

## King Edward III (1312–77), reigned 1327–77

### King of England, Lord of Ireland and Duke of Aquitaine



Fig. 1 King Edward III, oil on panel, c. 1590s–c. 1610 (NPG 4980(7))  
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Edward III was the eldest son of Edward II of England (1284–1327) and Isabella of France (1295–1358), daughter of the French king Philip IV (1268–1314). He became king at the age of fourteen after his father was deposed by his mother and her lover, Roger Mortimer, and was crowned at Westminster Abbey on the 1 February 1327. His father, Edward II, was subsequently murdered. Isabella and Mortimer initially acted as regents with the young Edward a mere figurehead, but in 1330 Edward seized control and began his personal rule. He was to reign for fifty years.

In January 1328 Charles IV of France (Isabella's brother) died without a direct male heir and his cousin Philip of Valois claimed the throne as Philip VI. Edward was not then in a position to assert his own claim to the French throne, but in 1337 he began to plan a military campaign against France which was to be the start of the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). In 1340 he proclaimed himself King of England and France, quartering the French emblem of the fleurs-de-lys on his coat of arms. The victory of Edward's army at the Battle of Crécy in 1346, where they were heavily outnumbered by the French, was widely celebrated and was due largely to the innovative tactics and weapons of the English. In 1360 Edward officially gained sovereignty over Calais and other French territories through the Treaty of Brétigny, although he had to continue to fight sporadically for this territory throughout his reign and later lost many of his gains.

In 1327 Edward married Philippa of Hainault and together they had twelve children, of whom nine survived to maturity. His five adult sons all became powerful magnates. Although none of his own children became king or queen of England, two of Edward's grandchildren (Richard II and Henry IV) went on to rule after his death. The royal houses of Lancaster, York and Tudor were all descended from Edward III and he was therefore a crucial figure in royal genealogies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

### Edward III's appearance

A wooden funeral effigy of Edward is preserved at Westminster Abbey. Probably carved from his death mask, it is likely that it gives a relatively accurate impression of Edward's appearance. The gilt bronze effigy made for his tomb (Fig. 2) is a more generalised image of a medieval king, although the face is not dissimilar from the wooden effigy.

From the fourteenth century onwards, Edward's image appeared in numerous manuscript illuminations and he was often depicted with long flowing hair and beard as in his funeral effigy. The funeral effigy also appears to be the source for printed and painted portraits of him that appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.



Fig. 2 Detail of the tomb effigy of Edward III (1312–77) at Westminster Abbey  
© Dean and Chapter of Westminster

## Edward III through Tudor eyes

Edward was celebrated by the Tudors as a warrior king and chivalric figure. Like his descendent Henry VIII, Edward held spectacular tournaments and he enjoyed martial sports. He was also a patron of the arts, undertaking numerous important building projects such as the rebuilding of Windsor Castle. In 1348 he founded the Order of the Garter, still the most eminent Order of Chivalry in Britain.

A cult of Edward III developed in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. He was particularly celebrated during the reign of Henry V (reigned 1413–22) who revived Edward's claim to the French throne, recapturing Normandy and securing recognition as heir to the French king Charles VI. Edward's military and chivalric actions were well-known in the sixteenth century, having been recorded by contemporary chroniclers such as the French writer Jean Froissart (c.1337–c.1404). Froissart and others compared Edward to the legendary King Arthur, an association the king encouraged through his attempts to establish a round table of knights at Windsor. Henry VIII (reigned 1509–1547), himself attracted to the legend of Arthur (naming his eldest son after him), held Edward III to be a model of kingship.

Edward III remained a popular and well-known historical figure in the sixteenth century, largely because of his importance to the Tudor monarchs. The claim to the throne of the first Tudor king, Henry VII (reigned 1485–1509), had rested solely on his descent (through his mother) from Edward III's son, John of Gaunt. It was strengthened by his marriage to Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV, who was also descended from Edward III.

## The portrait at Montacute

Portrait sets of English kings and queens produced as prints and paintings became popular in the sixteenth century. Reflecting his importance to the Tudor monarchs, Edward III's image was usually included in these sets. The painting on display at Montacute House (Fig. 1) is from the 'Hornby Castle' set of kings and queens, now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery. Painted in the late 1590s or early 1600s the set was previously owned by the Duke of Leeds and hung at Hornby Castle, his Yorkshire seat. Other painted versions of the portrait survive in the collections of The Duke of Northumberland at Syon House, Trinity College Cambridge, the Royal Collection, the Deanery at Ripon and Hardwick Hall.

The portrait type appears to be based on Edward's tomb effigy. The image to the right (Fig.3) shows an engraved version made for Henry Holland's *Bazillologia* (or Book of Kings) (1618), a printed set of kings and queens.



Fig 3 Edward III by Renold Elstrack (1570–c.1625), line engraving, 1618 (NPG D9384) © National Portrait Gallery