

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE:
TRAVEL BURSARY REPORT

ANGLOPHONE READING COMMUNITIES IN LATE MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Thanks to the award of a travel bursary from the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature I was able to visit both the Bodleian Library and the library of Longleat House during the summer of 2012 to undertake codicological research for an article-in-progress which examines two related manuscripts: Warminster (Wilts.), Longleat House, Marquess of Bath MS 29 and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Musaeo 232.

This research is an extension of work undertaken for my doctoral thesis, which offered a reconsideration of Anglophone reading communities in late medieval Ireland. Underpinned by a detailed examination of a selected manuscript corpus of literary texts in Middle Hiberno English, it questioned the validity of the current cultural narrative for the study of these codices by tracing and challenging the sponsoring (and contested) historiographies of previous literary scholarship on these materials. The key contention of the study was that Middle Hiberno English texts have been understood, in these accounts, only in relation to specific and questionable models of Irish historiography and thus, the prevailing literary conceptualisation of these materials (for example, the "Kildare" poems in British Library Harley MS 913, or the "Douce *Piers Plowman*" of Bodleian Library MS Douce 104) owes more to a specific discourse of twentieth century Irish nationalism than it does to the material and contemporary circumstances of these manuscripts' production.

The purpose of the SSMLL-sponsored research trip was to undertake a detailed codicological examination of both Longleat MS 29 and MS eMus.232; to verify the accuracy of transcriptions I had made previously from microfilm reproductions of the manuscripts; and to carry out related archival research in the Bodleian Library.

The hand of MS eMus. 232 is that of the main scribe in Longleat MS 29 (Hanna, 170 and 208) and whilst both manuscripts are accepted as "central exhibits in the formulation of Middle Hiberno-English" (Hanna, 171; cf. McIntosh and Samuels, 1-11) there is, as yet, no published extra-linguistic evidence to support the Irish provenance of these manuscripts which is suggested, potentially, on dialectal grounds – a provenance implicitly accepted by most scholars but which is rejected by Ogilvie-Thomson in her EETS edition of the Rollean material in Longleat MS 29 (1988,

xxxiv-xxxv). My research allows me to offer some new, extra-linguistic, evidence for the manuscripts' likely provenance in late medieval Anglophone Ireland, and the purpose of the article on which I am currently working is to present this evidence in conjunction with a diplomatic edition of a previously unpublished item from Longleat MS 29.

In light of the importance of MS Longleat 29 as a "major anthology" of Rollean material (Hanna, xx), the Irish provenance of these manuscripts is worthy of more consideration in terms of Anglophone literary culture in late medieval Ireland than it has received hitherto, and this study, I hope, will serve as an initial step towards rectifying this apparent neglect.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Society for the award of a travel bursary, which facilitated the final codicological research necessary in preparation for this article's submission, and to thank Dr Kate Harris and her colleagues at the library at Longleat and the library staff at the Bodleian for their assistance.

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