A great strength of the John Rylands Library is its comprehensive collection of bibles, in numerous versions and languages, in both manuscript and printed form. The approximately 10,000 volumes in the Bible Collection contain printed editions in more than 400 different languages and dialects from the mid-fifteenth century to the present day. In addition, there are several important original manuscripts of both the Septuagint and the Vulgate from the late classical to the late medieval periods as well as facsimiles of many other biblical manuscripts in other libraries. Not only does such a large collection give a chronological depth of coverage in this area of study but also an opportunity for the collation of texts within and between different languages. For the study of the medieval English Bible, the Rylands conserves a number of important items, a selection of which was displayed on the occasion of Professor Godden's keynote lecture at the Second G.L. Brook Symposium, delivered at the John Rylands Library, Deansgate on the evening of 31 March 1993. A general description of the Library's holdings in this area, illustrated by photographs of parts of a few of the exhibited items, is given here in order to show their continuing relevance to researchers on the topic of the papers in the present collection.

Although the Library does not own any manuscripts of Old English texts of the Bible, it possesses a full set of the Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile series which includes monochrome photographic reproductions of the Nowell Codex (including *Judith*), the Paris Psalter, the Vespasian Psalter, the Old English Illustrated Hexateuch, the Vercelli Book, and of various manuscripts

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1 Clive Field with Judith Shiel, *Theology and church history: a guide to research resources in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* (Manchester: JRULM, 1990) is a useful summary guide for all periods. For a list of the published catalogues and handlists of early western manuscripts in the Rylands, see 12-13 therein.

2 The following items were included in the exhibition: English MSS 77, 79-82, 85, 88, 90-2, 98, 113; Latin MSS 19, 140, 352; early printed books R4549, 4582, 4591.
containing Caedmon's Hymn and other short religious texts.\textsuperscript{3} The important facsimiles of the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Exeter Book and the Junius Manuscript are also present.\textsuperscript{4} There is a good range of printed editions of Old English biblical texts, from the mid sixteenth-century onwards, together with more modern monographs and periodicals.

For the Middle English period, the Rylands preserves several original manuscripts relevant to the study of vernacular biblical text and commentary. The largest group of these consists of fourteen manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible, ten containing parts of the New Testament and four containing books of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{5} Nearly all of these are of the Later Version of the Wycliffite Bible (completed between 1395 and 1397), but one manuscript containing the New Testament (English 81) and perhaps a manuscript containing the Apocalypse (English 92) are of the Earlier Version (translated by 1383).\textsuperscript{6} The text of parts of Earlier and Later Versions, as represented by specific manuscripts, can be compared within the Rylands collection; thus, for instance English 81 (Earlier Version) has 'sente oute be spirit or diede' for the Vulgate's expiravit at Luke 23:46, but English 79 (Later Version) has '3af up be gost', a reading followed by 'gave up the ghost' of both William Tyndale and the Authorized Version (see figs 5 and 6). One Old Testament manuscript (English 89) and a manuscript containing Acts (English 84) are of mixed versions\textsuperscript{7} and their sections of the Earlier Version may also be used for comparison with the Later Version. Eleven of these biblical codices (English 75–84, 92), together with two manuscripts of Middle English tracts

\textsuperscript{3} In progress (Copenhagen and Baltimore: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1951–); particularly vols 8, 12, 14, 18–19, 23.


\textsuperscript{7} Lindberg, 'The manuscripts and Versions', 336–7.
Figure 5

JRULM, English MS 81, fo. 55r (s. xiv/xv): Luke 23–4 in the Earlier Version of the Wycliffite Bible. Alternative translations of words are underlined in red in the manuscript. Luke 23: 46 (see p. 206) is in column 1, line 22. Cf. Figure 6.
Figure 6

JRULM. English MS 79, fo. 88r (s. xv in.): Luke 23-4 in the Later Version of the Wycliffite Bible. Luke 23: 46 (see p. 206) is in column 1, line 13. Cf. Figure 5.
and one containing *Pore Caitiff* (now English 85-7), formerly belonged to the earl of Ashburnham.\(^8\) They were purchased by Mrs Rylands in 1897 for £1,260 from the London dealer Henry Southeran.\(^9\) One of the other manuscripts, containing the Wycliffite Gospels (English 3), was purchased in 1901 as part of the Crawford collection, while two others (English 88-9), both Old Testament texts, were acquired in 1908.\(^10\) A further Middle English biblical manuscript (English 895), which includes the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, was purchased in 1937. English 902 is a nineteenth-century transcript of English 81, made by Lea Wilson for his 1848 edition of the latter.\(^11\)

Besides the Ashburnham one, the Rylands also owns a second manuscript of *Pore Caitiff* (English 412). Other Middle English religious manuscripts include three of *The Prick of Conscience* (English 50-1, 90), and three of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the life of Christ* (English 94, 98, 413; for the second, see fig. 7).

Earlier provenances of five of the above manuscripts are of some interest. Two of the Wycliffite bibles (English 82 and 85) belonged by 1786 to the church of St Martin in the Fields, outside the city of London. English 92, an Apocalypse with commentary, belonged to the Kentish antiquary Sir Edward Dering (died 1644) and still has its seventeenth-century binding displaying his coat of arms. English 81 was given in 1517 by Dame Anne Danvers to the Bridgettine house at Syon, Middlesex. English 90, a manuscript of *The Prick of Conscience*, seems to have been in the town of St Albans, Hertfordshire, c.1500.\(^12\)

The above manuscripts are datable from the later fourteenth to the mid fifteenth-century. The only precisely dated writing in any of them is that on fos 253v-271v, the Apocalypse, within the Wycliffite New Testament now English 80. This is dated to 1444 by a scribal colophon on fo. 271r: ‘Here endi p e Apocalypse. Anno. domini. M°. ccc<><>0. xliii°.’

The Apocalypse, or Revelation of John, is one biblical book in particular which lends itself, as a text full of symbolic visionary images, to explanatory comment and pictorial illustration. It is one on which fruitful comparative work may be undertaken between Vulgate texts, the two versions of the Wycliffite Bible and illustrated


\(^9\) JRULM, Invoices, p. 185: 11 October 1897.

\(^10\) It is not known when English 91 was acquired by the Rylands.


\(^12\) This is based on the addition (c.1500) to fo. 1v of the names of three witnesses from St Albans, see Ker, *Medieval manuscripts*, 413.
Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the life of Christ*, chapters 24-5. Chapter 25 explains the first part of the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes. The artist of the border decoration has signed his name (Robertus) in the lower margin.
medieval manuscripts. A very cursory comparison of the Middle English text and commentary in English 92 with one of the pictures and Vulgate text in Latin 19, a fourteenth-century illustrated Apocalypse, may serve as an example. The illustration on fo. 8v of Latin 19 (with text accipe librum et deuora illum from Revelation 10:9) is shown as Figure 8. The text of the Apocalypse (Revelation 10:2-11) from English 92 (fos 16v–17r) reads as follows (see also fig. 9):

\[\begin{align*}
\text{C} & \text{ And be aungil } \hat{\text{a}} \text{ t I s} \text{is stood on } \text{b} \text{e see. and on } \text{b} \text{e er} \text{p} \text{e. and lifte up his hond into heuene. and s} \text{woor bi him } \hat{\text{a}} \text{ t lyueb wi} \text{bouten ende. } \hat{\text{a}} \text{ t made heuene and er} \text{p} \text{e. and see. and al } \hat{\text{a}} \text{ t } \text{p} \text{erynne is. } \hat{\text{a}} \text{ t } \text{b} \text{e tyme schal la} \text{t} \text{e no lengir. but to } \text{b} \text{e tyme of } \text{b} \text{e vij. aungil } \hat{\text{a}} \text{ t he begynne to trumpe. schal be endid } \text{b} \text{e preuytees of } \text{G} \text{od. as he haj} \text{) prechid } \text{b} \text{orus hise profetis and hiseruauantis/ } \text{A} \text{n}\text{d } \text{b} \text{e voice } \hat{\text{a}} \text{t is herd from heuene eft spak to } \text{m} \text{e and seide/ Go and tak}\text{e } \text{b} \text{ook } \hat{\text{a}} \text{t is open of } \text{b} \text{e aungelis hond } \hat{\text{a}} \text{t stondi} \text{p on } \text{b} \text{e see. and upon } \text{b} \text{e er} \text{p} \text{e And I wente to } \text{b} \text{e aungil and seide to } \text{him: } \hat{\text{a}} \text{t he schulde seue me } \text{b} \text{e book/ } \text{A} \text{n}\text{d } \text{b} \text{e seide to me/ } \text{T} \text{ake } \text{b} \text{e book and deuoure it. and it schal make } \text{b} \text{i wombe bittir'. but in } \text{b} \text{i mou} \text{b} \text{i schal be swete as hon} \text{y/ And I took } \text{b} \text{e book of } \text{b} \text{e aungils hond and deuouride it.' and it was in my mou} \text{b} \text{as swete hon} \text{y/ And whanne I hadde deuourid it'/ my wombe was bittir/ And he seide to me/ It bhoue} \text{b} \text{ee eftsone to profesie to he} \text{p} \text{ene men/ and to peplis and langages and to manye kingis/}
\end{align*}\]

Part of the commentary on this text from the same manuscript reads:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{C } \text{b} \text{e book open } \hat{\text{a}} \text{t } \text{b} \text{e aungil held in his hond. bitokeneb hem } \hat{\text{a}} \text{t desiren } \text{b} \text{e vndirstondinge of holy writ and takib it': } \text{G} \text{od comaundib hem } \hat{\text{a}} \text{t } \text{h} \text{ei do it in werk'. } \hat{\text{C}} \text{ } \text{b} \text{at } \text{b} \text{e book was swete in his mou} \text{b} \text{ and bittir in his wombe. bitokeneb } \hat{\text{a}} \text{t Goddis word is plesaunt to man for to heere it. and to rede it and to preche it': but it is ful hard to do in werk/}
\end{align*}\]

The making of a detailed commentary in Middle English such as that in English 92 was a reflection of the deep knowledge of biblical exegesis based on Vulgate texts upon which the translation of the Bible by John Wyclif and his colleagues was founded. Any study of the Vulgate would also have been greatly helped by finding-aids such as Latin 352 (see fig. 10), a pocket-sized thirteenth-century concordance, this one perhaps from France, of the type known as concordancie minores. Each page contains sixty lines of writing arranged in seven columns. Each of the lemmata is referred to biblical book, chapter and lettered pericope within a text of the Vulgate.

13 M.R. James, The Apocalypse in art (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1931), 3 (no. 4), described Latin 19 as 'Flemish, copied from English archetype'
15 The French origin was suggested by N.R. Ker (JRU1.M, copy of unpublished catalogue entry).
Figure 9

JRULM, English MS 92, fo 17r (s. xiv/xv): Wycliffite Apocalypse with commentary. In column 1 the text of Revelation 10: 7–11 is underlined in red and is followed in column 2 by the commentary. See p. 211 and cf. Figure 8.
Figure 10

JRULM. Latin MS 352, fo. 10r (s. xiii): a pocket-sized concordance to the Vulgate. The end of the lemmata beginning with the letter E, the start of F
Figure 11

Figure 12
Besides Middle English manuscripts of the Bible itself, biblical commentaries, tracts and such overtly religious works as *Pore Caitiff*, *The Prick of Conscience* and the *Mirror of the life of Christ*, the Rylands owns at least one more strictly 'literary' manuscript in Middle English in which biblical quotations or allusions appear from time to time, often with a marginal indication of their presence. English 113 is a fifteenth-century manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, probably written by one John Brode its first owner. The 'Parson's Tale' is one location of many such biblical allusions (see fig. 11). Here again comparison could be made with the text of manuscripts of versions of the Wycliffite Bible within the Rylands collection.

The Rylands is world-famous for its collection of incunabula and one of these deserves particular mention in the present context. It is William Caxton's *The Golden Legend* (Westminster, 1483; R4591), his translation of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, the very popular thirteenth-century account of the lives of saints and biblical characters. A fine series of woodcuts illustrates the text (see fig. 12).

Besides the above medieval manuscripts and many important printed versions of the English Bible onwards from that of Miles Coverdale (Cologne or Marburg, 1535; R4582), the Rylands owns one modern facsimile edition which is itself something of a rarity. R4549 is a reproduction, printed on vellum and published in 1862, of the only example of William Tyndale's *New Testament* (Worms(?), 1526) definitely known to have been completed. The exemplar belonged to the Baptist College Library, Bristol until 1994, when it was purchased by the British Library, on the occasion of the quingentenary of the birth of Tyndale. While the latter's contribution to the making of the English Bible was justly celebrated in that year, the papers in the present collection, as also the relevant holdings of the Rylands which were partially represented by the associated exhibition, are witnesses to the earlier legacy we have received from the Anglo-Saxon and medieval workers in the same field, a legacy which is often under-estimated and upon which there remains much further work to be done.

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16 The whole text was written by a single scribe who also wrote the claim to ownership (*Iste liber constat Ioannam Brode junioris*) on fo. 194r. The same scribe wrote Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby MS 181, fos 1–53, which has the colophon *Explicit Edorb quod* on fo. 39r (*Edorb* being *Brode* in reverse); see Daniel W. Mosser, 'The scribe of Chaucer manuscripts Rylands English 113 and Bodleian Digby 181', *Manuscripta*, 34 (1990), 129–47; cf. John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The text of the Canterbury Tales studied on the basis of all the known manuscripts*, 1, *Descriptions of the manuscripts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 349–55.