

### C. England/Britain (and France) — The Norman Conquest and the Hundred Years' War

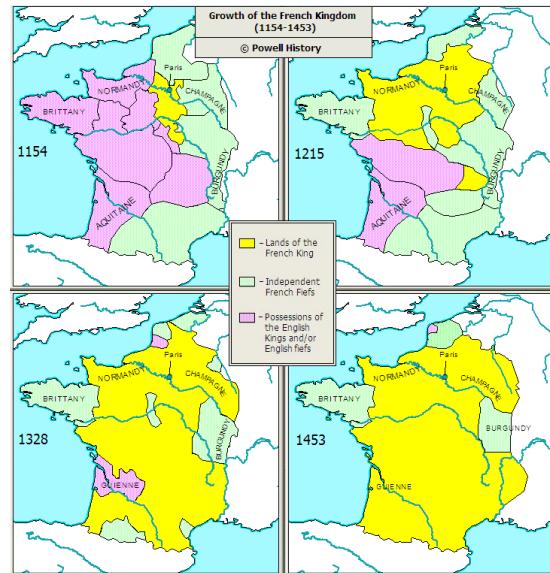
1. The islands of Britain and neighboring Ireland have always had a loose connection to events unfolding in Europe—necessarily connected by their proximity to continental Europe, but also somewhat removed by virtue of being islands.
2. This geographical circumstance has dictated the basic theme of British history: *how to relate to the rest of Europe*. Britain's answer has been to vacillate between closer ties and maintaining the nation's distance.
3. The Roman Empire had extended as far as England, but not up into Scotland, which was isolated Roman-held England by Hadrian's Wall. When the Romans abandoned England as their empire collapsed, tribes called the “Angles” and “Saxons” moved in to fill the void. The Dark Age of this time is characterized by the substitution of Arthurian folklore for genuine history. It would be centuries before historical definition would return to the events unfolding in Britain.
4. The defining event of British history is the *Norman Conquest of 1066*.
  - a) As the Dark Ages slowly waned, England, France & Germany all experienced waves of occupation along their coasts by the Northmen / “Normans” / Vikings.
  - b) Some settled in England. Some settled in northern Germany. Others settled in northern France, in the territory that came to be named after them, “Normandy.”
  - c) The ruling families of England and Normandy were connected, and when the king of England died in 1066, his cousin William (the Duke of Normandy) decided to press his own claim to the throne against a host of other contestants. William won, became king of England, and was henceforth known as William “the Conqueror.”
  - d) The monarchy of William the Conqueror deeply shaped English culture. Having obtained the throne by conquest, he ruled with an iron fist, and the rule of he and his Norman descendants was increasingly tyrannical. This gave English culture a unique trajectory, giving rise to revolts and the evolution of a constitutional system to limit the power of the kings. We will examine this development later.
  - e) The other crucial impact of William’s tenure was the creation of a difficult relationship between England and France. William’s domain included his kingdom in England and his land in Normandy. The latter, however, he did not control outright. He owed his allegiance to the French king in order to maintain his status as Duke of Normandy.
  - f) Over time, however, the Norman kings accrued more land in France through marriage, and their possessions were so vast that it was tempting to avoid their obligations to the French kings. This created a tense standoff between French and English kings. As long as a lord was loyal, the king could not take his land—



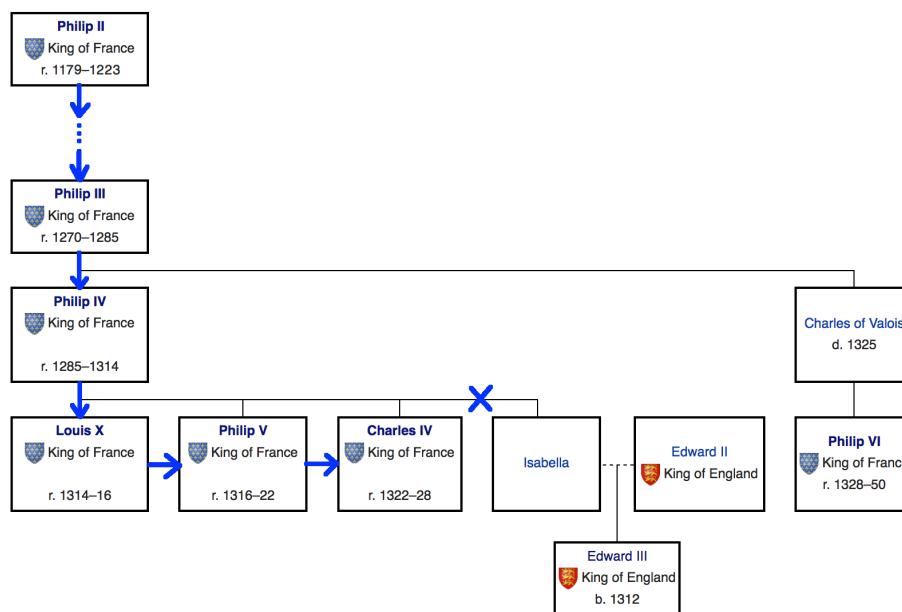
The Dominion of William “the Conqueror” in 1066— included both his *kingdom of England* and the *duchy of Normandy* (in France).

unless he had the power to do so, but the French kings did not. This meant they had to outsmart the English kings or wait for opportunities if the English kings slipped up. Clever French rulers did gradually take back control of their kingdom up until about 1328.

- g) In that year, a disturbing development arose. The French king Charles IV died without a direct heir. If his sister Isabella inherited the throne, her husband—the king of England—would then inherit all of France, and France would be ruled from England.



The French kings outmaneuvered the English kings to regain control of their country by 1328, but it all seemed for naught when the English king seemed poised to inherit the whole thing because he was married to the sister of Charles IV of France (see below).



The dynastic succession of the French throne until 1328, when all the gains by the French kings at the expense of the English kings appeared as though they would be wiped out.

- h) To avoid this development, the ruling family gave the throne to the nearest male relative: Philip VI (see above, on the right).

- i) To press his claim, the descendant of William the Conqueror, Edward III, initiated a long struggle by the English to retake France. This tortuous conflict is known as the *Hundred Years' War (1337-1453)*.
  - j) Despite great hardships, the French won the war after the rise of the inspirational leader, Joan of Arc.
  - k) By 1453, England's link to France was essentially severed. This is the key to the entire sequence of events in this section.
5. The connection established in 1066 between the countries of France and England by William the Conqueror shaped the two nations we know today. Over the centuries that passed the two countries were gradually evolving into *nations*—but they were connected because of the power of the English kings. Had this connection persisted, there might not be separate French and English nations. Seeking greater power for themselves, the French kings eventually detached France from England by France by enduring through the *Hundred Years' War* between them (1337-1453). The national identities of both countries were thereafter conditioned by a mutual antagonism and resentment.