

1-2003

Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*

University Libraries–University of South Carolina

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/rbsc_pubs



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

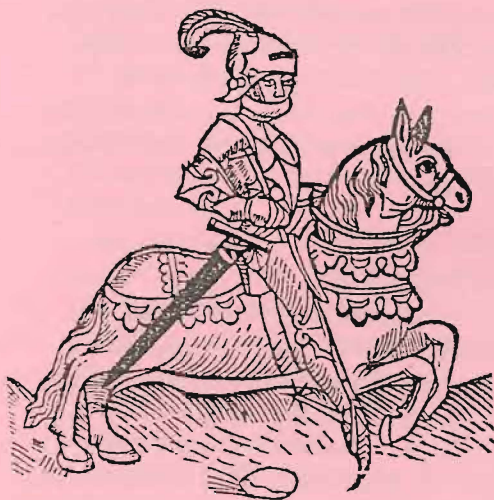
Recommended Citation

University of South Carolina, "University of South Carolina Libraries - Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*, January 2003". http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/rbsc_pubs/25/

This Catalog is brought to you by the Irvin Department of Rare Books & Special Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Rare Books & Special Collections Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

**Department of Rare Books
& Special Collections**

CHAUCER
and **THE**
CANTERBURY
TALES



Main Lobby
Thomas Cooper Library
University of South Carolina
January 2003

The Canterbury Tales, written more than six hundred years ago, remains one of the most influential poems in the English language. It was circulated in Chaucer's own time in beautifully illuminated manuscript copies, and it was among the first works of English poetry to reach printed form, in Caxton's edition of 1478. Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400) was a courtier and civil servant as well as a poet, and his work provides a lively panorama of contemporary medieval society.

This exhibit puts on display, alongside some original material, modern high-quality reproductions of the most important of the Chaucer manuscripts and of the early printed editions of his work.

1: BACKGROUND

Chaucer's poem describes a group of medieval pilgrims, gathering at the Tabard just south of the river Thames, in London, to set out on the road to Canterbury, where the "holy blisful martyr" St Thomas a Becket was buried in the cathedral.

* an original medieval illuminated manuscript book, a psalter or book of psalms, dating from the early 15th century, shortly after Chaucer's death.

* reproduction of the frontispiece portrait of Chaucer, from Thomas Speght's edition of 1598, based on the near-contemporary Hoccleve portrait.

* a 1588 map of the walled city of Canterbury, still looking much as it would have appeared to medieval pilgrims (*Osman Collection of Braun &*

Hogenberg City Maps).

* portrait of Chaucer from the Ellesmere manuscript.

2: THE ELLESMERE MANUSCRIPT

Though many manuscript versions of *The Canterbury Tales* survive, one of the most authoritative and most handsomely-illuminated manuscripts remained unknown till the mid-nineteenth-century. The Ellesmere manuscript, at that time owned by the Marquis of Stafford, was first printed in F.J. Furnivall's Chaucer edition in 1868. In 1917, it was purchased by the America railroad baron Henry E. Huntington and is now the centrepiece of the library he founded in southern California. The Ellesmere manuscript dates from c. 1405, within a few years after Chaucer's lifetime. The pages displayed here are from the facsimile produced for the Huntington Library in 1995.

*** Opening to *The General Prologue***

*Whan that April with his showres soote
The droughte of March hath perced to
the roote . . .*

*Thanne longen folk to goon on
pilgrimages.*

*** The Knight**

He was a verray parfit gentil knight.

*** The Squire**

A lovere and a lusty bachelor,

*** The Manciple**

A gentle Manciple was ther of a temple,

3: CHAUCER & THE CHURCH

*** The Prioress**

And she was cleped Madame Eglantine.

*** The Monk**

A manly man, to been an abbot able.

*** The Pardoner**

Ful loude he soong, "Com hider, love, to me."

*** The Clerk of Oxford**

*But al that he mighte of his freends
hente,
On bookes and on lerning he it spent.*

4: CHAUCER & THE LAITY

*** The Wife of Bath**

*Bold was hir face and fair and reed of
hewe.*

*** The Merchant**

*His resouns he spak ful solempnely,
Souning alway the encrees of his
winning.*

*** The Miller**

*Ful big he was of brawn and eek of
bones.*

*** The Canon's Yeoman**

It seemed that he carried lite array.

5: FROM CAXTON TO SPEGHT

*** Caxton & the first printed Chaucer**

Shown are a reproduction of one sheet from William Caxton's edition of *The Canterbury Tales* (1476) and a reproduction of his second edition (1484), both illustrated with woodcuts.

*** Thynne's Chaucer**

Thynne, William, d. 1546, ed.
*The Works of Geffray Chaucer newly
printed, with dyvers workes never
in print before.* London: Thomas
Godfray, 1532. Facsimile: Menston:
Scolar, 1969.

*** Speght's Chaucer (1598)**

Speght, Thomas, fl. 1600, ed.
*The workes of our antient and lerned
English poet, Geffrey Chavcer, newly
printed.*
Londini: G. Bishop, 1598.

6: LATER CHAUCER EDITIONS

*** Urry's Chaucer (1721)**

Urry, John, 1666-1715, ed.

The works of Geoffrey Chaucer: compared with the former editions, and many valuable mss. out of which, three tales are added which were never before printed. London: Lintot, 1721.

*** Tyrwhitt and Stothard**

Tyrwhitt, Thomas, 1730-1786, ed.

The Canterbury tales of Chaucer. 5 vols. London: Pickering, 1830.

—Tyrwhitt's edition was first published in 1775-1778. The frontispiece shows Thomas Stothard's 1807 painting *The Canterbury Pilgrims*.

*** Researching Chaucer's Life**

Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, 1762-1837, ed.

Theatrum poetarum Anglicanorum.

Canterbury: Simmons and Kirby, 1800. Interleaved.

—Brydges's interleaved copy with MS addenda for the 1824 revision.

*** Morris and the Kelmscott Chaucer**

F.S. Ellis, ed., *The works of Geoffrey Chaucer now newly imprinted.*

Pictures designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones and engraved by W.H. Hooper.

Hammersmith: printed by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press, 1896.

Facsimile: Cleveland: World Publishing, 1958.

This exhibit was originally curated by Patrick Scott for students in ENGL 288.

RARE BOOKS & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Location and hours

The Department is located on the mezzanine level of Thomas Cooper Library. The Graniteville Reading Room is open for research use on weekdays, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. (except major holidays).

Catalogue and web-pages

Special Collections holdings are cataloged into the library's on-line catalogue USCAN, and descriptions or exhibits for many of the major collections are also available through the department's home page at:

<http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/rarebook.html>

Other services and activities

In addition to support of research and teaching, through courses and class visits, the Department provides specialized bibliographical reference services and mounts a regular program of exhibits and events, in cooperation with the library's friends group, The Thomas Cooper Society.

Contact information

Department of Rare Books & Special Collections, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208.

Tel: 803-777-8154.