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Middle English Scribes and Guildhall Clerks: A Reassessment

In their recent book *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375-1425*, Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs propose a series of identifications of the scribes of manuscripts containing works by Chaucer, Gower, Langland and others as clerks working in the London Guildhall.[1] This set of identifications leads them to conclude that the Guildhall functioned as a 'central clearing house' for Middle English literature in early fifteenth-century London.[2] Elsewhere I have expressed my doubts, based upon the palaeographical evidence, about the identification of the scribe of the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a Guildhall clerk.[3] Indeed, drawing upon the palaeographical evidence presented by Mooney and Stubbs, I would extend that to include their identification of the scribe of London, British Library MS Harley 7334 and Oxford, Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 198 of Chaucer's work as John Marchaunt.[4] The entries they attribute to this scribe in the Letter Books and the *Liber Albus* are generally similar to his hand in literary manuscripts, but there are not sufficient distinctive and idiosyncratic features to sustain an assertion that they are the work of a single scribe. The more serious objection to their hypothesis concerns their identification of this hand as John Marchant; Mooney and Stubbs include three lines of text and a signature which is certainly not the same as the hand that copied the Chaucer manuscripts, nor that of the *Liber Albus* and Letter Books that they attribute to him.

But in the end such arguments tend to become rather subjective; we lack agreement about key methodological principles: which graphetic features such identifications should be based upon, which features characterise individual scribal copyists, how much variation a single scribal repertoire comprised, and how to compare writings in different scripts and languages. In a recent attack on Mooney and Stubbs's work, Lawrence Warner takes issue with their identification of Adam Pinkhurst as the scribe of Hengwrt and Ellesmere, although agreeing with their claim that Pinkhurst was the copyist responsible for Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.15.17 of the B-text of *Piers Plowman*.[5] But for Warner the clinching feature is an aspect of decoration rather than handwriting. According to Warner, Trinity College B.15.17 and Adam Pinkhurst's signature in the Common Paper of the Scriveners' Guild are linked by their use of a decorative adornment which he labels 'snowballs' or 'traffic lights'.[6] But without a comparative study of a larger corpus of manuscripts and a fuller account of the distribution of this decorative mark, it remains to be seen whether such a feature is truly distinctive to this scribe.

Instead of revisiting the palaeographical evidence or the use of decorative marks, this paper will examine Mooney and Stubbs's theory that these copyists were working in the Guildhall from a different perspective. A key feature of this theory is their proposal that the scribes were working on a single site, collecting together exemplars of major vernacular works in order to facilitate the production of further copies. Although we know little about the organisation of the booktrade in the early fifteenth century, Mooney and Stubbs's claim runs directly contrary to the evidence assembled by A.I. Doyle and M.B. Parkes concerning the production of a contemporary copy of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.[7] This manuscript, now Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.2, was copied by five scribes, and thus might

appear to lend some weight to the theory that such manuscripts were the product of multiple copyists working within a single institution. Given that two of the contributing scribes, Doyle and Parkes's scribes B and D, are claimed by Mooney and Stubbs to have been clerks employed by the London Guildhall, this manuscript provides potentially important evidence in support of their theory.

But Doyle and Parkes's assessment of the codicological and textual evidence offered by this manuscript concluded that the discontinuities and lapses in co-ordination between the five distinct scribal stints strongly implied that these five scribes were an ad-hoc team, not working in close proximity, as would be expected if they were members of the same scriptorium or workshop. If they had been working in the same premises, many of the awkward transitions that are now apparent would have been noticed sooner, and more easily resolved. So what might on the surface appear to offer compelling evidence in support of the theory of production on a single site, instead suggests the opposite. The five scribes that contributed to Trinity R.3.2 appear to have been working independently, perhaps even with no awareness of, or contact with, other contributors to the final product.

If Mooney and Stubbs's theory is correct, we would expect to find evidence of the kind of collaboration and co-ordination amongst the manuscripts produced by their putative Guildhall clerks that Doyle and Parkes found to be lacking in Trinity R.3.2. As the large corpus of manuscripts ascribed to these copyists includes examples of scribes recopying the same texts, we would also expect to find evidence of textual affiliations pointing to the use of shared exemplars, offering support for Mooney and Stubbs's claim that the scribes were stockpiling copytexts as an aid to further copying and distribution.

This paper seeks to assess Mooney and Stubbs's claims concerning the production of these manuscripts by examining four copies of the *Canterbury Tales* attributed to Guildhall clerks. These manuscripts are the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts, copied by Doyle and Parkes's Scribe B (Mooney and Stubbs's Adam Pinkhurst) and Corpus 198 and Harley 7334 copied by Doyle and Parkes's Scribe D (Mooney and Stubbs's John Marchaunt).[8] Both of these important scribes copied the same Chaucerian text on two occasions. Since the *Canterbury Tales* has a complex textual history, with its numerous fifteenth-century witnesses testifying to differences in their contents and arrangement of the constituent tales, as well as in the text of the tales that they transmit. As the work was left incomplete by Chaucer at his death in 1400, scribes struggled to assemble complete copies from the fragmentary and disarranged materials he left behind. Given these difficulties, it would make sense for them to centralise their efforts to source exemplars for this work, and to draw upon others' experiences in organisation and copying. These early manuscripts thus offer an important test-case for the Guildhall theory proposed by Mooney and Stubbs. If we find evidence of collaboration between their scribes, combined with evidence of standardisation in the organisation, layout and decoration of the text, as well as the use of shared exemplars, this would offer strong support for this theory. But far from witnessing to a close relationship, these features differ across the four manuscripts in numerous significant ways.

As we have seen, Mooney and Stubbs have characterised the Guildhall as a 'clearing house', claiming that it was used to stockpile exemplars. But an important feature of these four manuscripts is that each of them is copied from a different set of exemplars. John M. Manly and Edith Rickert (who carried out a full collation of the manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*) assign each of them to a different genetic

group.[9] Both Hengwrt and Harley 7334 are independent of all groups and of each other, while Ellesmere belongs to the *a* group, and Corpus to the *c* group. So not only did these two scribes not share exemplars with each other, they did not even re-use the same exemplar when they came to copy the text for a second time.

The Corpus manuscript was copied from an exemplar which did go on to serve as the copytext for at least two further manuscripts: London, British Library MSS Lansdowne 851 and Sloane 1686.[10] This might appear to lend support to the Guildhall theory, but in fact neither of these manuscripts has been linked with the London Guildhall by Mooney and Stubbs. The Lansdowne manuscript contains an illustration and a sophisticated programme of decoration that is suggestive of London production; Kathleen Scott has attributed the miniature, showing a youthful Chaucer holding a book, to Herman Scheere.[11] The manuscript is traditionally dated to the first quarter of the fifteenth century; on the basis of the decoration Scott offers a more precise dating of 1407-10. Yet the dialect employed by the scribe points to an origin in the West Midlands: an area close to, though not identical to, that attested in the work of Scribe D.[12] But, despite this evidence that the manuscript was decorated in London in the same period as Corpus was being copied, by a scribe whose dialect is similar to that of Scribe D, there is no evidence to link it directly to that scribe or the Corpus manuscript he copied. Sloane 1686 is much further removed from this group of manuscripts. It was produced in the last quarter of the fifteenth century; on the basis of the paper Daniel Mosser suggests a date in the 1480s.[13] As well as being chronologically removed from the Corpus 198 and Lansdowne 851 manuscripts, Sloane 1686 was copied in a markedly regional dialect suggestive of an East Anglian, and specifically Norfolk, origin.[14] So, although the copytext used for Corpus 198 (or one closely related to it) did remain intact and available to subsequent copyists, there

is no evidence that the scribes who did access it had any connection with the London Guildhall.

As well as assigning these manuscripts to genetic groups based upon their textual affiliations, Manly and Rickert also categorised them according to their ordering of the constituent tales. If we consider these four manuscripts from this perspective, we can see that there is no evidence that the scribes were working from exemplars grouping the tales in the same order, or from a similar set of organizing principles.

Hengwrt	Ellesmere	Corpus	Harley
I (GP-Kn-Mi-Rv-Co)	I	I + Gam	I+Gam
III (WB-Fr-Su)	II	II	II
II (ML)	III	Va (Squire)	III
Va (Squire)	IV	III	IV
IVb (Merchant)	V	IV	V
Vb (Franklin)	VI	Vb (Franklin)	VIII
VIIIa (Second Nun)	VII	VIII	VI
IVa (Clerk)	VIII	VI	VII
VI (Ph-Pd)	IX	VII	IX
VII (Sh-Pr-Th-Mel-Mo-NP)	X	IX	X
IX (Manc)		X	
X (Ps)			

Set out in this way, it is clear that there are broad similarities between the placement of the tales, but these are shared by many of the surviving copies. More important are the significant differences concerning the location of the Clerk-Merchant-Squire-Franklin's tales (Fragments IV and V), and the Second Nun's and Canon's Yeoman's Tales (Fragment VIII). That these scribes were working independently and devising local solutions to problems of organising a work that was unfinished and lacked guidelines for arranging the constituent parts, is apparent from the way that the Corpus manuscript differs from each of the others in implementing a system of chapter numbers. Thus the Reeve's Prologue is labelled 'Co .iij.' at its opening on fol. 54v. While Corpus 198 appears to be the earliest surviving copy to implement such a system, this feature is also found in some contemporary or slightly later copies, such as Sussex, Petworth House National Trust 7 and Cambridge, Cambridge University Library Mm 2.5. But this system is not found in any of the three copies considered to have been produced within the Guildhall, further pointing to the likelihood that they were copied independently. Just as the exemplar used for copying Corpus remained available to other scribes, so too did the system of chapter numbers that it included. But there appears to be no relationship between those manuscripts that employed the Corpus exemplar and those that adopted its system of chapter numbers, further highlighting the independent lines of descent.

One way of trying to explain this evidence would be to suggest that the Guildhall had amassed a stock of multiple manuscripts, from which scribes were free to select the exemplars they wished to employ. An alternative theory might posit that the scribes were experimenting with different orderings from the various parts of the text they had in their possession. But both are directly contradicted by the evidence, since - far from being spoilt for choice - it is apparent that the scribes encountered

difficulties accessing certain parts of the poem, even after copying had begun; in some cases they never got access to the complete work. This problem is best known from the evidence of the Hengwrt manuscript, which lacks the entirety of the Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale and the Merchant's Prologue, and has a shorter form of the Nun's Priest's Prologue. Even the much better planned and more finished Ellesmere manuscript is missing the Man of Law's Endlink, an omission that it shares with Hengwrt. Both Harley 7334 and Corpus 198 include the Tale of Gamelyn as an additional Cook's Tale - a tale not found in Hengwrt or Ellesmere. The status of this addition remains unclear; it may have been a later inclusion by scribes attempting to fill out a lacuna in Chaucer's papers, or it may have been found amongst Chaucer's papers, suggesting that it was intended to form part of the authorial work. Either way, it is clear that it was not available to all of these scribes. In the case of Harley 7334, a note in an informal hand (probably that of the scribe) at the bottom of fol. 58v records the location for the addition of Gamelyn: 'Icy come*n*cera le fable de Gamelyn'. The presence of this note, and its use of the future tense, imply that the scribe did not have access to the tale itself at this point in the production of the volume, offering further evidence that these scribes were accessing materials while production was in progress, rather than drawing from a stock of exemplars on site. Both Hengwrt and Ellesmere fail to include a complete copy of the Cook's Tale – presumably because the text remained unfinished at Chaucer's death in 1400. But the way the two manuscripts handle this gap implies that in both cases the scribe was uncertain as to whether additional text would become available at a later date. When he copied Hengwrt, the scribe appears to have initially anticipated the later appearance of more text, since he left the remainder of the folio blank and began copying the Wife of Bath's Prologue on the opening leaf of a new quire. When copying the Ellesmere

manuscript, the scribe did not leave any such provision following the end of the unfinished Cook's Tale. This might indicate that the scribe was now aware that he had received the text in its genuinely incomplete state. However, M.B. Parkes has suggested that the 8 ruled leaves now bound at the end of the manuscript may have initially been intended to carry an ending to the Cook's Tale, or perhaps the Tale of Gamelyn, subsequently being discarded and bound as endleaves when no further text was forthcoming.[15] This evidence concerning the missing portions of text in both the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts indicates that, when Scribe B copied the two manuscripts, he was not able to draw upon a single set of authoritative exemplars, such as that posited by Mooney and Stubbs, but instead was relying upon a variety of sources for his texts, and was unable to access all the material that was in circulation.

Perhaps the most problematic issue for the scribes involved in copying these manuscripts was the difficulty of accessing the linking passages. Since in many cases these passages explicitly refer to both the preceding and following pilgrim narrators, they function as useful guides to the ordering of the tales. But linking passages appear to have circulated independently of the tales, and the required passages seem not to have always been available. A consequence of this is that scribes were often confronted with the difficult question of which order to copy the tales in, without the guidance offered by the links themselves. A good example of this, and the concomitant difficulties it caused the scribes, concerns the Squire-Merchant-Franklin sequence. It is clear from the Hengwrt manuscript that the scribe did not have the links to hand when he copied the tales; as a result he left a gap to accommodate them at a later stage. We know that these are later additions because, when the links arrived, they did not fit in the space that he had left for them. But, even more problematically, when the scribe got the links, he realised that the arrangement he had

adopted was wrong. The correct order was Merchant-Squire, Squire-Franklin, as in the later Ellesmere manuscript, thereby forcing him to change the names of the pilgrims to fit his botched ordering.

This problem, and the solution that the Hengwrt scribe implemented, is well known, but the Corpus and Harley manuscripts appear to show evidence of Scribe D encountering similar difficulties. In the case of the Corpus manuscript, the scribe never received the links that introduce the Squire's, Merchant's and Franklin's Tales. There are codicological and textual anomalies at these same points in Harley 7334 that point to similar difficulties. The text of the Merchant's Tale ends in an anomalous quire of 6 leaves. The final leaf of this quire contains the Merchant's Endlink and the Introduction to the Squire's Tale, with unfilled lines suggesting that the link was copied later onto a leaf that was initially left blank. Evidently, having finished copying the Merchant's Tale, the scribe left the rest of the quire blank for the link, and began copying the Squire's tale in a new quire.

In Corpus 198 problems in the supply of copy are also evident in the Merchant's Tale itself, for which the Corpus scribe received an incomplete version of the tale. This version, lacking the final 100 lines, is found in both the other *c* group manuscripts, demonstrating that it reflects a gap in the exemplar rather than a scribal oversight. As Germaine Dempster first noted, this point coincides with a change in ink colour found in the Hengwrt manuscript, implying that the Hengwrt scribe's copy of the Merchant's Tale was similarly lacking at this point, forcing him to break his copying here and turn to another part of the text.[16] Since this implies that the Hengwrt and Corpus scribes were both using an exemplar of the Merchant's Tale with a physical break occurring before the final hundred lines, this might appear to lend support to the Guildhall theory where exemplars were being shared between scribes.

But, unlike the Corpus scribe, the Hengwrt scribe did receive the remainder of the text, suggesting that – despite encountering similar problems – they had access to different sources for the texts they copied.

The fact that these scribes experienced difficulties at precisely the same points in the text may appear to support the theory that they were working in the same location - although it is hard to square with the concept of the Guildhall as a 'clearing house'. But the fact that in some cases the text was forthcoming, while in other instances it was not, combined with the different solutions the scribes implemented, points instead to the scribes as independent craftsmen.

Another example of a problem resolved in different ways can be seen in the treatment of the Man of Law's Endlink in Harley 7334 and Corpus 198. While both manuscripts include this link, they treat it very differently, further suggesting that each manuscript was an independent commission with little or no recourse to the previous one. Corpus 198, generally considered to be the earlier of the two, uses the link as an introduction to the Squire's Tale, which it places directly after the Man of Law's Tale:

Nay by my fader soule þat schal he nat
Seyde þe Esquier heer schal he nat preche
(Man of Law's Endlink, 1178-9)
(fol. 90)

In Harley 7334 the equivalent line in the Man of Law's Endlink reads 'sompnour' instead of 'Esquier', a reading that makes little sense in the context of the tale order,

since in Harley 7334 the Endlink is followed by the tales of Fragment III (Wife of Bath, Friar and then Summoner).

Nay by my fader soule þat schal he nat
Sayde the sompnour he schal heer nauȝt preche
(Man of Law's Endlink, 1178-9)
(fol. 86)

As well as differing in its naming of the interrupting pilgrim, the text of the link in Harley 7334 differs from that in Corpus 198 in omitting the final five lines. The most likely cause of this omission is that the scribe did not have the endlink when he copied the surrounding text and so had to leave a space for its later insertion. The link that he received was too long for the gap he left, forcing the scribe to truncate it by omitting the final five lines.

As we saw earlier, this link does not appear in Hengwrt; but the scribe did leave an entire blank leaf for a link to join the Man of Law's Tale to the Squire's Tale, implying that he did anticipate receiving a link to connect those tales. The amount of space he left was considerably larger than the link itself, demonstrating his lack of insight into the details of the passage. So, while the evidence suggests that both the Harley 7334 and Hengwrt scribes did not have the endlink to hand once they had completed the Man of Law's Tale, both left space for its later inclusion. The amount of space they left, however, implies that there was no cross-consultation, while the fact that the Harley 7334 scribe did subsequently receive the link but the Hengwrt scribe did not, further attests to their working independently.

A further example of problems with the linking passages concerns the Parson's Prologue. This link appears between the Manciple's and Parson's Tale in the Hengwrt manuscript, although the reference to the Manciple in line 1 has been written over an erasure. Using ultra-violet light, Manly and Rickert concluded that the erased text originally read 'Franklin', but found this hard to explain since there is no evidence Chaucer planned to link these two tales. This apparent difficulty is removed if we assume both readings, 'Franklin' and 'Manciple', are scribal, both reflecting changes implemented by the Hengwrt scribe himself in order to accommodate different arrangements of the tales. The Franklin's Tale is now followed by the Second Nun's Tale in Hengwrt, but this is clearly a rearrangement of an earlier ordering as the Second Nun's Tale was added after the Franklin's Tale had been copied, producing an irregular quire of sixteen leaves. Perhaps the scribe initially planned to follow the Franklin's Tale with the Parson's Tale. Once he decided to interpolate the Second Nun's Tale into the quire, perhaps because it arrived after he had decided the overall ordering, that became impossible. In order to resolve this problem, the scribe erased the word 'Franklin' in the opening line, and substituted it with 'Manciple'. This example, combined with the other instances of scribes altering names to fit their differing tale orders, suggests that editors need to be more sceptical of the authority of the various arrangements that survive in our extant manuscripts.

What these examples show is that, far from working from a stock of authoritative exemplars, these scribes were accessing materials from a variety of sources, and did not have all the tales or links in their possession before copying begun. Both scribes encountered similar difficulties, caused by a lack of links, or links that did not fit their tale arrangements, but resorted to different solutions to remedy them. If they were working in a single location, such as the Guildhall, we would

surely expect to see more evidence of cross-consultation, especially when it came to sourcing links and resolving problems of tale order. While we might well expect the first attempts at collecting together and organising the work to reveal problems with supply of text and uncertainty concerning its arrangement, the Guildhall functioning as a repository for texts would surely have meant that later attempts would have encountered fewer such problems.

Another area where we would expect to find evidence of collaboration concerns the problems caused by textual lacunae. But there is no evidence that scribes were resolving gaps in their exemplars by referring to other manuscripts or their exemplars. One possible example of this concerns several corrections in Corpus 198 that Manly and Rickert claimed are textually and orthographically identical to the equivalent text in Harley 7334. Manly and Rickert cited this in support of their theory that these two manuscripts were produced in a single shop. However, if we look at the textual evidence, we find that the correspondences are not as close as Manly and Rickert implied. For instance, a correction of VII 852-3 added in margin of fol. 216 of Corpus 198 reads as follows:

And mede eek in a mass[…]
& ryal spicerye
Of gyngebreed þat was f[…]
(Tale of Sir Thopas, 852-3)

The equivalent text in Harley 7334 is similar, but by no means identical:

And made him eek in a maselyn

A real spicerye

Of gyngebred þat was so fyn

(Tale of Sir Thopas, 852-3)

The addition in Corpus 198 includes several substantive variants: ‘mede’ instead of ‘made’, the addition of ‘him’ and an additional ‘so’. In addition to these changes, are orthographic variants, a double ‘s’ in the incomplete ‘mass[…]’ instead of ‘maselyn’, ‘ryal’ instead of ‘real’ and ‘gyngebreed’ for ‘gyngebred’. While such variation is comparatively trivial, it does undermine Manly and Rickert’s claim that corrections in Corpus 198 must have been copied from Harley 7334.

In other instances, textual lacunae in both Corpus 198 and Harley 7334 were left unfilled, suggesting that the scribe could not refer to alternative textual sources when copying these manuscripts. One example of this is his treatment of the missing Adam stanza in the Monk’s Tale in Corpus 198. The scribe evidently knew that a stanza narrating the tragedy of Adam was lacking in his exemplar of the Monk’s Tale, since he left 8 blank lines on fol. 236v for the missing stanza and wrote ‘De Ad*a*m*o*’ in the margin. But, despite making provision for the stanza, he never received the missing text and was forced to leave the space blank.

The evidence that we have considered here does not prove that these scribes were not working at the Guildhall, but it does call into question the theory that these four manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* were produced as part of a centralised operation. Mooney and Stubbs do themselves recognise the difficulty such evidence poses for their theory, but they do not follow through its implications, nor do they attempt to explain it: ‘It is difficult to understand why Marchaunt and Pinkhurst, who were both working at or near the Guildhall, did not confer on the development of the

texts and the construction, or alteration, of manuscripts of the *Tales*'.[17] The lack of such consultation, and of access to their previous copies and their exemplars, is surely better explained by the ad-hoc organisation proposed by Doyle and Parkes than the centralised model Mooney and Stubbs offer.

Mooney and Stubbs further suggest that such changes indicate that these manuscripts were produced during Chaucer's lifetime. According to this theory, the text was received piecemeal because Chaucer was still working on it. This seems unlikely; if these scribes had access to Chaucer himself, they would surely have had a better idea which tales and links to expect, and which order they should be placed in. Instead of the variety of solutions we have seen across these manuscripts, access to the author would surely have resulted in greater unity and less confusion.

An alternative explanation for the codicological evidence we have surveyed is that it is the result of text that was circulating in parts rather than as a complete collection of materials. This theory can be traced back to Manly and Rickert, who explained the scribes' partial access to exemplars as evidence that they were drawing on texts that were already in circulation amongst Chaucer's friends and early readers. This theory led them to propose that each tale had its own textual tradition, and that variant traditions reflected different authorial recensions. That is, Chaucer released portions of the *Canterbury Tales* during his lifetime, but continued to revise them. This theory has been rejected by most subsequent editors, who note that there is little or no evidence of authorial revision in the various manuscript traditions of the *Canterbury Tales*; variant readings are better explained as the result of the usual processes of scribal corruption.[18] But, the evidence we have considered here might point to a modified version of this theory. There is clear evidence in these early manuscripts that scribes were receiving the tales separately from the linking passages.

This caused them considerable problems, since it made it difficult to know which order to copy the tales in. But why should they get the text in this way?

One possible answer is that the tales themselves were already in circulation, without the linking passages that form part of the *Canterbury Tales* framework, and which would be superfluous in the context of free-floating tales. After Chaucer's death, scribes may have turned to these circulating copies to begin the process of assembling a complete copy of the *Canterbury Tales*, beginning new tales, or groups of tales, at the openings of quires, and leaving blank spaces between tales to be filled by links at a later date. In a number of places the gaps were left unfilled - since Chaucer had not completed the series of links - and in others links needed to be repurposed to suit an arrangement that was not sufficiently flexible to be altered.

This suggestion that the tales were already in circulation gets support from other kinds of evidence, such as the narrator's suggestion that the recipient of the Envoy to Bukton 'rede' the Wife of Bath on the subject of marriage. Since most critics would agree that the *Canterbury Tales* itself was never released during Chaucer's lifetime, since he was still working on it, it may be that the reference in the Retraction to the *Canterbury Tales*, those that 'sownen into sinne', also implies circulation of individual tales during Chaucer's lifetime[19]. The reference to Chaucer having written the life of St Cecilia and the Palamon and Arcite in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is usually taken to imply these were early works, later incorporated into the *Canterbury Tales* as the Knight's and Second Nun's Tales.[20] But these references might also be indicative of independent circulation of works written expressly for inclusion in the *Canterbury Tales*, in the same way as is implied by the Envoy to Bukton.

Paul Strohm has argued that the inspiration for the *Canterbury Tales* came during a period of personal and political crisis; Chaucer was forced to leave London and take refuge in Kent.[21] The loss of his audience of city friends and supporters led him to create a fictional audience in the Canterbury pilgrims. But Sebastian Sobecki has recently challenged this narrative, arguing that during this period Chaucer was in Southwark, and that the *Canterbury Tales* were written for a local audience, comprising members of the Kentish gentry, civil servants and scriveners.[22] It is easy to imagine copies of individual tales circulating amongst that readership; such copies could have formed the basis for the manuscripts that now survive, thereby explaining the considerable variety in their contents, tale-order and textual affiliations. It seems more likely that the copyists responsible were drawn from this group of readers and professional scribes, than from a centralised office like the London Guildhall.

Notes

[1] Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Subbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375-1425* (Woodbridge: Bodyell and Brewer, 2013).
[2] Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes and the City*, p. 132.
[3] Simon Horobin, 'Thomas Hoccleve: Chaucer's First Editor?' *Chaucer Review,* 50 (2015), 228-250. The Hengwrt manuscript is Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 392D; the Ellesmere manuscript is San Marino, Huntington Library MS Ellesmere 26.C.9. For Mooney and Stubbs's identification see 'Adam Pinkhurst, Scrivener and Clerk of the Guildhall, c.1378-1410', in *Scribes and the City*, pp. 66-85.
[4] See 'John Marchaunt, Chamber Clerk, 1380-99, Common Clerk, 1399-1417', in *Scribes and the City*, pp. 38-65.
[5] Lawrence Warner, *Chaucer's Scribes: London textual production, 1384-1432* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[6] Warner, *Chaucer's Scribes*, p. 41.
[7] A.I. Doyle and M.B. Parkes, 'The production of copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the early fifteenth century', in M.B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson, (eds.), *Mediaeval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: essays presented to N.R. Ker* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1978), pp. 163-203.

[8] For the initial identification of Adam Pinkhurst as the scribe of the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts see Linne R. Mooney, 'Chaucer's Scribe', *Speculum,* 81 (2006), 97–138.
[9] See John M. Manly and Edith Rickert (eds.), *The Text of the Canterbury Tales: Studied on the basis of all known Manuscripts* 8 vols (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1940).
[10] See Manly and Rickert *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, vol. 1, pp. 304-8 and 510-14.
[11] Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490* 2 vols (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), II, 87.
[12] Simon Horobin, *The Language of the Chaucer Tradition* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), p. 152-3 localizes the dialect of Lansdowne 851 to the Gloucestershire/Worcestershire/Herefordshire border. On Scribe D's dialect see Jeremy J. Smith, 'The Trinity Gower D Scribe and his Work on Two Early *Canterbury Tales* MSS', in J.J. Smith (ed.), *The English of Chaucer and his Contemporaries* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), pp. 51-69.
[13] See the description of this manuscript in Daniel W. Mosser, *A Digital Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Manuscripts and Incunables of the Canterbury Tales* <http://mossercatalogue.net>
[14] For the Norfolk localisation see Horobin, *The Language of the Chaucer Tradition*, p. 161.
[15] M.B. Parkes, 'The Planning and Construction of the Ellesmere Manuscript', in Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward (eds.), *The Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation* (San Marino, CA and Tokyo: Huntington Library & Yushodo Press, 1995), pp. 41-7 (44-5).
[16] Germaine Dempster, 'On the Significance of Hengwrt's Change of Ink in the Merchant's Tale', *Modern Language Notes*, 63 (1948), 325-30.
[17] Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes and the City*, p. 64.
[18] See, for instance, N.F. Blake, 'The Editorial Assumptions in the Manly-Rickert edition of *The Canterbury Tales*', *English Studies*, 64 (1983), 385-400.
[19] *Retraction*, line 1085.
[20] *Legend of Good Women* F 420-6.
[21] Paul Strohm, *The Poet's Tale: Chaucer and the year that made The Canterbury Tales* (London: Profile Books, 2015).
[22] Sebastian Sobecki, *A Southwark Tale: Gower, the 1381 Poll Tax, and Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales*', *Speculum*, 92 (2017), 630-60.