

John of Gaunt

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John of Gaunt, 1st Duke of Lancaster, KG (6 March 1340 – 3 February 1399) was a member of the House of Plantagenet, the third of five surviving sons of King Edward III of England and Philippa of Hainault. He was called "John of Gaunt" because he was born in Ghent, then rendered in English as *Gaunt*. When he became unpopular later in life, scurrilous rumours and lampoons circulated that he was actually the son of a Ghent butcher, perhaps because Edward III was not present at the birth. This story always drove him to fury.^[2]

As a younger brother of Edward, Prince of Wales (Edward, the Black Prince), John exercised great influence over the English throne during the minority of Edward's son, who became King Richard II, and the ensuing periods of political strife. Due to some generous land grants, John was one of the richest men in his era. He made an abortive attempt to enforce a claim to the Crown of Castile that came courtesy of his second wife Constance, who was an heir to the Castillian Kingdom, and for a time styled himself as such.

John of Gaunt's legitimate male heirs, the Lancasters, include Kings Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. His other legitimate descendants include his daughters Queen Philippa of Portugal and Elizabeth, Duchess of Exeter (by his first wife Blanche of Lancaster), and Queen Catherine of Castile (by his second wife Constance of Castile). John fathered five children outside marriage, one early in life by a lady-in-waiting to his mother, and four by Katherine Swynford, Gaunt's long-term mistress and third wife. The children of Katherine Swynford, surnamed "Beaufort," were legitimised by royal and papal decrees after John and Katherine married in 1396. Descendants of this marriage include Joan Beaufort, Countess of Westmorland, a grandmother of Kings Edward IV and Richard III; John Beaufort, 1st Earl of Somerset, a great-grandfather of King Henry VII; and Joan Beaufort, Queen of Scots, from whom are descended all subsequent sovereigns of Scotland beginning in 1437 and all sovereigns of England, Great Britain and the United Kingdom from 1603 to the present day. The three houses of English sovereigns that succeeded the rule of Richard II in 1399 — the Houses of Lancaster, York and Tudor — were all descended from John's children Henry IV, Joan Beaufort and John Beaufort, respectively. In addition, John's daughter Catherine of Lancaster was married to King Henry III of Castile, which made him the grandfather of King John II of Castile and the ancestor of all subsequent monarchs of the Crown of Castile and united Spain. Through his daughter Philippa, he was grandfather of King Edward of Portugal and an ancestor of all subsequent Portuguese monarchs as well. Through John II of Castile's great-granddaughter Joanna the Mad, John of Gaunt is also an ancestor of the Habsburg rulers who would reign in Spain and much of central Europe.

John of Gaunt's eldest son and heir, Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, the son of his first wife Blanche of Lancaster, was exiled for ten years by King Richard II in 1398 as resolution to a dispute between Henry and Thomas de Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk.^[3] When John of Gaunt died in 1399, his estates and titles were declared forfeit to the crown, since King Richard II had named Henry a traitor and changed his sentence to exile for life.^[3] Henry Bolingbroke returned from exile to reclaim his inheritance and depose Richard. Bolingbroke then reigned as King Henry IV of England (1399–1413), the first of the descendants of John of Gaunt to hold the throne of England.

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John of Gaunt



A retrospective portrait of Gaunt commissioned in c.1593 by Sir Edward Hoby for Queenborough Castle, Kent, probably modelled on his tomb effigy.^[1] His jupon bears the royal arms of Castile and León, representing his claim to that kingdom; impaled with the royal arms of England differenced by a label argent of three points ermine.

Duke of Lancaster; Duke of Aquitaine

Successor Henry Bolingbroke

Born 6 March 1340
Ghent, Flanders (now in Belgium)

Died 3 February 1399 (aged 58)
Leicester Castle, Leicestershire

Burial St Paul's Cathedral, City of London

Spouse Blanche of Lancaster
m. 1359; dec. 1369
Infanta Constance of Castile
m. 1371; dec. 1394
Katherine Swynford
m. 1396; wid. 1399

Issue Philippa, Queen of Portugal
Elizabeth, Duchess of Exeter
Henry IV of England
Catherine, Queen of Castile
John Beaufort, 1st Earl of Somerset
Cardinal Henry Beaufort
Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter
Joan Beaufort, Countess of Westmorland

House Plantagenet (by birth)
Lancaster (founder)

Father Edward III of England

Mother Philippa of Hainault

Duke of Lancaster



Kenilworth Castle, a massive fortress extensively modernised and given a new Great Hall by John of Gaunt after 1350

John was the fourth son of King Edward III of England. His first wife, Blanche of Lancaster, was also his third cousin; both were great-great-grandchildren of King Henry III. They married in 1359 at Reading Abbey as a part of the efforts of Edward III to arrange matches for his sons with wealthy heiresses. Upon the death of his father-in-law, the 1st Duke of Lancaster, in 1361, John received half his lands, the title "Earl of Lancaster", and distinction as the greatest landowner in the north of England as heir of the Palatinate of Lancaster. He also became the 14th Baron of Halton and 11th Lord of Bowland. John inherited the rest of the Lancaster property when Blanche's sister Maud, Countess of Leicester (married to William V, Count of Hainaut), died without issue on 10 April 1362.

John received the title "Duke of Lancaster" from his father on 13 November 1362. By then well established, he owned at least thirty castles and estates across England and France and maintained a household comparable in scale and organisation to that of a monarch. He owned land in almost every county in England, a patrimony that produced a net income of between £8,000 and £10,000 a year.^[4]

After the death in 1376 of his older brother Edward of Woodstock (also known as the "Black Prince"), John of Gaunt contrived to protect the religious reformer John Wycliffe, possibly to counteract the growing secular power of the church.^[5] However, John's ascendancy to political power coincided with widespread resentment of his influence. At a time when English forces encountered setbacks in the Hundred Years' War against France, and Edward III's rule was becoming unpopular due to high taxation and his affair with Alice Perrers, political opinion closely associated the Duke of Lancaster with the failing government of the 1370s. Furthermore, while King Edward and the Prince of Wales were popular heroes due to their successes on the battlefield, John of Gaunt had not won equivalent military renown that could have bolstered his reputation. Although he fought in the Battle of Nájera (1367), for example, his later military projects proved unsuccessful.

When Edward III died in 1377 and John's ten-year-old nephew succeeded as Richard II of England, John's influence strengthened. However, mistrust remained, and some suspected him of wanting to seize the throne himself. John took pains to ensure that he never became associated with the opposition to Richard's kingship. As *de facto* ruler during Richard's minority, he made unwise decisions on taxation that led to the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, when the rebels destroyed his home in London, the Savoy Palace. Unlike some of Richard's unpopular advisors, John was away from London at the time of the uprising and thus avoided the direct wrath of the rebels.

In 1386 John left England to seek the throne of Castile, claimed in *Jure uxoris* by right of his second wife, Constance of Castile, whom he had married in 1371. However, crisis ensued almost immediately in his absence, and in 1387 King Richard's misrule brought England to the brink of civil war. Only John, on his return to England in 1389, succeeded in persuading the Lords Appellant and King Richard to compromise to usher in a period of relative stability. During the 1390s, John's reputation of devotion to the well-being of the kingdom was largely restored.

Sometime after the death of Blanche of Lancaster in 1368 and the birth of their first son, John Beaufort, in 1373, John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford, the daughter of an ordinary knight, entered into an extra-marital love affair that would produce four children for the couple. All of them were born out of wedlock, but legitimized upon their parents' eventual marriage. The adulterous relationship endured until 1381, when it was broken out of political necessity.^[6] On 13 January 1396, two years after the death of Constance of Castile, Katherine and John of Gaunt married in Lincoln Cathedral. The children bore the surname "Beaufort" after a former French possession of the duke. The Beaufort children, three sons and a daughter, were legitimised by royal and papal decrees after John and Katherine married. A later proviso that they were specifically barred from inheriting the throne, the phrase *excepta regali dignitate* ("except royal status"), was inserted with dubious authority by their half-brother Henry IV.

John died of natural causes on 3 February 1399 at Leicester Castle, with his third wife Katherine by his side.

Military commander in France

Because of his rank, John of Gaunt was one of England's principal military commanders in the 1370s and 1380s, though his enterprises were never rewarded with the kind of dazzling success that had made his elder brother Edward the Black Prince such a charismatic war leader.

On the resumption of war with France in 1369, John was sent to Calais with the Earl of Hereford and a small English army with which he raided into northern France. On 23 August, he was confronted by a much larger French army under Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. Exercising his first command, John dared not attack such a superior force and the two armies faced each other across a marsh for several weeks until the English were reinforced by the Earl of Warwick, at which the French withdrew without offering battle. John and Warwick then decided to strike Harfleur, the base of the French fleet on the Seine. Further reinforced by German mercenaries, they marched on Harfleur, but were delayed by French guerilla operations while the town prepared for a siege. John invested the town for four days in October, but he was losing so many men to dysentery and bubonic plague that he decided to abandon the siege and return to Calais. During this retreat, the army had to fight its way across the Somme at the ford of Blanchetaque against a French army led by Hugh de Châtillon, who was captured and sold to Edward III. By the middle of November, the survivors of the sickly army returned to Calais, where the Earl of Warwick died of plague. Though it seemed an inglorious conclusion to the campaign, John had forced the French king, Charles V, to abandon his plans to invade England that autumn.^[7]

In the summer of 1370, John was sent with a small army to Aquitaine to reinforce his ailing elder brother, the Black Prince, and his younger brother Edmund of Langley, Earl of Cambridge. With them, he participated in the Siege of Limoges (September 1370). He took charge of the siege operations and at one point engaging in hand-to-hand fighting in the undermining tunnels.^[8] After this event, the Black Prince surrendered his lordship of Aquitaine and sailed for England, leaving John in charge. Though he attempted to defend the duchy against French encroachment for nearly a year, lack of resources and money meant he could do little but husband what small territory the English still controlled, and he resigned the command in September

1371 and returned to England.^[9] Just before leaving Aquitaine, he married the Infanta Constance of Castile on September 1371 at Roquefort, near Bordeaux, Guyenne. The following year he took part with his father, Edward III, in an abortive attempt to invade France with a large army, which was frustrated by three months of unfavourable winds.

Probably John's most notable feat of arms occurred in August–December 1373, when he attempted to relieve Aquitaine by the landward route, leading an army of some 9,000 mounted men from Calais on a great chevauchée from north-eastern to south-western France on a 900 kilometre raid. This four-month ride through enemy territory, evading French armies on the way, was a bold stroke that impressed contemporaries but achieved virtually nothing. Beset on all sides by French ambushes and plagued by disease and starvation, John of Gaunt and his raiders battled their way through Champagne, east of Paris, into Burgundy, across the Massif Central, and finally down into Dordogne. Unable to attack any strongly fortified forts and cities, the raiders plundered the countryside, which weakened the French infrastructure, but the military value of the damage was only temporary. Marching in winter across the Limousin plateau, with stragglers being picked off by the French, huge numbers of the army, and even larger numbers of horses, died of cold, disease or starvation. The army reached English-occupied Bordeaux on 24 December 1373, severely weakened in numbers with the loss of least one-third of their force in action and another third to disease. Upon arrival in Bordeaux, many more succumbed to the bubonic plague that was raging in the city. Sick, demoralised and mutinous, the army was in no shape to defend Aquitaine, and soldiers began to desert. John had no funds with which to pay them, and despite his entreaties, none were sent from England, so in April 1374, he abandoned the enterprise and sailed for home.^[10]

John's final campaign in France took place in 1378. He planned a 'great expedition' of mounted men in a large armada of ships to land at Brest and take control of Brittany. Not enough ships could be found to transport the horses, and the expedition was tasked with the more limited objective of capturing St. Malo. The English destroyed the shipping in St. Malo harbour and began to assault the town by land on 14 August, but John was soon hampered by the size of his army, which was unable to forage because French armies under Olivier de Clisson and Bertrand du Guesclin occupied the surrounding countryside, harrying the edges of his force. In September, the siege was simply abandoned and the army returned ingloriously to England. John of Gaunt received most of the blame for the débâcle.^[11]

Partly as a result of these failures, and those of other English commanders at this period, John was one of the first important figures in England to conclude that the war with France was unwinnable because of France's greater resources of wealth and manpower. He began to advocate peace negotiations; indeed, as early as 1373, during his great raid through France, he made contact with Guillaume Roger, brother and political adviser of Pope Gregory XI, to let the pope know he would be interested in a diplomatic conference under papal auspices. This approach led indirectly to the Anglo-French Congress of Bruges in 1374–77, which resulted in the short-lived Truce of Bruges between the two sides.^[12] John was himself a delegate to the various conferences that eventually resulted in the Truce of Leulinghem in 1389. The fact that he became identified with the attempts to make peace added to his unpopularity at a period when the majority of Englishmen believed victory would be in their grasp if only the French could be defeated decisively as they had been in the 1350s. Another motive was John's conviction that it was only by making peace with France would it be possible to release sufficient manpower to enforce his claim to the throne of Castile.

Head of government

On his return from France in 1374, John took a more decisive and persistent role in the direction of English foreign policy. From then until 1377, he was effectively the head of the English government due to the illness of his father and elder brother, who were unable to exercise authority. His vast estates made him the richest man in England, and his great wealth, ostentatious display of it, autocratic manner and attitudes, enormous London mansion (the Savoy Palace on the Strand) and association with the failed peace process at Bruges combined to make him the most visible target of social resentments. His time at the head of government was marked by the so-called Good Parliament of 1376 and the Bad Parliament of 1377. The first, called to grant massive war taxation to the Crown, turned into a parliamentary revolution, with the Commons (supported to some extent by the Lords) venting their grievances at decades of crippling taxation, misgovernment, and suspected endemic corruption among the ruling classes. John was left isolated (even the Black Prince supported the need for reform) and the Commons refused to grant money for the war unless most of the great officers of state were dismissed and the king's mistress Alice Perrers, another focus of popular resentment, was barred from any further association with him. But even after the government acceded to virtually all their demands, the Commons then refused to authorise any funds for the war, losing the sympathy of the Lords as a result.

The death of the Black Prince on 8 June 1376 and the onset of Edward III's last illness at the closing of Parliament on 10 July left John with all the reins of power. He immediately had the ailing king grant pardons to all the officials impeached by the Parliament; Alice Perrers too was reinstated at the heart of the king's household. John impeached William of Wykeham and other leaders of the reform movement, and secured their conviction on old or trumped-up charges. The parliament of 1377 was John's counter-coup: crucially, the Lords no longer supported the Commons and John was able to have most of the acts of 1376 annulled. He also succeeded in forcing the Commons to agree to the imposition of the first Poll Tax in English history — a viciously regressive measure that bore hardest on the poorest members of society.^[13] There was organised opposition to his measures and rioting in London; John of Gaunt's arms were reversed or defaced wherever they were displayed, and protestors pasted up lampoons on his supposedly dubious birth. At one point he was forced to take refuge across the Thames, while his Savoy Palace only just escaped looting.^[14] It was rumoured (and believed by many people in England and France) that he intended to seize the throne for himself and supplant the rightful heir, his nephew Richard, the son of the Black Prince, but there seems to have been no truth in this and on the death of Edward III and the accession of the child Richard II, John sought no position of regency for himself and withdrew to his estates.^[15]

John's personal unpopularity persisted, however, and the failure of his expedition to Saint-Malo in 1378 did nothing for his reputation. By this time, too, some of his possessions were taken from him by the Crown. For example, his ship, the *Dieulagarde*, was seized and bundled with other royal ships to be sold (to pay off the debts of Sir Robert de Crull, who during the latter part of King Edward III's reign had been the *Clerk of the King's Ships*, and had advanced monies to pay for the king's ships.^[16] During the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, John of Gaunt was far from the centre of events, on the March of Scotland, but he was among those named by the rebels as a traitor to be beheaded as soon as he could be found. The Savoy Palace was systematically destroyed by the mob and burned to the ground. Nominally friendly lords and even his own fortresses closed their gates to him, and John was forced to flee into Scotland with a handful of retainers and throw himself on the charity of King Robert II of Scotland until the crisis was over.^[17]

King of Castile

Upon his marriage to the Infanta Constance of Castile in 1371, John assumed (officially from 29 January 1372) the title of King of Castile and León in right of his wife, and insisted his fellow English nobles henceforth address him as 'my lord of Spain'.^[18] He impaled his arms with those of the Spanish kingdom. From 1372, John gathered around himself a small court of refugee Castilian knights and ladies and set up a Castilian chancery that prepared documents in his name according to the style of Peter of Castile, dated by the Castilian era and signed by himself with the Spanish formula 'Yo El Rey' ("I, the King").^[19] He hatched several schemes to make good his claim with an army, but for many years these were still-born due to lack of finance or the conflicting claims of war in France or with Scotland. It was only in 1386, after Portugal under its new King John I had entered into full alliance with England, that he was actually able to land with an army in Spain and mount a campaign for the throne of Castile (that ultimately failed). John sailed from England on 9 July 1386 with a huge Anglo-Portuguese fleet carrying an army of about 5,000 men plus an extensive 'royal' household and his wife and daughters. Pausing on the journey to use his army to drive off the French forces who were then besieging Brest, he landed at Corunna in northern Spain on 29 July.

The Castilian king, John of Trastámara, had expected John would land in Portugal and had concentrated his forces on the Portuguese border. He was wrong-footed by John's decision to invade Galicia, the most distant and disaffected of Castile's kingdoms. From August to October, John of Gaunt set up a rudimentary court and chancery at Ourense and received the submission of the Galician nobility and most of the towns of Galicia, though they made their homage to him conditional on his being recognised as king by the rest of Castile. While John of Gaunt had gambled on an early decisive battle, the Castilians were in no hurry to join battle, and he began to experience difficulties keeping his army together and paying it. In November, he met King John I of Portugal at Ponte do Mouro on the south side of the Minho River and concluded an agreement with him to make a joint Anglo-Portuguese invasion of central Castile early in 1387. The treaty was sealed by the marriage of John's eldest daughter Philippa to the Portuguese king. A large part of John's army had succumbed to sickness, however, and when the invasion was mounted, they were far outnumbered by their Portuguese allies. The campaign of April–June 1387 was an ignominious failure. The Castilians refused to offer battle and the Galician-Anglo-Portuguese troops, apart from time-wasting sieges of fortified towns, were reduced to foraging for food in the arid Spanish landscape. They were harried mainly by French mercenaries of the Castilian king. Many hundreds of English, including close friends and retainers of John of Gaunt, died of disease or exhaustion. Many deserted or abandoned the army to ride north under French safe-conducts. Shortly after the army returned to Portugal, John of Gaunt concluded a secret treaty with John of Trastámara under which he and his wife renounced all claim to the Castilian throne in return for a large annual payment and the marriage of their daughter Catherine to John of Trastámara's son Henry.



John of Gaunt dines with John I of Portugal, to discuss a joint Anglo-Portuguese invasion of Castile (from Jean de Wavrin's *Chronique d'Angleterre*).

Duke of Aquitaine

John left Portugal for Aquitaine, and he remained in that province until he returned to England in November 1389. This effectively kept him off the scene while England endured the major political crisis of the conflict between Richard II and the Lords Appellant, who were led by John of Gaunt's younger brother Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester. Only four months after his return to England, in March 1390, Richard II formally invested Gaunt with the Duchy of Aquitaine, thus providing him with the overseas territory he had long desired. However he did not immediately return to the province, but remained in England and mainly ruled through seneschals as an absentee duke. His administration of the province was a disappointment, and his appointment as duke was much resented by the Gascons, since Aquitaine had previously always been held directly by the king of England or his heir; it was not felt to be a fief that a king could bestow on a subordinate. In 1394–95, he was forced to spend nearly a year in Gascony to shore up his position in the face of threats of secession by the Gascon nobles. He was one of England's principal negotiators in the diplomatic exchanges with France that led to the Truce of Leulingham in 1396, and he initially agreed to join the French-led Crusade that ended in the disastrous Battle of Nicopolis, but withdrew due to ill-health and the political problems in Gascony and England.^[20] For the remainder of his life, John of Gaunt occupied the role of valued counsellor of the king and loyal supporter of the Crown. He did not even protest, it seems, when his younger brother Thomas was murdered at Richard's behest. It may be that he felt he had to maintain this posture of loyalty to protect his son Henry Bolingbroke (the future Henry IV), who had also been one of the Lords Appellant, from Richard's wrath; but in 1398 Richard had Bolingbroke exiled, and on John of Gaunt's death the next year he disinherited Bolingbroke completely, seizing John's vast estates for the Crown.

Relationship to Chaucer

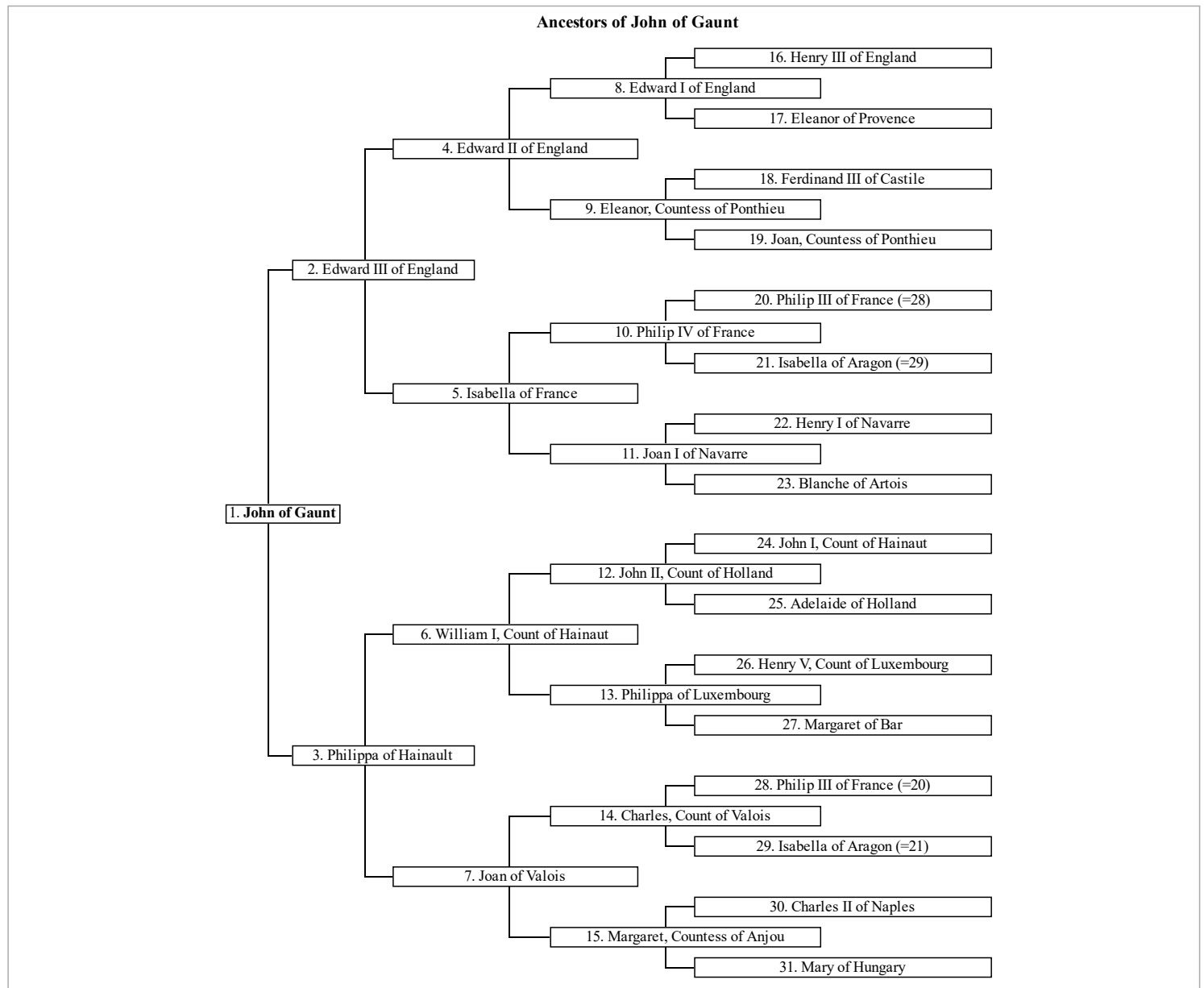
John of Gaunt was a patron and close friend of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer, most famously known for his work *The Canterbury Tales*. Near the end of their lives, Lancaster and Chaucer became brothers-in-law. Chaucer married Philippa (Pan) de Roet in 1366, and Lancaster took his mistress of nearly 30 years, Katherine Swynford (de Roet), who was Philippa Chaucer's sister, as his third wife in 1396. Although Philippa died c. 1387, the men were bound as brothers and Lancaster's children by Katherine – John, Henry, Thomas and Joan Beaufort – were Chaucer's nephews and niece.

Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, also known as the *Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse*,^[21] was written in commemoration of Blanche of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's first wife. The poem refers to John and Blanche in allegory as the narrator relates the tale of "A long castel with walles white/Be Seynt Johan, on a ryche hil" (1318–1319) who is mourning grievously after the death of his love, "And goode faire White she het/That was my lady name ryght" (948–949). The phrase "long castel" is a reference to Lancaster (also called "Loncastel" and "Longcastell"), "walles white" is thought to likely be an oblique reference to Blanche, "Seynt Johan" was John of Gaunt's name-saint, and "ryche hil" is a reference to Richmond; these thinly veiled references reveal the identity of the grieving black knight of the poem as John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and Earl of Richmond. "White" is the English translation of the French word "blanche", implying that the white lady was Blanche of Lancaster.^[22]

Believed to have been written in the 1390s, Chaucer's short poem *Fortune*, is also inferred to directly reference Lancaster.^{[23][24]} "Chaucer as narrator" openly defies *Fortune*, proclaiming he has learned who his enemies are through her tyranny and deceit, and declares "my suffisaunce" (15) and that "over himself hath the maystrye" (14). *Fortune*, in turn, does not understand Chaucer's harsh words to her for she believes she has been kind to him, claims that he does not know what she has in store for him in the future, but most importantly, "And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyve" (32, 40, 48). Chaucer retorts that "My frend maystow nat reven, blind goddesse" (50) and orders her to take away those who merely pretend to be his friends. *Fortune* turns her attention to three princes whom she implores to relieve Chaucer of his pain and "Preyeth his beste frend of his noblesse/That to som beter estat he may atteyne" (78–79). The three princes are believed to represent the dukes of Lancaster, York, and Gloucester, and a portion of line 76, "as three of you or tweyne," to refer to the ordinance of 1390 which specified that no royal gift could be authorised without the consent of at least two of the three dukes.^[23] Most conspicuous in this short poem is the number of references to Chaucer's "beste frend". *Fortune* states three times in her response to the plaintiff, "And also, you still have your best friend alive" (32, 40, 48); she also references his "beste frend" in the envoy when appealing to his "noblesse" to help Chaucer to a higher estate. A fifth reference is made by "Chaucer as narrator" who rails at *Fortune* that she shall not take his friend from him. While the envoy playfully hints to Lancaster that Chaucer would certainly appreciate a boost to his status or income, the poem *Fortune* distinctively shows his deep appreciation and affection for John of Gaunt.

Family

Ancestry



Marriages

- On 19 May 1359 at Reading Abbey, John married his third cousin, Blanche of Lancaster, daughter of Henry of Grosmont, 1st Duke of Lancaster. The wealth she brought to the marriage was the foundation of John's fortune. Blanche died on 12 September 1368 at Tutbury Castle, while her husband was overseas. Their son Henry Bolingbroke became Henry IV of England, after the duchy of Lancaster was taken by Richard II upon

John's death while Henry was in exile. Their daughter Philippa became Queen of Portugal by marrying King John I of Portugal in 1387. All subsequent kings of Portugal were thus descended from John of Gaunt.

- In 1371, John married Infanta Constance of Castile, daughter of King Peter of Castile, thus giving him a claim to the Crown of Castile, which he would pursue. Though John was never able to make good his claim, his daughter by Constance, Catherine of Lancaster, became Queen of Castile by marrying Henry III of Castile. Catherine of Aragon is descended from this line. Constance died in 1394.

During his marriage to Constance, John of Gaunt fathered four children by a mistress, the widow Katherine Swynford (whose sister Philippa de Roet was married to Chaucer). Prior to her widowhood, Katherine had borne at least two, possibly three, children to Lancastrian knight Sir Hugh Swynford. The known names of these children are Blanche and Thomas. (There may have been a second Swynford daughter.) John of Gaunt was Blanche Swynford's godfather.^[25]

- John married Katherine in 1396, and their children, the Beauforts, were legitimised by King Richard II and the Church, but barred from inheriting the throne. From the eldest son, John, descended a granddaughter, Margaret Beaufort, whose son, later King Henry VII of England, would nevertheless claim the throne.

Queen Elizabeth II and her predecessors since Henry IV are descended from John of Gaunt. Edward IV, Edward V and Richard III were the grandchildren (or, in Edward V's case, great-grandson) of John's daughter with Katherine Swynford Joan Beaufort.

Children

- By Blanche of Lancaster:
 - Philippa (1360–1415) married King John I of Portugal (1357–1433).
 - John (1362–1365) was the first-born son of John and Blanche of Lancaster and lived possibly at least until after the birth of his brother Edward of Lancaster in 1365 and died before his second brother another short lived boy called John in 1366.^[26] He was buried in the Collegiate Church of the Annunciation of Our Lady of The Newarke, Leicester (the church founded by his grandfather Henry, Duke of Lancaster^[27]).
 - Elizabeth (1364–1426), married (1) in 1380 John Hastings, 3rd Earl of Pembroke (1372–1389), annulled 1383; married (2) in 1386 John Holland, 1st Duke of Exeter (1350–1400); (3) Sir John Cornwall, 1st Baron Fanhope and Milbroke (d. 1443)
 - Edward (1365) died within a year of his birth and was buried in the Collegiate Church of the Annunciation of Our Lady of The Newarke, Leicester.
 - John (1366–1367) most likely died after the birth of his younger brother Henry, the future Henry IV of England; he was buried in the Collegiate Church of the Annunciation of Our Lady of The Newarke, Leicester.
 - Henry IV of England (1367–1413) married (1) Mary de Bohun (1369–1394); (2) Joanna of Navarre (1368–1437)
 - Isabel (1368–1368)^{[28][29]}
- By Constance of Castile:
 - Catherine (1372–1418), married King Henry III of Castile (1379–1406)
 - John (1374–1375)^{[29][30]}
- By Katherine Swynford (née de Roet/Roelt), mistress and later wife (children legitimised 1397):
 - John Beaufort, 1st Earl of Somerset (1373–1410)—married Margaret Holland.
 - Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester and Cardinal (1375–1447)
 - Thomas Beaufort, Duke of Exeter (1377–1427), married Margaret Neville, daughter of Sir Thomas de Neville and Joan Furnivall.
 - Joan Beaufort (1379–1440)—married first Robert Ferrers, 5th Baron Boteler of Wem and second Ralph Neville, 1st Earl of Westmoreland.
- By Marie de St. Hilaire of Hainaut, mistress:
 - Blanche (1359–1388/89), illegitimate, married Sir Thomas Morieux (1355–1387) in 1381, without issue. Blanche was the daughter of John's mistress, Marie de St. Hilaire of Hainaut (1340–after 1399), who was a lady-in-waiting to his mother, Queen Philippa. The affair apparently took place before John's first marriage to Blanche of Lancaster. John's daughter, Blanche, married Sir Thomas Morieux in 1381. Morieux held several important posts, including Constable of the Tower the year he was married, and Master of Horse to King Richard II two years later. He died in 1387 after six years of marriage.

Burial

John of Gaunt was buried beside his first wife, Blanche of Lancaster, between the choir stalls of St Paul's Cathedral. Their magnificent tomb had been designed and executed between 1374 and 1380 by Henry Yevele with the assistance of Thomas Wrek, at a total cost of £592. The two alabaster effigies were notable for having their right hands joined. An adjacent chantry chapel was added between 1399 and 1403.^[31] The grave and monument were destroyed with the cathedral in the Great Fire of London in 1666. A modern monument in the crypt lists John of Gaunt's grave as among the important ones lost.

Titles and arms

Titles

- Earl of Richmond: granted as an infant in September 1342, surrendered to the crown in June 1372.



Coat of arms of John of Gaunt asserting his kingship over Castile and León, combining the Castilian castle and lion with lilies of France, the lions of England and his heraldic difference



1640 drawing of tombs of Katherine Swynford and daughter Joan Beaufort

- Earl of Leicester, Earl of Lancaster, Earl of Derby: inherited *jure uxoris* in November 1362 following the death of his wife's father Henry of Grosmont.
- Duke of Lancaster: granted as a new creation in November 1362 following the death of the prior Duke, Henry of Grosmont.
- King of Galicia, King of Castile, King of León: claimed in January 1372 by his second marriage to the heiress to these thrones, unrecognised except for a brief period when he was able to capture Galicia from 1386 to 1387; claim surrendered 1388.
- Duke of Aquitaine: granted in January 1390 by his nephew, Richard II of England, who himself had inherited it from his father Edward the Black Prince.

Arms

As a son of the sovereign, John bore the royal arms of the kingdom (*Quarterly, France Ancient and England*), differenced by a label argent of three points ermine.^[32]

As claimant to the throne of Castile and León from 1372, he impaled the arms of that kingdom (*Gules, a castle or quartering Argent, a lion rampant purple*) with his own. The arms of Castile and León appeared on the dexter side of the shield (the left hand side as viewed), and the differenced English royal arms on the sinister; but in 1388, when he surrendered his claim, he reversed this marshalling, placing his own arms on the dexter, and those of Castile and León on the sinister.^[33] He thus continued to signal his alliance with the Castilian royal house, while abandoning any claim to the throne. There is, however, evidence that he may occasionally have used this second marshalling at earlier dates.^[34]

In addition to his royal arms, Gaunt bore an alternative coat of *Sable, three ostrich feathers ermine*. This was the counterpart to his brother, the Black Prince's, "shield for peace" (on which the ostrich feathers were white), and may have been used in jousting. The ostrich feather arms appeared in stained glass above Gaunt's chantry chapel in St Paul's Cathedral.^[35]

In popular culture

John of Gaunt is a character in William Shakespeare's play *Richard II*. Shortly before he dies, he makes a speech that includes the lines "This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle, This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars ... This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England". He is also referred to by Falstaff in *Henry IV Part I*.

Lancaster city council has an administrative ward that bears the name and the city also has a public house called the *John O'Gaunt*.

Remnants of a building in King's Somborne, Hampshire, are sometimes referred to as "King John's Palace".^[36]

Hungerford in Berkshire has ancient links to the Duchy, the manor becoming part of John of Gaunt's estate in 1362 before James I passed ownership to two local men in 1612 (which subsequently became Town & Manor of Hungerford Charity). The links are visible today in the Town & Manor-owned John O'Gaunt Inn on Bridge Street,^[37] the John O'Gaunt School on Priory Road,^[38] as well as various street names. It is customary for the Loyal Toast to be given by residents as "The Queen, the Duke of Lancaster".

The John of Gaunt School on Wingfield Road in Trowbridge, Wiltshire,^[39] is built upon land that he once owned.

John held large tracts of land in Lincolnshire and the City of Lincoln. At the appropriately named site of Gaunt Street, he maintained a palace, remains of which were found in the late 1960s. A finial window, complete, was found between two walls in the then "West's Garage". This was moved and now adorns the entrance through the east bail of Lincoln Castle.

Opposite the Palace site stands St Mary's Guildhall, locally known as John O'Gaunt's stables. This large medieval building once formed the entrance to the John O'Gaunts football ground, home to Lincoln City until they moved to their present Sincil Bank ground.

The remnants of the castle at Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, once owned by John, sit on John o' Gaunt's Street.

The John of Gaunt Stakes is a British race for Thoroughbred horses run annually in June.

Fakenham in Norfolk has the full name of Fakenham Lancaster as a tribute to him as Duke of Lancaster.

Anya Seton's best-selling 1954 novel *Katherine* depicts John's long-term affair with and eventual marriage to Katherine Swynford.

John of Gaunt is a major character in Garry O'Connor's *Chaucer's Triumph: Including the Case of Cecilia Champaigne, the Seduction of Katherine Swynford, the Murder of Her Husband, the Interment of John of Gaunt and Other Offices of the Flesh in the Year 1399* (2007).

John O'Gaunt is a piece of music written for brass band by Gilbert Vinter in 1965. It documents John O'Gaunt's life in a musical tone poem.

The romance novel *Almost Innocent* by Jane Feather tells the story of a possibly fictitious illegitimate daughter of John of Gaunt, and contains much history and vivid description of John and of royal life.



The tomb of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster in St. Paul's Cathedral, as represented in an etching of 1658 by Wenceslaus Hollar. The etching includes a number of inaccuracies, for example in not showing the couple with joined hands.



Modern interpretation of the arms of John of Gaunt

A suit of armour alleged to have been John of Gaunt's is on display in the Tower of London, and is of exceptional size (6'9"), but its ownership is now disputed. The armour is believed by experts to have been made c.1540 in Germany, and did not enter the Tower's collection until the early 17th century. By 1660 it was described in an inventory as "a large white armour cap-a-pe, said to be John of Gaunt's", and this erroneous description has remained with the armour.^[40]

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- The Katherine Swynford Society website (<http://katherineswynfordsociety.org.uk>)

<div> <div>John of Gaunt</div> <div>House of Plantagenet</div> <div>Born: 6 March 1340 Died: 3 February 1399</div> </div>		
Regnal titles		
Preceded by Richard II	Duke of Aquitaine 1390–1399	Succeeded by Henry Bolingbroke
Peerage of England		
New creation	Duke of Lancaster <i>2nd creation</i> 1362–1399	Succeeded by Henry Bolingbroke
Preceded by Henry of Grosmont	Earl of Leicester Earl of Lancaster Earl of Derby 1361–1399	
Preceded by Robert III of Artois	Earl of Richmond 1342–1372	Vacant Title next held by John IV of Brittany
Political offices		
Preceded by Henry of Grosmont	Lord High Steward 1362–1399	Succeeded by Henry Bolingbroke
Titles in pretence		
Preceded by Henry II <i>as unopposed king</i>	— DISPUTED — <i>King of Castile</i> 1372–1388	Succeeded by John I <i>as unopposed king</i>

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