

British History Series: Episode 13 - The Hundred Years' War

Presented by Chris Green

This session focused on significant events and figures during the Hundred Years' War between England and France. Here's a breakdown of the key points covered:

Early Stages and Naval Power:

- **Battle of Sluys:** A decisive English naval victory where English longbowmen decimated the French fleet. This victory allowed Edward to plan an invasion of France.
- Despite its historical importance, the Battle of Sluys is often overlooked compared to events like the Battle of Trafalgar.

Major Battles and the Longbow:

- **Battle of Crécy:** A significant English victory where Edward's army was cornered by the French. The English, though outnumbered, used the longbow with devastating effect against the French army.
- **The English Longbow:** Described as the "machine gun of its day," English archers could fire 10 arrows a minute with accuracy at 300 yards. The specially designed "Birkin arrows" could pierce through armour.
- **Battle of Neville's Cross:** While Edward was in France, King David of Scotland invaded England per the "Auld Alliance" with France. The English defeated the Scots using longbows, and King David was captured.
- **Battle of Poitiers:** Edward the Black Prince led the English to another victory, again using the longbow. King John II of France was captured.

Key Figures and Events:

- **Edward III:** King of England who pursued claims to the French throne, initiating much of the conflict.
- **Edward the Black Prince:** Edward III's son, known for his military prowess, particularly at the Battle of Poitiers.
- **Henry V:** Another significant English king who reignited the war, notably with his victory at the Battle of Agincourt.
- **Agincourt:** A famous English victory where longbowmen again played a crucial role, resulting in heavy French losses and Henry V gaining significant political leverage.
- **Treaty of Troyes:** Resulted from Henry V's victories, which recognized him as the ruler of Normandy and Gascony, and he was to marry Catherine, the daughter of Charles VI of France, with their offspring inheriting the French throne.

- **Joan of Arc:** Her influence led to French victories and a shift in momentum against the English, despite her capture and execution.
- **Capture of Calais:** Following a victory, Calais was captured by the English and remained under their control for over 200 years.

End of the War and its Legacy:

- The English eventually lost most of their territories in France, keeping only Calais.
- The war significantly shaped English national identity, language, and culture.
- The English language became more prominent, with figures like Henry IV and Henry V using and writing in English.
- St. George became more established as the patron saint of England.
- The Hundred Years' War led to a sense of rivalry with France and a separation from continental affairs.

Interesting Points:

- The English royalty maintained a claim to the French throne until after the French Revolution.
- The Order of the Garter was created by Edward III during this period.
- Several “what ifs” were discussed, such as what would have happened if Henry V had been killed by an arrow at the Battle of Shrewsbury.