

For today's 'on this day' email, I thought we would go back to 7 May 1429 - almost six hundred years ago - to the city of ORLEANS in France, which was being besieged by the English army. (Remember that the siege (pronounced 'seej') of a city involves surrounding it and either trying to break into the city, or getting the people inside the city to surrender because they are starving (though I'm not starving at the moment - I've just had a burger and chips).) So what was an English army doing in France? Well, the reason for that goes all the way back to 1066, and WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR's conquering England and becoming King of England.



You'll remember that before William the Conqueror became King of England, he was the Duke of Normandy - and he didn't stop being Duke of Normandy just because he became King of England. So ever since 1066, whoever was King of England because they were descended (pronounced 'dis - ended') from William of Conqueror - would that they were entitled to rule over the North of France, just like William the Conqueror, and sometimes they would claim they were entitled to rule over the whole of France. And obviously the people in France did not like the idea of being ruled over by an English king very much, and so they would refuse to accept the King of England's claims. And so the King of England would have to raise an army, go over to France, beat up a lot of French people, and get them to accept that he was not only King of England but also ruler of at least part of France. And this sometimes didn't work out so well - sometimes the King of England would come over with an army, and get beaten by the French and have to go home and fight another day.

This is how England and France ended up getting locked into a HUNDRED YEARS WAR, which started in 1337 when KING EDWARD III of England came over to France to claim the French throne. In 1429, which is the year we are focussing on, the HUNDRED YEARS WAR was still going on and the English army under the command of the DUKE OF BEDFORD (the then King of England - HENRY VI - was very young) was fighting the French, as always, and trying to get the city of Orleans to surrender. Things were not going well for the French - but a young girl, only 17 years old, found the French king CHARLES VII and told him her name was JOAN OF ARC. She told Charles VII that at the age of 13 she started to have visions of messengers from Heaven, and they were now telling her to drive out the English from France. She urged Charles VII to send her to Orleans, so she could save the city from the English. Charles VII was a bit puzzled by this strange girl, but thought 'What have I got to lose?' and sent her to Orleans with some soldiers. Joan arrived in Orleans on April 29, and on May 7 she inspired the French soldiers inside Orleans to come out and fight the English surrounding the city. The French won a huge victory, and the English fled away from Orleans. The French then beat the English again and again, and it looked like Joan of Arc was the lucky mascot, and that under her leadership the French Army would drive the English back across the English Channel.

But then disaster struck for Joan. In the middle of battle, she was captured by some French

noblemen who were actually on the side of the English. The noblemen handed Joan over to the English, who locked her up and put her on trial for being a witch. This really powerful clip is from a great film about Joan of Arc, called THE MESSENGER, and shows Joan of Arc in her prison cell, being visited by God, who tests her faith as to whether God is really on the side of the French by asking her how she can know for certain God wanted her to do the things she did:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtQEXW0lVts>

But Joan kept her faith and refused to say that she was a witch. She was found guilty and executed on 30 May 1431. But if the English thought that was the end of their troubles, they had another think coming. Instead, it seemed like God punished the English for daring to execute his messenger and allowed the French to win victory after victory against the English, finally bringing the HUNDRED YEARS WAR to an end in 1453, with a huge victory over the English at the BATTLE OF CASTILLON. The English would continue to claim that they ruled over France until 1803, but the English never again tried to invade France and beat the French on their own soil.

As for Joan, she got her reward in Heaven. She was made a saint in 1920.