MS Lansdowne 796 and a Late Fifteenth-Century Recurrent Scribe of Poetry

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In the 1970s, P. R. Robinson and Gisela Guddat-Figge observed a connection between two manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 326 and MS Rawl. poet. 34.[1] It is probable that they were formerly one manuscript. They are very close in size and they share one stock of paper (bearing a watermark of a crossbow formed from one line) among the several stocks from which they are constructed.[2] The same two scribes contribute to each manuscript. One of the two scribes in these manuscripts copies the romance *Amis and Amiloun* in MS Douce 326, folios 1r–13v, and a verse life of St. Margaret in MS Rawl. poet. 34, folios 1r–4r, each in two columns, the first with over forty lines per column, the second with nearly sixty. He models his handwriting on a style of anglicana typical in the last few decades of the 1400s in its splay and proportions. He writes with great currency, which allows his personal ductus to show through clearly. In 2024, Charlotte Ross and I observed in this journal that this scribe also contributed as the 'Scribe B' of a manuscript of Thomas Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes* and a manuscript of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. He copied the Hoccleve and Chaucer manuscripts along with two other scribes who recur in both books and two more who appear in *Troilus* only, one of the latter two using a style very similar to that of 'Scribe B'. The three and five scribes in those manuscripts of Hoccleve and Chaucer work in stints which alternate frequently, shift haphazardly or untidily, and on occasion overlay each other, one adding corrections or paratexts to pages by another, in ways which suggest that they worked in close proximity but not, or not primarily, as makers of books.[3]

As well as that copyist 'Scribe B' who has been identified in what are now four manuscripts, he had a collaborator who recurs in the two of them which were probably once joined, MS Douce 326 and MS Rawl. poet. 34. This collaborator in MS Douce 326, folios

14r–v, copied six rhyme royal stanzas in praise of Mary, in the idiom of a courtly love epistle ("Goe lytyll byll *and* doe me reco*m*mende").[4] In MS Rawl. poet. 34, folios 4v–17v, 18v–20r, he copied seven longer poems, including the romance *Sir Degare*, poems on saints, a carol about a "galaw*n*t" spending his inheritance on fashionable fripperies, and another poem in praise of Mary in rhyme royal, of which the final stanza has some lines very close to those in MS Douce 326 (e.g., "Go lytill balett and doe me reco*m*mende").[5] At least one leaf has been lost from the middle of his stint in this MS Rawl. poet. 34.[6] In this manuscript he also, below a colophon for *Sir Degare*, wrote the name "Iohn bygge" and then what looks like "I" again followed by a zigzag or four or five very current minims and a flourish perhaps of abbreviation, such as "Iohn bygge Iuni*or*" or similar.[7] Guddat-Figge suggested that John Bygge was the scribe's name.[8] It is not clear that this inscription is a scribal identification, and identifying a common, short name is difficult. There were several men called John Bygge in the second half of the 1400s, identified in documents, living in Benenden, Kent; Stortford, Hertfordshire; Kyngeston, Berkshire; Gloucestershire; Canterbury, Kent—the mayor in 1473–5, indeed, a person who might well be interested in trade regulations in one of Bygge's manuscripts (identified below); London; and Surrey.[9]

While John Bygge has not yet been identified, something can be said more speculatively of this copyist's skill in writing. Though the second of his stints is long, the appearance of his stints might suggest that they were later additions to a book by somebody copying for himself or his close associates, rather than for money. He writes a single column, of lines which are widely spaced not in a gracious layout but through a lack of control. The lines of writing slope on some pages. The handwriting is very current indeed. There is a hiccup when he copies the final seven lines of a poem on the passion of St Erasmus twice, at the top of consecutive rectos, crossing out the second duplicated attempt. That suggests some effort at organized copying but an effort that went awry in some curious way when moving

from page to page. While such accidental duplications often show how consistent scribes could be in reproducing the text, in this duplication some divergent errors suggest a copyist not at all careful in this kind of text (e.g., “almyȝtty god” in one copy becomes “almyȝtty go” in another).[10] This copyist seems not to be accomplished in literary codices.

Nevertheless, this copyist can now be identified copying a poem in another, in a now fragmentary manuscript: London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 796, folios 1v–4r. Here he writes the sole surviving copy of a poem beginning “Goo forth lybell / and mekly schew thy face” and running to 148 lines in quatrains. This poem offers advice on economic policy, especially the wool trade, and is couched in places with the specificity of detail and some of the formulae found in the ordinances to govern trade issued by various civic authorities or trade guilds.[11] The first eight lines are lifted from the envoy of *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*, a poem by this point a few decades old, and the rest echoes some concerns of *The Libelle*, although it introduces new ones and is briefer and in quatrains.[12] Rossell Hope Robbins proposed a date of 1463/4, when laws were issued governing matters the poem discusses, but, as James Davis warned, it is risky to tie a poem’s generalized concerns to a specific moment; the economic issues remained germane across the fifteenth century and beyond.[13] The copyist here titles the poem with a short Latin heading summarizing its argument that naval power and the wool trade will bring England glory: “Anglia // p*ro*pter tuas naves et lanas | Om*n*ia Rengna te salutare deberen*t*” (*sic* for “Rengna”) meaning “England, for thy ships and wools, | All kingdoms should have saluted thee.”[14]

This copyist’s handwriting (Figure 1) is modelled on a variety of anglicana used for documents and letters throughout the second half of the 1400s and into the very early 1500s. It is easy to recognize in a new manuscript, because it is of the less perfectly trained and less formally and more quickly executed variety used for everyday writing in the 1400s in England. Other people whose primary training and employment were in making books or

documents often achieved a style relatively consistent with their colleagues and difficult to distinguish—as controversies about identifying such scribes' handwriting attest. But people in the course of other kinds of employment, such as trade or estate management, would sometimes make documents, but for them writing was not the sole or main task. They tended to have more informal and current kinds of handwriting often with more idiosyncratic features. A closely comparable example to this copyist's handwriting would be, for instance, that of Edmund Bedingfield, a correspondent of the Cely family, the wool merchants of the Cotswolds and Calais and owners of ships—interests also close to those of this poem—in a letter of 1479 or 1480.[15]

The copyist's handwriting has the standard diagnostic allographs or letterforms which would allow one to label it as anglicana: two-compartment **a**, figure-of-eight **g**, long **r**, sigmoid word-final **s**, the elaborate looped **w**; and it has the standard rounded movement of the pen or ductus, as letters are formed largely with loops, including in connecting strokes between them. There is almost no influence of the broken strokes of the variety of cursive known as secretary script in England, let alone the more Frenchified models which became popular in the later 1400s. Only the one-compartment **a** favoured in secretary is 'borrowed' into the anglicana repertoire, and this is borrowed so commonly by many scribes as to be unexceptional; its adoption was probably prompted, for convenience and speed, by its simpler form (in a way explained well by Jacob Thaisen, as a form 'shorter' to write, by a fraction of a second).[16]

While typical of his time and script, this particular copyist can be identified by the overall aspect of his handwriting. Some very current handwriting develops large ascenders, as these strokes can become the connecting strokes between letters written in haste. By contrast here, the ascenders, which extend above the *x*-height or body of the letters, are proportionally shorter than the body of the letter in most cases. As a result, the loops on the tops of

ascenders for **b**, **d** and **h** are tiny curls smaller than the curls in the body of **b** and **d**; and even the elaborate curls on the top of the elaborate **w** favoured in anglicana script are not here very large, unlike many specimens throughout the 1400s. By contrast, the limb of **h**, the descender of **p**, long **r**, long **s** and the bottom-left stroke of **x** extend below the baseline for almost double the *x*-height of the letters above the baseline. The scribe's deep space on his unruled pages accommodates this downward splay. This means that the module or size of his writing is large, yet also gives it a 'bottom-heavy' look, as though weighed down by these pendulous strokes. There is in addition a pronounced horizontal splay. Some such splay is typical for cursive handwriting, especially in its more current execution, as the pen moves fast across the page, and so the graphs are not 'halted' repeatedly and quickly. Here some strokes splay rightwards as much as the width of two letters, especially on the otiose stroke through word-final **h**, the sigmoid word-final **s** and the tail of **y**, which gives an impression of extreme breadth and ranginess. The drift downward and rightward can reach its fullest extent in the layout of the poem on the wool trade, which is in one column with only twenty-eight lines on the page, and in a similarly generous layout for the lyrics "Away ffeynt lufe full of varyaunce" and "Goe lytyll byll *and* doe me reco*m*mende" in four rhyme royal stanzas per page in the other manuscripts.[17] In some of this person's copying, he uses two columns and crowds more lines to the page, so the writing can at first glance look less expansive in scale.[18] The relative proportions within that scale are, however, recognizable even within tighter confines.

The copyist does vary his layout for the different works which he copies. In particular, he marks the beginning of new stanzas with different marks: in MS Lansdowne 796, each stanza begins with a mark like **cc** or the abbreviation with *oc*-shaped **a**, with a rightward dash after. Just one stanza in this manuscript is, instead, distinguished with a mark like **u** with a

figure-of-eight flourish above (Figure 1); yet it is that mark which he uses for all new stanzas in his other manuscripts.[19] It is supporting evidence that the same hand is at work.

Another, even stronger support is that his spelling is largely consistent across the three manuscripts and several poems he copies, suggesting that he has followed his own orthographical preferences by and large, with just a few striking exceptions to suggest what his exemplars might have looked like. For instance, his third person singular present inflexion is almost always <yth> (e.g., “sorowyth” and “waylyth”).[20] But for just a few lines in a poem on St Erasmus in MS Rawl. poet. 34 he spells this inflexion <ess> in two rhyming words and in a verb in the middle of the following line (“telless” and “dwelless” rhyming, and then “falless”).[21] The odd survival in rhyme, carried on perhaps in error in the next line, suggests that his exemplar for this poem on St Erasmus might have been in spelling more typical of regions further north, but which he was ‘translating’ to <yth> elsewhere, where it would not disrupt the rhyme. Likewise, in syllables which now are spelled <and> the scribe prefers spellings with <ond> (e.g., “londe” and “vndyrstonde”), although again MS Rawl. poet. 34 has a stray northern “land” perhaps carried over from an exemplar for the poem *Novem virtutes*.[22] Such brief divergences suggest that the orthography relatively consistent elsewhere might reflect his preferences imposed rather than his exemplars. Other spellings which are common across his manuscripts are *which* without <h> in the initial consonant as <wich>; <sch> at the start of words where Present Day English has <sh>; <y> far more commonly than <i> for the vowel, including in unstressed syllables and inflexions.

In one feature, he is consistently inconsistent, so to speak, in a way that suggests something interesting about pronunciation in the later 1400s when he was at work. His spelling of the consonantal cluster <ȝt> or <ght> is inconsistent across all his manuscripts and suggests some uncertainty about the need for <ȝ> as a grapheme or about the sound it and <gh> represented: the voiceless velar fricative /x/. Both grapheme <ȝ> and the sound /x/

which it rendered before /t/ at the end of syllables were beginning to be lost and would largely vanish from English in the following century.[23] In the verb *might*, always spelled with the vowel <y>, on the first page and the first line of the second page of MS Lansdowne 796, he uses <ȝ>, and on one of those uses he follows it with <g> oddly in <myȝgth>, as though uncertain what to put there; but elsewhere he uses <gh> as in Present Day English. It looks as though he might be picking up yogh from his exemplar but slowly shifting to a preference for <gh>, as he is 'working in' to his task.[24] But in other words such as *almighty*, *bought*, *bright*, *knight*, *light*, *night*, *nightingale*, *nought*, *right* and *sought*, across all his manuscripts he uses <ȝt> about as much as he uses <ght>. Nonetheless, three times in MS Lansdowne 796, he rhymes a word ending <ght> or <ȝte> with a word ending <wte> or <wth>, which suggests that the sound /x/ captured once by <ȝ> or <gh> was no longer strongly pronounced and could be rendered by <w>.[25] The same change might affect the word *weight*, spelled <weythe> and <weyte>.[26] One other unusual spelling occurs. For French-derived words ending in Present Day English in <ance>, he usually has the spelling <aunce>, but three times in MS Lansdowne 796 he has the rare spelling <aunss>: for instance, within this manuscript and another he spells the same word as "varyaunss" and "varyaunce" on different occasions. Even there, though, the ductus of the shared letters **varyaun** is identical.[27]

Because this scribe was writing in the late fifteenth century, it is not possible to compare his orthography too closely with the features traced in *The Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, which does not cover the later fifteenth century fully. But, that caveat aside, the dot maps in the *Atlas* do suggest where this scribe's spelling was commonly found. Some features are found from the Midlands northwards (e.g., <mykyll>, <trew>).[28] Other features are found from the Midlands southwards (e.g., also <mych>, <schal> with initial <sch>, <whan> with medial <a>, <lond> with medial <o>).[29] The consistent co-occurrence of such features might suggest that the scribe's habits in spelling were picked up where these

different features occur in the southern part of the Midlands, broadly in a belt from Shropshire to Lincolnshire. Other features are identified by the *Atlas* in the Midlands especially (e.g., the third-person singular present inflection <yth>).[30] Others are identified in the southeastern Midlands especially (e.g., <theyr>, <theym>, <lytyll>), say Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, usually along also with London, where of course many people gravitated for work.[31]

Unfortunately, nothing more is known of the immediate origins of MS Lansdowne 796, but a few speculations can be offered about its origins, based on its contents and physical dimensions; and some information can be offered about its provenance since it was copied.

The contents of the manuscript offer an important clue to the interests of its copyists or first users or both—indeed, it seems like a book scruffily copied by two people, in two stages, for their own use. The poem and this recurring scribe's stint finish halfway down a recto. The verso and following few leaves have on them an 'assize' or set of prose rules regulating trading practices, weights and measures for sixteen trades, as well as two more regulations about 'regrating' or sharp pricing in general. It was copied, with variants, into town custumals, including two from the southeast Midlands, the region suggested by the first scribe's orthography. It was added to Coventry's Leet Book, a record of the local legislative assembly, in 1474, where it is called "the Statutes of Wynchestur" and preceded by a preamble, saying that it had been "Ennakte and publisshed" by the king and lords for each town in the realm, and by nearly a page of other regulations, before a version of the text found in MS Lansdowne 796 begins with a new heading "Statut*a* de Wynchestur de Vitellers *et* de al*iis* Hominib*us* a Artific*ia* vt pat*et* sup*ra*script*a*" in red. MS Lansdowne 796 has the trade names in the margin on the first page of the text; the Coventry Leet Book has them in the margin throughout, in a display script.[32] In the custumal of nearby Northampton, this text

begins as abruptly as it does in MS Lansdowne 796.[33] Both the Coventry and Northampton texts have many small variants and larger ones, but one variant suggests a textual connection: both Leet Book and custumal have the entries for butchers before fishers, where BL, MS Lansdowne 796 has fishers before butchers but also has an error "Bochare" corrected to "Fysshare" at the point where it diverges.[34] The text also appears in the town custumal of Colchester and in Elizabethan regulations for Cambridge. This text was not in fact a legal statute, though it did elaborate three thirteenth-century regulations on trade, which had come to be enforced as though they were statutes, known as the *Assisa Panis et Cervisie*, the *Composicio* and the *Judicium Pillorie*. (To avoid confusion with the actual Statute of Winchester of 1285, on quite different matters, I do not use that title for the text in MS Lansdowne 796.)[35] James Davis has argued, instead, that these regulations might have originated with the clerk of the market, a royal official who issued commands to the local traders who would provision the royal household as it moved round the country, and whose stipulations came to set standards more widely; there is some connection with a set of regulations reportedly issued in 1468.[36] Many such regulations moved into English from the mid-1400s on, as everyday governance shifted to the vernacular, a process of appropriation described imaginatively by Kathleen Kennedy as the "information commons."[37]

Davis suggested that the assize in MS Lansdowne 796 is in the same hand as the poem.[38] The handwriting is similar, again modelled on anglicana script, but in my view it is not the same. It has most of the same range of letterforms, and is very alike in 'backwards' **e** and long **r**; but in ductus, the movement of the pen executing those letterforms, and in the resulting aspect it is different, if not dramatically so. The writing is less current and hurried: for instance, whereas the scribe of the poem forms sigmoid **s** with a very small, tight anti-clockwise circle and then a jerk and splay to the right, the scribe of the assize has a broken stroke in the circle and the top stroke curls tightly downwards, evocative of set varieties one

might call anglicana formata. This scribe has higher and wider loops on the top of **w** and on the ascender of **h**, giving his handwriting a top-heavy aspect. On **h** he also extends the limb below the baseline into an anti-clockwise loop. Although his handwriting is not perfectly vertical, leaning about 10 degrees forward from the vertical, or about 80 degrees above the baseline, it is more vertical than the scribe of the poem. It also does not borrow the one-compartment **a** of secretary, as the scribe of the poem does. These two features give this scribe's handwriting the more rigid and traditional appearance of legal uses of anglicana by the late 1400s and, especially, early 1500s. That would fit the assizes as a regulatory genre, so it could be one scribe modifying his handwriting for the occasion; but the sustained difference in ductus seems more likely to be the work of a different person with different training. It might also suggest a scribe trained or working very slightly later than the recurrent scribe and his colleagues.

This manuscript of the poem on trade and rules on assize now consists of only seven leaves of paper from the fifteenth century, of indeterminate and presumably incomplete quire structure, with a leaf of early modern paper at the front and the back, and now bound with further modern paper leaves as make-weights in a rebinding typical of the Lansdowne collection (i.e., with the donor's motto "VIRTUTE NON VERBIS" meaning "By virtue, not words"). On the last of the original seven leaves, after the final rule of assize and trade, the scribe of those rules writes "The benefytes geuyn to the Cityzen folow thys leeffe iiij. levysse" and leaves the rest of the page blank.[39] (A prayer was jotted in the space a little later, in the mid-sixteenth century to judge by the handwriting.) That is, further entitlements to citizens of the city or town in question once occurred four leaves later, so there were at least eleven leaves once; this manuscript is a fragment of something larger.

Intriguingly, MS Lansdowne 796 is only a little smaller than the two other manuscripts, those probably formerly one book, which contain this scribe's handwriting, MS

Rawl. poet. 34 (290 mm x 208 mm) and MS Douce 326 (285 mm x 204 mm), both of them perhaps slightly cropped. In MS Lansdowne 796, most of the leaves are frayed at some of their edges, now repaired by conservators, and even where leaves have straight fore-edges without repairs, there has evidently been some trimming, as parts of the markings before new stanzas have been trimmed from versos.[40] The original size can only be guessed roughly, therefore. But the pages as trimmed with straight edges, but not repaired by conservators, measure consistently 288 mm. tall by 200 mm. wide.[41] This is within a few millimetres of this scribe's other manuscripts, which were likely once one manuscript; and so it is possible that these leaves in MS Lansdowne 796 also came from the same book. At the least, the shared dimensions likely reflected this scribe's or his colleagues' consistent habit of folding sheets of common size in the same way to make their quires. Those other two manuscripts contain at least three watermarks; MS Lansdowne 796 contains a watermark of a general kind which Charles Briquet described as three mountains, the central one surmounted with a cross. Briquet's catalogue of watermarks offers no perfect match but comparable specimens are attested from Verona between 1444 and 1459, and Basel in 1431, the latter earlier than this scribe and the poem adapted from *The Libelle*.[42]

Whatever its origins in the fifteenth century, MS Lansdowne 796 was by March 1734 at the latest in close proximity to the two manuscripts, probably once joined, in which the scribe of the poem recurs. Moreover, also in close proximity with those three manuscripts were two more made by this recurring scribe's collaborator 'Scribe B'. All were in the possession of the collector Thomas Rawlinson (1681–1725) and sold in 1734 after his death. There is a handwritten catalogue of his collection as "sold by himself and me R+R" or Richard Rawlinson (1690–1755), Thomas's brother. There was also a printed catalogue advertising 1010 books "now to be sold" in March 1734.[43] MS Lansdowne 796 is not definitely identifiable in the handwritten catalogue. Two works on economics are identified

as Elizabethan, one dated 1575 in the handwritten list, the other described again in the printed catalogue of the auction of Thomas Rawlinson's book with the added detail that it was dedicated to Elizabeth I.[44] But several poems are described in the handwritten catalogue vaguely as being about "Some Verses about Old England" or an "Old English Ballad" and could be MS Lansdowne 796.[45] "Old English" would not now mean Middle English but could then.[46] In the printed catalogue, the term is used to describe what is definitely MS Lansdowne 796: "The Properties of England, and the Syze of several Trades *in old English Prose and Verse*." It is listed as the sixth of the folio-sized volumes on sale for the ninth evening of sales, as lot 736.[47] Helpfully, a note in eighteenth-century handwriting is on the first early flyleaf of MS Lansdowne 796 and reads "9th days sale numb. 6."[48] An annotated copy of the auction catalogue records that it sold for "1/6" or one shilling and sixpence to "Ames" or Joseph Ames, the collector and historian of printing (1689–1759).[49] (Prices of manuscripts, sadly, have increased since then.) After his death, Ames's books were sold over eight nights in May 1760. This was auctioned that time on the seventh night, listed in the printed catalogue with wording almost identical to that in the 1734 catalogue of Thomas Rawlinson's sale: "The Properties of England, and the Syze of several Trades, *in old English Verse*." It sold, this time for two shillings and sixpence.[50] (The price had already increased far above the inflation of 11.7% between 1734 and 1760.)[51] Thence it ended up in the collection amassed by William Petty, first Marquess of Lansdowne (1737–1805), which joined the then British Museum in 1807. Whether it moved to the Lansdowne collection directly is unclear. The antiquary James West purchased manuscripts and printed books from the Ames auctions in 1760, and after West's death in 1772 his manuscripts were purchased by private treaty for the future Marquess of Lansdowne.[52] This might have been the fragment's later movement.

Before March 1734, however, MS Lansdowne 796 had been in the library of Thomas Rawlinson. It was there with the other two manuscripts (or more likely manuscript fragments)

by the recurring scribe, as well as the other two manuscripts by his collaborator, their 'Scribe B'. In the handwritten catalogue and printed catalogue of Rawlinson's books coming up for sale, these other related books can be identified. MS Rawl. poet. 34, to which this recurring scribe contributed, is listed in the handwritten catalogue as "The Life of S. Margaret in Eng. Verse" at number 329, and in the printed catalogue as "Lives of Saints, viz. S. Margaret, S. Erasmus, Passion of S. Katherine, &c. *In English Verse*. Old." at number 664.[53] MS Douce 326, to which the recurring scribe also contributed, is called in the handwritten list "The Life of Amys *and* Amylion. A Poem" at number 340, and in the printed list "The Lyfe of Amys and Amylion, a Poem, *in old English Verse*" at number 672.[54] In each list they are only a few items apart, and one wonders whatever spatial arrangement in Rawlinson's holdings the lists follow. The copy by this scribe's collaborator as Scribe B with four others of Chaucer's *Troilus* in MS Rawl. poet. 163 must be "Chaucer's Troilus *and* Cressida" in the handwritten list as number 192.[55] The copy by that collaborator and two of the others of Hoccleve's *Regiment* in Princeton, University Library, MS Garrett 137 could be one of two items on the handwritten list, but is more securely identifiable as one of three in the more detailed printed catalogue. In the handwritten list, it could be either "A Poem of ye Government of Princes . By Tho. Hoccleve" at number 306 or "Hoclyffe. a Poem" at number 338.[56] In the printed catalogue, neither "Oclives Poems, *on Velom*, [*imperfect*] *illuminated*" at number 557 nor "Hoccleve's Government of Princes, *part Velom, part Paper, ancient*" at number 647 could be MS Garrett 137, which is neither illuminated nor partly on parchment.[57] But the printed catalogue entry for "Hokleffe super Egidium de Regimine Principum. *Old English Verse*" at number 671 echoes the colophon to a table of authorial sayings quoted in the poem called "Tabula Super Egidium de Regimine Principum" at the front of MS Garrett 137 and the title of the poem itself as "Hokcleffe" (with the unusual use of <k>) on the facing page.[58] This manuscript was also for sale at number 671 directly before its Scribe B's copy of *Amis and*

Amiloun at no. 672 (above). An eighteenth-century annotator of the printed sale catalogue bracketed *The Regiment* and *Amis and Amiloun* together and marked that they sold together, for two shillings and sixpence.[59] In addition, the first leaf of MS Lansdowne 796 has a note that it contains "Folia 7" or seven written leaves, and an earlier, less full handwritten list of Thomas Rawlinson's books has a similar note on its first leaf ("Folia Signata N^{o}. 15") in the same handwriting, to judge by the distinctive **F**.[60] The poem on the wool trade was among this company until that March 1734.

Thomas Rawlinson collected over a thousand manuscripts from diverse places, so the fact that he owned all these books with the work of one scribe need not mean that they had always travelled together. As it happens, one by this scribe and his collaborator Scribe B had travelled alongside another by that collaborator Scribe B since the early to mid 1500s, when the same person annotated both; they might also have the same documents cut up as their parchment guards.[61] So it would not be impossible that MS Lansdowne 796 had followed a similar path before Thomas Rawlinson gathered it up too. But that cannot be proven from the exiguous evidence in the small fragment of a former book that is all that MS Lansdowne 796 consists of now.

What do we learn from identifying the same copyist in MS Lansdowne 796 as in the probably once conjoined MS Douce 326 and MS Rawl. poet. 34? We get further confirmation about the people who copied literary works in the late 1400s. Somebody whose handwriting is well fitted to everyday jottings, in accounts, letters or similar, but hardly fitted to copying extensive codices, nonetheless did copy several English poems. The copying is of a quality which would suggest that this person copied for himself. It is hard to imagine others paying this person to copy, given the currency and informality of the handwriting (and its uneconomical spacing and splay in many cases). Such scribes seem likely to be people with everyday literacy turning their hands to copying books as a pastime for themselves or for

others in their immediate network. The practical information also copied in the back of MS Lansdowne 796 was also of practical use more than for social display. At the same time, that practical information on economic rules was also thematically akin to the poem in the front of MS Lansdowne 796. Michael Johnston has reminded us that such skill in everyday writing, as I would call it, fostered the efflorescence of literary copying in this period.[62] MS Lansdowne 796 adds another piece of evidence to prove that the skills of pragmatic literacy were turned to copying things more literary in the later 1400s, and it ties a codex of romances and religious poems, now split into two separate manuscripts, into that world of business and trade.

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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust, which funded the research of which this is part (grant MRF-2021-015), and to Dan Haywood and Charlotte Ross for advice.

[1] Gisela Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (Munich: Fink, 1976), 267–8; P. R. Robinson, "A Study of Some Aspects of the Transmission of English Verse Texts in Late Medieval Manuscripts" (BLitt. diss., University of Oxford, 1972), 220–223.

[2] The watermark of Oxford, Bodleian Library (hereafter BodL), MS Rawl. poet. 34, recurs in BodL, MS Douce 326, fols. 2 and 14 (the two outermost bifolia). MS Douce 326 has two further watermarks: fols. 3, 11, a bull, similar to Piccard 86102; and fols. 16, 7, 10, grapes with tendrils, similar to Piccard 129526. These identifications are made by Charlotte Ross and Daniel Wakelin, "Three Collaborative Scribes of Chaucer, Hoccleve and Romance," *Journal of the Early Book Society* 27 (2024): 41–72, at 59, 68 n. 49.

[3] This paragraph summarizes the findings of Ross and Wakelin, "Three Collaborative Scribes".

[4] *DIMEV*, 1533, printed by Henry Noble MacCracken, "Lydgatiana V: Fourteen Short Religious Poems," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 131 (1913): 40–63, at 47–8. *DIMEV* lists only this MS, but also carries the note "In one MS only of Lydgate's *Troy Book*." This is not a manuscript of *Troy Book*; it is unclear whether the lyric recurs elsewhere.

[5] In BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34 in order, *DIMEV*, 1488/1, 500/1, 318/1, 398/1, 1942/1, 3116/1, and, after the scribe left fol. 18r blank, *DIMEV*, 741/1 (to Mary). The latter is printed by MacCracken, "Lydgatiana V," 51–3, who also, 47, notes the similar lines but not the shared scribe.

[6] BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, with a stub bearing traces of his writing between fols. 4v and 5r, after the end of "Huff a galaw*n*t vylabele" (*DIMEV* 1488/1) and losing the start of a poem titled in its colophon "disputacio inter Clericu*m* et philomenam etc" (*DIMEV* 500/1).

[7] BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fol. 17v.

[8] Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue*, 267–8.

[9] These places occur in various records of the National Archives, searchable for "John Bygge" by period on https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/; the London Bygge, an immigrant,

appears on the database *England's Immigrants*, https://www.englandsimmigrants.com, nos. 49718 and 49929. For earlier immigrants of the same name, see nos. 35764 (in Coventry in 1441, probably too early to be this scribe, but in a place which has links to another of this scribe's manuscripts, as emerges below), 57010, 57391 and 57457.

[10] BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fols. 7r, 8r (*DIMEV* 318/1, which does not note the recurrence of seven lines on fol. 8r). On the care revealed, paradoxically, by such duplicated passages see e.g., Richard Beadle, "Some Measures of Scribal Accuracy in Late Medieval English Manuscripts," in *Probable Truth: Editing Texts from Medieval Britain*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 223–40.

[11] London, British Library (hereafter BL), MS Lansdowne 796, fols. 1v–4r; *DIMEV* 1527/1; printed by Rossell Hope Robbins, ed. *Historical Poems of the XIV and XV Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) no. 70; also in Thomas Wright, ed., *Political Poems and Songs relating to English History, composed during the period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III*, 2 vols., Rolls Series 14 (London: HMSO, 1859, 1861), ii, 282–7.

[12] For the brief comment, see Eleanor Prescott Hammond, ed., *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1927), 243; R. H. Robbins, "A Political Action Poem, 1463," *Modern Language Notes* 71 (1956): 245–8; Carol M. Meale, "*The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* and Mercantile Literary Culture in Late-Medieval London," in, ed., *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Boffey and Pamela King (London: Westfield College, 1995), 181–227, at 222; and James Davis, "Market Regulation in Fifteenth-Century England," in *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Richard Britnell*, ed. Ben Dodds and Christian Liddy (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), 81–105, at 84.

[13] Robbins, "A Political Action Poem," 245–8; Davis, "Market Regulation," 85.

[14] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 1v.

[15] London, National Archives, SC 1/59/20, printed by Alison Hanham, ed., *The Cely Letters 1472–88*, EETS os 273 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), no. 103. Hanham dates the letter

to 24 September "? 1480"; the National Archives' catalogue dates it to 24 September 1479. Others in the Cely circle, such as William Cely himself and their agent Thomas Kesteven have more loosely comparable handwriting in the late 1470s and 1480s, in various letters in the same guard-book, London, National Archives, SC 1/59.

[16] For this useful concept of 'short' forms, see Jacob Thaisen, "Adam Pinkhurst's Short and Long Forms," in *Scribes, Printers, and the Accidentals of their Texts*, ed. Jacob Thaisen and Hanna Rutkowska (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 73–90.

[17] BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fols. 18v–20r (*DIMEV* 741), and BodL, MS Douce 326, fol. 14r–v (*DIMEV* 1533/1).

[18] BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fols. 5r–17v. When a passage of copying in two columns ends in the left-hand column and the space for a right-hand column is unused, then the splay recurs (e.g., BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fols. 5v, 17v).

[19] Compare the penultimate stanza mark in MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 3r, with those in BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34 and MS Douce 326.

[20] BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fol. 5r, col. a, line 8, and BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 2v, line 10.

[21] BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fol. 6r, col. b, lines 1–3. *LALME*, dot map 61, places the *3rd sing. pr.* ending <es> mostly north of a notional line from Shropshire to Norfolk.

[22] Quoting BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 2r, lines 5–6; and see also fol. 3v, lines 25–6 ("lond" and "hond"); compare BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fol. 10r, col. a, line 16.

[23] On these changes, see Roger Lass, "Phonology and morphology," in *The Cambridge History of the English Language II. 1066–1476*, ed. Norman Blake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 23–155, at 63.

[24] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, quoting fol. 1v, line 30 (counting the title as lines 1–2), and see also fol. 2r, line 1 ("myȝth"), but thereafter <gh> on e.g., fol. 3r, line 27, fol. 3v, line 7, and throughout MS Rawl. poet. 34, fol. 5r, col. a, lines 9, 25, fol. 8v, col. a, lines 8, 9 etc.

[25] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 1v, lines 7–8 rhyming “thought” and “sowthe” (for Present Day English *sought*); fol. 2r, lines 25–6 rhyming “nowȝte” (for *nought*) with “sowth” (for *sought*); fol. 2v, lines 9–10 rhyming “wrowte” (for *wrought*) and “nowȝtte” (for *nought*).

[26] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 3r, lines 16, 19.

[27] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, f.1v, line 2, fol. 3v, lines 23–4 (<aunss>); and contrast MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 1v line 18, and BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 34, fol. 18v, line 1 (<aunce>).

[28] *LALME*, dot maps 16 <mykyll>, 270 <trew>.

[29] *LALME*, dot maps 16 *much* ending <ch>, 22 <schal>, 56 <whan>, 183 <lond>.

[30] *LALME*, dot map 61 <yth>.

[31] *LALME*, dot maps 8 <theym>, 9 <theyr> (though the initial consonants <th> also are found further north), 191 <lytyll>.

[32] Coventry, City Archives, BA E/6/37/1/1, fols. 222v–224r, printed by Mary Dromer Harris, ed., *The Coventry Leet Book*, EETS os 134, 135, 138, 146 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1907–1913), 395–7 (preamble), 397–401 (duplicated text). Harris’s method of summarizing sometimes in *Leet Book* obscures how close the wording is at a local level.

[33] Northampton, West Northamptonshire Archives, LG02/4/1/1, fols. 93r–96v; printed by Christopher A. Markham and J. Charles Cox, ed., *The Records of the Borough of Northampton*, 2 vols. (Northampton: Northampton Record Society, 1898), i, 344–9.

[34] Coventry, City Archives, BA E/6/37/1/1, fol. 223r (Harris, ed., *Coventry*, 398); Markham and Cox, ed., *Northampton*, i, 345–6; BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 5r. In addition, Coventry, City Archives, BA E/6/37/1/1, fol. 223v (Harris, ed., *Coventry*, 400), omits the rules for beer-brewers, which appear in MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 6r.

[35] Davis, “Market Regulations,” 85–6.

[36] Davis, “Market Regulations,” 90–1. James Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 327, 336–7, 340–1, has also drawn on these regulations as an index of ideal trading

practices.

[37] Kathleen Kennedy, *Medieval Hackers*, 39–41. Kennedy, 40, lists MS Lansdowne 796 among manuscripts which translate all or part of the assize of bread and ale, though it is more loosely descended from the older *Assisa Panis et Cervisie*.

[38] Davis, "Market Regulation," 84.

[39] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 7v.

[40] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, e.g., fols. 2v, 3v.

[41] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, e.g., fol. 6r. The final leaf, perhaps not original, is something under a millimeter taller but very close in dimensions, trimmed to at most 299 mm x 200 mm.

[42] Visibly on London, BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fols. 5, 7, upside down. In https://briquet-online.at/, the closest is no. 11737 and 11738, which Briquet places in Verona in 1444 and 1454, but their crosses are pommeled; compare in general nos. 11736–11740, otherwise from Verona in 1450–9. In https://www.wasserzeichen-online.de/, it resembles nos. CH0780-PO-150856 and CH0780-PO-150860, attested in Basel in 1431. Meale, "*Libelle*," 222, describes a watermark of "a sun divided internally into seven segments, with twelve rays emanating from it," but I cannot see such a mark.

[43] Respectively BodL, MS Rawl. C. 937, and *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae Catalogus cum Appendice Impressorum; in omni fere Facultate et Lingua* (London: Thomas Ballard, 1733–4). A copy of the printed catalogue is cut up and mounted at the back of MS Rawl. C. 937. A copy annotated with details of purchasers and prices is also kept at BodL, shelfmark Mus. Bibl. III. 8º 11. B. J. Enright, "The Later Auction Sales of Thomas Rawlinson's Library, 1727–34," *The Library* 5th ser., 11 (1956): 23–40, 113–123, describes these sales.

[44] BodL, MS Rawl. C. 937, p. 20, no. 317 ("A Treatise of English Coin *and* of Exchange 1575"); and p. 9, no. 137 ("Abuse of Money by Exchange *and* Rechange"), with wording which recurs in the printed *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae*, 23, no. 326,

supplemented with the words “dedicated to Queen Elizabeth”.

[45] BodL, MS Rawl. C. 937, p. 22, nos. 346, 351.

[46] *OED*, *Old English*, *n.* and *adj.*, sense 1.

[47] *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae*, 57.

[48] BL, MS Lansdowne 796, flyleaf ii^{r}. This flyleaf also has, further down, the number 588 in handwriting of a similar period. (The first flyleaf fol. i is part of the nineteenth-century binding.)

[49] *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae*, 57, no. 736, annotated in BodL, Mus. Bibl. III. 8^{o} 11. The same catalogue records that Ames also purchased the next lot, no 737, “History of King Arthur, Gawayn, and Dame Gaynon, *in old English Verse*” for one shilling and fourpence (on which see n. 0000 below).

[50] *A catalogue of the genuine and entire collection of scarce printed books, and curious manuscripts, of Mr. Joseph Ames, F.R.S.* (London: for [Abraham] Langford, 1760), 83, no. 1174; the BL’s copy, annotated with prices fetched, is reproduced on Google Books and on *ECCO: Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*. Interestingly, just as in 1734 (see previous note), the following lot, no. 1175, was again “History of King Arthur, Gawayne and Dame Gaynon, *in old English Verse*” and sold for five shillings and sixpence. The Bodleian copy of *The catalogue of . . . Mr. Joseph Ames* (shelfmark BodL, Douce CC 291) is annotated by Francis Douce, who remarks of lot no. 1175, the Arthurian poem, only: “Mr Baynes afterwards bought this article of Lockyer Davis for a guinea, and by his will bequeathed it to Ritson. It was published by Pinkerton in a very unhandsome and unwarrantable manner. At Ritson’s sale I purchased it. F.D.” If this is BodL, MS Douce 236, the romance *Of Arthour and Merlin*, it is not by either scribe of MS Lansdowne 796 nor of the related MSS. For brief descriptions, not noting this provenance, see O. D. Macrae-Gibson, ed., *Of Arthour and Merlin*, EETS os 268, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1973–9), ii, 42–3, and Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue*, 264–5. Other Arthurian romances formerly owned by Douce (BodL, MS Douce 261 and MS Douce 309) are post-medieval transcriptions.

[51] I compared figures on the Bank of England's calculator for inflation since 1209: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator.

[52] R. Charles Lucas, "Book-Collecting in the Eighteenth Century: The Library of James West," *The Library* 5th ser., 3 (1949): 265–78, at 268, 271, 273.

[53] BodL, MS Rawl. C. 937, p. 21 (no. 329); *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae*, p. 50, no. 664.

[54] BodL, MS Rawl. C. 937, p. 22, no. 340; *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae*, p. 51, no. 672.

[55] BodL, MS Rawl. C. 937, p. 13, no. 192, which Ross and Wakelin identify at "Three Collaborative Scribes," 67, n. 38.

[56] BodL, MS Rawl. C. 937, p. 19, no. 306, and p. 21, no. 338. Ross and Wakelin, "Three Collaborative Scribes," 67, n. 38, suggest that the former is Princeton, University Library, MS Garrett 137; the handwritten list's title makes that likelier.

[57] *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae*, 42, no. 557, 48, no. 647.

[58] *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae*, 51, no. 671; Princeton, University Library, MS Garrett 137, fols. 2v, 3r.

[59] *Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Rawlinsonianae*, 51, annotated in BodL, Mus. Bibl. III. 8^{o} 11. The purchaser is not stated clearly but, left unstated, might be understood as Richard Rawlinson, the last person marked, before number 667 on the preceding page.

[60] Compare BL, MS Lansdowne 796, fol. 1r, and BodL, MS Rawl. C. 928, fol. 1r. Similar but perhaps not identical handwriting makes a similar note in BodL, MS Rawl. poet. 163, fol. 1r.

[61] Ross and Wakelin, "Three Collaborative Scribes," 57, 59.

[62] Michael Johnston, "Desiring to Write/Learning to Write in Late Medieval England," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 68 (2024): 47–91, at 48.