Manuscript Production in Medieval Winchester

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Manuscripts produced at Winchester include some of the most beautiful ever made. The Benedictional of Æthelwold was made for Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester (963-984), during the revival of Benedictine monasticism in the second half of the tenth century.¹ The Winchester Psalter was made c.1150, probably in the Cathedral Priory of St. Swithun, Winchester.² The Winchester Bible is a little later, also made when Henry of Blois was Bishop of Winchester (1129-71), and almost certainly made at the same place.³ Few manuscripts of the priory manuscripts survived the Reformation, and monastic records of St. Swithun's were pillaged and dispersed during the Civil War. The earliest surviving catalogue of Winchester manuscripts was made in 1622.⁴ Winchester manuscripts attested to the first half of the twelfth century are almost entirely lacking. In contrast, the scriptorium of St. Alban's had a prodigious output throughout the reigns of four abbots, documented in the Gesta Abbatum Sci Albani.⁵ Oakeshott attributes the later increase in production at Winchester to the upsurge in interest and patronage of Henry of Blois. Nevertheless, it is dangerous to read too much into the absence of material from Winchester dating from to the early twelfth century. Manuscripts may have existed which do so no longer, or which await discovery even, unlikely as that may seem. It is evident that Winchester was a notable centre of high status manuscript production from the Anglo-Saxon period to the end of the medieval period, with varying levels of output perhaps. The city was an important royal and ecclesiastic centre from an early date.
Art-historical analysis has done much to place the manuscripts made at Winchester in context. Similarities in style have linked the Winchester scriptoria to other ecclesiastic centres, notably St. Alban’s and Canterbury. Byzantine influence is seen particularly in the work of the later twelfth century, suggesting wider contact, direct or indirect. Possibly the artists who worked on the manuscripts were itinerant, even secular professionals. Close parallels in style have been seen between the decorative capitals of the Winchester Bible and other artistic media, especially wall paintings. Figures depicted on seals and carvings have also been shown to have some affinity with the illustration of manuscripts. The artists may have practiced various crafts. The scribes, however, were more likely to have been monks. Ker notes a particular uniformity of script in the great Bibles of the mid-twelfth century.

The name of a Winchester scribe is known in one early instance. This is Godeman, who wrote the text of the Benedictional of Ethelwold. He gave his name in a dedicatory prayer illuminated at the beginning of the book. This informs us that he was a monk, writing for his patron, Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester. There are examples from elsewhere of scribes at work, probably self-portraits, but rarely do they mention the name of the scribe. There is a picture of St. Jerome as a scribe in the Winchester Bible. The representation of St. Jerome was presumably a standard iconographic piece, but the scribal activity depicted must bear some relation to the experience of the artist of the initial. The tools shown; the pen and the knife are standard in the frequent illustrations of scribes of the period. Jerome is both author and scribe in this instance.

Most manuscripts were penned by anonymous scribes. Though the authorship may be known, the scribes and illuminators who laboured to make copies of the texts are nameless to the modern world. In the manuscripts, the clues to their identities lie in the small variations in
handwriting, linking them with one monastic scriptorium of another, or stylistic variations, suggesting influence from one or another source. Many production processes leave evidence behind, either documentary or archeological. There is evidence of both kinds surviving for manuscript production in Winchester. As might be expected the traces are slight, but careful examination reveals that the various processes involved have left behind a record. In fact manuscript production must have been an important activity in the city.

At Winchester there is particularly extensive documentary evidence from which information may be gleaned relating to people who produced manuscripts. This is the by-name, surname and place name evidence found in royal surveys, records of taxation, and in deeds of title recorded in charters. Two surveys made in 1110 and 1148 are today known as the ‘Winton Domesday’. Winchester, like London and Hastings, was among the places recorded in the survey commissioned by William the Conqueror in 1085, despite spaces being left for these three places in the manuscript of the Great Domesday. Possibly they were omitted because the evidence collected was never copied across to the Domesday Book. However, Henry I ordered the Bishop of Winchester and four courtiers to put the burgesses of the city on oath and make an inquiry into the royal rights in his demesne in Winchester which had been held by King Edward, in order that he might recover them. Eighty-six burgesses were empanelled and sworn, and the inquiry took place between 1102 and 1115, possibly c.1110. The result lists the royal lands which paid landgable and brewgable in Edward the Confessor’s day. The second survey was carried out in 1148, in the third quarter of the reign of King Stephen, by the bishop of Winchester. This inquired into the identity of each tenant, the extent of his holding, from whom he held it, and the payments made. This may have been made in order to assess the loss to the church caused by
the civil war in 1141. A further two surveys were made in 1212 and 1285. That of 1212 was an inquiry into alienated properties of the crown, as part of a survey into knight’s fees and serjeanties carried out by the sheriffs of each county. It excludes properties in the King’s demesne. The survey of 1285 is a verdict of twelve jurors at the time of Edward I, possibly an exchequer inquiry. It specifies the sources of income which made up the fee farm of the city and other of the king’s revenues. A tarrage survey was made in 1417, listing the landgable payable to the king as part of the fee farm. The pipe rolls of the bishop of Winchester survive from 1208-9 to 1453-4. There are also court rolls, with copies of property transactions. These records, naturally, only record the names, occupations and places of abode of relatively wealthy citizens of Winchester. Nevertheless, these sources do give some information about named individuals who may have had some connection with manuscript production in Winchester. The very fact that some of these were of a reasonably wealthy class gives an indication that production was on a fairly large scale, particularly in the case of parchment makers. The manuscripts they produced may or may not have been ecclesiastic. However, the number of parchment skins required for a book like the Winchester Bible required four hundred and sixty eight parchment skins of the highest quality. Even a relatively small ecclesiastic selection of books would result in a high demand for parchment. Royal administration would also need this product, and the existence of these two markets alone could explain why the parchment makers became wealthy enough to feature in the documentary record to such an extent.

Bynames were like nicknames, describing the origin, appearance or occupation of the bearer. They were in use from at least the eighth century. They were not hereditary, unlike surnames, which came into use between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, in association with the increasing adoption of documentary bureaucracy. The date at which
bynames became hereditary surnames varies with location and social status.

In the Winton Domesday, there are three bynames whose bearers may have had some connection which manuscript production, i.e. 'parcheminus' a maker of parchment, 'pictor' a painter, and 'scriba' scribe. Two others which may have a connection are 'taneator' a tanner, and 'tinctor' a dyer.

Ainulf the parchment maker lived in Bucche Street. Four men bore the byname 'Pictor'; Henricus, Ricardus, Rogerus and Willelmus. Gisulfus was a royal scribe who had interests in two properties in Winchester. Three tanners are mentioned in the survey of 1110, and two in that of 1148. It is possible that, as people who worked with skins, they may have supplied skins to parchment makers, or accepted skins rejected by parchment makers. Likewise the four dyers in the survey of 1148 might just have had some connection with ink production, even if only supplying some of the raw materials necessary. The inclusion of the men with the byname 'pictor' is debatable. As painters, they could have been responsible for colour-washing the exterior of houses, wall-paintings such as that in the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre in Winchester Cathedral, painting pottery, or any other kind of painting. It is just possible that these pictores were painters who worked on manuscript illumination, solely or as part of a portfolio of skills. If they were secular artists working on ecclesiastic manuscripts illumination or chapel wall paintings they may have rented property in the city in which they worked. A carpenter named Alfred was also a painter in the thirteenth century, suggesting that his painting may have been more closely allied to the building trade than to manuscript illumination.

Later references to occupations include Walter le Parchemaner (fl. 1312) who was probably related to Water Parchemaner (fl.1257-78, d. by 1283-4). There was a Thomas Parchemyner fl. 1396-8. Richard
Gay (fl.1396-1419) was a parchment maker who also bought and washed sheepskins and calfskins. Thomas Bene(y)t (fl.1401-17) was described as a parchment maker. He had many trades; also being at various dates a skinner, fishmonger and innkeeper. He was frequently in trouble for trading offences. A Henry Bonet was described as a parchment maker in 1464 and Thomas Roberts was a parchment maker fl.1524.

Scribes or lay scriveners are referred to in later records as clerks. There were very many clerks in Winchester in the later Middle Ages. There was a Robert Scryvayn (fl.1387-97) who may have been a scrivener. He was a tapster from 1392-7, and sold a book in 1387. It would be interesting to know whether the book was one which he had produced himself.

It seems that the association of bynames with occupation in Winchester separates quite early on in the cases recorded. Parchment makers are still named after their occupations in the late thirteenth century. Scribes rarely seem to have been named thus, possibly because their occupation was secondary to their official position. Monks would have been an exception. Even if they devoted much of their life to copying texts, as the main scribe of the Winchester Bible must have done, their vocation would have made them less visible as individuals. Painters also seem to be less readily identifiable by occupational surname, possibly because they turned their hands to many crafts, or because if they were dedicated manuscript painters, they may have been peripatetic, and not stayed long enough in any one location to appear in taxation records.

Another type of information that can be extracted from the documentary sources is place name evidence. Many street names derive from the occupations carried out in them. Over the centuries, as centres of production have changed, street names have also changed, but the earlier names can give insights into the trades carried out in
them and the periods in which they took place. Names which could indicate trades relating to manuscript production include Parchment Street, *Flesmangerestret* (Fleshmonger Street), *Bucchestret* (Butcher Street), Skinner’s Row and Tanner Street.  

Parchment Street is self-explanatory. The other names relate to butchery trades which would have produced skins as a by product, and possibly even engaged in finishing the skins for use as parchment.

The name Parchment Street dates back to the later thirteenth century, when it replaced the name of the street then known as *Flesmangerestret*. The name *Flesmangerestret* was transferred to the former *Alwarnestre* in 1293-4 (later undergoing a further name change, to St. Peter’s Street). These two streets ran parallel to each other NNE towards the city walls. It is interesting that the name Parchment Street should come into being in the late thirteenth century, at about the time when the parchment makers start to be recorded by other bynames than that of their trade (see above). Also the name Parchment Street was applied to a street whose former name *Flesmangerestret*, meant the street of the butchers. This suggests that some degree of specialisation by tradespeople in *Flesmangerestret* had evolved by this time. The other street names relating to butchery or leather trades may also have had parchment makers working in them, as a similar trade using animal skins, or the tradespeople may have made parchment as an occasional undertaking. The changing street names chart the movement of trade specialization from one area to another. The street named *Goldestret*, street of the Goldsmiths, may have supplied gold for the illumination of manuscripts. There are no other street names recorded which seem very relevant to manuscript production. Scribes may have dwelt in the priory, also illuminators, though see comments above re. *pictores*.

Street names are not the only type of evidence relating to manuscript production which can be found in the documentary
evidence. Records of manufacturing and trade activities are also informative. Ink may have been made by *tinctores*, as dyers may have had knowledge of preparing colours for treating various surfaces. However, in the Dialogus de Scaccario, there is a reference to an usher who paid two shillings a year to the sacristan of the great church of Westminster, in return for the supply of ink. The first editor of the Dialogus read the abbreviation as *Wintoniensis*, rejected by later editors for *Westmonasterii*.\(^3\) Clerks in the King's service were originally members of the Chapel staff, which was at Westminster at the time that the *Dialogus* was written, between 1176 and 1179. However, the treasury and exchequer would have had closer links with Winchester in the early days of royal administration, and the payment may indicate a customary privilege originally held by the sacristan of Winchester Cathedral.\(^3\) Interestingly the Dialogus lists the items the usher it is the responsibility to supply, i.e. the forels for packing the money, the rolls, tallies and other necessaries, wood for the tallies, wooden bowls, knives, purses and straps. It is not surprising that the cathedral scriptorium should have supplied ink to the exchequer, as the monks would have had expertise in making all manner of materials needed for manuscript production.

Parchment makers and tanners held fewer properties than most tradespeople, less in fact than skinners. They congregated in one part of the city, partly because the smell of hose trades would have been offensive to most city dwellers, and partly because they would have needed a good water supply, served by streams present in that low lying part of the city. A comprehensive statement of customs governing the use of water courses in the city was made in the city court in 1299, forbidding the putting of waste from tanning, sheepskins, entrails, etc., into them. This would have affected parchment makers, though they do not seem to have been singled out on that instance.\(^2\) However, Richard Gay, parchment maker, and his
wife were accused of washing foul sheep skins and calf skins at the little bridge near Newbridge in 1396, by Richard Wantlesburgh, who was driven from his house opposite by the stench. Parchment makers held properties in Parchment Street in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. A tenement in Parchment Street was quitclaimed to Walter le Parchemaner and his wife Isabel in 1318. William the Chaplain, called parchment maker, sold a house in Parchment Street to Andrew de Lecestre, reserving a rent of 1d, together with reliefs, wards, suits, and other secular services. William granted this rent to the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England and the Brothers at Godsfield. Later holdings of parchment makers were in the low lying part of the city, with good access to running water, between Tanner Street and Buck Street, and in the east of the city. This shift in location could be due to a change in the level of the water table in the later Middle Ages, or to a change in the production process, whereby the washing of the skins was done in the streams, but the dry processes of stretching and scraping were done elsewhere. The parchment making trade may have been bound by guild rules, as unfranchised men could not buy ‘green’, untreated hides, nor could such hides be taken out of the city. In 1407, a parchment maker was fined for having sold sheepskins before he entered the liberty, and Richard Bonet sold three skins of parchment without making fine with the bailiffs in 1421. In 1396 Richard Gay claimed that he had the right to all the hides of the calves slaughtered by Richard Hunte, a butcher, who in turn claimed 20s from Gay in payment for sheep skins. The same Richard Gay bought calfskins from Thomas Pollard in 1402. The frames upon which the skins were stretched caused a nuisance to passers by as records in the court rolls for 1401, 1404 and 1409 relating to Thomas Beneyt show. Parchments and tools are mentioned in the wills of Thomas Roberts, a parchment maker of Chesil Street in 1542. Parchment making seems to have been a thriving industry in
Winchester from the early Middle Ages from the documentary evidence. Other related manufacturing processes, apart from the rather oblique reference to ink supply, do not seem to appear in the written record.

Archaeology has provided evidence of a different kind, and of a different aspect, of manuscript production in medieval Winchester. Excavations that took place between 1961 and 1971 yielded items relating to writing and book production. The excavations, led by Martin Biddle, investigated twenty-five sites in the city of Winchester, including sites in the Cathedral green and car park, Lower Brook Street and Wolvesey Palace, from which most of the material evidence relating to manuscript production were found. Lower Brook Street is the modern name for the medieval Tanner Street. Most of the finds were writing tools.

Parchment, not being tanned, has a relatively low survival rate in the archaeological record. Also, any fragments of reasonable size were used or re-used in the medieval period, as the remarkably small size of some charters shows. Three fragments of skin-derived material found in a garderobe pit at Winchester Castle have been tentatively identified as fragments of parchment. Scraps of leather and skin were found at the Castle Yard and at Lower Brook Street in ninth to thirteenth century contexts. Leather working tools were found at the Castle Yard and Lower Brook Street. The close association of parchment making with leather working (see above) means that parchment manufacture possibly took place at these sites also.

Writing tools directly associated with manuscript production found included possible parchment prickers, writing leads, and knives. Some tools used were not found. Quill pens, for example, would not be expected to survive in the archaeological record. Inkhorns may have survived, but not be identified as such. Gold used in illumination was polished using a tooth according to the instructions of Theophilus.
Though tooth enamel can survive, it is unlikely that it would be identifiable as a polishing tool. Likewise many items that had been used in the manufacture or storage of inks might be overlooked, as Theophilus names such things as wooden boxes, jars, cauldrons and iron rods, whose function would not appear specific unless they had identifiable residue adhering to them.

The objects Biddle suggested were line prickers are the least certain identification. He notes a reference to a tool called a 'punctorium' in a text called De nominibus utensilium written c.1170-80. This object was not described, but its purpose was to make the holes either side of parchment in order to rule guidelines for writing. Clearly these holes were made by something capable of puncturing parchment, and the fact that a tool for the purpose is named in at least one text means that, in some cases at least, a specific tool was made for the purpose rather than pressing into service other items such as needles, pins or bodkins. The tools found at Winchester are all made of bone, between 4.7 cm and 10.9 cm long, with a spherical head at one end and a metal point set into the other end. The patterns of wear on them suggest that they were held in the fingers with the thumb resting on the spherical end, i.e., as one might hold them for pushing into parchment. There is no wear on the shoulders of the 'parchment prickers' which might result had they been pushed into parchment up to the 'hilt' so to speak, but this does not necessarily contradict that use. If the parchment was rested on a hard surface for the task, or if care was exercised, the tools would not penetrate to any great depth. These objects were found in contexts dating from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, at Brook Street and Wolvesey Palace.

A variety of writing leads was found. Writing lead, or plummet, was used for a variety of purposes including ruling lines, making marginal notes, and sketching designs. Ker noted the adoption of pencil ruling between 1100 and 1147 in various scriptoria.
Winchester Bible was anachronistic, being blind ruled by the main scribe, but pencil ruled by the later corrector. Biddle refers to a thirteenth century Winchester text which mentions the use of lead (plumbo) to make notes prior to the writing of annals. The writing leads found at Winchester were of four different styles, round or square in cross-section, tapered for writing at one end, flattened or split at the other. They were found at the Old Minster (9th to 12th century contexts), the New Minster (11th to 12th century contexts), Wolvesey Palace (10th to 14th century contexts), and Lower Brook Street (13th to 16th century contexts, churches, 10th to 15th century, houses). The majority of leads in twelfth century or earlier contexts were found at the Old and New Minsters and Wolvesey Palace, and those from thirteenth century or later contexts from Lower Brook Street. Biddle thought that those from the ecclesiastic sites were used in manuscript production, and those from Lower Brook Street were used by craftsmen, especially carpenters, though with increasing secularization of literacy perhaps Lower Brook Street was also becoming a centre for the production of written texts.

Knives are often depicted in illustrations of scribes. They were used for sharpening the nibs of quill pens and erasing mistakes on parchment and, again, are one of the tools listed in the text De nominibus utensilium. There are two manuscripts with Winchester connections which have illustrations of scribes, showing them with a pen in one hand and knife in the other. One is in the Winchester Bible, probably made at Winchester itself (Winchester Bible, volume 1, St. Jerome’s letter to Paulinus, f.1. and see note 50 below). A picture of St. Jerome shows him with a pen in his right hand and a knife in his left. The handle of the knife is decorated. The other is the Bible in the Bodleian Library, Auct. E. inf. 2, fo. 2, which has close connections with Winchester having been corrected there, and whose artists had some connection with the ‘Winchester School’ of illumination. This
Manuscript Production in Medieval Winchester

shows King David, again with a pen in his right hand and a knife in his left, the knife handle being decorated. Thirteen knives found in the excavations at Winchester have been identified as scribes knives because they have pivoting blades, offering a choice of cutting edge, thus making them suitable for the variety of tasks which scribes needed to use them for. Two of the blades found are decorated with non-ferrous metal inlays, recalling the decoration on the knives shown in the two manuscripts cited. Of the thirteen pivoting knives, ten came from Lower Brook Street (nine from one house), two from the New Minster and one from the Assize Courts site. They came from contexts ranging from the late ninth to the early thirteenth centuries. The knives found in the Lower Brook Street house do not seem to have been made there, and other rich finds were also discovered there. Again, this could indicate secular manuscript production. The writing leads from Lower Brook Street did not come from the same house sites as the knives, and were found in later contexts.

Styli are indirectly associated with manuscript production. They were used for writing on wax tablets. The Benedictional of St. Æthelwold, produced at Winchester between 971 and 984, shows a stylus being used by Zacharias. The stylus shown is thick-shafted, with a point at one end and a triangular spatula at the other. This is like the copper-alloy styli excavated at Anglo-Saxon sites, though iron examples are also known. The point was for writing on the tablet, a layer of wood overlaid with wax. The triangular spatula was for erasing what had been written on the wax, by heating it and rubbing it across the surface. For this purpose the stylus had to be made of metal. This type of stylus continued in use on the continent until the late medieval period, but during the twelfth century styli with a ‘T’ shaped bar at the end came into use. Six possible styli were found at Winchester, though only one has been identified with certainty, a copper alloy stylus with a flat triangular head and a fat shaft tapering
to a point, from Lower Brook Street. It was found in a mid twelfth to early thirteenth century context. The other possible styli were made of copper alloy and iron, and are also from Lower Brook Street, with one exception. This is a bronze object found at the New Road site, lying outside the city walls to the west. It is a finely made casting of a dragon, with something which could be interpreted as a ‘T’ shaped stylus end projecting from its mouth. A ferrous shaft originally projected from the knop by the dragon’s tail, perhaps the point of a stylus, but is missing. The style is Romanesque, possibly the second quarter of the twelfth century like the initials in the Carilef Bible.

The dragon stylus was not the only decorated item associated with books to be found at Winchester. A copper alloy book clasp was found in a fourteenth to fifteenth century context in Lower Brook Street. The design is of two birds, back to back, the plate being pierced with holes for attachment to a book cover. It has parallels in manuscript initials from Canterbury of c.1130. It is similar in style to the dragon stylus, though that does not necessarily mean that it, or the book it was attached to, had been produced at Winchester. Three other book clasps were found, of copper alloy and plain in design, and late medieval in date. Also, four late medieval seal matrices were found, three from Wolvesey Palace and one from Lower Brook Street. Those from the Palace may have been lost at the time documents were sealed. The book clasps and seals are not evidence of manuscript production at Winchester, but are associated with literate activity in the city.

Curiously, there seem to be rather more archaeological evidence for writing from Lower Brook Street than might be expected from the documentary evidence, or from the manuscript illustrations. One might expect to find many more writing implements from ecclesiastic sites, and not to find them in an area that had been a leather or parchment producing site. This discrepancy might be explained by a time lag in street name changes not reflecting occupations, particularly in the later
Manuscript Production in Medieval Winchester

periods when administrative documentation might 'fossilize' street names. The absence of archaeological writing evidence from the ecclesiastic sites is not necessarily significant. It is clearly not possible to excavate the entire cathedral and surrounds, and other evidence may lie in areas not examined, or have been obliterated by the continuing use of and incremental changes to the cathedral. The presence of archaeological information in Lower Brook Street is more significant than its absence from the Priory sites.

It can be seen that, in addition to the manuscripts known or believed to have been produced at Winchester in the medieval period, there is a large body of evidence showing that manuscript production was taking place in the city during that period of history. The occupational bynames of from the documentary sources record several trades allied to manuscript production, including those of scribes, painters and parchment makers. Parchment making is also recorded in court records, and in street names. It seems to have been an important industry in Winchester over several centuries, suggesting that demand for parchment was strong in the city. The activity was centred in one area of the city, as appropriate for an odiferous task. Scribal activity, reflected by the distribution of writing implements, is represented in the finds spectrum of Winchester by parchment prickers, writing leads, knives and styli. A surprisingly high proportion of these was found at Lower Brook Street, suggesting that at least some scribal activity was taking place in a secular location at an early date. Descriptions in medieval lexicons and manuals, and in illustrations of the same period, show writing tools of the kind found at Winchester. Documentary evidence and archaeological evidence show that manuscript production was taking place at Winchester between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. Even if no manuscripts had survived, it would have been reasonable to suppose that they had been produced in this city in the medieval period.
NOTES


5 Oakeshott, *The Two Winchester Bibles*, p. 129.

6 ibid.


12 ibid., p. 18.

13 ibid., p. 509.

14 ibid., p. 511.

15 ibid., p. 25.

16 ibid., p. 11.

17 ibid., p. 193.


21 ibid., p. 1241.
22 ibid., p. 1161.
23 ibid., p. 1168.
24 ibid., p. 1333.
28 Biddle, *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages*, fig. 32.
29 ibid., p. 234.
32 Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester*. 2.i, p. 64.
33 ibid., p.288.
35 ibid., p.699, ref.342.
37 ibid. p. 288.
38 ibid., p. 288, and note 2.
39 ibid., p. 288.
40 ibid., p. 288.
43 Biddle, *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester*, 7.ii, vol 1, p. 245.

Ker, *English Manuscripts in the Century after the Norman Conquest*, p. 42.


ibid., p. 752, table 87.

ibid., p. 741.

BL Add. M.S. 49598, fo. 92v.


Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record (2nd edition)*, p. 118.


ibid., p. 755.

ibid., p. 754.