Project Details

This is the case for support, which was approved by the AHRC when awarding the current grant:

Research questions or problems

Just as there has been a reluctance to accept the existence in the later middle ages of anything more than a 'proto-state', so too it is believed that a professional soldiery did not develop until the early modern period. This project aims to test this assumption by conducting a comprehensive longitudinal study of soldiers in English royal armies between 1369 and 1453. Since there was officially no standing army, although some permanent garrisons were maintained, our definition of 'professional' necessarily includes those who saw repeated service as well as those who served more continuously. But how can we know who these men were? This is the key question since if we have names we can track careers and also try to find out further information on our soldiers.

This leads naturally to questions concerning recruitment and the structures of service. How old were men when they began and ended their service? Did certain parts of the country produce more soldiers than others? Did men move between retinues of different captains? This question is particularly important given the perceived nature of the late medieval army as a collection of retinues whose members were connected in some existing, non-military way with their leader. But were there also horizontal ties, in that men served alongside friends, neighbours and relations?

Other questions relate to the nature of soldiering. Did men possess special skills, such as in artillery, before they entered royal pay, or did they develop such skills within the army? Did they tend to serve only in one theatre, or are they found in different geographical locations over time? Did men who served in the expeditionary armies also serve in garrison? Were those raised to serve as soldiers in naval campaigns a special group who did not serve in other contexts? Did years with a relative lack of military activity have a dampening effect on the professionalisation of the soldiery?

There are also important questions to be asked on the composition of armies (i.e. in terms of the various military ranks and functions) and on the level of military participation of different social groups. In all respects, the debate is whether changes came about as a result of military needs or of changes within society itself. In particular, why were there changes in the ratio of men-at-arms to archers, so that by the end of the period the armies comprised many more archers than at the start of it? Why too does the number of knights in the armies fluctuate, but also move downwards over the period? Both this and similar trend in terms of the military participation ratio of the nobility could be interpreted as indicative of the decline of older traditional habits of service towards a professional soldiery independent of social status in civilian life. In this context, it is important to consider whether terms such as esquire, yeoman and gentleman were generated within military contexts first, and whether the rise of such groups is a symptom of military professionalisation.

Research Context

Over the last forty years or so, a new military history has emerged aimed at linking the more traditional aspects of engagements and hardware with the society which produced them. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the study of English armies of the late thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century. Whilst it is possible to say much about these earlier armies in terms of structure and personnel, it is only from the reopening of the Hundred Years War in 1369 that a comprehensive study can be undertaken since it was from that point that all armies were raised by indenture and were subject to formal mustering. Even when indentures and musters (The N(ational) A(rchives) E101) do not survive we have other materials, such as warrants for issue (E404), issue rolls (E403) and post campaign accounts (E101, E364) providing full information on the size and composition of armies. This system was also applied to garrisons and remained unchanged into the fifteenth century. The loss of Gascony in 1453 forms a suitable terminal point for the project since it marked the end of intensive military activity overseas.

The main campaigns of the period were to France but there were others to Flanders, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Wales and Scotland, a much wider geographical spectrum than before 1369. In addition, garrisons were maintained within England (such as that held at the Tower of London), the Channel Islands, Wales and the marches, as well as at Calais and in Gascony. In the fourteenth-century phase of the Hundred Years War, the English also held some garrisons in areas of northern France, and in the fifteenth-century phase, there was a systematic garrison-based occupation of Normandy and surrounding regions, which was initially administered through the English Exchequer, hence producing materials now housed in TNA, and subsequently by the French chambre des comptes, whose archives remain largely in France, although some were purchased by the British Library and elsewhere).

The chosen period therefore offers a wide range as well as high incidence of military activity, all of which is well-documented. Indeed, it stands as the most highly militarised of the whole medieval period and is worthy of study for that reason alone, since the period was also one of considerable political upheaval. Yet it has also been suggested by Ayton and Keen that the periods of inactivity in overseas war (respectively 1360-69, 1389-1412) led to a demilitarisation of the English gentry. The period chosen also usefully avoids the customary divide of 1399 which has been applied in both military and political histories. It also permits a full study of the reign of Henry IV which is to date the 'missing link' and yet which initial research suggests saw the introduction of what became the English optimum ratio of one man-at-arms to three archers.

Curry's research into the English armies which conquered and occupied Normandy has focused largely on structures, events and civil-military relations, but she has transcribed the names of men-at-arms in all of the relevant armies and garrisons producing a database of over 40,000 service records. She included in her recent book on Agincourt a list of men-at-arms and archers on the campaign since over the years she has received many queries from genealogists on the subject. There is also considerable interest amongst historians of the period about the military careers of nobility and gentry since these link into political activity, and much information has already been supplied to the History of Parliament's ongoing project on fifteenth-century MPs as well as to those working on particular families and regions, and to the NewDNB. Bell's work on the armies of 1387-88 (founded on a database of 10,000

names), which included all kinds of troops and which explored their vertical and horizontal links in a comprehensive fashion, has shown the huge potential of this fuller approach.

Definite conclusions on the late medieval soldier, whether commander, man-at-arms or archer, cannot be drawn without a complete and systematic study which is based on as large a sample as possible, including all military contexts on land and sea, and over a long enough time span to illustrate changes and continuities. This can only be effected by a team project which combines the considerable expertise of Curry and Bell in the military history and documents of the period with the technical prowess of Bell, and with the inputs of Research Assistants and a Project Student who will be young medieval historians who will gain considerable experience from their involvement not only technical in terms of data collection but also academic in their knowledge of sources and their role in assisting in the analysis and writing up. We have budgeted for the RAs to deliver paper(s) at Leeds Medieval Congress in Year 3.

The outcomes of the project will be of immense interest and value to late medieval historians since the issues of clientage, social mobility and political loyalties are central to current debates, But they will also excite a popular audience fascinated (as Curry can testify from the response to her Agincourt work) by military history and by the possibility of tracing their ancestors.

Research methods

The project utilises a tried and tested research methodology already developed by Bell for the analysis of the medieval military community. This focuses upon the design, creation, population and then analysis of a relational database using Microsoft Access. The value of this technique has been demonstrated by Ayton in his work on earlier armies.

Once the design of the database has been formalised by the whole team, the existing databases of Bell and Curry will be integrated. These cover the entire personnel of the armies of 1387-88 as well as the men-at-arms serving in expeditions to and garrisons in Normandy between 1415-1450. The RAs will then begin the collection of data on all other land and naval expeditions (soldiers only, not mariners) and all garrisons in England and overseas. In addition, the relational database will record details of the size and composition of retinues and armies as a whole, thereby facilitating analysis of changes in ratios, numbers of retinues etc. In addition to names derived from musters and other records emanating from the financial administration of the armies, the RAs will also collect names and information from the enrolled letters of protection and appointments of attorney surviving on the Treaty Rolls (C76). These add much supporting material, such as occupations and locales of soldiers. In addition the Supplementary Patent Rolls (C67) contain lists of those taking royal pardons in connection with campaigns. The project will verify whether this practice diminished as the fifteenth century progressed.

For each soldier the RAs will enter information in set fields which include title, first name, last name, date, retinue leader, military rank, function and place of service, annotations. The database will enable us to keep an exact record of an individual's service as transcribed from the muster rolls and other sources. We will be able to

quickly search for individuals and, using the process of record linkage, build up career profiles and track movements between or continuance of service within retinues, geographical areas and types of military activity.

This can be done without the need to locate any supplementary information, However, for those of higher status or with proven personal and regional connections the RA will be guided to seek out further leads in the accessible printed sources such as the Chancery enrolments and Inquisitions post mortem, and from access to the Ancient petitions project at York and the Poll Tax data collected by Fenwick. Searches will also be made in the income tax of 1436 (E179, E359) and information from the testimonies before the Court of Chivalry will also be fed in. There is a wealth of relevant secondary published material such as the Victoria County History, the History of Parliament 1386-1422, visitation records, and monograph studies on individual peers and regions.

The scale of this project is ambitious with its aim of creating one central resource for the study of the soldier during this period. The size of the proposed undertaking justifies our plan to employ two RAs for the whole length of the project. A will have primary responsibility for 1369-1399 and will work with Bell, B for 1413-1453, working with Curry. The RAs will share the responsibility for 1399-1413.

The data entry will be done directly into the database using two Laptop PCs, one for each RA, with DVD burners to facilitate back-up. We will purchase a digital camera for the RAs to capture images of documents in TNA to transcribe later at their work base. RA A will spend six months at TNA in year 1 and three months in year 2. RA B will spend five months in year 1 between TNA and the BL, and three months at TNA in year 2, as well as three months in Paris, Caen and Rouen in year 1 in order to collect the names of archers in the 15th C Norman garrisons from musters held in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Archives Nationales and Archives Départementales. Since Professor Curry has already collected the names of men-at-arms, it was discovered to be more economical to have the RA go to France than to purchase microfilms. Photocopies of the few relevant materials held in other locations in France and elsewhere will be purchased.

Project management

The role of the project investigators will be to firstly orientate the two RAs, both to the project and the subject, and to the archive materials. Dr Bell will have responsibility for RA A (employed at The University of Reading) and Professor Curry for RA B (employed at the University of Southampton). The project investigators will also be jointly responsible for the analysis of the database and writing up of the research outputs, in liaison with the RAs. Dr Bell will be Project Manager, responsible for the design, build and transfer of existing data into the project database; the instruction of the RAs and research student, and production of guidance notes regarding the data entry; and the monitoring of milestones – regarding both data entry, analysis and the production of the research outputs. The data collection of the RAs will be sampled by the Principal Investigator who will spend one day per month at the archives checking the RAs' data entry against the sources.

The timetable of milestones for the project are based on the experience of both investigators with the collection of muster roll and other nominal source material and entry into a database on their own pilot projects. In addition, the project manager has just successfully completed a one year ESRC-funded study (rated Good) with a similar need for a structured timetable for the collection and analysis of original sources.

Orientation with the sources: 1 October–30 November 2006
Database design: 1-31 October 2006
Integration of existing data held by investigators: 1–30 November 2006
Data Entry of muster rolls, protections and pardons: 1 November 2006-31 October 2007
Data Entry of supporting sources: 1 November 2007–31 October 2008
Interrogation of database: 1 November 2007–31 October 2008
Production of outputs: 1 November 2008–30 September 2009
Online Resource Production: 1 November 2008–30 September 2009
Submission of resource to AHDS: 1–30 September 2009

Regular meetings of the whole team will ensure consistency of collection and reporting of problems. At the start of the project, weekly meetings will be held. Once the methodology has been established and training undertaken, meetings will be held at least termly. RAs will be expected to report regularly by email to the Project Manager.

In addition, there will be a six monthly meeting of the Management Board to ensure that appropriate progress is being made and that milestones are being met. This will consist of the full project team, plus two external members from the Universities of Reading and Southampton (for whom travel expenses has been included in the budget).

Publication and dissemination

A number of outputs will be produced. The electronic resources will be completed and disseminated by the end of the project, and the printed items within a year of its end.

1) a relational database (using Microsoft Access) including the names and service records of all soldiers serving in the pay of the crown 1369-1453, and details of the composition and size of all armies during this period.

2) an alphabetical list of soldiers by surname with full service details.

3) the creation of a web-based publicly searchable resource of the alphabetical listing of soldiers. This will be of great value to genealogists and family historians, as well as historians of this period. It will be hosted on the dedicated web server at the ICMA Centre at Reading where there is technical expertise to support this kind of digital resource. We have budgeted additional technical support for the creation of this online facility.

4) To share our findings with those working in similar fields we will offer a one-day workshop in Year 3 to explain and discuss the created resource and to disseminate good practice in this area of research.

5) To disseminate our findings to an academic audience we will produce a team-authored book, entitled The Soldier in later medieval England which will be an in-depth analysis covering all of the themes investigated in the project.

6) For the same audience we will submit an article to a top ranking refereed journal.

7) We also plan to offer a number of conference and seminar papers to the medieval studies community.

8) To appeal to non specialists we will write an article for a popular historical magazine, such as History Today, make presentations to local and family history groups and to publicise our resource in their newsletters.