**Agincourt in context: war on land and sea. Introduction**

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This special issue contains a selection of nine papers issued from an international conference commemorating the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt. These contributions replace the battle in the broader context of late medieval warfare, highlighting new trends in war studies and engaging with new and old historiographical debates.

**Keywords:** Battle of Agincourt; Hundred Years War; logistics; military organisation; chivalry

**Introduction**

This special issue of the *Journal of Medieval History* investigates the Battle of Agincourt and the wider conduct and organisation of war in the late Middle Ages. The articles presented here are developed from papers at a major international conference held between 31 July and 3 August 2015 at the University of Southampton to commemorate the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt. The conference was organised by Professor Anne Curry and supported by The Royal Armouries (Fort Nelson) and The Battlefields Trust.[[1]](#footnote-1) In addition to the academic papers showcased here the conference included a series of stimulating lectures given to the public and delegates. These were given by Professor Jon Adams, former Deputy Director of the Mary Rose Project; Alexandra Hildred, Curator of Ordnance at the Mary Rose Trust; Thom Richardson of the Royal Armouries; Ian Mortimer, author of a *Time Traveller’s Guide to Medieval England*; Andrew Ayton, emeritus Senior Lecturer from the University of Hull and Bertrand Schnerb, Professor of Medieval History at the Université de Lille–III.

**Agincourt and the history of war**

The Battle of Agincourt continues to be of immense national and international interest. In her most recent work on the battle Anne Curry has investigated the enduring legacy of Agincourt in the English national consciousness, showing that Henry V’s victory was used to promote English martial endeavours for centuries.[[2]](#footnote-2) Valérie Toureille has recently argued that defeat at Agincourt helped galvanise French national awareness, in response to an external enemy.[[3]](#footnote-3) Other new research has focused upon, among other themes, the French army and battlefield casualties, and new discoveries are being made in other areas.[[4]](#footnote-4) Craig Lambert’s work in the present special issue, for example, casts new light upon the hitherto under-scrutinised maritime dimension of the 1415 campaign. Examining the wider context of Agincourt through related themes is arguably the best way to extend our knowledge of the battle. The articles in this special issue aim to provide the reader with a better understanding of the organisation and practice of war during the late Middle Ages by developing current thinking on important academic debates on military professionalism, logistics and the conduct of war.

The issue of professionalism amongst the fighting men of the late Middle Ages continues to stimulate scholarly debate.[[5]](#footnote-5) Andrew Ayton’s article in this special issue adds to this discussion by tracing the development of military careerism in England during the fourteenth century. As previous research has shown, careerism could be shaped by the system of recruitment.[[6]](#footnote-6) In this respect English scholars are fortunate. The practice of military indentures and paid armies has bequeathed a detailed series of records that not only provide information relating to the costs and planning of war, but also offers the names of tens of thousands of serving soldiers and their captains. The *Soldier in Later Medieval England* project (www.medievalsoldier.org) headed by Professors Anne Curry and Adrian Bell shows the scale and scope of these records. Through the adoption of a methodological approach known as military service prosopography English scholars have made great strides in examining the social and personal links that existed between men and their retinue captains.[[7]](#footnote-7) Following this line of enquiry, Gary Baker’s article studies the duke of York’s retinue at Agincourt and reveals the impact of this captain’s death on the dynamics of recruitment in the early fifteenth century. The lack of payrolls for Portuguese armies did not, however, prevent Monteiro, Martins and Viúla de Faria from examining military recruitment in a Portuguese context. They take as their case study the preparation for the conquest of Ceuta in 1415. They reveal the interconnectedness of European states by showing how the Portuguese adopted military practices learnt as a result of English interventions in Iberia in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. In examining the ‘posthumous knighting’ of Davy Gam, Adam Chapman sheds light on the construction *a posteriori* of a reputation. It also serves as a reminder that the ‘English’ army at Agincourt was a very much a multi-national force.

Moving and supplying men, horses and artillery for foreign wars were perhaps the most difficult tasks faced by medieval governments.[[8]](#footnote-8) In numbers large armies resembled mobile towns which needed feeding and lodgings as they marched. More recently there has been renewed scholarly interest in Henry V’s navy and English maritime resources.[[9]](#footnote-9) Lambert’s chapter in this special issue argues that England’s merchant fleet, far from the declining entity of traditional scholarship, was in fact more than capable of supplying the ships Henry needed to freight his army. Henry’s fleet also carried a large artillery train. Dan Spencer’s contribution highlights how Henry made use of these weapons in the siege of Harfleur, showing that England was not surpassed by her continental neighbours in the use of gunpowder and artillery in the first half of the fifteenth century.[[10]](#footnote-10)

How did combatants in late medieval armies behave at war? Recent scholarship seems to be divided. Rory Cox has depicted late medieval warfare as lawless, acutely cynical, pragmatic and essentially strategic.[[11]](#footnote-11) On the other hand, a reappraisal of the Agincourt campaign by Jan Willem Honig has stressed upon the need to study the Middle Ages in its own right, and to show more consideration for the normative framework in which combatants operated.[[12]](#footnote-12) The articles by Andy King and Rémy Ambühl lean toward the view espoused by Honig. Henry’s killing of French prisoners after the Battle of Agincourt is often cited as a case in which the chivalric conduct of war was infringed. While King’s survey of rules and practices in battle sheds a different light on the massacre of Agincourt, Ambühl tests the purported cruelty of Henry V at Meaux in 1422 against the standards of the time, showing yet again how politics and ethics were interconnected.

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   The website Agincourt 600 hosted by the University of Southampton provides a detailed insight into the ongoing activities around the commemoration of the battle: http://www.agincourt600.com/. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Anne Curry, *Great Battles: Agincourt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Valérie Toureille, *Le drame d’Azincourt. Histoire d’une étrange défaite* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, for example, Anne Curry and Malcolm Mercer, eds., *The Battle of Agincourt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Adrian R. Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King, David Simpkin, *The Soldier in Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The literature on this is vast. The best current studies are: Bell and others, *Soldier*; Andrew Ayton, ‘Military Service and the Dynamics of Recruitment in Fourteenth-Century England’, in *The Soldier Experience in the Fourteenth Century*, eds. Adrian R. Bell and others (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 9–60; Anne Curry, ‘Personal Links and the Nature of the English War Retinue: a Case Study of John Mowbray, Earl Marshal, and the Campaign of 1415’, in *Liens personnels, réseaux, solidarités en France et dans les îles britanniques XIe–XXe siècle*, ed. D. Bates and others (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006), 153–67; D. Simpkin, *The English Aristocracy at War: From the Welsh Wars of Edward I to the Battle of Bannockburn* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008); Andrew Ayton and Philip Preston, eds., *The Battle of Crécy, 1346* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005) and Bertrand Schnerb, ‘Vassals, Allies and Mercenaries: the French Army Before and After 1346’, in *Battle of Crécy*, eds. Ayton and Preston, 265–72; Philippe. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans, Michael Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Andrew Ayton, ‘The English Army at Crécy’, in *Battle of Crécy*, eds. Ayton and Preston,159–252. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cliff S. Davies, ‘Provision for Armies, 1509–50: a Study in the Effectiveness of Early Tudor Government’, *Economic History Review*, second series 17 (1964–5): 234–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Craig Lambert, *Shipping* *the Medieval Military: English Maritime Logistics in the Fourteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011); Ian Friel, *Henry V’s Navy: the Sea Road to Agincourt and Conquest, 1413–1422* (Stroud: The History Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, vol. 2, *1278–1485 AD* (London: Greenhill Books, 1998); O.F.G. Hogg, *English Artillery 1326–1716* (London: Royal Artillery Institution, 1963); Kelly DeVries, ‘Gunpowder Weaponry and the Rise of the Early Modern State’, *War History* [Is this title *War in History*?]YES 5 (1998): 127–45. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rory Cox, ‘A Law of War? English Protection and Destruction of Ecclesiastical Property during the Fourteenth Century’, *English Historical Review* 128 (2013): 1381–417. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Jan W. Honig, ‘Reappraising Late Medieval Strategy: the Example of the 1415 Agincourt Campaign’, *War in History* 19 (2012), 123–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)