

## PAPER IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Orietta Da Rold provides a detailed analysis of the coming of paper to medieval England, and its influence on the literary and non-literary culture of the period. Looking beyond book production, Da Rold maps out the uses of paper and explains the success of this technology in medieval culture, considering how people interacted with it and how it affected their lives. Offering a nuanced understanding of how affordance influenced societal choices, *Paper in Medieval England* draws on a multilingual array of sources to investigate how paper circulated, was written upon, and was deployed by people across medieval society, from kings to merchants, to bishops, to clerks and to poets. *Paper in Medieval England* offers new insights on how medieval paper changed communication and shaped modernity.

ORINETTA DA ROLD is University Lecturer in Literature and the Material Text, 1100 to 1500 in the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of St John's College. Her publications include *The Dd Manuscript: A Digital Edition of Cambridge University Library, MS Dd. 4.24 of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (2013) and the co-edited *Cambridge Companion to British Manuscripts* (2020).

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PAPER IN MEDIEVAL  
ENGLAND

*From Pulp to Fictions*

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## *A Preface with Thanks*

Il est aussi facile de rêver un livre, qu'il est difficile de le faire.

It is as easy to dream up a book as it is difficult to produce it.  
(Balzac, *Le cabinet des antiques*)

The idea of this book emerged in one of those many serendipitous accidents in the life of a student. It came about many years ago with a conversation and a manuscript during one of my last PhD supervisions. It was a discussion on why Cambridge University Library, MS Dd.4.24, an early copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, has had a mixed reception among scholars. The material, paper, was at fault. 'What's wrong with paper and scholars! Don't they realize what a wonderfully rich and informative material it is?', I said. My amused supervisor smiled, and calmly replied: 'Well, that's something for you to sort out and tell us'.

But 'sorting out' paper in medieval book production has been a rather long and complex process. What seemed a straightforward assertion during that supervision was a challenging idea to pursue. As Stevenson noted: 'In England . . . most of the paper story remains to be worked out'.<sup>1</sup> Hills added a considerable amount to this story in his important study on the history of paper in post-print Britain,<sup>2</sup> and yet the arrival, adoption and use of paper before the advent of print have more stories to tell. Paper is a material that may seem simple – after all, paper is made from rags and water – but presents modern scholars with an array of challenges. How do we talk about paper? What knowledge are we seeking in studying paper? And what methods or frameworks are there to enable us to 'think paper' in medieval England? Of course, codicologists, bibliographers and

<sup>1</sup> Briquet's *Opuscula: The Complete Works of Dr. C. M. Briquet without 'Les filigranes'*, ed. by Allan Stevenson (Hilversum: Paper Publications Society, 1955), p. xxix.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Leslie Hills, *Papermaking in Britain, 1488–1988: A Short History* (London: Athlone Press, 1988).

filigranologists have taught us a number of invaluable lessons on how to approach paper, in particular its watermarks, for dating books and solving fascinating textual puzzles.<sup>3</sup> A survey of paper evidence in medieval England was, I thought, a good starting point and I began following the steps of two excellent European projects, the *Progetto Carta* as well as the Bernstein Project.<sup>4</sup> My early work confirmed to me that there is more to paper than watermarks. As I was busy collecting and measuring watermarks, other evidence on the distribution, circulation and use of paper in medieval England and Europe captured my curiosity; the story of paper became more intriguing and the project substantially different.

The debates on whether book history ought to be about analytical evidence or conceptual propositions also made me realize that one does not need to exclude the other.<sup>5</sup> Scholars in manuscript studies often combine the two. Indeed, the importance of writing about paper in medieval manuscript production ought to be complemented by other concerns: scholarly perceptions, terminology and an understanding of the wider use of paper in medieval society. In essence, what I wanted to know was why paper matters to our understanding of late medieval English culture. England is situated on the fringes of the European centres of paper production, and yet it is central to the perception of the ‘idea’ of paper, both as a writing material and a cultural artefact. I use English rather than British under advisement. I soon realized that, as I broadened my research questions, the geographical scope of the project had to be narrowed. The amount of evidence I discovered was such that it was impossible to propose a full examination of the arrival of paper in all the territories under the Angevin kings. The arrival of paper in Ireland and Wales as well as the use of paper in the Angevin regions in France demand a study in their own right.<sup>6</sup> Scotland also deserves a separate investigation. I therefore decided to focus on evidence mainly pertaining to England as a geographical entity within a complex system of political influences,

<sup>3</sup> For an initial overview, see Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); Allan Stevenson, *The Problem of the Missale Speciale* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1967); and Stephen Spector, ed., *Essays in Paper Analysis* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Research from the *Progetto Carta* has appeared in Ornato *et al.* For the Bernstein Project, see [www.berstein.oeaw.ac.at/](http://www.berstein.oeaw.ac.at/) and the Memory of Paper, [www.memoryofpaper.eu/BernsteinPortal/app\\_start\\_disp](http://www.memoryofpaper.eu/BernsteinPortal/app_start_disp) (accessed 1 December 2019).

<sup>5</sup> See the very interesting discussion in William Kuskin, *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 24 n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Pádraig Ó Macháin, ed., *Paper and the Paper Manuscript: A Context for the Transmission of Gaelic Literature* (Cork: University College Cork, 2019).

annexations and possessions. Naturally, the evidence of paper in some of these other regions also informs my discussion on paper in England.

Broadening my approach, and focusing my geographical remit, offered the answer to my initial question and suggested that ‘thinking paper’ comprises three interrelated themes: ‘Paper in Culture’, ‘Paper in Time’ and ‘Paper in Space’. All three interrelated themes, however, could not be compressed into one book, and in the present investigation I set out to examine ‘Paper in Culture’, planning a subsequent volume on ‘Paper in Time and Space’. Paper in culture pushes the boundaries of historicism to articulate the many questions that paper presents to us and the answers to these questions. This book is not exclusively about book history or the codicology of medieval paper manuscripts. It is not about watermarks in medieval paper. It is not a new Briquet. It is an invitation to read the evidence of paper beyond bibliographical details, and yet it is informed by the experience of studying hundreds of paper manuscripts and searching for the significance of paper use in books. This approach compelled me to seek where else paper was used in the Middle Ages, why it was adopted and what its uses might signify. This book is grounded on a conception of paper studies as defined by paper’s use in manuscript culture, but my work has also profited immensely from economic and cultural history, anthropological readings on agency, philosophical methodologies on tacit knowledge, media studies and close readings of literary texts. The interdisciplinary approach which I offer in this book has helped me to think through why paper became a success story in pre-modern England.

This project owes its completion to the British Academy. I am very grateful for the award of a Mid-Career Fellowship in 2017. This fellowship gave me time to gather my thoughts and write up my past and recent work on medieval paper. However, this project is also the result of many conversations and the generosity of colleagues. It has its foundations on the learning of other scholars who helped me to refine my thinking even though my own argument differs. Knowledge and scholarship are incremental, especially on a subject of study like paper, and it was often difficult to be selective. I point to further readings within specific references as a way to acknowledge the breadth and depth of the field. My project was also greatly facilitated by those often invisible and anonymous people who have laboured over the compilation of ground-breaking resources, especially in their digital iterations: *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, *Geiriadum Prifysgol Cymru (A Dictionary of the Welsh Language)*, *The Middle English Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

I am extremely grateful to the librarians and the staff of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the British Library and the Bodleian Library for giving me permission to examine material in their care. I would like to thank Frank Bowles and the manuscript reading room team of Cambridge University Library for putting up with a large number of requests at, sometimes, very short notice, and James Freeman for further thoughts on some of these manuscripts and for reading sections of the manuscripts. The Appendix in this volume pays tribute to this team of people for their patience and insights. I wish also to thank Consuelo W. Dutschke, Curator of the Medieval and Renaissance Collections of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University; Vanessa Wilkie, William A. Moffett Curator of Medieval Manuscripts and British History at the Huntington Library; Don C. Skemer, Curator of Manuscripts, Princeton University Library; Melissa Grafe, John R. Bumstead Librarian for Medical History, Yale Medical Historical Library; Gina Hurley and Ingrid Lennon-Pressey at The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. A big thank you also to Alison Archibald, Conservation Manager, Paul Drybugh, Principal Record Specialist, and Sonja Scwoll, Senior Conservation Manager at The National Archives for showing me some of the very early paper held in their care and very patiently answering my questions on their records. Also, thank you to Robert Bell at Wisbech Museum, and John Alban and Susan Maddock formerly at The Norfolk Record Office.

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Cheese for offering insightful comments on manuscript conservation; Sarah Knight for wonderful conversations on translating and interpreting Medieval Latin; Nicola Morato for reading parts of the book and inviting me to explain some of my methodological approach; and David Rundle on humanist manuscripts. I thank Bernardo S. Hinojosa for reading sections of the book, and Daniel Sawyer for further checks on manuscripts in Oxford. For further suggestions and references, I thank: John Bollard, Patrick Boyde, Mark Clarke, Siân Collins, Helen Cooper, Godfried Croenen, Emanuela Di Stefano, Jane Gilbert, Philip Knox, Raphael Lyne, J. P. McDermott, Laura Moretti, George Younge and Nicolette Zeeman. I am also grateful to Hollie Morgan for inspirational cards throughout the last stages of this project as well as for reading each chapter, and for humorous conversations on my neologisms, false friends and idioms. I am grateful to past and current colleagues at the Universities of Leicester and Cambridge for helping me to think through this project in different ways and from different angles. In particular, I thank my colleagues in St John's College, Ruth Abbott and Chris Warnes, for support in the final stages of this book. To all of you, my most sincere thanks. The proofs of the book arrived in the spring of 2020 when the world was in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This made it impossible to complete all the further checks I intended to do at this stage. All remaining errors are my own.

Earlier versions of sections of this book have been presented at national and international events. I am grateful to the participants of the Birmingham, Cambridge and Oxford Medieval Research Seminars, East–West Text Technologies Project in Beijing, the third annual collegium ‘TexTexTile-Texture’ at Stanford University, the London Medieval Manuscripts Seminar, the Cambridge Palaeography Workshop and History of Material Text Seminar for their insights and suggestions. My students have always been sources of inspiration: Freya Brooks, Elena Violaris, Abi Glen and Carlotta Barranu, thank you for making the writing of this book more bearable, and for discussing some of its sections with me. At Cambridge University Press, I would like to thank Emily Hockley and Daniel Wakelin for believing in this project, and the production team for their patience. Dan, in particular, has been a most attentive Series Editor, offering invaluable suggestions especially on the final version of the manuscript. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, and for encouraging me to write better. Last, but not least, my very special thanks to Cecilia Pietropoli, who first believed in me, and to N. F. Blake, the aforementioned PhD supervisor, whose witty smile I will never forget; and to my family, Inan, Elif and Eren for their unabated support and encouragement. To my husband, I hope this book will make a good doorstep.

## *Abbreviations and Conventions*

Beadle, <i>Paston</i>	Richard Beadle and Colin F. Richmond, eds, <i>Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century</i> , EETS, s.s. 22 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)
BL	British Library, London
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Briquet	C. M. Briquet, <i>Les filigranes: dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600</i> , 4 vols (Paris and Geneva: A. Picard & fils and A. Jullien, 1907)
Chaplais	Pierre Chaplais, <i>Diplomatic Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (London: HMSO, 1964)
CUL	Cambridge University Library
Davis, <i>Paston</i>	Norman Davis, ed., <i>Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century</i> , EETS, 2 vols, s.s. 20, 21 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
<i>DMBL</i>	Andrew G. Watson, <i>Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts, c.700–1600 in the Department of Manuscripts, the British Library</i> , 2 vols (London: British Museum, 1979)
<i>DMCL</i>	Pamela R. Robinson, <i>Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts c.737–1600 in Cambridge Libraries</i> , 2 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988)
<i>DMLBS</i>	<i>The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources</i> , ed. by R. E. Latham <i>et al.</i> , 17 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975–2013), <a href="http://www.dmlbs.ox.ac.uk/web/online.html">www.dmlbs.ox.ac.uk/web/online.html</a>
<i>DMLL</i>	Pamela R. Robinson, <i>Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts c.888–1600 in London Libraries</i> , 2 vols (London: British Library, 2003)

## Dating Conventions

xix

<i>EETS</i>	<i>Early English Text Society</i> (o.s.: original series; s.s.: supplementary series)
fol./fols	folio/folios
<i>GPC</i>	<i>Geiriadum Prifysgol Cymru (A Dictionary of the Welsh Language)</i> , <a href="http://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html">http://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html</a>
<i>IBP</i>	Frieder Schmidt and Elke Sobek, eds, <i>Internationale Bibliographie zur Papiergeschichte (IBP): Berichtszeit: Bis Einschliesslich Erscheinungsjahr 1996</i> (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2003)
<i>MED</i>	<i>The Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. by Hans Kurath <i>et al.</i> , 20 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001), <a href="https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/">https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/</a>
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , <a href="http://www.oxforddnb.com/">www.oxforddnb.com/</a>
<i>OED</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , ed. by John A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 2nd edn, 20 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), <a href="http://www.oed.com">www.oed.com</a>
Ornato <i>et al.</i>	Ezio Ornato, C. Federici, P. Busonero <i>et al.</i> , <i>La carta occidentale nel tardo medioevo</i> , 2 vols (Rome: Istituto centrale per la patologia del libro, 2001)
<i>Riverside</i>	<i>The Riverside Chaucer</i> , ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
s.	<i>saeculo</i>
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
Zonghi	A. F. Gasparinetti, ed., <i>Zonghi's Watermarks</i> , Monumenta Chartae Papyraceae Historiam Illustrantia (Hilversum: Paper Publications Society, 1953)

## Dating Conventions

I have adopted the system which was suggested by N. R. Ker in his *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, vol. 1, p. viii: s. xiv<sup>in</sup> [= 'ineunte'] for 'early fourteenth century', s. xiv<sup>1</sup> for 'first half of fourteenth century', s. xiv<sup>med</sup> [= 'medio'] for 'middle of the fourteenth century', s. xiv<sup>2</sup> for 'second half of the fourteenth century', s. xiv<sup>ex</sup> [= 'exeunte'] for 'late fourteenth century', and s.xiv/xv for 'around the turn of fourteenth century', and their permutations across the fifteenth century.

**Transcriptions**

For the material transcribed from documents and manuscripts, I have adopted some simplified principles. I retain manuscript orthography, but I have modified word spacing for the sake of clarity. I have retained the original capitalization, punctuation and lineation. When transcribing a prose text, lineation is indicated by a vertical stroke. | denotes a line break; || denotes a page break. I have silently expanded all abbreviations. Unreadable letters have been marked by 'x'; additions by {} and deleted letters and words (crossing out, erasure or expunctuation) in < >.

**Translations**

Unless otherwise stated all translations in the book are my own. I have always opted for as literal a translation as possible to enable readers to make their own interpretations. I translate quotations from languages other than Middle English either implicitly in the text by paraphrasing quotations in the original or translate passages immediately afterwards.