

THE ARCHER'S TALE: AN EXAMINATION OF ENGLISH ARCHERS
DURING THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR AND THEIR
IMPACT ON WARFARE AND SOCIETY

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Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

THE ARCHER'S TALE: AN EXAMINATION OF ENGLISH ARCHERS DURING THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR AND THEIR IMPACT ON WARFARE AND SOCIETY, by Major Stephen S. Taliaferro, 122 pages.

Much of England's success in the Hundred Years War is attributed to England's use of large infantry formations made up of commoners armed with the longbow. A variety of factors including the Black Death and the amalgamation of several cultures, created a society in England with a relatively high degree of social mobility. The demands of war against a much larger opponent combined with England's relative social mobility made it possible for England to incorporate low born archers into their professional military community which previously only included the aristocracy and the gentry. The success of these common archers on the battlefield continued to increase the level of social mobility available to low born men. English "Yeoman Archers," as they came to be known, became the embodiment of a new social order in which ability was more prized than birth. They had a dramatic impact on the character of warfare in the fourteenth century and the development of the western way of war as we know it today.

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CHAPTER 1

THE ARCHER'S TALE

On the afternoon of August 26th, 1346, a French army, approximately 30,000 strong, fought an English army of approximately 10,000 men near the village of Crecy in northern France. The French army had around 12,000 knights and men-at-arms, while the English army had only about 2,500.¹ Knights and men-at-arms normally fought as heavily armored horsemen and were generally regarded as the most effective troops of the medieval era by many of their contemporaries.² According to the prevailing military wisdom of the day, the English were heavily outmatched both quantitatively and qualitatively.

However, when the battle was over, nearly 2,000 French knights and countless numbers of French infantry lay dead, while the English suffered only a few hundred

¹ There is some disagreement between the various contemporary sources and between modern historians as to the size of each army. Estimates for the French have ranged anywhere from 30,000-100,000, however most modern historians settle somewhere near 30,000. The English forces have been estimated to be as low as 6,000 and as high as 15,000. Most modern historians believe the English numbered around 9,000-10,000. Significantly all the sources are in agreement on the number of men-at-arms each force contained. This agreement in the contemporary sources illustrates how shocked the medieval military community was that a force so superior in heavy cavalry was defeated in such a one sided battle. For more on the battle of Crecy see John Lynn, *Battle A History of Combat and Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 73-76; Johnathon Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 524-530.

² Knights and men-at-arms fought in exactly the same manner. The primary difference between them was that knights were of increased social status.

casualties.³ The English victory and the great disparity in casualties can be explained by the presence of 6,000 to 7,000 English archers armed with the yew longbow. In this, the first great battle of the Hundred Years War (1337 to 1453), the English archers established their dominance on the medieval battlefield that would last for nearly 200 years.

Before the early-fourteenth century, it would have been unimaginable for any army so weak in heavy cavalry to win such a one-sided victory. This was particularly true for England. At the beginning of the fourteenth century the kingdom of England was, at best, a second rate military power. However, before the end of the century, English armies would be considered some of the finest in Europe. Indeed, in the initial stages of the Hundred Years War, the English defeated significantly larger French armies in several stunning battles, of which Crecy was only the first. The English victories were all the more stunning when one considers that France was vastly superior to England in terms of economic and military resources.

Much of England's success in the Hundred Years War is attributed to England's use of large infantry formations made up of archers armed with the longbow. However, despite their demonstrated success, the English were the only western monarchy to develop a large native military archery capability, and with the exception of Scotland, the English were the only western monarchy to effectively use infantry in any capacity. Indeed, the English tactical system was dependent on disciplined missile and melee infantry formations. Significantly, in an age in which social class was of the utmost

³ The contemporary chronicler Geoffrey Le Baker stated that the English had lost less than 100 men. Geoffrey Le Baker, David Priest, and Richard Barber, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey Le Baker* (Woodbridge UK: Boydell Press, 2012), 75.

concern, English archers were recruited from the lower and middling classes. This was due, in part, to a confluence of events, including The Black Death and the Hundred Years War, which caused English society in the fourteenth century to undergo dramatic changes. The rise of English archers and their integration into the professional military community was the early embodiment of these sweeping social changes. What is more, the archers' continued success on the battlefield continued to drive change, particularly in the realms of political representation and social mobility.

In order to validate these assertions, this thesis will contain an examination of the social status of English archers, and discussion on the unique aspects of English society and the events of the fourteenth century that allowed archers to integrate into the military community. Additionally, this thesis will include discussion on the military and social ramifications of widening the professional military community to include peasant infantry.

In order to understand the archer's place in society one must first have some understanding of society as a whole. Therefore, chapter 2 begins with a brief discussion of English society in the fourteenth century. This discussion addresses how English society tried to define itself utilizing the three estates, and how the realities of English society differed from this idealized model. Additionally, there is a brief examination of the major events that shaped the fourteenth century.

Chapter 3 narrows the focus to examine the English military community of the fourteenth century. It is necessary to discuss the structure of the military community and the social aspects that determined who served as a man-at-arms and who served as an archer. It will also be necessary to examine the social and military realities of the English

position at the beginning of the Hundred Years War that necessitated their reliance on archers. These discussions will establish a firm understanding of English society and the English military community and allow for a more detailed analysis of the social status of English archers.

The fourth chapter examines the social status of English archers as well as the specific aspects of English culture that allowed England to create a massed archery capability when no other western monarchy could. This study will conclude with an examination of the archer's impact on the western way of war and English society.

The writings of several fourteenth century chroniclers have been particularly important to this research. The Chronicles of Jean Froissart have provided insight into the political and social complexities of the medieval era. While Froissart discusses warfare, and mentions archers on several occasions, he admits that none of his accounts are first-hand and that he relied heavily on the Chronicles of Jean le Bel for his battle accounts. Jean Le Bel seems to be a reliable source on English Warfare in the fourteenth century as he participated in Edward III's Scottish campaign of 1327. Le Bel also claims that all of his descriptions of events in the Hundred Years War are from eye witness accounts. The Scalacronica of Sir Thomas Grey is also a valuable resource. Grey is a fourteenth century English knight who participated in many of the campaigns against the Scots, and provides valuable information concerning the English military community.

In addition to chronicles, the literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth century has been important in developing this thesis. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the various Robin Hood ballads were key in developing many of the assertions of this study. While only so much historical certainty can be gained from popular fiction of the era, like

popular fiction in every era, it is valuable because it represents the general beliefs and views of average people from the era.

There are a multitude of secondary sources useful to this study. Mathew Strickland and Robert Hardy's collaborative effort, *The Great Warbow: From Hastings to the Mary Rose*, is an excellent resource on the history of military archery in Western Europe. The book is a wealth of information, and while a significant portion of it is devoted to discussing longbowmen in the Hundred Years War, the book also looks at many aspects of the development of the bow from prehistory to the sixteenth century. There are additional sections on military medicine, archery during the crusades, crossbows, and medieval warfare in general. This comprehensive work is the starting point for any research into western military archery.

Several other books were extremely important for understanding the military community of England during the fourteenth century and warfare during the Hundred Years War. Michael Prestwich's *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, dispels many common assumptions about medieval warfare and illustrates the strategic, operational and tactical complexity of military operations during the high middle ages. Andrew Ayton's *Knights and Warhorses*, also discusses these matters. Both Ayton and Prestwich discuss in length the changes in recruitment and organization that occurred in English armies of the fourteenth century and give significant credence to the notion that England experienced a revolution in military affairs during the fourteenth century.

Phillip Contamine's *War in the Middle Ages*, was equally valuable to this study. While, Ayton and Prestwich were primarily concerned with the English military community of the fourteenth century, Contamine examines the state of military affairs

throughout Western Europe during the medieval period and provides context to the changes that were taking place in England.

Jonathon Sumption's three volume work *The Hundred Years War*, is the recognized authority on The Hundred Years War. Sumption provides detailed analysis, based on primary sources, of the political, military, and social aspects of the Hundred Years War. His work is an essential resource for understanding a conflict that lasted over a century and involved almost all of the kingdoms of Western Europe.

When specifically discussing the social status of English archers and their place in the military community, the research of Anne Curry and Adrian Bell was particularly valuable. Their book, *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*, contains the best analysis to date of the social status of archers, as well as other members of the English military community, during the Hundred Years War.

For research into medieval culture and society this study relied heavily on the writings of the late Maurice Keen, who was the preeminent medieval scholar of the twentieth century. Keen's book, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, is widely recognized as the foremost work examining English society in the medieval era. Christopher Dyer's *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* was also indispensable for understanding the socio-economic conditions of the medieval period. The writings of Victor Davis Hanson were also a source of inspiration and insight for many of the concepts discussed in this thesis concerning the western way of war and the element of class struggle between cavalry and infantry.

Finally, many of the assertions made in this thesis build on the research of Clifford Rogers. Roger's writings on the "Infantry Revolution of the Fourteenth

Century,” provided much of the inspiration to begin work on this thesis. His article “The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years War,” and the chapter he wrote for, *The Dynamics of a Military Revolution*, were particularly insightful. Rogers convincingly argues that the emergence of disciplined peasant infantry formations during the Hundred Years War was a fundamental step towards the military revolution of the early modern era.

This thesis is primarily concerned with social developments related to England’s reliance on archers during the Hundred Years War. Thus, the technical aspects of the longbow and its development will not be discussed at length. However, there is still a fair amount of controversy surrounding the English adoption of the longbow and it is necessary at this point to briefly discuss the competing theories.

In the nineteenth and twentieth century many historians posited the theory of the “short bow” to explain the seemingly sudden reliance the English placed on archers in the fourteenth century.⁴ According to the theory, the longbow was a relatively new technological development originating in Wales. The longbow was incorporated into English formations during the reign of Edward I (1272 to 1307) in the late thirteenth century after his extensive campaigns in Wales. The bows used in western medieval warfare before this time were short bows drawn only to the chest as opposed to the

⁴ For more on the original theory of the rise of the longbow see Charles Oman, *The Art of War in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 116-122; John Edward Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 100-103.

longbow which is drawn to the ear. These short bows were thought to be largely ineffective against even lightly armored men.⁵

The opposing theory asserts that longbows of the type used in the Hundred Years War had existed for centuries before the thirteenth century. The archaeological evidence provided by bows found in peat bogs and grave goods firmly establishes that the longbow was in use in Western Europe long before the thirteenth century. Literally dozens of bows that would be recognizable to any English archer of the Hundred Years War have been discovered all over northern Europe. The Ashcott Heath bow, dating to 2600 B.C.E. is a “D” bellied bow with a thickness to width ratio of. 1:1.1, exactly the same as the Tudor longbows found on the Mary Rose.⁶ Another longbow found at a burial site in Hedeby Denmark, dated to the tenth century, had an estimated draw weight exceeding 100 pounds. This bow would certainly have been powerful enough to pierce mail and perhaps even plate armor.⁷ Many more longbows with similar proportions dating from 2400 B.C.E. to 900 C.E. have been found throughout northern Europe. Given how easily wood is destroyed by age, the sheer number of finds suggest that longbows were prolific in Europe from at least the second millennium B.C.E., if not much earlier.⁸

⁵ Based on various test with period armor, a bow with a draw weight of at least 70 lbs is required to penetrate chainmail armor. For more on this see Mathius Bane, “English Longbow Testing” (Thesis, 2006); Hugh Soar, *Secrets of the English Warbow* (Yardley, PA: Westholm Publishing, 2006).

⁶ Matthew Strickland and Robert Hardy, *The Great Warbow* (London: Sutton Publishing, 2005), 39-43.

⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁸ Robert Hardy, *Longbow: A Social and Military History* (Sparkford: Bois d'arc Press, 1992), 17-18.

This evidence makes it clear that England's adoption of the longbow in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was not due to technological developments regarding the longbow, but instead, were due to sweeping social changes taking place in England.

This research is important to modern historians and military professionals alike. It demonstrates the effectiveness of developing existing capabilities in times of fiscal austerity as well as demonstrating the importance of questioning contemporary military wisdom. Additionally, the research demonstrates that the most important aspects of a military revolution are social, and that warfare is one of the primary drivers of social change. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge concerning the social and military complexity of medieval society.

CHAPTER 2
ENGLISH SOCIETY IN THE
FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The English archer was unique among fighting men in Western Europe and had a profound effect on the course of military development in Western Europe generally and social development in England specifically. In order to understand how the English archer was unique, one must first understand Western European medieval society generally and then understand how and why English society was unique from the rest of Europe. This chapter will set the stage for examining the English archer by looking at medieval society briefly. In the course of this, it will be necessary to compare England to its neighbors on the continent in order to illustrate the unique aspects of English culture that made it so successful in war. This chapter will also briefly examine the Hundred Years War, as this conflict drastically affected every level of English society and provided the opportunity for the English archer to come to the forefront of contemporary military fighting men.

The Three Estates of Man and the Feudalism

Europe in the fourteenth century was a hierarchical society in which social position determined the level of respect and obligatory service one man might expect to give or receive from another. This was true even in England, where social position was more flexible than anywhere else on the continent. The main ways in which status was determined was by birth, tenure, and wealth, normally in that order. To put it more plainly, one's status depended on who one's father was in the case of birth, to whom one

paid rent or owed service in the case of tenure, and how much money or property one had in the case of wealth. All three of these factors were determined, or at least were supposed to be determined, by one's position in the three estates of man and the feudal system. The feudal system and the three estates framework were mutually supporting as a means to maintain the social hierarchy.⁹

The fourteenth century English poet Jon Gower wrote, "We recognize that there are three estates. In his own way, everyone in the world lives under them and serves them."¹⁰ Gower was referring to the three estates framework by which European medieval society generally defined itself. Under this framework, there were three estates or classes of men. The clergy of the Catholic Church composed the first estate. Their role in society was to look after its spiritual well-being. The nobility composed the second estate. They were the lords protector who provided military and administrative services. Anyone who was not a member of the church or the nobility belonged to the third estate. The third estate was defined by the manual labor of its members in supporting the nobility and the clergy.¹¹ In theory, the three estates were mutually supporting, but it seems to have been a much better arrangement for the clergy and the nobility than it was for the peasants and townsmen of the third estate.

When discussing the second estate, gentry is a more useful term than nobility to describe social conditions in England. In England nobility refers mainly to the apex of

⁹ Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 1-2.

¹⁰ John Gower, *Vox Clamantis*, Middle Ages: Topics, accessed April 1 2015, http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/middleages/topic_1/satire.htm#vox.

¹¹ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 2.

medieval society, the 70 or so important men who made up the peerage and held land directly from the king and were called lords in Parliament. On the continent, nobility refers to a much larger section of the population. This is because in many places on the continent knighthood was frequently hereditary. This was not the case in England where only the major titles such as earl or duke were hereditary.¹² Even with these titles, only the eldest son inherited the title. The younger sons were simply members of the gentry. In theory, there was no social difference between the son of a duke and the lowest esquire.

The estates framework clearly resembles Plato's *Republic* in which society is divided into philosopher rulers, warriors, and producers, but regardless of its roots in classical literature, the estates model was a specifically Christian framework and was propagated most by the Church. Indeed, it was considered man's Christian duty to perform the tasks dictated by his social station. As one might expect from a system endorsed by the Church, the clergy were considered first in the order of dignity. They were followed by the nobility. Despite numerous disagreements between the Church and the nobility, the primary function of both was the exercise of authority within their respective spheres of influence.¹³ So not only were the knight and the priest to be supported by the peasants, they were to have lordship over them as well.¹⁴

¹² Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200-1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18.

¹³ There was a constant struggle between the Church and the kings of England concerning the king's rights in church affairs, beginning with the controversy of who has the right to invest Bishops, continuing with the death of Thomas Beckett at the hands of knights loyal to Henry II, and culminating with Henry VIII's final break with the Catholic Church.

¹⁴ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 3.

The estates framework was just as restrictive to social mobility as it was hierarchical. The aversion to social mobility in the estates framework also had religious undertones. The Church preached that the social hierarchy and a man's fixed position within that hierarchy were divine intention. "Let every man abide in the same calling in which he was called,"¹⁵ was often quoted by the Church to reinforce this view. They interpreted this verse to mean that if one were born to a lowly station, then one will remain in a lowly station because if God had meant for one to be something different, then one would have been born that way.¹⁶

However, just like Plato's *Republic*, the estates framework was an idealistic view of how contemporaries believed society should be formed. It never did correspond totally with cultural realities, especially by the mid-fourteenth century in England. Geoffrey Chaucer, writing in the late-fourteenth century, depicted the knight, the parson and the ploughman as the models for the three estates in the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. However, Chaucer describes nineteen other characters in the book, many of whom are difficult to assign to an estate. Chaucer was gently pointing out the primary problem of the estates framework, which was that it did not accurately portray the complexities of English society.¹⁷

The feudal system, which was complimentary to the three estates framework, was not really a system at all. It was a collection of feudal customs that were codified at

¹⁵ 1st Corinthians 7:20 (Douay-Rheims Bible), accessed 1 December 2014, <http://www.drbo.org/chapter/53007.htm>.

¹⁶ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 3.

¹⁷ Donald R. Howard, *Chaucer His Life His Works His World* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1987), 410.

various times in the medieval era in order to provide some clear understanding of one's feudal obligations or expectations as a tenant or a landlord respectively.¹⁸ It developed primarily as a mechanism to provide the kingdom with trained fighting men and maintain their loyalty. Under idealistic conditions the king owned all the land. He granted tracts of land, or tenures, to his followers, who were then his tenants. In return, the tenants pledged loyalty and military service to the king. The king's tenants had the right to any profits from the land and jurisdiction over any peasants who lived on the land. The peasants worked the land for the king's tenants, giving them the freedom to train for war, which many of them did from birth. The land was essentially owned by the tenant and his family at that point and were known as freeholds.

The king retained certain rights that allowed him to charge a fee each time the land was handed down to an heir, and the king could take control of the land while the heir remained a minor. The tenant in turn might grant a portion of the land to a subtenant retaining the same rights as the king, or sell the entire tenure or portions of it to another man as long as the new tenant swore to uphold the same obligations to the king. The subtenant could now do the same. This system was hierarchical in determining to whom one owed service and allegiance.¹⁹ In theory, the tenures, usually based on size, would determine social position. The barons held tenures from the king, and the knights held sub tenures from the barons. All provided military service when called and remained loyal to their landlords and ultimately to the king.

¹⁸ David Herlihy, ed., *The History of Feudalism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1970), 177.

¹⁹ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 19.

However, like the three estates framework, feudalism was an idealized system that did not always ensure loyalty or military service in actual practice. Issues arose when a man might marry an heiress who owned lands in tenure from a lord other than his own. Their son might buy a tenure from a man who held lands in tenure from an entirely different lord. His son in turn might marry an heiress who held lands in the exact same fashion so that now one man owned lands in tenure to multiple lords, probably at different levels in the tenure hierarchy. One must keep in mind that this system had been in place since the time of the Norman Conquest. This long period of dilution of the military-social hierarchy meant that by the mid-fourteenth century, grades in the hierarchy of tenure lost much of their finite value.²⁰ A lord would have very little meaningful control over the military service of a tenant who might owe fealty to several different lords at varying social levels within the feudal system.

The most profound effect of the estates framework and the feudal system was on the military community of medieval Western Europe. The military community, which had once encompassed all free men in the classical era, was now made up of aristocrats fighting as armored horsemen. The formation of the ruling class into a professional class of privileged warriors is in direct opposition the concept of the citizen soldier that was the hallmark of Greek and Roman armies.²¹ However, Germanic cultures, such as the Saxons and the Franks, always gave a higher status to warriors within the community as well as religious leaders. Thus, what develops in Western Europe after the fall of the

²⁰ Ibid., 20.

²¹ Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture* (New York: First Anchor Books, 2002), 2-5.

Western Roman Empire, is a culture that is a combination of Roman and Germanic cultures in which the Church and Roman administrative practices replace the old pagan religions and tribal society. The personal retinue of tribal chieftains evolves into the aristocratic feudal cavalry and replaces the citizen armies of the Roman Empire.

Consequently, warriors became more separated from the peasant population, so that before long armies were almost exclusively aristocratic heavy cavalry. In most of Western Europe by the end of the thirteenth century peasants were viewed as more of a hindrance on the battlefield than an asset. Accordingly, the peasant classes were seldom if ever mustered. When they were pressed into service they were intended only to give the appearance of numbers and assist in the rout once the battle had been won by the heavy cavalry. In some places on the continent peasants were prohibited from possessing weapons at all.

The feudal system was in many ways a reaction to growing military trends in the early Middle Ages, which focused on the importance of heavy cavalry. Additionally, the intensification of farming of cereal crops, which are labor intensive, meant that peasants were often not available to fight on even short campaigns. So, the perceived importance of cavalry, the economic realities of intensive agriculture, and hierarchical system endorsed by the Church had effectively forced peasants out of military service throughout most of Europe.

The Realities of English Society

English society was unique from much of Western Europe. How and why English society developed differently from the rest of Europe is beyond the scope of this study. It is enough to say that by the fourteenth century England was unique from the rest of

Western Europe in several important ways. First was the relative level of available social mobility. Second was the unique way that England was governed through parliament and the monarchy. Last, England had developed a sense of national identity based on the peculiar mix of Norse, Celtic, Saxon, and Norman French cultures. While many regions of Europe were beginning to coalesce into proto-nation states with a unique national identity, there were aspects of the English identity that were unique in Western Europe during the medieval period.

Wealth and Social Mobility

A common misconception about medieval society is that it followed the rigid feudal orders set forth by the three estates and there was no chance for social advancement. However, as has already been pointed out earlier in this chapter, the estates framework and the feudal system were simply inadequate to describe and define, let alone control, the complexities of human society and interaction. Thus, social mobility in England was not uncommon. Contemporaries were fully aware of the imperfections of the three estates classifications and developed ways of equating men with each other on the social scale. The administrative and literary records of the era clearly indicate that wealth had become almost as important, as birth for determining status.²²

Most social classes in English society had some overlap, and therein lies the problem for the medieval historian. Defining social class based on its mid-section is not that difficult. The difficulty is in locating the upper and lower limits of a social class. A very rich knight might be indistinguishable from a poorer baron, and so on down the

²² Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 20-26.

social ladder to the point where a wealthy yeoman might be indistinguishable from an esquire or gentleman and a poorer yeoman might be tottering on the edge of becoming a laborer.²³ To confuse the matter further, there are a disconcerting amount of labels used in medieval sources to describe men's social position, and the peculiarities of the English language during the fourteenth century mean that the various names for social groups appear in Latin, French and English.

Some of the best evidence for how society was stratified in the fourteenth century comes from the graduated poll tax of 1379 to 1381 where it is clear that income is afforded almost as much prominence as birth. Analysis of these records allow one to see a more realistic picture of medieval society that was still trying to frame itself based on the notions of feudal nobility and the three estates, yet needed a practical means of determining status so that men could be taxed. By the late fourteenth century English society could be divided as seen in table 1.

²³ Ibid., 15.

Table 1. Social Hierarchy in Fourteenth Century England

	Rural Landed		Urban
	Clergy	Laity	
Nobility	Archbishop Bishop Abbot	Duke Earl Baron	
Gentry	Rectors Vicars	Knights Esquires Gentlemen	Wealthy Merchants Lawyers
Commoners	Parish Priests Lesser Clergy	Yeomen Ploughman Laborers	Master Craftsmen Journeymen Laborers
	Villeins or unfree tenants who were bound to the land still existed by the beginning of the 15th century in small numbers but they were being replaced in favor of freemen who paid cash rents instead of providing work.		
	Marginal Members of Society (outlaws, beggars, wandering friars, entertainers, etc . . .)		

Source: Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200-1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 20 with input from a chart created by Dr. William Kautt.

The Catholic Church was a very hierarchical organization in and of itself. Based on income and its participation in the governance of the realm, the higher ranking clergy were little different than the nobility or the gentry. They owned lands and collected rents from tenants in exactly the same way. Many were from noble families as the sons of earls and barons often gained preferential treatment in the Church.²⁴

When discussing nobility in England it is important to note that no clear judicial status for what constitutes nobility developed in England as it did in France or other

²⁴ Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 21.

places on the continent.²⁵ Clearly, some families were more respected than others with the royal family being chief among them. However, nobility in England only applies to the apex of medieval society, unlike the broad social range encompassed by the French term “noblesse.” So in general the term gentry is more useful than nobility when discussing the upper echelons of medieval English society.²⁶

Gentry generally refers to all those who had income greater than ten pounds a year, which for most people represented a small fortune. The primary characteristics of the gentry were incomes derived primarily from land ownership, performing some kind of military, government, or jurisdictional role, and their supposed adherence to a set of courtly and chivalric values. In these ways the gentry were almost identical to the nobility. The gentleman and the duke were separated more by their amount of wealth than their behavior. The men who served as local government officials in the shires were most often from the gentry of one degree or another.

The term gentleman came to be used to describe men of considerable standing yet still below the rank of knights and esquires, thus increasing the number of men that might call themselves gentry. They might also have the wealth to hold a knighthood but refused it for a variety of reasons. Gentlemen, still maintained all the characteristics of the gentry, but held no formal titles. As mentioned previously, there were very few hereditary titles in England. Thus, the second son of the most powerful duke in England was addressed the same way as a common country gentleman. The need to expand the gentry to include those below the rank of esquire is illustrated by a list of landowners in Gloucestershire in

²⁵ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 12.

²⁶ Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 18.

1344 that indicates there were 177 men with incomes of 10 pounds or more who were neither knights nor esquires, yet held the lordship of manors and filled minor governmental positions.²⁷

The urban centers of England developed their own specific class structure. The tax records from the fourteenth century paint an interesting portrait of how the townsmen, who had no place in the estates framework, fit into the socio-economic hierarchy. The Lordly Mayor of London for instance, paid taxes at the same rate as an earl, as did some lawyers, while urban craftsmen and laborers paid taxes at the same rate as yeoman farmers and rural laborers.²⁸

When looking at peasants, the medieval sources do not make it easy to determine exactly how society was stratified among the lower classes about who little was written by contemporary chroniclers. However, the economic classification that had begun to develop in the later-fourteenth and into the fifteenth century for the purposes of classifying the peasantry was yeoman, ploughman, and laborer.²⁹

Peasants were all, to one degree or another, involved in agricultural production, and had a stake in the common fields of their village. Their communities were mostly self-governing; however, all were in some way subject to the jurisdiction of a lord. At the top of the peasant class was the yeoman. A yeoman's lands were fairly extensive, but not necessarily freeholds. His lands could be his own or held in tenure from someone else,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20. For a detailed description of the manorial system see Werner Rosener, *Peasants in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 16-17; Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 74-75.

²⁸ Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

though normally the more successful yeomen were freeholders. Most yeomen normally held approximately 60 acres, although a significant number of yeomen possessed larger holdings, perhaps with parcels scattered throughout the shire. With such sizable holdings, the yeomen would need to employ laborers or rent his land to sub tenants, thus resembling a lord himself and blurring the line between peasant and gentry.³⁰

A ploughman was a farmer who had sufficient land to support himself and perhaps have a small surplus in good years. A laborer might only have a few acres or just a house and lived mainly through wages. A villein was an unfree peasant bound to the land of a feudal lord to whom he paid rents or provided services in exchange for land. A villein was entirely subject to the feudal lord, but was not technically a slave.³¹ Many if not most of the peasants below the level of yeomen, and even a great many yeomen, owned just enough land to commit them to farming and tie them to a village or manor, but not enough to assure prosperity. Many found it necessary to supplement their incomes through a variety of activities including wage labor, brewing, small crafts, cutting and collecting wood and peat, and hunting and poaching.³² It was these last activities that enabled men to transition from farming to war, and as will be discussed in later chapters, this had a dramatic effect on the military community of England.

However, even for the poorer sections of society, social advancement was possible. The most notable example of social mobility among the peasant classes in

³⁰ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 67.

³¹ Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 15.

³² Scott L. Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

England was William of Wykeham. William's father had been a poor peasant farmer, probably equivalent to a ploughman. His father's overlord noticed William's intelligence and had the boy educated to serve in his household, not an uncommon arrangement. William's ability got him noticed at the royal court by Edward III and in time he rose to be the Chancellor of England.³³

William's story would be unique in any age, but it demonstrates that if a man could rise from the lowest order of peasantry to the highest positions of government and power, then gaining entry into the lesser gentry was a very achievable goal. A great many men were able to accomplish just such a feat by serving as archers in the king's army. This too will be examined in greater detail in later chapters.

In towns and in the countryside lived an indeterminate number of people who cannot be easily classified into a class based on social status or wealth. These were the outlaws, beggars, wandering friars, prostitutes, and traveling entertainers who made up the marginalized portion of society.³⁴ For the purposes of this study, the outlaws will have particular significance in any discussion of archers.

Government

England was one of the few kingdoms in Western Europe where there were established practices that forced the king to gain consent for his endeavors. This check on royal authority was the Parliament. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the development of Parliament, but by the mid-fourteenth century its centrality in English

³³ Terry Jones and Ereira Alan, *Medieval Lives* (Random House, 2004), 31.

³⁴ Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 25.

politics could not be denied. The uniqueness of this institution is best seen when compared to several examples illustrating the absolutism of the French monarchy of the middle ages. In one instance, a French chronicler said of the king of France that, “being placed by the grace of God above all other men, we are bound to the will of him who has made us thus pre-eminent.”³⁵ Another instance in approximately 1314 occurred when Pope Boniface challenged the French King Phillip IV’s right to tax the clergy. The king’s reply was, “The king stands above the law, above all customary right and private privilege. . . . It is his prerogative to make law or to amend or abrogate it as he may deem fit.”³⁶

This is in stark contrast with the statement made by Edward I at Parliament in 1297 when he stated that, “What touches all should be approved by all.”³⁷ Even more telling is an incident occurring at that same Parliament involving the reported exchange between Edward, who was one of the most respected and most able kings of England, and Roger Bigod, the earl of Norfolk. The king was trying to raise forces for a campaign in Gascony, but the greater landholders of England, of which the earl of Norfolk was the primary spokesman, were resisting. Finally, after a very heated argument on the matter the king declared to Bigod, “By God earl, you will either go or you will hang.” To which Bigod replied, “By the same oath king, I shall neither go nor hang.”³⁸ To his credit, the

³⁵ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volumn 1 Trial by Battle*, 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁷ Dan Jones, *The Plantagenets* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 289.

³⁸ Jeffrey H. Denton, *Robert Winchelsy and the Crown 1295-1313* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 118.

earl did neither. Granted, there were many other underlying political issues affecting that conversation, but it is clear that the king's will was subject to the approval of at least some of his subjects and that both the king and his subjects were accustomed to some measure of consensus.

It is the idea of mutual consent that best characterized English domestic politics in the fourteenth century. Consent, in the form of money, for any major undertaking of the kingdom was garnered in Parliament. Building on precedents from the early thirteenth century, Parliament was the proper venue for discussing matters that affected the entire realm.³⁹

Parliament addressed nearly every aspect of English politics and was the center of power and decision making for the kingdom. While Parliament may have curbed some royal authority in domestic politics, it strengthened the king's power in international politics and war. This is because the mutual consent of the Crown and the Parliament enabled national mobilization and support on a scale that was unheard of in the rest of medieval Europe.⁴⁰

During the reign of Edward III this arrangement worked well because the king was a skilled negotiator and recognized the importance of garnering consent from Parliament. However, if a king was petulant or foolish, like Edward II (1307 to 1327), then the great lords of England considered it their right as granted by the Magna Carta to

³⁹ Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, 193.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

rebel against the king. This was not an idle threat. In 1326, Parliament deposed Edward II and installed his son Edward III on the throne.⁴¹

Parliament was divided into three groups, the king's counselors who were appointed ex officio by him and who were his personal servants and advisors. There were also the great lords of the realm also known as the peers of the realm. This group included all of the men with titles such as earl or duke, the major landholding barons who were tenants in chief from the king, and the great clerical lords such as the archbishops and bishops, collectively known as the "Lords Spiritual." These men were either invited to participate in Parliament or did so through hereditary right or office.⁴² The last group that comprised Parliament was the Commons. Originally, the Commons were only observers to the proceedings, but by the end of the fourteenth century they were playing a major role in deciding policy and their consent was required for major activities, in particular taxation. The Commons consisted of 74 knights elected from 37 counties throughout England, as well as the 150 to 200 aldermen or mayors elected to represent the larger towns.⁴³

While only the gentry were permitted to serve in parliament, the peasantry were not wholly forgotten, for the elected members of the House of Commons spoke for their communities and had the responsibility of binding their communities to the decisions of Parliament. It is a safe assumption that no member of the Commons would agree to

⁴¹ Jones, *The Plantagenets*, 351.

⁴² Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, 197.

⁴³ Ian Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England: A Handbook for Visitors to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 235.

something that he knew the peasants in his community would not support. The same can be said for the alderman and mayors who, more than likely merchants or craftsmen themselves, represented the economic interests of the lesser merchants and craftsmen in their towns.⁴⁴

In fact, the main strength of the English state was within the Commons and the local community's independence. England had an ancient system of local government based on Anglo Saxon and Norse tradition that was more elaborate than anything on the continent and penetrating far deeper into the social strata. Most cities had acquired royal grants that entitled them to self-government. It was these cities, which were the industrial and commercial centers of England that the king depended upon heavily for taxation to pay for his endeavors, particularly for his wars.⁴⁵

In the shires, the typical local official in the fourteenth century, such as a sheriff, was not an enforcer of the king, but a local landowner with his own interests that would outlive his term of office and did not necessarily coincide with those of the king. They seldom served for long, as they received no formal pay from the Crown and their duties often put them at odds with their neighbors. Normally, they were all local men of the upper peasantry or lesser gentry.⁴⁶

Just above them were the more substantial landholders of the shires. These were the knights and esquires linked by elaborate ties of kinship and patronage. They met periodically to transact judicial business of the shire, read and discuss royal statutes and

⁴⁴ Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, 198-199.

⁴⁵ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

proclamations, and to air their collective opinions and grievances. This entire system formed the political community of the shires.⁴⁷

This did not mean that local governments were free from royal control. All local officials with fiscal responsibilities had to account to the Exchequer and were forced to reimburse the Crown for any deficiencies. This light level of central control discouraged abuses but did not promote the kind of single minded enthusiasm displayed by French officers of the crown. In reality, this was an advantage for the English king; for although the king was heavily dependent on local communities who could obstruct the king's enterprises, when he gained community support he had a much greater percentage of resources and popular support than any French king of the fourteenth century.⁴⁸

English National Identity

Despite the various cultures that had come to coexist in England, Welsh, Irish, Saxon, Danish and Norman French, by the mid-fourteenth century, England had developed a remarkably uniform culture and language. Even the rebellious Welsh were firmly ensconced in the kingdom by that point, and only the Scots remained perpetually obstinate to English dominion of the British Isles.

As a result, the people of England, whether they were gentry or peasant, considered themselves as members of a single community. This was in large part due to the benefits of being geographically isolated as an island nation. This relative isolation and the people's perception that they were surrounded by enemies reinforced this sense

⁴⁷ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 44.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

of shared identity. The English Channel protected England from her most dangerous enemies on the continent and also prevented any large scale cultural diffusion between England and the continent. Provincial differences and regional loyalties, while they surely existed, were superficial. England's political institutions operated consistently throughout the entire realm.⁴⁹

The burgeoning English national identity also owed a great deal to the English tradition of Parliament to approve national endeavors. This meant that the representatives to Parliament, the elected knights of the shire and the elected townsmen, and by association the counties and towns that they represented, became aware and formed opinions on issues of wider importance than those that only affected their respective communities. It also meant that they worked in closer proximity to the nobility, than their equals on the continent, thus narrowing the social gap between them. As will be discussed in later chapters, this narrowing of the social gap was more prominent in the conduct of war.⁵⁰

The most compelling evidence for the existence of English national identity in the fourteenth century is the rise literature in England being written in the common vernacular of Middle English instead of Latin or French. Geoffrey Chaucer, Jon Gower, and William Langland, the fathers of English literature, made deliberate choices to write their works in English. These men who were all fluent in Latin and French saw the English language as “a powerful patriotic bond uniting commons, aristocracy, and crown

⁴⁹ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 39.

⁵⁰ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 148-150.

against enemies from abroad.”⁵¹ The deliberate decision to write in English represents the successful “attempt to elevate the national language and challenge Francophone hegemony on the horizon of European culture.”⁵²

Plague and War in the Fourteenth Century

The two events with the greatest effect on English society during the fourteenth century were the Black Death and the Hundred Years War. Indeed, they affected not only England, but all of Western Europe. The medieval era cannot be understood without having some knowledge of them.

The Plague

The Black Death struck England in 1348; by 1350 more than a third of the population was dead from the disease. Entire villages and small farming communities were wiped out or were simply abandoned. Towns with any sizable population were usually reduced by half.⁵³ The disease affected every level of society, and these were immediate and catastrophic to the social fabric of England. One cannot underestimate the psychological effect such a catastrophe had, as people became accustomed to death on a scale unimaginable to the modern mind. Death touched every family and community.

⁵¹ Nicholas Watson, “The Politics of Middle English Writing,” in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. J. Wogan-Brown (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 339.

⁵² Duncan Hardy, “The Hundred Years War and the ‘Creation’ of National Identity and the Written English Vernacular: A Reassessment,” *Marginalia* 17 (November 2013): 21.

⁵³ Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, 88.

There were serious economic consequences as well, consequences that brought the already impractical feudal system to its knees. The peasants who survived the plague found their economic positions drastically improved. Labor to work the lands of the gentry became scarce. Landless peasants took over abandoned holdings and many who already possessed some land simply took more. Wages doubled and the decrease in population led to the price of wheat being cut nearly in half.⁵⁴

The entire economic system was turned upside down as the gentry lost total control of the basis of economic power. The free peasants could dictate what wages they would be paid to work a lord's land, and if he refused, there was plenty of vacant land that the peasant could farm for himself. The villeins, or serfs, who had been bound to the land by law and by economic necessity, now simply deserted their lord's manor to find their own land or went to work for a different lord for better wages.⁵⁵

Obviously this shift in economic power was of great concern to the gentry, as is evident by the laws created to try to restore and maintain the old system in which the gentry dictated terms. The Statute of Laborers in 1351 describes the issue saying that "servants . . . to their own ease and covetousness, do withdraw themselves from serving great men, unless they have living and wages double or treble of what they were wont to take in the 20th year (of the King's reign: i.e. in 1346 and 1347) and earlier, to the great damage of all the community."⁵⁶ The statute gave landlords preferential hold over the

⁵⁴ Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, 90-91.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁶ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 38.

labor of men living on his land and prevented any negotiation of wages.⁵⁷ Other laws of compulsory service were enacted or restored to force men to return to villeinage and fix wages. Ultimately, these efforts were futile in reestablishing the old order and in fact contributed to the only large scale popular uprising in English history, the Peasants Revolt of 1381.⁵⁸

The rebels openly sought privileges and social change that the post plague economic conditions should have granted them. While the rebellion was quickly dispersed, it generated unease among the gentry. After all, the rebellion had been extremely well organized, and the rebels had overrun the Tower of London and executed the royal treasurer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chancellor of England and several other members of the gentry.⁵⁹ Consequently, the fears of the gentry undermined laws such as the Statute of Laborers and the vigor went out of their enforcement, accelerating the demise of manorialism and villeinage in England.⁶⁰

So in the end, the opportunities for social mobility that the plague provided were allowed to take place in England. This was not true for much of the rest of Europe, where the decline in economic production caused by the plague increased the social divide between the peasants and the nobility. The nobility was much more severe in their attempts to compensate for their financial losses at the expense of the peasantry.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁸ Rosener, *Peasants in the Middle Ages*, 249.

⁵⁹ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 44.

⁶⁰ Rosener, *Peasants in the Middle Ages*, 249.

⁶¹ Ibid., 269.

The Hundred Years War

In 1328, the last king of France in the line of House Capet, Charles IV, died without a male heir. Charles IV and his wife had been expecting a child before his death. Charles gave instructions that if the child was a boy, Phillip of Valois should be his guardian until he came of age. If the child were a girl, then Charles asked twelve of his most influential vassals to give the kingdom to whomever had the best claim to the throne.

Edward III had been on the throne of England for almost a year and was 15 years old. His mother Queen Isabella, was the sister of Charles IV and this gave Edward III a claim to the French Crown. However, the 12 great lords of France determined that the line of succession could not pass through a female. Instead, the crown was given to Philip of Valois, the son of Charles's uncle.⁶² In truth, Edward was more closely related to Charles, but it seems likely that the French lords would not assent to being ruled by an Englishman.

Queen Isabella probably would have liked nothing more than to press her son's claim to the throne of France, but England was beset with internal strife at that time. The queen, with the help of the English barons, Parliament, and her lover Roger Mortimer had deposed her husband Edward II. Parliament crowned her son, Edward III, and she and Mortimer were ruling as his regents, but their position was tenuous. As such, the queen made no claim to the throne of France on behalf of her son.⁶³

⁶² Jean Froissart, Peter Ainsworth, and Godfried Croenen, *The Online Froissart. A Digital Collection of the Chronicles of Jean Froissart*, Book 1 Folio 22, December 20, 2013, accessed November 21, 2014. <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/onlinefroissart>.

⁶³ Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, 13.

Edward III took control of the throne in 1330, Roger Mortimer was executed and the Queen quietly retired to a convent. Edward's first order of business was to reassert England's domination of Scotland. He defeated the Scots rather handily in 1333 at Halidon Hill and the Scottish king, David Bruce, son of Robert the Bruce, was exiled. This worsened relations between England and France because France and Scotland signed the treaty of Corbeil in 1326 in which they promised to aid each other militarily, particularly against England.⁶⁴

Several events from 1333 to 1337 intensified the hostility between England and France to the point that in 1337 Edward publicly asserted his claim to the French throne.⁶⁵ It is unclear if he was actually sincere in his claim or simply using it as a tool to pressure the French into a settlement on the issue of Gascony and Flanders. Whatever his motivation, the young king was ready and willing to bring the English war machine that he had developed on the moors of Scotland to the Plains of France, and invaded France in 1338.⁶⁶

England and France remained in a state of war, broken intermittently by uneasy truces, from 1337 until 1453 when the English finally surrendered their last territorial possessions in France. While technically the English lost the war because they lost their

⁶⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁵ The English had very close economic ties to Flanders. While Flanders was technically a vassal of France, it was heavily dependent on England due to the wool trade. Edward declared an embargo on the export of wool to Flanders in an attempt to break Flanders away from France. Additionally, the English held the region of Gascony on the Atlantic coast of France since the twelfth century, much to the consternation of the French. In May of 1337, Phillip attempted to seize Gascony, and Edward responded by publicly asserting his claim to the French throne.

⁶⁶ Waugh, *England in the Reign of Edward III*, 15.

French possessions, it is hard to view the French as winners. The English occupied large portions of France for over 100 years and plundered the French countryside almost at will. The political and military superiority that France had enjoyed since the eleventh century was destroyed. England, though enjoying great success throughout most of the war, could not sustain the domestic political support necessary to carry on such a costly endeavor.

The few paragraphs above are only the barest skeleton of a bloody conflict that lasted over 100 years and would eventually lay waste to much of the kingdoms of France and England, while drawing the other great powers of Western Europe, the Holy Roman Empire, the Italian States, and Spain, along with numerous smaller principalities, into the conflict at various times. There will be more discussion of specific military innovations and events of the Hundred Years War in subsequent chapters; however, it will focus more on English military archery as that is the focus of this research.

It is clear that English society experienced intense changes during the latter half of the fourteenth century and was developing in complexity that did not easily fit into the estates framework or feudalism. Additionally, the Black Death and the Hundred Years War were both catastrophic events that rocked English society to its core. Both of these events quickened the pace of social change as society tried to adapt to the new realities created by these upheavals. The coming chapters will contain discussion on how these changes impacted the English military community, and how, in turn, the developing military community continued to affect change on society.

CHAPTER 3
THE ENGLISH MILITARY COMMUNITY OF THE
LATTER FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The last chapter contained a brief examination of English society and some of the factors that influenced its development in the mid-to-late fourteenth century. In this chapter, the focus will narrow to briefly examine the military community of fourteenth century England in order to further one's understanding of the archer's place in English society.

This brief examination of the English military community in the fourteenth century will look at the economic and social realities that shaped the way England waged war. This chapter will also contain an examination of how English soldiers were recruited and trained, as well as a discussion on the reasons men might choose to become soldiers.

The Social and Economic Realities of the English
Military Situation in the Fourteenth Century

As has already been discussed in the previous chapter, the feudal system was supposed to be the primary system for providing soldiers, specifically heavily cavalry. A heavily armored man, fighting from horseback with lance and sword was a fearsome thing. Under normal conditions heavy cavalry was considered the undisputed king of the medieval battlefield at the beginning of the fourteenth century. This posed significant problems for relatively small kingdoms like England, especially when their primary foe was a kingdom as large as France.

In medieval English armies, most men were expected to provide their own equipment, armor, weapons, and horses. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, there

were approximately 10,000 men in England with incomes greater than five pounds sterling a year. Of those, only about 1,000 had incomes over 40 pounds sterling a year.⁶⁷ When one considers that, at a minimum, a chainmail shirt would cost five pounds, a single warhorse another five pounds,⁶⁸ a helmet around 15 shillings,⁶⁹ and weapons, consisting of a decent sword and lance, at least another 10 shillings,⁷⁰ it would cost approximately 11 pounds to outfit one knight with the bare minimum of equipment.⁷¹ Add to this, horses injured easily, necessitating cavalrymen bring several,⁷² and the price then jumped to around 20 pounds or more. These points make it clear that England had a small pool of men, approximately 3,000, with the status and wealth to be knights.⁷³ Moreover, not all of these men fought, or if they did, it was perhaps only in a single

⁶⁷ Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 30-31.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁹ Charles Ffoulkes, *The Armourer and his Craft from the XIth to the XVIth Century* (Nabu Press, 2010), 88.

⁷⁰ Frances Gies, *The Knight in History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 30.

⁷¹ 1 Pound = 20 shillings (s). 1 shilling (s) = 12 pence (d).

⁷² Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy Under Edward III* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1994), 72.

⁷³ It is important here to denote the difference between a knight and a man-at-arms. Knighthood was an honorary title bestowed by the king. A man-at-arms was just that, a man wearing heavy armor who was trained to fight from horseback or from the ground with all manner of melee weapons. Almost all knights were men-at-arms but all men-at-arms were not knights. As mentioned in the previous chapter, knighthood in England was not hereditary, therefore a great many men-at-arms were the younger family members of older knights or they were men of equivalent social and economic status who had for one reason or another never been knighted. These men normally held the title esquire and were trying to prove themselves worthy of being granted a knighthood. From here on out the term man-at-arms will be used to describe any heavily armored man who can fight from horseback. The term can be considered interchangeable with cavalry.

campaign when they were younger and before they came into their inheritance. Not everyone, even men born into the supposed warrior caste of the second estate, was cut out to be a soldier. Comparisons of the payment records for fourteenth century English armies reveal a great many men who fought in only one or two campaigns.⁷⁴

Part of this was due to the greater emphasis English society placed on wealth than on birth as examined in chapter 2. Therefore, a great many men who had made fortunes in trade or land speculation had the wealth to become knights, but did not feel the social compunction to become warriors. In fact, many men of wealth viewed knighthood as a burden that prevented them from managing their personal affairs.

It also put them into a different tax bracket, as being knighted meant that you owed service directly to the king. So many men avoided becoming knights, that a “distrain of knighthood” was created to force men to become knights.⁷⁵ The monarchy made 26 attempts between 1224 and 1272 to force knighthood on all men possessing income of at least 20 pounds or more.⁷⁶

These men were knighted, not necessarily because the king wanted them to serve as soldiers, but because English kings learned early on that it was far better to extract money from a man who owed you service, and to hire a willing soldier, than force an unwilling one to serve. Beginning with Henry II (1154 to 1189), English kings began to

⁷⁴ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 136.

⁷⁵ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 64.

⁷⁶ Phillip Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 69.

collect “scutage,” which is a term used to describe giving money instead of military service for one’s feudal obligation.⁷⁷

The lack of men-at-arms and the near-constant state of war endemic to the medieval period meant that the English army was a relative meritocracy. The English recruited many “sergeants,” which translated roughly to servant in Anglo-French. Sergeants were normally young men of a lesser gentry class who were identified at an early age as having some natural talent for violence and then trained at the expense of a wealthier man to serve as men-at-arms. However, even when English armies supplemented their cavalry forces by recruiting able men from lower social stations, they were never able to field more than 5,000 cavalry at once.⁷⁸

This is in sharp contrast to France, which in 1340, mustered more than 27,000 cavalymen. While the importance of cavalry began to decline in the fourteenth century, the disparity in numbers illustrated the difference in resources between the two kingdoms.⁷⁹ Consequently, when compared with her more prosperous continental neighbors, England came to rely on peasant infantry more than any other western monarchy with the possible exception of Scotland.⁸⁰

In 1181, Henry II issued the first Assize of Arms instructing all free men to possess arms on a sliding scale according to wealth and to be prepared to provide military

⁷⁷ Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, 36.

⁷⁸ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 15.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

service to the realm when called. A free man with assets more than ten marks⁸¹ was expected to own mail, a helmet, and a lance, while all other freemen men were expected to at least own a padded jacket and a spear.⁸² The assessment was based directly on wealth, not on social status, and put the onus on the individual Englishman to muster if summoned by the king. The Assizes were updated and reissued in 1230, 1242, and 1253.⁸³

It is important to note that the Assizes were intended mainly as a way of maintaining law and order and less for mustering an army, but also established a tradition that all free men should possess military equipment appropriate to their financial means, and was the feudal mechanism English kings used to recruit infantry before the mid-thirteenth century. The final version of the Assizes was issued by Edward I in 1285 and was known as the Statute of Winchester.⁸⁴ However, as the previous chapter established, the feudal system of recruitment was slow and undependable and was an impractical tool for recruiting large infantry armies.

Accordingly, the English devised an efficient conscription system that allowed them to recruit infantry on an unprecedented scale. In the last decade of the thirteenth century the English began using commissions of array to supplement feudal recruitment. Under the commissions, individual communities under their local administrators were

⁸¹ A mark was worth 13s 4d, or a little more than one pound sterling.

⁸² Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 82.

⁸³ Michael Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 121.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

given the responsibility of providing infantry requested by the king. This system, while more effective than the feudal system of recruitment in which individuals were responsible for providing service, also lent itself to abuses. Local community officials did not always send their best and brightest off to war. Bribery was also rampant. A contemporary poem complained that, “The richest buy themselves off for ten or twelve shillings whilst the poor are conscripted.”⁸⁵

In 1315 a royal official reported that the men sent to the army were, “feeble chaps, not properly dressed, and lacking bows and arrows.”⁸⁶ Additionally, in practice, only about two-thirds of the forces requested could be expected to appear at the muster location, and desertion was a serious problem. However, by the standards of the day, the commissions were effective at raising large bodies of soldiers fairly quickly.⁸⁷

The new recruitment practices led to a dramatic increase in English infantry recruitment during the last decade of the thirteenth century and the first decades of the fourteenth century, when infantry were recruited for campaigns in Wales and Scotland on a scale not seen since the classical era and not seen again until the early modern era. Edward I had over 22,000 men taking royal wages in Wales in 1297.⁸⁸ The next year he mustered approximately 26,000 men for the Falkirk campaign. Edward II’s doomed Scottish campaign of 1314, ending in humiliating defeat at Bannockburn, numbered over

⁸⁵ Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses*, 15.

⁸⁶ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 124.

⁸⁷ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War, Trial by Battle*, 64.

⁸⁸ Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, 207-212.

20,000, as did another futile campaign in Scotland in 1322.⁸⁹ Despite the large numbers, these armies were composed primarily of poorly equipped and poorly motivated conscripts. So while the commissions of array were effective at recruiting large numbers, they lacked quality.

It was not only England's comparative lack of aristocratic population and resources that forced her to rely on infantry. England had learned some very hard lessons in the early fourteenth century from the Scots. The Scots were weaker in cavalry forces than the English and were compelled to use large peasant infantry formations called schiltrons made up of pikemen. At the battle of Bannockburn in 1314 the Scots thoroughly routed the English army. While English infantry were present, including large numbers of archers, the English who were vastly superior in heavy cavalry, accepted the prevailing notion of the day that a disciplined charge of heavy cavalry could sweep any infantry force from the field. Confident in this assertion, the English heavy cavalry charged into the disciplined Scottish formations and were slaughtered.⁹⁰

It is important to note that six years earlier a vast French army of heavy cavalry had been defeated in exactly the same way by Flemish pikemen at the battle of Courtrai in Flanders. Despite the obvious lesson of this defeat, that disciplined infantry were more than a match for unsupported cavalry, the French would commit the same blunder against the English army at Crecy in 1346.

The English however, modified their tactics. When they met the Scots again at Halidon Hill in 1333, they made effective use of combined arms tactics by using their

⁸⁹ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 116-117.

⁹⁰ Strickland, and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 168-174.

archers to disperse the Scottish Schiltrons that allowed the cavalry to exploit the gaps created and win the battle. So it would appear, “the English learned from the Scots what the French failed to learn from the Flemings.”⁹¹ This is a lesson the English would teach the French again on several occasions in the fourteenth century.

The key element of the English successes was the use of the longbow as a weapon of war. The English developed a combined arms tactical system in which missile infantry wielding the longbow mutually supported dismounted men-at-arms and cavalry. This tactical system did not need large numbers of unskilled infantry. It required only a relatively few archery specialists. The standoff and lethality that the longbow provided was a significant force multiplier.

Feudal recruitment and the commissions of array meant that archers were recruited separately from men-at-arms and were mixed in with large numbers of men who were of little use on the battlefield. It would be difficult to separate the effective soldiers from the chaff and integrate them into the English combined arms formations.

Surviving records from Norwich in the 1350's indicate that very few of the men mustered through the commissions of array were archers. One roll, with 54 names, lists only two as archers.⁹² This indicates that by the 1350s the array system was no longer useful to the English monarchy as a recruitment tool, since the English tactical system depended heavily on archers.

The cumbersome armies of the late thirteenth century, comprised of large numbers of unskilled infantry were not be maintained during the Hundred Years War,

⁹¹ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 65.

⁹² Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 140.

chiefly because it was financially draining to recruit and maintain a large slow moving army. The English simply did not have the resources to maintain such a force for long and learned that marching large slow armies into enemy territories created more problems than it solved. Thus, the English moved from large ill equipped conscript armies to smaller more professional armies with a high percentage of well-equipped disciplined infantry who were easier to maintain in the field.⁹³ These armies demonstrated their worth in 1332 when a small English army of about 1,500 men, supporting a claimant to the Scottish throne backed by England, defeated a Scottish army of approximately 10,000 at the battle of Duplin Moor.⁹⁴

With this model in mind and the apparent difficulty in procuring the desired type of troops, namely archers, the English under Edward III, began recruiting troops using contracted indentures in the 1330s. A contracted indenture was a contract an individual commander signed guaranteeing to provide the king with a specific number and type of troops. The individual commanders were normally men who would owe feudal service, but to avoid the problems of feudal obligation, the king offered them a contract to serve with specific types of troops for a set amount of time at an agreed upon price. This meant that the individual commanders would recruit their own archers and men-at-arms as a single force. This made a much more cohesive unit that supported the English combined arms tactics.⁹⁵

⁹³ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 117.

⁹⁴ Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1985), 88.

⁹⁵ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 125.

Men-at-arms had usually been professional, or at least, semiprofessional soldiers. They were men who because of their birth and social status had prided themselves on being members of the warrior caste, and many trained from birth to be warriors. Indeed, the higher a man's rank in the social and economic hierarchy of the day, the more likely he was to pursue a military career.⁹⁶ Indeed, for the aristocratic population of England the only respectable occupations were landowner, warrior, or clergy.

Conversely, peasants recruited into military service under the feudal system and the commissions of array were normally of villein status, the absolute bottom of the social hierarchy. However, the men recruited to serve as archers in contracted indentures, while they were still peasants, were skilled in their craft. An individual lord or retinue captain would only hire capable men that could bring him fortune and glory in which all could share.

Men had to be of at least moderate means to be an archer, since during the Hundred Years War the great majority of archers were mounted.⁹⁷ This was a lesson the English learned in their war with the Scots. As has already been mentioned, large infantry armies moved very slowly and were seldom able to seize the initiative. Thus, the Scots began mounting a large portion of their infantry on cheap horses that allowed them to keep up with the mounted men-at-arms. On arrival at the battlefield, they dismounted to

⁹⁶ Adrian Bell, Anne Currey, Andy King, and David Simpkin. *The Soldier in Later Medieval England* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.

⁹⁷ The term "mounted archers" means that archers were mounted for movement to and from the battlefield. Once at the battlefield they would dismount to fight, similar to dragoons or mechanized infantry in later eras.

fight, and then escaped if the situation was not advantageous.⁹⁸ Mounting infantry made the armies more flexible, but also more expensive, as all men had to have a horse, not to mention fodder and other care.

The English adopted this technique wholesale by the 1340s and recruited mounted archers whenever possible. The appearance of the mounted archer, recruited as a combined arms team with the man-at-arms into contracted retinues, reinforced the English tactical system of mutually supporting heavy infantry and missile infantry fighting in coordination. Perhaps more importantly, these changes modified the social composition of the military community. Gone were the exploited peasant conscripts of years past; Archers of the Hundred Years War were respected as full members of the military community and could rise to be retinue captains or even knights.⁹⁹

The increased reliance on mounted archers and men-at-arms serving in contract retinues under professional captains meant that the military community was drawn from a narrower social base, not for social, but for economic reasons. It also meant that the social and economic divide between men-at-arms and archers narrowed, as they were now recruited together and most mounted archers were now recruited from relatively respectable social classes.¹⁰⁰

So, based on the description of civil society in chapter 2, by the end of the fourteenth century the recruitment base for the military community of England looked

⁹⁸ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 66.

⁹⁹ Adrian R. Bell, *War and the Soldier in the Fourteenth Century* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁰ Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses*, 16.

something like what is seen in figure 1. As the graph makes apparent, just as the lines between the social classes were blurred, so too were the social distinctions between men-at-arms and archers. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

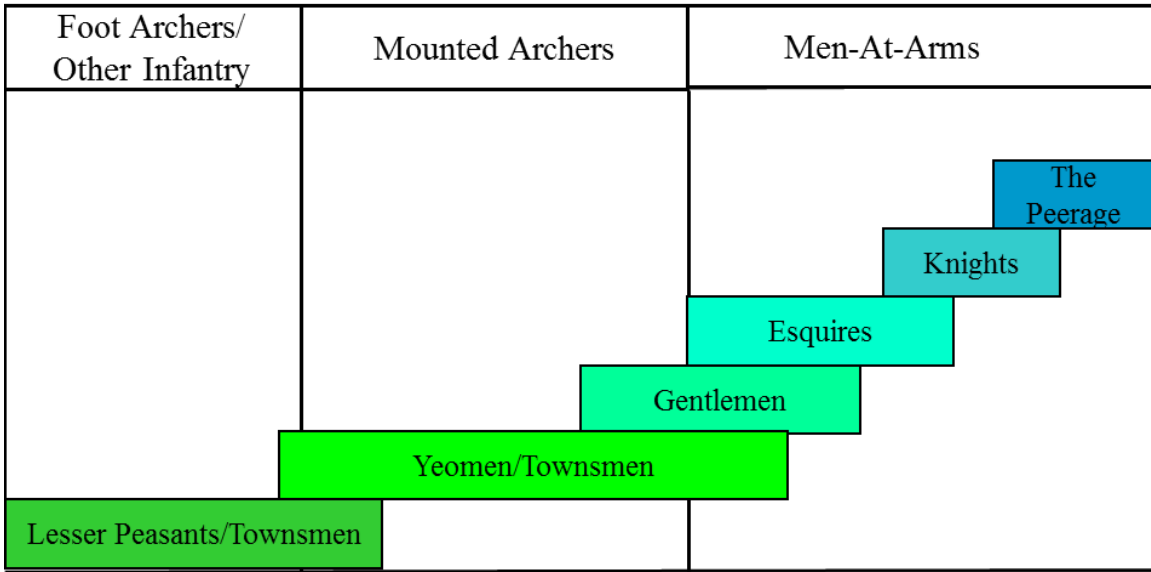


Figure 1. The English Military Community in the Fourteenth Century

Source: Created by author.

Training

It is well known that the knightly class trained from an early age in horsemanship and with every type of melee weapon. Tournaments in which men-at-arms could fight individually or as part of a group were very popular and considered excellent training for war.¹⁰¹ There is no evidence that clearly shows men-at-arms drilling together, however

¹⁰¹ For more information on the individual training of knights see the excellent contemporary source on the subject, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry* by Geoffroi de Charny.

there are clear records which explain the way in which European men-at-arms were expected to fight on horseback.

A group of men-at-arms formed into a unit called a battle that could vary widely in size.¹⁰² They arrayed themselves in a long line side by side facing the enemy with their horses almost touching. They would begin moving towards the enemy at a slow pace, perhaps a walk or a canter, being sure to all stay at the same pace to maintain the integrity of the line. When they were close enough to the enemy they spurred their horses into the gallop, however they were still expected to hold the line with no gaps. They would make contact with the enemy as a single compact line that, theoretically, would sweep the enemy from the battlefield. The adage was that one should not be able to throw a plum at an advancing line of well-trained men-at-arms without it being impaled on a lance.¹⁰³ So, while there is no mention of organized drill in any of the surviving records, it was impossible for men to conduct such complicated maneuvers as the ones mentioned above without training as a unit.

The same issue applies to military archery in the fourteenth century. The longbow was woven into the fabric of English culture. Hunting was popular in England among all classes, so many, if not all; Englishmen had at least some skill with a bow. Hunting will be discussed in much greater detail in the next chapter. Individual practice, either for recreation or subsistence hunting, was commonplace. In fact, a Royal Decree in 1363, made individual practice on Sundays and feast days compulsory for all military age

¹⁰² Battle is the forerunner of the modern word battalion.

¹⁰³ Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 229-230.

males.¹⁰⁴ This decree was reissued throughout the middle ages until firearms were adopted.

So, it is known that groups of men were practicing together, but were they simply practicing individual marksmanship? It seems likely that given that the aim of the laws was to provide a pool of trained archers for the king's wars abroad, that men were also drilling in tactical organization and commands.¹⁰⁵

The English organized their archers into twenties led by a ventenar, and five twenties, or 100 men, were led by a centenar. This level of systematic organization suggests some level of unit training.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, there were many instances where men appeared to be idle while on the King's payroll. Pay rolls indicate that in 1342, one hundred archers waited in Plymouth for 21 days before shipping to France.¹⁰⁷ One may question how idle they were. It seems feasible that there would also be some type of drill. There is absolutely no hard evidence for drill in English armies during this era, but contemporary battle accounts and the undisputable outcomes of battles suggest that English armies were well disciplined and utilized a relatively complicated tactical system. It seems feasible that perhaps the archers were drilled in their downtime while on the King's payroll.

¹⁰⁴ Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer*, 160-164.

¹⁰⁵ Hardy, *Longbow: A Social and Military History*, 82.

¹⁰⁶ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ Hardy, *Longbow: A Social and Military History*, 82.

Why Join the Army?

The question one must ask at this point is, why would men of standing in the community now wish to join the army through contracted indenture if under the feudal system and the commissions of array they would bribe their way out of military service and the shires would conspire to send the dregs of the community? There were actually many good reasons, including pay, plunder, patronage, and pardon. The commissions of array had focused on raising troops to fight in Scotland and Wales. Both were relatively poor countries that offered soldiers little chance for plunder. However, France was extremely wealthy, and many men made fabulous fortunes early in on in the Hundred Years War. The chance for wealth and social advancement attracted many men. There was virtually no limit to the social advancement achievable by capable men during the Hundred Years War.

Men received daily wages based on their social rank and troop type. Pay for soldiers in the fourteenth century would not make a man rich and did not cause men to rush to join the army. The pay was calculated to ensure that a man could support himself in the lifestyle to which he was accustomed for the duration of the campaign. Even under feudal obligation and commissions of array, men were not expected to serve without receiving sufficient funds to cover their expenses and ensure that they were not ruined by being away from their civilian occupation.¹⁰⁸ A dubbed knight was paid 2 shillings a day,

¹⁰⁸ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 84.

a man at arms was paid 1 shilling a day, a mounted archer received 6 pence a day and a foot archer 3 pence a day.¹⁰⁹

The 6 pence earned by a mounted archer compared favorably with most civilian occupations even during the prosperous decades following the Black Death. In the 1370s even skilled craftsmen such as carpenters only earned 4 pence per day.¹¹⁰ Additionally, soldiers received wages for every day they were in the king's service whereas craftsmen and laborers only received wages for days they actually worked. Therefore, an archer who served for a full year would earn 9 pounds 2 shillings 4 pence.¹¹¹ Interestingly, this was very near the 10 pounds of annual income that was generally considered necessary to be considered gentry.¹¹²

Although the pay was good, and was certainly a key determiner in a man's decision to become an archer, it was probably not the primary reason most men joined the army. There were several reasons for this. First, soldiers were not hired indefinitely, but only for the course of a campaign. Once the campaign was over, the men returned to England and their wages stopped. Of course, there were some men who remained in garrisons and continued to earn pay, but for the majority, soldiering was only a part time

¹⁰⁹ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 137.
1 pound=20 shillings, 1 shilling (s)=12pence (d).

¹¹⁰ For craftsmen wage rates and earnings see Dyer, 222-233.

¹¹¹ While standing armies were not present in the medieval era, a significant number of archers would have found year round employment as garrison troops on the Scottish marches and in the English possessions in France.

¹¹² Bell et al., *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*, 153-154.

affair. Second, there were always delays in pay and back wages were owed to nearly everyone.¹¹³

If a man joined the army to get rich, and surely many men did, then the potential to get rich from plunder was a far greater lure than any promise of pay. This is revealed by the amount of attention given to the division of spoils in indentured contracts.

Normally the king was entitled to a third of the spoils taken by his contracted captains, and in turn, the captains were entitled to a third of any spoils taken by their men.¹¹⁴

Immediately a vision of captured jewels or gold comes to mind, but in reality the majority of plunder was everyday items such as pots, pans, tools, farming implements, tapestries, clothes, and mercantile goods. All of this was cataloged and shipped back to England, either for sale or to adorn English homes. Indeed, the chronicler Thomas Walsingham noted that there were few households in England that did not possess something from Caen, Calais, or other French towns.¹¹⁵

The ultimate goal of a medieval soldier was to take a wealthy prisoner who would pay large cash ransom to be released. King David II of Scotland was captured in 1346 at the battle of Neville's Cross and King Jean II of France was captured in 1356 at the battle of Poitiers. Both men paid exorbitant ransoms. However, most men hoped for more modest ransoms. Bastot de Mauleon, a Gascon man-at-arms in the English army, took

¹¹³ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 138.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

prisoner a knight and two squires at the battle of Poitiers who were able to pay a combined ransom of approximately 700 pounds.¹¹⁶

Many humble ransoms and money gained from the sale of common items taken as plunder was the foundation upon which many men raised their families from the peasantry to the gentry. Sir Thomas Gray, a fourteenth century knight and historian, described many men who did just that as, “young fellows who hitherto had been but of small account who became exceedingly rich.”¹¹⁷

Patronage was as important to raising social status as wealth. The old adage of “it’s who one knows,” definitely applied to the fourteenth century. Just as the king looked more favorably upon the great lords who had accompanied him on campaign, so local lords looked more favorably upon a local peasant who had accompanied him and given good service. The local peasant who shared a bond of military brotherhood with the local lord had a distinct advantage over his neighbors.

Even if the contract soldier and the lord were from different shires, patronage was still very important. As Maurice Keen so eloquently states, “Association on a purely military basis and for the short term of an expedition could grow into a more enduring association, and so breed further contacts and forge new connections of service, clientage and patronage that had no connection with the local origins and influence of either client or patron.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Taken from Froissart’s Chronicles.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Gray and Herbert Maxwell, *Scalacronica: The Reigns of Edward I, Edward II, and Edward III as recorded by Sir Thomas Gray and translated by Sir Herbert Maxwell* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1907), 131.

¹¹⁸ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 140.

Finally, many men were drawn to the army by the promise of a pardon. A significant number of men who served in the English armies of the Hundred Years War were outlaws who received pardons for military service. This was true of men-at-arms and archers alike. This aspect of the military community will be discussed in further detail in chapter 4.

Conclusion

Even today the image of the knight in shining armor charging into battle on his warhorse is a symbol of the honor and glory of the martial profession, and this was particularly the case in fourteenth century Europe. However, the role of the common soldier was still vital, especially for countries like England with relatively small populations and few resources.

By the time the Hundred Years War began, while feudal recruitment and commissions of array were still occasionally used, the majority of troops were recruited through contracted indentures that ensured only capable motivated men were recruited into the army. English field armies in the latter half of the fourteenth century, on average, only contained approximately 4,000 to 5,000 men and seldom exceeded more than 10,000 men at any one time, while the French could very easily muster 25,000 men with more than a quarter of them being cavalry, and in 1339 actually mustered more than 50,000.¹¹⁹ However, while the French infantry were either ineffective peasant conscripts or foreign mercenaries, the English infantry in the form of archers were professional

¹¹⁹ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volumn 1 Trial by Battle*, 15.

troops deployed in an operational and tactical system designed specifically to defeat France's superior numbers.

It was the English longbowmen, in the great battles of the Hundred Years War that truly demonstrated the power of disciplined peasant infantry.¹²⁰ The reliance on infantry, and in particular archers, caused the English to widen the professional military community to include these men who a generation before would have been excluded due to lack of wealth or status. The next chapter will narrow the focus of this paper even further and examine the English archers in depth to determine what social characteristics made them such effective soldiers.

¹²⁰ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 115.

CHAPTER 4

THE ENGLISH ARCHER

In the medieval era, most histories and literature were written for the educated: the clergy the gentry and the nobility. For this reason, the medieval military historian has a difficult time separating fact from religious, societal and political propaganda, making it difficult to gain an accurate picture of even the most influential military figures of the medieval period.

The problem compounds when attempting to study the common soldier, about which little, if anything, was mentioned in the chronicles. The English archer was normally a peasant and accordingly, early medieval chronicles gave only the barest description of English military archery. It was not until the middle of the fourteenth century, when military archery became such a decisive factor in the battles of the Hundred Years War, that military archery became mentioned more prominently in the chronicles. Even then, it was only English tactics that were discussed. Little was ever mentioned about the individual men who drew the bow. Certainly there are great lists of names that survive from the muster rolls, but in most cases their names and their function in the army are all the identification available. The local records from the smaller villages and communities from which these men came are not normally available.¹²¹

Even in literature, archers came up sparingly and when mentioned, they were often the subject of scorn. The thirteenth century French poet Bertrand D Bar-sur-Aube

¹²¹ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 143.

described the archer as a coward who would not come near his enemy.¹²² It was not until the fourteenth century that the bow became a suitable weapon for heroes in literature, yet even then, it was the weapon of the anti-hero Robin Hood (see below). It is no coincidence that it was not until the late fourteenth century that literature began to be written in the English language for consumption by the general population of England. Prior to this, literature was primarily in Latin or Norman French for consumption by the gentry and the clergy.

Beginning in the fourteenth century and continuing until the zenith of military archery in the mid-fifteenth century, English archery and archers became more effective on the battlefield and consequently more respected in society, so that by the sixteenth century, even the English nobility had embraced the bow as a national symbol. Indeed, Roger Ascham, a servant in the court of King Henry the VIII and tutor to the future Queen Elizabeth I, composed the first work in English on the subject of Archery dedicated to the king. In *Toxophilus, The School of Shooting*, Ascham asserts that for Englishmen shooting the longbow is, “that thing where-unto nature hath made them most apt, and use hath made them most fit.”¹²³

The previous chapter examined the development of the military community in England and the shift in preference to mounted archers, or at least experienced foot archers, hired individually through contracted indenture vice feudal levy or commission of array. This meant that many of the very poorest of English society, who were probably

¹²² A. T. Hatto, “Archery and Chivalry: A Noble Prejudice,” *The Modern Language Review* (January 1940): 40-54.

¹²³ Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus, The School of Shooting* (London: Read Book, 2013), 17.

sent away by their communities to serve in feudal levies and commissions of array, were now excluded from military service.¹²⁴

This chapter is an examination of the social status of English archers, and the different levels of society from which they were recruited. Additionally, this chapter will include a discussion on the unique aspects of English society that made English archers such effective soldiers, specifically hunting and outlawry. This will set the stage for further examination into the social and military impact English archers had on English and Western European society.

The Yeoman Archer

Now he had brought one servant by his side,
A YEOMAN—with no more he chose to ride.
This Yeoman wore a coat and hood of green.
He had a sheaf of arrows, bright and keen,
Beneath his belt positioned handily— . . . 105
He tended to his gear most yeomanly,
His arrow feathers never drooped too low
And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
His head was closely cropped, his face was brown
The fellow knew his woodcraft up and down— . . . 110
He wore a bracer on his arm to wield
His bolts. By one side were his sword and shield,
And on the other, mounted at the hip,
A dagger sharply pointed at the tip.
A Christopher of silver sheen was worn— . . . 115
Upon his breast; a green strap held his horn.
He must have been a forester, I guess.¹²⁵

So Geoffrey Chaucer describes the knight's Yeoman in the prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*. The man Chaucer describes was obviously a soldier and more

¹²⁴ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 143.

¹²⁵ Ronald L. Ecker and Eugene J. Crook. *Geoffrey Chaucer The Canterbury Tales: A Complete Translation* (Palatka, FL: Hodge and Braddock, 1993).

specifically, he was an archer. He carried a sword, a dagger, a shield, and most importantly a sheaf of arrows and a “mighty bow.” Indeed, the yeoman class was so closely associated with military archery that the term yeoman archer is synonymous with English archers during the Hundred Years War and beyond. For this reason, it is important to clarify the term yeoman as it applies to English archers.

Clarification is not easy as the term yeoman, like many social terms from the past, evolved over a long period to possess shades of meaning that are lost on the modern observer.¹²⁶ The word yeoman is most likely a contraction of the words “young man” and first appeared in the mid-thirteenth century.¹²⁷ The difficulty in defining the term comes from the social changes that were taking place in England during the mid-thirteenth century and throughout the fourteenth century. English words were replacing or merging with French and Latin words which were previously used to define social class. Additionally, as the socio-economic structure of English society changed, so did the terms used to describe men’s positions within that society.¹²⁸

For instance, a squire, or esquire, was originally a servant to a knight, socially and militarily. However, by the mid-fourteenth century the term esquire had come to denote the social rank immediately below knights in landed society. An esquire was supposedly of gentle birth, and many possessed coats of arms recognized by the Court of Chivalry. In war, the esquire, who had once been a supporting asset to the knight, now served as a man-at-arms in the same fashion as a knight. Thus, while knights were still socially

¹²⁶ Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer*, 175.

¹²⁷ J. C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 122.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

elevated above esquires, they were militarily of equal status in their capacity to serve as heavy cavalry. The term “gentleman” also appeared in the fourteenth century and was used to denote the social class immediately below esquires. Gentleman applied to men who claimed gentle birth yet did not have the social standing to acquire a coat of arms. Unlike knights and esquires who possessed formal titles bestowed on them by the king or through birth, it appears there were few qualifications to being called a gentleman.¹²⁹

Up until the early fourteenth century, esquires were classified in contemporary documents as *valetti*, which roughly translates to servant in Latin. This classification was in accordance with the esquire’s role as a supporting element to the knight in war. However, by the mid-to-late fourteenth century, once esquires began to be equated with knights in war, the term *valetti* applied to yeomen.¹³⁰ Indeed, a parliamentary petition in 1363 equated the term yeoman with *valetti*.¹³¹ Muster rolls and exchequer records from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries listed men by name, social status, such as knight or esquire, and function in the army, such as man-at-arms or archer. Thousands of men from these records who are listed as archers are also listed as yeomen or *valetti* and the terms were interchangeable.¹³² So, by the end of the fourteenth century yeomen occupied the same position in the military community held by esquires a century earlier.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 119.

¹³⁰ Bell et al., *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*, 150.

¹³¹ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 119.

¹³² Anne Currey and Adrian Bell, *The Soldier in later Medieval England*, October 2013, accessed April 15, 2015, www.medievalsoldier.org.

As mentioned in chapter 2, yeoman was a broad socio-economic label used to identify the most socially elevated group of peasant farmers in England, that were just below esquires and gentlemen. After the devastation caused by the Black Death, many peasant farmers took advantage of the situation to expand their wealth and distance themselves from the rest of the peasantry, yet they had not quite gained entry into the gentry. Sir John Fortescue wrote in the 1460s that five pounds a year was a fair living for a yeoman. He went on to say that there were some yeomen in England with incomes nearer one hundred pounds a year.¹³³ This disparity illustrates that the level of prosperity within the yeoman class could vary broadly; however, three-to-five pounds a year seems a safe estimate for the average income of yeomen. Indeed, Archbishop Hugh Latimer in 1549 described his father as a yeoman with an income of three or four pounds a year who was able to acquire arms and a horse to serve in the king's army.¹³⁴ Many of these men, probably possessing considerable influence in their local communities, served as archers in the Hundred Years War.¹³⁵

When these descriptions of the social position of yeomen are compared to the Writ of Arms issued by Edward III in 1345, which decreed that men with five pounds of income were to serve as mounted archers and men with two pounds worth of land were to serve as foot archers, it seems clear that many English archers were recruited from the yeoman class.¹³⁶

¹³³ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 119-121.

¹³⁴ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 205.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

An excellent example of the traditional view of yeoman archer is William Jodrell, a Cheshire man who held 13 acres in Macclesfield forest. He served with the Black Prince in Gascony and was given a pass to return home in 1355. His descendants retain the handwritten pass to this day. William prospered after his return from Cheshire and at the time of his death in the 1370s he possessed assets totaling more than three pounds.¹³⁷

William's son, Roger, took advantage of the direct link his father had established with the aristocracy of England and served as a squire to the body of Richard II.¹³⁸ Roger is listed in the muster rolls of an expedition to Wales as an esquire with a retinue of four archers and in another expedition to Scotland with a retinue of six archers. Roger's military service to the Crown, built on the foundation laid by his father, expanded the family fortune further through war, enabling him to enter the gentry.¹³⁹

However, the term yeoman actually had a dual meaning as it corresponded to the term *valetti*, so that a yeoman could be a substantial peasant landholder or a man who served as an official in an aristocratic household. Chaucer was just such a man. He was part of the English force that Edward III took to France in 1359 and 1360. The records for the campaign list Chaucer's position as Yeoman of the Chamber to Lionel of Antwerp, the second son of Edward III.¹⁴⁰ In this case, Chaucer, who by wealth and status probably belonged to the lesser gentry, bore the title yeoman.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹³⁸ The organization and significance of Richard II's infamous Cheshire archers will be discussed in chapter 5.

¹³⁹ Richard Wadge, *Arrowstorm The World of the Archer in the Hundred Years War* (Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2007), 125.

¹⁴⁰ Howard, *Chaucer His Life His Works His World*, 71-72.

The household yeomen were as diverse a group as the landholding yeomen, particularly in the royal household where a long established hierarchy of officials with various duties deemed yeoman existed. Chaucer was a Yeoman of the Chamber whose duties equated to that of a personal assistant. However, more relevant to this study, there were also Yeomen to the Crown, who were personal bodyguards. The Yeomen of the Crown were to be, “most seemly persons, cleanly and strongest archers, honest of condition and of behavior, bold men, chosen and tried out of every lord’s house in England for their cunning and virtue.”¹⁴¹ The Yeomen of the Crown were exemplified in the 200 mounted archers recruited from Cheshire in 1334 to serve as a bodyguard to King Edward III. The concept of yeoman being a title for men of increased status is supported by the notion that in Cheshire there were many men serving as archers with the status equal to men-at-arms recruited from other counties.¹⁴² The tradition of archers and men with the title yeoman providing military service to the English Crown continues to this day with the Royal Company of Archers, the Yeomen of the Guard, and the Yeomen Warders, all of which serve as honorary guards to the Royal Family of Great Britain.¹⁴³

Chaucer’s Yeoman, is portrayed as more of a professional soldier who was a servant to the aristocracy rather than a farmer. Everything about the description of Chaucer’s Yeoman, from the description of his equipment to the obvious care he took in tending to his arms, suggests a man of martial skill. The fact that the tale makes specific

¹⁴¹ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 120.

¹⁴² Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 204.

¹⁴³ The British Monarchy, “Yeomen of the Guard,” accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.royal.gov.uk/RoyalEventsandCeremonies/Ceremonialbodies/YeomenoftheGuard.aspx>.

mention that the knight chose only to ride with one servant is a testament to the yeoman's competence and the knight's trust in him. It also hints at the English tactical system of the fourteenth century which required archers and men-at-arms to be recruited at a one-to-one ratio.

It is doubtful that Chaucer's Yeoman was a landholder, but instead was a full-time retainer of the knight and a professional soldier. This is a condition that applied to many archers during the Hundred Years War. Indeed, John Taillefer, an ancestor to the author of this study, served in Norman garrisons and personal retinues, first as an archer and then as a man-at-arms, more or less permanently from 1420 to 1443.¹⁴⁴

While John's story was not unique neither was it the rule. The records indicate that there were just as many men who served as archers for only one or two campaigns. A great many of these men, exemplified by the earlier example of William Jodrell, were probably substantial landholders of yeoman status, rather than household yeoman. So it would seem the term "yeomen archers" encompassed men bearing the title yeoman and also farmers from the shires entering into military service as means for social advancement. However, these two groups were not mutually exclusive. So, the yeoman landholder and the household yeoman were of more or less equal status and often one and the same.¹⁴⁵

While the yeomen landholder and household yeoman were crucial components to medieval English armies, it is important to recognize that archers of the Hundred Years

¹⁴⁴ Currey and Bell, *The Soldier in later Medieval England*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

War composed a complex social group.¹⁴⁶ Just as there was overlap of social classes in English society, there was also overlap in the social stratification of the military community. So in many cases the section of society that served as men-at-arms also served as archers. The exchequer records indicate that many families, who most likely could not afford to outfit more than one man-at-arms, provided a man-at-arms as well as an archer, perhaps a younger son, to English armies. Therefore, an English army would contain archers and men-at-arms of roughly the same social status. For instance, Thomas de Assheton contracted directly with King Henry IV to provide one man-at-arms and one archer for an expedition to Scotland in 1400. Thomas served as the man-at-arms, while his kinsmen, John de Assheton, served as the archer.¹⁴⁷ There was also the case of John Abbey who served as an archer on an expedition to France in 1441. Two years later John was contracted for another expedition to France, this time as a man at arms bringing along his kinsmen Richard Abbey to serve as an archer.¹⁴⁸ Clearly, the social divide between men-at-arms and archers had become less pronounced.

Despite the relative social equality between many men-at-arms and archers, archers still did not have the social status of men-at-arms. Regardless of the obvious respect that Chaucer had for the knight's yeoman, he was still very much the servant of the knight. There are references in the muster rolls to "each man-at-arms with his archer"

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Ayton, *Military Service and the Development of the Robin Hood Legend*, 137, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://deremilitari.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ayton3.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷ Currey and Bell, *The Soldier in later Medieval England*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

which are reminiscent of Chaucer's Knight with his Yeoman.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, numerous contracted indentures are for only one man-at-arms accompanied by one archer. Subcontracts from the Duke of Gloucester's 1392 campaign to Ireland list 28 men at arms who provided only a single archer.¹⁵⁰

By the late fourteenth century, the yeoman archer occupied the position in the military community once held by the esquire a century earlier. Archers were clearly of lesser social status but were valued for their worth on the battlefield as a mutually supporting counterpart to the men-at-arms. Moreover, just like the traditional image of the esquire as a man trying to prove himself worthy to be a knight, yeoman archers could earn knighthoods through exemplary military service.

So it seems the term "yeoman archer" refers more to the archer as a supporting asset to the man-at-arms,¹⁵¹ and successor to the esquire as the second tier in the military community, than it does to the archer as a small farmer or freeholder. It seems certain that many archers did hold substantial lands bought with the money they made serving in the army, making them yeomen in both senses of the word. However, the fact that many archers were career soldiers recruited from levels other than the actual yeomanry, and then through the course of their military careers, became men-at-arms, implies that yeoman in the military sense was different from yeoman in the socioeconomic sense.

¹⁴⁹ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 205.

¹⁵⁰ Currey and Bell, *The Soldier in later Medieval England*, 161.

¹⁵¹ The term man-at-arms refers to knights, esquires and gentleman with the social status and economic means to serve as heavy cavalry.

Therefore, just as terminology evolved to describe the changing social stratification of English society, so terminology also evolved to describe the changes in the English military community. So the term yeoman archer did not necessarily imply the archer was of the yeoman social class, but could refer to the archer's status as a companion and supporting asset to the knight or man-at-arms.

Clearly, the English archers of the Hundred Years War composed a complex social group that was unique in Western Europe. The remainder of this chapter will examine several aspects of English society that made English archers such effective soldiers, specifically the English tradition of hunting and the English acceptance of outlaws.

Hunting in the King's Forest

Hunting was one of the main pursuits of the aristocracy of England. Medieval hunting required a high degree of skill and physical endurance and the aristocracy found it to be valuable training for war.¹⁵² The principal sources for hunting in medieval England are several treatises written for aristocratic hunters. By their nature they were guides to hunting in the King's Forests.¹⁵³

The King's Forest was any land specifically set aside for use by the King, normally for hunting deer, in which the forest law applied. The Royal Forests were not always actual forests. Indeed, at one point during the reign of King Henry II (1154 to

¹⁵² Jean Birrell, "Families and Friendships: Hunting in the Medieval English Forest," in *Forests and Chases of Medieval England and Wales c.1000-c.1500*, eds. John Jones and Graham Langton (Oxford, England: Oxbow Books, 2010).

¹⁵³ Richard Almond, "The Forest as Hunting Ground," in *The Forests and Chases of England and Wales c.1000-c.1500* (Oxford, England: Oxbow Books, 2010), 68.

1189), about one-third of England was subject to forest law.¹⁵⁴ Commoners who lived inside the forest usually retained long established use rights to common areas and resources known as commons. However, forest law was subject to the king's will and was therefore fickle and often repressive.

The forest law was primarily concerned with the preservation of the vert and venison. Vert was the vegetation, and venison was the deer in the forest. A deer park was an enclosed area owned by an individual set aside for hunting. A park could belong to the king, a knight, the church, or a gentleman. There were no commons inside a park and the owner usually implemented some version of forest law.¹⁵⁵

In 1217, when Henry III was forced to reissue the Magna Carta, he also issued a special Charter of the Forest which addressed the grievances of those men, both peasant and gentry, who chafed under the forest law. Like the Magna Carta, it was re-issued many times by subsequent kings depending on the political situation of the realm.¹⁵⁶

One of the key issues in the First Baron's War was the issue of the arbitrary and highly punitive forest laws which prevented both commoners and gentry alike from harming the king's vert or venison, which is to say chopping down trees or killing deer. In the next century, the desire to hunt freely was one of the demands made on Richard II during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The leader of the rebellion, Wat Tyler, demanded that, "all warrens as well in fisheries as in parks and woods, should be common to all: so

¹⁵⁴ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 144.

¹⁵⁵ Almond, "The Forest as Hunting Ground," 69.

¹⁵⁶ A. E. Dick Howard, *Magna Carta Text and Commentary* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 24.

that throughout the realm, in the waters, ponds, fisheries, woods and forests, poor as well as rich might take the venison and hunt the hare in the fields.”¹⁵⁷ These demands, from gentry and peasants alike, spanning more than a century, demonstrate the popularity and importance of hunting in England for both sport and subsistence.

Royal forests and parks were administered by officials who were accountable directly to the king himself. The head of a forest was the warden who was usually a knight. Very often this title was hereditary. Under him was a collection of commoners: verderers, foresters, woodwards, rangers, agisters, and parkers, were all positions that involved enforcing the forest law or assisting the nobility in hunting.¹⁵⁸ One can safely say that all had some skill with the longbow.

Gaston De Foix was a French knight who wrote the definitive medieval treatise on hunting, in which he described the best practices for hunting with a bow. He concluded by saying that if one wanted to know more about the bow, then he should go to England, for there it was a way of life.¹⁵⁹ The records of the forest courts reinforce this statement and make it clear that both poachers and foresters used longbows.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the forest court of Nottinghamshire in 1287 decreed that, “no man in future shall carry bows or arrows in the forest outside the king’s highway unless he be a sworn forester.”¹⁶¹ This statement reinforces the assertion that use of the bow was widespread.

¹⁵⁷ Almond, “The Forest as Hunting Ground,” 78.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁵⁹ Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer*, 167.

¹⁶⁰ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 146.

¹⁶¹ G. J. Turner, *Select Pleas of the Forest* (London, 1901), 64.

Foresters would not only have been skilled archers, but also accustomed to violence as it was the foresters who fought with poachers. A great many of these men who developed specialized skills with the longbow patrolling the royal forests became archers in the Hundred Years War. Naturally, they were some of the first selected to serve as archers by commissions of array or by retinue captains hiring soldiers under contract. This statement is supported by the hundreds of men from the muster rolls named Parker, Forester, or Verder.¹⁶² John of Gaunt relied heavily on the foresters under his sovereignty to recruit 300 archers in 1373.¹⁶³ Indeed, Chaucer supposes that the Knight's Yeoman was a forester. Perhaps he was a forester as well as a soldier, serving on the knight's estate, but whenever the knight was called to fight either through feudal obligation or voluntarily through a contracted indenture, the yeoman would definitely have accompanied him.

Despite what the treatises may have said, hunting was by no means a purely aristocratic activity. As mentioned previously, many commoners were involved officially in hunting as appointed officials and in assisting the aristocracy in their hunts, but many more were involved in hunting illegally.¹⁶⁴ There is very little literature written on hunting by the peasantry because, out of necessity, most hunting by anyone other than the aristocracy was at best clandestine and usually illegal.¹⁶⁵ In truth, people from every level of society hunted deer on a regular basis using the longbow. This is borne out by the

¹⁶² Currey and Bell, *The Soldier in later Medieval England*.

¹⁶³ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 146.

¹⁶⁴ Almond, "The Forest as Hunting Ground," 77.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

hundreds of, “offenses against the venison,” presented at each forest court, and this does not account for the many offenses that surely went undetected.¹⁶⁶

Additionally, many types of people were accused of poaching in the courts. Offenders ranged from solitary villeins to large hunting parties led by respected members of the local community.¹⁶⁷ Thus, the same warrior skills that the aristocracy hoped to cultivate were being practiced by the lower classes as they plied the forest with longbows, not only hunting deer, but fighting royal foresters as well.¹⁶⁸

In 1246, in the forest of Rockingham in Northampton, four of the king’s foresters observed five men with bows intent, “on doing evil to the venison of the lord king.” When the foresters confronted the men, they, “turned in defense and shot arrows at the foresters,” killed one, and then escaped into the forest.¹⁶⁹ In Huntingdon in 1248 two foresters confronted 12 men armed with bows. The men shot at the foresters with their bows and then fled; the foresters wisely chose not to follow them. One of the poachers was later identified to be Jeremiah of Caxton, a cook in the service of Sir John Crakehall, a local knight. The court records identify Jeremiah as a repeat offender and it seems likely that Sir John was present in the hunting party with his cook.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Turner, *Select Pleas of the Forest*.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Birrell, “Families and Friendships: Hunting in the Medieval English Forest,” 80-91.

¹⁶⁹ Turner, *Select Pleas of the Forest*, 81.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

In another instance in Rockingham forest in 1272, a group of 12 men armed with bows entered the forest and killed three deer. Two foresters came upon the poachers and challenged them, at which point the poachers shot at the foresters. The foresters were forced to flee, but not before recognizing many of their assailants. In this instance the poachers were the sons of a parson, several prominent land holders, and, interestingly, a local forest official.¹⁷¹ All of these men served some time in jail, or were outlawed for failing to appear in court. All of these men were of the lesser gentry or yeomanry, exactly the class of men who became the yeomen archers of the Hundred Years War.

In 1334 in Sherwood Forest, four men were accused of entering the forest with bows and illegally killing a deer. Of the four, one died before the forest court convened, two failed to appear in court and were outlawed, and the fourth, named Hugh of Woodborough, was sentenced to prison. However, the records indicate that Hugh was pardoned.¹⁷² This account is worth mentioning because many of the archers who fought for Edward III at Halidon Hill against the Scots in 1333 were poachers from Sherwood Forest, pardoned on the condition that they serve in the king's army.¹⁷³

The inference, therefore, is that the widespread participation in hunting and poaching by Englishmen of almost every social class greatly contributed to the number of men, both common and gentle born, who could effectively wield a longbow. This meant

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 38-40.

¹⁷² Ibid., 66.

¹⁷³ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 148.

that the aristocracy was aware of the bow's potential as a weapon of war even if they chose not to use it personally in battle.¹⁷⁴

As mentioned previously, poaching resulted in a great many men being outlawed for illegally killing the king's deer, or worse, the king's foresters. As discussed in the next section, these men, along with men outlawed for other crimes, played a key role in English armies of the Hundred Years War, and had special significance to English national identity.

Outlaws, the Robin Hood Legend, and Royal Pardons

It is important to discuss outlaws in any discourse of English archers, because royal pardons were a considerable recruitment tool. It is also important because the prevalence of English outlaws of the Robin Hood mold, skilled archers accustomed to violence and taking risks, provided a large pool of men with technical skill and a proven capacity for violence that made for excellent medieval soldiers.

The French chronicler Jean Froissart stated that "men in England were fickle, dangerous, arrogant, and rebellious."¹⁷⁵ Many Englishmen viewed this with pride. Sir John Fortescue, a fifteenth century justice of the King's Bench, claimed that the English were more courageous than the French because of the boldness of their outlaws. He supported his assertion by claiming that more Englishmen were hanged for robbery and murder in a single year than were hanged in France in seven years.¹⁷⁶ While Fortescue

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹⁷⁵ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 50.

¹⁷⁶ Terry Jones and Ereira Alan, *Medieval Lives* (Random House, 2004), 65.

comment may have had a touch of hyperbole, it is a sign of the degree to which outlaws were an accepted part of society. Even more telling is that of the men who represented Bedfordshire in parliament during the first decades of Edward III's reign (1327 to 1377), more than a third of them had been convicted of a violent crime ranging from robbery to murder.¹⁷⁷

No discussion of English archers or outlaws would be complete without some mention of the most famous archer and outlaw from English legend, Robin Hood. There are five surviving medieval Robin Hood poems or ballads. The earliest, titled *Robin Hood and the Monk*, is found in a manuscript collection dated to around 1450. *Robin Hood and the Potter* is found in a similar manuscript written in 1503. The Robin Hood myth was already popular by this time and there are multiple slightly differing editions of the third surviving work, *The Gest of Robin Hood*, printed in the early and mid-sixteenth century. The other surviving works are dated to this era as well.¹⁷⁸

However, the Robin Hood legend was first mentioned in the allegorical poem "Piers Ploughman" written around 1377 by William Langland. In the poem, a character named Sloth states that:

I can not parfitli my pater-noster as þe preest syngþ.
[I do not know the lord's prayer as the priest sings it]
but I can rymes of robyn hood
[but I know the rhymes of Robin Hood]¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volumn 1 Trial by Battle*, 56.

¹⁷⁸ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 15-16.

¹⁷⁹ William Langland, Heinrichs Katherine, and Timothy Stinson, Piers Plowman Electronic Archive, November 4, 2014, 407-408, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://piers.iath.virginia.edu/exist/piers/docs/B/O/5/scribal/0>; Holt, *Robin Hood*, 109-110.

This makes it clear that by the latter fourteenth century stories of Robin Hood were well known. It seems safe to assume that the popularity of these poems and the rise in status of the English yeoman class, and above all, the English archer, was not coincidence.

The yeomanry and lesser gentry were the target audience for these stories, based on how the ballads themselves address the audience. *The Gest of Robin Hood* begins:

Lythe and listin, gentilmen,
That be of frebore blode;
I shall you tel of a gode yeman,
His name was Robyn Hode.¹⁸⁰

Sit and listen gentlemen,
Who are of freeborn blood;
I shall tell you of a good yeoman,
His name was Robin Hood.

Similarly, *Robin Hood and the Potter* begins:

Harkens god yemen,
Comely, courteys and god
On of the best that yever bare bowe,
Hes name was Roben Hode.¹⁸¹

Listen good yeomen,
Comely, courteous and good,
One of the best that ever bore a bow,
His name was Robin Hood.

That literature was being written in which the protagonists were peasants, demonstrates the rising status of the yeoman class and of archers.¹⁸²

Another ballad, entitled *Adam Bell, Clim of Clough, and William of Cloudesley*, dates from approximately the same time period as the early Robin Hood ballads and the protagonists, Adam, Clim, and William are strikingly similar to Robin Hood. The ballad ends with the following lines:

¹⁸⁰ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Western Michigan University, 2000), 90.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁸² Holt, *Robin Hood*, 109-110.

Thus endeth the lyves of these good yemen,
[Thus ends the lives of these good yeomen]
God sende them eternall blysse,
[God send them eternal bliss,]
And all that with hande-bowe shoteth,
[And all that with the bow shooteth,]
That of heven they may never mysse!¹⁸³
[Pray heaven that they never miss!]

So it would seem the Robin Hood legends fed into a popular cultural movement that was parallel to chivalry. Just as chivalry provided the aristocracy with an image of the ideal knight, so the Robin Hood myths provided the lesser classes with an image of the ideal yeoman. The ballads were clear in their admiration of the yeoman class and of archers. The appearance of the Robin Hood ballads and their popularity also highlight the acceptance of outlaws in English society, as well as the prominence of archers in English armies of the fourteenth century.

Above all, Robin and his men were depicted as archers who are just as chivalrous as their social betters. Indeed, in the *Gest of Robyn Hood*, Robin and his men use their bows to help a knight who was being tormented by the Sheriff of Nottingham.¹⁸⁴ This depiction of archers rescuing a knight has clear connotations concerning the lower classes' perceptions of the archer's role in the Hundred Years War.

The role of archery was also important. The longbow was the primary weapon of Robin and his men. In the *Gest of Robyn Hood*, both Robin and Little John won archery contests; Robin kills the sheriff of Nottingham with a bow; and poaches the king's deer with a bow. Despite all this, Robin and his men are pardoned by the king after a display

¹⁸³ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 262.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 80-168.

of his archery skills and entered into the king's service.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, many of the ballads end with Robin being pardoned by the king. This is not simply a story telling device, as many outlaws of the era, especially those skilled with the longbow, did receive pardons for good service in the king's wars or simply for the promise of service. In a period where a soldier's pay or plunder from the campaign was attractive, but not guaranteed, pardons were a useful tool to attract men already accustomed to violence.

An examination of the patent rolls reveals that the vast majority of pardons were issued in return for military service or a promise to provide service at a future time.¹⁸⁶ They appear to have been a primary tool in recruitment of soldiers, particularly archers, as they occurred on a large scale. In 1346 and 1347 after the battle of Crecy and during the siege at Calais, King Edward III issued thousands of pardons. The majority of these pardons came with the stipulation that the pardoned man remain with the army until completion of the siege. On one day alone the king issued 1,138 pardons. These men were forgiven, "all homicides, felonies, robberies and trespasses committed in England."¹⁸⁷

In 1360, Edward issued another large group of pardons, 408 in total, that provide insight into the social composition of the army. These pardons, in many cases, list the occupations of the accused, making it easy to identify them as archers. A saddle maker, shoemaker, leatherworker, fishmonger, and a chaplain, were all pardoned for murder.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Andrew Villalon, "Taking The Kings Shilling To Avoid The Wages Of Sin," in *The Hundred Years War Part III*, ed. Andrew Villalon and Donald Kagay (Boston: Brill, 2013), 360.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 376.

These men of moderate means from the burgeoning English middle class were exactly the kind of men who served as archers. Indeed, the majority of the pardons went to this class of men, and only one pardon of the 408 went to a knight.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, the large majority of these pardons were for violent crimes. Of the 408 pardons, 368 involved the death of at least one person.¹⁸⁹ The description of the men's crimes also marks them as archers, as with Robert de Colke and Alan de Bockeshull, who had besieged, "John de Brampton in his house . . . and shot twenty arrows at him to kill him."¹⁹⁰

The 1360 pardons list also records the names of the captains who requested the pardon on behalf of their retainers. These men represented the military elite of England and included the Prince of Wales, John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, the Earl of Northampton, and the Earl of Warwick among others. That such powerful men would request pardons from the king on behalf of archers, demonstrates the respect, or at least the desperation at the time to obtain that skill set, that archers commanded in the military community as well as illustrating the importance of patronage in relation to securing a pardon.¹⁹¹ A man could literally get away with murder.

Many of the outlaws of medieval England were men who had adopted the military life as a serious career.¹⁹² A great many men, such as Sir Robert Knolles and Sir John

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 401.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 381.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 406.

¹⁹² This is one of the primary points made by Andrew Ayton, *Military Service and the Development of the Robin Hood Legend*.

Hawkwood,¹⁹³ began their careers as archers, and through a lifetime of brilliant military service, rose to the highest echelons of society. However, most men were not as successful, and many who chose to become professional soldiers relegated themselves to frequent periods of unemployment as large scale warfare during the Hundred Years War was intermittent, and there were no standing armies during the era.

Many professional soldiers serving as archers had no property or permanent position serving a great lord to fall back on in times of peace. For these men there were several options. They could join one of the mercenary companies that controlled large portions of the French countryside or travel to Italy where English soldiers, particularly longbowmen, were in great demand to serve in the mercenary companies of the Italian city states. Indeed, the same ancestor of the author of this study mentioned earlier did just that.

Another option was to return to England and take the skills they had acquired ravaging the countryside of France and use them to subsist until the next campaign. This seems to have been a severe problem in England as a legal statute in 1360 noted that men, “who have been plunderers and robbers beyond the sea and are now returned and go wandering and will not work as they were used to do before.”¹⁹⁴ Men might select this course of action for several reasons. They may have been unable to settle back into civilian life after experiencing the excitement and profitability of military life and preferred the freedom of an outlaw lifestyle, similar to Robin Hood. Men like this, if they

¹⁹³ See chapter 5 for more information on Sir Robert Knolles and Sir John Hawkwood.

¹⁹⁴ Ayton, *Military Service and the Development of the Robin Hood Legend*, 139.

did not make enough money to acquire property, would simply live off the English countryside in the same manner that they had in France while they waited for the next campaign. The large numbers of these men that the court records and pardon records indicate existed in England during breaks in fighting of the Hundred Years War surely contributed to the Robin Hood legends, and the legends themselves would then reinforce this type of lifestyle. If a man was outlawed for his actions, it was of little concern because he would more than likely be pardoned to serve in the next military campaign.¹⁹⁵

Conclusion

This study began with the intention of explaining clearly and succinctly to what social class English archers of the Hundred Years War belonged. However, this has proved a difficult proposition. The research has shown that archers were recruited from many levels of English society and that the English archery corps was composed of a social strata almost as complex as that of England as a whole. If a man could shoot a bow well, as a great many Englishman from every social strata could, and had the inclination to join the king's campaigns in Scotland or France, but did not possess the means or the martial training to serve as a man-at-arms, then he would no doubt become an archer.

The English archer might be a poor villein pardoned for poaching the king's deer, a forester from the king's estate, a minor landholder hoping to increase his fortune, the younger son of the lesser gentry, a respected citizen in his local community, an outlaw or a bandit engaged in criminal activity between campaigns, or a part time mercenary.

Whatever the case archers were the backbone of the English army during the Hundred

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 139.

Years war and a key component to English successes.¹⁹⁶ What is more, archers, because of their often humble origins, were the harbingers of a new social order, based more on ability than birth, that would not be fully realized until the French revolution 300 years later.

¹⁹⁶ One must take care not to overstate the importance of archers. Certainly, archers were the key to English successes during the Hundred Years War, however, archers had to be supported by men at arms or comparable heavy infantry or they were extremely vulnerable.

CHAPTER 5
THE ARCHER'S IMPACT ON
WARFARE AND SOCIETY

Unfortunately, war was, and remains, an integral part of society. Thus, war and the way in which war is conducted has an impact on the fabric of society. War is ultimately about forcing one's will upon another and surviving the experience to reap the benefits of victory. So, while one may wage war on principles or ideals, they are won through pragmatism and common sense. Social conventions and mores are often abandoned in favor of survival. For this reason war is very often the harbinger of social change.

This was also true in fourteenth century England as the pressures of an extended conflict against a larger foe forced the king to rely on peasant infantry, who became the backbone of English armies. In an age where accepted military wisdom was that heavy cavalry was the most effective fighting force, and society was sharply divided by a social system which determined who would be warriors, the English expanded their professional military community to include men whose wealth and status had prevented them from participating in war as cavalymen. These men were primarily archers recruited from the lower ranks of English society. As Victor Davis Hanson observed so eloquently, "battle is one of the few arenas in which ingenuity, muscle, and courage can still trump privilege, protocol, and prejudices."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture* (New York: First Anchor Books, 2002), 136.

This widening of the professional military community not only contributed to changes in English society, but also drastically changed the character of war.¹⁹⁸ This chapter will contain a discussion on the effects that English archers had on English society and the western way of war.

War influences every facet of society in some way or another. However, few things are influenced more than the distribution of political power. The rule of the strong over the weak characterized the medieval era. Those who had the military power to enforce their will or to resist the will of others, generally, had some say in governance. The direct relationship between military power and political power is self-evident. In fourteenth century England this relationship became apparent as the increased influence of the Commons coincided with the increased reliance on longbowmen.¹⁹⁹

Certainly, a great many things contributed to the rise of the Commons. Much of the power of the Commons derived from the kings' need to secure financial support for their war efforts. However, it is important to recognize that the reason the king and the great lords of England needed to secure the approval of the Commons was due to their loss of the military monopoly.²⁰⁰ The Commons' ability came from the longbow and the men who wielded it so effectively. For instance, the peasant revolt of 1381 began

¹⁹⁸ The phenomena of the lower classes beginning to play a more active role in war was not entirely unique to England. The social and military changes taking place in England were a part of what has been called the "infantry revolution of the fourteenth century." For a more detailed analysis of the Infantry Revolution, see Clifford J. Rogers, "The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years' War," *The Journal of Military History* (1993): 241-278.

¹⁹⁹ Rogers, "The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years' War," 241-278.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

primarily as a protest over the poll tax of 1380, which had been levied without the consent of the Commons.²⁰¹ The rebels were primarily armed with longbows and their leader, Wat Tyler, had served in the campaigns in France.²⁰²

There is little doubt that the inclusion of archers into the military community contributed to the increased political influence of the Commons.²⁰³ It is not a coincidence that the minimum property qualification which gave a man the right to vote in Parliamentary elections was set at the relatively low level of 40 shillings of land income per year.²⁰⁴ This was the same amount stipulated by the Statute of Wincher (1285) that obligated a man to own a bow and be prepared to serve as an archer.²⁰⁵ Increased political power of the lower classes was not the only result of archers being integrated into the English military community. In an age when birth was of the utmost concern in determining a man's social status, the success of English archers in the Hundred Years War provided a genuine opportunity for a man of low birth to significantly elevate his social status.

One of the hallmarks of the gentry was always military service as a man-at-arms. Feudalism and manorialism developed in the early middle ages as a means to cover the expense and secure the loyalty of an aristocratic heavy cavalrymen. Indeed, the estates

²⁰¹ Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, 41.

²⁰² Froissart, Ainsworth, and Croenen, *The Online Froissart*, 73-76.

²⁰³ Rogers, "The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years' War," 254.

²⁰⁴ According to measuringworth.com, 40 shillings of yearly income in 1300 equates to 72,000 pounds in 2015.

²⁰⁵ Rogers, "The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years' War," 254.

framework depended on the gentry to provide military service to protect the realm. However, the necessities of war, especially in a conflict as protracted as the Hundred Years War, meant that martial skill was as valuable as birth. This allowed competent men to increase their social standing through military service.

Indeed, there were men who began their careers as common archers who rose to the pinnacle of medieval society-men such as Sir John Hawkwood(1320 to 1394), the second son of an Essex tanner, who rose to be one of the most respected military commanders of the medieval era. Hawkwood began his adult life as a tailor in London, but like many younger sons not expecting to receive an inheritance, he joined the retinue of the Earl of Northampton as a longbowmen for a campaign in Brittany in 1342. John most likely participated in the battles of Crecy and Poitiers, probably as an archer at Crecy and then as a man-at-arms at Poitiers. Hawkwood was knighted in 1361, and during the peace following the treaty of Bretigny, he joined a mercenary company in Italy where he remained until his death. Hawkwood served as the overall military commander for the city of Florence and as an envoy of England to the papacy.²⁰⁶

Sir Robert Knolles (1325 to 1407) was another man of humble origins who became the most feared English commander of his generation. Knolles was a Cheshire man from a, “poor and undistinguished yeoman” family. He began his career as an archer and rose to the rank of knight banneret. He led men in nearly every major campaign of

²⁰⁶ William Caferro, *John Hawkwood An English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 38-40.

the Hundred Years War during the latter half of the fourteenth century and was instrumental in securing the Duchy of Brittany for an English-backed claimant.²⁰⁷

Hawkwood and Knolles were exceptional cases; seldom did men rise so high. However, many more men made more modest jumps in the social hierarchy by serving as archers. A man could begin his military career as an archer, and through skill at arms, become a man-at-arms. It is sometimes difficult to equate military terminology to social status, particularly in England where the lines between social classes were blurred. However, men-at-arms were paid twice as much as archers, and since pay was calculated to enable a man to provide for himself in a manner to which he was accustomed, the perception of the era seems to be that men-at-arms were of a higher social status than archers.²⁰⁸

In truth, it was possible for an archer simply to promote himself to man-at-arms just by acquiring the necessary equipment. However, simply having the proper equipment did not mean that a man could use it effectively or that a man would be accepted into the hierarchical military community that was still very much aware of social status. Thus, the men in the muster rolls who go from archer to man-at-arms, usually did so only after participating in several campaigns in which they built their wealth and reputation, as well as developed the skill set, that would have allowed them to transition from archer to man-at-arms. Hundreds of men who first served as archers and then later served as men-at-

²⁰⁷ Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years War II Trial By Fire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 32-33.

²⁰⁸ Mounted archers received 6d per day and men-at-arms received 1s per day throughout most of the Hundred Years War. For a more thorough explanation of wages in medieval English armies see Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, 83-87.

arms have been identified by Anne Curry, Adrian Bell and their oxford team using a database drawn from surviving muster rolls from the years 1369 to 1453.²⁰⁹

However, the benefits of war that these men enjoyed came at a price. The incorporation of large numbers of well-trained and disciplined peasant infantry into the English military community made medieval battles more violent. Warfare was already a clash of wills, but by relying so heavily on peasant infantry, England also made warfare a battle between classes.²¹⁰ Cavalry versus infantry was, at its core, class warfare in which the aristocratic contempt of the mounted nobleman for the peasant, “is instantaneously realized in the downward stroke of his lance or saber.”²¹¹

As mentioned in chapter 3, until the beginning of the fourteenth century, heavy cavalry was considered the ultimate power on the medieval battlefield. Social class determined who served as cavalry and who served as infantry, primarily because only the aristocracy and the gentry had the wealth to afford war horses. So, from at least the eleventh century until the early fourteenth century, the armies of Western Europe were primarily aristocratic heavy cavalry functioning as shock troops.

Medieval heavy cavalry could be very effective. The aristocrats and gentry who served as heavy cavalry had a number of advantages over the common infantry levees.

²⁰⁹ Information on soldiers has been taken from the AHRC-funded, “The Soldier in Later Medieval England Online Database’,” www.medievalsoldier.org.

²¹⁰ The Scots, the Swiss, and the Flemings all played a significant role in the infantry revolution; however the English arguably played the greatest role as they experienced the most success. The English were the only ones to use missile infantry whereas the Scot, Swiss, and Flemish used melee infantry in tight disciplined formations armed with pikes and halberds.

²¹¹ Hanson, *Carnage and Culture*, 136.

As members of the warrior class, they were supported by the work of the peasants, and therefore, had the time to train for war. They also had the money to afford arms, armor, and horses that amplified their skills as soldiers. A man wearing mail armor could withstand multiple blows that would easily have killed or disabled an unarmored man. A horse provided him with speed and maneuverability on the battlefield, both of which allowed him to out maneuver infantry formations, pursue fleeing enemies, and escape an unfavorable situation. The horse also gave him mass, which was focused into a killing stroke from lance or sword, or simply used to ride down an opposing infantryman.²¹²

With a few notable exceptions, most battles in the feudal era had been more akin to ritualized sport than to the modern concept of battles. The tenets of chivalry and the generally accepted laws of war normally prevented large numbers of casualties in military engagements between knights of opposing kingdoms.²¹³ Nearly 1,000 Anglo-Norman and French knights fought at the battle of Bremule in 1119, and of those only three were killed.²¹⁴ A succession crisis in Flanders in 1127 sparked a war involving approximately 1,000 knights fighting for over a year. During the fighting only one knight was killed by enemy action.²¹⁵ At the battle of Bouvines, in 1214 involving nearly 5,000

²¹² A great deal of research has been done on knights and men-at-arms serving as heavy cavalry. The sources which were relied upon most for this study were; Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy Under Edward III* and Frances Gies, *The Knight in History*.

²¹³ For more on the laws of war see Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* and Keen, *Chivalry*.

²¹⁴ Rogers, "The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years' War," 255.

²¹⁵ Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 256.

cavalry, only around 100 knights were killed on either side.²¹⁶ At Lincoln in 1217 only three knights were killed while over 400 were captured.²¹⁷ Men of high station such as kings, princes of the blood, or title bearing nobility (counts, dukes, earls, etc . . .) were even less likely to be killed. The English Chronicler Orderic Vitalis writing in the twelfth century stated that knights, “spared each other on both sides out of fear of god and fellowship in arms.”²¹⁸

This reluctance of knights and nobility to kill men of similar status to their own was as much a result of the desire for ransoms as it was the ideals of chivalry. As discussed in chapter 3, the promise of taking a noble prisoner to ransom was a primary aim of many medieval soldiers. The ransom of King Jean of France, captured at the battle of Poitiers in 1356, was set at 3,000,000 gold ecus.²¹⁹ Lesser knights would not bring such exorbitant sums, but enough to make capturing them more desirable than killing them. This was not the case for common soldiers, who would probably not be able to afford a ransom, and therefore, were more likely to be killed.

²¹⁶ Joseph Dahmus, *Seven Decisive Battles of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1983), 167.

²¹⁷ Rogers, “The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years’ War,” 255.

²¹⁸ Orderic Vitalis, quoted from Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 256.

²¹⁹ Sumption Vol II 447 The French ecu was roughly equivalent to the English pound. Money and Prices, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.maisonstclair.org/resources/pricelist/pricelist.html>. According to measuringworth.com 3,000,000 pounds in 1356 would equate to approximately 1.7 billion pounds in 2015 using the historic opportunity cost indicator. Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, “Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present,” *Measuring Worth*, 2015, accessed May 1, 2015, www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

Even before the infantry revolution of the fourteenth century, the disdain for peasant infantry, and archers in particular, made itself apparent throughout the medieval era, particularly in how prisoners were treated. Knights were seldom killed if captured. Conversely, commoners were outside of the laws of war and the protections of Chivalry. One chronicler from the era wrote that “a man may not torture a prisoner . . . but it is different in the case of peasants.”²²⁰ An archer, who was normally a peasant or at least perceived to be so by his social betters, was thus part of the group that could be tortured or killed.

There are numerous examples of archers and other infantry being executed or tortured. This was true of every kingdom, even the English who would eventually come to depend on and glorify their archers. After the fall of Rochester Castle in 1215, King John spared the men-at-arms of the rebellious garrison, but hanged the archers. In 1264 Henry III ordered the execution of 300 rebel archers who had harassed his army as he marched through south east England.²²¹ When Edward I defeated a band of rebels at Alton Wood in Hampshire in 1266, he spared the leader of the band, a knight named Adam Gurdon, and hanged all his common followers.²²²

Arguably, the most well-known instance of brutality towards archers is the alleged French practice of cutting off the draw fingers of captured archers. This comes

²²⁰ Quote is from Paris of Pozzo taken from Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages*, 243.

²²¹ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 79.

²²² Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London: Routledge, 2000), 195. This was an important event as many scholars have proposed that the Robin Hood legends are based on disposed Montfortians living in the forest as outlaws.

from the account of the early fifteenth century chronicler Jean de Wavrin. According to Wavrin, Henry V tells his archers before the battle of Agincourt that, “the French were boasting that they would cut off three fingers of the right hand of all the archers that should be taken prisoners to the end that neither man nor horse should ever again be killed with their arrows.”²²³ While the French certainly hated English archers, this story was likely an invention of Henry V to inspire his men rather than any actual practice of the French. However, the fact that the story was told at all, illustrates the brutality which lowborn soldiers expected to receive from their social betters.

As has already been discussed in chapter 4, many men-at arms and archers were roughly of the same social status. So, there was a possibility that a man at arms in a defeated English army might be captured for ransom, but a close relation of the man-at-arms serving as an archer might be tortured or executed.²²⁴

While class divisions may have played a large part in the savagery between cavalry and infantry, with regard to archers there is also a level of frustration inherent in being tormented by an enemy from a distance with no way to strike back at him. When one does finally close with the enemy who has been tormenting one’s forces with missile fire, it is natural to vent one’s frustrations in violence towards the offender. The same thing is seen in the savagery that armies unleash upon cities whose defenders caused a

²²³ Wavrin, Jean de Translation: Edward Hardy and William Hardy, *A Collection of the Chronicles and Ancient Histories of Great Britain, now called England. 2. From A. D. 1399 to A. D. 1422*, 2012, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k50254g/f212.image>.

²²⁴ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 206.

great deal of casualties to the besieging army. Shadows of this are seen in recent history as American soldiers in WWII were rumored to never take snipers prisoner.

However, the brutality of the Hundred Years War was by no means one sided, and it was certainly exacerbated by the infantry revolution. With the introduction of large numbers of effective peasant soldiers to the battlefield, things changed significantly. If the peasants were not protected by chivalry, then they felt no compunction to abide by the rules of chivalry either. The aristocracy, who had once enjoyed the protections of chivalry from their foes, and could legitimately expect to survive a battle even if they were defeated, were subjected to a new level of lethality in warfare and death tolls grew exponentially.

The contrast between the casualty rates of the battles mentioned above and the casualty rates of the Hundred Years War are striking. At Crecy more than 2,000 French knights and other noblemen were killed. Their numbers included King John of Bohemia, who was fighting on the side of the French and seven other princes of the blood, or men directly related to the king of France.²²⁵ These figures are only for the knights and do not account for the French infantry casualties which, according to contemporary chronicler Geoffrey Le Baker, were so numerous that “no one took the trouble to count them.”²²⁶

At Poitiers (1356) more than 2,500 French knights were killed.²²⁷ The French chronicler Monstrelet estimates that at Agincourt (1415) approximately 8,000 French

²²⁵ Sumption *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 530.

²²⁶ Geoffrey Le Baker, David Priest, and Richard Barber, *The Chronicle of Geofry Le Baker* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2012), 75.

²²⁷ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War II*.

knights and men-at-arms were killed, and of these, over 100 were “men entitled to banners.”²²⁸ Similarly high casualty rates were seen at Verneuil (1424).²²⁹

Another reason that casualty rates rose was that longbows were designed to kill from a distance before the more heavily armed enemy could close with and kill the archer. It is next to impossible to offer or accept a personal surrender at a distance.²³⁰ As mentioned earlier, at the battle of Crecy a literal king’s ransom was lost when King John of Bohemia was killed.²³¹ King Phillip VI of France was also very nearly killed at Crecy by an archer, as he sustained an arrow wound to his face.²³² King David II of Scotland was also wounded in the face by an English arrow at Neville’s Cross.

At the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403, the future king Henry V was wounded in the face by an English longbowmen fighting in the forces of Richard II. It seems ironic that the English King who won the most striking victory of the Hundred Years War at Agincourt, relying heavily on the skill and bravery of English archers, was very nearly struck down by an English arrow.²³³

Despite the obvious threat to the military supremacy of the aristocracy that archers posed, the English military community evolved out of necessity to include

²²⁸ Anne Currey, *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2000), 169.

²²⁹ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 347-349.

²³⁰ Rogers, “The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years’ War,” 257.

²³¹ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 529.

²³² Lynn, *Battle A History of Combat and Culture*, 77.

²³³ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 265.

archers. As archers became the lynchpin of the English tactical system, the attitudes of the English aristocracy toward archers softened. The English chronicler Geoffrey Le Baker credits the Black Prince with giving this speech to his archers before the battle of Poitiers:

You have often given me good proof of your courage and your loyalty. In many fierce tempests of war you have shown that you are not degenerate sons, but of the same blood as those men under the leadership of my father and my ancestors as kings of England found no task impossible, no place forbiddingly impassable, no mountain too high to climb, no tower too strong to capture, no army unbeatable, no armed enemy formidable. Their lively courage tamed the French, the Cypriots, the Syracusans, the Calabrians and the Palestinians. It also subdued the stiff necked Scots, Irish, and the Welshman who could endure all labor. It is not just my words which are urging you to show yourselves equal to your fathers. It is also the situation, the time, and the dangers which are wont to make brave men out of cowards and lively men out of lumps. It is also honor and love of your country. It is also the splendid spoils to be won from the French. So follow the standards, with mind and body concentrated on the commands of your leaders, so that, if life and triumph comes our way, we may continue in that firm friendship which always wants the same and scorns the same. But if jealous fortune, which God forbid, should propel us down the final road of all flesh during the task which lies before us, it is not imprisonments awaiting the wicked which will dishonor your names. No, all of you together with me and with these noblemen, my companions, would drink from the same cup. For us to conquer the nobility of France will be glory, and to be conquered will not be a peril cowardly shunned, but a peril met with boldness.²³⁴

And of course few people are unfamiliar with the stirring speech Shakespeare attributed to Henry V just before the battle of Agincourt:

O, do not wish one more!
Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart; his passport shall be made
And crowns for convoy put into his purse:
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.

²³⁴ Le Baker, Priest, and Barber, *The Chronicle of Geofry Le Baker*, 125.

Later, he continues,

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 remember'd;
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 accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.²³⁵

While the Black Prince may have said something similar to the speech accredited to him, it is clear that the St. Crispin's day speech of Henry V is fiction. However, Shakespeare wrote these words in the Tudor period when the longbow was still England's primary weapon of war, and whether the Black Prince uttered these words or not, English chroniclers of the era claimed that he did, probably with his endorsement. So in both eras it was accepted that serving as an archer to the king elevated one's status. The Black Prince said that he and the archers are "comrades together," and that they shall share "the same cup." Henry went further, saying that participation in the battle of Agincourt will "gentle" a man's condition. Indeed, many archers at Agincourt and Poitiers did gentle their condition through plunder and ransoms that raised them into the gentry. Thus, while archers were clearly not of the same status as knights and esquires, the mere fact that they were soldiers for the king gave them a social status far elevated above other commoners and an opportunity to raise their status further.

²³⁵ William Shakespeare. King Henry V.

Another example of the rising status of archers in the English military community is the Ordinances of War of 1385. The ordinances state that if a man-at-arms or mounted archer should raise a false alarm and jeopardize the cohesion of the army, then he will lose his best horse. However, soldiers of lesser status, to include foot archers, would lose their right ear. This extension of the privileges enjoyed by gentlemen to mounted archers illustrates the respect that at least some archers commanded.²³⁶ It also illustrates the social diversity of men serving as archers and the level of social separation that could exist between them.

If the English came to hold their archers in higher regard, then the French obviously did not. The French Chronicler Monstrelet noted of the English dead from the battle of Patay in 1429, “among the dead were a certain number of the leaders, the rest were men of middling or low degree, the sort who are always brought from their own country to die in France.”²³⁷ The contrast between the way the English viewed their archers and the way the French viewed their own archers and infantry is striking. The French continued to rely heavily on mercenary crossbowmen and were reluctant to use any infantry in a significant way. Indeed, it appears the French scorn for English archers extended to their own peasant infantry, nor did the French seem to possess any particular skill for employing infantry, particularly early in the war.

At the battle of Crecy in 1346, the French had hired approximately 6,000 Genoese crossbowmen.²³⁸ The French army came upon the English army arrayed for battle in mid-

²³⁶ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 205.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

²³⁸ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 526.

to-late afternoon. The weather had been rainy all day and the Genoese crossbow strings had been soaked, causing them to stretch and limit the range of the weapons. Additionally, the French baggage train was strung out miles behind the army, and the Genoese's pavises, the large shields the crossbowmen stood behind to reload their weapons, were still in the baggage train. Despite these disadvantages, the French were eager to begin the battle and the Genoese were ordered forward. A very one-sided archery duel began between the Genoese and the English longbowmen, as the longbows faster rate of fire and greater range quickly overwhelmed the Genoese. As the Genoese attempted to flee from the arrow storm of the English, the French knights simply rode them down.²³⁹ King Philip of France is reported to have exclaimed, "Kill this riff-raff! Kill them all! They are doing nothing but getting in our way!"²⁴⁰ After the humiliating defeat, Phillip used the Genoese as a scapegoat and ordered the execution of any who survived the battle.²⁴¹

At Agincourt there were approximately 5,000 missile infantry in the French army, yet they were not allowed to take positions in the front ranks where they could be most effective because they were supplanted by French knights eager to be in the first ranks of the attack in order to secure glory and wealthy prisoners.²⁴²

²³⁹ Jean Le Bel and Nigel Bryant, *The True Chronicles of Jean Le Bel 1290-1360* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2011), 180.

²⁴⁰ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Volume 1 Trial by Battle*, 528.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 531.

²⁴² Currey, *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations*, 33.

If the French nobility held the infantry in scorn as lower class amateurs, then defeat at the hands of such men was particularly galling. The Chronicles of the Monks of St. Denis lamented that at Agincourt:

[T]he nobility of France were taken prisoner and put a ransom as a vile troupe of slaves or else perished under the blows of a faceless soldiery. O eternal dishonor. O disaster for ever to be deplored. If it is usually a consolation for men of heart and a softening of their sadness to think that they have been beaten by adversaries of noble origin and of a recognized valor it is on the other hand a double shame double it to me to allow oneself to be beaten by an unworthy and vile men.²⁴³

The obvious contempt that the aristocracy had towards the common soldier, and the bitterness they must have felt after a defeat at the hands of such men, partially explains the savagery with which defeated commoners were often treated.²⁴⁴

However, this disdain for infantry is still striking, especially given the demonstrated success of English missile infantry. This begs the question, why did the French or other western European powers not integrate infantry and especially missile infantry into their respective military communities? In point of fact, many nations, particularly those who had been on the receiving end of English archery, did attempt to create some kind of archery arm.

Some historians have suggested that the French were afraid to arm their peasants, particularly after the Jacquerie Revolt (1358). Indeed, a contemporary chronicler wrote that the French nobility gave up on developing an archery arm because they believed that the peasant archers, “if they had been gathered together, would have been more powerful

²⁴³ Ibid., 107-108.

²⁴⁴ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 206.

than the princes and nobles.”²⁴⁵ The Spanish addressed this issue by making their crossbowmen knights, integrating them into the aristocracy in an attempt to alleviate any social tensions and avoid creating an armed peasantry.²⁴⁶

However, in the case of the French, fear of social unrest, while certainly a concern, does not seem likely as many of the attempts to develop an archery arm came after the Jacquerie revolt. Indeed, the French made a concerted effort to develop an effective missile infantry arm on several occasions throughout the course of the Hundred Years War. Charles V (1364 to 1380), who had been present at the battle of Poitiers when his father was taken prisoner by the English, supported the creation of confraternities of crossbowmen and archers throughout France and afforded them special privileges, in particular, tax exemption. Charles also ordered that a register of all crossbowmen and archers be compiled in order to gauge the strength of his potential missile infantry force. He also passed laws similar to those in England which mandated archery and crossbow practice.²⁴⁷

Despite these efforts, the French ultimately abandoned their attempt to create a native missile infantry arm in the late fourteenth century.²⁴⁸ By the 1370s, the French,

²⁴⁵ The quote is taken from Rogers, “The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years’ War” quoting Jean Juvenal des Ursins, *Histoire de Charles VI, in Choix de chroniques et memoires sur l’histoire de France. XIVE siècle.*

²⁴⁶ Ralph Payne-Gallwey, *The Book of the Crossbow* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 48.

²⁴⁷ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 255.

²⁴⁸ After the disastrous defeat at Agincourt (1415) and Verneuil (1424), the French would once again try to create a native missile infantry capability, this time with more success. Indeed, it has been suggested that France’s effective use of Missile infantry drawn from the commons and awarded special privileges is what finally allowed them to

with the defeats of Crecy and Poitiers still fresh in their minds, adopted a strategy of “containment and avoidance”²⁴⁹ of large English armies. The French used their superior cavalry forces to harass and out maneuver English forces and committed to an engagement only when they were certain of victory. This strategy did not require large missile infantry forces and its successes reinforced the French faith in the efficacy of heavy cavalry and dismounted men-at-arms over missile infantry.²⁵⁰

In the end, the archer’s value on the battlefield was not enough to overcome the class biases of the day. Throughout history, when one social group has power or privilege, they have endeavored to hold on to them as long as possible. This was especially true in the medieval era, and the effectiveness of archers was a concern for those who wished to maintain the status quo. Even before the infantry revolution of the fourteenth century, the aristocracy and the clergy recognized missile weapons as potentially destabilizing to feudal society.

In 1139, the Catholic Church attempted to limit the use of missile weapons by banning their use against fellow Christians. “We prohibit under anathema that murderous

expel the English from France in the fifteenth century. For further information see Bradbury.

²⁴⁹ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 254.

²⁵⁰ This portion of the Hundred Years War is seldom discussed by military historians because of the lack of large scale pitched battles; however it is an important time because it demonstrates an effective operational response by the French to the superior English tactics. For more on this portion of the Hundred Years War see Sumption, *The Hundred Years War II*.

art of crossbowmen and archers, which is hateful to God, to be employed against Christians and Catholics from now on.”²⁵¹ Obviously this was widely ignored.

Through most of the medieval period the bow was scorned by the gentry as a weapon for lesser men. As mentioned previously, a man of gentle birth was expected to fight with sword and lance from horseback. This is primarily because arms, armor, and horses were status symbols that spoke to a man’s gentle condition and wealth. A peasant fought from the ground with whatever makeshift weapons were available. The popular image of an undisciplined mob of peasants armed with pitch forks and axes is not far from the truth. When compared to a knight armed with a sword and shield, in heavy armor, and riding a horse bred specifically for war, the peasants stood little chance. However the peasants also would have been armed with bows, especially in England where hunting was popular among all levels of society.

A longbow can penetrate armor, and kill a horse, therefore negating the advantages of the wealthier men-at-arms. The bow also provided the peasant with standoff so that he could engage the knight from a distance without exposing himself to the knight’s superior melee weaponry and fighting skills. These are the primary reasons the aristocracy and gentry found the archer so objectionable. It was abhorrent to them that a knight, whose arms and armor could cost a small fortune and who had spent the better part of his life training for melee combat, could be killed by a peasant from a safe distance without putting himself in harm’s way.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Norman P. Tanner, “The Second Lateran Council,” Papal Encyclicals Online, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum10.htm>.

²⁵² Hanson, *Carnage and Culture*, 136.

The fear of the aristocracy and the clergy seemed to be realized in the corps of Cheshire archers maintained by Richard II.²⁵³ Cheshire archers were arguably the finest archers in England. More than likely this was due to Cheshire's proximity to both the Welsh and Scottish marches. Cheshire archers had been participating in the king's wars since the twelfth century, and English kings since the reign of Edward I had retained Cheshire archers as a personal bodyguard. However, as the reign of Richard II grew more tumultuous, the king felt he could not trust any of the aristocracy, particularly with his personal security. Therefore, he hired larger numbers of Cheshire archers to his personal retinue.²⁵⁴

Unlike the yeoman of the crown, who were archers paid by the exchequer; the Cheshire archers were recruited from Richards's earldom in Cheshire and wore his personal livery. Richard normally maintained a bodyguard of 312 archers led by squires of proven loyalty. In times of greater turmoil Richard would increase this force, sometimes to as many as 2,000. Richard Wadge has compared Richard's Cheshire archers to the Praetorian guard of the Roman Empire. Ultimately, they were responsible for his personal safety but they also had military and political functions.²⁵⁵ Indeed, Richard used his archers to coerce the High Court of Parliament to hand down death sentences to his political enemies in 1397. The contemporary chronicler Adam of Usk

²⁵³ Richard II reigned from 1377 until he was forced to abdicate in 1399.

²⁵⁴ Strickland and Hardy, *The Great Warbow*, 258.

²⁵⁵ Wadge, *Arrowstorm The World of the Archer in the Hundred Years War*, 83.

wrote that Richard's Cheshire archers were "men of the utmost depravity who went about doing as they wished, assaulting, beating and plundering his subjects with impunity."²⁵⁶

While much of the criticism of Richard's archers stemmed from their behavior, there was also anger that the king was relying on archers, mostly peasants and some minor gentry, to carry out his bidding instead of the upper echelons of the aristocracy. Many in the aristocracy were bitter at being scorned by the king for common archers. One chronicler complained about, "these iniquitous archers, in whom, above all others, the king had confidence, even entrusting the security of his person to them, whereby most of the kingdom was treated with disdain."²⁵⁷

Consequently, attempts were made to restrain the rise of lowborn men and maintain the social order. A decree in 1390 stated that nobles were not to give livery²⁵⁸ to men called yeomen archers or anyone else below the rank of esquire.²⁵⁹ The decree also forbade yeoman from serving in Parliament, although men with forty shillings of land income could still vote in shire parliamentary elections.

Despite this reaction during the reign of Richard II, the demands of the Hundred Years War meant that the English monarchy was still heavily dependent on archers and the Commons. Thus, while their rise in station was checked somewhat by the,

²⁵⁶ *Chronicles of Adam of Usk* quoted from Wadge, *Arrowstorm*, 84.

²⁵⁷ *Historia vitae et regni Ricardi Secundi* Quoted from Wadge, *Arrowstorm*, 83.

²⁵⁸ Livery is the badge of an individual lord or noble house that is worn by certain servants of said lord or house. The wearing of livery gives the servant some measure of the lord's power and authority. For instance, an archer wearing the livery of the king could theoretically demand things of an earl in the name of the king. Obviously, this would be somewhat galling to the earl.

²⁵⁹ Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer*, 172.

“seigneurial reaction”²⁶⁰ of the late-fourteenth century, the class of men who served as archers and voted in parliamentary elections continued to gain in prominence and power.

It can be argued that the rise of the archers’ importance militarily, and the political enfranchisement of the social class that provided archers, contributed to the political upheavals of the seventeenth century which led to the English Civil War. The war was brought on by Parliament’s assertion that all of the king’s authority was derived from parliament. The members of Parliament were able to validate that assertion. Indeed, parliament executed Charles I, and Charles II was only restored to the throne with the consent of Parliament.²⁶¹ It is legitimate to wonder if the English political system would have developed differently if English kings had not become so dependent on English archers and Parliament for their wars in France.

The causes of cultural and social change are extremely complex and can never be attributed to just one factor. The author of this study is not attempting to suggest that archers were the only reason, or even the primary reason, for many of the dramatic social changes that were taking place in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, they certainly played a significant role.

²⁶⁰ The seigneurial reaction was not only directed at men who rose in status through participation in war but also those who benefitted from the economic opportunities created by the Black Death.

²⁶¹ For more on the English Civil War see Peter Gaunt, *The English Civil War: A Military History*.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study began with the intention of clearly defining the social status of English archers during the Hundred Years War, and was based on the assumption that there was a “typical” English archer at the time. This has turned out to be a much more difficult undertaking than was originally expected, chiefly because there was no typical English Archer, just as there is no typical U.S. infantryman. Certainly, there are generalizations that can be applied to a majority of archers. However the military community of fourteenth and fifteenth century England, of which archers were a significant part, was just as complex as the society from which its members came. Thus, as the preceding chapters have demonstrated, an archer might be a poacher, a forester in royal service, an outlaw, a respectable peasant farmer, a servant in an aristocratic household, or the second son of a minor gentry family. Furthermore, men from all of these categories might be professional soldiers who pursued war as a career, or part time soldiers only participating in a few campaigns.

The men who served as archers also joined the army for a variety of reasons. Some joined seeking royal pardons for past crimes, while others joined for pay and plunder. Some men joined the retinues of powerful lords hoping to curry favor that would assist them in their civilian lives. Other men joined simply for the promise of adventure. Whatever their motivations, serving in the king’s army as an archer offered a chance for men to improve their social and financial standing significantly. Sometimes these men realized this dream.

Many men of humble origins improved their own stations and laid the foundations for their descendants to enter the gentry. One must only remember William Jodrell who founded a gentle family based on the financial and social benefits he earned serving as an archer for the Black Prince in Gascony, nor was the Jodrell family wholly unique. Dr. Anne Curry and Dr. Adrian Bell's Oxford team have conducted exhaustive analysis of surviving muster rolls, protection letters, and garrison records to identify hundreds of men who began their career as archers and later served as men-at-arms, to include an ancestor to the author of this study.²⁶² This thesis has demonstrated the obvious economic separation and the perceived social separation between archers and men-at-arms. Thus, transitioning from an archer to a man-at-arms meant that a man had markedly improved his social and economic station.

The military community of England was a reflection of the society from which its members were drawn and, thus, was influenced by developments in that society. However, the military community also influenced the development of society, especially in periods of prolonged warfare in which societies placed a high premium on military service. This was the case in fourteenth century England.

The fourteenth century saw dramatic changes in English society. The already floundering and impractical feudal system and estates framework were relegated to near insignificance by the Black Death and the Hundred Years War. These events coupled

²⁶² For more information on the research of Dr. Bell and Dr. Curry see *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*, 139-178, which contains the most detailed analysis of individual English archers to date based on contemporary sources. Also see the website *The Soldier in later Medieval England*, <http://www.medievalsoldier.org/#> which contains a searchable database of nearly 300,000 records illuminating the service of individual archers and men-at-arms.

with the unique aspects of English society, chiefly, the relative social mobility, the tradition of democratic rule, and the growing sense of national identity, facilitated the rise to prominence of the English archer. In turn, the archer's success on the battlefield continued the development of English society in these areas. Indeed, the success of English archers during the Hundred Years War did as much to topple the estates framework and the feudal system, and to develop the national identity of England and its modern democratic institutions as any event of the medieval period.

The most compelling evidence for this assertion was the rise of the Commons in Parliament during the Hundred Years War. By the beginning of the fifteenth century it was virtually impossible for an English king to collect taxes or wage war without the consent of the Commons. The power of the Commons was, in no small part, due to the military successes of the lower classes in the form of archers. With military might, comes political influence.

As long as the aristocracy had been perceived as the protectors of the realm, then they could be endured by the peasants. However, the great battles of the Hundred Years War were not won by knights in shining armor, but by peasants armed with a peasant's weapon, the yew longbow. When these men shot into the French ranks at Crecy and Poitiers, and watched the most respected knights in Christendom cut down by their arrows, the armored knights on horseback could no longer maintain their illusion of invincibility. The protectors had now become the protected and had to share the power and respect that comes from military might.²⁶³

²⁶³ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The White Company* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1891), 99-100.

The cause-and-effect relationships of something as complex as social change are impossible to ascribe to only one variable. While there is compelling evidence that archers had a dramatic impact on English society, ultimately, their importance can never be quantified because so many other factors were involved in the evolution of English society. Obviously, the English reliance on archers was not the only cause or driver of the social changes affecting England in the fourteenth century. However, the English archers of the Hundred Years War and the social mobility afforded to them based on individual achievement, were one of the earliest embodiments of many of these social changes. What is more, these men continued to drive social and military change through their successes on the battlefield.

While the causes of social change can be difficult to identify, the causes for changes in the character of warfare are easier to trace. English archers had a dramatic and quantifiable impact on the war in Western Europe. As discussed in chapter 5, the introduction of disciplined peasant infantry into the arena of warfare, which had previously been the domain of only the aristocracy, increased the lethality and destructive character of war.

Furthermore, English archers played the primary role in the infantry revolution of the fourteenth century that laid the foundation upon which the military revolution of the early modern era was based. The English combination of cavalry, heavy infantry and missile infantry fighting as a combined arms team, is the predecessor to the linear “pike and shot” tactics of the early modern era.

Additionally, the military enfranchisement of the common population added a national character to English armies of the Hundred Years War. Particularly for England

and France, the bloody battlefields of the Hundred Years War were the beginnings of the national identities that would facilitate the creation of modern nation states and the ideals of nationalism, both of which have profound effects on the way societies conduct war to this day.

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