

## [Transcript] The Rest Is History / 319. Hundred Years' War: Triumph of the Longbow

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I thank you, said the king, for that you have delivered into my hands, one whom I had vowed to punish, in that he has caused us more scathe by fowler means than any living man.

Twice have I sworn that Peter the Red Ferry shall hang, for all his noble blood and coat armor, if ever he should fall into my hands, now at last his time has come.

Sire, murmured Nigel, it ill becomes me to cross your royal will, the dark, plantagenet wrath gathered upon the king's high brow, and gloomed in his fierce, deep-set eyes.

By God's dignity, no man has ever crossed it yet and lived unscathed.

How now, young sir, what mean such words to which we are little want?

Have a care, for this is no light thing which you venture.

Nigel faced the king with a face as grim as his own.

You may not put to death the Red Ferret.

So that's Tom Holland, was a reading from Sineischl back to Arthur Conan Doyle.

And what a treat, for all the listeners, that there are going to be two more of those.

Does the Red Ferret appear in the next two as well?

Well next week?

Yeah.

No, no, no.

Okay.

The Lord of Groo-Wah.

Okay, listen, so that was the face of the Red Ferret.

There's a massive disagreement between Sineischl and the king, Edward III.

Tom, you talked last time about how much you loved that book, Sineischl, when you were growing up.

Yeah.

I can't believe that you're desecrating it with your laughter.

Well, I know.

You'll whip all to it.

It is.

Yes, it is poor.

So we're talking about the Hundred Years War.

Last time you gave us, I thought, I suppose I'm biased because it's kind of my podcast, but I thought it was a brilliant summation of the causes of the Hundred Years War.

It's an incredibly complicated story.

The relationship between France and England, Philip VI, I think it's Philip VI, isn't it?

Yes.

The French king.

Philip of Valois.

Yeah, increasingly fat and depressed.

Yeah.

But who was disgraced himself by his provocations against the rightful king of fards.

Yeah, the gallant Edward III.

Anyway, Edward III has launched this sort of slightly pre-emptive war, hasn't he?

He is concerned about Scotland in the north.

He's got France across the Channel.

You entered the last podcast by saying that everybody in Europe basically thinks the English are going to lose.

They're the massive underdogs.

France is six times richer, many times larger.

The home of chivalry, of gallantry, of kind of the knightly code, all of that kind of business.

How does Edward, Tom, think he's, I mean, what's his strategy?

How is he going to play this?

Well, he spells it out, actually, in a letter to the Pope, no less, which he writes a couple of years after the start of the war.

He says that his aim in fighting the war is, we only make a shield against him who leveled a deadly blow at our heads, so that's Philippe of Valois.

The best way to avoid the inconveniences of war is to pursue it away from one's own lands.

It makes the best sense for us, then, to fight our enemy in his own realm in alliance with the power of our allies rather than to wait for him to batter down our front door.

Okay.

Yeah.

So, to do that, basically, he has to prevent the French from landing in England, and so he has to win control of the seas, but that's a challenge because ships are very, very expensive. So ideally, you'd be looking for a kind of knockout battle where you could perhaps, you know, demolish the French fleet.

And actually, the year before he wrote that letter to the Pope, there'd been a sign of how dangerous and precarious the situation is for England when the French, I mean, they burned Portsmouth to the ground.

I think they leave a single church standing, and then they attack Southampton.

So this is a real danger for the English.

And the other thing that he's saying is that, you know, he's going to attack France in alliance with the power of our allies.

So he has these three kind of semi-independent realms in France, so there's Aquitaine, which he's defending.

There's Brittany, where he has very kind of close allies, and then there's Flanders.

And Flanders, of course, is the closest theatre of war to England.

It's the easiest for him to get across to, and it's also France's richest province by far.

And so by attacking that, he will force the French king to focus on that rather than attacking Gascony, which is a long way from Paris.

And Edward, as his predecessors on the Throne of England have understood, recognises that the key to winning Flanders over isn't necessarily to target the counter Flanders, who's an ally of the French king, but to target the cities where the weavers live because they are dependent on the supply of French wool.

So these are the Ghent and Bruges and Ypres and all these places?

Yes.

So in 1337, Edward bans wool exports.

And this imposes massive strain on the various cities in Flanders.

And by December 1337, basically, the whole of Ghent is in a state of revolution.

And it's led by a guy called Jacob von Ahtervolt, who is a merchant in Ghent.

And he basically makes the economic case for allying with Edward, he says to his fellow weavers and merchants, without the goodwill of the king of England, we shall die for Flanders lives by making cloth, cloth cannot be made without wool.

It follows therefore that we must make a friend of England.

And the other leading cities in Flanders, so Bruges and Ypres, I mean, they all hate each other.

But on this, they agree.

And they basically say the cities that they will be neutral in the coming conflict.

And Jonathan Sumption, then the first volume of his immense history of the Hundred Years War, describes this as one of the few examples in history of a wholly successful economic blockade.

So it has exactly the results that Edward wants.

And Edward is hopeful that things might go even further because von Ahtervolt is quite keen actually to have an open alliance with England.

But the problem with that is that if the various Flemings do row in openly behind Edward, then that puts them in breach of their oaths of loyalty to the French throne.

So what's the way around that?

Well, the obvious way around that is for Edward to lay claim to the French throne.

Oh, because then they're not, so they take their oaths so seriously because they've sworn on the Bible or something.

Yes, they do take it seriously.

Yeah, well, they'd risk excommunication.

So Edward isn't yet ready openly to declare himself king of France.

But in the spring of 1338, he sends ambassadors to Paris where he addresses Philip VI, not as a king, but as Philip of Valois, and delivers a formal announcement that Edward is intending to conquer our inheritance, so France, by our force of arms.

But it's so interesting that that's a tactic in the war rather than the reason for which the war is fought.

It is.

It's a symptom of war rather than a cause.

Right.

Absolutely.

But of course, Edward faces this problem that England compared to France is very, very puny.

And his strategy basically requires him to, you know, there are four theatres of war.

So there's the Scotland, the Scots are misbehaving up in the north.

There's the south coast of England.

So that's getting raided all the time.

There's Gascony, of course, that needs defending.

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And now he's opened up this fourth front in Flanders.

And this needs money.

And so Edward borrows vast, vast amounts from various Italian banks, and he also borrows vast amounts from the various cities in Flanders.

And the cities in Flanders knows that Edward basically, Edward can only pay them back if he starts winning storming victories in France.

Right.

And there's the Flanders surity that Edward crosses to Flanders and stays there.

And so he does that.

He invades France, northern France in 1339.

He's trying to provoke Philip into battle.

Philip doesn't take the bait.

And so basically by January 1340, Edward is really facing problems because his debts are just piling up.

He's stuck in Flanders back in England, parliament's becoming very resentful because Edward is demanding that they vote him more money and it just seems to be a kind of bottomless hole.

There's popular resentment in England.

People are starting to write abusive poems about him and about the war.

And so Edward, to try and kind of rally the cause, in January, he openly declares himself King of France.

And he is backed in this throne by the Count of Hano, who is the father of his Queen, Philippa, and by Gent and all the various cities in Flanders.

But in England, it's very unpopular because the English don't like the idea of their King becoming King of France.

So it's not a rally.

Because they think they'll be relegated.

Yeah, they do.

And so Edward realizes that he's got a real problem in England and so basically he's got to go back to England to sort it out.

And the Flemish cities impose really humiliating terms on him.

So he's able to go back, but he has to leave hostages, including several of his leading nobles, but also Philippa, his wife, his queen.

And this is when she gives birth to her third son, who is called John, in Ghent, which is why he comes to be called, in due course, John of Ghent, i.e. John of Gaunt, a kind of famous player.

You know, I never knew that, Tom.

Yeah.

So that's the reason.

I've really learned something tremendous.

John of Gaunt is actually John of Ghent.

Yes.

So that's where that comes from.

Preyki.

So basically, Edward is facing the collapse of his entire strategy because he can't afford

it.

And I think that this would be enough to bring him to terms, but he's still absolutely determined to carry on the war.

He's still absolutely determined that he's got the right strategy.

And what are the reasons for this?

Well, I mean, there is no disputing the fact that he is probably the biggest lad ever to sit on the throne of England.

I mean, he's very, very good at certainly getting his immediate circle on his side.

And indeed, this is why he goes back to England because he's confident that his kind of glamour, his charisma will succeed in winning his subjects back to his cause.

So just for the listeners' benefit, he's about 26, 27 at this point.

I think he turns 27 in 13, 39 or so.

So he's still, he's absolutely in the prime of life.

Yeah.

Serial tournament winner, lover of gallantry, all that kind of stuff.

He's got this sort of JFK style glamour, I guess.

Well, it's Arthurian glamour because it is Camelot.

I mean, it's overtly Camelot.

So, I mean, shortly after he's overthrown Mortimer, you know, who'd been blocking the throne for him, he goes to Glastonbury to pay his respects to the tomb of Arthur.

And the various lads, his friends who had helped him to overthrow Mortimer, are kept around him rather in the way that Arthur keeps the Knights of the Round Table around him.

And in 1337, when the war begins, he elevates six of them.

He makes them earls.

So the one who will become the most famous is, he's the fifth son of the Earl of Hereford.

So very low down the pecking order for that family, but he's created the Earl of Northampton.

Right.

And, you know, it's very much the idea that you get in Shakespeare's Henry V, where he talks of, we few, we happy few, we band of brothers.

This is what Edward III is all about.

But as you said, he's also very, very good at dazzling his people with tournaments and you know, all the kind of Camelot stuff.

So that's important.

Public relations is really, really important.

But he's also, I mean, he's pursuing the right strategy.

He's the great strategic genius in the Hundred Years' War.

His strategy is right.

And even though, you know, he's got money problems, he's right that denying the French access to the Channel ports, which is what the Alliance with Flanders has brought him, is really key because that means that basically the English are safe from invasion.

So that's his first target.

But on top of that, he has mentioned at the end of the last episode, he has a secret weapon.

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And this secret weapon is the longbow, which is a word that is kind of brought into common usage over the course of the 14th into the 15th century to describe a specifically English bow that is about the height of a man, maybe even higher when strung.

And they're so long that they can accommodate kind of very, very long arrows because you can draw it all the way back to your ear.

So that gives it much greater velocity.

And Dominic, I'm afraid that I have to introduce some maths at this point.

Maths.

This is the first in the rest of his history.

Yeah.

So I'm going to read a sentence from an essay by Clifford Rogers, who brilliantly is Professor of Medieval History at West Point, the Military Academy in the United States.

So very interested in weaponry.

And he says that the exceptional thickness of these bows is crucial because the draw strength of a straight bow rises proportionately with the cube of its thickness, so that for example, 30% greater thickness equates to 120% more power.

Did you understand that?

I did.

I followed that very closely.

Good.

So they're very long and thick bows, basically.

And incredibly powerful.

So they have incredible penetrative power and they can penetrate through chainmail.

And that's the key thing.

So obviously people had bows before.

So you're telling me that all the bows that people had previously employed from the Romans through to the Franks, to the Normans and so on, this had not occurred to people before to have bows of such size.

Well, there is controversy around this.

It probably won't surprise you to learn that there are revisionists who claim that actually the longbow is nothing, that it's just another word for bows that already existed.

But I think that's improbable both because the name the word longbow does get introduced because of the impact that it has.

And also because you do at the beginning of the 14th century, you start to get both manuscripts and illustrations that are referring to bows that are clearly longbows.

So the earliest manuscript to show a longbow is about 1305.

The first document that unambiguously describes a longbow, it's in a murder indictment that can be dated very precisely to the 4th of July, 1313.

And so what that suggests is that I had always thought, this is what I read when I was a child with my 100 years war obsession, that Edward I had picked it up from Welsh fighters in these wars against the Welsh.

Because the Welsh are very famous because of Agincourt and whatnot.

But it turns out that this seems not to be the case.

It basically seems to have been invented in the first decades of the 14th century.

And it seems to have been targeted against the Scots.

So it may be that it's a response to Edward II's war going badly against the Scots, Barnett Byrne and the aftermath of that, an attempt by the English to basically consciously develop a weapon that will enable them to redress the balance of war.

And certainly at the Battle of Halladon Hill, which is where Edward III wins his first great victory against the Scots outside Berwick, Henry of Huntingdon, the chronicler, specifies that it's the ability of English archers to penetrate mail that comes as a shock to the Scots and basically kind of leads to their route, the sense that this is something new.

And so I think we did an episode on Trafalgar.

And the whole thing about Trafalgar was that Nelson could be confident that his mastery of naval warfare was in every way superior to that of the French and Spanish, that the Royal Navy's ability to inflict carnage on their enemies was quantitatively greater, qualitatively greater.

And this essentially is what Edward III also has.

He has a military technology that he knows that if he can bring it to bear on his enemy, he can essentially annihilate them.

And this is in the context of medieval warfare is very unusual, very, very decisive battles in the Middle Ages are rare.

So Hastings stands out precisely because it is so unusual, it's the exception that proves the rule.

So Edward's aim is very radical and there's a kind of pleasingly Nelsonian quality to his first great victory in the Hundred Years War, which is that it comes not actually not on land, but at sea.

Because in June 1340, he's brought the news that a great French fleet has descended on Flanders.

Now, so it's enemy territory to the King of France, and it's anchored in the mouth of the river Zvinn, which is opposite the port of Sluice, which today is landlocked because of the estuaries silted up, but back then it's the kind of the major, major port.

And so Edward has brought this news, and he promptly empties all the harbours across England of shipping.

And he packs these ships with infantrymen, so men at arms, but above all with longbowmen, and he sails for Sluice.

And when the French have brought news of this, they decide that they're going to adopt a defensive strategy.

And so they draw their ships up in three lines, and they've got some absolutely massive ships, one of which is Edward's flagship, which had been captured, so very humiliating for Edward.

And they put them in the front row, and then they chain them up, and then they put another, they put another line, and then another line.

And the aim with this is to create a kind of absolutely impossible barrier so that the English can't force it.

But Edward has the advantage that is provided for him by his longbowmen.

So the English fleet closes in on the French lines, which are absolutely immobile.

And the French have crossbowmen, so the crossbows are kind of mechanical, have bolts, very powerful,

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but are very slow to load, and can't fire as far as the longbow, as it turns out. So essentially, they can't reach the English ships, but the English ships, with their archers, can reach the French ships. And this kind of rain of death descends on the French contemporary, who saw it, says that it was like hail in winter. Just on the longbows, Tom, can I ask you a quick question about the longbows? So the people, they are trained longbowmen, they've been training at home. And the bows, I mean, the story is always that they're made of you, is that right, that they're made of you? And they are literally the height of a man. So they're like five foot ten, six foot or whatever it might be. And why is it that other people haven't copied the English? So for example, why don't the French have longbows? Because this seems to be a technology that is distinctive to the English. They've developed it in the north of England. They haven't yet had a chance to unleash it, and to demonstrate what it can do. So the French don't even know what's coming? They don't really know what's coming. And on top of that, I think that one of the reasons why the English king and the English nationability are so invested in using infantry as opposed to cavalry, which is the way that traditionally knights display their chivalric prowess, is that they've suffered the humiliation of the battle of Bannockburn and defeat at the hands of Scottish infantrymen. So the lesson that they have learned from their defeat in the Scottish Wars of Independence is that infantry and particularly archers can defeat charging cavalry. So this is a lesson that they have absolutely internalised, whereas for the French, I mean, the very idea would be a kind of heresy. So they're just not prepared to grapple with it. And it's at the battle of Sluys that they first demonstrate what can be done with this weapon because the reign of death that falls on the French at Sluys is such that by the time the English ships close in with the French ships and grapple them, people are dying all across the decks and the men at arms can jump onto the French ships, clear them, seize them. And then the ships in the first line are so massive, so high that the archers can then step onto them and just kind of rain death down on the other ships beyond them. And it's absolutely lethal. And it's not only the English who are attacking the French ships because the Flemings who are in alliance with the English, they see what's going on and they pour out of Sluys and they attack the French in the rear. And it's an absolute blood bluff and the slaughter carries on well into the night and Edward's triumph is total. And Edward actually captures one of the admirals, the other two have died and this is a guy who's been leading raids along the English coast. And so rather than ransom him, which is what convention would prescribe, Edward hangs him from the yard arm of his ship and that's a pretty bold statement. It is absolutely a bold statement.



Yes, it is.

And what Edward is doing is marketing himself not just as the leader of a kind of a terrifying war machine, but as a man who is prepared to inflict terrible punishment on his enemies.

You know, he's absolutely sending a marker.

So that combined with the annihilation of the French fleet.

I mean, Jonathan Chump's assumption describes it says that the French had suffered a naval catastrophe on a scale unequaled until modern times, I mean, so basically until the time of Nelson.

Isn't there some tremendous story about the king's jester telling him the news or something?  
Yes.

So people are very nervous about telling Philip the sick for what has happened.

And then the story is that the jester is pushed into his presence and he cries out, oh, the cowardly English, the cowardly English.

And then the king says, well, why were they cowardly?

And the jester replies, they did not jump overboard like our brave Frenchman.

So tremendous stuff.

And the corollary of this great victory is that it repairs Edward's prestige just when he needs it to be repaired.

But at the same time, it gives the English control of the channel.

And so therefore, Edward's strategy of taking the war to France is enormously facilitated because he can be confident now that the war won't come to England.

So from this point onwards, he can hit the French a will effectively because he has control of the channel, right?

I mean, this has completely changed the course of the war.

Isn't it said, isn't there a claim, Tom, which I always enjoy, that the fish at Sleuths had drunk so much French blood that if God had given them the power of speech, they would have spoken French?

We say very well, French fish who'd known it.

Right.

So shall we take a break, Tom, and then you can return by picking up the story after the Battle of Seuss, because I think we're heading for an even more exciting battle.

Yeah, an even more crushing victory.

The Battle of Cressy.

This is a tremendous story.

All right, we shall see you after the break.

Welcome back to The Rest is History.

You'll be relieved to hear there's no reading about the Red Ferret to queue up after the 27 takes that the initial reading took, but Tom, we ended last time by talking about the Battle of Sleuth's tremendous victory for Edward III, he has established this strategy of annihilation.

He basically doesn't have the resources, does he, to do your traditional medieval war of kind of capturing a castle here, a castle there, bringing the enemy to terms.

So what's his plan, would you say, from Sleuths onwards?

I think his plan is a kind of forced defrap to corner the French army and to inflict such

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a devastating defeat on it that Philip will be brought to terms.

So very like Nelson, I mean, it's a kind of Nelsonian strategy, only he wants to adopt it on land.

But the problem is precisely that he does have to bring Philip to battle.

And Philip is kind of wise to the dangers of that.

And so basically there's a kind of deadlock and both sides are in a bad way.

So Philip has lost the Battle of Sluys, he's lost naval control of the channel.

His lands have been wasted by Edward who keeps kind of marching in and burning everything.

So he's really lost face, he's lost prestige.

But Edward III is, you know, the Battle of Sluys doesn't help him with his finances.

And so he actually ends up declaring bankruptcy and it precipitates the world's first great banking crash.

So, you know, we've got all this kind of stuff at the moment with Swedish and all that kind of thing.

Deutsche Bank, Deutsche Bank.

Well, it was Edward III who set off the first one.

So yeah, two great Italian banks are kind of crashing down in ruin.

And you get the first Italian contemporaries condemning the bankers for their greed and stupidity.

It's the first case of this.

But isn't this a foreshadowing of how the war will end, Tom?

Because isn't this a classic case of one of those wars that the French have so many more resources and really, you know, military historians would often say, it's finance, it's industrial capacity, it's all these things that actually wins wars.

So you can fight against that for so long, but you have to keep winning and winning and winning.

Once you start to lose, you know, the French can afford to lose battles and they're still in the game.

The English cannot really afford to lose any.

And so, Edward, despite his great victories, signs a truce with Philip and he's absolutely, again, you know, he writes to the Pope saying, basically, I haven't got any money.

It's the money that's the problem.

But the war kind of rumbles on in the other great semi-independent fiefdom in France, which is Brittany, because in May 1341, the Duke of Brittany dies and the succession is disputed.

So there's his half-brother, John de Montfort, who is very pro-English, and his niece, Joan.

And Philip VI takes the side of Joan, marries her to his nephew, who's a guy called Charles de Blois.

And he summons John de Montfort, so the rival to Paris, under assurance of safe conduct and promptly arrests him, which is not good behaviour, is it?

It's kind of what I expect from a French king there to be fair.

But John de Montfort, luckily, has a tremendously cool wife, Lady de Montfort, who bravely holds out, invites the English, who comes sailing over.

Edward III comes across in person.

Great success.

So the Earl of Northampton, the guy who has been made an earl back in 1307, he captures Breton and that's absolutely key because that is a port that controls, you know, the headland of Britain, he's sticking out into the sea and thereby makes the sea route from England to Gascony and Bordeaux secure.

So that's a great strategic success.

And in 1343, there's another treaty signed and basically things are starting to look up for Edward because he's now got his alliance in Flanders, he's got all kinds of footholds in Brittany, you know, it's starting to look good.

And he's starting to put flesh on the bones of his claim to be King of France.

And he knows that this is the more successful he is, the likelihood is that Philip is going to have to meet him in battle when the truce ends, which it actually ends in 1345.

So Edward repudiates it a year early.

And he sends an army to Gascony, planning to lead another into Normandy, but the terrible storms and then everything goes tits up in Flanders because Van Arteveld, you know, who the merchant from Ghent, who's very much his right hand man there gets killed by a mob.

And so Edward has to go to Flanders to try and sort it out, which he does successfully, but it means that his invasion of Normandy is delayed for a year.

So it's 1346, it's the year where he decides that he's going to launch a full frontal invasion of France.

And at this point, he's thinking, one battle, use the longbows, beat Philip and the war is done and dusted.

Yes.

And so this is the largest expedition that he's organised.

And whereas previously he'd been largely fighting using kind of continental allies, say Flemings or, you know, allies from the German Empire or Bretons or whatever.

With this one, it's the majority of his troops are going to be English.

So he's taking the flower of English cavalry, but he's also taking huge contingent of longbowmen and men at arms.

And the aim is to inflict such damage on France that Philip will have no choice but to meet him in battle.

So it's kind of all or nothing strategy.

I mean,

Yeah, it is.

Because England doesn't have the manpower of France, right?

So if Edward loses, he can't go back and dredge up another X thousand.

So sorry, actually say X thousand.

How many people are we talking about, would you say by and large, in these kind of armies?

Probably about 8000 men.

Right.

I was leading about 8000 men.

Yeah.

I mean, obviously the French will be able to muster vastly larger numbers, but Edward is relying on the fact that he's a better commander and that his men are better.

Right.

But it is a huge gamble.

Not least because the risk of an English defeat is that Edward himself and he's taking his young son, Edward of Woodstock, the Prince of Wales, the man who in due course will come to be known as the Black Prince.

So he's taking him as well.

So if Edward, the Prince of Wales and the flower of English cavalry get taken prisoner, I mean, that will bleed England dry.

So it's a huge high stakes gamble that he's taking.

But he's prepared for it very, very comprehensively.

So he's taking large numbers of arrows.

And he's also, for the first time in a medieval campaign, taking field cannon.

So he's got 100 small cannon, previously they'd only ever been used in sieges.

He's had powder prepared in the Tower of London, kept dry, brought with him.

So it's all or nothing, basically.

So they leave early July, 12th of July, they land in Normandy, actually next to the beach that in 1944 will be called Utah Beach, so Great Broad Beach.

The landing unlike in 1944 is unopposed.

They land on the beach.

Edward knights his son, the Prince of Wales.

So very, very powerful moment.

And he, brilliantly, he declares that he's launching this invasion, which is very sweet of him, out of compassion for the wretched fate of the people of France.

Oh, he's doing it for compassionate reasons.

He's doing it to be kind.

And so the moment he's landed, the English just start looting, burning, destroying everything in their path.

It's in the way to all my people who proclaim their own kindness on social media.

Yes.

So he's doing it to be kind.

And he just, he, you know, he, he marches through, I mean, Normandy is some of the richest arable land in, in France, burns it all.

And he embarks on what is called a chevauchee.

And the chevauchee is basically lads on tour, burning everything, kind of 15 mile band around the, the movement of the army.

And he advances down the line of the River Seine, heading towards Paris, because he knows that heading for Paris, Philip, we'll be able to ignore that.

So Philip is brought the news of this, and on the 22nd of July, he takes up the, the great royal standard, the oriflamme.

And now this is the marker of a king who, French king who is taking war seriously.

And at the same time, he sends messengers to Scotland to summon David II, who's gone back to Scotland to invade Northumbria.

So the Weasel Scott in Henry V's words.

And he's also summoned troops from across France.

And while he's waiting for these troops to, to come, he orders all the bridges across the Seine to be cut.

So the Edward who's on the South Bank is basically left with the choice of attacking Paris, which will be murderous because he doesn't have enough troops to get involved in, in street fighting in the city, or to retreat to Normandy, which would obviously be an enormous loss of face.

Yeah.

However, Edward isn't going to adopt either policy because he's convinced that it should be possible to find a crossing.

And so in that conviction, he carries along the Seine very, very pointedly burning and looting all the royal properties that he comes across and trying to find a bridging point.

So they, they arrive at Rouen and they find that the bridge has been lost there.

And there there is a tremendous display of English heroism from a man who is, do you know what he's called?

Well, you do.

Oh my word.

He's called Sir Thomas Holland.

He is.

What are the chances?

Well, this is one of the leading figures of, of English chivalry and all of these podcasts have been building up to this moment.

So Sir Thomas Holland, he's standing by the Rouen Bridge at Rouen and he sees French on the far side and he bellows at them over and over again, St George for King Edward, which I think is admirable behavior.

Does he fight anybody?

Well, he can't because he can't get at them because the bridge has been cut.

Always the way with Tom Holland all talk and no, no, no Dominic because you will see that Sir Thomas Holland quits himself very, very well in due course.

He could be.

Anyway, if they ever do a hundred years more film, Tom, it would delight you to know that he could be played by Tom Holland, the well-known Spider-Man.

Or me.

Well, all you, but are you not a little Tom Holland now?

Or Tom Holland now?

Maybe.

Maybe.

Yes.

Anyway, go on.

So the English, they continue going towards Paris and they come to a place called Poissy, which is a few miles outside Paris.

And the bridge there has been broken, but engineers inspect it and they tell Edward, actually I think we can repair this, but it's, you know, this is very kind of erasure on the bridge stuff because once they've done that, it will require English troops to cross it in the assurance that they will basically be sitting ducks as they cross it.

## [Transcript] The Rest Is History / 319. Hundred Years' War: Triumph of the Longbow

So, you know, very, very perilous, but the guy who steps up to the plate is the Earl of Northampton.

No, the guy who was ennobled as a thank you.

Yeah.

Yeah.

His sort of Royce Spring Powell.

His Royce Spring Powell, yeah.

And they get over the crossing, they engage the French in brutal hand-to-hand combat, and they hold them back as the English manage to make a crossing.

And you know, the English do indeed have many casualties, but not as many as it turns out as the French, because all the holding force on the north side of the river are wiped out and Edward is able to get across.

So this is a great moment and Edward now decides that he is going to head towards Pontier, which is the estate that, you know, is his inheritance as King of England.

It's been confiscated by Philip, so it's been annexed.

By going to it, Edward is basically making a statement that he is going to his own, but it is also land that he's familiar with.

So he knows the terrain there.

The problem for him is that to get to Pontier, he has to cross another river, the Somme.

And he gets to the banks of the Somme, and he again discovers that Philip has destroyed all the bridges.

However, there is a ford.

So this is a place called Blanche Attack, the white spot.

And at low tide, it's Blanche because there's a white stone can be seen and you go to cross.

And they get there and they discovered that it's guarded by 500 men at arms by 3000 Genoese crossbowmen.

But again, Northampton steps up to the plate.

So he takes 100 longbowmen, 100 men at arms across the estuary.

The longbowmen rain a fire on the French guarding the northern bank.

More and more English pile up behind it, storm up, 2000 Frenchmen killed, entire English army cross.

Just as the last Englishmen get to the north bank and high tide makes the ford impossible.

So it's kind of a bit like Moses crossing the Red Sea, that kind of thing.

So again, Edward has made it across and he can now head into Pontier, his own duchy.

And he makes for the great forest of Cressy, where there is a position that will entirely suit the kind of battle that he wants to fight.

Meanwhile, the French are coming on chasing the whole time.

So meanwhile, the French are crossing the Somme and news is brought to Philip that Edward and the English have stopped at this hill by the forest of Cressy about 10 miles to the north.

And the French start to move towards it.

And Edward has drawn up his men in three lines.

So his knights and his men at arms.

So about 8,000 to 10,000 men in total.

## [Transcript] The Rest Is History / 319. Hundred Years' War: Triumph of the Longbow

So the first, the first line, the first battalion is commanded by the Prince of Wales, who's 16, who is 16.

And so he has a man with a wiser head by his side on that, that, that, that man, Dominic is Thomas Holland.

But of course, it's good of you to be in the front row, Tom.

Yeah, I'm there.

Second one is commanded by Northampton, right, who's done tremendous service already.

And the third is commanded by Edward the third.

Yeah.

Who's commanding the reserves basically.

Is he?

And Edward puts the archers and the cannon, you know, the French have no idea that the English have brought cannon with them because they've been strapped underneath the underside of the wagons.

But the powder has been kept dry.

The cannon are there.

So the archers and cannon are putting two great kind of clumps on either wing.

And the archers dig holes and the archers dig trenches with spikes in in front of them.

And they put the wagons of the, the wagon train in front to create a kind of barrier between them and the French forces.

And it's a very, very strong position.

And Philip arrives on the morning of the 26th of August and he recognizes that it's a strong position and it's exactly the kind of battle that until now he has refused to join.

But he also knows that he just can't afford the loss of face that would result from refusing Edward the battle.

And even though there are lots in his council of war who urge him to do precisely that, he decides that they will fight and that they will wait for the late afternoon so that as many people who are coming to join him can arrive, but that they will fight it that day.

And so he likewise draws his men up in three divisions.

He's got about 25,000 men.

So more than double.

It's about three times the size.

Yeah.

Three times the size of the English army.

So he, he puts his Genoese crossbowmen at the front and the Genoese crossbowmen normally would have kind of wicker shields that they would put up and fire from behind the shields.

But these are left behind in the baggage train hasn't yet arrived.

So they are without their, their protection.

And they are commanded by John, who is the blind king of Bohemia.

We mentioned in the first.

I'll say it right now.

Madness to have a blind man.

Come on.

I don't want to be ableist.

Right.

I wouldn't put a blind man in command.

But he's a great night.

He's a great night.

He's a, he's a paragon of chivalry and that counts for more than being able to see.

I was going to say being able to see is absolute.

No.

No.

Being a paragon of chivalry is much more important.

Well we'll see how the battle works out for you.

We'll see how it goes.

Then the second division is under the command of Philip's brother, who is a guy called the Count of Alonso.

So Alonso is a fiefdom in Normandy that traditionally is awarded to the kind of second ranking royal in the French, French family, so that's the marker of the Count of Alonso status.

And the rearguard is commanded by Philip VI himself.

So the, the Genoese longbowmen advance to get within reach of the English as they hope and it starts to rain.

And this is a disaster because it means that the cords on their bows start to slacken.

But what about the longbowmen, surely their, do their strings not slacken as well?

No.

Because they've prepared for it.

And also of course, the range of the longbow is much greater than the range of the crossbow.

So basically the Genoese without their shields, they can't fire arrows, they're not within range of the English, they get absolutely murdered.

And their commander can't see.

Which is...

Their commander can't see.

Exactly.

Exactly.

And so all the, all the knights who are on their horses under the command of the Count d'Alonso behind are seeing that the Genoese are being useless.

They're not, they don't seem to be firing, lots of them are starting to run away.

And this rumor goes around that they are, that they're cowards or that they're traitors, you know, that they're in the pay of the English.

And the Count of Alonso basically gets fed up with it, draws his sword, says they're all cowards, let's, let's ride them down.

Look, behind him gets terribly excited, starts yelling in a loud voice, kill them, kill this riffraff, kill them all.

Kill the riffraff.

They're doing nothing.

It's such a French thing to shout, isn't it?

It's a bad, bad, bad.

Louis.



Louis.

Louis.

The battle starts going badly.

And, and basically saying, you know, they're, they're absolutely useless.

They're in our way, trample them down.

And so the whole of the French cavalry starts careering across the battlefield, galloping down the...

At their own troops.

Well, they're Genoese, so they're expendable.

And they're just, you know, they're archers.

So, that's, so...

Port Aytkestom, I have to say.

And Edward has brought so many arrows that the, that the arrow range just keeps falling and falling and falling.

And the French discovered, as the Scottish knights had discovered earlier at Halladon Hill, that these are arrows that can penetrate their armor.

And you know, they are horses are collapsing, knights are being horribly wounded or killed.

There's a brilliant description by one of the French chroniclers who says that they were tumbling over each other like a vast litter of pigs.

So kind of crashing down on top of each other.

But some of them do get through.

And of course, they attack the front English line, which is commanded by the Prince of Wales.

Yeah.

He's only 16, but, but he's already much taller than anybody else.

He's very physically pre-potential looking chap.

And so he becomes the focus of the French attacks.

At one point, his standard is dropped, it gets picked back up again.

Others go, you know, ascent by Sir Thomas Holland, who's, who's there trying to look after the Prince of Wales back to Edward III saying, you know, could you, could you send some reinforcements?

And this is where Edward III delivers one of the most famous lines delivered by any English king where he turns down this request and says, let the boy win his spurs.

Do you know, I remember doing this at school when I was about 10.

And that line, I loved, I mean, I loved the Battle of Cressy, but that line, the let the boy win his spurs, I just thought that was absolutely tremendous.

It is.

Everybody comes out so well from that.

And as we've always said, we're a very patriotic podcast, so we're going to enjoy that.

So the French keep attacking and attacking and they keep getting wiped out and things get so bad that it's obvious they're going to lose.

And at this point, John of Bohemia, that paragon of chivalry, right, decides that, you know, he's let, he's let France down, he's let Philip VI down, but worse for all, he's let himself down.

Yeah.

He's absolutely let Bohemia down.

And so he, he orders his squire to basically point him in the direction of the, of the battle.

And he just charges in.

See, we're going away.

How does he know?

Well, you can hear the sound.

So he charges into the melee, waving his sword around and, you know, that's the end of him.

Oh, he's killed.

Meanwhile, Philip VI gets struck in the face with an arrow.

He has to be led away.

The aura flame is left trampled in the mud.

It's an absolute, it is exactly what Edward had wanted.

It is a killing field.

And as the sun sinks beneath the west, darkness spreads over the battlefield, sounds of screams of the dying and the wounded.

Edward orders a great windmill on the hill to be filled with brushwood and set on fire so that the English will have a focus, but also they can see the scale of the victory that they've won.

It's on why an earthen Gibson wasted his energy with Braveheart.

I don't know.

This is a, this would be a tremendous film, wouldn't it?

And he, Edward, comes and finds the Prince of Wales and embraces him and declares, fair son, God save you.

You are my good son and you have acquitted yourself nobly today.

You are worthy to keep a realm.

And the Prince of Wales has been given the, the ostrich feather crest of the fallen King of Bohemia.

Iqidian, I serve and he gives it to Edward and Edward gives it back to the Prince of Wales.

And that's why the Prince of Wales to this day has the, the feathers and the ostrich feathers.

Not so, Iqidian.

Exactly so.

Exactly so.

So all very stirring.

In the morning, a fresh contingent of, of, of French come up, get wiped out.

So that's even more who've been wiped out.

And the French casualties are, are stupefying.

I mean, thousands and thousands are dead.

King of Bohemia is dead, 11 princes are dead.

The count of, of Flanders is dead.

The count of Alonso, who had led the disastrous charge is dead and Archbishop is dead.

English casualties, 300 men.

God, this is a brilliant, this is one of the best episodes we've ever done, Tom.

And so I mentioned about how, you know, the similarities with Trafalgar, Ian Mortimer in his book, Perfect King about Edward III writes that the importance of the battle of Cressy cannot be exaggerated.

It was the first major battle between two well resourced martial kingdoms in which victory was obtained by projectile weaponry rather than hand to hand fighting.

In that sense, it marks the advent of modern warfare, which is a very kind of striking claim to make.

But, you know, in the sense that from now on, basically, it will be first longbowmen, then, you know, rifles and muskets and rifles and so on.

So I mean, it's kind of interesting.

It's a brilliant demonstration of the importance of technology, isn't it?

I mean, basically, being in Chicago, honestly outnumbered, they win because of technology, you know, strategy, well, that sort of rather than martial, I mean, ironically, given that we remember Cressy for kind of martial valor and the heroism of the Prince of Wales and whatnot.

It's actually not won by that, is it?

It's won by...

Right.

And so that's kind of the immediate impact of this is that, firstly, it is a demonstration by Edward III that his chivalric prowess is now greater than that of France.

So that's an incredible bragging right.

But you're right that the victory has basically been won by archers, by yeoman and peasants, not by knights.

And Edward's genius really is to kind of fuse the stories that are told about the Prince of Wales with the achievements of the longbowmen.

And that over the next two decades will be a kind of very potent combination, a kind of very potent myth, this idea that knights and yeoman in the English armies are fused in a common sense of purpose.

But the challenge for Edward, obviously, is now he's won his battle.

What next?

I mean, he hasn't become king of France.

So what's he going to do?

So his plan is to win, in the aftermath of this, he wants to win a permanent foothold in northern France because the problem is landing on Normandy beaches is always risky.

So he has targeted a place called Calais, which is very, very well protected, kind of surrounded by marshes, very high walls, commanded by one of France's best soldiers, a man called Jean de Vienne.

But Edward is determined to seize it.

It's a very, very long siege.

It requires all his administrative ability, his strategic ability, his organizational ability.

It involves blockades, naval blockades, the transfer of troops and foods and supplies

and arrows and all this kind of thing.

So incredible figures that between July 1346, when he starts the siege in September 1347, when Calais finally surrenders England's port supplied Edward with 853 ships, manned by 23,907 seamen, very precise figures reflective of the kind of the paper trail.

You need some kind of bureaucracy to do all this.

And while this siege is going on, there are two further, I mean, kind of incredible triumphs that set the seal on this Anas Marabolis.

The first is that on the 17th of October, David II, the Scottish King, who in obedience to the old alliance has invaded England, is met at a place called Neville's Cross, an English army led by two lords, Neville and Percy, who in the 14th century and 15th century particularly will become massive players.

Yeah.

The Great Northern Magnates.

The Great Northern Magnates and the Archbishop of York.

And the Archbishop of York has taken with him the banner of Saint Cuthbert from Durham Cathedral.

Yeah.

And Cuthbert, you know, he gets in behind England because the Scots are absolutely wiped out and David has taken prisoner.

He's found hiding under a bridge and brought to London.

They should have just stopped history then, shouldn't they?

Well, no, because there's more to come, Dominic.

There's more to come.

So the following year, 20th of June, so in 1347, Charles de Blois, who is Philip VI candidate to be Duke of Brittany, is defeated and he's taken prisoner and taken to England.

So the prisoners are stacking up.

Philip VI meanwhile has attempted to relieve Calais, can't do it.

So retreat, so that's another humiliation for him.

And on the 4th of August, 1347, Calais surrenders and it's an unconditional surrender.

And in token of this, Jean de Vienne and six of the burgers of Calais, so not burgers as in, you know, Big Macs, but people who are kind of leading merchants, that kind of thing.

So they come out from Calais, they're bareheaded, Jean de Vienne is holding his sword backwards as a kind of symbol of his, his, his acknowledgement that he's been defeated.

So he's riding out behind him, walking barefoot, come the burgers barefoot, only wearing their shirts and they're wearing halters around their neck, which is kind of symbolic of Edward, their acknowledgement that Edward has the right to hang them.

Edward says he is going to hang them, his wife, his queen, Philippa, begs for mercy.

And this is what queens do in the Middle Ages, kings are very stern.

Kings beg for mercy.

The kings then gives in to the queen and everyone is satisfied.

So Edward has, has simultaneously been able to demonstrate that he's a figure of terrifying the determination, but also that thanks to his, thanks to Queen Philippa, he's going to show mercy.

## [Transcript] The Rest Is History / 319. Hundred Years' War: Triumph of the Longbow

So he, he lets the people of Calais live, but he expels them because his aim is to reestablish Calais as an English city.

So people from England are, are given all kinds of trade deals and rights to live in in Calais.

There's a massive population transfer.

So Calais is to be an English city.

It is given a garrison that is the largest concentration of troops in any urban settlement in Europe.

So it's, it's, it's an absolute triumph.

You know, the scale of English success is everything that Edward could have wanted.

And so of course, in the autumn of 1347, he is looking forward to continued successes, perhaps over the winter, perhaps into 1348, but Dominic, something intervenes.

So am I right in thinking, Tom, that hundreds of miles to the south, in, is it Messina, in Sicily, a Genoese ship lands at that pretty much that exact moment.

Pretty much as Calais is falling.

As Calais is falling and onboard the ship, the, some of the sailors are carrying an unknown and utterly deadly disease marked by black bubos under the armpits.

And I mean, that really, if this was a, you know, we were joking about it being Game of Thrones or being a Hollywood film, but that is the ultimate twist, isn't it?

That you can just see this sort of the picture fading on the scenes of celebration and then a kind of epilogue or a post credit scene of this, the black arriving, their black death is coming.

And that changes everything.

And actually, I would love to hear what happens next, but we're not going to, are we?

We're going to wait till next week.

We are.

For those of you who are members of the Restless History Club, I know people love hearing this again and again.

So I think we should give people what they want, Tom.

That's what we want.

For those of you who are members of the Restless History Club, you can find out what happens next.

Does the black death make a difference to the course of the Hundred Years War?

Spoiler alert, it changes everything.

You can hear that right now.

If you're not a member of the Restless History Club, and you could, of course, join up at RestlessHistoryPod.com, but if you don't want to, you'll have to wait till next week.

And that's so...

So, and next week, it's not just about the black death, it's also about the black prince.

The black death and the black prince.

Very good, Tom.

I like it.

So, we will be joining you next week with the black death and the black prince and the next and most importantly, the next exciting reading from Sir Nigel.

**[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 319. Hundred Years' War: Triumph of the Longbow**

And when I tell you that this is the moment where Nigel meets Raul de la Roche, Pierre de Brahe, the Afri Vavasor of the Noble Count of Toulouse, you will know how exciting that is.

A very debonair man, Tom.

And he and Nigel become fast friends, as you will remember from your childhood reading.

So, there's lots to look forward to next week.

And on that bombshell, we will say au revoir.

Au revoir.

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