

Robert Williams

Professor Facer

FR 102 S2020

4/21/2020



Philippa of Hainault

While my dad's French Canadian ancestry is common knowledge among my family, it has recently been discovered that my mom also has some French ancestry through her father's bloodline. While tracing through generations of the family line, my aunt found American ancestry throughout our nation's history including some who fought in our War for Independence and the Civil War. From my understanding, ancestors in the Christian line (my grandfather's surname) were founders of what is now Kingsport, Tennessee. The most surprising detail of her

discovery is that we are likely descended from European royalty most recently from the English House of Plantagenet. The reason I say European royalty rather than that of a specific country is because the royal and noble families of European nations were more or less related at the time due to politically strategic marriages. Considering this, one would think there would be far less wars than there were back then. How many common people died in wars because of petty international family drama? God bless America.

While there were likely many in the line who proved themselves to be capable of great evil, there were also men and women of great character.

One such ancestor who stood out to me is a French woman named Philippa of Hainault who became Queen of England. There are multiple articles and resources on her life that seem to tell her story differently, so I do not know a specific source to recommend for research. I believe she was born sometime in the 1310s in either France or Belgium. Her father was the count of Hainaut, which from my understanding shared culture and language with France, but was separate. For alliance purposes, she was betrothed to the heir of the English throne, Prince Edward son of King Edward II, when the two were around twelve years old. Of course, like I said above, they were related through their mothers to the same great-grandfather, King Philip III of France. Queen Philippa was adored by the English people and was known for her gentle kindness and virtue.

There were multiple times when she saved the lives of people in the kingdom who would have been killed by either getting involved in the justice system or interceding for them to her husband. One instance was when she and other ladies were on a wood platform (at some gathering I think), the platform collapsed and she was hurt. Edward III was livid was ready to put

the incompetent carpenters who built it to death. However, Philippa looked to them with compassion and begged the king for their forgiveness. The king accepted her plea, and the men were spared. It is amazing to think that the Queen of England would be so forgiving and merciful toward men of low status who had caused her pain and possibly embarrassment. There were many on the throne throughout the centuries who would not have hesitated to kill those men. It is told that she once, while her husband was away, rallied the troops against a Scottish attack. This battle resulted in a Scottish defeat and capture of their king. I do not know if this really happened or not, but I think it is a cool story regardless.

Philippa and Edward's marriage produced fourteen children including nine who passed away before her. Their firstborn and heir to the throne was Edward the Black Prince who was probably named for his dark armor. Sadly, the Black Prince was to die before becoming king, and his son Richard II became the successor to Edward III. My supposed line of descent is through their son John of Gaunt who became Duke of Lancaster. Edward and Philippa seemed to be close throughout their marriage (in spite of infidelity on Edward's part) and he seemed to have been heartbroken when she died in 1369. The two are now buried together at Westminster Abbey in London.

I feel like much of Edward III's success as king is due to his wife and the support she brought him from both the English people and her own people of Hainault. Queen Philippa is a great inspiration of virtue whose patient forgiveness and gentle mercy remind me of our greatest King Jesus Christ. Just as I look to His life on earth as the model of how to live my own, I can now draw inspiration from the life of my many-greats grandmother 700 years before me.

An interesting fact that I learned from studying all of this is that nobility in England actually spoke French as their native language during the time of the Edwards. The English language was looked down upon as the lowly language of peasants. English did not become the official language of England until the 1400s from what I read.