

TEXTUAL PROVENANCE THROUGH THE MALE AND FEMALE NAMES IN THE FINDERN MANUSCRIPT

ANNA GOTTSCHALL

Although referred to conventionally as the Findern Manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6 could have belonged to any number of influential Derbyshire families associated with regional networks of manuscript exchange. In this article I will argue that the names and signatures written within the manuscript offer an invaluable source of evidence, suggesting that the families mentioned directly contributed to the construction and readership of the Findern Manuscript. Local history records indicate that the families of Frauncis, Cotton, Hungerford and Shirley, named in the manuscript, were intricately interconnected through bonds of matrimony, kinship and geographical proximity. The families provided original contributions to the manuscript, developed their writing skills, offered their individual annotations and provided or copied excerpts from the source material.

This article considers both male and female names written in the Findern Manuscript. The first half of the analysis focuses on the appearance of female names as a means to connect the manuscript with specific local gentry families. The second half of the article considers the role of male names in the Findern Manuscript. The male names refer primarily to estate servants and thus provide a means of investigating the cultural importance of literary agents in the dissemination of ideas amongst the noble households of Derbyshire. The use of scribes as literary agents is one of the unexplored means by which the Findern and other families operated. In this respect they were similar to the Paston family, who notably used scribes in the circulation of private correspondence (Davis).

The Female Names. One of the signs of female involvement in the manuscript's compilation is the presence of two female names – Elizabeth Cotton and Elizabeth Frauncis – which appear at the conclusion of the romance commonly referred to as *Sir Degrevant* (ff.96r-109v). Since these names appear in the place of scribal signatures the implication is that the two women copied out the romance. If they did not undertake the copy then the method of its “signing” awards them ownership indirectly.¹ Robbins states that the hand which wrote “Elisabet koton” on f.109v also copied the second half

of *Sir Degrevant* (ff.100r-109v) and Hoccleve's *Epistre de Cupide* (ff.71r-76v) (626-627).² Harris disagrees with Robbins, proposing that the two signatures are in the same hand and therefore written by the self-same woman (317). O'Mara, however, remains unconvinced that the two signatures are in the same hand or that either hand is responsible for copying any part of *Sir Degrevant* (90-91).³

Several other important female names appear on various pages of the manuscript and offer a more nuanced understanding of networks of cultural exchange. "Elizabet Frauncys" is written on f.109v in a hand that, according to Beadle and Owen, greatly resembles the writing style of the second scribe of the text (viii). This suggests that the manuscript originates from south Derbyshire and provides a connection with the Finderns. The Frauncis family resided in Foremark, three miles south east of Findern, and there is a record of the marriage of Elizabeth Frauncis and John Findern (fl. 1476) (Metcalf, "Derbyshire" 134-35, Harris 303). Similar connections tie these families to the Port family – John Frauncis (fl. 1509-1510, 1543-1544) married Barbara, daughter of Sir John Port and her sister married George Findern (Robbins 627). "Elizabet Koton," whose name appears at the end of *Sir Degrevant*, was presumably a member of the Cotton family of nearby Hamstall Ridware in Staffordshire. Hamstall Ridware is approximately fifteen miles south west of Foremark and a similar distance from Findern. Elizabeth was the wife of Sir Richard Cotton (Burke and Burke 136), and she appears to have lived at the same time as Elizabeth Frauncis, wife of John Findern.

According to Casson, the two different scribal hands that occur within *Sir Degrevant* are found within different booklets (1949:xii). The watermark evidence dates the first booklet to c.1423-27 and the second to c.1453 (Briquet). Casson suggests that the second booklet dates to c.1446-61 as evidenced by *The cronekelys of seyntyis and kyngys of yngelond* (ff.110r-113r). The text ends during the first reign of Henry VI (1422-1461). This suggests that the text could not have been written before this date. These dates fit with those associated with Elizabeth Frauncis and support the theory that the two women were contemporaries. However, watermarks can only be used to date the paper, not the signatures. The signatures could have been written any time after the production of the paper. Hanna suggests that the text was copied from a split exemplar by the two scribes (63-64). He proposes that the join in the two stints was not accurately executed as the last leaf of the first quire has been cancelled without loss of material, indicating the first scribe was not given enough copy to fill the quire completely. Such evidence is highly speculative and reveals nothing concrete about the relationship of the two scribes. One possibility is that the two scribes knew one another but did not work closely together. Another possibility is that they did not know each other and that the second

scribe finished the work. The occurrence of the signatures thus can be used to vindicate the possibility that the scribes were connected.

The names of Margery Hungerford and Anne Shirley appear as marginalia among “filler items” on blank folios. These items include more than a dozen lyrics, a record of a “rekenyng be twne Iohn wylsun et mester fynderne” (f.59v) as well as an inventory of “parcellys off clothys at fyndyrn” (f.70r) (McNamer, “Female Authors” 281). These names do not appear to be connected with specific texts, and may be pen trials or handwriting practice.

A late-fifteenth-century hand inserts the name of “Margery Hungerford” in the top margin of f.20v. Robbins and Harris suggest that Margery may refer to Mary, or that Margery may have been a relation of Mary Hungerford (Robbins 627, Harris 305). Mary Hungerford was born c.1467 and her second marriage was to Sir Richard Sacheverell in 1509 (Robbins 627). Sir Richard and Sir Henry Sacheverell are named as supervisors and Ralph Sacheverell as an executor of the will of Thomas Findern who died in 1525 (Raine 210). There is also a record of a marriage between Ralph’s daughter Mary, sister of Richard, to Thomas Findern (Metcalf, “Derbyshire” 135).⁴

Another contemporary name appears on f.118r, that of “Anne Schyrley.” Robbins proposes that the same hand that wrote the name also copied *La Belle Dame sans Mercy* (ff.117r-134v) (626-627).⁵ Anne can be identified as belonging to the Shirley family of Ettington in Warwickshire, Staunton Harold in Leicestershire (eight miles south east of Findern) or Shirley in Derbyshire (nine miles north east of Findern). At least four persons named “Anne Shirley” can be traced amongst these families between the 1480s and 1520s (Seaton 87). There appears to be a close connection between the Shirley and Frauncis families at the time of the manuscript’s production. The above families are related through the marriage of Anne, daughter of Sir Thomas Clinton, to Robert Frauncis in 1423. Moreover, Anne’s half sister, Margaret Saunton, married Ralph Shirley (d. 1466) (Metcalf, “Derbyshire” 134) and Joyce Findern married Thomas Shirley (Robbins 627).

The Shirleys of Staunton Harold can be linked to another important manuscript Cambridge, St John’s College, MS 264: Lady Margaret’s *Horae*. Another Anne, daughter of Sir Henry Vernon of Haddon and second wife of Sir Ralph Shirley (d. 1517) received a book of hours as a gift from Lady Margaret Beaufort according to Shirley’s records in the *Stemmata Shirleiana* (58). The inscription on f.12v, which is reproduced in Scott’s *Collegium Divi Johannis Evangelistae* (plate xiv), reads:

my good lady Shyrley pray for
me that gevythe yow thys boke
I hertely pray yow / Margaret/
moder to the kynge

James's catalogue description, however, identifies "lady Shyrley" as the wife of Richard Shirley. Richard Shirley was bailiff to Lady Margaret Beaufort's manor in Ware, Hertford.⁶ It is unlikely that the wife of a bailiff would be referred to as a lady by someone with the social standing of Lady Margaret Beaufort, and therefore the theory proposed in the *Stemmata Shirleiana* is more plausible. In either circumstance the manuscript was presented to one of the ladies who had married into the Shirley family and highlights the family's connection with royalty.

The interrelation of these families implies that the manuscript may be distantly associated with the Findern family. Ownership of the manuscript remains unclear until it appears in the collection of Sir Thomas Knyvett (c.1539-1618) of Ashwellthorpe in Norfolk (McKitterick 163 no.55). The Cotton pedigree is recorded in *The Visitation of the County of Warwick* which states that Richard Cotton of Woodcote in Warwickshire, son of Richard Cotton of Welton in Northamptonshire and nephew of Thomas Cotton II (d. 1519), married Katherine the daughter of one Roger Knyvett of Whitchurch in Shropshire (second wife) (Fetherston 305). From an evaluation of the documentary and palaeographical evidence, Harris deduces that the manuscript belonged to the families of one of these women before coming into the hands of the Finderns (McNamer, "Female Authors" 281). Harris's evidence further indicates the wide ranging textual interests in the poetry of the Findern Manuscript held by affluent women living in secular and gentry communities located as far away from the cultural circles in London as Derbyshire. This has great consequence when studying networks of information exchange as it implies that provincial women followed metropolitan tastes, especially in relation to the courtly love tradition.

Texts radiated out from the metropolitan centre through a variety of methods. Lords and ladies may have given texts as gifts and important employees may have been presented with texts to take home to their families. This can be illustrated from dedicatory epistles found within extant manuscripts, as already mentioned, with the book of hours given to one of the Anne Shirleys by Lady Margaret Beaufort. Also, this system of literary dissemination is evident from wills and bequests in which we find that books were passed down through generations and also between families. In 1453 Joan Newmarch was a resident at Saint Bartholomew's Priory, London.⁷ At the time of her demise in the same year, she bequeathed several books of hours to relations and friends (Kingsford 98-99). Lady Joan Clinton, a contemporary of Joan Newmarch also resident at Saint Bartholomew's, mentions members of the Shirley and Frauncis families in her will, which is dated 1457-1458 (Nicholas 284-286).

The literary implications of the social links between families are vast. The fact that the gentry families mentioned are connected, in some vein, through ties of marriage,

suggests that texts were circulated as part of a technique by which interesting discoveries could be shared. It is also possible that other families were encouraged to write within the Findern manuscript as an autograph book. Such a practice is evident within the manuscript, with the array of signatures detailing familiar names from the local gentry.

These noble families may have had ties to courtly and aristocratic circles. Within the social hierarchy, middle class families were often invited to court at the request of the King; they could have travelled to London on business, met with members of peerage or visited kin who belonged to a courtly household or circle. This hypothesis seems to be plausible in relation to the Shirley family. John Shirley worked as a scrivener and literary craftsman in London, although he occupied this role before the Findern Manuscript was completed. There is a critical consensus that he owned or had access to a broad selection of literature in Latin, French, and English, and works written in both prose and verse, as well as covering different categories of devotional, historical, and didactic material (Boffey and Thompson 283-287).

An additional connection existed between the circulation of texts and the Shirley family. Sir Thomas Clinton, the father of Anne Shirley, who married Robert Frauncis in 1423, functioned as the Controller of the Royal Household during the reigns of Henry V and Henry VI (Harris 305). Members of the Shirley family were thus conceivably associated with the court and this exists as a means by which “good” quality texts spread from London into Derbyshire.

A similar route of textual circulation and cultural exchange could be assumed of the other families of Derbyshire, but evidencing these networks is beyond the scope of this article. What can be said is that gentry society was strongly interconnected, especially through marriage, and that this highlights networks by which texts could have circulated. Such connections indicate the provenance of texts, implying that the owners of the manuscript followed national literary tastes.

The Male Names. Three male names appear in the manuscript but the individuals associated with these names are difficult to identify. An extract from Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* (“Tale of Thisbe” ff.64r-67v) is signed “nicholaus plenus amoris” (f.67v). Nothing is currently known about this scribe.⁸ On f.42v *The Parlement of Foules* (ff.29r-42v) is signed “W.Calverley.” Calverley collaborated with an unnamed scribe in the copying of this item. He too is untraceable in local history records. Another scribe copied *The Seven Deadly Sins* (f.58v) and Chaucer’s *Complaint unto his Purse* (f.59r). He signed himself “lewestoun” at the end of each text. Neither Calverley nor Leweston seem to be the names of local families. Furthermore, the Calverley family have been

identified as descending from Calverley in Yorkshire (Clay 167-172), and the Leweston family from Leweston in Dorset (Metcalf, "Hertfordshire" 96).

Hammond suggests that the rebus of a barrel, fish and scroll, appearing on f.137v and f.139r, may represent "Lewestoun" (luce-tun) (344). Robbins notes that the rebus appears "in the exact same form" in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 658 (629). On the last leaf of this small parchment manuscript (f.63r) the rebus with the scroll reading "A god when" appears in the same hand as that in the Findern Manuscript, albeit the scribe is presumably absent from the copying of the previous item. Robbins proposes that "A god when" stands for Godwin and this is possible for a similar rebus appears in London, British Library, MS Harley 7333, representing Stockton of Stoughton (Harris 303 fn.32). Although the association of Hugh Shirley with the manor of Stockton is coincidental, it is worth noting that the *Stemmata Shirleiana* records this as his place of descent (Shirley 46-60).

Perhaps the difficulty in identifying the scribes endorses Beadle and Owen's position that Calverley, Leweston and Nicholas "plenus amoris" were "estate servants of the type who acted extensively as amanuenses for the Paston family" (1977:xvi). The Pastons' fifteenth-century collection of letters contains items from women which were dictated to clerks or chaplains acting as scribes (Pearsall 425). This practice could be similar to the production methods employed in the Findern Manuscript (McNamer, "Female Authors" 279-310).

Four remaining names contribute to an increased understanding of the manuscript's origins. One of the male names is difficult to attach to any known personality. "Sharesmith" is written upside-down in the lower margin of f.10v and, in the same hand, "Sharesmyth" and "Sharesmyth / Willelmus" appear in mirror writing in the right margin of f.19r (Grazebrook 64). Grazebrook mentions a Richard Sharesmyth as a jury member for the Inquisition Post Mortem on the 15th October 1432 of Constance Sutton, whose father was Lord Dudley of Barton, Derbyshire (d. 1406) (64). This Sharesmyth record conveniently locates the family within the provincial area.

Another name can be associated with southern Derbyshire during the sixteenth-century. The name "ffranclIs Cruker" appears in the lower margin of f.65v; "ffrances Cruker"⁹ appears on blank f.95v; and "Crvker" occurs in the lower margins of f.63v. These names appear to be in the same hand. Robbins argues that the hand which wrote "ffraunces Cruken" on f.95v also wrote the prose chronicles of *seyntys and kyngys of yngelond* on ff.110r-113r (626-627).¹⁰ Francis (Frances) Cruker has not been identified at present. John Crewker, however, was an executor of Thomas Findern's will (d. 1525), and Crewker's family held the Derbyshire manor of Twyford¹¹ (Beadle and Owen viii, xvi). Furthermore, three John Crewkers are recorded within local documents. Firstly, in

November 1420, a John Crewker appears as a witness to a conveyance of land from Joan Findern, widow of John, to be held in trust for her son, Robert (Jeayes 157 no.1280). Secondly, a document dated 22 October 1443 records a grant of lands in Twyford and Stenson to Robert Frauncis. One of the witnesses was John Crewker (Jeayes 306 no.2411). Finally, on the 2 September 1495, John Crewker received a grant of lands in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, and amongst the witnesses to this document was Robert Sacheverell (Jeayes 139 no.1123).

In a late-fifteenth to mid-sixteenth-century script is the name Richard Lathbury in a memorandum on f.59v. The memorandum states:

A rekenyng be twne Iohn wylsun et mester fynderne
 Item furst tyme that I went into lester shyre w'
 richard lathbery I spent iij for my selfe et myh
 hors Item iij anoder tyme wen I went to mester
 richard w' for

Seaton, and Beadle and Owen observe that Richard Lathbury is mentioned in the will of Thomas Findern (d.1525) (Seaton 86, Beadle and Owen viii). None of the family pedigrees from Cadeby in south Leicestershire, Egginton in Derbyshire (south east of Findern) or Lathbury in Holme (north Derbyshire) mention a Richard Lathbury (Metcalf, "Derbyshire" 228). Robbins notes that the names of Findern and Lathbury are associated as early as 1420 (628). The will of Thomas Findern sheds some light on the names of Lathbury, Crewker and Margery Hungerford (Raine 208-211). Among the recipients of his bequest is a Richard Lathbere (Metcalf, "Derbyshire" 228) and Findern names as executor of the will "my cousyng, John Crewker" (Jeayes 139 no.1123, 306 no.2411).¹²

The fourth name implies the continued association of the manuscript with the Cotton family. As previously mentioned, evidence suggests that Elizabeth Cotton may have copied *Sir Degrevant* – "cotun" is inscribed in the right margin of f.72r and "cotton" appears again in the right hand margin of f.76r. Finally, the name "Thomas Cotun" is included in a supplementary note, probably in another hand dating to the early sixteenth century. This note is written upside-down in the lower margin of f.139v. Thomas Cotton was probably a descendant of William Cotton, with the male line including four Thomas Cottons in succession, all from Conington in Huntingdonshire (Jeayes 303). The last Thomas Cotton (MP for Huntington 1557-1558) married Elizabeth, daughter of Francis Shirley of Staunton Harold, Leicestershire, further strengthening the evidence for a relationship between those families associated with the Findern Manuscript (Shirley 61).

In conclusion, the connection between local families is clearly reflected in the evidence of names written within the manuscript. Further research is needed on the

connections between the families and on their relations to the manuscript. Future research could concentrate on the geographical area of Derbyshire and its surrounding counties in greater detail – employing expertise in dialectology, palaeography, genealogy, and local history. Such an approach could build an increasingly detailed picture of a local community, simplify recognition of the products of the same scribes, and identify local authors by their work, if not by name.

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Notes

- ¹ See McNamer "Lyrics and Romance" 206-207 and "Female Authors" 281 who follows Beadle and Owen, Harris and Hanna in assuming the names are scribal signatures.
- ² I have identified the copier of the Hocleve item as the same scribe who copied the first part of the *Parlement of Foules* (ff.29r-38r) and parts of *La Belle Dame sans Mercy* (ff.117r-119v, 123r-126v, 130r-134v). This is not the same hand as I have identified as copying the second half of *Sir Degrevant* and writing the name of "Elisabet koton."
- ³ O'Mara differs greatly from Harris. McNamer "Female Authors" unquestionably accepts Harris's findings, whereas Boffey has strong reservations.
- ⁴ Ralph (d. 1488); Richard (d. 1534).
- ⁵ My research does not agree. I have identified two hands within *La Belle Dame sans Mercy* (ff.117r-119v, 123r-126v, 130r-134v, and ff.120r-122v, 127r-129v).
- ⁶ James 311-313, Cooper 36-37 contains a letter from Lady Margaret to Richard Shirley, bailiff of Ware.
- ⁷ Daughter of Sir Hugh Shirley.
- ⁸ "Plenus amoris" or "full of love" is a common scribal signature, however, to date no definite reason for usage has emerged. See Macray 21-22 who cites many other examples.
- ⁹ Robbins includes "ffrances krukun" f.65v and "ffraunces Cruken" f.95v within his list of female names. He provides no evidence to confirm this statement.
- ¹⁰ I disagree with Robbins as I have identified two hands copying this text (ff.110r-112r and f.112r).
- ¹¹ Five and a half miles from Derby.
- ¹² Thomas Findern's brother-in-law Sir Richard Sacheverell, who married Mary Hungerford in 1509, is appointed a supervisor of the will as mentioned earlier (Nichols 394, 508).