Boston’s Forgotten Crusade

How an army from south Lincolnshire led by the future King Henry IV sailed from Boston to join the Teutonic Knights in the 1390 crusade to Prussia and Lithuania
Note on sources

• This presentation is based on the accounts, receipts and expenditure of Henry of Derby - now held in the Public Record Office but printed in 19th century and available online.

• The accounts were made up from memoranda, jottings on slips or small rolls of parchment, and receipts for money.

• Accounts were kept by Henry’s Treasurer.
Other sources

• Walsingham’s Ypodigma Neustriæ mentions the 1390 siege of Vilnius and the part played by the English forces in its capture.

• John Capgrave, an Augustinian priest at Kings Lynn, mentions the crusades (the 1392 crusade started from Kings Lynn).

• The Prussian chronicles mention the English force – Scriptores rerum Prussicarum (see also John of Posilge, a priest at Eilau who kept a chronicle; letters in the Prussian archives).
Secondary sources

- Illustrations have been taken from the Codex Manesse – an illuminated German manuscript produced about 50 years prior to the 1390, but gives a good idea of courtly and chivalric life in northern Europe at the time.
What were the crusades?

Holy wars against Christendom’s external and internal enemies – in the Holy Land, in Spain, in North Africa and Egypt, in northern Europe against the pagan tribes, internally against heretics, even the Columbus expedition across the Atlantic.
What is a crusade and what is a “crusader”? 

• A crusade must be declared by the Pope in defence of Christian lands or people.
• Crusaders must take a vow to perform military service on the crusade.
• In return they receive an indulgence to forgive their sins.
• While on crusade the crusaders are granted the same privileges and support given to pilgrims (financial support, legal immunity, practical support in terms of food and shelter etc).
• At the end of the crusade the crusader returns to normal life – or goes on another crusade.
The Baltic crusades
Who were the Teutonic Knights?

Tannhäuser in the habit of the Teutonic Knights – from the Codex Manesse
Who were the Teutonic Knights?

- Fighting monks NOT crusaders.
- Followed Augustinian Rule.
- One of the three great military orders involved in the crusades.
- Jerusalem hospital founded by the citizens of Bremen and Lubeck in 1187, and after the fall of Jerusalem re-founded in Acre1190 with vows to tend sick pilgrims and fight “the pagans”.
Who were the Teutonic Knights?

• In 1230 they were asked by the Pope to undertake a crusade against the pagan Prussians and eventually controlled the whole of Prussia and set up their own quasi-independent state.
• After the fall of Acre in 1291 they moved their headquarters to first Venice and then to Marienburg on the River Vistula.
• Eastern expansion from Prussia into Pomerania.
Headquarters of the Teutonic Knights – Marienberg Castle  
(Marienberg was a Hanseatic town)
Who were the Teutonic Knights?

- Grand Commander lived at Marienburg, the Marshal at Konigsberg and the Grand Hospitaller at Elbing – all Hanseatic ports.
- In theory the Grand Commander was a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire and also nominally subject to the Pope and the King of Poland.
- In practice Prussia was an independent state.
- Teutonic Knights were not exclusively German – spoke German but wrote in Latin, followed the international rule of the Augustinians and recruited throughout Europe, including Poles and Christian Lithuanians.
- Kings of England supported the Teutonic Knights with financial payments and they recruited in England, although did not own any land in England – had close links with the Augustinians.
Who were the Teutonic Knights?

• Strong links with the Hanseatic League – Danzig was a Teutonic Knights port and had strong links with Boston, Lynn, Hull and York.
• As the Teutonic Knights moved eastwards the Hanseatic League expanded.
• Prussia under the Teutonic Knights was a regional member of the Hanseatic League.
Local evidence

- Chaucer was a friend of Henry of Derby and was often at Bolinbroke Castle.
- In the Canterbury Tales the Knight is described as going on crusade to Prussia.
- Was Chaucer’s Knight based on a knight in the 1390 crusade?
Site of Gisors or Gishours Hall – Boston home of Henry of Derby.
Local evidence

- Double headed eagle – misericord in the chancel of the Stump.
- Dated to 1390 – the year of the crusade.
- Is the head on the left a portrait of Henry of Derby? – compare with coronation portrait.
Double-headed eagle was a heraldic emblem of both the Teutonic Knights and the Hanseatic League – for instance Otto von Botenlauben sold his lands in the Kingdom of Jerusalem to the Teutonic Knights and returned to Germany
Who was Henry Earl of Derby?
Who was Henry of Derby?

- Eldest son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Aquitaine and Lancaster and grandson to Edward III.
- Cousin to Richard II (and carried the Sword of Mercy or Curtana at Richard’s coronation).
- In 1390 was twenty five years old, married to Mary de Bohun (at age 15), and had three sons.
- His home and main base was Bolingbroke Castle but also had other properties including Gisours Hall in Boston.
- One of the most important princes in England and one of the leading knights.
- Went on several crusades, including two to Prussia.
Household

- Henry’s household was modelled on the Royal Household, and the officers followed him everywhere, even to war.
- Included Steward, Treasurer, Controller, Chamberlain, Chaplain.
- Also Clerk of the Kitchen, Marshall of the Hall, Butler, Office of the Saucery, Office of the Poulty, Office of the Scullery (Robert Spaigne), Clerk of the Spicery (included sugar, honey, almonds, dried fruits, even wafers made in Konigsberg), Office of the Chaundry (soap, tallow, candles and torches), Clerk of the Buttery (wine and beer in barrels), Clerk of the Pantry (baking bread, making pies, pastry cooks etc), Clerk of the Marshaley (hay, oats, horse shoes, Clerk of the Great Wardrobe.
- Retinue of knights, esquires, valets, grooms, henchmen (young boys or wards being brought up in the household), pages and many servants.
- Henry’s auditor was Thomas de Wombewell (Wombwell House in Fishtoft).
Musicians

• Acted as a kind of military band.
• Two trumpeters, three pipers, one cymbal-player.
Bolingbroke Castle
Jagello
Civil war in Lithuania

• Relations between the Teutonic Knights and the Lithuanian tribes had been warlike.
• But also complex periods of alliance.
• Poland and Lithuania became united in 1386 when Grand Duke Jagello’s son Uladislas converted and married the Queen of Poland Hedwig.
• This alliance was opposed by Jagello’s cousin Vitold (Prince of Samogitia) who appealed to the Teutonic Knights for help.
• In 1390 the Teutonic Knights planned an invasion of Lithuania and probably appealed for international help which came from England, France and the Low Countries. Henry of Derby planned to join the expedition.
POLISH AND LITHUANIAN CONFLICT WITH TEUTONIC PRUSSIA. 1377-1434.
The English force

- Great number of men with English surnames – c12 knights with esquires and valets.
- Troop of bowman and other military attendants.
- Household servants - Stables, Kitchen, Buttery, Pantry, Poultry, Falconry.
- Six minstrels, a trumpeter, five other musicians.
- Private chapel.
- Heralds.
- John of Posilge estimates the army to be about 300, but this may include men recruited locally.
How did they get there?

• Two large vessels were commissioned, probably English but with German (Hanseatic?) captains.
• They were hulls and were fitted up with cabins and various other accommodation.
Surnames in the accounts

- Continental names are mostly Low German or Saxon, very few Salvic.
- Occasionally among the German names is an English surname – probably an English resident in Danzig.
- Thomas Swinford – the accounts refer to horses brought from Kettlethorpe manor.
- Peter Bucton – referred to in a poem by Chaucer.
- Ralph Rochford, a Lincolnshire knight.
- English surnames can be divided into three parts
  1. Those names after a place (Willoughby, Bolingbroke, Melbourne).
  2. Those names after an occupation (Baker, Cage Maker).
  3. Those who have true surnames (Cudworth, Maunsell)

Note: the officers, esquires and valets were drawn from the towns, manors and villages of the Bolingbroke demesne.
Timeline

• Appointment of Kyngston as Treasurer signed on 6\textsuperscript{th} May 1390.

• Purchase of provisions – large quantities of wine, beer and food; chattells and utensils; horses and cattle - all of which were directed to Boston.

• Deadline for departure was the feast of St Margaret (20\textsuperscript{th} July).
• Henry’s ships left from “Chopehire” – probably Skirbeck.
The ships crossed the North Sea and passed Copenhagen and on 8\textsuperscript{th} August three men were landed on the Pomeranian coast at Leba.

Henry and a small party landed a little further on at Rixhoft where they immediately had a meal.

The ships went on to Danzig.
• Henry travelled from Rixhoft to Danzig by horse, and stayed in the city from 10\textsuperscript{th} to 13\textsuperscript{th} August at the house of Lord de Burser.

• Lancaster Herald took letters from Henry to the Grand Master at Marianburg (everywhere he went heralds proceeded him to announce his arrival and arrange food and lodging). The heralds left painted shields throughout the journey – do any of these still exist?

• The army disembarked and began to form up.
• The English force crossed the Vistula and proceeded to Konigsburg arriving on the 16th August (some of the stores and provisions went by water in flat boats).
• Thirteen carts were required to convey Henry’s stores and armour.
• Eighteen hired Prussian carts took provisions to the Castle of Insterburg for after the campaign.
• 18th August the prince slept at Cremitten, passed through Tapiau, and had dinner at the castle of Norkitten (see picture below).
• The English army now approached the “Wyldrenesse” or wilderness – a no-mans-land that divided Prussia from Lithuania.

• This was the great forest today known as the Grauden Forest.
• 24th August the English crossed the Memel river.
• 25th August they received information that the Lithuanian leader Skirgal was ahead of them, and they decided on a surprise attack.
• Sunday 28th August Henry’s forces attacked the Lithuanians and forced them to retreat. Sir John Loudeham (Leadenham?) was killed in the battle. Three Lithuanian dukes, eleven boyars and 200 horses were captured.
Vilnius
Capture of Vilnius

- Vilnius was strongly fortified with outer wooden defences and an inner castle on the hill built of stone.
- Three armies, including the English force, stormed the city, which fell on 4th September 1390.
- Both English and German chronicles say that the Lincolnshire force was crucial to the capture of the city, the English bowmen were devastating, and an English banner was the first to be planted on the walls of the captured city (by a yeoman of Bourchier).
• Vilnius was looted and burned, many prisoners were taken, but despite a siege the inner stone fortress of Vilnius was not captured.

• Sickness, lack of gunpowder, onset of bad weather made the forces give up the siege.

• Henry and his force returned to Konigsberg which they reached on 20\textsuperscript{th} October.
Pilgrimage to church of St Katherine of Alexandria at Arnau
Four months at Konigsberg

- Henry’s stay in the city included Christmas and New Year.
- Programme of tournaments and hunting parties.
- Henry continually presented with gifts including horses and hawks.
- He gave in return many fur robes and other gifts including jewels, wax, spices and linen.
- Music featured heavily with minstrels, fiddlers and other musicians hired locally (in addition to his own band of musicians).
Konigsberg Castle
Scenes from Codex Manesse

Tournament – Heinrich von Breslau
Chaucer’s knight recorded as being in the crusade against Lithuania and place at the head of the “board” (feasting table) in the celebrations that followed.
Hanging up shields
Six weeks in Danzig

• In February Henry left Konigsberg and arrived in Danzig (principle city of the Hanseatic League in Prussia) on 15\textsuperscript{th} February 1391.

• Henry stayed with merchant Klaus Gottesknecht, many of his party were lodged at the castle-palace of the Bishop of Leslau just outside Danzig.

• Mention in the accounts of English residents in the city providing goods and services to Henry (ie John Bever).

• Henry went on pilgrimages to four churches within Danzig and left offerings of money and gained “indulgences”.

Danzig
Return to Boston

- Two ships were chartered under Prussian masters but with pilots from Boston.
- Carpenters created cabins for the men, stables for the animals and cages for the hawks.
- Henry spent Easter (26th March) in Danzig with festivities and gift-giving.
- 31st March Henry embarked for the voyage home – landing in Hull and sending his baggage by coastal vessels to Boston.
• Henry Catour died on the voyage back and may explain why Henry returned via Hull – Catour was buried at Hull and masses said for his soul.
• Henry crossed from Hull to Barton and travelled south to Bolingbroke Castle, stopping for supper at Caister en route.
• His baggage was carted from Boston to Bolingbroke.
Richard II banishing Henry
Coronation of Henry IV