century. Remaining in control of this region guaranteed control over the English ports on the continent. These ports had become vital for English trade which had developed with the growth of the cities since the 12th century. Edward probably accepted this compromise so willingly because it gave him time to cope with his problems at home. Like his predecessors, Edward was leading a difficult war against Scotland again, and he needed all his money and troops for this campaign. However, King Philip felt Edward's problems were his chance to drive the English out of France forever. Not only did Philip send troops to take back Gascony from Edward, he even sent French troops to support the Scots. This was more than Edward could take and open warfare between France and England broke out in 1337.

## ***The Hundred Years' War***

Lasting from 1337 to 1453, the Hundred Years' War\* was obviously longer than a hundred years, but paradoxically, it was also shorter since battles did not continually take place. The Hundred Years' War was rather a period in which the old conflict between England and France was finally – and brutally – solved. It can be divided into three phases of active battle.

In the first phase, the English were more successful because their army, consisting of paid foot soldiers, was better organised than the French army which consisted mainly of farmers. Of course, the soldiers were trained to fight. Moreover, their longbows\* were more successful than the crossbows\* of the French. Even if the crossbows might have hit harder, it took too long to get them ready to shoot in battle. Due to these advantages, the English could win several important battles. King Edward's son could even capture the French King John II (1350-1364). He was not set free until a large sum of money had been paid and he had promised not to interfere in the English possessions on the continent anymore. This was guaranteed in the Peace of Brétigny (1360) which officially ended the war. But English troops did not stop to plunder French areas and French counts did not stop to occupy lands officially granted to England. So the Peace of Brétigny only concluded the first phase of the war.

Even if both sides did not respect the Peace of Brétigny, neither side had enough resources to renew open battle. The English kings had to pacify the Scots, and the French kings had to rebuild their army after the disastrous defeats in the first phase of the war. But in 1415, King Henry V of England (1413–1422) had his hands free to concentrate on France again. He demanded the restoration of the frontiers of Gascony as promised at Brétigny. Of course, this was only a lame excuse to take the chance of beating a weak French king, for Charles VI of France had gone mad and his son, Charles VII, was still too young to govern. After his army had once again beaten the French, Henry V made the mad French king promise that his daughter Catherine would marry Henry and that the children of this marriage should inherit the French throne. The French nobles did not accept this treaty which would have made the English monarchs kings of France, too. So fighting continued although chances for the French were poor: Charles VI had died, but his son Charles VII had not been crowned. He only governed the southern part of France from the city of Bourges\*.



Though Henry V died in 1422, his underage son Henry VI was crowned both King of England and King of France as the English nobles kept up Henry's claim to the French throne. In order to get rid of Charles VII – and thereby end French resistance to the English claim to the throne – an English army besieged the city of Orléans\* in 1428. Once again, it looked like the French would be defeated, but then Joan of Arc\*, a young peasant woman, convinced Charles VII to send her to Orléans: she said God had told her in a vision to free her country from the English and to help Charles become king of all of France. Of course, it is impossible to say how much of that was true. But for the course of history it was only important that Joan of Arc really went to Orléans, dressed as a male soldier, and gave enthusiastic speeches to the troops. Highly motivated by her, the French managed to free Orléans and to push back the English, so Charles VII could finally be crowned in 1429. Unfortunately, Joan herself could not really enjoy this event: she had been captured by allies of the English. The English accused her of being a witch and handed her over to the Inquisition, knowing that this would kill her. Being a woman dressed in men's clothes, fighting like a knight and declaring to have visions, the accusation of witchcraft was easily believed, and Joan was burned at the stake. This brutal English revenge came too late, however: Joan's enthusiasm had helped to turn the war against the English. In addition to that, with the coronation of Charles VII, the English nobles had lost their direct aim to make the young Henry VI king of France.

As a result, fighting slowed down and a truce was finally signed in 1444, but the basic question of the whole war had not been answered yet: it was still unsettled how independent Henry should be as count of his French territories. When fighting between the English and French broke out again in 1449, the French made use of a new weapon, the cannon, and finally defeated the English in 1453. All territories in France were lost for the English. Only the port of Calais\* stayed English until 1556. England and France have been separate countries ever since.

### ***Consequences of the Hundred Years' War***

Not only did the Hundred Years' War shape the borders of the two countries, though, it also influenced the inner structure of both countries immensely. In the course of this long and expensive war, kings and nobles had to establish new ways to finance and lead wars. In England, this helped the formation of the parliamentary monarchy. In France, it helped the establishment of the Estates-General\*, also a meeting of representatives of the people. These were meant to symbolize French society as it was seen at that time. The First Estate or class consisted of important members of the Church. The nobles made up the Second Estate. The common people were the Third Estate. However, only important towns were invited to send representatives to the meetings. As the common people made up the majority of French society by far, the Estates-General were far from democratic. However, democratic representation was not the aim of the Estates-General anyway. The Estates-General were rather invited by the kings to make important decisions affecting the whole country. Consequently, the importance of the Estates-General rose considerably during the Hundred Years' War as the king had to repeatedly ask for troops and taxes. However, the Estates-General regularly agreed to the king's wishes without much hesitation in order to beat the common enemy. Therefore, the Estates never functioned as a strong opposition to the king, and they can hardly be compared to Parliament in England. On the contrary, they helped the French kings in Paris take control of the whole country. In the long run, this helped the monarchs to turn France into a state which was much more centralized than England or the Holy Roman Empire.

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