

Social Studies

WV History/Geography

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The Fall of Rome

At its height, the boundaries of the Roman Empire stretched from the north of England across the North Sea, along the Rhine and Danube Rivers to the Caspian Sea, south to Egypt, along the coast of Africa to Spain. The decline and eventual collapse of this vast empire took place over a period of years before reaching its bitter end in the middle of the 5th century. Its demise followed a pattern in which extended periods of weakness were followed by unsustainable bursts of strength that inevitably led to further decline. The forces that motivated its destruction came from the internal decay of its economic, political and social structure combined with relentless barbarian attacks from without.

The Huns made their first appearance in what is now Eastern Europe around the year 370. Thundering out of Asia's Central Steppes, their arrival pushed the resident tribes such as the Vandals and Visigoths westward into a collision with the Roman Empire ([see Dining with Attila the Hun](#)). In 376, the Visigoths crossed the Danube River - a traditional boundary of the Roman Empire - and swarmed southward. Two years later, the Visigoths defeated the Romans at the battle of Adrianople, further weakening the Empire.

Further west, the Vandals crossed the Rhine River - another traditional boundary of the Empire- in 406. They continued their assault southward to Spain, crossing the Pyrenees Mountains in 409. A year later, the Visigoths sacked Rome and continued on to Spain.

In 429, the Vandals crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and reached the shores of Africa. They continued their assault eastward along the coast and re-crossed the Mediterranean to make a landing in Italy. In 455 they followed in the footsteps of the Visigoths and sacked Rome. The Western Roman Empire was dead. However, a vestige of Rome lived on. Its Eastern portion, with its capital at Constantinople, lasted for another 1000 years until the city was sacked by the Muslims in 1453.

"Who could believe this?"

St. Jerome was born around the year 340. He came to Rome and was baptized there around 360. He devoted the rest of his life to scholarly pursuits and the translation of the Bible into Latin. He died in 420. He wrote the following observations describing the devastation of the Empire around 406:

"Nations innumerable and most savage have invaded all Gaul. The Whole region between the Alps and the Pyrenees, the ocean and the Rhine, has been devastated by the Quadi, the Vandals, the Sarmati, the Alani, the Gepidae, the hostile Heruli, the Saxons, the Burgundians, the Alemanni, and the Pahnonians.

Oh wretched Empire! Mayence [Mainz, Germany], formerly so noble a city, has been taken and ruined, and in the church many thousands of men have

been massacred. Worms [Germany] has been destroyed after a long siege. Rheims, that powerful city, Amiens, Arras, Speyer [Germany], Strasburg, - all have seen their citizens led away captive into Germany. Aquitaine and the provinces of Lyons and Narbonne, all save a few towns, have been depopulated; and these the sword threatens without, while hunger ravages within.

I cannot speak without tears of Toulouse, which the merits of the holy Bishop Exuperius have prevailed so far to save from destruction. Spain, even, is in daily terror lest it perish, remembering the invasion of the Cimbri; and whatsoever the other provinces have suffered once, they continue to suffer in their fear.

I will keep silence concerning the rest, lest I seem to despair of the mercy of God. For a long time, from the Black Sea to the Julian Alps, those things which are ours have not been ours; and for thirty years, since the Danube boundary was broken, war has been waged in the very midst of the Roman Empire. Our tears are dried by old age. Except a few old men, all were born in captivity and siege, and do not desire the liberty they never knew.

Who could believe this? How could the whole tale be worthily told? How Rome has fought within her own bosom not for glory, but for preservation - nay, how she has not even fought, but with gold and all her precious things has ransomed her life...

Who could believe that Rome, built upon the conquest of the whole world, would fall to the ground? That the mother herself would become the tomb of her peoples? That all the regions of the East, of Africa and Egypt, once ruled by the queenly city, would be filled with troops of slaves and handmaidens? That to-day holy Bethlehem should shelter men and women of noble birth, who once abounded in wealth and are now beggars?"

References:

This eyewitness account appears in Robinson, James Harvey, Readings in European History (1906); Duruy, Victor, History of Rome and of the Roman People, vol VIII (1883).

How To Cite This Article:

"The Fall of Rome" EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2007).

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Invasion of England, 1066

The Battle of Hastings

King Edward of England (called "The Confessor" because of his construction of Westminster Abbey) died on January 5, 1066, after a reign of 23 years. Leaving no heirs, Edward's passing ignited a three-way rivalry for the crown that culminated in the Battle of Hastings and the destruction of the Anglo-Saxon rule of England.

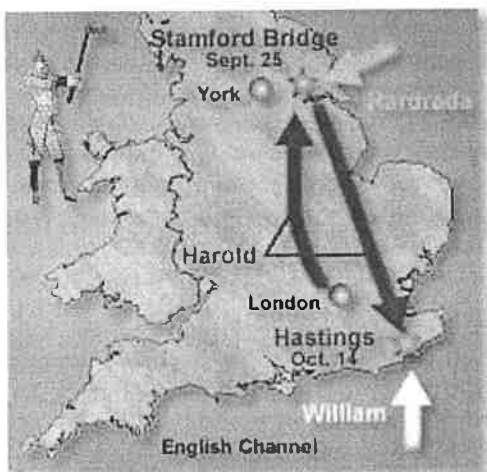
The leading pretender was Harold Godwinson, the second most powerful man in England and an advisor to Edward. Harold and Edward became brothers-in-law when the king married Harold's sister. Harold's powerful position, his relationship to Edward and his esteem among his peers made him a logical successor to the throne. His claim was strengthened when the dying Edward supposedly uttered "Into Harold's hands I commit my Kingdom." With this kingly endorsement, the Witan (the council of royal advisors) unanimously selected Harold as King. His coronation took place the same day as Edward's burial. With the placing of the crown on his head, Harold's troubles began.

Across the English Channel, William, Duke of Normandy, also laid claim to the English throne. William justified his claim through his blood relationship with Edward (they were distant cousins) and by stating that some years earlier, Edward had designated him as his successor. To compound the issue, William asserted that the message in which Edward anointed him as the next King of England had been carried to him in 1064 by none other than Harold himself. In addition, (according to William) Harold had sworn on the relics of a martyred saint that he would support William's right to the throne. From William's perspective, when Harold donned the Crown he not only defied the wishes of Edward but had violated a sacred oath. He immediately prepared to invade England and destroy the upstart Harold. Harold's violation of his sacred oath enabled William to secure the support of the Pope who promptly excommunicated Harold, consigning him and his supporters to an eternity in Hell.



Harold Godwinson
From the Bayeux Tapestry

The third rival for the throne was Harald Hardrada, King of Norway. His justification was even more tenuous than William's. Hardrada ruled Norway jointly with his nephew Mangus until 1047 when Mangus conveniently died. Earlier (1042), Mangus had cut a deal with Harthacut the Danish ruler of England. Since neither ruler had a male heir, both promised their kingdom to the other in the event of his death. Harthacut died but Mangus was unable to follow up on his claim to the English throne because he was too busy battling for the rule of Denmark. Edward became the Anglo-Saxon ruler of England. Now with Mangus and Edward dead, Hardrada asserted that he, as Mangus's heir, was the rightful ruler of England. When he heard of Harold's coronation, Hardrada immediately prepared to invade England and crush the upstart.



The Invasions of England, 1066

Hardrada of Norway struck first. In mid September, Hardrada's invasion force landed on the Northern English coast, sacked a few coastal villages and headed towards the city of York. Hardrada was joined in his effort by Tostig, King Harold's nere-do-well brother. The Viking army overwhelmed an English force blocking the York road and captured the city. In London, news of the invasion sent King Harold hurriedly north at the head of his army picking up reinforcements along the way. The speed of Harold's forced march allowed him to surprise Hardrada's army on September 25, as it camped at Stamford Bridge outside York. A fierce battle followed. Hand to hand combat ebbed and flowed across the bridge. Finally the Norsemen's line broke and the real slaughter began. Hardrada fell and then the King's brother, Tostig. What remained of the Viking army fled to their ships. So devastating was the Viking defeat that only 24 of the invasion force's original 240 ships made the trip back home. Resting after his victory, Harold received word of William's landing near Hastings.

Construction of the Norman invasion fleet had been completed in July and all was ready for the Channel crossing. Unfortunately, William's ships could not penetrate an uncooperative north wind and for six weeks he languished on the Norman shore. Finally, on September 27, after parading the relics of St. Valery at the water's edge, the winds shifted to the south and the fleet set sail. The Normans made landfall on the English coast near Pevensey and marched to Hastings.

Harold rushed his army south and planted his battle standards atop a knoll some five miles from Hastings. During the early morning of the next day, October 14, Harold's army watched as a long column of Norman warriors marched to the base of the hill and formed a battle line. Separated by a few hundred yards, the lines of the two armies traded taunts and insults. At a signal, the Norman archers took their position at the front of the line. The English at the top of the hill responded by raising their shields above their heads forming a shield-wall to protect them from the rain of arrows. The battle was joined.

The English fought defensively while the Normans infantry and cavalry repeatedly charged their shield-wall. As the combat slogged on for the better part of the day, the battle's outcome was in question. Finally, as evening approached, the English line gave way and the Normans rushed their enemy with a vengeance. King Harold fell as did the majority of the Saxon aristocracy. William's victory was complete. On Christmas day 1066, William was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey.

The Bayeux Tapestry

The Bayeux Tapestry (actually an embroidery measuring over 230 feet long and 20 inches wide) describes the Norman invasion of England and the events that led up to it. It is believed that the Tapestry was commissioned by Bishop Odo, bishop of Bayeux and the half-brother of William the Conqueror. The Tapestry contains hundreds of images divided into scenes each describing a particular event. The scenes are joined into a linear sequence allowing the viewer to "read" the entire story starting with the first scene and progressing to the last. The Tapestry would probably have been displayed in a church for public view.

History is written by the victors and the Tapestry is above all a Norman document. In a time when the vast majority of the population was illiterate, the Tapestry's images were designed to tell the story of the conquest of England from the Norman perspective. It focuses on the story of William, making no mention of Hardrada of Norway nor of Harold's victory at Stamford Bridge. The following are some excerpts taken from this extraordinary document.

King Edward sends Harold on a Mission

The Tapestry's story begins in 1064. King Edward, who has no heirs, has decided that William of Normandy will succeed him. Having made his decision; Edward calls upon Harold to deliver the message.

This at any rate, is the Norman interpretation of events for King Edward's selection of William is critical to the legitimacy of William's later claim to the English crown. It is also important that Harold deliver the message, as the tapestry explains in later scenes.

In this scene King Edward leans forward entrusting Harold with his message. Harold immediately sets out on his fateful journey.



King Edward sends Harold on a mission

Harold Swears an Oath to William

Pursuing his mission, the Tapestry describes how Harold crosses the English Channel to Normandy, is held hostage by a Norman count and is finally rescued by William.



Harold swears an oath

Harold ends up in William's castle at Bayeux on the Norman coast where he supposedly delivers the message from King Edward. At this point the Tapestry describes a critical event. Having received the message that Edward has anointed him as his successor; William calls upon Harold to swear an oath of allegiance to him and to his right to the throne. The Tapestry shows Harold, both hands placed upon religious relics enclosed in two shrines, swearing his oath as William looks on. The onlookers, including William, point to the event to add further emphasis. One observer (far right) places his hand over his heart to underscore the sacredness of Harold's action. Although William is seated, he appears larger in size than Harold. The disproportion emphasizes Harold's inferior status to William. The Latin inscription reads "Where Harold took an oath to Duke William."

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Kublai Khan In Battle, 1287

In the middle 13th century the influence of the Mongol Empire established by Genghis Khan stretched from the borders of Poland in the West to the Yellow Sea in the East. Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis, became ruler of the empire in 1260 and proceeded to consolidate his power by relinquishing the Mongol conquests outside China establishing his capital at the site of modern-day Beijing.

Nicolo Polo and his brother Maffeo were Venetian merchants and the equivalent of today's entrepreneurs. In 1260 the brothers traveled overland to the Mongol capital and remained in the Khan's court until their return to Venice in 1269. In 1271, the merchants again made the hazardous journey to Kublai Khan's court this time taking Nicolo's seventeen-year-old son Marco with them. It took 3 1/2 years for the adventurers to reach their destination. They stayed with the Khan for 17 years and then endured a three-year return journey to Venice where they arrived in 1295. Marco Polo immediately impressed the Khan with his intelligence and knowledge of language and was soon providing invaluable service as the Khan's emissary and political adviser. Marco Polo's description of his travels aroused the interest of Medieval Europe in the Orient and later inspired Christopher Columbus to search for a Western sea route that ultimately led to the discovery of America.

A Great Battle

In 1287 Marco Polo accompanied Kublai Khan and his army on an expedition to destroy the forces of the Khan's uncle and rival Nayan. Nayan had gathered an army of 300,000 with the intent of wresting power from his nephew. Alerted to the threat, Kublai quickly marched north at the head of a force of some 460,000 troops surprising the usurper, as he and his army lay encamped in a shallow valley. We join Marco's story in the early morning as Kublai Khan looks down on his enemy in the valley below:

"What shall I say about it? When day had well broken, there was the Kaan with all his host upon a hill overlooking the plain where Nayan lay in his tent, in all security, without the slightest thought of any one coming thither to do him hurt. In fact, this confidence of his was such that he kept no vedettes whether in front or in rear; for he knew nothing of the coming of the Great Kaan, Owing to all the approaches having been completely occupied as I told you. Moreover, the place was in a remote wilderness, more than thirty marches from the Court, though the Kaan had made the distance in twenty, so eager was he to come to battle with Nayan.

And what shall I tell you next? The Kaan was there on the hill, mounted on a great wooden bartizan, (a wooden defensive tower) which was borne by four well-trained elephants, and over him was hoisted his standard, so high aloft that it could be seen from all sides. His troops were ordered in battles of 30,000 men apiece; and a great part of the horsemen had each a foot-soldier armed with a lance set on the crupper behind him (for it was thus that the foot-men were disposed of); and the whole plain seemed to be

Marco Polo dictated his memoirs to a fellow prisoner while held captive by the Genovese during a war between Venice and Genoa.

Kublai Khan's attempt to invade Japan was thwarted when his ships were destroyed by a typhoon. This "Divine Wind" or "Kamikaze" was a term resurrected by the Japanese during World War II to describe their pilots who flew suicide missions against American naval ships.

Marco states that after the battle Kublai Khan ordered Nayan put to death by wrapping him in a carpet and vigorously tossing the bundle

covered with his forces. So it was thus that the Great Kaan's army was arrayed for battle.

from side to side. This form of execution assured that the Khan spilled no royal blood.

When Nayan and his people saw what had happened, they were sorely confounded, and rushed in haste to arms. Nevertheless they made them ready in good style and formed their troops in an orderly manner. And when all were in battle array on both sides as I have told you, and nothing remained but to fall to blows, then might you have heard a sound arise of many instruments of various music, and of the voices of the whole of the two hosts loudly singing. For this is a custom of the Tartars, that before they join battle they all unite in singing and playing on a certain two-stringed instrument of theirs, a thing right pleasant to hear. And so they continue in their array of battle, singing and playing in this pleasing manner, until the great Naccara (*giant battle drums*) of the Prince is heard to sound. As soon as that begins to sound the fight also begins on both sides; and in no case before the Prince's Naccara sounds dare any commence fighting.

So then, as they were thus singing and playing, though ordered and ready for battle, the great Naccara of the Great Khan began to sound. And that of Nayan also began to sound. And thenceforward the din of battle began to be heard loudly from this side and from that. And they rushed to work so doughtily with their bows and their maces, with their lances and swords, and with the arblasts of the footmen, that it was a wondrous sight to see. Now might you behold such flights of arrows from this side and from that, that the whole heaven was canopied with them and they fell like rain. Now might you see on this side and on that full many a cavalier and men-at-arms fall slain, insomuch that the whole field seemed covered with them. From this side and from that such cries arose from the crowds of the wounded and dying that had God thundered, you would not have heard Him! For fierce and furious was the battle, and quarter there was none given.

But why should I make a long story of it? You must know that it was the most parlous and fierce and fearful battle that ever has been fought in our day. Nor have there ever been such forces in the field in actual fight, especially of horsemen, as were then engaged - for, taking both sides, there were not fewer than 760,000 horsemen, a mighty force! and that without reckoning the footmen, who were also very numerous. The battle endured with various fortune on this side and on that from morning till noon. But at the last, by God's pleasure and the right that was on his side, the Great Khan had the victory, and Nayan lost the battle and was utterly routed. For the army of the Great Kaan performed such feats of arms that Nayan and his host could stand against them no longer, so they turned and fled. But this availed nothing for Nayan; for he and all the barons with him were taken prisoners, and had to surrender to the Kaan with all their arms.

Now you must know that Nayan was a baptized Christian, and bore the cross on his banner; but this nought availed him, seeing how grievously he had done amiss in rebelling against his Lord. For he was the Great Kaan's liegeman, and was bound to hold his lands of him like all his ancestors before him."

References:

Yule, Henry (translator, editor), *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (3rd Edition), (1929).

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Torture in the Tower of London, 1597

Father John Gerard was a spy. In November 1588 he was among a team of four Jesuit priests sent from Rome and secretly landed on the shores of England with the mission of making contact with and ministering to that country's Roman Catholic community. He joined a clandestine network of Catholic operatives controlled from their headquarters in London.

Born in England, Father Gerard mingled easily among English society, passing himself off as a gentleman of leisure. It was a dangerous existence; as evidenced by the fact that Father Gerard's three companions in the landing party were eventually discovered and executed. Gerard remained undetected for six years until his betrayal by a servant in a household in which he was staying.

After three years in captivity he was taken to the Tower of London where he was subjected to torture in an effort to force him to confess that his mission was to overthrow Queen Elizabeth and to reveal the identity of the leader of the spy ring. Despite the pain, he refused to divulge any information. On the night of October 4, 1597 he made a daring escape from the Tower with the help of friends on the outside. He slipped into the English countryside and remained undiscovered for another eight years.

Finally, with the attempt to blow up Parliament and the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, the political atmosphere became too dangerous. Father Gerard slipped out of the country and sailed to the European continent disguised as a member of the Spanish diplomatic mission.

Torture

Father Gerard wrote a book detailing his adventures shortly after his escape to Europe. He describes his torture in the Tower of London:

"We went to the torture room in a kind of procession, the attendants walking ahead with lighted candles.

The chamber was underground and dark, particularly near the entrance. It was a vast place and every device and instrument of human torture was there. They pointed out some of them to me and said I would try them all. Then he asked me again whether I would confess.

'I cannot,' I said.

I fell on my knees for a moment's prayer. Then they took me to a big upright pillar, one of the wooden posts which held the roof of this huge underground chamber. Driven into the top of it were iron staples for supporting heavy weights. Then they put my wrists into iron gauntlets and ordered me to climb two or three wicker steps.

My arms were then lifted up and an iron bar was passed through the rings of one gauntlet, then through the staple and rings to the second gauntlet. This done, they fastened the bar with a pin to prevent it from slipping, and then, removing the wicker steps one by one from under my feet, they left

me hanging by my hands and arms fastened above my head. The tips of my toes, however, still touched the ground, and they had to dig the earth away from under them. They had hung me up from the highest staple in the pillar and could not raise me any higher, without driving in another staple.

Hanging like this I began to pray. The gentlemen standing around me asked me whether I was willing to confess now.

'I cannot and I will not,' I answered.

But I could hardly utter the words, such a gripping pain came over me. It was worst in my chest and belly, my hands and arms. All the blood in my body seemed to rush up into my arms and hands and I thought that blood was oozing from the ends of my fingers and the pores of my skin. But it was only a sensation caused by my flesh swelling above the irons holding them.

The pain was so intense that I thought I could not possibly endure it, and added to it, I had an interior temptation. Yet I did not feel any inclination or wish to give them the information they wanted. The Lord saw my weakness with the eyes of His mercy, and did not permit me to be tempted beyond my strength. With the temptation He sent me relief. Seeing my agony and the struggle going on in my mind, He gave me this most merciful thought: the utmost and worst they can do is to kill you, and you have often wanted to give your life for your Lord God. The Lord God sees all you are enduring - He can do all things. You are in God's keeping.

With these thoughts, God in His infinite goodness and mercy gave me the grace of resignation, and with a desire to die and a hope (I admit) that I would, I offered Him myself to do with me as He wished. From that moment the conflict in my soul ceased, and even the physical pain seemed much more bearable than before, though it must, in fact, I am sure, have been greater with the growing strain and weariness of my body...

Sometime after one o'clock, I think, I fell into a faint. How long I was unconscious I don't know, but I think it was long, for the men held my body up or put the wicker steps under my feet until I came to. Then they heard me pray and immediately let me down again. And they did this every time I fainted - eight or nine times that day - before it struck five...

A little later they took me down. My legs and feet were not damaged, but it was a great effort to stand upright..."

References:

Father Gerard's account appears in Gerard, John, *The Autobiography of an Elizabethan* (1951); Dods, A.H., *Elizabethan England* (1973); Youngs, Joyce, *Sixteenth Century England* (1984).

How To Cite This Article:

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The Battle of Agincourt, 1415

The English victory at the Battle of Agincourt gave birth to a legend that was immortalized in William Shakespeare's *King Henry V*. The battle took place in a muddy farmer's field in northern France on October 25, 1415 and was one in a series of encounters between France and England that has become known as the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453).

The story begins two months before the battle. Henry and his army had landed in France on August 14 near the mouth of the Seine River. The objective was to regain English territory lost to France over a period of centuries. The first task was to besiege and conquer a nearby town. Henry was successful, but the time-consuming effort took over a month. It was now early October. Henry realized that his reduced force and the limited time left in the campaigning season, meant that he would not be able to press his attack on the French. Instead, he led his army north in a "show of force" that would end at the English port of Calais and embarkation back to England.

As the English army marched north, it was dogged by a French force intent on bringing Henry to battle. The French were able to slip ahead of Henry and block his path to the sea at Agincourt. On the morning of October 25, the two armies faced one another on a recently plowed field muddied by an overnight rain and constricted by woodlands on either side. The majority of Henry's army was made up of archers; the remainder consisted of armored knights who fought on foot. His opponent's force consisted primarily of knights who fought on foot and on horseback, supported by archers. Although estimates of the relative strength of the two armies vary, there is no argument that the English were vastly outnumbered.

The two enemies faced one another, exchanging taunts designed to provoke an attack. Henry marched his force close enough to allow his archers to unleash a hail of arrows upon the French. The French knights charged forward only to be caught in a slippery quagmire of mud. To make matters worse, the French attackers were unable to effectively swing their broadswords because of the tight quarters of the battlefield and the continuing forward rush of their comrades behind them. Henry's archers fired lethal storms of arrows into this dense mass of humanity until the French began to retreat. The archers then dropped their bows, picked up what weapons they could find and joined the English knights in slaying their foe. The setting sun left a battlefield heaped with the bodies of thousands of French knights and the cream of France's ruling class. The English had dealt their enemy a disastrous blow.

"...their horses stumbled among the stakes, and they were speedily slain by the archers."

Jehan de Wavrin was the son of a Flemish knight. His father and older brother fought with the French at the battle. Both were killed. The young de Wavrin observed the battle from the French lines and we join his account as the two armies prepare for combat:

The size of the English army has been estimated at 7,000 (including 6,000 archers). The French force may have numbered between 12,000 and 25,000, the majority of these being knights.

Agincourt was the name of a near-by fortress. Henry gave this name to his victory.

"When the battalions of the French were thus formed, it was grand to see them; and as far as one could judge by the eye, they were in number fully six times as many as the English. And when this was done the French sat down by companies around their banners, waiting the approach of the English, and making their peace with one another; and then were laid aside many old aversions conceived long ago; some kissed and embraced each other, which it was affecting to witness; so that all quarrels and discords which they had had in time past were changed to great and perfect love. And there were some who breakfasted on what they had. And these Frenchmen remained thus till nine or ten o'clock in the morning, feeling quite assured that, considering their great force, the English could not escape them; however, there were at least some of the wisest who greatly feared a fight with them in open battle.

...The French had arranged their battalions between two small thickets, one lying close to Agincourt, and the other to Tramecourt. The place was narrow, and very advantageous for the English, and, on the contrary, very ruinous for the French, for the said French had been all night on horseback, and it rained, and the pages, grooms, and others, in leading about the horses, had broken up the ground, which was so soft that the horses could with difficulty step out of the soil. And also the said French were so loaded with armour that they could not support themselves or move forward. In the first place they were armed with long coats of steel, reaching to the knees or lower, and very heavy, over the leg harness, and besides plate armour also most of them had hooded helmets; wherefore this weight of armour, with the softness of the wet ground, as has been said, kept them as if immovable, so that they could raise their dubs only with great difficulty, and with all these mischiefs there was this, that most of them were troubled with hunger and want of sleep.

...Now let us return to the English. After the parley between the two armies was finished and the delegates had returned, each to their own people, the King of England, who had appointed a knight called Sir Thomas Erpingham to place his archers in front in two wings, trusted entirely to him, and Sir Thomas, to do his part, exhorted every one to do well in the name of the King, begging them to fight vigorously against the French in order to secure and save their own lives. And thus the knight, who rode with two others only in front of the battalion, seeing that the hour was come, for all things were well arranged, threw up a baton which he held in his hand, saying 'Nestrocq' ['Now strike'] which was the signal for attack; then dismounted and joined the King, who was also on foot in the midst of his men, with his banner before him.

Then the English, seeing this signal, began suddenly to march, uttering a very loud cry, which greatly surprised the French. And when the English saw that the French did not approach them, they marched dashingly towards them in very fine order, and again raised a loud cry as they stopped to take breath.

Then the English archers, who, as I have said, were in the wings, saw that they were near enough, and began to send their arrows on the French with great vigour.

Then the French seeing the English come towards them in this manner, placed themselves together in order, everyone under his banner, their helmets on their heads. The Constable, the Marshal, the admirals, and the

other princes earnestly exhorted their men to fight the English well and bravely; and when it came to the approach the trumpets and clarions resounded everywhere; but the French began to hold down their heads, especially those who had no bucklers, for the impetuosity of the English arrows, which fell so heavily that no one durst uncover or look up.

Thus they went forward a little, then made a little retreat, but before they could come to close quarters, many of the French were disabled and wounded by the arrows; and when they came quite up to the English, they were, as has been said, so closely pressed one against another that none of them could lift their arms to strike their enemies, except some that were in front...

[The French knights] struck into these English archers, who had their stakes fixed in front of them... their horses stumbled among the stakes, and they were speedily slain by the archers, which was a great pity. And most of the rest, through fear, gave way and fell back into their vanguard, to whom they were a great hindrance; and they opened their ranks in several places, and made them fall back and lose their footing in some land newly sown; for their horses had been so wounded by the arrows that the men could no longer manage them.

[The French] men-at-arms without number began to fall; and their horses feeling the arrows coming upon them took to flight before the enemy, and following their example many of the French turned and fled. Soon afterwards the English archers, seeing the vanguard thus shaken, issued from behind their stockade, threw away their bows and quivers, then took their swords, hatchets, mallets, axes, falcon-beaks and other weapons, and, pushing into the places where they saw these breaches, struck down and killed these Frenchmen without mercy, and never ceased to kill till the said vanguard which had fought little or not at all was completely overwhelmed, and these went on striking right and left till they came upon the second battalion, which was behind the advance guard, and there the King personally threw himself into the fight with his men-at-arms.

As the English continued to gain the upper hand, King Henry received news that the French were attacking at the rear of his army and that French reinforcements were approaching. King Henry ordered that all French prisoners be put to the sword - an order his knights were reluctant to follow as, if kept alive, these prisoners could bring a healthy ransom:

"When the King of England perceived them coming thus he caused it to be published that every one that had a prisoner should immediately kill him, which those who had any were unwilling to do, for they expected to get great ransoms for them. But when the King was informed of this he appointed a gentleman with two hundred archers whom he commanded to go through the host and kill all the prisoners, whoever they might be. This esquire, without delay or objection, fulfilled the command of his sovereign lord, which was a most pitiable thing, for in cold blood all the nobility of France was beheaded and inhumanly cut to pieces, and all through this accursed company, a sorry set compared with the noble captive chivalry, who when they saw that the English were ready to receive them, all immediately turned and fled, each to save his own life. Many of the cavalry escaped; but of those on foot there were many among the dead."