

# AGINCOURT 600

**A Band of Brothers:  
Parliamentarians and the Battle of Agincourt  
25th October 1415**



Effigy of the earl of Arundel at St Nicholas' Church, Arundel, Sussex

AGINCOURT  
600

 THE HISTORY OF  
PARLIAMENT  
British Political, Social & Local History

 2015  
PARLIAMENT  
IN THE MAKING

He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,  
 Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,  
 And rouse him at the name of Crispian.  
 He that shall live this day, and see old age,  
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,  
 And say "To-morrow is Saint Crispian."  
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,  
 And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."  
 Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,  
 But he'll remember, with advantages,  
 What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,  
 Familiar in his mouth as household words—  
 Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,  
 Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester—  
 Be in their flowing cups freshly rememb'rd.  
 This story shall the good man teach his son;  
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,  
 From this day to the ending of the world,  
 But we in it shall be remembered—  
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
 For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
 This day shall gentle his condition;  
 And gentlemen in England now-a-bed  
 Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,  
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

**Shakespeare, Henry V, Act iv, scene iii.**



King Henry V, from Sir Thomas Holme's Book of Arms: anonymous verses on the kings of England, (Harley Ms 4025, f. 7v), England, c.1445 - c.1450.

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### **This year marks the 600th anniversary of Henry V's great victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt on 25th October 1415.**

This small booklet, presented by The History of Parliament Trust as part of Parliament's 2015 Anniversaries programme, explores the connections between Parliament and the campaign: how Parliament financed the war, and how it marked the victory both in 1415 and subsequent years; and provides vignettes of some of the many men who both served in the campaign and in Parliament—in the Lords and in the Commons.

## Parliament and Agincourt

When Henry V's intention to renew the war with France was first mooted in Parliament, nobody could have predicted that the young King's first campaign would result in a victory that would eclipse even Edward III's great triumphs at Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1357). Parliament met at Leicester at the end of April 1414, but the Commons were not prepared to offer a tax grant beyond the customs on imports and exports. By the autumn, the King's preparations were progressing in earnest, and a new Parliament assembled at Westminster on 19 November. It seems that the Lords and Members were less than enthusiastic about the prospect of a full-scale invasion of France, and that they advised the King to consider his options carefully. By the early days of December, though, the Commons had nevertheless agreed to a substantial tax grant, probably to no small degree as a result of the efforts of the Speaker, Thomas Chaucer, in managing the house. A handful of Members of the Commons, mainly royal servants like Lewis John, Sir Roger Leche, Sir William Phelip, Sir John Skydemore, John Stanley and William Swinburne, nevertheless went on to join the royal army in person.

## The French Expedition, August-October 1415

Following the dissolution, preparations gathered pace. Supplies had to be stockpiled and a fleet assembled. In parallel, the king continued to conduct an energetic campaign of foreign diplomacy.

In August 1415, finally, the royal fleet crossed the English Channel and Henry's army laid siege to the strategic port of Harfleur. The siege continued for more than a month, before Harfleur surrendered on 22 September. During the siege, the English army was ravaged by illness, and it became necessary to send a number of men home. Meanwhile, the King, having assigned a further part of his force to garrison Harfleur, prepared to march for the English stronghold of Calais.

The principal obstacle facing the English army was the river Somme. A planned crossing at Blanchetaque, near the mouth of the river, was rendered impossible by the French, and the English were forced to march a long way to the south-east to avoid a French army on the northern river bank. On 20 October, the day after the English had finally been able to cross, they were met by French heralds sent to issue a formal challenge to battle. Henry V nevertheless drove his men on towards Calais, but on the 24th they were intercepted by a much larger French force.



Tomb of Sir Edmund Ferrers at Merevale Church, Warwickshire

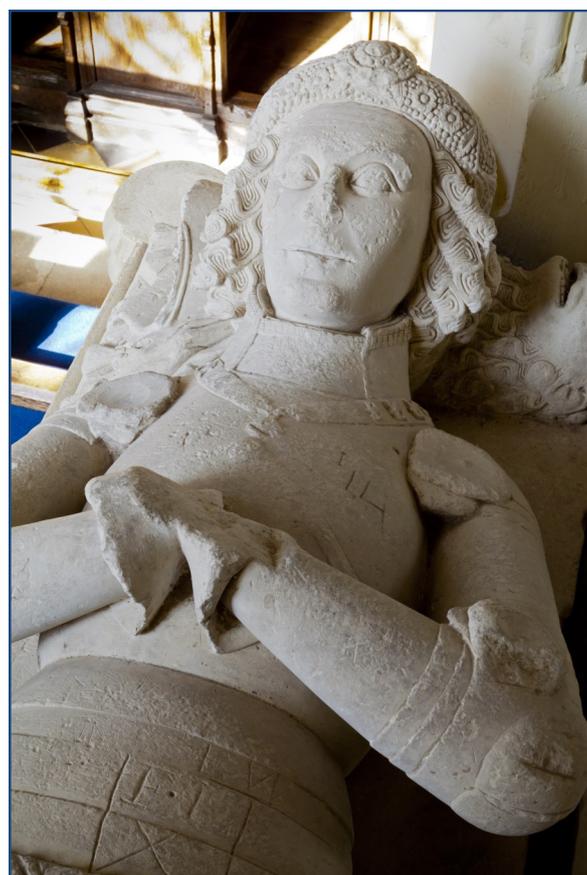


Illustration, c.1484 from "Les Vigiles de Charles VII" by Martial d'Auvergne, Ms. francais 5054, fol. 11 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

### The Battle of Agincourt, 25 October 1415

The battle on St. Crispin's day was a notable victory for the English, and little short of a disaster for the French. Contemporaries were in no doubt about the significance of the victory, which saw several princes of the French royal house of Valois and a number of other leading nobles killed or captured along with the Constable and Marshal: the French military establishment had been effectively decapitated. Within four days of the battle, news of the victory reached London, where church bells were rung and the citizens processed through the streets to Westminster in celebration.

Just under a month later, the King himself made his triumphal entry into the city.



Tomb effigy of Sir Philip Thornbury in Little Munden Church, Hertfordshire

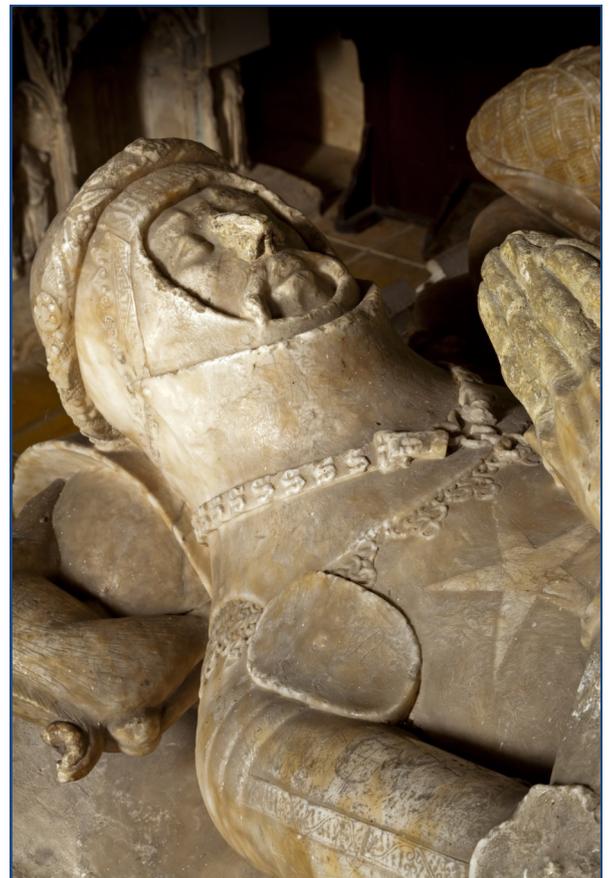
## Remembering Agincourt in Parliament

King Henry was not yet back by the time a new Parliament assembled on 4 November, but the chancellor, Bishop Beaufort of Winchester, in his opening address provided those assembled with a detailed account of what had occurred, and reassured them that Henry and his men had reached the safety of Calais. In the light of the 'glorieuse [and] merveillouse victorie', Parliament took just a few days to agree to further taxation.

In the years that followed, references to the King's great victory became a staple of the sermons that opened Parliament, and during the session of October 1416 the first anniversary of the battle was marked with a special Te Deum in the royal chapel. In the Lords, the captains of the various contingents of Henry V's army made up a majority of the temporal peers, and in the Commons, too, the veterans of the great battle could command some attention, particularly when the vexed question of the continuing war in France and its funding was debated in the decades after Henry V's death. Up to the 1430s there were regularly half a dozen such men among the Commons, including individuals of particular note like Sir Thomas Strickland who had carried the King's banner of St. George during the battle, or Sir Brian Stapleton, who took no fewer than eight French prisoners.



Edward I presiding in Parliament  
© De Agostini/The British Library Board



Tomb of the earl of Oxford at Bures Church, Essex

## A BAND OF BROTHERS

We can identify a large number of the men who served in the campaign that led to Agincourt, and who fought in the battle itself. Many of them also served in Parliament, either in the House of Lords or the Commons. For a few, we can find representations, in tomb effigies or brasses, or other traces they have left behind. Here is a parliamentary selection of Henry V's 'band of brothers'.



Tomb of John Curson at Kedleston, Derbyshire

**Sir John Blaket (d.1430)** served Sir Henry Percy ('Hotspur') in the defence of Berwick-upon-Tweed in the 1390s, but became a member of Henry IV's household and in 1402 escorted Princess Blanche to Cologne for her wedding. Before the Agincourt campaign he represented Leicestershire in three Parliaments, including that of April 1414, and in 1415 he raised a modest contingent for Henry V's army. Knighted soon after disembarkation in Normandy, he was among those assigned to man the garrison at Harfleur. Shortlisted (but not selected) for the post of marshal of the army for the second invasion of France in 1417, he served throughout that campaign.

**Sir Thomas Cumberworth (d.1451)** was a wealthy and pious Lincolnshire knight, who sat in Parliament in 1414 (and on four later occasions). It is not certain that he fought at Agincourt, although

he probably did. In any event, the battle had a determinative effect on his career, for he long acted as the gaoler of two of the great French lords captured there, Charles, duke of Orléans, and John, duke of Bourbon. A bell he gave to the church of Somerby in 1431 is still in situ, and one of his books, bearing the inscription 'Liber domini Thome comorworth militis', is now in New York Public Library.

**John Curson (d.1455/6)** of Kedleston in Derbyshire was from an ancient family of middling rank which came to prominence through its support for Henry IV. Although he served not only in the Agincourt campaign of 1415 but also in those of 1417 and 1421, on each occasion in the retinue of his local lords, the Greys of Codnor, his long later career was that of a local administrator. He represented his home county in seven Parliaments.

When Henry V's army sailed for Harfleur, **Sir Thomas Erpingham (d.1428)**, could look back on a military career of more than 45 years, having fought in Aquitaine, Picardy, Spain and Prussia in the service of the Black Prince, John of Gaunt and the young Henry of Bolingbroke. When Bolingbroke claimed the throne as Henry IV, Erpingham bore the sword of state before him into Westminster Hall, and he was subsequently rewarded with appointment as chamberlain of the King's household and membership of the elite fraternity of the Knights of the Garter. Henry V confirmed him as chamberlain and he accompanied the King on the Agincourt campaign, in which he was to play a prominent part. At Harfleur he was one of the English representatives who negotiated the surrender of the town, while on the field of Agincourt he took responsibility for the deployment of the all-important English long-bowmen. In the final years of his life he became an important public benefactor: perhaps his best-known legacy is the Erpingham gate of Norwich cathedral close, where his praying statue may be seen to the present day.

In April 1414, while attending his seventh Parliament, the distinguished **Sir Walter Hungerford (d.1449)**, was elected Speaker, thus emulating his father Sir Thomas, the Speaker of 1377. Knighted on the eve of Henry IV's coronation, he had been handsomely rewarded for his loyalty to the house of Lancaster, and Henry V promoted him to the prestigious office of chief steward of the duchy of Lancaster and sent him on important embassies seeking an alliance with the Emperor Sigismund

prior to going to war with France in 1415. Hungerford's retinue was composed of 17 men-at-arms and 55 archers. The night before the battle he expressed the wish that the King had 10,000 more good English archers at his disposal, but Henry rebuked him, saying that he trusted more in the power of God than in numbers. Hungerford went on to serve Henry in his subsequent campaigns. He assisted at the great naval victory of the Seine in 1416, and in 1417 took a force of 245 men to France. For his service on military campaigns and as an ambassador, he was rewarded with estates in Normandy and selection as a Knight of the Garter. He was present when Henry V died at Meaux. As his executor and one of the guardians of his heir, Henry VI, he served as a member of the royal council until his death, and as treasurer of England from 1426 to 1432. He was created Lord Hungerford in 1426.



Garter Stall Plate of Sir Walter Hungerford in St George's Chapel, Windsor

**Sir John Phelip (d.1415).** The Phelip brothers owed their fortunes to the spectacular rise of their maternal uncle Sir Thomas Erpingham KG when Henry IV seized the throne. One of the closest friends of Henry, Prince of Wales, John served as a captain in the force sent by him to France in 1411 under the command of **Thomas, earl of Arundel**. Both brothers were knighted on the eve of Henry's coronation in 1413, and John sat for Worcestershire in the first Parliament of his reign. Favours were heaped upon him, notably when he took **Alice Chaucer** as his third wife. When the French refused the terms for peace offered by the English ambassadors, of whom Phelip was one, he recruited 120 men for the invasion of Normandy. After fighting courageously at the siege of Harfleur, he fell victim to the flux on 2 October. The splendid brass at Kidderminster, which records his friendship with Henry V, shows his second wife Maud (*d.1414*), between her two husbands: Walter Cokesey (*d.1407*) and Phelip. Phelip's young widow outlived him by 60 years, and died as dowager duchess of Suffolk.

**Sir William Phelip, Lord Bardolf (d.1441),** Sir John's elder brother, wore Henry IV's livery and with his uncle Erpingham's help contracted a marriage to a coheiress of the traitor Thomas, Lord Bardolf. He represented Suffolk in both Parliaments of 1414, during which the Commons gave their approval to the King's policy of active renewal of the war with France. After his brother's death at Harfleur he marched on with the King towards Calais, and so fought at Agincourt. Subsequently, Phelip's distinguished service in the field prompted Henry V to nominate him to the Order of the Garter and appoint him captain of Harfleur and treasurer of his Household in 1421. When the King died in France in 1422 Phelip took responsibility for the funeral arrangements and escorted Henry's body home to England. His role as chamberlain and councillor to the young Henry VI led to his recognition as Lord Bardolf. He and his wife Joan (*d.1447*) founded 'Phelippes chantry' in Dennington church, where they were buried in a sumptuous tomb chest.



Effigies of Sir William Phelip and his wife in Dennington Church, Suffolk

**Sir Philip Thornbury (d.1457)** had served at sea in 1404, in a fleet commanded by Sir Thomas Beaufort as admiral of England, and campaigned in Guienne in 1405 and under the **duke of Clarence** in 1412-13. Probably knighted on the Agincourt campaign, he fought at the siege of Harfleur and as a member of the garrison, once more under Beaufort's command. Three elections to Parliament for Hertfordshire followed, and he lived to old age – into his late seventies. The 'SS' collar displayed on his effigy at All Saints church, Little Munden, indicates that he was a retainer of the house of Lancaster.

**Sir Edmund Thorpe (d.1418)** Although directly descended from John Thorpe (d.1324) who had been summoned to the Lords by individual writ, Sir Edmund himself sat in the Commons (for Norfolk in 1397 and 1407). His father had fought at Crécy, and his own military career began with a naval engagement in 1385 and continued in Richard II's retinue in Ireland. Henry IV appointed him mayor of Bordeaux in 1400, only to remove him in 1402 when a servant accused him of disloyalty to the King. Although well advanced in years, Thorpe responded to the challenge of Henry V's expedition to Normandy in 1415 by enlisting as a lieutenant of the earl of Dorset, with whom he probably remained at Harfleur. He also mustered for the second invasion. Recorded as camped before Lou-

viers on 9 June 1418, he died before the town yielded on the 23rd. An impressive alabaster tomb was built for him and his wife at Ashwellthorpe.

**Thomas Fitzalan, earl of Arundel (d.1415)**, was only 16 years old when his father, Earl Richard, fell victim to Richard II's 'tyranny' in 1397. That King's deposition in 1399, however, allowed him to recover his family's great estates, and he loyally and energetically supported the new King, Henry IV, campaigning against the Welsh rebels and, in 1405, taking a prominent part in the suppression of the Yorkshire rising. Through their mutual service in Wales he established a close personal relationship with the prince of Wales, the future Henry V, and in 1411 commanded a successful raid into France in support of the prince's pro-Burgundian policy. He intended to serve in the campaign of 1415 with a large retinue of 100 men-at-arms and 300 archers, but although many of these men went on to fight at Agincourt he himself did not. He was invalided home with dysentery from the siege of Harfleur, and died, on his 34th birthday, soon after returning to Sussex.

Effigy of Sir Edmund Thorpe at  
Ashwellthorpe, Norfolk





Memorial brass of Lord Camoys and his wife at Trotton Church, East Sussex

**William, Lord Botreaux (d.1462)**, from an ancient Cornish family, inherited the family estates when only six years old in 1395. He had a long but undistinguished career, living on until 1462. After serving on the Agincourt campaign, in 1418 he took part in a naval expedition commanded by Hugh Courtenay, earl of Devon. In 1426 his uncle, Sir Ralph Botreaux, who had served under him in France, employed a necromancer in an unsuccessful attempt to bring about his death.

**Thomas, Lord Camoys (d.1421)**, was already a relatively old man when he fought at Agincourt. His military experience extended back to 1377

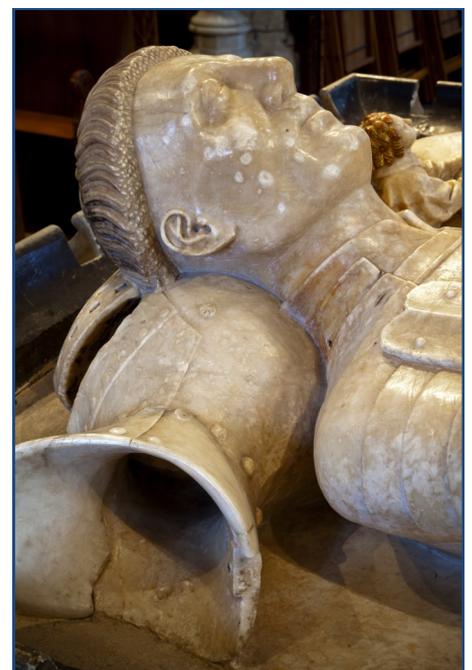
when he participated in an abortive naval campaign against the Spanish. He then followed an intermittent military career as opportunity allowed, fighting, for example, in the Scottish campaign of 1385 and under John of Gaunt in Spain in 1386. It is thus not surprising that he should have enlisted to serve on the Agincourt campaign. He headed a substantial retinue of 24 men-at-arms and 69 archers and was put in command of the left of the English line as they faced the French at that great battle. His service was recognized by elevation to the elite military fraternity of the Order of the Garter, but he seems not to have fought again before his death in 1421.

**Thomas of Lancaster, duke of Clarence (d.1421)**, the second son of Henry IV and brother of Henry V, was born in 1387 and knighted on the eve of his father's coronation in 1399. Despite his youth, he served intermittently as his father's lieutenant in Ireland for much of the reign, but was reprimanded by the royal council for neglecting his duties by spending much of his time in England. In 1412 he was given a better opportunity to prove himself, as put in command of an expeditionary force to France in support of the Armagnacs against the Burgundians. His successful raid enhanced his reputation, and as his brother prepared for the invasion of France in 1415 he undertook to serve with the massive retinue of 240 men-at-arms and 720 archers, the largest retinue of any lord. As it transpired he did not fight at Agincourt, for he was invalided home with dysentery from the siege of Harfleur. In later campaigns, however, he fought with distinction until March 1421 when, recklessly and against the advice of his captains, he gave battle against a superior French force and was killed at Baugé in Anjou.

**Sir Reynold Cobham (d.1446)** of Sterborough in Surrey, known as Lord Cobham, was compromised in his early career by doubts about his legitimacy. Unlike his father and grandfather, he was not summoned to the Lords. He served in the campaigns of 1415 and 1417 and, like Sir Thomas Cumberworth, later acted as gaoler to Charles, duke of Orléans.

**Sir Edmund Ferrers (d.1435) of Chartley** in Staffordshire (known as Lord Ferrers but never summoned to Parliament), succeeded to his family estates in 1413 in his mid-20s. He was immediately involved in a violent dispute with his neighbours, the Erdeswicks, which was pacified only by direct royal intervention. Part of his penance was to serve in the 1415 campaign and he went on to make a career as a soldier, fighting in France until Henry V's death in 1422. Then, however, like many others, he abandoned military service, resuming his disruptive activities at home.

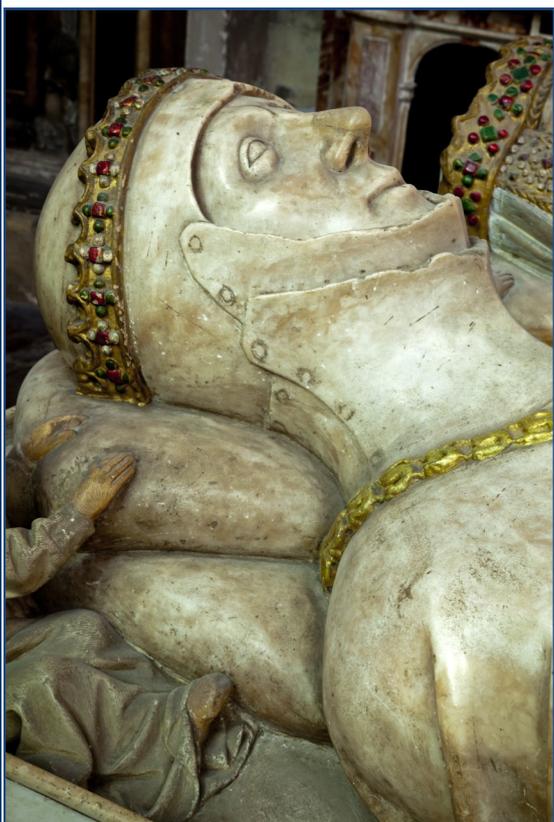
**John, Lord Harrington (d.1418)**, succeeded in 1406 to a large but divided estate, comprising the family's ancient lands, lying largely in Cumberland, and his maternal inheritance in Somerset and the West Country. In 1415 he indented to serve with 34 men-at-arms and 94 archers but he was among those invalided home from the siege of Harfleur. He again indented to serve on the campaign of 1417 and died during the course of the conquest of Normandy on 11 February 1418.



Tomb of Lord Harrington at Porlock Church, Somerset

**Clockwise from top right:**

Memorial brass of Sir John Phelip, in Kidderminster church; Tomb effigy of Lord Botreaux, North Cadbury Church, Somerset; Tomb of Lord Cobham at Lingfield Church, Surrey; Tomb of the duke of Clarence in Canterbury Cathedral; Tomb of John Blaket at Icomb Church, Gloucestershire.



**John, Lord Roos (d.1421)**, succeeded to the barony of Roos of Belvoir and Helmsley in 1414 as a seventeen year old. His short career was almost entirely concerned with war: after fighting at Agincourt he again indented for service in 1417 and went on to hold the captaincies of Chateau Gaillard and Mantes. He was another casualty of the battle of Baugé in 1421.



Tomb of Lord Roos at Bottesford Church, Leicestershire

**Richard de Vere, earl of Oxford (d.1417)**, born in about 1385, was another young nobleman whose career was almost entirely concerned with the French war. He served under Clarence in the French raid of 1412 and indented to serve in the Agincourt campaign with a retinue of 40 men-at-arms and 100 archers. He distinguished himself at the battle, being, according to a London chronicler, 'wonder fierce ... in that fight'. In the following year he was elevated to the Order of the Garter and fought under the duke of Bedford in the naval victory at the mouth of the Seine. He died in February 1417, perhaps as a result of wounds received on campaign.

Tomb of the earl of Suffolk at South Wingfield Church, Suffolk

**Michael de la Pole, earl of Suffolk (d.1415)**, was the son of Richard II's chief minister, William de la Pole, who was impeached in the 'Merciless Parliament' of 1386. The family's estates were forfeited and Michael, aged about 20 on his father's fall, only slowly recovered them. Under Henry IV, although he played only an equivocal part in the events leading to that King's accession, he rose to a new prominence. In 1400 he led a large retinue in the Scottish campaign and in 1412 he was one of Clarence's principal captains on his raid into France. In 1415 he indented to serve with a retinue of 40 men-at-arms and 120 archers, but, like several other notable men, he fell victim to dysentery at the siege of Harfleur and died on 17 September. He is memorialized in *Gesta Henrici Quinti* as 'a knight of excellent and most gracious name'. His eldest son, another Michael, just short of his majority, then assumed command of his father's retinue, along with his own of 20 men-at-arms and 60 archers, and went on to fight at Agincourt. He was one of the most notable of the English casualties of the battle, enthusiastically remembered in *Gesta*, as 'as daring as any member of the court'.



**THOSE STILL ABED**

**Brass of Thomas Chaucer at Ewelme Church, Oxfordshire**

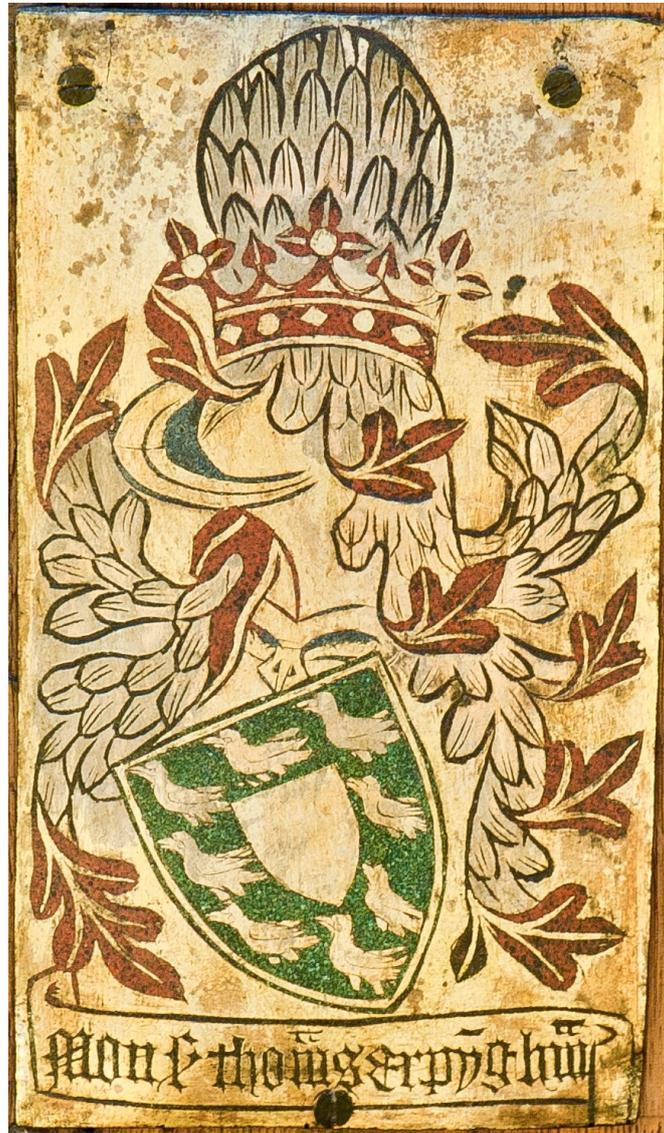


Tomb of the duchess of Suffolk at Ewelme Church, Oxfordshire

**Thomas Chaucer (d.1434)**, the only son of the poet Geoffrey, was the most outstanding parliamentarian of his day. He represented Oxfordshire in at least 14 Parliaments between 1401 and 1431, and achieved the remarkable record of five Speakerships, which was not to be equalled until the 18th century. The nephew of Katherine Swynford, the mistress and eventual third duchess to John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, Chaucer's own intimate relationship with the house of Lancaster and close alliance with his Beaufort cousins led to an illustrious career. Henry V employed him as an envoy for diplomatic negotiations in 1414 whereby he hoped to win support for his claim to the throne of France, and Chaucer was Speaker in the Parliament of November that year when the preparations for war were finalized and the Commons voted a grant of taxation as an earnest of their support. Chaucer contracted to lead a force of his

own to Normandy, but in the event his retinue of 47 men embarked without a leader, for he was taken ill and obliged to stay at home. He had a lucky escape, unlike his son-in-law, **Sir John Phelip**, who died at Harfleur leaving Chaucer's only child **Alice** a widow at just eleven years old.

**Alice Chaucer (d.1475), duchess of Suffolk.** The daughter and heiress of **Thomas Chaucer** of Ewelme and widow of **Sir John Phelip**, she married Thomas Montagu, earl of Salisbury (d.1428) and then William de la Pole, successively earl, marquess and duke of Suffolk (murdered in 1450). All three of her husbands served on the Agincourt campaign. The last, William de la Pole, lost his father **Michael, second earl of Suffolk**, at the siege of Harfleur, where he himself was wounded, and just a few weeks later his elder brother Michael (an earl for only a few weeks), fell at Agincourt.



Garter Stall Plate of Sir Thomas Erpingham in St George's Chapel, Windsor

**Text: Dr Linda Clark, Dr Hannes Kleineke and Dr Simon Payling**

**Photographs: Robert Morris /robertmorrisimages.co.uk; Stall Plates at the College of St George, courtesy the Dean and Canons of Windsor**

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**Many thanks to Arundel Castle Trustees/Paul Barker, paulbarkerphotographer.co.uk; All Saints, Ashwellthorpe; St Stephens Chapel, Bures; St Mary's, Bottesford; Canterbury Cathedral, with kind permission from the Dean and Chapter; St Mary, Dennington; St Mary the Virgin, Ewelme; St Mary's, Icomb; All Saints, Kedleston/The Churches Conservation Trust; St Mary's, Kidderminster; St Peter & St Paul, Lingfield; All Saints, Little Munden; St Chad, Longford; The Church of Our Lady, Merevale; St Michael & All Angels, Mottram; St Michael the Archangel, North Cadbury; St Dubricius, Porlock; St George's Church, Trotton; St Peter & St Paul, Weobley; St Andrew's, Wingfield**