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Agincourt Sermon
This address was delivered by Christopher Tyerman, Lecturer in History at New College,
Fellow of Hertford College, Professor of the History of the Crusades, on the occasion of the
600th anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt, 25 October 2015, in New College Chapel.
Today marks the 600th anniver

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Such questions were addressed by our second New College figure, Nicholas Upton. Upton,
from Devon, had become a fellow of New College in 1415. Like Chichele he studied not theology
but civil law. Although ordained, he went on to make his name as a herald, employed in English
armies to adjudicate on matters of honour and to design appropriate coats of arms for those
knighted on the battlefield, a task to which he brought a degree of pawky almost end-of-the- pier
humour. His hefty four volume magnum opus, De studio militari, A Study of Knighthood, emphasised
the positive moral and martial virtues necessary for true nobility, a sort of Manners Makyth Man
in plate armour. War, if conducted with discipline and according to the laws of arms, provided a
touchstone of personal virtue. Upton’s connection with Agincourt rests in Book IV of De studio
where he praises Henry V’s disciplinary ordinances for the conduct of his troops. These had been
effective. Even French observers noted how well behaved the English army had been as it trudged
towards Agincourt. For all his elevation of martial virtue, Upton’s strictures on the necessity of
just conduct recognised the brutality and degradation of war in an attempt to chart a way through
the ethical morass of military behaviour, at once noble and sordid. With images from Abu Ghraib
still in our minds, this distant effort may touch a chord.
 The conduct of war leads to my third New College man, another Devonian,
Richard Hankford, whose grandfather, a judge, had known the Founder. Admitted to the college
in September 1414, Hankford left in July 1415, the first- but far from last- recorded scholar to
leave, so the college register states drily, ‘being minded to give up study’. He almost certainly left
to join Henry V’s army and fought at Agincourt itself, a unique link between the battle and
someone who had worshipped in this place. Hankford went on to pursue a very successful military
career, seeing in war a noble vocation as well as a means of self-advancement. Hankford’s own
dynastic success may be measured by his direct descendants who include Elizabeth I and, so I am
assured by fabpedigree.com, his 16th great grandsons President Lyndon Johnson of the USA,
Prince Charles and David Cameron.
Chichele, Upton and Hankford; these three New College men demonstrate how far and
how quickly William of Wykeham’s scholars moved beyond the Fo