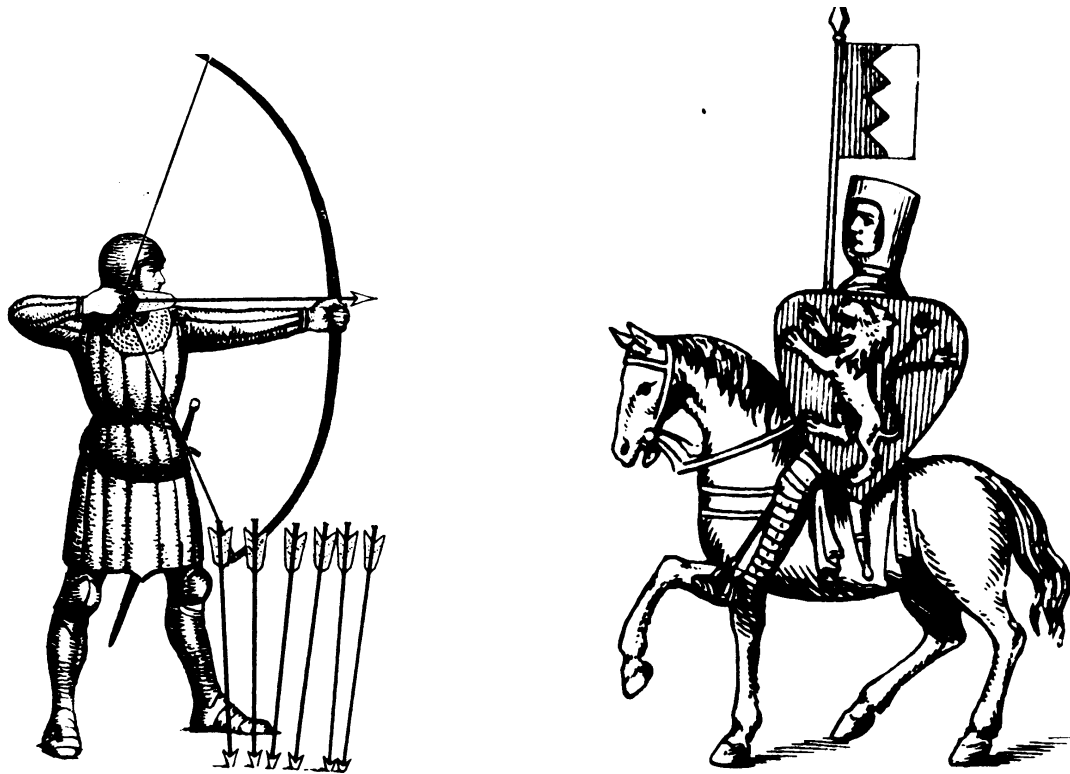


Battle of Shrewsbury 21 July 1403.



Background to the Battle - Barons, Bishops and Parliament

Henry IV (1399-1413) usurped the throne¹ from his cousin Richard II. Three groups of people helped him: Parliament, the barons and the bishops. Everyone knew that Henry was a usurper. He was descended from the fourth son of Edward III, the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt. There were descendants of Edward's second son who had a better claim to be king of England. He therefore had to be careful not to upset those who had helped to put him on the throne.

Parliament

Parliament had decided that Richard II had broken the law and was not fit to be king. Henry IV was therefore king by the will of Parliament. People in England recognised this situation. They were proud that they lived in a country where the king could not alter the laws of the land just at a whim and had to obey them himself.

Because the king was weak, the power of Parliament grew stronger. The expenses of government had increased. Henry had lost much of his revenue by giving away crown lands to those who had supported him. He could not live even in peace time without asking parliament for special subsidies. Previous kings had only asked parliament to grant such subsidies for special expenses such as war. This gave parliament more power, since they could refuse the money the king needed. Henry was compelled to allow parliament to actually make laws. Previously Parliament had asked for reforms. The king had decided the best way of carrying them out. Now Parliament began to debate bills of their own which they presented to the king for approval.

¹ Someone who usurps the throne takes it by force although they do not have a real right to it.

Barons

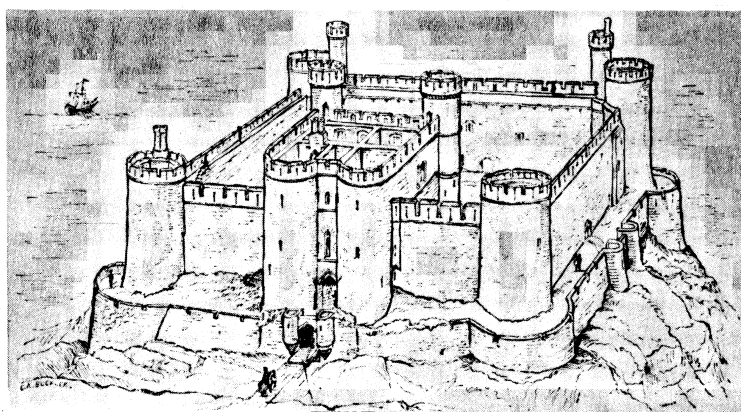
The barons had helped Henry gain the throne. Now Henry had to keep them happy also. This he did by giving them crown lands. He allowed the Percies to rule in Northumbria, the Nevilles in the western midlands and the Mowbrays in East Anglia almost as if they were independent princes. These families became very powerful. The loss of the crown lands reduced the king's revenue and so made him weaker.

Henry tried to gain popularity by war with Scotland. He was unsuccessful as the Scots simply avoided fighting. The next year the Scots raided England. They were defeated - but not by the king. The Percies, the Earl of Northumberland and his son Hotspur, defeated them. This made Henry IV look weaker than ever.

The Percies were the most powerful noble family in England and the Earl was Warden of the Marches of Scotland and so had an army. This army had joined Henry when he returned from exile and helped to make him king, so Henry was under an obligation to the Percies. As a reward they were given money and lands, including lands in Wales but they were not satisfied, saying the Welsh land was worth nothing. Harry Hotspur picked a quarrel with the king, saying that the promised money had not been paid and the Percies raised an army and joined forces with Owen Glendower.

Owen Glendower

England had been joined to Wales since the defeat of the Llewellyn brothers by Edward I and the Statute of Wales (1284). Richard II had been popular in Wales and Wales soon revolted against Henry IV even though Henry was himself a Welshman. The Welsh leader was a rich landowner Owen Glendower, a descendant of the old Welsh princes. He had been in the service of Henry but he grew to hate the English because a certain Lord Grey had seized some of his land and kept it by means of armed men. He went to London to complain but was told rudely that "a barefooted Welsh buffoon" would not be heard. Owen found the Welsh were ready to rise, they believed that Richard



was still alive, the peasants had grievances just like the English peasants and they knew that the great Welsh castles were poorly manned. They flocked to Owen and were assisted by Welsh scholars and labourers who returned from England to join them. In the mountains of Wales, Owen was difficult to defeat and he got help from the French and also from the Percies, the Earl of Northumberland and his son Harry Hotspur.

The Battle

Henry was also able to get a strong army together and when he heard that Hotspur and his men were marching to meet Owen Glendower he went out to meet him. They fought at Shrewsbury "The sorry battle of Shrewsbury, one of the worst that ever came to England, and the unkindest." The Percies were defeated with great slaughter. "In the which battle was Sir Henry Percy slain, and Sir Thomas Percy taken and kept two days, and after he was hanged and beheaded, and his head with a quarter of Sir Harry Percy set upon London Bridge." Harry Hotspur's head was cut off and sent to York in case his men should claim he was still alive. Henry himself fought bravely and killed thirty men himself, having been thrown to the ground three times.

The Welsh leader Owen Glendower managed to hold out in the Welsh hills for some time longer although Wales was subdued, dying in his own land, perhaps of starvation but at any rate not as a prisoner of the English.

Bishops

What was life like for Christians in 1403? To find out we need to consider the third group of people that had helped Henry IV gain the throne, the bishops. The Archbishop of Canterbury supported Henry. Richard II had not allowed outright persecution of Christians who were generally known as *Lollards* at this time. The Archbishop hoped that if Henry became king he would allow the church to stamp out the Lollards.

Under Richard II there had been a revival due to the preaching of Wycliffe and his followers. People were being awakened from the darkness of the superstition of the Roman church. The Duke of Lancaster had been Wycliffe's protector at first. The lollards must have wondered if his son, Henry IV would be the protector of the Lollards too? But the bishops were angry that Lollardry was continuing. They wanted the new king to give them permission to persecute Lollards. Henry was grateful to the bishops for helping him gain the throne. He was devoted to the Roman church. There was no influence on Henry like Anne of Bohemia, Richard II's queen, who had helped the Lollards in the previous reign. A period of persecution for God's people began. Once again the University of Oxford was purged² of men who had Lollard ideas. Once again it lost many of its best minds.

In 1401 Henry passed a cruel law, *De Heretico Comburendo* which said that anyone convicted of heresy in the church courts should be publicly burned alive. Some Lollards were burned. The first Lollard to be burnt was a priest named William Sawtre. The clergy drew up the Constitutions of Arundel. These forbade the translation and reading of the Bible without special permission from a high officer of the church. Some Lollards recanted³ when they were threatened with being burned. In many places Lollard meetings were held in secret to avoid persecution.

The king did protect one Lollard. Sir John Oldcastle earned the king's favour during the early part of his reign by maintaining order in West Herefordshire on the troubled Welsh border. Here he was perhaps far enough away to practice Lollardry without persecution. In 1409 he married a lady who was heiress to estates in Kent and he moved there, becoming Lord Cobham. Here as in his old home near the far western mountains, he continued to protect Lollard preachers with arms if necessary. He continued to do this through out the reign of Henry IV. Lollardry did not die out in England. Lollards continued here and there faithfully reading their Wycliffe Bibles through all the persecution that followed until the Reformation began in England many years later.

2 To purge is to clean out.

3 To recant is to withdraw or renounce as wrong, opinions or ideas you have once held.



Fifteenth Century Street Scene

Quiz

1. Who was king before Henry IV (1399-1413)?

- (a) Richard II
- (b) Henry (III)
- (c) Owen Glendower

2. What is a usurper?

- (a) a kind of bow used in a medieval battle
- (b) someone who takes the throne by force although they do not have a real right to it.
- (c) someone who succeeds to the throne after a battle.

3. Richard II had

- (a) not allowed outright persecution of the Lollards.
- (b) persecuted the Lollards fiercely.
- (c) been very sympathetic to the Lollards

4. Which of these helped to bring Henry IV to power? (note: you may tick more than one)

- (a) Barons
- (b) Bishops
- (c) the Percies
- (d) Parliament
- (e) the Irish

5. Why did parliament become stronger in Henry IV's reign?

- (a) because he encouraged it
- (b) because he fought against it.
- (c) because the king was weak.

6. The Earl of Northumberland's son was called

- (a) Lord Grey
- (b) Owen Glendower
- (c) Hotspur

7. Northumberland joined forces with

- (a) Owen Glendower
- (b) Henry IV
- (c) Parliament

8. Whose preaching led to a revival in the reign of Richard II?

- (a) Tyndale
- (b) Wycliffe
- (c) Whitfield

9. Henry IV's father had once helped the Lollards; who was he?

- (a) The Earl of Northumberland
- (b) Henry III
- (c) The Duke of Lancaster

10. What was *De Heretico Comburendo*?

- (a) A law that lollards should be burnt alive.
- (b) A law against the Welsh
- (c) A law forbidding the reading of the Bible without special permission.

11. What were the Constitutions of Arundel?

- (a) A law that lollards should be burnt alive.
- (b) A law against the Welsh
- (c) A law forbidding the reading of the Bible without special permission.

11. Sir John Oldcastle was protected by the king. Why did he need special protection?

- (a) He was a Welshman.
- (b) He was a relative of the Percies.
- (c) He was a lollard.

12. What was his other name?

- (a) Lord Cobham
- (b) Hotspur
- (c) William Sawtre

13. Now colour all the pictures. You may decorate the sheets with any pictures, borders etc. that you like.