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The Life and Coinage of Edward, the Black Prince

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Background

Prince Edward, the Black Prince, was born in 1330 in the village of Woodstock, outside Oxford (close to where Blenheim Palace now stands). He was the eldest son of Edward III, King of England and Queen Philippa originally of Hainault, (now split between France and Belgium.) He was related both through his father and mother to the Valois kings of France. He became Prince of Wales, the third English prince to do so, after his father and grandfather.

He had seven younger brothers and five sisters. One of his brothers, the fourth son of the family, was John of Gaunt (Ghent) who married the heiress of the duchy of Lancaster. Three other brothers and four of his sisters died in childhood or as teenagers. His life and campaigns were documented by the Herald of Sir John Chandos, Constable of Aquitaine, and his companion in arms.¹

No one seems to know why he was called the Black Prince. It was not a title applied during his lifetime, but seems to have come in Tudor times. Some say it was because he wore black armour, but it may have had something to do with the perspective of his French enemies.

When he was 16, Edward took part in the battle of Crécy (1346), which was directed by his father. He earned his 'spurs' at this famous battle and demonstrated his

future prowess as a soldier. He spent most of his military career in France. Ten years later, in 1356, commanding his own forces, he defeated a French army at the battle of Poitiers and captured the French king, Jean II le Bon, who was taken captive to London. Conditions set for the release of the French king included an exorbitant ransom and the transfer of a large part of south-western France to the absolute control of the English, as an enlarged principality of Aquitaine. As part of the deal, King Edward III would give up his claims to the crown of France. The terms were embodied in the Treaty of Brétigny.

In 1362, Prince Edward was created Prince of Aquitaine by his father. He travelled from England to Bordeaux with his wife Joan, 'the fair maid of Kent', and his young son, also Edward, where they held a sumptuous court. In Bordeaux they had a second son, Richard, who became sole heir when their first son tragically died in childhood. Edward the Black Prince ruled Aquitaine for 10 years and issued his own coinage in gold, silver and billon at many mints in the extended Aquitaine Principality. The ornate designs of the coins reflect the period, held to be the time of the high point of Gothic art.

Edward never became King of England—he died nine months before his father did. This came about, in part, because

of a campaign in Spain. Always the hero, Edward could not resist a plea for help from Pedro, king of Castile, who had had his throne usurped by his illegitimate brother Henry. Henry was supported by the French. To encourage Edward to come to his aid, Pedro offered to pay all his expenses. While in Spain, the English forces had a decisive victory over their enemies at the battle of Najera. The downside was that the Prince caught some form of disease from which he would never recover and, in addition, Pedro did not fulfil his promise to pay Edward's expenses. As a consequence the Principality of Aquitaine became almost bankrupt and the Prince's reputation suffered as he tried to levy taxes to make up the shortfall. The city of Limoges revolted and was sacked by the English.

The Prince's health degenerated so much that in 1372 he had to relinquish his post and return to England. Here he died four years later, aged only 46. He was buried in Canterbury Cathedral and his tomb is still looked after by a dedicated following of admirers. His father died shortly after and the ten year old Richard of Bordeaux, Edward's only remaining son, was crowned King of England, under the regency of his uncles, especially John of Gaunt. Richard himself lost the throne in 1399 to his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, John's son. Richard died childless the following year. Richard's death spelt the end of the elder Plantagenet line, splitting it into Lancastrian and York factions.

The coins

The coins of Edward the Black Prince follow the pattern set by his father, King

Edward III. When the father had been Duke of Aquitaine all coinage and government was administered from London and meticulous records kept. These records survive. When Prince Edward took over Aquitaine, however, the administration was from Bordeaux and all connection with London was severed. Records which were kept in Bordeaux were eventually lost when Bordeaux was captured by the French many years later, in 1453.² Thus, the only records we have today to work out the sequence of coin issues are the coins themselves.

The main reference for the coinage of the Black Prince is the book by Duncan Elias, *Anglo Gallic Coins*.³ An early reference, published in 1830 by General Ainslie⁴, dedicates the book to the Duke of Wellington who, he states, was the last general to march through Aquitaine at the head of a British army since the Black Prince. Elias notes that there were more mints for the silver than the gold, the latter being mainly minted at Bordeaux and La Rochelle, but also (rarely) at Limoges, Poitiers and Figeac. A single letter at the end of the reverse legends indicates which mint (ie, B, R, L, P, or F).

The gold is of spectacular beauty. Five main types were minted, but there are some variants and also some halves which are extremely rare. Of the five types, two were similar to those of his father, two were unique to the Prince, and one was continued by his son Richard. This gives a tentative minting order, which is not definitively known because of the lack of records. As I was able to access four of the five Black Prince gold coin types, as well

as the one of his father's issues which the Prince copied, all five of the gold coin types could be studied in detail.

The obverse legends proclaim the titles of the ruler and the reverse legends are often a religious text. The Black Prince is known on his coins as ED PO GNS REX ANGL P'NCEPS AQITANIE or similar. This is short for Edward, first born (Primo Genitus) of the King of England, Prince (Princeps) of Aquitaine. Sometimes Lord (Dominus or DNS) of Aquitaine.

The common pattern of most Gothic gold coins is to have a portrait of the ruler on one side, but possibly replaced by a heraldic device and on the other a floriated cross. Each cross design is unique to match the obverse, with very few mules being known. Reverse legends are more interesting.



Fig 1. King Edward III Guyennois d'or, 3rd type.
Obverse: King's titles, King in full armour, marching to right under Gothic portico, two leopards under his feet.
Reverse: GLA IN EXELCIS DOE [sic] ET IN TERRA PAX HOIBVS (Gloria in Excelsis Deo et in Terra Pax Hominibus—from the Latin mass: Glory to God in heaven and on earth peace to men). This is also the reverse legend on the silver demi gros, but without the Hominibus, for which is there is no room). Floriated cross within a tressure of 12 arches, fleur de lis in 1st and 4th angles, leopard in 2nd and 3rd angles, placed square with the cross instead of towards the centre. The corresponding coin of the Black Prince is somewhat rarer and is similar except for the titles, and that Prince wears a conical helmet instead of a crown.



Fig 2. Edward the Black Prince Leopard d'or.
Obverse: Prince's titles. Stops, double voided quatrefoils, pellet or annulet at end of legend, crowned leopard passant to left, within a tressure of 10 or 11 arches, with quatrefoils in all the spandrels except one which has a star.
Reverse: XPC VINCIT XPC REGNAT XPC IMPERAT (Christ conquers, Christ Reigns Christ Commands). Stops, double voided quatrefoils. Pellet at the end of the legend. Floriated cross, leopard in each angle.



Fig 3. Edward the Black Prince Chaise d'or, Bordeaux mint.
Obverse: Prince's titles, stops, rosettes. The Prince seated on throne, sceptre in right hand. The seat of the throne is ornamented with Gothic arches, two on the left and one on the right of the Prince.
Reverse: DEVS IVDEX IVSTIS FORTIS Z PACIENS B (God is a righteous judge, strong and patient—Psalm vii 12). Stops, rosettes. Cross collarino, within ornamented pierced quatrefoil, lis in 1st and 4th angles, leopards in 2nd and 3rd angles



Fig 4. Edward the Black Prince Pavillon d'or, 2nd issue, Bordeaux mint.

Obverse: Prince's titles, stops, voided quatrefoils. The Prince, standing, facing, beneath a Gothic portico, sword in right hand, left hand raised, two leopards couchant at his feet, two ostrich plumes curved to right at either side.

Reverse: DNS AIVTO Z PTECIO ME Z IIPO SPAVIT COR MEVM. B. (Dominus Adjutor et protector meum et in ipso speravit cor meum: The Lord is my strength and my shield and my heart hath trusted him—Psalm xxviii, 8). Stops, voided quatrefoils. Cross quernée within ornamental quatrefoil, lis in 1st and 4th angles, leopards in 2nd and 3rd angles. E in centre of cross.



Fig 5. Edward the Black Prince Hardi d'or, La Rochelle mint.

Obverse: Princes titles, with R at end of legend, stops rosettes. Half length figure of Prince facing, sword in right hand, left hand raised, fillet of roses in hair, Tressure of 12 arches.

Reverse: AVXILIUM MEUM A DOMINO. R. (My help cometh from the Lord). Psalm cxxi, 2. Stops, rosettes. Cross quernée within tressure of 16 arches. Lis in 1st and 4th angles, leopards in 2nd and 3rd angles.

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3. Elias, ER Duncan. *The Anglo-Gallic Coins*. Paris and London, Émile Bourgey and Spink and Son, 1984.



Fig 6. Edward the Black Prince, AR demi-gros, second issue, La Rochelle mint.⁴, p 184

Obverse: Prince's titles. Stops, double rosettes, half length figure of the bearded Prince to right, holding sword in right hand, left hand raised.

Reverse: PRINCEPS. AQUITANIE. GLIA:INE: XCEL CIS: DEO ET IN: TRA PAX. Long cross dividing legends, three pellets in each angle.



Fig 7. Edward the Black Prince, Hardi d'argent, Limoges mint.

Obverse: Prince's titles with L at end. Half length figure of unbearded Prince facing, under Gothic canopy, sword in right hand, left hand raised, fillet of roses in hair, within inner circle, cut at the top of the canopy and at the bottom by the figure of the Prince, which also divides the legend.

Reverse: PRNCPS AQTANE. Long cross dividing legend. Lis in 1st and 4th angles, leopards in 2nd and 3rd angles.

4. Ainsley (Maj. General). *Illustrations from the Anglo-Gallic Coinage*. London, 1830.

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