

Agincourt: Henry V and the Battle That Made England

By Juliet Barker


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Waged almost six centuries ago, the Battle of Agincourt still captivates. It is the classic underdog story, and generations have wondered how the English--outmanned by the French six to one--could have succeeded so bravely and brilliantly. Drawing on a wide range of sources, Juliet Barker paints a gripping narrative of the October 1415 clash between the outnumbered English archers and the heavily armored French knights. Populated with chivalrous heroes, dastardly spies, and a ferocious and bold king, AGINCOURT is as earthshaking as its subject--and confirms Juliet Barker's status as both a historian and a storyteller of the first rank.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Barker, a British biographer (*The Brontës*) and accomplished medievalist, brings an excellent synergy of academic and literary skills to this study of the 1415 British campaign in France and the battle that was its climax, around which she elaborately reconstructs the conflict's antecedents. Henry V spent years preparing the ground: asserting initially shaky authority in England, exploiting domestic strife in France and isolating the disorganized kingdom from its traditional allies. During the campaign itself, a train of artillery manned by foreign gunners supplemented the men-at-arms and the longbowmen, who were the British army's real backbone. But the French were not the vainglorious incompetents of English legend and Shakespearean drama. Many in northern France made a brave effort, often putting aside personal and political differences to stand together at Agincourt, where they came closer to success than is generally realized. Barker shows that the battle hung by a thread: French numbers against English desperation, with courage a common virtue. She also illustrates how Agincourt was decisive—not only for its consequences in France. An English defeat would have meant chaos, perhaps civil war. Destiny on both sides of the Channel turned on the outcome of St. Crispin's Day. (*June 14*)

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From [Booklist](#)

The Battle of Agincourt of 1415 has endured in popular awareness on the strength of Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth*. The historical Henry V bears scant resemblance to Falstaff's royal drinking buddy: in Barker's lushly detailed account, Henry V was a pious warrior, an able administrator, and an aggressive diplomat. Barker dwells extensively on Henry's rapid intensification, after ascending to the throne in 1413, of the Hundred Years' War, the English attempt to control the crown and territory of France. As a result, her emphasis on the organization of the campaign that culminated at Agincourt delivers a superb description of how a medieval military force was raised. Founded on feudal precepts of lord-and-vassal obligation, Henry's army and that of France were personalistic, a trait Barker turns to positive advantage in portraying the combatants. From longbow men to men-at-arms, Barker successfully individuates the Agincourt battle so that readers perceive actual people, not just a melee of thousands, engaging in the battle. With fluency and empathy, Barker delivers a superior performance that should capture avid history readers. *Gilbert Taylor*
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About the Author

Juliet Barker is the distinguished biographer of Wordsworth and the Bronte sisters. She is also a noted medievalist and lives with her family in the UK.

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