

## CHÂTEAU TALBOT

Château Talbot owes its name to Connétable Talbot, an illustrious military commander during the Hundred Years War. (To this day, the name Talbot persists in many locations in the Bordeaux region.)

The château, built in the late 18th C, took the name of the hilltop location where it stands, itself named after Connétable Talbot, not far from the harbour on the Gironde river where he and his troops disembarked on their way to Bordeaux in October 1452.

### John Talbot, ‘Terror of the French’—but Hero to Bordeaux

Feared, hated, respected and even immortalized by Shakespeare, the lifelong commander led the English through their doomed final decades of the Hundred Years’ War

On July 17, 1453, the general John Talbot, 1st Earl of Shrewsbury, acted on bad intelligence. The commander of English forces in the final years of the Hundred Years’ War had gained a reputation for striking with speed, dexterity, fearlessness—and unusual brutality, even by the standards of that era’s primitive and gruesome combat.

On that July day, he rode to save Castillon, near Bordeaux, from a French siege; the Gironde region had been a territory of the English crown for three centuries. There Talbot found a major cohort of enemy soldiers encamped behind at least 250 guns of all sizes, some that could kill several men with a single blast. It was a suicide mission for the English.

John Talbot was born around 1387 at a place called Black Mere Castle in Shropshire. While wealthy young noblemen were expected to go to war, Talbot seemed to genuinely relish fighting. So In 1420, King Henry V dispatched Talbot to France, where the wars that had begun in 1337 continued to rage. Eventually, he’d be lionized as the “English Achilles” and an exemplar of chivalry, but the French, whose villages he massacred and whose farms he laid waste to, saw it differently.

At last in 1452, Talbot, now in his mid-sixties and with the title of Connétable of France, arrived in Gascony. After a few successes like those he’d had up and down the west of the continent over the decades, Talbot led his men to their final stand. The story goes that Talbot’s white horse was laid low by a projectile, throwing and pinning him. An advancing soldier finished the job with an axe-blow to the skull.

Castillon would be the last battle of the Hundred Years’ War, with the French soon all but expelling the English from the continent. But the legacy of the Connétable Talbot lives on in ways that surely would have surprised him: in literature, in art and, yes, in wine.

## THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR

Crossbows, Cross-Dressing and Claret: The Hundred Years’ War, As It Happened

Untangling the long and brutal decades of fighting and intrigue that snuffed out the Middle Ages, chivalry and countless lives—but birthed the legends of Joan of Arc, the Black Prince and fine Bordeaux wine

History textbooks will tell you the Hundred Years' War flared up in 1337, but the trouble began much earlier.

In the lead-up to the series of warring periods much later called the Hundred Years' War, “England” and “France” were not the nations we consider them today, but ever-splintering lineages of monarchs and their vassals that held ever-shifting territories and alliances on the continent and the island. In 1337, French King Philip VI simply declared the “English” region of Gascony his own, touching off the first round of conflict.

The first major pitched battle, in 1356 near Poitiers, was a rout for the rapid-firing longbow archers of the English. They pressed the advantage with another glorious English victory at the Battle of Agincourt, in 1415, leaving 6,000 French horizontal in the muck by day's end.

By 1429, the English and their allies had nearly conquered France's holdings. But during the siege of Orléans, French dauphin Charles VII entertained a peculiar request: An illiterate teenage farm girl arrived with claims that she had divine visions urging her to fight alongside him, and return France to the French. The French rallied behind their charismatic banner-woman, Joan of Arc, and drove the English from their bastions around the city.

Joan of Arc would be captured, tried for heresy (and “cross-dressing”) and burned at the stake two years later. But now England was on the back foot.

In ever-faithful Gascony, veteran commander John Talbot made England's last stand in 1453. That year, his quixotic campaign reached the town of Castillon, where a heavily-armed French garrison awaited. On hearing the news of losing Bordeaux—of losing the continent—English King Henry VI would have a mental breakdown. He'd get to see plenty more fighting, though, at home, and died deposed in the Tower of London.

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