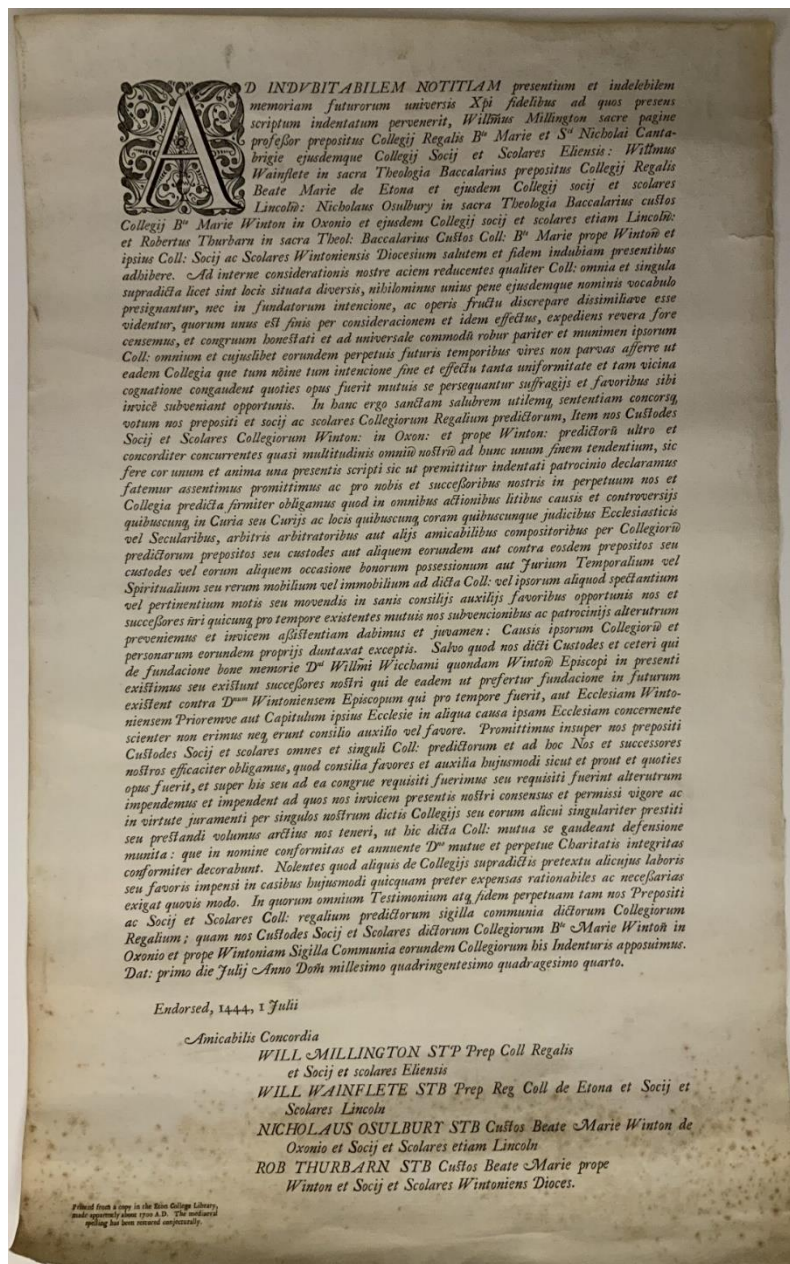


Amicabilis Concordia 1444–2024

The Amicabilis Concordia, or friendship agreement, is a document renowned these days perhaps especially for the evensongs occasionally held in its name by four colleges dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary; that is New College, Oxford, King's College, Cambridge, Eton College, and Winchester College. The Concordia was sealed on 1 July 1444 as a quadripartite indenture. It is a somewhat elusive document as none of the four parties appears to have retained their copy, assuming that each received one. Its text is now known from a transcript made around 1700 in Eton College, and published in 1852 in Mackenzie Walcott's *William of Wykeham and his Colleges*. It is worth perhaps exploring a little more how the agreement came about, what it signifies, its subsequent application, and the surviving documentation surviving of it and generated as a result of it.



Transcript of the original Concordia printed c. 1700

New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 2845

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With no surviving original, it is hard to be certain as to quite what the original document might have looked like. As an indenture, it is likely to have been written on a single sheet of parchment, with an indented or zig-zag head, with the seals of the four institutions on parchment tags appended through slits in a turnup at the foot of the document. Each institution should have had a copy, with each one looking pretty much the same. The transcribed text begins with a statement as to what the document is, then that it is for everyone, and then whom it is from, naming the heads of house and the corporate title of each. New College heads the list—in the form of Warden Nicholas Osulbury—followed by Winchester College, King’s College, and Eton College. This could also just reflect the fact that New College (1379) and Winchester College (1382) are rather older foundations than King’s College (1441) and Eton College (1440). There is then some rationale for what they are agreeing to, in that they share a common dedication—St Mary the Virgin—and, albeit they are in different locations, a commonality of purpose and of their founders’ intent. Thereby, they agree reciprocally to help each other, especially in lawsuits—lay and ecclesiastical—to defend their properties and their rights, both of the colleges and of their members. The influence of William of Wykeham in all their foundations is then acknowledged by a caveat that for his sake they will not thereby assist against the bishop, [cathedral] church, or prior and chapter of Winchester. A statement of mutual assistance follows, which will be incumbent on their successors, followed by the sealing and dating clauses. The dating clause has no place date, so it is difficult to discern at which, if any, of the four institutions, this might have been originally drawn up.¹

As to the context for the Concordia, it would seem to be part of the setting up and initial development of Henry VI’s associated foundations of Eton College and King’s College. By 1444, both were under way but were still very much developing. King’s College was still on its initial relatively small site which Henry VI would look to expand considerably in the next few years. He would also look to bring its establishment up from an initial 12 scholars to the New College model of 70. As Wykeham had done for New College with the then popes Urban VI and Boniface IX, Henry would also secure a number (nine) of confirmatory bulls from Pope Eugenius IV to secure his college’s rights and privileges.² The Concordia can be seen as one more element in this protective network for Henry VI’s nascent college of King’s. The hand of William Waynflete, formerly of Winchester College and by 1444 provost of Eton College, has also been seen in the Concordia, alongside his fellow Wykehamists Thomas Beckington (the king’s secretary since 1437) and Richard Andrew. They were preparing statutes for Eton College and King’s College, based on Wykeham’s for his similar twin foundations, and the Concordia fits into this effort to model Eton and King’s on, and link them with, New College and Winchester College.³

Another factor may have been the then (1444) bishop of Winchester, Cardinal Henry Beaufort. One of the kingdom’s then most eminent prelates and a major financier of the crown, his influence was waning by 1444, with his last appearance at the king’s council being in May.⁴ Beaufort had succeeded Wykeham as bishop of Winchester in 1404 and the clause in the Concordia about the bishop etc of Winchester, and indeed the whole Concordia, may have been an attempt to provide some sort of protection for his see and his successors against such as the rising political star of William de la Pole earl of Suffolk. Beaufort also had a role in the Concordia

¹ The printed text is to be found in Mackenzie E. C. Walcott, *William of Wykeham and his Colleges* (Winchester: David Nutt, 1852), pp. 141–3; New College’s copy of Eton College’s printed facsimile is New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 2845, and a c. 1700 further manuscript transcript is NCA 1191.

² John Saltmarsh, *King’s College: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 2–3. Hastings Rashdall and Robert S. Rait, *New College* (London: F. E. Robinson, 1901), pp. 30–32 lists and discusses Boniface’s 13 various supporting bulls secured by Wykeham.

³ R. L. Storey, ‘The Foundation and the Medieval College, 1379–1530’, in *New College Oxford 1379–1979*, ed. John Buxton and Penry Williams (Oxford: The Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford, 1979), p. 20; H. C. Maxwell-Lyte, *A History of Eton College 1440–1875*, rev. ed. (London: Macmillan, 1889), pp. 22–3, 346–7; Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI: The Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422–1461* (London: Benn, 1981), pp. 242–8.

⁴ G. L. Harriss, *Cardinal Beaufort A Study of Lancastrian Ascendancy and Decline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 359.

as the patron of William Waynflete, whom he had appointed to the mastership of the Hospital of St Mary Magdalen in Winchester in 1438. Waynflete would even go on to succeed Beaufort as bishop of Winchester in 1447, and to emulate Wykeham in founding an Oxford college—Magdalen in 1458.⁵ Beaufort may also have been mindful of his episcopal predecessor's foundations of New College and Winchester and his relative lack of endowment of them. He may thus have been keen to provide something of a legacy which might smooth their existence in the uncertain political times of his last years, when he was also supporting his particular interest of St Cross Hospital.⁶

The Concordia is also somewhat symptomatic of its time. As well as political uncertainties at home, there was the military situation in France which was exacerbating political tensions in England. The Concordia was being drawn up at about the time that the earl of Suffolk was negotiating Henry VI's marriage to Margaret of Anjou and a truce with the French (to last until 1 April 1446), as English fortunes declined in France. It may have been mere coincidence that this truce was to start on 1 July 1444, the date of the Concordia's sealing.⁷ Furthermore, the form of the Concordia, with its formal mutual provision of 'maintenance' and each party helping the other, has something of the sense of contemporary contracts between lords and retainers.⁸

Whatever the need for the Concordia, or the background to it, and the rationale behind it, it has to be said that it has subsequently left little trace in the archives of New College, for all but 500 years. Henry VI continued seemingly to derive inspiration from Wykeham's foundations for his own buildings at King's College and Eton College: the former was to have a detached cloister and bell tower to the west and the latter was to have a choir with only a foot variance from New College's plan.⁹ Various members of Eton College, including the Provost William Say, were provided with hospitality at New College in September 1445, and similarly fellows, and on one occasion choristers, from King's College similarly appear in the New College accounts in the late 1440s.¹⁰ Formal recourse to or invoking of the Concordia does not seem to have been recorded. Much may have gone on by way of informal support and assistance, and there are occasional hints at this. In the archives at King's College is a 1631 copy of New College's statutes along with an account of the 1666/7 visitation of New College by the bishop of Winchester.¹¹

It is not until around 1900 that there is far more evidence of more general interaction between the four institutions. Actually, it is more usually between the two university colleges—New College and King's College—and sometimes the two schools—Eton College and Winchester College—and only occasionally all four together. Also, it is general interaction that features rather than the support in law suits specified in the Concordia. This interaction has often taken the form of joint sporting fixtures between New College and King's College, whose legacy has been photographs of the two teams and menus for the subsequent dinners. These survive for rugby, football, athletics, and tennis fixtures, though perhaps curiously no joint rowing contests seem to have occurred.¹²

⁵ *A History of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight: Volume Two* (Victoria History of the Counties of England), ed. H. Arthur Doubleday (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1903), p. 200; Virginia Davis, 'Waynflete [Wainflet, Patten], William (c. 1400–1486)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (24 October 2019) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28907>> (Accessed: 1 April 2024).

⁶ Harriss, *Cardinal Beaufort*, pp. 373–4.

⁷ Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), p. 176.

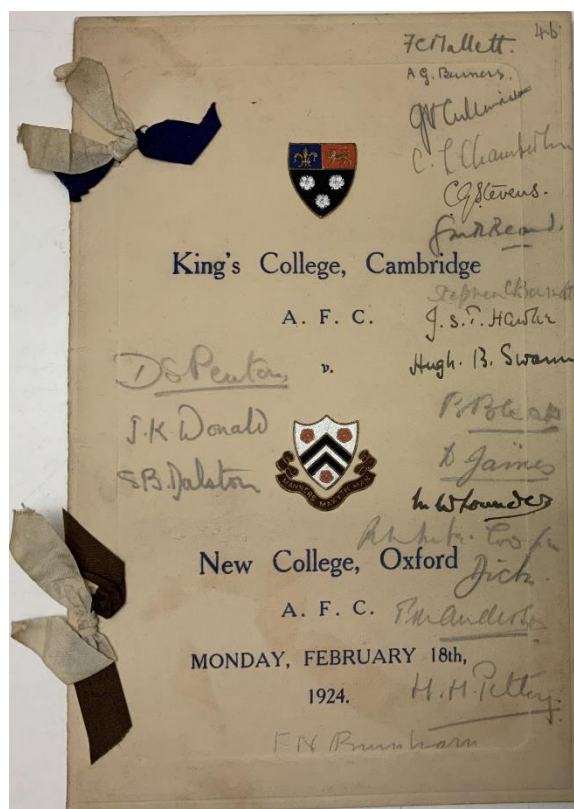
⁸ Storey, 'Foundation and the Medieval College', p. 20, and see such as K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 102–121 and J. G. Bellamy, *Bastard Feudalism and the Law* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 79–101 on maintenance more generally, and John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 180–99 on the general political situation at this time.

⁹ Gervase Jackson-Stops, 'The Building of the Medieval College', in *New College Oxford*, ed. Buxton and Williams, pp. 189–90.

¹⁰ NCA 7409–7411 (bursars' account rolls).

¹¹ King's College Archives, Cambridge, KCAR/3/2/1/4, KCV/37.

¹² Rugby: NCA JCR/P11/3, NCA JCR/L2/8/4, King's College Archives, Cambridge, KCAC/1/3/6/4/3, KCAS/26/2/1–2, SC/Chatterjee/1 (1903, 1910, 1926, 1927, 1939). Football: NCA JCR/R/Fell/5, NCA



The signed and beribboned menu for the dinner after the King's College versus New College football 1924
New College Archives, Oxford, NCA JCR/R/Mallett/4b

As well as student sporting exchanges, there was a suggestion in 1931 at New College that a more formal exchange of common room rights with King's might be discussed; a committee was duly appointed.¹³ Nothing seems to have come of this initiative which was perhaps looking to enhance the social exchange already taking place between King's College and New College with members attending formal celebrations at each other's locations.¹⁴ The initiative was revived in 1974/5 when there was again discussion between the two colleges about reciprocal rights for their senior members. Neither seemed to be being particularly generous though in suggesting that visiting fellows from the other institution would have to pay for meals. There was also discussion about taking such reciprocity to the level of junior members with discussions about such as access to the other's library. A sticking point for New College was that by then King's College was co-residential, and New College would be 'unable to extend the same hospitality to King's women'; that bar would be removed in 1979 when New College also became mixed.¹⁵

That the Amicabilis Concordia was very much still in mind in these years became particularly clear in 1944 when it was formally affirmed by all four institutions. The Second World War had already not deterred New College from at least drafting a letter of congratulation to King's College on its 500th anniversary in 1941,¹⁶ and this was enhanced when the similar 500th anniversary of the Concordia arose three years later. The Provost of Eton seems to have been the first to spot the anniversary as his letter reminding New College of this was reported at the Warden

JCR/R/Mallett/4, NCA JCR/R/Darlow (1919, 1921, 1922, 1924 (on two separate occasions). Athletics: NCA JCR/L2/B2 (1928). Tennis: NCA JCR/R/Parsons/1 (1930).

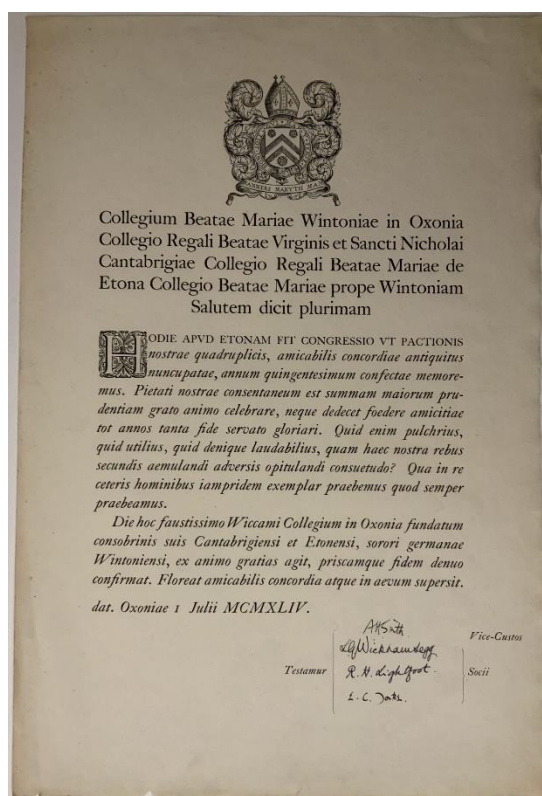
¹³ NCA 9645, p. 124.

¹⁴ The menu cover for the 1906 Founder's Commemoration at New College features the arms of actually all four institutions: NCA JCR/R/Phipps/1/14. Arrangements for New College's attendance at King's were being discussed in 1936: NCA 9646, p. 74.

¹⁵ NCA ACA 1/97.

¹⁶ Noted at the 21 November 1941 Warden and Fellows meeting, NCA MIN/W&F8, p. 199.

and Fellows meeting of 10 May 1944. The sub-warden was to reply suggesting a ‘small luncheon or dinner’ which New College might host as ‘the senior foundation’. The sub-warden (then Alic Smith) duly carried this out, and even invited all three institutions.¹⁷ Discussions evidently moved on as each institution actually produced an affirmation of the Concordia, addressed to the other three, signed and/or sealed as appropriate, exactly 500 years on from the original. They all reaffirmed the principles and aims of the original Concordia in the hope that it should continue in perpetuity. The *New College Record* details that this happened, indeed at a luncheon, but one held at Eton rather than New College, as also mentioned in New College’s affirmation. All four affirmations are held in New College’s archive. Their texts, in Latin, are all different, as evinced by their dating clauses. New College has a modest ‘1 Julii MCMXLIV’ in the only printed text of the four; Winchester’s is a little more expansive, being dated ‘Primo die Julii MCMXLIII’; Eton’s affirmation is dated as the Vigil of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary AD MCMXLIV; that of King’s College is perhaps dated the most obtusely as being ‘Kal[ens] Iul[i] a[postolice] s[edis] MCMXLIV’. In honour of the occasion, New College also appointed the Warden of Winchester and the Provosts of Eton and King’s College as honorary fellows.¹⁸



New College’s 1944 affirmation of the Concordia
New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 3117/1

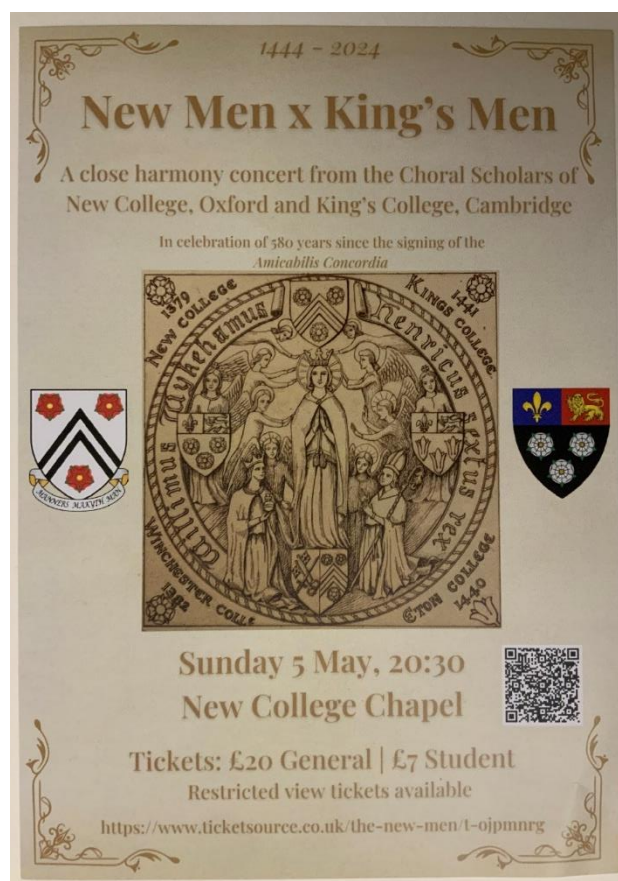
Thereafter, the Concordia seems to have been most effected in musical joint enterprises. A joint evensong of all four choirs was held to celebrate the affirmation in Eton in 1944, and there have been similar such joint performances at intervals since (ones have been held at New College in 1962 and 2014).¹⁹ There was also a major concert in 1994 to celebrate the 550th anniversary of

¹⁷ Winchester College Archives, Domus I, Ae, letter dated 22 May 1944.

¹⁸ NCA MIN/W&F8, p. 247; NCA 3117/1–4; *New College Record 1943–1944* (Oxford: New College, 1944), pp. 4–5, which also prints the text of New College’s affirmation. Copies of all four affirmations are also held in for instance Eton College Archives: COLL PF 06 05–08.

¹⁹ Service papers at NCA CH/B/5 (1962 & 2014), Eton College Archives COLL P 07 05 and PF 06 11 (1944 & 2005), King’s College Archives, Cambridge, KCAR/8/3/21/44–45 (1972/3 & 1991/2)

the Concordia involving all four choirs, with also a dinner in New College. Logistically, organising all four choirs in one location has not been easy, and this concert had to be held on 22 April rather than the ideal date of 1 July which should perhaps have been feasible as it was a Friday. Warden MacGregor acknowledged that hitting the actual anniversary had been his intention but that a ten-week lead-in time was probably what the original Concordia had had anyway. The programme for the concert comprised choral pieces reflecting roughly the eras of 1444, or at least since 1444, and 1994.²⁰ So organising just two choirs in one location has been more manageable. Thus New College and King's College have cooperated most recently in such as a performance in King's College Chapel of Haydn's *The Creation* on 3 November 2023 by the two choirs and a concert in New College Chapel by the two back rows (groups known respectively as the New Men and the King's Men) on 5 May 2024.²¹ This last concert even promoted in its publicity that it was a celebration of the 580th anniversary of the Concordia and utilised an image of the 1906 Founder's Commemoration featuring all 4 institutions. Indeed, this piece itself has even been prompted by a visit to New College on 1 March 2024 from the King's College Middle Common Room when some of the material discussed here was displayed. Such interchange and cooperation were very much the idea of the original Concordia and is testimony to its enduring legacy.



Publicity for the New Men and King's Men concert on 5 May 2024
New College Archives, Oxford, NCA CH/K11/1

Michael Stansfield
Archivist & Records Manager
New College, Oxford

²⁰ NCA CH/H6.

²¹ NCA CH/H6; NCA CH/K11.