

Travel Bursary Report

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A travel grant from the SSML for 2012 allowed me to consult three important mid-fifteenth-century prophecy collections, as part of the final stage of research for my PhD thesis, entitled 'Political Prophecy and England's Borders, c.1136-1461'.

Two principal manuscripts were the purpose of my visit to Aberystwyth (although the trip also afforded opportunities to explore other materials): NLW, Peniarth MS 50 (compiled in Wales in c.1450) and NLW, Peniarth MS 26 (compiled c.1454 in Oswestry, on the northern Welsh March). Both are collections of Welsh and English prophecy material, compiled by bilingual scribes. The Welsh prophetic contents of the manuscripts are for the most part largely traditional prophecies of Welsh restoration. In terms of English prophecies, the first collection exhibits a decidedly Lancastrian affiliation, and the second, a vested interest in the claims of the earls of March to the English throne - which we might regard as the basis for a proto-Yorkist collection (in its English prophecies Peniarth 26 has much in common with later Yorkist collections extant from the later 1450s, '60s, and '70s).

Both manuscripts are incredibly rich sources for our understanding of the relationship between Welsh and Marcher prophecies and partisan prophecies in circulation in England during the fifteenth century. Importantly, both collections contain previously un-noted analogues to material found in contemporary English manuscripts, and in some cases provide the earliest extant witnesses. Although the Welsh contents of Peniarth 50 has received some scholarly attention, the English contents of both remain largely overlooked.

Peniarth 26 contains an un-noted fragment of the *Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (a northern English text, often understood to have no visible Welsh circulation prior to the Tudor accession). The manuscript also includes a number of other prophecies in the Erceldoune tradition, many of which are adapted from prophecies associated with the Percy earls of Northumberland (whose presence in the northern Welsh March during the early fifteenth century was short-lived but long remembered). This Marcher material presents a hitherto unremarked facet of the genre's development.

Alongside an important reserve of Lancastrian political prophecy, Peniarth 50 also contains a unique (English language) prophetic poem derived from the B-text of *Piers Plowman*. I intend to publish an analysis of the latter poem, independent of my thesis, at a later date.

Trinity College, Dublin, houses one important manuscript for my current investigation: TCD, MS 516. A commonplace book in the possession of John Benet, a Bedfordshire vicar, it features numerous English and Latin political prophecies in circulation during the mid-fifteenth century. The manuscript has previously been regarded as a Lancastrian commonplace book, but in fact, it presents a very clear window into various strands of prophetic material in circulation through this period, beyond any one partisan focus.

Alongside Lancastrian material, it includes prophecies which my investigations through the course of my thesis have established as (by this period) definitively Yorkist. The nodal point around which this material has accrued is very likely to have been an interest in apocalypticism - this is not surprising given the scribe's occupation, and the anxieties of the age. Some of its contents cohere with materials found in Peniarth 26 and Peniarth 50, and again, it presents a number of unique witnesses of both Lancastrian and Yorkist political prophecy.

I would like to express my thanks to both the society, and library staff at the National Library of Wales, and the library of Trinity College, Dublin, for the opportunity to undertake this vital research for my PhD.