

## Bishop Henry Despenser and Manuscript Production in Late Medieval Norwich

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Three illuminated manuscripts now in the British Library once were the property of Henry Despenser, who served as bishop of Norwich from 1360 to 1406. That they were made for him during his long episcopacy is evident from his distinctive heraldic devices displayed prominently in each: quarterly first and fourth, *argent*; second and third, *gules fretty or*; a *bend sable* overall; a *bordure argent* of bishop's mitres *or*. These manuscripts are: London, British Library (BL) MS Additional 34114 (*olim* Spalding), containing five poems, all in Anglo-French (a version of the *Chanson d'Antioche*, the *Roman d'Éneas*, the *Roman de Thèbes*, *Le Songe Vert*—a dream-vision—and a 170-line segment of the *Ordène de Chevalerie*, attributed to Hue de Tabarie); BL MS Arundel 74, a copy of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*; and BL MS Cotton Claudius E.viii, a compendium of works bound together by Robert Cotton in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> The main texts of this last, a *Flores Historiarum* with the *Continuatio chronicarum* of Adam Murimuth brought to 1340, unequivocally belonged to Despenser.<sup>2</sup> Previous scholars (with different

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<sup>1</sup> On Cotton's practice of reconstituting manuscripts to suit his own tastes, see in particular James P. Carley and Colin G. C. Tite, 'Sir Robert Cotton as Collector of Manuscripts and the Question of Dismemberment: British Library MSS Royal 13 D.I and Cotton Otho D.VIII', *The Library* 6<sup>th</sup> series, 14 (1992), 94–99.

<sup>2</sup> The full contents of the manuscript, using contemporary numbering, all likely belonging to Despenser, are: *De fundatoribus ecclesiarum per Angliam* (fol. 5r); prophecies (fols 5v, 27r–v); description of Rome (fols 10r–11r); a brief list of weights and measures (fol. 12r); *De uiris illustribus quo tempore scripserunt*

degrees of certainty) have assigned the production of these books to Norwich based on the evidence of their provenance – criteria that are ultimately insufficient for establishing *origin*. We hope here to build a more rigorous case for the bishop's commission of all three books – not in London or even Oxford, but locally – in the city of Norwich itself, and we will do this by analysing the two main artists involved, together with a larger grouping of contemporary illuminated manuscripts uniform in both style and provenance. Our investigation will have four parts: the first, to consider the man, Henry Despenser, as a reader and collector of fine books; the second, to make the case for a 'Despenser Master' and several associates through careful examination of the bishop's three surviving books; the third, to engage in stylistic comparison with *other* manuscripts of established Norfolk provenance; and finally, to establish more firmly the feasibility of Norwich's place as a locus for manuscript production during the years of Despenser's episcopacy.

### The 'Fighting Bishop'

Henry Despenser, if he comes to mind at all, is not often thought of with a book in his hand, but rather a sword. The life of the historical bishop is commonly reduced to two events, both martial, one much praised at the time, the other much reviled. The earlier is of course his vigorous

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(fols 13v–14r); *Expositio vocabulorum*, a list of legal terms translated from Old English (fol. 14v); brief notes on coronation and a dispute of King John, liberties of Yarmouth from Domesday Book, descriptions of Rome and of England (fols 15r–17v), index to *Flores historiarum* (fols 18r–26v); brief list of the priors of Norwich Cathedral Priory (fol. 26v); *Flores historiarum*, AD 1–1307 (fols 27v–240r); Adam Murimuth, *Chronicon*, AD 1303–1340 (fols 242r–253v); ecclesiastical lists (fols 268r–272v).

response to the revolt of 1381, in particular at the so-called ‘Battle of North Walsham’, wherein a small but well-armed group led by Despenser defeated a larger force of rebels, capturing and summarily executing its leader, and thereby effectively ending the uprising in East Anglia.<sup>3</sup> The latter occurred two years later, when Despenser commanded a disastrous ‘crusade’ in Flanders, ostensibly against the French followers of the anti-Pope Clement VII, but quickly sidetracked to benefit the English wool trade, of which Norwich, not incidentally, was an important centre. The failure brought impeachment and condemnation by parliament, the loss of his temporalities for over two years, and a royal demand for return of sums advanced by the crown, amounting to £37,475 7s. 6d., finally repaid eight years later.<sup>4</sup>

To some degree, the characteristics that led to both results—courage on one battlefield and imprudence on the other—could be thought of as family legacies. The fifth son of a Marcher lord, and the grandson of Hugh Despenser the younger, favourite of Edward II, Henry followed his elder brother Edward, Lord Despenser (made Knight of the Garter in 1361 and Constable of

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<sup>3</sup> For details see R. G. Davies, ‘Despenser, Henry (d. 1406)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7551>> accessed June 2023; and further Richard Allington-Smith, *Henry Despenser, the Fighting Bishop* (Dereham, 2003). The justice of Despenser’s impeachment is somewhat disputable. Nigel Saul for example notes that ‘the bishop had been made the scapegoat for the errors and omissions of others.’ See *Richard II* (New Haven, CT, 1997), 107.

<sup>4</sup> And drew, as well, a vehement rebuke from John Wyclif: see *De cruciate sive contra bella clericorum* (1382). The repayment remained an issue until 1391, when the matter was resolved by the Exchequer. See Édouard Perroy, *L’Angleterre et le Grand Schisme d’Occident: Étude sur la politique religieuse de Angleterre sous Richard II, 1378–1399* (Paris, 1933), 186; Margaret Aston, ‘The Impeachment of Bishop Despenser’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 38 (1965), 127–48 (129–31).

the English army in France in 1373) into Italy, initially as part of the wedding party accompanying Lionel Plantagenet, and subsequently to fight for Urban V against Bernabò Visconti. Henry Despenser's performance in the attack on Milan was instrumental in garnering his appointment to the suddenly vacant bishopric of Norwich in 1370. As it had been for many years, doubtless a word from his brother was helpful too—probably sweetened by a financial 'loan' to the pope. As a fifth son, with little hope of acceding to the lordship, Henry had been destined for the church. In furtherance of this, Edward had garnered for his brother first a canonry with expectation of a prebend in Salisbury Cathedral in 1354 when Henry was ten or twelve years old; in 1361 a papal dispensation set aside his youth to allow him to take up a rectory in Leicestershire, although his ordination (as a sub-deacon) came a year later. Neither impeded his military life in Italy. At the time of his appointment to the see of Norwich, Henry had added an archdeaconry at Llandaff (not far from family estates), a canonry in Lincoln cathedral, and a rectory in Cambridgeshire to his benefices.<sup>5</sup>

These experiences are important for understanding the bishop, and the book collector, that Despenser eventually became. Clearly he learned to fight in Italy, but seemingly no less was he blind to the visual culture around him. Some of what he saw may have influenced the so-called 'Despenser Retable', given to the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity in Norwich, c. 1382, perhaps by Despenser.<sup>6</sup> Italian influences, as well as German, French, and Bohemian, have

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<sup>5</sup> See Davies, 'Despenser, Henry'; Allington-Smith, *Henry Despenser*, 7–8.

<sup>6</sup> The question of the donors of the Retable and their purposes is unresolved, and likely to remain so, given that the evidence depends upon the border of heraldic devices, much of which was cut away during the Reformation. See David J. King, 'The Panel Paintings and Stained Glass', in *Norwich Cathedral*:

been claimed to explain its richness and figure styles.<sup>7</sup> It may—or may not—have been produced locally.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, however, the chancel ceiling of St. Giles hospital with 250 painted panels showing the arms of Anne of Bohemia was local work, and ordered by Despenser to greet Richard II and his queen during their visit to Norwich in 1383.<sup>9</sup> More centrally, as part of his training for his predetermined ecclesiastical career, the future bishop studied civil law at Oxford, earning a bachelor's degree before 1361; by 1370, he was a licentiate.<sup>10</sup> Thoughtfully considered, then, Despenser would seem a man a good deal more complex than Thomas Walsingham's

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*Church, City, and Diocese 1096-1996*, ed. by Ian Atherton et al. (London, 1996), 410–30, and his caveat at 412 (hereafter *Norwich Cathedral*).

<sup>7</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner cites Italian Trecento in the colours and the treatment of draperies, and compares the 'facial types' to the work of 'Master Bertram in Hamburg'. See *The Buildings of England: North-East Norfolk and Norwich* (Harmondsworth, 1962), 221–22 (222).

<sup>8</sup> See King, 'Panel Paintings', 410–13.

<sup>9</sup> Specifically, the ceiling panels derive from the arms of the Holy Roman Empire, borne by Anne's father, Charles IV of Luxembourg, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia, whose personal arms showed a *gules lion rampant argent, queue fourchée in saltire, armed langued and crowned or*, often placed at the center of the eagle's breast once Charles became Emperor. Anne's personal arms showed the eagle in the first and fourth quarters, the lion in the second and third.

<sup>10</sup> A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1957–59), III:2169–70. Davies, 'Despenser, Henry'; Allington-Smith, *Henry Despenser*, 8.

disparaging characterisation of him as ‘vir nec literis nec discretione peditus, juvenis effrenis et insolens’ (‘a man neither lettered nor gifted with discretion, an unbridled youth and insolent’).<sup>11</sup>

Such a Despensers, a reader with an eye for aesthetic effect, accords well with the high quality of the three volumes that once belonged to him. These are very fine books indeed. Additional 34114 has 237 folia, measuring 360x260mm; Arundel 74 is 106 folia, measuring 345x240mm; Cotton Claudius E.viii is massive, containing 267 folia, and measuring 415x280mm. High-grade parchment is the norm in all (Additional 34114 being exceptional in quality), gold leaf is abundantly in evidence, and—as will be discussed in the next section—some of the illuminating artists exhibit significant skill in rendering border designs that include both stylised and naturalistic motifs. The contents, too, are potentially revealing, and further undermine Walsingham’s dyspeptic assessment of the bishop. Historical texts such as Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the *Flores Historiarum*, and Murimuth’s *Continuatio*, all relatively common in ecclesiastical libraries, are nonetheless far from easy reads.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the five Anglo-French poems collected in Additional 34114—*Chanson d’Antioche*, *Roman d’Éneas*, *Roman de Thèbes*, *Le Songe Vert* and the segment of Hue de Tabarie’s *Ordène de Chevalerie*—while lighter fare and suggestive of literary tastes unsurprising for a man of Despensers’s martial

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<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliae*, ed. E. Maunde Thompson, Rolls Series 64 (London, 1874), 258.

<sup>12</sup> On the presence of historical texts in monastic libraries generally, and in Norwich cathedral in particular, see Barbara Dodwell, ‘The Muniments and the Library’, in *Norwich Cathedral*, 336–37.

background, are yet works that, for full enjoyment, require a reader's thoughtful engagement.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it is clear that the bishop's bookish tastes, and possibly his mathematical ability, were no secret. At least one manuscript is known to have been composed as a gift for Despenser, *Tractatus de ludo philosophorum*, by the monk John Lavenham, probably in hope of preferment. It demonstrates the pleasures of rithmomachia, a game requiring no little calculative skill.<sup>14</sup>

Could such books as these have been produced in the Norwich of Despenser's time? From an economic point of view, the answer doubtless should be 'yes', but with several caveats. The period of Despenser's tenure corresponds to a temporary dip in Norwician wealth. The medieval history of Norwich is in effect a tale of two cities: prior to the great plague of 1348–50, Norwich ranked with Bristol, Lincoln, and York among England's leading provincial towns, based on extant tax records, its wealth sustained by a diversified industry and significant domestic and cross-channel trade.<sup>15</sup> By the end of the century, in contrast, the population had

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<sup>13</sup> A differently slanted view of Despenser's interest in these poems has been taken by Christopher Baswell, who finds indications of 'part of a complex pattern [...] of asserting aristocratic ideology'. See 'Aeneas in 1381', *New Medieval Literatures* 5 (2002), 8–58 (42).

<sup>14</sup> A copy of Lavenham's *Tractatus*—not an autograph—survives in Princeton, Princeton University Library, MS Garrett 95, fols 47r–54r. In a brief dedicatory letter, Lavenham identifies 'domino Henrico Norwiciensis episcopo' as the intended benefactor. For transcription, and discussion of Lavenham's gift, see Don C. Skemer, 'From the Fighting Bishop to the Wizard Earl: A Medieval Book as Text and Object', in *The Medieval Book as Object, Idea and Symbol*, ed. Julian Luxford (Donington, 2021), 272–91.

<sup>15</sup> See Elizabeth Rutledge, 'Economic Life', in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson (London, 2004), 157–88 (hereafter *Medieval Norwich*).

more than halved, with a significant percentage of urban poor, its diminished prosperity by then heavily dependent on woolen cloth, especially the manufacture of worsteds, and by an extensive herring fishery.<sup>16</sup> This is not to assert that Norwich was impoverished during Despenser's episcopacy, but the drop in its fortunes is visible today in its notable religious buildings, from the thirteenth, when Norwich flourished initially, and—predominantly—from the first half of the fifteenth centuries, when the city's fortunes swelled again.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever most citizens' conditions were at any time, however, the bishops themselves did rather better. Based upon the assessment of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535—admittedly a good deal after our period—the bishop of Norwich 'was probably the wealthiest magnate in Norfolk'.<sup>18</sup> Coming closer to home, it is likely corroborative that Richard II, always with a shrewd eye for sources of income, saw fit to punish Despenser for the disastrous failure of the Flanders Crusade in 1383 by confiscating his temporalities for two years. Except perhaps during those two years (1383–1385), it would seem that the bishop could easily have afforded fine books if he so chose.

The question then would be, were conditions such in Norwich as to encourage him to commission books locally, rather than in—say—London?

#### Despenser's Books: Origin vs. Provenance

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<sup>16</sup> See Penelope Dunn, 'Trade', in *Medieval Norwich*, 213–34.

<sup>17</sup> See Jonathan Finch, 'The Churches', in *Medieval Norwich*, 48–72 (60).

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Harper-Bill and Carole Rawcliffe, 'The Religious Houses', in *Medieval Norwich*, 73–120 (80–81).



In the exhibition catalogue *Medieval Art in East Anglia*, Andrew Martindale makes the rather striking point that only one book from the period c. 1360–1430 can be assigned unequivocally to Norfolk: a book with a colophon. The rest ‘are merely connected with East Anglia, either via a liturgical text or heraldically’. Evidence for a book’s intended use does not tell us where it was made. In other words, evidence for provenance is not evidence for origin, even if it is sometimes indicative of it, making the business of localising the production of manuscripts notoriously difficult. The illuminated borderwork in Despenser’s library is assigned by Martindale to ‘Norwich?’ with fair warning: it ‘may have been produced by local citizens; equally it may all have been ordered in London, or it may have been produced in Norwich by London people’.<sup>19</sup> The problem is intractable unless we can establish a grouping of manuscripts ‘characterized both by uniform style and identical provenance’, which suggest by their association that they ‘were probably made in the place they were intended to be used’.<sup>20</sup> Establishing such a grouping on the basis of shared style, and assessing the quality of its evidence for Norwich origin, is the main aim of this essay.

In the case of Despenser’s extant library, the first important connection between two of the books—uniform in style and provenance—was established by Christopher Baswell (with the assistance of Lucy Freeman Sandler). Their identification of the same illuminator in Additional

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<sup>19</sup> P. Lasko and N. J. Morgan (eds), *Medieval Art in East Anglia 1300–1520* (London, 1974), 29, and cat. nos 41 and 42. For the difficulties in establishing origin see Teresa Webber, ‘Where were Books Made and Kept?’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval British Manuscripts*, ed. Elaine Treharne and Orietta Da Rold (Cambridge, 2020), 214–33.

<sup>20</sup> Lucy Freeman Sandler, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles: Gothic Manuscripts 1275–1385*, 2 vols (London, 1986), I:50.

34114 and in parts of Cotton Claudius E.viii is an important starting point, in view of the coincident heraldic evidence. Baswell turned to Sandler's and Scott's catalogues of Gothic illuminated manuscripts for comparative material and concluded that the Despenser volumes were 'clearly in the Norwich style [...] Bishop Despenser employed a Norwich atelier, then, to decorate at least these two manuscripts of secular texts for him'.<sup>21</sup> Two relevant entries in these catalogues—a psalter (Holkham Hall MS 26) and a missal (Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 1) — certainly share with the Despenser group a comparable repertory of decorative motifs. That similarity notwithstanding, however, no other work by the 'Hatton Missal Artist' has been identified until now, while the manuscripts attributable to the 'Holkham Psalter Artist' (primarily Latin service books and secular history) suggest that he was a peripatetic lay professional on a 'monastic circuit'.<sup>22</sup> Thus in spite of their shared style with Despenser's books, the mixed provenance evidence is (as it stands) insufficient for establishing origin. Baswell has opened an

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<sup>21</sup> Baswell, 'Aeneas in 1381', 45, with reference to Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, no. 143 (Psalter for Ramsay Abbey); and Kathleen L. Scott, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles: Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390–1490*, 2 vols (London, 1996), no. 5 (Missal, Diocese of Norwich).

<sup>22</sup> Lynda Dennison, 'The Significance of Ornamental Penwork in Illuminated and Decorated Manuscripts of the Second-Half of the Fourteenth Century', in *Tributes to Kathleen L. Scott: English Medieval Manuscripts: Readers, Makers and Illuminators*, ed. Marlene Villalobos Hennessy (London, 2009), 31–64 (33). The career of the Holkham Psalter Artist is dealt with in greater detail in Lynda Dennison, 'Monastic or Secular? The Artist of the Ramsey Psalter, now at Holkham Hall, Norfolk', in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 1994 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Benjamin Thompson (Stamford, 1999), 223–61. The relevant aspects of this artist's career will be discussed briefly below.

important topic, one that warrants closer investigation precisely because we know so little about non-metropolitan book production in the later medieval period.<sup>23</sup> In what follows it will be shown for the first time that the production of Despenser's three surviving books involved six artists, and that several more manuscripts containing evidence for Norwich provenance can be associated with the Despenser group through aspects such as style and collaboration. One of these newly related books involved both the main Despenser artist and the Hatton Missal Artist, suggesting that it was a shared urban location that formed the basis of their comparable styles. Although caution is necessary when dealing with the combined evidence of stylistic attribution and intended use, cumulatively such indications strengthen the likelihood that Norwich was the place of production.

Beginning with the division of artists' hands in Despenser's three manuscripts, the most straightforward case is the compilation of Anglo-French poems in Additional 34114. One illuminator carried out the full programme of work: a clasp border to open the crusade poem (fol. 1v), a three-quarter border for each of the openings of *Eneas* (fol. 106r) and *Thèbes* (fol. 164r), and a three-line illuminated initial 'A' for the start of the dream vision, *Le Songe vert* (fol. 227r). Only *Eneas* contains any additional visual punctuation, or demarcation of text with illumination: the four-line gold initial 'T' that begins a description of the city of Troy on folio 113r.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>23</sup> For a recent exception, see Lynda Dennison's case for Oxford as an important centre for manuscript production in the fourteenth century: 'The Dating and Origin of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 180: Adam Easton's copy of Richard FitzRalph's *De Pauperie Salvatoris*', in *Cardinal Adam Easton (c. 1330–1397): Monk, Scholar, Theologian, Diplomat*, ed. M. Wendling (Amsterdam, 2020), 65–99.

<sup>24</sup> Line 859 in *Eneas: Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. J.-J. Salverda de Grave, 2 vols (Paris, 1929, rept. 1983, 1985), I:27.

large format of Additional 34114, its fine-grade parchment, and the discipline with which the scribe maintains an elegant *textura rotunda* throughout, is matched by the bold scale of finely executed decorative motifs. The three folios with three-sided borders feature large, decorated initials of modelled foliage on gold ground; the initial finials extend into profile-serrated leaves with interstices of golden triangles which, in turn, form thin, rectilinear extensions (a bar-frame of gold alternating with blue or rose). The golden triangles give the impression of scalloped edges to the bar-frame, with added interest provided by the semi-circular notches ‘cut’ into the frame, the quatrefoils ‘pinned’ to it (fol. 1v), or by the gold balls that hedge both bar-frame and initials (Figure 1). These borders terminate in gently curling sprigs of conventional foliate forms (kidney- and heart-shaped leaves, three-pointed leaves, daisy buds and flowers), punctuated by short sprigs tipped with gold balls and black squiggles. Some foliate nodules at corner- and mid-points provide the occasion for lion masks, heraldic devices, or for the emergence of the winged-dragon, in profile, ‘biting on’ to further foliage, stem, or letter form (as in Figure 1). These features are all typical of the late fourteenth century especially the use of dragons or grotesques (cf. Figures 5 and 8), which virtually disappear from English borders by around 1400.<sup>25</sup>

This artist, whom we have designated the ‘Dispenser Master’, also provided some of the more substantial decoration in Cotton Claudius E.viii, as Baswell and Sandler recognised.<sup>26</sup> It is extensively illuminated and required the collaboration of another three artists for its completion (Table 1). The Dispenser Master’s work features on nearly every folio in the second to sixth

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<sup>25</sup> Kathleen L. Scott, *Dated & Datable English Manuscript Borders c. 1395–1499* (London, 2002), 13.

<sup>26</sup> Our own examination of Cotton agrees exactly with Baswell and Sandler’s partial account of the artists’ stints (given for selected folios up to folio 115): ‘Aeneas in 1381’, 45 n. 111.

quires, and comprises bar-borders (in various designs), a new instance of an elaborate trellis border not seen in Additional 34114, and champ initials in gold with fine white reserve-work on rose/blue grounds, characteristic of this man's work. The sheer volume of illumination in Cotton Claudius E.viii compared with Additional 34114 extends the range of motifs expected in the artist's repertoire (holly, kite, triangular, lobe-and-tongue leaves, an illusionistic form of deeply-folded leaf), as well as the variety with which a single motif might be executed, such as the use of balls (normally gold) in colour with white decorative highlighting (cf. Figures 1–3). Artist C of Cotton, the third hand in the manuscript and quite possibly the 'junior assistant' of Baswell and Sandler's terminology, is here designated the 'Dispenser Assistant' (Figures 4–7). He is the only artist other than the Dispenser Master to feature in two of the volumes in Dispenser's library.<sup>27</sup> Both Master and Assistant use the same range of colours and motifs, although the palette is less vivid in the Assistant's usage, and the motifs are differently executed. The conventional foliate forms, for example, are the same as those described for the Dispenser Master but slightly larger and cruder in the Dispenser Assistant's handling, with less care taken in the use of white for decorative highlighting. Even small details of penwork are coincident in design if not in execution. The black penwork vines that end in a single motif, for example, intersect at right angles with the 'main' pen-vine, often overlapping, and accompanied by short slashes (cf. Figures 3 and 4). As with every coincident factor, the Dispenser Master's handling is crisper, more detailed, and often elaborated: single or double slashes intersect the vine, e.g., in

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<sup>27</sup> See Table 3 below.

addition to the more occasional black dots (Figure 3).<sup>28</sup> Clear difference is also evident in the artists' treatment of the 'squiggle' on gold balls: the assistant's approach is to 'stack' flattened lines in between the ball and the squiggle. The Despenser Assistant replicates the Master's grotesques and masks (Figure 5), but he also differs significantly from him in his use of naturalistic figural forms, flora and fauna: acorns and oak leaves, roses, peapods, and birds, including the owl and ?spoonbill on folio 137v (Figure 6). In view of the question of origin, the important point about the occurrence of both drolleries and realistic representations is that they 'are not typical of late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup>-century border decoration in London shops [...] the presence of these motifs probably indicates a continuing regional tradition'.<sup>29</sup>

Table 1: The division of illuminator hands in BL MS Cotton Claudius E.viii, *Flores historiarum* and the *Chronicle* of Adam Murimuth

Quire / fols <sup>30</sup>	Decoration type	Illuminator	Comments
1 / 5–12v	Full trellis border with Despenser arms (5r); champ initials	Artist A	This quire only
2–6 / 13–51v	Full trellis border (27v); full bar-border with central bar (43r); variety of three-sided and single-bar borders; champ initials	Artist B ( <b>Despenser Master</b> )	

<sup>28</sup> Another instance of elaboration occurs in their different treatment of gold grounds: in the trellis border (fol. 27v) the Despenser Master's gold is punched with lines of dots in various patterns, executed free hand.

<sup>29</sup> Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II:34.

<sup>30</sup> The manuscript has two sets of modern foliation, one of which (cited here) counts flyleaves, and is located in the lower right corner of the leaf.

7–8 / 52–67v		Artist C ( <b>Dispenser Assistant</b> )	
9 / 68–75v	Full bar-border with central bar (71v); champ initials	Artist D and Artist C	Artist D on fols 68r–v and 75r–v (i.e. the outer bifolium)
10 / 76–83v	Borders, various (76r–v, 77r, etc); champ initials	Artist D and Artist C	Artist D on fols 76r–v, 83r–v, and 79r–80v (i.e. the outer and inner bifolia)
11 / 84–91v	Champ initials	Artist C	
12 / 92–99v	Champ initials	Artist D and Artist C	Working on the same bifolia
13 / 100–107v	Champ initials	Artist C	
14–19 / 108–153v	Borders; champ initials	Artist D and Artist C	Pattern: border pages by Artist C and initials divided between D and C. Working on the same bifolia except in quire 17
20–34 / 154–270v <sup>31</sup>	Borders (161v, 163r, 205v, 225r, 239v); champ initials	Artist C	

Artist D of Cotton provides eight bar-frame borders in quire 10 and shares in the provision of champ initials between quires 9 and 19 with Artist C (Dispenser Assistant). Cotton Artist D is difficult to distinguish from Artist B (Dispenser Master), although direct comparison of the champ initials at the end of quire 6 (fol. 51v) and the start of quire 9 (fol. 68r) shows a decline in quality, particularly in the absence of the fine white reserve-work replaced with simpler, cruder highlighting both on motifs and groundwork of initials. Near the end of Artist D's stint in quires 18 and 19, motifs are increasingly oversized, an inconsistency in handling that

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<sup>31</sup> Quire 35, the final quire at fol. 271, contains no illumination. It comprises a single bifolium followed by three flyleaves with the first flyleaf foliated as fol. 273. For a description of the manuscript, see H. R. Luard (ed.), *Flores historiarum*, 3 vols, Rolls Series 95 (London, 1890), I:xxiv–xxvi.

is difficult to attribute to the Despenser Master (Artist B). The impression, certainly, is of another ‘junior assistant’, quite possibly in training. In conjunction with the similarities in style between artists B, C and D, the mode of collaboration between artists C and D strongly indicates that they worked in close proximity. Before the bifolia were assembled into quires (presumably), the two artists often worked on the same bifolia (quires 12, 14–16, 18–19) and more occasionally on separate bifolia (quires 9, 10, 17). This indicates that artists C and D, at least, who appear to have been the two main assistants of the Despenser Master, could feasibly have worked within the same environment (whether monastic or secular). Cotton Artist A’s biting dragons, lion masks and foliate forms indicate a shared stylistic milieu, and yet his independent work in the first quire (the preface to *Flores historiarum*) gives no clue as to whether or not he worked in the same physical space as any of the other artists. Nevertheless, whatever the precise organisation of the illuminators involved, the iconographic scheme is coherent. The first quire’s opening trellis border is replete with crowns and bishop’s mitres in alternating roundels, and an initial occupied by the Despenser arms. Thereafter the arms recur within initials that begin descriptions of key moments in royal English history, especially coronations, thus continuing the visual associations of the first folio.<sup>32</sup> Although neither of the books discussed so far contain miniatures, we should not doubt that they are high-grade productions: sixteen decorated initials are infilled with the Despenser arms in Cotton, thereby providing the main focal point of the illumination (and

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<sup>32</sup> In Additional 34114 Despenser’s arms are associated with key moments of ‘majestic events in imperial history’ (Baswell’s observation, ‘Aeneas in 1381’, 45–46), while in Cotton they are tied to major events in royal English history.



obviating the need for historiated initials).<sup>33</sup> No other work by Cotton artists A or D has been found; nevertheless, we suggest that Cotton Artist C (Despenser Assistant) is identifiable in parts of another Despenser-owned book, reinforcing the idea that Cotton artists B, C, and D were located in the same area for at least the time that Despenser's books were in production.

Table 2: The division of illuminator hands in BL MS Arundel 74, Bede's *Ecclesiastica historia* (fols 1–99), *Epistola Cuthberti de Obitu Bedae*, etc.

Quire / fols	Decoration type	Illuminator	Comments
1 / 1–8v	Full bar border with historiated initial (2v); three-sided border (1r); champ initials	Artist A ( <b>Despenser Assistant</b> )	
2 / 9–16v	Champ initials	Artist B	This quire only
3 / 17–24v	Champ initials, incl. one 7-line 'h' with Despenser arms (21r)	Artist C and Artist A	Artist A on fols 20v–21r (i.e. the inner bifolium only)
4 / 25–32v	Champ initials	Artist A	
5 / 33–40v	Champ initials	Artist C and Artist A	Artist A on fols 36r–v, 37r (i.e. the inner bifolium only)
6–9 / 41–72v	Champ initials	Artist A	
10 / 73–80v	Champ initials	Artist C and Artist A	Artist A on fols 75v, 78r–v (i.e. the third bifolium only)
11 / 81–88v	Champ initials	Artist C	
12–13 / 89–106v (quire 13 at fol. 97)	Champ initials	Artist A	

<sup>33</sup> On fols 5r, 27v, 43r, 71v, 113r, 115v, 120r, 127r, 130v, 135v, 137v, 140r, 142r, 161v, 225r and 239v.

The same pattern is evident in Additional 34114 (fols 106r, 164r) with the exception of fol. 1r where the arms are incorporated within the lower mid-point of the bar-frame.

The third and final manuscript known to have been owned by Bishop Despenser is Arundel 74, a copy of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. As illustrated in Table 2, no part of it was decorated by the Despenser Master, and Artist A appears to have been the Despenser Assistant (Figure 7). This manuscript is less lavish in most respects than the other two books, with a program of illumination comprising two border pages in quire 1 and champ initials throughout. The occurrence of an unfinished historiated initial of a man (Bede?) at his writing desk is unexpected in more ways than one, given that historical chronicles were seldom illustrated at all.<sup>34</sup> Quite possibly the patron had a special affection for the work of this foremost medieval historian of British and Saxon history, although apparently not enough to situate the figure of authority (fol. 2v) before the placement of the Despenser arms (fol. 1r). The Despenser Assistant provided the main aspects of the illumination in Arundel, including the only two occurrences of the Despenser arms within the book (fols 1r, 21r). Artists B and C of Arundel 74 do not occur in either of Despenser's other books, adding to the impression that there was a plentiful supply of artists in the vicinity of the Despenser Master and Despenser Assistant. It is not clear that Artist C of Arundel 74 worked in the same physical space as Artist A. Even though his hand appears together with the Despenser Assistant's in quires 3, 5 and 10, he consistently worked on what were almost certainly separable bifolia at that stage in the manuscript's making—a task requiring vicinity, albeit not necessarily proximity. All of this points to sustained activity in one locality, a factor that *can* confirm a single area of production for Despenser's library; what it *cannot* confirm, at this stage, is that it was produced in a 'Norwich atelier'.<sup>35</sup> Baswell's suggested reading of Additional 34114's legendary texts 'as a myth book of the Despensers' is certainly

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<sup>34</sup> Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, I:36, and I:71 n. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Baswell, 'Aeneas in 1381', 45.

compelling, and a Norwich origin would help to reinforce his idea that it ‘was produced at Bishop Despenser’s direct commission, and that it hence reflects his interests and, in its decoration, his familial ambitions’.<sup>36</sup> Confirming this hypothesis, however, will require new identification of some (ideally all) of the artists in other books—books not related to Despenser—in order to compile ‘the relatively richer evidence of groups of manuscripts of a given date with the same provenance’.<sup>37</sup>

### Beyond Despenser’s Books: Related Manuscripts

A selective search of manuscript catalogues for items with East Anglian provenance, as well as of bibliographic listings relating to Norfolk specifically, has enabled us to identify manuscripts illuminated in the period c. 1380–1400.<sup>38</sup> So far, the Despenser Master can be identified in the

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<sup>36</sup> Baswell, ‘Aeneas in 1381’, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Webber, ‘Where were Books Made and Kept?’, 221.

<sup>38</sup> N. R. Ker, ‘Medieval Manuscripts from Norwich Cathedral Priory’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 1 (1949), 1–28; Richard Beadle, ‘Prolegomena to a literary geography of later medieval Norfolk’, in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. Felicity Riddy (Cambridge, 1991), 89–108 (Beadle’s list supplements that given in Angus McIntosh and others, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, 4 vols (Aberdeen, 1986) (hereafter *LALME*)); Lasko and Morgan (eds), *Medieval Art in East Anglia*; Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*; Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*; the BL’s *Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts* <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/welcome.htm>> accessed June 2023; and notes taken by James-Maddocks during the preparation of the section on Trinity College, Cambridge in: Ann E. Nichols and Holly James-Maddocks, *An Index of Images in English Manuscripts: Cambridge II* (London, 2022).

calendar (fols 1r–6v) of the Sarum Hours in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.11.7, which contains the synodal feasts of Norwich (Figure 2).<sup>39</sup> The continuator of the original programme of borderwork from fols 7r–217r is the Hatton Missal Artist, whose work is currently known only in Hatton 1—a missal with a Norwich calendar and other masses and non-Sarum feasts of Norwich designated in the sanctoral (cf. Figures 8–9, 11–12).<sup>40</sup> Two further manuscripts contain illumination that is in part attributable to the Hatton Missal Artist—a missal (‘Wellis’) and a processional—and their borderwork may be compared with Hatton 1 in Figures 10–13. A smaller-format missal (‘Bedingfield’) contains illuminated borders that are clearly related in style to Hatton Missal Artist’s, although the green wash on vine tendrils is characteristic of post-1400 production and thus points to a younger contemporary or follower of his style (Figure 14). The distribution of labour is as follows:<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Felix (8 March), Translation of Edmund (29 April), Dominic (5 August), Thomas of Hereford (2 October), and Francis (4 October). See Nicholas Rogers, ‘The Artist of Trinity B.11.7 and his Patrons,’ in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Rogers (Stamford, 1994), 170–86 (172); and M. R. James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge*, 4 vols (Cambridge, 1900), I:342–46. Fully-digitised: ‘B.11.7’, *The Wren Digital Library* <<https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/Manuscript/B.11.7>> accessed June 2023.

<sup>40</sup> *Medieval Art in East Anglia*, 31. See also Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, no. 5. In comparing the images supplied here of Hatton 1 and Trinity B.11.7 (e.g. figs 8 and 9), it is worth noting the markedly different dimensions of the original folios (Hatton at 440x300mm and Trinity at 270x180mm) and the consequent impact upon the proportions of the foliage in reproduction.

<sup>41</sup> Basic catalogue entries can be accessed on the BL’s *Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts* <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/welcome.htm>> (for MSS Additional 25588 and

- i. BL MS Additional 25588, ‘Wellis’ Missal. Hatton Missal Artist as Artist B on folio 109v only, with two assistants, the second of whom (Artist C) commences on folio 112v;
- ii. BL MS Additional 57534, Processional of St Giles’s Hospital, Norwich. Hatton Missal Artist as Artist A of the borderwork, with one assistant (Artist B) for the champ initials;
- iii. *Related:* BL MS Harley 3866, ‘Bedingfield’ Missal (one illuminator working in the style of the Hatton Missal Artist).

The processional in Additional 57534 (Figure 13a) is substantially smaller in format than the missals in Hatton 1 and Additional 25588, and thus the clearest indication that this seemingly cruder work can be attributed to the same ‘Hatton Missal Artist’ comes from comparison with the minor decoration in Hatton 1 such as the champ initials or demi-vinets (cf. Figure 13b).<sup>42</sup>

Remarkably, both the Wellis Missal and St Giles Processional contain illuminated initials by the same collaborator, here referred to as the ‘Wellis Missal Assistant’ (Figure 15a and 15b). Table 3 summarises the evidence for overlapping work across the wider group. This collaborative characteristic, as well as the evidence for provenance in all of the books newly related to the Despenser-Hatton group, will be considered further below.

Table 3: The distribution of labour among border artists of the Despenser-Hatton group identified in more than one manuscript (the symbols ‘\*’ and ‘#’ mark the recurrence of the same styles of pen-flourishing).

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Harley 3866); and on the BL’s *Catalogue: Archives and Manuscripts* <<https://searcharchives.bl.uk/>> accessed June 2023 (MS Additional 57534).

<sup>42</sup> Page dimensions for the Hatton group are as follows: Hatton 1 (missal), 440x300mm; Additional 25588 (missal), 380x250mm; Harley 3866 (missal), 280x185mm; Trinity B.11.7 (hours), 270x180mm; Additional 57534 (processional), 210x140mm.

Dispenser Master	Dispenser Assistant	Hatton Missal Artist	Wellis Missal Assistant
Additional 34114*			
Cotton Claud.E.viii* (Artist B)	Cotton Claud.E.viii (Artist C)		
TCC B.11.7 * (calendar)		TCC B.11.7 (original borderwork from fol. 7 <sup>r</sup> )	
	Arundel 74 (Artist A)		
		Hatton 1#	
		Additional 25588 (Artist B)	Additional 25588 (Artist C)
		Additional 57534# (Artist A)	Additional 57534 (Artist B)

The Hours of the Virgin in Trinity B.11.7—the book to which both the Dispenser Master and Hatton Missal Artist contributed—is the complex product of an aggregation of labour, arising from at least two phases of production. The first campaign, conducted in the late fourteenth century, saw the completion of the calendar in its entirety, as well as most of the decorated borders throughout the rest of the book (Figures 2 and 9).<sup>43</sup> Following the calendar, the illustrative program appears to have been left unfinished until the blanks were filled during the second campaign, although (as Michael Orr observed) some of the miniatures and historiated initials were repainted.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, erasures and adjustments to the borderwork in this section were made to accommodate the new illustrations’ frames, often accompanied by rubbed areas of

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<sup>43</sup> The exceptions are the borders on fols 20r, 21r–v, and 45r–v, which are early fifteenth-century in style. These folios also contain the patronal figures identified by Nicholas Rogers (discussed below, n. 46).

<sup>44</sup> Michael Orr, ‘Illustration as Preface and Postscript in the Hours of the Virgin of Trinity College MS B.11.7’, *Gesta* 34.2 (1995), 162–76 (163).

text.<sup>45</sup> The illuminations of the second campaign, which include depictions of the book's new owners, can be assigned more firmly to c. 1413–1422.<sup>46</sup> The important point for the present discussion is that all of the illumination in the calendar (roundel miniatures and borders) and most of the borders in the hours appear to have been completed earlier, during the late fourteenth century, meaning that work by the Dispenser Master and Hatton Missal Artist was probably contemporaneous.<sup>47</sup> The calendar's roundel miniatures, depicting the Occupations of the Months

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<sup>45</sup> Rubbed or erased borderwork is visible on fols 20v, 29v (motifs on the inside of the border frame), 22v (gutter), 29r (top R corner), etc. Most of the band-borders infilled with gold filigree have been adjusted to match the patterned surfaces within the miniatures and frames e.g. fols 23v, 25r, 28r, 41v, 53v (for an original band-border cf. fol. 19v). Other adjustments include the monochrome roundels set within borders on fols 7r and 13r where, in each case, the same pigment was used for the monochrome curled acanthus of the new historiated initial. Occasional outlining in green has been added to border-frames in both the calendar (fol. 1r) and hours (fol. 13r), further indicating that the later illuminating shop inherited both sections together. It was not necessarily the case, of course, that the calendar and hours were originally intended for each other.

<sup>46</sup> Rogers has identified the owners of two mottoes which occur in some of the miniatures as those of Sir John Cornwall, Baron Fanhope (d. 1443), and his wife Elizabeth, Henry IV's sister (d. 1425). The miniature of the young, unbearded king kneeling at a prie-dieu (fol. 31v) is interpreted as Henry V: see 'The Artist of Trinity B.11.7', 173–75.

<sup>47</sup> Scott's suggestion that the borders may be an attempt to imitate the late fourteenth-century decoration of the calendar would not explain the alterations made to some borders after fol. 7r, or why this imitation-principle was not employed on fols 21 or 45 (cf. *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II:153) (fol. 20r is, conversely, an attempt to imitate fol. 27r). We share the view of both Orr and Rogers that the illumination of the calendar and hours was contemporary, and while Rogers' 1410s dating is conceivable for the

and Zodiacal signs, are set within three-sided borders illuminated by the Despenser Master (fols 1r–6v). Iconographically the Occupations constitute a relatively rare subject, as Scott has noted, and one would need to look to ‘very lavish manuscripts’ such as the Sherborne Missal or the Hours of Elizabeth the Queen for comparable calendars.<sup>48</sup> Whether or not the roundels themselves are the work of the Despenser Master or a separate ‘miniaturist’, what is clear is that he participated in some of the highest-grade productions of his day—a factor worth emphasising if we are indeed dealing with a non-metropolitan illuminator. The calendar contains the synodal feasts of Norwich, as noted, and ‘a certain East Anglian flavour’ continues in the text decorated by the Hatton Missal Artist, with the inclusion of St Edmund and St Etheldreda in the *memoriae* at Lauds.<sup>49</sup> Since the Trinity Hours constitutes newly identified work by both the Despenser Master and Hatton Missal Artist, the localisation of one illuminator is clearly of potential relevance to the other. Books attributed to the Hatton Missal Artist, therefore, help us to develop further the theory that they were Norwich-based book producers.

The cataloguer of Hatton 1 for *Medieval Art in East Anglia* remarked upon the similarity of its borders to those in Despenser’s *Flores Historiarum*—a stylistic correspondence that is now explicable in light of the identification of both artists in Trinity B.11.7.<sup>50</sup> Comparison with

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hours-illustrations, as well as the borders on fols 20, 21 and 45, it is too late for the careers of the Despenser Master and Hatton Missal Artist (Orr, ‘Illustration as Preface and Postscript’, 162–63; cf. Rogers, ‘The Artist of Trinity B.11.7’, 176).

<sup>48</sup> Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II:153. No other work has been identified by the illustrator of the roundels.

<sup>49</sup> James, *Trinity College*, I:343. Discussed in greater detail in Rogers, ‘The Artist of Trinity B.11.7’.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Martindale in *Medieval Art in East Anglia*, 32.



Cotton Claudius E.viii reveals that the Hatton Missal Artist employed the extended repertoire of the Despenser Assistant, preferring the use of naturalistic foliage and animals in combination with various drolleries (including the distinctive grotesque with the bill of a spoonbill: cf. Figures 5–6 and 8). The interest in realistic motifs is far more developed in Hatton 1, and its borders teem with strawberries and columbines, as well as foxes, dogs, boars, apes, squirrels and one snail – several forming dramatic vignettes that make this ‘large and splendid book worthy of comparison with other great missals of the period’ (Figure 11).<sup>51</sup> It is clear from comparison of the smallest details – such as the intersecting pen-vines with slashes and dots, or the interest in colour modulated by white (as modelling, filigree or reserve-work) – that the Hatton Missal Artist worked to the same level of refinement as the Despenser Master. Yet there are differences in Hatton 1’s borderwork, both in repertoire and in execution, that make it distinguishable from work attributed to the Despenser Master. In repertoire there is the Hatton Artist’s frequent use of band-borders in pink/blue with white reserve-work or repeat-pattern (e.g. Figures 10–11); the naturalistic vignettes; and a kidney-triangle (or leaf-triangle) motif in opposing colours (see lower borders of Figures 12–13a; cf. 14). In terms of execution, the Hatton Artist is consistent in ‘stacking’ semi-circular curves on gold balls (some stacked on three sides of the ball and forming near-foliate lobes); in the curled tendrils in penwork that ‘grow’ from the bar-frame or vine; and in the propensity to place a gold foliate-form within a grouping of the same form in colour (e.g. Figure 10). It is these differences that make the Hatton Missal Artist distinguishable from the Despenser Master and it is these differences found in combination in parts of the Trinity Hours,

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<sup>51</sup> *Medieval Art in East Anglia*, 31.

the Wellis Missal, and the St Giles Processional that encourage their attribution to the border artist of Hatton 1 (Figures 8–13).

Analysis of aspects of minor decoration, such as the pen-flourished initials in manuscripts attributable to the Despenser Master and Hatton Missal Artist, proves relevant to the arguments made for distinguishing between the illuminators. In Additional 34114, for example, the manuscript illuminated solely by the Despenser Master, the initials are occasionally infilled with lion-masks or foliage, and the foliate saw-tooth style is unusually elongated, and interspersed with a spiral coil or a dotted circle, while (in larger initials) tendrils form staves terminating in trefoils or circles (Figure 1). The same style of flourishing recurs in quire 3 of Cotton, coinciding with the Despenser Master's stint, and throughout the calendar in Trinity B.11.7 (Figure 16), stopping short of folio 7r where the Hatton Missal Artist takes over the borderwork (and pen-flourishing ceases altogether).<sup>52</sup> The pen-flourished initials throughout Hatton 1 are broadly similar although executed differently, with less well-defined foliate 'teeth' separated by cross-hatching in ink; further decorative elements may include circles grouped together to form triangles at the initial edges, or double slashes on tendrils which themselves end in kites, faces, trefoils or circles. Pen-flourished initials remarkably similar to those in Hatton 1 occur in the St Giles Processional (Additional 57534), a manuscript largely illuminated by the Hatton Missal Artist (Figure 17).<sup>53</sup> Analysis of the decoration in all of these books has revealed four

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<sup>52</sup> See Table 3, marked by '\*'. The only other pen-flourishing in Cotton is in quire 1 (illuminated by Cotton Artist A) and it is different from that in quire 3. Arundel 74 contains no pen-flourishing.

<sup>53</sup> See '#' in Table 3. For completion, the 'Wellis' Missal (MS Add. 25588) contains two different styles of pen-flourishing: the first occurs in quires illuminated by Artist A and the second in quires illuminated

illuminators so far who worked on multiple volumes (Table 3, above). Some of them even appear to have collaborated with the same flourisher more than once, if they did not simply carry out this minor decoration themselves.

The emerging pattern seems to demonstrate a consistency in the availability of hands in one area—an origin point that is strongly indicated by the provenance evidence for Norwich diocese in every single volume. Like the Hatton Missal and Trinity Hours, both of the Wellis and Bedingfield missals contain calendars which include the synodal feasts of Norwich. In addition to this textual connection with East Anglia, both volumes can be linked by ownership to the same area: an early owner of Additional 25588 was Henry Wellis, chaplain in the diocese of Norwich (fols 4v, 250r), and an unnoticed fifteenth-century inscription on folio 10r places the volume in the church at ‘Bixley, near Norwich’; similarly, Harley 3866 appears to have been in the hands of the Bedingfield family of Suffolk by the second quarter of the fifteenth century (calendar). A combination of internal evidence and added inscription indicates that the processional in Additional 57534 belonged to St Giles’s Hospital in Norwich, and may even have been made for its clerical community.<sup>54</sup> All three manuscripts are thus coherent in their evidence for early provenance and complement the uniformity in styles of illumination found in manuscripts attributed to the Despenser Master, Hatton Missal Artist, and their assistants.

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by Artist C. The Hatton Missal Artist (Artist B) contributed only the borderwork (and possibly the miniature) on fol. 109v.

<sup>54</sup> Aden Kumler, ‘*Imitatio Rerum*: Sacred Objects in the St Giles’s Hospital Processional’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 44.3 (2014), 469–502 (474–75).

The eight books discussed so far support the view of East Anglia and, in particular, Norwich, as a thriving locus for manuscript illumination, as we might expect for one of the major regional centres. The rich illustration of the Hatton Missal Artist's books—a half-page Crucifixion miniature (Additional 25588), eighteen historiated initials (Hatton 1), and nine schematic diagrams of liturgical conduct (Additional 57534) —clearly associates this border artist's with high status work, and the same can now be said of the sumptuous 'occupations' roundels that feature in the Despenser Master's calendar in the Trinity Hours (MS B.11.7). The Despenser Master's connection through the Trinity Hours to the Hatton Missal Artist and, through him, to a wider circle of Norwich-related books, clearly strengthens the case for the local production of Bishop Despenser's surviving library. This has implications for other important manuscripts tentatively localised to East Anglia. Early fourteenth-century books assigned 'rather too definitely' to Norwich, according to Doyle, such as the Ormesby and Bromholm psalters, do nevertheless assert an influence in the continued use of narrative vignettes and naturalistic motifs in the later books with identical provenance.<sup>55</sup> A desideratum of future research must be the attempt to track chronological developments in styles of manuscript illumination in multiple regional centres over extended periods of time—creating a meaningfully diagnostic framework for understanding the relationship between use and origin. Until then we cannot be sure, as Webber warns, that any stylistic elements assigned to a given place 'are not to be found in material produced elsewhere'.<sup>56</sup> One such thorny problem in the attempt to localise the

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<sup>55</sup> A. I. Doyle, 'English Provincial Book Trade Before Printing', in *Six Centuries of the Provincial Book Trade in Britain*, ed. Peter Isaac (Winchester, 1990), 13–29 (20–21). Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, II:49–52, nos 43 and 44.

<sup>56</sup> Webber, 'Where were Books Made and Kept?', 223.

Dispenser Master is the career of an older contemporary known as the ‘Holkham Psalter Artist’. Several scholars have noticed a resemblance between the borderwork in the psalter for Ramsay abbey, now Holkham Hall MS 26, and in the *Flores Historiarum* for Henry Dispenser, with its comparable repertory of large-scale foliage, interlace, and lion masks, alongside the ‘uniquely characteristic’ ‘profile dog-headed, web-winged dragons with disc-patterned backbone and the large, pendant lavender columbines’ all set within rectilinear borders.<sup>57</sup> The issue that arises with respect to localisation, given their close resemblance in style to the Holkham Psalter Artist, is that the latter was almost certainly itinerant. His known *oeuvre* comprises at least twelve manuscripts, according to Lynda Dennison, which indicate that he was active from c.1360 to c.1395 and that he illuminated books destined for the monastic orders, both Augustinian and Benedictine.<sup>58</sup> The disparity in provenance evidence is stark with one early production made for

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<sup>57</sup> Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, II:166. The same observation is made in: Dennison, ‘Monastic or Secular?’, 229; and in Lynda Dennison and Nicholas Rogers, ‘A Medieval Best-Seller: Some Examples of Decorated Copies of Higden’s *Polychronicon*’, in *The Church and Learning in Later Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of R. B. Dobson*, ed. Caroline Barron and Jenny Stratford (Donington, 2002), 80–99 (90). Columbines feature in the Hatton Missal too and the general stylistic unity between the Dispenser Master and Hatton Missal Artist are now, as argued here, better substantiated by the work they each contributed to the original portions of the Trinity Hours.

<sup>58</sup> A synthesis of Dennison’s work on this artist is given in ‘The Significance of Ornamental Penwork’, 31–64. A more recent, tentative identification of the Holkham artist’s hand is the fine border on folio 117r of the Vernon manuscript, plus verse initials in the same gathering: see Dennison, ‘The Artistic Origins of the Vernon Manuscript’, in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet.a.1*, ed. Wendy Scase (Turnhout, 2013), 171–205.

the Augustinians of Christ Church, Dublin (c.1360–1380),<sup>59</sup> while eight later productions (c.1380–1395) were destined for a variety of Benedictine communities: two for Ramsay abbey,<sup>60</sup> two for Norwich cathedral priory,<sup>61</sup> and one each for St Augustine’s abbey, Canterbury, Christ Church cathedral priory, Canterbury, Abingdon abbey, and Reading abbey.<sup>62</sup> Dennison’s assessment of this artist’s patronage led her to conclude that ‘he was a semi-itinerant, secular, illuminator who travelled from one monastic centre to another but had a stable base at one or possibly two such centres, where lay persons and the secular clergy could also order books’. One potential stable base, it seems, was a Benedictine ‘centre, or centres, in East Anglia, most likely Ramsay and/or Norwich’.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the recurrent columbine motif is likely to prove indicative of provenance: Scott’s hypothesis that it was ‘an identifying badge of the Norwich house’ requires

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<sup>59</sup> The information on the Holkham Psalter Artist’s career given in the rest of this paragraph is drawn from Dennison, ‘The Significance of Ornamental Penwork’, 31–32, 35–36, 42. The ‘Derby Psalter’ (with undisputed Augustinian destination) is Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson G. 185.

<sup>60</sup> Holkham Hall, MS 26, Psalter; BL, MS Royal 14 C.ix, *Polychronicon*.

<sup>61</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 316, *Polychronicon*; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 4922, *Polychronicon*.

<sup>62</sup> Respectively: Cambridge, University Library, MS li.2.24, *Polychronicon*; Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B. 191, *Polychronicon*; Oxford, Pembroke College, MS 2, John Mirifield, *Breviarium Bartholomei*; and BL, MS Royal 4 C.vi, anon., Commentary on Wisdom.

<sup>63</sup> ‘The Significance of Ornamental Penwork’, 32. In Dennison’s most recent statement on the Holkham artist’s later career, Norwich is hypothesised as the most feasible location for the particular confluence of artistic styles in the Vernon manuscript: see ‘Vernon Manuscript’, 202–205.

further substantiation,<sup>64</sup> while Doyle and Dennison agree on the columbine's primary association with monasticism, and with Benedictines in particular.<sup>65</sup> If the Holkham Psalter Artist's career was facilitated by a monastic network, his clear influence on the styles of both the Despenser Master and Hatton Missal Artist lends support to Dennison's idea that Norwich may have been one of the primary centres in which he settled during the 1380s to 1390s. Certainly, what we can say is that *all* of the manuscripts attributable to the Despenser-Hatton group (Table 3, above) show textual connections with the diocese of Norwich, whether liturgical, as in most cases, or heraldic, or even dialectal as in the case of Despenser's *Flores Historiarum*, whose main scribe switches to Norfolk-English.<sup>66</sup> Coincidence is unlikely. Parallels in the findings of different scholars—such as the convergences in style, provenance and date evident in the careers of the Holkham, Hatton and Despenser artists—cumulatively lead to a better sense of book illumination as a sustained activity in late medieval Norwich. We have few specific indications for the *circumstances* of production (what were the specific roles of the bishop and the priory, for example?), but we can be more confident about *place* of production.

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<sup>64</sup> Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, II:34–35, in a discussion of the columbines in Hatton 1 (of Norwich provenance), refers to their presence in other manuscripts probably made for Norwich Cathedral Priory: the *Polychronicon* in both Bodley 316 (with BL, MS Harley 3634, fols 125–196 (1394–97)), and BnF, MS lat. 4922, and the works of Alanus de Insulis etc., in Bodleian Library, MS Canon Misc. 110, cited from Ker, 'Norwich Cathedral Priory', nos 57, 62, 105.

<sup>65</sup> A. I. Doyle, 'Introduction', in *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng. poet.a.1* (Cambridge, 1987), 1–16 (9); Dennison, 'The Significance of Ornamental Penwork', 33 n. 14.

<sup>66</sup> *LALME*, I:223. The measures of weight given on fol. 12r in the main hand.

## Norwich

The question then would be, were conditions such in Norwich as to encourage Despenser to commission books locally, rather than in—say—London? Stylistically, the answer to that question is a probable ‘yes’. This conclusion gains further support for reasons both biographical and contextual. Foremost we should consider proximity: as his Registers show, for ten years after 1385, Despenser scarcely left Norwich, other than brief attendance at parliament and convocations.<sup>67</sup> He was resident in London from May 1397 to February 1398, and may have commissioned books then; but other, more pressing concerns probably occupied him in those months.<sup>68</sup> Thus the most likely period, and place, for the making of these three manuscripts is that decade the bishop spent in Norwich (c. 1385–1395). Two pieces of circumstantial evidence would seem to corroborate this assumption. Records from various sources, including sacrist and obedientiary rolls from the Cathedral priory and lists of freemen working in the city, though incomplete in both cases, nonetheless show two distinct periods of book-related activities: broadly between 1280–1300 and 1381–96.<sup>69</sup> Neil Ker explained the first as the monks hiring scribes and artisans to replace the manuscripts destroyed during the citizens’ riot of 1272; the

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<sup>67</sup> Despenser’s Registers are kept in the Norfolk Record Office, as DN/REG 3/6.

<sup>68</sup> Davies, ‘Despenser, Henry’, opines Despenser’s London stay was in support of Richard II against the Appellants, and to secure Archbishop Arundel’s favorable settlement of his dispute with the Norwich priory.

<sup>69</sup> See, in addition to L’Estrange’s *Freemen’s Calendar*, discussed below, data accumulated by M. A. Michael, ‘English Illuminators c. 1190–1450: A Survey of Documentary Sources’, *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700* 4 (1993), 62–113.



second, we suggest, was encouraged by Despenser's decade of residence—a supposition that accords well with stylistic elements in the manuscripts.<sup>70</sup>

Secondarily, from 1381 on, the city was again prospering. Fiscally the leading citizenry possessed the wherewithal to have supported a local book trade. And late fourteenth-century Norwicians, like their bishop, clearly had the tooth for aesthetically fine things, even if the city's best years for such production were on either side of Despenser's episcopacy. Norwich stained glass is a distinctive style that bloomed in the fifteenth century—much of it sadly destroyed during the Reformation—but fragmentary evidence affirms its high quality contemporaneous with Despenser.<sup>71</sup> Sculpture flourished as well in and about Norwich, especially of baptismal fonts; notably also, in the cathedral nave and cloister are the finest and most numerous roof bosses in England. While most of the latter were added during the tenure of Despenser's successor, that they accumulated so quickly after his death suggests both an earlier interest and an already-functioning local community of designers, stoneworkers, and colourists.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Ker, 'Norwich Cathedral Priory', 8–9.

<sup>71</sup> See David J. King, 'Glass Painting', in *Medieval Norwich*, 121–36, who notes (at 124): 'Glass datable between 1370 and 1390 [...] found near the church of St. Parmentergate [...] demonstrates that the glaziers then documented in the city were working in a style close to that seen elsewhere in glass and manuscript painting.'

<sup>72</sup> See in particular M. R. James, *The Sculptured Bosses in the Cloisters of Norwich Cathedral* (Norwich, 1911); and further Martial Rose, 'The Vault Bosses', in *Norwich Cathedral*, 363–78. At Norwich there are more than 1400 bosses; the next largest grouping in England numbers about 250, at St. Mary the Virgin Abbey in Tewkesbury. Perhaps not insignificantly, five Despensers were patrons of St. Mary the Virgin, and Lord Edward, Henry's eldest brother, is buried there in a magnificent chantry chapel. The

More closely related and relevant to our present inquiry nonetheless is figure painting. Lamentably, Cromwellian iconoclasts were particularly efficient in Norfolk and, like glass, frescoes and painted panels proved especially vulnerable targets. As with Norwich glass, however, enough remains here and there to suggest confidently that the many churches—indeed, so many that medieval Norwich was known as ‘the city of churches’—must have been replete with polychrome art.<sup>73</sup> For our purposes, two examples of painted wooden panels offer suggestive comparison: the aforementioned ‘Dispenser Retable’, so named because it, like the manuscripts under consideration, bears his episcopal arms, assuring at least his financial contribution to its production; and an altarpiece assembled from unrelated survivors, several contemporaneous with Dispenser and showing the same cosmopolitan style as the Retable.<sup>74</sup> Judging from such examples, the extensive tradition of the arts in Norwich implies that culturally/aesthetically the late fourteenth-century city could easily have accommodated production of fine books. But among these many craftsmen, were there any in fact in the book trade at work there, and if so, who were they?

To the first question we have definitively answered ‘yes’. To the second, affirmatives of two kinds can be offered, based on existing documents. Here we need to consider manuscript

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relationship continued into the 1430s: See Julian M. Luxford, ‘The Construction of English Monastic Patronage’, in *Patronage, Power, and Agency in Medieval Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane (University Park, PA, 2013), 31–53 (esp. 42, 46).

<sup>73</sup> See, for examples, David Park and Helen Howard, ‘The Medieval Polychromy’, in *Norwich Cathedral*, 379–409. Especially valuable evidence are obediatory rolls and sacrists’ accounts listing sums paid for materials and to painters, at 401–04.

<sup>74</sup> See n. 7 above.

producers of two types, commercial and clerical. Of the former, one probable pool can be drawn from the *Calendar of the Freemen of Norwich*, with significant entries from 1317 through the early seventeenth century. Less fortunately—but hardly surprising—the records are fullest for Edward III and then from Henry V forward—that is, 1327–1377 and 1413–1471—and less so for our period of interest, Richard II and Henry IV (1377–1413).<sup>75</sup> Despite the gaps, however, enough remains to be suggestive. Prior to the arrival of Henry Despenser in 1370, Norwich would seem to have had active scriveners, ‘writers’, and proportionately a large number of parchment-makers.<sup>76</sup> Notable too, probably, are those enrolled as ‘peyntour’ during Edward’s

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<sup>75</sup> See John L’Estrange, *Calendar of the Freemen of Norwich, from 1317 to 1603 (Edward II to Elizabeth Inclusive)*, ed. Walter Rye (London, 1888); and more recently the charts in Rutledge, ‘Economic life’, 170–72.

<sup>76</sup> The following list (with *Calendar* page numbers in parenthesis, and those working during Richard’s reign in **bold**) covers the reigns of Edward III to Henry VI, on the assumption that some practitioners had extended careers: Nicholas Baldok, parchmener 21 & 22 Edw.III (4); William Archer, scrivener 7 Henry V (8); John de Bradewelle, peyntour 48 Edw.III (19); John Brice, scrivener 2 Henry V (20); Peter Brice, scrivener 38 Edw.III (20); **Robert Castell**, scriptor 8 & 9 Rich.II (28); Richard Clerk, text writer 27 & 28 Henry VI (32); William Dene, skrevener 16, 17, 18 Henry VI (42); William Dowty, scrivener 5 Henry VI (45); **John Drable alias Gilbert**, scrivener (?) 18 & 19 Rich.II (45); William de Draitone, scrivener (?) 23 Edw.III (45); John de Frenge, peyntour 48 Edw.III (55); **Stephen Frenge**, peyntour 10 & 11 Rich.II (55); **Edmund Frensshe**, peyntour 10 & 11 Rich.II (55); Master Ralph Gunton, notary and writer 3 Henry V (65); Ralph Gunton, writer 8 Henry IV (65); Robert de Gunton, writer (?) 23 Edw.III (65); Thomas Hamond, screvyner 3 Henry V (67); Richard Herbeger, scrivener 30 Henry VI (71); Thomas de Horning, parchmener 21 & 22 Edw.III (76); Peter Laurence, skryvener 1 Henry VI (85); William Lote, parchmener 3 Henry V (88); William de Lucham, scrivener (?) 1 Edw.III (89); John de Ludham,

reign, since painters sometimes doubled as limners, illuminating manuscripts. Under Richard II the trades apparently continue, in concentrated numbers as noted above. Noteworthy are the cross-reign presence of certain surnames, evidence perhaps of multi-generational ‘family’ trades: i.e., John de Frenge, painter (48 Edward III), and Stephen Frenge, painter (10 and 11 Richard II); Thomas de Ocle, painter (10 and 11 Richard II), and Robert Ocle, painter (9 Henry IV); Peter Brice, scrivener (38 Edward III) and John Brice, scrivener (2 Henry V); Robert de Gunton, ‘writer’ (?) (23 Edward III), Ralph Gunton, ‘writer’ (8 Henry IV), and Ralph Gunton, notary and ‘writer’ (3 Henry V).<sup>77</sup> In these cases, the Frenge, John and Stephen, the Ocles, Thomas and Robert, were all clearly working during Despenser’s tenure; and if the families Brice and (de) Gunton carried on such a family enterprise, their presence in the more complete records of Edward III and Henry V that bookend the Despenser years could suggest continual scribal

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parchmener (?) 12 Edw.III (89); Roger March, parchmener 24 Henry VI (92); John Marchaunt, parchmener 9 Henry V (92); **John Mathew**, ‘le roller’ 16 & 17 Rich.II (94); Robert Ocle, peyntor 9 Henry IV (103); **Thomas de Ocle**, peyntor 10 & 11 Rich.II (103); Richard Ode, parchmener 3 Henry V (103); Thomas Percy, ‘lomynour’ 20 Henry VI (108); John Skrevener, text writer 16, 17, 18 Henry VI (124); **Henry J. Strykere**, parchmyner 4 Rich.II (132); Nicholas Sutton, ‘Qwylwright’ (penmaker) 5 Henry IV (133); Robert Werkton, scrivener 13 Henry VI (147); William West, ‘loumer’ 24 Henry VI (148).

<sup>77</sup> This Ralph Gunton may in fact be the same person. Our thanks are due to the anonymous reviewer for alerting us to two wills: Thomas Frenge, peyntour, 1426–1427 (will at Norfolk Record Office, NCR 1/18 r.11), who can be added to L'Estrange's list; and Thomas Oxley (Ocle), citizen of Norwich, 1424 (Norwich County Council, Will Register Hirning, 138), who may be the Thomas de Ocle, peyntour, recorded in 10 & 11 Richard II.

activity by relatives during the less well-documented period. Finally, of some interest, perhaps, is one ‘Adam Bookebynder’, listed without occupational title in 10 and 11 Richard II, about whom L’Estrange comments that ‘it seems probable that most of the early trade names really indicated the occupations of their owners’.<sup>78</sup>

Alternatives to commercial producers also existed, in the form of clerical scribes and limners. These are of several types. Unbeneficed clergy comprise one such, as a possible source-pool for at least some of portions of Despenser’s books. During his episcopacy Norwich resembled London in regard to such clergy, albeit on a smaller scale. As Norman Tanner has pointed out:

...two tax assessments from the reign of Richard II show that the city of Norwich contained a substantial number of unbeneficed secular priests by the end of the [fourteenth] century. Thus under the deanery of Norwich, whose boundaries coincided almost exactly with those of the city, forty-five unbeneficed chaplains were listed in one assessment and fifty-two or fifty-three in the other.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> L’Estrange, *Calendar*, x. His guess may be correct, yet trade-originated surnames require careful handling. In some cases, such as ‘John Skrevener, text writer 16, 17, 18 Henry VI’, the name corresponds; but in others, such as Henry Lomynour and William Lomynour, who appear in *Norfolk Official Lists, from the Earliest Period to the Present Day*, ed. Hamon Le Strange (Norwich, 1890), 99, as bailiffs in 1379 and 1381, respectively, were not in fact limners, but cloth merchants. See, e.g., on Henry, *The History of Parliament III, The House of Commons 1386–1421*, ed. J. S. Roskell et al. (Stroud, 1992), 605–06. Apparently this confused M. A. Michael as well: see ‘English Illuminators’, 90.

<sup>79</sup> Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532* (Toronto, 1984), 22.

Such men found work where they could. For many, of course, that meant the chantries, of which Norwich had an abundance. Nevertheless, few chantry endowments were lucrative, and many weren't funded for the long term, leaving clergy to find other income sources. To quote Alison McHardy:

Not all the qualities and skills these men provided were necessarily connected with ministry; their duties might be primarily legal, secretarial, administrative, or advisory, and their ranks included a small number of doctors, astrologers, and entertainers.<sup>80</sup>

These are the 'clerical proletariat' described by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton; and although we have no way of knowing exactly who these men were, undoubtedly to McHardy's list of substitute employments in Norwich could be added scribes and limners.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the so-called 'Holkham Psalter Artist', discussed above, seems to have been one of that type.

Norwich Cathedral priory could be considered a second possible locus—perhaps a better descriptor than 'source', in this case. Bishop Henry's relations with the priory were complex, to say the least, over more than one issue, beginning in 1386 and continuing past his death in 1406.<sup>82</sup> So considered, the probability that Despenser would obtain manuscripts copied there

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<sup>80</sup> Alison K. McHardy, 'Careers and Disappointments in the Late Medieval Church', *Studies in Church History* 26 (1989), 111–30 (118).

<sup>81</sup> See 'The Clerical Proletariat: The Underemployed Scribe and Vocational Crisis', in *Journal of the Early Book Society* 17 (2015), 1–34, and more recently *The Clerical Proletariat and the Resurgence of English Poetry* (Philadelphia, 2021).

<sup>82</sup> The disputes concerned a host of issues, including disposal of property, discipline of monks, visitation, allotment of certain tithes and dues from dependent churches. Litigation variously extended to the crown,

would seem slight. Yet much evidence exists that, despite the long-running litigation, the bishop and the priory were able to work in tandem, even cordially: obtaining freedom for a serf in 1382, providing water for a Lynn friary, settling a dispute (in the priory's favour) with the Norwich citizenry in 1390. In 1395 Despenser gifted the prior, Alexander Tottington, with one of the episcopal manors valued at £10 annually, apparently uncoerced.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps more telling as signs of episcopal-monastic relations are the generous epitaph the monks accorded him at his tomb before the cathedral altar, recorded by Capgrave, and the inclusion of prayers for Despenser in the mass established for himself by Tottington, once Despenser's fiercest opponent during the litigation, but subsequently his successor.<sup>84</sup> Thus, despite initial appearances, Despenser might seemingly have sought willing scribes and artists in his local monastic community.

Whom he would have found working there, however, is another uncertain matter. Obedientary rolls show sums advanced to priory monks to purchase books—though they do not

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three archbishops of Canterbury, and two popes, before finally being resolved in 1411. See Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, 158–62; Allington-Smith, *Henry Despenser*, 61–62; and esp. E. H. Carter, *Studies in Norwich Cathedral History* (Norwich, 1935), 37–57.

<sup>83</sup> And apparently at some cost to himself: Despenser's failure to obtain necessary royal permission to reallocate title prompted an official inquiry: see *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Volume VI, 1392–1399* (London, 1963), 41, no. 86.

<sup>84</sup> For Capgrave, see *Liber de Illustribus Henricis*, ed. F. C. Hingeston, Rolls Series 7 (London, 1858), 174; for Tottington, see Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, 214.

indicate to whom the payments were made, whether from workers in the city or from monks in-house.<sup>85</sup> A. I. Doyle has suggested both, observing that:

There was a widespread practice of individual religious using monetary allowances and gifts for book purchases [...] Not infrequently they employed their funds and friends to provide items direct for the communal collections, sometimes perhaps by meeting the material costs of work actually executed by themselves or their brethren.

He goes on to demonstrate the ‘ample evidence that religious houses and their members employed named and unnamed scribes in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to write documents and books, both over a period and occasionally’.<sup>86</sup> Examples accumulate of books produced in consort by a variety of hands, commercial and clerical, of different orders, some of whose members were itinerant.<sup>87</sup> Dennison has taken this farther, arguing in multiple studies for a pattern of probably lay illuminators who were peripatetic and who worked mostly for monastic patrons. Norwich Cathedral Priory is often central to Dennison’s hypotheses regarding a ‘Benedictine monastic circuit’—whether the object of consideration is the decoration of the

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<sup>85</sup> To 1317, many of these are non-monastic; subsequent affairs are less clear. See Ker, ‘Manuscripts from Norwich Cathedral Priory’, 8–9.

<sup>86</sup> A. I. Doyle, ‘Book Production by the Monastic Orders in England, 1375–1530: Assessing the Evidence’, in *Medieval Book Production: Assessing the Evidence*, ed. Linda L. Brownrigg (Los Altos Hills, CA, 1990), 1–19 (1–2).

<sup>87</sup> One contemporary example is the Sherborne Missal written by the monk John Whas, presumably a member of that Benedictine community, and illuminated by the Dominican John Siferwas. See BL MS Additional 74236, e.g., 216, 276 (paginated), where both are pictured in their respective habits.



Vernon manuscript or the later career of the Holkham Psalter Artist.<sup>88</sup> One final example of a book related to this context is that of the Helmingham Breviary discussed by Janet Backhouse, who concluded that it was ‘most probably produced in a professional commercial workshop, very likely in Norwich’.<sup>89</sup> Equally viable candidates for those involved in the manufacture of this and other Norwich-provenance books, including Despenser’s, certainly include the city’s clerical population.

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To sum up, then: it is our considered view that the three manuscripts known to have belonged to Henry Despenser, Bishop of Norwich—BL MSS Additional 34114, Arundel 74, and Cotton Claudius E.viii—were commissioned and produced in Norwich between 1380 and 1400, a period that can perhaps be narrowed further to 1385–1395, when the bishop was in residence almost exclusively. Conditions in an economically resurgent Norwich were at that time amply supportive of a scribal workshop (or perhaps shops), part of a flourishing community of associated trades: painters of wood, stone, and glass, parchmeners, scribes, and sculptors. Nor is it doubtful any longer that Despenser, historically a controversial figure in many respects, possessed the character of a collector of fine books. Clearly he did, and his interest was known to others, at least one of whom sought preferment at his hand with a gift of books.

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<sup>88</sup> See Dennison, ‘Vernon Manuscript’, 203; Dennison, ‘Monastic or Secular?’, 251–61. For the involvement of monastic orders in book production in fourteenth-century Oxford, including consideration of both the Holkham Psalter Artist’s stylistic influence and the patron’s (in this case Adam Easton’s) connections with Norwich Cathedral Priory, see: Dennison, ‘Adam Easton’s copy’, 68–73, 90–93.

<sup>89</sup> ‘The Helmingham Breviary: the Reinstatement of a Norwich Masterpiece’, *National Art Collections Fund Review* (1993), 23–25 (25). With thanks to one of the reviewers for bringing this to our attention.

Details of provenance alone, however, are insufficient to locate origin. While the precise circumstances of production of Despenser's manuscripts continue to remain elusive, much is evident about the hands that rendered them. Stylistic analysis shows that Despenser's three surviving books involved six artists, one of whom—clearly the most accomplished—we have identified elsewhere for the first time and designated the 'Despenser Master'. He stands out as the lead contributor to two of the bishop's three manuscripts, Additional 34114 and Cotton Claudius E.viii. A second artist, close to the Master in skill but notably drawing on his effects and working, very probably, in close proximity, we have designated the 'Despenser Assistant'. He produced Arundel 74. Significantly, their work can be associated with a larger grouping of important contemporary illuminated manuscripts of established Norfolk provenance that extends beyond the important Hatton Missal and Holkham Psalter. While the 'Holkham Psalter Artist' was probably a peripatetic lay professional on a 'monastic circuit', the joint presence of work by the main Despenser artist and the Hatton Missal Artist suggests that their comparable styles were formed in a shared urban location. That location, where Despenser's three known books were commissioned and produced, can safely be claimed as Norwich. The exact circumstances of these commissions, whether they were manufactured within a secular or monastic environment (or both) remains to be established.