



**Richard Fox of St Albans: the life, work and connections of
a fifteenth-century chronicler**

**Richard Fox de St Albans: vida, trabalho e ligações de um cronista
do séc. XV**

Anna Probert

University of Liverpool / Department of English
19-23 Abercromby Square
University of Liverpool
L69 7ZG

a.probert@liverpool.ac.uk

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3425-7798>

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RESUMO

Em 1448, Richard Fox, um funcionário leigo da Abadia de St. Albans, redigiu uma substancial crónica em prosa sobre assuntos britânicos e continentais. Este artigo examina o que se sabe acerca de Fox, começando por dar uma visão geral da *Chronicle* e do manuscrito em que esta se encontra, e também por avaliar três fontes principais: o seu testamento, de 1454, a sua miscelânea literária e a sua aparição nos anais de Saint Albans. Pretende-se assim mostrar as importantes ligações que Fox tinha, tanto com a cultura do livro medieval, quanto com pessoas influentes, como o abade John Whethamstede e a tradutora Eleanor Hull, que podem ter contribuído para a sua *Chronicle*.

Palavras-chave: Cronistas, St Albans, Cultura do Livro

ABSTRACT

In 1448, Richard Fox, a lay man employed by St Albans Abbey, completed a substantial prose chronicle of British and Continental affairs. This article examines what is known about Fox, first by giving an overview of the *Chronicle* and the manuscript in which it appears and also by appraising three key sources: his will of 1454, his literary miscellany and his appearance in the annals of Saint Albans. In doing so it shows the important connections that Fox had, both to medieval book culture and to influential people including Abbot John Whethamstede and translator Eleanor Hull, which may have contributed to his *Chronicle*.

Keywords: Chroniclers, St Albans, Book Culture



In 1448, Richard Fox, a lay man employed by St Albans Abbey, completed a substantial prose chronicle of British and Continental affairs¹. Written in a learned environment famous for producing fine manuscripts on theology, science, history and music, Fox's text successfully blends the monastic tradition of historical writing with a distinct secular focus on socio-political events. In so doing, it captures exceptional information and insights into medieval culture found nowhere else. As well as providing an overview of Fox's *Chronicle* and the manuscript in which it appears, this article will appraise the three other key sources that illuminate Fox's life and work: his will of 1454; his literary miscellany in Cambridge University MS Kk.1.6; and his appearance in the annals of Saint Albans.

Woburn Abbey MS 181

Fox's *Chronicle* survives uniquely in Bedfordshire, Woburn Abbey MS 181 and, to date, only a few extracts of it have been published². According to a colophon at the end of the manuscript the majority of text was written by 1448. In approximately 180,000 words it covers 500 years of history from King Alfred (871-899) to the Siege of Rouen in 1419. At the end of the manuscript additional historical material is provided about mid-fifteenth century political events in the form of an account of the deposition of Richard II based on the official record known as "Record and Process", an account of the parliament of Bury and the death of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and a list of the acts of parliament for the year 1449. There are also a few lines of verse about Richard, duke of York and regulations of cooks' fees in London copied in different hands on the final folios.

¹ I would like to thank the AHRC for funding the scholarship allowing me to study my PhD. I would also like to thank Graeme Dunphy and Thea Summerfield for their support and encouragement and especially Sarah Peverley for her valuable comments and suggestions. I am grateful to his grace the Duke of Bedford for permission to quote from Woburn Abbey MS 181.

² The account of the eighteenth and nineteenth year of Richard II's reign as well as the account of the parliament at Bury in 1446 are published as an appendix in DAVIES, John Silvester ed. – *An English chronicle of the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI* (London: Longman, Green, 1829). An extract concerning the beginning of the Peasants Revolt is quoted in MATHESON, Lister M. – "The Peasants' Revolt through Five Centuries of Rumor and Reporting: Richard Fox, John Stow, and Their Successors". *Studies in Philology* 95:2 (1998) pp. 121-151.

For the most part, the chronicle is written in the same distinct, hybrid anglicana hand³. Given the amount of immediate correction throughout the manuscript, this was identified by Lister Matheson as likely to belong to Fox himself⁴. However, one quire concerning the reign of King John is copied by a different, professional secretary hand, perhaps suggesting that at some point the manuscript was copied and some of the quires were mixed up. The final manuscript appears to have been taken to London for decoration by artists known to have worked on other books in the city⁵.

Fox's *Chronicle* opens with a 'table of all þe kynges that be comprehendid with inne þis boke' beginning with 'Afrede þe brother of Elfrede' and concluding with 'þe wynnyng of Roone in þe vj zere of þe regne of kyng Harry of Munmouth'⁶. Fox then begins the chronicle proper. Thea Summerfield notes that Fox's account of Alfred's reign 'is derived largely from Mannyng's *Chronicle* as found in London, Inner Temple Library, Petyt ms. 511, vol. 7 (or the Langtoft source-text, of which it is a close translation). However, details before and after this episode are found in neither Mannyng nor Langtoft'⁷. Fox also used other, as yet unidentified sources, often only referring to them as 'anoþer cronycle' or similar⁸. In some cases he repeats entire reigns giving alternative details found in contradictory sources, including William the Conqueror and Henry II. Fox draws attention to the alternative source by writing in a rubricated heading that 'Another croneclere wryt of Wylyyam Conquerour as here foleweþ aftur'⁹. William the Conqueror's reign includes the involvement of Edgar Atheling, grandson of Edmund Ironside, 'weche was þe ryzt eyre to þe crowne', in several rebellions against William¹⁰. This version also includes a disagreement

³ For further discussion of Fox's hand as it appears in CUL MS Kk1.6 see WAKELIN, Daniel – "Writing the Words". In GILESPIE, Alexandra; WAKELIN, Daniel (eds.) – *The Production of Book in England 1350-1500*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 34-58 (p. 44) and DA ROLD, Orietta - *Paper in Medieval England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 137.

⁴ MATHESON, Lister M. – *The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle*. Tempe, Arizona: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998, p. 328.

⁵ Identification of the provenance of the manuscript's illumination has been tentatively made by my supervisor, Professor Sarah Peverley, during our initial examination of the manuscript.

⁶ Woburn Abbey MS 181, f.1r; 6v.

⁷ SUMMERFIELD, Thea – "Fox, Richard". In *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*. Vol. 1 DUNPHY, Graeme (ed.). Leiden: Brill, 2010, p. 630.

⁸ Woburn Abbey MS 181, f. 52v.

⁹ Woburn Abbey MS 181, f. 36v.

¹⁰ Woburn Abbey MS 181, f. 37r.

between William and Abbot Frederick of St Albans over the rights of spiritual lords in England, that ended in Frederick leaving St Albans for Ely, and William consequently 'toke away moche of þe lyflode of Seynt Albons.'¹¹ Fox similarly repeats the reign of Henry II, this time giving much more detail concerning Thomas Becket. At other times, Fox refers to another chronicler only for a brief anecdote, such as the detail that 'as on cronyclere wryte' Henry I's corpse stank so much that the butcher who was hired to remove his internal organs 'eete neuer mete afterward but deyde of þe stencche'¹².

Most of Fox's references to alternative sources occur in his accounts of the years up to the end of Henry II's reign in 1189, the period furthest from his own time. A notable exception is a reference to Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, which Matheson identified as one of Fox's sources, as Gloucester is 'noted by name in the account of the sky darkening after the battle of Evesham (1265)'¹³. Fox says that 'A good clerke þat was called sir Robert sawe þis syzt xxxti myle fro þe place wher þe batayle was And for þe merveyle he labered first þis Booke'¹⁴. Fox's second account of the reign of Henry II follows a very short initial account of Henry's reign which is only one folio long and leaves out major events such as Thomas Becket's death. It may be that Fox, having secured a more detailed source no longer needed to add extra details from other chroniclers. Alternatively, Fox may have started synthesizing his sources differently at this point, and decided to desist from drawing attention to different sources. Fox's use of several chronicles points to a desire to give as complete and accurate history as possible and also to the potential accessibility of historical materials to him when writing the chronicle.

While more work remains to be done to establish the various sources Fox relies on for the earlier part of his chronicle, the latter part of Fox's work, from the reign of Richard II to the Siege of Rouen, is based primarily on the Middle English *Prose Brut*, with Matheson classifying it as a peculiar version of the text¹⁵. A note in the

¹¹ Woburn Abbey MS 181, f. 38r.

¹² Woburn Abbey MS 181, f. 54v.

¹³ MATHESON, Lister M. – *Brut*, p. 328.

¹⁴ Woburn Abbey MS 181 f.87v.

¹⁵ MATHESON, Lister M. – *Brut*, p. 326.

manuscript informs readers that Fox only obtained a copy of the *Brut* part way through writing his *Chronicle*. After narrating the death of Edward III, but before beginning Richard II's reign, he pauses to relate Merlin's prophecy concerning Edward I from the *Brut*, explaining:

Here endeth þe Cronycle of kyng Edwarde off wyndesore. And be gyneth Merlynes prophesies þat he prophesied of kyng Edwarde with þe longe schankes wheche was Grannfader to kyng Edward of Wyndesore and ffader to kyng Edwarde off Carnarvan. The cause þat þis prophesye is set here is þis for at þe wrytyng of þe seyð kyng Edward with þe longe schankes þe copy of þis prophecy was not hade¹⁶.

Within the *Brut*-derived narrative, Matheson identifies several unique additions made by Fox. These include: a story about the birth of Richard II where he is said to have been born prematurely and had to be wrapped in hot animal skins in a specially prepared hut¹⁷; an account of the eighteenth and nineteenth years of Richard II's reign; and additions in the reign of Henry IV detailing the capture and deaths of the duke of Surrey, the earl of Salisbury, and Sir "Raff Lompney" along with added details of a naval battle in 1416 during Henry V's reign¹⁸.

One of the most interesting of Fox's additions to the *Brut* narrative is his account of the beginning of the Peasants Revolt of 1381. Claiming to be 'enformed by on þat was at þe same tyme being nigh by', Fox relates how a corrupt tax collector was killed while attempting to ravish the young daughter of John Tyler under the guise of establishing her age, as those younger than fourteendid not have to the poll tax¹⁹. Such grievous abuse of power incensed Tyler and his neighbours, providing the catalyst for men in Kent to take up arms against the king and his officials. Until Matheson's discovery of the anecdote in Fox's *Chronicle* in 1998, it was believed that the story, which remained influential in all accounts of the rebellion until the late nineteenth century, had been fabricated by the Tudor historiographer John Stowe²⁰. Instead, Matheson demonstrated that Stowe had taken it from Fox, who could have

¹⁶ Woburn Abbey MS 181, f. 169v.

¹⁷ MATHESON, Lister M. – *Brut*, p. 327; MATHESON, Lister M. – "Peasants Revolt", p. 125.

¹⁸ MATHESON, Lister M. – *Brut*, p. 327.

¹⁹ Woburn Abbey MS 191 f. 171v.

²⁰ MATHESON, Lister M. – "Peasants' Revolt", p. 122.

conceivably spoken to an eyewitness at the time. The text supplements our knowledge of the periods covered by Fox, especially the contemporary sections. Further analysis of the narrative and identification of its sources will potentially reveal more about the texts available to Fox in St Albans. Fox's advanced language skills are clear from the appearance of both English and Latin in his *Chronicle*. It is likely he knew French as well and his repeated use of the phrase 'Ghenade Richard Fox' ('Ghenade' being Middle Dutch for 'grace' or 'mercy') indicates a familiarity with Dutch²¹. His knowledge of languages may indicate a sophisticated working environment with foreign connections. Further analysis of the *Chronicle* during the course of my research will undoubtedly offer insights into Fox as a chronicler, as well as his role in late medieval book production.

Fox's Will

A valuable resource for understanding Fox beyond what his chronicle can reveal is his will of 1454. Found in a collection of wills in Hertfordshire Record Office ASA/1AR Register of Wills, and known as the Stoneham Register due to that being the first name to appear in the document, the register is 120 folios long and includes wills from the archdeaconry of St Albans from the period 1415 to 1470²². Fox's will was written on 10th May 1454 and proved on 12th August 1454 and appoints his wife Agnes as his executor. One of its most striking features is the number of books that Fox mentions:

I bequeth to Johan my sone goddes blessyng & myn & my lytell primer heled with rede leder. Item I bequeth to my sone vj bounde bokes & a boke þat is in quayers xxv for þe more parte wryte redy. Of þe vj bokes abouesaid þe on is of seint Albons lyffe. The 2 begynneth with seint Edmundys lyffe þe kyng. The 3 begynneth with domine ne in furore. The 4 begynneth with brute. The 5 begynneth with Elfrede & Alfrede kyngs and so forth cronekeles. 6 begynneth of þe tales of gower. & all my quayers þat may stonde hym in stede I wyll þat he haue hem & specially a quayer heled with rede lether wher in be many contentes as þe wayes to Rome & all þe stacions of Rome & of Jerusalem bothe. Also I wyll he haue my longe boke of stymeles consyensye [...] Also þer is a blake

²¹ MATHESON, Lister M. – "Peasants Revolt", p. 125.

²² OWST, G. R. – "Everyday Life in Medieval St Albans: Some Notes on a Fifteenth Century Register of Wills". In *Transactions of the St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society* (1926) pp. 190-206 (p. 190).

quayer & þer in be many makyng of diuers metes & diuers festes & mony a gode vers. As of þe remeland of my bokes lette chese whych he wyll haue mor & þo þat he leueth let Chucheley haue some & some to my cosyn Robert. Also I bequeth to ve pryoras of þe pray & to her susters too bokes of legenda aurea þat on begynneth with Adam & Eve y helde with rede leder þe secunde is held with wyte leder & begynneth with seint Christoffre²³.

It is clear from this that Fox owned an extraordinary number of books compared to his contemporaries. In his study of books mentioned in the register, Owst names Fox as one of the two 'book-lovers of St Albans [...] who had somehow managed to collect what, for their period and station in life, would be an extensive little private library' and he describes Fox's collection as 'the most interesting' of the two²⁴. This extract of Fox's will refers specifically to twelve texts. However, given he refers to 'the remeland of my bokes' he must have possessed more.

The first text that Fox mentions is his 'lytell primer heled with rede leder.' Primers, often a central part of lay devotion, were often left in wills including those of the 'middling and lower sorts' as well as the gentry by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries²⁵. Its wide use meant that there was huge variety in the quality of primers. It is impossible to tell from Fox's brief reference whether this was a prized object richly illuminated or a more simple book. The fact that Fox gifts it to his son separately to his other books, along with 'goddes blessing & myn' suggests that this bequest is Fox showing his concern for his son's moral instruction. In addition, it could also be serving as a remembrance of Fox for his son, if the primer was Fox's personal primer that he used often. Here the mention of 'lytell' may be crucial as Daniel Sawyer notes that 'a small format could make a book personal and a large format might make a book impersonal'²⁶.

²³ Hertfordshire Record Office, ASA/1AR Register of Wills: Stoneham, f. 70v.

²⁴ OWST, G. R – "Some Books and Book-Owners of Fifteenth-Century St Albans: A Further Study of the Stoneham Register". In *Transactions of the St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society* (1928) pp. 176-95, (p. 178).

²⁵ DUFFY, Eamon – *The Stripping of the Altars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, p. 212.

²⁶ SAWYER, Daniel – *Reading English Verse in Manuscript c.1350-1500*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 84.

Fox then lists six ‘bounde bokes’, one of which is ‘of seint Albons lyffe’ and another ‘begynneth with seint Edmundys lyffe, þe kyng.’ Owst identifies these as Lydgate’s two texts, *Life of St Edmund and St Fremund* and *Albon and Amphabel*²⁷. The former was written and dedicated to Henry VI in 1433 and the later was written on the request of the abbot of St Albans, John Whethamstede in 1439. Another of Fox’s bound books is one which ‘begynneth with domine ne in furore.’ This is in fact, Cambridge MS Kk.1.6, a compilation consisting primarily of Eleanor Hull’s English translations of a *Commentary of the Seven Penitential Psalms*, discussed in more detail below. There is also one that ‘begynneth of þe tales of gower’ which Owst identifies as Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*²⁸. Perhaps of most interest to the study of Fox as a chronicler are the two works of history. The first book which ‘begynneth wyt brute’ is likely the copy of the Middle English Prose Brut that Fox obtained part way through the writing of his chronicle as mentioned above. The second which ‘begynneth with Elfrede and Alfrede, kyngges, and so forth cronekeles’ is not identified by Owst. This is almost certainly Fox’s *Chronicle*, which also begins with kings Elfred and Alfred. As with the miscellany including Eleanor Hull’s translations, Fox’s description does not make explicit that he is responsible for the creation of this text. This leaves the possibility that some of his other bound books could also be miscellanies or compilations which he was responsible for. His description of another ‘boke þat is in quayers xxv, for þe more parte wryte redy’ implies that he made at least one other text, although the lack of description of its content makes it difficult to identify. It may have never been bound together after Fox death and so its contents left scattered or be awaiting identification somewhere.

Apart from the bound books, Fox also lists his ‘quires’ which include first one ‘wher in be many contentes as þe wayes to Rome and all þe stasions of Rome and of Jerusalem bothe’. Quire had several meanings, including both a short book or a book that was not bound²⁹. Owst suggests that the ‘Stations of Jerusalem’ were taken from books seven and eight of the *Mandeville’s Travels* while the ‘Stations of Rome’ was taken from another contemporary vernacular tract either in prose or verse³⁰. In

²⁷ OWST, G. R – “Books and Book-Owners”, p. 180.

²⁸ OWST, G. R – “Books and Book-Owners”, p. 182.

²⁹ *Middle English Dictionary*, ‘quaier n.’ senses 1 and 2.

³⁰ OWST, G. R – “Books and Book-Owners”, p. 184.

addition, the ‘Stymeles Consyensye’ or *The Prick of Conscience* was a religious poem whose popularity is attested by the fact it survives in 130 manuscripts, more than any other Middle English poem³¹. Finally among Fox’s quires is the ‘blake quayer & ther in be many makynge of diuers metes and diuerse festes & mony a gode vers.’ For this text, Owst suggests either a regular cook book or something on a larger scale giving instructions on grand feasts such as the ‘Boke of Kerving’³². However, the mention of ‘mony a gode vers’ indicates a miscellany containing both recipes and poems rather than exclusively a cookery book. The last bequest among Fox’s books is the two volume set of *Legenda Aurea*, a collection of hagiographies by Jacobus de Voragine. This was gifted to ‘the pryoras of the pray and to her susters’ or the prioress of St Mary de Pre, a nunnery affiliated with St Albans. At this time, the prioress was probably Isabel Benyngton who had been prioress since the 1430s.³³ While this list of texts is valuable in presenting an idea of what Fox was reading, the way Fox writes about his books also reveals information about fifteenth-century book culture. While Fox makes some distinction between his bound books and his quires, he also uses the word ‘quire’ interchangeably to mean both books that were unbound, such as the one that is in quires and ‘for þe more parte wryte redy’ and books that are evidently were bound but were perhaps shorter. Some of these quires are described as ‘heled’ with leather, that is covered with leather, indicating that they have not been left simply as loose booklets of parchment and have either been bound or given a more flexible leather covering without boards. Fox also refers to ‘my longe boke of stymeles consyense.’ Here ‘longe’ may mean that this a longer form of the poem, as at least one version of the *Prick of Conscience* introduces itself as ‘þe langer pryck of conscience’³⁴. Alternatively, it may indicate that this book had the tall and narrow shape, sometimes called ‘holster books.’ In his examination of ninety *Prick of Conscience* manuscripts, Sawyer found at least two copies in this format and notes that even when these examples are left out ‘the *Prick of Conscience* corpus is physically narrower’³⁵. Also of interest are the colours that Fox mentions

³¹ *Prik of Conscience* – (ed.) James Morey Teams, Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012).

³² OWST, G. R. – “Books and Book-Owners”, p. 185

³³ SMITH, David (ed.) – *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales, III 1377-1540*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 687.

³⁴ SAWYER, Daniel – *Reading English Verse*, p. 83 quoting Wellesley College, MS 8, p.12, l.19.

³⁵ SAWYER, Daniel – *Reading English Verse*, p. 94.

in relation to his books. Several of his religious texts are bound in red leather, including his primer, the first volume of the *Golden Legend* and his quire containing the *Ways to Rome*. The second volume of the *Golden Legend* is covered with white leather, while Fox's 'blake quayer' may have been covered in some kind of dark or black fabric or leather, perhaps a practical concession if it was used to assist in the preparation of feasts. These covers of different colours may have been to help the owner quickly identify their books when looking for them. Fox's inclusion of them in his descriptions may have reflected the way he referred to them, as well as to help his executor identify them. The variety of books mentioned in Fox's will, both in text and format, shows how enmeshed Fox was in the literary and book culture of the fifteenth century and what a broad collection of books he owned. Everything is covered in his personal library, from history and literature to recipes and works of religious instruction – all the essentials of a medieval household.

In addition to providing important information about Fox's books, his will also tells us about his social circle. He had a son named John to whom he must have loved dearly as he bequeaths 'goddes blessing and myn' as well as the vast majority of his books. His wife Agnes is appointed his executor and left first choice of Fox's household goods and 'all þe residewe of my godes with in & with owt I put in to my wyuys dispocicoun to pay my detts & to do for me as she wold y shuld do for her'³⁶. Fox also had a cousin named Robert and a friend called 'Chicheley' who were to have some of the books that John Fox did not want. This Chicheley is likely John Chychley of Chipping Barnet whose wife Isabelle is referred to in Agnes Fox's 1459 will as 'sorori mea' indicating that John Chychley was Richard Fox's brother in law³⁷. As well as these bequests of books to family members, Fox also bequeaths 'my signet of gold þat I have vsed to were dayly opon my fynger' to 'þe Archedekyne'³⁸. This is presumably the archdeacon of St Albans, who in 1454 was William of Wallingford, a monk of the abbey. The gift suggests that there was a personal relationship between Fox and Wallingford. This points to Fox's relationships with high-ranking members of St Albans Abbey, as Wallingford held simultaneously six different offices within

³⁶ Hertford, ASA/1AR, f. 70v.

³⁷ Hertford, ASA/1AR, f. 95r. Isabelle is referred to as John's wife in his will of 1458 (ASA/1AR, f. 93r).

³⁸ Hertford, ASA/1AR, f. 70v.

the abbey – archdeacon, cellarer, bursar, forester, sub-cellarer and official-general. After Abbot Stow's death in 1451, Wallingford was among the candidates to become abbot until it became clear that Whethamstede was to resume the office, and Wallingford was eventually elected abbot in 1476³⁹. Wallingford had 'some distinguished noble patrons including, Edmund Tudor, earl of Richmond, and Lord and Lady Sudeley' who asked for leniency when Wallingford was accused of mismanagement⁴⁰. Fox may have made use of these political connections, as well as those of Whethamstede, for information informing the narrative of his *Chronicle*. St Albans was also an exceptionally well placed abbey for receiving the traffic of pilgrims and other visitors who may have also informed Fox's work. Wallingford may have also shared Whethamstede's and Fox's love of books as he completed the building of the new library of St Albans begun by Whethamstede.

Fox's connections to St Albans can be seen in his requests concerning his burial. His 'wrecchid and synfull body' was 'to be beryed by lycence of my lorde and þe couent in þe west ende of þe body of þe chyrche in þe gret porche'⁴¹. According to Christopher Daniell, in a medieval church 'the most holy area was the high altar at the east end; the holiness lessening towards the west end and into the churchyard'⁴². Fox's burial in the west end of the church, then, is not among the most coveted of spaces. However, Daniell also points to the importance of liminal spaces, 'for example across a boundary or near an edge, which may equate with the soul crossing the boundary from earth to the afterlife'⁴³. In this case, Fox's burial in the great porch, on the threshold between inside and outside the church would still have held significance. While not the most important of placements it is still more distinguished than a burial within the cemetery. Fox's choice of burial place shows not only his standing in the community, but also his own connection to St Albans and its importance to him. Overall, Fox's will illuminates his connections with influential people including William Wallingford, Eleanor Hull and the pioress of St Mary de

³⁹ CLARK, James G. – "Wallingford, William". In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴⁰ CLARK, James G. – "Wallingford, William".

⁴¹ Hertford, ASA/1AR f. 70v.

⁴² DANIELL, Christopher – *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550*. London: Routledge, 1997, p. 86.

⁴³ DANIELL, Christopher – *Death and Burial*, p. 91.

Pre, as well as his personal status in St Albans. All of this points to his being a valuable and well-connected chronicler of his times.

Cambridge MS Kk.1.6.

Cambridge MS Kk.1.6 was compiled between 1449 and 1454 and described in Fox's will as a bound book which 'begynneth wyt Domine ne in furore'. It consists mainly of Eleanor Hull's translation from French of the *Commentary on the Penitential Psalms*. It also contains a prose treatise on the passion, eleven poems by Lydgate, thirty-two tales from the *Gesta Romanorum*, the Trental of Saint Gregory and three polyphonic liturgical compositions⁴⁴. Fox compiled the miscellany and as well as writing out the Lydgate poems, he also wrote a contents page and rubricated the entire manuscript. Barratt identifies six distinct scribes in the manuscript, including the hand of Fox. It appears that Fox had a special fondness for Lydgate, as he owned two bound books containing text by him, and he personally wrote out several of his poems. The many different texts in this manuscript which are not evident in its description in Fox's will may indicate that some of his other books likewise contained other texts in addition to those used to describe them to his executors. If these manuscripts are still extant and can be identified it would widen Fox's literary collection further and provide a greater sense of his tastes. Barratt suggests that, given the description of a manuscript 'in quayers xxv, for the more parte wryte redy', Fox 'constructed his books from unbound quires written, perhaps simultaneously, by various people including himself, each of whom was responsible for different texts or groups of texts'⁴⁵. In addition, according to Barratt, 'some features of [Fox's] dialect suggest that he came from the Essex-Sussex border, or learnt to write there'⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ JAMES, M. R. - *Unpublished description by M.R. James of Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk.1.6 (Eleanor Hull, Meditation on the Seven Psalms, extracts from Augustine, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux and others, On the Passion, and other texts)* (2021); BARRATT, Alexandra (ed.) – *A Commentary on the Penitential Psalms Translated by Dame Eleanor Hull* EETS 307. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. xiv-xvii.

⁴⁵ BARRATT, Alexandra – *Commentary*, p. xx.

⁴⁶ BARRATT, Alexandra – *Commentary*, p., xxii.

Eleanor Hull likely spent much of her widowhood as Sopwell Priory, a nunnery about a mile from Saint Albans and dependent on the Abbey⁴⁷. Hull already had connections with St Albans itself, and so Fox could have come into contact with her work there. He also had a connection to Sopwell. Richard Fox was one of the executors of the will of the chaplain Thomas Goodleaf in 1445 who was buried at Sopwell⁴⁸. According to Owst, Goodleaf bequeathed a copy of Raymond of Penyafort's *Summa Penitentiae*⁴⁹. Just like Fox, he left a bequest to the nuns of St Mary le Pre, another nunnery dependent on St Albans Abbey⁵⁰. Given that Hull's works circulated among limited circles it seems likely that Fox became aware of Hull's work through this connection to Sopwell. Fox was certainly aware of whose work was in his miscellany as it is his hand that attributes the translations to her, saying, 'Alyanore Hulle drowe out of ffrenche alle this before wreten in this lytylle Booke'⁵¹. If there were a personal connection between Hull and Fox, Fox may have made use of Hull's impressive political connections in the writing of his *Chronicle*. Hull had served Joan of Navarre, wife of Henry IV, and attended the proxy wedding of Henry VI to Margarete of Anjou⁵². Her son, Edward Hull, was likewise an important figure in the Lancastrian regime. The miscellany in Kk.1.6 therefore helps to underscore and enhance our understanding of Fox's literary and social connections, as well as giving insight into how he constructed his works. Studying this miscellany and further examining the connections that it shows will help to better understand Fox and his *Chronicle*, as well as his role in book production and books associated with St Albans and nearby religious houses through his connections to Hull and Lydgate.

Annals of St Albans

More information can be gleaned about Fox's work beyond his literary endeavours from his appearance in the *Annals of St Albans Abbey* covering the years 1421 to 1440, attributed to John Amundesham, a monk of the abbey. Fox appears twice in

⁴⁷ BARRAT, Alexandra – *Commentary*, p. xxvi.

⁴⁸ Hertford, ASA/1AR, f. 44r; Goodleaf was chaplain at Sopwell and must have had strong ties there as he bequeathed 'to my two spiritual daughters, each of them, xij pence' Owst, 'Everyday Life,' p. 195.

⁴⁹ OWST, G. R. – "Books and Book-Owners", p. 193.

⁵⁰ Hertford, ASA/1AR, f. 44r.

⁵¹ BARRAT, Alexandra – *Commentary*, p. xv.

⁵² BARRAT, Alexandra – *Commentary*, p. xxix.

connection with the lawsuits of the litigious Abbot John Whethamstede. Fox is first mentioned in 1435, in relation to the case of Richard Whitman. In 1433, at the outset of a long and protracted lawsuit, Whitman was summoned by William Alnewike, the archdeacon of St Albans, to answer for defamation of William Creke. When he did not appear the Archdeacon pronounced Whitman contumacious and barred him from entering the church. Whitman appealed to the Court of Arches and the Court of Rome and later to the Archbishop of Canterbury who in turn excommunicated Alnewike the Archdeacon and Henry Burwasse, the vicar of Rikmersworth where Whitman lived. At this point, according to Amundesham, Alnewike became alarmed and involved the abbot. Whethamstede invoked the goodwill of Thomas Bekynton Official of the Court of Arches, to look favourably on his suit and appealed in turn to the Court of Rome. The annal describes Bekynton as Whethamstede's 'amico suo maxime fideli' (his most faithful friend)⁵³. The case concluded after Whitman was arrested and imprisoned in Hertford for a year and twelve months, after which he agreed to submit and asked pardon of the Abbot⁵⁴. Richard Fox appears as a witness to the 1435 Letters Certificatory in response to the Letters Mandatory from the Court of Rome, which certified that Richard Whitman and his wife Margaret had been summoned to attend court on the twenty-seventh of April and had not appeared and so could be declared contumacious. In the letter, John Wellis certifies that he had personally summoned Whitman and his wife on the fourteenth of April to attend court, '*in praesentia discretorum virorum, Thomas Heyne, Publici, auctoritate Apostolica, Notarii, ac Ricardi Fox et Johannis Kent, testium ad hoc vocatorum et rogatorum*' (in the presence of the prudent men, Thomas Heyne, notary public by apostolic authority, and Richard Fox and John Kent, called and requested as witnesses for this purpose)⁵⁵.

Fox's involvement was much greater in a subsequent dispute between Whethamstede and St Albans and John Depyng, the rector of Grytton or Girton. This dispute concerned an annual pension and tithes which Whethamstede claimed were

⁵³ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes - *Annales Monasterii S. Albani* (ed.) TILEY, Henry T. vol. 1 (1870) p. 373.

⁵⁴ For full account of the Richard Whitman case see AMUNDESHAM, Johannes - *Annales*. vol. 1 pp. 369-408 and AMUNDESHAM, Johannes - *Annales Monasterii S. Albani* ed. Henry T. Riley vol. 2 (1871) pp. 3-88 and also Early Chancery Proceedings, Bundle 44, no. 235 in which Whitman accuses Creke of breaking into his tenement and the abbot of showing partiality to Creke.

⁵⁵ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes - *Annales* vol. 2 p. 4.

owed to St Albans. The dispute was arbitrated by Thomas Bekynton, the Official of the Court of Arches and Whethamstede's 'most faithful friend.' In the accounts of Whethamstede's expenditures during his first abbacy, there is a record for the gift of a silver gilt standing cup (*cypho stante argenteo et deaurato*) given to Thomas Bekynton 'for favours done to the Monastery' (*pro favoribus etiam Monasterio impensis*) worth 6 pounds, eight shillings and four pence⁵⁶. It seems likely this expensive gift was in thanks for Bekynton's involvement in Whethamstede's many lawsuits including the ones featuring Richard Fox. Despite this Bekynton concluded that Depyng did owe St Albans the pension of thirty three shillings and four pence, but the right to the tithe belonged to the parish of Girton and not to St Albans⁵⁷.

Richard Fox is introduced in this section of the annal as 'Ricardus Fox, *litteratus, Procurator religiosorum virorum, Dominorum Johannes, Abbatis exempti Monasterii Sancti Albani, Lincolniensis Dioecesis*'⁵⁸. 'Litteratus' can simply mean that he was literate, as is evident from his *Chronicle* and his compilation work. Alternatively, it could mean 'clerk' and perhaps refer to his role at St Albans. Barratt translates it as 'layman literate in Latin'⁵⁹. The word '*procurator*' is similarly ambiguous, as Barratt notes that it can mean either 'steward' or 'proctor'⁶⁰. Owst supposed Fox to be a 'butler, chamberlain or marshal to the lord Abbot, or some other dignitary of the establishment'⁶¹. It should be noted that Owst based this assumption entirely on the basis of Fox's will as he appears to have no knowledge of Fox's presence in the Amundesham annal, or indeed his connection to Woburn Abbey MS 181 or Cambridge MS Kk.1.6. In his will Fox describes himself as 'of the house of St. Albon, simple servaunt' although this was likely an example of false modesty on his part⁶². Owst's assumption of Fox's position was based on the mention of 'a blake quayer, and ther in be many making of divers metes and diverse festes' in Fox's will. Owst points out that 'if Richard Fox of St Alban's had been an upper servant to the Lord

⁵⁶ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales* vol 2. Appendix A p. 257.

⁵⁷ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales* vol. 2 pp. 93-4.

⁵⁸ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales*, vol. 2 p 90.

⁵⁹ BARRAT, Alexandra – *Commentary*, p. xix.

⁶⁰ BARRAT, Alexandra – *Commentary*, p. xix

⁶¹ OWST, G. R. – "Books and Book-Owners", p. 179.

⁶² OWST, G. R. – "Books and Book-Owners", p. 178.

Abbot as was suggested, it is easy to see why he should have come by such a book⁶³. However, far more likely, given the legal context of this description of Fox is that ‘*procurator*’ should be translated as ‘proctor’. The introduction to the case explains that Whethamstede appoints a proctor for himself to deal with the case⁶⁴. Crucially the annal also quotes from the letters of proxy giving Fox permission to act in the abbot and abbey’s stead in these legal proceedings.

These letters of proxy for Richard Fox quoted in the annal refer specifically to the Depyng case. They grant Fox proctorship specifically ‘about and around the right to take and have the portion or two tenths of grain’ from Girton and ‘also the right to receive from the same church for us, a certain annual pension of thirty-three shillings and four pence’⁶⁵. This is in contrast to the letters of proxy from the Whitman case, which are for Jacob Cole. Those letters are more general, with Whethamstede appointing Cole proctor ‘in all cases and affairs concerning us, our person and our monastery’⁶⁶. They are also dated 16 October 1428. However, the Whitman case during which Jacob Cole acted as proctor occurred between 1433 and 1435. It is clear that Cole has been appointed to be a permanent proctor to deal with any of Whethamstede and the abbey’s cases, whereas Fox has been appointed only for this occasion. It may be that, given the overlapping timeframes of the two, Fox was appointed proctor of the Depyng case because Cole, who presumably would normally have dealt with it, was unavailable as he was busy with the Whitman case. While some professional proctors worked full time, there were also ‘occasional proctors who acted as agents from time to time, usually for a friends of family member’⁶⁷. It is not clear whether Fox was an occasional or professional proctor, although it seems unlikely that Whethamstede would employ a non-professional given his status and the fact that he had previously hired Cole, a professional proctor. Whether professional or occasional, Fox would not necessarily have had

⁶³ OWST, G. R. – “Books and Book-Owners”, p. 185.

⁶⁴ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales* vol 2., p. 89 ‘constitutoque sibi Procuratore’

⁶⁵ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales*, vol. 2, p. 95 ‘De et super jure percipiendi et habendi portionem sive duas garbas decimales [...] ac jure percipiendi ab eadem ecclesia per nos quamdam pensionem annuam triginta trium solidorum quatuor denariorum.’

⁶⁶ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales*, vol 1., p. 386 ‘in omnibus causis et negotiis nos, personas nostras, et nostrum monasterium.’

⁶⁷ BRUNDAGE, James A. – *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession: Canonists, Civilians and Courts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 353 n.

any formal legal training as, 'unlike advocates, proctors were not expected to be deeply versed in law'⁶⁸. Proctors were also less well regarded than advocates, who were paid more and were considered more prestigious⁶⁹. According to James Brundage, 'such information as there is suggests that rank-and-file proctors frequently came from families of modest means'⁷⁰. While it is clear that Fox was acting as proctor in the Depyng legal case, it is still possible, or indeed likely, that this was not a permanent post. This leaves the question of how he was employed when not occupied with this case. Fox is clearly still working at the abbey when his will was written in 1454, as he describes himself as its 'simple servant,' although he is not mentioned again in the annal which goes up to 1440. It may be he was working as a freelance proctor, either for the abbey or for the general population of St Albans. However, equally likely is that he was acting as some kind of steward at the abbey, where his literacy would have been a useful skill. Further examination of the extant records of St Albans may shed light on this.

Whatever his other roles and duties, Fox was certainly heavily involved in the Depyng case. It is not clear exactly when the dispute between Depyng and St Albans began, although Amundesham's preamble to this case says that Whethamstede turned his attention to this matter 'as the dawn of the fourteenth year began to redden' suggesting that it began at the beginning of the year.⁷¹ The dates given in the documents quoted in the annal are in October 1434, however it is possible there was correspondence earlier in the year between Depyng and St Albans concerning the dispute over the tithe and pension that is not quoted as it was not part of the official arbitration. The first exact date given is 8 October 1434. On this date Whethamstede and Depyng both sign statements agreeing to obey the findings of Thomas Bekynton in this case, with a penalty of twenty pounds if they failed to uphold them⁷². The abbot of Ramsey Abbey, to which the church of Girton belonged, also signed a document confirming his approval of the findings, as much as it

⁶⁸ BRUNDAGE, James – *Legal Profession*, p. 355.

⁶⁹ BRUNDAGE, James – *Legal Profession*, pp. 360-4.

⁷⁰ BRUNDAGE, James – *Legal Profession*, p. 363-4.

⁷¹ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales*, vol. 2 p. 89 'Statim tamen ut aurora anni quarti-decimi rubere coeperat'.

⁷² AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales*, vol. 2 pp. 99-101.

pertained to him⁷³. The Prior of Barnwell Priory, to whom the tithe claimed by St Albans belonged, signed a similar document, as did the bishop of the diocese⁷⁴. Also dated to 8 October are Fox's letters of proxy appointing him proctor which were signed and sealed by Whethamstede in the abbey chapter house⁷⁵. Just as the dispute may have begun earlier in the year than is recorded in the annal, Fox's involvement may also date to earlier than when he was granted his proctorship. Indeed, given the quick turnaround of the case it seems likely that Fox would have already been familiar with case in order to be prepared enough to take responsibility for it. Whethamstede and Depyng's agreement to abide by the arbitration was notarised by the notary public Robert Brympton on 13 October 1434, which also acknowledges Fox as proctor for Whethamstede and St Albans⁷⁶. By 19 October the case had concluded, with Bekynton finding that Depyng, as rector of Girton, did owe St Albans an annual pension of thirty three shillings and four pence, but that St Albans had not sufficiently proved that they were owed the tithe of two tenths of grain⁷⁷.

The details of the argument made during the arbitration, which Fox would have been responsible for presenting if not creating, are not explicit within the annal. However, they can be surmised to a certain extent from the wording of the documents. The tithe that is claimed by St Albans is described as '*duas garbas decimales*' or two tenths of grain from the land that once belonged to William son of Hugh, in the fief of Pain Peverel, within the boundaries of the parish of Girton.⁷⁸ This tithe was given by this same William to Barnwell Priory who in turn, it is claimed, granted the tithes to St Albans⁷⁹. The records of Barnwell Priory record that Picot, who founded the Priory in 1092, granted '*duas partes decimarum*' or two parts of the tithes of several

⁷³ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales* vol. 2 p. 102.

⁷⁴ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales* vol. 2 pp. 102-3.

⁷⁵ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales* vol. 2 p. 96.

⁷⁶ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales* vol. 2 p. 96.

⁷⁷ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales*, vol. 2 p. 93-4.

⁷⁸ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – vol. 2 pp. 91-2 '*quondam Willelmi filii Hugonis, de feudo Pagani Peverelle preadicti, infra fines, limites, et bundas dictae Ecclesiae de Gryttone situato et constituto*'.

⁷⁹ AMUNDESHAM, Johannes – *Annales*, vol. 2. p. 92 '*per eundem Willelmum olim Priori et Conventui Prioratus de Bernewelle, dictae Eliensis Dioecesis, donatas et concessas; qui Prior et Conventus eandem portionem decimarum videlicet, dictas duas gabad decimales [...] dicitis Abbati et Conventui perpetuo possidendas, ex causa concesserunt;*'

churches in Cambridgeshire to the canons of Barnwell, including Girton⁸⁰. This grant was then confirmed by Pain Peverel when he succeeded to the barony of Bourn which Picot had held⁸¹. Peverel was appointed to this barony around 1110 by Henry I after Picot's son Robert conspired against the king. This is likely the grant of tithes referred to in the Depyng case, although it is unclear who William son of Hugo is. However, it is probable that this was meant to refer to someone from the time of Pain Peverel given the reference to his land and the lack of surname of William, as surnames were uncommon at that point. There is no mention in these records of the rights to this tithe being granted to St Albans Abbey. It is clear that St Alban's argument was to date their right to this tithe from Girton all the way back to the eleventh century. Fox may have been chosen to take charge of this case due to his interest in history that is evident in his *Chronicle*.

Fox clearly lived a rich and engaging life that helped inform the writing of his *Chronicle*. His collection of books and the variety of literature in them points to his engagement with his contemporary literary culture. His descriptions of his book collection, in conjunction with a codicological examination of the *Chronicle* manuscript, may also help shed light on medieval book-culture and production. His possession of Eleanor Hull's translations, as well as his service to Whethamstede at St Albans also shows some of his social connections, whose political knowledge and government connections may have contributed to his writings. In addition, his evident legal experience in acting as proctor may have also had a bearing on his *Chronicle* and explain the rationale behind the inclusion of materials relating to contemporary politics at the end of Woburn Abbey MS 181. His world was one of important political and governmental connections, and his life was lived in the orbit of a wealthy abbey already notable for its book production and he had connections with several literate women, including Eleanor Hull and the prioress of St Mary de Pre. As this study of the documents associated with Fox shows, there are several potentially fruitful avenues of research that promise to shed further light on Richard Fox, his social milieu and his chronicle. My doctoral research intends to pursue

⁸⁰ CLARK, John Willis (ed.) - *Liber Memorandum Ecclesie de Bernewelle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907, p. 40.

⁸¹ CLARK, John Willis (ed.) - *Liber Memorandum*, p. 42.

these lines of investigation to gain a better understanding of Fox and his *Chronicle* and to establish his contribution to late medieval historiography and book production.

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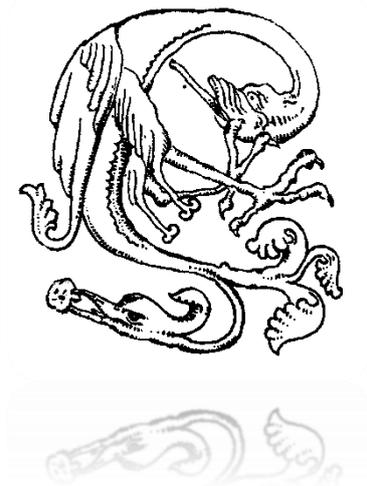
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