

Introduction

The Pynkhurst Phenomenon

A history of London textual production ca. 1375–1425, remarkable for its richness, elegance, and detail, has emerged from Linne Mooney's essay "Chaucer's Scribe" (2006), which effected a "Copernican revolution" in the field of Middle English studies,¹ and Mooney and Estelle Stubbs's subsequent book *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature 1375–1425* (2013), which elaborated on that essay and identified the Guildhall as a major site of vernacular manuscript production in the London of this era. In around 1355, so we learn, someone of the name Adam Pynkhurst married one Joanna; this man would become a King's Archer, a very prominent position in the service of the realm. In this capacity Adam became acquainted with Geoffrey Chaucer, fellow member of Edward III's household. He later retired to his family's home region of Surrey–Sussex, where he held lands, but in the meantime his son or nephew, and namesake, came to be Chaucer's scribe, copying *Boece* and *Troilus* (perhaps in copies, fragments of which are still extant) for the poet in the 1380s and earning a notorious place as addressee of a light-hearted stanza bemoaning his copying errors. He also did bureaucratic work for some guilds, especially the Mercers, and for the former mayor John of Northampton, and he produced a beautiful *Piers Plowman*, thus altering our understanding of topics ranging from Chaucer's political affiliations to the development of standard English.²

For it is as "Chaucer's own scrivener" that Pynkhurst is so important, that is to say, as postulated addressee of that stanza already mentioned addressed to one "Adam scryveyne" and as copyist both of the Hengwrt *Canterbury Tales*, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 392D (Hg), which in this narrative was undertaken just before the poet's death and possibly under his supervision, and of the lavish Ellesmere *Canterbury Tales*, San Marino, Huntington Library MS EL 26 C.9 (El), his greatest production.³ This account has it that during this period, and

perhaps earlier, Pynkhurst the younger held a clerkly position in the Guildhall, recording a handful of entries in Letter Book I. He was one of four main clerks who combined their work for the City with the copying of vernacular literature, suggestive of a concerted Lancastrian policy to promote English, for which the founding of the Guildhall Library in the 1420s might have been intended. The other three were Richard Osborn, Chamber Clerk of the Guildhall and copyist of *Piers Plowman*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, *Mandeville's Travels*, and much else; John Marchaunt, Common Clerk, called "Scribe D" for his stint on Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.2 (in which Pynkhurst was "B"),⁴ copyist of Chaucer, Langland, Trevisa, and especially Gower; and John Carpenter, Marchaunt's successor, identified now as scribe of two Gowers and a *Troilus*.

By 1380, Adam Pynkhurst Sr., assuming the accuracy of Mooney's account, was a very rich man. This is no surprise, given his award of an annuity of six pence per day for life by Edward III in April 1370, the year Adam and Joanna rented a property in Bramley, Surrey,⁵ and his wealth has only recently been confirmed – to leave Mooney's portrait for a moment – by the revelation that the 1381 Poll Tax records for Bramley show that the Pynkhurst couple paid 6s 8d, their two servants John Houwyk and John Colles paying 4d and 6d respectively.⁶ As Gary Baker has observed, "even if he were paying only half the 6s. 8d. for himself," the other half paid by Joanna, "and potentially less if paying for other un-listed family members, this was still three times the amount the average person was expected to contribute."⁷ Nothing about the identity of the King's Archer as the scrivener would present difficulties to any of this. That his entry in the Scriveners Company Common Paper "is the longest, the most rhetorically ornate, and the most elegantly copied of all," in Richard Firth Green's judgment, "speaks volumes ... about Pinkhurst's prominent position in the pecking order of the fledgling scriveners' company," a prominence that would make good sense if he was this wealthy King's Archer.⁸ And the listing of another royal archer, John Kenne, as a weaver (*textor*) in the 1379 Poll Tax records mitigates any sense that King's Archers were only military men.⁹

At this point the other major figure of Linne Mooney's story, not as rich as Pynkhurst but still notable as scribe, poet, and civil servant, comes into the picture of the Guildhall's central role in Middle English literary production. For "Scribe E," and possible supervisor, of the Trinity Gower of which in this account Pynkhurst was "B," was Thomas Hoccleve, clerk at the Privy Seal, in which capacity he came to know Marchaunt, his apprentice John Carpenter, and, most remarkably, Chaucer himself, on whose

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behalf he wrote a petition in 1399, as Pynkhurst had done as well. Hoccleve remained active, if beset by frequent psychological and financial hardships, in the 1410s and 1420s. Recent years have witnessed two major additions to this history. First is Mooney's claim that London, British Library MS Royal 17 D.XVIII, an ordinary-looking *Regiment of Princes*, is in fact a holograph copy, with new readings reflecting the changed circumstances of both country and poet in the year since this poem was first issued.¹⁰ The second, perhaps more surprising, is Simon Horobin's argument that Hoccleve was "Chaucer's first editor," who supervised Pynkhurst's (that is, Scribe B's) work on Hengwrt, Ellesmere, and the Trinity Gower.¹¹

This is a thrilling account, and it is no wonder that the Pynkhurst identification in particular has captured so many imaginations. And yet we have already seen the story's need to interpret the historical record in light of the attributions at issue rather than vice versa, in the form of the division of "Adam Pynkhurst" into two separate individuals. The alternative is to believe that Pynkhurst was "sixty-five when writing the Hengwrt manuscript around the time of Chaucer's death in 1400; at least seventy-three when copying his stint in Trinity College MS R.3.2 in 1408 or later; and seventy-five when his hand last appears in the Letter Books (1410). This seems a long career," say Mooney and Stubbs, so that, while not impossible, "the balance still seems tipped in favour of there having been two men of this name."¹² The possibility that one man named Adam Pynkhurst did all this copying dissipates further still when one considers his wealth, suggesting the absence of any need to work for money; the short lifetimes even of the rich in that era, half of whom had died by age fifty;¹³ and new evidence, presented in Chapter 5, which, if Pynkhurst's placement in the Guildhall is accurate, means he must still have been at work in 1416, when he was about eighty-one. On top of this, again, is the absence both of any positive support for the split of Adam Pynkhurst into two men and of any mention of the younger in any historical records after ca. 1401.

That date, 1401, is the latest for the final known Pynkhurst life record, not mentioned by Mooney, though Jane Roberts brought it to light a few years before the most recent account of his life. Kew, National Archives SC 8/134/6655 is a petition in French dated to 1399–1401 "by one 'Adam Penkhurst' requesting confirmation of grants made by Edward III and Richard II to the petitioner."¹⁴ At issue are "provenantz de countees de Sussex & Surrey," so there is no question of this referring to an unrelated man of the identical name; the earliest known document mentioning Adam Pynkhurst is from the Feet of Fines for Surrey, 1355.¹⁵ If there were two Adam Pynkhursts this 1401 petition in itself presents no problem.

The complication arises from Roberts's observation that the hand of the petition "writes a confident Secretary script that bears comparison with the oath in the Common Paper, although a less formal piece of writing" in that it "lacks the extravagant embellishments of the oath and has a more restrained sprinkling of Anglicana letter forms."¹⁶ Chapter 2 will turn to the relevant paleographical features of Pynkhurst on which basis I will say here that I deem it likely that this is the hand of the famous scribe. The simplest if not inevitable explanation is that this script on behalf of "Adam Penkhurst" is so close to that of our "Adam Pynkhurst" because they are the same man, who retired to Surrey in 1400.

The identification of "Chaucer's scribe," then, whose immense impact on the field of Middle English can scarcely be measured, necessitates the existence of two Adam Pynkhursts despite the absence of any evidence for such a split and the presence of suggestive evidence against it. And this is before questions of handwriting, dialect, Guildhall records, or any other of the bodies of evidence at issue arise, each of which presents equally pressing interpretive dilemmas which can be answered in only one way if we are to accept that Pynkhurst was Scribe B and thus was Chaucer's scribe. Yet much of the identification's power inheres in the sense that no such interpretive dilemmas interfered, that is, that Mooney had "discovered" something whose meaning was self-evident. "I was amazed he had not been found before," she told one news agency: "It took about a second to recognise. I was so excited";¹⁷ in another account, "I stopped still in the middle of a busy intersection as the penny dropped – as the British say – and I said aloud, 'Oh, his name is Adam!'"¹⁸ and in the 2006 essay "Chaucer's Scribe" itself, too, the case is transparent: "Certain decorative features reveal him immediately."¹⁹

Chaucer's Scribes argues for a more diffuse history of vernacular book production in London in this era than that recounted above. Among its conclusions are that Adam Pynkhurst was one man, and that no evidence suggests he copied Chaucer's works, not to mention was Chaucer's scribe. The plural of this book's title, scribes, indicates not any postulated employees of a poet, as Pynkhurst/Scribe B has been assumed to be, but copyists of or contributors to, at various states of remove, the manuscripts of *Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *Boece*. Earliest is the Goldsmiths' clerk Thomas Usk, copying or perhaps just reading the *Troilus* around 1384–85; the latest, ninety years later, completed another manuscript of that poem whose original exemplar had most likely been the Usk copy. Over the near-century between those dates, Scribes B and D between them copied four of the earliest *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts, while B produced a *Troilus*

as well, now only a fragment; Hoccleve, E on the Trinity Gower, filled in a few lines left blank in Hengwrt; the scribe of Huntington MS Hm 114 abandoned a *Troilus* (the one eventually completed ca. 1474 as just mentioned) before including that poem in one of his two compilations of Middle English literature in the 1420s or 30s; Carpenter, a senior clerk who was instrumental in the foundation of the Guildhall Library, seems to have been at work on vernacular literature, and has recently been identified as scribe of a *Troilus*; and finally Pynkhurst himself might have decorated a *Boece*.

Some of these men might have known Chaucer but there is no evidence that he employed any of them as scribe. Neither did any of these clerks copy his works exclusively. Scribe B's name grows from his work on Gower; D was a Gower specialist who also copied Trevisa, Langland, and the *Brut*; the Hm 114 scribe produced the longest extant *Piers Plowman* as well as *The Siege of Jerusalem*, Mandeville, *Brut*, and others; the sole literary manuscript I think Carpenter did copy is a Gower; and Hoccleve's only sustained scribal literary stint of a work other than his own was the *Confessio* as well. Pynkhurst's sole extant literary manuscript, so I will argue, is a *Piers Plowman* not a Chaucer. This book is called *Chaucer's Scribes*, then, not because it comprehensively treats those with a right to that title, but because Middle English literary studies is in urgent need of a rigorous critique of the world created by "Chaucer's Scribe," with the happy additional circumstance that nearly all of these hands are indeed found somewhere in manuscripts of his works. The exceptions are Carpenter, though as mentioned a *Troilus* has been attributed to him, and Richard Frampton, who comes closest via a potential connection with the Hm 114 scribe, discussed in Chapter 5.

This book presents a new account of the production of vernacular literature in London between 1384 and 1432, with one visit to the 1470s, an account in which the development of the English language, these scribes' connections with institutions like the Guildhall and Goldsmiths' Hall, and other topics far beyond that of their names feature prominently. The story of a single scribe, Adam Pynkhurst, who was "Chaucer's" and now belongs, as it were, to Chaucer studies, does not account very well for the extant historical, paleographical, and linguistic evidence. Neither does the account of his reintroduction to the field as surveyed above adequately respond to the history of that field. The seeming obviousness of the Pynkhurst identification explains the alacrity with which so many Chaucerians (including me) embraced it. The articulations of this "obvious" character invariably include a personal pronoun: "I was amazed *he* had not been found before."

Who is “he”? On the one hand, Reuters quoted this line because the answer was “Chaucer’s scribe” (note 17), and the “major scoop” of the 2004 New Chaucer Society congress was “Mooney’s utterly persuasive disclosure of the identity” not of Scribe B, but rather “of ‘Adam Scryveyn’ as Adam Pynkhurst.”²⁰ But on the other, when Mooney says that “certain decorative features reveal *him* immediately,” the referent of that pronoun can only be the Hengwrt-Ellesmere scribe.

Mooney’s claim, that is, came about not from paleographical analysis, which at most would have given Scribe B a name, but rather from the assumption that because this name was Adam he must have been the addressee of the lyric “Chauciers wordes. a Geffrey vn to Adame his owen scryveyne.” This is not a disinterested conclusion that could take about a second to reach. It also needs stressing that “Chaucer’s scribe,” both as concept and essay, is the product of collaboration that turned, eventually, into a solitary quest. In 2011 Jane Roberts recounted that seven years earlier she had happened to see close similarities in script between the Mercers’ petition of 1387/88 and the hands of such London figures as Scribes B and D. Mooney, she reports, heard about this, “got in touch with [her] and began searching for documents in similar handwriting in the National Archives, the Guildhall, and the Mercers’ Hall. Regrettably,” says Roberts, “despite a summer filled with the excitements of chewing happily over her discoveries, it turned out that we were not in agreement as to the relationship between scribe B and his growing portfolio.”²¹ Mooney’s announcement of the discovery of Chaucer’s scribe makes much more sense in light of Roberts’s account. The parameters of Mooney’s quest, sparked by the evidence that B was at work in London in the 1380s, would have been determined by the critical history of “Adam scryveyne,” leading, in other words, straight to Pynkhurst’s confirmation in the Scriveners Company Common Paper. Chapter 1 covers this story.

Whether or not its subsequent influence grew from the assumptions that an obvious truth had revealed itself to a single scholar, Mooney’s announcement opened out exciting opportunities. Its biggest impact was surely in the classroom,²² but a vibrant Pynkhurst scholarly industry, too, quickly materialized. Most scholars, including me, noted it as an accepted part of Middle English literary and textual scholarship; some accepted the identification and built on it; others queried certain claims but embraced its main conclusion; and one or two have, very recently, followed Roberts in calling it into question.²³ An impressive range of topics was affected: the authority and respective dates of Hengwrt and Ellesmere, Chaucer’s political affiliations and biography, the development of London English and

its status in modern critical editing, and much else. In 2012 Pynkhurst was awarded an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, reserved for “people who have left their mark on an aspect of national life,”²⁴ and The National Library of Wales has claimed that Hengwrt’s importance “has recently been magnified by the identification of its scribe as Adam Pynkhurst, one of Chaucer’s London-based associates.”²⁵

Meanwhile Mooney continued her project of scribal attribution, much of it together with Stubbs and Horobin. This culminated in the 2011 launch of the *Late Medieval English Scribes* web database www.medievalescribes.com by all three scholars, and the 2013 publication of Mooney and Stubbs’s *Scribes and the City*, for which the way was prepared by a new collection of press releases (“Research Reveals Cradle of English Literature” and so forth).²⁶ These materials quickly gave rise to a new body of scholarship,²⁷ but also, entertainingly, to a new trend in fiction. “Now him I remember,” remarks a character in Bruce Holsinger’s *The Invention of Fire* (2015), having been queried by the sleuth John Gower regarding the copyist of an important document: “Strange face, that scribbling carl, all burned up, and an odd name to match. Pinkhouse or some likeness.” Gower fills out the picture when they meet: “Rather young” (this is 1386), “yet with a steady hand at the quill, the scrivener had already established himself as an invaluable scribal asset for numerous parties, keeping accounts for the mercers’ guild and the wool custom while working doggedly for the Guildhall.”²⁸ And in Amy Rowland’s *The Transcriptionist* (2014), set in modern-day New York, the protagonist Lena converses with a scholar who says she has “discovered the identity of Chaucer’s scrivener, which helps certify Chaucer’s work. He had written a poem about Adam.” Upon learning that Lena, a newspaper transcriptionist, has “a personal interest in scribes,” this academic continues: “I’d been on the trail for quite a while and I finally compared the two signatures. The evidence has been there for centuries, but I suppose no one had looked for it before.” She ends up showing off to Lena her “database of scribes in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.”²⁹ Thus did the small world of fictional medievalists – Lucky Jim, Rosamund Merridew, William Stoner, Persse McGarrigle’s head of department Liam McCreedy – welcome another denizen.

Not every note struck has been celebratory or commemorative. Christopher de Hamel paints a dark picture of outrage within “the British academic establishment”: “Without the courtesy of weighing her evidence, there were those who instantly prejudged any identifications by Linne Mooney to be inherently preposterous.” This “dreadfully unjust” response gave rise to “on-going controversies over Adam Pynkhurst [which] have

come to resemble the pamphlet wars of the eighteenth century, driven as much by faith and jealousy as by reason and historical verification.”³⁰ To be sure, de Hamel needs to create a sense of controversy which he will adjudicate (“Our first witness to be called in the trial of Adam Pynkhurst”),³¹ as some readers might say about *Chaucer's Scribes* as well. And de Hamel renders a Scottish verdict of case “not proven” in line with my rejection of the identification. Still, I think it worthwhile to rebut this account. Given that “it took about a second to recognise” and his identity was “revealed immediately,” it is unclear how these scholars could have done otherwise than “instantly prejudge” Mooney’s claim. And the roles of the British scholars Roberts, Stubbs, and Horobin in the story lessen any sense that the U.K. was outraged at an American’s intrusion into their territory. Yet most misleading in my view is the reference to continuing controversies that have revived the spirit of the pamphlet wars. The sole sustained critique of the Pynkhurst identification, in print at least, is by Roberts herself, to which there have been no replies to date; otherwise, as one Oxford Chaucerian has observed, “everyone is agreed on the importance of the discovery.”³²

Among the premises of *Chaucer's Scribes* is that, questions of accuracy aside, to call the identification of Pynkhurst as Scribe B a “discovery” does justice to the histories neither of medieval textual production nor of modern scholarly work. The brilliance of “Chaucer’s Scribe” is not that it uncovers previously hidden facts but that it creates a powerful, elegant, and hugely attractive world. Such a characterization does not detract from its accomplishments in the slightest: all work in the humanities ought to aim so high. And all announcements of such power, especially, ought to invite continual testing and challenge. In accepting that invitation, this book will in part mount the negative argument that Adam Pynkhurst was not scribe of Hengwrt or Ellesmere, referent of “Adam scryveyne,” Chaucer’s scribe, a Guildhall clerk, or copyist of the Mercers’ petition of 1387/88, and that many of the arguments that built on such beliefs, too, are inaccurate. But the more important and positive argument will be that London literary production in this era was astounding and unprecedented precisely for its resistance to any localization (e.g., to the Guildhall) or direct connection of any of the many scribes at work in the environs of London, Southwark, and Westminster with Chaucer, Langland, or most other authors (Gower is a different story). Chapter 1, “Adam,” fills out the point that so long as there exist viable interpretations of “Adam Scryveyne,” as I shall call the lyric for convenience, other than that it is addressed to a historically identifiable scribe named Adam who worked for the poet, the most

that can be said of Pynkhurst, assuming the paleographical case that he copied Hengwrt and Ellesmere is accurate, is precisely that: that he copied those and a few other manuscripts. The chapter concludes by showing in detail, on the grounds of metrical and linguistic analysis, that this lyric is unChaucerian in any case.

Chapter 2, “The Pynkhurst Canon,” argues that all paleographical evidence shows that the only literary manuscript Pynkhurst copied was Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.15.17, main text *Piers Plowman*, his other extant productions comprising some bureaucratic and ornamental work. The second subject of the chapter, after that indicated by the title, is the silent shift in the use of paleographical evidence that enabled Mooney’s explosive announcement. If my attribution of Trinity B.15.17 to Pynkhurst is accurate, the urgent question arises as to whether its language supports Horobin and Mooney’s attribution of that copy to the Hengwrt-Ellesmere scribe. Chapter 3, “Pynkhurst’s London English and the Dilemma of Copy-Text,” argues that the answer is no, a shift in the norms of dialectal study producing recent suggestions otherwise. It then turns to the larger theoretical question of the relationship of dialectology with other disciplines, via the central topics of “Type III” English and of the best way to present the authorial *Piers Plowman* B to readers today.

The scribe of Huntington Hm 114 (*Piers Plowman*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Mandeville’s Travels*, etc.) has been the subject of more scholarly essays in the past decade than has Pynkhurst himself. Mooney and Stubbs identify him as Richard Osbarn, clerk of the chamberlain 1400–37, on the basis of what they call “quite conclusive evidence.” Chapter 4 first shows that the authors have misread or misunderstood the evidence behind that identification, before bringing to light hundreds of new items in his hand ca. 1397–1432 from the Guildhall and the Goldsmiths’ Hall. He was indeed a Guildhall clerk, just not Osbarn, and he had left that institution by the time he turned to literary copying. Part of the story concerns the former Goldsmiths’ clerk, author, and doomed political pamphleteer Thomas Usk, who gets connected across the decades to the Hm 114 scribe upon his move from the Guildhall to the Goldsmiths. Chapter 5, “The Guildhall Clerks,” works through Mooney and Stubbs’s identifications of their Osbarn’s colleagues: Scribe D, specialist in Gower manuscripts, whom they take to have been Osbarn’s supervisor John Marchaunt, common clerk; their Adam Pynkhurst, placed in the Guildhall on the basis of attributions of items in Letter Book I; Marchaunt’s successor John Carpenter, to whom are attributed two Gowers and a *Troilus*; and Richard Frampton, whose work on an item in common with their Osbarn helps secure his inclusion

in the group. The chapter casts doubt on these claims, arguing that more diffuse historical forces are at work.

The discovery by A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes that the poet and Privy Seal clerk Thomas Hoccleve was Scribe E of the Trinity Gower, combined with their subsequent identification of his hand among those filling in the blank spaces of Hengwrt, placed Hoccleve at the center of Middle English textual studies. At stake in such claims as that he was Chaucer's first editor, as throughout this book, are both the state of paleographical, codicological, linguistic, and textual scholarship, and the methodologies by which it arrived here. The final chapter, "Hoccleve's Hengwrt, Hoccleve's Holographs," argues that Hoccleve remains absolutely central, and yet impossible to pin down in the ways attempted since 2011 or so.

No single picture of London textual production ca. 1384–1432 emerges from my study of these figures. That is the book's major point: scholarship's embrace of Adam Pynkhurst as Chaucer's scribe, of the Guildhall as cradle of his and his peers' literary works, and of Hoccleve as his editor finds little evidentiary support. That said, certain trends do emerge: a fluidity of these clerks' associations, such as Pynkhurst's between the King's Archers and the Scriveners Company, or the Hm 114's between the Guildhall and the Goldsmiths; a general consistency of language within each scribe's writing and spelling practices, at odds with some influential recent claims; the incubating of literary production by institutions and individuals in Westminster and Southwark as well as London; and, with the major exception of Scribe D, who seems likely to have had some sort of affiliation with Gower, a lack of any evidence that any of these scribes knew the authors whose works they copied. This is the case even for Hoccleve, whose hand is in Hengwrt and who claims a friendship with Chaucer.

By necessity *Chaucer's Scribes* expends much energy on previous scholarship, but as a core part of doing so it also offers a substantial body of new information and interpretations of existing evidence. Chapter 1 reads "Adam Scryveyne" in light of our knowledge of Chaucerian meter for the first time, so far as I know; Chapter 2 reveals the extent to which a certain decorative motif central to the identification of Pynkhurst as Chaucer's scribe pervaded the deeds, charters, and wills of the era; and Chapter 4 brings to light strong evidence that Thomas Usk might have copied or read a *Troilus and Criseyde* that remained in the Goldsmiths' Hall for forty years and that the Hm 114 scribe was the most active clerk in the city courts from 1404 to 1410. All of this is of a piece with this book's account of claims made by Mooney and her collaborators. *Chaucer's Scribes*, that is, tells a story of modern scholarly methodologies no less than of medieval