

= Edward III of England =

Edward III ( 13 November 1312 ? 21 June 1377 ) was King of England from 25 January 1327 until his death ; he is noted for his military success and for restoring royal authority after the disastrous and unorthodox reign of his father , Edward II . Edward III transformed the Kingdom of England into one of the most formidable military powers in Europe . His long reign of fifty years was the second longest in medieval England and saw vital developments in legislation and government ? in particular the evolution of the English parliament ? as well as the ravages of the Black Death .

Edward was crowned at age fourteen after his father was deposed by his mother and her lover Roger Mortimer . At age seventeen he led a successful coup against Mortimer , the de facto ruler of the country , and began his personal reign . After a successful campaign in Scotland he declared himself rightful heir to the French throne in 1337 but his claim was denied due to the Salic law . This started what would become known as the Hundred Years ' War . Following some initial setbacks the war went exceptionally well for England ; victories at Crécy and Poitiers led to the highly favourable Treaty of Brétigny . Edward 's later years , however , were marked by international failure and domestic strife , largely as a result of his inactivity and poor health .

Edward III was a temperamental man but capable of unusual clemency . He was in many ways a conventional king whose main interest was warfare . Admired in his own time and for centuries after , Edward was denounced as an irresponsible adventurer by later Whig historians such as William Stubbs . This view has been challenged recently and modern historians credit him with some significant achievements .

= = Early life = =

Edward was born at Windsor Castle on 13 November 1312 , and was often referred to as Edward of Windsor in his early years . The reign of his father , Edward II , was a particularly problematic period of English history . One source of contention was the king 's inactivity , and repeated failure , in the ongoing war with Scotland . Another controversial issue was the king 's exclusive patronage of a small group of royal favourites . The birth of a male heir in 1312 temporarily improved Edward II 's position in relation to the baronial opposition . To bolster further the independent prestige of the young prince , the king had him created Earl of Chester at only twelve days of age .

In 1325 , Edward II was faced with a demand from the French king , Charles IV , to perform homage for the English Duchy of Aquitaine . Edward was reluctant to leave the country , as discontent was once again brewing domestically , particularly over his relationship with the favourite Hugh Despenser the Younger . Instead , he had his son Edward created Duke of Aquitaine in his place and sent him to France to perform the homage . The young Edward was accompanied by his mother Isabella , who was the sister of King Charles , and was meant to negotiate a peace treaty with the French . While in France , however , Isabella conspired with the exiled Roger Mortimer to have the king Edward deposed . To build up diplomatic and military support for the venture , Isabella had Prince Edward engaged to the twelve @-@ year @-@ old Philippa of Hainault . An invasion of England was launched and Edward II 's forces deserted him completely . The king was forced to relinquish the throne to his son on 25 January 1327 . The new king was crowned as Edward III on 1 February 1327 .

It was not long before the new reign also met with other problems caused by the central position at court of Roger Mortimer , who was now the de facto ruler of England . Mortimer used his power to acquire noble estates and titles , and his unpopularity grew with the humiliating defeat by the Scots at the Battle of Stanhope Park and the ensuing Treaty of Edinburgh ? Northampton , signed with the Scots in 1328 . Also the young king came into conflict with his guardian . Mortimer knew his position in relation to the king was precarious and subjected Edward to disrespect . The tension increased after Edward and Philippa , who had married at York Minster on 24 January 1328 , had a son on 15 June 1330 . Eventually , Edward decided to take direct action against Mortimer . Aided by his close companion William Montagu and a small number of other trusted men , Edward took Mortimer by surprise at Nottingham Castle on 19 October 1330 . Mortimer was executed and Edward III 's

personal reign began .

= = Early reign = =

Edward III was not content with the peace agreement made in his name , but the renewal of the war with Scotland originated in private , rather than royal initiative . A group of English magnates known as The Disinherited , who had lost land in Scotland by the peace accord , staged an invasion of Scotland and won a great victory at the Battle of Dupplin Moor in 1332 . They attempted to install Edward Balliol as king of Scotland in David II 's place , but Balliol was soon expelled and was forced to seek the help of Edward III . The English king responded by laying siege to the important border town of Berwick and defeated a large relieving army at the Battle of Halidon Hill . Edward reinstated Balliol on the throne and received a substantial amount of land in southern Scotland . These victories proved hard to sustain , however , as forces loyal to David II gradually regained control of the country . In 1338 , Edward was forced to agree to a truce with the Scots .

One reason for the change of strategy towards Scotland was a growing concern for the relationship between England and France . As long as Scotland and France were in an alliance , the English were faced with the prospect of fighting a war on two fronts . The French carried out raids on English coastal towns , leading to rumours in England of a full @-@ scale French invasion . In 1337 , Philip VI confiscated the English king 's duchy of Aquitaine and the county of Ponthieu . Instead of seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict by paying homage to the French king , the way his father had done , Edward responded by laying claim to the French crown as the grandson of Philip IV . The French , however , invoked the Salic law of succession and rejected his claim . Instead , they upheld the rights of Philip IV 's nephew , King Philip VI ( an agnatic descendant of the House of France ) , thereby setting the stage for the Hundred Years ' War ( see family tree below ) . In the early stages of the war , Edward 's strategy was to build alliances with other Continental princes . In 1338 , Louis IV named Edward vicar @-@ general of the Holy Roman Empire and promised his support . As late as 1373 , the Anglo @-@ Portuguese Treaty of 1373 established an Anglo @-@ Portuguese Alliance . These measures , however , produced few results ; the only major military victory in this phase of the war was the English naval victory at Sluys on 24 June 1340 , which secured English control of the Channel .

Meanwhile , the fiscal pressure on the kingdom caused by Edward 's expensive alliances led to discontent at home . The regency council at home was frustrated by the mounting national debt , while the king and his commanders on the Continent were angered by the failure of the government in England to provide sufficient funds . To deal with the situation , Edward himself returned to England , arriving in London unannounced on 30 November 1340 . Finding the affairs of the realm in disorder , he purged the royal administration of a great number of ministers and judges . These measures did not bring domestic stability , however , and a stand @-@ off ensued between the king and John de Stratford , Archbishop of Canterbury , during which Stratford 's relatives Robert Stratford Bishop of Chichester and Henry de Stratford were temporarily stripped of title and imprisoned respectively . Stratford claimed that Edward had violated the laws of the land by arresting royal officers . A certain level of conciliation was reached at the parliament of April 1341 . Here Edward was forced to accept severe limitations to his financial and administrative freedom , in return for a grant of taxation . Yet in October the same year , the king repudiated this statute and Archbishop Stratford was politically ostracised . The extraordinary circumstances of the April parliament had forced the king into submission , but under normal circumstances the powers of the king in medieval England were virtually unlimited , a fact that Edward was able to exploit .

Historian Nicholas Rodger called Edward III 's claim to be the " Sovereign of the Seas " into question , arguing there was hardly any Royal Navy before the reign of Henry V ( 1413 ? 22 ) . Although Rodger may have made this claim , the reality was that King John had already developed a royal fleet of galleys and had attempted to establish an administration for these ships and ones which were arrested ( privately owned ships pulled into royal / national service ) . Henry III , his successor , continued this work . Notwithstanding the fact that he , along with his predecessor , had hoped to develop a strong and efficient naval administration , their endeavours produced one that

was informal and mostly ad hoc . A formal naval administration emerged during Edward 's reign which was composed of lay administrators and headed by William de Clewre , Matthew de Torksey , and John de Haytfield successively with them being titled , Clerk of the King 's Ships . Sir Robert de Crull was the last to fill this position during Edward III 's reign and would have the longest tenure in this position . It was during his tenure that Edward 's naval administration would become a base for what evolved during the reigns of successors such as Henry VIII of England 's Council of Marine and Navy Board and Charles I of England 's Board of Admiralty . Rodger also argues that for much of the fourteenth century , the French had the upper hand , apart from Sluys in 1340 and , perhaps , off Winchelsea in 1350 . Yet , the French never invaded England and France 's King John II died in captivity in England . There was a need for an English navy to play a role in this and to handle other matters , such as the insurrection of the Anglo -Irish lords and acts of piracy .

= = Fortunes of war = =

By the early 1340s , it was clear that Edward 's policy of alliances was too costly , and yielded too few results . The following years saw more direct involvement by English armies , including in the Breton War of Succession , but these interventions also proved fruitless at first . A major change came in July 1346 , when Edward staged a major offensive , sailing for Normandy with a force of 15 000 men . His army sacked the city of Caen , and marched across northern France , to meet up with English forces in Flanders . It was not Edward 's initial intention to engage the French army , but at Crécy , just north of the Somme , he found favourable terrain and decided to fight an army led by Philip VI . On 26 August , the English army defeated a far larger French army in the Battle of Crécy . Shortly after this , on 17 October , an English army defeated and captured King David II of Scotland at the Battle of Neville 's Cross . With his northern borders secured , Edward felt free to continue his major offensive against France , laying siege to the town of Calais . The operation was the greatest English venture of the Hundred Years ' War , involving an army of 35 000 men . The siege started on 4 September 1346 , and lasted until the town surrendered on 3 August 1347 .

After the fall of Calais , factors outside of Edward 's control forced him to wind down the war effort . In 1348 , the Black Death struck England with full force , killing a third or more of the country 's population . This loss of manpower led to a shortage of farm labour , and a corresponding rise in wages . The great landowners struggled with the shortage of manpower and the resulting inflation in labour cost . To curb the rise in wages , the king and parliament responded with the Ordinance of Labourers in 1349 , followed by the Statute of Labourers in 1351 . These attempts to regulate wages could not succeed in the long run , but in the short term they were enforced with great vigour . All in all , the plague did not lead to a full scale breakdown of government and society , and recovery was remarkably swift . This was to a large extent thanks to the competent leadership of royal administrators such as Treasurer William Edington and Chief Justice William de Shareshull .

It was not until the mid 1350s that military operations on the Continent were resumed on a large scale . In 1356 , Edward 's eldest son , Edward , the Black Prince , won an important victory in the Battle of Poitiers . The greatly outnumbered English forces not only routed the French , but captured the French king , John II and his youngest son , Philip . After a succession of victories , the English held great possessions in France , the French king was in English custody , and the French central government had almost totally collapsed . There has been a historical debate as to whether Edward 's claim to the French crown originally was genuine , or if it was simply a political ploy meant to put pressure on the French government . Regardless of the original intent , the stated claim now seemed to be within reach . Yet a campaign in 1359 , meant to complete the undertaking , was inconclusive . In 1360 , therefore , Edward accepted the Treaty of Brétigny , whereby he renounced his claims to the French throne , but secured his extended French possessions in full sovereignty .

= = Later reign = =

While Edward 's early reign had been energetic and successful , his later years were marked by inertia , military failure and political strife . The day to day affairs of the state had less

appeal to Edward than military campaigning , so during the 1360s Edward increasingly relied on the help of his subordinates , in particular William Wykeham . A relative upstart , Wykeham was made Keeper of the Privy Seal in 1363 and Chancellor in 1367 , though due to political difficulties connected with his inexperience , the Parliament forced him to resign the chancellorship in 1371 . Compounding Edward 's difficulties were the deaths of his most trusted men , some from the 1361 ? 62 recurrence of the plague . William Montague , Earl of Salisbury , Edward 's companion in the 1330 coup , died as early as 1344 . William de Clinton , who had also been with the king at Nottingham , died in 1354 . One of the earls created in 1337 , William de Bohun , Earl of Northampton , died in 1360 , and the next year Henry of Grosmont , perhaps the greatest of Edward 's captains , succumbed to what was probably plague . Their deaths left the majority of the magnates younger and more naturally aligned to the princes than to the king himself .

Increasingly , Edward began to rely on his sons for the leadership of military operations . The king 's second son , Lionel of Antwerp , attempted to subdue by force the largely autonomous Anglo -@- Irish lords in Ireland . The venture failed , and the only lasting mark he left were the suppressive Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366 . In France , meanwhile , the decade following the Treaty of Brétigny was one of relative tranquillity , but on 8 April 1364 John II died in captivity in England , after unsuccessfully trying to raise his own ransom at home . He was followed by the vigorous Charles V , who enlisted the help of the capable Constable Bertrand du Guesclin . In 1369 , the French war started anew , and Edward 's younger son John of Gaunt was given the responsibility of a military campaign . The effort failed , and with the Treaty of Bruges in 1375 , the great English possessions in France were reduced to only the coastal towns of Calais , Bordeaux , and Bayonne .

Military failure abroad , and the associated fiscal pressure of constant campaigns , led to political discontent at home . The problems came to a head in the parliament of 1376 , the so @-@ called Good Parliament . The parliament was called to grant taxation , but the House of Commons took the opportunity to address specific grievances . In particular , criticism was directed at some of the king 's closest advisors . Chamberlain William Latimer and Steward of the Household John Neville were dismissed from their positions . Edward 's mistress , Alice Perrers , who was seen to hold far too much power over the ageing king , was banished from court . Yet the real adversary of the Commons , supported by powerful men such as Wykeham and Edmund de Mortimer , Earl of March , was John of Gaunt . Both the king and the Black Prince were by this time incapacitated by illness , leaving Gaunt in virtual control of government . Gaunt was forced to give in to the demands of parliament , but at its next convocation , in 1377 , most of the achievements of the Good Parliament were reversed .

Edward himself , however , did not have much to do with any of this ; after around 1375 he played a limited role in the government of the realm . Around 29 September 1376 he fell ill with a large abscess . After a brief period of recovery in February 1377 , the king died of a stroke at Sheen on 21 June . He was succeeded by his ten @-@ year @-@ old grandson , King Richard II , son of the Black Prince , since the Black Prince himself had died on 8 June 1376 .

= = Achievements of the reign = =

= = = Legislation = = =

The middle years of Edward 's reign were a period of significant legislative activity . Perhaps the best @-@ known piece of legislation was the Statute of Labourers of 1351 , which addressed the labour shortage problem caused by the Black Death . The statute fixed wages at their pre @-@ plague level and checked peasant mobility by asserting that lords had first claim on their men 's services . In spite of concerted efforts to uphold the statute , it eventually failed due to competition among landowners for labour . The law has been described as an attempt " to legislate against the law of supply and demand " , which made it doomed to fail . Nevertheless , the labour shortage had created a community of interest between the smaller landowners of the House of Commons and the greater landowners of the House of Lords . The resulting measures angered the peasants , leading

to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 .

The reign of Edward III coincided with the so @-@ called Babylonian Captivity of the papacy at Avignon . During the wars with France , opposition emerged in England against perceived injustices by a papacy largely controlled by the French crown . Papal taxation of the English Church was suspected to be financing the nation 's enemies , while the practice of provisions ? the Pope providing benefices for clerics ? caused resentment in the English population . The statutes of Provisors and Praemunire , of 1350 and 1353 respectively , aimed to amend this by banning papal benefices , as well as limiting the power of the papal court over English subjects . The statutes did not , however , sever the ties between the king and the Pope , who were equally dependent upon each other .

Other legislation of importance includes the Treason Act of 1351 . It was precisely the harmony of the reign that allowed a consensus on the definition of this controversial crime . Yet the most significant legal reform was probably that concerning the Justices of the Peace . This institution began before the reign of Edward III but , by 1350 , the justices had been given the power not only to investigate crimes and make arrests , but also to try cases , including those of felony . With this , an enduring fixture in the administration of local English justice had been created .

= = = Parliament and taxation = = =

Parliament as a representative institution was already well established by the time of Edward III , but the reign was nevertheless central to its development . During this period , membership in the English baronage , formerly a somewhat indistinct group , became restricted to those who received a personal summons to parliament . This happened as parliament gradually developed into a bicameral institution , composed of a House of Lords and a House of Commons . Yet it was not in the upper , but in the lower house that the greatest changes took place , with the expanding political role of the Commons . Informative is the Good Parliament , where the Commons for the first time ? albeit with noble support ? were responsible for precipitating a political crisis . In the process , both the procedure of impeachment and the office of the Speaker were created . Even though the political gains were of only temporary duration , this parliament represented a watershed in English political history .

The political influence of the Commons originally lay in their right to grant taxes . The financial demands of the Hundred Years ' War were enormous , and the king and his ministers tried different methods of covering the expenses . The king had a steady income from crown lands , and could also take up substantial loans from Italian and domestic financiers . To finance warfare on Edward III 's scale , however , the king had to resort to taxation of his subjects . Taxation took two primary forms : levy and customs . The levy was a grant of a proportion of all moveable property , normally a tenth for towns and a fifteenth for farmland . This could produce large sums of money , but each such levy had to be approved by parliament , and the king had to prove the necessity . The customs therefore provided a welcome supplement , as a steady and reliable source of income . An " ancient duty " on the export of wool had existed since 1275 . Edward I had tried to introduce an additional duty on wool , but this unpopular maltolt , or " unjust exaction " , was soon abandoned . Then , from 1336 onwards , a series of schemes aimed at increasing royal revenues from wool export were introduced . After some initial problems and discontent , it was agreed through the Ordinance of the Staple of 1353 that the new customs should be approved by parliament , though in reality they became permanent .

Through the steady taxation of Edward III 's reign , parliament ? and in particular the Commons ? gained political influence . A consensus emerged that in order for a tax to be just , the king had to prove its necessity , it had to be granted by the community of the realm , and it had to be to the benefit of that community . In addition to imposing taxes , parliament would also present petitions for redress of grievances to the king , most often concerning misgovernment by royal officials . This way the system was beneficial for both parties . Through this process the commons , and the community they represented , became increasingly politically aware , and the foundation was laid for the particular English brand of constitutional monarchy .

= = = Chivalry and national identity = = =

Central to Edward III 's policy was reliance on the higher nobility for purposes of war and administration . While his father had regularly been in conflict with a great portion of his peerage , Edward III successfully created a spirit of camaraderie between himself and his greatest subjects . Both Edward I and Edward II had been limited in their policy towards the nobility , allowing the creation of few new peerages during the sixty years preceding Edward III 's reign . The young king reversed this trend when , in 1337 , as a preparation for the imminent war , he created six new earls on the same day . At the same time , Edward expanded the ranks of the peerage upwards , by introducing the new title of duke for close relatives of the king . Furthermore , Edward bolstered the sense of community within this group by the creation of the Order of the Garter , probably in 1348 . A plan from 1344 to revive the Round Table of King Arthur never came to fruition , but the new order carried connotations from this legend by the circular shape of the garter . Polydore Vergil tells of how the young Joan of Kent , Countess of Salisbury ? allegedly the king 's favourite at the time ? accidentally dropped her garter at a ball at Calais . King Edward responded to the ensuing ridicule of the crowd by tying the garter around his own knee with the words *honi soit qui mal y pense* ? shame on him who thinks ill of it .

This reinforcement of the aristocracy must be seen in conjunction with the war in France , as must the emerging sense of national identity . Just as the war with Scotland had done , the fear of a French invasion helped strengthen a sense of national unity , and nationalise the aristocracy that had been largely Anglo -@-@ Norman since the Norman conquest . Since the time of Edward I , popular myth suggested that the French planned to extinguish the English language , and as his grandfather had done , Edward III made the most of this scare . As a result , the English language experienced a strong revival ; in 1362 , a Statute of Pleading ordered the English language to be used in law courts , and the year after , Parliament was for the first time opened in English . At the same time , the vernacular saw a revival as a literary language , through the works of William Langland , John Gower and especially *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer . Yet the extent of this Anglicisation must not be exaggerated . The statute of 1362 was in fact written in the French language and had little immediate effect , and parliament was opened in that language as late as 1377 . The Order of the Garter , though a distinctly English institution , included also foreign members such as John IV , Duke of Brittany and Sir Robert of Namur . Edward III ? himself bilingual ? viewed himself as legitimate king of both England and France , and could not show preferential treatment for one part of his domains over another .

= = Assessment and character = =

Edward III enjoyed unprecedented popularity in his own lifetime , and even the troubles of his later reign were never blamed directly on the king himself . Edward 's contemporary Jean Froissart wrote in his *Chronicles* that " His like had not been seen since the days of King Arthur " . This view persisted for a while but , with time , the image of the king changed . The Whig historians of a later age preferred constitutional reform to foreign conquest and discredited Edward for ignoring his responsibilities to his own nation . In the words of Bishop Stubbs :

Edward III was not a statesman , though he possessed some qualifications which might have made him a successful one . He was a warrior ; ambitious , unscrupulous , selfish , extravagant and ostentatious . His obligations as a king sat very lightly on him . He felt himself bound by no special duty , either to maintain the theory of royal supremacy or to follow a policy which would benefit his people . Like Richard I , he valued England primarily as a source of supplies .

? William Stubbs , *The Constitutional History of England*

Influential as Stubbs was , it was long before this view was challenged . In a 1960 article , titled " Edward III and the Historians " , May McKisack pointed out the teleological nature of Stubbs ' judgement . A medieval king could not be expected to work towards the future ideal of a parliamentary monarchy ; rather his role was a pragmatic one ? to maintain order and solve

problems as they arose . At this , Edward III excelled . Edward had also been accused of endowing his younger sons too liberally and thereby promoting dynastic strife culminating in the Wars of the Roses . This claim was rejected by K.B. McFarlane , who argued that this was not only the common policy of the age , but also the best . Later biographers of the king such as Mark Ormrod and Ian Mortimer have followed this historiographical trend . However , the older negative view has not completely disappeared ; as recently as 2001 , Norman Cantor described Edward III as an " avaricious and sadistic thug " and a " destructive and merciless force . "

From what is known of Edward 's character , he could be impulsive and temperamental , as was seen by his actions against Stratford and the ministers in 1340 / 41 . At the same time , he was well known for his clemency ; Mortimer 's grandson was not only absolved , but came to play an important part in the French wars , and was eventually made a Knight of the Garter . Both in his religious views and his interests , Edward was a conventional man . His favourite pursuit was the art of war and , in this , he conformed to the medieval notion of good kingship . As a warrior he was so successful that one modern military historian has described him as the greatest general in English history . He seems to have been unusually devoted to his wife , Queen Philippa . Much has been made of Edward 's sexual licentiousness , but there is no evidence of any infidelity on the king 's part before Alice Perrers became his lover , and by that time the queen was already terminally ill . This devotion extended to the rest of the family as well ; in contrast to so many of his predecessors , Edward never experienced opposition from any of his five adult sons .

= = Issue = =

= = Ancestry = =

= = = Relationship to French monarchs = = =

Edward 's claim on the French throne was based on his descent from King Philip IV of France , through his mother Isabella .