

Soldiers' Wives in the Hundred Years War

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In January 2006 the *Daily Telegraph* reported the sale in New York of an eighteenth-century gold box, embossed with the arms of the city, which had been presented along with the freedom of the city to Thomas Gage, commander-in-chief of the British Army in North America in 1773.¹ At that point, the report continued, Gage was 'deeply in love with his American wife' – Margaret Kemble from New Brunswick – who had given him eleven children.² Two years later, Gage was a 'broken man ... estranged from Margaret for ever after she put the land of her birth before her husband and handed his military secrets to Paul Revere'. Gage had planned to send 800 men to Concord with the aim of seizing two revolutionary leaders, Samuel Adams and John Hancock, and destroying the weapons which they had been building up at Lexington and Concord. But, being forewarned, Revere famously rode to advise them of Gage's plan. The rest, as they say, is history.

Gage immediately suspected his wife since, other than his fellow officer, she was the only person he had told of his plans. He banished her to England, and although he also returned home six months later, the couple never spoke again. Margaret Gage later 'confided to a close friend that her feelings were those spoken by Lady Blanche in Shakespeare's *King John*':

The sun's overcast with blood; fair day adieu!
Which is the side that I must go withal?
I am with both ...
Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose.³

¹ *Daily Telegraph*, Friday 20 January 2006, p. 17. Report by Harry Mount in New York. The box passed through the Gage family until it was sold towards the end of the nineteenth century through an antique dealer to Lord Rosebery, British prime minister. The document of the mayor of New York granting the freedom of the city remains in the possession of the Gage family at Firlie Place in Sussex.

² Margaret (1734–1824) was the granddaughter of a mayor of New York and daughter of a New Jersey businessman and councillor who had been at school with Gage at Westminster. The couple had married in 1858. D. H. Fisher, *Paul Revere's Ride* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 95–6.

³ Fisher, *Paul Revere's Ride*, p. 96, from *Calendar of the Home Office Papers of the Reign of George III, 1773–1775*, ed. R. A. Roberts (London, 1899). The quotation is from *King John*, Act III Scene i.

As the *Daily Telegraph* reporter put it, behind the sale of this box 'lies one of the saddest love stories of the American Revolution'. Similar stories could be told for other international wars. The Hundred Years War is no exception. To cite but one variation on the theme: in 1429, as the English in Normandy stepped up their level of security in the wake of the successes of Joan of Arc, the local wife of the English porter and gaoler of the castle of Verneuil fell in love with one of the French prisoners in her husband's care.⁴ With the aid of the chambermaid of a friend who had been similarly smitten by another prisoner, she helped them escape. Both women tried to follow their lovers but were captured by the English authorities.

The chambermaid was executed on the grounds that she was *la principale faiseresse*. This tendency to place blame on a servant is not unprecedented. In the *exempla* for female behaviour presented by the Knight of La Tour Landry, a work composed in French in the 1370s but subsequently translated into Middle English, we find the story of a maid who was bribed by the gift of a hood into arranging for a knight to have access to her lady.⁵ She persuades her lady into accepting the knight's blandishments. The act of adultery is betrayed to the husband by, typically, a male servant of the household, and the husband immediately has his wife cast into prison. When in due course the wife explains that the maid put her up to it, the husband turns his anger against the girl. By her disloyalty to master and mistress she was guilty of treason – indeed this was the law – and so the husband ordered beheading, so that the neck and the hood which had bought the maid's services should be cut together.

The wife of the gaoler of Verneuil castle was, like her literary counterpart, put in prison but she was subsequently pardoned, hence the record which we have within the *lettres de remission* granted during the English occupation.⁶ Would that we knew whether she and her husband ever spoke again. We might conclude that she was merely foolish, a victim of her own passion, but from a modern perspective, we quite like our medieval women to have minds of their own. That is a large part of the appeal of Joan of Arc (not a soldier's wife,

⁴ Paris, Archives Nationales JJ 174/262, printed in *Actes de la Chancellerie d'Henri VI concernant la Normandie sous la domination anglaise*, ed. P. Le Cacheux (Rouen and Paris, 1907–8), ii, item CXCI.

⁵ *The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry*, ed. T. Wright (EETS, original series 33, London, 1868), pp. 72–3. The author concludes, 'Now maye ye see how good is to take wyth him good companye, and in his service good and trewe servauntes that be not blamed of no man lyvyng. For the said demoyzell – the maid – was not wyse. And therefore good is to take wyse servauntes and not fooles'. The writer acknowledges that women frequently called upon their female servants to give them advice: all the more reason, then, to ensure that wise servants were employed, otherwise foolish advice would be given.

⁶ This type of source, essentially pardons, has proved a very fertile hunting ground for historians. See, in particular, C. Gauvard, '*De grace especial*: crime, état et société en France à la fin du moyen âge' (Paris, 1991); A. Curry, 'Sex and the Soldier in Lancastrian Normandy', *Reading Medieval Studies* 14 (1988), 17–45; M. Evans, 'Brigandage and Resistance in Lancastrian Normandy. A Study of the Remission Evidence', *Reading Medieval Studies* 18 (1992), 103–33.

of course, and hostile to her male companions seeking sexual solace).⁷ We are similarly impressed when a woman from the 'Stokkes' area of London led a deputation of women to the parliament of 1427 to present letters to the duke of Gloucester and the other temporal and spiritual lords present. As the St Albans chronicler John Amundesham tells us

The tenor of these letters was to reproach the duke of Gloucester on account of his refusal to rescue his wife, Jacqueline of Hainault, from her effective imprisonment by the duke of Burgundy. Rather, as his love for her had gone cold, he was inclined to leave her in captivity, and he was holding himself for another in adultery, and quite publicly, to the ruin of himself, of the realm and of the strength of the institution of marriage.⁸

Impressed as we might be, this was unusual behaviour on the part of women and therefore worthy of report,⁹ rather like the mention by the Bourgeois of Paris, of another Hainaulter, Margot, a female player of the *jeu de paume*, active in Paris around the same time (1426–27),

She was fairly young, about 28 or 30 ... and was the best tennis player anyone had ever seen. She played both forehand and backhand very strongly, very cleverly and cunningly, as well as any man. There were few men she could not beat, except the very strongest players.¹⁰

In this context it is interesting to note how Amundesham considered it necessary to mention that his protesting women were respectfully attired (*reverenter ornatis*) as though that gave their presence a greater legitimacy in a parliamentary context where otherwise female appearance was not known. Similarly, the Bourgeois gives the aura of respectability to 'La Fausse Pucelle', Claude, who hailed from Lorraine and who fought in the pope's army but who

⁷ Her page told the Trial of Rehabilitation that Joan 'would not allow women with the army', and on more than one occasion chased mistresses off with her sword (M. Warner, *Joan of Arc. The Image of Female Heroism* (London, 1981), p. 233).

⁸ *Annales Monasterii S. Albani a Johanne Amundesham Monacho*, vol. 1, ed. H. T. Riley (Rolls Series, London, 1870), p. 20. We know that the duchess of Gloucester had sent letters to the city asking for them to intercede on her behalf, and that the mayor and alderman had themselves lobbied to this end (*Calendar of London Letter Books, K*, ed. R. R. Sharpe (London, 1911), p. 68, printed in A. R. Myers, 'Parliamentary Petitions in the Fifteenth Century', *EHR* 52 (1937), 386). See also *PROME*, x (1422–31), ed. A. Curry (Woodbridge, 2005), introduction and appendix to the parliament of 1427. For Lydgate's poem of the same juncture criticising Gloucester's approaching marriage to Eleanor Cobham, see E. P. Hammond, 'Lydgate and the Duchess of Gloucester', *Anglia* 27 (1904).

⁹ Note, however, that according to the Bourgeois of Paris, three women came to intercede on behalf of Joan of Arc in September 1430 (*A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, ed. J. Shirley (Oxford, 1968), p. 234). Another example of female solidarity is provided by the Bourgeois where he tells of women of noble and citizen rank who approached the duchess of Bedford just before she set off with her husband for the council of Arras in 1435 asking her to 'take the kingdom's peace' under her own protection (*ibid.*, pp. 294–5).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

conformed to gender stereotype by marrying a knight and bearing two sons.¹¹ 'La Vraie Pucelle', of course, did not have opportunity, or perhaps inclination, to do the same.¹²

Thomas Gage, of course, could have chosen to follow his wife's example. Both could have defected to the embryonic United States. That would have been quite a story to report, as were the examples which happened at the expulsion of the English from Normandy in 1449–50, a subject on which Maurice Keen has contributed much wisdom.¹³ John Edward, captain of La Roche Guyon, was married to a French woman who had *belles terres*. At his wife's behest he surrendered his fortress and became French (*se fist français*) on the understanding that he could keep his wife's lands.¹⁴ Richard Merbury, captain of Gisors, acted similarly. One of the French negotiators for the surrender of the place was related to his French wife. Surrender was thereby negotiated whereby two of Merbury's children who had previously been taken prisoner would be released, and his wife would keep her lands. In return Merbury agreed to accept French allegiance.¹⁵

These examples were included in the French narratives of the reconquest of Normandy for several reasons. The most obvious is because they happened. But they also served a purpose as politically charged incidents which added further lustre to recent French successes. The reconquest was, for the French, a decisive moment in their recovery from the depths of despair following the treaty of Troyes which had seen a French king accept an Englishman as his heir. The English had now sunk so low that their soldiers could be persuaded by their wives to change allegiance. This was quite a coup. Throughout the Middle Ages we can see the distaste of male writers in the face of female influence over men. A real man, and more especially, a real knight, did not need his wife's prompting, and the advice of a wife was not always wise. As the Knight of La Tour Landry observed, 'Also a man aught not so mooche to encline to his wiff but that he shulde take hede whedir it wer perell to do her counsel or not.'¹⁶

In marriage wives were expected to follow their husband's political allegiances and opinions. This was most obvious in the case of royal marriages where the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 337–8.

¹² As an aside, what would have happened, what could have happened, if Joan of Arc had not been captured? She was too low in status to marry a knight or to enter a nunnery. Her authority, so dependent upon her youth and virginity, would surely have been diminished by middle-aged spread.

¹³ M. Keen, 'The End of the Hundred Years War: Lancastrian France and Lancastrian England', *England and her Neighbours 1066–1453. Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais*, ed. Michael Jones and Malcolm Vale (London, 1989), pp. 297–311; M. Keen and M. Daniel, 'English Diplomacy and the Sack of Fougères in 1449', *History* 59 (1974), 375–91.

¹⁴ 'Le Recouvrement de Normandie par Berry, heraut du roy', *Narratives of the Expulsion of the English from Normandy MCCCXLIX–MCCCCL*, ed. J. Stevenson (Rolls Series, London, 1863), p. 277.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁶ *Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry*, p. 60.

new bride was forced to forego the fellow countrymen who had accompanied her.¹⁷ It has also been suggested that, in the case of the protest of the London women in 1427, they were being used as a way of reinforcing their husbands' stance on foreign policy. The impression that women followed the lead of their husbands is also given by the Bourgeois of Paris in his account of the civil war between Armagnac and Burgundian, yet he also indicates how significant female participation was and how it had its own distinctive characteristics. Over 4,000 women, he claims, all wearing Armagnac sashes (*bandées*) attended the bonfire rallies in Paris in late June 1414 to celebrate the attack on the Burgundian city of Soissons.¹⁸ Just before the Burgundian capture of Paris in May 1418, the Bourgeois tells us of a pogrom against men and women who were not *bandées* (i.e. not showing support for the Armagnac regime):

The women they were going to drown. They had already forcibly requisitioned cloth from the merchants and others in Paris without payment, saying that it was needed to make tents and pavilions for the King. Really it was to make sacks in which to drown the women.¹⁹

When the Burgundians took Paris on 29 May, their male supporters in the city sought out Armagnacs to kill whilst women and children used tongues as a weapon against their enemies, cursing them as 'filthy traitors'. The violence continued over the following weeks with women as well as men meeting their deaths. On 22 August the officially condoned, if not conducted, execution of Armagnac women is specifically recorded. When Soissons was recovered by the Burgundians, much the same scenario is described, only this time – a marvellous indication of how rumours were embellished – the Armagnac women were accused of sewing the bags which had been intended to be used to drown their pro-Burgundian counterparts four years earlier.²⁰

If we turn again to the English loss of Normandy in 1449–50, the cases of John Edward and Richard Merbury are the exception to the rule, another reason why the French narratives of the reconquest mentioned them specifically. Most of the wives of the soldiers in Normandy came back with their husbands to England. At the surrender of Bayeux, for instance, the French commanders, 'pour lonneur de gentillesse', lent the departing defenders some of their horses to carry the ladies and other gentlewomen as the English made for Cherbourg in order to take ship to England. The chronicler adds that they also

¹⁷ See, for example, the case of Catherine de Valois. According to Walsingham, on the very day after the wedding at Troyes, Henry V assigned to her household worthy Englishmen 'nec remansit in eius obsequio quisquam Gallicus exceptis tribus mulierculis generosis et duabus ancillis quae famularentur magistrae suae'. (*Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley (Rolls Series, London, 1863–64), ii. 335). Henry was not bound by the treaty of Troyes, as he was for her parents, to maintain a purely French household.

¹⁸ *Parisian Journal*, p. 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 122.

lent carts to convey the women of the said English who went with their husbands, a thing pitiful to behold. For there set out from the said city of Bayeux three to four hundred women, without counting the children of whom there were a great number. Some of the women carried the smallest children in their arms, the middle sized on their backs and the bigger ones they led by the hand. It was a very miserable sight. And so the said English and their wives made their way to Cherbourg.²¹

A few pages later we are told of the surrender of Caen where Edmund Beaufort duke of Somerset, the English commander, was with his wife, Eleanor Beauchamp, and children along with 3,000 English. The terms of the composition included an agreement that the duke and his own wife and children, as well as all the English who wished to depart should be able to do so with their wives, children, horses, armour, and moveable goods.²² Only recently had the duchess experienced the surrender of Rouen, where similar terms had been allowed to the duke, *madame sa femme*, and their children.²³ Such terms were standard practice in the fifteenth century: we see Henry V similarly allowing the women in conquered places to leave.²⁴ In the conquest of Normandy, local men were also allowed to take out safe-conducts which covered their wives as well as themselves.²⁵ Once the duchy was completely in English hands the wives of those who refused to swear fealty to Henry were ordered to join their husbands within eight days on pain of imprisonment.²⁶ In effect, therefore, they were not being allowed to stay in Normandy if their husbands decided to support the Dauphin, another example of the expectation that a woman would follow her husband's lead.

When the tide turned it was the English who suffered similarly, wives as much as husbands. In 1452 the English who had been resident in Maine until its surrender to the French in 1448 presented a petition to Henry VI about the losses they had suffered in his service. Some of them had lost out twice since they had retreated to Normandy but then, when the duchy also fell, 'lost all that remained to them of their moveable goods, upon which they, their wives and their children depended for their lives'. They now sought compensation so that they could support themselves as well as their families.²⁷ A similar situation arose at the loss of Gascony in 1453 when we find soldiers and their wives

²¹ *Narratives*, p. 342.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 354.

²³ *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France during the Reign of Henry VI, King of England*, ed. J. Stevenson (Rolls Series, London, 1861–64), vol. ii, part ii. 611.

²⁴ *Rotuli Normanniae in turre Londinensi asservati Johanne et Henrico Quinto Angliae regibus*, ed. T. D. Hardy (London, 1835), p. 287 (surrender of Caen, 9 September 1417).

²⁵ *Foedera*, vol. IV, part iii. 47 (12 April 1418).

²⁶ 'Calendar of the Norman Rolls', *Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, xlii (London, 1881), p. 435.

²⁷ *Letters and Papers*, vol. ii, part ii. 598–603, translated in C. T. Allmand, *Society at War. The Experience of England and France during the Hundred Years War* (Edinburgh, 1973; new edn, Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 174–6.

expelled from Bordeaux and coming to England. The expectation, indeed the social norm, was for women to follow their husbands. Therefore they followed them to the home country when the overseas possessions were lost.

But had they crossed with them from England in the first place? This is not something which chroniclers mention when telling us about the expeditionary armies which had conquered and defended northern France in the fifteenth century, nor indeed their predecessors of the fourteenth century. Women were expected to keep well away from action zones. This is also revealed by the fine of 20 *livres tournois* imposed on the countess of Salisbury in 1423 when she refused to retire into one of the fortified places held by the English in response to an order that noble ladies should so do whilst the French were threatening to besiege Avranches.²⁸ Yet John of Gaunt had deliberately taken his wife Constanza, daughter of Pedro the Cruel, on his campaign in Castile in 1386 since she had an important political role to play. The Religieux of Saint-Denis claimed that Constanza was pregnant when she went to Spain. Although this is difficult to substantiate, it is possible that Gaunt hoped to have a son born on Spanish soil since this would reinforce the claim to the Castilian crown through Constanza.²⁹ It may have been a desire to sire an heir as soon as possible which led to Katherine de Valois being housed by her husband at the siege of Melun in a little house specially constructed for her and at which she was serenaded every morning and evening by his minstrels.³⁰ An alternative view is that Henry waited until they were on home soil so that the heir to the double monarchy could be conceived and born in England. These wives had an important political role to play in warfare.

It is unlikely, however, that soldiers engaged in the chevauchée-style campaigns of the fourteenth century, or those involved in the initial conquests of Henry V, were normally accompanied by wives or concubines. Even so, there was no explicit ban on this happening until the ordinances issued by Henry VIII for his first French expedition in 1513:

also that no man bring with him any manner of woman over the sea, upon pain for forfeiture of their goods to the marshal and their bodies to be imprisoned there to remain at the king's will.³¹

Military ordinances of the fifteenth century concentrated on keeping women at bay. An undated set of ordinances, but which probably belong to the 'coronation expedition' of 1430, include the following clause:

²⁸ BL, Additional Charter 3572, dated 21 [...] 1423.

²⁹ A. Goodman, *John of Gaunt. The Exercise of Princely Power in the Fourteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1992), p. 126.

³⁰ J. H. Wylie and W. T. Waugh, *The Reign of Henry the Fifth* (Cambridge, 1914–29), iii. 212.

³¹ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin (London, 1964), i. 113.

Item that no woman be walking in the host sekyng prisoners and yff eny suche be founde she shalle be chastised in such manner that other shalbe abashed to come in such wyse.³²

The wording suggests that the ban was aimed at the wives and other women-folk of the captured enemy. This may reflect a fear that such women might be employed as spies: ample evidence exists to show that women were employed in this capacity by both the English and the French. Late in 1435, for instance, the lieutenant of English-held Evreux sent two women to Chartres, Gallardon and Senonches 'to seek out certain men of the area who were prisoners' in order to gain information on the army under Dunois.³³ Thirteen years earlier, the town council of Mantes had sent 'la femme Blondel' along with Robert Saxe to spy out enemy actions between Nogent and Chartres.³⁴

Other ordinances attempted to keep soldiers away from the temptations of the flesh whilst not banning sexual activity altogether. Henry V, for instance, had commanded:

that these open and comon strompettes be suffred in no maner wyse to abyde wyth in oure hooste and specially at the siege of townes castelles and fortresses but then they be removed to gyther a leeghe at the least from the hooste.³⁵

A similar order was subsequently issued by the earl of Salisbury, probably in connection with the conquest of Maine in the mid-1420s:

For women that usyn bordell the which logge in the oste. Also that no maner man have ne hold any comon woman within his loggyng upon peyn of losyng a monthese wages.³⁶

³² BL, Additional Manuscript 33,191, clause xxxii. For discussion see M. Keen, 'Richard II's Ordinances of War of 1385', *Rulers and Ruled in Later Medieval England. Essays Presented to Gerald Harriss*, ed. R. E. Archer and S. Walker (London, 1995), p. 34 n. 8.

³³ Paris, BnF, manuscrit français 26060/2710 (December 1435–January 1436): 'pour querir certains gens de pais prisonniers pour savoir regarder et espier quelle assemblee faisoit le batard d'Orléans.' They were well paid, at 5 *sous tournois* per day, and brought back useful information on enemy intentions.

³⁴ Archives Communales de Mantes CC 22 (1422–23), fol. 38. For use of female spies by those resisting English authority in Normandy, see R. Jouet, *La résistance à l'occupation anglaise en Basse Normandie (1418–1450)* (Cahiers des Annales de Normandie 5, Caen, 1959), p. 86.

³⁵ *The Essential Portions of Nicholas Upton's 'De Studio Militari' before 1446*, translated by John Blount, *Fellow of All Souls*, c. 1500, ed. F. P. Barnard (Oxford, 1931), pp. 47–8. For the problems of dating these ordinances see A. Curry, 'The Military Ordinances of Henry V: Texts and Contexts', *War, Government and Aristocracy in the British Isles c. 1150–1500. Essays in Honour of Michael Prestwich*, ed. C. Given-Wilson, A. Kettle and L. Scales (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 214–49.

³⁶ The earliest, mid-fifteenth-century, copy is to be found in BL Lansdowne 285 fol. 149. Unfortunately sixteenth-century copies misread Salisbury for Shrewsbury, with the result that these ordinances have continued to be misattributed. See Curry, 'Military Ordinances', p. 216.

We could be pedantic and interpret this last order as saying that lawfully married wives were allowed, but prostitutes not. This was certainly the case in the armies of Elizabeth I:

And for that it often happeneth that by permitting of many vagrant idle women in an armie, sundry disorders and horrible abuses are committed. Therefore it is ordeined that no man shal carrie into the field, or deteine with him in the place of his garrison, any woman whatsoever, other than such as be known to be his lawful wife, or such other women to tende the sicke and to serve for launders, as shall be though meete by the Marshall, upon paine of whipping and banishment.³⁷

In the reign of Henry V, however, we can see that at least two knights about to depart on campaign in 1416 (Sir William Claxton of Horden, and Sir William Bulmer of Wilton) made arrangements for their wives to lodge at the house in Dinsdale of their fellow north-country knight, Sir Thomas Surtees. That the husbands expected to be away for at least twelve months is reflected by the fact that the deal was made for that length of time. And a deal it certainly was: the wives would lodge with their maids at Surtees' house at a charge of 10 marks each.³⁸ That other soldiers' wives stayed in England is revealed by the necessary role they played in estate administration. Manorial rents, for instance, were paid to Lady Stonor whilst Sir Thomas was in France in 1419.³⁹ The duty of the wife in maintaining family interests in the husband's absence was a theme pursued by Christine de Pisan in her *Trésor de la Cité des Dames*. Whilst the husband was away, the 'good lady' was urged to keep her dress and lifestyle simple, and to pray for him in processions and oblations. At his return, she was to greet him with great joy and honour. A military context is emphasised:

To all his company she will give a joyous welcome and she will eagerly want to her about the best of his men, the most noble and the most valiant. She will want to know how they are, and very gladly will she hear their adventures recounted. She will receive them with great honour and give them fine gifts. She will also want to know how those who had had the care of his body did their duty and how they treated him.⁴⁰

³⁷ C. G. Cruickshank, *Elizabeth's Army* (Oxford, 1946), p. 146. See also a report of 1589 by Sir Henry Cocke, which speaks of the arrest of 'a counterfyete soldier, which travelled with a harlot namynge her to be his wife, afirminge the same with very greate othes' (BL Lansdowne 62/26 fols 58–59v, cited in L. Boynton, 'The Tudor Provost-Marshal', *EHR* 77 (1962), 449).

³⁸ A. J. Pollard, *North-eastern England during the Wars of the Roses. Lay Society, War and Politics, 1450–1500* (Oxford, 1990), p. 211, citing R. Surtees, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham* (Durham, 1816–40), iii. 231.

³⁹ *Stonor Letters and Papers 1290–1413*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (Camden Society 3rd series xxxix, London, 1919), introduction, p. xx.

⁴⁰ Christine de Pisan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, ed. and trans. S. Lawson (London, 1985), pp. 64–5. For a letter of John Multon to his wife before embarking on a campaign to Prussia in 1367, see Magdalen College, Oxford, Muniments: Multon 71a.

We can be certain, however, that in both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, once the English became established in their conquests in France, soldiers were keen to bring in their wives. Chroniclers note that in September 1347, for instance, after the final surrender of Calais, ten ships crossed from England with horses and victuals, as well as women coming to join their husbands in the encampments (although the ships were captured by the captain of Boulogne and pirates).⁴¹ During the siege of Rouen in October 1418 Thomasina, wife of William Drue, was given a safe-conduct to bring provisions, a reminder that wives might have a practical role in military contexts.⁴² After the treaty of Troyes, English military leaders in France regularly had their wives and families with them. Beatrice, illegitimate daughter of João I of Portugal, had not accompanied her first husband, Thomas, earl of Arundel, to France on the campaign of 1415 but did cross with her second husband, John, earl of Huntingdon, when he took up office as royal lieutenant in Guienne in 1439. She died at Bordeaux on 23 October 1439, and her body was brought back for burial at Arundel alongside her first husband. She had experienced war-widowhood for seventeen years; Earl Thomas died only two weeks after being invalided home from the siege of Harfleur.⁴³

As we have already seen, the wife of Edmund Beaufort was present with him during his tenure of the lieutenant-generalship at the end of the English occupation of Normandy. We can also prove her present during his earlier stint of service in 1440, when he was involved in the campaign to recover Harfleur, since we have record that he wrote to his wife, who was in Rouen, with news that the French were in the field in great strength.⁴⁴ Cecily Neville was present with her husband, Richard, duke of York, during his second lieutenantancy in Normandy. According to Dominic Mancini, she admitted that she had an adulterous relationship whilst in Rouen, the result of which was the future Edward IV. Michael Jones has suggested that the duke was indeed absent on campaign at Pontoise at the crucial moment of July and August 1441 when Edward must have been conceived, and that there were rumours that the duchess had an affair with an archer called Blaybourne.⁴⁵

York's predecessor as lieutenant-general, Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, had also been accompanied by his wife, Isabel. After his death at Rouen on 30 April 1439, letters were taken from the Norman capital to Honfleur where the countess was believed to be, possibly because she was preparing to return with his body to England. The pursuivant could not find her and was told she

⁴¹ J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War. Trial by Battle* (London, 1990), p. 584, citing the chronicles of Henry Knighton and Giles le Muisit.

⁴² 'Calendar of the Norman Rolls', *Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, xli (London, 1880), p. 717.

⁴³ *Complete Peerage*, V, p. 208.

⁴⁴ BnF manuscrit français 26067/4090 (17 July 1440).

⁴⁵ M. K. Jones, *Psychology of a Battle: Bosworth 1485* (Stroud, 2002), pp. 79–83. We can assume that Sir Richard Woodville met his future bride, Jacquetta of Luxembourg, second wife of John duke of Bedford, when serving in France.

had gone to Caen, so made for there instead.⁴⁶ Isabel's presence in Normandy during previous periods of her husband's military service is well evidenced. In 1427, for instance, the couple were both present at the baptism in the chapel of Caen castle of the posthumous son of Richard Afford, who had been killed at the siege of Pontorson, where the earl had been in command.⁴⁷ The countess was regularly by her husband's side whilst he was captain of Rouen during Henry VI's stay in France (1430–32). This is revealed by the household account book of Earl Richard for the year beginning 15 March 1431 which lists presences at meals.⁴⁸ We can also see that their daughter, Margaret, wife of John, Lord Talbot, spent much time with her parents whilst her husband languished in French custody for four years following his capture at the battle of Patay in July 1429. The wives of other captains were also regularly present at the meals hosted by the Warwicks. Their presence acquires an extra significance when we see that the bourgeoisie of Rouen, invited to some of the earl's banquets, were also accompanied by their wives. In the same castle was lodged Joan of Arc. Whilst she languished in prison, other English and French women made small talk over dinner.

The wives of commanders played an essential role in the social and symbolic side of the English conquest. They were seen as particularly important in the aftermath of the treaty of Troyes in creating an English court in France for Katherine de Valois as Henry V's wife. So we find the duchess of Clarence and the countess of March regularly in the new queen's company.⁴⁹ The latter's mother, however, Anne, countess of Stafford (d. 1438), does not seem to have crossed to France to join her second husband, Sir William Bourchier, who had come to prominence for his service in the conquest of Normandy and had been created count of Eu, one of the captured areas, in June 1419. Even so, she was the regular recipient of her husband's news from the front, which she passed on to others.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ BnF, manuscrit français 26065/3775 (16 May 1439).

⁴⁷ Archives Nationales, Dom Lenoir 9/302 (microfilm collection 104), cited in C. T. Allmand, *Lancastrian Normandy 1415–1450. The History of a Medieval Occupation* (Oxford, 1983), p. 99. This also shows that Afford's wife was in the duchy with him.

⁴⁸ Warwickshire County Record Office CR 1618/W 19/5; A. Curry, 'The "Coronation Expedition" and Henry VI's Court in France, 1430 to 1432', *The Lancastrian Court*, ed. J. Stratford (Stamford, 2003), p. 48.

⁴⁹ London, College of Arms, Arundel XLVIII fol. 264, cited in C. T. Allmand, *Henry V* (London, 1992), p. 155. That Lady Eleanor Courtenay, widow of Sir Edward who died in France in August 1418, herself died in the same country is revealed by the licence given to Sir John Harpenden on 28 March 1422 to bring her body back to England for burial (*Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper*, xlii. 447). She was the sister of Edmund, earl of March, and had likely also been in the court of Queen Katherine.

⁵⁰ Her first husband had been killed fighting on the side of Henry IV at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. The Cartulary of Llanthony Priory contains two letters where she communicated the news of the successful outcome of the siege of Rouen and of the negotiations of December 1419 which led to the treaty of Troyes (TNA C115, K2/6682, fols 106v, 130r).

Wives were also crucial in providing a court and escort for Margaret of Anjou as she was taken through Normandy to England. The records of Mantes, for instance, reveal the presence in her company of the wife of the captain of the town, Lady Scales, as well as the countess of Suffolk and the wife of the treasurer of Normandy.⁵¹ Just after the English victory at Verneuil in 1424, the wife of the captain of Mantes was given a gift of six fowl by the town council.⁵² No doubt they hoped that she would persuade her husband, who had served on the campaign, that the town had remained fully supportive of the English cause at a time of confused reports on which side had won the battle. This example therefore serves as a further reminder of the political importance of women within a military occupation.

Not surprisingly, service connections generated marriage connections, as Anne Marshall's researches into English war captains revealed.⁵³ A good example is Sir Andrew Ogard. His first wife was Margaret Clifton, whose father Sir John Clifton of Buckenham Castle, Norfolk, was his predecessor as captain of Vire. This case is all the more interesting since Ogard had been born in Denmark and had fought in the English cause, rising to become the duke of Bedford's councillor and chamberlain by 1430, and receiving letters of denization at the parliament of 1433 whilst Bedford was in England.⁵⁴ Another of Bedford's officials, William Sylvestre of Hertfordshire, married Margery Petit, daughter of another Englishman, Edmund Petit. The groom agreed to pay his wife 6 nobles of rent per annum for life to be secured on his English properties, and to make 80 nobles available to her relative Thomas Hunt to buy property for her benefit in England.⁵⁵ This 'pre-nuptial agreement' was registered in the Tabellionage of Rouen, but the terms remind us of the problems raised by cross-Channel residence.

The English intended their presence in their conquered lands to be permanent. This had been boosted by Henry V's policy of granting lands to soldiers and administrators. In such circumstances, the residence of wives with their husbands was to be expected. But what of the marriage of Englishmen to local women? On 30 September 1417, at the castle of Caen, three weeks after

⁵¹ Archives Communales de Mantes BB 4 (Délibérations 1440–48), fol. 85 (23 December 1444).

⁵² Archives Communales de Mantes, CC 23 (Comptes de la ville 1423–24), fol. 21. The captain at this juncture was Edward Macwilliam, who had taken fifteen men-at-arms and forty-five archers for the action (BnF manuscrit français 4485, pp. 229–31).

⁵³ A. E. Marshall, 'The Role of English War Captains in England and Normandy 1436–1461' (MA thesis, University of Wales Swansea, 1975).

⁵⁴ J. A. Stratford, *The Bedford Inventories. The Worldly Goods of John, Duke of Bedford, Regent of France (1389–1435)*, (London, 1993), pp. 417–21. Although she died before her father, Ogard was able to buy, at Sir John's death in 1447, the Clifton estates in Norfolk.

⁵⁵ Archives Départementales de la Seine Maritime [ADSM], 2E1/173 (Tabellionage de Rouen 1427–28), fols 191–2, printed in *Rouen au temps de Jeanne d'Arc*, ed. P. Le Cacheux (Rouen and Paris, 1931), item LVII. The marriage agreement between John Salvain and Eleanor, sister of Robert, lord Willoughby, was similarly registered in the Tabellionage on 13 October 1436, with her brother providing 600 marks sterling (ADSM 2E1/180, fol. 124).

he had entered the town, Henry gave licence for an Englishman, John Convers, to marry the daughter of Richard Caunet (or Cauvet) of the town of Caen, and granted him the house in Caen which Caunet had inhabited as well as all the lands he had held.⁵⁶ This is the only known example of an Englishman receiving royal permission to marry locally. Does it reflect an initial ban by Henry V on such linkages, or was it an act to encourage integration?⁵⁷ It may be that Henry and his commanders were keen to encourage marriage in order to limit other forms of relationship. Witness, for instance, the order of April 1421 that no soldier should hold any woman in concubinage or 'what is worse adultery', and other illicit relationships, the argument being advanced that this was the kind of lifestyle which would lead them to pillage populations and would therefore be prejudicial to the *res publica*.

Were mixed marriages a deliberate strategy for the consolidation of conquest, or a natural consequence of the inevitable interactions between soldiers and civilians? The Religieux of Saint-Denis implies that it was a way for local women to save themselves from poverty and exile, and there may indeed have been an element of self-protection on the part of those who married their occupiers.⁵⁸ But the cases of John Edward and Richard Merbury, who chose to defect to the French in 1449, remind us that the benefits were not all one way, since marriage to a Norman heiress could provide greater social and financial advancement than these men might have acquired by marriage in England.

A study of the surviving registers of the Tabellionage of Rouen during the English occupation gives evidence of thirty-seven definite and twelve probable mixed marriages. Seventeen of these were marriages to widows, and another eight to heiresses.⁵⁹ One Englishman, Robert Regnard, barber of London, was married to a German woman who was the widow of a Rouen man.⁶⁰ Allmand has identified other mixed marriages in the Tabellionage of Caen, with further examples being detected by Massey in his work on the land settlement. Thomas Smart, an archer in the garrison of Caen between 1426 and 1441, and porter of the castle in 1430, was married to Guillemine, whose name suggests she was Norman. In 1436 he 'bequeathed his house in Caen to the chapel of St George

⁵⁶ Hardy, *Rotuli Normaniae*, p. 184.

⁵⁷ *Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper*, xlii. 428; *Foedera*, vol. IV, part iii. 24. This order was issued whilst the earl of Salisbury was the effective ruler of Normandy whilst the king was in England and following the death of the duke of Clarence at Baugé. Since the earl also issued ordinances banning soldiers from holding common women in their lodgings (see note 36 above), he appears to have had a particular concern for moral probity.

⁵⁸ During the early stages of the campaign he notes that mothers and children were driven out and forced to seek other refuges 'illis exceptis quae connubiali vinculo eligeabant Anglicis copulari' (Le Religieux de Saint-Denis, *Histoire de Charles VI*, ed. L. Bellaguet, Collection des documents inédits sur l'histoire de France (Paris 1839–52), VI, pp. 164–5).

⁵⁹ ADSM 2E1/168–184. See also P. Cailleux, 'La présence anglaise dans la capitale normande: quelques aspects des relations entre Anglais et Rouennais', *La Normandie et l'Angleterre au Moyen Age*, ed. P. Bouet and V. Gazeau (Caen, 2003), pp. 27–6, although the author speaks of only 'une vingtaine de mariages franco-anglais'.

⁶⁰ ADSM 2E1/169, fol. 39.

in the castle so that both he and his wife might be buried within the castle cemetery and benefit from all services recited for the dead'. This demonstrates how soldiers and their wives integrated into local society yet retained a distinctive military flavour in their social relationships. It should also be remembered that the English occupation lasted long enough for mixed marriages to occur across two generations. For instance, the daughter of Thomas Burgh and his French wife, Elizabeth de Pressy, married Robert Hayton, a member of the garrison of Cherbourg.⁶¹

Some marriages contracted in Normandy were undoubtedly bigamous. Judetta de Montigny had married an Englishman, Henry Turnbull, without knowing whether her husband was dead or not. (He was in exile or else serving with the French army.) She was pardoned because of her poverty but also because she had been compelled by Turnbull into marriage *par force et violence*.⁶² Many other fascinating insights can be gleaned from both church and lay records. In 1448, Roger, lord Camoys, took as his second wife Isabel de Beaunoy of the diocese of Rouen with whom he had already cohabited, seeking papal permission.⁶³ John Painter wrote to the wife of his fellow soldier, John Rippes, whilst her husband was serving at the siege of Cherbourg in 1418, falsely informing her that her husband was dead. She thus agreed to Painter having her *compagnie charnele*. They cohabited for ten years at Valognes and elsewhere, ignorant of the fact that her husband was alive and well and serving in the garrison of Cherbourg. When the two men finally came face to face at Valognes, they fought and Painter was killed. Rippes was pardoned for his death on the grounds that the wife had provoked the dispute by her disloyalty.⁶⁴ Robert Oliver bequeathed all his goods to his fiancée, Guillette, in case he died during the expedition he was undertaking at royal orders in 1421.⁶⁵

The last example reminds us of the dangers of death in service. War widows were to be found in all periods. The wife of Michael de la Pole, whose husband held the earldom of Suffolk briefly between his father's death at the siege of Harfleur and his own death at Agincourt, took the veil within five years of his demise.⁶⁶ Alice Chaucer was twice a war widow, with her first husband, Sir

⁶¹ Allmand, *Lancastrian Normandy*, pp. 102–3, with the example of Smart on p. 99; R. A. Massey, 'The Land Settlement in Lancastrian Normandy', *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History*, ed. A. Pollard (Gloucester, 1984), p. 87.

⁶² ADSM G249 (Amendes de l'officialité de Rouen: poursuites, 1424–25). This file also contains a case against an Englishman who had been found guilty of bigamy. In ADSM G250 (1425–26) there is a similar case involving a priest who marries a local girl to an Englishman without the proper paperwork since physical violence is threatened.

⁶³ *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1893–), vol. X (1447–55), p. 16. See also *Complete Peerage*, II, pp. 511–12.

⁶⁴ AN JJ 174/157, printed in *Actes*, ii, CLXXXIV (May 1428). Unfortunately we cannot tell whether the wife was English or Norman.

⁶⁵ ADSM 2E1/168, fol. 181v.

⁶⁶ *Complete Peerage*, XII, pp. 442–3. She was Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Mowbray duke of Norfolk. They had married before 24 November 1403. She was still alive 1 December 1423. Their daughter also took the veil at the same nunnery, Bruisyard in Suffolk.

John Phelip, dying of dysentery at Harfleur, and her second, Thomas, earl of Salisbury, being killed by a cannon ball at the siege of Orléans in 1428. Her third husband, William de la Pole duke of Suffolk, was lynched in the aftermath of the loss of Normandy. Alice lived on for another twenty-five years as a widow. Another widow of the siege of Orléans, Joan, lady Moleyns, survived her first husband for fifty-eight years, losing a second husband at the battle of Tewksbury in 1471.⁶⁷ In addition to the personal loss, war widows also faced the responsibility of discharging their husband's obligations. Since captains were paid the wages for all their troops, the widow as executrix faced claims from soldiers for monies due. So we find the countess of Warwick paying arrears of wages to her husband's personal retinue after his death.⁶⁸ Widows might also find themselves involved in disputes, as did Lady Maud Salvain, widow of Sir Roger, erstwhile treasurer of Calais, because of money received by her husband from Agincourt ransoms.⁶⁹ In 1442 widows in Painswick, Gloucestershire, complained against their manorial lord, John, earl of Shrewsbury, who had brought back only five of the sixteen tenants he had taken to war in France, and were able to force the holding of an assize which secured their rights to their husbands' lands for life.⁷⁰

By this point the war in Normandy was going badly for the English, and worse was to come, creating particular difficulties for soldiers' wives. A good example is the Norman wife of Bernard de Montferrant who was left behind in the duchy in 1444 when her husband was discharged from his captaincy of St Lô and despatched instead to his native Gascony. She was given a grant of 100 *livres tournois* by the Norman administration, but she faced subsequent problems because her dowry had been assigned from her husband's lands in Gascony which were by now not in English hands.⁷¹ We have commented already on the problems which soldiers and their wives faced when the English were driven out of Normandy and Gascony completely. In this context mixed marriages became a political issue. Relatively few of the local women who had married English soldiers had sought letters of denization.⁷² When French wives accompanied

⁶⁷ *Complete Peerage*, IX, p. 42.

⁶⁸ BnF pièces originales 3047 Warwick 8 (June 1439). For a similar example in 1445 for Constance, widow of Sir John Cressy, see BnF pièces originales 929 Cressy 11, although she shared the responsibility with another executor, Thomas Wilde, probably Cressy's cousin.

⁶⁹ J. Kirby, 'The Financing of Calais under Henry V', *BIHR* 23 (1950), 174–5; TNA C1/6/76, with facsimile in M. Mercer, *Henry V. The Rebirth of Chivalry* (London, 2004), p. 57. Unfortunately, the transcript provided there misreads as 'fermier' the word 'femme' and misses 'Dame Maud' completely.

⁷⁰ R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), p. 109.

⁷¹ BL Additional Charter 1028 for the grant from Norman revenues; Stratford, *Bedford Inventories*, pp. 414–17.

⁷² An example of one who did was Joanne, the wife of Thomas Gower, who had been born in Alençon but who was granted denization in 1434, the letters covering the children the couple had already had as well as any they might have in the future (*PROME*, xi (1434–45), ed. A. Curry (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 117).

their husbands back to England in 1450 there was an expression of concern that they were a potential threat to national security:

Item it hath not ben sen that men born of this lande havynge ther wiffes and children dwellyng under the obeissance of our souverayn lordys adversaires shuld be cherrished here and kno the printe of our counsell for they be but as spys and therefore by the avye of the councele a remedye must be purveyed for such that they nother goo ne come withoute licence.⁷³

The last phrase suggests that such wives might have been attempting to preserve their landed interests and to keep in touch with their families in France. Mixed marriages which had created the prospect of unity between the two nations in the wake of the occupation of Normandy and Maine were therefore a potential factor for division and suspicion in the aftermath of its failure.

In this respect a study of women as soldiers' wives provides insights into broader issues of national identity as well as into personal responses to changing circumstances. But what it also shows is that relationships could be as fraught in the fifteenth century as in modern times. Two closing examples must speak for all the rest. First the longevity of the mother-in-law problem. The wife of the mercenary, François de Surienne, was present in the castle of Longny when it was surrendered to the French in 1449 by her son-in-law, the Sire de Saint-Maure. She was furious with him.⁷⁴ And secondly, the failed international marriage. Giles Starkey, herald of the earl of Norfolk, had married Alice, a Rouennaise who was the widow of Guillaume Trubert.⁷⁵ The match of French and English had not on this occasion worked and a separation was being negotiated. Starkey claimed a right to half of the house which Alice had inherited from her first husband. The court disagreed, but permitted him to have a room in the house in which to live and to store his possessions for a few months until he could find somewhere else to go. Accordingly, Alice piled his belongings into this room. But Starkey complained that the room was unsuitable. It was too small. In fact it was really a stable. *And* it was insecure, giving on to a street where no one else lived and where rubbish was accustomed to be thrown. He concluded his rant by demanding a better room in the house. Alice agreed, but only if he delivered half his share in a vineyard in Pontoise and gave her a pension on his English lands. Faced with such female aggression (not all Frenchwomen needed to follow Joan's example in taking to arms against the invader – the tongue and

⁷³ London, College of Arms Arundel XLVIII, fol. 324. The estimate of dating is based on the fact that it does not mention the loss of Gascony. It may have been presented at the parliament of November 1450. See my discussion in *PROME*, xii (1447–61), ed. A. Curry and R. Horrox (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 166. Note also that in 1461, after the attainder of those who had fought on the Lancastrian side, there was reference to the rights of their wives, including 'wyfes or other wommen born under the obeissance of the crown of England in any place oute of the reame of France and of the duchie of Normandie or borne out of this reame' (*PROME*, xiii (1461–70), ed. R. Horrox (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 53).

⁷⁴ *Narratives*, p. 269. One of the text variants writes that she was 'malcontente de son gendre'.

⁷⁵ *Rouen au temps de Jeanne d'Arc*, item XLIX, from ADSM 2 E1/171, fols 387–8 (8 March 1427).

bloodymindedness were weapons enough) Starkey capitulated. Alice thus kept her house all to herself whilst he gained her quitclaim against his property in both England and France. He agreed to move out of the house within eight days in return for 12 *salus*, which his wife generously paid. The suit ends with the comment that this agreement will only be annulled if the couple can, by the aid of their friends, re-establish themselves 'en mariage paisible'. At the end of the day their marriage had proved no more a recipe for peace than that between the nations of England and France which Henry V and Charles VI had concluded at Troyes in 1420.