

The battle of agin-court 1415 history essay



Turning point being a change in the course of events during the Hundred Years War concerning the English and the French, for example a shift from a state of peace between the 2 nations into an aggressive situation, or a shift of fortunes during the fighting or within their own country's politics. A turning point's significance is measured by how important it is in comparison with other turning points throughout the Hundred Years War.

Agincourt is viewed by many historians, such as Mortimer and Neillands, to be the beginning of the 3rd stage of the war[1],

as despite further fighting was afterwards postponed until 1417, it led to a campaign which lasted up until 1422, during which time they had captured the majority of the northern half of France, including the political capital, Paris.

Daniel Waley argues that in fact Agincourt had no decisive strategic consequences but that it's effect on English opinion helped Henry to renew war in 1417[2]. Anne Curry is in agreement with this point, stating that " His success could only serve to increase English enthusiasm for, and willingness to finance, further war"[3]. The taxes he had been granted by Parliament, to be collected in February 1416, were brought forward to December 1415 and another tax collection was granted in late 1416 and he was granted customs duty of foreign trade. By gaining this funding he proved he had gained strong trust and approval in government and effectively " a vote for the continuation of the war"[4]. Such generous tax grants showed that Parliament backed Henry V's cause, and the fact they dared demand such high taxes from the common Englishman, considering the short time

between the two demands, suggests that the general consensus of the English was also positive, otherwise Parliament would not have risked the possible revolts that might have followed.

On the other hand, the victory at Agincourt did set England up for huge success; the French lost significant numbers of its leading figures including many important nobles, and the defeat then triggered a bout of mental illness in Charles VI which led to France becoming further divided. This was because France was forced to place the leadership of the country under regency and in an already unstable country regency would prove to have disastrous results for France, as when England returned to France in its divided state they exploited its weakness to a point where they controlled the bigger half of the country, including Paris.

Robin Neillands states that "...the victory at Agincourt, shattering though it was to French moral, at first gained England very little in political terms"[5] This statement is more accurate than Waley's view, as he does not reject the strategic advantages Agincourt brought, but instead accepts that it didn't offer much politically; by end of the Agincourt campaign, the only political advantage England had gained over France was Harfleur, which gave them a second French port, and a few important prisoners. At least concerning foreign policy this is true, but as previously mentioned, it gained England domestic stability.

Strategically, Agincourt left England in a fantastic position; France were defeated, weakened and the rife factional division further deepened, leaving them wide open for another English attack, but the English were only strong

for as long as the country supported the army. At the end of the Agincourt campaign, England left with only Harfleur and Calais to its name; they had gained no political advantage in France other than Harfleur, which gave them a second 'safe' gateway into France, it being a port town, and a handful of prisoners.

Agincourt seriously affected the French. For a long time factional feuds kept them from uniting, but it provoked them into defending their homeland.[6] It would eventually lead, if indirectly, to reunification, but Agincourt laid the foundations for the French so they could begin to stabilize and pull together, as the threat Henry V posed forced them to. Another turning point in a sense, although one which did not really take effect immediately.

Agincourt was the beginning of a new war but it was only a beginning, whose biggest importance was that it motivated the English and divided the French, therefore giving momentum to something much bigger. It was a turning point in what it started but there was little direct gain in France from it until 1417.

However Agincourt is not entirely unique, despite being the most famous battle of the Hundred Years War[7]. Strong similarities between Agincourt and the Battle of Crecy, 1346, can easily be drawn. Both battles suffered poor weather conditions that profoundly affected the outcome of the battle; at Crecy the rain soaked the crossbow strings, ruining the elasticity, depriving the French of ranged fighting whilst at Agincourt the rain turned the battlefield into a bog that the French could only cross slowly, leaving them vulnerable for long durations of time. Also, the French men-at-arms

came between their own crossbows and the English, meaning the French (again) couldn't shoot due to the risk of friendly fire. Henry V used the same combination of men-at-arms and archers as the Black Prince had deployed at Crecy[8] and in both battles the English were desperately disadvantaged. The outcome of both battles was an impressive campaign in France that would end in a Peace Treaty extremely advantageous to the English with the defeated French nursing an inflamed hatred towards England, having been humiliated and demoralized again to come together and take back what was originally theirs.

This brings the significance of Agincourt into question, considering the similarities, why is Agincourt perceived to surpass Crecy? There are differences between the two battles, and where Anne Curry believes that "The impact of Agincourt parallels that of Crecy"[9], the long term effects of Agincourt turned out to be more serious than the ones of Crecy. Agincourt was the starting point of the conquering and reconquering of northern France, where Crecy only led to the recapture of the old Angevin Empire and Edward III had no real control, and the reunification of the French nobles under Charles VII[10] was started with the attitude, although Crecy did enable Edward III to recover a dangerous political situation which had occurred around the time of the Naval Battle of Sluys. Agincourt created a fatal tradition of English Kings fighting in France, which would lead to a decline in English domestic stability once they started losing after the French reunited. Also at Crecy Edward III commanded an army of an estimated 20 000 troops although like at Agincourt this has come under much dispute, particularly by French historian Ferdinand Lot, who claims in ' L'Art Militaire

et les Armies au Moyen Age' 1946, that the English numbered only 9000 and that French numbers were in turn inferior. Yet as Alfred H. Burne points out, should this have been the case then French Chroniclers would've leapt on the opportunity to make excuses for the defeat, and yet there is a lack of such evidence.

Agincourt is also surrounded by much confusion. Chroniclers concerning the numbers of soldiers at Agincourt range from 6000 English to 100 000 and from 8000 French to 150 000 obviously making it difficult to determine exactly the odds the English faced. Many historians place their trust in the Gesta Henrici Quinti, an eyewitness account of the Agincourt campaign which estimates that the English were outnumbered by 10 to 1, with a 60 000 strong French army attacking a weak disease-ridden English force of 6000. It was published in 1416 and does not draw on any other sources when putting together the numbers of those involved, so it cannot be corrupted by possible inaccuracies contained in other estimates. The same cannot be said for many contemporary chronicles, and care must be taken when using them. There are only 4 surviving eyewitness accounts of what happened[11]and two of these were released years after the actual event, leaving ample time for the authors to be affected by propaganda, which is what the Gesta was used for. So despite it being a primary source and being found accurate when cross-referenced with other sources, the fact that it was used as a propaganda tool means that it must be treated with caution as there is not enough primary evidence to check it against and it's motives for being written are suspicious.

Even so, the fact the English were so outnumbered does not make Agincourt any more significant, only more impressive, so despite everything before mentioned, Agincourt's fame may be purely down to reputation rather than anything that was particularly important.

This reputation will have come about through the heavy propaganda campaign surrounding activity in France, taking advantage of the chivalrous cult of the era. To justify invading France, Henry V fought under the banner of God and Christianity, that it was his divine hereditary right to be King of France and that if he was victorious then it was clear that in the eyes of God he was the rightful King. Agincourt was the 1st time there was massive inclusion of clergy in the army outside of a crusade which put the campaign under a religious flag, rather than a matter of state, which was much more important to the people who would be paying for the war. Henry V also surrounded himself with significant religious symbols and publicly laid out a set of Ordinances, to protect the church, even the church in France to cement the image in place. Then the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* was released, to show the people, to whom he had sold his image as the model Christian prince, of his endeavours in France and what his victory meant. However in 1422 the Treaty of Troyes was signed, which throws his divine right and piety in jeopardy. As Anne Curry points out, by becoming Charles VI's heir, Henry abandoned the hereditary claim to the French throne he had through Edward III and recognised Charles' right to be king for the 1st time; he was therefore abandoning his God-given right to be King of France through Edward III, the idea on which he had based his campaign when he presented it to his people. It grows hard to trust his justification of going to war with France.

Also, the campaign may be famous for the way the English marched insolently through French lands along an almost identical path as Edward III after Crecy. It's that arrogance in looking for a fight and taking such a famous route that would have gotten people talking; how dare he? The only two conclusions are that he is either totally confident he would be King of France or he was crazy. Luckily victory made sure he was the hero King and not the fool as he had ignored his councillors advice to go straight home from Harfleur by sea. Luck made him very famous, as doubtless with the boggy conditions Agincourt was fought upon, the English would've been destroyed.

He was written into legend by Shakespeare's play ' Henry V', but upon closer inspection it's based upon the chronicles now criticised for their inaccuracy by Anne Curry. It is frightening that so many historians base their studies on this play considering, and in a way it has played a role as part of ongoing propaganda over Agincourt. Despite the cynicism of many modern historians, there are still Historians who are affected by it. Juliet Barker, for example holds complete faith in the Gest Henrici Quinti and is in firm believe of Henry V being as pious and chivalrous as this document claims, defending him where maybe he ought not be defended . Times such as the negotiations just before the war started, falsely sending the French messages that he does not want a war unless absolutely necessary whilst preparing a large fighting force and making ridiculous demands of the French which they could never accept. She defends these saying that he was following the codes of chivalry and that he genuinely felt it was necessary to be a diplomat in such a way. More likely it was a mix of the two, as he lived in an age where

religion was of great importance still, but he was a King with power to gain, religion was used to achieve an end. Still, Juliet Barker is aware of the propaganda as she acknowledges and discusses it within her text, which to some extent is strange as she does not seem to realise she may have fallen victim to it.

Despite all of this, who is to say that Agincourt or Crecy were the most important turning points in the Hundred Years War, despite their reputations. Is it not possible that the Peace Treaties of the Hundred Years War caused, or at the very least influenced, just as much change as the famous battles surrounding them? Whilst bringing peace, they caused just as many problems due to unworkable or unfulfilled terms.

The Treaty of Bretigny, 1360, is a perfect example. The final ratification of the Treaty was not completed, after being delayed until either when the terms of the Treaty concerning land were fulfilled, or until November 1361, whichever came 1st. While unofficially England and France were at Peace[12]“...the roots of antagonism and discord had been rooted up and the seeds of perpetual peace between the two great countries sown”[13]. This was shown upon the death of Jean II in 1362, when his successor Charles V became the aggressive party in Anglo-French relations, antagonised by the 1st period of the war, he took the lands back. Where temporary peace may have come about with the Treaty of Bretigny[14], the war resumed again into another period of fighting because there was no legal ending to the conflict and England did not hold the renewed Angevin Empire in full sovereignty. This meant France could reclaim it without breaking the Treaty. Later on, despite the fact it was never ratified, Henry V <https://assignbuster.com/the-battle-of-agincourt-1415-history-essay/>

would later claim these lands were his own as he marched through “ his Duchy of Normandy” and “ his county of Pontieu” and “ his town of Calais”[15], following Edward III’s footsteps after the siege of Harfleur, in full knowledge that it was on a similar expedition in 1346 that the his predecessor won the famous battle of Crecy. So the Treaty of Bretigny 1360 set up another period of fighting because it didn’t satisfy either side and because no peace was legally enforced war continued, but this time the French were beating the English.

The Treaty of Troyes was about as much use as the the Treaty of Bretigny. It held a flaw with similar magnitude to that of Bretigny’s; as discussed, Henry V became heir to Charles VI with it’s signing, and then the fact that Charles VII was still alive, was brought fully into the fore; he’d been disinherited but he was not excluded from succession to the French throne. Unlike the treaty of Bretigny, where a flaw in the legal proceedings have prevented a final conclusion, the actual circumstances of the time prevented this treaty from working; Charles always remains in a position strong enough where he could challenge the English’s authority as a contender to the throne because he was 17 when disinherited, old enough for the French people to be accustomed to the fact that he would be their next king[16]. No French man with any self respect would accept an English monarch after the humiliation the English had put them through. This Treaty hardened French attitudes strongly against the English, although until the Siege of Orleans the French were still beaten and demoralized, divided and unable to do anything. The Treaty of Troyes was build-up to the most important turning point of the Hundred Years War, it signalling the beginning of the end for England’s time

of having a hold over France, for though primarily it appears to bring peace and solve the problems, it actually causes more fighting until 1453, leading to the expulsion of the English from French land.

The Siege of Orleans may be the foremost major turning point of the entire period. In 1429; France was in serious trouble with England holding large portions of land under their control; should they take Orleans, the rest of France would fall. As it happened Jeanne d'Arc motivated demoralized men and turned the tables on the English, and rallied them under the one flag of Dauphin Charles VII's cause. After the siege was broken they used their momentum to continue clearing out English troops. The French finally realised their seeing Charles VII crowned King of France in 1436. They then attacked and recovered Paris from English conquerors. France was becoming one whole force, division was no longer dividing them[17]. This unification was completed with the Treaty of Arras, when the Burgundian alliance finally stopped getting in the way of the crown

The unification of the warring French factions the Burgundians and Armagnacs, and the effects it had on the course of the war show how much the division weakened them. A good example is during the Battle of Agincourt, where the French performed appallingly as far as tactics were concerned. Due to the lack of leadership and complete lack of trust or even any kind of relationship other than hatred or jealousy, all of the other leading nobles and their hosts were assembled in the vanguard, leading to confusion and a huge scale of French mortality.

This shows how domestic affairs impacted greatly on the way the war ran. The more divided the French were, the better the English did as seen during Henry V's period of fighting in France, such as during the usurpation of Richard II where Henry IV had to abandon affairs with in France for years whilst cementing the Lancastrian dynasty's position and also at the time around the Battle of Sluys. This period is also important, as during this time, the future Henry V was learning to wage war, lessons which would later be applied to battles with the French, particularly the arrangement of archers and men-at-arms. England also stayed out of France during Richard II's reign, but through personal choice rather than a need to stay away. He adopted a policy where he allowed piracy in the English channel towards the French, and completely ignored it, something which Henry IV also used.

In conclusion, Agincourt was significant as part of a turning point. It restarted the Anglo-French Wars and fully restored stability to the Lancastrian reign in England, however it served more to set the English up for success than it did as a stand alone turn around of events. The peace treaties of the Hundred Years War did not particularly aid peace, rather produced more violence and when considered next to Agincourt they are background factors which affect the temperament of the two countries towards each other. The siege of Orleans was the most important turning point of the Hundred Years War as it triggered the decisive fall of English power in France and had the longest lasting effect although without the change in English and French domestics it probably would have made no difference - Agincourt was an impressive battle in a sequence of events.

Source Evaluation

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I used Juliet Barker's " Agincourt - the King - the Campaign - the Battle" the most throughout the study and found it to be highly useful but questioned it's reliability when I found it to contain numerous one sided arguments in Henry V's favour that I cross-referenced and found that the information generally agreed with other historians. It was the fact that it was handwritten that suggested she was influenced by Henrician propaganda from the time - it has been passed along from generation to generation.

This Gesta Henrici Quinti is a primary source from 1416, an eye-witness account of the Battle of Agincourt as there are only four surviving chronicles from the era, there was very little to cross-reference the information against to check it's validity. However, it is a stand-alone source, and no other sources were used in its writing.

Colonel Burne focused on the tactical side of the battle of Agincourt and the surrounding wars, but this appears to have affected his judgement concerning the related issues as his work is all based around the fighting. He does not appear to have considered the tactical implications of this fighting, or the overall impact of the battle as part of the Hundred Years War.

Ormrod's " Edward III", although useful, was more concerned with social politics and their involvement in the war, rather than the other way around. However, his work does appear to coincide with that of other historians, in particular concerning the Treaty of Brittany. Therefore, where the analysis of this subject is appropriately needed, Ormrod was helpful, but otherwise his priority was how politics effected the war. He has discounted the effect that the peace treaties had on the war.

I had to check the reliability of Daniel Waleys text as the chapter I used was entitled “ French Defeats and Chivalrous Ideals” leading me to believe his work should be checked due to any possible one-sided arguemtns.