

NEW LIGHT ON THE PROVENANCE OF A COPY OF
THE CANTERBURY TALES, JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY,
MS ENG.113

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John Rylands Library, MS Eng.113 is a copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and other Middle English verse pieces, dating from the last quarter of the fifteenth century.¹ The text of the *Canterbury Tales* and one other verse text were copied by the Johannes Brode, whose ownership inscriptions appear on fos 2r and 194r, whom Manly and Rickert identify with an individual living at Harberton, near Totnes, Devon.² The only other clue to the early origins of the manuscript is the name of the translator of the verses on fo. 4r–v, beginning 'Musyng alone voide of consolacion'. The translator's name is given as Henry Baradoun, although this individual is, apparently, otherwise unknown.³

The manuscript contains various names and pen-trials in sixteenth-century hands, including 'Robert Croke' (fo. 195r) and 'Thoma Jonsun' (fo. 2r),⁴ and, on fo. 196r, 'John Hull customer of Exceter and Dartmouthe', with other pen-trials and inscriptions of

¹ The manuscript is described by John Manly and Edith Rickert, *The text of the Canterbury Tales*, 8 vols (Chicago, 1940), I.349–55 and by N.R. Ker, *Medieval manuscripts in British libraries: III, Lampeter-Oxford* (Oxford, 1983), 420–1. Ker assigns the manuscript to the second half of the fifteenth century, whilst Manly and Rickert suggest 1483–85, on the basis of the presumed dating of the other texts. The hand of the same scribe in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 181 is assigned to the last quarter of the fifteenth century by M.B. Parkes, *English cursive book hands 1200–1500* (Oxford, 1969), 3.

² The inscriptions read: 'Iste liber Constat Johanni Brode Juniori' (fo. 194r) and 'Johannes Brode', 'Johannes Brode constat iste liber' (fo. 2r), Manly and Rickert, I.352; Ker, 421. Manly and Rickert and Ker both note that the hand is similar to that of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 181, fos 1–139, which ends with the words: 'Explicit Edorb quod'. The scribe of the Rylands and Digby manuscripts has been discussed most recently by Daniel Mosser, 'The scribe of Chaucer manuscripts Rylands English 113 and Bodleian Digby 181', *Manuscripta*, 34 (1990), 129–47. Mosser concludes that the same scribe copied fos 1r–53v of MS Digby 181 and fos 1r–195r of MS Eng.113 and he localizes the linguistic features of these sections of text to Warwickshire or possibly to Leicestershire or Staffordshire.

³ The verses are IMEV no. 2227, printed by F.J. Furnivall, *Political, religious and love poems*, Early English Text Society, O.S. 15 (London, 1866), 289–90. The explicit reads: 'Baradoun Henricus transtulit istud opus per semetipsum'.

⁴ Manly and Rickert, I.352.

this name, apparently in several different hands, on fos 1r, 2r, 194v, 195r, 196r, 196v.⁵ Several other names are associated with these additions in the manuscript, including John Cuttelar, William Lay and his wife Juliana, John Denys, and the place-name Daynton (possibly Deignton, Devon).⁶

Manly and Rickert identify John Hull with an individual of this name of Larkbeare, near Exeter, collector of customs between 1523 and 1547, who died in 1549. They sketch a set of family and other associations to explain the identities of the other individuals named in the various pen-trials and inscriptions.⁷ Manly and Rickert suggest that the manuscript was copied by John Brode in the later fifteenth century, possibly at Harberton, and that by the first half of the sixteenth century, the manuscript had come into the possession of John Hull and other members of his family.⁸ Beyond this, however, nothing was known to Manly and Rickert, nor to Ker, of the provenance of the manuscript until it came into the possession of Lawrence W. Hodson of Compton Hall, near Wolverhampton, whose paper label remains in the book. The manuscript was purchased from the booksellers Bernard Quaritch by the Rylands Library in 1910.⁹

A manuscript now in The Schoyen Collection, MS 1580, sheds new light on the provenance of John Rylands Library, MS Eng.113.¹⁰ The manuscript consists of a transcription of MS Eng.113, with some leaves copied in facsimile, by William James Pynwell. Pynwell describes himself, in a decorative cartouche on the opening leaf, dated 1847, as 'y^e clerke of Horley' and 'MA de Coll. SSS Trin. apud Cantab'. Pynwell matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge on 2 March 1820, graduating B.A. in 1824 and M.A. in 1828. He subsequently went to Oxford and then to the curacy of Horley with Hornton, Oxfordshire from 1849 to 1853, becoming

⁵ Manly and Rickert, I.352–53; Ker, 421.

⁶ Manly and Rickert, I.352–54.

⁷ Manly and Rickert, I.352–55.

⁸ Mosser's analysis of the language of MS Eng 113 and MS Digby 181 suggests a localization of the scribe's idiolect to Warwickshire or a more northerly county. If the Rylands manuscript was copied near Exeter, the scribe had, presumably, moved to that area from the Midlands, or perhaps the manuscript was taken from the Midlands to Devon very soon after its completion.

⁹ Manly and Rickert, I.355. Ker (421) notes that the manuscript was not in the Hodson sale at Sotheby's, 3 December 1906, and states that it was purchased by the Rylands Library from Bernard Quaritch on an invoice dated 24 May 1910. The Rylands manuscript did not appear in the sale catalogue of Hodson's library, which contained three other copies of the *Canterbury Tales*: Sotheby's, 3–5 December 1906, lots 115, 116 and 117, now London, British Library, MS Egerton 2863, MS Egerton 2864; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 249, respectively.

¹⁰ The correct form of reference is: Oslo and London, The Schoyen Collection, MS 1580. The manuscript was purchased from Simon Finch Rare Books, Catalogue 17 (1992), item 43.

vicar there from 1853 to 1878. He died on 10 September 1885, aged eighty-nine years.¹¹ A note on page 536 of the manuscript, at the end of the text of the *Canterbury Tales*, states that he began copying the work on 17 September 1846 and completed it on 29 January 1847. There are other signs that he added notes to his transcription at least until 1873.

The opening leaf, naming Pynwell, is followed by a full-page miniature of the standing figure of Chaucer. The next leaf is a title-page, 'The Canterbury Tales of Geoffrey Chaucer from a MS: of the XV Century', within a decorated border containing the arms of Chaucer and the Royal arms (France ancient quartering England). The first eight pages of the manuscript are taken up with a preface, dated 11 February 1847. In the preface Pynwell describes the circumstances of his discovery of the manuscript and discusses various aspects of its text, which he also collated with Urry and Tyrwhitt's editions of the *Canterbury Tales*.

The preface states that the book is a 'faithful transcript' of a fifteenth-century paper manuscript then owned by Revd Samuel Winter Pearse, vicar of Shaugh and Sampford Spinney, of Cadleigh House, near Ivybridge, Devon, about five miles east of Plympton. The preface states that the manuscript 'had been long' in Pearse's family. Pynwell also notes that an ownership inscription 'in a hand not later than the middle of the 17th century' on the outside of the manuscript, now apparently lost, stated that 'This book belongs to Mr Woolcombe of Pitton', referring to a member of the family who lived at Pitton, near Yealmpton, a little south of Plympton and Ivybridge.

In the preface Pynwell says that he had heard of Pearse's ownership of documents connected with the priory of Plympton St Mary, Devon, the house of Augustinian canons, founded in 909.¹² He recounts that when he visited he was first shown a Latin manuscript on vellum 'written in a set Court hand', measuring

¹¹ Pynwell, also spelled Pinwell, the son of Andrew Pinwell of Plymouth, was educated at Plympton, Devon, before going on to Cambridge. He is listed as a resident of Plymouth in the Clergy List of 1847-48, and, according to the note of the date of the transcription, it was at this time that he saw the Rylands manuscript in Devon. He became curate of Horley with Hornton in 1849, though he describes himself as 'clerk of Horley' on the first page of his transcript, with the date 1847. One must suppose this to have been added a few years later. Pynwell became chaplain to Lord Kingsale and died in retirement at Dawlish in 1885; J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigiensis: 1752-1900* (Cambridge, 1953), 131; Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxoniensis: 1715-1886* (Oxford, n.d.), 1119.

¹² George Oliver, *Monasticon diocesis Exoniensis* (Exeter, 1846), 129-50; William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 6 (London, 1846), 51-6; David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: England and Wales* (London, 1953), 170-1. The original collegiate foundation was dissolved in 1121 and re-founded by William Warelwast, Bishop of Exeter as a priory of regular canons. The prior and canons subscribed to the King's supremacy in 1534.

10.5" × 8", in a binding of oak boards covered with 'rough calf leather', apparently with traces of clasps and with five bosses on each board. The manuscript opened with a transcription of a document naming Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, which must have dated from between the time of the King's marriage to Catherine on 11 June 1509 and the annulment of the marriage on 23 May 1533 or the subsequent dissolving of the marriage by Act of Parliament in March 1534.

Pynwell's examination of this manuscript led him to think that it was not 'a Register of Acts or a collection of Rules for the guidance of the monks', but that it contained transcriptions of 'valuable legal documents'. Judging his own expertise to be wanting, he showed the manuscript to an acquaintance, Henry Woolcombe of Plymouth (coincidentally the same family name said to have been written on the covers of the Chaucer manuscript). Woolcombe concluded that the manuscript was 'a compilation of legal documents made and used in the reign of Henry 8th, consisting of writs, warrants, etc.'. Woolcombe also noted that the name 'Willelmus Godyng le puisne' was written on a flyleaf in a hand contemporary with the manuscript and that another flyleaf inscription, of later date, stated that the manuscript had been given to Philip Moulton by one Johannes Headonis. The spine or lower board was said to have the title 'L[iber] Catesby'. The Godyng inscription was transcribed in facsimile by Pynwell in the manuscript now in The Schoyen Collection, along with the inscriptions from the Rylands manuscript.

Pynwell recounts a Pearse family tradition that both this Latin manuscript, c.1509–33, and the copy of the *Canterbury Tales*, c.1475–1500, had belonged to the last prior of Plympton, John Howe, who was said to have bequeathed them to an ancestor of the Revd Pearse, even though the evidence that Pynwell, himself, cites would suggest that the Chaucer manuscript, at least, belonged first to a member of the Woolcombe family.¹³

The Latin manuscript does not appear to have been the lost cartulary of the Augustinian house of Plympton, attested only by notes taken from it in the seventeenth century by Richard James (1592–1638), but may have been a copy of documents connected with the dissolution of the house.¹⁴ It seems clear that this

¹³ The last prior, John Howe, succeeded 8 March 1522. At the Dissolution he retired to Exeter College, Oxford and was still alive in 1553; Dugdale, 52; Oliver, 132–3.

¹⁴ The only extant manuscript from the priory of Plympton known to N.R. Ker, *Medieval libraries of Great Britain*, second edition (London, 1964), is London, British Library, Additional MS 14250, a twelfth-century copy of Bede. Ker also cites the notes taken by Richard James from the lost cartulary in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS James 23, 151–70, which include details of books left by Robert, archdeacon of Totnes in the late twelfth

manuscript must have remained in the immediate area of Plympton after the Dissolution and passed through the hands of William Godyng, John Headon and Philip Moulton, until it came into the hands of an ancestor of the Revd Samuel Pearse, in whose possession Pynwell saw it in 1846. There is nothing in MS Eng.113 to confirm that it, too, originated in or was ever owned by the Augustinian priory of Plympton, despite Pynwell's suggestion of such a provenance.¹⁵ Nor do the names of any of the monks of Plympton granted pensions at the Dissolution agree with any of the names written in either manuscript.¹⁶ It is possible that the copy of the *Canterbury Tales* only later came into the same hands as the manuscript from the priory of Plympton.

Manly and Rickert connected the scribe of the copy of the *Canterbury Tales*, John Brode, with the village of Harberton, near Totnes, about fifteen miles from Plympton. They were similarly able to connect later, sixteenth-century owners with the same area of South Devon. Thereafter they were able to find no evidence of the manuscript's later provenance until its re-appearance in the early years of the present century.

The subsequent history of the manuscript may now be sketched from Pynwell's account of its provenance. From John Hull (d.1549) and his relatives and other associates, the manuscript had passed by the mid-seventeenth century into the hands of the family of Woolcombe of Pitton, whence it came finally to ancestors of the

century. James states (151) that his notes were taken from a book supplied by Sir John Eliot in 1627. Thomas Tanner, *Notitia Monastica*, ed. James Nasmith (Cambridge, 1787) includes four manuscripts in his list of sources for the history of the priory at Plympton: (i) A manuscript in the British Museum from the collection of Francis Peck, containing notes by John Howe on indulgences granted to those visiting the chapel at Plymbridge; (ii) The *Registrum Prioratus de Plimpton*; (iii) A rental, dated 9 Henry IV; (iv) London, British Library, MS Harley 862. It is not impossible that Tanner's item (ii), described as the *Registrum Prioratus de Plimpton*, is the Latin manuscript seen by Pynwell. G.R.C. Davis, *Medieval cartularies of Great Britain* (London, 1958), lists for Plympton (i) the untraced cartulary copied by James, said to have been copied by the prior, M. de Mimmiglonde, between 1305 and 1332, with fifteenth-century additions; (ii) London, British Library, MS Harley 6974, fos 28–30, being notes taken by Tanner in 1698, when the cartulary was in the possession of Bishop John Moore; (iii) London, British Library, MS Harley 4766, the rental dated 1408 (item (iii) in Tanner's list of manuscripts).

¹⁵ In view of Mosser's localization of the language of MS Eng 113 to Warwickshire or possibly Leicestershire or Staffordshire, it may be significant that at least one copy of the *Canterbury Tales* can be associated with an Augustinian house in Leicestershire. London, British Library, MS Harley 7333 is a copy of Chaucer and other contemporary verse pieces, derived from a manuscript annotated by John Shirley, apparently copied at the priory of St Mary de Pre, Leicester (Manly and Rickert, I.207–18).

¹⁶ Pensions were granted by the King's Commissioners on 1 March, 30 Henry VIII to the prior, John Howe, and eighteen others, as listed by Dugdale, 55 and Oliver, 150. Amongst the annuities granted by the last prior, John Howe, Oliver (p. 133) notes one to Sir Thomas Denys. A 'Morys Denys' and a 'John Denys' are amongst the names found in MS Eng.113, Manly and Rickert, I.353–4.

Revd Samuel Winter Pearse, in whose possession it was seen by Pynwell in 1846. A note dated June 1858 added by Pynwell in the margin on page 8, 'Mr Pearse is now aware of the value of his MS, he says he is told it is worth 50£, I should say 250£', may suggest that the vicar of Shaugh was already considering selling the manuscript. By whatever means it then came into the collection of Lawrence Hodson, and so to the Rylands Library.