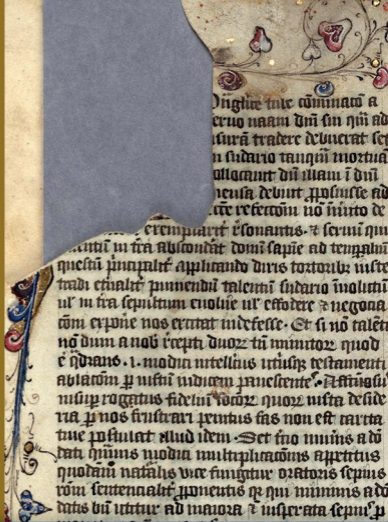


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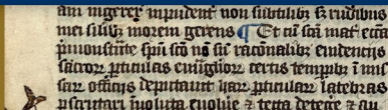


KRISTA A. MILNE

The Destruction of Medieval Manuscripts in England

Institutional Collections

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OXFORD STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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The monograph series *Oxford Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture* showcases the plurilingual and multicultural quality of medieval literature and actively seeks to promote research that not only focuses on the array of subjects medievalists now pursue in literature, theology, and philosophy, in social, political, jurisprudential, and intellectual history, the history of art, and the history of science but also that combines these subjects productively. It offers innovative studies on topics that may include, but are not limited to, manuscript and book history; languages and literatures of the global Middle Ages; race and the post-colonial; the digital humanities, media and performance; music; medicine; the history of affect and the emotions; the literature and practices of devotion; the theory and history of gender and sexuality, ecocriticism and the environment; theories of aesthetics; medievalism.

In loving memory of my darling cat Penny

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List of Abbreviations

- Benedictine* *English Benedictine Libraries: The Shorter Catalogues*, edited by R. Sharpe et al., CBMLC 4 (London: British Library, 1996).
- BL British Library
- BnF Bibliothèque nationale de France
- CBMLC Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues
- EETS Early English Text Society
- Fragments* N. R. Ker, *Fragments of Medieval Manuscripts Used as Pastedowns in Oxford Bindings: With a Survey of Oxford Binding c.1515–1620* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1954).
- HMC Historical Manuscripts Commission
- MLGB* N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*. 2nd edition (London: Royal Historical Society, 1964).
- MMBL* N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–2002).
- Registrum* *Registrum Anglie de libris doctorum et auctorum ueterum*, Latin Text established by R. A. B. Mynors, edited with an introduction by R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse, CBMLC 2 (London: British Library, 1991).
- TNA The National Archives

Note on the Translation and Treatment of Texts

Since the primary language of this book is English, all quotations in languages other than English are accompanied by translations. Quotations in English from works written prior to the fourteenth century have been translated into present-day English. For quotations in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English, words that might be obscure to a modern reader have been supplied with glosses. These glosses are written in italic script and set in square brackets. All glosses and translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

The titles of medieval works preserve medieval language and spellings, except for certain titles, such as *The Canterbury Tales*, that are now most typically written using modern language or spellings. Titles follow the capitalization rules of the languages in which they appear.

Introduction

A variety of different factors have been said to have influenced a medieval manuscript's chances of survival in England. One of these factors is use; the suggestion is that the more a manuscript was used during the medieval period, the lower its chances of having survived.¹ So, it has been argued that manuscripts that were frequently read in medieval England, including those containing works of popular religious instruction or schoolroom works (such as grammar texts), were destroyed in greater numbers than other types of manuscripts.² On the same grounds, it is widely believed that some of the most vulnerable manuscripts were service books (and related works), such as missals, psalters, and ordinals—books that were typically kept in the choir and were in near-constant use.³

If overuse were indeed a significant threat to a manuscript's survival, we would expect these and other more frequently used religious volumes to be disproportionately under-represented in today's collections—in other words, that they would form a smaller portion of collections today than they would

¹ For example, Pamela Robinson suggests that 'the survival rate of primers is poor, as they were read until worn out', in 'Gothic Script in England c.1300–1500', in *The Oxford Handbook of Latin Palaeography*, edited by Frank T. Coulson and Robert G. Babcock (2020), pp. 369–90, p. 374. The same argument is made about Carolingian manuscripts; see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (1989), p. 43.

² Richard Gameson writes that 'if one looks at survival rates as a whole from our period [before c.1200], there is a disproportionately low representation of grammatical and pedagogical texts—doubtless in part because many copies were literally used to death, while those that survived then fell from fashion and were abandoned'; *The Earliest Books of Canterbury Cathedral: Manuscripts and Fragments to c.1200* (2008), p. 35, n. 50. A similar explanation is offered by A. I. Doyle for the low survival rates of *Handlyng Synne*; according to Doyle, the work's surviving copies suggest broad geographical dispersal and circulation, but the number of surviving copies was 'greatly reduced by hard handling'; see A. I. Doyle's 'Survey of the Origins and Circulation of Theological Writings in English in the 14th, 15th and Early 16th Centuries with Special Consideration of the Part of the Clergy Therein', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cambridge University, 1953), vol. 1, p. 65.

³ Alan Coates suggests that '[s]ervice books would have been the ones which were most heavily used, and therefore the least likely to survive'; see Alan Coates, *English Medieval Books: The Reading Abbey Collections from Foundation to Dispersal* (1999), p. 45. Gameson also suggests that service books were more likely to be destroyed through use than other types of books; see Gameson, *Earliest*, p. 35. For another who suggests that service books were more likely to be destroyed through use, see Alma Colk Browne-Santosuosso, 'Bishop William of St. Carilef's Book Donations to Durham Cathedral Priory', *Scriptorium* 42, no. 2 (1988): pp. 140–55, p. 147. On the storage of service books, see Glenise Scott, *Vernacular Writings in the Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, 2 vols (unpublished dissertation, Keele University, 1980), vol. 1, p. 14.

have during the medieval period. Of course, religious volumes of any sort might also be under-represented in collections today due to England's spotted history of violent religious upheaval, which includes such cataclysmic events as the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII.⁴ Yet religious books on the whole were, we have sometimes been told, more likely to have been cherished, and (so the logic goes) preserved, than secular books, because during the medieval period supposedly single-minded religious houses exercised powerful control over the preservation of manuscripts.⁵

But other factors are also thought to have affected medieval manuscript survival in England. Unbound and limp-bound manuscripts are thought to have been disproportionately destroyed.⁶ The same is often said of smaller manuscripts—and especially of single leaves.⁷ Larger manuscripts are often thought to have had better chances of survival, either on the grounds that they were more valued or that they were less frequently read.⁸ Cost is also

⁴ For those who argue that religious volumes were disproportionately targeted during the Dissolution of the Monasteries and its aftermath, see Chapter 3 below, pp. 113–4.

⁵ For this claim, see, for example, R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (1952), p. 38. Linda Georgianna notes that E. T. Donaldson makes this claim in the *Norton Anthology*; see Linda Georgianna, 'The Protestant Chaucer', in *Chaucer's Religious Tales*, edited by C. David Benson and Elizabeth Robertson (1990), pp. 55–70, p. 61. Donaldson writes that 'By far the larger proportion of surviving Middle English literature is religious, though it is not necessarily true that an equal proportion of the literature actually composed in Middle English was religious.' Donaldson claims that the Church 'was itself a large producer of books . . . as well as a maintainer of libraries. Therefore, it is quite natural that religious literature should bulk large. But the literature that has been lost probably contained a very large number of secular items'; quoted in Georgianna, 'Protestant', p. 16.

⁶ Scott notes that service books and 'unbound quires' were particularly at risk; see *Vernacular*, vol. 1, p. 20; Gameson suggests that parchment books from Canterbury were more likely to be destroyed through use than other sorts of books; see *Earliest*, p. 35.

⁷ For those who suggest that smaller manuscripts were more prone to destruction than larger ones, see, for example, Daniel Sawyer, *Reading English Verse in Manuscript c.1350–c.1500* (2020), p. 90; and Malcolm Vale, 'Manuscripts and Books', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume 7, c.1415–c.1500*, edited by Christopher Allmand (2015), pp. 278–86, p. 278. A recent statistical analysis has contended that smaller incunabula were less likely to survive than larger ones; see Jonathan Green et al., 'The Shape of Incunable Survival and Statistical Estimation of Lost Editions', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 105 (2011): pp. 141–75, p. 175. Elaine Treharne notes that 'any single-leaf document is obviously more at risk than a bound book'; see Elaine Treharne, *Perceptions of Medieval Manuscripts: The Phenomenal Book* (2021), p. 63. The same was true for single-sheet incunabula, which seem to have had extremely low chances of survival; see Falk Eisermann, 'Fifty Thousand Veronicas: Print Runs of Broadsheets in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', in *Broadsheets: Single-Sheet Publishing in the First Age of Print*, edited by Andrew Pettegree (2017), pp. 76–113, p. 89; see also Alexandra Hill, *Lost Books and Printing in London, 1557–1640: An Analysis of the Stationers' Company Register* (2018), p. 148.

⁸ Elisabeth Leedham-Green writes that, 'Large books have a far better chance of survival than small books' in 'University Libraries and Book-Sellers', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume 3, 1400–1557*, edited by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (2014), pp. 316–53, p. 339. Mary Beth Long finds that the editors of the *Index of Middle English Verse* claim that 'it is really long books that are found in the largest number of manuscripts', and Long suggests that this is because such manuscripts were used less frequently, in 'Corpora and Manuscripts, Authors and Audiences', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, edited by Sarah Salih (2010), pp. 47–89, p. 5. Long draws here on the work of Kate Harris, 'Patrons, Buyers and Owners: The Evidence for Ownership,

sometimes cited as a factor: it is often assumed that expensive, deluxe, and lavishly illustrated manuscripts tended to be preserved in greater numbers due to their value.⁹ On the other hand, we have been told that costly volumes, some of which were stored in monastic treasuries due to their worth, were often pilfered during the Reformation, or cut up for their illustrations, and that these volumes therefore have disproportionately low survival rates.¹⁰ Latin works, we are told, were targeted during times of religious reform, but on the other hand it has been suggested that vernacular works have survived less well on the whole.¹¹

and the Role of Book Owners in Book Production and the Book Trade', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, edited by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (2007), pp. 163–200, p. 166. Dean Rowland suggests that statutes have survived in smaller numbers because they were 'undecorated or on paper' in 'The End of the Statute Rolls: Manuscript, Print and Language Change in Fifteenth-Century English Statutes', in *The Fifteenth Century XI: Concerns and Preoccupations*, edited by Linda Clark (2012), pp. 107–26, p. 122.

⁹ A recent introduction to the history of the book in Britain suggests that at the Reformation 'magnificent, monumental volumes' were 'the books most likely to be protected, preserved, or, indeed, seized and transferred to new owners'; see Daniel Allington et al., *The Book in Britain: A Historical Introduction*, edited by Zachary Lesser (2019), p. 102. Considering different explanations for the survival rates of medieval bestiaries, Ron Baxter writes that 'it is arguable that picture books were more likely to escape destruction', in *Bestiaries and Their Users in the Middle Ages* (1998), p. 223. Discussing survival figures for copies of the *Canterbury Tales*, David Carlson writes that 'In the case of a work that saw deluxe copying so often, the survivals are more likely to approach equaling the numbers of manuscripts actually produced, than would be the case with something like *Piers Plowman*, for example, which seems to have circulated generally in humbler copies'; 'Theory of the Early English Printing Firm: Jobbing, Book Publishing, and the Productive Capacity in Caxton's Work', in *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing*, edited by William Kuskin (2006), pp. 35–68, p. 65, n. 31. For similar views, see Lesley A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (2000), p. 9; Jesse Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (2015), p. 18, and Robert G. Babcock, 'Half-Uncial', in *The Oxford Handbook of Latin Palaeography*, edited by Frank T. Coulson and Robert G. Babcock (2020), pp. 109–14. See also Kirsty Bennett, *The Book Collections of Llanthony Priory from Foundation until Dissolution (c.1100–1538)*, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kent, 2006), vol. 1, p. 229. Carla Bozzolo and Ezio Ornato suggest that manuscripts that were luxury productions and that therefore had a higher 'valeur vénale' ('monetary value') had a higher chance of survival; *Pour une histoire du livre manuscrit au moyen âge: Trois essais de codicologie quantitative* (1983), pp. 372–3, no. 23. See also Hanno Wijsman, *Luxury Bound: Illustrated Manuscript Production and Noble and Princely Book Ownership in the Burgundian Netherlands (1400–1550)* (2010), p. 21.

¹⁰ Scott writes that 'At the Dissolution of the religious houses volumes such as these [i.e. those with gems and expensive bindings] were of course the first to be removed along with the church plate'; *Vernacular*, vol. 1, p. 14. Nigel Ramsay suggests that these volumes were more likely to be targeted during the Dissolution due to their value; see "'The Manuscripts Flew about Like Butterflies': The Break-up of English Libraries in the Sixteenth Century", in *Lost Libraries: The Destruction of Great Book Collections since Antiquity*, edited by James Raven (2004), pp. 125–44, pp. 129–30. Michael Sargent notes that these sorts of books were often cut up; see 'What Do the Numbers Mean? Observations on Some Patterns of Middle English Manuscript Transmission', in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, edited by Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney (2008), pp. 205–44, p. 210.

¹¹ For the idea that Latin theological writing was targeted in Europe during periods of religious reform, see Uwe Neddermeyer, *Von der Handschrift zum Gedruckten Buch: Schriftlichkeit und Leseinteresse im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit: Quantitative und Qualitative Aspekte: 1: Text* (1998), pp. 77–8. But the opposite view is expressed by Rudolf Hirsch, who suggests that 'vernacular popular literature' (apparently in both manuscript and printed forms), along with 'school books' and

The overwhelming sense, then, is that certain types of manuscripts were more prone to destruction than others, but there is no consensus about which ones. Humble books and luxury books, Latin books and vernacular books, secular books and purely liturgical books are all thought to have been disproportionately destroyed.

Nor is there any consensus about how these manuscripts were prone to destruction or about when they were destroyed. Although it is often claimed that the Dissolution of the Monasteries was the single most significant event in England's history of medieval manuscript loss, the scholarly consensus on this question is shifting, and it is not clear what mark the Dissolution left on modern manuscript collections, nor what mark was left by the Reformation more broadly. Some have argued that orthodox religious volumes suffered more than other sorts of volumes at the hands of reformers who are thought to have attacked manuscript collections, while others have argued that these volumes were, in fact, rescued more often than other sorts of volumes at the Dissolution by concerned monks.¹² The whims of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antiquarians who gathered up volumes are also thought to have left their mark on the record, but there is no agreement as to how.¹³

Considerable inroads have been made into identifying the scope and nature of manuscript destruction in England during the Reformation and beyond it.¹⁴ Still, key questions remain. How often were manuscripts destroyed in England during the Reformation and what sorts were most likely

many other sorts of works from the fifteenth century 'are more likely to have disappeared than others', in *Printing, Selling and Reading, 1450–1550* (1974), p. 11. For the claim that vernacular incunabula were less likely to survive than Latin ones; see Green et al., 'Shape', p. 174.

¹² For these views, see below, pp. 113–4.

¹³ For the notion that the record has been skewed by the whims of early modern collectors see, for example, Coote, *Prophecy*, p. 9 and the sources discussed below, pp. 112–4. Exploring the survival of manuscripts in France, Carla Bozzolo and Ezio Ornato suggest that a manuscript's chances of survival were tied to whether it ended up in public or private hands; see *Pour une histoire*, pp. 372–3, no. 23. Exploring the survival of manuscripts in the Low Countries, Hanno Wijnsman finds that manuscripts that ended up in institutional collections early in their journeys had a higher chance of survival than those that stayed in private hands; *Luxury*, p. 24. See further the discussion below, pp. 146–7.

¹⁴ The best-known articles on the topic are C. E. Wright, 'The Dispersal of the Monastic Libraries and the Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon Studies: Matthew Parker and His Circle: A Preliminary Study', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 1, no. 3 (1951): pp. 208–37 and C. E. Wright, 'The Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth Century', in *The English Library Before 1700*, edited by Francis Wormald and C. E. Wright (1958), pp. 148–75; more recent formative studies include much of the (extensive) oeuvre of James Carley and especially 'The Dispersal of the Monastic Libraries and the Salvaging of the Spoils', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1, to 1640*, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (2008), pp. 265–91; and James P. Carley, 'Monastic Collections and Their Dispersal', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume 4, 1557–1695*, edited by John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie with the assistance of Maureen Bell (2014), pp. 339–50. See also Ramsay, 'Manuscripts'; Sargent, 'What'; and, less pertinently, Eltjo Buringh, *Medieval Manuscript Production in the Latin West* (2010). See also the discussion below.

to be destroyed? Which moments were the most devastating for the surviving record? How did the losses that occurred in England at various stages of the Reformation compare to each other, or to those that preceded the Reformation, or to those that followed it? How did the kinds of losses caused by sectarian conflicts compare to more everyday kinds of loss, such as destruction through overuse, improper storage, or deliberate deacquisition? Which manuscripts were targeted, when, and in what ways can we expect the corpus of surviving manuscripts to be skewed by these actions?¹⁵

These questions, which lie at the heart of this study, are important for researchers working in multiple fields, including literary studies, book history, and archival sciences. In the sense that they can provide new insights into which manuscripts existed and circulated during the medieval period, they are crucial for how we understand medieval tastes, ownership patterns, and literary communities, and, concomitantly, for how we view the circulation of knowledge in the period.¹⁶ Since books are, by some accounts, a measure of economic growth, understanding which books circulated during the medieval period can be helpful for understanding medieval social and economic history.¹⁷ More broadly, since books were deeply interwoven into the intellectual and social fabric of the medieval period, understanding which books circulated during this period by exploring these questions can help us understand the thoughts and values of their medieval owners.

In order to explore these questions, this study explores how, when, and—whenever possible—approximately what proportion of medieval manuscripts were destroyed in England from the medieval period until the present. England lies at the focal point of this investigation because it is often thought to have had unique patterns of manuscript destruction because the Reformation—generally regarded as the single greatest cause of manuscript loss—took a unique shape in England.¹⁸ But given that the centuries under

¹⁵ See the discussion below, pp. 111–15.

¹⁶ Michael Clanchy, for example, argues that ‘the permanent growth of literacy is related to the growth of documents’; *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (1979), p. 14. The question of how many manuscripts have survived is also important for palaeography and codicology; the point is made by Peter Stokes in his contribution to Stewart Brookes et al., ‘The DigiPal Project for European Scripts and Decorations’, in *Writing Europe, 500–1450: Texts and Contexts*, edited by Aidan Conti, Orietta Da Rold, and Philip A. Shaw (2015), pp. 25–58, p. 41.

¹⁷ The notion that the growth of book production is a measure of economic growth is advanced by Eltjo Buringh and Jan Luiten van Sanden in their argument for the importance of large-scale book history; see Eltjo Buringh and Jan Luiten van Zanden, ‘Charting the “Rise of the West”: Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, A Long-Term Perspective from the Sixth through Eighteenth Centuries’, *The Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 2 (2009): pp. 409–45, p. 410.

¹⁸ Buringh dedicates a significant portion of his study of manuscript loss in the West to England, on the grounds that there is more research available on English libraries than on others in the West; see Buringh, *Medieval*, especially pp. 198 and 203. Writing about the relatively small number of

investigation here saw the frequent reconfiguration of national and cultural boundaries—and given that these were often crossed by manuscripts, both during and after the medieval period—this study also considers some manuscript losses that happened on the continent and elsewhere on the British Isles (including Scotland, Wales, and Ireland). It also must be stressed that although the focus here is on medieval manuscript loss that took place in England, this focus is in no way limited to manuscripts *from* England (and certainly not, of course, to manuscripts *in English*). Many of the manuscripts that have been, or are now, in England originated in other parts of the world, and this was true during all of the periods under investigation here.¹⁹

The primary focus of this investigation is institutional manuscript loss—that is, loss that happened to collections of manuscripts owned by established groups of people, rather than by private individuals. So, for example, losses to the British Museum's collections during the nineteenth century are considered while losses to private collections during the nineteenth century typically are not. This institutional focus could be considered a limitation. After all, a large number of volumes are held in private libraries scattered across England, and this was as true during the medieval period as it is today. When the God of Love in *The Legend of Good Women* suggests that Geoffrey Chaucer's poetic persona holds 'sixty bokes olde and newe' ('sixty books, old and new'), the passage reflects a sizeable library which is at least aspirational even if it was not actual, and overlooking sizeable collections of books such as this one is of course regrettable.²⁰ A focus on institutions is also regrettable considering that the lives and cultural interests of individuals are, for good reasons, becoming increasingly important for social, cultural, and literary history.

manuscripts with lay owners that survive from England, Christopher de Hamel writes that 'It is traditional to blame this comparative dearth on the ferocity of the Reformation in Britain' (although de Hamel suggests another explanation: that books may have simply been less important in England); see Christopher de Hamel, 'Books and Society', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume 2, 1100–1400*, edited by Nigel J. Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (2008), pp. 1–21, p. 16.

¹⁹ Not all of the manuscripts in England today were brought there peacefully. During a British Indian Army campaign in Ethiopia in 1867, British forces stole manuscripts from the collections of Emperor Tewodros II. These manuscripts were auctioned off and many of them were eventually bought up by institutions such as the Bodleian and British Libraries. Over 300 manuscripts that were looted at the time are still in the British Library today. See Richard Ovenden, *Burning the Books: A History of Knowledge Under Attack* (2020), p. 180 and 'Maqdala Collection', *The British Museum Story*, The British Museum, <<https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/maqdala-collection>>. On the importation of manuscripts from the Continent and from elsewhere on the British Isles prior to the Norman Conquest, see David N. Dumville, 'English Libraries Before 1066: Use and Abuse of the Manuscript Evidence', in *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: Basic Readings*, edited by Mary P. Richards (1994), pp. 169–219, pp. 197–8.

²⁰ On this passage and its fictionality, see Piero Boitani, 'Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, edited by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (2004), pp. 58–77, pp. 58–60.

Moreover, the focus on institutional collections adopted here means that the conclusions of this study are most relevant to the sorts of books housed in institutional collections—whether medieval or modern. In the first three chapters, which begin in the medieval period and end with the Dissolution of the Monasteries, this focus has significant implications for the types of manuscripts under discussion. Manuscripts that were used almost exclusively in private collections during the medieval period (such as collections on household management) do not appear in these chapters. Manuscripts that were used most commonly in institutions during the medieval period (such as service books and collections of canon law) appear frequently. Romances appear infrequently in these chapters, although, as we shall see, this has less to do with their status in institutional collections and more to do with the nature of the surviving evidence.²¹ In the later chapters, the focus on institutional collections has less impact on the sorts of manuscripts under discussion because, as this study shows, the nature of institutional collections in England shifted during the early modern period and beyond it, and the acquisition policies of institutions became more wide-ranging and inclusive. Yet as discussed below, even during these later periods the acquisition policies of institutions in England were not wholly neutral, and even modern-day institutions prioritize some manuscripts over others.

A focus on institutions is therefore far from ideal, but it is not brought about through preference or the deliberate exclusion of individuals' collections. Rather, this focus is imposed on this investigation by the nature of the surviving evidence which, prior to the nineteenth century, most typically emerged from—and was centred around—institutions rather than individuals.²² Nor is this focus an exclusive one. As this study shows plainly, the boundaries of institutional and private book ownership were (and in many ways still are) porous. Many of the books that tend to be associated with medieval religious institutions were owned by private individuals and vice versa, and many of the books and collections explored here passed from private to public hands on multiple occasions, so private ownership is also taken into account in many cases, and it is explored in depth where the evidence allows for it.

²¹ See below, pp. 20–1.

²² The seminal study of private manuscript ownership in medieval England is the masterful dissertation of Susan Hagen Cavanaugh, 'A Study of Books Privately Owned in England, 1300–1450' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1980). On the limitations of the evidence, see Cavanaugh's introduction, especially pp. 8–19. I am currently working on another study that will explore the destruction of medieval manuscripts in England outside institutional collections.

Given that many manuscripts from private collections ended up in institutional ones, whether during the medieval period or after it, the institutional focus of this study is not as limiting as might be feared. It has, however, created a considerable complication with respect to service books. As this study shows, these sorts of books—which formed the heart of the medieval religious service and related rituals—were among the most ubiquitous manuscripts during the medieval period.²³ Even taking into account private manuscript collections (which were less likely to contain service books than institutional collections), it remains evident that service books were among the most widely owned sorts of books during the medieval period. Yet relatively few service books survive in institutions today, for reasons that are explored below. Since this is the case, the discussion of service books that follows may seem surprising to those who are familiar with modern manuscript collections, but it is in keeping with the significant influence and ubiquity of these books during the medieval period itself. If we are to understand the nature of manuscript destruction, we must also understand the nature of medieval book collections and the sorts of volumes (such as service books) that featured most prominently among them.

This investigation proceeds chronologically from the medieval period to the present day. It does not seek to recount every incident of manuscript loss in England—a task which would evidently be impossible. Rather, this investigation is based on what were identified at the outset of the study as the most significant episodes in the history of manuscript loss in England—including pre-modern episodes (such as the recycling of service books for binding fragments during the late medieval period, the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and the attacks on service books during the reign of Elizabeth I) and more modern episodes (such as the famous Ashburnham House fire and the Blitz during the Second World War). The significance of each episode varies along different axes. Some episodes are significant for tracing the historiography of manuscript survival; episodes from the sixteenth century, which looms large in modern perceptions of medieval manuscript loss, are important in this respect, and the sixteenth century correspondingly receives more chapters than other periods. Other episodes are more significant for identifying the types of manuscripts that have survived, or for determining how or how many manuscripts have survived. Significance along any of these axes is of course subject to debate, and some might have begun this book with a

²³ A longer discussion of service books, including examples of service books, follows below. See also the list on p. 160.

different selection of episodes. With an awareness that the significance of each episode along the specified axes is subjective to some degree, this study approaches each of these episodes as only a starting point for the analysis at hand, and the significance of each episode is continually open to re-evaluation in the study that follows; indeed, one of its primary goals is to identify and evaluate the relative significance of each episode along each of the aforementioned axes.

To do so, it draws on some of the more traditional approaches of book history, looking at so-called ‘qualitative’ sources of documentary evidence such as library inventories, donors’ lists, wills, written accounts, and official proclamations. It also draws on, and follows, a vast and significant body of work that recognizes that these sources of evidence are not neutral or transparent.²⁴ The point is illustrated effectively by Brigitte Bedos-Rezak in her analysis of the donors’ lists from abbeys in the Île-de-France region. Her analysis reveals that these lists emphasize powerful donors at the expense of less powerful ones as a means of upholding and promoting the abbeys’ visions of rigid social hierarchies and, in so doing, serve as a powerful example of why donors’ lists and other sources of documentary evidence should not be treated as neutral sources of evidence.²⁵ Few of us are entirely forthright about all the books we acquire, or about the books that we give away or lose—this is as true of institutions as it is of individuals. And it is perhaps especially true of medieval and early modern institutions, whose book collections and policies of acquisition could be subject to intense, and at times perilous, public and political scrutiny.

Documentary evidence, then, must be approached with caution. More material evidence, such as reader marks and owner inscriptions, may seem to offer more direct, unmediated access to the past. But even this sort of evidence cannot always be taken at face value. We know, for example, that book inscriptions could be embellished or falsified to suit a testy political climate.²⁶

²⁴ The point is made directly by Cyndia Clegg in her discussion of written proclamations, statutes, and other censorship documents. Clegg writes that historians approaching the topic of censorship had once taken these documents at face value, ‘without fully considering the documents themselves as rhetorical productions with multivalent meanings’ (p. 6). In contrast, she approaches these documents with a recognition that they cannot be understood as straightforward evidence of censorship and that they should therefore be approached ‘as cultural constructs that require nuanced reading in a culture where politics mattered deeply’ (p. 7).

²⁵ See the discussion in Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (2010), pp. 19–20. The point that accounts of manuscript circulation from the medieval period may not be honest or representative is also made by Neddermeyer, in *Handschrift*, vol. 1, p. 47.

²⁶ One of many examples of possible falsification is the inscription that was added to one copy of the *Speculum vitae* that claims that the book was checked over in 1384 and found to be free of heresy; see the discussion of this inscription in Fiona Somerset, ‘Censorship’, in *The Production of Books in England 1350–1500*, edited by Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (2011), pp. 239–58, p. 249.

Moreover, while material evidence such as owner inscriptions can provide insight into the histories of the books that remain, it can provide only limited insight into those that have been lost, and it therefore obscures the specific contingencies of survival that this study seeks to explore.

In this sense, every potential source of information about medieval book history is arguably obscured or mediated—or what the statisticians would call ‘biased’—either by the ideological and social forces that created it or by the limitations of the surviving record. That these sources of evidence are not neutral is now widely accepted, and by pointing to the ways that both documentary and material witnesses to the past are mediated I do not seek to disavow them. Indeed, this study follows a long tradition within both book history and the related field of literary studies of treating these witnesses to the past as valuable sources of evidence. But with the awareness that these witnesses are not neutral, this investigation also seeks to contextualize, confirm, and complicate these qualitative sources of evidence by exploring them within their historical contexts and by placing them in dialogue with more quantitative sources—ones that are grounded in large-scale, pattern-based, and sometimes computer-assisted methods of analysis. So, for example, the second chapter charts some of the changes to the book collection of Christ Church Canterbury Cathedral Priory that happened between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries by identifying and analysing quantitative patterns using three of the collection’s book lists. This more quantitative analysis is put in dialogue with documentary evidence about the collection to shed light on the kinds of changes that book collections underwent during the centuries prior to the Dissolution.

Proponents of more quantitative and large-scale approaches to humanistic inquiry sometimes argue that these are better for understanding large movements or systems (such as book transmission or literary evolution) than more qualitative approaches. As we shall see, this argument has often been overstated, but it is worth examining here. The point has been made explicitly by Franco Moretti, widely considered the progenitor of quantitative and large-scale analysis in the humanities, in his influential essay ‘Conjectures on World Literature’ (2000). Within the context of literary studies, Moretti writes that close reading, the traditional approach of literary studies that relies on the careful analysis of individual texts, is limited in the sense that it ‘depends on an extremely small canon’. Moretti writes that we must ‘look beyond the canon’ ‘if we want to understand the system in its entirety’. Moretti’s proposed solution is his influential approach known as ‘distant reading’. While Moretti coined the term in this initial essay to describe the large-scale analysis of

secondary literature, the term has now come to refer to any analytical approach that seeks to shed light on systems or movements through the large-scale analysis of multiple data points.²⁷

The implications of Moretti's work for the field of digital humanities are significant, and they have been explored recently by Andrew Piper in his collection of large-scale digital humanities studies. Building on the work of Moretti, Piper challenges the validity of qualitative investigations into large bodies of literature or entire literary movements, arguing that these are flawed because they tend to focus on individual texts and examples that, in their singularity, could never adequately represent the larger movements that these investigations purport to explore. Piper gives the example of *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach's influential 1946 study of the Western canon. According to Piper, Auerbach's work 'dramatized, perhaps more than any other work in the field before or since, the metonymical crisis that lay at the core of literary criticism, an incommensurable relationship between part and whole.' The issue, according to Piper, is that in *Mimesis*, '[e]very chapter begins with a passage from a "great work," where the singular instance of text is meant to stand for the singular nature of the work under review, which in turn stands for all of "occidental literature"'.²⁸ For Piper, Auerbach's claims about Western literature are undermined by Auerbach's limited number of examples—what one might term limited input data. Piper echoes Moretti's call for more large-scale analysis and adds to it a call for more computational modelling—using the processing power of computers and digital technology more broadly to perform large-scale analysis.²⁹

These proponents of quantitative and large-scale analysis are undoubtedly right to draw attention to the limitations of approaches to literary studies that make claims about a large body of literature (or, for example, a broad cultural movement) based on only a small number of examples. By encouraging us to take into consideration a large number of data points, large-scale approaches help us look beyond the limited number of examples that are traditionally

²⁷ The essay, 'Conjectures on World Literature', is reprinted in Franco Moretti's *Distant Reading* (2013), pp. 43–62, pp. 48–9.

²⁸ Andrew Piper, *Enumerations: Data and Literary Study* (2018), pp. 6–11, quoted at p. 7.

²⁹ Piper, *Enumerations*, pp. 6–11. It could be argued that Auerbach's primary aim is not to make claims about the whole of Western literature, and yet Piper is right that Auerbach does make some claims about the whole of this body of literature—and that he does so without a fully representative set of examples. Auerbach ends his first chapter, for example, by discussing what he describes as the 'Homeric and the Old Testament' styles, then writes that 'it is in their full development, which they reached in early times, that the two styles exercised their determining influence upon the representation of reality in European literature'; see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; repr. 2019), p. 23.

studied within a given field. Moretti gives the example of the rise of the novel. According to Moretti, the novel is usually understood as emerging within a given national literary tradition independently, and with little international influence. But Moretti finds that distant reading analysis reveals something different. Examining twenty overviews of the rise of the novel in an equal number of geographical areas, Moretti finds that, in most cases, the rise of the novel happened through a combination of local and ‘foreign’ influences. Moretti concludes that, by shedding light on this phenomenon, the distant reading approach ‘had completely reversed the received historical explanation of these matters.’³⁰ In this way, large-scale approaches can offer new perspectives on literary works and on historical data—ones that hold the potential to be relatively free from some of the inherited heuristic frameworks of more traditional forms of inquiry. By including more large-scale approaches, my own investigation seeks to tap into their potential for taking into account a large body of evidence, for raising new questions, and for challenging inherited interpretative frameworks by decentering some of the traditional objects of book historical study.

This aspect of large-scale analysis—its tendency to decenter the traditional foci of humanistic study—also has another benefit: the potential to shed light on pieces of evidence or on cultural records that are not typically chosen as the foci of humanistic study. Within the context of literary studies, large-scale and quantitative approaches can better account for works that have not been granted canonical status and that therefore tend to go overlooked in studies that are based on a smaller number of canonical texts. In the case of medieval literary studies, large-scale approaches can help us look beyond canonical works such as *Beowulf*, the centrality of which in modern academic conferences and volumes risks distracting from the rest of England’s pre-Conquest writing. Within the context of book history, large-scale approaches can account for manuscripts or other pieces of material evidence that often go overlooked in studies that are based on a limited number of documents or samples. In the sense that they can take into account a larger body of evidence than approaches based on isolated examples, large-scale and quantitative approaches can shed light on a larger number of lives, experiences, and interchanges, and can therefore offer the possibility of a more grassroots historical perspective.

In this sense, quantitative book history can be thought of as representing an extension of a movement that emerged in France in the late 1950s and

³⁰ Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, pp. 52–3.

1960s. As Robert Darnton notes in his brief historiography of the field, publications such as Lucien Febvre's *L'apparition du livre* (1958) set aside the 'fine points of bibliography' that had been dominating the field up until that point and sought 'to uncover the general pattern of book production and consumption over long stretches of time'. This meant a shift away from studies focused on individual works, volumes, and transmission cases and towards studies of broader circulation and transmission patterns. As Darnton describes it, this interest in identifying broader patterns led to an interest in the quotidian and mass literary culture of the past as it was represented in genres such as the *bibliothèque bleue*—the cheap and widely popular literature that circulated in early modern and pre-Revolutionary France.³¹ Insofar as it sought to elucidate broader patterns in quotidian and working class social history, the movement took its inspiration from the great *Annalistes* historians, combining the emphasis on working class rural life and social structure found in the works of Marc Bloch with the emphasis on the *longue durée* of quotidian social life found in the work of Fernand Braudel.

In many ways, large-scale and quantitative approaches to book history represent an extension of this more grassroots approach. While decentering the books and transmission cases that have been centred within traditional approaches to book history, these more large-scale approaches can shed light on the reading patterns, interests, and habits of a large number of people. By shedding light on these reading patterns and interests, these large-scale approaches can offer insight into cross-sections of society that are broader than those elucidated through more traditional approaches to book history (though it must be stressed that these broader cross-sections are by no means comprehensive—especially within the context of medieval book history).³²

Quantitative and large-scale approaches can therefore be useful for offering the potential of a broader social vision of the past and for raising new questions—ones relatively free of inherited heuristic models that have emerged from traditional, more qualitative approaches. Stressing these benefits of quantitative approaches is useful, especially for a study such as this one, which draws in part on such approaches. Yet stressing these aspects of quantitative approaches also comes with the risk of overstating the distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches. As Stephen Ramsay has

³¹ See the discussion of this movement in Robert Darnton's 'What Is the History of Books?', *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): pp. 65–83, pp. 66–7.

³² In the context of medieval book history, the relatively high costs of medieval books and their relatively limited availability mean that a vast cross-section of the population will not be well represented by the surviving evidence—no matter how much of this evidence can be gathered.

shown within the field of literary studies, quantitative approaches to interpretation and analysis contain within them many of the same elements found in more traditional qualitative approaches. Ramsay writes that traditional qualitative interpretation usually involves collecting examples and drawing conclusions based on these. Quantitative approaches work in the same way, according to Ramsay, but tend to collect a much larger number of examples. Thus a large-scale or quantitative approach, in this sense, is not operating within a different conceptual framework from more traditional approaches; rather, '[i]t is the same thing at a different scale and with expanded powers of observation.'³³ The two approaches therefore rely on the same fundamental interpretative movement.

Of course, proponents of quantitative approaches are undoubtedly right to suggest that qualitative approaches are often less representative of whole movements of systems than quantitative ones, in the sense that the former tend to be based on individual examples that, due to their singularity, cannot adequately represent whole movements or systems. But while they may be more representative of these broader systems in some contexts, quantitative approaches are nevertheless subject to the same kinds of distortions, or biases, as qualitative ones. In the sense that both rely on a set number of data points that must be determined in advance by the researcher, both are prone to what is often termed 'selection bias', which occurs when the results of an investigation are not based on a representative sample of the subjects under investigation. With more qualitative approaches, which tend to be based on few examples, the propensity for selection bias is obvious, but even quantitative approaches, insofar as they are based on a limited and predetermined dataset, are subject to selection bias. To use Piper's own example, any study of the Western canon, no matter how large scale, must be subject to some selection bias, since the vast and amorphous scope of the Western canon renders some principle of selection, and corresponding limitations on the input data, necessary.

Within the specific subdiscipline of medieval book history, the propensity for selection bias is compounded by the predetermined limitations of the available data. Uwe Neddermeyer has remarked that for studies based on medieval sources, neither qualitative nor quantitative approaches could ever be based on a 'complete' or 'representative' dataset, because such a dataset

³³ Stephen Ramsay, 'Algorithmic Criticism', in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, edited by Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (2013), pp. 477–91, pp. 490–1.

simply does not exist any more.³⁴ Any collection of data points used to study the medieval past will be limited and every collection must therefore be examined carefully for its representativeness; this is as true of larger datasets as it is for smaller ones.

There is another similarity between qualitative and quantitative approaches that is worth mentioning in this context. Since the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ we have been primed to expect every piece of data about the past to be mediated in some way, whether by the opacity of language itself or by the values and desires we bring to historical inquiry. This is evidently true of qualitative data, but it is also true of large-scale and quantitative data, which is at its core simply a collection of individual pieces of data. A dataset containing 600 manuscripts is just as likely to have been shaped by the linguistic and cultural distances between today and the moment it is supposed to reflect than any individual example would be. In this respect, quantitative approaches have much in common with more qualitative approaches.

So, just as every witness to the past is mediated, every approach to analysing these witnesses—whether larger or smaller scale—is also mediated. I share with many in the field the conviction that this need not discredit either larger- or smaller-scale approaches, as long as we approach both data and analysis with an awareness of their contingencies. With these contingencies in mind, this study proceeds by drawing on a variety of different threads of evidence, each a product of, and mediated by, the unique circumstances of its production. Some of these threads of evidence are based on individual examples, others on large-scale analyses. The study proceeds by first gathering together a number of threads based on individual examples to form a larger tapestry. I examine each thread both within its context and in terms of its potential for representing this particular context, in order to determine how it fits into a larger tapestry. Some threads will be found to be strong enough to provide a sort of ‘backing’—or supporting evidence—for this investigation, while others will be found better suited to decorative—or illustrative—purposes.

Once the initial tapestry is woven from this evidence, it is held up for comparison against a quantitative case study to determine whether the tapestry matches the case study. So for example, the exploration of manuscript loss during Edward VI’s reign begins by drawing on individual threads of evidence about this loss to establish which sorts of manuscripts were the most likely to be targeted during this tumultuous period. The findings of this more

³⁴ See *Handschrift*, vol. 1, p. 47.

qualitative approach are then checked by comparing them with more quantitative data, drawn from the work of Neil Ker, about the frequency with which different sorts of manuscripts are found as pastedowns in books that were bound in Oxford during this period.³⁵ Here, as elsewhere, neither the collection of ‘threads’ nor the more quantitative case study is treated as a superior form of evidence. Rather, both are compared to each other and contextualized to arrive at a fuller impression of the sorts of manuscripts that were lost and how these losses happened.

The weaving metaphor that I have been using here can perhaps be pushed further. Weaving follows a series of rules, but it is also based on a series of choices and is, to some degree, contingent; the same is true of this investigation. Some might draw on different threads from the ones I am using here. Others would draw on the same threads while creating a very different work. But I hold with many that the contingency of this investigation is an inevitable consequence of working in a field in which so much has been lost, and that as long as the contingency of the data is recognized within this investigation, it is worth pursuing.

Before exploring the story of medieval manuscript survival, it is worth exploring the terrain of what has survived in modern collections. This terrain will of course differ widely based on how a manuscript is defined. This study follows the more usual conventions of the field by defining a manuscript as any handwritten book that, at least in its medieval form, contained a collection of leaves. A pamphlet of three leaves would therefore be included in this definition, as would a fragment of a book that had been bound into a collection at some point during the medieval period—a broadside or single-leaf charter or literary composition would not.³⁶ Single leaves are explored here for the sake of comparison but are not considered at any length. This is not to suggest that single leaves were unimportant, but simply because the relatively vulnerable structure of single leaves means that their survival patterns differed so significantly from those of manuscripts that to study both together in a book of this length would mean doing justice to neither.³⁷

³⁵ See the discussion below, pp. 177–84.

³⁶ Scrolls are included here; since medieval scrolls comprise a series of leaves that are stitched together, they arguably meet the criteria laid out here. But since scrolls represent only a small portion of the material under investigation, the decision to include them in the analysis has little impact on the results.

³⁷ The significant differences between the survival of bound volumes and the survival of single leaves can be inferred from looking at evidence from early modern print runs; single leaves survived in far fewer quantities than bound volumes. See Green et al., ‘Shape’, p. 168.

For the purposes of this investigation, then, the question of what constitutes a manuscript is clear. The question of which manuscripts can be considered medieval is somewhat trickier. I have chosen to define medieval manuscripts as those copied between 500 and 1500. The starting point was selected because it is far enough in the past to account for all the books that appear on the earliest library lists from England and that could arguably count as 'medieval'.³⁸ The latter date is a bit more arbitrary, but for a reason. It was selected because it is a convenient, base-ten year that is often associated with the end of the medieval period, but, crucially, is tied to neither the rise of print, nor the Dissolution of the Monasteries, nor to any other historical event that is typically associated with the end of the period. This is important since this study aims, in part, at investigating whether the historical and cultural weight placed on such events in the context of book history is deserved.

Having settled on a working definition for medieval manuscripts, we can turn to the question of how many in total have survived. This question, which can only be answered in an approximate way given the present state of scholarship, has been approached at the greatest length by Eltjo Buringh. Drawing on a vast range of sources, including a large number of institutional manuscript lists, Buringh estimates that there are approximately 2.9 million medieval manuscripts in the world today. Buringh aims to include in this estimate all handwritten archival documents, including single leaves and fragments. Out of these 2.9 million manuscripts, Buringh estimates that 1.3 million are from Western Europe initially, which, for the purposes of his study, includes Great Britain (and, therefore, England). The ambition and scale involved in Buringh's estimates means that they are necessarily very rough (and they must be approached with caution, for reasons that are discussed elsewhere in this study).³⁹ Buringh's figures, then, should be approached as rough estimates, and the total number of medieval manuscripts that have survived in the world today cannot be answered in any reliable way at present.

We can now turn to the more relevant question of how many medieval manuscripts exist in England's institutional collections today. Before doing so, it must be stressed that this is a different question from the question of how many manuscripts have survived from medieval England—the latter

³⁸ By starting this study in 500 I do not mean to suggest that there was no writing in England before this date; a large quantity of written material pre-dates this period, as has been highlighted in, for example, the discussion of pre-550 material in Michelle Brown's *The Book and the Transformation of Britain, c.550–1050: A Study in Written and Visual Literacy and Orality* (2011).

³⁹ For these estimates, see Buringh, *Medieval*, p. 118. For a discussion of why Buringh's estimates must be approached with caution, see below, p. 30.

question, while interesting, must be considered separately. There is at present no reliable count of the precise number of manuscripts that exist in England's libraries today. One approach to the question, daunting as it may be, might be to count all the manuscripts in England's libraries that are listed in Ker's famous five-volume *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, but this count would be woefully inaccurate, since Ker's list omits the collections of many libraries—most notably the extensive collections of the British Library (the British Museum, at the time that Ker was working), the Bodleian Library, and Cambridge University Library.⁴⁰ At present, then, it is not possible to count the precise number of surviving manuscripts in England's collections today.

Given that no precise count is possible, it is helpful to look at the existing estimates that are available. According to one estimate, the British Library has about 120,000 manuscripts, but this number can only reveal so much for the question at hand since many of these manuscripts are not medieval ones. Based on my correspondence with a curator at the British Library, the number of medieval manuscripts at the British Library is closer to a third or a quarter of this figure.⁴¹ The British Library is, of course, just one of many

⁴⁰ See Ker, *MMLB*, vol. 1, pp. v–vi.

⁴¹ The estimated number of manuscripts in the British Library was given in 2009 by Buringh in *Medieval*, pp. 101, 106. Buringh takes this figure from a 1990 estimate made in the *New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edn, vol. 2 (1990), p. 530. Buringh works under the assumption that this estimate refers to the number of medieval manuscripts at the British Library, but it seems more likely that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* estimate was based on all the manuscripts at the British Library (not just the medieval collections). In 2024, I wrote to the British Library to enquire about this figure. The British Library curator who kindly responded wrote that while a complete count was not possible at that time (since some of the relevant databases were inaccessible), the estimate of 120,000 was likely made based on all of the British Library's historical manuscripts (not just the medieval ones). The curator noted that the British Library's collection of pre-1600 illuminated manuscripts (defined broadly as manuscripts containing some form of decoration) was estimated to contain about 10,000 manuscripts; the total number of pre-1600 manuscripts can only be approximated at present but it is likely to be about three times that number, or a bit higher. I am grateful to the curators and staff at the British Library who helped provide an answer to my enquiry.

The history of the British Library's collection also supports the suggestion that the 120,000 figure is closer to the total number of manuscripts in the British Library than to the total number of medieval manuscripts. In 1866, the collection comprised about 43,000 manuscripts (see below, p. 241) and it is not inconceivable to me that the collection could have grown by an additional 77,000 manuscripts (of all sorts—not just medieval ones) between 1866 and 1990. For checking Buringh's number it is somewhat helpful to look at the additional shelfmark, which often, but not always, gets assigned to new medieval manuscript acquisitions (the other 'open-ended' collection is the Egerton collection). A recent addition to the additional manuscript collection was given the shelfmark Add. MS 89379. Of course this does not mean that there are 89,379 additional manuscripts, since the shelfmark range begins at 4101 (after the range of the Sloane collection); when this factor is taken into consideration we arrive at a more accurate count of some 85,000 manuscripts, all of which must have been acquired between when the shelfmark began to be used in 1756 and when MS 89379 was added in 2019. This count represents a different moment in the collection's growth than the one represented by Buringh's figure and it therefore cannot be used to check Buringh's count, but the scale involved certainly seems to correspond with the scale of Buringh's count. On British Library, Add. MS 89379, see 'Reunited at last: The Percy Hours and Percy Psalter', in *Medieval Manuscripts Blog*, The British Library, 12 April 2019, <<https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2019/04/reunited-at-last-the-percy-hours-and-percy->

modern collections in England—Ker's *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* lists manuscripts from 314 collections in Great Britain alone, and many of these are in England. Ker notes, moreover, that there are 51 collections in Great Britain containing more than fifty manuscripts; most of these are in England.⁴² The British Library data therefore provides an incomplete picture of institutional manuscript holdings in England, but in the absence of any more reliable data, the estimated number of manuscripts at the British Library at least provides a sense of the scale involved.

Having considered how many manuscripts exist in institutional libraries in England today, we can now turn to a different question: how many medieval manuscripts from England can be found in present-day collections? Such manuscripts can of course be found not only in England, but almost anywhere in the world, and given these manuscripts' vast geographical dispersal across thousands of collections, it is not possible to answer the question in any precise way. To arrive at a sense of the scale involved, it helps to look at specific collections and temporal periods. There are 1,291 surviving manuscripts from England that were produced before 1100, by Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge's count.⁴³ More than three-quarters of these are held in England today.⁴⁴ By comparison, about fifty manuscripts survive from the same period from Ireland, only ten of which are in Ireland today. About ten manuscripts survive from the same period from Wales, none of which are in Wales today.⁴⁵ Continental survivals from this period are much greater; Bernhard Bischoff and Birgit Ebersperger give some 8,200 continental manuscripts surviving from the ninth century alone.⁴⁶ For the early period, then, survivals from England are relatively few.

One of the largest databases of medieval manuscripts of relevance here is Neil Ker's well-known *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, which lists manuscripts that can be traced to medieval libraries referred to in his title. Given

psalter.html>, accessed 12 May 2022. On the Additional manuscript collection, see 'The Open-Ended Collections', in *Illuminated Manuscripts: A Guide to the British Library's Collections*, British Library, <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourCollOpen.asp>>, accessed 12 May 2022.

⁴² The count of collections containing more than fifty manuscripts is given in Ker, *MMBL*, vol. 1, p. v. The count of the number of libraries represented in Ker's *MLGB* is given in Buringh, *Medieval*, pp. 191–2.

⁴³ Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (2014), p. x.

⁴⁴ Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Uses of Writing in Early Medieval Wales', in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, edited by Huw Pryce (1998), pp. 15–38, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Sims-Williams, 'Uses', pp. 20–1. For the figures for Ireland, Sims-Williams draws on the work of James F. Kenney.

⁴⁶ See Buringh, *Medieval*, p. 3. The reasons behind the high number of continental survivals are manifold and fall outside the scope of this study, which is focused on England.

the focus of Ker's list, it contains not only manuscripts that were copied in England, but also some manuscripts that were copied elsewhere on the British Isles or on the Continent, and it also contains manuscripts that were in the possession of religious houses in Ireland. While most of the books on Ker's list exist in present-day collections, Ker's list also contains some books that no longer survive, and it includes both early printed books and handwritten manuscripts. For these and other reasons, the scope of Ker's study does not map neatly onto the scope of the present question, but it does give some insight into the scale involved. The digitized database at the time of writing contains 8,354 entries.⁴⁷ Judging from the counts of Gneuss and Lapidge, and from Ker—both of which represent only a portion of the total count in question—the number of manuscripts from England that survive must be in the tens of thousands.

As Ker's list makes evident, the vast majority of manuscripts that survive from medieval England are in Latin. This would perhaps come as a surprise to someone outside the field surveying the preponderance of articles and conference sessions dedicated to vernacular works from England. Perhaps most notably, Middle English romances occupy a central place in literary and even book historical studies, yet they survive in a mere hundred or so manuscripts—a tiny portion of what has survived from medieval England as a whole.⁴⁸ But the importance placed on English works in these disciplines has little to do with the numbers of their surviving copies. It is due in part to the legacies of these disciplines, with their heavy investments in Romantic visions of national identity and of literary genius.⁴⁹ It is also due in part to the often-grim colonial histories of the English language, which have resulted in English being spoken in a much larger part of the world than it was during the medieval period. In terms of the numbers of surviving manuscripts, English is practically insignificant.

⁴⁷ The data at the time of writing have been archived. The count includes both manuscripts and printed books. All of them are listed by their modern collections. Nigel Ramsay writes that 'From the eight hundred or more monasteries, friaries and other religious houses of England, only about 5,200 library and service books survive' and notes that 1,800 of these are from cathedral priories, which had better survival rates; see 'Manuscripts', p. 138. Ramsay does not provide sources for these numbers as far as I can tell. They seem to be based on Ker's lists, but these lists are not comprehensive.

⁴⁸ Gisela Guddat-Figge's *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (1976), which is still the definitive list, contains only ninety-nine manuscripts.

⁴⁹ On the ways in which literary histories of England have prioritized writing in English over writing in Latin or French, and the ways in which this prioritization of English writing is tied to national sentiment, see Ardis Butterfield's *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (2009), especially pp. 11–12.

Among surviving vernacular works from England, very few survive in a large number of copies.⁵⁰ Vernacular works that are well represented in the record include *Mandeville's Travels* (c.300 copies, many of which are continental), the Wycliffite Bible (more than 250 copies), the prose *Brut* (about 181 copies in English), the *Prick of Conscience* (123 copies), Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (c.81 copies), Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (63 copies in English), insular versions of the *Somme le roi* (with 9 English translations surviving in 62 manuscripts), Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (61 copies), *Piers Plowman* (54 copies), *Pore Caitif* (32 'complete' copies, 16 'extracts', and 5 shorter extracts), *Speculum vitae* (45 copies), and the *Manuel des péchés* (28 French copies; over 40 copies if all of its translations are included).⁵¹ In comparison to these 'best-selling' vernacular works, Middle English romances have survived in remarkably few copies.⁵²

Does English survive in more medieval manuscripts produced in England than French?⁵³ The answer might seem straightforward, given that English has a longer history in England than French, yet as we shall see, the situation is complicated by the important role of French in business and legal domains during the late medieval period. It is therefore worth approaching the question by considering first the manuscripts that contain literature (which I define here using the very broad approach laid out by Dean and Boulton, and which includes not just more traditional texts such as romances, but also less traditional ones such as letters, scientific writings, and prayers), and then considering the manuscripts that contain other sorts of writing. In terms of literature, then, it appears that the number of surviving medieval manuscripts containing English literature that were produced in England far exceeds the

⁵⁰ Michael Sargent writes of Middle English works that 'only the smallest number of texts survive in great numbers of manuscripts', in 'What', p. 242.

⁵¹ For the number of copies of the English works on this list (aside from *Pore Caitif* and the *Speculum vitae*), see Sargent, 'What', p. 206. For copies of the *Somme le roi*, the *Manuel*, and *Speculum vitae*, see Krista A. Murchison [Milne], *Manuals for Penitents in Medieval England: From Ancrene Wisse to the Parson's Tale* (2021), pp. 3, 70–1, 127. For *Pore Caitif*, see Diana Denissen, *Middle English Devotional Compilations: Composing Imaginative Variations in Late Medieval England* (2019), p. 32. For *Mandeville's Travels*, see the 'Introduction', in *The Book of John Mandeville*, edited by Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson (2007), pp. 1–19, p. 1. I discuss in brief how the numbers of surviving literary manuscripts in English compare to those in French in Krista A. Milne, 'French Literature of the British Isles after the Norman Conquest: A Digital Data-Driven Investigation', *French Studies* 77, no. 3 (2023): pp. 351–74, p. 356.

⁵² See above, p. 20.

⁵³ As already noted, the borders of England shifted during the medieval period and beyond it, which makes any approach to defining these borders challenging; for the sake of consistency, this investigation is focused on the geographical area that now encompasses England, and which differs in key ways from that of medieval England.

number of surviving medieval manuscripts containing French literature that were produced in England.⁵⁴ To arrive at a count of the first category of manuscript, it is helpful to start with the number of surviving manuscripts containing Old English, which is over 400 by Ker's count (a small portion of these manuscripts were not copied in England, and many of these manuscripts contain works that do not meet Dean and Boulton's definition of literature, but this number nevertheless provides a good starting point).⁵⁵ There is no count of manuscripts containing Middle English literary works available at present—in an informal estimate, Richard Beadle estimated 'the total number of manuscripts containing English literary texts' to be 'upwards of 5,000, perhaps 6,000 or 7,000'.⁵⁶ This number, too, must include some manuscripts copied outside England, but it is nevertheless suggestive; the number of manuscripts containing Middle English literature and copied in England is clearly in the thousands.

As I have shown elsewhere, the question can also be approached differently; if we count only the manuscripts of the 'best-selling' Middle English literary works just listed (setting aside the English translations of the *Manuel des péchés* and the more thorny case of *Mandeville's Travels*) we arrive very easily at 973 manuscripts—and this figure omits the manuscripts of most literary works in Middle English.⁵⁷ In contrast, the most comprehensive list of manuscripts containing Anglo-Norman literature (that in the back of Ruth Dean and Maureen Boulton's handlist) contains only 958 manuscripts by my count.⁵⁸ Dean and Boulton aim to include in their list any manuscript containing French literature that was produced anywhere on the British Isles (not just England), so the true number of manuscripts on this list that were produced in England is undoubtedly lower than this count of 958. Since the

⁵⁴ I discuss the scope of Dean and Boulton's approach in 'French', p. 354.

⁵⁵ Neil Ker lists in his catalogue 412 manuscripts containing Old English copied by English scribes and an additional 39 copied by what he terms 'foreign' scribes (p. 475); see his *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon*, 2nd edn (1957; 1990), pp. 1–474 and 475–84. Ker also lists an additional fifteen manuscripts in the 'Supplement' to his catalogue. Of course there is no equivalent category of manuscripts containing French, but the number of manuscripts containing French produced before the eleventh century is relatively limited; see Milne, 'French', pp. 357–9.

⁵⁶ See Beadle's remarks in 'Panel II: Manuscript Studies and Literary Geography, Discussion Chaired by Graham Caie', in *Speaking in Our Tongues: Proceedings of a Colloquium on Medieval Dialectology and Related Disciplines*, edited by Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson (1994), pp. 105–25, p. 108.

⁵⁷ Some of these manuscripts—though relatively few—were produced outside England.

⁵⁸ I have arrived at this figure by counting all the manuscripts listed at the back of Ruth J. Dean and Maureen B. M. Boulton's, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts* (1999). I have omitted continental copies from this count when these are indicated as such by Dean and Boulton. See Krista A. Milne, 'French Literature of the British Isles after the Norman Conquest: A Digital Data-Driven Investigation', *French Studies* 77, no. 3 (2023): p. 6, n. 18.

number of manuscripts containing the ‘best-sellers’ of English literature exceeds the number of all manuscripts containing French literature on Dean and Boulton’s list, it seems evident that the numbers of surviving manuscripts copied in England that contain English literature must exceed the numbers of those copied in England that contain French literature. A contention might be raised that the grounds of comparison here are unequal because the English ‘best-sellers’ listed here encompass a variety of different types of writing, whereas Dean and Boulton’s list is limited to literary works, but this contention can easily be set aside when we remember that Dean and Boulton’s definition of literature is wide-ranging enough to encompass all the different types of writing included in the English list. In terms of surviving literary texts copied in England, then, English seems to have had the upper hand.

It must be stressed, however, that this comparison applies only to literary texts; it does not take into consideration administrative documents, legal texts, and other sorts of writing that are omitted within Dean and Boulton’s approach to literature. This is an important consideration. It is certainly true that in England, French was used far more commonly than English for many business, legal, and administrative purposes between about the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, as Serge Lusignan has masterfully shown.⁵⁹ Yet during the fourteenth century, English increasingly gains a foothold in legal, administrative, and business domains, so the issue is complicated.⁶⁰ There is at present no reliable count of all manuscripts containing administrative, legal, and other non-literary works from England in either English or French. Even if such a count did exist for either language, it would not be particularly useful

⁵⁹ Serge Lusignan, *La langue des rois au Moyen Âge: Le français en France et en Angleterre* (2004).

⁶⁰ It is worth noting that changes in the languages of royal administration and legal documentation happened in a gradual manner, and that these changes occurred at different times within different domains. On these changes and how they emerged within the Crown’s records, see Gwilym Dodd’s work on the topic, including ‘Trilingualism in the Medieval English Bureaucracy: The Use—and Disuse—of Languages in the Fifteenth-Century Privy Seal Office’, *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 2 (2012): pp. 253–83; ‘The Rise of English, the Decline of French: Supplications to the English Crown, c.1420–1450’, *Speculum* 86 (2011): pp. 117–50; and ‘The Spread of English in Records of Central Government, 1400–1430’, in *Vernacularity in England and Wales, c.1300–1550*, edited by Elisabeth Salter and Helen Wicker (2011), pp. 225–66. On the use of languages within England’s royal administration and muster rolls, see Anne Curry et al., ‘Languages in the Military Profession in Later Medieval England’, in *The Anglo-Norman Language and Its Contexts*, edited by Richard Ingham (2010), pp. 74–93. On changes in the languages used for petitions submitted to parliament, see, for example, Christopher Fletcher, ‘Langue et nation en Angleterre à la fin du moyen âge’, *Revue française d’histoire des idées politiques* 36, no. 2 (2012): pp. 233–52. On the persistence of French within legal documents during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Gwilym Dodd, ‘Languages and Law in Late Medieval England: English, French and Latin’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Law and Literature*, edited by Candace Barrington and Sebastian Sobiecki (2019), pp. 17–29; on the persistence of French in the law courts of England into the early modern period, see Butterfield, *Familiar*, p. 323.

for the present investigation, since many of the administrative and other documents in question (such as deeds) circulated in single leaves during the period and so, strictly speaking, should not be included in this investigation, according to the approach to manuscripts laid out above.⁶¹ It is therefore best to conclude with the now-obvious statement that manuscripts from England that contain English literature survive in far greater numbers than those containing French literature, and that given the present state of scholarship it is unclear whether the same is true for manuscripts from medieval England as a whole (not just literary ones). Regardless of the precise numbers of manuscripts containing English and French from medieval England, it is evident that both categories of manuscript are vastly overshadowed by manuscripts containing Latin, which account for the bulk of survivals from medieval England.

It is not easy to determine the relationship between what has survived and what used to exist. On one hand, Nigel Ramsay takes an optimistic view. He acknowledges that only some manuscripts have survived, and, based on surviving manuscripts, he suggests that the manuscripts that had the best chances of survival were those containing 'historical, patristic and biblical books', while those with the worst chances of survival were 'those containing scholastic theology and philosophy, as well as canon and civil law'.⁶² But while acknowledging that many manuscripts must have been lost, Ramsay holds that most texts (rather than manuscripts) had a very good chance of survival. Ramsay points to the fact that almost every chronicle known to have existed in medieval England survives today. He notes, moreover, that almost all of the 'works of British authors' recorded in Bale's notebooks (published as the *Index Britanniae scriptorum*) have survived, and he concludes from this evidence that 'it may be doubted if many texts were wholly lost'.⁶³

This view stands in marked contrast to that expressed by R. M. Wilson in his study of lost texts which, despite having been written in 1952, remains the most recent full-length exploration of the topic. Wilson examines references to lost literary works from medieval wills, book lists, and more literary works. By shedding light on lost religious works, chronicles, lyrics, and romances, Wilson shows that we have lost a large number of medieval literary works and

⁶¹ For a discussion of how this study will approach manuscripts, see above, p. 16.

⁶² Ramsay, 'Manuscripts', p. 139.

⁶³ Ramsay, 'Manuscripts', p. 139. Ramsay does not specify which of Bale's works he is referring to here and it may be the *Illustrium majoris Britanniae scriptorum*, but it is more likely the version that appears in his notebook and published as the *Index Britanniae scriptorum*, since this is the only work of Bale that Ramsay mentions explicitly; see p. 144, no. 46.

their manuscripts.⁶⁴ In the case of manuscripts, the same impression tends to emerge when examining the *stemma codicum* for works that have survived. With some notable exceptions, autograph copies are usually lost to us and the relationships between copies that survive, which editors establish based on recension and other techniques, often suggest that a large number of copies have been lost to us. The *stemma* of twelve copies of the early thirteenth-century religious guide *Ancrene Wisse* suggests that at least eleven ‘ancestor’ copies (represented by nodes on the *stemma*) have been lost—and these are just the ones suggested by the copies that survive.⁶⁵ Working from the *stemma* of a small set of late medieval texts, Angus McIntosh and Peter Buneman estimated that ‘it was very unlikely that more than one manuscript in twenty of a given stemma will have survived.’⁶⁶ The overall impression is that much has been lost.

But how much, exactly? The question cannot be answered in any conclusive way, but asking it is fundamental for how we understand the literary and cultural landscape of medieval England. For those working in literary studies, the question has a particular urgency. Since manuscripts were the most commonly used tool for transmitting texts across large geographical regions in medieval England, they are key for understanding the breadth of dissemination of literary works. Exploring what portion of manuscripts has survived (even in an approximate way), and exploring which manuscripts were more likely to survive, can give us a better sense of what existed in the medieval period and, in so doing, help us explore vital questions about the circulation, reception, and historical contexts of these works.

To use one of any number of examples, two different versions have survived of the story of Gawain encountering a mysterious green knight, each in one single manuscript copy: the anonymous and little-known poem known as *The Green Knight* (which survives in the Percy Folio) and the much better-known poem ascribed to the ‘Pearl Poet’ (which survives in British Library, Cotton Nero A.X). If we believe that manuscript survival rates are very high, we must suppose that these works represent a fair portion of the written tradition recounting the story of Gawain encountering a green knight that was

⁶⁴ Wilson, *The Lost*.

⁶⁵ The most up-to-date *stemma* of *Ancrene Wisse* is in Bella Millett’s introduction to her edition of *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, EETS os 325, vol. 1 (2005), pp. xxix–xxx.

⁶⁶ See Angus McIntosh’s comments in ‘Panel II: Manuscript Studies and Literary Geography, Discussion Chaired by Graham Caie’, in *Speaking in Our Tongues: Proceedings of a Colloquium on Medieval Dialectology and Related Disciplines*, edited by Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson (1994), pp. 105–25, at p. 105.

circulating in medieval England. We might suppose, on this basis, that this particular green knight story was rather unfamiliar to a medieval audience (or we must assume that a large number of oral versions were in circulation but not written down, which is a possibility). On the other hand, if we believe that survival rates are very low, we might suppose that these two texts and the two manuscripts that contain them represent only a small sample of what medieval audiences were reading about the green knight story. The difference has significant implications for interpretation, especially within models that situate the locus of interpretation in the medieval past. If, for example, one assumes that a fair sample of the written tradition has survived, one can assume that moments of the poem that are obscure to us today, such as the Green Knight's motivations for appearing in Arthur's court at the very start of the Pearl Poet's version of this story, were also obscure to a medieval audience. If we think we have only a poor sample of what has survived, we might expect a medieval audience encountering such moments would have filled in details from another work—perhaps one along the lines of *The Green Knight*. The question is therefore fundamental to how we approach the poem's medieval reception and interpretation.

The question also has important implications for literary history. The implications are clear if we consider the reference to a text entitled 'The Greene Knyght' on an inventory of Sir John Paston, the wealthy fifteenth-century landholder.⁶⁷ Is this one of the two accounts of the green knight story known to us through surviving manuscripts (either *The Green Knight* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), or is it some intermediary text, or even some other account of this story, now lost? How one approaches this question will depend on one's views of manuscript survival. If only a tiny portion of what was copied in the medieval period has survived, it would be most likely that Paston's book contained a version that is now lost to us. If, on the other hand, a large portion of what was copied in the medieval period has survived, it would be more likely that Paston's book contained one of the two accounts of the green knight story known to us today, and we could use this information to consider the relationship between these texts and their audiences. The question of manuscript survival, then, has important implications for how we approach literary history. And the question also has implications that reach beyond literary studies: since it can provide insight into what circulated

⁶⁷ The list is printed in G. A. Lester, 'The Books of a Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman, Sir John Paston', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 88, no. 2 (1987): pp. 200–17, pp. 201–2. Lester suggests that the title in question could be one of the two known accounts of the Green Knight story, or could be a version not known to us today (p. 204).

during the medieval period, it is central to our understanding of medieval administration, trade, literacy, religious practices and other areas of cultural and historical inquiry.

Within modern scholarship, the question of survival has been explored more thoroughly for early printed books than for manuscripts. This is attributable, at least in part, to the nature of the available data; we have more information about the production patterns of print books than of manuscripts. While there is no consensus about the average size of a print run, and while this size seems to have varied considerably, it is generally accepted that each edition in the fifteenth century was produced in at least a hundred copies.⁶⁸ Since we know that incunabula typically circulated in the hundreds, we already have more information about their production and circulation numbers than we do for manuscripts, and we can use surviving incunabula to make estimates about how many were produced (to use a very simple example, if there are two surviving copies of a work from two different print runs, we might suppose that at least 200 copies of the work once existed).

One preliminary attempt at making these estimates was undertaken by Michael Milway. Milway uses edition records from the British Library's *Incunabula Short Title Catalogue* to estimate the number of copies of best-sellers produced in fifteenth-century Europe. The records indicate, for example, that there were 449 print runs of various breviaries between 1455 and 1500, and Milway estimates, based on this figure, that 225,000 breviaries were printed during this period. These estimates of the total numbers of volumes printed may be a bit off, since Milway assumes each print run had the exact same number of copies, and he therefore does not account for the aforementioned differences in print run size—differences which could be very large. And Milway's numbers are undoubtedly inflated, since he assumes each print run created an average of 500 copies, which is a higher number than most early modern book historians will allow.⁶⁹ Milway's figures are thus helpful for gesturing towards the very considerable scope of

⁶⁸ Falk Eisermann, for example, writes that 'By and large, recent scholarship agrees on the following assumptions: print runs below 100 copies are supposed to have been unusual in the age of incunabula, as are print runs over 1,000'; Eisermann finds, however, that the second assumption is inaccurate, writing 'that already in the incunabula age some texts were distributed in high print runs, regularly reaching 1,000 and more copies'; 'Fifty', pp. 78, 112–23. Jonathan Green et al., by contrast, assume 'a typical print run of 200 copies', in 'The Shape', p. 144.

⁶⁹ Michael Milway's estimate of 500 copies is given in 'Forgotten Best-Sellers from the Dawn of the Reformation', in *Continuity and Change: The Harvest of Late Medieval and Reformation History, Essays Presented to Heiko A. Oberman on his 70th Birthday*, edited by Robert Bast and Andrew Colin Gow (2000), pp. 113–42, p. 117, n. 13. See the previous footnote for a more typical estimate of print run sizes. Milway recognizes these limitations of his approach and reminds us that '[s]tatistics of this order deserve our utmost caution and scrutiny' (p. 120).

what existed in the medieval period, but they may be inflated due to the nature of his estimations.

Milway's work on the number of editions that were produced, on the other hand, is not affected by these estimations and is, therefore, more reliable. Milway finds a remarkable total of 27,500 separate editions represented in surviving incunabula from the period. But as Milway himself acknowledges, since his dataset is drawn from surviving records, it does not account for works that have been destroyed entirely, and in this respect his figures are undoubtedly lower than they would be if we were to somehow count every edition that was produced in the period.⁷⁰

The problem may be a significant one. A recent statistical analysis of lost incunabula from early modern Europe has shown that for individual incunabula editions, the most common number of surviving copies is one. In other words, there are far more editions surviving in one copy than editions surviving in two copies, or in three copies. The researchers behind this analysis found that the statistical distribution of surviving incunabula suggests that the number of editions surviving in zero copies must be very large. Indeed, setting aside broadsides (which were more likely to be destroyed than other sorts of incunabula), the researchers estimate that between 35 per cent and 67 per cent of all early modern editions survive in zero copies. They estimate that between 14,000 and 52,000 incunabula editions have gone missing entirely.⁷¹ Early modern Europe was, they claim, 'awash in ephemera'.⁷² The impression is that tens or hundreds of thousands of books have been lost from the early decades of print. Recent work on incunabula, then, has shown that books were far more common in the fifteenth century than previously assumed; what survives represents a mere fraction of what once existed. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the same is true of manuscripts, which, unlike printed books, were not bound by circulation patterns dictated by mechanical reproduction and mass market appeal.

Yet some attempts have been made to use what we know about the survival of incunabula to explore that of manuscripts. While addressing the question

⁷⁰ Milway, 'Forgotten', p. 120.

⁷¹ Green et al., 'Shape', p. 168.

⁷² Green et al., 'Shape', p. 174. The same impression emerges from individual examples taken from the early modern period. A. J. Aitken finds that a printer and bookseller in Scotland had 545 copies of the *Testament of Cresseid* when he passed away in 1599, but his 1593 edition of the text survives in only one copy. Aitken adds that 'In 1602 Robert Smyth had 1638 "Cressedis", of which none survives'; see Aitken's comments in 'Panel II: Manuscript Studies and Literary Geography, Discussion Chaired by Graham Caie', in *Speaking in Our Tongues: Proceedings of a Colloquium on Medieval Dialectology and Related Disciplines*, edited by Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson (1994), pp. 105–25, at p. 109, n. 4.

of how many manuscripts were produced in total in medieval Europe, Uwe Neddermeyer notes that the ideal sources for answering this question are those for which we know how many were produced and how many have survived, and he notes that this information is not available for manuscripts; rather, 'Diese ideale Situation ist aber nur bei (recht zahlreichen) Inkunabeln gegeben' ('this ideal situation is only available for (very many) incunabula').⁷³ Neddermeyer thus begins his investigation with incunabula. He first compares the size of known print runs of incunabula to the number of surviving copies to arrive at a survival rate of 1 in 20 for incunabula.⁷⁴ He then predicts a high survival rate for manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which, he argues, had better chances of survival than print books.⁷⁵ Through this highly conjectural method, Neddermeyer estimates the survival rate for manuscripts from medieval Europe that were produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as approximately 1 in 15 (or 7 per cent).⁷⁶ Neddermeyer uses this prediction and a list of manuscripts that survive from the medieval libraries of Germany and Switzerland to predict the survival rates of medieval manuscripts from different centuries.⁷⁷ Neddermeyer's data is based in part on manuscripts that were housed in Benedictine libraries, and David d'Avray points out that this is a potential limitation of Neddermeyer's study, since Benedictine libraries were relatively stable compared to other sorts of book collections. D'Avray also points out another potential issue: Neddermeyer's argument assumes that books all had the same chance of survival regardless of when they were produced. D'Avray raises the point that some books, such as those produced in the thirteenth century or by mendicants, may have been more easily cast aside than other volumes.⁷⁸

Other limitations to Neddermeyer's study have emerged. Hanno Wijsman raises doubts about 'certain steps' in Neddermeyer's argument, including that it 'is based on a series of arguments that are absolutely not quantified'.⁷⁹ While taking into account this limitation, Wijsman nevertheless adopts Neddermeyer's survival rate of 7 per cent as a starting point for his own investigation, which is focused on luxury manuscripts—lavishly illustrated

⁷³ Neddermeyer, *Handschrift*, vol. 1, p. 75.

⁷⁴ Neddermeyer, *Handschrift*, vol. 1, pp. 75–9.

⁷⁵ Neddermeyer, *Handschrift*, vol. 1, pp. 80–1.

⁷⁶ Neddermeyer, *Handschrift*, vol. 1 p. 80.

⁷⁷ Neddermeyer, *Handschrift*, vol. 1, pp. 81–5. Neddermeyer uses the list of surviving manuscripts in Sigrid Krämer's *Handschriftenerbe des deutschen Mittelalters*, 3 vols (1989–90).

⁷⁸ David d'Avray, 'Printing, Mass Communication, and Religious Reformation: The Middle Ages and After', in *The Uses of Script and Print 1300–1700*, edited by Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (2004), pp. 50–70, pp. 57–60, especially at p. 59.

⁷⁹ Hanno Wijsman, *Luxury Bound: Illustrated Manuscript Production and Noble and Princely Book Ownership in the Burgundian Netherlands (1400–1550)* (2010), p. 20.

manuscripts—produced in The Netherlands. But Wijsman adjusts this rate for the luxury manuscripts that lie at the heart of his study. Wijsman suggests that ‘library manuscripts’ that were subsumed into institutional collections prior to 1550 had a particularly high rate of survival; he suggests 50 per cent ‘does not seem too high’. For manuscripts that found their way into the book collections of the nobility (and which, therefore, often ended up in the relative safety of public collections), Wijsman suggests a survival rate between 5 per cent and 25 per cent. For Books of Hours, which remained in private collections more often than other sorts of books, Wijsman posits a survival rate of ‘probably towards the lower end of the 5% to 25% estimated’. Based on these estimates, Wijsman suggests an average survival rate of one in five (or 20 per cent) for illuminated manuscripts produced in The Netherlands between 1400 and 1550.⁸⁰

With the renewed interest in the material contexts and circulation patterns of medieval manuscripts that accompanied the advent of the New Philology in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and with the increasing availability of digitized manuscripts and large-scale methods of analysis in the past few decades, the question of manuscript survival has received increased attention, and it has been raised directly by several studies. By far the most ambitious of these is by the economic historian Eltjo Buringh, whose work has already been examined in brief. The goal of Buringh’s study is to calculate the total numbers of medieval manuscripts that were in circulation during the medieval period, which Buringh views as an indicator of overall economic prosperity. Buringh’s study is extremely wide-ranging; while it is focused primarily on manuscript production and circulation, it also considers loss, and while it is focused primarily on the ‘Latin West’, it also explores other regions in the Eastern hemisphere. This aspect of the study is a limitation according to Marilena Maniaci, who has raised significant concerns about the study’s regional breadth and chronological scope (‘estensione cronologica’), which, she notes are far too broad, and which lead to results that ‘appear—in the eyes of the book historian—evidently devoid of plausibility’ (‘appaiono—agli occhi dello storico del libro—evidentemente privi di verosimiglianza’).⁸¹ Despite these limitations, many of Buringh’s local investigations (and their

⁸⁰ Wijsman, *Luxury*, pp. 19–25 quoted at pp. 25 and 26.

⁸¹ Marilena Maniaci, ‘Quantificare la produzione manoscritta del passato: Ambizioni, rischi, illusioni di una “Bibliometria Storica Globale”’, *IALS Online*, <http://www.iaslonline.de/index.php?vorgang_id=3567>, accessed 2 September 2021. For this source and a brief overview of concerns surrounding Buringh’s work, see Brandon W. Hawk, *Preaching Apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon England* (2018), p. 39.

conclusions) are supported by solid evidence, and these particular investigations are therefore taken into consideration here, with all due caution.

Despite his focus on issues of manuscript production, Buringh considers the question of how many manuscripts have survived from various book collections from medieval England. Drawing on Ker's *MLGB*, Buringh estimates how many manuscripts various medieval collections originally held and how many of these have been identified today. He finds that the survival rates varied significantly between collections. In total, his study identifies 1,725 manuscripts that survive from various medieval libraries of England that he estimates to have once held approximately 19,527 manuscripts.⁸² This is a survival rate of approximately 8.8 per cent.

Buringh is, however, less interested in the portion of collections that have survived and more in what he terms loss rates. Using the figures for individual book lists and the number of centuries that have elapsed since these lists were produced, he calculates the loss rate by century for various collections. A collection with a loss rate of 10 per cent, for example, would have lost, on average, one-tenth of its collection per century. This loss rate-based approach is helpful, because it allows for comparison between collections that were documented at different points in time. Buringh calculates the loss rate for many of the collections featured in the *Registrum Anglie* and arrives at an average loss rate of –37 per cent per century. He finds some variations between types of institutions, with cathedrals having an average loss rate of –20 per cent and other sorts of institutions as having an average loss rate of –39 per cent.⁸³ These loss rates result in survival rates in the same range as those of previous studies such as Wijsman's. Buringh's loss rate approach is helpful for allowing comparison between different institutions, but since loss rates are calculated as averages, they cannot on their own shed light on when manuscripts were lost or how.

Few studies of medieval manuscript loss are as wide-ranging as Buringh's, but recent years have seen the emergence of some innovative studies about survival rates that are focused on particular sorts of medieval texts. Perhaps the best known of these is that of Mike Kestemont and Folger Karsdorp, which is focused on the survival rates of medieval romance manuscripts produced in the Low Countries. Kestemont and Karsdorp observe that 74 distinct texts of Dutch romances survive in 164 manuscripts (including

⁸² Buringh, *Medieval*, p. 192.

⁸³ Buringh, *Medieval*. The data is in annexes L and M, on pp. 479–87 and pp. 488–91. See further the explanation on p. 193.

fragments).⁸⁴ They estimate the number of texts that previously existed using a model taken from ecology known as the ‘unseen species model’. The model uses data about the number of unique romances that survive in one manuscript, the number that survive in two manuscripts, and so on to predict the number of romances that survive in zero manuscripts—the so-called ‘unseen species’.⁸⁵ The approach holds promise, especially for exploring the survival rates of the sorts of works which are known to have been produced in roughly similar quantities.⁸⁶ Using this approach, Kestemont and Karsdorp estimate that about 148 distinct Dutch romance texts were produced initially. They note that if 74 distinct texts have survived, this is a survival rate of about 50 per cent for distinct romance texts.⁸⁷

More recently, a team of researchers, including Karsdorp and Kestemont, has applied the same model to romances (more precisely ‘medieval heroic and chivalric fiction’) in six different European vernaculars, including English.⁸⁸ Using this method, they arrive at a survival rate of 63.2 per cent to 73.5 per cent for works and 7.5 per cent to 10.7 per cent for documents, a category which for the purposes of their study includes both manuscripts and fragments.⁸⁹ The survival rate for romance manuscripts and fragments—between 7.5 per cent and 10.7 per cent—is in the same range as previous estimates of medieval manuscripts, including those of Wijzman and Buringh.

These studies of loss are, for the most part, focused on continental manuscripts. There have been few equivalent attempts to study survival rates from manuscripts from England, although some of the great book historians of the field have made important contributions to our knowledge of the topic. In his work on the medieval catalogue of the library of the Augustinian Friars at York, M. R. James laments the poor survival rates of these friars’ volumes. He states that out of the original 646 manuscripts listed in the catalogue he can find only four (this number has been revised in recent years to seventeen, but it is still very small).⁹⁰ James supposes that more of these friars’ books must

⁸⁴ Mike Kestemont and Folgert B. Karsdorp, ‘Het Atlantis van de Middelnederlandse ridderepiek: Een schatting van het tekstverlies met methodes uit de ecodiversiteit’, *Spiegel der Letteren* 61, no. 3 (2019), pp. 271–90, p. 276.

⁸⁵ Kestemont and Karsdorp, ‘Het Atlantis’, pp. 282–5. The model is described further in Mike Kestemont et al., ‘Forgotten Books: The Application of Unseen Species Models to the Survival of Culture’, *Science* 375, no. 6582 (2022): pp. 765–9, pp. 765–7.

⁸⁶ As Kestemont et al. note in another article, the model ‘works satisfactorily as a nearly unbiased point estimator when the abundances of rare species are nearly homogeneous or singletons and undetected species have approximately the same mean abundances’, ‘Forgotten’, p. 767.

⁸⁷ Kestemont and Karsdorp, ‘Het Atlantis’, p. 284.

⁸⁸ Kestemont et al., ‘Forgotten’, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Kestemont et al., ‘Forgotten’, p. 3.

⁹⁰ M. R. James, ‘Prefatory Note’, in ‘The Catalogue of the Library of the Augustinian Friars at York, Now First Edited from the MS at Trinity College Dublin’, edited by M. R. James, pp. 2–17, in *Fasciculus*

have survived and that these simply cannot be identified, yet he finds it likely that from this collection 'nine-tenths of the books have ceased to exist.' This would mean a survival rate of about 10 per cent for friars' collections. James supposes that the survival figures for friars' houses in other populous areas must have been similar.⁹¹ This suggestion is supported by the work of K. W. Humphreys, who, while surveying all the other surviving friars' lists from medieval England, reflects that, 'It is distressing to find that of the 550 or so manuscripts recorded in these lists, apart from those for the Austin Friars at York . . . only twelve can be shown to be extant.'⁹² This is a survival rate of only 2.2 per cent.

Looking at a variety of different institutional collections, Michael Sargent remarks on the significant variation in terms of their manuscript survival. He finds that the fifteenth-century library catalogue of the Augustinian priory at Leicester lists 940 items, of which only 20 can be identified (this means only 2 per cent have been identified, by my calculation). He finds that similar figures emerge from the collections of the brothers of Syon Abbey; 1 in 51 of their listed manuscripts can be identified today (about 1.9 per cent). But Sargent notes that some survival rates are much higher. An incredible 100–50 manuscripts have apparently survived from Llanthony Secunda Priory in Gloucestershire; its mid-fourteenth century catalogue lists about 500 books, which would mean survival of 20 to 25 per cent.⁹³

In his brief examination of survival rates from various institutions, William P. Stoneman also finds significant variation among different institutional collections. He notes that from a 1389 booklist of Dover Priory, only 20 out of over 400 manuscripts are now known to survive, which is 1 in 20 (or 5 per cent). He notes that other survival rates are much higher; from a booklist of Christ Church Canterbury almost 1 in 6 survive (about 17 per cent) and from a book list of St Augustine's about 1 in 11 (about 9 per cent).⁹⁴ Some scholars have identified even higher survival rates in various contexts. In his

Ioanni Willis Clark dicatus (1909), pp. 2–96, pp. 16–17. For the updated numbers, see K. W. Humphreys, 'Introduction', in *The Friars' Libraries*, edited by K. W. Humphreys, CBMLC 1 (1990), pp. xv–xxxv, pp. xxx–xxxiii.

⁹¹ James, 'Prefatory', pp. 16–17, quoted at p. 16; see also the discussion of James's work in Ernest Albert Savage, *Old English Libraries: The Making, Collection, and Use of Books During the Middle Ages* (1911), p. 67.

⁹² Humphreys, 'Introduction', p. xx.

⁹³ Sargent, 'What', p. 211. The editors of the Leicester Priory catalogue suggest there may have been more than a thousand volumes in the library originally; either way, the survival rate for Leicester is clearly very low; see the 'Introduction', in *The Libraries of the Augustinian Canons*, edited by M. T. J. Webber and A. G. Watson, CBMLC 6 (1998), pp. xxii–xxvii, p. xxvii. On Llanthony, see the discussion below, pp. 139–140.

⁹⁴ *Dover Priory*, edited by William P. Stoneman, CBMLC 5 (1999), p. 4.

study of the book collections of Bury St Edmund's, R. M. Thomson finds that the abbey had about 51 manuscripts before the Conquest, of which 15 survive; this is a survival rate of about 29 per cent.⁹⁵

The general sense, then, is that the survival rates varied significantly across collections, with rates ranging from about 2 per cent to 29 per cent. Those who would venture estimates about survival rates for manuscripts on the whole tend to place these between about 7 per cent and 10 per cent. As this study will show, these estimates are useful for understanding the fates of the kinds of works that circulated in institutional library collections (such as monastic libraries), but they provide only limited insight into the survival rates of medieval manuscripts as a whole, or even of institutional collections as a whole. Indeed, a focus on the book lists and books of large institutional libraries has led to a widespread tendency to misrepresent and underestimate the destruction of medieval manuscripts in England. When considering the fates of library collections alongside the fates of volumes such as service books that passed through the doors of institutions (and that formed a key collection within most religious institutions) but that were not typically part of the medieval library, a new picture emerges. The evidence presented here shows that while manuscripts from medieval libraries were subject to some institutional loss, renewal, and dispersal, they were relatively safe; those housed within institutions but outside their libraries suffered considerably more, and from various and ongoing threats.

To explore these threats, this book looks at moments that, using the criteria already given above, could be considered the most significant for the loss of medieval manuscripts.⁹⁶ The manifold ways that manuscripts were destroyed prior to the Reformation, and the relative significance of each sort of destruction, are explored in the first chapter. Here, new evidence drawn from book inventories, bishops' registers, and recycled bookbinding material shows that medieval libraries were far from static; material was constantly being decommissioned and recycled—and not only due to wear. Institutional book collections embraced renewal in the face of changing practices, scripts, language use, and educational aims. Indeed, the evidence presented here suggests that the destruction of manuscripts was not uncommon during this period, and that the risk of destruction was particularly pronounced for manuscripts that were 50 to 200 years old—those that had neither the cachet of the new nor the prestige of the old.

⁹⁵ R. M. Thomson, 'The Library of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Speculum* 47, no. 4 (1972): pp. 617–45, p. 622.

⁹⁶ For the criteria, see pp. 8–9.

The findings of the first chapter, which are based largely on qualitative evidence (such as a bishop's complaint about the waning state of a parish book collection) are supported in the second chapter through a quantitative case study. The study is centred around the library of Christ Church Canterbury Cathedral Priory—one of the largest libraries in medieval England and, therefore, a particularly useful one for tracking changes to medieval book collections. Building on existing work on Canterbury's manuscript collections, this chapter shows that the collections of Christ Church Canterbury Cathedral library experienced significant loss and renewal in the c.150 years under investigation, between c.1176 and 1326. Indeed, the evidence explored here suggests that this cathedral library lost far more volumes during this period solely to everyday causes—such as borrowing, theft, and deacquisition policies—than it lost during the sectarian tumult that marked the Dissolution of the Monasteries. As a cathedral priory, Christ Church cannot be taken as representative of all religious houses in England, but the example is nevertheless useful for highlighting that significant loss to manuscript collections occurred long before the Dissolution.

The next chapter looks more closely at the extent of manuscript destruction that occurred in the wake of the Dissolution, which is often considered the most significant moment in English history for the loss of medieval manuscripts. While many have suggested that surviving manuscript collections have been skewed in some way by the Dissolution (and the Reformation, more broadly), there is little clarity about how the record was skewed—or about how much. This third chapter explores two key questions: (1) how extensive were the attacks on manuscripts in the wake of the Dissolution and (2) what kinds of manuscripts were most likely to be destroyed during this period?

Drawing on new evidence and on a growing and important body of work on Reformation-era manuscript dispersal by James Carley and others, this chapter considers how manuscript survival has been shaped by key moments during the early stages of the Reformation, from early book burnings to the collection and dispersal of volumes at the Dissolution. It shows that the immediate impact of the Reformation on manuscript survival was, in many ways, limited. While it is true that many manuscripts passed from institutions into private hands and were subsequently destroyed, the evidence explored in this study suggests that the deliberate destruction of manuscripts was limited in scope and was not, as is sometimes assumed, directed at more Catholic-leaning volumes. And while it is sometimes claimed that manuscripts were shipped abroad en masse, there is little in the way of compelling evidence to

support this claim—a point supported here through a quantitative approach to surviving fragments. There were, moreover, many attempts to collect and preserve volumes during this period. As this chapter shows, if these preservation attempts skewed the record at all, it would be towards the preservation of the newest and oldest volumes. Monks seem to have prioritized preserving the latest theological tracts, while antiquarians worked to rescue what John Leland describes as ‘the monuments of aunycent writers’. Service books and Books of Hours, which comprised some of the most common books during this early period, were largely spared from any Crown-endorsed destruction and continued to be used openly by their owners.

The climate changed drastically with the ascension of Edward VI and his 1549 Act of Uniformity. This act, which aimed to impose one uniform liturgical programme in English on the entire Church, and, in so doing, to abolish more local Latin liturgical uses, called for the destruction of antiphonals, missals, and other service books. The fourth chapter explores which of Edward’s new policies affected medieval manuscript survival, and the extent to which these were enacted. The investigation is supported by quantitative evidence from recycled binding material, gathered from the work of Neil Ker and from a collection of fragments at Durham. This material indicates that this period saw a distinct and targeted approach to book destruction, with service books being particularly vulnerable. But the evidence also indicates that a belief in the potential return to the old religion and a high valuation placed on some of the targeted volumes meant that Edward’s policy was not enacted in any comprehensive way. By showing that manuscript destruction during the early stages of the Reformation was more limited than is usually assumed, this chapter and the previous one contribute to a growing body of work that suggests that the impacts of the Dissolution have been overstated within broader narratives of the Reformation.

Indeed, it was not until the reign of Elizabeth I that service books were destroyed in any systematic way. Elizabeth’s 1559 injunction against service books and other ‘ornaments’ of the Catholic liturgy led to the mass investigation, documentation, and confiscation of church possessions. This Elizabethan injunction against service books was taken very seriously—a point that is reinforced in this chapter through a quantitative analysis of 150 church inventories. At the same time that antiquarians were seeking out ancient volumes for their collections, reformers were destroying service books, many of which were survivals from the late medieval period, in large numbers. The impact of this campaign against service books is reflected in the record. While existing discussions of medieval manuscript survival, most

of which are based on the institutional library lists that tend to omit service books, place survival rates between 7 and 10 per cent, the survival rates for service books have been shown to be strikingly lower—about 0.2 per cent for missals and 0.1 per cent for antiphonals. This disparity is significant because, as this chapter shows, service books were ubiquitous in the period; they were among the most common books in medieval England. The findings of this chapter highlight the vast disparity among survival rates of different types of manuscripts and point to the significant problems posed by relying on institutional library lists for calculating broader survival rates.

The final chapters explore the ways in which a shifting conceptualization of manuscripts' antiquarian value during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to a final push towards preservation. As medieval manuscripts were increasingly viewed as relics of a bygone and inaccessible—but also politically useful—past, their preservation took on greater political and cultural urgency and far fewer manuscripts were destroyed. Examining multiple accounts, this chapter shows that while key Royalist supporters of Charles I and Charles II described specific instances of manuscript destruction at the hands of the Parliamentarians, these reports were in many cases exaggerated for political ends, and the period was marked by an overall atmosphere of preservation. The point is reinforced through a quantitative examination of a set of data gathered by Neil Ker and Ivor Atkins (1944), which shows that at Worcester Cathedral, the majority of sixteenth and seventeenth-century losses from the cathedral's library collection happened at the hands of collectors and not, as is often suggested in Royalists' accounts, at the hands of uncultured iconoclasts. While modern losses such as the 1731 Ashburnham House fire and the wartime bombing of London's libraries tend to dominate discussions of modern manuscript survival, and tend to give the impression of significant manuscript losses, the past 300 years have been marked rather by a tendency towards preservation. As manuscripts increasingly came to be viewed as irreplaceable cultural heritage, their preservation became a national priority. Ironically, the greatest threat to England's manuscripts today is their perceived value; this study shows that more manuscripts have been lost to theft and to deliberate dismemberment for resale than to either of the World Wars.

England's institutional manuscript losses, then, should be considered in distinct categories. Collections that were typically housed in a church's choir (such as missals, antiphonals, and other service books) during the medieval period suffered considerable losses at the hands of reformers who targeted them for their contents. On the other extreme, collections that more typically were housed in institutional libraries were not commonly targeted for their

contents and had, on the whole, far better chances of survival. Indeed, in some cases these latter sorts of collections suffered more losses during the medieval period—when damaged or unfashionable manuscripts were culled and sometimes recycled—than during the centuries that followed. Most at risk during all periods under investigation were manuscripts that were considered too old to be of use but too new to be of any historical or antiquarian value. The Conclusion considers the policy implications of these findings for the preservation of media today, arguing that good archival practice must do more to account for the everyday, but nevertheless important, ephemera that often get neglected in favour of the very old and the very new.

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PART I
MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPT LOSS
BEFORE C.1500

1

Before 1500

Medieval Manuscripts Destroyed in Medieval England

While conceding that monasteries were not ‘patrons and cultivators of classical literature for its own sake’, a Victorian commentator, writing in the venerated pages of the *Edinburgh Review*, claims that monasteries were nevertheless ‘almost the sole instruments of its preservation.’ In this model, medieval monks, despite disapproving of the contents of ancient works, kept them out of a slavish commitment to preservation—a commitment, we are supposed to believe, that the monks maintained despite their greater commitment to the Christian theology that these works contradicted. The ‘function’ of monastic book collections, we are told, was ‘mainly that of passive instruments in handing on to posterity the collections of ancient authors which already existed.’¹

This description of monastic libraries was written over a hundred years ago, but the view that it represents—that medieval monasteries were largely passive preservers of ancient wisdom—has persisted in various quarters. In his seminal and widely cited study of the dispersal of monastic collections during the Reformation, C. E. Wright claims that ‘monastic libraries remained for the most part intact until the dissolution.’² A recent and widely popular history of the library explains that ‘medieval libraries in Europe were conservative places, where interest focused on a few venerated texts.’³ In some

¹ ‘Review of *Memoirs of Libraries, including a Handbook of Library Economy*. By Edward Edwards. 2 vols. 8vo. London: 1858, and other volumes, *The Edinburgh Review* 139, no. 283 (1874): pp. 1–43, quoted at pp. 9–10.

² Wright does, however, recognize that some destruction took place during the medieval period itself, but he describes this destruction as having been very limited; see Wright, ‘Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth’, p. 149.

³ Matthew Battles, *The Library: An Unquiet History* (2003), p. 60. The idea that monastic libraries were conservative is common; describing changes to monastic book collections, David Bell writes of ‘the innate conservatism of the monastic orders’, in ‘The Libraries of Religious Houses in the Late Middle Ages’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1, to 1640*, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (2008), pp. 126–51, p. 136. Nigel Ramsay writes that ‘The Benedictine tradition of respect for antiquity meant that ancient books and charters were preserved even if they were in Old English and no longer comprehensible to anyone’, ‘Manuscripts’, p. 126.

quarters, the impression is still that monastic institutions had preservation as their primary aim, and that they were largely successful in achieving this aim.⁴

But a growing body of evidence and research has made it plain that medieval libraries were not passive preservers of ancient volumes.⁵ They lost, and even actively destroyed, many volumes. And much like modern libraries, they struggled with the question of how to develop suitable policies for preservation and deacquisition. The goal of this chapter is to explore the forms of damage and destruction that affected medieval book collections in order to shed light on what kinds of books were most often threatened during the medieval period and how these books came to be recycled or wholly destroyed (rather than simply damaged). In so doing, the chapter explores the question of how manuscript loss during the medieval period shaped the corpus of manuscripts that has survived. While exploring these topics, I draw not only on a growing and important body of work on medieval book loss but also on primary sources that hold special significance for this topic, including several bishops' registers, church inventories, and other historical documents that have not yet been considered in these contexts.

Before exploring these sources, it is worth pausing to note that the idea of loss must be treated with some caution, since it encompasses a range of fates that should not be conflated. A manuscript that went missing from a monastic collection was not necessarily destroyed, and it is different in key ways from a manuscript that was recycled due to changing tastes. The focus of this book is not on damaged or misplaced manuscripts but on destroyed ones—defined rather narrowly as manuscripts that no longer exist today due to destruction in the past. Other, more ambiguous, types of loss (such as manuscripts being stolen, scraped clean for reuse, or decommissioned from monastic collections) are considered here because they provide clues about broader patterns of historical destruction, but in each case, these other sorts of losses are treated with considerable caution and are contextualized carefully. Manuscripts that were scraped clean for reuse, or those that have been broken into fragments but subsequently preserved as binding material, illustrate the complexity well: are these 'destroyed' in the sense that they no longer serve their original functions (and indeed typically many folia of these manuscripts are lost entirely to us today) or can they be considered 'preserved' in some

⁴ This view is by no means universal. For those who acknowledge that monasteries were far from static, see, for example, James Carley, who stresses that 'monasteries themselves had weeded out and recycled over the centuries'; 'Monastic', p. 347.

⁵ See, for example, the 'Introduction', in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. xiv–xxx, p. xxviii. See also Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 178 and the secondary literature cited there.

way? Each type of loss and damage is considered separately here and contextualized to ensure that the important distinctions between them are not lost.

It is also important to stress that many medieval religious institutions, and especially the larger ones such as monasteries or friaries, had a variety of separate collections, and that damage done to one of them did not necessarily imply damage done to all. The idea of having a separate room in a large religious institution for a library was not common in England until the fourteenth century, and even after this idea caught on, institutions continued to store their books in a variety of different locations.⁶ C. E. Wright, in his study of the dispersal of manuscripts at the Reformation, provides a useful though broad categorization of monastic book collections, which breaks down into three types: (1) the muniments, including cartularies and deeds, and other documents related to the history of the institutions and its possessions—these were typically stored in the treasury; (2) the service books, which were typically housed in the choir (or sometimes in the sacristy); and (3) the library books, which in many institutions came to be stored in a dedicated room.⁷ Starting in the late thirteenth century, and possibly inspired by practices at the Sorbonne, religious houses in England increasingly separated this main library into a borrowing library and a reference library, the latter of which was sometimes kept in place through book chaining.⁸ To these three or four collections we can add the collections of books that were intended to be read in the refectory over mealtime, which were stored separately in some institutions. These formal collections were sometimes supplemented by smaller, more personal ones.⁹ So, in the fourteenth century, St Albans had several formal collections, including a collection of chained books, and, in addition to these, the abbot, sacrist, and archdeacon all had their own separate collections.¹⁰ A list of loans to its cell at Hertford indicates that the abbey also loaned out books to dependent cells.¹¹

⁶ Teresa Webber, 'Where Were Books Made and Kept', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval British Manuscripts*, edited by Orietta Da Rold and Elaine Treharne (2020), pp. 214–36, p. 225. On book collections prior to the Norman Conquest, see Dumville, 'English', pp. 189–90.

⁷ Wright, 'Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', p. 151; see also the distribution of documents at Peterborough Abbey, where some deeds were also stored in the abbot's quarters; 'Introduction', in *Peterborough Abbey*, edited by Karsten Friis-Jansen and James M. Willoughby, CBMLC 8 (2001), pp. xxi–xlii, p. xxxiii. On the arrangement of books in monastic institutions, see Teresa Webber, 'The Libraries of Religious Houses', in *The European Book in the Twelfth Century*, edited by Erik Kwakkel and Rodney Thomson (2018), pp. 103–21. On the housing of service books in the sacristy, see pp. 113–14.

⁸ On the separation of these collections in the context of friars' houses, see Humphreys, 'Introduction', p. xxvii.

⁹ See Webber, 'Where', p. 225. We find some variations between different houses; at Reading Abbey, the books intended for reading in the refectory were stored in the dormitory in the fourteenth century; see *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 451.

¹⁰ *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 543.

¹¹ The list is B86 in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 552–4.

The same general arrangement of book collections was found in friaries, in addition to the collections of books possessed by individual friars.¹² The separation of library books into a fixed reference library and a more fluid lending library became increasingly common in friars' houses over the course of the fourteenth century. It was eventually mandated by the General Constitutions instituted by Benedict XII in 1365 and was likely a standard feature of friars' houses by the late fourteenth century.¹³ Aside from these fixed collections, friars' houses also stored parts of their collections at their dependent cells, although some cells seem to have had distinct collections of their own.¹⁴ In cathedral priories, the distribution of books was similar to that of the abbeys, although this distribution varied somewhat between institutions. Westminster Cathedral Priory had the standard formal collections of books but also 'a collection kept for the edification of monks undergoing the "sedney" or bleeding'.¹⁵ In many of these houses, the main collection of library books was stored on the north side of the cloister, which was the closest to the church and allowed for quick access.¹⁶ Within larger institutions, then, books were typically arranged into separate collections based on their roles within a given house, and we must consider the fates of these collections separately if we are to understand medieval manuscript loss.

Perhaps the most obvious sorts of loss were indiscriminate ones—the sorts caused by fire, floods, or other accidental catastrophes. What mark did these types of loss leave on the record? Fire posed an ongoing threat to medieval collections. On one hand, manuscripts do not make particularly good kindling compared to paper or even papyrus. Dominique Ribeyre, in his study of one lost collection, notes that a manuscript would have to reach 1,500 degrees Celsius before it would burn completely; as he puts it 'Rien ne brûle plus mal' ('[almost] nothing is less susceptible to burning').¹⁷ Manuscripts will, however, burn if exposed to prolonged and extreme heat, and medieval fire containment strategies were limited.

Much of the evidence for accidental book collection fires is early. At Croyland Abbey in 1091, a large fire caused significant destruction. By this early date,

¹² In a study of friars' collections, K. W. Humphreys notes that a single friary could have several different formal collections of books: 'one in the Choir or Sacristy, one in the Refectory, a chained reference collection and the books in the communal library from which friars might borrow items'; in 'Introduction', p. xix.

¹³ Humphreys, 'Introduction', p. xix.

¹⁴ See 'Introduction', in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. xxviii.

¹⁵ *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 611.

¹⁶ See *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 464, 610.

¹⁷ Dominique Ribeyre, 'Les disparus du Saint-Quentin', in *Épreuves du temps: 200 ans de la Bibliothèque de Metz*, edited by Pierre Louis (2004), n.p.

the monastery had already amassed over 300 manuscripts, but all of them were lost in the flames.¹⁸ The destroyed manuscripts included the abbey's valuable charters—despite these having been stored in large chests for safe keeping. A contemporary chronicler describes assessing the damage: 'in our charter room we found that although the boxes appeared to be safe and uninjured, yet all the muniments contained in them had been shrivelled up and burnt to ashes by the excessive heat.'¹⁹ A fire of this magnitude was impartial and we would not expect certain types of volumes to have been destroyed in any disproportionate way; indeed, at Croyland, even the documents that had been set aside for safe keeping were lost to the flames.

At Christ Church Cathedral Canterbury, the library was ravaged by a fire in 1067. In his *Vita S. Bregwini*, Eadmer of Canterbury wrote that nearly all of the books were destroyed in the fire—'sacred and secular alike.'²⁰ Since some manuscripts survive from prior to this disaster, Richard Gameson concludes that this is probably an exaggeration, but the library did sustain significant damages and Gameson finds that the fire probably contributed to 'a generation of frantic but piecemeal writing and collecting in the late eleventh century.'²¹ The evidence suggests that the fire impacted the survival rates of early manuscripts from the priory, but it does not seem to have impacted any one sort of book in any disproportionate way (in other words, the fire does not seem to have destroyed one sort of book in greater proportions than any other).²²

About a hundred years later, St Augustine's Abbey, a Benedictine house a short distance from Christ Church Cathedral Canterbury, also suffered fire damage. In 1168, a fire swept through the abbey church and the shrine of St Augustine. Contemporary accounts record staggering damage, but it is not clear how many books were destroyed. In his account of the fire, the chronicler William Thorne writes that 'multae codicellae antiquae perierunt'

¹⁸ Edward Edwards writes that 'more than three hundred volumes, together with about four hundred tracts and minor pieces', but from the phrasing it is not clear if these tracts and other pieces were contained in the lost volumes; Edward Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries: Including a Handbook of Library Economy*, 2 vols (1859), vol. 1, p. 14.

¹⁹ Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 14–15.

²⁰ Quoted in Richard Gameson, *The Manuscripts of Early Norman England (c.1066–1130)* (1999), p. 16.

²¹ Gameson, *Manuscripts*, p. 16. On the survivals from prior to this period, see Richard Gameson, 'English Manuscript Art in the Late Eleventh Century: Canterbury and its Context', in *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest: Churches, Saints and Scholars, 1066–1109*, edited by Richard Eales and Richard Sharpe (1995), pp. 95–144, p. 112. On the acquisition of volumes in the wake of the fire, see below p. 89.

²² On books surviving from before the fire, see A. B. Emden, *Donors of Books to S. Augustine's Abbey Canterbury* (1968), pp. 1–2.

(‘many old *codicellae* have perished’). M. R. James, in his study of the collection, suggests that ‘codicellae’ (literally ‘small books’) refers here to ‘charters and other such documents.’²³ But James suggests that many library books were also destroyed, and he writes that ‘there is a smaller proportion, among the extant books, of eleventh and twelfth century manuscripts than we should have expected.’²⁴ A. B. Emden is more optimistic about the fates of library books in the fire; he finds that approximately fifty library books from St Augustine’s survive from prior to the fire and concludes that this is comparable to survivals from other institutions of this size.²⁵ B. C. Barker-Benfield, in his magisterial study of St Augustine’s library, also suggests that the fire was limited and, following James, takes ‘codicellae’ to ‘refer not to books but to documents, maybe laid at the shrine as records of donation to the saint.’²⁶ While the fire must have been devastating to the community at the time, the damage does not seem to have left a significant mark on the abbey’s library collection.

Thus with the exception of the fire at Croyland, these fires would have had relatively limited impact on manuscript survival as a whole. It is also worth observing that all of them happened before the thirteenth century. Medieval fire prevention strategies started to improve dramatically after this point. After a large fire in London in 1212, the mayor introduced a series of regulations aimed at fire management and prevention. These included a rule that every household had to keep a pot of water outside and an early building code that banned roofs made of rushes, straw, or any other flammable material. These requirements mostly achieved their aims, and although they were limited to London, they seem to have led to a broader interest in fire prevention.²⁷

Another development that was helpful for protecting book collections was the designation of separate library rooms in monastic institutions, which became increasingly common in building plans in the thirteenth century. Of course, these library rooms were not designed with fire resistance in mind. Although institutions took care to prevent water damage by, for example,

²³ M. R. James, *The Ancient Libraries of Canterbury and Dover: The Catalogues of the Libraries of Christ Church Priory and St. Augustine’s Abbey at Canterbury and of St. Martin’s Priory at Dover* (1903), pp. lxii–lxiii.

²⁴ James, *Ancient*, p. lxiii.

²⁵ Emden, *Donors*, pp. 1–2. Emden’s comparison to Christ Church here is perhaps misleading since Christ Church also suffered a fire (see above), but his point still holds.

²⁶ B. C. Barker-Benfield, ‘Introduction’, in *St Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury: Catalogue, First Part*, edited by B. C. Barker-Benfield, CBMLC 13.1 (1990), pp. xlvii–cii, pp. li, liii.

²⁷ These regulations are discussed in Martha Carlin and David Crouch, eds, *Lost Letters of Medieval Life: English Society, 1200–1250* (2013), p. 55.

building libraries on the second floor, the arrangement of medieval institutional libraries made them very vulnerable to fire damage.²⁸ John Davies, who was at Durham Cathedral in the wake of the Dissolution, describes the traditional arrangement of its library in detail:

In the North-side of the Cloisters, from the corner over against the Church-door, to the corner over against the Dorter-door, was, from the height to the sole, within a litle of the ground unto the Cloister-garth, all finely glazed, and in every Window three Pews, or Carrels, where every one of the Old Monks had his Carrel several by himself; to which, having dined, they did resort, and there study their Books, every one in his Carrel, all the Afternoon, till Even-song time. And this was their exercise every day. Their Pews, or Carrels, were finely Wainscotted, and very close; the fore-side having carved work of Wainscot, to let in light to their Carrels, and in every Carrel was a Desk to lay their Books on. And the Carrels were no greater than from one Stanchel [*support*] to another of the Window. Opposite to the Carrels, against the Church-wall, stood certain great Ambries, of Wainscot, full of Books, as well the Ancient written Doctors of the Church, as other profane Authors, with divers other holy men's works.²⁹

This arrangement, in which books are encased in what would have been highly flammable wood panelling, suggests that even by the time of the Dissolution, Durham's library was highly vulnerable to fire damage.

But although libraries such as Durham's were vulnerable, they offered a new form of protection by removing books from the day-to-day operations and threats of the communities that held them. Some institutions took great care to prevent stray sparks from breaking out in their collections, going so far as to ban candles from library rooms.³⁰ Thanks to this development and the changing approaches to fire prevention already examined, library fires were rare in medieval institutions after the thirteenth century.

The relatively few libraries that were set ablaze were often collateral victims of local conflict. In the midst of the anarchy in 1141, Henry of Blois's forces shot flaming bolts through the city of Winchester. In the chaos, Hyde Abbey

²⁸ On the development of the medieval library, see Bell, 'Libraries,' pp. 147–8.

²⁹ John Davies, *The Ancient Rite and Monuments of the Monastical, and Cathedral Church of Durham: Collected out of Ancient Manuscripts, About the Time of the Suppression* (1672), p. 131.

³⁰ Arthur der Weduwen and Andrew Pettegree note that the College of the Sorbonne banned candles from its library; *The Library: A Fragile History* (2021), p. 46. For other examples of restrictions on library use, see Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library* (2008), pp. 18–19.

was entirely demolished, including, apparently, the library. Nunnaminster suffered a similar fate.³¹ A fire set during a series of local riots destroyed a large part of Norwich Cathedral library in 1272.³² These fires, and the others already examined, would have been devastating to their local communities and their book collections, but the evidence of these fires suggests that they happened rarely and it therefore seems unlikely that they would have had a significant impact on either the nature or scope of the corpus of manuscripts that have survived.

To identify the factors that had a greater impact on the surviving record, it is helpful to look at contemporary commentary. Reflecting on the threats to their collections, medieval commentators are most often concerned about damage caused by either human error or malice. Both were significant threats to book collections. The Benedictine rule famously recommends that every member of a monastic institution should be assigned a book each year, and this stipulation exposed medieval library books to a wide range of human threats. A warning towards the end of a Middle English version of the Benedictine rule addressed to nuns outlines some of the concerns around book damage that were in circulation:

That thei be nougt negligent for to leue here [*leave their*] bokes to hem assigned, behynde hem in the quer [*choir*], neyther in cloystre [*cloister*]; nether leue here bokes open other vnclosed, ne withoute kepinge, neither kitte out of no book leef, ne quaier, neyther write therinne; neyther put out withoute leue, neyther lene no book out of the place, ho so vnwitinge or his negligence or mysgouernaunce lest or alieneth. Bote al so clene and enter that thei ben kept, and in same numbre and in the same stat, or in bettere, yif it may, that thei be yolde vp [*surrendered*] agen into the libraries as thei were afore in yer resseyued. Yif there is eny agens these poyns that had trespassed, of that he be in chapitele changeled and corrected.³³

The concerns here—that a book could be left behind, mutilated, defaced, or left open too long—are pronounced.

³¹ Steven Frederick Vincent, 'The Monastic Libraries of the Diocese of Winchester During the Late Anglo-Saxon and Norman Periods' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Western Michigan University, 1981), pp. 75, 98.

³² N. R. Ker, 'Medieval Manuscripts from Norwich Cathedral Priory', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 1, no. 1 (1949): pp. 1–28, pp. 5–6.

³³ The manuscript is Washington, Library of Congress MS Faye-Bond 4. See Betty Hill, 'Some Problems in Washington, Library of Congress MS Faye-Bond 4', in *In Other Words: Transcultural Studies in Philology, Translation and Lexicology Presented to Hans Meier on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, edited by J. Lachlan and Richard Todd (1989), pp. 35–44; quoted in Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (2006), p. 32.

But were they more pronounced for some sorts of books than for others? Not usually; similar warnings appear in a wide variety of volumes. The only surviving compilation of John Audeley's poetry ends with a warning that the book should not be defaced: 'No mon þis book he take away, | Ny kutt owte noo leef—y say forwhy, | For hit ys sacrelege' ('No man should take away this book, or cut out any leaf; I will tell you why: it is sacrilege!').³⁴ Such statements indicate that damage to any sort of manuscript was considered a threat—one that medieval collectors felt had to be very carefully prevented. Even despite its stark warning, twenty-four leaves of John Audeley's poetry book are missing, their absence a reminder of the constant threats that manuscripts faced during the medieval period.³⁵

Of course, we do not know when Audeley's book was damaged, and it may have happened in modern times. But this sort of damage clearly did happen during the medieval period as well. Expenditures on book repair are scattered throughout monastic account rolls of the period. At the Church of St Laurence in Reading, for example, the account rolls note that in 1508 the church paid 20 pence to one John Cokks 'for mending of the gret preksong [*notated music*] boke of Jhesu Masse.'³⁶ Some damage went unrepaired; a romance manuscript that had piqued the interest of the early modern book collector John Leland was already missing 'a Quayre or ii' ('a quire or two') by the time it had fallen into his hands.³⁷

As these examples illustrate, a damaged book was not easily thrown away. In abbeys, monks were expected to repair volumes that had become damaged. During their visitations to Syon Abbey, bishops were required to check, 'If ther be an inuentory or register of the bokes of the library, and how they and other bokes of study be kepte and repayred.'³⁸ A 1482 'library ordinance' from Syon expresses deep concern over the 'great hurtte and notable dayly Enpayrment of oure singler tresour Bokes, of oure Queeres [*quires*], and libraries, for defaute of byndynge, writynge and notynge of queyres.'³⁹ Books

³⁴ Quoted in E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick, 'Fifteenth Century Carols by John Audelay', *Modern Language Review* 5, no. 4 (1910): pp. 473–91, p. 474.

³⁵ See Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (2010), p. 215.

³⁶ Christopher Wordsworth and Henry Littlehales, *The Old Service-Books of the English Church* (1904), p. 44.

³⁷ Quoted in Wilson, *Lost*, p. 116.

³⁸ The articles of visitation are printed in George James Aungier's *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery, the Parish of Isleworth, and the Chapelry of Hounslow Compiled from Public Records, Ancient Manuscripts, Ecclesiastical and Other Authentic Documents* (1840), pp. 277–80, quoted at p. 278.

³⁹ Printed in Vincent Gillespie's 'Introduction', in *Syon Abbey, with The Libraries of the Carthusians*, edited by Vincent Gillespie and A. I. Doyle, CBMLC 9 (2001), pp. xxvii–lxv, p. xlvi. I have added punctuation.

in need of repair were often sent away for rebinding, and it would seem that a considerable industry sprang up around them. Diane E. Booton, whose study of bookbinding in medieval Brittany is the most comprehensive examination of the topic to date, finds that 'Breton financial accounts record more payments to bookbinders than to scribes and illuminators'. She identifies thirty such payments using fifteenth-century registers. Of course not all of these payments would have been for repair or rebinding, and many were undoubtedly for the bindings of new books. But several entries are unquestionably about rebinding and these suggest that it happened with some frequency in the fifteenth century. The prices paid for rebinding ranged from 5 pence paid in 1418–19 to one Magister Guillelmus de Montfort 'pro reparatione et religacione librorum dicte ecclesie' ('for the repair and rebinding of books for the said church') to 60 shillings paid to Yves Sy 'pro reparatione librorum in libraria existentium' ('for the repair of existing books in the library').⁴⁰ The registers suggest considerable variation among the prices for repair and rebinding.

For important books, such as those that were used for the administration of the Divine Office, repairs had to be carried out promptly. Walter, the Bishop of Exeter, found many things in need of repair at his visitation of Hartland Abbey in 1319: 'Librorum eciam defectum, quorum aliqui sunt insufficientes omnino, idem Abbas, sub pena x librarum, Ecclesie nostre Exoniensis Fabrice [sic] applicanda, infra annum a data Presencium faciet emendari' ('There is also a lack with respect to the books, some of which are wholly inadequate; the same abbot, under penalty of 10 pounds [to be applied to the fabric of our Church of Exeter], must correct this within a year of the present date').⁴¹ Prompt repairs were clearly expected.

Despite such expectations, members of the clergy were regularly accused of neglecting their libraries. Upon visiting Salisbury Cathedral in 1420, the Italian bibliophile Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) complained that there were 'amatores verum litterarum perpaucos' ('truly few lovers of literature') there and that the works by Origen that he had hoped to find there were

⁴⁰ Diane E. Booton, *Manuscripts, Market and the Transition to Print in Late Medieval Brittany* (2010), p. 25.

⁴¹ *The Register of Walter de Stapeldon, Bishop of Exeter, (A.D. 1307–1326)*, edited by F. C. Hingston-Randolph (1892), p. 171; my translation. The precise meaning of 'Fabrice' is perhaps somewhat obscure. In their translation of Quinel's statutes, Joseph Goering and Daniel S. Taylor translate 'fabrice ecclesie Exoniensis' as 'the fabric of Exeter Cathedral'; 'The Summulae of Bishops Walter de Cantilupe (1240) and Peter Quinel (1287)', *Speculum* 67, no. 3 (1992): pp. 576–94, quoted at p. 582. I have adopted their approach here.

missing.⁴² Concerns over monks neglecting their libraries were especially pronounced in the tense climate of religious unrest that marked the late fourteenth century. One anti-clerical writer of this period accuses '[c]lerkis possessioners' of hoarding their books (the phrase '[c]lerkis possessioners' means simply 'clergymen who own things', but 'beneficed clergy' seems to be implied here).⁴³ The anti-clerical writer claims that these men 'han manie bokes, and namely of holy writt, Summe by bygging and some by zifte and testamentis and some bi opere disceitis and sutiltees' ('have many books, especially books of Holy Writ, some [which they got] through begging and some through donation, and some through bequests, and some through other deceits and sneaky behaviour'). But, he claims, they refuse to share them with others and they let their books fall into disarray: 'hyden hem from seculer clerkis & sufren þes noble bokes wexe roten in here librarie' ('[they] hide them from secular clerks, and allow these noble books to waste away in their libraries').⁴⁴ We cannot take this statement, marked as it is by anti-fraternal invective, at face value, but it nevertheless suggests a climate of concern over how well monks were preserving and repairing their volumes.

At the colleges, libraries spent considerable sums on repairs, judging from the registers of expenses that survive. Fifteenth-century registers from Cambridge University Library record various payments for the binding and repair of books, including a 1454–5 payment of 7 shillings and 8 pence to a bookbinder 'pro reparacione librorum' ('for the repair of books').⁴⁵ The records of All Souls College Library record various expenditures on book repairs, including a 1456–7 payment to one Iohanni Bokebynder 'pro emendacione et ligacione librorum' ('for the emendation [either correcting or repair] and binding of books').⁴⁶ The titles of books in need of repair are often absent, but when they are given they are typically those of scholastic books that were in frequent use; so in 1446, Exeter College Oxford paid 2

⁴² Poggio Bracciolini, *Lettere: Volume 1*, edited by Helene Harth (1984), p. 20. Translated in Christopher S. Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance: Language, Philosophy, and the Search for Meaning* (2018), p. 138. The passage is discussed in Brian Cummings's *Bibliophobia: The End and the Beginning of the Book* (2022), pp. 86–7.

⁴³ 'Of Clerks Possessioners', in *The English Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted*, edited by F. D. Matthew, EETS os 174 (1880), pp. 114–40, p. 128. The phrase '[c]lerkis possessioners' was common among Wycliffite writings. I base the interpretation here on the entry for 'possessiouner' in the *Middle English Dictionary*, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED34138/>>, accessed 10 March 2023.

⁴⁴ 'Of Clerks Possessioners', in *The English Works*, p. 128.

⁴⁵ See J. C. T. Oates, *Cambridge University Library, A History: From the Beginnings to the Copyright Act of Queen Anne* (1986), pp. 14–15.

⁴⁶ N. R. Ker, *Records of All Souls College Library 1437–1600* (1971), p. 114.

pence for the repair of a single copy of Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*.⁴⁷ Given the twelfth-century date of this text's composition, the copy was likely no more than a century or two old at the time, so we can assume the damage done to it was the result of use and not age.

Of course not all damage could be repaired, and although medieval book owners are often viewed as conservative, they were willing to cull books that they considered too worn out to be useful. Although it is mentioned only indirectly in the record, some books that were beyond repair or thought to be not worth keeping were thrown away or recycled into binding material for new books.⁴⁸ For determining what impact this would have had on the record, it would be helpful to determine whether it happened frequently (and which manuscripts met this fate most frequently), but these questions are not easy to answer, because libraries rarely describe their deacquisition procedures. Occasionally, hints of a library's deacquisition approach emerge. At the Cathedral Church of Saint Peter in Exeter, a 1327 catalogue records the important volumes in the collection, then adds that the library possesses 'Multi alii libri vetustate consumpti Gallice, Anglice, et Latine scripti, qui non appreciantur, que nullius valoris reputantur' ('many other books, wasted with age, written in French, English, and Latin, to which no value is assigned since they are thought to be worth nothing').⁴⁹ It is not clear if any of these particular books have survived, but it is worth noting that none of the known survivals from Exeter is in French and it therefore seems likely that the French books, at least, were destroyed at some point.⁵⁰ On the other hand, many of the survivals from Exeter are in English, so some of the English volumes referred to may not have been destroyed.⁵¹ The age of the books in question is not given and it would be easy to conclude that they must have been very old, but the

⁴⁷ The registers record 'ii d pro reparacione Libri Sententiarum' ('for the repair of the *Book of Sentences*'); quoted in Charles William Boase, 'History of Exeter College', in *Registrum collegii exoniensis: Register of the Rectors, Fellows, and Other Members on the Foundation of Exeter College, Oxford With a History of the College and Illustrative Documents*, edited by Charles William Boase (1894), pp. i-clxxxiii, p. xxxvii.

⁴⁸ So, for example, the visitation report at Salcombe Regis records that the books for Matins had recently been replaced by the Dean and Chapter; 'Visitations of Devonshire Churches', edited by H. Michell Whitley, *Report and Transactions: The Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art* 42 (1910): pp. 446-74, p. 459. Since the old books were deemed inadequate, it seems unlikely that they would have been kept or given to another institution. For evidence that books were recycled as binding material, see below, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Printed in George Oliver, *Lives of the Bishops of Exeter, and a History of the Cathedral* (1861), p. 309. Translated in Wilson, *Lost*, pp. 80-1. See the brief discussion of this description in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 168.

⁵⁰ Survivals in French from English monastic libraries are listed by Madeleine Blaess in 'Les manuscrits français dans les monastères anglais au moyen âge', *Romania* 94, no. 375 (1973): pp. 321-58.

⁵¹ See the list of survivals in Ker's *MLGB*, pp. 81-5.

reference to French books suggests otherwise. The earliest surviving French copied in England dates to the twelfth century, and we cannot expect much French to have been copied in or brought to England before that, so Exeter clearly considered some books that were a century or two old as too old to be useful.⁵²

In some cases, a book might be worn out within a single generation. In his introduction to the *Gesta Herewardi Saxonis*, the author claims that he had searched everywhere for an English version of the life of Hereward (c.1035–1072), but all he could find were some worn out and decaying leaves. He claims to have drawn his own account partly from these leaves and partly from those with first-hand knowledge of Hereward. This means that the author was alive within living memory of Hereward, and that the leaves that he was using must have become worn out faster than the memory of those who had had first-hand knowledge of Hereward.⁵³ The account, preserved in a thirteenth-century copy, could easily have been invented, but, at the very least, it suggests that the author did not think it impossible for a book to become worn out or damaged beyond repair within a single lifetime.

As this example illustrates, old and worn-out books were not necessarily thrown away or recycled right away. We can get a sense of how old books were approached from the 1247–8 book list from Glastonbury Abbey, since it contains, somewhat remarkably, many descriptions of the conditions of books in the collection. These descriptions, which appear for only a limited portion of the volumes, range from ‘noui’, ‘ueteres’, to ‘uetustissimi’ (‘new’, ‘old’, to ‘the oldest’).⁵⁴ The surviving volumes from Glastonbury that have been identified provide a glimpse into what the community considered old at the time of the list. Of the seven volumes that survive, only three have physical descriptions in the catalogue, but the data is nevertheless telling (see Table 1.1).⁵⁵

⁵² For the earliest surviving French literature in England, see *Intercultural Dialogue and Multilingualism in Post-Conquest England: A Database of French Literary Manuscripts Produced Between 1100–1550*, edited by Krista A. Murchison [Milne], <<https://leidenuniversitylibrary.github.io/manuscript-stats/>>, accessed 2 November 2021; see also Milne, ‘French’, pp. 7–9.

⁵³ The text is preserved in the Register of Robert of Swaffham from Peterborough Abbey. The account is edited by S. H. Miller and translated by W. D. Sweeting under the title ‘Gesta Herwardi’, in *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis* (1895), pp. 7–72, pp. 2–3. The passage is discussed by Wilson in *Lost*, pp. 113–14.

⁵⁴ *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 168.

⁵⁵ The list (B39) is printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 167–215. The seven surviving volumes, listed by the numbers assigned to them on list B39, are 7, 39, 60, 156, 263, 310, 312. I have identified these using the list of surviving manuscripts printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al. The dating information is taken from the catalogue.

Table 1.1 Surviving Manuscripts with Descriptions on List B39 in CBMLC

No. on B39	Description on B39	Contents	Modern shelfmark	Date
60	'omnes uetusti set legi possunt'	Augustine on John the Evan.	London, BL Harley MS 1916; one leaf is now BL, Harley MS 5958, f. 87	12th c.
263	'uetusti' ('old')	Julian of Toledo's <i>Prognosticon futuri saeculi</i> , with Latin and Old English glosses et al.	London, BL, Royal MS 12 C. xxiii	early 11th c.
312	'uetustissimi' ('oldest')	'St. Dunstan's Classbook' (Eutyches, with Old Breton glosses)	Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F. 4. 32	9th c.

This list reveals two things. First, members of the abbey clearly had a sense of the relative dates of the books in their collections; the oldest volume is identified as the oldest. Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes, the list reveals that manuscripts were considered old within a relatively short timespan; a manuscript of 50 to 150 years old is described as old, one of 350 to 450 years old is the 'oldest'. It is also worth noting that every book that is known to have survived from Glastonbury has either no description in this catalogue or has a description that stresses its age (rather than any of the other qualities described in the catalogue). At Glastonbury, at least, the books that have survived well are those that were considered old even in the thirteenth century. The available evidence, while limited, all points to the same conclusion: books were considered 'old' relatively quickly (within 50 to 200 years). Books that were considered old and worn out were viewed as worthless; those that were not obviously worn out had much better chances of survival.

Wear, then, seems to have been an important factor, and it merits further investigation. Of course, some types of texts were more likely to be destroyed through wear than others, but identifying which ones is challenging. Institutions rarely provide lists of materials that were thrown away due to wear, and identifying the shape of an absence is a notoriously difficult task. One approach to the problem is to identify the most frequently used books. Yet even this task cannot be done easily. Records of monks' reading practices are relatively scarce, as some of the leading book historians of the field have

observed.⁵⁶ Researchers making pronouncements about which books were read typically rely on data about which texts have survived in the greatest numbers, but of course this method must be avoided here because its underlying premise—that the texts that survive in the greatest number of copies were also produced in the greatest number of copies—is one that this study seeks to interrogate and test. Moreover, even if we could ascertain that a given text had been produced in a large number of copies during the medieval period, we could not conclude from this finding alone that this book was read frequently, or that it was more likely to be worn out through use. Book acquisition often has a weak correlation with book use.

Some guesses about which manuscripts were used the most frequently can be made based on patterns of wear. In her well-known codicological study of booklets, Pamela Robinson notes that smudging, dirt, and folded corners on the outside leaves of a codicological unit may suggest that the unit circulated independently; such marks of wear can suggest a manuscript was used rather than that it simply sat on a library shelf.⁵⁷ Missing leaves, especially at the beginning or end of a manuscript, may also suggest damage due to use. The vast majority of manuscripts on Gisela Guddat-Figge's catalogue of Middle English romance manuscripts are defective in some way—most typically at the beginning or end—and this evidence suggests that these sorts of books were read more often—or, perhaps, simply in more raucous situations—than other sorts of books.⁵⁸ But of course, marks of wear, missing leaves, and other damage can only tell us so much, and distinguishing between different types of damage is not a straightforward task.

Ground-breaking densitometer-enhanced methods of analysing material manuscript evidence has revealed invaluable information about which parts of books were the most frequently read, and they also hold the potential to shine light on which books were the most frequently read.⁵⁹ The densitometer works by shining light on a folio and identifying how much of the light is refracted, which can reveal which parts of a manuscript are most heavily soiled and possibly (though not conclusively) the most handled. While the method is valuable for helping elucidate reading patterns within a single

⁵⁶ See 'Introduction', in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. xxvii.

⁵⁷ See Pamela R. Robinson, 'Self-Contained Units in Composite Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Period', *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978): pp. 231–8, pp. 231–2.

⁵⁸ See Guddat-Figge's *Catalogue*.

⁵⁹ For ground-breaking work using a densitometer to identify patterns in manuscript use, see Kathrine M. Rudy's study of Books of Hours from the Low Countries, 'Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts Using a Densitometer', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2, no. 1 (2010): pp. 1–26.

volume, it is, unfortunately, of little help for the questions at hand; at present the method is not suitable for identifying the books that were read the most frequently during the medieval period, because it is difficult to distinguish between the different owners of a given volume, or to tell the difference between the interests of medieval readers and recent book historians.⁶⁰

Until methods such as this one are refined, some information about book use can be gleaned from the lists of books that were read aloud in the refectory during meal times. A thirteenth-century list of this nature from Bury St Edmunds suggests that patristic works, such as the writings of Gregory the Great, John Cassian, and John Chrysostom, were standard mealtime reading.⁶¹ At Reading, a fourteenth-century list of books that were intended for the refectory included biblical books and commentaries, several books of homilies, and works by Augustine and Gregory the Great.⁶² At Peterborough Abbey, the list of refectory readings includes books of psalms, several works by Bede, and commentaries on biblical texts.⁶³ These lists suggest that refectory reading, which was aimed at an entire community and undoubtedly shaped by this broad audience, was centred around traditional, established authors. If monasteries strayed from these established works, they were not eager to record it on their book lists.

We might expect that the literary tastes of individual monks might not be reflected in their collective refectory readings, and it is therefore worth considering the evidence that survives of individual reader preferences. Information about these can be gleaned from medieval borrowing lists, although relatively few of these survive, unfortunately. As the editors of the shorter Benedictine library catalogues have observed, there is only one surviving collection of precentor's records from a Benedictine house related to the practice of lending out books to monks at Lent. This collection, from Thorney Abbey, records books on loan during the abbacy of Reynold of Water Newton (1323–47). Commonly borrowed books include Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, works of Augustine and Isidore, works of canon law, and books on the administration of confession.⁶⁴ A shorter borrowers' list from the Augustinian Anglesey Abbey contains saints' lives and miracle stories, and works by Thomas Aquinas, among other books on loan.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ The problem is addressed by Rudy in 'Dirty', p. 25.

⁶¹ See *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 88–9.

⁶² The list (B74) is printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 451–3.

⁶³ The list (BP21) is edited in *Peterborough*, ed. Friis-Jansen and Willoughby, pp. 47–9.

⁶⁴ On the few lists that survive, see 'Introduction', in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. xxvii. The list (B100) is printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 598–604.

⁶⁵ The list (A1) is edited by Webber and Watson in *The Libraries of the Augustinian Canons*, pp. 3–4.

Aside from Lent there were many other opportunities for monks to borrow books. At St Albans, a list of sixty-three books on loan produced sometime between 1420 and 1437 leads its editors to suggest that ‘a considerable portion of the collection was off the library shelves, perhaps over a long period.’⁶⁶ The list features a remarkable range of texts. Works on the administration of confession, such as Richard of Wetheringsett’s *Summa qui bene praesunt*, are common, and may reflect the interests of these particular borrowers, which include the subprior Hugh Eyton.⁶⁷ Given the broad range of the borrowed volumes on this list, it seems that a wide variety of volumes could be subject to wear.

Aside from wear, borrowed books were also at risk of being permanently removed from their institutional collections and, once they had lost their institutional protections, vulnerable to destruction. Some of the evidence for this sort of removal emerges from a 1337 list from Christ Church Cathedral Canterbury of books that had gone missing while borrowed by monks or while loaned outside the community. Most common among the missing books are Thomas Aquinas’ commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and *vita* and miracle stories of the local saint Thomas Becket. Service books, including antiphonals and diurnals, appear particularly commonly among the borrowed volumes.⁶⁸ Judging from all of these borrowing lists, Thomas Aquinas’ works were clearly popular.⁶⁹ And at Canterbury at least, scholastic works, local saint material, and service books were clearly prone to removal through borrowing. A book lost from an institutional collection was not necessarily destroyed, and some of the volumes listed as borrowed and lost from Christ Church Canterbury undoubtedly survived, but very few of these have been located and it is likely that without the stability of an institutional collection many of them were destroyed.⁷⁰

As the presence of scholastic and legal works on these borrowing lists suggests, institutional libraries often loaned books to students. Spalding Priory loaned Alan Kirton a collection of works for his study at Oxford. The twelve books, which had not been returned after Kirton’s return to Spalding at the end of his studies, included scholastic texts (such as Peter Comestor’s *Historia scholastica* and Peter Lombard’s *Sententiarum libri IV*), and works of canon

⁶⁶ The list (B87) is in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 554–63, quoted at p. 555.

⁶⁷ See the list (B87) in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 554–63.

⁶⁸ See the discussion below, p. 104.

⁶⁹ It is worth noting that another of Thomas Aquinas’ works, a *Summa* in four volumes, appears on a list of books returned to Ely in 1329 (B27). The books had been on loan to Roger of Huntingfield, whom the editors of the list identify as a former fellow of Peterhouse; see *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 127–30.

⁷⁰ See the discussion below, pp. 103–5.

law (such as Gregory's *Decretales* and Gratian's *Decretum*).⁷¹ From Ramsay Abbey there is a thirteenth-century list of books on loan to one Johannes de Haliwell. The list shows similar interests; we find among the twelve books listed some of the classics of the medieval library, such as Isidore's *Sententiae*, and also works of canon law such as Gratian's *Decretum*, three volumes of Gregory's *Decretales*, and an unidentified summary of the *Decretals*.⁷² As we might expect, these student borrower lists reflect a pronounced interest in works of scholasticism and canon law.

Much like students, friars often borrowed books. A fourteenth-century cartulary from Suffolk contains five records of books on loan to Augustinian friars dating from the late thirteenth to the middle of the fourteenth century, each with the stipulation that the books must be returned to the convent of Clare when the friar dies.⁷³ The books on loan are: Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, a breviary, Thomas Aquinas' *Super tertium sententiarum*, Aegidius Romanus' *De erroribus philosophorum et de materia celi*, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologica*, and Jacobus de Voraigue's *Sermones episcopi Januensis*.⁷⁴ It is not clear if these books were returned; as David d'Avray has noted, the distinctive lifestyle of friars meant that their volumes were more vulnerable than those of other religious communities.⁷⁵

Loans to those outside religious houses sparked significant concerns. An accusation of loaning books recklessly to outsiders was levelled at Geoffrey Lambourn, the Abbot of Eynsham (1351–88), upon an inspection of his abbey. According to the accusation, the loaned-out books had never been returned; these included service books, works of canon law, and priests' guides. Lambourn wrote an appeal. He claimed to know the location of some of the books; he admitted that he had loaned out one missal and one psalter, but he knew that the borrowers of these volumes were trustworthy. He claimed the other cases of missing books were not his fault; according to Lambourn, several books had gone missing at the hands of the Bishop of Lincoln, John Gynwell (1347–62), at a time when the house had had no abbot—apparently a risky period for an abbey library.⁷⁶ Books on loan were clearly at risk; not only were they more likely to suffer from wear, but they could also be lost or potentially destroyed.

⁷¹ The list (B95) is printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 590–4. Books sent to Oxford are noted on the book list of Dover Priory; see *Dover Priory*, ed. Stoneman, p. 11.

⁷² See the list (B69) in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 415–17.

⁷³ The list is preserved in British Library, Harley MS 4835. It is described in *Friars*, ed. Humphreys, pp. 4–5.

⁷⁴ The list is given in *Friars*, ed. Humphreys, pp. 6–7.

⁷⁵ See below, p. 83.

⁷⁶ The list (B33) is printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 153–4.

We may conclude this brief examination of use and borrowing patterns by observing that service books and books about confession were often borrowed—and likely used. Aside from these books, the most commonly used books appear to have been patristic works, which were read aloud in the refectory, and the sorts of works that were borrowed by students, including scholastic works (such as Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*, Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, and the works of Thomas Aquinas) and works of canon law (such as Gregory's *Decretales* and Gratian's *Decretum*). There are relatively few records of more secular works being read openly and enthusiastically within monasteries, but we must assume that this did happen and was simply not reported. The wear on the surviving corpus of medieval romances indicates that at least some portions of medieval society were reading these more secular works frequently and points to the importance of considering a variety of types of evidence when identifying patterns of use.⁷⁷ Commonly used books were not necessarily more likely to be destroyed, but, as the list of losses from Christ Church Canterbury suggests, many commonly used books would have been more vulnerable than those that were less frequently read.

Aside from the books that were frequently loaned out or read, other types of documents were also vulnerable to destruction. A large number of single-leaf documents circulated in medieval England and these were particularly prone to loss. Since their survival patterns differ so significantly from those of manuscripts containing multiple leaves, single-leaf documents are not considered here at any length; nevertheless, they are worth considering briefly.⁷⁸ A witness to this sort of ephemera appears in a mid-fifteenth century medical text in the Thornton Manuscript. The text recommends a charm for childbirth that involves tying a parchment leaf to a woman. The leaf was supposed to contain a Latin inscription about Mary's labour. Many such leaves must have been used and subsequently cast aside.⁷⁹ Single-leaf documents were also used for announcements or for political verse, which would be appended as notices to church doors. R. M. Wilson, in his discussion of the practice,

⁷⁷ Book lists occasionally mention French romances as being in the possession of monks; see the list of romances that appear on Benedictine book lists in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 912. For example, a manuscript containing *La mort le roi Artu* and Robert de Boron's *Roman de l'estoire dou Graal* appears on a list of books bequeathed to Evesham Abbey by several high-ranking members of the clergy: Prior Nicholas of Hereford (d. 1392), Prior John Marcle (fl. fourteenth century), and the sacrist John of Bromsgrove (fl. late fourteenth century). The manuscript is no. 69 on the list of bequests to Evesham (no. B30) printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 145. See also Blaess, 'Manuscripts', p. 357.

⁷⁸ See above, p. 16.

⁷⁹ See the discussion in Martha D. Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix* (2007), p. 171.

gives the example of ‘a bill sett vppon þe north Chirch durre in seynt Mighels Chirch’ in 1494 that contained verse in defence of one Laurence Saunders, who had been accused of inciting a riot.⁸⁰ Wilson finds that a variety of such documents could be posted on church doors, including seditious ballads, political satire, and scathing lyrics.⁸¹ An industry for the production of such documents seems to have emerged. In 1431, William Warbelton proclaimed to the Duke of Gloucester that he had apprehended the Wycliffite leader Jack Sharpe, along with ‘bille casters and kepers’.⁸² By 1450, the king had forbidden the posting of bills in public places, which suggests that doing so had become relatively common.⁸³ Yet the vast majority of these bills have not survived and it is clear that they were treated as ephemeral and easily cast aside.

Also treated as ephemeral were the numerous single quires that circulated during the medieval period. The thirteenth-century library list from the Premonstratensian Abbey of St Radegund in Bradsole, Kent, records whether a book is ‘non ligati’ (‘unbound’) or ‘in quaternis’ (‘in gatherings’), and David Bell finds that there are ‘some two dozen’ books described using such terms in the book list—‘about 16% of the entries’.⁸⁴ He finds that ‘a number of them comprise sermons, *notulae*, or *uitae sanctorum*’ and suggests that they may have been left unbound either to save money or to facilitate circulation.⁸⁵ Indeed, as Ralph Hanna has famously shown, texts were sometimes produced—and deliberately left—in individual or easily separable quires (known as booklets) to allow for flexible circulation and production.⁸⁶ Alex Gillespie, drawing on the work of Joel Fredell on political pamphlets, notes that single-quire and limp-bound documents allowed for the reshaping of textual compilations.⁸⁷ While some lone quires were designed to be bound into larger collections, some circulated on their own, and we know from the references to these that a great deal of them existed that have not survived. To give one of countless examples, a witness account given by the Abbot of

⁸⁰ Wilson, *Lost*, p. 192.

⁸¹ See the discussion in Wilson, *Lost*, pp. 190–7.

⁸² The letter is ‘William Warbelton to the Duke of Gloucester and the Council, Claiming the Reward for Taking Jack Sharpe’, in *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History; Including Numerous Royal Letters: From Autographs in the British Museum, and One or Two Other Collections*, edited by Sir Henry Ellis, 2nd edn, 5 vols (1824), vol. 1, pp. 103–5, pp. 104–5.

⁸³ See the discussion in Wilson, *Lost*, p. 193.

⁸⁴ Bell, *Libraries*, p. 160.

⁸⁵ Bell, *Libraries*, p. 160.

⁸⁶ Ralph Hanna famously makes the argument in ‘Making Miscellaneous Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century England: The Case of Sloane 2275’, *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 18 (2015): pp. 1–28.

⁸⁷ Alexandra Gillespie, ‘Bookbinding’, in *The Production of Books in England 1350–1500*, edited by Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (2011), pp. 150–72, p. 169. Gillespie quotes from Joel Fredell’s “Go litel quaier”: Lydgate’s Pamphlet Poetry’, *JEBBS: Journal of the Early Book Society* 9 (2006): pp. 51–73.

Bylegh (Beyleigh or Beeleigh) in the early fifteenth century describes a strange message that the witness heard read out from a quire while he was at Colchester Abbey; two men, whom he names as Beloyne and William Blithe, stood at the window by the entrance to the chapel and one ‘toke oute a lital quayer of his bosim of papere & red [b]eron diverse [b]lyngis’—including a mysterious prophecy.⁸⁸ The quire has not been identified among surviving manuscripts, and it stands as a witness to the vast number of loosely bound quires that are now lost. The evidence surveyed here therefore suggests that a large number of single quires and single leaves circulated in the medieval period; some of these were undoubtedly bound into larger collections but the relative paucity of such quires and leaves in modern-day collections suggests that these documents were vulnerable to damage, neglect, and destruction.

Before turning away from the topic of damage caused by wear, it is important to consider the wear of medieval service books.⁸⁹ These books tended to be kept separate from library books because they were in constant use during services. Missals, for example, supplied the texts for the celebration of mass and grailes (or graduals) supplied the chants.⁹⁰ Such books provided the clergy with crucial information about how to run the service, including what to say, which songs to sing, and which feasts to commemorate. Put in simple terms, service books functioned like users’ guides or cookbooks for the liturgy: they provided practical, easy-to-follow instructions for how to carry out the daily services of the Church. Every religious institution, no matter how small, was expected to have a collection of service books. By the late medieval period, a small parish church was supposed to have at least eight or nine of them. The range is illustrated by the thirteenth-century statutes of the diocese of Bath and Wells, which request that all parish churches have at least eight distinctive liturgical texts: an antiphonal, a gradual, a psalter, a troper, an ordinal, a missal, a manual, and a breviary.⁹¹

Since service books were used so frequently, they were typically kept close to the church choir, either placed on lecterns in the choir itself or stored nearby so they could be brought in during services. Their function in religious communities was practical, and they were read and consulted on an ongoing basis. For small parish churches, service books formed the core of

⁸⁸ The account was edited by Benjamin Williams in ‘Appendix A’, in *Chronicque de la traïson et mort de Richart Deux roy dEngleterre*, edited by Benjamin Williams (1846), pp. 267–77, p. 274.

⁸⁹ For those who see service books as prone to overuse, see above, p. 1, no. 3.

⁹⁰ For a longer explanation of the different types of service books and their roles in medieval institutions, see below pp. 160–1, and the Appendix.

⁹¹ Katherine French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (2000), pp. 182–3.

their book collections. In larger religious communities, such as cathedrals and abbeys, the service book collection was often kept separate from a much larger institutional book collection, which was housed in a designated library.⁹² But even in a larger institution, service books typically comprised a significant portion of the institution's complete holdings. From the Cathedral Priory of Ely in the late eleventh century we have a list of 287 books, and a striking 79 of these are service books; this is 27.5 per cent.⁹³ The figure is important for showing the significant role that service books played in medieval book culture more broadly.

During their routine inspections of churches within their episcopates, bishops and their commissioners would regularly inspect the churches' collections of service books, which tended to be classified, due to their important role in supporting the mass and other ceremonies, with the ornaments of a church. A common complaint was that service book collections were worn out. So, for example, the register of Bishop Rede records a 1409 visitation of the Church of Chichester that found the service was not being performed properly because, 'the books are very defective and discordant.'⁹⁴ Fourteen churches in Devonshire were inspected in 1301 and at all but one of them the service book collection was found deficient in some way; volumes were found 'badly bound', 'much worn and defective', 'worn out and unfit for use', 'too much worn', and 'old and decayed.'⁹⁵

Service books seem to have been in need of repair more often than other sorts of books. This is at least the impression that emerges from the book lists included in the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues (CBMLC), in which books listed as being in need of repair are often liturgical ones.⁹⁶ The

⁹² Not all service books were kept separate from library books. A book list from Exeter Cathedral Church does include many service books, but it is worth noting that the list is part of a church inventory and not a library list, so the presence of service books on the list should not surprise us; see Oliver's *Lives*, pp. 301–11.

⁹³ The inventory records 'ccc libri xiii minus, ex his xix. missales sunt et viii. lectionales et ii. benedictionales xxii. psalteria et vii. breviarum et ix. antiphonarii et xii. gradalia' ('300 books, less 13; of these 19 are missals, and 8 lectionaries, and 2 benedictionals, 22 psalters, and 7 breviaries, 9 antiphonals, and 12 graduals'). The list is printed in *Liber Eliensis, ad fidem codicum variorum*, edited by E. O. Blake, vol. 1 (1848), p. 283. It is discussed in the introduction to the Ely book list (B27) in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 127.

⁹⁴ See Robert Rede, *The Episcopal Register of Robert Rede, Ordinis Predicatorum, Lord Bishop of Chichester, 1397–1415*, edited by Cecil Deedes, 2 vols (1908–10), vol. 2, p. 370.

⁹⁵ 'Visitations of Devonshire', ed. Whitley, pp. 451–62. Only at Culmstock were all the books described as at least 'fairly good' (p. 461).

⁹⁶ A record from the house of Grey Friars in London from 1494 notes that Andreas Bavard, finding the books in the choir out of date, commissioned a legend, an antiphonal, a psalter, and a gradual, and ensured many other books would be repaired; see the record in *Friars*, ed. Humphreys, p. 217. There are, of course, records of library books being repaired as well; see, for example, *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 610–11. The account rolls of Norwich describe only one expenditure on rebinding:

same impression also emerges from the chart of payments made to bookbinders across the channel that was compiled by Diane Booton. Here, the books listed as being in need of repair are a Bible, existing books from the library ('librorum in libraria existentium'), a certain book from the choir ('quendam librum in choro'), a missal, another missal, all the antiphonals of the cathedral at Vannes, a 'manuale divinorum officiorum' (probably another missal), a fourth missal, and a book described as an old antiphonal.⁹⁷ These are all service books, with the exception of the first two items. Although it is rarely acknowledged, it seems that service books, and especially missals, were in need of repair more often than other sorts of books.

In priories, expenses for the repair of books and other library costs often fell to the prior, while the day-to-day maintenance of the library collection usually fell to the precentor.⁹⁸ In parish churches, the repair and replacement of service books was usually the duty of the vicar. So in 1315, Walter de Stapeldon, the Bishop of Exeter (1307–26), worried that the vicars of the Church of Saint Budock and Behedlan did not have a sufficient stipend to support the church and its collections. Among other issues, the bishop found that the books were in need of repair and called on the vicars to maintain them, while setting aside 'quadraginta solidos sterlingorum, in subsidium reparacionis Librorum et aliorum defectuum' ('forty shillings of silver to support the repair of books and other defects').⁹⁹ A vicar could be blamed if a

'item pro religacione libri dompni Episcopi' ('item: for the rebinding of the books of the lord Bishop; I take 'religacione' to mean rebinding here because the list uses other terms for other sorts of binding work). It is not clear which book is intended. The rolls also mention the binding of two old books: 'Item pro ligatura duorum librorum antiquorum' ('Item: for the binding of two old books'); see Ker, 'Medieval Manuscripts from Norwich', pp. 26–7. The list (B57) is also printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 292–9.

⁹⁷ The relevant items, with their numbers on Booton's list are: 1 'Bible' ('Bible'), 8 'librorum in libraria existentium' ('of the existing books from the library'), 9 'quendam librum in choro' ('a certain book from the choir'), 10 'pour relier le misal de ladite eglise' ('for binding the missal of the said church'), 13 'ung missel couvert de neuff' ('a missal newly covered'), 15 'tout [antiphonals] reliés de neuff et pour avoir relié de neuff manuale divinorum officiorum et couvert de peau de serff' ('all the antiphonals bound anew and for having bound anew a *manuale divinorum officiorum* and covered [it] in deer hide'), 16 'relié de neuff . . . ung missel' ('a missal . . . bound anew'), 21 'pour avoir relié ung veil antiphoner de ladite eglise' ('for having bound an old antiphonal of the said church'); see Booton, *Manuscripts*, pp. 25–6. Not all binding is rebinding and I take a cautious approach to the evidence. I therefore ignore any mentions of 'religando' and its variants unless the evidence indicates clearly that some kind of rebinding process is involved, since the word could be used to refer to both binding and rebinding. I take 'reparando', 'pro reparacione', and variations of these terms as evidence of rebinding. For French entries, I take 'relié de neuf' as evidence of rebinding but ignore entries described simply as 'relié', which could simply be describing a first binding.

⁹⁸ See *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 292; *Dover Priory*, ed. Stoneman, p. 7, and *The Libraries of the Augustinian Canons*, ed. Webber and Watson, p. xxv.

⁹⁹ *The Register of Walter de Stapeldon, Bishop of Exeter, (A.D. 1307–1326)*, edited by Francis Charles Hingeston-Randolph (1892), pp. 326–7. The bishop also found books in need of repair at Burlescombe and at Zennor; see pp. 90–1.

service book was damaged while under his watch. At a visitation to Salcombe Regis in 1301, inspectors noted ‘an old and decayed antiphoner; and a legenda in a similar condition, the interior decayed through the neglect of the vicar, who allowed it to be kept in a damp place.’¹⁰⁰ Perhaps to prevent a similar incident from occurring, the vicar had, by the time of the 1330 visitation, carried away a chest containing several service books into his own private quarters.¹⁰¹

Judging from the complaints in these bishops’ registers and from other evidence, service books were frequently damaged, and even the most prized service books could be decommissioned when they were beyond repair. In 1426 the chaplains of the chapel of St Mary, Ichistoke, were instructed to ‘keep the missal, breviary and other books’ within the chantry and to ‘repair the same when necessary at their own charges, and when these are worn out or taken away, provide others as good or better.’¹⁰² Sometimes a worn volume was viewed as an opportunity for change. In 1517, the canons at Royston Priory asked the Bishop of London if they could change their liturgy from the Use of Bangor to the far more common Use of Sarum, and they supported their request in part by claiming that their old service books of Bangor Use were worn out.¹⁰³ Aside from wear, changing tastes must have also had an impact on the proportion of service books that have survived.

Changing tastes also posed a threat to the books that were more typically held within the library of an institution (as discussed in more detail above, service books were often kept separate from an institution’s library, although this was not always the case). Periods of mass social reorganization were met with corresponding changes in literary taste. At Malmesbury, Abingdon, Winchester, and at other great houses, the aftermath of the Norman Conquest was marked by an intellectual shift: a pronounced interest in the copying of

¹⁰⁰ ‘Visitations of Devonshire’, ed. Whitley, p. 459.

¹⁰¹ The books are said to be ‘deficient in Ecclesia, set dicitur quod sunt in domo Vicarii’ (‘missing from the church, but it is said that they are in the vicar’s dwelling’); see *The Register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter (A.D. 1327–1369): Part I, 1327–1330*, edited by F. C. Hingeston-Randolph (1894), p. 575. There is evidence to suggest that vicars treated service books as part of their personal estates; Katherine French examines clerical wills from the diocese of Bath and Wells and finds that of the 18 wills of vicars from this diocese, 6 (33 per cent) record the donation of books to the local parish or clergy, which suggests that vicars viewed some books as their own property; see French, *The People*, p. 183.

¹⁰² Translated in *The Register of John Stafford, Bishop of Bath and Wells: 1425–1443, From the Original in the Registry at Wells*, edited by Thomas Scott Holmes, vol. 1 (1915), p. 51.

¹⁰³ John Harper, ‘Contexts for the Late Medieval Pontifical of Anian, Bishop of Bangor: Issues of the “Local” and the “More-Than-Local”’, in *Music and Liturgy in Medieval Britain and Ireland*, edited by Ann Buckley and Lisa Colton (2022), pp. 17–49, p. 27. See the discussion of the use of Bangor below, p. 70.

Latin patristic works.¹⁰⁴ William of Malmesbury recounts how the first Norman abbot of Malmesbury, Godfrey of Jumièges, was disappointed with the abbey's library and felt compelled to improve it, and the editors of Malmesbury's text suppose that Godfrey's concern was not just with the size of the library but with its contents.¹⁰⁵ It is not clear what happened to any volumes that were deemed inadequate during this period of change, but there is a great deal of contemporary evidence of books being dismantled for binding scraps.¹⁰⁶ As changes in glossing and *ordinatio* took place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, books lacking the latest technology could also become obsolete.¹⁰⁷ In some cases, cost may have been a factor; Alex Gillespie notes that the boards and other materials used in bookbindings were expensive, and she finds several examples of these being reused.¹⁰⁸

Some works were recycled because they were no longer of interest. In the thirteenth or fourteenth century, an eleventh-century glossed copy of the *Aeneid*, still apparently in good condition, was dismantled to be used as binding material.¹⁰⁹ A similar sort of recycling is very clearly on display in British Library, Arundel MS 57. The main text in this manuscript is the English translation of the *Somme le roi*, known as the *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, which was copied in 1340. The text is an autograph of Michael of Northgate, who was a monk of St Augustine's Canterbury and who donated it to the abbey's book

¹⁰⁴ See George Garnett, *The Norman Conquest in English History: Volume I: A Broken Chain?* (2021), p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ Rodney M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* (1987), p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ In his book on the use of decommissioned volumes for binding scraps known as pastedowns, Ker notes that this kind of recycling did not begin in the sixteenth century; indeed, the practice was very much in use as early as the twelfth century (although Ker suggests that the practice became much more common around 1520); see *Fragments*, p. vii. In his study of the early collections of Christ Church Cathedral, Gameson gives several examples of books being recycled as pastedowns, including an eleventh-century collectar that seems to have been recycled after it was copied due to defects in the copy; see *Earliest*, pp. 34–7. Mark Faulkner gives many examples of manuscripts that contain recycled manuscript material in their bindings. In almost all of the cases for which Faulkner provides a date, this process of recycling took place in the eleventh or twelfth century; see Mark Faulkner, 'The Uses of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts, c.1066–1200' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2008), pp. 33–4. Faulkner suggests that most of these manuscripts were recycled because they were too worn to be useful but the evidence is inconclusive.

¹⁰⁷ Bell gives the example of some glossed Bible books at Durham which, by the 1400s, were viewed by the community as obsolete and which were ultimately transferred to Durham College Oxford; see Bell, *Libraries*, p. 130. Bell notes that such volumes were often kept in an institution's spendement (a storeroom used for books and other religious items).

¹⁰⁸ Gillespie, 'Bookbinding', p. 163. On the recycling of book boards, see also Hannah Ryley, *Re-using Manuscripts in Late Medieval England* (2022), p. 62.

¹⁰⁹ The fragment of Virgil's text is now in British Library, Royal MS 8 F xiv, ff. 3 and 4; it is bound with a collection of theological works; see 'Royal MS 8 F XIV', in *Explore Archives and Manuscripts*, British Library, <http://searcharchives.bl.uk/IAMS_VU2:LSCOP_BL:IAMS040-002106403>, accessed 2 May 2022. The fragment is mentioned in Thomson, 'The Library', p. 623. For other examples of recycling that took place during the medieval period see Wright, 'Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', pp. 148–9.

collection. An extra quire was added to both the start (ff. 1–12) and end (ff. 97–108) of this codicological unit, perhaps as a means of protecting Michael of Northgate's text.¹¹⁰ The quire at the beginning of the manuscript is a fragment of Aristotle's *De anima* and the quire at the end is a commentary on Matthew (possibly that of Johannes Rupella).¹¹¹ These must have been added around the same time that the *Ayenbite* was copied, because the first contains a table of contents for the *Ayenbite* (ff. 2r–4r) that is copied in the same hand as the *Ayenbite* itself.

The fate of the last fragment is a bit difficult to comprehend. It was copied in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century and it is not clear why it was recycled some fifty to seventy-five years later.¹¹² More information is available about the first fragment. It dates to the second half of the thirteenth century and contains a gloss from the late thirteenth century, which suggests that the text was still being used and read some forty to eighty years before it was recycled.¹¹³ The gloss itself reflects an early medieval tradition of Aristotle commentary, and not the later tradition that began in the late thirteenth century with the translation of William of Moerbeke.¹¹⁴ It is not clear why the monks decided to recycle this particular manuscript. The important role of *De anima* in scholastic contexts may suggest that this copy was read frequently, and that the copy might have met its fate because it began to fall apart from overuse. But the recycled quire seems to have been in good condition when it was reused, so this part of the manuscript, at least, did not fall apart from overuse. It seems much more likely that the text, its gloss, or the style of one of these had simply fallen out of fashion in the early fourteenth century; perhaps the gloss was rejected in favour of a more modern version, such as that of Moerbeke. A book list from St Augustine's from the early fifteenth

¹¹⁰ See Pamela Gradon, 'Introduction', in *Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyt, or, Remorse of Conscience: Introduction, Notes and Glossary*, vol. 2, EETS os 23 (1979), pp. 3–4.

¹¹¹ See Gradon, 'Introduction', p. 4, no. 2.

¹¹² For the date of the last fragment, see Gradon, 'Introduction', p. 4.

¹¹³ Gradon, 'Introduction', p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Pamela Gradon, drawing on the work of Malcolm Parkes, notes that the text and glosses closely resemble those of Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 114 and, on this basis, argues that the fragment represents one of the early versions of Aristotle's text that was used for the *Corpus vetustius* (the standard collection of Aristotle's works that was used in the thirteenth-century schoolroom), and not the later translation of Aristotle by William of Moerbeke ('Introduction', p. 3, n. 1). Gradon suggests that the glossed text was recycled because a section of f. 3v was copied out of order and 'thus became available to Dan Michel for the writing of his preface and list of contents' (p. 5). But this explanation, which depends on the immediate rejection of a freshly copied text, strikes me as untenable; as Gradon herself acknowledges, the gloss on *De anima* was added years after the text was copied, which suggests that *De anima* had been used as a functional text. Moreover, there were at least forty years between the glossing on *De anima* and the copying of the *Ayenbite*—a long period for scrap parchment to have sat unused.

century lists a wealth of manuscripts containing *De anima*, including one collection of Aristotle's *Naturalia* described as being 'de nova translacione' ('in a new translation') (item 1024 on the list), and perhaps the abbey considered older versions disposable.¹¹⁵ Regardless of why the quire was recycled, the example illustrates plainly that a manuscript could be dismantled within a mere century of its having been in use.

Changing tastes posed a pronounced threat to manuscripts containing liturgical music. This was particularly true of those containing polyphonic music (music designed to be sung by two or more voices), which evolved quickly, rather than plainchant, which evolved much more slowly.¹¹⁶ Using administrative documents from churches and wills and other documents owned by private individuals, Andrew Wathey identifies 174 references to polyphonic music manuscripts and finds that very few of these seem to survive today.¹¹⁷ More recently, Karen Desmond has taken a quantitative approach to the survival of polyphonic music. Drawing on the catalogue produced by William J. Summers and Peter M. Lefferts, Desmond notes that there are 75 manuscripts surviving from the thirteenth century containing polyphony that were copied in the British Isles. She finds that an incredible 57 of these are fragmentary—76 per cent.¹¹⁸ The largest portion of these fragmentary manuscripts were torn up by the monks of Worcester, who in the late fifteenth century embarked upon an extensive project of recycling their music manuscripts—which were in these cases only about two centuries old at the time.¹¹⁹

The need for updated material also rendered many service books vulnerable; they quickly became obsolete due to changes in the liturgy and its

¹¹⁵ The list is printed in James, *Ancient*, pp. 196–406 and in *St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury*, edited by B. C. Barker-Benfield, CBMLC 13.1 and 13.2 (2008). Items on the book list of *St. Augustine's* containing *De anima* include nos 1026, 1027, 1028, 1029, 1031, 1033, 1035, 1036, 1040, 1049, and 1052 (see *St. Augustine's*, ed. Barker-Benfield, CBMLC 13.2, pp. 1045–61); there are also many commentaries on the same text, including one by Johannes de Rupella (no. 1096; 13.2, p. 1096).

¹¹⁶ For the idea that plainchant was more conservative than polyphony, see Karen Desmond's talk, 'Fragments and Reconstructions: The Written Traces of Polyphonic Liturgical Music in Medieval Worcester and Beyond', Dark Archives Conference (2020), <<https://aevum.space/darkarchives/20/fragments-and-reconstructions-the-written-traces-of-polyphonic-liturgical-music-in>>, accessed 5 February 2022. See also Andrew Wathey, 'Lost Books of Polyphony in England: A List to 1500', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 21 (1988): pp. 1–19. Wathey argues that polyphonic books 'were relatively short lived by comparison with other forms of book' because the music they contained fell rapidly out of fashion, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Wathey, 'Lost', pp. 1–19.

¹¹⁸ Desmond works with William J. Summers and Peter M. Lefferts's *Manuscripts of English Thirteenth-Century Polyphony* (2016).

¹¹⁹ Desmond, 'Fragments'.

administration.¹²⁰ It is worth examining these changes here, however briefly, since they are little studied and poorly understood, for reasons which will over the course of this study become clear. In the wake of the Norman Conquest, large cathedrals typically had their own customs for the celebration of mass and other ceremonies. These customs—known as local uses—covered everything from the rules to be followed during the mass, to the texts to be read out during ceremonies, to the feast days and local saints to be observed. These rules and observances were codified in bound volumes such as a missal (which contained the offices for mass). The regulations for these uses, and the roles of observants, were typically codified in an ordinal (or customary or *consuetudinalis*).¹²¹ Books such as these survive in extremely limited numbers, but they formed the spiritual and administrative foundation of the medieval mass and the Divine Office.¹²²

The large eleventh- and twelfth-century cathedrals, including Lincoln, Chichester, and Wells, are thought to have had their own distinct uses in this period, and these would have influenced practices within each cathedral's local diocese.¹²³ But a movement towards greater liturgical uniformity began to take hold in the thirteenth century and led to a widespread shift away from local liturgical practices and towards the adoption of the liturgy in use at the Cathedral Church of Salisbury (also known as the Use of Sarum).¹²⁴

Why did the Sarum Use become standard, instead of one of the other regional uses? The reasons for the importance of Sarum Use are obscured somewhat by the paucity of surviving sources, but O. T. Edwards, in his wide-ranging study of Sarum Use antiphonals, suggests that the development of

¹²⁰ The general trend is remarked upon by Ryan Perry in 'The Sum of the Book: Structural Codicology and Medieval Manuscript Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval British Manuscripts*, edited by Orietta Da Rold (2020), pp. 106–26, p. 121.

¹²¹ Richard W. Pfaff notes that a distinction is sometimes drawn between the *consuetudinalis* and the ordinal in that the former is 'concerned mainly with monastic officeholders'. But Pfaff notes that 'the line is often blurred'; see *The Liturgy in Medieval England: A History* (2009), p. 203. Although ordinals are arguably not service books (in the sense that they give regulations for the service rather than the words of the service), they are closely related to service books and so will be considered here; on the question of whether ordinals can be considered service books, see 'Objects Recorded in the Inventories', in *Norwich Archdeaconry: Inventory of Church Goods, 1368*, edited by Aelred Watkin, part 2 (1947), pp. xxv–ci, at p. xxv.

¹²² See the discussion of the survival rates of these books below, pp. 203–5.

¹²³ William Smith, *The Use of Hereford: The Sources of a Medieval Diocesan Rite* (2015), pp. 1–2. Smith writes that prior to the thirteenth century, 'these were as individual as the architecturally [*sic*] unique foundations that created them' (p. 1).

¹²⁴ Writing on Sarum Use has been rather limited due, in part, to a paucity of evidence, which means that W. H. Frere's relatively early study, *The Use of Sarum* (1898), is still influential. For an overview of those who have written on Sarum Use, see Nigel J. Morgan, 'The Introduction of the Sarum Calendar into the Dioceses of England in the Thirteenth Century', in *Thirteenth Century England VIII: Proceedings of the Durham Conference 1999*, edited by Michael Prestwich, Richard Britnell, and Robin Frame (2001), pp. 179–206, p. 179.

Sarum Use ‘had a standardizing effect’ because ‘it was welcomed by the clergy as providing solutions to many a liturgical problem.’ According to Edwards, Sarum Use ‘was admired for its detailed regulation of services for a non-monastic church, with instructions provided for the celebration of all the services throughout the year, mass and office alike.’¹²⁵ In short, Sarum Use was popular because it offered clear and well-developed guidance for those grappling with the complexities of liturgical regulation and celebration.

The greatest movement towards the widespread adoption of Sarum Use happened between the early thirteenth and mid-fourteenth centuries.¹²⁶ Nigel Morgan has argued convincingly that the Use of Sarum had been introduced throughout the archdiocese of Canterbury by 1325 and was adopted almost universally by 1350.¹²⁷ By the time that Ranulf Higden was writing his *Polychronicon* (between c.1327 and 1360), he could claim of Bishop Osmund of Salisbury that ‘Hic quoque composuit librum ordinalem ecclesiastici officii quem Consuetudinarium vocavit, quo fere nunc tota Anglia, Walla utitur et Hibernia’ (‘It was he who wrote the ordinal [*librum ordinalem*] of the offices of the Church that is called the Consuetudinarium, which almost all of England, Wales and Ireland use’).¹²⁸ By Higden’s time, the near-universality of Sarum Use could be treated as a given.

But we should not mistake the widespread adoption of Sarum Use as a movement towards complete liturgical homogeneity. Though the evidence for it is limited, the change may have happened a bit more slowly in the dioceses of the Benedictine cathedrals such as Winchester and Worcester, where the monastic customs at use in the cathedral would have necessarily differed from those of the local parishes.¹²⁹ Even the dioceses that adopted Sarum Use enthusiastically occasionally maintained local variations.¹³⁰ A few dioceses even maintained their full local uses, but it is unclear how long this situation persisted. The archdiocese of York and the diocese of Hereford both maintained their own customs until the Reformation—a decision which moved Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to complain in 1549 about too much diversity

¹²⁵ O. T. Edwards, ‘How Many Sarum Antiphonals Were There in England and Wales in the Middle of the Sixteenth Century?’ *Revue Bénédictine* 99 (1989): pp. 155–80, p. 157.

¹²⁶ Morgan, ‘The Introduction’, p. 181.

¹²⁷ The only exception given by Morgan is Hereford, which was slower to adopt the Use of Sarum; ‘The Introduction’, p. 183. Morgan writes that ‘[o]f the extant secular Missals and Breviaries of the fourteenth century, after 1325, about 95 per cent or more are of Sarum Use’; the figures are undoubtedly, as Morgan acknowledges, heavily influenced by survival rates (p. 185).

¹²⁸ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis*, edited by Joseph Rawson Lumby, vol. 7 (1879), p. 294.

¹²⁹ See Smith, *The Use*, p. 3.

¹³⁰ See Morgan, ‘The Introduction’, p. 184.

among local uses.¹³¹ Major differences can be found in the calendars and the sanctorale cycles that circulated in these dioceses, as well as the texts and observances of the offices—including the offices of baptism, marriage, and the burial of the dead.¹³² Lincoln and Bangor seem to have also maintained their own uses, although Morgan argues that Lincoln had begun to adopt Sarum Use by the second half of the thirteenth century.¹³³

This major shift towards the widespread adoption of Sarum Use coincided with more practical changes in the administration of the liturgy. In general, the movement was towards greater complexity. Liturgical volumes created before the Norman Conquest are relatively simple; they typically contain prayers and very basic material related to the administration of the mass.¹³⁴ As the needs of ecclesiastical officials increased in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, new collections of liturgical material became increasingly expansive and prescriptive, and old volumes rapidly became obsolete. Richard Pfaff, in his seminal study of the medieval liturgy, uses the term sacramentary to distinguish the early examples, which contain a collection of material about the mass, from these later missals, which provide more complete liturgy for use during the mass and codify a local use.¹³⁵ The change from sacramentary to missal can be seen in a collection of mass material from St Augustine's Canterbury that was produced in the 1190s. In the ensuing decades the liturgy rapidly became more codified and its administration more complex, and the volume was updated frequently to reflect these changes.¹³⁶

As the requirements for a missal became increasingly wide-ranging in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this evolution reduced the need for separate liturgical volumes. As William Smith notes in his study of the Use of Hereford, tropers had effectively become obsolete by the early thirteenth century because the material that they would typically contain had been incorporated into the *missale plenarium*.¹³⁷ By the fifteenth century, much of the material included in *legenda* and antiphonals had been absorbed into breviaries.¹³⁸ All these changes meant that liturgical volumes fell out of date very quickly. It is clear from the early examples of updating and recycling already

¹³¹ Pfaff, *The Liturgy*, p. 466.

¹³² These differences are described by Edwards, in 'How Many', p. 156.

¹³³ Morgan, 'The Introduction', p. 183. While Morgan raises doubts about the existence of the Use of Bangor (p. 180), John Harper finds references to it from the medieval period that support its independent existence; see Harper, 'Contexts', p. 27.

¹³⁴ The largest surviving mass book that was produced before 1100 is the missal of New Minster, Winchester, now Le Havre Bibl. mun. MS 330; see Pfaff, *The Liturgy*, p. 110.

¹³⁵ See Pfaff, *The Liturgy*, pp. 7 and 124, where the difference is clear.

¹³⁶ Pfaff suggests that these updates 'show it being turned into something like a missal', in *The Liturgy*, p. 116.

¹³⁷ Smith, *The Use*, p. 707.

¹³⁸ French, *The People*, p. 183.

given that service books were vulnerable even before these changes took place in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but the evidence suggests that the destruction, recycling, and replacement of service books intensified in the aftermath of these changes.¹³⁹

Sarum Use was itself not static. An inventory of 1452 from the Church of All Hallows Barking distinguishes between not only its service books of Sarum Use and the older ones which were not of Sarum Use, but also between an old Sarum Use and a new one.¹⁴⁰ In the late fourteenth century or early fifteenth century, a Wycliffite commentator remarked directly on the frequent need for new service books, complaining of ‘alle þe studie & traueile þat men han now abowte salisbury vss wiþ multitude of newe costly portos, antifeners, graielis, & alle opere bokis’ (‘all the study and labour that people dedicate to Salisbury Use nowadays, with a multitude of new, costly Portuasses, Antiphoners, Grailes, and all sorts of books’).¹⁴¹

Such updates were, however, often necessary. On a practical level, an out-of-date service book could be a source of considerable problems. When Ralph of Shrewsbury, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, visited Wells Cathedral in 1338, he determined that the service was being performed improperly because the books were in need of repair, and the main ordinal was woefully out of date:

Subsequentur eciam detectum extitit quod libri et vestimenta dicte ecclesie nostre correctione et reparacione necessario indigebant, et potissime quod in libro qui ordinale vocatur ‘Magnus’ inueniebatur defectus, occasione cuius minus decenter et conuenienter in dicta ecclesia divina officia celebrantur.¹⁴²

[Thereafter it also came to be revealed that the books and vestments of our aforesaid church were in need of essential correction and repair, and above all that the book which is called the ‘Magnus’ ordinal was found defective, on account of which the divine services are performed less properly, and less suitably, in the said church.]

¹³⁹ While Faulkner finds some evidence of sacramentaries being recycled in the eleventh and twelfth centuries due to changing liturgical practice, he notes that the evidence for the recycling of liturgical volumes in this period is limited; ‘Uses’, p. 35.

¹⁴⁰ Its inventory collection contains ‘ij. grayelles olde not Salesb[er]ly’ as well as ‘ij. olde antiphoners of olde Salesbery vse’; see ‘Inventory of Church Goods, 1452’, in *Survey of London, All Hallows, Barking-by-the-Tower: Part 1, The Parish Church*, edited by Lilian J. Redstone (1929), pp. 70–5, p. 70.

¹⁴¹ ‘Of Feigned Contemplative Life’, in *The English Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted*, edited by F. D. Matthew, EETS os 174 (1880), pp. 187–96, p. 194. The tract has been ascribed by Matthew to Wycliffe but Julia Bolton Holloway and Daniel Kline exercise reasonable caution about this identification, noting simply that it ‘bears the hallmarks of Wycliffe’s thought’; see Julia Bolton Holloway and Daniel T. Kline, ‘Literary and Cultural Contexts: Major Figures, Institutions, Topics, Events, Movements’, in *Medieval British Literature Handbook*, edited by Daniel T. Kline (2009), pp. 49–81, p. 79.

¹⁴² *The Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1329–1363: From the Original in the Registry at Wells*, edited by Holmes T. Scott (1896), p. 344.

Some out-of-date service books were simply updated. The history of the Hanley Castle Missal illustrates the process well. This manuscript was copied in Worcestershire in the early thirteenth century. By the fourteenth century, its calendar was thought to be out of date, and it was replaced with a new one of Sarum Use (ff. 1r–6v). Other material of Sarum Use (ff. 116r–136v) was also added at the same time. According to William Smith, '[t]hese modifications exemplify a steady process of assimilation to Sarum.'¹⁴³ Updates such as these could extend a manuscript's life in the face of continual changes to liturgical practice.

Sometimes updates to liturgical material were made at a bishop's request. This was the approach taken at Wells Cathedral: 'Preterea injunximus dicto capitulo, quod libri, vestimenta et defectus in ordinali predicto [sic] citra festum sancti Michaelis proximo futurum corrigi facerent et eciam reparari.'¹⁴⁴ ('Henceforth we have commanded the said chapter, that the books, vestments, and defects in the aforementioned ordinal should be corrected and also repaired before the next feast of St Michael.') The register of Bishop of Exeter Walter de Stapeldon contains a 1322 request to the Church of St Eval in Cornwall for the 'invencione, refeccione, et reparacione Librorum' ('creation, updating, and reparation of books').¹⁴⁵

When a liturgical volume could not be updated, it was replaced. As William H. Campbell notes, the introduction of new service books at a diocese must have caused some initial struggle for a local parish priest, who would need to recite new texts at different times of the year.¹⁴⁶ The older volume might be given away to a smaller parish that could not afford more current books; Katherine French notes that the thirteenth-century episcopal statutes of Glastonbury stipulate that monasteries with old liturgical volumes should donate these to local parishes.¹⁴⁷ A volume not fit to be given away was tossed aside or recycled.¹⁴⁸ Sometimes an older liturgical volume found its way into the hands of an individual associated with a given religious community. This tendency helps to explain why a book described as an old mass book of friar's use appears on the book list of the sergent-at-law Thomas

¹⁴³ Smith, *The Use*, pp. 3–4, quoted at p. 4. The manuscript is Cambridge University Library MS Kk.2.6.

¹⁴⁴ *The Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury*, p. 344.

¹⁴⁵ *The Register of Bishop Stapeldon*, p. 330.

¹⁴⁶ William Hopkins Campbell, *The Landscape of Pastoral Care in Thirteenth-Century England* (2018), p. 120.

¹⁴⁷ French, *The People*, p. 183. In his study of the Use of Hereford, William Smith notes that service books that had fallen out of date would pass 'to individuals willing to take them for their private use, or to parishes unable to afford their own liturgical books, or even destroyed as remnants of another age'; see Smith, *The Use*, p. 707.

¹⁴⁸ See Smith, *The Use*, p. 707, and Perry, 'The Sum', p. 121.

Kebell that was compiled in 1500.¹⁴⁹ Members of the clergy sometimes kept decommissioned service books; surveying the wills published in the four-volume set of Yorkshire wills dating from 1346 to 1509, Arnold Hunt finds several service books and suggests that ‘there was a considerable stock of second-hand service books in circulation.’¹⁵⁰

We do not know how often these volumes were recycled, but there is enough medieval evidence of it to suggest it was very common. Mark Faulkner gives the example of some leaves from a tenth-century Breton sacramentary that were recycled within a century or two for the binding of a copy of Gregory’s *Homiliae xl in Evangelia*.¹⁵¹ The process of recycling can be illustrated by one of a great number of missal fragments: British Library, Harley Charter 83 A. 37. This fragment is a single folio. The recto side features a full-folio depiction of the crucifixion, which was taken from a missal that was produced between 1220 and 1230. According to an inscription above the image, the missal belonged to the Church of St John the Baptist in Pirton (Hertfordshire). In the fourteenth century, this missal leaf was recycled and the verso side was used as scrap paper to record a charter between the Church of St John the Baptist and the Lord of Pirton, William le Poer.¹⁵² In other words, within a century or a little more, this missal had already fallen out of use and was being recycled. The utilitarian nature of service books, then, made them particularly vulnerable, not only because they could be used until they were falling apart, but also because they fell out of date very quickly. The evidence, taken together, suggests that service books were particularly prone to destruction from these factors, and we can expect that this would have a significant impact on the proportion of service books that have survived.

Aside from the factors already examined, a book could also become obsolete due to changing scribal practices. In the wake of the Norman Conquest several unique letter forms and older scripts (such as insular minuscule, English uncial, and Carolingian minuscule) fell out of fashion.¹⁵³ This change, and a new emphasis on what Malcolm Parkes has termed the

¹⁴⁹ The list is printed as an appendix in Eric William Ives’s *The Common Lawyers of Pre-Reformation England: Thomas Kebell, A Case Study* (1983), pp. 445–6.

¹⁵⁰ Arnold Hunt, ‘Clerical and Parish Libraries’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1, to 1640*, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (2006), pp. 400–19, p. 403.

¹⁵¹ Faulkner, ‘Uses’, pp. 34–5.

¹⁵² See Walter de Gray Birch and Henry Jenner, *Early Drawings and Illuminations: An Introduction to the Study of Illustrated Manuscripts; With a Dictionary of Subjects in the British Museum* (1879). The missal has been digitized; see ‘Harley Ch 83 A 37’, in *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ch_83_a_37_fs001r>, accessed 28 October 2021.

¹⁵³ See Faulkner, ‘Uses’, p. 31.

‘grammar of legibility’—a paratextual structure including punctuation and word spacing designed to improve the readability of texts—rendered older manuscripts difficult to read.¹⁵⁴ When a script started to become unfamiliar, an attempt might be made to update it. This goal clearly lies behind several modifications to the copy of *Ancrene Wisse* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402. On the first few folia, a scribe, apparently annoyed by the text’s antiquated letter forms, sought to modernize the hand, scraping away the original scribe’s wynn (ƿ), which had fallen out of use, to replace it with a more modern *w*, and scraping away *eth*, to replace it with the longer-standing thorn.¹⁵⁵

But such updates were not always possible, and a book could be decommissioned when its script had become illegible. Sometimes a manuscript in an outdated script might get recycled for bookbinding material.¹⁵⁶ In his study of pre-Conquest manuscripts, Mark Faulkner has found several examples in which a text was scraped away, apparently due to its being in an older script, and replaced with a new text in a new script. One of these is London, College of Arms, Arundel 30, which contains ‘leaves from a copy of Virgil’s *Aeneid* in Phase II Square Minuscule’ (ff. 5–10 and 208) and a ‘leaf of a twelfth-century gradual’ (f. 2) among others, which were scraped clean and reused in the fourteenth century for a compilation of poetry and the chronicle of John of Taxter, a monk of Bury St Edmunds Abbey. All of Faulkner’s examples date from the mid-thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, at which point the older minuscule hands had become unfamiliar.¹⁵⁷

Changes in language—and language use—could also render a manuscript obsolete. Of course there are a few cases of religious houses that are known to have kept manuscripts even when the language they were written in had become unintelligible. Glenise Scott suggests that the conservative nature of religious houses meant that they tended to keep books that were in good condition even if they could not understand them, and Glastonbury’s library catalogue lists whether a book is *legibilis* or not (which suggests that even the

¹⁵⁴ M. B. Parkes, ‘The Contribution of Insular Scribes of the Seventh and Eighth Centuries to the “Grammar of Legibility”’, in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (1991), pp. 1–18.

¹⁵⁵ The changes are apparent on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, f. 1r.

¹⁵⁶ Alexandra Barratt suggests that some manuscripts that were copied in Carolingian minuscule were recycled as binding fragments when the script fell out of fashion and became hard to decipher; see ‘Waste Not, Want Not: Manuscript Fragments in the Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland’, *Parergon* 32, no. 2 (2015): pp. 19–37, p. 30.

¹⁵⁷ Faulkner, ‘Uses’, pp. 30–2.

illegible ones were kept).¹⁵⁸ But the language of a manuscript nevertheless seems to have affected its chances of survival.¹⁵⁹

In some cases, the language of a manuscript could be updated if it fell out of use, but examples of this happening are relatively rare.¹⁶⁰ This process, known as ‘lexical modernization’, can be seen in the glosses to the eleventh-century collection of Ælfric’s homilies in Bodleian MS Hatton 115. In the thirteenth century, the Worcester scribe known by his ‘tremulous’ hand added Middle English glosses to Old English words that had fallen out of use; so, for example, he glosses the Old English interjection ‘efne’ (‘behold!’), which fell out of use in the thirteenth century, with Middle English ‘lo’.¹⁶¹ A need to update lexemes was undoubtedly felt more often by users of vernacular texts than those of Latin ones, which, due to the status of the language in medieval England, exhibit a higher degree of standardization.¹⁶²

It has sometimes been argued that books containing vernacular texts survived less well during the medieval period than books containing Latin, but the evidence for this claim is scarce.¹⁶³ The case for incunabula is a bit clearer. Recent statistical work has provided powerful evidence for the claim that vernacular incunabula from England had a much lower chance of survival than Latin ones.¹⁶⁴ The same claim has been made based on more qualitative evidence by Julian Roberts, who suggests that ‘[i]n the mid-sixteenth century the status of books in English was low in contrast with that of books in the “learned languages”’.¹⁶⁵ But of course the status of vernacular incunabula

¹⁵⁸ Scott, *Vernacular*, vol. 1, p. 20. The Glastonbury list is B39 in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 169–215. The catalogue is also printed in Thomas Webb Williams, *Somerset Mediaeval Libraries, and Miscellaneous Notices of Books in Somerset Prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries* (1897), pp. 55–78.

¹⁵⁹ Scott, *Vernacular*, vol. 1, p. 20.

¹⁶⁰ See the work of Andreas Fischer, who, drawing on the work of Roy Liuzza, claims that the practice is ‘not very frequent’, in ‘The Vocabulary of Very Late Old English’, in *Studies in English Language and Literature: ‘Doubt Wisely’: Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, edited by M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (1996), pp. 29–41, p. 32.

¹⁶¹ For the term ‘lexical modernization’ and an excellent examination of the Worcester scribe’s glosses to these homilies, see Fischer, ‘Vocabulary’, pp. 38–9.

¹⁶² For other vernacular examples, see Faulkner’s ‘Uses’, pp. 132–5.

¹⁶³ Bernard O’Donoghue states that Old English had become illegible by Chaucer’s day and describes the survival of Old English poetry in terms of its ‘precariousness’ in ‘Old English Poetry’, in *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, edited by Michael O’Neill (2010), pp. 7–25, p. 7. For those who argue that vernacular works have survived less well than other sorts of works see above, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Green et al., ‘Shape’, p. 174. See also the discussion by Rudolf Hirsch in *Printing*, p. 11 (also discussed above, pp. 3–4). See the discussion of English manuscripts after the Dissolution below, pp. 181–4.

¹⁶⁵ Julian Roberts suggests that beginning in ‘the period 1550–1640 . . . the proportion of English books in libraries gradually rises from the negligible to the dominant’, in ‘Extending the Frontiers: Scholar Collectors’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1, to 1640*, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (2008), pp. 292–321, p. 294.

would have differed in key ways from that of vernacular manuscripts, so we cannot assume that vernacular manuscripts fare the same in this respect—or that the two vernaculars of medieval England (English and, arguably, French) would have fared the same.¹⁶⁶

Mark Faulkner has found that in the wake of the Conquest fewer English manuscripts seem to have been recycled for binding material than Latin ones, but since contemporary book lists attest to far fewer English volumes than Latin ones this disparity tells us very little about the relative survival rates of the two languages.¹⁶⁷ Middle English does not seem to have been recycled as binding material very often during the medieval period, judging from the surviving evidence.¹⁶⁸

Looking at the developments undergone by one collection, that of Christ Church Canterbury Cathedral Priory, is helpful here, because it provides quantitative data that can serve to illuminate the more qualitative evidence already considered. During the medieval period, the priory held a relatively large number of volumes containing French, but the survival rate of these volumes seems surprisingly low.¹⁶⁹ Of the eighteen French volumes that appear on a book list copied between 1320 and 1326, only one has been found in a modern collection.¹⁷⁰ There may of course be others that survive that simply cannot be identified, but for the sake of comparison we can use as a rough estimate a survival rate of 1/18, or about 5.6 per cent. By contrast, approximately 164 of all the 1,793 books included on the same list have been identified in modern collections and can be said to have survived—about 9.1 per cent.¹⁷¹ Although more books may eventually be located and these figures may change, the difference suggests clearly that manuscripts containing French from Christ Church Canterbury had a lower survival rate than the survival rate of the collection as a whole.

The lower survival rate of volumes containing French could be because these volumes were used more frequently than other books and thus were more likely to be misplaced, stolen, or thrown away due to wear. On the other

¹⁶⁶ As Ardis Butterfield notes, there was once a tendency to refer to English as England's only vernacular, while in fact the different varieties of French spoken in England should also be considered vernaculars; see *Familiar*, especially p. 275, and Ardis Butterfield, 'Chaucerian Vernaculars', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009): pp. 25–51, at pp. 26, 29–37.

¹⁶⁷ See Faulkner, 'Uses', p. 35.

¹⁶⁸ All the datable binding fragments of Middle English romances listed by Guddat-Figge in her *Catalogue* were recycled after the medieval period; see the discussion below, p. 183.

¹⁶⁹ The collection of Christ Church Cathedral Canterbury is discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁰ This is Harley MS 636; see James, *Ancient*, pp. 122; 510–511. This list is discussed further below.

¹⁷¹ The figures for surviving manuscripts and the size of the collection here have been taken from Buringh, *Medieval*, p. 479.

hand, the lower survival rates of volumes containing French may be a result of changing approaches to the language. One piece of evidence that supports this second interpretation is a fragment of a fourteenth-century copy of Pierre D'Abernon of Fetchem's *Lumere as lais* (1267) that was retrieved from the binding of a 1468 register and is now in the Canterbury Cathedral archives.¹⁷² It seems to me highly likely that this fragment is from the copy of the *Lumere* that appears on the cathedral's early fourteenth-century book list.¹⁷³ If so, the French book would have been created and added to the cathedral's library in the early fourteenth century, only to be destroyed for the sake of a binding some 150 years later, at a stage when the evidence suggests that French books were gradually—though by no means completely—falling out of fashion.¹⁷⁴

Indeed, numerous French volumes seem to have been destroyed in this way. In their study of French manuscripts from the twelfth century, Maria Careri, Christine Ruby, and Ian Short reflect on the 'fragilité du corpus' ('fragility of the corpus'); they find a large number of fragments among the surviving French manuscripts from the twelfth century (of the 102 manuscripts on their list, 27 are fragments) and suggest that the proportion of fragmentary manuscripts is unusual relative to Latin manuscripts of the same period.¹⁷⁵ Many of these served as bookbinding fragments and they appear to have been torn up deliberately. It is usually not possible to determine when the original manuscripts or documents were torn up to create binding fragments; most of the fragments are no longer in bindings (and in the case of fragments that are still in bindings, the exact date of manuscript destruction cannot usually be determined with any certainty, as discussed below).

It is worth pausing to examine the evidence in aggregate. As we have seen, the corpus of twelfth-century French writing is unusually fragmentary relative to Latin writing of the same period; given that a large portion of relevant fragments were retrieved from bindings, it seems that twelfth-century French

¹⁷² The fragment is now Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library MS Add. 128/47. See Ker, *MMLB*, vol. 2, pp. 321 and 323. Ker notes that the binding fragments at Canterbury were, for the most part, taken from business books bound at Canterbury; see p. 313. The fragment is described in Gameson, *Earliest*, as no. 39, pp. 367–70.

¹⁷³ This is item 1522 on the book list for Christ Church Canterbury Cathedral Priory; see 'Tituli librarium de libraria Ecclesie Christi Cant., et contenta in eisdem libris, tempore H[enrici de Estria] prioris', in James, *Ancient*, pp. 13–142, p. 128.

¹⁷⁴ On the idea that the production of French literature was gradually declining in the fifteenth century, see Milne, 'French', pp. 16–17. This decline was neither complete nor linear; see the discussion in the footnotes below.

¹⁷⁵ Maria Careri, Christine Ruby, and Ian Short, *Livres et écritures en français et en occitan au XIIIe siècle: Catalogue illustré* (2011), p. xxxv. The twelfth-century manuscripts on this list are from any area (so the list is in no way limited to England), but Careri, Ruby, and Short find that 66 per cent of all twelfth-century manuscripts containing French were produced on the British Isles; *Livres*, p. xvii. Of these, most are from England.

was at least somewhat prone to being recycled. We have also seen some examples of poor survival rates of manuscripts containing French from England's institutional collections. While the Cathedral Church of Saint Peter in Exeter held French, English, and Latin books in 1327, only English and Latin books from this institution have been identified in modern collections, and there is no evidence that any of the French books have survived. At Christ Church Canterbury, the survival rate of manuscripts containing French (about 5.6 per cent) is notably lower than that of the collection as a whole (about 9.1 per cent)—at least based on manuscripts that have been identified. From the same institution we find the example of a French work that was created in the fourteenth century, then torn up only about 150 years later. The evidence, while limited, all points in the same direction; it suggests that manuscripts containing French had lower survival rates in England than those containing Latin.¹⁷⁶

This finding is perhaps not surprising given the history of French literary production on the British Isles. As I have shown elsewhere (while building on a growing body of scholarship on the role of French in late medieval England and on the British Isles in particular), the surviving manuscripts indicate that on the British Isles, the production of French literary manuscripts (which are defined here, as above, using the approach of Dean and Boulton) reached its peak during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries before gradually declining in the tumultuous political and social climate of the late fourteenth century. While literary works in French continued to be produced on the British Isles in the late fourteenth century and throughout the fifteenth—and while the notion of a linear decline in French production during this period has been firmly and unequivocally rejected by scholarship of the past few decades and must, therefore, be avoided—the manuscripts that survive suggest that French literary production on the British Isles was nevertheless reduced during this period.¹⁷⁷ It should therefore not surprise us if French texts were devalued and destroyed in England during this same period.

French books in England, then, seem to have had lower survival rates than those in Latin. Was the same true of English? There are nineteen manuscripts described as containing works in English on the book list from Christ Church Canterbury that was copied between 1320 and 1326. R. M. Wilson, in his

¹⁷⁶ I am currently working on a more comprehensive study of this issue and my work so far has pointed to the same finding.

¹⁷⁷ See Milne, 'French', pp. 10–17. On the persistence of French in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in various domains (including educational and legal ones), see, for example, Butterfield, *Familiar*, pp. 313–35.

study of lost literature, finds that four of these can be said with certainty to have survived: an Old English gloss on the Rule of St Benedict (British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A. iii; 11th or 12th century); a book described in the catalogue as a ‘Cronica uetustissima’, which is now known at the Parker Chronicle and is the oldest surviving version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 173; 11th century); the Wessex Gospels (British Library Royal MS 1 A xiv; 13th century); and a chronicle described in the catalogue as ‘Cronica Latine et Anglice’ (British Library MS Cotton Domitian viii; late 13th or 14th century). One other manuscript, an English version of Genesis, may also survive, in Bodleian Library MS Junius 11.¹⁷⁸ To the volumes identified by Wilson we could add the Edwin Psalter, although this case is somewhat complicated, because it contains Latin versions of the psalms with Old English and Anglo-Norman translations.¹⁷⁹ The survival of volumes containing English, then, is either 26 per cent or 32 per cent, depending on whether the Genesis is counted. This is about three times the survival rate of the collection as a whole.

The reason behind the high survival rates of English books from Christ Church Canterbury can be explored by investigating the histories of individual volumes. The Wessex Gospels manuscript is inscribed with the name of Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), the Archbishop of Canterbury. The volume likely passed to him along with other Christ Church volumes at the dissolution of the house in 1540, although Cranmer did acquire some of his manuscripts before the dissolution.¹⁸⁰ Cranmer was particularly interested in early theology and in the history of England’s Church, and these interests may explain why the Wessex Gospels manuscript was added to his collection.¹⁸¹ The last of the survivals listed by Wilson, a copy of what is known as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, was read by the Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker (1504–75).¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Wilson, *Lost*, pp. 77–8. The Wessex Gospels are described on the book list from Christ Church as ‘Textus iv Euangeliorum Anglice’.

¹⁷⁹ The manuscript is Trinity College Cambridge MS R. 17.1 (James, *Ancient*, no. 987). It was produced at Christ Church Canterbury and appears as no. 323 on the Christ Church book list; see ‘Tituli librorum’, in James, *Ancient*, p. 51. Wilson notes that the psalter appears on the book list from Christ Church but does not count the Edwin Psalter among surviving English texts; pp. 78–9.

¹⁸⁰ See ‘Royal MS 1 A xiv’, *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_1_A_XIVv>, accessed 22 December 2021. See below, pp. 107–8.

¹⁸¹ On Cranmer’s collecting habits and interests, see D. G. Selwyn, ‘“Books With Manuscript”: The Case of Thomas Cranmer’s Library’, *The British Library Journal* 23, no. 1 (1997): pp. 47–59, especially p. 48; and D. G. Selwyn, ‘Thomas Cranmer and the Dispersal of Medieval Libraries: The Provenance of Some of His Medieval Manuscripts and Printed Books’, in *Books and Collectors, 1200–1700: Essays Presented to Andrew Watson*, edited by James P. Carley and Colin G. C. Tite (1997), pp. 281–94.

¹⁸² See the catalogue entry for ‘Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173: The Parker Chronicle’, in *Parker Library on the Web*, <<https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/wp146tq7625>>, accessed 23 April 2022.

Parker's interests, much like those of Cranmer, tended towards older volumes with relevance to modern church reform.¹⁸³ The motivation behind Parker's interest in this particular chronicle is clear; Parker left annotations in it and Nicholas A. Sparks, in his study of these annotations, finds that they are focused on 'the doings of archbishops, bishops, and other persons involved in affairs of church and state.'¹⁸⁴ These two volumes, then, were saved because early collectors felt that these volumes reflected the history of the early Church in England.

The two Cotton manuscripts, on the other hand, seem to have been selected for preservation on account of their language. They were acquired at some point after the Dissolution by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571–1631), whose collection, which includes five of the nine copies of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that survive, reflects a pointed interest in older texts in English.¹⁸⁵ The Edwin Psalter could have been rescued for any number of reasons. In the sixteenth century it passed, along with at least twenty-four books from Christ Church Canterbury, into the collection of Thomas Nevile, who was the dean of that institution. Nevile gifted this substantial collection—which numbered at least 126 manuscripts—to Trinity College Cambridge, apparently to preserve it, and it has remained there in safety. In his analysis of Nevile's collection, Philip Gaskell finds that it was about two-thirds theological volumes and contained about seventeen volumes of 'philological, philosophical and scientific works'; the Edwin Psalter could have been prized for its philological value or for its theological content.¹⁸⁶ It is therefore clear that these five English volumes were preserved because they were of interest to early modern collectors—either because they represented the history of England's early Church, or because they offered insight into England's early linguistic landscape.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ See the discussion of Parker's interests below, pp. 200–1.

¹⁸⁴ For the identification of the annotations in the Parker Chronicle and an analysis of these annotations, see Nicholas A. Sparks, 'Finding Matthew Parker in Manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 108, no. 1 (2014): pp. 107–11, especially pp. 110–11.

¹⁸⁵ See the catalogue entries for 'Cotton MS Tiberius A III', in *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Tiberius_A_III>, accessed 23 November 2021; and 'Cotton MS Domitian A VIII', in *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Domitian_A_VIII>, accessed 18 December 2021.

Examples of English texts collected by Cotton are given in Richard Ovenden's study of his collecting habits in 'The Libraries of the Antiquaries (c.1580–1640) and the Idea of a National Collection', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1, to 1640*, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (2006), pp. 527–62, pp. 545–55.

¹⁸⁶ See the discussion of Nevile's collection and the motivations behind his donation in Philip Gaskell's *Trinity College Library. The First 150 Years: The Sandars Lectures 1978–9* (1980), pp. 80–1.

¹⁸⁷ See the discussion of these antiquarians' interests below, pp. 200–13.

A different fate seems to have befallen a few other English volumes from the Christ Church Canterbury collection. Two manuscripts from Christ Church in English have survived only in fragments; these had been cut up and recycled as book wrappers. One of these is an Old English version of Gregory's *Dialogues* that was copied in the early eleventh century (now Canterbury Cathedral MS Add. 25). The other is an Old English *Regula canonicorum* from the middle of the eleventh century, which Wilson suggests is now Canterbury Cathedral Box ccc no. xixa. Both of these are older fragments, and although it is not clear when they were recycled, it seems possible that the community recycled them when they had ceased to be legible. The evidence from Christ Church Canterbury therefore suggests that Old English manuscripts were sometimes recycled during the medieval period, but those that survived these earlier purges had from that point onwards a high probability of surviving, largely due to the particular interests of early modern antiquarians. In sum, if a manuscript in English had the good fortune of surviving long enough to become antique, it had a very good chance of survival after that point.

The investigation thus far has been aimed at determining which books were more likely to be damaged or destroyed due to overuse or due to changing tastes or reading habits (and, concomitantly, which sorts of books are likely to have lower survival rates). But some damage and destruction was not so straightforward. What happened to books that were stolen or misplaced from institutional or private collections? Many undoubtedly survived, merely changing hands, but some must have gone missing and they are therefore worth considering here. It is well known that libraries took great care to prevent theft by, for example, adding curses and chains to their books.¹⁸⁸ But even in the late medieval period when book chaining had become more common, it was not at all universally practised; chains were expensive, made comparison between volumes difficult, and prevented books from being loaned out—a practice that was stipulated by the Benedictine rule.

Examples of deliberate theft are numerous and, judging from the curses that were added to books as a protection against thieves (a practice that Ker

¹⁸⁸ Although John Willis Clark (*Libraries in the Medieval and Renaissance Periods* [1894], p. 49) and others suggest that the practice of chaining books declined with the rise of print due to the greater affordability of this medium and the resulting decline in book costs, it is worth noting that most of the examples identified by William Blades in his survey of chained books date from after the Reformation, and it is clear that the practice persisted long after the rise of print. See William Blades, *Books in Chains: And Other Bibliographical Papers* (1892).

finds was ‘commoner earlier than late’), it was perceived as a real threat.¹⁸⁹ It was also met with a serious punishment; many curses threaten anyone who steals a book with excommunication. This was not an empty threat, judging from a 1253 letter about a book stolen from Reading Abbey that suggests the culprit should be excommunicated. The stolen book had contained Grosseteste’s *Templum Domini*, a section of the Bible, and other texts.¹⁹⁰ Were certain books more likely to be stolen than others? No clear pattern emerges from the surviving evidence, and as is clear from the example of Grosseteste’s *Templum Domini* (a somewhat practical text that seems to have circulated in utilitarian manuscripts), thieves did not necessarily target lavish luxury volumes.

The fates of stolen volumes are usually uncertain, and many of them undoubtedly survived into subsequent generations, but the removal of volumes from institutional collections would have left them more vulnerable to destruction.¹⁹¹ Glenise Scott gives the example of Lindisfarne, where four books were taken away in the early fifteenth century by Roger de Maynesford, the bursar. The books were not there seven years later and they may have been simply taken elsewhere, but none of them can be identified today and it seems likely that they were destroyed.¹⁹² In some cases along these lines, however, the issue at hand may be the identification process itself. Once a volume was removed from an institutional library, its ex-libris inscription was often removed, which meant that it could no longer be identified as having once belonged to that library. Modern techniques using UV light can sometimes reveal erased ownership marks, but many of these marks have been lost entirely. Manuscripts taken outside institutional collections were therefore not only more likely to be destroyed but also more likely to be ‘lost’ from the

¹⁸⁹ The examples of deliberate theft are numerous; one example of such a theft was committed by William de Fenton, a clerk of Carlisle who stole a book worth 100 marks from the Archbishop of York in the fourteenth century; see Cavanaugh, *Study*, p. 338. For another example of theft, see list BA6 in *St Augustine’s Abbey Canterbury: Other Sources, Appendices and Index*, edited by B. C. Barker-Benfield, CBMLC 13.3 (1990), pp. 1667–72. On book curses in earlier volumes, see Neil Ker, ‘The Migration of Manuscripts from the English Medieval Libraries’, *The Library* 4, no. 1 (1985): pp. 1–11, p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ The point is made by the editors of the letter. See the letter and its introduction in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 448–51.

¹⁹¹ For a discussion of books that went missing while out on loan, see Bell, ‘Libraries’, pp. 145–6. For the idea that books outside institutional collections tend to be more vulnerable, see Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 168. Treharne notes that, in contrast, ‘manuscripts in private and commercial hands are at risk of being on the open market, where collections can be dispersed, and whole medieval and early printed books broken up for maximum profit’ (p. 168). Treharne’s account is focused on modern collections but it is nevertheless relevant here since the roots of modern collections can be traced back to the early modern period (see below, especially pp. 147–8).

¹⁹² Scott, *Vernacular*, vol. 1, p. 19.

record. Theft, then, posed an existential threat to medieval books, but no clear patterns emerge from the evidence, and it does not seem that medieval instances of theft led to certain types of manuscripts having significantly lower chances of survival than others.

The threat of theft, whether accidental or deliberate, was especially pronounced for friars' books and it is to them that we must now turn. Examining the evidence for friars' preaching manuals, David D'Avray finds that only a handful survive from two collections that he estimates must have originally held hundreds. He posits that friars' books were 'more vulnerable' than those of the older orders.¹⁹³ The evidence from friars' collections seems to support this; Neil Ker lists only 340 manuscripts that survive from the medieval collections of friars; of these survivors, 200 are from Franciscan institutions.¹⁹⁴ Friars' books were not tied to any given library but to the province in which a friar operated. Dominican communities were supposed to keep a list of their books and the friars that held them. But D'Avray, observing that '[t]his sort of regulation seldom works properly', finds that it would have been exceptionally difficult to keep track of books on loan. Books owned by friars were therefore far more likely to be sold off or lost than books tied to the more stable orders, and they were destroyed in far greater numbers.¹⁹⁵

One final category of book that was particularly subject to loss and damage must be considered here, and that is books that were subjected to religious censorship. Although public book burnings were rare in England prior to the Reformation, books that fell prey to censorship were sometimes mutilated and defaced.¹⁹⁶ And censorship could take other forms; Somerset, who has explored the evidence related to Wycliffite books in detail, finds that manuscripts were sometimes rebound to hide potentially heretical material. Somerset helpfully distinguishes between 'primary censorship' as censorship carried out by those in authority and 'secondary censorship' as that which is carried out by 'those subject to them.'¹⁹⁷ Building on the foundational work of Nicholas Watson, Somerset finds examples of both primary and secondary censorship emerged in response to concerns of Wycliffe and his followers.

¹⁹³ David D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (2005), pp. 46–8, quoted at p. 46. On the low survival rates of friars' books, see also Humphreys, 'Introduction', pp. xx–xxiii. Humphreys finds that the lists from friars collections (setting aside the collections of the Austin Friars at York) include '550 or so manuscripts' of which only twelve can be identified; see p. xx and the discussion above, pp. 32–3.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in K. W. Humphreys, 'The Loss of Books in Sixteenth Century England', *Libri* 36, no. 4 (1986): pp. 249–58, p. 249.

¹⁹⁵ D'Avray, *Medieval*, pp. 46–8, quoted at p. 48.

¹⁹⁶ On the infrequency of book burning prior to the Reformation, see below, pp. 165–6.

¹⁹⁷ Somerset, 'Censorship', pp. 255–7.

Among many examples of the latter, she notes that in a copy of Thomas Walsingham's *Short Chronicle* the names of knights who are described as being sympathetic to the Lollard movement have been expunged through scraping. This scraping, which must have happened before 1397, reflects a growing concern in England that Lollardy was becoming a threat.¹⁹⁸ We might also count among examples of secondary censorship the vast number of books that were never written due to concerns over Wycliffite content.¹⁹⁹ The challenges that Margery Kempe faced while trying to find someone willing to write down her visions are suggestive of the numerous books that went unwritten amidst the testy religious climate of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. While these books were not 'lost' in any traditional sense, their absence has nevertheless left a mark on the record of surviving books in the sense that the volumes representing orthodox religious practices were more likely to have been produced in the first place than more heterodox volumes.

Medieval book collections, then, were far from static. While their owners did expend considerable efforts to preserve their books, these were not always successful and clearly much was lost. Owners were, moreover, willing to throw away or recycle volumes that had ceased to be useful, whether due to overuse or to changes in practices, script, or language. Although the evidence for these practices is relatively scarce—especially in the case of book destruction, which in many cases would have left no trace—there is nevertheless enough of it to suggest that many books were thrown away or recycled for other uses during the medieval period.

As we have seen, missals, graduals, and other service books appear frequently among references to recycled or destroyed texts, and it is clear that the unique role they played in the daily life of the clergy—which was, in terms

¹⁹⁸ Somerset, 'Censorship', pp. 255–7.

¹⁹⁹ The foundational article about the censorship of Wycliffite material in medieval England is Nicholas Watson's 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitution of 1409', *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995), pp. 822–64. Watson's model has been extended and refined in recent years. Among those who have contributed to this movement is Katherine Kerby-Fulton, who argues that the impact of the Arundel Constitutions varied widely among different types of writing and should not be overstated in *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (2006), pp. 397–401. Michael G. Sargent has raised questions about the impact of the Constitutions on certain genres of vernacular literature, including saints' lives and sermons; see 'Censorship or Cultural Change? Reformation and Renaissance in the Spirituality of Late Medieval England', in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, edited by Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (2011), pp. 55–72, p. 65. For further discussion and other examples, see Krista A. Milne [Murchison], *Manuals for Penitents in Medieval England: From Ancrene Wisse to the Parson's Tale* (2021), pp. 13–15.

of these books' frequency of use and propensity for falling out of date, much like that of a modern cookbook, map, or almanac—made them particularly prone to destruction. While it happened less frequently, books that were more typically held in an institution's library (rather than its service book collection) were also destroyed or recycled. This could happen when a book fell out of date, whether due to changing glossing practices, scripts, or linguistic use. It could also happen when a book was damaged due to use, and while the evidence for use is limited, borrower lists suggest that works of scholasticism, canon law, and other student texts were among the most frequently used volumes during the period. Signs of wear on manuscripts that contain Middle English romances also suggest frequent use. While it is sometimes claimed that works in the vernacular were more prone to destruction than other sorts of books, the evidence presented here indicates that this was true only of manuscripts containing French. By contrast, those containing English had relatively high survival rates—due, in part, to the work of early modern collectors—and we can expect that a greater proportion of these manuscripts have survived. There is no evidence of luxury manuscripts being disproportionately destroyed during the medieval period, nor is there any evidence of more secular books being disproportionately destroyed. The greatest threats to manuscripts housed in institutional collections during the medieval period seem to have been changing tastes, practices, and writing systems.

One further observation can be made about the destroyed and recycled material identified here. While the age of lost manuscripts is not always known, a clear pattern emerges from the material. At Exeter, books were described as being worthless within only a century or two of being copied. Leaves of a *Life of Hereward* had begun to fall apart within a single lifetime. A copy of Aristotle's *De anima* was recycled a mere forty to eighty years after it was last updated. At Pirton, the missal of a parish church was recycled within about a century of the date at which it was copied. A gradual was scraped for reuse after only a century or two. Polyphonic music books were recycled after only two centuries. Manuscripts containing French were decommissioned and recycled after only a century or two. With the limited but important exception of manuscripts that were destroyed because their scripts were no longer legible, all the destroyed manuscripts examined here met their fate only a century or two after being copied. These were not ancient volumes.

Indeed, once volumes had reached a certain age they tended to be treated with extra reverence, with the twelfth-century chronicler William of Malmesbury, for example, describing a Bible from the days of Aldhelm

(c.639–709) as exhibiting ‘antiquitatis uenerandum’ (‘venerable antiquity’).²⁰⁰ In the early fourteenth century, a group of friars based in London began cataloguing copies of various works in ninety different religious houses; the works they were interested in, and which now form the basis of the well-known *Registrum Anglie de Libris Doctorum et Auctorum Veterum*, are mostly patristic authors and theologians who were writing no later than the twelfth century.²⁰¹ Volumes and authors of 200 or more years old were clearly imbued with special significance.

In sharp contrast, almost all of the destroyed volumes considered here had fallen into the ambiguous and perilous age between being too new to be treated with reverence and too old to be viewed as current or fashionable. As we shall see, it is this uneasy stage between the new and the old—the period during which a manuscript possesses what I describe here as ‘age without vintage’—that proved the most dangerous in the life of a medieval manuscript. The significant danger of this stage will prove to be a recurring theme across many of the key episodes of book destruction that lie at the heart of this investigation.

The analysis of book loss thus far has been based on material evidence and on contemporary descriptions of loss and damage. Such evidence can be useful for exploring both the sorts of threats that medieval book collections faced and the ways in which such threats were perceived. It can also provide some preliminary qualitative insights into the relative proportions of manuscripts that met various fates during the medieval period. But the utility of this type of evidence for understanding survival patterns is nevertheless limited. It can tell us very little about how many books were destroyed, or about how many of one sort of book were destroyed relative to another. And even if it could reveal such information, the high value placed on manuscripts (and the knowledge that they contain), and the cultural and political weight of the damaged book, mean that we cannot expect medieval descriptions of loss to be completely honest or representative.

²⁰⁰ Edited and translated in William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*, edited by M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson, vol. 2 (2007), pp. 566–7, translation quoted in Faulkner, ‘Uses’, p. 185. For a discussion of this passage and for other examples of old books being venerated, see Faulkner, ‘Uses’, pp. 185–9.

²⁰¹ See R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse, ‘Preface’, in *Registrum Anglie de libris doctorum et auctorum ueterum*, Latin Text established by R. A. B. Mynors, edited with an introduction by R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse, CBMLC 2 (1991), pp. xiii–xvii, p. xiii; the editors of the *Registrum* note here that the *Registrum* is focused on Church Fathers and ‘later authors who commented on the faith, the Christian life and especially on the scriptures—patristica et spiritualia, then, through the twelfth century’. Other sorts of works were typically ignored; see Rouse and Rouse, ‘Introduction’ to *Registrum*, p. lxxiii.

To get a better sense of losses to medieval collections and how they affected the surviving record, it is helpful to focus on the losses of one particular collection. With this goal in mind, this investigation turns now to one of the largest and best-documented institutional collections of its day: the book collections of Christ Church Cathedral Canterbury.

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2

Before 1500

A Quantitative Approach to Medieval Manuscript Loss

Reformers such as John Leland (c.1506–1552), before investigating medieval monasteries for their treasures, would sometimes claim that their libraries had been found already marred by decay and disarray.¹ Writing of one particularly memorable visit to the library at St Augustine's Canterbury, John Leland claimed that it had been greatly reduced from its former glory—not only by the fire that had ravaged the collection in 1168, but also by the sheer negligence of the monks who were using it.² It is hard to know how seriously to take complaints against monks made by a far from impartial figure such as Leland, but it is by now clear that neglect, overuse, changing tastes, and other forces destroyed manuscripts long before the Reformation.

Yet identifying the precise scope and nature of these pre-Reformation losses is notoriously challenging. Medieval writers were not always honest about the states of their collections and it is therefore not clear whether their accounts are representative. Nor is it clear from these accounts how often manuscript destruction and recycling happened, nor how the destruction of different types of books compared to the destruction of others. Nor is it clear what proportion of medieval manuscripts were destroyed during the medieval period. The goal of the present chapter is to shed light on these topics by exploring quantitative evidence based on the history of the book collections of one particular institution: Christ Church Cathedral Priory.

The collections of Christ Church Cathedral Priory are particularly helpful for analysing changes to medieval book collections because they were both remarkably rich and remarkably well documented.³ Undoubtedly the rich

¹ I would like to express my deep gratitude to the anonymous readers of this material for their astute and helpful feedback on this chapter while it was in development.

² Leland also laments that manuscripts were lost from the Carmelite house in London, and he claims that the library of the Oxford Franciscans had fallen into disarray; see James P. Carley, 'The Dispersal of the Monastic Libraries and the Salvaging of the Spoils', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, vol. 1 (2006), 265–91, pp. 267–8.

³ M. R. James, in his influential study of the libraries of Christ Church Cathedral Priory and St Augustine's Canterbury writes that these were 'two of the largest libraries which could

history behind the Christ Church collections is in part due to its status as a cathedral priory—and to its cathedral serving as the seat of the archbishop. Given this special status, any simple generalizations based on the history of Christ Church's library must be avoided, but tracing changes to its collections is nevertheless useful for the topic at hand.

After the devastating fire in 1067, the priory embarked upon a deliberate programme of book acquisition under the careful watch of Archbishop Lanfranc (1070–7). At different stages in the institution's growth, the priory created book lists that describe parts of its collections. The book lists that have survived offer glimpses into parts of its collections at several key stages, and these can be compared to get a sense of what types of material left the collections and when. Of course, charting what types of material left the collections, by itself, tells us very little about what was destroyed. A manuscript that is lost from an institutional collection could easily have ended up in a different institution, or in private hands. With this in mind, the analysis presented here considers different types of losses separately and seeks to determine which books have survived, which were destroyed, and—where possible—how.

Before any such identifications can be made, however, it is necessary to examine the lists from Christ Church Canterbury and what they represent, since they differ considerably from each other and we cannot assume that they are all describing the same parts of Christ Church's collections.⁴ The first list of note was produced during the last quarter of the twelfth century.⁵

be found in the country'; he notes moreover that 'we possess at the present day at once fuller records of these two collections than of any others of similar size; and larger remains in the shape of extant books than of any other English monastic libraries, except perhaps Durham and Bury St Edmunds'; *Ancient*, p. xix. In their edition of the early fourteenth-century catalogue of manuscripts in England, Scotland, and Wales known as the *Registrum*, Rouse and Rouse write that 'Christ Church Canterbury has by far the lengthiest report of any library surveyed in the *Registrum*'; see Rouse and Rouse, *Registrum*, p. lxxxiii; this means that the key authors that were included in the *Registrum* were particularly well documented at Canterbury, which may suggest that the library was better stocked (at least in these authors) than any of the ninety or so religious libraries surveyed for the *Registrum*; see p. xiii.

⁴ Our understanding of the sources presented here will undoubtedly be enriched by the volume about Christ Church Canterbury currently under preparation by James M. W. Willoughby for CBMLC.

⁵ The list is in Cambridge University Library MS li.3.12, ff. 74a–76a. The list was dated to c.1170 by James, partly on palaeographic grounds and partly based on its contents. James notes that the most recent acquisitions on the list are from Becket's lifetime but that it contains no reference to books owned by, or about, Becket, which suggests 'he had not yet fallen before the swords'; James, *Ancient*, quoted at p. xxxii. The dating of the catalogue could easily be pushed later if we take into consideration that Becket's books, and apparently most acquisitions post-dating his death, ended up classified in a different part of the library in the next catalogue (see below). Irene O'Daly suggests the list must have been produced after 1176, since the entry for John of Salisbury's *Enteticus* describes him as 'Carnotensis' (no. 219)—a title that would only make sense after John's elevation to Bishop of Chartres in 1176; see *John of Salisbury and the Medieval Roman Renaissance* (2018). The entry, which appears at the end of the catalogue, could have been added after the rest of the catalogue was copied, but not

This list is very clearly not a complete catalogue of the library and it cannot be taken as representative of the library's full collections at the time. The partial nature of this list is, however, not a problem for the present analysis, provided that its limitations are kept in mind. For the most part, the list is limited to secular works—works of geometry, natural philosophy, and the like. It contains 223 items. M. R. James, who edited this book list and the next, estimates on the basis of these lists that the library contained some 600 or 700 volumes in the last quarter of the twelfth century.⁶

The next book list from Christ Church dates from the priorate of Henry de Estria (or of Eastry), 1284–1331. It is embedded in a collection of inventories of the priory.⁷ Internal evidence from this group of inventories and from the book list itself suggests that the list was produced sometime between 1320 and 1326.⁸ James suggests, based on gaps in the book list and on other evidence, that it may have been copied from a more complete original.⁹ This 1320s book list contains about 1,831 items. Even so, it does not cover all of Christ Church's book collections. Bibles and other books housed in expensive jewelled bindings were listed in the inventory for the sacristy, along with other treasures.¹⁰ Moreover, some books, such as those in the possession of individual monks, may have been in the priory but left off this list.

Despite their limitations, the lists are telling. Since the first list suggests a collection of 600–700 volumes, and the second suggests a collection of

by more than a lifetime, and it seems to be in the same hand as the rest of the catalogue. Since the list was apparently not complete until 1176, I use that date here, with the proviso that the list may have been started before this date and could in fact be somewhat later.

⁶ James, *Ancient*, p. xxxv. ⁷ The list is in Cotton Galba MS E. IV, ff. 128–47.

⁸ James dates the Cotton inventory on palaeographic grounds to the early fourteenth century and suggests the catalogue was produced 'not long after 1300'. The Cotton inventory seems to have been updated at least once, but it makes no mention of the book donation of Archbishop Walter Reynold in 1327, so James posits that it was finished before this year; for James's dating see *Ancient*, pp. xxxv, xlv. The Cotton list seems to have been copied at the same time as the section of the priory's inventory that precedes it. The editor of this inventory finds that it contains a note on f. 122r about a delivery on the day after All Souls' day, in 1321; on the dating of the inventory, see *Inventories of Christ Church, Canterbury*, transcribed and edited by J. Wickham Legg and W. H. St. John Hope (1902), p. 10. Drawing, I suspect, on this evidence, Laura Cleaver dates it to the 1320s in 'The Monks' Library at Christ Church Canterbury c.1180–c.1250', in *Medieval Art, Architecture & Archaeology at Canterbury*, edited by Alixe Bovey (2013), pp. 156–65, p. 157. Christopher de Hamel dates it to c.1326 in 'The Dispersal of the Library of Christ Church, Canterbury, from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century', in *Books and Collectors, 1200–1700: Essays Presented to Andrew Watson*, edited by James P. Carley and Colin G. C. Tite (1997), pp. 263–79, p. 263. The evidence, taken together, suggests that the catalogue is most representative of the library's collections in c.1320–6.

⁹ James, *Ancient Libraries*, p. xliii.

¹⁰ James, *Ancient Libraries*, p. xlv; see also *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. xxiv. James notes that the fourteenth-century list has no Bibles in the first Demonstration, probably because these were held in the sacristy; *Ancient*, p. xliiii. The sacristy list, also included in the inventory (f. 122), lists nineteen Gospel books and the psalter of St Thomas, all with richly decorated covers, and two sets of empty covers without books; see *Inventories*, transcribed and ed. Legg, p. 28. The absence of these volumes from the c.1320s list should not cause any problems for the comparison here since the c.1176 list is itself limited to more secular works.

around three times that figure, these lists indicate very clearly that the book collections of Christ Church grew considerably during the c.150 years between its first and second surviving lists. Much of this growth likely came from within; according to Neil Ker, Canterbury was a site of 'large-scale' book production in the late twelfth century.¹¹ Much of the library's growth during this period was stimulated by the donations of monks and others affiliated with the priory; Laura Cleaver, who has examined the 1320s list in detail, finds that donors would typically collect volumes for their own use and then donate them to the library.¹² It was through these and other acquisitions that the library appears to have tripled in size between the first and second book lists. This growth seems to have been commensurate with broader changes in book acquisition at the time, given that the twelfth century is often thought to be the most significant for the production of medieval manuscripts in England.¹³

The next list of interest was produced on 12 March 1337.¹⁴ It is entitled 'Defectus librorum' ('absences of books') and it lists books that had gone missing from the collection, along with the names of their most recent borrowers. According to James, the list used the same recording system as the library itself, indicating manuscripts on loan either 'in magnis tabulis' ('in the large tables') or 'in parvis tabulis' ('in the small tables'). James finds that these tables were 'boards on which it is known that borrowers of books had their names and borrowings recorded'. The large tables recorded books missing from the general library collection, while the small tables recorded books missing from the collection of service books. After listing all the books missing from these boards, the 1337 list records books that had gone missing at the time of a monk's death, and those in the hands of secular readers.¹⁵ Given its level of detail, this list is of considerable value for tracking what left the collections of Christ Church Priory, but of course gives no insight into the growth of the collections in this period.

¹¹ N. R. Ker, *English Manuscripts in the Century After the Norman Conquest: The Lyell Lectures 1952–1953* (1960), p. 1.

¹² Cleaver, 'Monks' Library', pp. 156–7. On the production of books in monastic scriptoria see Rodney M. Thomson, 'Monastic and Cathedral Book Production', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, edited by Nigel J. Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson, vol. 2 (2008), pp. 137–67.

¹³ Ker states that the century after the Conquest was 'the greatest in the history of English book production', in *English*, p. 1.

¹⁴ Other book lists from Canterbury include a list of the bequests of Henry of Eastry, a list of gifts, the *Tabula septem Custodiarum*, the lists of Chillenden, Courtenay, and Prior Selling, and notes by Leland. These have been examined for the purpose of this chapter but none of them is relevant to the current investigation, since they mostly list books that entered the collections after the last library list and therefore provide no additional information about book loss.

¹⁵ For a description of the 1337 list and the quotations given here, see James, *Ancient*, p. xlv.

Table 2.1 Key Book Lists from Christ Church Canterbury Cathedral Priory, their Dates and their Contents

Date of book list	c.1176	c.1320–1326	c.1337
Type	Book list from Christ Church	Book list from Christ Church	List of missing volumes from Christ Church
Comprehensive?	No; mostly secular volumes	No; missing Bibles, missals, and other texts held elsewhere	Unknown (it is not clear if all missing books are listed)
Size of book list	223	1,831	93 (missing)
Size of library collection	c.600–700 (James's estimate)	c.1,850	Unknown

For ease of reference, the book lists considered here, and their contents, can be summarized (see [Table 2.1](#)).

These lists, while not comprehensive, allow us to identify some changes to the collections at two key periods in the library's development: c.1176–1326 and c.1326–1337. The first step is to compare the two earliest book lists. James partially began this process while editing the book lists in question. James noticed that many of the volumes from the 1176 book list are absent from the early fourteenth-century one. He suggested that 'this is attributable partly to wear and tear, and accident, and partly, I believe, to carelessness on the part of the scribe' who copied the later library list.¹⁶ It is worth examining this situation in more detail. To do so, I have sought to identify volumes and authors from the 1176 list on the 1320s list ([Table 2.2](#), below). This comparison can of course provide insight into only the books that are listed on the 1176 book list in the first place; it cannot provide insight into the collection as whole.

In some cases, the process of identification is easy. So item 6 of the earlier list, 'Priscianus constructionum Britonis in asseribus', is clearly the 'Priscianus constructionum, W. Britonis' of the later list (item 397). But in many cases, the identification is less straightforward. Book descriptions on the c.1176 list are often cursory and render identification complicated. It is, for example, difficult to establish if the 'Tractatus de Astronomia et aliis' listed on the c.1176 book list is the same as the collection of works that begins with a 'Libellus de Astronomia' (no. 449) on the 1320s one. As a consequence, volumes that are described in terms too vague to support identification have been marked as uncertain in [Table 2.2](#).¹⁷

¹⁶ James, *Ancient*, p. xli.

¹⁷ These are excluded from the low count of missing volumes, but included in the high count.

Table 2.2 The Identification of Manuscripts from the c.1176 Book List on the c.1326 List^a

Description of manuscript on the c.1176 book list	No. in c.1176 book list	1176 copies identified on the c.1326 list	Total copies on the c.1326 list
Priscianus magnus	5	5	8
Priscianus constructionum	5	2	7
Priscianus de xii uersibus Virgillii	2	1	2
Summa super Priscianum magnum	2	0	0
Summa super Priscianum constructionum	1	0–1	1
Glose super Priscianum constructionum	3	1	1
Glose super orthographiam	1	1	1
Regule de mediis sillabis	1	0–1	1?
Differencie parcium	1	1	1
Remigius super primam partem Donati	3	1–2	2?
Remigius super Donatum Samsonis	1	0	0
Donatus grece	1	0	0
Donatus Anglice	1	0	0?
Beda de scematibus et arte metrica	2	2	3
Rethorica (Cicero)	8	5	5
Glose super Rethoricam	1	1	1–2
Muscia Boethii	2	2	5
Musica ‘Osberni’ (i.e. Osbern was the donor)	1	0	?
Micrologus Guidonis	2	2	2
Musica Hogerii	1	1	1
Expositio in musicam Guidonis	1	1	2
Arismetica	8	6–7	6–7
Macrobius	11	6	8–9
Marcianus Capella	4	4	7
Marcianus Capella and Plato	1	1	2
Plato (the <i>Timaeus</i>)	4	2	2
Glose super Platonem et Plato	1	0	0
Glose super Marcianum Capellam	1	0	1
Glose super Platonem	1	0	1
Glose super Marcialem	1	1	1
Glose super Macrobius	2	1	1
Boethius de consolatione	7	3	4
Boethius quomodo Trinitas unus deus (<i>de Trinitate</i>)	1	1	5
Terentius	5	2	2
Glossed Terentius	1	0	0
Salustius	8	2	2?
Tullius de Senectute (Cicero’s <i>De Senectute</i>)	1	1	2?
Tullius de Amicitia (Cicero’s <i>De Amicitia</i>)	2	1	2
Arator (one copy with Prudentius)	5	3	3
Virgilius totus	3	0	2?
Bucolica	3	0	0
Glose super/in eneida	2	0	0
Oratius totus (Horace)	6	0	0
Poetria. Sermones. Epistole oratii (i.e. Horace)	1	0–1	?
Ode (Horace)	1	0–1	?

Continued

Table 2.2 *Continued*

Description of manuscript on the c.1176 book list	No. in c.1176 book list	1176 copies identified on the c.1326 list	Total copies on the c.1326 list
Lucanus (<i>Pharsalia</i>)	5	4	5
Status magnus (i.e. the <i>Thebaid</i>)	4	0	0
Status paruus (i.e. the <i>Achilleid</i>)	2	0	0
Juuenalis	4	0–1	0
Glose super Iuuenalem	1	0–1	?
Persius	9	0	0
Prudentius et Prosper	1	1	1
Prosper et Iuuenicus	1	0	0
Iuuenicus (Juvencus)	1	0	0
Sedulius	2	0	0
Prudentius	1	1	5
Prosper	2	2	3
iiii libri Ouidii magni	1	1	3
Ovid compendium	1	1	1
Glose super Ouidium magnum, 'Plenare cum multis aliis'	1	1	1
Cato glosatus	1	0	0
Theodolus cum multis aliis	1	0	1
Auianus cum multis aliis	1	1	1
Glose super Theodolum (Gloss on the <i>Eclogue</i> of Theodulus)	1	0–1	1
Ouidius Epistolarum (with Samson as the donor)	1	0	0
Ouidius Tristium non totus	1	0	0
Liber in euidenciam auctorum	1	0–1	?
Igenus (Hyginus) de Astrologia	2	0	?
Tractatus de numero et aliis	1	0–1	?
Tractatus de Astronomia et aliis	1	0–1	?
Marcianus de astrologia	1	0–1	?
Liber Hermannii de astrolabio faciendo	1	1	1
Imago mundi et Regule de compoto	1	0	3
Kalendarium Haymonis	1	0	?
Tabule Astronomicæ	1	0–1	?
Epistole Senece ad paulum	1	1	4
Liber Capitulum	1	0	0
Lucidarius	1	1	1
Liber de situ Cluniacensi	1	0–1	?
Amalarius non totus	1	1	5
Wimundus de corpore et sanguine domini	1	1	1
Forma uita honeste	1	0–1	?
Recapitulatio de paradiso	1	0–1	0
Vita Sancti Wilfridi	1	0	1
Alia uersificæ	1	0	2
Tobia et Iosue uersificæ	1	0–1	?
Expositio misse secundum ysidorum	1	1	2
Libellus Roberti Caluelli	1	0–1	?
Sentencie de diuersis auctoribus	1	0–1	?
Liber de uirtutibus et uiciis	1	1	at least 15

Liber Ricardi pratellensis abbatis (Richard de Préaux)	1	0–1	3
Versus Theodorici	1	0	0
Tractatus de creatione et anima	1	0–1	?
Liber de ethimologia	1	1	4
Liber ex dictis plurimorum	1	0–1	?
Lamentationes Jeremie glosate	1	1	at least 6
Topica Aristotelis	1	1	3
Porphirius cum aliis	1	0	0
Porphirius	1	0	1
Elenchis	1	0	2
Porphirius Britonis	1	0	0
Comenta super topica Tulli	1	1	1
Glose super Porphirium. et topica Tullii	1	0	0
Commentum super topica Tullii	1	0	0
Comentum Boethii super predicamenta Aristotelis	1	0	0
Comentum Boethii super Porphirium	1	0	0
Glose super Porphirium	3	0	0
Sentencie super.x. predicamenta Aristotelis	1	0	0
Glose super periermenias (i.e. Aristotle's <i>De interpretatione</i>)	2	0	0?
Pars Glosarum super periermenias	1	0	0
Liber de sillogismis	1	0–1	?
Tractatus logice	1	0–1	?
Glose in librum diuisionum (i.e. Boethius' <i>Divisions</i>)	1	0–1	?
Enteticus Iohannis Carnotensis (i.e. John of Salisbury's <i>Entheticus</i>)	1	0	0
Seneca de declamationibus	1	0–1	1
Institutiones Iustiniani	1	1	at least 10
Liber de lege uetus	1	1	12
Liber de situ ierusalem	1	1	2

^a Titles on the table are taken directly from the book list, aside from a few which have been modernized for the sake of clarity. Ranges (such as '0–1') and question marks reflect cases in which an identification is considered uncertain, in keeping with the methodology described above.

Complicating matters further, the book lists do not distinguish clearly between individual volumes, leaving these important distinctions at the discretion of the editor. The problem is so pronounced that the first editor of the 1320s book list, Edward Edwards, estimated that it lists 698 volumes, while its later editor, M. R. James, estimates that it contains c.1,831—almost three times as many.¹⁸ Edwards's number is, as James demonstrates, based on the flawed assumption that each new volume in the book list is marked by a

¹⁸ The first edition is in Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 122–235. The problem is described by James in *Ancient*, pp. xxxv–xxxvii.

paragraph mark, but the discrepancy points to the general difficulty that arises when identifying individual volumes on a medieval book list.

Adding to these complications is the possibility that some works on the earlier list were rebound with others. A work listed as an individual volume in the 1176 list may be difficult to identify on the 1320s book list due to its having been bound into a larger volume during the intervening years. So, for example, there is a stand-alone copy of a 'Vita Sancti Wilfridi' listed on the earlier book list, but no stand-alone copy in the later one. Was this *vita* lost, or could it be the 'Vita Sancti Wilfrici et miracula eiusdem' that was bound with a collection of saints' lives and classified under the 'vita sancti Edwardi, ii' on the later book list? In the absence of further evidence, I have suggested a potential match in cases such as this one, while noting that the identification is uncertain.

Thankfully the order of the 1320s list provides some clues that support identification. James notes that at the time that this book list was produced, the library was divided into two 'Demonstrations', which were probably two sides of a library room. These were further subdivided into a number of 'distinctions', which were probably vertical cases of books.¹⁹ Each distinction held between 35 and 69 books. In the first Demonstration (or side of the room), books were arranged largely based on topic (Chronicles, Theological works, etc.) or language (with the English books classified separately). Within each of these arrangements, the books were arranged alphabetically. Most of the books from the earlier of the two lists seem to have been housed in the first Demonstration and there is enough overlap between the two lists to suggest that they are describing the same collection of books.²⁰

In the second Demonstration, the books were arranged in what James terms 'roughly speaking, chronological order', based primarily on donor and the moment at which they were donated to the collections.²¹ It starts rather strikingly with the books of Thomas Becket (c.1119–1170). The next listed donor is Becket's assistant and biographer, Herbert of Bosham (*fl.* 1162–89). Next are the books of one Radulphus Remensis, who, based on his name and donations, must be the Radulphus Remensis (d. 1194 or 1195) described in Christ Church's martyrology as 'frater et benefactor noster, qui dedit ecclesiae Christi Cantuariae bibliothecam suam veteris et novi testamenti glosatam'

¹⁹ James, *Ancient*, p. xlv.

²⁰ For one of many examples of this overlap, see the discussion above of the book described as 'Priscianus constructionum, W. Britonis', p. 92.

²¹ James, *Ancient*, pp. xxxviii–xxxiv, quoted at p. xxxiv; see also de Hamel, 'The Dispersal', p. 263.

(‘our brother and benefactor, who gave to Christ Church Canterbury his library of glossed Old and New Testaments’).²² Almost all the donations in this section were made after the earlier book list.²³ Indeed, books listed as donations on the earlier list are not typically classified in this donation section of the later one. These aspects of the lists, and some similarities between the earlier list and the first Demonstration of the later one in terms of the arrangement of books, suggest that as the Christ Church collections grew, the arrangement of books as it is represented on the c.1176 list was kept somewhat intact, with the older library eventually forming the core of the first Demonstration of the 1320s library. Some of the library’s newer acquisitions seem to have been added to the end of the first Demonstration and some to the second Demonstration.

If this supposition is correct (and comparison suggests it is, but we cannot be certain), we would expect most of the surviving volumes from the c.1176 book list to appear in the first Demonstration of the 1320s book list. But the situation is not at all straightforward, since many of the volumes had apparently been reclassified and rearranged in the approximately 150 years between the two book lists.²⁴ With these considerations in mind, I have used considerable caution where the title of a book on the c.1176 list seems to match that of a book listed in the second Demonstration of the 1320s list. I have listed the identification as certain when it is accompanied by strong supporting evidence, such as when the donor names match between the two lists unambiguously. In all other cases, I have marked the identification as uncertain.²⁵

²² James identifies this Radulphus Remensis as an almoner (d. 1188), but notes that the identification is uncertain (*Ancient*, p. 537). The donation described in the martyrology matches that of Remensis listed in the catalogue (nos 859–96), which consists of thirty-eight volumes of glossed books of the Bible, and a few miscellaneous volumes, such as ‘Tota ars phisice’ (no. 895) and a ‘Liber Sermonum’ (no. 896). The relevant section of the martyrology is edited in ‘Extracta ex martologio ecclesie cantuariensis’, in *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I: Epistolæ cantuarienses, The Letters of the Prior and Convent of Christ Church, Canterbury from A.D. 1187 to A.D. 1199*, edited by William Stubbs, vol. 2 (1865), pp. 557–61, p. 559. I am not the first to make this identification; the issue is treated in the biographical notes of Ralph of Reims in *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury 1162–1170, Vol. II: Letters 176–329*, edited by Anne J. Duggan (2000), pp. 1384–5.

²³ Earlier donors, including Archbishops Lanfranc and Hubert, may be contemporary with the earlier catalogue, but post-date it if their gifts were made upon death, as seems to have been common.

²⁴ Some volumes listed under a donor name in the 1176 catalogue are not listed under the same name in the 1320s catalogue and it is not always clear why; were these volumes lost, or were they simply described differently in the later catalogue? Titles listed under a donor’s name in the earlier catalogue but not in the later may or may not be the same volume; the identification is therefore noted in Table 2.2, but marked as uncertain.

²⁵ For evaluating whether a book from the c.1176 list has survived I have also taken into consideration the volumes from Canterbury that have survived today, but due to the relative paucity of these they have supplied very little in the way of additional evidence.

Even by using the most liberal approach to identification (by including all the volumes marked as uncertain), only about half of the books recorded in the c.1176 list of secular works appear on the 1320s one; between 111 and 135 of the 223 books listed on the earlier list are not found on the later one. The authors and works that are absent from the later list in the greatest numbers are: Persius (9 copies absent from the later list), Salustius (6 copies absent), 'Oratius totus' (i.e. 'complete' collections of Horace) (6 copies absent), Macrobius (5 copies absent), Boethius' *De consolatio* (4 copies absent), Statius magnus (i.e. the Thebaid) (4 copies absent), Juvenal (4 copies absent), Priscian's *De constructione* (3 copies absent), the *Rhetorica* (Cicero) (3 copies absent), Terentius (3 copies absent), 'Virgilius totus' (i.e. the 'complete' works of Virgil) (3 copies absent), Virgil's *Bucolica* (3 copies absent), and 'Glose super Porphyrium' (glosses on Porphyry) (3 copies absent).

The apparent absence of some volumes on the 1320s list is easy to explain through the identification issues already discussed. The works of Gaius Sallustius Crispus, known more commonly as Sallust, are described vaguely as 'Salustius' on the c.1176 list. Some of these works may be the *Controversia*, which is ascribed to Sallust on the 1320s list, but many of them are likely Sallust's *Historiae*, and this work, which could be described simply as a history book, might appear on the 1320s list in terms too vague to allow for identification. The same vague approach to description may also explain why the earlier list contains four books described as 'Status magnus', but the later contains none; the books in question are likely the Thebaid, and they may have been described more vaguely as histories on the later list.

Less obvious is why works by Persius, Horace, Macrobius, and others are not found on the 1320s list. We should not immediately assume that these volumes were missing or destroyed. As James suggests, in some cases a book not found on the 1320s list may have simply not been recorded; at the time of the 1320s list, some volumes must have been overlooked because they were stored elsewhere and some must have been in the possession of individual monks.²⁶ But some must have indeed gone missing. Some must have fallen out of use, while others may have been destroyed due to wear.²⁷ Others may have been stolen or misplaced by borrowers, or relocated to other collections. Christopher de Hamel, who has explored the collections' later losses in detail, finds that some of its volumes passed to monastic

²⁶ See above.

²⁷ Richard Gameson finds that several of the eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscripts that have survived from the library show signs of continued use in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; see *Earliest*, p. 30.

houses in the region—‘not necessarily by intention.’²⁸ Clearly wear and theft were ongoing threats to the collections.

Some of Christ Church’s volumes passed to Dover Priory, which, despite periods of considerable resistance on the part of the Dover monks, was a dependent cell of Christ Church.²⁹ Many of the volumes, and especially those that contain the classics of the university curriculum, must have gone to Canterbury College Oxford, which provided board and training to monks from Canterbury Cathedral. The college statutes indicate that each student was entrusted with his own books. The system was to be administered by Christ Church itself, and the borrowed volumes were to be inspected each year.³⁰ Though the college was not established until 1361—decades after the two lists under consideration—monks from Christ Church were already travelling to Oxford for their studies by 1331, and there is evidence that they brought books with them.³¹ Given that the college was an extension of the cathedral community, books brought to the college cannot be considered ‘missing’ from the cathedral, at least in any traditional sense.

By 1524, when the college’s collection was documented, it had amassed around 300 volumes, and James notes that a significant portion of the collection seems to have come from Christ Church Priory. A few of Christ Church’s more scholastic volumes, such as Priscian’s *De constructione* (a common grammar text of the day), Boethius’ *De consolatione*, a book of Horace’s works, and Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, seem to have been relocated to the college library during this period. Indeed, several of the volumes from the college’s 1524 book list bear a striking resemblance to volumes missing from the c.1320–1326 book list, and it would not be surprising if the process of removing books from the library for educational purposes had started long before the college had been founded.

Yet given that the college must have had very few attendees in its initial years, it cannot account for very many of the volumes that are absent from the 1320s book list, and an explanation must be sought elsewhere. The comparison between the two book lists offers some clues. In several cases, a particular manuscript that appears on the 1176 list does not appear on the

²⁸ De Hamel, ‘The Dispersal’, p. 264. At least one volume was lent to Anglesey Abbey; see below. De Hamel’s arguments in this chapter wisely anticipate some of the quantitative findings presented here.

²⁹ De Hamel, ‘The Dispersal’, p. 264. For a detailed but not impartial account of the conflict between Dover and Christ Church, see Charles Reginald Haines, *Dover Priory: A History of the Priory of St Mary the Virgin, and St Martin of the New Work* (1930), pp. 59–110.

³⁰ Alan Coates notes that some of the volumes still contain the names of individual monks who used them: *English*, p. 107.

³¹ William Abel Pantin, *Canterbury College, Oxford*, vol. 4 (1947), pp. 4–5.

1320s list, but the work that it contains does—and sometimes in multiple copies. So, some of the copies of Priscian's *De constructione* that appear on the 1176 list cannot be identified on the 1320s list, but the 1320s list does contain different copies that, based on their descriptions, were apparently newer.³² Cases along these lines suggest that the works in question still held currency in the 150 years between the two lists, since the library acquired new copies of them during this period. If the copies listed on the 1176 list had gone missing, the library was clearly eager to replace them with similar copies. This suggests that any loss to these works was not due to a deliberate deacquisition policy and more likely due to wear, borrowing, or theft—the kind of loss that generally results from use.

The most prominent works in this category are foundational philosophical works (such as Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*), texts that were typically used for teaching Latin (including Priscian's *De constructione*), and other school texts (such as Macrobius' commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, and the *Arismetica*).³³ Since these volumes, many of which formed the foundation of the monastic educational curriculum, continued to be acquired by Christ Church throughout the 150 years under investigation, the copies on the earlier list that are missing from the later list were likely not decommissioned, but they may have succumbed to wear, theft, or other hazards of frequent use. In some cases, older copies of a given work may have been replaced with newer ones that reflected new developments in format or layout. Some may have been furnished with glosses, in keeping with a broader trend of acquiring the products of the scholastic movement—seen in communities such as Bury St Edmunds.³⁴

On the other hand, some works from the earlier list cannot be identified on the later one at all; neither the old copies nor any new copies can be found. In some cases, the works in question may be omitted from the later list because they had been placed somewhere else in the community, but this explanation cannot account for all of the many volumes in question. They may instead have been devalued and potentially decommissioned (since any missing copies were clearly not replaced). Perhaps they had fallen out of fashion entirely, or they held ideas that had become risky or obsolete. Works in this category

³² See Table 2.2.

³³ Macrobius' commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* was a widely popular school text; it survives in over 200 copies, 'of which nearly half were copied in the twelfth century'; see Alison Peden, 'Macrobius', in *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Thomas F. Glick, Steven J. Livesey, and Faith Wallis (2005), pp. 317–18, quoted at p. 318.

³⁴ See Thomson, 'The Library', p. 645.

include Persius (9 copies on the 1176 list; 0 on the 1320s one), Horace (6 on the earlier list; 0 on the latter), Sallust (6 on the earlier list; 0 on the latter), Statius' *Thebaid* (4 on the earlier list; 0 on the latter—although identification is difficult for these last two), Juvenal (4 on the earlier list; 0 on the latter), Cicero's *Rhetorica* (3 on the earlier list; 0 on the latter), Virgil's works, especially the *Bucolica* (3 on the earlier list; 0 on the latter), Porphyry (3 on the earlier list; 0 on the latter) and volumes described as 'Terentius', which were likely Terence's plays (3 on the earlier list; 0 on the latter).

Since these classical works appeared on the earlier list in multiple copies but do not appear at all on the 1320s list, the priory may have lost interest in them in the 150 years between the two lists. Why might this have happened? To understand the change it is worth looking at some of the changes that were taking place at the time to the authors that were the foundations of the education system of medieval Europe—what Hastings Rashdall, in his study of this system, terms the medieval canon. Rashdall finds that prior to the twelfth century, the normative and foundational list of authors included a mix of both Christian figures (such as Prudentius, Sedulius, and Prosper) and 'pagan' ones (such as Persius, Horace, Sallust, and Statius).³⁵ Surveying the curriculum across medieval universities such as Oxford, Rashdall concludes that it reflects an overwhelming belief that 'all *auctores* are of the same value, and all are timeless.'³⁶ Rashdall argues that this list of authors became the foundations of the 'medieval school canon' that persisted into the thirteenth century.³⁷ Yet he finds that this canon was disrupted by several changes that took place in the university curriculum starting in the twelfth century. Among these changes he cites the rise of dialectics and a new emphasis within the universities on law, medicine, and philosophy (especially the works of Aristotle). These changes led to a move away from the established *auctores* and the study of classical literature. At the same time, the pagan authors so esteemed by their predecessors were increasingly being sidelined in a curriculum that prioritized writers who were either Christian (and here Boethius was included) or who could easily be Christianized.³⁸ Pagan authors, including Persius, Horace, and

³⁵ Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, edited and updated by F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden, vol. 3 (1936; reprinted in 1969), pp. 49–51, pp. 260–1.

³⁶ Rashdall, *Universities*, p. 51.

³⁷ Rashdall, *Universities*, pp. 260–1.

³⁸ Rashdall gives the example of the addition of Theodolus to the canon; see *Universities*, pp. 260–1. Some of these curriculum changes were instituted at a broader level; in 1336 an injunction issued by Benedict XII required that every Benedictine monastery provide instruction in grammar, logic, and philosophy; see David Bell, 'Libraries', p. 129. Robert Black has identified a similar curriculum change in an Italian context; he finds that interest in Persius and in the moral works of Cicero seems to have been on the decline in the thirteenth century. He distinguishes between older, classical Latin works such as these and newer ones and suggests that many classical authors had simply 'dropped out of the

others, were increasingly set aside. The changes that Rashdall describes would have differed somewhat between individual universities, but they are nevertheless relevant here; as Rashdall shows, these changes had an impact on the curriculum at Oxford—the university with the strongest connections to Christ Church—and it would not be a surprise to find that these changes influenced the book collecting habits at Christ Church Cathedral Priory.³⁹

These curriculum changes may therefore help to explain why books by authors such as Boethius and Priscianus continued to be acquired by Christ Church after the 1176 list while those of Persius, Cicero, Horace, and Virgil apparently were not. Similarly, waning knowledge of Greek might explain why a Greek grammar book, labelled ‘Donatus grece’ on the 1176 list (no. 25) is absent from the 1320s list, while there was apparently no attempt made to acquire any new Greek works in the intervening years.

Of course, without further evidence, the fate of the volumes that are absent from the 1320s list must remain a matter of conjecture. What is certain, however, is that if its secular holdings are any indication, the priory’s library underwent significant changes in the c.150 years between its two major book lists. Only about half of the collection on the 1176 list can be identified on the 1320s list and, if James’s estimates of the size of the library are correct, an additional 1,500–50 volumes seem to have been added in the intervening years.⁴⁰ Although the evidence provides insight into only one cross-section of the collection (comprising mostly secular books), it indicates very clearly that the collection was in a state of extreme flux and renewal in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The collection was expanded significantly, while many volumes dropped off the record entirely—perhaps because they had been stolen, decommissioned, or devalued.

Italian grammar-school curriculum. Black traces the change to a new emphasis on ‘*ars dictaminis*, and *notaria*, law and medicine’; while the acquisition of Latin was still important—and was creating a need for more Latin learning guides—there was little time left in the curriculum for the exploration of older Latin works; see *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (2001), p. 197. On the role of Persius in the medieval curriculum prior to the Conquest, see Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (2006), pp. 99–100. On the growing importance of Aristotle in the educational curriculum during the thirteenth century, see Steven J. Williams, ‘Aristotle in the Medieval Classroom: Students, Teaching, and Educational Change in the Schools of Paris in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries’, in *The Classics in the Medieval and Renaissance Classroom: The Role of Ancient Texts in the Arts Curriculum as Revealed by Surviving Manuscripts and Early Printed Books* (2013), pp. 223–43.

³⁹ Rashdall, *Universities*, pp. 153–68.

⁴⁰ If James’s estimates are correct, the earlier collections had c.600–700 volumes in total. At least 111 volumes from the earlier collections were not listed on the 1320s list; this figure represents books from the secular collection, which had only 223 volumes. If the rest of the collections underwent similar changes, we would expect only 300–50 volumes of the earlier collections to have survived. An additional 1,500–50 volumes would have had to have been added to arrive at the c.1,850 figure quoted by James.

The same process of renewal seems to have continued throughout the decades that followed, judging from the c.1337 list of books that were found to be *deficit*. From this list we can gain insight into the losses sustained by the whole library—not just by the limited works found on the earlier book list. Since the c.1337 list is focused on the volumes that had gone missing due to borrower activity (and not, for example, due to wear or deliberate culling), it supplies a different perspective on the kinds of changes that the library underwent.

In total, 93 books are listed as missing on the c.1337 list.⁴¹ The list begins with books that had gone missing at the hands of members of the priory—a remarkable 76 items in total. In some cases, a single monk was responsible for multiple losses.⁴² The missing volumes are further subdivided, first into books missing from Demonstration I (13 in total) and Demonstration II (only 6 in total). The missing volumes include religious works, such as two copies of the ‘*liber transfiguratus in crucifixum*’ (‘the book *Transfigured on the Cross*’) that had gone missing (nos 1 and 15), and more secular ones, including a copy of the medical guide attributed to Avicenna (no. 2). Thomas Aquinas’ commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard were apparently particularly prone to loss; commentaries on the first, second, third, and fourth *Sentences* had apparently gone missing (nos 8, 9, and 10—which contained commentaries on the first two). Perhaps unsurprisingly given the saint’s popularity, three volumes containing *vita* and miracle material related to Thomas Becket had also gone missing at the hands of the monks (nos 13, 16, and 17).

These losses were clearly recent; most of the missing books can be identified on the c.1320–1326 booklist of the priory (although some seem to have been listed under a different Demonstration on the earlier list) and the monks who were responsible for the losses seem to have been alive and active at the time of the c.1337 list.⁴³ The borrower list does not seem to record older

⁴¹ Glenise Scott counts 93 (*Vernacular*, vol. 1, p. 19); I count 91 (19+19 on f. 104a and 36+17 on f. 104b). Regardless of the exact figure, it is a lot of books. See the list in James, *Ancient*, pp. 146–9.

⁴² Robert de Aledone was responsible for the loss of no. 19 and a Diurnal from the ‘*parvis tabulis*’ (‘small tables’); Ricardus de Ickham was responsible for no. 15 and a Diurnal from the ‘*parvis tabulis*’; Walter de Coventre was responsible for no. 1 and a Diurnal from the ‘*parvis tabulis*’; W. de Cantuaria was responsible for no. 13 and a Processional from the ‘*parvis tabulis*’; see James, *Ancient*, pp. 146–9 and *Litterae Cantuarienses: The Letter Books of the Monastery of Christ Church, Canterbury*, edited by J. Brigstocke Sheppard, vol. 2 (1889), pp. 146–52.

⁴³ The reorganization of the library has been noticed before; de Hamel (‘The Dispersal’, 269) notes that it must have been reorganized sometime between when its 1320s list was produced and the late fourteenth century. Gameson notes that several volumes attest to books being reshelfed in the fourteenth century; *Earliest*, p. 32, n. 39. Robert de Aledone is attested in a series of conflicts with Prior Henry of Eastry in the 1320s; see *A History of the County of Kent*, edited by William Page, vol. 2 (1926), p. 117. Thomas de Bourne, who had no. 14 when it went missing, apparently got the priory in trouble with the archbishop for the way he presented a few new monks to him, according to a c.1337

losses. So, no mention is made that Christ Church lent a manuscript containing a chronicle and the writings of St John Chrysostom to Anglesey Abbey in the early fourteenth century, and that the volume was not returned until the Prior of Christ Church wrote to the abbey asking for it back.⁴⁴

Other books are listed as missing ‘in parvis tabulis’ (‘from the small tables’); these books, nineteen in number, are all service books. Psalters are especially common among these missing books, as are antiphonals, ordinals, and diurnals. Service books also account for a large number of the manuscripts in the next category: books that had gone missing when the monks who had borrowed them had died.⁴⁵ James finds that 28 of the 38 listed here are service books.⁴⁶ These also seem to have been recent losses; so two books are listed as having ‘Dominus H. Prior in nota’ (no. 20) and so must have been in the possession of Henry of Eastry when he died in 1331.

The list then records the secular borrowers who had not returned their books—including Edward II, who had apparently taken but never returned a book about the miracles of Thomas Becket and a volume of saints’ lives of Thomas Becket and Anselm.⁴⁷ A total of seventeen volumes had gone missing in secular hands, many of which were civil law books that had gone missing in the hands of those described as *magister*.⁴⁸ The presence of secular borrowers on this list is worth noting, especially since borrowing is suggestive of use. It is equally worth noting that books in French seem to have been particularly prone to loss at the hands of borrowers, both secular and monastic; although the 1320s list contains very few of them, three are reported missing on the 1337 list, and this finding suggests that French appealed to those using the collection.⁴⁹

Did any of the missing volumes come back? De Hamel notes that 32 of the 93 books listed as missing on the 1337 list can be identified with certainty on

letter; see *Litterae Cantuarienses*, ed. Sheppard, p. 163. It is worth noting that James gives Thomas Donru as the borrower of no. 14 but Sheppard’s edition gives Thomas de Bourne; see *Litterae Cantuarienses*, p. 147. Walter de Coventre, who was responsible for two losses (see above) was active in 1336; see *Litterae Cantuarienses*, ed. Sheppard, p. 164.

⁴⁴ The exchange is noted in Nigel Ramsay, ‘The Cathedral Archives and Library’, in *A History of Canterbury Cathedral*, edited by Patrick Collinson, Nigel Ramsay, and Margaret Sparks (1995), pp. 341–407, p. 361. See also de Hamel, ‘The Dispersal’, 361.

⁴⁵ These are recorded as being ‘of which dead monks are *in nota* (i.e. noted as borrowers)’ (‘ad quos mortui monachi sunt in nota’); see James, *Ancient*, p. xlv. Presumably, the monks in question had borrowed the books and the books had not been returned to the library at the monks’ deaths.

⁴⁶ James, *Ancient*, p. xlv.

⁴⁷ James, *Ancient*, p. 148.

⁴⁸ James, *Ancient*, p. xlvi.

⁴⁹ The missing French volumes are: a French copy of miracles of the Virgin Mary (missing at the hands of one Robertus de Aledone (item 19), a ‘Collectarium de multis in gallica lingua’ donated by John of London (item 23 on the missing books list and item 1560 on Eastry’s list), and a Brutus Gallice (item 25), missing at the hands of one Alex. de Sandwych.

the c.1320s list (and there are undoubtedly many more that simply cannot be identified), yet not one of these seems to have survived.⁵⁰ Once the books had been taken away from the priory's library and the institutional control it offered, they must have been particularly vulnerable. A total of 1,831 volumes appear on the 1320s library list; if between 32 and 98 books had gone missing from this list by 1337, this means between 2 per cent and 5 per cent of books on the 1320s list had gone missing within only 11 to 17 years—not through fire, flooding, or deliberate destruction, but through borrowing, sheer negligence, and, in some cases, probably theft.

Books were also being deliberately relocated during this later period. Monks and secular clerks were evidently still bringing books to Canterbury College Oxford.⁵¹ Books were sent to the college for monks' individual use, and de Hamel finds that many monks recorded their own names in these volumes.⁵² The process of transporting books to the college seems to have continued until the Reformation. De Hamel, who has surveyed this process in detail using the book lists of Canterbury College Oxford, notes that by the time the college made its first list in 1459, many volumes from the c.1320s list of Canterbury had been brought there, including 28 that can be identified with complete certainty and 19 'with overwhelming probability'.⁵³ De Hamel suggests that '[t]here must have been many hundreds of volumes involved . . . even as much as half of the Christ Church library was actually lost to Oxford'.⁵⁴ De Hamel also notes that Christ Church's collections probably shrank during this period as a result of these relocations.⁵⁵ Evidently these books were lost from Christ Church, but should they be considered lost for the sake of this study?

⁵⁰ De Hamel, 'The Dispersal', p. 264. James suggests that Harley MS 636 may be the same French *Brut* chronicle that had gone missing while on loan to one Alex de Sandwyche, which is listed as no. 1435 in the Christ Church book list of c.1284–1331. But James notes that the Harley volume could just as easily be no. 675 in the Christ Church catalogue—a volume that is not listed as having gone missing. This latter identification is more likely, since no. 1435, listed under the name of Ricardi de Wenchepe, must have been produced by the late thirteenth century, at which point Wenchepe was still active, and Harley MS 636 has been dated to the early fourteenth century. See James, *Ancient*, pp. 122, 510–11. On Richard, see Antonia Grandsen, *Historical Writing in England: c.500 to c.1307* (1974), p. 371. The same Richard is also, apparently, mentioned on the late thirteenth-century register of John Pecham; see *The Register of John Pecham, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1279–1292*, edited by Decima Douie, vol. 2 (1968).

⁵¹ One volume, a 'brito super prologos bible' ('Brito, *On the Prologues of the Bible*'), was at Christ Church Priory in the 1320s (either no. 642 or 1555 on Eastry's list), but in c.1337 it is missing at the hands of one Thomas Vndirdoune Senior. It apparently turns up on the 1524 list of Canterbury College (no. 124).

⁵² De Hamel, 'The Dispersal', p. 265.

⁵³ De Hamel, 'The Dispersal', p. 264.

⁵⁴ De Hamel, 'The Dispersal', p. 266.

⁵⁵ De Hamel, 'The Dispersal', p. 266; Gameson, on the other hand, estimates that the collections at Christ Church must have grown after Eastry's catalogue; see *Earliest*, p. 19.

Although it was not uncommon for books that were transferred to a college to find their way back to a mother house, de Hamel notes that in the case of Christ Church, once a book had been moved to Canterbury College, it does not seem to have made its way back to Christ Church. De Hamel finds that some of these books must have been destroyed through use, citing as evidence an item on the 1521 book list described simply as '[i]tem alia folia plurima dissuta ac lacerata' ('also many folia, ripped out and torn').⁵⁶ Many other college books seem to have been recycled for bookbinding material, and this process happened both before and after the Reformation.⁵⁷ So significant was the destruction at the college that Nigel Ramsay finds that 'Canterbury College's substantial collection . . . seems to have perished almost totally.'⁵⁸ Many books lost from the priory thus came to be lost forever.

Within the c.160 years between its earliest surviving book list and that of 1337, then, the collections of Christ Church Canterbury experienced considerable changes. Many of these were due to active use—books being brought to Canterbury College Oxford for study, or books going missing while they were out on loan, or, perhaps, needing to be replaced due to overuse. In some cases, books were apparently devalued—and potentially decommissioned—due to changing interests; this fate seems to have been most common among the older works by 'pagan' writers—and probably one work in Greek—which were no longer considered *au courant* (although it is worth noting that these volumes may have simply been moved or not recorded). Changes to the collection were substantial: about half of the secular cross-section of the collection that appears on the c.1176 list cannot be identified on the 1326 list, and shortly after this period, between 2 per cent and 5 per cent of the collection went missing at the hands of borrowers within less than two decades. Based on this latter figure, an estimate of 600–800 volumes removed from the collection over the course of the 160-year period represented by the lists is not, I think, too high—anywhere from a third to almost half of the collection.

While the Reformation was of course a significant source of manuscript redistribution, the evidence presented here shows the considerable scope of redistribution that happened before it. Some of these changes were of the sort that result from use or from interest in a work; grammar books, saints lives, service books, and civil law works all seem to have gone missing from Christ Church's collection under these circumstances. Some loss seems to have been tolerated due to changing fashion; this fate seems to have claimed several

⁵⁶ On books returning to a mother house, see Bell, 'Libraries', p. 128 and de Hamel, 'The Dispersal', p. 267.

⁵⁷ De Hamel, 'The Dispersal', pp. 266–8.

⁵⁸ Ramsay, 'Manuscripts', p. 132.

works by the ‘pagan’ Latin poets that had started to be sidelined in the school curriculum by the thirteenth century. Some of the lost works may have been stolen due to their value, especially the books in expensive bindings that were held in the sacristy. But it is worth noting that on the whole, more sumptuous volumes do not seem to have had significantly lower chances of having been removed from the collection.⁵⁹

Given how well the collections of Christ Church have been documented, they provide valuable insight into a medieval library’s patterns of deacquisition and, in some cases, loss. They suggest that a large proportion of medieval manuscripts were removed from medieval libraries during the medieval period itself. Of course, it is difficult to determine whether the losses sustained by Christ Church are representative of the kinds of losses sustained by other medieval libraries, especially since Christ Church, as a cathedral priory, and as the seat of the archbishopric, was something of an anomaly among institutions. But losses of a similar scope at comparable institutions during the same periods suggest that the situation at Christ Church was not an anomaly.⁶⁰ Moreover, many of the patterns of loss at Canterbury fit with the patterns of loss identified at other institutions (and indeed, can serve to confirm them); as we have seen, scholastic works (and especially the works of Aquinas), service books, and canon law texts were all vulnerable due to borrowing and use.

The book collections of Christ Church, then, much like those of other medieval institutions, underwent considerable changes during the medieval period. These changes are particularly striking when compared to the kinds of changes that the collections underwent at the Dissolution of the Monasteries, which were—perhaps surprisingly—limited. De Hamel finds that while volumes from the priory started to appear in the hands of reformers such as Thomas Cranmer and John Bale after Christ Church’s suppression in 1540,

⁵⁹ Indeed, de Hamel suggests that the older books of Christ Church were eventually housed in a separate chained library in the lead-up to the Reformation, where they were largely protected from the vicissitudes of fortune.

⁶⁰ The editors of the shorter Benedictine library catalogues write that ‘Records of accession or loan or circulation or loss show no great variation between one century and another or between a large and well-equipped house and a smaller and poorer one’; see ‘Introduction’, in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. xxviii. For examples of comparable loss, see, for example, B. C. Barker-Benfield’s *St Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury* (2008). At Glastonbury, a reviser working shortly after the original book list was produced in 1247 noticed five volumes missing from the original list; see *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 167–8. At Dover Priory, twenty books are listed as missing on the 1389 book list, which contains over 400 volumes. One of these was subsequently returned; see *Dover Priory*, ed. Stoneman, pp. 4–5. At Syon Abbey, the *Registrum* of the Brethren, maintained between about 1500 and 1524, indicates that many books had gone missing or were replaced during this period; this is especially true of grammar texts; see *Syon Abbey*, ed. Gillespie, pp. liv–lviii, and the editions of these lists on pp. 1–438 and pp. 439–504 and Betson’s Index, pp. 505–66. Arthur der Weduwen and Andrew Pettegree find that between the time that the College of the Sorbonne was founded in 1257 and 1338, its book collections grew to over 2,000 volumes; they find that over 300 of these were missing by 1338; see *The Library*, pp. 45–6.

much of the collections seems to have been safely stowed on the second floor of the priory and spared the worst of the pillaging. De Hamel suggests that until work began on this section of the priory in c.1569, its library seems to have remained ‘almost as intact as it had been before the Reformation.’⁶¹ In the thirty years following its dissolution, the library lost far fewer volumes than it had lost in the 11–17 years leading up to the 1337 list.

Indeed, it has been argued that the Dissolution had a relatively small impact on the religious culture of Christ Church. Joseph B. Sheppard has argued that many of the monks remained at the cathedral after the Dissolution and remained invested in the upkeep of the library.⁶² The religious continuity enjoyed by Christ Church at the Dissolution was not unique; the cathedrals were suppressed later than other institutions and C. B. L. Barr and David Selwyn find that even after these institutions were suppressed, many aspects of their day-to-day procedures and management were left intact. While Barr and Selwyn find that few cathedrals were able to keep their book collections intact across the centuries, it does not necessarily follow that losses to these collections were caused by the Dissolution. Indeed, several cathedral priories, such as that at Worcester, seem to have held on to much of their collections during the Dissolution and Christ Church was in this respect not unique.⁶³

In the case of Christ Church Canterbury, then, the impact of the Dissolution has been greatly overstated. Judging from the list of missing books, far more books were removed from Christ Church’s book collections in the centuries preceding the Dissolution than at the Dissolution itself. This finding highlights the fluid nature of medieval book collections and, considered alongside the findings of the previous chapter, illustrates the significant losses to collections that resulted from borrowing and the desire for renewal during the medieval period itself. By illuminating the extent of the losses sustained during this period, it contributes to an increasingly important line of inquiry that has called into question the pervasive tendency to emphasize the scope and significance of the destruction that took place during the Reformation. It is to the question of this destruction that we must now turn.

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⁶¹ De Hamel, ‘The Dispersal’, pp. 271, 273.

⁶² Joseph B. Sheppard, ‘Introduction’, in *Christ Church Letters: A Volume of Mediaeval Letters Relating to the Affairs of the Priory of Christ Church Canterbury*, edited by Joseph B. Sheppard (1877), pp. i–xlvi, p. ii.

⁶³ The fates of Cathedral priory book collections at the Dissolution are discussed at greater length below, p. 136. See the discussion in C. B. L. Barr and David Selwyn’s ‘Major Ecclesiastical Libraries: From Reformation to Civil War’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1, to 1640*, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (2006), pp. 364–6.

PART II

MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPT LOSS
BETWEEN C.1500 AND C.1600

3

1518–1547

The Dissolution of the Monasteries and 'The Monuments of Auncyent Writers'

Writing in the wake of the Dissolution to his fellow bibliophile Matthew Parker, John Bale (1495–1563) describes the process through which he found some of the manuscripts he collected:

And as concernynge bookes of antiquite, not printed... I had great plenty of them, whom I obtayned in tyme of the lamentable spoyle of the lybraryes of Englande, through muche fryndeshypp, labour and expences. Some I founde in stacyoners and bokebyndeers store howses, some in grosers, sope sellers, taylers, and other occupyers shoppes, some in shyppes ready to be carried over the sea into Flaunders to be solde—for in those uncircumspecte and carelesse dayes, there was no quiyckar merchaundyce than lybrary bookes, and all to destructyon of learnynge and knowledge of thynges necessary in thys fall of antichriste to be knowne—but the devill is a knave, they say—well onle conscience, with a fervent love to my Contrey moved me to save that myghte be saved.¹

The image horrifies. The description of manuscripts being devalued, tossed into grocers' shops, and carried off abroad suggests both mass negligence and the deliberate, profit-based destruction of cultural heritage. For Bale, the transportation of ancient books abroad is a scourge, and their preservation a national duty. In this anecdote and elsewhere, Bale casts himself as a lone saviour, fighting tirelessly to preserve the ancient wisdom of books in the face of his contemporaries' pervasive neglect and capitalist greed.²

The passage, often cited in histories of the Reformation, is also in many ways representative of the broad history of responses to the cultural damage

¹ Quoted in Wright, 'Dispersal of the Monastic', p. 211.

² A similar sentiment is expressed in the quotation from John Leland below.

that occurred at the Reformation. In this model, books—widely recognized as symbols of knowledge and culture—were threatened by both zealous anti-Catholic sentiment and by the opportunistic and profit-driven masses who took advantage of a moment of cultural instability for the sake of personal gain. Men like Bale and Leland, both considered luminary figures, rescued some of the jewels of civilization from the overwhelming tide of the destruction and commodification of culture.³ The Reformation, for many, stands out as both a uniquely devastating moment for the loss of medieval books and, through the work of men like Bale, a first step towards the recognition of their value as artefacts.⁴ Countless studies have explored the nature and cultural implications of the destruction that took place at the Reformation, and the significant losses that library collections sustained have been discussed at length.⁵

There is, however, little clarity about how the losses to medieval manuscript collections that occurred at the Reformation compare to the kinds of losses that occurred prior to the Reformation—losses that were, as we have seen, substantial. And there is little clarity about which stage of the Reformation was the most devastating for manuscripts. While several important studies have been dedicated to estimating the survival rates of medieval manuscripts, the issue of when manuscripts in England were most likely to have been destroyed remains unresolved.⁶

³ For the tradition behind this model, see the Conclusion.

⁴ For those who view the Reformation as a particularly significant moment for the loss of medieval manuscripts, see for example, Wright, ‘Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth’, p. 148; Buringh, *Medieval*, pp. 198–201; and, more recently, Zachary Lesser’s ‘Consolidation and Control in the World of Print, 1530–1640’, in *The Book in Britain: A Historical Introduction*, edited by Zachary Lesser (2019), pp. 81–134, pp. 101–2. Jennifer M. Sheppard suggests that the Dissolution of the Monasteries may have had a uniquely profound impact on England’s medieval book collections; she writes that ‘because of the ensuing Dissolution of the Monasteries and wholesale dispersal of their libraries, medieval book collections in England are perhaps more eclectic than many in “unreformed” Europe’, in ‘A Census of Western Medieval Bookbinding Structures to 1500 in British Libraries, Stage 1: Cambridge. A Final Report—And a Glimpse at Some “Treasures”’, in *Care and Conservation of Manuscripts 8*, edited by Gillian Fellows-Jensen and Peter Springborg (2005), pp. 175–89, p. 175. For those who stress the significance of Reformation-era book losses more broadly, see, for example, Harriet Lyon’s *Memory and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in Early Modern England* (2021), especially the conclusions on p. 240. Gameson describes the Reformation as the ‘charnel house of early English liturgical books’, while noting that much of the destruction of these books preceded the Reformation; see *Earliest*, p. 35. Neil Ker writes that [e]xtant books have survived because collectors after and to some extent before the Dissolution thought them interesting’, in ‘Cardinal’, p. 438.

⁵ See, for example, most of the chapters in Part 3 of *Books and Collectors, 1200–1700: Essays Presented to Andrew Watson*, edited by James P. Carley and Colin G. C. Tite (1997); see also important work by James Carley (including ‘Monastic’) and, more recently, Lyon’s *Memory*.

⁶ Studies exploring the survival rates of medieval manuscripts are discussed in the Introduction above; these include Sargent’s ‘What’; A. R. Bennett, ‘What Do the Numbers Mean? The Case for Corpus Studies’, in *Manuscript Culture and Medieval Devotional Traditions: Essays in Honour of Michael G. Sargent*, edited by Jennifer N. Brown and Nicole R. Rice (2021), pp. 48–83, pp. 51–2;

Nor is there any clarity about which manuscripts were targeted for destruction—and, therefore, were less likely to have survived—during the Reformation. Nor is it clear what proportion of these manuscripts was destroyed. It is commonly believed that manuscripts that were inimical to Protestant thought were among the worst casualties of this tumultuous period.⁷ Service books are often thought to have been particularly prone to loss at the Reformation due to their orthodox theological contents, which Reformers are thought to have viewed as a threat.⁸ The typical view is that works that reflected pre-Reformation church practices were targeted, but it has also been suggested that any associated theological works could have been targeted. To give one of many possible examples, Brandon Hawk has argued that manuscripts containing apocrypha may have been particularly prone to destruction. He suggests that Protestant reformers ‘might have sought to destroy these documents—especially if they were viewed as associated with Catholics—in the early modern period.’⁹ One copy of the popular guide for religious recluses known as *Ancrene Wisse* was torn up and used as a book wrapper in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, and Yoko Wada suggests that it was targeted due to its contents, along with other ‘works of a Catholic character.’¹⁰ Thus while it is generally accepted that some works that reflect the pre-Reformation Church were targeted, it remains unclear which these were and under what circumstances they were attacked.

Beyond the question of which theological books were targeted there is the more complex question of which had the best chances of survival. After all, books with theological contents are thought to have survived in larger numbers than other sorts of writing and Christopher de Hamel, while exploring the Reformation-era dispersal of the collection at Christ Church Cathedral Priory, raises the question of whether theological volumes may have been actively preserved by those who resisted the Reformation.¹¹ On the other

Buringh and Van Zanden, ‘Charting’, pp. 409–45; Buringh’s related book, discussed above; and Kestemont and Karsdorp’s ‘Het Atlantis’, pp. 271–90.

⁷ While also blaming ‘the negligence of monastic custodians’, Walter Wilson Greg suggests that the loss of books was caused by ‘the vandalism of their anti-clerical spoilers’, which gives the impression that books of a more clerical nature were targeted; ‘Books and Bookmen in the Correspondence of Archbishop Parker’, *The Library* 4, no. 3 (1935): pp. 243–79, pp. 247–8 quoted in Wright, ‘Dispersal of the Monastic’, p. 220.

⁸ Coates suggests of service books that ‘by their very nature they would have been unlikely to have lasted beyond the Dissolution of the Monasteries’; see *English*, p. 45. Gameson writes that service books fell under target in large numbers at the Reformation (see above) and suggests that ‘outlawed service books were left behind’ at Canterbury Cathedral Priory at the Dissolution and were ‘destroyed or lost’ or ‘re-cycled in bindings and as covers for court proceedings and other records’; *Earliest*, p. 20.

⁹ Hawk, *Preaching*, p. 40.

¹⁰ Yoko Wada, ‘Temptations’ from *Ancrene Wisse*, vol. 1 (1994), pp. xcvi–xcvii.

¹¹ De Hamel, ‘The Dispersal’, p. 272.

hand, some have suggested that reformers and antiquarians were more likely to have rescued works that fitted their interests—whether humanist or otherwise.¹² Less commonly, it has been suggested that the Reformation claimed a disproportionate number of more ornate volumes, since these were, we have been told, more likely to be targeted by looters.¹³ Writing of the destruction of manuscripts during Henry VIII's reign, Neil Ker suggests that 'the kinds of books which had on the whole the best chance of surviving were historical, patristic, and biblical, and mainly of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and that the kinds of books which had the least chance of surviving were those containing the scholastic theology and philosophy of the later Middle Ages, and the law-books.'¹⁴

It is worth evaluating some of these claims, since tracking what was lost and when can help shed light on what remains. If, for example, the Reformation were indeed the most significant moment for manuscript losses, we would expect our surviving collections to reflect its impact. If it were true that reformers targeted specific types of volumes—such as missals—we could suppose that the distribution of these volumes among all surviving medieval volumes is not representative of the distribution of these volumes in the medieval period itself. Understanding medieval distribution patterns and how they differ from modern ones is important, because it is key to understanding medieval reading habits, tastes, and thought patterns.

Of course, it might be argued that the reading and collecting interests elucidated by this exploration are limited to those of the people who lived and worked in medieval institutions, given the institutional focus of this investigation. There is some truth to this statement. Since the evidence that survives is weighted towards institutional collections, this study, like most of the discussions of manuscript survival that precede it, can tell us more about the reading and collecting interests of those within medieval institutions than those outside them. But there is a risk of overstating this point. Books passed frequently from institutions to individuals in the medieval period, so any evidence we gather about the reading and collecting interests of institutions

¹² Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham suggest that reformers 'often spared the works of Catholic humanists' in *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (2007), p. 68. Coote suggests the record was skewed by the tastes of sixteenth-century antiquarians, including those of Leland, who collected with an eye to the interests of Henry VIII; see above, p. 4, no. 13.

¹³ Scott notes that the more beautifully ornate books were sometimes kept in the treasury of a monastic institution and that these were usually pilfered first from monasteries at the Dissolution. See the discussion above, p. 3, no. 9, and Scott, *Vernacular*, vol. 1, p. 14.

¹⁴ Ker, 'Migration', p. 6.

contributes to our understanding of the interests of individuals. Moreover, the fates of institutional collections and private collections were, as we shall see, deeply intertwined in this period and in the centuries that followed, and shedding light on one also sheds light on the other. And if, as Roger Chartier has claimed, the sixteenth century witnessed an unprecedented shift towards the increased privatization of book ownership, understanding broader changes in the distribution patterns of books during this period is crucial to understanding the new reading and collecting habits of individuals.¹⁵

The goal at hand, then, is to shed some light on the forms of loss that ravaged medieval book collections during the sixteenth century and to explore the relative significance of these forms of loss in terms of their impacts on the surviving record (considering, where relevant, the impact of these forms of loss on the historiography of the Reformation). The question, then, is two-fold: (1) what was the impact of the attacks on manuscripts over the course of the Reformation (and how did these compare to other sorts of losses) and (2) what kinds of manuscripts were the most likely to be destroyed or preserved? Since the total numbers of manuscripts lost from this period cannot be determined with any certainty, the goal of both questions is not to determine a definitive count of lost manuscripts, but rather to determine an overall impression of the scope of the losses—one which can then be compared to the losses of other periods. Both questions will be explored here through an analysis of Reformation-era policy changes, accounts of libraries, and book lists. This analysis will be compared to quantitative evidence from the period, such as Ker's work on the manuscripts that are found most commonly recycled as pastedowns in Reformation-era bindings.

Of course, the Reformation happened in a series of stages. Book destruction under Henry VIII looked different in both nature and scope from book destruction under Edward VI, which looked different still from book destruction under Mary or Elizabeth I. In order to avoid conflating the significant differences between each of these stages of the Reformation, this study explores each stage separately, beginning with the reign of Henry VIII. While so doing, it draws on a growing and important body of work that approaches the Reformation with a sensitivity to the regional, social, and class-based differences in terms of its impacts, and, on this basis, seeks to contextualize

¹⁵ Roger Chartier, *Histoire de la vie privée, Tome 3: De la Renaissance aux Lumières* (1986), p. 129; translated in *A History of Private Life, Volume 3: Passions of the Renaissance*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (1987), p. 128.

the impacts of the Reformation on book collections within their particular sociohistorical frameworks.

The fates of many book collections during the early stages of the Reformation have already been examined. The work of James Carley, which builds on, and powerfully extends, the foundational work of M. R. James and Neil Ker, has transformed modern understandings of the Dissolution by tracing, in a series of influential studies, both the fates of monastic libraries and the preservation work of collectors such as John Leland during the period.¹⁶ Over the past few decades, ground-breaking projects such as the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues and the *Cambridge History of Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland* have offered unprecedented insight into the fates of particular book collections at the Dissolution and beyond it. It may seem needless to go over ground that has been so expertly charted already, but the goal at hand, which is to explore the relative impacts of the Dissolution on the corpus of surviving manuscripts, renders a new exploration of these topics necessary. Thus this chapter will be in some ways a synthetic one, drawing on previous work wherever possible and putting it in dialogue with new findings and primary sources in order to evaluate the larger questions at hand.

Any account of the destruction of books under Henry VIII must begin not with the Dissolution of the Monasteries, but with a growing climate of unease surrounding the works of Luther during the early years of Henry's reign. Luther's books had been available in England as early as 1518 and initially they circulated without persecution.¹⁷ Yet the situation changed in response to developments on the Continent. In June of 1520, the Pope issued a decree threatening Luther with excommunication and calling on religious authorities to burn Luther's works in public locations. In response, book burnings were organized in Antwerp, Ghent, and other key cities across north-western Europe.¹⁸ England answered the call relatively late. In 1521, Cardinal Wolsey organized a public burning of Luther's books in the churchyard at St Paul's Cathedral.¹⁹ David Cressy suggests that this burning was largely symbolic, and he observes that 'it utterly failed to remove Protestant works from

¹⁶ See, for example, Carley, 'The Dispersal'; James P. Carley, 'John Leland and the Contents of English Pre-Dissolution Libraries: Glastonbury Abbey', *Scriptorium* 40, no. 1 (1986): pp. 107–20; and *The Libraries of King Henry VIII*, edited by James Carley, CBMLC 7 (2000).

¹⁷ See David Cressy, 'Book Burning in Tudor and Stuart England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, no. 2 (2005): pp. 359–74, p. 362.

¹⁸ See Cummings, *Bibliophobia*, pp. 100–8.

¹⁹ David Cressy notes that this was the first public book burning during Henry's reign, in 'Book Burning', p. 362. See also Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society Under the Tudors* (1993), p. 57.

circulation.²⁰ But although relatively few books were destroyed in this burning incident, it is significant in the sense that it is suggestive of the symbolic weight ascribed to books in early modern culture—what Brian Cummings, in his description of the incident, describes as ‘the status of the book as the most powerful and public engine of cultural controversy.’²¹

In the same year, Wolsey issued an edict against Luther’s works and ordered bishops to confiscate them whenever possible. Despite this very public condemnation of Luther’s works, they continued to circulate in England freely.²² There is, however, some evidence attesting to further persecution of Luther’s works during Henry’s reign. According to John Foxe, four or five London merchants, including one Thomas Sommers, were condemned for owning suspicious books. The books in question, according to Foxe, were ‘Luther’s Books’ and some of them were translations of the Gospels. According to Foxe, the offending books were hung from holes in the men’s clothes and strung around Sommers’s neck, and the merchants were made to ‘ride from the Tower into Cheapside.’ At Cheapside, they were put in pillories and their books were burned.²³ The account stands out as a striking example of the persecution of Luther’s works in England. But Avner Shamir finds that Foxe’s account is somewhat muddled and that Foxe’s dating of the incident is clearly mistaken. A contemporary, and likely more reliable, account makes no mention of the titles of the books in question and they may not have been Luther’s.²⁴

As concerns over heresy intensified in the 1520s, Cuthbert Tunstall, the Bishop of London, passed an edict that forced booksellers to request permission before printing or importing books from the Continent. In 1529, a proclamation was made against ‘heretical and blasphemous books lately made and privately sent into this realm by the disciples, fautours [*supporters*], and adherents of the said Martin Luther and other heretics.’ The act specifies that ‘no man within the King’s realm or his dominions... compile and write any book... contrary to the Catholic faith or diminution of Holy Church.’ It goes

²⁰ See Cressy, ‘Book Burning’, p. 362.

²¹ Cummings, *Bibliophobia*, p. 108.

²² On the banning and circulation of Luther’s works in England during this period see Cressy, ‘Book Burning’, p. 362.

²³ *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe: A New and Complete Edition*, edited by Stephen Reed Cattle, vol. 5 (1837), p. 453. Some of the details of the incident are described by Cressy in ‘Book Burning’, p. 362.

²⁴ Avner Shamir writes that ‘Foxe dated the story to 1541, but a contemporary London chronicle dated it to 1530. The chronicler only mentioned the procession and burning of books of four merchants, one of them Sommers (“Thomas Somar”). It seems, however, that the chronicler mixed up the story of Sommers with the story of John Tyndale, who went through a similar process in 1530. However, since the chronicler mentioned Sommers, the incident cannot have taken place in 1541—the chronicle was in all likelihood written before 1540; see *English Bibles on Trial: Bible Burning and the Desecration of Bibles, 1640–1800* (2016), p. 186, n. 11.

further, threatening those who support anyone who ‘maketh, writeth, or publisheth any such book’. The books in question had to be delivered ‘to the bishop of the diocese or to the ordinary of the place within 15 days.’²⁵ Anyone who did not deliver them in time could be arrested. The act is followed by a list of prohibited books. Several of these books were by Tyndale. Although some of the prohibited books had been based on earlier texts, all of them had been published recently, and there is no suggestion that pre-1500 books were under threat at this time.²⁶

A further proclamation, *Prohibiting Erroneous Books and Bible Translations* (22 June 1530), also targeted books printed abroad. It railed against ‘pestiferous English books, printed in other regions and sent into this realm to pervert the people from the true faith of Christ’ and called on anyone who owned an ‘erroneous’ book in English, French, or German to send it to his bishop or a commissary within fifteen days. A list of banned books is attached: ‘*The Wicked Mammon*, the book named *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, the *Supplication of Beggars*, and the book called *The Revelation of the Antichrist*, *The Summary of Scripture*, and divers other books made in the English tongue, and imprinted beyond the sea’. All the books mentioned here, much like those mentioned in the previous act, were written by contemporary reformist writers. The act also reinforced a previous ban that applied to translations of the Bible in ‘the French or Dutch tongue’ and in English.²⁷

Fears surrounding foreign influence over English presses continued, and they continued to affect state policy. In 1534, an act restricted the rights of immigrants who were working as booksellers in England and banned the import of books that had been bound abroad. Foreign-printed books could still be sold in England but they had to be imported en masse and before binding (Julian Roberts, in his examination of the practice, describes it as ‘wholesaling’).²⁸ This measure, by privileging local booksellers, supported

²⁵ The act, which was announced before 6 March 1529, is printed in Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin’s *Tudor Royal Proclamations: Volume I: The Early Tudors: 1485–1553* (1964), pp. 181–6, quoted at pp. 182–3. The second last item on the list is described as unidentified in this volume; the work in question is *Hortulus animae: The garden of the soule*, a 1530 English translation of Henrick Eckert van Hombrecht’s work of the same title; see Andrew Pettegree and Malcolm Walsby, *Netherlandish Books: Books Published in the Low Countries and Dutch Books Printed Abroad Before 1601*, 2 vols (2011), vol. 1, pp. 692–3.

²⁶ Hughes and Larkin, *Tudor*, pp. 184–6.

²⁷ The first three books are by Tyndale, the next and last are by Simon Fish and the second last is by John Frith; see the act and the identification of volumes in Hughes and Larkin, *Tudor*, pp. 193–7, quoted at pp. 194, 196.

²⁸ See Roberts, ‘Extending’, p. 295. See also James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450–1850* (2007), p. 31; and D. M. Loades, ‘The Press Under the Early Tudors: A Study in Censorship and Sedition’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 4, no. 1 (1964): pp. 29–50, p. 49.

Henry's nativist agenda while enabling the Crown to exercise both economic and thematic control over the publishing industry.²⁹

These edicts must have had a powerful impact on what was printed and sold in England. But they are primarily focused on print works and there is no evidence that they led to the censorship or destruction of any medieval manuscripts, or of having any impact on the medieval manuscripts still in circulation during this period. And though other acts of censorship targeting printed books were issued during Henry's reign, these will be passed over here, since the goal at hand is to evaluate all the key moments of manuscript destruction rather than printed book destruction. For evaluating the extent of manuscript loss in the period, we must instead turn to what is known as the Dissolution of the Monasteries—although the term, which suggests a single moment of dissolution, is somewhat deceptive. As James Carley has stressed, the closure of monastic houses happened in stages; houses began to be dissolved as early as 1523, and the process was still ongoing during Edward's reign.³⁰ Thus rather than refer to this period as the Dissolution it is perhaps more fitting to describe it through its phases of dissolutions.

The impact of these dissolutions on institutional libraries started early. In the early 1530s, commissioners following Cromwell's orders began to undertake comprehensive inspections of religious houses that they claimed were suspected of impropriety. These commissioners would occasionally take volumes of interest. Examples of books being removed under these circumstances at this early stage are rare and tend to pertain to volumes that were deemed exceptional. Thus while visiting the Benedictine Abbey of Bath, the commissioner Richard Layton removed a book from the abbey's collections and sent it to Lord Cromwell, describing it as 'a bowke of our lades miracles well able to mache the canterberie tales such a bowke of dremes as ye never sawe wich I fownde in the librarie'. There is no evidence to suggest that commissioners were removing volumes en masse during these early stages of the Dissolution.³¹

It was during these early stages of the Dissolution that John Leland first began to visit the collections of medieval monasteries and catalogue their books. Leland's primary focus was on the religious and historical books in their collections.³² His interests would in many ways come to determine the

²⁹ On the ways in which the act supported Henry's nativist aims, see Raven, *Business*, p. 31.

³⁰ Carley, 'The Dispersal', p. 269.

³¹ See the quotation and the discussion of it in Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 367.

³² E. Gerhardt, "'No Quyckar Merchaundyce Than Lybrary Bokes': John Bale's Commodification of Manuscript Culture', *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2007): pp. 408–33, p. 412.

thematic and historical contours of the medieval manuscript collections that survive in England today. His lists, and those made by his contemporary John Bale, stand as key witnesses to monastic book ownership from prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries, but unfortunately neither antiquarian made any attempt to be comprehensive in his survey of monastic libraries.³³ James Carley, who has examined Leland's journeys in detail, notes that some of the religious houses that Leland visited still had relatively intact book collections that had not yet been dispersed, while others seem to have lost much before Leland's arrival.³⁴

In the early 1530s, one of the key aims of Leland's work was to identify books that could support Henry's motion to declare his marriage to Catherine of Aragon invalid.³⁵ In support of this case, monastic libraries began to send their books to Henry VIII's retinue at Hampton Court.³⁶ These books were typically older ones that were focused on history, canon law, and theological issues.³⁷ They were subsequently added to the Crown's library collections. We should not conclude from this curation policy that books of ecclesiastical polity and history were more likely to have survived this period, since this policy was short lived and limited in scope, and since the Crown's library collections were themselves far from static. Many of the manuscripts added to the Crown's collections in this way were removed from these collections after Henry's death, and Carley finds that only 440 manuscripts survive out of the over 1,450 books and manuscripts that were held around the middle of the fifteenth century in the Upper Library at Westminster and in a second collection.³⁸

Much more significant for the survival of medieval manuscripts was the Suppression of Religious Houses Act, which was passed in 1536. This act, which claimed to be aimed at curbing perceived abuses, targeted the 'lesser' religious houses—those with incomes under £200 a year.³⁹ These smaller houses numbered 419 at the time, although in his study of the act, G. W. Bernard has found that only 243 of these were suppressed in response to the act. The rest were allowed to remain open due to protests on behalf of the affected

³³ Carley, 'Dispersal', pp. 265–6. ³⁴ Carley, 'Leland: Glastonbury', p. 108.

³⁵ Carley, 'Leland: Glastonbury', p. 108. ³⁶ Carley 'The Dispersal', p. 270.

³⁷ See Carley, 'The Dispersal', pp. 270–2.

³⁸ See James P. Carley, 'Books Seen by Samuel Ward "in Bibliotheca Regia", Circa 1614', *The British Library Journal* 16, no. 1 (1990): pp. 89–98, p. 89, and Gerhardt, 'No', p. 413, who draws on the work of Carley. On the dispersal of the royal libraries, see also Roberts, 'Extending', p. 296.

³⁹ Lyon, *Memory*, p. 4.

clergy.⁴⁰ The monastic institutions that were closed due to the act met a variety of fates. While Henry initially wanted the abolished institutions to be torn down, the effort involved proved in many cases too great. John Freman, who had been charged with overseeing the demolitions in Lincolnshire, complained to Cromwell that the efforts involved in demolishing an entire building were substantial and suggested the Crown adopt instead a policy of partial demolition, which would take ‘downe the rovys, batilments, and stayres, and lete the wallis stonde.’⁴¹ Eventually the scope of the task meant that the Crown had to temper its initial expectations, and many of the suppressed institutions were allowed to stand.

The act mandated that all the possessions of the suppressed institutions would fall to the Crown. In 1536, the Court of Augmentations was founded with the aim of overseeing the transfer of property from dissolved institutions to the Crown.⁴² What became of the records and book collections of the institutions suppressed under this initial act? Nigel Ramsay notes that ‘the monastic books, being generally regarded as without financial value, simply do not feature in the Augmentation records.’⁴³ The fates of these book collections are therefore not easy to trace.

The fates of these institutions’ records (such as charters) are a bit easier to pin down. As already noted, collections of records were typically kept separate from an institution’s library books, and many of these records remained in place in the wake of the 1536 act. Nigel Ramsay finds that prior to the Dissolution, the original foundation charters of the suppressed institutions were typically copied into a register for the Crown, but the original charters were not confiscated.⁴⁴ While exploring the fates of records of the Yorkshire institutions at the Dissolution, B. A. English and C. B. L. Barr find that records (such as cartularies and deeds) were not considered objects of antiquarian interest at the time; these records were instead ‘regarded in a strict and narrowly legal way as deeds of title to the former monastic estates, and as soon as the estates were sold by the crown, as most of them were within a decade or two, the evidences [*sic*] would more or less automatically go with the ownership of the land and so come into the possession of the landowners.’

⁴⁰ George W. Bernard, ‘The Dissolution of the Monasteries,’ *History* 96, no. 324 (2011): pp. 390–409, p. 400.

⁴¹ Gerhardt, ‘No,’ p. 411.

⁴² See B. A. English and C. B. L. Barr, ‘The Records Formerly in St. Mary’s Tower, York,’ *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 42 (1967–70), pp. 198–235, 359–86, 465–518, at pp. 203–4, and Wright, ‘Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth,’ p. 151.

⁴³ See Ramsay, ‘Manuscripts,’ p. 127.

⁴⁴ See Ramsay, ‘Manuscripts,’ p. 126 and English and Barr, ‘Records,’ pp. 202–3.

A thirteenth-century cartulary roll of Flaxley Abbey, for example, was found by Thomas Wynniatt in the early nineteenth century; it had apparently passed to Wynniatt's ancestors, who had received lands from Flaxley at the Dissolution.⁴⁵ English and Barr find that 'of the 825 houses of the regular orders which were dissolved in the 1530's and 1540's, only two dozen cartularies have been preserved among the public records from an early date, and over a third of the cartularies that survive today are still in private ownership'.⁴⁶ While the Crown collected some records at the Dissolution, most stayed in the properties in which they were housed in the aftermath of the Dissolution, although as we shall see, many of these records were removed by antiquarians at a later date once the records began to be viewed as collectors' items.⁴⁷

The fates of the library book collections of dissolved institutions are more various. In response to the 1536 act, preparations were made for the expansion of the Crown's book collections. The main collection, which had been established under Edward IV, had been moved to Richmond Palace during Henry VIII's reign.⁴⁸ Aside from this main collection, several libraries were made ready for acquiring new volumes in the wake of the 1536 act; Leland mentions libraries at the palaces of Westminster, Hampton Court, and Greenwich in this context.⁴⁹ Books in monastic libraries began to be earmarked for these royal libraries and some books were appropriated for them.⁵⁰

Despite these motions, the number of volumes transferred to the royal libraries during this period was still very limited. On the 1542 book list of the Upper library at Westminster, over 100 manuscripts are listed as having originated from dissolved religious institutions, but this is a tiny portion of the number of books that must have been held by the suppressed institutions and the majority of these books had been added to the royal libraries prior to the

⁴⁵ On this manuscript, BL MS Add. 49996, see *The Libraries of the Cistercians, Gilbertines and Premonstratensians*, edited by David Bell, CBMLC 3 (1992), p. 16.

⁴⁶ English and Barr, 'Records', p. 206.

⁴⁷ English and Barr describe records being transferred to the Crown; see 'Records', especially p. 233. On the removal of records by antiquarians and others, see below, pp. 199–200, 214–15, 218–19, 221–2, 228, and 242.

⁴⁸ 'Introduction', in *The Libraries of King Henry VIII*, edited by James Carley, CBMLC 7 (2000), pp. xxiii–xcii, p. xxvi. On Edward IV's library, see, for example, Wright, 'Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', p. 163.

⁴⁹ Gerhardt, 'No', p. 413. Many books from these collections were eventually transferred to a consolidated library at Westminster in the 1540s; others were removed from the collections; see Carley, 'Introduction', pp. lxxv; lxxiv.

⁵⁰ Carley notes that at one Lincolnshire house, officials drew up a list of books and crosses were placed beside those intended for the royal library; 'Dispersal', p. 270. About 100 volumes from Rochester Cathedral Priory were sent to the royal library, a collection that has been described as 'the largest single group of monastic manuscripts to enter the Royal Library at this time'; *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 468. See also Carley, 'Introduction', pp. xxxvii–xxxviii.

Dissolution of these houses.⁵¹ Indeed, the royal libraries during this period have been described as ‘issue-driven’, with ‘the dominating issues under Henry VIII [being] the King’s Great Matter, his divorce and, subsequently, the royal supremacy.’⁵² The royal collections played only a limited role in determining the fates of manuscripts from monastic houses.

Given that they were not transferred to the Crown in large numbers, it is worth exploring what happened to the rest of the manuscripts of dissolved institutions, since this is important for determining the proportions of manuscripts that survived the period, and for determining the relative impact of these dissolutions on the corpus of manuscripts that has survived. Were the manuscripts of dissolved institutions left to decay (perhaps simply thought to be of too low value to be preserved), or were they deliberately destroyed by iconoclasts, or did they meet some other fate? There is no clear data about how many manuscripts were destroyed at the Dissolution of the Monasteries during the first half of the sixteenth century, but it is generally believed that the number is very large. M. R. James once speculated that ‘thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of manuscripts were destroyed in the first half of the sixteenth century.’⁵³ Describing the Dissolution in his influential volume for *The Oxford English Literary History*, James Simpson writes that ‘Certainly massive numbers of books were lost or destroyed: John Bale’s lament in 1549 about the mistreatment of books from monastic holdings squares with the estimations of recent scholars concerning the magnitude of the loss.’⁵⁴ In the scholarship of the past few decades, the Dissolution of the Monasteries is often described as the most devastating moment for the loss of England’s manuscripts.⁵⁵ The idea is so popular that the introduction to medieval literature in the *Norton Anthology of Literature*, a volume that has been formative for medieval literary studies due to its widespread use in the undergraduate classroom, proclaims that, ‘Only a small proportion of medieval books

⁵¹ Gerhardt, ‘No’, p. 413; here Gerhardt draws on the work of James Carley in ‘The Royal Library under Henry VIII’, in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume III, 1400–1557*, edited by Lotte Hellings and J. B. Trapp (1999), pp. 274–81, pp. 276–7.

⁵² Roberts, ‘Extending’, p. 296. See also Carley, ‘Introduction’, p. xliii.

⁵³ M. R. James, ‘Prefatory Note’, in ‘The Catalogue of the Library of the Augustinian Friars at York, Now First Edited from the MS at Trinity College Dublin’, edited by M. R. James, pp. 2–17, in *Fasciculus Ioanni Willis Clark dicatus* (1909), pp. 2–96, p. 16.

⁵⁴ It is not clear which recent scholars Simpson refers to here since the only source Simpson cites here is Wright, ‘Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth’; see James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History: Reform and Cultural Revolution (1350–1547)* (2002), p. 9.

⁵⁵ Taking up the question of how books were lost during the Reformation, Humphreys writes that ‘[t]here are a number of causes. For the monasteries and friaries the most important was the suppression of the monasteries’ (‘Loss’, p. 250). Barr and Selwyn open their recent chapter by stating that ‘[t]he factor which most dramatically affected ecclesiastical libraries at the time of the Reformation was the Dissolution of the Monasteries’, in ‘Major’, p. 363. See other examples above, p. 112, no. 4.

survive; large numbers were destroyed at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s.⁵⁶ The implication is clearly that this early part of the Reformation was the most significant for manuscript loss.

If so many medieval manuscripts were indeed destroyed during the 1530s, how would a loss of this scope have occurred? It is sometimes believed that the libraries of suppressed institutions were left open to theft and destruction. A once-popular image is that of boorish reformers tearing apart anything they thought smacked of popery.⁵⁷ But a growing body of evidence has suggested that for many religious houses, this image is wholly inaccurate.⁵⁸ Of course, the fates of each monastic institution varied widely, and they powerfully resist generalization.⁵⁹ But it is generally true that when the smaller houses began to be suppressed in 1536, there was no popular rush to strip them of their book collections. Even antiquarians such as John Bale, who are in many cases eager to paint the Dissolution as a wildly chaotic affair causing catastrophic and lasting damage to antiquarian manuscripts, make no suggestion that manuscripts were being pilfered directly from monastery shelves at the Dissolution.⁶⁰

To understand what happened to manuscripts and other monastic holdings in the initial stages of the Dissolution, it is important to recognize that the closure of the smaller monasteries in 1536 was met with considerable resistance. This act of closure is often cited as one of the key causes of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and although the precise causes of this rebel movement are still uncertain and subject to some debate, the suppression of the abbeys

⁵⁶ Stephen Greenblatt et al., 'Introduction', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al., 9th edn, volume A (2012), pp. 2–25, p. 6.

⁵⁷ J. E. Jackson laments the fate of England's libraries in the wake of the Dissolution, writing that '[w]hen the monasteries were broken up, the rage seems to have been to destroy not only the buildings, but everything in and belonging to them'; 'Malmesbury Abbey in its Best Days', *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 21 (1884): pp. 35–60, p. 51. The view that collections were ransacked is still somewhat pervasive. To give a recent example, Elizabeth Spiller, in a study of Marlowe's works, blames 'bibliophiles' who 'ransacked the monastic libraries'. She goes so far as to claim that 'Parker and other Reformation book "collectors" destroyed or discarded perhaps a thousand medieval books or manuscript for every one they kept'. Based on the reference to Parker, however, it would seem that Spiller dates this process to sometime after the reign of Henry VIII; see 'Marlowe's Libraries: A History of Reading', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, edited by Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (2013), pp. 101–9, p. 106.

⁵⁸ The tendency among scholars now is to view the initial stage of the Dissolution as a moment of 'dispersal' rather than outright destruction; see, for example, Carley, 'Dispersal', and Ramsay, 'Manuscripts'. See, most relevantly, the work of David Rundle, who writes about his work on the dispersal of Duke Humfrey's library that 'an intention of this chapter has been to emphasise in contrast to cataclysmic moments that process of loss which is unexceptional or quotidian'; 'Habits of Manuscript-Collecting: The Dispersals of the Library of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester', in *Lost Libraries: The Destruction of Great Book Collections Since Antiquity*, edited by James Raven (2004), pp. 106–24, p. 118.

⁵⁹ The point is also made by Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 363.

⁶⁰ See the discussion of Bale's lament below, p. 130.

was certainly one of the motivations behind it.⁶¹ G. W. Bernard, who views the movement primarily as an uprising against Henry's policy of monastic upheaval, notes that at Louth, rebels were concerned that their local parishes might eventually fall victim to Henry's commissioners and, in response, 'secured their parish church so that its treasures could not be confiscated, and having disrupted the work of the commissioners intending to question the clergy, they then went to Legbourne nunnery, just one and half miles away, captured two of Cromwell's servants, working as administrators there following its dissolution, and burnt the books of the king's surveyors of dissolved monasteries at Louth Park Priory. The rebels brought the process of dissolution in Lincolnshire to a halt.'⁶²

Bernard describes the rebels here as 'the commons of Louth', but the question of how far the response of the rebels was representative of the views of the common folk remains unsettled, with opinions tending to fall on sectarian lines.⁶³ Of course, the question is not particularly relevant here; the important point is that the closure of monasteries was met with resistance, and that regardless of how they may have felt about the Church, many would have balked at the idea of pillaging institutions that had been for many years the cornerstones of their communities and spiritual lives. Moreover, while there was in some quarters considerable anti-monastic sentiment at the time, even those sympathetic to the suppression of the monasteries, and potentially eager to destroy the former collections of these houses, would not have had many opportunities in this early period; the closure of institutions was marked by careful control on the part of both the state and the clergy.

There is correspondingly very little evidence of collections being ransacked or pillaged during this early stage of the Dissolution. This may come as a surprise to some, since it is not uncommon to find histories of the Reformation, especially older ones, suggest that some mass pillaging did take place. So, the Victorian librarian and book historian Edward Edwards, in his wide-ranging and influential history of libraries, claims that reformers actively pillaged

⁶¹ Bernard ('Dissolution') argues that the religious changes of 1536 were a key factor in the rebellions, citing as evidence the fact that the 'only specific, concrete demand' of the rebels was that the abbeys would be allowed to remain open until the next meeting of parliament (p. 401).

⁶² Bernard, 'Dissolution', p. 401.

⁶³ Bernard believes that the views of the rebels are suggestive of much broader concerns over the protection of the monasteries; 'Dissolution', pp. 360–2. Others have taken the view that the Dissolution of the Monasteries was broadly welcomed; it is this view that inspires Eamon Duffy, in his defence of the 'power, integrity and internal logic' of late medieval religion, to push back against the notion that 'by 1500 this was a failing religion that had already alienated or lost the commitment of the more intelligent and forward-looking of its lay English audience', in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*, 2nd edn (1992; 2005), p. xviii.

books from monastic libraries. However, he offers as evidence only one example that might reasonably count as pillaging. Edwards quotes from a letter to Thomas Cromwell from John London, one of those charged with the visitations of the abbeys, in which London claims that when the Franciscan Friary at Reading was dissolved in 1538, 'As soon as I hadde taken the Fryer's surrendre, the multytude of the poverty of the town resortyd thedyr, and all thinge that mygt be hadde they stole away in so myche that they had convayd the very clapers of the bellys.'⁶⁴ Removing the quotation from its context, Edwards suggests that it describes the townsfolk ransacking the friary, and Edwards takes it as an example of libraries being pillaged at the Dissolution.⁶⁵

But I would argue that the fuller context of this quotation complicates this interpretation:

As soon as I hadde taken the Fryers surrender the multytude of the Poverty of the town resorted thedyr and all thinge that myght be hadde they stole away [*all the things that were available to be taken they took away*], insomuyche that they had conveyed the very clapers of the bellys. And saving that Mr. Fachell (Vachell) wiche made me great chere at hys house and the Mayor dydde assist me they wold havd made no litell spoyl [*And had it not been for Mr. Fachell—who entertained me well at his house—and the Mayor, who assisted me, the commoners would have made no small spoil*]. In thys I have done as moche as I cowde to save everything to the King's Graces use, as shall appear to your Lordeschippe at the begynnyng of the terme, Godde willing, who wt increse of moche honor long preserve yor gudde Lordeschippe.⁶⁶

The emphasis in this quotation, then, is on the fact that London rescued goods from the hands of the commonfolk so that they could not carry off a large amount of plunder. While London does mention some things being stolen away, it is not clear if any of these were books, or if the books had been safely locked away. Indeed, the quotation makes no reference to books at all. If the library had been pilfered (and again there is nothing in the quotation to determine this one way or another), it is worth noting that at least one volume from it has survived: the fourteenth-century British Library, Harley MS 493, a two-volume collection of statutes that includes Walter de Henley's

⁶⁴ Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 357.

⁶⁵ Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 357.

⁶⁶ *The Victoria History of Berkshire*, edited by P. H. Ditchfield and William Page, vol. 2 (1907), p. 91.

Housebondrie.⁶⁷ In sum, to claim that the library of the friars at Reading was ransacked (as Edwards does) is to greatly overstate the evidence.

Others looking for evidence of pillaging often quote from Bale's lamentations over the fates of manuscripts at the Dissolution, but this, too, is based on a misreading of the evidence.⁶⁸ Indeed, I have found that those who claim that mass pillaging occurred at the initial closure of monastic houses have offered remarkably little evidence of it. The most notable and often-cited proponent of this claim is C. E. Wright, but Wright in fact presents very little evidence that supports it. Almost all of Wright's evidence for book pillaging at the Dissolution concerns either the Crown's aforementioned removal of volumes from monastic institutions, or post-Dissolution losses. Wright himself admits that the evidence of pillaging from monastic institutions at the Dissolution itself is largely lacking.⁶⁹ Some more recent studies of the Dissolution cite Wright's claims that mass pillaging took place at the Dissolution, but Wright's claim is not supported by adequate evidence and I have seen very little additional support offered for this claim. Some recent studies are largely silent on the question of pillaging, but nevertheless suggest that monastic book collections suffered heavy losses. So, for example, in his influential overview of the period, James Simpson suggests that collections suffered significant losses during this period, but Simpson does not take up the issue of book pillaging, and it is not clear what losses are intended.⁷⁰ Given that those who claim that the Dissolution resulted in mass book pillaging have provided little support for this claim, it seems that the evidence for such pillaging is surprisingly thin.

This is not to suggest that such pillaging never happened. It is reasonable to expect that some books must have been lifted from their shelves and sneaked away by highly motivated reformers, and there is some limited

⁶⁷ The manuscript contains an inscription stating that it had been given to the 'fratribus minoribus de Redyng' ('friars minor of Reading'). The identification, based on this inscription, is made in Ker's *MLGB*; see 'British Library, Harley MS 493', in *MLGB3*, edited by Sharpe et al. [based on *MLGB*], Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <<http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mlgb/book/4609/>>, accessed 2 February 2022.

⁶⁸ See below, p. 130.

⁶⁹ For Wright's note that the evidence of such theft is largely lacking from monastic institutions, see 'Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', p. 158. Aside from the Coggeshall example given below (p. 128, no. 71), Wright's examples of mass pillaging happened after the Dissolution (p. 158). Wright draws some evidence from the writings of Leland (pp. 156–8), for which see pp. 130–6. Wright also mentions the removal of volumes by former religious (pp. 159–61), the removal of volumes for the royal library (pp. 161–4), and the targeted destruction of university texts such as those of Duns Scotus from the Oxford libraries (pp. 165–6). The bulk of Wright's evidence after this point is from after the Dissolution and with the possible exception of destruction at Oxford, Wright does not provide any evidence of reformers pillaging library shelves.

⁷⁰ See James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (2002), p. 9 and the discussion above.

evidence of it.⁷¹ But given how few accounts of it have survived (even among those who describe the Dissolution as a moment of significant destruction), and given that both Church and Crown were invested in maintaining strong control over the possessions of religious houses when these were transferred to public or private hands at the Dissolution, it is reasonable to conclude that any pillaging that took place during this initial period was limited. While revisionist, this conclusion is also supported, as we shall see, by the large number of medieval volumes still in circulation long after the Dissolution, and by quantitative evidence from the manuscripts that were recycled as binding fragments during this period, which were largely ones that had fallen out of date. Given the lack of evidence for pillaging and the other evidence discussed here, it is perhaps best to think of this chapter in the life of medieval manuscripts, as some scholars have done, as one of ‘dispersal’ rather than of destruction. Yet even the term ‘dispersal’ is somewhat misleading, since many institutional collections remained largely intact throughout this period of religious upheaval.⁷²

The next important moment for the historiography of manuscript destruction was 1537, when the list of religious houses slated for closure was expanded to include all monasteries.⁷³ G. W. Bernard has stressed that the suppressions of monastic houses during this period differed significantly from the pre-1537 dissolutions in that the Crown did not seek to legitimize these closures through an act as it had previously. Rather, the Crown proceeded by encouraging monasteries (sometimes with force) to surrender themselves. This new approach was, as Bernard suggests, undoubtedly to quell rebellion. A 1539 act ‘declared that the surrender of abbeys by their abbots and convents was legal’ but unlike the act of 1536 it does not give commissioners royal authority to force such a surrender. Rather, the Crown typically offered monks comfortable pensions in exchange for what the Crown

⁷¹ There is some limited evidence of books being removed directly from institutions at the Reformation, such as a roll of statutes from the Cistercian abbey of Saint Mary the Virgin in Coggeshall, Essex that contains a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century inscription stating that the manuscript was ‘Found in the abbey of Coxall in Essex at the Tyme of the dissolution’. See ‘Huntington Library, San Marino, HM 27186’, in *MLGB3*, edited by Sharpe et al. [based on *MLGB*], Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <<http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mlgb/book/1784/>>, accessed on 2 February 2022. The example is given by Wright in ‘Dispersion of the Libraries in the Sixteenth’, p. 157. See also Leland’s suggestion that ‘Germanes’ stole volumes from library shelves, and the discussion of possible issues with this evidence, p. 132.

⁷² For those who refer to the period as one of ‘dispersal’ rather than destruction, see, for example, Wright, ‘Dispersion of the Libraries in the Sixteenth’, and ‘Dispersion of the Monastic’, and Carley, ‘Dispersion’.

⁷³ Bernard notes that there is little evidence that explains directly the motivation behind Henry’s decision to expand the suppression; ‘Dissolution’, p. 404.

considered a voluntary surrender.⁷⁴ This strategy of encouragement under duress was not always successful at quelling rebellion. Monks at Glastonbury, Reading, and Colchester rebelled, and their abbots were eventually executed by order of the Crown.⁷⁵ Yet Bernard notes that ‘by 1540 every monastery had gone’ except for ‘the seven monasteries associated with cathedrals, and six Benedictine houses, notably Westminster Abbey’ which were allowed to remain, as were ‘fifty monastic churches.’⁷⁶

Bernard finds that most of the deeds of surrender from this period are strikingly similar. In most, former members of the clergy surrender their houses to the Crown and confess to supposed wrongdoings. Commenting on the confessions in these deeds, many of which seem excessive, Bernard writes that ‘they were manifestly drawn up by the king’s councillors’ and are very obviously ‘not a true reflection of what monks, nuns or friars felt.’⁷⁷ Although the deeds, biased as they are, can tell us very little about how religious experienced the closure of their houses, they can nevertheless provide insight into the status of monastic goods during these closures. In this later period of dissolutions, there was no act that stipulated that these goods would fall automatically to the Crown, but it was strongly implied by the 1539 act, which specified ‘that all monasteries or monastic possessions given to His Majesty by an Abbott or Prior... shall be confirmed.’⁷⁸ Typically the deeds of surrender describe the possessions of a religious house as being offered to the king in the form of a gift. Sometimes this ‘gift’ is cast as a form of retribution for a life of sin. Bernard describes one deed, from the prior and convent of St Andrews, Northampton, in which the prior offers ‘all the possessions of the monastery’ to the Crown in hopes of receiving the king’s mercy and pardon.⁷⁹

Library collections are not mentioned explicitly in these deeds of surrender. Yet some books continued to be transferred to the Crown’s library at Westminster during this period. Books were also sold off to various buyers. When Bury was closed in 1539, its book collections and other ornaments not taken into royal custody were sold off by the King’s Commissioners, who reported that ‘they were not of such value as might be expected.’⁸⁰ William Smart, portreeve (a town official) of Ipswich, collected over 100 volumes

⁷⁴ See the discussion in Bernard, ‘Dissolution’, pp. 404–5. See also Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 350–6.

⁷⁵ For an overview of the stages of the Dissolution, see Bernard, ‘Dissolution’, pp. 403–4; and Wright, ‘Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth’, pp. 149–51.

⁷⁶ Bernard, ‘Dissolution’, p. 405. On various stages of the Dissolution, see also Edwards, ‘How Many’, pp. 159–61.

⁷⁷ Bernard, ‘Dissolution’, p. 406.

⁷⁸ The act is printed in Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 352.

⁷⁹ Bernard, ‘Dissolution’, pp. 407–9.

⁸⁰ See *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 48.

from these sales, and in 1599 he donated these books to Pembroke College, where they remain today.⁸¹ In some cases, then, the dispersal of a collection at the hands of buyers resulted in its subsequent preservation.

Sometimes the dispersal of a collection happened when a religious house was sold into private hands. In these cases, the library would fall to the buyer, and the books within it would be at his mercy. It is a concern over these sorts of transactions, and not any sort of mass pilfering of the monasteries, that sparked John Bale's most famous lament about the dispersal of monastic collections. In his 1549 preface to Leland's work, Bale describes many of those who bought up monastic houses as wholly unscrupulous; he claims that '[a] great nombre of them whych purchased those superstycyouse mansyons' ripped the books out of these institutions' libraries and used them as toilet paper, or as scouring paper for candlesticks or boots. Some books, Bale writes, 'they solde to the grossers and sope sellers.'⁸² Bale, writing at some remove from the events he describes, and motivated by the hope of garnering financial support for his preservation efforts, might be exaggerating, but it is clear that some of those who bought religious houses did not see any need to keep their manuscripts in place and recycled them or sold them off in this way.⁸³

In some cases, religious houses sold off their book collections before closure instead of forfeiting them. The list of books sold at the 1538 closure of Bordesley Abbey in Worcestershire provides one illustrative example. Among the objects that the abbey sold to one 'Robert Doryngton' were an 'old boke, and a cofer in the library', which were sold together for two shillings, and 'old bokes in the vestry' which were sold for 8 pence.⁸⁴ Doryngton was a mercer (a textile trader) in Staffordshire and, judging from his other acquisitions at the time, such as 'a gret basen' and 'auter clothes', his interests were pragmatic and not antiquarian, and his book acquisitions may have met some of the fates described by Bale.⁸⁵ The sums involved—2 shillings in one case and 8 pence in another—suggest that the price of books, while still high, had fallen

⁸¹ See *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 48. See also M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Pembroke College, Cambridge* (1905), p. viii.

⁸² Quoted in Wright, 'Dispersal of the Monastic', p. 211.

⁸³ Ramsay gives the example of Sir William Sidney, whose account books, starting in 1542, are bound with manuscript fragments of psalters and service books taken from the collections of Robertsbridge Abbey, which he acquired in 1539; 'Manuscripts', p. 129.

⁸⁴ Savage, *Old*, p. 67. The account of the sale is printed in 'Accounts of John Scudamore', in *Three Chapters of Letters Relating to the Suppression of Monasteries*, edited by Thomas Wright (1843), pp. 266–78.

⁸⁵ Scudamore, 'Accounts', ed. Wright, pp. 267, 268. Doryngton's occupation is mentioned in a 1542 or 1543 court case involving the appropriation of corn printed in 'Staffordshire Suits in the Court of Star Chamber, temp. Henry VII and Henry VIII', edited by W. K. Boyd, in *Collections for a History of*

somewhat since the beginning of the fifteenth century; in contrast, the 1500 book inventory of Thomas Kebell (c.1439–1500), an established sergeant-at-law from Leicester, records book prices ranging from 12 pence for a printed book (which has been tentatively identified as *Mandeville's Travels*) to 30 shillings for a parchment manuscript of the work of Peter Comestor.⁸⁶

Further sales at Bordesley are also illuminating. They suggest a concerted effort to treat service books specially. These were sold to different buyers and some were sold for more than the 'old bokes' from the vestry purchased by Doryngton—the missal alone for 8 pence, and a mass book for 12. Some 'old bokes in the quyer' sold for 6 pence, and 'a fryers masse boke' for 4.⁸⁷ Clearly some service books were being valued more highly than other books, although there is no evidence of these particular volumes having been preserved and it is not clear what happened to them afterwards.

It is worth noting that not all of the books at Bordesley were sold off in this way. In 1538, Richard Rich, who was the Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations, complained about the way that the abbey's possessions had been sold off and requested that some of what remained be transferred to his friend Sir George Throckmorton.⁸⁸ His complaint must have applied to the book collections since at least one book from the abbey, a collection of English works known as the Worcestershire miscellany, fell to the Throckmorton family at this time.⁸⁹ The book seems to have been highly prized by the family and it has survived. It serves as a valuable reminder that even books sold or transferred by the owners of monastic institutions at the Dissolution were in some cases preserved.

Of course many institutions were not able to sell off their books before their possessions were forfeited or bought up. John Bale, in his 1549 preface to the *New Year's Gift*, suggests that some of those who bought up former

Staffordshire, edited by the William Salt Archaeological Society, vol. 10, part 1 (1907), pp. 71–188, p. 156. There is no evidence that any of Doryngton's acquisitions have survived.

⁸⁶ The list appears in *The Common Lawyers*, pp. 445–6; see the discussion of the list above, pp. 72–3.

⁸⁷ Savage, *Old*, p. 67. Ramsay interprets this passage differently; he assumes that the 'old books in the vestry' are service books and are priced considerably lower than other sorts of books, but the record also mentions books from the choir (another typical spot for the storage of service books) and it mentions the missal and mass book separately, so there is no reason to assume that the books in the vestry were also service books. Regardless of what sort of books they were, Ramsay's point, that the prices of books varied considerably in an uncertain market, is clearly true; see 'Manuscripts', p. 130.

⁸⁸ Peter Marshall, 'Crisis of Allegiance: George Throckmorton and Henry Tudor', in *The Throckmortons of Coughton from Reformation to Emancipation*, edited by Peter Marshall and Geoffrey Scott (2009), pp. 31–67, p. 56.

⁸⁹ According to an early sixteenth-century inscription, the book was owned by Goditha Throckmorton, who was the daughter of Sir Thomas Throckmorton. See 'London, British Library, Add. MS 37787', in *MLGB3*, edited by Sharpe et al. [based on *MLGB*], Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <<http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mlgb/book/457/>>, accessed 8 October 2021.

religious institutions subsequently shipped their books to foreign buyers: 'some they sent ouer see to þe bokebynders, not in small nombre, but at tymes whole shyppes full, to the wonderynge of the foren nacyons.'⁹⁰ Elsewhere, Bale laments that books were being put 'to so homely an office of subjeccyon & utter contempe' as to 'becomen coverynges for bokes comminge from the foren nacyons.'⁹¹ Some of these books may have been the same ones that Bale claims he saw loaded onto ships directed for Flanders which we have already considered.⁹² Bale claimed that books were still being shipped abroad even during Edward's reign; in his plea to Edward VI to give him funding for the protection of old manuscripts, Bale laments that 'we sende them over the see, never to returne agayne.'⁹³ Leland, too, suggested that foreign collectors were taking the books directly; he justified his work in 1536 by stating that the English monasteries were under threat from 'Germanes' who were pilfering English libraries and bringing their works to the continent for their antiquarian interests.⁹⁴ If this were true, it might provide evidence for pilfering at the Dissolution. But it is not clear which books, if any, these scholars were stealing, nor what fate awaited these volumes after they had been stolen.

Bale's comment certainly seems to suggest that some continental bookbinders broke down stolen volumes to use as binding material, but very few have taken up the question of whether such acts of cultural vandalism were at all common. One early attempt, and an early instance of what is now termed 'fragmentology', was undertaken by R. Howlett. Hoping to evaluate Bale's suggestion that books from England were bought up and recycled by continental bookbinders, Howlett gathered together a large collection of fragments rescued from the bindings of early printed books from the continent. In an impassioned address to the British Archaeological Association in 1886, Howlett dramatically laid his collection of fragments on a table and proclaimed that almost all of them had been copied by continental scribes. There was, he claimed, no evidence of English material being shipped to bookbinders across the channel en masse.⁹⁵ Unfortunately the collection that Howlett

⁹⁰ John Bale, *Preface to Leland's New Year's Gift*, quoted in Wright, 'Dispersal of the Monastic', p. 211.

⁹¹ Quoted in Gerhardt, 'No', p. 422; the passage is discussed at further length below.

⁹² See above, in the introduction to this chapter, p. 111.

⁹³ Quoted in Gerhardt, 'No', p. 419. ⁹⁴ Carley, 'Dispersal', p. 273.

⁹⁵ R. Howlett remarks on the large amount of philosophical and theological (especially liturgical) material among the fragments: 'There is abundance of absurd mediaeval philosophy, both English and foreign; there are bits of many theological treatises; and there are leaves of many liturgical books which, perhaps, contained some valuable jottings on the margins, and certainly contained many charming works of art.' He finds, moreover, that 'there is not a single scrap which contains a word of historical information, and that there is not a morsel from any classical author. Surely if MSS. of these two important classes had been packed off wholesale to the Continent, we should have found some

used to illustrate his point, which was mostly borrowed from the antiquarian Cecil Brent, seems to have been sold into private hands at Brent's death and it cannot now be traced.⁹⁶ It is therefore difficult to reproduce Howlett's particular study or to evaluate his approach.

Thankfully the online repositories available today offer new approaches. One of these is the *Fragmentarium*, a collaborative collection of manuscript fragments from medieval Europe that are now housed in institutions across the Western hemisphere. At the time of writing, the catalogue contains 2,845 fragments. Some of these fragments are folia that at one point became detached from a larger work; many are pastedowns or other sorts of scraps that were once inserted into bookbindings.⁹⁷ In general, the *Fragmentarium* dataset seems to support Howlett's predictions. Of the fragments with known origins found in continental bindings, the vast majority originated in continental manuscripts. For example, the database contains fifty-three fragments that are currently held in Belgium, and most of these were rescued from Belgian bindings. None of them seems to have originated in England.⁹⁸ And none of the binding fragments tagged as having been produced in England is listed as having come from a continental volume.⁹⁹ The database is of course limited by the information that has been added to it, but the information that is included reveals plainly that most bookbinders who used recycled manuscript leaves worked with local materials.

A search further afield for evidence of continental binders recycling English manuscript fragments yields some results, but these are limited. The binding fragments of Middle English romances of known provenance that are

little piece of one of them lurking amongst this large collection of fragments; but it is not so'; R. Howlett, 'Observations on the Alleged Extensive Loss of Historical MSS After the Dissolution of the Monasteries', *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 42, no. 3 (1886), pp. 263–71, pp. 267–8.

⁹⁶ For Cecil's ownership, see Howlett, 'Observations', p. 263. Cecil's books were sold in a Sotheby's auction in 1902. The catalogue mentions 'fragments of Early Printed and English black letter Books, Title Pages, &c' (no. 332), but it is not clear if these are the same fragments that Howlett used and their whereabouts are unknown; see Sotheby, Wilkinson, and Hodge, eds, *Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts, Including the Library of the Late Cecil Brent, Esq.* (1902), p. 27.

⁹⁷ The data at the time of writing has been archived.

⁹⁸ At the time of writing, the metadata is somewhat inconsistent, so a comprehensive search across the database is not likely to yield accurate results. For this reason, I have checked each fragment individually. Some of the fragments of unknown provenance may be from England but there is no evidence to suggest this. There is a fragment of the Archbishop of Canterbury John Pecham's *Collectanea biblicorum* in Antwerpen, Rijksarchief te Antwerpen, Verzameling Losse Aanwinsten, nr. 2.10, but this work circulated on the continent and there is no reason to suspect that this particular fragment is an insular production.

⁹⁹ The Beauvais Missal is also tagged as having a text language in English but this is apparently a mistake in the metadata.

included in Guddat-Figge's catalogue all came from insular bindings.¹⁰⁰ Two folia of an insular copy of the Anglo-French *Amadas et Ydoine* (Dean no. 161) from the middle of the thirteenth century show signs of having been rescued from a binding and are now in Göttingen, which could potentially reflect the kind of destruction that Bale describes, but it is not clear how the Anglo-French poem ended up there or when it was recycled, and it may have been recycled long before the Dissolution, like many other manuscripts of French poetry from England.¹⁰¹ A fragment of a fifteenth-century classroom manuscript from England recently turned up in Ghent and may have been rescued from a continental binding, but it is not clear where or when the classroom manuscript was recycled and it could have happened prior to the Dissolution or long after it.¹⁰²

It is tempting to add to this limited evidence three service book fragments that William Smith finds reflect the use of Hereford: a missal fragment used as binding material in a copy of Angelo Ambrogini's *Opera omnia* (Venice, 1498), a gradual fragment in a copy of Alexander Aphrodisiensis' *Quæstiones naturales* (Venice, Hieronymus Scotus, 1541), and a print processional (dating, rather surprisingly, from around 1540) in a copy of the *Opus historiarum nostro seculo* (Basle, 1541).¹⁰³ Since these English service book fragments are bound up with continental works, it is tempting to suspect that the service books were destroyed on the Continent and that they therefore provide evidence for the kind of destruction suggested by Bale. But this evidence is complicated. The first example must have been recycled prior to the Reformation, so cannot be a witness to the kind of destruction Bale describes. The latter two fragments were almost certainly recycled in England rather than the Continent, since an act was passed in 1534 banning the importation of pre-bound books to England.¹⁰⁴ It is of course possible that the volumes in question were illegal imports but there would have been little motivation to

¹⁰⁰ The fragments listed in Guddat-Figge's catalogue are listed below, pp. 182–3. Of these, the fragments with known provenance are no. 3, 23 (several fragments, on which see above), 29, 33, and 58.

¹⁰¹ They are now Göttingen Univ. Bibl. Philol. 184. See the recent catalogue entry for these fragments in 'Göttingen Univ. Bibl. Philol. 184', in *Intercultural Dialogue and Multilingualism in Post-Conquest England: A Database of French Literary Manuscripts Produced Between 1100–1550*, edited by Krista A. Murchison (Milne), <https://leidenuniversitylibrary.github.io/manuscript-stats/details/ms_309.html>, accessed 27 October 2021. See Careri et al.'s comments on the 'fragility of the corpus' of French writing from twelfth-century England above, p. 77.

¹⁰² The fragment, which is currently being catalogued, is Ghent University HS 2583/108. I am grateful to the Medieval Manuscripts in Flemish Collections team for drawing this fragment to my attention through their X (formerly Twitter) account.

¹⁰³ Smith, *The Use*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁴ On the 1534 act see Loades, 'The Press', p. 49; Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 6; and above, pp. 118–19. It is also worth noting that the first two volumes are now in libraries in England and the last was owned by the English writer Robert Burton (1577–1640); see Smith, *The Use*, p. 86.

import these particular volumes illegally and it seems far more likely that these continental works were bound with Hereford material after they arrived in England than that they were bound with Hereford material while on the continent and then illegally shipped to England later. Thus none of these examples supplies evidence of the kind of destruction suggested by Bale.

If bookbinders did take large numbers of volumes from England to the continent, then, there is very little evidence of these being recycled for binding material. It is worth noting that even English bookbinders did not usually use pilfered monastic manuscripts for binding scraps during this early period; the Oxford bookbinding fragments studied by Neil Ker that date from 1490 to 1540 are mostly taken from volumes of canon law texts and other books that were rendered obsolete by the arrival of print.¹⁰⁵ This is not to suggest that no English book was ever recycled by a continental bookbinder, but if there is so little evidence for it, and if most binders relied on local material for recycling, it is fair to conclude that it happened relatively rarely, and Bale's lament was based on a limited practice.

What are we to make of Leland's similar lament, that continental scholars were bringing books overseas for their own use? Here, too, the evidence is limited, and it has led one early commentator to proclaim that Leland's account of 'Germanes' stealing books is inaccurate and that 'there is little evidence that Germany got much from English libraries.'¹⁰⁶ There is, however, some evidence of English books being brought overseas during this period. Some of these ended up in the collection of the early printer Jan Moretus (1543–1610), who was based in Antwerp. By the time his library was catalogued in 1592 it contained an eleventh-century manuscript containing a copy of the *Excerptiones de Prisciano* and, most likely, Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, which originated from the Abbey of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Abingdon, Berkshire.¹⁰⁷ A fourteenth-century collection of sermons in the same collection,

¹⁰⁵ See Neil Ker, *Fragments of Medieval Manuscripts Used as Pastedowns in Oxford Bindings: With a Survey of Oxford Binding c.1515–1620* (1954), p. xi and the discussion below in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁶ See Aubrey Gwynn, 'Fate of the English Monastic Libraries', *The Dublin Review* 206 (1940), pp. 300–15, pp. 311–12, and Carley, 'Monastic', p. 312.

¹⁰⁷ The manuscript was broken up; one part is now British Library, Add. MS 32246 and the rest is Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, MS 16.2 (formerly MS 47). Ker suggests that the same manuscript once contained an eleventh-century glossed copy of Aldhelm's *De virginitate* now in Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, MS 1650 (1520) and Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, 16.8 (formerly MS 190; a glossed copy of Boethius' *De consolatione Philosophiae*). This latter book was owned by the corrector and humanist Theodore Poelman (1511–81) and passed into the Plantin collection from Poelman's; see Neil Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (1957), pp. 1–3, 6, and Ker, *MLGB*, p. 2. For Poelman's collection see Max Rooses, *Catalogue of the Plantin-Moretus Museum* (1894), pp. 41, 57. See also the description of the additional fragment at 'Add MS 32246', in *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_32246>, accessed 15 December 2021.

now Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum M 305 (formerly MS lat. 57), also seems to have originated in England and may have been added to the collection during the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁸ Some manuscripts were brought abroad during this tumultuous period to ensure their preservation. This was the case for the approximately 200 manuscripts from Cambridge libraries, many of which were scholastic and theological volumes, that were collected and shipped overseas. By 1545 these manuscripts were under the care and protection of Cardinal Marcello Cervini (1501–55), who eventually became Pope Marcellus II.¹⁰⁹ Thus Leland and Bale were right to claim that manuscripts were brought abroad in the wake of the Dissolution, but there is little evidence that these exported manuscripts were pilfered, and little evidence of their being subsequently destroyed en masse.

Much of the evidence examined so far is about the typical fates of monastic collections, and it is worth pausing to examine the fates of the cathedral priories separately, since their statuses differed considerably at the Dissolution from those of the monasteries. C. B. L. Barr and David Selwyn, who have studied the fates of the cathedral priories in depth, note that these priories were left relatively safe during the initial years of the Dissolution. Norwich, the first cathedral priory to be suppressed, was not closed during the initial waves, but rather on 2 May 1538. Yet Barr and Selwyn find that while the relative continuity enjoyed by cathedrals at the Dissolution might be expected to have allowed them to preserve their book collections intact, the reality is very different. They stress that the continuity of these institutions is somewhat illusory; in most of these institutions, there was a transitional period at their suppression between the retirement of the prior and the institution of the dean and they suggest that the instability of this period may have left manuscript collections at risk of loss (although they do not suggest that this happened at the hands of pillaging reformers). They find that of the nine non-monastic cathedrals, only three (Hereford, Lincoln, and Salisbury) were able to keep much of their pre-Reformation book collections. Of the eight monastic cathedrals, only two (Durham and Worcester) were able to keep much of their pre-Reformation collections.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ It contains a bit of verse in Middle English; see 'I Wonder Much in the Writing Above', in *The Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, compiled, edited, and supplemented by Linne R. Mooney et al., <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=2322#wit-2322-1>>, accessed 11 January 2022.

¹⁰⁹ See Humphreys, 'Loss', p. 256 and Neil Ker's 'Cardinal Cervini's Manuscripts from the Cambridge Friars', in *Xenia medii aevi historiam illustrantia oblata Thomae Kaeppli OP*, edited by Raymundus Creytens and Pius Künzle (1978), pp. 51–71; revised and reprinted in *Books, Collectors and Libraries: Studies in the Medieval Heritage*, edited by Neil Ker and Andrew G. Watson (1985), pp. 437–58, p. 438.

¹¹⁰ Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', pp. 364–6.

The evidence, then, suggests great variation in the fates of the manuscripts from the religious houses that were shuttered during the Dissolution. A very limited number were carried away to the royal libraries; these tended to be volumes that held historical or political importance for Henry. Some volumes were sold off, either by their original owners or by those who purchased disbanded religious houses. In some cases, manuscripts that were sold off in this way were subsequently brought abroad, apparently for antiquarian purposes or for safe keeping. There is, by contrast, very little evidence of monastic libraries being ransacked or vandalized during this period, and those who claim that they were tend to base this claim on evidence that has been misinterpreted. Based on the available evidence, the destruction of manuscripts that took place at this moment seems to have been limited to manuscripts that were purchased by merchants and others who recycled them for scrap material. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no evidence of any books being targeted for destruction on account of their contents, nor of more ‘Catholic-leaning’ volumes being targeted.

Of course in one sense this distinction may not seem that important. If some books were destroyed, does it really matter exactly why? But the implications become obvious when we try to assess how far the books that do survive are representative of the ones that once existed, and the evidence suggests that the destruction that took place during the immediate aftermath of the Dissolution is unlikely to have skewed the nature of the surviving record in any single direction. It must be stressed that this statement is true only of the effects of the destruction that took place in the immediate aftermath of the dissolutions of the religious houses. The effects of destruction during later stages of the Reformation, and of the preservation attempts during this period and others, are separate issues, and ones to which we shall return shortly.

It is also important to recognize that many manuscripts were left in their home institutions at the Dissolution. As we have seen, several large cathedrals that were converted into Anglican institutions managed to keep their book collections relatively intact at the Dissolution.¹¹¹ The book collections of Christ Church Priory which, as we have seen, was left relatively intact, were not entirely unusual in this respect. Books also remained in place at some monasteries. Carley, who has examined the fate of monastic books in this context, notes, for example, that some manuscripts were still in Tavistock Abbey in 1566.¹¹² Many parish churches maintained their collections throughout the

¹¹¹ See Roberts, ‘Extending’, p. 295 and Barr and Selwyn, ‘Major’, pp. 364–6.

¹¹² See Carley, ‘Monastic’, p. 341 and Ramsay, ‘Manuscripts’, p. 129.

tumult of this period and even beyond it; Carley describes a 1567 visitation record for the Church of Ripon that records that, ‘there is in a howse within a wawte of the said Churche yet some remaininge reserved. . . . xlix [49] bookes, some Antiphoners, and suche bookes as ar condemned by publique auctoritie.’¹¹³ Clearly some book collections remained stable despite a tense atmosphere of religious reform.

There were, moreover, concerted efforts aimed at preserving medieval manuscripts during this period, and it is worth examining these efforts to establish which types of volumes were more likely to be saved, since the issue is important for understanding the impacts of the Dissolution on the corpus of manuscripts that survives. In many cases, manuscripts were carried away by members of the clergy upon the closure of their houses. This seems to be the case with a fifteenth-century volume containing a psalter and other liturgical pieces which is marked with the name of Robert Blakeney, who was the prior of Tynemouth when it was dissolved in 1536.¹¹⁴ The manuscript has survived and remains in private hands today. After the surrender of St Augustine’s Abbey in 1538, Robert Bracher, who had been a monk of the abbey, possessed a copy of William Thorne’s chronicle that had previously been in the abbey’s possession; he eventually gave it to Matthew Parker.¹¹⁵ In some cases, individual volumes seem to have been gifted to monks at the Dissolution; a thirteenth-century Latin Bible contains a note stating that in 1538 it had been gifted from the Cistercian abbey of St Mary the Virgin to one of its former monks.¹¹⁶ At the dissolution of the Charterhouse in London, the books and beds from the cells were given to ‘the brethren who dwelt in

¹¹³ ‘Dispersal’, p. 284, n. 84. At St Augustine’s many books were left in place at the Dissolution; the same may be true of the book collection of Rochester Cathedral Priory, although these books were eventually added to the royal library collections; see *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 464. Some books from Barking Abbey may have been left at Barking at the Dissolution and were under the control of the steward of the estates at the time of the Dissolution; see the discussion in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 13–14. The books at the Abbey of St Werburg in Chester may have also remained in place at the Dissolution; see *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 105. Many books were also left in place at Worcester Cathedral Priory; see *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 651.

¹¹⁴ Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Third Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (1872), p. 255.

¹¹⁵ Emden, *Donors*, p. 19. The manuscript is Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 189. According to an inscription in the manuscript (f. 1r), it also passed into the hands of Thomas Twine at some point during this period, although the inscription leaves the precise nature of the manuscript’s journey uncertain. The manuscript is ‘Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 189: Canterbury Documents. William Thorne OSB, Chronicle (587–1375)’, in *Parker Library on the Web*, <<https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/tf079gs7238>>, accessed 23 October 2023.

¹¹⁶ ‘Iste liber pertinet ad me Iohannem Webster clericum ex dono domus beate Marie virginis de pipewell a. d. 1538 5^o die novembris. Quicumque alienaverit anathema sit. Webster.’ (‘This book belongs to me, John Webster, cleric, [from] the gift of the dwelling of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Pipewell, in the year of our Lord 1538, on the 5th day of November. Whoever shall alienate [this book], let him be cursed. Webster’). See ‘Biblia latina—Pipewell, Northamptonshire. Cistercian abbey

the said cells.¹¹⁷ Some volumes that the clergy kept at the closure of their houses were subsequently sold; upon the dissolution of St Alban's Abbey in the 1550s, its last abbot, Richard Boreman, seems to have kept some volumes and then sold at least one to the famous magician John Dee in 1553–4. Despite changing hands many times, this particular volume has survived.¹¹⁸ There are enough examples of former monks and other members of the clergy holding onto the volumes of their former institutions to suggest that this was not an anomaly but a relatively common practice.¹¹⁹

Indeed, there is far more evidence of monks bringing volumes with them at the dissolution of their houses than of monastic libraries being pillaged by reformers. In some cases, members of the clergy were able to save a large number of volumes upon their retirement. Richard Hart, the last prior of Llanthony, established an agreement with Cromwell in 1538 regarding the closure of his house.¹²⁰ Hart retired with a decent pension of £100 a year and seems to have kept a significant portion of the institution's books.¹²¹ Hart also collected other manuscripts and Anthony Wood estimated that at the time Wood was writing, Hart's collection numbered about 800 volumes.¹²² It is apparently thanks to Hart's conservation efforts that such an unusually large portion of Llanthony's collection survives: about 180 manuscripts and two printed books from the priory—approximately a fifth of what the collection had held at its dissolution.¹²³ About half of the preserved manuscripts (c.90) date to the twelfth century, but we should not take this to suggest that Hart

of St Mary the Virgin', in *MLGB3*, edited by Sharpe et al. [based on *MLGB*], Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <<http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mlgb/book/4441/>>, accessed 2 February 2022.

¹¹⁷ Ramsay, 'Manuscripts', p. 128.

¹¹⁸ See Aubrey Gwynn, 'Fate of the English Monastic Libraries', *The Dublin Review* 206 (1940), pp. 300–15, at pp. 311–12; and Carley, 'Monastic', p. 341.

¹¹⁹ Ker suggests that former religious preserved books at Merton, Ashridge, and at 'Fountains, Glastonbury, Hailes, Southwark, Syon and the Charterhouses': 'Migration', p. 11. Wright gives examples from Durham Priory, St Mary's Abbey in Kells, Llanthony Secunda, and the Cluniac Priory of Monk Bretton (although these were acquired from a sale; see below); in Wright, 'Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', pp. 159–60. Building on the work of Ker, Carley finds more evidence of the practice at the houses listed by Ker, and he also finds evidence of it at other houses; those not yet mentioned here are the abbeys of Kirkstall, Rievaulx, Roche, Pershore (where mostly print books were rescued), Evesham, and Bury St Edmund's; the priories of Guisborough, Haltemprice, and Newburgh; the Hull Charterhouse (where only print books were rescued), the Mount Grace Charterhouse, the Grandimontine priory at Grosmont, and the friary of the York Franciscans; Carley, 'Dispersal', pp. 285–9; see also Carley, 'Monastic', p. 341 and Carley, 'Introduction', pp. xlii–xliii; Ramsay lists several of the examples already given as well as the example of the London Charterhouse and the Cistercian abbey of Byland; see 'Manuscripts', p. 128; Arnold Hunt lists some of the aforementioned examples, suggests the same may have happened at Grosmont Abbey, and adds other possible examples, in 'Clerical', pp. 405–6.

¹²⁰ Bennett, 'Book', vol. 1, p. 21.

¹²¹ Bennett, 'Book', vol. 1, p. 216.

¹²² Humphreys, 'Loss', p. 255.

¹²³ See Sargent, 'What', p. 211. In her thesis on the topic, Bennett notes that the survival rates of manuscripts from Llanthony are remarkably high; 'Book', vol. 1, p. 219.

prioritized older volumes; in her study of the collection of Llanthony, Kirsty Bennett suggests that the disproportionate number of twelfth-century manuscripts reflects a period of pronounced productivity at Llanthony and does not reflect a particular proclivity towards older volumes on the part of Hart.¹²⁴ Bennett does, however, find that twelfth-century theological commentary has survived especially well, and she suggests that Hart may have preferred to rescue theological volumes.¹²⁵

Friars also rescued books at the dissolution of their houses. The chronicle of the Franciscan friary in London, known as the Greyfriar's chronicle, was 'almost certainly written by a friar who took the manuscript away with him at the house's closure and continued to write in its blank pages.'¹²⁶ Some volumes moved from dissolved houses into the hands of local parish priests. Arnold Hunt finds that at the dissolution of Byland Abbey in 1538, its book collection seems to have passed to its last prior and then was eventually inherited by Robert Barker, who became the vicar of Driffeld in Yorkshire. Hunt finds that Barker seems to have continued to view the collection, which numbered an incredible 150 volumes, as a 'working theological library'.¹²⁷

At Durham Cathedral Priory, the careful efforts of the bishop led to the preservation of a large number of volumes. These efforts have led A. J. Piper to the conclusion that 'Books formerly owned by Durham Cathedral Priory have survived in far greater numbers than those of any other medieval English institution.'¹²⁸ Clearly the preservation work of former clergy was a major factor in deciding the survival rates of a dissolved house's book collection. It is not always clear why former religious preserved volumes, but James Carley finds that some members of the clergy saved manuscripts in hopes that their collections could be reincorporated into monastic collections at an expected reopening of the monasteries.¹²⁹ Indeed, many monasteries were still buying books up until their closure and there is evidence to suggest that

¹²⁴ Bennett, 'Book', vol. 1, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Bennett, 'Book', vol. 1, p. 83, n. 155, p. 223. Bennett also finds that patristic works had relatively high chances of survival (p. 140).

¹²⁶ Mary C. Erler, *Reading and Writing During the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns 1530–1558* (2013), p. 38.

¹²⁷ Hunt, 'Clerical', p. 405.

¹²⁸ See A. J. Piper, 'The Libraries of the Monks of Durham', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, edited by Malcolm Parkes and A. Watson (1978), pp. 213–49, p. 213. For other examples of religious saving books at the Dissolution, see Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 368.

¹²⁹ See Carley, 'Dispersal', pp. 284–5. Carley here draws on the work of Peter Anthony Cunich, who writes that wills from Yorkshire indicate that some former members of the clergy 'made provision for the return of personal possessions [including books] to their former communities should they ever be re-founded'; see 'The Ex-Religious in Post-Dissolution Society: Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?', in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, edited by James Clark (2002),

some did not anticipate any extended interruption.¹³⁰ Other members of the clergy undoubtedly held onto the book collections of their former houses out of a sense of nostalgia. While the motivations behind these acts of preservation are various and in many cases uncertain, it is clear that these acts were common: aside from the eight examples given here of houses where books were rescued by former religious, another twenty-five at least can be added.¹³¹ These are just the documented cases. Although it runs against traditional historiographies of the period, the evidence suggests that far more books were rescued by former religious than were destroyed by iconoclasts during this period.

Monks were more inclined to save some volumes than others. We have already seen that Hart might have prioritized theological volumes. Examining the books mentioned among the wills of former clergy from Yorkshire, Carley finds several interesting patterns. He notes that after the monastery of Monk Bretton was dissolved in 1538, several former clergy members, including the prior William Browne, set up a new community at Worsborough. They secured 148 books from their former house, probably by purchasing them from a royal officer at the Dissolution, and Carley finds that when the collection was inventoried twenty years later, most of the books were print volumes.¹³² While making the same observation, the editors of the inventory suggest it may be possible ‘that what the former monks chose to keep was not their most venerable volumes, but their most up-to-date’, although the editors also consider the possibility that the disproportionate number of print volumes in the post-Dissolution collection may simply reflect the particular shape of the pre-Dissolution collection.¹³³

A similar pattern can be seen in the collections of other religious. When the former prior of the Hull Charterhouse took books with him upon the dissolution of his house, he seems to have favoured print works; Carley finds that 5 out of the 6 that survive today are print works.¹³⁴ Carley concludes from these and other examples that he takes from Yorkshire wills that ‘the religious normally took away printed books’, although he finds some manuscripts listed

pp. 227–38, quoted at p. 236 in Carley ‘Dispersal’, p. 284, no. 84. See also Carley, ‘Monastic’, p. 341, no. 12, and Ramsay, ‘Manuscripts’, p. 128.

¹³⁰ See Bell, ‘Libraries’, p. 137.

¹³¹ See p. 139, no. 119 above.

¹³² See Carley, ‘Dispersal’, p. 284 and Wright, ‘Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth’, p. 161. On the proportion of print books and how the books were acquired, see also *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 267–8.

¹³³ See ‘Introduction’, in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. xxix, and p. 268. The list appears in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 266–87.

¹³⁴ Carley, ‘Dispersal’, p. 286.

among the wills too.¹³⁵ Using the same wills, Carley also identifies some patterns in terms of the contents of the volumes preserved by former religious in Yorkshire. He finds that these volumes ‘consisted primarily of bibles and commentaries on the Bible, although there was a smattering of historical works.’¹³⁶ Carley finds that the same preferences emerge from elsewhere in England and he concludes that former members of the clergy were especially interested in preserving works of ‘theology.’¹³⁷ Carley suggests that this preference for works of theology stands in strong contrast to the preferences of Leland and other antiquarians, who were interested in rescuing primarily ‘antiquarian material of patriotic and historical, sometimes legal, value.’¹³⁸

It is worth examining the work of those antiquarians and their preferences since it is important for determining the impact of this period on the corpus of manuscripts that has survived. These subjects have already been explored in considerable depth by Carley and there is thus no need to explore them at length here, but some remarks about the nature of books that antiquarians wished to preserve are nevertheless necessary.¹³⁹ Perhaps the best-known manuscript collector from this early period was John Leland. It is clear that while visiting the collections of monastic houses, Leland removed some manuscripts. His expressed intent was to preserve them.¹⁴⁰ Were certain manuscripts more likely to be removed by Leland than others? Leland’s reflection on his previous activities, recorded in his *New-year’s Gift to King Henry* (1545), is telling. Leland describes how Henry VIII had prompted him ‘to peruse and dilygentlye to searche all the lybraryes of Monasteryes and collegies of thys your noble realm, to the entent that the monuments of aunycnt wryters, as wel of other nacyons as of your owne prouynce, myght be brought out of deadly darkness to lyvelie lyght... Yea, and furthermore that the holy scryptures of God myghte both be syncerly taught and learned, all maner of superstycyon and crafty-coloured doctryne of a rowt of Romaine Bysshoppes, totally expelled oute of thys your most catholyque realme.’¹⁴¹ Leland, then, had two expressed aims: preserve ancient writers and help stamp out any theological views that ran contrary to Henry’s.

¹³⁵ Carley, ‘Dispersal’, pp. 285–7.

¹³⁶ Carley, ‘Dispersal’, p. 287. Carley notes that few of these books can be identified in modern collections; they may have been destroyed because they were vulnerable when they were taken outside institutions although they may still exist and are simply difficult to recognize today without any surviving institutional ownership marks.

¹³⁷ Carley, ‘Dispersal’, pp. 287–91, quoted at p. 291.

¹³⁸ Carley, ‘Dispersal’, p. 291.

¹³⁹ On the work of antiquarians at the Dissolution see especially Carley, ‘Monastic’, pp. 340–7.

¹⁴⁰ Carley ‘Dispersal’, p. 275.

¹⁴¹ John Leland, *The Laboryouse Journey and Serche of John Leylande*, edited by W. A. Copinger (1895), pp. 33, 35.

Leland has a clear idea of which writers he considers ‘ancient’. He extols the ‘godly wyts and wryters, learned with the best... in this your region; not only at such tymes as the Roman emperors had recourse to it, but in those days that the Saxons prevayled of the Brytayns, and the Normans of the Saxons.’¹⁴² In this statement, a rather early expression of interest in England’s earliest written history, the authors that are praised all lived before the twelfth century—over 300 years before Leland was beginning his collection efforts. Leland does not express any interest in more recent medieval authors or in medieval authors not mentioned on this list. His collection and documentation policies were centred around Britain’s pre-twelfth-century history.

In his *New-year’s Gift to King Henry*, Leland describes his plans to condense the fruits of his labour into a book, *De viris illustribus*, although his efforts were not published until 1709.¹⁴³ The ‘Famous Men’ whom Leland extols in his work are wide-ranging and reflect the depth of Leland’s penetration into the libraries of the nation. They range from important church officials such as the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Bradwardine (d. 1349), to influential writers such as Geoffrey Chaucer, to more obscure figures such as John Haynton, a Carmelite friar active c.1429.¹⁴⁴ While some of the writers who piqued Leland’s interests were relatively new at the time, the vast majority lived at least a couple of centuries before Leland and would have been preserved in older volumes; Leland is clearly particular to the works that he considers the ancient monuments of a British past.

These interests are all evident from Leland’s collecting habits. Many of the books collected by Leland are listed on Bale’s *Index Britanniae scriptorum*—a list of ‘British’ writers and the places where manuscripts of their works can be found. Carley finds that 176 manuscripts on this list belonged to Leland, and it was clear that his collection was viewed as an important repository of the works of British writers.¹⁴⁵ Most of the works by British writers in Leland’s collection were over 300 years old at the time; these include the works of

¹⁴² Leland, *The Laboryouse Journey*, p. 485.

¹⁴³ R. Scott Beville, ‘John Leland’, in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, edited by Siân Echard, Robert Rouse, et al. (2017), pp. 1169–74, p. 1173.

¹⁴⁴ There is an edition of Leland’s work in *John Leland: De viris illustribus/On Famous Men*, edited by J. P. Carley (2010); the authors mentioned are no. 347 (p. 563), no. 505 (pp. 703–14), and no. 542 (p. 749).

¹⁴⁵ See Carley, ‘Leland: Glastonbury’, p. 108. The list is John Bale’s *Index Britanniae scriptorum quos ex variis bibliothecis non parvo labore collegit Ioannes Baleus, cum aliis: John Bale’s Index of British and Other Writers*, edited by Reginald Lane Poole with the help of Mary Bateson (1902).

Alcuin (724–c.804), Walter Map (c.1130–1210), and Hugh the Chanter (c.1180).¹⁴⁶ Leland's collection was clearly strong in older British authors.

Further information about Leland's interests can be gleaned from James Carley's detailed work on the antiquarian's visitation to Glastonbury Abbey. By comparing Leland's list of forty-four books of note from Glastonbury to the abbey's pre-Reformation book collection, Carley finds that Leland had a strong preference for recording older volumes, writing that 'Leland was, of course, a connoisseur of old books and in the Glastonbury list at least 30 of the 44 items could easily date from before 1100.' With respect to post-Conquest writers, Leland's interests were, according to Carley, chiefly historical.¹⁴⁷

Leland's lists have a particular regional bias; most of the post-Conquest volumes that interested Leland were by writers from the British Isles.¹⁴⁸ At Revesby Abbey, a Cistercian house, Leland records only two volumes: the *Vita S. Modwennae* by Geoffrey, the Abbot of Burton-upon-Trent (d. 1151), and the *Commentaria super duodecim prophetas* by Robert of Bridlington (d. c.1160).¹⁴⁹ James Simpson finds that 'For Leland and Bale the identity that qualifies all writers for inclusion in their catalogues is "Britishness".' Simpson adds that 'This category was itself highly charged, since England was now making very strong claims to Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.'¹⁵⁰ Did Leland's interests, tied as they were to a sense of British identity, lead him to a preference for works written in English rather than Latin? The evidence is hard to read. Carley notes that only one of the works that Leland lists at Glastonbury is described as containing English, but Carley also notes that at the time, the library held only six books containing English.¹⁵¹ Leland was clearly interested in works in English, but only if they upheld his vision of a British past.

Leland's aim of preserving the history and literature of the British Isles and a notionally British identity also took other forms. Carley finds that Leland had 'a strong urge to uphold the vision of British history put forward by Geoffrey of Monmouth.'¹⁵² Tied to this aim was a pronounced interest in material pertaining to King Arthur.¹⁵³ Leland drew on this material for his

¹⁴⁶ Alcuin spent some time at the Carolingian court but was from York and is considered a British writer by Bale. References here are to Bale's *Index*, pp. 16, 110, and 172; quoted in Carley, 'Leland: Glastonbury', p. 108.

¹⁴⁷ Carley, 'Leland: Glastonbury', pp. 110–11. ¹⁴⁸ Carley, 'Leland: Glastonbury', p. 110.

¹⁴⁹ James P. Carley, 'John Leland and the Contents of English Pre-Dissolution Libraries: Lincolnshire,' *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 9, no. 4 (1989): pp. 330–57, pp. 347–8.

¹⁵⁰ Simpson, *Reform*, p. 24. ¹⁵¹ Carley, 'Leland: Glastonbury', p. 110.

¹⁵² Carley, 'Leland: Glastonbury', p. 111.

¹⁵³ On the ways in which Arthur was used by Leland to promote a sense of British identity, see Simpson, *Reform*, p. 298.

1544 *Assertio inelytissimi Arturii regis Britanniae*, a defence of the historicity of King Arthur written in response to Polydore Vergil's claims to the contrary.¹⁵⁴

It does not seem that Leland was less likely to preserve more 'Catholic' volumes. We have seen that the various royal libraries were initially stocked with volumes that were thought to support Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, but that these were mostly older chronicles and works of canon law. We have seen, too, that Leland's own preservation and acquisition policies were centred around 'good authors'—writers from Britain's past that were typically preserved in older volumes. There is no evidence that Leland prioritized seemingly proto-Protestant writers, or, for that matter, that he tried to destroy more Catholic-leaning volumes.¹⁵⁵

Leland's interests, then, seem to have skewed towards material from before c.1100, material that could support Henry VIII's marriage goals, and material related to the history of the British Isles. Indeed, summarizing the collection policies of Leland and his associates, Carley writes that these men tried to preserve material of 'patriotic and historical, sometimes legal value'.¹⁵⁶ There is no evidence that Leland destroyed more Catholic-leaning volumes, and if his notes are to be trusted it would seem that any influence he had on the corpus of manuscripts that survives today would be towards the preservation of older or historical works of medieval England.

It would seem that in this respect Leland's activities matched those of other collectors from this era, though the evidence for their activities is in most cases more limited.¹⁵⁷ Bale, publishing Leland's notes in 1549, offers a remarkably explicit description of which works he considers worthy of preservation:

Yf the byshop of Romes lawes, decrees decretals, extravagantes, clementines and other suche dregges of the devyll, yea yf Heytesburyes sophismes, Porphyryes universals, Aristotles olde logyckes and Dunses dyvynyte, wyth such other lowly legerdemaynes, and frutes of the bottomlesse pytte, had leaped out of our libraries, and so becomen coverynges for bokes comminge from the foren nacyons, we might wele have ben therwith contented. But to put our auncient Chronicles, our noble hystories, our

¹⁵⁴ Bevill, 'John Leland', p. 1172.

¹⁵⁵ Carley, 'Dispersal', p. 275.

¹⁵⁶ Carley, 'Dispersal', p. 291.

¹⁵⁷ For other antiquarians who collected volumes during this period, such as Sir John Prise, see Ker, 'Migration', Carley 'Monastic', p. 341; Ramsay, 'Manuscripts', p. 127, and Gerhardt, 'No', p. 414. In Lincolnshire, a commissioner of Henry VIII took little interest in the print material, favouring older volumes; see 'Introduction', in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. xxix.

learned commentaryes & hystories, our learned commentaryes & homelyes upon the scriptures, to so homely an office of subjeccyon & utter contempte we have both greatly dishonoured our nacyon, and also shewed our selves very wycked to our posteryte.

Here, Bale suggests that some books are worthy of destruction: older collections of the decretals and other law books, and some older theological and philosophical texts. On the other hand, Bale prioritizes preserving 'our' ancient chronicles (presumably those of England), scholarly commentaryes and histories, and commentaryes on the scriptures. The list of texts worthy of preservation reflects a pronounced interest in older works and in historical texts—especially those of national importance.¹⁵⁸

Other antiquarians who were contemporaries of Leland and Bale also prioritized the preservation of works of historical value. In an oft-cited passage, one of Henry's commissioners, Thomas Bedyll, describes saving a volume on the basis of its antiquity: 'Please it you to understand that in the reding of the muniments and chartors of the house of Ramesey, I found a chartor of King Edgar, writen in a very antiq Romane hand, hard to be red at the first sight, and light inowghe after that a man found out vj or vij words and after compar letter to letter. I am suer ye wold delight to see the same for the straingnes and antiquite thereof...I have seen also there a chartor of King Edward writen affor the Conquest.'¹⁵⁹ The ancient charters in question may have been those from the Ramsay Cartulary, which includes material matching Bedyll's description.¹⁶⁰ This volume has survived, its antiquity apparently ensuring its preservation.

Of course, not all of these antiquarians' preservation attempts were successful in the long term, and it is fair to say that they had a very limited impact on the shape of the surviving record.¹⁶¹ Judging from Bale's list of some 200 books in Leland's collection, Leland's success was limited. It is true that Bale's list is partial, but even if Leland's collection had been twice this size, it would have represented only a tiny fraction of the vast collections held by the

¹⁵⁸ Bale and Leland, *The Laboryouse Journey*, Giiir; quoted in Gerhardt, 'No', p. 422.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Savage, *Old*, p. 68.

¹⁶⁰ The first charter that Bedyll describes closely resembles the charter in a cartulary of Ramsey Abbey, British Library Cotton MS Vespasian E II, f. 5r; see the edition in 'Carta Regis Ædgari', in *Chronicon abbatiae rameseiensis: a sæc x. usque ad an. circiter 1200*, edited by W. Dunn Macray (1886), pp. 181–9.

¹⁶¹ Barr and Selwyn write that the collecting work of Bale, Leland, and Parker 'did not significantly affect or tell us much about what happened to the bulk of ecclesiastical libraries after the Reformation'; see 'Major', p. 363. Given the limited size of these antiquarians' collections, Barr and Selwyn's claim makes sense.

institutions that he visited and it could therefore not have determined the fates of many volumes at the Dissolution. And not all of Leland's books have survived. After Leland passed away, his collection of manuscripts was dispersed and the fates of some of his volumes remain uncertain.¹⁶²

The collection of John Bale, which comprised at least 150 manuscripts at its height, fared even worse. Bale told his friend Matthew Parker that when he fled to the continent in 1553 he had been 'deprived of all that I had, by the papystes undre quene Marye'. He claimed that many of his books had fallen to the Catholic Anthony Selleger, whose sons had 'distributed' them 'amonge the most obstynate papystes of all the whole contraye, to brynge them to naught'.¹⁶³ Little material evidence remains of Bale's collection and it is reasonable to suppose that much was indeed lost.

The collection work of this first wave of early modern antiquarians therefore had little direct impact on manuscript survival rates. But while its direct impact was limited, the work of these early antiquarians, which tended to be directed towards older volumes and those of historical and political importance for Henry VIII, did have some indirect impact on the surviving record. In many ways it established the foundations for the collection policies of the next wave of antiquarians, whose work, as we shall see, gave shape to long-lasting public collections with significant institutional protection.

Indeed, the legacy of early antiquarian collection policies may help to explain some of the patterns of survival that have been identified through studies of individual monastic libraries. One of these studies is in William P. Stoneman's edition of the Dover Priory book lists. Stoneman observes that very few manuscripts from these book lists have survived. Over 400 manuscripts are listed on a 1389 book list, but only 20 of these have been identified—this is 5 per cent. Stoneman finds that manuscripts containing histories and other works of the sort that interested Bale are disproportionately well represented among the survivors. Particularly prominent among the survivors are pre-thirteenth-century works of historical and political importance, as well as certain classical works, such as the works of Ovid.¹⁶⁴ Thus among the few survivors from Dover, many (though not—it must be stressed—all) seem to reflect the legacies of early antiquarians such as Leland and Bale.

The surviving manuscripts from St Albans Abbey, which was dissolved during the period under investigation, reflect similar patterns of survival.

¹⁶² On Leland's collection, see Carley, 'Dispersal', p. 276; on the dispersal of the collection, see pp. 278–9.

¹⁶³ Gerhardt, 'No', pp. 408–9, quoted at p. 408.

¹⁶⁴ See the discussion in *Dover Priory*, ed. Stoneman, pp. 4–5.

Surveying the list of surviving manuscripts, James Clark finds that '[o]f the 150 or more known St Albans books, those made before 1300 outnumber the remainder by almost three to one'. Clark finds, moreover, that many of the later manuscripts that have survived 'were those preserved for their historical significance or political or public utility at the break with Rome'.¹⁶⁵ Clark does not compare the list of surviving volumes to any earlier lists due to the limitations of the surviving evidence, but the preponderance of volumes of historical or political importance among the survivors is nevertheless notable. The distribution of these sorts of volumes clearly differs from the typical distribution of these sorts of volumes in pre-Reformation collections.

In most of the pre-Reformation collections, by contrast, works of theology predominated. Indeed, theological volumes account for the bulk of pre-Reformation collections according to David Bell. Using examples from the collections of five different religious orders from medieval England, David Bell finds that on the low end, theological volumes account for 58.6 per cent of all volumes at Bradsole (a Premonstratensian house) and on the high end they account for 85.3 per cent of all volumes at Rievaulx (a Cistercian house).¹⁶⁶ Theological volumes were also very well represented among the collections of manuscripts owned by private individuals.¹⁶⁷

While there is no complete medieval book list from St Albans that could stand as a point of comparison, there is certainly nothing on the lists from the abbey that do survive that could suggest that the collections of St Albans would have diverged from the norm in any significant way, and we can safely assume that its collections were well stocked in theological material.¹⁶⁸ The high survival rate of historical—and historic—material from St Albans therefore stands out.¹⁶⁹ The list of survivors seems to reflect the legacies of antiquarians like Bale, although based on the evidence outlined above, it is not likely that they were shaped by these antiquarians directly and it is more likely that they were shaped by those who followed their ideological paths.

It is clear by now that during Henry's reign, antiquarians worked to preserve manuscripts that could support Henry's marriage case or support a

¹⁶⁵ James G. Clark, *A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans: Thomas Walsingham and His Circle c.1350–1440* (2004), p. 80.

¹⁶⁶ Bell, 'Introduction', p. xxv.

¹⁶⁷ Susan Cavanaugh has found that 'at least half of the books mentioned in medieval wills are liturgical or devotional', although she notes that they might be overrepresented in wills because '[f]or testamentary purposes, devotional books were ideal gifts'; see Cavanaugh, 'Study', p. 10.

¹⁶⁸ The surviving lists from St Albans are printed in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., pp. 538–85.

¹⁶⁹ Reflecting on the survivors from St Albans, Clark remarks that they 'do not present a true cross-section of the books (and booklets) which must have been in use in the late medieval community'; *Monastic*, p. 80.

politically charged version of Britain's past. They did not prioritize more reformist manuscripts or single out more 'Catholic' volumes for destruction. There was, however, some censorship of more 'Catholic' material during Henry's reign that must be considered here. The first incident of note occurred after Henry first rejected the supremacy of the Pope. John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester (1469–1535), refused to accept both Henry's assumed position as head of the Church and his marriage to Anne Boleyn, and on these grounds Fisher was executed for treason. A few months later, Fisher's writings were banned. The December 1535 proclamation of the ban went so far as to ban all books that criticized Henry VIII's regime or supported Rome:

all and every person and persons which have or hereafter shall happen to have any of the said books containing the said sermon of the said late traitor, or any other writing or book, wherein shal be contained any error or slander to the King's majesty, or to the derogation or diminution of his imperial crown or of any authority knit to the same, or repugnant to his statutes of this realm made or the surety of his grace's succession, or for the abolition of the usurped power of the Bishop of Rome, shall within 40 days next after this his grace's proclamation bring and deliver the said books and writings to the Lord Chancellor of England or to Thomas Cromwell, esquire, the King's Chief Secretary and Master of his Rolls.¹⁷⁰

Offenders were to be prosecuted 'without any pity or mercy'.¹⁷¹ The wording is powerful. But the act, focused as it was on recent issues, was limited in its applicability and makes no suggestion that medieval manuscripts were under threat.

More important for the survival of medieval manuscripts were contemporary attempts to modify and censor Books of Hours. After Henry VIII was elevated to the head of the Church of England through the 1534 Act of Supremacy, several high-ranking Protestant supporters began to reform the traditional Book of Hours. Among these was William Marshall, whose 1534 Book of Hours omitted the Litany, Office of the Dead, and other 'perilous prayers'.¹⁷² In 1545, the reform of Books of Hours went so far that Henry VIII released an official primer, granting exclusive printing rights for it to two

¹⁷⁰ See *Tudor*, ed. Hughes and Larkin, pp. 235–7, quoted at p. 236.

¹⁷¹ *Tudor*, ed. Hughes and Larkin, p. 236.

¹⁷² See Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240–1570* (2006), p. 147.

London-based printers.¹⁷³ Eamon Duffy, in his magisterial work on Books of Hours, writes that Henry's new Book of Hours 'contained reformed and shortened versions of the traditional hours, and a wide selection of vernacular material, including...the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Creed, commandments (in a protestant version emphasizing the evils of image-worship) and Grace before and after meals.'¹⁷⁴ The changes were therefore significant.

Despite these significant changes to the officially recognized Book of Hours, the Crown did not attempt to make any similarly drastic changes to service books. Indeed, O. T. Edwards has remarked that the liturgy 'was to remain unaltered in structure during Henry VIII's reign.'¹⁷⁵ Crown policy did call for older service books to be searched and modified, but not for them to be destroyed. A 1543 proclamation specified that 'all mass books, antiphoners, portuises in the Church of England, should be newly examined, corrected, reformed and castigated from all manner of mention of the bishop of Rome's name, from all apocryphas, feigned legends, superstitions orations, collects, versicles, and responses.'¹⁷⁶ The word 'papa' ('pope') had to be scraped from existing service books, along with any saints not mentioned in scripture.¹⁷⁷

This was not the first proclamation to target the representation of saints in liturgical material. In 1538, Henry had passed an act that called for the removal of any images of, or references to, Thomas Becket from liturgical material.¹⁷⁸ Becket was a particular target because his cult was perceived as a direct threat to Henry's supremacy. Building on a Lollard tradition of viewing saints such as Becket as traitors, the proclamation of Henry VIII denounced Becket for having opposed 'the wholesome laws established against the enormities of the clergy by the king's highness' most noble progenitor, King Henry II. The act also gives a revisionist version of Becket's death, stating that when Becket was apprehended by Henry II's men, 'he not only called one of them bawd, but also took [William de] Tracy by the bosom and violently shook and plucked him in such a manner that he had almost overthrown him to the pavement of the church, so that upon this fray one of their company perceiving the same, struck him, and so in the throng Becket was slain.'¹⁷⁹ Henry's campaign against Becket was wide-ranging and had a powerful impact.

¹⁷³ *Tudor*, ed. Hughes and Larkin, p. 353.

¹⁷⁴ Duffy, *Marking*, p. 148.

¹⁷⁵ Edwards, 'How Many', p. 163.

¹⁷⁶ The injunction is quoted in Edwards, 'How Many', p. 155.

¹⁷⁷ The word was, for example, scraped from the register of Deeping Priory in British Library, MS Harley 3658; see *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 606.

¹⁷⁸ Duffy, *Marking*, pp. 151, 164.

¹⁷⁹ *Tudor*, ed. Hughes and Larkin, pp. 270–6, quoted at pp. 275–6. For Henry VIII's animosity towards Becket, see Kay Brainerd Slocum's *The Cult of Thomas Becket: History and Historiography Through Eight Centuries* (2018), Taylor & Francis eBook, ch. 6 (sections 455–542).

Indeed, Duffy, who has explored it in depth, notes that its reach extended beyond more public devotional books such as service books to include Books of Hours. Its impact was so wide-ranging that Duffy finds that ‘The overwhelming majority of surviving manuscript and printed Books of Hours show that most Tudor devotees dutifully blotted, scraped or sliced the Pope and St Thomas Becket out of their devotions.’¹⁸⁰ Those who did not could fall under suspicion. In 1540 Lord Cromwell asked Ralph Lane to examine the books of the parson of Hardwick, Thomas Cantwell. Lane found five suspicious books: ‘three entytled [Tomi] Homeliaru[m] Johannis Eckii, being all three dated in Anno Dno. M̄ CCCC xxxviij. [1538]; one boke of the liff of St Thomas Beckett; and a Myssale wherin is the wurde Papa thorowoughtly vncorrected’. The reasons why these books were targeted are clear; the first, a print book by Johann Eck (1486–1543) had been banned under the stipulation against foreign books while the others were banned under the edict targeting liturgical material. Less clear is what happened to these suspect books. They do not seem to have been destroyed outright; Lane wrote that he was sending them to Cromwell and informing Cromwell about them so that ‘due reformacion myght therin be made accordingly.’¹⁸¹ Regardless of what happened to the books, it is clear that the Crown took the censorship of volumes very seriously.

While Books of Hours and service books were censored in great numbers in response to Henry’s act, it does not seem that a large number were destroyed outright. Books of Hours are, after all, among the most common medieval manuscripts in collections today. Of course, this may be simply because these manuscripts were created in such large numbers in the first place. While no figures are available for manuscripts, Milway finds that Books of Hours were among the most frequently printed books in Europe during the lead-up to the Reformation, undergoing at least 404 printings (or ‘production runs’) between 1455 and 1500.¹⁸² But there is, to my knowledge, no evidence

¹⁸⁰ Duffy, *Marking*, p. 151. See also Edwards, ‘How Many’, p. 166. Examples abound and are highlighted in an online post in the British Library’s website that was written by Sarah J. Biggs, ‘Erasing Becket’, *British Library*, <<https://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2011/09/erasing-becket.html>>, accessed 2 February 2022.

¹⁸¹ ‘Letter CCCLVI’, in *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History: Including Numerous Royal Letters: From Autographs in the British Museum and One or Two Other Collections*, edited by Henry Ellis, vol. 3 (1846), pp. 256–8, at 256–7. William Norton, a priest, was similarly accused of the ‘keypyng of certen prohibited bok[s]’; these were ‘Portuces not reformed of the Romes names and a boke of Busshop Fysshiers for the mayntenans of the sayd Bisshop of Romes pretended supreme ecclesiasticall power’; see ‘Letter CCCXII’, in *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History: Including Numerous Royal Letters: From Autographs in the British Museum and One or Two Other Collections*, edited by Henry Ellis, vol. 3 (1846), pp. 142–6, p. 145.

¹⁸² Milway, ‘Forgotten’, p. 141.

of either service books or Books of Hours being destroyed wholesale on the basis of Henry's injunction.

And there were considerable efforts made to keep these books safe. One beautifully illuminated fifteenth-century Book of Hours contains an eighteenth-century note claiming that 'The Book was fund in ye thatch of an old house.' To some, the note suggests—though it is only a guess—that the volume was placed there at the start of the Reformation to ensure its safety.¹⁸³ It is not clear if this guess is correct but if it is, the book may have been placed there to protect the images of Becket and other saints, which escaped intact aside from what appears to be damage from ritual kissing of the folia.¹⁸⁴ Some of the owners who did scour Becket references from their books tried to resist further destruction. This resistance is illustrated by the fifteenth-century Book of Hours in British Library, Harley MS 2935, where Becket's feast day has been scraped off the calendar (f. 12v) and his suffrage excised (f. 30r-v) but a full-folio depiction of his murder remains (f. 29v).¹⁸⁵

The edict, which calls for modification rather than destruction, reflects a wide-scale recognition of the value and importance of the books themselves, and an atmosphere of preservation. In this way it is in keeping with a broader climate of preservation towards liturgical volumes during this period. While service books seem to have been targeted and destroyed in great numbers during the 1550s and during Elizabeth's reign, there is no evidence that anything similar happened during the early years of the Reformation.¹⁸⁶ While Henry powerfully rejected monastic life, the elevation of saints, and other central aspects of pre-Reformation doctrine, he remained, in the words of one historian, 'devoutly attached to the mass' and he continued to uphold its traditional service books.¹⁸⁷

Towards the end of his reign, however, Henry's spirit of reform took a turn. His 1542–3 'Act for the Advancement of True Religion and the Abolishment of the Contrary' banned 'all maner of bokes of the Olde and Newe Testament

¹⁸³ The manuscript is Oxford, Balliol College MS 384. The story is recounted in Wilson, *Lost*, pp. 237–8. The note is printed in the *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Balliol College Oxford*, compiled and edited by R. A. B. Mynors (1963), p. 362.

¹⁸⁴ The damage is described on the Balliol Archives and Manuscripts blog, 'Case 14: MS 384', in *Balliol College Archives and Manuscripts*, <<https://balliolarchivist.wordpress.com/2017/10/17/mss2017-case-14-ms-384/>>, accessed 12 March 2021.

¹⁸⁵ The manuscript has been digitized and is described here: 'Harley MS 2985', in *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_2985>, accessed 11 December 2021.

¹⁸⁶ See the discussion below, pp. 158–209. Ker observes that 'service-books were rarely used as pastedowns, at least in Oxford, before 1540. Nor are they common in bindings of the forties. They were used extremely frequently in the fifties and often afterwards', *Fragments*, p. ix.

¹⁸⁷ Bernard, 'Dissolution', p. 409.

in Englishe, being of the craftye false and untrue translac[i]on of Tyndale, and all other bookes and wryting[s] in the English tongue teaching or com-prysing any mattiers of Christen religion articles of the faithe or holye scrip-ture, or any parte of them, contrarye to that doctrine whiche sithens [*since*] the yere of our Lorde a thousande fyve hundred and fourtie is.¹⁸⁸ Henry's Act would have had little impact on medieval manuscripts, since it contains a provision for works printed before 1540 (and, judging from the context, those copied before 1540 are implied as well)—and more specifically for 'Canterbury tales, Chaucers bokes, Gowers bokes, and stories of mennes lieves.'¹⁸⁹ The provision for *The Canterbury Tales* is particularly notable in that it supports Linda Georgianna's argument that the survival, and enduring popularity, of this work is due in part to its having been generally unobjectionable to both Protestants and Catholics alike.¹⁹⁰

A few years after Henry passed this act, Richard Cox, who was tutor to Prince Edward, wrote to the secretary William Paget claiming that the king's book ban had led to excessive acts of cultural vandalism. According to Cox, it was not just the books banned by Henry's act that were being targeted but, in some cases, Henry's officially sanctioned theological books as well. Cox claimed that men have 'burnt New Testaments, Bibles not condemned by the Proclamation, and that out of parish churches and honest meaning men's houses'. Cox added that, 'They have burnt of the King's Majesty's books concerning our religion lately set forth, and his primers which now be utterly despised and not used nor taught the youth, contrary to his most godly meaning and commandment.'¹⁹¹ It is not clear whether the excessive vandalism that Cox describes was at all common, but either way it seems to have had little impact on the survival of medieval manuscripts. Thus while Henry's act led both directly and indirectly to the widespread destruction of books, it had a negligible impact on the survival of medieval manuscripts.

¹⁸⁸ See 34 Henry VIII ch. 1, in *The Statutes of the Realm*, edited by T. E. Tomlins et al., vol. 3 (1817; 1963), p. 894.

¹⁸⁹ *Statutes*, ed. Tomlins et al., p. 895.

¹⁹⁰ Georgianna finds that following the Reformation, Chaucer's continued success owed much to Foxe's reclamation of him for the Protestant cause, and to Chaucer's general amenability to Protestant sensibilities. See Georgianna, 'Protestant'.

¹⁹¹ The letter is 'Dr. Richard Cox to William Paget', 29 October 1546, The National Archives, State Papers of Henry VIII: General Series 1 [SP 1]/226, f. 16r. I am grateful to the staff at The National Archives for supporting my work on this letter. The letter is printed as 'Dr. Richard Cox to William Paget', *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII: September 1546–January 1547*, edited by James Gairdner and R. H. Brodie, vol. 21.2 (1910), p. 147. Selections of the letter are printed in Gutch's edition of Anthony Wood's *The History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*, edited by John Gutch, vol. 2 (1796), p. 81.

What would have been the cumulative effects of all these changes on more Catholic-leaning manuscripts? In the case of Henry's public acts of book burning and censorship, the answer seems to be relatively little. It is true that the works of John Fisher and others were targeted in Henry's acts, and it is also true that these acts must have shaped, however indirectly, the kinds of material that were being written. But there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that Henry adopted any comprehensive policy of destroying medieval manuscripts, and there is no evidence that the manuscripts destroyed during Henry's reign were 'Catholic-leaning' ones. While Henry's fervently anti-Rome attitude is sometimes cited as a key factor in the survival of manuscripts today, there is no evidence of its having skewed the body of surviving manuscripts in any direct or meaningful way.

This is not to suggest that the period did not leave its mark on the body of surviving manuscripts. It is abundantly clear that the Dissolution of the Monasteries led to the redistribution of medieval manuscripts in England. But we must be cautious in evaluating the impact of the Dissolution on the surviving corpus of manuscripts. The findings presented here build on and support ongoing work in the field of book history that suggests that the destruction of manuscripts at the Dissolution was relatively limited. As we have seen, the traditional belief that mass pilfering of religious libraries occurred in the wake of the Dissolution was based primarily on a misreading of the available information, and there is very little evidence to suggest that it took place.

Of course it is true that some manuscripts were sold off at the Dissolution with the institutions that held them, and we must trust that some of these eventually came to the tragic fates described by antiquarians such as Bale: recycled into scouring papers, soap wrappers, or other ephemera. But the recycling of manuscripts from disbanded religious houses was clearly limited; as Ker has shown, most of the manuscripts recycled for bookbinding material during this period were decommissioned due to changing practices and changing tastes—not destroyed due to religious upheaval.¹⁹² Nor is there much evidence of volumes being destroyed abroad by continental bookbinders. Bale is undoubtedly right to claim that it did happen, but it could not have been common practice and the data strongly suggest that bookbinders typically used local material for their bindings. There is more evidence to support Leland's claim that manuscripts were carried overseas during this period, but these manuscripts were not necessarily 'lost' and many of them

¹⁹² See above, p. 152, no. 186, and the further discussion below, pp. 178–81.

have survived. There were, moreover, wide-ranging efforts dedicated to preserving manuscripts, both within and beyond the walls of religious institutions, and many of these had a lasting effect.

The immediate impact of the Dissolution on the surviving record was therefore highly limited in terms of its scope. But what impact did it have on the shape of the surviving record? Or, to put it more precisely, did it lead to some sorts of books having survived in disproportionate numbers? As we have seen, it seems likely that some manuscripts from dissolved institutions were recycled for soap wrappers and other mercantile purposes, but it is not clear if any particular types of manuscripts were singled out for this fate more than any others. Although it has sometimes been claimed that manuscripts of a more ‘Catholic’ nature were disproportionately destroyed during this period, the evidence simply does not support this claim. Indeed, in the case of pre-Reformation service books, there is evidence to suggest that they received a bit more care than other sorts of books. It is clear that at Bordesley, some pre-Reformation service books were sold off separately and were priced higher than other sorts of books, and this may suggest that these service books were valued higher by both seller and buyer and, therefore, less likely to have been destroyed than other books.

The preservation efforts undertaken during this period by antiquarians and former religious must have left their mark on the shape of the surviving record, but in seemingly competing directions. The efforts of former monks seem to have been aimed at preserving religious volumes and especially the newer, more fashionable printed ones. The efforts of Leland and other antiquarians, on the other hand, were aimed at preserving works of political importance for Henry’s marriage case and works of historical value or interest—especially pre-1100 works. The books that did not benefit from these preservation efforts—and which, we might surmise, were more likely to be destroyed—were therefore those produced between about 1100 and 1475—volumes that were too old to be fashionable but too new to be antique.

While it is undoubtedly true that the Dissolution led to significant damage to medieval book collections, the cases and analyses presented here contribute to a growing body of work that suggests that the impact of the Dissolution on the survival of medieval volumes has traditionally been exaggerated. I suspect the reason for this exaggeration stems, in part, from the powerful influence that the Reformation had on the shape of modern book collections, including those of the Parker Library of Corpus Christi College Cambridge and the Wren Library of Trinity College Cambridge.

But the tendency to emphasize the Dissolution over other moments of pre-modern book loss owes even more, I think, to a traditional tendency to view the Reformation as the keystone in the development of the liberal humanist subject. This tendency can be felt in the writings of the reformers themselves, with men like John Bale casting themselves as saviours of the classic Western tradition. Never mind that the dispersal of monastic manuscripts was a direct result of the Reformation—in the writings of Bale and other reformers, it is the common man, still blinded by the veil of the Catholic Church, who committed cultural atrocities against manuscripts from Britain's past, while the clear-eyed luminaries of the Reformation fought back, saving the classics of antiquity from the greed of the Catholic Church on one side and of the boorish and commodity-driven common man on the other.¹⁹³

This model, in which the reformers are cast as the protectors of cultural heritage, was appealing to the nineteenth-century (usually Protestant) historians who gave shape to the field. So in his influential history of English literature, Henry Morley (1822–94) speaks of the 'patience and fidelity of research,' through which Leland had—and here he quotes Leland's own words—'conserved many good authors the which otherwise had been like to have perished.' The lengthy history book for which Leland claimed to be collecting manuscripts reflects, according to Morley, 'the new influence of the Italian Renaissance.' Thus Bale and Leland are, for Morley, 'the two Englishmen who first endeavoured, with regard to the whole people, to restore the fading memories of those of their forefathers whose thought and work had shaped the present, and were full of help towards the shaping of the future.'¹⁹⁴ Here, the antiquarian searches of men like Bale and Leland are cast as acts of cultural preservation and as the foundations of Renaissance humanism.

This model, in which reformers like Leland and Bale are considered luminaries saving the treasures of antiquity from a primitive and greed-driven popular religion, is strikingly pervasive in Victorian histories of English literature, and it was part of a broader Victorian tendency to associate the Reformation with a new capacity for intellectual growth and enlightenment.¹⁹⁵ While this tendency, and the Burckhardtian view that underlies it,

¹⁹³ See above, p. 112.

¹⁹⁴ Henry Morley, *English Writers: An Attempt Towards a History of English Literature*, vol. 8 (1892), pp. 103–5.

¹⁹⁵ The tendency to cast reformers such as Leland and Bale as luminaries can be seen in, for example, Herbert Cowell's 'The Character and Place of Wickliffe as a Reformer,' *The British Quarterly Review* 28 (1858): pp. 360–421, p. 369. Jacob Burckhardt famously describes the 'common veil' 'woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossession' that covered civilization in the medieval period and that was at last removed during the Renaissance; see *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, translated by S. G. C. Middlemore, 2 vols (1958), vol. 1, p. 143.

has been challenged repeatedly over the course of the twentieth century, its influence can still be felt in some quarters. An influential chapter on the dispersal of the libraries after the Dissolution describes men like Bale as luminary figures; they were, we are told, ‘great men’ to whom ‘we today owe an immense debt of gratitude’. The sixteenth century is depicted in this chapter as a moment of awakening, when suddenly ‘men begin to be...aware of the need to preserve.’¹⁹⁶ More broadly, echoes of Burckhardtian thought are found in the widely used *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, which describes the Reformation as the moment when England finally picked up on the ‘extraordinary cultural and intellectual movement’ that had already been ‘flourishing’ in Italy.¹⁹⁷ It is this model—with its focus on the Reformation as the final rupture point between the primitive medieval world and the enlightened modern one—that has led, I suspect, to the present-day fixation on the cultural destruction associated with the Reformation and, concomitantly, with the recovery work of the reformers.

If we are to understand the true extent and nature of losses to medieval book collections we must strive to step outside such models, grounded as they are in the legacy of centuries-old sectarian debates and outmoded views of the past. Doing so is crucial, not only for shedding light on how the losses of the past have shaped the archives of the present, but also for shedding light on how we can prevent losses to cultural heritage objects in the future.

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¹⁹⁶ Wright, ‘Dispersal of Libraries in the Sixteenth’, pp. 170–1.

¹⁹⁷ See the ‘Introduction’ in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 4th edn, edited by M. H. Abrams et al. (1979), vol. 1, p. 418. For those who have challenged the Burckhardtian conjunction of the Reformation with the birth of intellectual enlightenment, see, for example, David Aers, ‘A Whisper in the Ear of the Early Modernists: Or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the History of the Subject’, in *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, edited by David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 177–202, pp. 178 and 185–94. I discuss the issue at further length in *Manuals*, pp. 19–21.

4

1547–1558

The Act for Abolishing Divers Books and Images and the ‘Inconstancy of Mankind’

Soon after Henry’s son Edward rose to the throne in 1547, manuscripts that had previously been safe fell under suspicion. The Act of Uniformity of 1549 replaced more localized Latin liturgy with a Church-wide liturgical programme in English aimed at removing rituals viewed as ‘supersticious’. The act is best known for introducing the widespread use of the Book of Common Prayer. This book, which was designed to be a replacement for the service books that had previously been in use, dictated the rules and procedures for liturgical practice. The shift towards greater liturgical uniformity that this act entailed was not an innovation; as we have seen, the liturgy had become increasingly standardized in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the number of dioceses that were still resisting the adoption of Sarum Use by the sixteenth century was limited. Nevertheless, the approach to this shift, which involved the sudden top-down imposition of a completely new service book, had never been seen on this scale in England.

In many ways, the shift was made possible by the professionalization of the printing industry. While it had previously been impossible to create nearly identical service books for every single parish in England, developments in the speed and consistency of print runs over the past fifty years had made the widespread introduction of a single common service book possible. It was these shifts that allowed a new liturgical guide to be printed at rates that could keep the book affordable, which was a crucial component of the Crown’s strategy for propagating it. A June statute of the same year as Edward’s act made it an offence to sell any copy for more than 2 shillings and 2 pence unbound, or 4 shillings if it was bound ‘in paste or in boards in calves’ leather.¹ The affordability of the Book of Common Prayer, in many ways enabled by the arrival of print, was key to its success.

¹ See *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, edited by Hughes and Larkin, p. 464.

Shortly after the imposition of the Act of Uniformity, a new act was passed calling ‘for abolishing and putting away divers Books and Images’. The act was not the first of Edward’s attempts at censorship; during Edward’s early years, various tradesmen and merchants had been persecuted for importing and selling Catholic works, and on 13 August 1549, an act of the Privy Council proclaimed ‘that from hensforth no prenter sholde prente or putt to vente [*sell*] any Englysshe booke but suche as sholde first be examined by Mr. Secretary Peter, Mr. Secretary Smith and Mr. Cicill or the one of them, and allowed by the same.’² But although the 1549 act for abolishing books was not the first to call for censorship, it was distinct from Edward’s former acts of censorship in that it targeted older volumes—not newer print works. For this reason, the act for abolishing books is worth considering here, in keeping with the aforementioned aim of exploring the most significant moments for the destruction of medieval manuscripts in England.³

The older books under target by this act were largely the service books that the Book of Common Prayer sought to render obsolete; the act lists ‘Antiphoners, Missals, Grailes, Processionals, Manuals, Legends, Pies, Portuasses, Primers, in Latin and English, Couchers, Journals, Ordinals, or other books or writings whatsoever heretofore used for service of the church, written or printed in the English or Latin tongue, other than such as are or shall be set forth by the king’s majesty.’⁴ On 25 December 1549, Edward issued a letter addressed to all the bishops in the realm stipulating that all the old service books within their dioceses were to be delivered to these bishops. The bishops were enjoined to ‘so deface and abolish [the books], that they never hereafter may serve either to any such use as they were first provided for, or be at any time a let to that godly and uniform order which by a common consent is now set forth.’⁵ This injunction, which calls for a degree of destruction that would render books entirely unusable, is a far cry from the calls for blottings and scrapings that were issued under Henry.

It is worth pausing to examine which books, in particular, were being targeted by Edward’s injunction, since some of them are not often encountered

² The act is edited by J. R. Dasent in *Acts of the Privy Council of England: Volume 2, 1547–1550* (1890), p. 312; for various acts of censorship under Edward VI including this one, see Loades, ‘The Press’, pp. 33–4.

³ For a discussion of this aim and the axes used to determine the significance of a given episode of manuscript destruction, see above, pp. 8–9.

⁴ The act is printed in ‘Statuta Edwardi VI A.D. 1547–1553’, in *The Statutes Relating to the Ecclesiastical and Eleemosynary Institutions*, edited by Archibald John Stephens, vol. 1 (1845), pp. 291–344, p. 329.

⁵ See *Tudor*, ed. Hughes and Larkin, pp. 485–6. The letter is preserved in British Library, Stowe MS 142, ff. 16r–17v.

today. These are not the sort of books that have traditionally been studied by literary historians; rather, they were utilitarian guides about the proper administration and celebration of liturgical ceremonies and the Divine Office. The first group of books listed by Edward's act are those that were used during mass and the office. **Antiphonals** supported the mass and the office by supplying the antiphons: verses of the Psalms that are sung during the mass and at other occasions, such as the canonical hours. **Missals** (also described as 'massbooks' in some of the records) were used at the altar during mass and gave the texts, including the Gospels and Epistles, that were recited during the celebration of mass. A **grail** (or gradual) is a volume that supplied the chants used during mass; some include a collection of chants known as the Kyriale (although the Kyriale also circulated in separate volumes during the medieval period).

The next group of texts on the list are used most typically outside mass. **Processionals** gave the music and text for processions or ceremonies aside from the mass. **Manuals** gave the words the priest was supposed to use during sacramental rites aside from the Eucharistic celebration that happened during mass—these rites included marriage and baptism. **Legends** were collections of material from sermons, biblical stories, and saints' lives that were used for preaching and during matins. **Pies**, which are often considered in the same class as ordinals, provided rules for priests about what to do if two or more offices fall on the same day. **Ordinals** contain the incipits for which parts of the office should be performed at different parts of the year and much like pies, contained the rules for how to handle overlapping feast days.

The next group of books are those related to the breviary. A **portas** (also described as a *portiforium*, from the Latin) was a portable breviary. It contained the Divine Office: a collection of psalms and other prayers that were to be recited at fixed hours during the day. **Primers** also contained prayers to be recited at fixed hours, but primers were typically intended for lay, rather than clerical use. **Couchers** were breviaries, typically intended for the clergy, and larger than a portas or a primer. **Journals** were also breviaries; these too were typically intended for the clergy and tended to be smaller.⁶ With the

⁶ These descriptions are based on the definitions supplied by Andrew Hughes in *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office: A Guide to Their Organization and Terminology*, rev. edn (1995), pp. 118–19; Hughes's definitions are, in turn, based on those of V. Fiala and W. Irtenkauf's 'Versuch einer liturgischen Nomenklatur', in *Zur katalogisierung mittelalterlicher und neuerer Handschriften*, edited by Clemens Köttelwesch (1963), pp. 105–37. Supplementary material has been drawn from Gordon Crosse's *A Dictionary of English Church History* (1912), p. 546. For ease of reference, the definitions here have been included below as an appendix.

exception of primers, then, all of the books targeted by Edward's act were aimed primarily at clerical use.

The age of the volumes that were targeted cannot be determined with certainty but some of the terms on the list are suggestive. 'Missals', for example, are more commonly associated with the later (or, more specifically, post-thirteenth-century) medieval period. As Andrew Hughes observes, there were a large number of texts that supplied the prayers and texts for mass in the earlier period, but it was only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that these began to be combined into more comprehensive guides that came to be known as 'missals'. The *portas*, a portable breviary, was likewise an innovation of the later medieval period.⁷ The injunction mentions none of the earlier forms of medieval service books, such as lectionaries, *tropers*, or *collectars*—forms that had become obsolete by the thirteenth century. Most of the sorts of service books targeted by the injunction were, therefore, no more than a few centuries old at the time.

A hint of how such service books were used can be gleaned from John Davies's first-hand accounts of Durham Cathedral prior to the Dissolution. Davies's aim was to record the pre-Dissolution practices of the cathedral, including both lost ornaments and lost rituals. He describes in intimate detail how the Office of the Mass was sung in the church choir. At the beginning of the Office, three monks would start singing at the south door of the choir, then proceed to the high altar. One of these monks served as the 'Gospeller', by bringing a missal (which contained the Gospels and Epistles) to the altar.

Davies describes the beauty of Durham's missal, which 'had on the outside of the covering the Picture of our Saviour Christ, all of Silver, of Goldsmith's work, all parcel-gilt, very fine to behold; which Book did serve for the *Pax* in the Mass'. The book was laid on a lectern made of brass decorated with a pelican feeding her young—a well-established symbol of Christ. The Epistler would chant the Epistle from the book and lay it back on the altar, then the Gospeller would do the same for the Gospel. At the end of the mass, the monks carried the missal with them out of the choir.⁸ As Davies's account makes clear, missals were central to the performance of the mass and were in constant use.

Edward's act would have affected every religious institution, from the largest cathedral to the smallest parish. Service books were, after all, used in almost every religious institution in medieval England. The editor of a collection of 358 church inventories recorded in the archdeaconry of Norwich in

⁷ See the discussion and overview in Hughes, *Medieval*, pp. 118–19.

⁸ Davies, *Ancient*, pp. 15–18.

1368 finds that ‘only 6 possessed no missal.’⁹ Ordinals were nearly as common as missals in Norwich; only seventeen churches had no ordinal and the same editor finds that of these, ‘the great majority were small churches in process of being abandoned after the Black Death.’¹⁰ The ubiquity of these service books persisted into the fifteenth century. In his statistical analysis of printing in medieval Europe, Michael Milway has found that missals and breviaries were among the most frequently printed books prior to 1500.¹¹ As we have seen, even before the Dissolution, evidence of damaged service books and evidence from borrowing lists indicate that such books were particularly prone to destruction due to overuse and due to the important roles that they played in the performance of the liturgy, which meant that they were expected to be up to date.¹² They were, then, important during the medieval period both in terms of their ubiquity and in terms of their function. The importance of service books had persisted throughout Henry VIII’s reign, and virtually every parish was still using them at the time of Edward’s injunction.

The range of service books in the average institution was significant. Long before most abbeys had dedicated libraries they were already collecting a wide range of service books. A short eleventh-century list of fifteen books in the possession of monks from Bury St Edmunds lists seven dedicated service books, along with other books that could be used for the service: two psalters, a hymnal, and a homiliary.¹³ By the thirteenth century, even small parish churches in some quarters were expected to have, as an absolute minimum, a set of eight service books.¹⁴ By the fourteenth century, the requirement was entrenched at an archdiocesan level. In 1368, Simon, the Archbishop of Canterbury, issued a proclamation that ordinaries—such as bishops and other high-ranking church officials—had to ensure that every parish within the entire archdiocese (which was by far the largest of the two in England) possessed and maintained a specific set of ornaments and books, including a legend, an antiphoner, a gradual, two psalters, a troper, an ordinal, a missal, and a manual—nine books in total.¹⁵

⁹ ‘Objects Recorded in the Inventories’, in *Norwich Archdeaconry: Inventory of Church Goods, 1368*, edited by Aelred Watkin, part 2 (1947), pp. xxv–ci, quoted at p. xxxi. Watkin’s finding is discussed by S. Cassel in ‘Structure and Image in Late Medieval East Anglian Angel Roofs’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2018), p. 66.

¹⁰ ‘Objects’, ed. Watkin, p. xxv.

¹¹ Milway, ‘Forgotten’, p. 124.

¹² See above, Chapter 1, pp. 59–73.

¹³ See the list (B12) in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 50.

¹⁴ See above, p. 61.

¹⁵ ‘Inventories of the Goods and Ornaments of the Churches in the County of Surrey in the Reign of Edward VI’, edited by J. R. Daniel-Tyssen, in *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, edited by The Surrey Archaeological Society, vol. 4 (1869), pp. 1–189, pp. 8–9.

By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, collections of service books could be extremely extensive, even in small parishes. According to an inventory of 1452, the Church of All Hallows Barking had a collection of twenty-nine service books; later additions included three more.¹⁶ By Edward's day, the Church of Ripon had a collection of forty-nine service books.¹⁷ The early sixteenth-century inventory of St Peter Mancroft (Norwich), neatly summarized by W. H. St John Hope, provides a fairly typical example of the range of service books in use at an ordinary parish church during the period:

Foremost among the books were those used at the hour services, consisting of five antiphonars and three others described as old, three legends, a book for the chanters or *rectores chori*, a book for the organs, a 'vitatory booke' with the hymns, a pricksong book, a collectar, four old psalters and another in the custody of Sir Thomas Love, and an old portose or breviary. For use at mass were four grails and a little one which 'servyth for Childera,' a 'pistill booke,' a 'gospelary,' and ten *missalia* or massbooks[.] Of the last-named, four were used at the high altar, one 'for every day.' A fifth belonged to John Cosyn's chantry, kept at the altar of Our Lady, and two others, one old, to the same altar. The other three massbooks belonged to the altars of St. John, the Holy Trinity, and St. Nicholas respectively. For use in processions were nine 'processionaries,' and for occasional services a manual. The list is completed by an *ordinale* or ordinal. The only addition to the original list is an antiphonar.¹⁸

The range of service books in a small parish church in the sixteenth century was therefore extensive. Given that every parish church was supposed to have a substantial collection of service books, and that these books continued to be used even during Henry's reign, they must have represented a sizeable portion of the medieval manuscripts still in circulation in the lead-up to Edward's act. These books were in many ways the heart of parish-level ritual, belief, and community practice of the day. Edward's abolishment of pre-Reformation service books must have been a shock to parishes across the land.

Edward's act stipulated that the service books in question were to be delivered to ecclesiastical authorities, who were expected within forty days to

¹⁶ The list is printed in 'Inventory, 1452', ed. Redstone, p. 70. ¹⁷ See above, p. 138.

¹⁸ W. H. St John Hope, 'Inventories of the Parish Church of St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich', edited by W. H. St John Hope, in *Norfolk Archaeology, Or, Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to the Antiquities of the County of Norfolk*, edited by the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, vol. 14 (1901), pp. 153–241, p. 156. The list appears in BL, Stowe MS 871.

'burn, deface, and destroy, or cause to be burned, defaced, or destroyed, the same books, and every of them.' The punishment for holding onto one of these books was 20 shillings for the first infraction, 4 pounds for the second, and imprisonment thereafter.¹⁹ While the wording of the act is stark, the punishment for the first infraction was relatively light—especially for those with institutional support behind them—increasing only upon subsequent infractions.

Although the act was not directed at manuscripts in particular, many of the service books in use at the time—and that therefore fell under attack—were medieval manuscripts. The evidence for this emerges from contemporary church inventories, many of which describe their service books as being 'in parchment' or as being 'old'—which, without other descriptors, suggests that they had been produced before the arrival of print some seventy years prior.²⁰ Older books seem to have been especially common in the collections of smaller parish churches, where finances were more limited and new books could not be purchased easily.²¹ Thus by casting suspicion over service books, Edward's act put medieval manuscripts at risk.

The question of how widely Edward's policy was enacted has not yet been adequately answered. On one hand, Edward's act has been described as 'a measure of ecclesiastical policy only.'²² The same view is expressed in a recent chapter in the *Cambridge History of Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland* by Barr and Selwyn, who write that aside from the act itself and some records of destruction at Westminster and Lichfield, 'there is little record of any formal destruction by ecclesiastical or civil authorities.'²³ Nigel Ramsay, describing the same act, writes that 'The Crown was hardly ever concerned to prosecute anyone for mere possession of service books.'²⁴ Yet other scholars claim that Edward's policy was indeed enforced. O. T. Edwards suggests that all the nation's bishops followed the injunction to destroy service books, although 'some were more willing to follow up the letter of the law than others.'²⁵ In her recent study, Jennifer Summit suggests that, 'Innumerable books that escaped

¹⁹ 'Statuta', ed. Stephens, p. 330.

²⁰ For examples, see the block quotation above and see 'Inventory of Church Goods, 1512', in *Survey of London, All Hallows, Barking-by-the-Tower: Part 1, The Parish Church*, edited by Lilian J. Redstone (1929), pp. 78–83, p. 80. See also below, p. 167.

²¹ Many parish churches received service books from large religious houses when these books were considered too old or outmoded by the larger houses; see above, p. 72.

²² For the view that the statute was not enforced, see E. Clements Bigmore and C. W. H. Wyman, who note that 'we find no attempt on the part of Henry VIII or his son Edward VI to harass the printers'; *A Bibliography of Printing*, vol. 2 (1884), p. 120.

²³ Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 369.

²⁴ Ramsay, 'Manuscripts', p. 131.

²⁵ Edwards provides no citation for this claim; see 'How Many', p. 172.

destruction in the initial waves of the Reformation fell victim to the 1550 Act.²⁶ An extreme articulation of this same view appears in Richard Rex's popular history of the Tudor era, where the response to Edward's act has been described as 'probably the greatest episode of book-burning in English history'.²⁷ Was it?

The act certainly had some impact. Evidence of book burning in response to the act emerges from disparate corners of the land. In the parish of Folkingham (Lincolnshire), all service books, including 'Masse bookes grailes Legendes couchers etc.', were 'rent burned & vtterlie destroi'd in King Edward his daies'—and never, apparently, replaced.²⁸ In the same period at Edenham, also in Lincolnshire, the parson burned 'all masse bookes and other bookes s(er)ving for Idolatrie'.²⁹ In Lancashire, a member of the clergy claimed to have 'burned all the books' in the wake of Edward's statute.³⁰ A report from the county of Gloucester made by the surveyor Thomas Dutton in 1555 lists various 'Masse bookes and grayles and Anthyphoneis burnt by commandment' which had been valued at 56 shillings and 2 pence.³¹ After Edward's reign, the community at Llandaff Cathedral in Wales protested that 'there lackithe in the seyd chirche misalls, antiphoner boks, processionals, bokes to redde the legens, & a grayle, so that God can not be there servyd for lacke of bokes'.³² Edward's injunction was clearly far reaching.

As the example of Folkingham makes clear, some volumes were not burnt, but rather torn up. This approach might seem strange, but not when one considers that parchment manuscripts, much like leather jackets, are remarkably fire resistant.³³ This is especially true when manuscripts are piled together.

²⁶ Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library* (2008), p. 102. The source of the quotation Summit supplies here is unclear since the citation for it (supplied on p. 279, n. 5) is evidently muddled: Summit cites Wright's 'Dispersal of the Monastic Libraries', p. 166 but no such page of Wright's article exists (the page range of the article is pp. 208–37, as Summit notes, and Summit must mean to cite Wright's 1958 chapter instead).

²⁷ Richard Rex also suggests that in the wake of this act, 'thousands upon thousands of volumes were consigned to the flames'; *The Tudors* (2005), p. 165. But Rex provides no source for either of these claims.

²⁸ Edward Peacock, *English Church Furniture, Ornaments and Decorations, at the Period of the Reformation: As Exhibited in a List of the Goods Destroyed in Certain Lincolnshire Churches, A.D. 1566* (1866), p. 80. See below for further discussion of this source.

²⁹ Peacock, *English*, p. 75.

³⁰ The episode is discussed by der Weduwen and Pettegree in *The Library*, p. 111.

³¹ Thomas Dutton, 'Estimate of the Goods of the Chantryes', in 'Inventories of, and Receipts for, Church Goods in the County of Gloucester and Cities of Gloucester and Bristol', edited by John Maclean, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, edited by John Maclean, vol. 12 (1887–8), pp. 108–12, p. 110.

³² See Sally Harper's *Music in Welsh Culture Before 1650: A Study of the Principal Sources* (2007), Taylor & Francis eBook, section 443.6.

³³ Back in the days when people used to pull out cigarette lighters during live shows I was hit in the arm with a lighter by someone who was dancing too enthusiastically, but I was wearing a leather jacket and I was fine. See also above, p. 44.

They burn only under excessive and prolonged heat and they do not, therefore, make good bonfire kindling. A commissioner hoping to make a public display against the old religion would likely find a pile of smouldering manuscripts underwhelming and I think it is no coincidence that public acts of book burning in England became far more common after the widespread adoption of paper.³⁴

Some of the manuscripts that were torn up were subsequently recycled. This would seem to have been the case with a manuscript of a Sarum Customary from the fifteenth century which was torn up and, perhaps in a symbolic gesture, used in the binding of a 1550 copy of John Bale's *The Image of Bothe Churches*.³⁵ Other service books were simply confiscated.³⁶

Even the library at Westminster seems to have been subjected to a high level of scrutiny in the wake of Edward's injunction. On 25 February 1550, a proclamation recorded in the council book declared that the library was to be searched and 'all superstitious books, as missals, legends, and such like' were to be removed. The 'garniture of the books' (i.e. their sumptuous jewelled binding material) was to be sent to one Sir Anthony Archer. It is not clear what became of the 'superstitious books' themselves once their 'garniture' had been removed, but it seems likely that they were subsequently destroyed.³⁷

In some cases, service books were not destroyed outright but rather were sold into private hands. Records of such sales survive in a group of reports made by churchwardens in Surrey for Edward's commissioners. It is not always clear if the service books being sold in these reports are manuscripts or printed books but the language often suggests that they are manuscripts.

³⁴ Cressy claims that the first public act of book burning in England happened under Henry VIII; see above, pp. 116–17 and 'Book', p. 362. There were of course some public acts of book burning prior to Henry's reign, including the burning of Reginald Pecock's works, but most of these acts were relatively restrained. On the burning of Pecock's works, see Andrew Taylor, 'Translation, Censorship, Authorship and the Lost Work of Reginald Pecock', in *The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, edited by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Luise von Flotow, and Daniel Russel (2001), pp. 143–60. On earlier episodes of book burning that took place on the Continent, see Cummings, *Bibliophobia*, especially pp. 92–4.

³⁵ The fragment is now Lambeth Palace Library MS 5051; see 'MS 5051', in *Database of Manuscripts and Archives*, Lambeth Palace Library, <<https://archives.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=MSS%2f5051>>, accessed 2 July 2021.

³⁶ See, for example, the books of South Littleton, Worcestershire described in Ramsay, 'Manuscripts', p. 131.

³⁷ See Carley's 'Introduction', p. lxxvii. See also Wright, 'Dispersion of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', p. 168. Jeremy Collier raises the possibility that the motivation behind this act was the acquisition of the 'garniture' of the volumes and not their contents, but even if this were true, it is not likely that the contents of the books would have survived; see Jeremy Collier, *An Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain, Chiefly of England*, vol. 5 (1708–14), p. 427. Collier here cites the King's Council book. The quotation given by Collier here leaves the impression that the books in question were burned, but the books subject to burning that are mentioned in this quotation are in fact the academic books discussed below.

So at St Mary Battersea, for example, ‘dyvers olde bokes’ were sold off for 3 shillings in 1549.³⁸ Judging from the sales accounts of this nature, such sales were arranged by the churchwardens, but the churchwardens had to work in consultation with their parishioners. Thus between 1549 and 1552 the Church of All Saints Wandsworth sold off many items of religious significance ‘with the concent of the hole parishes’. These items included ‘certen old bokes for 5 shillings and 6 pence.’³⁹ Sometimes parishioners took matters into their own hands. Duffy finds that ‘the parishioners of Rayleigh in Essex, despite the absence of its churchwarden, held a meeting after service one Sunday in 1550 and hastily sold off most of their Catholic liturgical books.’⁴⁰ Judging from these reports, Edward’s injunction was taken seriously.

Evidence from Norwich indicates that objects that had been banned by Edward’s injunction were sold off in large numbers. A record from St Andrew’s Church in the city of Norwich states during the third year of Edward’s reign (1549 or 1550), ‘all the books of the quere’ (which included ‘Grayles massebooks antyveners Legendes and other quere books valyed at xxs [20 shillings]’) were sold to one William Gylbert. There is no record of what Gylbert did with them but the low price of the sale, 20 shillings, leads the editor of the record to suspect that ‘they were purchased as mere waste material.’⁴¹ But a purchaser such as Gylbert may have chosen to keep his new acquisitions. The threatened fine of 20 shillings—the same amount that Gylbert had paid for the books in the first place—may have been a deterrent to acquisition but not a barrier.

Some of the church’s service books may have fared even better. There is an indication that the churchwardens who prepared the inventory from St Andrew’s may have deliberately underestimated the number of service books in the church with an eye to saving them from Edward’s commissioners. A 1368 inventory from St Andrew’s records a wealth of service books—far more, it would seem, than those that the church officials mention being housed in the choir on their later inventory.⁴² Thus while the wardens claimed

³⁸ ‘Inventories’, ed. Daniel-Tyssen, p. 95.

³⁹ ‘Inventories’, ed. Daniel-Tyssen, pp. 46–7.

⁴⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (1992), p. 485.

⁴¹ See the edition and comments in ‘Church Goods of St. Andrew and St. Mary, Coslany, Norwich, Temp. Edward VI’, edited by J. L’Estrange, *Norfolk Archaeology* 7, no. 1 (1872): pp. 45–78, pp. 53, 58. L’Estrange notes that the Gilberts were grocers and considers this episode an example of religious books being sold to grocers for packing material.

⁴² The church possessed ‘One Ordinal, two Antiphonaries, Legend of Festivals and Saints, in one volume, given by the Rector; three Psalters, Martyrology, two Manuals, one Processional, Missal, with clasp; two Graduals, with Tropers; one quire of the Service of Corpus Christi, another with Tonal, and other books, many of which had been donations: three missals, two portiforia, two graduals (one described as ‘new’), a psalter, and a legendary of saints; see the list in H. Harrod, ‘Goods and Ornaments of Norwich Churches in the Fourteenth Century’, *Norfolk Archaeology* 5, no. 1 (1859): pp. 89–121, pp. 107–9.

to have sold off all the service books from the church, some may in fact have been saved, either hidden away or entrusted to members of the parish for safe keeping.

Whether voluntary or forced, the various sales that took place at St Andrew's seem to have been viewed by the parish as an opportunity for purchasing new books of the sort approved by Edward. These included Erasmus' *Paraphrases on the New Testament*, which had become a required staple of every parish library by a 1547 injunction.⁴³ The church also bought several other books around the same time, including 'half a dozen psalters' made of paper for 12 pence, and 'other newe churche bookes' for 10 shillings. Soon after, the church acquired even more books: a 'paraphrase uppon th' epistells' for 6 shillings, 'half a dossen psalters' for 8 shillings and 4 pence, and, later, 'a newe booke of Service for our Curate' for 14 pence. The church also paid 5 shillings for 'pryking certen songes'.⁴⁴ A few years later, the church paid 4 shillings and 2 pence for a Book of Common Prayer.⁴⁵ The parish of St Andrew's, then, was actively expanding its collection at this time to bring it in line with Edward's doctrine—possibly while still preserving some of their older books.

There is also other indirect evidence of efforts to preserve traditional service books. This evidence emerges from records created by Edward's commissioners in 1552 or 1553. The commissioners had searched churches in Surrey to identify what had been removed since their most recent inventories. According to these records, the wardens at the Church of St Mary, Barnes had reported a curious event. They claimed in 1551 or 1552, several of the church's more traditional ornaments, including 'a cope of white baudkin, a bible, an other boke, and ij aulter clothes', had been secretly removed during the night, 'but by whom we know not'.⁴⁶ From this account and others, a strange pattern emerges. Similar thefts—always of the sorts of church ornaments that were prohibited by Edward—appear in several records. In 1552, the wardens at St Peter and St Paul Mitcham reported that a year prior, and 'about Mydsomer', the church 'was robberyde by theffes' who stole various ornaments, including 'an alter clothe', 'a surples', and 'a great byble boke'. The wardens had—perhaps conveniently—lost the previous inventory of the

⁴³ 'Church Goods', ed. J. L'Estrange, p. 60; see Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 367, and J. S. Craig, 'Forming a Protestant Consciousness? Erasmus' *Paraphrases* in English Parishes, 1547–1666', in *Holy Scripture Speaks: Studies in the Production and Reception of Erasmus' Paraphrases on The New Testament*, edited by H. Pabel and M. Vessey (2002), pp. 313–58.

⁴⁴ 'Church Goods', ed. J. L'Estrange, pp. 60–2.

⁴⁵ 'Church Goods', ed. J. L'Estrange, p. 66.

⁴⁶ 'Inventories', ed. Daniel-Tyssen, p. 40.

church's ornaments.⁴⁷ At St Mary Merton, an unnamed 'boke' was reported as having been stolen in 1550.⁴⁸ What can explain all these reports? The books in question may indeed have been stolen, but it would be hard to explain such a large number of thefts of volumes that had lost much of their resale value, and it seems likely that the books were either hidden or, if they had been stolen, had been taken away by some who were either inspired to hide them from Edward's commissioners or tacitly endorsed by someone who was. The reports, in other words, suggest quiet resistance on the part of churchwardens and a concerted effort to protect the books banned by Edward's injunction.

Resistance also took other forms. In rare cases, service books were defaced but, in direct contravention of Edward's act, kept in an otherwise usable condition. The legacy of this approach may potentially explain the damage that occurred to the Stainton Missal, and while it is not a manuscript, it is worth considering here. This book, which was printed in Rouen in 1516, fell victim to what must have been deliberate destruction. It was slashed seven times, apparently in a fit of iconoclastic fervour, and Brian Cummings, in his study of the missal, suggests that this damage took place during Edward's reign.⁴⁹ This book was preserved, but damaged service books of this nature are rare, and Cummings suggests that most books damaged by reformers would have subsequently been destroyed or recycled.⁵⁰

But we also find many volumes that managed to escape destruction entirely. Occasionally, whole book collections were hidden with a view to their preservation. For example, in his study of religious change in the sixteenth century, Duffy finds that 'all the Catholic liturgical books' were hidden from visiting commissioners at Wycombe in Buckinghamshire.⁵¹ Edward's statute, then, was indeed enforced. But there were also extensive efforts made at preserving service books during this period.

How many medieval service books survived Edward's reign? As we shall see, there is evidence of pre-Reformation service books in circulation during Mary's reign and during that of Elizabeth, and this raises the question of how far Edward's policy was carried out.⁵² There is a great deal of other evidence to suggest that Edward's policy was enforced imperfectly. In Northumberland, a survey of Church inventories from 1576 describes the missals at several

⁴⁷ 'Inventories', ed. Daniel-Tyssen, pp. 72–4.

⁴⁸ 'Inventories', ed. Daniel-Tyssen, pp. 115–16.

⁴⁹ Brian Cummings, 'The Wounded Missal: Iconoclasm, Ritual and Memory in Reformation Yorkshire', in *Memory and the English Reformation*, edited by Brian Cummings, Alexandra Walsham, Ceri Law, and Bronwyn Wallace (2020), pp. 353–71, p. 355.

⁵⁰ On the distinctiveness of the Stainton Missal, see Cummings, 'The Wounded', pp. 365–6.

⁵¹ Duffy, *Stripping*, p. 491. ⁵² See below.

chapels as 'olde' or 'of parchement'.⁵³ The books at St Michael's Parish Church in Bishop's Stortford seem to have survived at least Edward and Mary's reigns, only to be targeted during Elizabeth's; a 1570 entry in this church's register records that the community 'receyved of diverse of the parisshes for the old bookes, aulter clothes crosse clothes and suche other stuffe as we sold at the comandement of my lord of london'; it is evident from this description that the books in question were older ones and, given that the description concerns the church's ornaments, the description likely concerns service books.⁵⁴ Edward's injunction, then, must have been carried out imperfectly if there were still old service books in circulation in the 1570s.

More quantitative data from Elizabeth's reign also supports this supposition. Of the 150 parishes asked to submit reports in 1566 regarding the recent destruction of their Catholic ornaments and books, only two claimed to have destroyed any service books during Edward's reign. Most did list destroyed service books among their destroyed ornaments, but they claimed that the destruction of these books had happened during Elizabeth's reign.⁵⁵ It is, of course, possible that some of these parishes were misrepresenting the evidence and that some of their service books had instead been destroyed during Edward's reign (or, for that matter, Mary's). Yet this possibility seems unlikely. The parishes under investigation would have been highly motivated to show their long-standing loyalty to the Protestant cause, and would therefore be expected to have pushed the date of this destruction as early as possible. The evidence, therefore, suggests that while some service books were destroyed during Edward's reign, many survived it and were still around during Elizabeth's. The destruction of service books under Edward was clearly significant but, as we shall see, it was relatively restrained compared to the destruction that happened after it.

The issue of service books being settled, we can turn to the issue of what impact the period had on other sorts of medieval books. It is sometimes claimed that Edward's 1550 statute against service books led, however indirectly, to widespread cultural vandalism within Oxford's libraries. Most who

⁵³ See, for example, the inventories of the chantries of St Anne, St Thomas in the Church of All Saints, St Eloye, Saint Katherine in St All Hallows, Our Lady in St All Hallows, and Trinity in St John's Parish printed in *The Injunctions and Other Ecclesiastical Proceedings of Richard Barnes, Bishop of Durham, from 1575 to 1587*, edited by James Raine (1850), pp. xc–xciv.

⁵⁴ See *The Records of St. Michael's Parish Church, Bishop's Stortford*, edited by J. L. Glasscock, Jun. (1882), p. 56. As a chantry, St Michael's Parish Church was dissolved later than other institutions. See also below p. 189.

⁵⁵ See the source in Peacock, *English*, and the discussion of this source below.

make this claim base it on the work of the seventeenth-century antiquarian Anthony Wood. Wood writes that in 1550:

The ancient Libraries, a glory to the University as containing among them many rarities, the works of our own country men, besides many matters obtained from remote places, were by them [i.e. the commissioners] or their appointment rifled. Many MSS, guilty of no other superstition than red letters in their fronts or titles, were either condemned to the fire or jakes. Others also that treated of controversial or scholastical Divinity were let loose from their chains, and given away or sold to Mechanicks for servile uses. I have heard it credibly reported from ancient men, and they while young from Scholars of great standing, that among such spoils brought out in public (in the Convocation House, say some) several copies of the Greek Testament were of the number, which had they not been understood by one wiser than the rest, had suffered the same fate; but let this report remain with their authors, sure I am that such books wherein appeared Angles, or Mathematical Diagrams, were thought sufficient to be destroyed, because accounted Popish, or diabolical, or both.⁵⁶

Wood describes these burnings as a horror to Protestants and Catholics alike, and he does not suggest that more Catholic volumes were targeted.⁵⁷ Reflecting on the losses to various college libraries, Wood concludes: ‘what their losses were I know not; in the mean time we may take this as worthy of observation, that what this generation did with scorn throw aside, the following did gather up with care; such is the inconstancy of mankind.’⁵⁸

According to Wood, by the end of the Oxford burnings there was little left in the college libraries but ‘poetry, grammar, idle songs, and frivolous stuff’. Elsewhere, Wood writes that during the reign of Mary, an inquiry was made into the fates of the books from Oxford’s university library, but all that remained was ‘only one of the parts of Valerius Maximus, illustrated with the Commentaries of Dionysius de Burgo, an Augustine Fryer, and with the Tables of John Whethamsted, Abbat of St Alban’s’. Wood laments that ‘some of the books so taken out by the Reformers were burnt, some sold away for Robin Hood’s pennyworths, either to Booksellers or to Glovers, to press their

⁵⁶ Wood, *History*, vol. 2, part 1, pp. 106–7.

⁵⁷ Wood, *History*, vol. 2, part 1, p. 107.

⁵⁸ Wood, *History*, vol. 2, part 1, pp. 106–7. Collier draws on Wood’s account, writing that ‘Baliol, Exeter, Queens’, and Lincoln colleges were purged of a great part of the Fathers and Schoolmen . . . great heaps of these books were set on fire in the market-place’, in *Ecclesiastical*, p. 428.

gloves, or Taylors to make measures, or to bookbinders to cover books bound by them, and some also kept by the Reformers for their own use'.⁵⁹

This account is moving, but it is difficult to know how far we can trust Wood, who writes a little over a century after the events he describes. Wood draws his account in part on material gathered by John Aubrey, and Aubrey himself was not an eyewitness to the events. According to Aubrey, it was his 'old cosen, parson Whitney', who told Aubrey 'that in the Visitation of Oxford in Edward VI's time they burned Mathematical bookes for Conjuring bookes, and, if the Greeke Professor had not accidentally come along, the Greeke testament had been thrown into the fire for a Conjuring booke too'.⁶⁰ Even this Parson Whitney was not an eyewitness; Whitney was born in 1593—several decades after the destruction would have taken place. Whitney may have been reporting on some well-known events from his parents' days, but, mediated as it is, we cannot take Whitney's account at face value.

Wood's accounts are at times sensationalized, and, as we have just seen, his sources can be called into question. Moreover, his alleged Catholic sympathies raise the possibility that Wood exaggerated the significance of an episode of cultural destruction that casts an act passed by the Protestant King Edward VI in a particularly bad light. If Wood's account is true, however, it is remarkable in the sense that it would suggest that the destruction during Edward's reign was not limited to missals or other service books.

To check if Wood's account is true, it is worth looking at the fate of one collection from Oxford: that of the famous Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester, which was donated to Oxford in 1444. Today, almost all the books in Humfrey's original collection are either lost or dispersed from the library. B. L. Ullman, who has studied the history of the collection, finds that none of the 300 or so manuscripts that Duke Humfrey donated to Oxford have remained at the university and only four have since returned. At most, only twenty-eight volumes from Humfrey's original collection can be identified today, and these are dispersed across various collections.⁶¹ At first glance, these figures seem to offer some support for Wood's claims that Oxford's collections were pillaged during the sixteenth century.⁶²

⁵⁹ Quoted in Savage, *Old*, p. 153.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Oliver Lawson Dick's 'Foreword', in *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, edited by Oliver Lawson Dick (1949), pp. xv–cx, p. xxxiii. See Aubrey's further accounts of the destruction below.

⁶¹ B. L. Ullman, 'Manuscripts of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester', *The English Historical Review* 52, no. 208 (1937): pp. 670–2, pp. 670 and 672; and Savage, *Old*, p. 154. When Ullman was writing, in 1937, only 27 manuscripts had been identified. Ullman identified the last; see 'Manuscripts', pp. 670–1.

⁶² For those who take the losses to Duke Humfrey's collection as evidence of broader Reformation-era losses, see, for example, Wright, 'Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', pp. 168–9 and Summit, *Memory's*, p. 102.

But a look at the figures involved complicates the picture. The survival rate of Duke Humfrey's collection, approximately 10 per cent, is comparable to that of other medieval institutions' library collections, and therefore does not necessarily reflect the sort of cataclysmic iconoclasm that Wood describes (unless the same iconoclasm that Wood describes happened at many other medieval institutional libraries, but there is no evidence of this).⁶³ But more importantly, in his study of Duke Humfrey's books, David Rundle finds that Wood's account seems to be inaccurate. Rundle suggests that Humfrey's collection was not the victim of sixteenth-century iconoclasm, but of a long history of disinterest caused, in part, by the rise of printing. Rundle writes that, 'The printing-press, God's greatest act of grace to reform, was also a divine disservice to the old manuscript culture: it probably made some handwritten books seem, for awhile, obsolete or out-dated, and thus liable to be neglected or discarded.'⁶⁴ Rundle concludes that even in the middle of the sixteenth century, 'neglect might have been as severe an opponent to survival as what may be called biblioclasm.'⁶⁵ According to Rundle, the fate of Duke Humfrey's library indicates that Wood's account 'is as exaggerated as it is compelling.'⁶⁶ Aside from Wood's account, there is no evidence of Edward's act leading to the destruction of medieval library books. Nor were there any other acts passed by Edward that targeted these books. It is therefore fair to conclude that state-sanctioned manuscript destruction during Edward's days was limited to service books and other books covered by his 1549 act for the destruction of 'superstitious books'.

Within two or three years, Edward's act was 'utterly repealed' when the Catholic Queen Mary rose to the throne.⁶⁷ Upon her ascension, Mary called for a return to the form of the mass that had been performed during the final year of Henry VIII's reign.⁶⁸ What impact did this have on the destruction of manuscripts? The answer is complex and has been somewhat obscured by sectarian historiography. In his overview of early modern religious acts, Richard Burn, who was a vicar of the Church of England during the eighteenth century, claims that Mary 'called in and destroyed the aforesaid rased books of king Henry the eighth'—meaning the missals and other books that had been scraped of references to the Pope and Thomas Becket during the reign of Henry VIII. Then, according to Burn, Mary 'required all parishes to

⁶³ Examples of similar survival rates are given above, pp. 33–4.

⁶⁴ Rundle, 'Habits', p. 115.

⁶⁵ Rundle, 'Habits', p. 118.

⁶⁶ Rundle, 'Habits', p. 115.

⁶⁷ Rundle, 'Habits', p. 365.

⁶⁸ '1 Mar. Sess. 2, Cap. 2', in *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani*, edited by Edmund Gibson, vol. 1 (1761), p. 267.

furnish themselves with new complete books.⁶⁹ It is not clear why Burn makes these claims; he provides no quotation or citation for them, nor do I find references to the destruction of these damaged service books in any of the Marian statutes, or evidence of this destruction in any discussions of Mary's reign that were consulted for this study.⁷⁰

In fact, it appears that the creation of new service books under Mary was limited, and that scraped and modified service books from Henry VIII's days continued to be used during Mary's reign. Brian Cummings, drawing on the work of Aude de Mézarac-Zanetti, writes that there were no new service books created in England during the first year and a half of Mary's reign: 'when the Marian statutes restored the Roman liturgy in 1553, for eighteen months there were no new service books produced for English use. Instead, they seem to have been restored and recycled from existing stock.'⁷¹ De Mézarac-Zanetti gives several examples of this type of restoration; she finds forty-six missals and one manual in which a corrector working during Mary's reign had restored the word 'papa' (which, as we have seen, was prohibited and often scraped out during Henry's reign) over the previous erasure of this word. In one case, the restoration work can be dated in an approximate way; De Mézarac-Zanetti finds an example in which the restoration of the word 'papa' is accompanied by the name 'Paulo', which suggests that this modification was made after Paul IV became pope in 1555.⁷² De Mézarac-Zanetti also finds twenty-four missals that originally lacked the word 'papa' (and that, therefore, had likely been produced after Henry had banned this word from missals), and that had had this word added in at some point during Mary's reign.⁷³ These books—seventy in total—all suggest that Mary's reign was marked by an atmosphere of preservation surrounding existing service books. Moreover, accounts of previously scraped service books being deliberately destroyed during Mary's reign are lacking.

⁶⁹ Richard Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*, vol. 3 (1775; 3rd edn), p. 224. Burn's statement has been repeated by others. De Mézarac-Zanetti ('Liturgical', p. 214) repeats the claim, citing only William Maskell, *Monumenta Ritualia Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, vol. 1 (1846), p. ccix; Maskell's only reference for this claim is Burn.

⁷⁰ The citation at the end of the relevant paragraph in Burn (*Ecclesiastical*, p. 225) is to Gibson's *Codex*; this citation refers not to the destruction of manuscripts, but rather to Mary's call for a return to the Divine Service that was in use during the days of Henry VIII. I have read through the statutes passed under Mary and cannot find any reference to the call for destruction that Burn describes. Burn's claim is occasionally repeated, without additional evidence, citations, or information, in the secondary scholarship (see above), but this is rare.

⁷¹ Cummings, 'The Wounded', p. 367. Cummings draws on the work of Aude de Mézarac-Zanetti in 'Liturgical Developments in England Under Henri VIII (1534–1547)' (unpublished PhD thesis, Durham University, 2011).

⁷² De Mézarac-Zanetti, 'Liturgical', p. 214.

⁷³ See De Mézarac-Zanetti, 'Liturgical', p. 214.

There were some new service books printed in England during Mary's reign, but—undoubtedly due in part to the brevity of her reign—these appear to have been limited in number. For identifying them, a helpful source is Francis Henry Dickinson's list of known copies of printed service books from the early modern period which, while compiled in the nineteenth century, remains a valuable source of information. On Dickinson's list, missals printed in England during Mary's reign are relatively rare. As already noted, there were none at all for the first part of Mary's reign. The first relevant missal on Dickinson's list dates to 1555; Dickinson lists five known missals that were printed in England this year (the number of editions is not recorded). The list contains no missals from England that were printed in 1556; for 1557 there are twelve from England on Dickinson's list.⁷⁴ This means that only seventeen missals printed in England appear on Dickinson's list for Mary's entire reign. There are no ordinals from Mary's reign at all on Dickinson's list.⁷⁵

It is of course likely that many more service books were printed during Mary's reign and that these have simply been lost. Moreover, Dickinson's list, produced in the nineteenth century, is undoubtedly incomplete (and Dickinson himself acknowledges that while he has tried to include all relevant service books, his list cannot be exhaustive).⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is notable that there are far more surviving missals produced before Mary's reign that show signs of modification during Mary's reign (the 70 identified by De Mézarac-Zanetti) than those produced anew during Mary's reign (17 identified by Dickinson). Although the latter number should likely be a bit higher, for the reasons already discussed, these figures nevertheless leave the impression that while some parishes acquired new service books during Mary's reign, many evidently continued to use their former service books, updating them manually to reflect Mary's ecclesiastical policies. Turning back to the question at hand, we can conclude that there is no good evidence of service books representing the old faith being targeted for destruction during Mary's reign in anything resembling the quantities destroyed during that of Edward—or, as we shall see, during that of Elizabeth.

Old service books, then, seem to have been relatively safe during Mary's reign. Some more recent printed books, however, were not. Mary passed new censorship laws in response to the 'printing of false fond books, and ballads,

⁷⁴ Francis Henry Dickinson, *A List of Printed Service Books: According to the Ancient Uses of the Anglican Church* (1850), pp. 18–19. It would be ideal to establish how many editions are represented by these surviving copies, but Dickinson notes that his sources are too imprecise to establish with any certainty which copies are from the same edition and which are from different editions; *List*, p. B.

⁷⁵ Dickinson, *List*, p. 20. ⁷⁶ Dickinson, *List*, p. B.

rhymes, and other lewd treatises in the English tongue, containing doctrine in matters now in question, and controversies touching the high points and mysteries in Christian religion.' Her answer to this material was to issue a decree stating that no one could 'print any book, matter, ballad, rhyme, interlude, process or treatise, nor to play any interlude, except they have her Grace's special licence in writing for the same, upon pain to incur her Highness's indignation and displeasure.'⁷⁷ In 1557, Mary extended her control over the printing industry by granting a monopoly on publishing to the Stationers' Company, a guild of book producers. In so doing, she gave the Crown even greater control over the production of new books. Although the idea of granting exclusive printing rights was itself nothing new—the first print monopoly having been established years earlier by Mary's father—Mary's decree was, in terms of its scale, an unprecedented attempt at state control over the printing industry in England and it had a significant impact on this industry.⁷⁸ Yet older volumes, including the manuscripts that lie at the heart of this study, seem to have been largely left alone.⁷⁹

The exploration of the aftermath of the Dissolution thus far has, in keeping with the approach outlined above, focused on the most significant moments for the destruction of medieval manuscripts. For this reason, it has explored all royal policy that had a meaningful impact on the history or historiography of manuscript destruction or preservation, and it has explored the significant cultural currents in terms of the collection and preservation of medieval manuscripts.⁸⁰ It has also sought to contextualize these pieces of evidence, both by considering them within their particular historical circumstances and by putting them in dialogue with more quantitative evidence drawn from the surviving record. This approach, which is aimed at bringing to the foreground social and cultural trends that had a powerful impact on the corpus of medieval manuscripts, is well suited to exploring the questions at hand, but it

⁷⁷ Peter Heylyn, *Ecclesia restaurata; Or, the History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, vol. 2 (1616; 1849), p. 95.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Henry's 1545 proclamation granting exclusive rights to the printing of the primer, in *Tudor*, ed. Hughes and Larkin, p. 353. See also the discussion in Loades, 'The Press', p. 49.

⁷⁹ While manuscripts do not seem to have been targeted during Mary's reign, there is one potential case worth mentioning here. During Mary's reign, a book burning apparently took place at Cambridge that led to the destruction of 'ii greate basketts full of bookes' and other books, all of which were deemed heretical. But it is not clear whether the volumes involved were medieval, and even if they were, the destruction could not have been widespread enough to have left a lasting mark on either the scope or nature of the body of manuscripts that have survived. On the burning of books at Cambridge under Mary, see Ramsay, 'Manuscripts', p. 134. Alexandra Hill finds that Mary imposed new restrictions over the printing of books deemed heretical; see *Lost Books and Printing in London, 1557–1640: An Analysis of the Stationers' Company Register* (2018), p. 103.

⁸⁰ For the approach of this study, see the Introduction, pp. 8–16.

should not be understood as offering a comprehensive view of all manuscript destruction that occurred during the aftermath of the Dissolution. We must assume that manuscripts continued to be destroyed in more everyday circumstances during this period, and that much of this destruction must remain unknowable to us due to the absences it has left in the surviving record.

With this in mind, it is worth considering the cumulative effect of all of these policy changes on the survival of medieval manuscripts. We have seen that official policy during Henry's reign left service books defaced but not destroyed. During Edward's reign, official policy targeted a full range of service books and many of the affected books would have been medieval ones, but this policy was, as is by now obvious, enacted with varying degrees of enthusiasm. While some parishes burned their service books in response to Edward's injunction, others sold them or tried to keep them and there is no certainty about how frequently these books were destroyed during Edward's reign. Nor is there any certainty about the fates of the sorts of books that were more typically housed in medieval libraries. While it is clear that official policy did not target them directly, there have been some insinuations that these books were destroyed, such as the account by Wood that claims that books of astronomy, theology, and mathematics from the colleges fell victim to the tenor of cultural destruction. And while Wood's account appears to have been exaggerated, we cannot on that basis assume that it is entirely false. We have arrived at a better picture of the kinds of destruction that took place during the sixteenth century but we still lack some details.

Looking at more quantitative patterns of the destruction that took place during this period is helpful here. One particularly rich dataset from the period is Neil Ker's impressive catalogue of manuscript fragments retrieved from the bindings of early modern printed books at Oxford. These fragments are from manuscripts that were broken up and reused as binding supports known as pastedowns (leaves that were pasted to the inside and outside covers to secure them to the rest of the book). While some of the fragments in Ker's dataset date to the early sixteenth century and would not, therefore, count as medieval according to the definition used here, these later fragments represent only a small and statistically negligible portion of the overall dataset and so are not expected to skew the analysis of the data in any meaningful way.

The dataset, and Ker's analysis of it, provides a wealth of information about early modern book destruction. Since many of the fragments are still in, or were removed from, printed books with known dates, it is often possible to determine the latest date at which a given manuscript was broken up. In this

way, the dataset helps shed light on what a given period considered waste material and provides valuable insight into the changing interests and needs of book collectors in the early modern period. That the collection came from Oxford is particularly useful here, because Oxford had an unusually long history of using medieval manuscripts as pastedowns. Ker writes that ‘The custom of using manuscript to cover the inside of the boards is, it seems, among English binders, mainly an Oxford and Cambridge custom before 1570 and almost exclusively an Oxford custom after 1570.’ Ker notes, moreover, that pastedowns used by binders in Oxford ‘are especially numerous’ and that ‘manuscript pastedowns were used during a longer period at Oxford than elsewhere, regularly between c.1520 and c.1570 and commonly or occasionally during the half-century on either side of these limits.’⁸¹ Since Ker’s collection of Oxford pastedowns covers a long period of time, it allows for the sort of diachronic comparison that is helpful for shedding light on changes in manuscript destruction.

The destruction of manuscripts for pastedowns in the sixteenth century is often taken as a reflection of the tense religious climate that emerged in the wake of the Dissolution of the Monasteries.⁸² A huge cartload of books carried out of Merton College in the early sixteenth century is correspondingly often taken as evidence for the post-Dissolution destruction of theological manuscripts that ran counter to the post-Dissolution Church. The tendency to view the destruction at Merton as a response to religious reform begins early; Anthony Wood, describing an atmosphere of excessive suspicion surrounding anything thought to contain ‘superstition’, writes that, ‘From Merton Coll. Library a cart load of MSS and above were taken away, such that contained the Lucubrations (chiefly of controversial Divinity, Astronomy and Mathematicks) of divers of the learned Fellows.’⁸³ Wood’s claim has been taken at face value as evidence of widespread book destruction at universities. Eltjo Buringh, for example, writes that, ‘In the sixteenth century the religious authorities of the Reformed Religion purged University libraries of superstitious books. More than a cartload of manuscripts was taken away from

⁸¹ Ker, *Fragments*, p. vii. See also the update to Ker’s *Fragments* in David Pearson’s *Oxford Bookbinding 1500–1640, Including a Supplement to Neil Ker’s ‘Fragments of Medieval Manuscripts Used as Pastedowns in Oxford Bindings’* (2000).

⁸² While acknowledging that many of the pastedowns in Ker’s dataset reflect other changes, Humphreys nevertheless describes these pastedowns as reflecting the ‘attitudes towards certain subjects brought about by the reformers’, in ‘Loss’, p. 257.

⁸³ Wood, *History*, vol. 2, part 1, p. 107.

Merton College and destroyed.⁸⁴ Buringh bases this claim exclusively on the work of Somner Merryweather, who gives no source for this information aside from Wood.⁸⁵ While the notion that manuscript destruction at Merton was a response to religious reform has been influential, little evidence for this notion has surfaced aside from Wood's claim.

To evaluate whether the destruction of manuscripts for pasedowns at Oxford was a response to religious reform, Ker's study is particularly useful. The author who appears most frequently among Oxford pasedowns is not a theological one, but rather Justinian (132 pasedowns), who is followed by Aristotle (76), and Thomas Aquinas (70).⁸⁶ None of these writers was viewed by reformers as representative of pre-Dissolution religion and we would not expect reformers to target these authors in particular. Of course, the aggregate numbers of pasedowns here should not be taken as a direct reflection of the propensity for these volumes to be destroyed, since some of these pasedowns were taken from the same volume, but the data is nevertheless suggestive for indicating which sorts of books were the most likely to be recycled during the sixteenth century. The most frequently occurring authors in the dataset therefore suggest that works of pre-Dissolution religion were not targeted for recycling in the sixteenth century.

It is worth looking more closely at which books tended to be recycled—and when. The earliest years of the sixteenth century witnessed a propensity for the destruction of works of canon law. Here, Ker's analysis of the dataset is helpful. Ker notes that 'during the fifty years between 1490 and 1540' binders at both Oxford and Cambridge 'used chiefly the texts of the canon and civil law, taking their share of the many ponderous manuscripts, Digest, Code, "Parvum volumen," Institutes, Decretum, Decretals, Sext and Clementines.'⁸⁷ It is not clear why these works figure so commonly among the pasedowns from this period but it seems to have been the result of updates to the works in question. Ker finds that during this period, manuscript copies of canon and civil law texts at Oxford 'were turned out of the libraries and replaced by equally ponderous printed copies.'⁸⁸ In the case of the Justinian pasedown

⁸⁴ Buringh, *Medieval*, pp. 195–6. For others who take Wood's claims at face value, see, for example, Frances A. Yates, 'Giordano Bruno's Conflict with Oxford', *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 3 (1939): pp. 227–42, p. 229; and G. R. Evans, *The University of Oxford: A New History* (2010), p. 148.

⁸⁵ Somner Merryweather, *Bibliomania in the Middle Ages* (1900), p. 11 and n. 12.

⁸⁶ I have counted these volumes using the online database of Ker's *Fragments* produced by David Rundle; 'Pasedowns in Oxford Bindings Online', *Lost Manuscripts*, <<https://www.lostmss.org.uk/pasedowns-oxford-bindings-online-poxbo>>, accessed 2 March 2022.

⁸⁷ Ker, *Fragments*, p. xi.

⁸⁸ Ker, *Fragments*, p. xi.

fragments, the vast majority date to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; the manuscripts of Justinian were, in other words, between 100 and 300 years old at the time that they were destroyed. Aside from the need for updates, some of the manuscripts of canon and civil law may have been recycled during this period because they were viewed as having little value. As we have seen, Bale, who was writing during this period, had described older books of civil and canon law as being of no value and as worthy of destruction.⁸⁹ Although C. E. Wright and others have viewed sixteenth-century manuscript recycling as an act of iconoclasm spurred by the Dissolution of the Monasteries, there is very little evidence of monastic manuscripts having been pilfered and subsequently recycled during this period.⁹⁰ Based on the evidence from Oxford, the recycling that happened during this period seems to have been spurred primarily by changes in format and need and not by political or religious upheavals.

Ker finds that towards the middle of the sixteenth century, volumes of, and commentaries on, the works of Aristotle start to appear among the victims of Oxford binders.⁹¹ Here, too, the motivation seems to have been changing tastes. As we have seen, Bale considered Aristotle's works *passé* and Ker, surveying the body of Aristotle manuscripts that got destroyed, finds that these were 'outmoded' and that '[t]heir places were taken by printed editions of the revised Renaissance translations of the texts, translations of Greek commentaries which had not been current in Western Europe in the Middle Ages, and, for those who could use them, texts and commentaries in the original Greek.'⁹² Indeed, Ker suggests that the large number of the books that were removed from Merton College during this period were destroyed not because they were viewed as superstitious remnants of the old religion but because they were replaced with newer print copies.⁹³ In other words, the destruction of these manuscripts was not due to anti-Catholic sentiment or religious reform or any other direct consequence of the Reformation, but rather a pervasive sense that the works they contained were simply out of date.

⁸⁹ See in Chapter 3 above, pp. 145–6.

⁹⁰ Wright takes the recycling of manuscripts as binding fragments as evidence of the destruction of manuscripts during the early stages of the Dissolution, but he does not provide support for this assumption and many of the examples of recycling given by Wright likely post-date this period. Cambridge University Library MS Gg. 3. 28, for example, contains fragments taken from a thirteenth or fourteenth-century service book, but it is not clear when these were bound into the manuscript and there is no evidence to suggest that the service book was destroyed at the Dissolution; see 'Dispersal of the Monastic', p. 212.

⁹¹ Ker, *Fragments*, p. ix.

⁹² Ker, *Fragments*, p. ix.

⁹³ Ker, *Fragments*, p. ix; Bell describes how the rise of print rendered many manuscripts obsolete in 'Libraries', p. 138.

The primers, psalters, and other books that fell under some suspicion during Henry VIII's reign are not well represented among Oxford pastedowns of this early period (1490 to 1540) and Ker finds that service books are very rare among pastedowns prior to 1540.⁹⁴ The situation changed around 1550, however, when, according to Ker, service books began to appear in Oxford bindings 'extremely frequently'.⁹⁵ This change, which took place in the wake of Edward's pointed injunction against service books, offers powerful confirmation of the evidence outlined above that Edward's injunction led to the targeted destruction of these books. The use of manuscript fragments of service books as pastedowns also offers confirmation for the suggestion outlined above that many of the books targeted by Edward's injunction were not printed books but rather manuscripts that had survived Henry's reign. The pastedown evidence from Oxford therefore strongly suggests that although the greatest threat to manuscripts during the first half of the sixteenth century was changing fashion made possible by the printing press (and not any deliberate targeting of more 'Catholic-leaning' volumes), in 1550 this situation started to change, and traditional service books started to be targeted en masse.

A manuscript's chances of being recycled during this period, then, were determined in part by its contents—this is in keeping with the findings above concerning the targeting of service books under Edward. What role did a manuscript's language play? Ker's dataset shows that some manuscripts containing Old or Middle English were recycled into pastedowns during the sixteenth century, but binding fragments containing these languages are nowhere near as common in Ker's pastedown dataset as Latin ones (perhaps because, as we have seen, manuscripts containing Old or Middle English were nowhere near as common as those containing Latin). Something of why manuscripts containing English were recycled can be gleaned by turning briefly away from Ker's pastedown dataset and towards other sources. In terms of Old English, Wright has identified several examples of binding fragments that contain the language, and these may have been recycled because Old English had become unintelligible.⁹⁶

But the corpus of surviving Old English contains relatively few binding fragments on the whole and it does not seem that English was targeted for recycling in this period more commonly than any other language.

⁹⁴ Ker, *Fragments*, p. ix.

⁹⁵ Ker, *Fragments*, p. ix.

⁹⁶ Wright, 'Dispersal of the Monastic', p. 212. The suggestion that some Old English manuscripts were recycled into fragments when the language became unintelligible is put forth by Peter Baker in his introduction to 'Waldere', in *Introduction to Old English* (2003; 2012), pp. 253–4, p. 254.

The evidence for this emerges from Ker's *Catalogue* of manuscripts containing Old English. Here, Ker lists 412 manuscripts containing Old English that were copied by English scribes (and a further 39 by 'foreign' scribes).⁹⁷ In an additional publication, Ker lists another 9 manuscripts from English scribes and 6 by continental ones, bringing the total number of manuscripts containing Old English identified by Ker to 466 (the real figure is undoubtedly slightly higher). Binding fragments or pastedowns described by Ker represent only 51 of the 466 (plus an additional 1, which is listed in his later article as no. 417). This is only about 11 per cent of the total. A further 46 witnesses to Old English are fragmentary because they were at one point separated from their original manuscripts, but the precise date of separation is usually unknown.

It is evident from Ker's data that Old English was more likely to have been recycled for binding material during the medieval period than after it. Of the 24 fragments whose use in bindings can be dated, 13 can be dated to the medieval period, and 11 can be dated to the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.⁹⁸ Ker also finds, somewhat surprisingly, that one manuscript containing Old English glosses to Aldhelm's *De laude virginitatis* (item no. 12 in his catalogue) was being cut up for binding material during the nineteenth century; since then, various scraps of it have been recovered from bindings.⁹⁹ Thus while there is some evidence of Old English having been recycled for binding fragments, it would seem that works in English were recycled relatively rarely compared to works in other languages, and recycling of the former seems to have been more common during the medieval period than after it.

Middle English was also recycled for binding material during the medieval period and later, but here, too, there is no evidence of English works being recycled in disproportionate quantities. Of the 99 manuscripts on Guddat-Figge's nearly comprehensive list of surviving manuscripts containing Middle English romances, only 11 are small fragments (of 8 folia or fewer): MSS numbers 1, 3, 10, 23, 29, 33, 55, 58, 82, 84, and 86.¹⁰⁰ All of these fragments

⁹⁷ See the fragments in Ker's *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, and the discussion of the survival of vernacular works above, pp. 75–81. On the manuscripts copied by 'foreign' scribes, see Ker, *Catalogue*, p. 475.

⁹⁸ I count here both the 10 listed by Ker and item no. 73, which Ker lists below this initial list but which came from a sixteenth-century binding (fragments of the eleventh-century *Legend of the Cross*; now Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 557).

⁹⁹ See Ker, *Catalogue*, p. lxi–lxiii. Ker's additional article is N. R. Ker, 'A Supplement to *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*', in *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976): pp. 121–31. In this additional publication, Ker also lists additional leaves that have been identified from manuscripts that are already described in his previous catalogue.

¹⁰⁰ See Guddat-Figge's *Catalogue*. Aside from the smaller fragments counted here, many of the manuscripts listed in the *Catalogue* are missing leaves; see above, p. 55. Item no. 23, the well-known

date to the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Several are now bound up in fragment collections and their provenance information has been lost. It is evident, however, that at least 6 of these were once used as binding material (MSS numbers 3, 23, 29, 33, 58, 82), and several of the others contain folds or other marks that suggest they were too.

When a date of recycling can be narrowed down, it is in most cases within a few centuries of when the original manuscript was copied. So, a fragment of the well-known Auchinleck manuscript (c.1330–1350) was recovered from what Margaret Connolly and A. S. G. Edwards describe as ‘a simple British binding of the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century (1580s–1610s)’.¹⁰¹ A fifteenth-century copy of *Parthenope of Blois* was found in the binding of a book that was donated in 1626, to New College by Michael Woodward (1602–75), who eventually became the warden of the college.¹⁰² A fifteenth-century fragment of *Richard Coeur de Lion* (Badminton House MS 704.1.16; now Gloucestershire Archives MS D2700/V/1. No 8) was recycled into binding material or into a wrapper for some Badminton House estate records sometime before the eighteenth century.¹⁰³ Oxford Bodleian Library MS Douce 384 was copied in the fifteenth century and recycled for a binding by the time Francis Douce (1757–1834) found it, although it is not clear which book it was used in.¹⁰⁴ The evidence, limited as it is, suggests that manuscripts containing Middle English were most likely to be recycled roughly 100 to 300 years after they were copied.¹⁰⁵

It is not clear how often Middle English was recycled for binding material. A. S. G. Edwards and Theresa O’Byrne, describing a mid-fifteenth-century fragment of the *Prick of Conscience* that seems to have been used as a wrapper

Auchinleck manuscript, is an unusual case. Three different sets of fragments of the manuscript have been found and Margaret Connolly and A. S. G. Edwards find that ‘all the identified detached bifolia have a Scottish origin insofar as their provenance can be established’; see ‘Evidence for the History of the Auchinleck Manuscript’, *Library* 18, no. 3 (2017): pp. 292–304, p. 279. Evaluating the evidence, they hypothesize ‘that the larger part of the manuscript was owned at some point before 1740 by a Scottish binder or binding shop’ (p. 298).

¹⁰¹ Connolly and Edwards, ‘Evidence’, p. 301. For more information on this manuscript, see the previous note.

¹⁰² The manuscript containing this fragment is Bodleian Library MS Bodl. Poet C. 3. It is listed in Guddat-Figge’s *Catalogue* as no. 84, on p. 279.

¹⁰³ This is Guddat-Figge’s *Catalogue*, no. 3, p. 79. See Norman Davis, ‘Another Fragment of “Richard Coer de Lyon”’, *Notes and Queries* 16, no. 12 (1969): pp. 447–52. The new shelfmark for this MS is supplied by Marisa Libbon in ‘The Invention of King Richard’, in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*, edited by Susanna Fein (2016), pp. 127–38, p. 127.

¹⁰⁴ Guddat-Figge’s *Catalogue*, no. 9, pp. 87–8.

¹⁰⁵ The only exception is no. 33 on Guddat-Figge’s *Catalogue* (pp. 163–4). This fragment, which contains one leaf of the romance *King Robert of Sicily*, was recycled as binding material but this may have been due to a copying flaw; thus Guddat-Figge muses, ‘Last page of an unfinished copy of *King Robert*? Scribe dissatisfied with the unmetrical appearance of his work?’ (p. 163).

for a printed copy of Thomas More's 1529 *Supplication of Souls*, note that this example is rare, writing that '[i]t is unusual to find Middle English verse surviving as binding wrappers.¹⁰⁶ The same is true of other sorts of fragments in Middle English. In the entire *Fragmentarium*, which contains at the current time of writing 4,511 medieval manuscript fragments of all sorts from across Western Europe, only 6 have been tagged as containing Middle English; by contrast, 62 have been tagged as containing French and 4,153 as containing Latin. To check if these figures have been skewed by the locations of institutions that have contributed data to the *Fragmentarium*, it is valuable to limit the search to fragments that have been tagged as being housed in English collections. Limiting the search in this way yields only 35 tagged fragments, but among these only 2 are in English (31 are in Latin).¹⁰⁷ English fragments, then, are rare among fragments in England's collections. The evidence suggests that while there are isolated examples of both Old and Middle English that were recycled by early modern bookbinders, this happened rarely, and certainly not in any disproportionate way.

Having evaluated the impact of language and contents on a manuscript's chances of being recycled, we can now turn to an examination of one final factor: age. For this examination, it is helpful to observe that the vast majority of pastedowns in Ker's catalogue are from late medieval manuscripts. Of these, 465 fragments are dated to the thirteenth century, 686 fragments are dated to the fourteenth, and 447 are dated to the fifteenth.¹⁰⁸ Since the vast majority of all the fragments in the database are taken from sixteenth-century bindings (with some taken from fifteenth- or seventeenth-century bindings), it is fair to conclude that the vast majority of manuscripts that were recycled into binding material were relatively new at the time; most were only 50 to 200 years old.

To check if this tendency was particular to Oxford, it is worth examining a collection of fragments that were found in early modern bindings in Durham Cathedral Library. Of the forty-nine fragments that have been catalogued to date, most are from the later medieval period (Table 4.1).

¹⁰⁶ See A. S. G. Edwards and Theresa O'Byrne, 'A New Manuscript Fragment of the "Prick of Conscience"', *Medium Ævum* 76, no. 2 (2007): pp. 305–7, p. 305.

¹⁰⁷ The data have been archived at the time of writing. On the *Fragmentarium*, see above, p. 133.

¹⁰⁸ I have determined this using the digitized version of Neil Ker's collection of pastedowns produced by David Rundle; see 'Pastedowns in Oxford Bindings Online', edited by David Rundle, in *Lost Manuscripts*, <<https://www.lostmss.org.uk/pastedowns-oxford-bindings-online-poxbo>>, accessed 2 March 2022. I have omitted manuscripts dated between centuries from the count. The data at the time of writing have been archived.

The majority of these fragments date to the fourteenth century or later, with the fourteenth century standing as the best represented among the fragments. Almost all of the fragments were found in sixteenth-century bindings, which means that the majority of manuscripts used in bindings were 50–300 years old at the time that they were destroyed: old enough to have become obsolete but not old enough to have been viewed as cultural artefacts worthy of preservation.

While Leland and his contemporaries were extolling the merits of older material—that which was written before the twelfth century—newer medieval material was being recycled into binding scraps. And while Leland and his contemporaries were seeking out histories and chronicles as antiquarian treasures, the sorts of works that they considered disposable, including works of canon law and works by Aristotle that were no longer in frequent use, were getting recycled en masse. The evidence from manuscripts recycled into bookbinding material strongly suggests that, with the important exception of service books and Books of Hours, most of the manuscripts selected for destruction during this period were targeted not because of their pre-Reformation theological contents, but because they had simply fallen out of fashion.

Table 4.1 Endpapers and Bindings in the Durham Cathedral Archive by Century

Century	No. of fragments ^a
12th	8
13th	9
14th	14
15th	12.5
16th	3.5
17th	2

^a Here, a manuscript dated within two centuries (i.e. ‘14th or 15th c.’) is counted as 0.5 in each century (so 0.5 in the fourteenth and 0.5 in the fifteenth), which means that the final counts include figures ending in decimals. The decision to approach manuscripts dated between centuries this way was made for this dataset but not for Ker’s because this one is much smaller, which means that each individual data point holds greater weight, and thus the omission of data has a greater chance of skewing the results. The fragments are described in ‘Durham Cathedral Archive: End Papers and Bindings’, *Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections Catalogue*, Durham University, <https://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1qj72p717b.xml>, accessed 8 March 2022.

The implications seem clear. While continuing religious reform in the middle of the sixteenth century did lead to the destruction of manuscripts, this was largely limited to service books and Books of Hours. For the sorts of books that tended to get housed in institutional libraries, religious reform posed little threat. Instead, the greatest threat to these books continued to be changing tastes, formats, and practices. The arrival of the printing press in the late fifteenth century led to the release of updated versions of works, and by the middle of the sixteenth century outmoded manuscripts—especially those from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—fell by the wayside, neither old enough to be valued for their antiquarian interests nor new enough to be fashionable. As we have seen, the same principle—that books that possessed ‘age without vintage’ were most at risk—was at play during the medieval period itself. And in many ways, these same forces are still at play on a different scale in modern destruction and deacquisition policies. When cities decide which buildings to destroy, or when libraries decide which books to deacquisition, or when collectors decide which media to discard, the first targeted are typically those that are considered too old to be useful or stylish, but too new to be antique, rare, or vintage. It is only if an object manages to survive this risky stage that it comes to be cherished and respected for its antiquarian value. As Wood reminds us, ‘such is the inconstancy of mankind’.

5

1558–1603

Elizabethan Purges and the ‘Auncient Recordes or Monumentes Written’

The suspicion and condemnation of traditional service books that had taken hold under Edward VI took on a new fervour when Elizabeth (1558–1603) rose to the throne. Indeed, while Elizabeth’s reign is typically overshadowed by that of Henry VIII in discussions of medieval manuscript loss, the Elizabethan period was, as we shall see, of comparable significance to that of Henry, both in terms of the proportion of manuscripts lost and in terms of its impact on later preservation policies. The goal of this chapter is to explore the kinds of manuscripts that were destroyed during Elizabeth’s reign and to approximate the proportion of manuscripts that were destroyed and its relative impact on the body of manuscripts that have survived. This chapter approaches these matters first through an analysis of all official policy that could have affected the survival of medieval manuscripts and then through a quantitative case study exploring the destruction reported at 150 parishes in Lincolnshire. Elizabethan print censorship is explored where it is relevant to the matters at hand, but since it has already been the subject of extensive analysis, it is not explored in any comprehensive way here; the focus here is rather on official policies that led to the destruction of medieval manuscripts.¹

The first of these emerged in 1559, when an injunction was passed requiring ‘that the churchwardens of every parish shall deliver unto our [i.e. the queen’s] visitors the inventories of vestments, copes, and other ornaments, plate, books, and specially of grails, couchers, legends, processionals, hymnals, manuals, portuesses, and suchlike apertaining to the church.’² In the wake of

¹ For studies exploring Elizabethan print censorship, see, for example, Frederick Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476–1776: The Rise and Decline of Government Controls* (1952); Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (1984); Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*; and Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England* (2000).

² W. H. Frere, ed., ‘The Royal Injunctions of Queen Elizabeth’, in *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, vol. 3 (1910), pp. 8–29, p. 22.

this injunction, Elizabeth's commissioners set out to investigate every parish and to collect the required inventories of books and ornaments. In the process, the commissioners were supposed to ask parish officials 'what books of God's Scripture you have delivered to be burnt, or otherwise destroyed, and to whom you have delivered the same'.³ The queen's injunction was therefore aimed at taking account of which churches had destroyed the ornaments of the old religion and which were still clinging to them.

The injunction was part of a broader programme of reform imposed by Elizabeth's commissioners. On 19 July 1559, Elizabeth issued a set of official injunctions aimed at establishing uniformity within the Church and at stamping out Catholic practices. Most of the fifty-three injunctions, including the call for the removal of Catholic ornaments, targeted the Church itself, but others had broader targets. Item 50 of these injunctions, which specified that words such as *papist* should not be used as an insult, was expressly aimed at reducing schism and conflict among the masses. The injunctions also called for a broader form of censorship. Item 51 specified that a licence had to be sought before printing 'any manner of boke or paper', although Cyndia Clegg, who explores the implications of this item in detail, notes that it was largely aimed at new religious volumes; the injunction makes provision for secular writings, school texts, and works 'that hath ben heretofore commonly receyved or allowed in any the unyversities or Scholes'. Clegg finds, moreover, that the wording left room for 'interpretation on the part of a printer', and that the impact of the injunction on printed works was limited.⁴ Manuscripts, especially those already in circulation, were not affected by this injunction, and the only injunction that did target them was the aforementioned one pertaining to service books, which tended to be categorized among the Church's ornaments.

The 1559 injunction against these books and ornaments was confirmed and extended in 1561 when Elizabeth's commissioners incorporated it into the existing Lambeth Articles. Among other things, these articles legislated that 'all old service-books, grails, antiphonars and other be defaced and abolished by order in visitations'.⁵ The specification that the books be 'old' suggests that the books under suspicion were not ones that had been printed during Mary's brief and recent rise to power but rather those created prior to

³ Frere, ed., 'The Royal', p. 6.

⁴ For the quotation and an in-depth discussion of Elizabeth's 1599 injunctions, see Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, pp. 37–9, quoted at p. 38.

⁵ Frere, ed., 'The Royal', p. 96. For the destruction of service books in Latin see William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation: The Struggle for a Stable Settlement of Religion* (1968), p. 165.

Edward's ban on service books and it provides, along with the evidence already examined, and evidence presented below, powerful support for the argument above that many older service books had survived Edward's similar injunction.⁶

If, as I argued there, Edward's injunction against service books was enforced by half-measures, the same was not true of Elizabeth's injunction. In response to it, churchwardens across the realm began to write descriptions of their collections that indicated both the ornaments and the books that they possessed and, if any, those that they had destroyed. For an example of one of these inventories we can turn to Landulph, Cornwall, where a list of the various ornaments that the church had destroyed was drawn up by churchwardens John Champlyn and Roger Hele. The destroyed objects include, for example, 'A cross of latyn which is broken in pieces.' But more important for the topic at hand is the description of the parish's book collection, which states that 'There are II masse books and a manuell, and II processionalls, which were burnt at Saltsayshe [i.e. the town to the south of the parish church]. The wardens then list the books that the church had adopted in place of the destroyed service books: 'We have in the Church at thys present, a byble, the paraphrase of Erasmus, and the communion book.'⁷ All of these remaining books were the foundational and sanctioned texts of the reformed Church.

In some cases, churchwardens reported on their holdings directly, by sending written inventories to appointed ecclesiastical officials. The requirement must have been seen by some as an unnecessary imposition. The register from St Michael's Parish Church in Bishop's Stortford records that in 1570 fourpence was paid 'for wryting a byll to my lord of London in testyfieng howe we sold the old bokes and alter clothes and suche stuffe.'⁸ The wording suggests that the parish had had to hire a scribe to send the record and this was undoubtedly not a welcome undertaking.

High-ranking ecclesiastical officials (termed 'ordinaries') were enjoined to check whether the wardens of parish churches were following orders. In 1560, a set of specific 'interrogatories' intended for this purpose was printed in a small booklet by the London stationer John Walley (1547–85).⁹

⁶ See Chapter 4 above.

⁷ Printed in *A Complete Parochial History of the County of Cornwall*, edited by Joseph Polsue, vol. 2 (1868), p. 408. On Erasmus' *Paraphrases*, see above, p. 168.

⁸ See the account edited by J. L. Glasscock Junior in *The Records of St. Michael's Parish Church, Bishop's Stortford* (1882), p. 57.

⁹ On Walley see Philip Luckombe's *A Concise History of the Origin and Progress of Printing: With Practical Instructions to the Trade in General* (1770), p. 92. The date of these articles is subject to some debate; I follow here the dating adopted by Frere, ed., 'The Royal', p. 87.

Churchwardens were to report to an 'ordinarie' on 'Whether that any images, bokes of service, or vestments, not allowed by law, be reserved of any man, or in any place, or no? By whom and where they be reserved?'¹⁰ Their parishioners, in turn, were supposed to be interrogated about 'whether any man maketh any singing-cakes [pre-Reformation mass cakes; see note], to say masse withal; reserveth vestments, superaltaries, masse books, or other instruments of this supersticion, or no?'¹¹ Parishioners were also supposed to be asked, 'Whether any bodye useth beads, Latin primers, or any other prayer books, then that be allowed by publike auctoritie to be used, or no?'¹² This last question is fascinating; the reference to primers and other prayer books indicates that although they were not mentioned explicitly in Elizabeth's injunction, these privately owned books were also under suspicion, just as they had been during Edward's reign.

The administration of these injunctions against service books tended to be handled at a diocesan level, and it was introduced gradually through sets of visitation articles. So, for example, the Bishop of London, Edwin Sandys, established the required visitation articles for his diocese in 1571; the Bishop of Rochester, Edmund Freke, did the same for his diocese in 1572–4; and the well-known Archbishop Matthew Parker did the same for his diocese of Winchester in 1575.¹³ The interrogations specified in these visitations articles resemble in many ways the ones specified in the official 1560 booklet. Thus, the articles specify that officials and various members of the parish be interrogated about whether 'all monuments of idolatry and superstition be clean

¹⁰ The interrogatories were also printed by Wyllyam Seres under the title *Interrogatories for the doctrine and maners of mynisters, and for other orders in the Churche* (London: William Seres, 1560). I quote here from the edition of John Walley's text printed as 'Interrogatories', in *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church of England, During the First Twelve Years of Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign*, edited by John Strype, vol. 1, part 2 (1725), pp. 494–500, p. 497. I have examined the digitized version of Seres's text that is held by the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington and compared it to Strype's edition; the differences are minor.

¹¹ 'Interrogatories', ed. Strype, p. 498. The injunction's concern over 'singing-cakes' should not be taken as a rejection of Eucharistic piety but does reflect changing attitudes towards the Eucharist. The bread that served as the basis of the host for most participants in the medieval mass was a round unleavened wafer; by the late medieval period, this was embossed with the image of a crucifix or lamb; see 'Wafers', in *A Church Dictionary*, edited by Walter Farquhar Hook, 6th edn (1854), pp. 574–5. There is evidence that by the late medieval period, larger pieces of bread, known as 'singing-cakes', were used for the priest and for private masses; see Alfred Charles Heales, *The Archaeology of the Christian Altar in Western Europe, with Its Adjuncts, Furniture and Ornaments* (1881), p. 57. Edward's *Book of Common Prayer* called for larger bread to be used for all communicants and for the bread to be left without embossing; see 'Wafers', pp. 574–5. An injunction passed during the reign of Elizabeth required that the host be 'of the same fineness and thickness, as the usual bread and water heretofore named singing-cakes, which served for the use of the private mass'; printed in J. H. M., 'Singing Bread', *Notes and Queries* 6, no. 159 (1852), p. 471, quoted at p. 471.

¹² 'Interrogatories', ed. Strype, p. 499.

¹³ Frere, ed., 'The Royal', pp. 311, 340, 374.

taken away and abolished out of your parish, and if any remain, what they are, and in whose hands.' The interrogations were also aimed at identifying resistance among parishioners; members of the parish were supposed to report on 'whether that there be any in your [parish] that have or use any forbidden books in Latin or English, or that use to pray upon any such book, or to read them openly or privately, and who they are, and what they have or use.'¹⁴ The wording indicates that the interrogations were concerned with weeding out not just service books but also Books of Hours.

The interrogation articles are remarkably consistent across the various dioceses. Yet despite this consistency, the approach to Elizabeth's injunction varied somewhat at a diocesan—and even parish-wide—level. This is, at least, the impression that emerges from the aforementioned 1566 list of churchwardens' accounts in the Lincolnshire episcopal registers.¹⁵ This collection of accounts, entitled the *Inventarium monumentorum superstitionis*, was evidently created in response to a set of visitations that must have been conducted through articles like the ones just examined. Under royal orders, each churchwarden had been asked to report on any more Catholic items or ornaments (including service books) that their church had either procured or destroyed during Elizabeth's reign. Presumably the wardens had to answer under considerable duress and with the tacit expectation that they would report that all their more Catholic ornaments had been destroyed.¹⁶ It is, therefore, not inconceivable that some churchwardens exaggerated in their reports as a means of assuring the queen and her commissioners of their loyalty. But as long as this possibility is taken into consideration, the reports are a valuable source of evidence about the destruction that took place.

The *Inventarium* contains reports from 150 parishes, most of which were very small and all of which were in Lincolnshire. These reports stress that the destruction of service books was taken very seriously during Elizabeth's reign. Thus the report from St Peter's Church, Waddingham, claims that in 1562 'all the masse w(i)t(h) all other bookes of papistrie savinge one manuell—were burnt and torn in peces.'¹⁷ As we have seen, the destruction was widespread,

¹⁴ Frere, ed., 'The Royal', pp. 341–2.

¹⁵ The list is edited by Edward Peacock, an antiquarian from Lincolnshire, in *English*. Peacock describes his source on p. 1. I can find no reference to it in the Lincolnshire archives, where it would be expected to be found, and Peacock gives little information to assist identification aside from its title. I am therefore incapable of ascertaining the accuracy or fidelity of Peacock's transcription. But others, including Stephen Greenblatt, have treated Peacock's transcription as a viable source of evidence so with due caution I do the same; see Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980; 2005), pp. 188, 288, no. 63.

¹⁶ See the introduction to the list for Folkingham in Peacock, *English*, p. 80.

¹⁷ Peacock, *English*, p. 156.

with over two-thirds of the 150 parishes reporting that they had destroyed or sold off their service books during Elizabeth's reign. Only two report that they had destroyed the bulk of their service books during Edward's reign instead (none claims to have destroyed books during Mary's reign).¹⁸ Judging from these reports, the destruction of service books sometimes took place in central community locations and seems to have been intended as a public warning. So in the Parish of New Sleaford, 'all the antiphoners masse bookes grales pies portises manuelles legendes hymnalles...w(i)t(h) suche other trumperie were burned in the markt place' around 1559.¹⁹ Displays of destruction such as this one were usually carried out by the churchwardens themselves, with parishioners watching as a member of the local community destroyed remnants of the old religion.

In some cases, churchwardens decided not to burn their missals and other service books; instead these were 'brokin and defacid'.²⁰ At Aswardby 'all the mass bookes and all bookes of papistrie were torne in peces' 'and sold to pedlars to lap [wrap] spice in'.²¹ Elsewhere, service books were broken up and recycled into binding fragments.²² Given that some of the books destroyed during this period must have been manuscripts, which—as we have seen—burn

¹⁸ By my count, of all the churches inventoried, 94 reported having destroyed, burnt, or defaced books during Elizabeth's reign; 8 others reported having sold them (7 specifying that this happened during Elizabeth's reign and 1 not specifying); 4 reported that their service books had been taken away by someone during Elizabeth's reign who subsequently destroyed them; 2 reported having destroyed books at some point but supplied no date for this destruction; 2 (Edenham, p. 75 and Folkingham, p. 80) reported having destroyed books during Edward's reign (Edenham reported having also destroyed books during Elizabeth's reign and Folkingham claimed that the only book they had acquired since Mary's days, a portas, was carried away by one John Tyson); 3 reported that their books had been stolen by someone during Elizabeth's reign (at Hemswell, 'one masse boke a manuell and a possessorer' were 'gone in p(ar)son norton dayes in the plage tyme frome the p(ar)sonage and no man knoweth howe', p. 103); 3 reported that their service books were taken away by a former priest or vicar during Elizabeth's reign; 10 reported that their service books had been borrowed (usually with specification that they had been borrowed during Mary's reign) and that they had since been returned to their lenders; 8 reported that their service books had been taken away (6 specifying that this had happened during Elizabeth's reign and 2 without further specification); 1 reported that some books had been defaced and a mass book that had been borrowed had been returned; 1 reported simply that their books were 'lacking'; 1 (Basingham, pp. 41–2) reported holding no service books but that they had found two books in the hands of what are presumably parishioners; 4 supplied no information about service books; 2 simply claimed that they had no service books at all; and 6 records lack information due to defects in the manuscript; see Peacock, *English*.

¹⁹ Peacock, *English*, p. 138. See also the burning at East Halton in Peacock, *English*, p. 97.

²⁰ At the parish of South Ickham in c.1558 'one masse bok and all othir bookes of supsticion [were] brokin and defacid' by the churchwardens; Peacock, *English*, p. 142. At Skegnes in c.1559 'one masse booke w(i)t(h) all other bookes of papestrye' and other ornaments of the church were 'broke and defacid' by two churchwardens; see p. 137. At the manor of Scotten, 'one masse book and other latten bookes of papistrie [were] torne in peces' in the year 1563; Peacock, *English*, p. 134. At the parish of Witham in 1559, 'Grales p(ro)[c]essioners masse bookes—w(hi)ch were made away by the aboue named church wardens in A(n)n(o) 1559 so that there remainethe no p(ar)cell of them but ar defaced'; Peacock, *English*, p. 166.

²¹ Peacock, *English*, p. 33.

²² See the discussion below, p. 193.

very badly, the decision to carry out their destruction through tearing rather than burning must have been in many cases a pragmatic one.

How many of the books destroyed at this time were medieval? Much of the destruction described in the Lincolnshire reports had happened during Elizabeth's reign (so was relatively recent at the time), but the age of the destroyed volumes is often unclear. One hint may be gleaned from the term 'popishe', which is used to describe many of the destroyed service books. The word suggests that the volumes in question were thought to represent the old religion; since Mary's reign had marked a return to this religion, the term alone does not necessarily indicate the age of a given volume. Sometimes the phrasing makes it clear that the books in question were from the first half of the sixteenth century or earlier. At Edenham (in Lincoln), 'all masse books and other books s(er)ving for Idolatrie before the tyme of Kinge Edward were by mr Gilbie, being p(ar)son here, defaced and burnt before queen marye reigne.'²³ The same impression emerges, as we have seen, from the language of Elizabeth's act, which targets 'old' books. But perhaps the clearest indication of the age of the destroyed volumes comes from other evidence. Since few service books for the old religion were created or brought to England after the widespread imposition and adoption of the Book of Common Prayer at the start of Edward's reign, and since we have seen that many service books that survived Edward's reign were still in use during Mary's, it follows that many of the service books that were destroyed during Elizabeth's reign were ones that had survived Edward's.²⁴ In some reports, the volumes under suspicion are described as being 'old' or 'in parchment'—specifications which are also suggestive of pre-1500 book production.²⁵ Although some of the destroyed volumes might have been produced during Henry's reign, many of them must have been produced before it, and some would have dated back to the medieval period.

This evidence alone, grounded as it is in reports made by church officials, may seem tenuous, but it can be confirmed through other evidence. Of the large number of service books that were recycled for binding scraps or otherwise broken apart during Elizabeth's reign, many were medieval manuscripts.²⁶ A rather striking example can be found in a collection of fragments that is

²³ Peacock, *English*, p. 75.

²⁴ For examples of books described as 'popishe' (or its variants) see Peacock, *English*, pp. 53, 58, 126. On the printing of new service books in the sixteenth century, see above, pp. 174–5.

²⁵ See the examples below, on p. 195.

²⁶ See, for example, the fragments numbered 1001, 1009.1, 1099, 1479, 1515, 1634, 1636, 1850, and 1980 in Ker, 'Pastedowns'. For historiographic considerations surrounding the use of pastedown evidence, see the discussion of pastedown evidence above, p. 179.

now British Library, Harley MS 3776. Among the fragments that make up the volume are eight folia from a breviary (ff. 128r–135v).²⁷ The breviary was copied in the fourteenth century and seems to have been broken apart in the sixteenth. At this point, it fell into the hands of one John, who added an inscription describing it as ‘An Olde Calender belonginge to me John Prim[...?] servaunt to M. George h[eton] chamberlaine of the cittie of London. 1568.’²⁸ The inscription is rather curious; although the fragment does contain a calendar (ff. 129–135v), it opens with Benedictions and the commemorations section of a breviary (‘Benedictiones per totum annum,’ f. 128r). Given that the inscription misrepresents some of the contents, it may have been designed to emphasize the less obviously Catholic calendar to shield the fragment from suspicion. It is worth noting that while the breviary was created prior to the Reformation, it was not in any way ancient at the time that it was broken up—it must have been between 200 and 300 years old at the time, and it stands as another example of the propensity to destroy books that had not yet come to be viewed as heritage objects.

Some churchwardens mounted powerful resistance to Elizabeth’s injunction to destroy service books. In some cases, they defaced service books but kept them in an otherwise usable condition—apparently deliberately.²⁹ Some parish communities managed to remove potentially offensive books from their churches before these could be destroyed. The churchwardens of West Deeping claimed that ‘all our masse books and portises and all other books of superstition’ had been carried off by their former parson upon his retirement in 1560.³⁰ Another parish claimed that ‘one masse book and all other popishe bookes’ had been removed by their priest and ‘what he hathe done w(i)th them we can not tell.’³¹ At Tallington, the parish held onto its service books as long as possible and until a visitation by the Queen’s Commissioners in 1565 rendered it too risky, at which point ‘masse bookes and Cowchers—were burnned spoyled and defaced.’³² Some parishes were able to avoid the commissioners’ suspicions better than others. Nigel J. Morgan, remarking that liturgical manuscripts owned by Benedictine monks and Augustinian canons had better chances of survival than those of the mendicants, suggests as a possible

²⁷ The fragment is described as a missal in the British Library catalogue, but its contents, which include the Benedictions and a Calendar, are more suggestive of a breviary.

²⁸ The inscription is on f. 128r and its transcription is given in the catalogue description, ‘Harley MS 3776’, in *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_3776>, accessed on 15 February 2022.

²⁹ See, for example, the parish of Barhome, where the service books were said to be ‘defaced and yet remayninge’; Peacock, *English*, p. 38.

³⁰ Peacock, *English*, p. 70.

³¹ Peacock, *English*, p. 37.

³² Peacock, *English*, p. 150.

explanation that service books from more rural locations may have been more likely to have survived the purges of the Reformation.³³

At some of the colleges, resistance was pronounced. At Merton College Oxford, one of the fellows, a Mr Hall, hid service books from the Queen's Commissioners by placing them under the floorboards of the college chapel.³⁴ In 1567, Elizabeth's High Commissioners sent a letter to the fellows of All Souls College Oxford, accusing them of holding onto banned books, 'diverse monuments of superstition, which by public orders and Laws of this Realm ought to be abolish'd as derogatory to the state of Religion publickly receiv'd'. The letter lists a few specific volumes, and the types of books being targeted can be gleaned from the list, which includes, alongside other remnants of the old religion, 'Three Mass Books old and new & 2 portmisses. Item 8 Grailes, 7 antiphoners of parchment & bound.' The college was asked to send every book on the list to Lambeth and warned, rather ominously, 'you will answer to the contrary at your perill'.³⁵ Despite this stark warning, the college resisted. In 1573, college officials were summoned before the Queen's Commissioners for having failed to destroy the books and other objects under investigation. They were asked to bring 'a true certificate of yowre whole doinges in the said defacing of the sayde Monuments of Superstition'.³⁶ The documentary evidence makes it clear that Elizabeth's commissioners took extreme measures to ensure that service books were destroyed.

But despite these threats, the resistance at All Souls was somewhat successful, and some All Souls books escaped destruction entirely. Several books from All Souls were brought to Antwerp and are now in the collection of the Plantin-Moretus Museum. It is not certain how or why the books were brought across the Channel, but the evidence suggests that this was done to protect the books during Elizabeth's reign.³⁷ Other books, including some

³³ Morgan J. Nigel, 'The Liturgical Manuscripts of the English Dominicans, ca.1250–ca.1530', in *A Companion to the English Dominican Province*, edited by Eleanor J. Giraud and J. Cornelia Linde (2021), pp. 370–408, p. 370.

³⁴ Frere, ed., 'The Royal', p. 119.

³⁵ The letter and the list are edited by John Gutch in 'Letter from Queen Elizabeth's High Commissioners Concerning the Superstitious Books Belonging to the College', in *Collectanea Curiosa*, edited by John Gutch, vol. 2 (1781), pp. 275–7; quoted at pp. 275–6, 276.

³⁶ 'Another Order from the Same', in *Collectanea Curiosa*, edited by John Gutch, vol. 2 (1781), p. 281.

³⁷ One account describes the manuscripts in question as 'several MSS, once the property of All Souls' College, and carried over to Flanders by Catholic fellows in their flight from Oxford in the reign of Elizabeth'; 'A Bibliographical Tour in Belgium', *The Bookseller: The Organ of the Book Trade* 211 (1875): pp. 492–3, at p. 493. Another source suggests that the books made their way to the Plantin collection 'thanks to the enterprise of Christopher Plantin' (1520–89); see Christopher Hibbert and Edward Hibbert's *The Encyclopaedia of Oxford* (1988), p. 13. Unfortunately neither source provides any citation information for their claims and I can find no further information related to them in any

service books, stayed at Oxford despite the threats of Elizabeth's commissioners. The inventory of suspicious books at All Souls drawn up by Elizabeth's commissioners lists a 'Founder's Mass Book'; this book is likely the fifteenth-century evangeliary donated by the founder of All Souls, Henry Chichele, which has survived, although it is now at Trinity College.³⁸ One early fourteenth-century missal was removed from All Souls College in the sixteenth century, undoubtedly for its protection, but was returned to the college when the tumult of religious reform had settled.³⁹ Thus despite considerable pressure, the college was able to protect some of its medieval service books.

Individuals, especially those with Catholic sympathies, also sought to protect their books during this time. Perhaps the most remarkable story of this occurrence comes from Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk. When the hall was renovated in 2020, archaeologists uncovered an illuminated vellum leaf along with some fragments of sixteenth-century printed matter. The leaf had been part of a fifteenth-century Book of Hours that had been hidden under the floorboards during the sixteenth century. The research team who worked on the discovery suggests that this book once belonged to the Bedingfeld family, who owned Oxburgh in the late medieval and early modern periods. The family was vocal in its support of Queen Mary and had strong Catholic sympathies. Sir Henry Bedingfeld (1505–83) had refused to sign the 1559 Act of Uniformity, which had called, among other things, for conformity to the Church of England and the official reinstatement of the Book of Common Prayer after Mary's reign. The research team has suggested that the Bedingfeld family may have held secret masses during Elizabeth's reign, hiding their Catholic books under the floorboards to escape persecution.⁴⁰

Aside from service books and Books of Hours, other sorts of books were targeted by official policy during Elizabeth's reign, but these were exclusively printed volumes. The extent to which Elizabeth sought to curb the press, and the extent to which she was successful in doing so, have been the subject of some debate, but it is clear that during Elizabeth's reign the state exercised

of the major articles about Plantin's trade, whether in English, French, or Flemish, so, guided by scholarly caution, I have resisted making any absolute pronouncements about why the books were taken to Belgium.

³⁸ It is now Trinity College Oxford MS 23. To make this identification, I have used *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain 3* [MLGB3], edited by Sharpe et al. [based on MLGB], Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <<http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>>. The 'Founder's Mass Book' is on the list printed in Gutch, ed., 'Letter', p. 275.

³⁹ It is now All Souls College MS 302. I have used MLGB3 to make this identification.

⁴⁰ 'Archaeologist Discovers Rare Items Under the Floor of a Tudor House', *National Trust* (2020), <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/press-release/archaeologist-discovers-rare-items-under-the-floor-of-a-tudor-house>>, accessed 2 February 2022.

strict controls over the printing industry.⁴¹ As Clegg has shown, most of this control was directed at protecting the interests of authors and printers against those who would usurp their privileges, and true acts of censorship were limited and happened almost exclusively in response to threats to Elizabeth's religious policies or to her supremacy.⁴²

Perceived threats to the former category led the state to restrict the printing of religious material. As we have seen, the same 1559 injunction that saw the widespread search and destruction of church ornaments also led to increased scrutiny of newly printed religious works. It is not clear exactly how many books were subject to this injunction, but surveying the available evidence, Clegg proposes that it was limited.⁴³ Clegg finds that threats to Elizabeth's religious policies were persecuted with particular intensity after Elizabeth was excommunicated by a Papal Bull in 1570.⁴⁴ In 1571, Parliament passed an act calling for a search for ornaments of the Catholic faith, including 'popishe bookes.'⁴⁵ Yet Clegg finds that the act had a limited impact on printed books and did not lead to censorship in any direct way. While some Catholic printed books were seized during the searches sanctioned by the act, 'merely possessing them did not constitute grounds for arrest.'⁴⁶ Indeed, surveying the evidence presented by Clegg, it is clear that direct print censorship of religious writings was limited.⁴⁷ Nor did it target Catholic works exclusively. When Elizabeth released a proclamation calling for the destruction of several volumes in 1573, it did not target Catholic works but, according to Cressy, 'those advocating Presbyterianism'. Two of the banned volumes, an anonymous *Admonition to the Parliament* and Thomas Cartwright's *Reply to an Answer*, were removed almost entirely from circulation as a result of this ban.⁴⁸

The excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570 had another impact on state censorship. Clegg has found that Elizabeth's excommunication inspired a 'body of Catholic propaganda...characterizing Elizabeth as the ultimate

⁴¹ Annabel Patterson has famously argued that Elizabethan censorship was wide-ranging and forced authors to adopt covert methods of subverting scrutiny; see Patterson, *Censorship*. Clegg pushes back against this view (and similar views of Elizabethan censorship put forward by Glynn Wickham and Frederick Siebert), finding that, 'Press control existed, but neither its ends nor means correspond to the overwhelming systemization found by Wickham, Siebert, or Patterson'; *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 5. For state control over the printing industry during Elizabeth's reign, see Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, pp. 12–19.

⁴² See Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, pp. 12–25.

⁴³ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, pp. 38–9.

⁴⁴ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, pp. 79–81.

⁴⁵ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 79.

⁴⁶ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, pp. 79–80.

⁴⁷ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, especially ch. 2, pp. 30–65.

⁴⁸ See Cressy, 'Book', p. 364.

heretic.⁴⁹ Threats to Elizabeth's religious policies such as these were controlled by a series of treason laws. Perhaps the most influential of these for the matter at hand was passed in 1571, when the existing treason laws were extended to include writing or claiming that Elizabeth was a heretic. It also banned writing about the succession question.⁵⁰ These laws were supplemented by a 1581 statute that banned the printing of works 'containing any false, seditious, and slanderous matter to the defamation of the Queenes Majesty'.⁵¹ Printing works that challenged Elizabeth's authority was clearly understood as an act of treason.

Yet in her extensive study of this legislation, Clegg finds that treason trials related to printed matter were relatively rare. She does, however, give several examples, including that of William Carter, who in 1584 was punished with execution for having printed Gregory Martin's *A Treatise of Schism*, a work that called on Catholics to reject the practices of other denominations.⁵² But perhaps the most famous example of the censorship of printed material during Elizabeth's reign is the case of John Stubbs.⁵³ In what Cressy considers 'one of the most violent government reactions to a controversial publication', the Puritan lawyer John Stubbs was charged with 'seditious libel' over the release of a book he had written. The book in question, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf Whereinto England is Like to be Swallowed*, voiced strong opposition to Elizabeth's proposed marriage to the Catholic Francis, Duke of Anjou. Stubbs's hand was cut off in a gruesome public display, and the offending volume was destroyed.⁵⁴ These acts of book censorship must have stood as a grim warning to printers under Elizabeth's reign, but it is worth noting that neither would have had any impact on the pre-Reformation manuscripts under consideration here.

The evidence thus indicates clearly that while censorship was pronounced during Elizabeth's reign, it was limited to certain types of volumes, and very few of these included medieval manuscripts. Official policy targeted service books in particular—the kinds of books that were used to perform the Mass and the Divine Office. Lists of destroyed volumes indicate that Books of Hours,

⁴⁹ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 94.

⁵⁰ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 32.

⁵¹ For the quotation and its context, see Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 32.

⁵² Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 33. See Gregory Martin's *A Treatise of Schism* (1578), in *Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership*, 2011, <<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A07105.0001.001>>, accessed 19 March 2023.

⁵³ Clegg notes that the persecution of John Stubbs is 'often taken as an exemplary instance of Elizabethan press censorship'; *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, p. 123.

⁵⁴ See Cressy, 'Book', p. 365.

which had been targeted during Edward's reign, continued to be targeted during Elizabeth's, but the sorts of books that were typically held within institutional library collections (rather than service book collections) almost never appear on these lists. While some volumes that embraced Presbyterianism and that challenged Elizabeth's decisions were banned, these were all modern, and it is clear that the medieval volumes that were the most vulnerable to destruction during Elizabeth's reign were service books.

Reports from Lincolnshire and elsewhere indicate that vast numbers of these books were destroyed—far more than were destroyed during Edward's reign. But Elizabeth's policy was not enforced equally across the realm. Commissioners often relied on churchwardens and priests to act and report on the policy, and many of these officials seem to have been reluctant to do so. Thus while vast numbers of service books were burned, others were kept in a usable state and others carefully hidden away. The destruction of medieval volumes during Elizabeth's reign was therefore significant, but it was still limited in both its targets and, to some degree, its execution.

Indeed, at the same time that these pre-Reformation service books were being targeted, other sorts of pre-Reformation manuscripts were being collected, cherished, and preserved by a new generation of antiquarians. These include the Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker (1504–75), the court astrologer John Dee (c.1527–c.1608), and the master of Peterhouse Andrew Perne (c.1519–1589). Their collections were wide-ranging. Matthew Parker, whom Timothy Graham describes as the 'foremost collector of medieval manuscripts of the Elizabethan period', collected over 500 manuscripts.⁵⁵ John Dee claimed to others that he had amassed a thousand manuscripts and his catalogue of 1583 indicates that he owned at least 300.⁵⁶

This new generation of antiquarians established specialized networks for the collection and exchange of medieval manuscripts.⁵⁷ Aside from gathering manuscripts through these networks, they also took them directly from the libraries of religious institutions, many of which had remained carefully guarded since the Dissolution. Richard Ovenden notes that although the removal of manuscripts from religious institutions tends to be viewed 'to some extent, as an activity of the early phases of the dispersals', '[b]ooks and

⁵⁵ See Timothy Graham, 'Matthew Parker's Manuscripts: An Elizabethan Library and Its Use', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1, to 1640*, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (2006), pp. 322–42, p. 322.

⁵⁶ Roberts, 'Extending', p. 300.

⁵⁷ Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 531. For example, Andrew Perne gave Matthew Parker a manuscript copy of Thomas Bradwardine's *De causa Dei contra Pelagium* as a Christmas gift; see Graham, 'Matthew Parker's', p. 324.

other documents, especially charters, however, could be had by those with the ability to gain access to muniment rooms and other storage areas as late as the 1630s.⁵⁸ As we have seen, while many books were dispersed in the early phases of the Dissolution, many remained in place at their medieval institutions, so there were still manuscripts to be found in these collections.

The removal of manuscripts by antiquarians during this phase of the Reformation can be illustrated by John Dee's acquisition of a manuscript of the Latin *Cosmographia* with Old English glosses. The manuscript had been in Worcester when Leland visited it and the manuscript apparently remained there until 1565, when it was given to John Dee by the Dean of Worcester, John Pedder.⁵⁹ This manuscript, which dates back to the tenth century, reflects some of the particular acquisitional interests of antiquarians in this period: it is very old (it was at least 500 years old when Dee collected it), and it reflects, with its Old English glosses, the linguistic and philological history of the nation. Crucially, antiquarians during this period were interested in a narrow range of books. There was during this period no sense that all medieval manuscripts are worthy of preservation; antiquarian interest in a manuscript was determined by the subjects it treated and by its age. Newer manuscripts were easily cast aside, and on the whole they were not treated any differently than any other sort of book. In most libraries, manuscripts and printed books were shelved together in much the same way that type-written and print doctoral theses are shelved together in many modern collections. It was only towards the end of Elizabeth's reign that manuscripts began to be treated as a wholly different sort of book from printed books—and, at the same time, as being more worthy of preservation.⁶⁰

If the antiquarians of this period were more likely to seek out manuscripts that contained certain subjects, which subjects were these? Matthew Parker, who began collecting manuscripts shortly after he was consecrated as

⁵⁸ Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 537. Matthew Parker was contacting cathedrals about any remaining manuscripts in their collections in the 1560s; see Graham, 'Matthew Parker's', p. 325.

⁵⁹ The manuscript is now the last part of British Library, Cotton Vespasian B. x (ff. 31–124); the inscription recording the gift to Dee appears on f. 31r. See Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 385. See also Ivor Atkins and Neil R. Ker's 'Introduction', in *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Wigorniensis*, edited by Ivor Atkins and N. R. Ker (1944), pp. 1–30, p. 12; and *Early Worcester MSS: Fragments of Four Books and a Charter of the Eighth Century Belonging to Worcester Cathedral, Photographically Reproduced by Permission of the Dean and Chapter*, edited by Cuthbert Turner (1916), p. lxxi.

⁶⁰ Surveying the evidence for this period, David McKitterick finds that 'for most libraries, the printed book was no different from a manuscript' in 'Libraries and the Organization of Knowledge', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1, to 1640*, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (2006), pp. 592–615, p. 610. On the growing sense of manuscripts as distinct cultural heritage objects worthy of a distinct approach to preservation, see Chapter 6 below, pp. 213–15.

Archbishop of Canterbury in 1559, initially began collecting at the request of the Magdeburg Centuriators, a group of theologians based in Magdeburg who were interested in the history of England and its ecclesiastical institutions.⁶¹ Later, Parker's efforts, much like those of Leland and Bale, were focused primarily on manuscripts containing theological works—especially those with relevance to the reformed religion—and on manuscripts with historical importance—either older ones or ones that contained historical texts. These efforts were bolstered in 1568, when the queen gave Parker authorization to search religious houses for 'auncient recordes or monumentes written' with a view to promoting their preservation.⁶²

Parker's interests in theological and historical material extended to his reading practices. Timothy Graham, who has studied the annotations in Parker's collection in detail, finds that Parker read his volumes with an eye to the key interests of the reformed Church:

The passages that called forth Parkerian annotations tended to relate to a hard core of specific issues: abuses committed by the papacy; the credulousness of the medieval church; the church's doctrine and practice with regard to clerical marriage; church teaching concerning the eucharistic bread and wine; and the history of Canterbury. Most of these issues were central to the reformed English church's stance against Rome. Parker's major purpose in using his collection was to search for material that would bolster the position of the fledgling Church of England, of which he was primate.⁶³

More modern manuscripts were rarely granted importance by Parker, and Timothy Graham has found several examples of Parker and his team recycling later medieval service books to use as pastedowns in their efforts to rebind older manuscripts.⁶⁴

Parker's interests, which centred around older manuscripts and those with historical or theological contents, were shared with many of his contemporary antiquarians. There were, of course, some slight differences between Elizabethan antiquarians' collecting habits; Julian Roberts, who has explored their habits in detail, finds that while Parker and Perne seem to have favoured manuscripts containing theological and historical material, John Dee favoured those containing science, natural philosophy, and alchemy. Dee was, however,

⁶¹ Roberts, 'Extending', p. 302.

⁶² Roberts, 'Extending', p. 303; Graham, 'Matthew Parker's', p. 326.

⁶³ Graham, 'Matthew Parker's', p. 334.

⁶⁴ See Graham, 'Matthew Parker's', p. 330.

also interested in collecting manuscripts pertaining to history, and especially Welsh (or, as he thought, 'ancient British') history, including those containing works by Geoffrey of Monmouth.⁶⁵ And Roberts finds that, on the whole, the antiquarians of this period had much in common; in his words, they shared 'a sense of regret at the spoiling of the monastic libraries' as well as 'similar views on the importance of Greek and Latin culture, and the witness of antiquity to the Christian faith.'⁶⁶ The collecting policies of these Elizabethan antiquarians, focused as they were on material that was older or that held importance for the Church, had much in common with those of earlier antiquarians such as Bale and Leland.

Since the manuscript collections of these later antiquarians were much larger than those of the earlier antiquarians, these collections held the potential to leave a greater mark on the record. But not all of the manuscripts collected by the later antiquarians have survived. Dee's collection was pilfered while he was abroad between 1583 and 1589, and while some of the stolen volumes ended up in the Royal College of Physicians, others have since been lost.⁶⁷ Others still were sold off in the early seventeenth century, and some found their way into Robert Cotton's collection this way.⁶⁸ Matthew Parker's collections, the bulk of which were left to Cambridge University Library and to the library of Corpus Christi College, have fared much better, but this was undoubtedly due to the strict conditions of Parker's bequest. Parker stipulated that if the college lost too many manuscripts—six folio, eight quarto, or twelve smaller ones—and failed to replace them within six months, the entire collection would fall to Gonville and Caius College.⁶⁹

At the same moment that these antiquarians were striving to rescue older volumes and those containing the kinds of historical, theological, and fundamentally British material that they considered to be of national importance, they let other volumes fall by the wayside. The attitude is illustrated by the recycling of a fifteenth-century Sarum book, which was torn up to serve as binding scraps for a 1550 copy of John Bale's *The Image of Bothe Churches*. On the whole, antiquarians of the sixteenth century were not interested in preserving all manuscripts—only those that might advance the reformed cause.⁷⁰ Material that was still relatively new, or that was used for the

⁶⁵ Roberts, 'Extending', pp. 298, 301. Roberts draws on two studies of Dee's collecting habits: Nicholas H. Clulee's *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (1988) and William Howard Sherman's *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (1995).

⁶⁶ Roberts, 'Extending', p. 298.

⁶⁷ Roberts, 'Extending', p. 301.

⁶⁸ See Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 540, 554, and Graham, 'Matthew Parker's', pp. 336–7.

⁶⁹ McKitterick, 'Libraries', p. 610; Graham, 'Matthew Parker's', p. 339.

⁷⁰ See above, pp. 145–6.

pre-Reformation liturgy, was neither valued nor, on the whole, actively sought out, and antiquarians made no outcry over the numerous service books destroyed by Elizabeth's commissioners.

It seems clear, then, that service books were destroyed in far greater numbers during Elizabeth's reign than during Edward's; this is clear not only from the Lincolnshire records examined above but also from the vast number of these books that were still in circulation during Elizabeth's reign and that cannot have been simply procured in the intervening years. It is also clear that the extent of the destruction of service books during Elizabeth's reign was significant, with the majority of parishes listed on the Lincolnshire records reporting that they had destroyed or sold off their service books during Elizabeth's reign. Admittedly, this impression is based in part on the accounts of churchwardens who had been asked—under duress—to describe how many books they had destroyed. It would therefore not be surprising if these accounts were unreliable. To gain further insight into the destruction that occurred during this period, it is worth turning to the survival rates of the sorts of service books that were targeted by Elizabeth's injunction.

Many scholars have noticed, without running any calculations, that very few medieval service books have survived. Robert Whiting, for example, writes that 'with rare exceptions—the Ranworth antiphoner, for instance, the books used in the parish churches of pre-reformation England have failed to survive.'⁷¹ The quantitative evidence is even more striking. Nigel Morgan makes what he considers 'a conservative estimate' that 40,000 missals were in use in medieval England and Wales by c.1400. He finds that 'only about ninety fairly complete Missals of the period c.1100–1400 survive.'⁷² This is a survival rate of about 0.2 per cent—much, much lower than any of the estimated survival rates of medieval library books which, as we have seen, tend to be between 7 per cent and 10 per cent.⁷³

The situation for antiphonals is even bleaker. Alixe Bovey notes that 'At the time of the Reformation more or less every religious institution, from the smallest chapel to the greatest cathedral, had at least one antiphonal, and often many more. Yet their medieval quantity is in inverse proportion to their

⁷¹ Robert Whiting, *The Reformation of the English Parish Church* (2010), p. 89.

⁷² Nigel Morgan, 'Books for the Liturgy and Private Prayer', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 2, edited by Nigel J. Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (2008), pp. 291–316, p. 291. Morgan writes that 'Of these, only nineteen are documented as belonging to specific parish churches' (p. 291). Morgan's estimate finds support in the work of Milway, who uses statistical analysis to estimate that in fifteenth-century Europe as a whole, some 180,000 missals were printed; 'Forgotten', p. 124.

⁷³ See the discussion of survival rates in the Introduction above, pp. 29–34.

survival.⁷⁴ Bovey draws here upon the work of O. T. Edwards, who attempts to identify all known Sarum use antiphonals and then attempts to estimate how many were in circulation during the medieval period. Drawing on ecclesiastical registers, Edwards finds that ‘there actually were about a thousand antiphonals in the parish churches of Norfolk *alone* at the end of the fourteenth century’. Based on this and other evidence, Edwards estimates that there were about 20,000 Sarum-use antiphonals in England and Wales in the lead-up to the Reformation.⁷⁵ Of these, he finds that about ‘one in a thousand’ have survived—a mere 0.1 per cent.⁷⁶ Edwards suggests that antiphonals may have survived periods of religious reform in even fewer numbers than other service books because of the large size of antiphonals; ‘Whereas a breviary or a missal might have been successfully smuggled away under a coat, a heavy antiphonal would have presented more serious difficulties.’⁷⁷ Other factors, including the late medieval absorption of the antiphons into breviaries discussed above, undoubtedly also influenced the survival rates of medieval antiphonals, and it is evident that they survived extremely poorly.

The survival rates of service books are therefore strikingly lower than the rates of books that were typically held in institutional libraries. The only potential exception worth mentioning is service books that were produced prior to the Norman Conquest. These seem to have survived in relatively high numbers compared to other pre-Conquest books, although this fact alone does not necessarily mean that they had disproportionately high survival rates; these books may have simply been produced in larger numbers than other sorts of books before the Conquest.⁷⁸ There is no reliable count of service books produced prior to the Conquest, so the relatively large number of service books that survive from this period may indeed be a reflection of the number of these books that were in circulation at the time, or it may be an effect of the acquisition policies of early modern antiquarians which, as we have seen, prioritized older books.

With respect to post-Conquest service books, their remarkably low survival rates must be due in part to developments that took place during the

⁷⁴ Alixe Bovey, ‘The Wollaton Antiphonal: Kinship and Commemoration’, in *The Wollaton Medieval Manuscripts: Texts, Owners and Readers*, edited by Ralph Hanna and Thorlac Turville-Petre (2010), pp. 30–40, pp. 30–1, no. 1.

⁷⁵ Edwards, ‘How Many’, pp. 177, 178, quoted at p. 177.

⁷⁶ Edwards, ‘How Many’, p. 180.

⁷⁷ Edwards, ‘How Many’, p. 173.

⁷⁸ Taking up the question of the survival of manuscripts produced before 1066, David N. Dumville writes that ‘A high proportion of our surviving manuscript volumes comprises gospel-books, miscellaneous books of the bible, legendaries and passionals, and more strictly liturgical books’; see ‘English Libraries’, p. 189.

medieval period itself. As we have seen, these books were, more than other types of books, destroyed and recycled during the medieval period due to overuse and due to changing liturgical practices. And many service books must have managed to weather the changes to liturgical practices and tastes of the medieval period only to be destroyed in response to Edward's 1549 Act of Uniformity. But judging from the records and accounts of the post-Reformation era surveyed here, Elizabeth's policy of destroying service books was carried out far more aggressively than that of Edward. The Elizabethan period was, in terms of the sheer number of volumes lost, the most significant for determining the survival rates of service books, many of which would have been medieval.

Recognizing the important role that the Elizabethan period played in determining the survival rates of medieval manuscripts is important, because it contributes to a growing awareness, evident in the work of James Carley and others, that the impact of the Dissolution in traditional accounts of manuscript loss has in some respects been overstated.⁷⁹ Manuscript loss happened throughout the sixteenth century, and was, at least in the case of service books, particularly pronounced during Elizabeth's reign. Indeed, no other Tudor monarch established such a relentless and methodical policy of book destruction. This point is rarely acknowledged in the historiography of the period. Indeed, in his influential study of book loss at the Dissolution, Wright claims that the destruction of manuscripts was 'arrested' during Elizabeth's reign.⁸⁰ Yet the evidence shows plainly that Elizabethan officials conducted extensive and systematic inspections of the book collections of a vast number of institutions, ranging from small parish churches to large university colleges, and these inspections resulted in a vast number of volumes being torn up, recycled, or set ablaze.

It is not clear how many of these destroyed volumes were medieval manuscripts, but accounts from parishes across the land and evidence from bindings suggest that it was many. Yet, devastating though Elizabethan policy was for medieval manuscripts, it was limited in its targets. The destruction was largely limited to Books of Hours and service books; other sorts of volumes, including other theological volumes, were largely safe. This Elizabethan policy was not, however, limited in terms of its impact. Since every parish church was expected to hold a set of service books, and since these books were the

⁷⁹ See the discussion above, p. 155.

⁸⁰ See Wright, 'Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', p. 170.

material and theological heart of parish-level textual culture, their loss must have been felt profoundly and in every corner of the land.⁸¹

The implications of this loss for the survival of medieval manuscripts are significant and wide-ranging. First, the findings presented here suggest that the survival rate of an institution's book collections was directly tied to that institution's size. For a small parish church, the complete eradication of its service book collection would have meant the near-complete eradication of its medieval book collection as a whole. For a larger institution, by contrast, the complete eradication of its service book collection would have had but a light impact on its collection as a whole. We can expect, then, that the medieval manuscript collections of smaller institutions have typically survived in smaller proportions than those of larger institutions.

This finding also, and importantly, points to a considerable issue that often goes overlooked in studies of medieval manuscript loss. If, as seems likely, the majority of the manuscripts destroyed during this period were ripped from small parish churches and from institutional service book collections—and not from the larger monastic library collections—the survival rates of medieval institutional library collections tell us very little indeed about the survival rates of medieval manuscripts as a whole. So, for example, we may know that 164 of 1,793 books from a Canterbury book list survive, but this tells us nothing about the survival rates of the hundreds of collections that were housed in the parish churches of the environs, and that were disproportionately affected by Reformation-era losses.⁸² Existing studies of medieval manuscript loss, most of which are based on data from large institutional libraries, can give us insight into the losses of the sorts of manuscripts that were typically housed in these sorts of libraries, but, insofar as they ignore the vast numbers of volumes that were destroyed from choirs and from regional parishes, they provide very little insight into the survival rates of medieval manuscripts as a whole.⁸³

Thus, given that institutional library books represented only a small cross-section of medieval books as a whole, their survival rates, typically estimated

⁸¹ The impact of the destruction of service books on parishes must have been significant; Nigel Ramsay finds that 'Ker's *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* and its *Supplement* list barely 154 books (including 44 missals) as certain or likely survivors from the 10,000 or more parish churches and chapels of England, Wales and Scotland'; 'Manuscripts', p. 132.

⁸² These numbers from Canterbury are discussed above, p. 76.

⁸³ Many of the studies of manuscript loss discussed in the introduction draw on library lists for their data; exceptions include the study of Kestemont and Karsdorp (which is focused on medieval romances) and, arguably, the studies of manuscript survival that are based on incunabula data. Other problems with basing survival rates on institutional book lists have been described by D'Avray in *Printing*, pp. 57–60, and by Matthew Wranovix in *Priests and Their Books in Late Medieval Eichstätt* (2017), p. 84.

to be between 7 per cent and 10 per cent on average, cannot be taken as representative of the survival rates of manuscripts as a whole. Service books, which have survival rates in the range of 0.1 per cent and 0.2 per cent, represented a much greater cross-section of the books that were produced and that circulated in medieval England, and we can therefore expect the survival rates for medieval books, considered collectively, to be much, much, lower than the rates that have been calculated using medieval library books alone.

If, as this chapter has shown, service books are so central to the story of medieval manuscript loss, why are they so often overlooked? The reasons are likely partly pragmatic and partly ideological. On a pragmatic level, the low survival rates of service books have contributed to their neglect; since so few of these books have survived, they have not attracted as much scholarly commentary as other sorts of medieval books. And since service books were typically (though certainly not always) kept separate from library books, service books have typically been excluded from the medieval book lists that have traditionally lain at the heart of book historical inquiry. But the neglect of service books that stems from these pragmatic reasons has arguably been compounded by ideological reasons. As Linda Georgianna has shown, the nineteenth-century scholars that gave shape to the modern fields of literary studies and book history had a well-documented tendency to overlook or de-emphasize works that they considered more ‘Catholic’ in character, and while the assumptions behind this tendency have been challenged repeatedly over the past century, its legacy has persisted in various ways—perhaps most notably in a tendency to misrepresent or misunderstand the medieval liturgy and its textual witnesses.⁸⁴ If we are to understand the scope and nature of medieval manuscript survival, we must aim to resist the legacies of these outmoded views of medieval textual culture by giving greater consideration to medieval service books and their dissemination. The approach taken here, by highlighting the importance of service books in medieval society and the systematic and methodical ways in which they were destroyed, is designed to support this aim.

⁸⁴ On the history of the tendency to de-emphasize the more Catholic elements of Chaucer’s work, see Georgianna, ‘Protestant’, especially pp. 60–6. The tendency to de-emphasize Catholic elements of medieval texts, and medieval texts associated with Catholicism, is still somewhat pervasive and it has had a powerful impact on the study of medieval manuscript survival. R. M. Wilson, for example, discusses several lost pastoral and liturgical texts in Old English but deems these uninteresting. He writes, for example, that ‘[v]olumes of Old English homilies are not infrequent, and it is unlikely that this particular one contained anything out of the way. Similarly with the Old English versions of the Psalter, the Gospels and the Passional; their interest, if any, would have been linguistic rather than literary’ (*Lost*, p. 75). I discuss the problem elsewhere; see Murchison [Milne], *Manuals*, p. 115.

By highlighting the vast numbers of service books that were in circulation in medieval England, this investigation also supports an impression that has emerged over the past few decades in various quarters that books were much more common during the medieval period than has traditionally been acknowledged.⁸⁵ Devotional experience in medieval England from the largest cathedral to the humblest parish was grounded in book culture. Perhaps most strikingly, the tens of thousands of service books that were once in medieval England but are now lost highlights the often unacknowledged size of the average parish priest's book collection and raises the question of the literacy levels of medieval parish priests.

While the question has been subject to less investigation than we might expect, it has been addressed directly by Jo Goering in his masterful study of the works and social contexts of William de Montibus (c.1140–1213). Here, Goering takes a pragmatic approach, noting that, prior to the thirteenth century, a typical parish priest 'had little need for formal education'. Goering notes that when William Pagula, writing in the fourteenth century, claims that a parish priest had to be 'reasonably literate', 'such literacy implied primarily the ability to pronounce correctly the Latin texts of the liturgy and sacramentaries—not the ability to read, write, and construe grammar and syntax'.⁸⁶ But our perception of the expectations for the average parish priest becomes more complicated if, as this investigation has shown, he was expected to have a minimum of eight service books in his church as early as the thirteenth century. It is of course true that some of the required books were the sort that could have been used by a priest who could pronounce Latin correctly without necessarily understanding it all, but others (such as ordinals, which laid out rules for how to deal with overlapping feast days), required thoughtful engagement of the sort that presupposed at least basic Latinity. Thus the expectation, already present in the thirteenth century, that every parish would own ordinals and service books suggests that the average parish priest was expected, at a relatively early date, to have at least basic Latin literacy.⁸⁷

Aside from their implications for our understanding of clerical literacy, the findings presented here may also have implications for our understanding of lay literacy. After all, the widespread circulation of service books highlighted

⁸⁵ See below, p. 270.

⁸⁶ See Joseph Goering, *William de Montibus (c.1140–1213): The Schools and the Literature of Pastoral Care* (1992), pp. 60–3, quoted at p. 61.

⁸⁷ The question of whether service books were read during services or instead repeated from memory is examined in Edwards, 'How Many', p. 176.

by this examination also affected the laity. The ownership of service books was not restricted to religious establishments and, as we have seen, these books passed very frequently into lay hands. It is reasonable to suppose that some members of the laity read them and used them for their private or personal devotions. Thus by highlighting the significant numbers of service books that once existed, the findings presented here support a growing and important body of scholarship that suggests that the ability to read from a page was much more commonplace in both the late medieval and in the early modern periods than was once assumed.⁸⁸

The Destruction of Medieval Manuscripts in England: Institutional Collections. Krista A. Milne, Oxford University Press.
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⁸⁸ Roger Chartier argues, based on evidence from medieval Flanders, that by the late fifteenth century literacy was more widespread than is usually acknowledged; see his *Histoire*, p. 123; translated as *A History*, p. 121. Andrew Pettegree has recently discussed a growing body of evidence that points to a mass of now-lost literature from the early modern period, and that suggests that reading was more widespread than is typically assumed; see Andrew Pettegree, 'Print and the Reformation: A Drama in Three Acts', *Church History* 86, no. 4 (2017), pp. 980–97. Those who have shed new light on the nature of—and by consequence, extent of—literacy in the medieval period include Brian Stock, in *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (1987), and the contributors to Rosamond McKitterick's *The Uses of Literacy in Early Modern Europe* (1990). These sources, and more recent work that has advanced our knowledge of medieval literacy, are summarized succinctly in E. J. Christie's 'Literacy', in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, edited by Siân Echard, Robert Rouse, et al. (2017), pp. 1192–200.

PART III
MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPT
LOSS AFTER C.1600

6

1603–1700

Medieval Manuscripts as Matters of National Importance

As Elizabeth's reign came to a close, antiquarians continued to collect medieval manuscripts that they thought held historical and philological value. These were most typically volumes that were more than 200 years old, or that were thought to reflect the ancient history of England. What John Earle wrote of antiquarians in 1628 was applicable to those in this period as well—that they were 'enamour'd of old age'.¹ Indeed, when Robert Cotton and other antiquarians requested a national library from Elizabeth during the last year of her reign (c.1602–3), they cited as motivation the need to preserve 'divers old bookes concerninge mater of history of this Realme originall Charters & monuments'.² The Arundel Psalter, which was purchased by the antiquarian William Howard in 1592, stands as a rather typical example of the interests of this wave of antiquarians; as a trilingual psalter copied in the eleventh century, the book embodies both the historical and philological values that were prioritized by collectors at the time.³

But around the turn of the seventeenth century the collecting habits of antiquarians began to shift. While earlier collectors such as Leland, Bale, and Dee had tended to favour material that was either about England's history or was itself from distant history (and especially material from the twelfth century or earlier), a new wave of collectors began to ascribe value to a wider range of medieval manuscripts. Manuscripts that had been produced in the fifteenth century and that were, therefore, over a hundred years old by this point, began to interest collectors—and regardless of what they contained. This change, like many changes in collecting habits, happened gradually; Sir Robert Cotton, for example, continued to favour older manuscripts throughout his life.⁴ But despite men such as Cotton who held onto their old ways, this change in collecting habits was pronounced. As we shall see, it led to a

¹ Quoted in Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 528.

² Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 548.

³ The psalter is BL, Arundel MS 155. See the discussion of Howard's acquisition of this psalter in Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 541.

⁴ On Cotton's approach to manuscript collection and curation, see Summit, *Memory's*, pp. 136–74.

drastic reduction in the destruction of medieval manuscripts—so much so that this chapter and the next, which explore manuscript destruction that occurred during the past 400 years, must largely abandon the large-scale approaches to manuscript destruction taken in some of the previous chapters to focus on individual episodes of destruction and preservation.

By the end of the eighteenth century, manuscript collectors had generally stopped prioritizing material related to Britain's past and its languages and were seeking out almost any medieval manuscript. This development is evident from an exchange between the collectors Humfrey Wanley (1672–1726) and Thomas Smith (1638–1710) about whether they should add a devotional manuscript from Wanley's collection to the Cottonian collection. The manuscript, a devotional compendium from the fourteenth or fifteenth century, was not the sort of historic or historical material that earlier collectors had valued. Nor did it have any relationship to the reformed Church—the topic that had so engrossed collectors such as Parker. The manuscript would therefore have been of little interest to these earlier collectors. But now, over 300 years after it was produced, it was being considered for an antiquarian collection. Smith explains that 'Altho' his Library [i.e. the Cottonian collection], as you know, was designed chiefly to be a repository of Saxon monuments, and other antiquities relating to our English History, yet such a translation of several pieces of devotion, out of French and Latine, into English, done above three hundred yeares since, and it may bee, not very long after the death of that extraordinarily strict and devout man Richardus de Hampole, deserves very justly a place there.'⁵ Over 300 years after it was produced, the manuscript had finally become a collector's item.

Why did this shift in manuscript acquisition policy begin to take hold in the seventeenth century? By this period, manuscripts were no longer the default medium for disseminating a public-facing text. Their use was increasingly being restricted to private notes and compositions, and earlier works disseminated in manuscript format had begun to stand out. It was in this period, about 200 years after the arrival of print in England, that the format of a medieval manuscript—rather than just its contents—began to receive antiquarian interest. The change is evident from the lists of antiquarian booksellers which, towards the end of the sixteenth century, begin to distinguish between print and manuscript volumes.⁶ By the 1640s, some booksellers were

⁵ 'Dr Thomas Smith to Mr Wanley', in *Original Letters of Eminent Literary Men: Of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries*, edited by Henry Ellis (1843), pp. 240–1, p. 240.

⁶ See McKitterick, 'Organisation', pp. 611–12.

specializing exclusively in the trade of manuscripts, which suggests that manuscripts were now seen as holding inherent antiquarian value.⁷ These changing views of manuscripts are also evident from the catalogue history of the Bodleian Library. David McKitterick finds that while the 1605 catalogue classified print and manuscript books together, the 1674 catalogue treated print books and manuscripts as two separate collections. Similar distinctions, which reflect a sense of the manuscript as a rarefied object, were also made in other collections during the seventeenth century.⁸

The medieval manuscript was beginning to be viewed less as a tool of communication and increasingly as a collectors' item and as an object of art. It was during this same period that antiquarians increasingly took note of the beauty of specific manuscripts in their collections, and it is this development that leads Richard Ovenden to describe 'the period 1580 to 1640 as the birth of appreciation of medieval books as works of art.'⁹ By this point, over 100 years after the arrival of print, the particular medium used for disseminating a text had begun to take on antiquarian significance of its own.

While antiquarians increasingly came to view manuscripts as collectors' items divorced from their original, more utilitarian aims—the stuff of archives and not of libraries—this view was occasionally met with resistance. In 1625, Henry Bouchier, one of Cotton's associates who was charged with seeking out manuscripts in Ireland for Cotton's collections, reported that the kinds of medieval bishops' registers that Cotton was seeking at the time were 'very rare in this kingdome, and such as are be in the hands of the possessors of the Abbey who will very unwillingly part with them'. Bouchier nevertheless promised to bring Cotton 'one at least' upon his next trip to England, but he noted that he found such registers hard to acquire. Many of them, he wrote, were still in active use, still serving as records of lands and possessions.¹⁰ For some, the manuscript was still a living record, but this view was, on the whole, waning in the early seventeenth century.

During this same period, the exchange and sale of manuscripts was becoming increasingly professionalized. By the time of his death in 1631, Robert Cotton had collected over 900 volumes, a large portion of which were manuscripts.¹¹

⁷ Nigel Ramsay, 'Libraries for Antiquaries and Heralds', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, edited by Giles Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley (2006), pp. 134–57, p. 138.

⁸ McKitterick, 'Organisation', p. 612.

⁹ Ovenden, 'Libraries', pp. 543–4.

¹⁰ See the letter from Henry Bouchier to Robert Cotton that is dated 23 September 1625 in BL, Cotton MS Julius C III, f. 404. The collection has been digitized; see 'Cotton MS Julius C III', in *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_julius_c_iii_f001r>, accessed 11 April 2022.

¹¹ Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 554.

Cotton's extensive manuscript collections made those of his predecessors, such as Leland and Bale, look meagre by comparison. Rich networks for the collection and exchange of medieval manuscripts, several of which have been studied in depth by Richard Ovenden and others, became formalized around 1585 with the formation of the College of Antiquaries, which in its early years counted among its members such influential figures as John Stow, Robert Cotton, and William Camden.¹²

A thriving industry emerged around the exchange and sale of manuscripts.¹³ The economic value of older manuscripts began to increase, and they were increasingly prized and sought out.¹⁴ Simonds D'Ewes wrote of an antiquarian book collection that he hoped to acquire that he 'had an earnest desire to buy the librarie, but mine owne wants, and diuers other men being about the acquiring of it likewise made mee feare I should misse of it.'¹⁵ Richard Beadle has found that towards the end of the seventeenth century, when the idea of auctioning off entire book collections took hold in England, buyers pored over their catalogues searching for prized medieval manuscripts.¹⁶

These antiquarians did not typically select manuscripts on the basis of size, so we should not expect their collecting habits to have influenced the size of surviving manuscripts in any significant way. It is nevertheless worth noting Julian Roberts' observation that the collector Andrew Perne seems to have considered smaller books—those in octavo and decimosexto—as too small for a proper library.¹⁷ It is possible that this attitude may have influenced Perne's collecting habits, but it seems unlikely that it had a significant impact on survival rates since it does not seem to have been a common one.¹⁸ Size was, however, often selected by antiquarians as an organizational principle, with some of their collections ordered from largest to smallest.¹⁹ Sometimes this organizational principle was combined with another; Thomas Knyvett, who had collected more than 1,400 books by the time of his death in 1618, divided his library by subject (theology, medicine, history, etc.) and then, within each subject, by size (folio, octavo, etc.).²⁰

¹² See Ovenden, 'Libraries', pp. 530–1. ¹³ Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 538.

¹⁴ Ovenden finds examples of volumes in this period retailing for 5 pounds, and by 1638 a collection of manuscripts could be sold for 50 pounds; Ovenden, 'Libraries', pp. 539–40.

¹⁵ Quoted in Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 546.

¹⁶ Richard Beadle, 'Medieval English Manuscripts at Auction c.1676–c.1700', *The Book Collector* 53, no. 1 (2004): pp. 46–63, pp. 48–9.

¹⁷ Roberts, 'Extending', p. 298.

¹⁸ For example, Robert Harley (1661–1724) bought from Nathaniel Noel 129 folios and 1,119 quartos and octavos. Shortly after, Harley bought 60 folios and 425 quartos and octavos from the collection of Basil Kennet. There is no evidence of Harley prioritizing larger volumes; see Ramsay, 'Libraries', pp. 152–3.

¹⁹ McKitterick, 'Libraries', p. 610.

²⁰ See the discussion of Knyvett's library in McKitterick, 'Libraries', p. 604.

C. B. L. Barr and David Selwyn find that manuscripts during this period increasingly moved from the hands of private individuals into the collections of large institutions.²¹ The numbers of manuscripts involved in these transactions were significant. Upon his death in 1574, Matthew Parker left twenty-five medieval manuscripts to Cambridge University Library and many others to Corpus Christi College Cambridge where, as we have seen, they have fared remarkably well.²² Barr and Selwyn note that John Whitgift's collection, which was the largest of its day and contained approximately 6,000 volumes (including both manuscripts and printed books), was broken up upon his death, with approximately 2,000 of the volumes going to the Lambeth Palace Library and 150 medieval manuscripts going to Trinity College Cambridge.²³ William Laud donated his sizeable collection of about 1,315 medieval manuscripts to the Bodleian Library between 1635 and 1640.²⁴ This trend of manuscripts passing from private to public collections reflects a broader professionalization of antiquarianism and a greater recognition of the value of medieval manuscripts, most of which by this stage were well over 200 years old.

Calls for a national collection, already issued by the College of Antiquaries in c.1602–3, intensified over the course of the seventeenth century. Richard Ovenden, who has studied these calls, notes that while they remained unanswered during the seventeenth century, Oxford's Bodleian Library in many ways 'served as the de facto national collection for over 150 years, until the establishment of the British Museum Library.'²⁵ The Bodleian's modern roots trace back to 1598, when Thomas Bodley set about building a public library at Oxford in the spirit of Duke Humfrey's former collection. Donations began to pour in and the library opened officially in 1602. The emergence of the Bodleian and other semi-public collections during this period evinced a growing conviction that manuscripts were irreplaceable heritage objects with public and political significance for the nation.

At the same time that these semi-public collections were emerging, the shape of many of the significant antiquarian collections was calcifying.²⁶ The collections of Harley, Sloane, and Cotton that would eventually become the cornerstones of the British Museum collections changed relatively little after the seventeenth century. Manuscripts that found their way into large public or private antiquarian collections by the seventeenth century tended to remain relatively safe and, with some notable exceptions—such as those that perished in the infamous Cottonian collection fire—have remained

²¹ Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', pp. 382–4.

²² Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 382.

²³ Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 383.

²⁴ Barr and Selwyn, 'Major', p. 383.

²⁵ Ovenden, 'Libraries', p. 557.

²⁶ See Ker, 'Migration', pp. 1–2.

safe up to the present day. Drawing on the work of Neil Ker, Ovenden writes that ‘by 1640 most of the great collections of manuscripts had reached a point where many of them were to remain substantially intact, and form the cornerstones of the major research collections of modern Britain.’²⁷ Thus the early seventeenth-century antiquarians’ collections—many of which were shaped by the habits, ideals, and priorities of even earlier antiquarians—had a lasting influence on the shape of manuscript collections in England and, concomitantly, on the ways in which these collections have been studied.

The preservation of manuscripts took on new significance under King James I (1603–25). James positioned himself as a patron of arts and culture, and his policies typically resisted cultural iconoclasm. Censorship of printed books during James’s reign was relatively limited. Indeed, Clegg, who has studied James’s censorship practices in detail, finds that ‘[e]mploying the most conservative estimate of the number of books that issued from England’s presses between 1603 and 1625, fewer than 1 per cent were in any way involved with efforts to suppress them or punish their authors or printers, and this includes those titles which received conditional authorization but do not appear to have been printed.’²⁸ Clegg finds that James’s acts of public book burning were especially rare, and those that did occur were intended to serve as pointed political messages.²⁹ All of the books condemned in this way that Clegg identifies were print works, and none of James’s acts of censorship were directed at medieval manuscripts. Indeed, James was in many ways invested in the preservation of older documents. While official acts passed under Edward and Elizabeth had direct impacts on the survival of medieval manuscripts, no official act under James had the same. For this reason, the exploration of manuscript destruction during James’s reign that follows proceeds not by considering official acts (as the previous chapters had done), but rather by considering key episodes of book destruction and preservation during this period.

During James’s reign, the collection of manuscripts in the Royal Library was greatly expanded. This was in part through the acquisition of a large portion of Lord Lumley’s important manuscript collection.³⁰ In 1622, Patrick Young, who was a scholar of Greek and the designated ‘Keeper of the King’s

²⁷ Ovenden, ‘Libraries’, p. 560. Ker writes that ‘the active period in the migration of manuscripts from the English medieval libraries to the modern collections was coming to an end in the middle of the seventeenth century’; ‘Migration’, p. 1.

²⁸ Cyndia Clegg, *Press Censorship in Jacobean England* (2001), p. 19.

²⁹ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Jacobean England*, pp. 68–9.

³⁰ See Edward Edwards, *Libraries and Founders of Libraries* (1864), p. 162.

Libraries, was given a warrant ‘to make search in all cathedrals for old manuscripts and ancient records, and to bring an inventory of them to His Majesty.’³¹ Unfortunately, only five of Young’s descriptions of these cathedral collections survive, and none of them seems to be a complete catalogue. Young lists 79 manuscripts at Lichfield, 181 at Salisbury, 334 at Worcester, 20 at Winchester, and very few at St Paul’s. Young’s lists were used to identify books from the old cathedral libraries that could be transferred to collegiate and national libraries. It is clear that at least some of the intended transfers took place, since the Royal Library evidently acquired some volumes through one of these transfers.³² Young’s royally sanctioned search for ‘old and ancient’ manuscripts indicates that during James’s reign the identification and preservation of medieval material was not simply a matter of concern for antiquarians but a matter of national importance.

Despite the atmosphere of preservation that had taken hold, manuscripts continued to be destroyed recklessly during the seventeenth century. In 1632, William Lisle told Thomas Howard the 2nd Earl of Arundel that he had rescued a ‘Psalterium interlineatum antiquo normanico’ (‘Psalter interlined in Old Norman’) from a bookseller who might otherwise have tried to recycle it. Lisle describes ‘An ignorant bookseller, that had yt, woulde have destroyed yt, to binde other books withall: and I, desirous to save yt, when he knew not how to measure the value but by his own bushell, gave him his asking—as much as it waied in other parchment books of the same foulding, whereof I had some to spare.’ Lisle gave the manuscript to Arundel. The manuscript in question can be tentatively identified as British Library, Arundel MS 230, which is a composite manuscript with codicological units produced during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and which contains several texts in Anglo-Norman, including an interlinear translation in Anglo-Norman of a Latin psalter.³³ If the manuscript is the same one that was found by Lisle, it is lucky that Lisle saved it from destruction because it stands as a lone witness to unique versions of several Anglo-Norman texts.³⁴

³¹ For the number of books on Young’s lists and the transport of these books to the royal libraries, see Barr and Selwyn, ‘Major’, pp. 386. See also Ovenden, ‘Libraries’, p. 528. On Young, see Ker and Atkins, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

³² See Barr and Selwyn, ‘Major’, pp. 386–7 and Ovenden, ‘Libraries’, p. 528.

³³ The letter from William Lisle to the Earl of Arundel is printed in *The Life, Correspondence and Collections of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel*, edited by Mary F. S. Hervey (1921), p. 305. The catalogue describes it as ‘the single surviving copy of an Anglo-Norman interlinear translation of the Gallican version of the Psalter.’ It does not explain how Thomas Howard acquired the manuscript. See ‘Arundel MS 230’, in *Digitised Manuscripts*, British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Arundel_MS_230>, accessed 10 September 2021. The identification has not previously been made as far as I am aware.

³⁴ See, for example, no. 379 and no. 48 in Dean and Boulton, *Anglo-Norman*, pp. 204 and 476.

The destruction of manuscripts, which had occurred on occasion during James's reign despite considerable resistance on the part of antiquarians, became somewhat more common during the period of political instability that marked the Civil Wars (1642–51). The antiquarian and Royalist supporter John Aubrey (1626–97) puts this destruction into perspective. In an oft-cited passage, Aubrey laments the losses of the past:

In my grand Father's dayes the Manuscripts flew about like Butter-flies. All Musick bookes, Account bookes, Copie bookes, etc, were covered with old Manuscripts, as wee cover them now with blew Paper or Marbled Paper. And the Glovers at Malmesbury made great Havoc of them and Gloves were wrapt up no doubt in many good pieces of antiquity.³⁵

This quotation is often taken to suggest that Aubrey viewed the Reformation as a uniquely devastating moment for the survival of medieval manuscripts. But Aubrey does not see the Reformation as unique in this respect. Rather, he describes it as one brief chapter in a larger, continuous story of destruction that was still being written in his own day. He goes on to describe how a rector he knew, one William Stump, had acquired several medieval manuscripts that had once belonged to Malmesbury Abbey. The rector had inherited these manuscripts from his great-grandfather 'St[ump,] the cloathier of Malmesbury', who had purchased Malmesbury Abbey at the Dissolution. Aubrey describes watching in sadness as the rector used folia of these manuscripts to stop the bungholes of casks of ale. This had occurred in the 1630s according to Aubrey; when Aubrey went back to check on the manuscripts in 1647, he learned that aside from a few deeds, all of them had been recycled and destroyed. The rector's sons were soldiers and had, according to Aubrey 'scoured their gunnes with them.'³⁶

The rector's nonchalant attitude towards these manuscripts evoked, for Aubrey, a horrific and pervasive climate of destruction that marked the Civil Wars. It was the Parliamentary forces, according to Aubrey, who had caused the worst of this destruction. Aubrey describes, for example, watching Parliamentary forces destroy cathedral windows and fonts. He laments that at Slaughterford, 'a prettie small Church', 'the very barres are taken out of the

³⁵ Printed in Dick, 'Foreword', pp. xxxii.

³⁶ Printed in 'Natural History of Wiltshire', in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 18, edited by John Britton (1847), pp. 563–85, p. 579; the passage is cited in Wright, 'Dispersal of the Libraries in the Sixteenth', p. 151; Wright notes that the account was written at some remove from the events it describes and 'must, therefore, be used with reserve' (p. 152).

windows by the fanatique rage of the late times.³⁷ The Parliamentarians were, for Aubrey, boors who could not recognize the value of cultural heritage. In contrast, Aubrey casts himself as a cultured antiquarian, stressing that the destruction of manuscripts ‘did grieve me then to see.’³⁸ In Aubrey’s account, then, the destruction of manuscripts was an ongoing threat to cultural heritage, but it was one that was happening against a mounting current of resistance from antiquarians such as himself.

What are we to make of Aubrey’s claims that Parliamentary forces destroyed medieval manuscripts? The matter is important for the question of how many medieval manuscripts were destroyed during the seventeenth century. It is certainly true that some manuscripts were destroyed during the general chaos of the Civil Wars. One attack that was particularly devastating for the survival of medieval manuscripts occurred during the siege of York of 1644. In order to breach the grounds of St Mary’s Abbey, the Earl of Manchester’s Parliamentary troops placed a mine under St Mary’s Tower, which was being used as a record repository. When the mine exploded and damaged the tower, the impact killed several civilians and destroyed many important records.³⁹ How many medieval documents were lost? The tower had held some records and cartularies that had been taken from Yorkshire religious houses during the Dissolution under Henry VIII, and it has sometimes been claimed that the tower held all or most of the records of the dissolved northern monastic houses.⁴⁰ However, in their study of the records of the tower, Barbara English and C. B. L. Barr find that although the exact number of documents held in the tower is unknown, its holdings were far more limited than is sometimes assumed.⁴¹

English and Barr add that the damage sustained by these collections was also more limited than is often assumed. To this point, they note that some of the records housed in the tower survive in rough copies that had been transcribed by the antiquarian Roger Dodsworth in the years before the attack.⁴² Moreover, English and Barr find that many of the records that had been held

³⁷ Quoted in Dick’s ‘Foreword’, p. xxxiii.

³⁸ Printed in ‘Natural’, p. 579.

³⁹ See Ramsay, ‘Libraries’, pp. 137–8. See also English and Barr, ‘Records’. The records they have identified as having been housed in the tower are described on p. 233.

⁴⁰ See The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in City of York, Volume 2: The Defences* (1972), p. 163. See the discussion of the treatment of records and charters at the Dissolution above, p. 121. For an overview of those who hold that the tower held all or most of the records of the northern monastic houses, see English and Barr, ‘Records’, pp. 198–9.

⁴¹ English and Barr, ‘Records’, pp. 198–202.

⁴² See the description of Roger Dodsworth’s notes in ‘Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. Dodsworth 8’, in *Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts*, Bodleian Library, <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/172326>, accessed 1 September 2020.

in the tower were rescued from the rubble in the aftermath of the attack. They credit Ferdinando, the second Baron of Fairfax, with rescuing many of these. Fairfax was a Parliamentarian who commanded the siege. Others credited with saving volumes include Fairfax's son Thomas, who was a fervent collector of medieval manuscripts (and who donated a large collection of these to the Bodleian) and Thomas Thompson, a notary public and official from the diocese of York.⁴³ Thompson seems to have brought the records he saved to the archiepiscopal archives of York, which were then housed at York Minster.⁴⁴ Other documents were rescued by Ferdinando's younger brother Charles Fairfax, who was a colonel in the Parliamentary army and who brought them to his Menston home. Preservation efforts continued; a month later, when the chaos of the siege had begun to settle down a bit, Fairfax and his friend Dodsworth returned to the rubble to rescue even more records.⁴⁵

The efforts of these antiquarians saved many old and irreplaceable documents, according to English and Barr. Indeed, they find that '[o]f seventy-seven religious communities whose documents, in whole or in part, are thus attested as having been kept in St Mary's Tower, forty-six had some documents surviving after the explosion.' Stressing that the explosion caused a collapse and not a fire (which would have been more destructive), and noting that a large number of documents held in the tower have survived, English and Barr suggest that while 'many' of the records held in the tower were destroyed, these losses were nevertheless limited.⁴⁶ This was, as we have seen, largely due to the efforts of Parliamentarian supporters, and this point is worth highlighting in light of Aubrey's criticisms of the Parliamentarians.

It is not clear whether the Parliamentarian forces were particularly inclined towards deliberate cultural destruction of the sort that Aubrey describes and, if so, how many medieval manuscripts they destroyed. Claims that the Parliamentarians destroyed manuscripts deliberately are sometimes taken at face value, but the evidence must be considered carefully. The Parliamentarians were certainly prone to iconoclasm and were suspicious of anything they thought resembled idolatry. This suspicion came to a head in 1641, when the House of Commons debated passing an ordinance for the removal of specific

⁴³ Anthony Wood credits Thomas Fairfax with saving manuscripts from the tower. See English and Barr, 'Records', p. 214. Dodsworth states that Thomas Thompson saved manuscripts; see English and Barr, 'Records', pp. 214–15; and Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *Inventory*, p. 163.

⁴⁴ 'Records', p. 215.

⁴⁵ On these rescue efforts, see English and Barr, 'Records', p. 215.

⁴⁶ English and Barr, 'Records', pp. 222, 234.

religious items from churches and chapels. The ordinance, which passed in September 1641, called for the removal of crucifixes, pictures of the Virgin Mary, and other objects and ceremonies that were deemed overly Catholic. The Commons considered adding a clause designed to protect the Book of Common Prayer from any attacks but this clause was ultimately rejected.⁴⁷

The list of banned items was expanded in 1643 when a related ordinance called for the removal of not only crosses, but also the images of saints. In 1644 the list of banned items was expanded yet again to include organs, roods, fonts, and images of angels, saints, and the Trinity.⁴⁸ Yet extensive as the three successive lists of banned items are, none of them mentions service books or any other sorts of books or manuscripts. Nevertheless, the passing of these ordinances reflects an atmosphere of suspicion surrounding aspects of pre-Reformation religion and they may have emboldened some Parliamentarians to destroy pre-Reformation religious volumes, and especially service books, since these were in many ways the last surviving incarnations of the pre-Reformation liturgy.

There is certainly some evidence that books were destroyed by Parliamentary troops. A roughly contemporary account entitled ‘A short and true narrative of the Rising and Defacing the Cathedral Church of Peterburgh in the year 1643’ describes Parliamentary soldiers engaging in iconoclasm at Peterborough. The description begins with the soldiers targeting copies of the Book of Common Prayer: ‘Then the souldiers enter the quire and there their first business was to tear in pieces all the common prayer books that could be found.’ Of course none of these were medieval volumes. But while tearing down the quire stalls, one soldier discovered a much older volume. The large book was a thirteenth-century chronicle of the abbey and—according to the modern editor of the account—the book had been hidden there before the war by the precentor of the church, Humfrey Austin. The book was pilfered by the Parliamentarians, but Austin devised a strategy to get it back; he claimed it was an ‘old latin bible’—a category of texts that the Parliamentarians would have been loath to harm—and offered 10 shillings for its safe return. The strategy was successful, and the soldier who returned it, Henry Topclyffe, added an inscription to the volume as surety:

⁴⁷ See the discussion and text of these ordinances edited by Trevor Cooper in ‘The Parliamentary Ordinances’, *The Journal of William Dowling: Iconoclasm in East Anglia During the English Civil War*, edited by Trevor Cooper (2001), pp. 337–44.

⁴⁸ A helpful comparison of the various ordinances is given by Cooper in ‘Parliamentary’, p. 338. The ordinances themselves are printed on pp. 340–4.

I pray let this Scripture Book alone, for he hath paid me for it and therefore I would desire you to let it alone. By me Henry Topcliffe, souldyer under Captain Cromwell, Colonel Cromwell's sonn; therefore I pray let it alone.—
By me Henry Topclyffe.⁴⁹

The inscription was evidently respected and the volume is now safely stored in Cambridge University Library.⁵⁰

The same witness who recounts the story of this chronicle also describes some other destruction at the cathedral. According to him, some charters and deeds destroyed at the chapterhouse by soldiers who had mistakenly thought they were the Pope's bulls. Yet the destruction was soon brought to a halt and it is not clear how much was lost.⁵¹ Were any other older books or documents targeted by the Parliamentarians during this period? It seems likely. The editors of Peterborough's library catalogue suggest that some books had remained in place at the cathedral during the Dissolution, adding that 'the continuity of personnel from abbey to cathedral' at the time of the Dissolution, 'offers the hope that the book collection benefited from a measure of institutional stability.'⁵² Yet very little from this collection survives today and it seems likely that the Civil Wars are to blame. James writes that while we cannot know how many volumes were destroyed during the Civil Wars themselves, 'the number of Peterborough books known to exist is remarkably small. Of Psalters and service-books, Consuetudinaries and Chartularies, there may be a score; but these are not library-books. Of library-books proper, I doubt if more than a couple dozen can be pointed out.'⁵³

⁴⁹ The inscription is given in George S. Phillips, *A Guide to Peterborough Cathedral* (1853), quoted at p. 40.

⁵⁰ It is Cambridge University Library, Peterborough Dean and Chapter MS 1. The incident is memorialized in a stained glass window at Peterborough Cathedral; see Paul Middleton's 'Henry Topcliffe—An Unlikely (and Unwitting) Hero', in *Tales from Tour Guides*, Peterborough Cathedral, <<https://peterboroughcathedral.wordpress.com/tag/swaffham-cartulary/>>, accessed 15 July 2022.

⁵¹ 'They likewise broke open the chapterhouse, ransack'd the records, broke the seals, tore the writings in pieces, specially such as had great seals annexed unto them, which they took or mistook rather for the popes bulls. So that a grave and sober person coming into the room at that time, finds the floor all strewed and covered over with torn papers, parchments and broken seals; and being astonisht at this sight, does thus expostulate with them: Gentlemen, (says he,) what are ye doing? they answer, we are pulling and tearing the popes bulls in pieces. He replies, ye are much mistaken: for these writings are neither the popes bulls nor any thing relating to him. But they are the evidences of several mens estates, and in destroying these, you will destroy and undo many. With this they were something perswaded, and prevailed upon by the same person, to permit him to carry away all that were left undefaced, by which means the writings the church hath now, came to be preserved'; edited by Phillips, in *Guide*, p. 51. See the discussion of this passage in Friis-Jansen and Willoughby's 'Introduction', pp. xxxix–xl.

⁵² Friis-Jansen and Willoughby, 'Introduction', p. xxxv.

⁵³ M. R. James, *Lists of Manuscripts Formerly in Peterborough Abbey Library* (2010), p. 14.

In their more recent study of the library of Peterborough Abbey, Karsten Friis-Jensen and James M. Willoughby find that ‘Ker and Watson have recorded some forty-five manuscripts known to survive from Peterborough, although only a little over half of the total number of survivors could be considered library books; a mere fraction of the total still belongs to the Cathedral.’⁵⁴ At some stage after the Dissolution, then, Peterborough lost a large number of library books, and the documentary evidence suggests that this occurred during the Civil Wars.

It is worth exploring whether the destruction at Peterborough was typical of how the Parliamentarians treated the cathedral manuscript collections in order to explore approximately how many medieval manuscripts were destroyed during the seventeenth century. There are some other accounts of Parliamentarians destroying manuscripts and, because these sometimes get cited in studies of medieval manuscript loss, they are worth considering here. But as we shall see, most of these accounts are from Royalists and they come from after the war, when Royalists were keen to paint Parliamentarians in a bad light, so we must consider the possibility that they were falsified or exaggerated. Given this possibility, it is worth looking at these accounts in some detail in order to evaluate their validity.

Many of these accounts come from the Royalist bishop William Nicolson. Nicolson was powerfully committed to the preservation of ancient manuscripts. Writing during Queen Anne’s reign (1702–14) and reflecting on the aftermath of the Civil Wars, Nicolson produced a study of the historical documents that were preserved in the libraries of the nation. In the preface to this work, dedicated to Charles Montagu, the 1st Earl of Halifax, Nicolson praises both Montagu and the parliamentary committee over which he had presided for having preserved what Nicolson terms the ‘Ancient History and Laws’ of the nation:

Soon after Her present Majesty’s Accession to the Throne of Her Royal Ancestors, You seasonably observed, that nothing wanted a more speedy Care and Attendance, than the deplorable Condition of our public Records; many whereof (through the supine, and long continued, Negligence of their respective Keepers) were in an useless and confused State, and others exposed to the last Injuries of the Weather.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Friis-Jensen and Willoughby, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxvi.

⁵⁵ Nicolson’s first edition was printed without this preface; the preface and dedication were added to his second edition in 1714. See William Nicolson, *The English Historical Library: In 3 Parts*, 2nd edn (1696–9; 1714), p. iii.

Nicolson praises Montagu's committee, which was appointed by Charles II to inspect the nation's manuscripts; according to Nicolson, it was this committee that had ensured 'the Safety and now regular Disposition, of these venerable Remains; which are justly reckoned to excel, in Age and Beauty, whatever the choicest Archives abroad can produce of the Sort.'⁵⁶ For Nicolson, the preservation of manuscripts was a worthy cause—and a distinctly Royalist one.

At the centre of Nicolson's work, then, is a deep conviction that manuscripts had to be preserved—and that their preservation was an issue that had to be addressed on a national level. Here, Nicolson builds on and extends an established tradition—one that traces its roots to Leland, Bale, and other sixteenth-century antiquarians—of casting the preservation of ancient documents as a matter of national importance.

The primary aim of Nicolson's work is to provide accounts of the nation's libraries, but Nicolson also gives lengthy accounts of their destruction, and these merit examination because they offer a window onto the nature of seventeenth-century manuscript loss. Nicholson describes a wave of destruction that targeted older manuscripts and that took place after outbreak of the first Civil War in 1642. Since much of the conflict during this period was concentrated in cathedral cities, much of the destruction Nicolson describes was to cathedral book collections. One of the most striking episodes that Nicholson describes happened when Chichester Cathedral was taken by the Parliamentary troops of Sir William Waller during his occupation of the city in 1642. The library of the church, which was connected to the cathedral and which therefore had fared better than many institutions during the sixteenth century, must have been sizeable during the medieval period. The cathedral must have also held numerous charters and other documents. But according to Nicolson, many of these were lost in the seventeenth century. Nicolson writes that 'Most of the ancient Records of this Church were squander'd and lost upon the City's being taken and plunder'd by Sir William Waller in our late Civil Wars.'⁵⁷ Based on the context, the old 'Records' to which Nicolson refers here are probably medieval charters.

It is not clear whether Nicolson's account is authoritative. It was written some twenty years after the destruction it describes, and it differs considerably from the earlier account of Bruno Ryves (or Reeves) who was Dean of Chichester in the wake of this period (1646–60). While Ryves's account also describes some destruction at the hands of the Parliamentarians, in Ryves's account the destruction is described in more limited terms: 'The rebels under

⁵⁶ Nicolson, *English*, p. iv.

⁵⁷ Nicolson, *English*, p. 128.

the conduct of Sir William Waller, entering the City of Chichester on Innocents Day 1642...force open all the locks, either of doors or desks wherein the singing-men laid their Common-Prayer-books, their singing books, their gown and surplices; they rent the books in pieces, and scatter the torn leaves all over the Church, even to the covering of the pavement.⁵⁸ In this account, the destruction caused by the Parliamentarians was limited to modern service books: it is the Book of Common Prayer (an Edwardian innovation) and ‘singing books’ (which by this point were almost certainly not medieval), that were destroyed.

Ryves describes similar destruction at the local parish church: ‘Having therefore made what spoil they could in the Cathedral, they rush out thence and break open a parish church, standing on the north side of the cathedral, called the sub-deanery; there they did tear the Common-prayer-books; and because many things in the Holy Bible made strongly against them, and did contradict and condemn their impious practices, they marked it in divers places with a black coal.’⁵⁹ Here, the targets are a Book of Common Prayer and a Bible. The latter was almost certainly not medieval and, based on Ryves’s account, it was marked up but not destroyed. In this contemporary account, then, the book destruction that is mentioned is limited to post-Reformation books; the medieval charters are not mentioned.

It is true that Chichester had very few medieval charters remaining by Nicolson’s time, but it is not clear how many charters were lost due to destruction caused by Parliamentary forces. In its description of the records at Chichester, the 1901 Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts explored the validity of Nicolson’s claims and determined that they are not supported by any evidence. The commission found that only twenty-five charters remained from Chichester’s collections and that ‘Few capitular collections have suffered such injury as those of the dean and chapter of Chichester,’ but it questioned whether the paucity of the collection was a result of the Civil War.⁶⁰ First, the report suggests that the collection at Chichester had been meagre prior to the Civil War. By way of evidence, it notes that in the early seventeenth century, the antiquarian William Dugdale (1605–86) worked with the collection at Chichester but seems to have drawn extracts from only

⁵⁸ Quoted in Charles Thomas-Stanford, *Sussex in the Great Civil War and the Interregnum, 1642–1660* (1910), p. 57.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Thomas-Stanford, *Sussex*, p. 59.

⁶⁰ Historical Manuscript Commission, *Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections: Berwick-upon-Tweed, Burford and Lostwithiel Corporations; the Counties of Wilts’ and Worcester; the Bishop of Chichester; and the Deans and Chapters of Chichester, Canterbury and Salisbury* (1901), p. 187.

one older volume: a now-lost cartulary.⁶¹ The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts also refers to a 1616 visitation report which seems to suggest that some of the ornaments of the church had already gone missing by that point; at the time, church officials at Chichester were asked, ‘what is become of the Copes, Monuments and Vestments of your Church. By whose default principally are your evidences wanting and lost.’⁶² Based on this visitation report and other evidence, the Commission suggests that the ‘destruction of records’ at Chichester may have been ‘due to the negligent rule of dean William Thorne’—so between 1601 and 1630—and not due to the Civil Wars.⁶³ Thorne had been a professor of Hebrew at Oxford prior to his appointment as dean and it is possible that he may have taken or redistributed records from Chichester during his deanship.

Although Chichester apparently lost its records prior to the Civil Wars, some ecclesiastical institutions did lose cartularies and records during the wars, especially after the 1646 Ordinance for the Abolishing of Archbishops and Bishops, which led to the confiscation of some ecclesiastical records.⁶⁴ But the evidence for this is limited. According to Nicolson, a number of cartularies and records of St Paul’s Church were destroyed during the seventeenth century, but Nicolson notes that he is unsure whether this occurred when the Parliamentary forces used the church as what Nicolson terms a ‘common stable’, or when the church was set ablaze during the 1666 Great Fire of London.⁶⁵ In this account, as in his account of Chichester, Nicolson is keen to paint the Parliamentarians as boorish by suggesting that they destroyed ancient documents, but there is no evidence that any of the documents in question were destroyed during the Civil Wars.

There are, however, some eyewitness accounts of deliberate book destruction that took place during the wars. The sub-dean of Christ Church Canterbury, Dr Paske, describes some books being destroyed at the cathedral church in 1642. According to his account, troops under Colonel Edwin Sandys ‘forced open the Cupboards of the Singing men, rent some of their Surplices, Gownes, and Bibles, and carried away others, mangled all our Service-bookes and

⁶¹ Historical Manuscript Collection, *Report*, pp. 187–9. The report does acknowledge that some books from Chichester seem to have gone missing during the war; it mentions a ‘Leiger’ (or ledger) book, which was still in the collection in 1616 and which went missing during the Civil War, apparently at hands of one Sir R. Farrington; see p. 200.

⁶² Quoted in Historical Manuscript Collection, *Report*, p. 201.

⁶³ Historical Manuscript Collection, *Report*, p. 188.

⁶⁴ See, for example, the account of the records of St Werburg in Chester in *Benedictine*, ed. Sharpe et al., p. 105.

⁶⁵ Nicolson, *English*, pp. 132–3.

Books of Common-prayer, bestowing the whole Pavement with the Leaves thereof'.⁶⁶ The account makes no mention of the age of the destroyed volumes. Since they seem to have been in regular use, and since they included copies of the Book of Common Prayer, they were probably not medieval books and the episode is therefore not directly relevant to the topic at hand, but it is nevertheless useful for showing that a fervour of destruction had taken hold among the Parliamentary forces at the time.

Judging from contemporary accounts, the cathedral that suffered the most damage during the English Civil Wars was Lichfield.⁶⁷ Local tensions were high; while the cathedral community was largely sympathetic to the Royalists, the village community sided with the Parliamentarians. Conflict between these two communities reached a breaking point in 1643 and in March of that year the cathedral close, which included the church, was stormed by Parliamentary forces. The Royalists under Prince Rupert laid siege to the cathedral on 8 April of the same year, finally retaking the cathedral from the Parliamentary soldiers on 21 April.⁶⁸ The cathedral was under siege a third time from March to June 1646.⁶⁹ During the conflict, the central spire of the church fell and a section of the cathedral itself was destroyed.

Valerie Edden writes that '[t]he effect of the siege on the fabric of the cathedral and on its books is inestimable. Service books had largely been destroyed at the Dissolution, along with vestments; what books remained were destroyed or dispersed during the Civil War.' By way of evidence, Edden notes that '[v]ery few of the books listed by Young are still at Lichfield'. She adds that of the twenty medieval manuscripts now at Lichfield, only three were at Lichfield in the medieval period.⁷⁰ It is clear from these figures that Lichfield lost many volumes at some point after Young produced his catalogue.

It is worth considering how these volumes were lost. An eyewitness account to the siege of 1643 by the Dean of Lichfield, Griffith Higgs, suggests that they

⁶⁶ Printed in J. Wickham Legg and W. H. St John Hope, eds, *Inventories of Christchurch Canterbury: With Historical and Topographical Introductions and Illustrative Documents* (1902), pp. 266–7.

⁶⁷ Norman Ellis and Ian Atherton write that 'Lichfield endured more destruction than any other [Cathedral]' during the Civil Wars; 'Griffith Higgs's Account of the Sieges of and Iconoclasm at Lichfield Cathedral in 1643', *Midland History* 34, no. 2 (2009): pp. 233–45, p. 233.

⁶⁸ Stanford E. Lehmborg, *Cathedrals Under Siege: Cathedrals in English Society, 1600–1700* (1996), p. 38.

⁶⁹ Ellis and Atherton, 'Griffith', p. 234.

⁷⁰ Valerie Edden, *Manuscripts in Midland Libraries* (2000), p. xvi. Edden writes that 'The Parliamentarians took possession of the cathedral and close for fourteen years from 1646' (p. xvi). It is not clear how Edden arrived at this number and I have not seen it quoted elsewhere; the Parliamentary commander capitulated on 21 April 21st, 1646 and the Civil War was over by 1651. Undoubtedly fourteen weeks is intended.

were torn up.⁷¹ Higgs describes extensive destruction at the hands of the Parliamentarians in 1643:

Yet others invaded the Cathedral and stole silver vessels, furniture inlaid with gold and whatever they could lay their hands upon, valuable or sacred. They destroyed the font, the Lord's table, the pulpit, the windows, the organs, and ripped apart bibles and the public prayer books—the bibles in case they should hear God's wrath towards them; the prayer books indeed lest the people should pray the Divine Office against them... Nothing was to survive their savagery, public records, handwritten documents, any papers protected under a seal they dispatched to the fire or the wind, so that by one and the same crime not only would our ancestors be deprived of their memorials but also our descendants their sustenance.⁷²

Writing of this description in their edition of Higgs's account, Norman Ellis and Ian Atherton claim that 'Higgs exaggerates.' With respect to Higgs's account of destroyed records, they note that '[t]hough many pre-1642 chapter records are missing, there are seven volumes of chapter acts from 1321 to 1637 along with several bundles of estate papers relating to both chapter and vicars-choral, a few cartularies and two lease registers beginning in the 1630s.'⁷³

But while they find some exaggeration in Higgs's account of the records that were destroyed, the editors of the account acknowledge that the destruction at Lichfield was nevertheless substantial and wide-ranging. They write that 'the volume of chapter acts beginning in 1637 is missing, along with almost all the books and manuscripts of the pre-war cathedral library.'⁷⁴ To determine how this happened, they consider two manuscripts that were saved from the destruction. One of these is a copy of Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* that was eventually purchased by Elias Ashmole. Ashmole added a note in the manuscript which indicates that it had been plundered in 1646—not, as Higgs's account would suggest, in 1643. Ellis and Atherton write that 'as Ashmole's note in that volume (now among the Ashmolean manuscripts

⁷¹ See also Stanford E. Lehmberg's *Cathedrals Under Siege*, which notes that after the siege of March 1643, the Parliamentarians began to destroy the ornaments of the church, which they considered monuments of superstition. They targeted statues and images and burned 'most of the books in the cathedral library' (p. 38).

⁷² Ellis and Atherton, 'Griffith', p. 241.

⁷³ Ellis and Atherton, 'Griffith', p. 241, n. 52. The 1901 Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts report finds that Lichfield 'possesses an extensive and finely preserved collection of charters as well as of registers and cartularies'; Historical Manuscript Collection, *Report*, p. 187. On the destruction of manuscripts at Lichfield, see also Ker, 'Migration', p. 5.

⁷⁴ Ellis and Atherton, 'Griffith', p. 241, n. 52.

in the Bodleian) suggests, some of the losses date from the fall of the Close to the Parliament a second (and final) time in July 1646, rather than to the events described by Higgs.⁷⁵ The other manuscript that Ellis and Atherton consider is the famous Lichfield Gospels, also known as the St Chad Gospels. The Gospels had originally been produced as a two-volume set. While one of the volumes was destroyed, the other was saved by William Higgins, who was the Precentor of Lichfield at the time. Popular legend suggests that Higgins gave the book to the Duchess of Somerset, who returned it to the cathedral after the war, along with a donation of several volumes.⁷⁶ Since the survival of this latter volume apparently depended on the preservation efforts of the Precentor, it stands as a witness to the destruction that the library sustained at the time.

The survival of other volumes also seems to have depended on preservation efforts. Ker notes that before the arrival of the Parliamentarians, some of the finest manuscripts from Lichfield's pre-war book list had been removed by the antiquarian John Langley of Amies and were, therefore, preserved.⁷⁷ Aside from the manuscripts just examined, there were thirty-one books at Lichfield in 1697 that, according to Ker, seem to have survived the Civil Wars; these are described on a list as 'old' or 'imperfect' and Ker suspects that these were all that had remained of the former collection after the devastation of the Parliamentary forces.⁷⁸ The evidence, then, strongly suggests that Lichfield lost a large number of volumes during the Civil Wars. Was the same true of other institutions?

Nicolson claims that other Parliamentary troops laid waste to the libraries at Hereford Cathedral. With his characteristic partiality, he writes that the cathedral was 'made a very improper Prey to a Fanatical and Illiterate Army of Rebellious Blockheads.'⁷⁹ The officer of these Parliamentary troops, Silas Taylor, had, according to Nicolson, 'a more than ordinary Fancy and Respect for Books and Learning', and this led him to pilfer ancient manuscripts from Hereford, thinking it was 'convenient to seize as many of the Churches Evidences and Records, as he could possibly get into his Clutches.' Nicolson

⁷⁵ Ellis and Atherton, 'Griffith', p. 241, n. 52. The note reads: 'This booke did formerly belong to the library in the close of Lichfeild and was plundered thence by the Parliament soldiers, 1646'; the note is transcribed and remarked upon by Ker in 'Migration', p. 4.

⁷⁶ The story of William Higgins saving the manuscript is recounted in Bishop Abraham, 'A Collation of St. Chad's Gospels at Lichfield', *The Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist: A Quarterly Journal* (1876): pp. 1–2, p. 1. The Bishop bases his version of events on an account of manuscripts kept in the cathedral library.

⁷⁷ See Ker, 'Migration', p. 5.

⁷⁸ See Ker, 'Migration', p. 5.

⁷⁹ Nicolson, *English*, pp. 133, 131; quoted at 131.

claims that the manuscripts pilfered by Taylor passed to the officer's creditors upon his death, and Nicolson raises doubts as to whether 'any care was taken to preserve them.'⁸⁰ Thus in Nicolson's account, the machinations of this Parliamentary officer led to significant manuscript loss.

But Nicolson's characterization of the situation is clearly inaccurate. In fact, the cathedral stands out among all non-monastic cathedrals as one of only three that were able to hold onto much of their pre-Reformation book collections.⁸¹ Any destruction that happened at Hereford must have been limited. The Parliamentary officer Silas Taylor did lift manuscripts from some cathedral libraries, but he is now recognized as an antiquarian in his own right; he had a pronounced interest in the history of Hereford and travelled through the area for four years collecting antiquarian material related to its past.⁸² And contrary to Nicolson's claims, many of Taylor's manuscripts are still with us today, and his papers are in the Harleian collection.⁸³ Indeed, in his 1717 history of Hereford, Richard Rawlinson describes Taylor's impact on the Hereford Cathedral library not simply as an act of thievery but as one of rescue; he writes that 'The Library was plunder'd and several valuable Manuscripts taken away, but preserv'd by Silas Taylor, a Captain of the Parliament Army, and a great Lover of Antiquities.'⁸⁴

But this is not the only act of thievery that Nicolson attributes to Silas Taylor. Nicolson claims that the Parliamentary officer pilfered manuscripts from Worcester Cathedral after it was stormed by Parliamentary troops.⁸⁵ Another suggestion that the manuscript collection at Worcester fell under threat during this period is made by William Dugdale, but Dugdale's version of events differs from Nicolson's. In his 1681 account of the Civil Wars, Dugdale claims that Essex's Parliamentary troops 'rifled the Library' at Worcester Cathedral and 'tore in pieces Bibles and Service-Books.'⁸⁶ It is worth looking at what happened to this collection in some detail, since there is an unusually large amount of evidence from it that survives.

It is true that Worcester lost many manuscripts during this period, but there are differing accounts of how this happened. Edden writes that at

⁸⁰ Nicolson, *English*, p. 131.

⁸¹ See above, p. 136.

⁸² One of the manuscripts that Silas Taylor collected, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson MS B. 328, seems to have been taken from the Cathedral Church of St Ethelbert in Hereford; see 'MS. Rawl. B. 328', in *Medieval Manuscripts in Oxford Libraries*, Bodleian Library, <https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_8019>, accessed 16 July 2022.

⁸³ David Whitehead, 'Taylor, Silas (1624–1678)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by David Cannadine et al. (2004), <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/>>.

⁸⁴ Richard Rawlinson, *The History and Antiquities of the City and Cathedral-Church of Hereford: Containing an Account of All the Inscriptions, Epitaphs, &c. Upon the Tombs, Monuments, and Gravestones* (1717), p. vii.

⁸⁵ Nicolson, *English*, p. 131.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Atkins and Ker's 'Introduction', p. 20.

Worcester the Civil Wars were to blame; indeed, she finds that the wars caused ‘greater disruption to the life of the Cathedral and the continuity of the library’ than the Dissolution. She writes that ‘[i]n 1642, [the cathedral’s library] was despoiled by troops of Essex and then in 1651 by Cromwell’s soldiers.’⁸⁷ But Atkins and Ker, who have studied the history of Worcester’s collections in detail, argue that ‘the Parliamentary soldiers took little, if any direct part in despoiling the library.’ Indeed, Atkins and Ker argue that the impact of the Civil Wars was not direct. They note that while some manuscript losses that took place at Worcester during the seventeenth century ‘cannot be accounted for’, most of them occurred due to the ‘selection and withdrawal of the choicest manuscripts by scholars and collectors.’⁸⁸

The material from Worcester that Ker and Atkinson present supports their interpretation. The library clearly sustained significant losses during the seventeenth century. Many of these can be identified thanks to two book lists that were produced at Worcester: one from c.1622–1623 that was produced by the royal librarian Patrick Young and the other from 1697. Examining these lists and other sources, Ker and Atkins identify the library’s post-medieval losses. They find that an incredible eighty-six manuscripts went missing between the earlier and later seventeenth-century catalogues. They also list some losses that the collection sustained prior to the production of its c.1622–1623 book list, although their data may not be wholly representative of the losses from this period since there is no reliable book list for Worcester prior to 1622. Modern losses at Worcester have been considerably rarer; indeed since the eighteenth century, only one manuscript (F. 17) has gone missing.⁸⁹

The losses identified by Ker and Atkins can be summarized in a table for the sake of comparison (see [Table 6.1](#)).⁹⁰

Using the latest possible date of loss for the x -axis data, I have presented the data in a visualization ([Figure 6.1](#)). The post-1622 data, which, as we have seen, is the most reliable here, is telling. The greatest losses (defined broadly here as books removed from the collection and not necessarily ones that had gone missing) took place during the mid- to late seventeenth century. As [Table 6.1](#) indicates, these losses occurred primarily at the hands of collectors and others who valued manuscripts for their antiquarian worth—not at

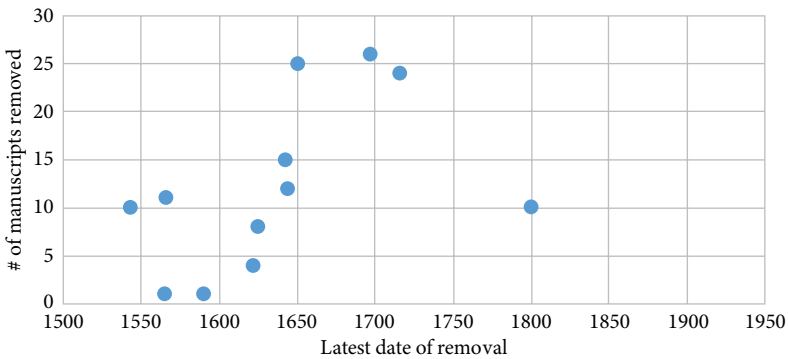
⁸⁷ Edden, *Manuscripts*, p. xxv. ⁸⁸ Atkins and Ker, ‘Introduction’, p. 20.

⁸⁹ See Atkins and Ker, ‘Introduction’, p. 28.

⁹⁰ Atkins and Ker note a few examples of manuscripts that left Worcester before this period. One of these is Peterhouse College Cambridge, MS 71, a copy of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* dated to c.1300, which must have left Worcester by 1418, when it was noted in the catalogue of the Peterhouse College Library. The second is Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 223, which must have left Worcester by at least 1612 and probably earlier; see ‘Introduction’, p. 8.

Table 6.1 Manuscripts Removed from Worcester Cathedral Between c.1534 and 1800

Earliest date of loss	Latest date of loss	No. of MSS	MSS went to	Atkins and Ker p. nos
1534	1543	10	Henry VIII's library	8
c.1560	1565/6	11	Parker	9–10
1565	1565	1 or more	Dee	11–12
c.1565	1606/1593/ 1603/1622	4	See Atkins and Ker p. 12	12
	1590	1	Bodleian	13
1600	1625	8	Bodleian	13
1600	1643	15 (charters)	Hatton	14
	1644	12	Hatton	14; 17
1600	1650	25	Theyer	15; 17
1622	1697	26	unknown	20
1651	1716	24 (charters)	Somers	20
1697	1800	10	unknown	20; 21

**Figure 6.1** Manuscripts from Worcester Cathedral Library by Latest Date of Removal

the hands of iconoclasts. It is also worth noting that the manuscripts that were removed from the collection during this period were not, on the whole, destroyed. The twenty-four charters that Lord Somers (1651–1716) received from the cathedral seem to have perished in a fire in 1752, but most of the others removed by antiquarians were subsumed into modern collections and subsequently preserved.⁹¹

The fate of Worcester Cathedral's book collection during the seventeenth century cannot be taken to represent the fates of all book collections during

⁹¹ See Ker and Atkins, 'Introduction', pp. 5–21.

that time. On one hand, as a cathedral, Worcester enjoyed greater stability during the Reformation than many other religious institutions; on the other, it experienced greater instability during the Civil Wars. But the evidence from Worcester is nevertheless telling. By showing that the most significant period for the removal of books was the seventeenth century, it highlights the importance of this period for the continuity of some collections. And by showing that more books were removed by antiquarians than destroyed by iconoclastic Parliamentarians of the sort described by Nicolson, it reminds us that we must use considerable caution in evaluating accounts of loss—especially of those who used accusations of book destruction to tarnish the reputations of their enemies.

Thus the deliberate destruction of medieval manuscripts at the hands of the Parliamentarians seems to have been very limited. With the important exceptions of Lichfield and—most likely—Peterborough Cathedral, the wars had little direct impact on the survival of manuscripts in the cathedral towns that were caught up in the conflict. The medieval manuscripts that were destroyed during the wars, such as the ones that were torn up to scour guns in Aubrey's account, or the charters destroyed at St Mary's Tower, were, for the most part, collateral damage. There was a steady drift of manuscripts out of ecclesiastical book collections during this period, and it may be true that their removal was enabled by the chaotic atmosphere of the wars. But these manuscripts were not, on the whole, removed by uncultured zealots bent on their destruction, but by antiquarians. This was not a moment of mass cultural iconoclasm but a predictable corollary to a growing antiquarian movement that traced its roots back to the sixteenth century. It was spurred by a conviction that older material, and especially manuscript material, was worthy of preservation and, in this sense, can be considered part of the same movement that led to preservation attempts such as Thomas Bodley's foundation of a public library at Oxford in 1598, or contemporary calls for a national collection of historical manuscripts. Once a medieval manuscript had survived into the seventeenth century, its long-term preservation was usually assured.

While some books were destroyed by the Parliamentarians, the primary target of their iconoclasm outside Lichfield and Peterborough seems to have been service books. Judging from the descriptions, the ones that are known to have been destroyed were not medieval; certainly the Books of Common Prayer that were destroyed could not have been much more than a century old. It is clear that the destruction of medieval manuscripts at the hands of the Parliamentarians was limited. Royalist accounts of destruction that were written in the wake of the Civil Wars greatly exaggerate the Parliamentarians'

proclivity for destroying manuscripts in a bid to paint Royalists and their supporters as the saviours of antiquity, working to preserve the memory of the nation from the enemies of history and culture. The destruction of manuscripts had become an egregious affront to civilization and an urgent issue of political and national interest.

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After 1700

Medieval Manuscripts Destroyed in Modern England

Perhaps the most infamous tragedy to strike medieval manuscripts after the Reformation was the Ashburnham House fire of 23 October 1731.¹ At the time of the fire, the house held the vast manuscript collection of Sir Robert Cotton, which would eventually become the British Library's Cottonian collection. This collection, comprising more than 950 manuscripts when the tragedy struck, had famously been placed in Ashburnham House for safe keeping.² The fire was not the first to destroy medieval manuscripts during the century of relative stability that followed the Civil Wars; the Great Fire of London of 1666 had claimed several important collections of medieval documents, including many important guild records.³ Yet among all episodes of manuscript loss in England, the Cottonian fire occupies a distinctive place in cultural memory, with one historian describing it as 'perhaps the greatest bibliographical disaster of modern times in Britain.'⁴

According to an official report, the disaster started when a beam hanging above a fireplace was set ablaze. At first, the fire was so small that no efforts were made to move any of the precious manuscripts in the adjoining library. When it became clear that the fire could not be contained, the deputy librarian David Casley began to throw books out the window to safety. At first, Casley tried to rescue all the books that he considered the most precious: the volumes housed under the bust of Augustus along with the Codex Alexandrinus, the famous fifth-century Bible in Greek. But Casley was soon forced to be undiscerning; as the fire spread, he started to rescue any books within reach, eventually giving up when the size of the fire rendered it necessary.⁵

¹ I am grateful to The National Archives of London for granting me access to the archival material used in the second half of this chapter.

² See Colin G. C. Tite, 'The Early Catalogues of the Cottonian Library', *British Library Journal* 6, no. 2 (1980): pp. 144–57, at p. 147.

³ See below, pp. 249–50. The fire was in fact the second Great Fire of London; see above, p. 46.

⁴ Andrew Prescott, "'Their Present Miserable State of Cremation': The Restoration of the Cotton Library", in *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and His Legacy*, edited by C. J. Wright (1997), pp. 391–454, p. 391.

⁵ House of Commons (Great Britain Parliament), *A Report from the Committee Appointed to View the Cottonian Library* (1732), p. 11. The Codex Alexandrinus is now London, British Library, Royal MS 1 DV-VIII.

Many print books from the Cottonian collection were lost entirely in the fire. The manuscripts, which were more fire resistant, fared somewhat better, although many were seriously damaged and some destroyed. After the fire, fragments of burnt manuscripts were collected from the ashes and taken to Westminster School, near Westminster Abbey.⁶ A team of experts and interested parties, including one Reverend William Whiston, gathered to look over these fragments, which were by then heavily damaged by not only the fire but also the water that had been used to save them. Under Whiston's guidance, those who had examined the fragments (who became known as the Committee Appointed to View the Cottonian Library), issued a 1732 report on the aftermath of the fire. The report describes extremely makeshift conservation strategies. The vellum manuscripts had been divided up, 'the wet from those that had suffered by Fire only'. Then, 'the wet were turned over Leaf by Leaf, and placed open upon the Floor for a few Days, and then taken up, and turned over again, and placed, as before'. Once the leaves were dried out, the manuscripts were placed in presses.⁷ A similar process was used for the manuscripts that had not been drenched by water, although another step was added. According to the report, the leaves of these manuscripts had become congealed with a 'glutinous Matter' in the heat of the fire which had to be 'carefully taken off by the Fingers'.⁸

After these initial and wholly inadequate preservation attempts, the collection was left in a state of disrepair until the nineteenth century, the crumbling fragments a grim reminder of what was lost. This situation changed after Sir Frederic Madden was appointed Keeper of Manuscripts of the British Museum in 1837. Madden embarked upon a substantial conservation project. He assembled a small team and set about describing and restoring the Cottonian collection, a process that took some forty years. It was this team that mounted many fragmentary manuscripts into the large wooden frames that have become a familiar feature of damaged Cottonian manuscripts.⁹

Thanks to these efforts, more manuscripts survived than might be expected. Indeed, the extent of the fire's destruction has been exaggerated in some respects according to Andrew Prescott. Prescott finds that while Whiston, in his 1732 report on the fire, claimed that 114 manuscripts had been damaged beyond repair or destroyed entirely, this estimate was made based on the limited conservation practices in place at the time that Whiston was writing. In fact, thanks to modern conservation work, most of the manuscripts that Whiston had claimed were lost have since been recovered in some

⁶ Prescott, 'Their Present', p. 393.

⁷ House of Commons, *Report*, p. 13.

⁸ House of Commons, *Report*, pp. 13–14.

⁹ See Prescott, 'Their Present', pp. 409–34.

form; Prescott finds that although many manuscripts were badly damaged in the Ashburnham House fire, only thirteen were lost entirely.¹⁰

Prescott also reports on an aspect of the collection's history that often goes overlooked. He finds that three Cottonian manuscripts were lost not in the Ashburnham fire but while they were undergoing conservation, when a large fire broke out at the British Museum bindery in 1865. The fire claimed Cotton MSS Galba A. I, II, and III and badly damaged Cotton MS Tiberius B. XI, which was a ninth-century version of Alfred's translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*. The last survives only in fragments.¹¹ Aside from the manuscripts from the Cottonian collection, three others were destroyed completely (Arundel MS 343, Egerton MS 1961, and Egerton MS 1962), while an additional three were badly damaged.¹² This bindery fire of 1865, which claimed six manuscripts, should arguably be considered alongside other bibliographic disasters such as the Ashburnham House fire, which claimed thirteen. Yet the bindery fire typically receives little comment in book history studies, aside from that of Andrew Prescott, who has described the 1865 fire as 'arguably the greatest single disaster to have struck [the British Museum] collections since the establishment of the Museum in 1753'.¹³

If the number of manuscripts lost in the Ashburnham House fire is only seven higher than the number lost in the bindery fire of 1865, why does the Ashburnham fire occupy such a prominent place in cultural memory, while the bindery fire is largely ignored? The report written in the aftermath of the Ashburnham House fire offers one clue that can help explain the position this fire occupies in cultural memory. The report quotes from an act written at the turn of the seventeenth century (c.1700–1) that describes the value of the Cottonian collection:

Sir Robert Cotton . . . did at his own great Charge and Expencc, and by the Assistance of the most learned Antiquaries of his Time, collect and purchase the most useful Manuscripts, Written Books, Papers, Parchments, Records and other Memorials, in most Languages, of great Use and Service, for the Knowledge and Preservation of our Constitution, both in Church and State.¹⁴

The Cottonian collection, then, was valued as a national record that preserved matters of national and ecclesiastical importance. The age and historical value

¹⁰ Prescott, 'Their Present', p. 392.

¹¹ Prescott, 'Their Present', pp. 420–1.

¹² The damages are described in Prescott, 'Their Present', pp. 420–1.

¹³ Prescott, 'Their Present', p. 420.

¹⁴ House of Commons, *Report*, pp. 7–8.

of the collection was clearly important at the time of the report; among the manuscripts described as the most valuable in the report are a copy of the Magna Carta and the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus.¹⁵ A catalogue produced shortly after the fire indexed the manuscripts according to matters of national and historical relevance; 'English Dominions in France', 'Hibernica', and 'Lawes of England' are all representative of its index headings.¹⁶ These headings indicate that approximately two centuries after the Reformation and the antiquarian journeys of men like Leland, the value of medieval manuscripts was still to some degree tied to their national, historic, and political importance.

The losses of the Cottonian fire occupied such an important place in cultural imagination and political memory that it led to changes in the preservation of manuscripts at individual, institutional, and national levels. In 1732, The Committee Appointed to View the Cottonian Library reported to the House of Commons concerning not just the aftermath of the fire but also, more broadly, the state of 'the publick Records of this Kingdom.' Their goal was to promote 'the better Reception, Preservation, and more convenient Use of the same.'¹⁷ Concerns over the preservation of manuscripts also inspired consequential individual action: it was the dismaying legacy of the Cottonian library fire that led the antiquarian Arthur Edwards to bequeath 7,000 pounds for the construction of 'a house as might be most likely to preserve that Library from all accidents' and 'to prevent the like accident for the future.'¹⁸ Edwards's bequest helped lay the foundations for the British Museum. From the ashes of the Cottonian fire, a new institution was born.

When it was established in 1753, the British Museum had as its cornerstones the collection of Robert Cotton and two other well-known personal collections. The first of these was the Harleian collection of manuscripts, which was established by Robert Harley (1666–1724). This collection contained over 7,000 manuscripts when it was brought to the British Museum, and Ramsay describes it as being focused on the 'history of England.'¹⁹ The other cornerstone of the museum was the Sloane collection, which comprised about 50,000 volumes, of which about 5,000 were manuscripts.²⁰ According

¹⁵ House of Commons, *Report*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Samuel Hooper, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library* (1777).

¹⁷ House of Commons, *Report*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 434, 443; quoted at p. 443.

¹⁹ Ramsay, 'Libraries', p. 153.

²⁰ P. R. Harris, 'The First Century of the British Museum Library', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2, 1640–1850*, edited by Giles Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley (2006), pp. 405–21, p. 405.

to its foundational act, the museum was aimed at ‘the better reception and more convenient use of the said collections.’²¹ The foundation of a national collection in England, then, was aimed at both promoting access to manuscript collections and ensuring their long-term preservation. The preservation of manuscripts was now entrenched in national policy.

In its early years, access to the British Museum was limited, with about 60 to 125 readers’ tickets issued a year.²² The collections grew steadily, and by the end of the eighteenth century the museum housed approximately 15,700 manuscripts, the bulk of which were medieval.²³ It was later in the eighteenth century that the first attempts were made to catalogue the collections, with the first catalogue, that of the Harley manuscripts, prepared between 1759 and 1763.²⁴ The museum’s manuscript collections—both medieval and post-medieval—grew considerably in the nineteenth century under the careful watch of the librarian Frederic Madden. P. R. Harris, in his study of the library’s early years, finds that in 1837 the library held c.23,900 manuscripts; by the time that Madden retired in 1866, the manuscript collection had grown to c.43,000.²⁵

The growing scope of the British Museum collection was paralleled by an increasing interest in the preservation of medieval manuscripts. Cathedrals that still held medieval manuscripts made new and elaborate provisions for their safety. At Gloucester Cathedral, for example, the dean and chapter made arrangements for a ‘Repository for Manuscripts and Choice Books’ for the Gloucester Cathedral library by 1789.²⁶ The proliferation of antiquarian societies in the eighteenth century reflected and promoted a growing interest in the manuscript as a collector’s item—not simply as a witness to the past, but as a historical artefact in its own right.²⁷ For some, the antiquity of the manuscript was its main source of value. Nigel Ramsay suggests that many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiquarians could not ‘have read or made sense of most of the medieval manuscripts in their collection.’²⁸ The medieval manuscript was no longer viewed as a living, working document but as a static object of antiquarian interest.

²¹ Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, quoted at p. 442.

²² Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 406.

²³ Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 405.

²⁴ Edwards, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 406.

²⁵ Harris, ‘The First’, p. 414.

²⁶ See Joan Williams, ‘Ecclesiastical Libraries’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 2, 1640–1850*, edited by Giles Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley (2006), pp. 313–23, p. 317.

²⁷ On the rise of antiquarian societies in the eighteenth century see Ramsay, ‘Libraries’, p. 155.

²⁸ Ramsay, ‘Libraries’, p. 153. Ramsay writes that ‘It is doubtful if either Harley [i.e. either Edward Harley or Robert] could have read or made sense of most of the medieval manuscripts in their collection, but the same might be said of many other collectors, from Sir Robert Cotton (beyond a certain point) and Thomas Howard, earl of Arundel, onwards;’ p. 153.

After the establishment of the British Museum and the growth of other institutional collections in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the story of manuscript loss reaches its denouement. The number of manuscripts lost in England after 1800 is almost negligible compared to the losses that took place before this period. Medieval manuscripts, by this point all at least 300 years old, had accrued near-mythic importance and their preservation had become fixed in national policy. Nothing like the Cottonian fire could be allowed to happen again; manuscripts had simply become too valuable, both in terms of their cost and in terms of their political and ideological weight.

The nineteenth century was marked by an even greater fervour for the preservation of medieval material. The preservation of records and other documents, many of which were far more utilitarian than the manuscripts in the cornerstone collections of the British Museum, became a topic of pronounced concern. In 1836, a Parliamentary committee was set up to inspect the state of the nation's public records, which included both manuscript and print material. The pessimistic conclusion of this committee—that the records were dispersed across 'a multitude of imperfectly responsible keepers'—led to the 1838 Public Record Office Act.²⁹ The act was aimed at 'keeping safely the public records' and at establishing a framework for national control over them, 'to allow the free use of the said records.'³⁰ Thus much like the foundational act of the British Museum, the act was aimed at promoting not just the preservation of historical documents but also their access. The act suggests that access to these documents is important for those settling legal disputes, and it therefore reflects not only the greater professionalization of the legal trade, but also a conviction that medieval records were still to some degree viewed as living documents with real legal weight.

Of course, the act covered much more than medieval records and the question of which documents were worthy of preservation became important over the course of the nineteenth century. An amendment to the act of 1877 set out rules for the disposal of documents that specified that nothing older than 1715 could be destroyed.³¹ In other words, documents more than about

²⁹ For the quotation and its context, see John Cantwell, 'The 1838 Public Record Office Act and Its Aftermath: A New Perspective', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 7, no. 5 (1984): pp. 277–86, p. 277.

³⁰ 'An Act for Keeping Safely the Public Records', in *A Compendious Abstract of the Public General Acts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland: 7 William IV-1873*, edited by The Law Journal, vol. 15 (1837), pp. 168–71, 168–9.

³¹ 'No rule made in pursuance of this section shall provide for the disposal of any document of older date than the year one thousand seven hundred and fifteen'; 'An Act to Amend the Public Record Office Act, 1838', in *A Compendious Abstract of the Public General Acts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Passed in the Fortieth And Forty-First Years of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria* (1877), pp. 226–8, p. 227.

150 years old were treated as monuments of the past worthy of preservation; only newer documents could be destroyed. The idea behind this policy—that documents of a certain age become worthy of preservation—is by now a familiar one, containing echoes of the preservation strategies shared by medieval libraries and early modern antiquarians alike.

The Public Record Office Act also made provision for the printing of public records, which has resulted in several well-known series of historical sources.³² In this respect, the act participated in a larger European movement aimed at the preservation and elucidation of public records of national interest, witnessed in projects such as the Prussian programme of publishing medieval records that culminated in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. As Norman Cantor has shown, the movement, which emerged in response to a growing climate of nationalism that was developing across Western Europe at the time, was inspired by a conviction that a country's records held national importance.³³ In England, the movement led to the establishment of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (or Historical Manuscripts Commission), which aimed to promote the preservation and study of records in private hands.³⁴

By the early twentieth century, the conservation and preservation of manuscripts had fully professionalized, and extensive and systematic efforts were made to protect the nation's manuscripts during the First World War.³⁵ In 1914, The British Museum library developed a set of carefully considered precautions, including the creation of strong rooms and safes for its manuscript collections.³⁶ As the threat of aerial bombardments increased over the course of the war, these earlier precautions were deemed insufficient, and the museum shipped its manuscript and rare book collections to the Welsh National Library at Aberystwyth.³⁷ These precautions helped ensure the safety of England's manuscripts, but the nature of the war in England was also an important factor in their preservation. The limitations of aircraft technology at the time meant that bombardment during the First World War was far more limited and less targeted than it would become during the

³² *Compendious: 7 William*, pp. 170–1.

³³ Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (1991), p. 33.

³⁴ On the establishment of the commission and its aims, see Elizabeth Shepherd's *Archives and Archivists in Twentieth Century England* (2009), p. 24.

³⁵ The British Museum of Natural History, for example, moved their collections of Sloane manuscripts to their branch at Tring, Hertfordshire, as a precaution. See Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: A Social History* (1994), pp. 28–31.

³⁶ See Kavanagh, *Museums*, p. 30.

³⁷ The move happened between February and May of 1918; see Kavanagh, *Museums*, p. 31.

Second World War. Although some parts of Britain sustained heavy damage from bombardment during the First World War, manuscript archives, museums, and other institutions where manuscripts were held were largely unharmed.³⁸ The only known damage to the British Museum library collection was from an accident that occurred in June 1917, when a British shell fragment fell through the window of the glass roof. The damage was minor. Writing in the aftermath of the war, Sir Frederic Kenyon, the Director of the British Museum, claimed somewhat dryly that it ‘flayed the backs off two unimportant German books.’³⁹ The museum’s medieval manuscripts escaped unscathed.

Across the channel, the fates of medieval manuscripts were far less secure, and in late August 1914 the world watched in horror as German troops set fire to the fifteenth-century library of Leuven (or Louvain), destroying countless medieval manuscripts. At their annual meeting on 4 September 1914, all active members of the Library Association, which was composed of representatives from most of the major libraries across Great Britain, unanimously passed a statement registering ‘their feelings of profound indignation at the wanton and unprovoked act of vandalism on the part of the German Army by the destruction of the City of Louvain, that ancient seat of learning, with its famous University and Library, whereby the world of scholarship has suffered irreparable loss.’⁴⁰ This brutal act of war, and an increased awareness of the threat of aerial raids, made the protection of manuscripts and other cultural heritage objects an urgent necessity in Britain.

As tensions between Germany and Britain increased in the wake of the 1938 Munich Crisis, the question of how best to protect cultural heritage in

³⁸ Though not, strictly speaking, within the purview of this study, country homes were another location that housed historical manuscripts during the war. Since many of these houses were near areas that were hit by aerial raids we might expect to find damage to some of the historical manuscripts in their collections, but I can find no evidence of country houses in England destroyed by enemy action during the First World War. The identification is unfortunately difficult due to a rule that was passed during the war against reporting on buildings destroyed by enemy bombardment. It is worth noting that the historical manor of Oxney Court, Kent, burnt down during the war, and probably in 1914, when it was being used by the British Army. I can find no evidence of any historical documents left in the house during this period; ‘How Love Rebuilt a Burnt Out Wreck’, *The Times*, 13 July 2012, <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-love-rebuilt-a-burnt-out-wreck-8lrwv8h89wk>>, accessed 10 November 2021.

³⁹ Frederic George Kenyon, *The British Museum in War Time: Being the Fourth Lecture on the David Murray Foundation in the University of Glasgow* (1934), p. 20; on this passage see Kavanagh, *Museums*, p. 32. Kenyon also made the point in a 1921 talk which was described in *The Guardian*; see ‘The British Museum in Wartime—Archive’, *The Guardian*, 5 March 1921; 5 March 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/mar/05/the-british-museum-in-wartime-archive-1921>>, accessed 16 July 2022.

⁴⁰ Printed in the Library Association, ‘The Destruction of Louvain’s Library’, *Library Journal* 39, no. 10 (1914): p. 763, quoted at p. 763.

the event of a war became increasingly pressing. In May 1939, the annual meeting of the Library Association, which took place in Liverpool, dedicated an entire session to the repair of rare documents.⁴¹ Later, in December 1942, many of the ideas discussed at the meeting would be incorporated into a pamphlet released by the British Records Association on ‘first aid for damaged manuscripts’, which describes how to treat manuscripts in the event of water or fire damage.⁴² Protecting manuscripts had become a leading issue in library management policy, and libraries across the nation dedicated extensive efforts to moving their manuscript collections to what they considered secure facilities. Most of these facilities were in rural areas away from the coasts, which had been targeted during the previous war and were thought to be unsafe, but some were as far away as America.⁴³ In other cases, manuscripts were simply moved to local facilities that were considered more secure. The Bodleian, for example, moved its rare books to the basement in October of 1939.⁴⁴ At the time, plans for the relocation and storage of manuscripts were usually kept in utmost secrecy to prevent them from being found in the event of an enemy invasion.

The largest collection to be moved was that of the British Museum. In 1938, the bulk of its manuscripts had been moved to Aldwych Underground station as a precaution, but the station was not suitable for long-term storage. Work began in secret on a more secure storage tunnel for the manuscripts, which was near where the manuscripts had been housed in safety during the previous war, at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. But by the time the Aberystwyth tunnel was complete two years later, the tunnel was deemed too risky for the manuscripts because Aberystwyth was on a flight path. In December 1940, the museum collections were moved instead to an underground quarry at Westwood, Wiltshire. The move was completed in total secrecy and extensive measures were taken to ensure the safety of the collection, including the installation of ‘one of the earliest smoke detectors.’⁴⁵ When the quarry, which had previously been used for growing mushrooms, was found to be too humid to house manuscripts, the walls were painted with

⁴¹ W. C. Berwick Sayers, ‘Britain’s Libraries and the War’, *The Library Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1944): pp. 95–9, p. 95.

⁴² It is described by Sayers in ‘Britain’s’, p. 97.

⁴³ See Donald Yazgoor, ‘A Survey of the Effects of World War II on English Libraries’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Southern Connecticut State University, 1961), pp. 20–1.

⁴⁴ See Yazgoor, ‘Survey’, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Simon Lambert, ‘The Early History of Preventive Conservation in Great Britain and the United States (1850–1950)’, *CeROArt* (2014), <<https://journals.openedition.org/ceroart/3765>>, accessed 6 July 2021.

a special silica paint and humidity and temperature monitors were installed to ensure the ideal storage conditions for manuscripts of 60 per cent relative humidity and 15.5 degrees Celsius.⁴⁶

Aside from these preservation strategies, other, less obvious, strategies emerged. During the summer of 1941, the American Council of Learned Societies started microfilming manuscripts in British Libraries under what they termed 'The Emergency Microcopying Program.' The idea was nothing new. In America, discussions of microfilming manuscripts had begun as early as 1939. In its initial years these discussions were motivated by the considerable challenges Americans faced in accessing the major collections of Western manuscripts. One of the early builders of the microfilm programme, while lamenting what he viewed as the 'flyspeck school of research' that had emerged due to grainy and potentially misleading microfilm copies of pre-modern books and manuscripts, viewed microfilm as a particular benefit to Americans; 'it is cheaper', he wrote in 1943, 'and less troublesome to use a reading machine than to travel to the British Museum.'⁴⁷ Yet despite the obvious benefits of microfilm, early American attempts to develop a framework for microfilming manuscripts had stalled, partly due to the costs involved and partly due to uncertainties as to whether British and European libraries would allow large portions of their collections to be put on microfilm.⁴⁸

These initiatives were bolstered by the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, which inspired a movement to preserve what were considered 'the records of civilization.'⁴⁹ The Emergency Microcopying Program that emerged from this movement began by microfilming a limited number of manuscripts that were housed in the British Museum, Public Record Office, and Bodleian Library collections.⁵⁰ The programme's policy for selecting which manuscripts were to be put on microfilm was based on the needs of American scholars, who submitted 'want-lists,' resulting in about 10,000 requests.⁵¹ Only a small portion of these could be met due to the considerable expenses involved. Adding to the Microcopying Program's challenges, one set of film rolls was lost when the vessel carrying it was sunk. Despite these challenges, the project got results. By 1942 about 242 rolls of microfilm had been produced, each containing about 10 manuscripts (so approximately 2,420 manuscripts in total).⁵²

⁴⁶ Lambert, 'The Early'.

⁴⁷ W. J. Wilson, 'Manuscripts in Microfilm: Problems of Cataloger and Bibliographer', *The Library Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1943): pp. 293–309, pp. 213, 214.

⁴⁸ Wilson, 'Manuscripts', p. 218.

⁴⁹ Wilson, 'Manuscripts', p. 217.

⁵⁰ Yazgoor, 'Survey', p. 21; Wilson, 'Manuscripts', p. 218.

⁵¹ Wilson, 'Manuscripts', p. 219.

⁵² Wilson, 'Manuscripts', pp. 219–20.

These rolls were stored in the Library of Congress in America both for public consultation and to serve as a form of insurance against potential loss. The concerted efforts made to preserve and protect manuscripts in these early stages of the war reflect a general consensus that the manuscript holds powerful cultural capital and its loss poses a threat to civilization.

Wartime accounts of these preservation strategies convey an overwhelming sense of their importance. Writing during the war, W. C. Berwick-Sayers, the former President of the Library Association, is eager to stress that library collections—both medieval and modern—have suffered little damage, although he concedes that since the war is still ongoing it is ‘impossible to trace all the losses’. For Berwick-Sayers, the stakes are very high; in his view, any losses to England’s libraries could have the potential ‘to menace English culture.’⁵³ Losses to manuscript collections are, according to Berwick-Sayers, worse than losses to print collections because the former are of particular historic value and are ‘irreplaceable.’⁵⁴ The manuscript for Berwick-Sayers is thus important because it is unique and irrecoverable. As Berwick-Sayers’s comments illustrate, manuscripts had gained an inestimable value—one which was fundamentally entangled with the cultural capital of the nation, and their preservation was tied to the preservation of English culture.

With this in mind, we can turn to the question of whether these preservation attempts were effective. There is, perhaps surprisingly, no clear record of how much was lost during the war.⁵⁵ Contemporary accounts of library losses tend to downplay them in the interest of maintaining morale. Thus in his account of these losses, Berwick-Sayers stresses that ‘they are a minute fraction of what was feared.’⁵⁶ The aftermath of the war left little time for widespread reckoning with Britain’s cultural losses, and nothing comprehensive has been attempted in the intervening years. Across the channel, the Bibliothèque nationale de France worked to establish a preliminary list of all the manuscripts and other irreplaceable documents that were lost during the war, but in Britain there was no comparable national effort.⁵⁷

⁵³ Sayers, ‘Britain’s’, p. 99. Sayers gives the date of writing on p. 97.

⁵⁴ Sayers, ‘Britain’s’, p. 96.

⁵⁵ Thus Peter Thorsheim describes ‘an untold number of unpublished documents’ destroyed in Britain during the war; Peter Thorsheim, *Waste into Weapons: Recycling in Britain During the Second World War* (2015), p. 184.

⁵⁶ Sayers, ‘Britain’s’, p. 97.

⁵⁷ See BnF, *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France, tome LIII, Manuscrits des bibliothèques sinistrés de 1940 à 1944* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1962). The closest equivalent for the UK is William Kent and Norman G. Brett-James, *The Lost Treasures of London* (1947) (which covers a variety of objects destroyed in London during the war but is neither focused on manuscripts nor comprehensive), and a limited report that was prepared during the war by C. T. Flower, ‘Manuscripts and the War’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (1943):

To understand the losses to Britain's manuscript collections, then, we must look carefully at the damage that the nation sustained. During the summer of 1940, as Germany prepared for its planned invasion of Britain, the Luftwaffe launched attacks on major transportation centres. In mid-August, most of these attacks were focused on airfields in the south-east of the country. With attacks increasingly destroying civilian as well as military targets on English soil, all branches of the English government mobilized to lessen the damage. Among these was the Historical Manuscripts Commission. In these early stages of the war, the secretary of the commission, R. L. Atkinson, started to seek out information about whether any manuscripts had been lost in the damage.

Atkinson was initially unsure how to collect this information, since communication channels were limited. After the air raids in late August 1940, Atkinson wrote to the Home Office about whether any 'manuscripts of historical importance' had been destroyed. In their reply, the Home Office told him that with their 'Intelligence Machine already so heavily loaded,' they could offer no information, and suggested he contact the Inland Revenue Valuers, the branch of the government charged with evaluating the extent of wartime damages.⁵⁸ The Chief Valuer responded to Atkinson's request by promising that he was making arrangements to ensure that the Historical Manuscripts Commission would be informed of any future damage to 'buildings known or believed to contain manuscripts of historical importance.'⁵⁹ Yet during these initial stages of the war, the locations of such manuscripts were in many cases unknown, and this difficulty and others inspired the Historical Manuscripts Commission to conduct a nationwide survey of the locations of manuscripts in order to gather more information about what was lost.

Perhaps the worst wartime damage to national book collections occurred in London during the series of air raids in the autumn of 1940. During these raids, the British Museum lost over 350 printed books when the King's Library was struck by a bomb.⁶⁰ Some of the lost books held antiquarian

pp. 15–33, pp. 31–2. A 1996 UNESCO report on lost libraries sought to identify the various losses sustained by book collections during the wars in various nations but it does not aim to document all losses and the list for England is very incomplete; see Hans van der Hoeven, *Lost Memory: Libraries and Archives Destroyed in the Twentieth Century* (Paris: UNESCO, 1996).

⁵⁸ See the letter, 'Atkinson to The Under-Secretary of State, Home Office', TNA, HMC1/189, 21 August 1940, and the Home Office's reply, 'Home Office to Atkinson', TNA, HMC1/189, 30 August 1940.

⁵⁹ 'Atkinson to The Chief Valuer', TNA, HMC1/189, 6 September 1940; 'The Chief Valuer to Atkinson', TNA, HMC1/189, 1 October 1940.

⁶⁰ See A. S. G. Edwards, 'Destroyed, Damaged and Replaced: The Legacy of World War II Bomb Damage in the King's Library', *Electronic British Library Journal* (2013): pp. 1–31, p. 14.

interest; A. S. G. Edwards finds that about 8 per cent of the lost volumes dated to the sixteenth century and 16 per cent dated to the seventeenth century.⁶¹ Later, the museum's library lost another 120,000 or so volumes when incendiary bombs fell on the Reading Room in 1941.⁶² Yet because the British Museum had moved its manuscript collections off site in 1938, these rarer collections were spared during both attacks.⁶³ The manuscripts at the University of London were also spared from the air raid damage. Although the University's library was heavily damaged by a high-explosive bomb in September 1940, and although approximately 700,000 volumes were destroyed, all of its irreplaceable older material had been moved prior to the war and was safe.⁶⁴

Similar prevention efforts also saved the older records of Holland House, a large historical estate in Kensington. The house was almost entirely destroyed on 27 September 1940, but its historical manuscripts had been moved to a secure location and escaped the worst of the danger. According to the owner of the house, Giles Stephen Holland Fox-Strangways, the 6th Earl of Ilchester, these historical documents suffered some water damage while in storage but were otherwise fine.⁶⁵

In London, the halls of guilds and companies suffered considerable damage. On the night of 29 December 1940, German aircraft dropped a mass of incendiary bombs on London, causing what is sometimes known as the Second Great Fire of London (although arguably it should be called the third).⁶⁶ The area around St Paul's Cathedral on the north bank of the Thames, which had been an important area for medieval guild activity, was badly hit. In this devastating raid and several others, 20 out of the 36 halls operating in London at the time suffered damage.⁶⁷ Since most of these organizations could trace their histories back to the medieval period, it would be easy to assume that a large number of medieval records were destroyed in these raids. But the wartime losses to these organizations' medieval collections were nearly negligible. Many of these halls had already lost large portions of their collections during the Great Fire of London of 1666, which had engulfed roughly the same area of the city. The collections that had survived

⁶¹ Edwards, 'Destroyed', p. 10.

⁶² See Graham Jefcoate et al., eds, *Handbuch deutscher historischen Buchbestände: Großbritannien und Irland* (2000), p. 62.

⁶³ Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, p. 82.

⁶⁴ For the University of London Library, see Sayers's wartime account in 'Britain's', p. 97 and Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, p. 83.

⁶⁵ TNA, HMC1/189, 26 October 1940; C. T. Flower, 'Manuscripts and the War', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (1943): pp. 15–33, pp. 31–2.

⁶⁶ See the discussion of the fire of 1212 above, p. 46.

⁶⁷ William Thomson Hill, *Buried London: Mithras to the Middle Ages* (1955), p. 132.

this earlier fire were by the twentieth century being treated with utmost care and consideration. The halls had taken considerable precautions to protect their collections when war was on the horizon, and, for the most part, their efforts to preserve these collections proved successful.⁶⁸

The Brewers, Dyers, Salters, Leathersellers, and Carpenters' halls all suffered extensive wartime damages, but their medieval records survived unscathed.⁶⁹ The Clothworkers' Company lost its entire library to bombs in May 1941, but their older records, which included 100 boxes of charters and documents, had been carefully stowed away in their strong room and were therefore preserved.⁷⁰ The Girdlers' archives, which had also been held in the Clothworkers' hall, suffered some damage in the raid, but only the modern collections.⁷¹ The office of the clerk of the Cooks' Company, at 34 and 36 Gresham Street, was destroyed in the 29 December air raid, and some of the company's documents perished in this disaster.⁷² But identifying these losses is complicated. The Cooks' Company, which was founded in the fifteenth century, had also suffered several losses due to fires during the early modern

⁶⁸ The precautions taken by halls to protect their manuscripts are described in, for example, 'H. Tapley-Soper, City Librarian to Atkinson', TNA, HMC1/189, 22 June 1941; and 'L. E. Hall, Clerk, Butcher's Hall to Atkinson', TNA, HMC1/189, 17 August 1944.

⁶⁹ See Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*; for the Brewers see p. 66; for the Dyers see p. 89; for the Salters see p. 40; for the Leathersellers see p. 104; for the Carpenters' Hall see p. 103. On 5 June 1941, Atkinson wrote to the Leathersellers' Company about some records that had suffered damage (TNA, HMC1/189, 5 June 1941, 'Atkinson to the Leathersellers Company'). On behalf of the company, George F. Sutton asked Atkinson whether he could bring some 'specimens' to Atkinson's office for Atkinson to look over (TNA, HMC1/189, 5 June 1941, 'George F. Sutton to Atkinson'). The Historical Manuscripts Commission has no written record of this consultation because communication about these specimens was done over the phone and in person, but it is reasonable to conclude that the damage was to modern documents since the commission recorded no damage to the Leathersellers' historical records; see also Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, p. 104. On 6 June 1941 Atkinson wrote to the clerk of the Salters' Company regarding some damage to their records (TNA, HMC1/189, 6 June 1941, 'R. L. Atkinson to the Clerk of the Salters' Company') but nothing pre-modern was lost from their collections according to Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, p. 40.

⁷⁰ Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, pp. 97–8.

⁷¹ On the Girdlers' archives, see Philip E. Jones and Raymond Smith's *A Guide to the Records in the Corporation of London Records Office and the Guildhall Library Muniment Room* (London: English University Press, 1951), p. 140. Norah Carlin writes that 'The Founders' Company archives, like those of the Girdlers' Company, were unfortunately lost in the Blitz of 1940'; in 'Liberty and Fraternities in the English Revolution: The Politics of London Artisans' Protests, 1635–1659', *International Review of Social History* 39, no. 2 (1994): pp. 223–54, p. 233. But Kent and Brett-James report that only the Girdlers' minute books were destroyed (*Lost*, pp. 55–6). These losses were post-medieval. The catalogue of the Girdlers' archives indicates that much has survived; see Guildhall Library, *Guide to the Archives of City Livery Companies and Related Organisations in Guildhall Library* (1982), pp. 41–2. I am grateful to the London Metropolitan Archives for answering my queries related to these topics and for granting me access to their collections.

⁷² In his history of the company, Frank Taverner Phillips reports that, 'All the papers, books and documents (including many originals), the Poor Box and its contents, Ballot Box, Beadle's Staff and Head and Master's Ivory Mallet, were consumed in the flames. It was not possible to say exactly what had been lost'; Phillips adds that 'the only thing later salvaged was the Beadle's Staff Head'; Frank Taverner Phillips, *A Second History of the Worshipful Company of Cooks, London* (1966), p. 135.

period, and the records suggest that many medieval documents, including the original charters and title deeds of the company, perished in a 1764 fire in the Great Hall.⁷³ Prior to the war, most of the company's remaining records were post-medieval, and as far as I can determine none of their older records were lost or damaged during the war.⁷⁴

Other companies lost some older documents during the war, but none of these were copied earlier than the sixteenth century. The Saddlers' Company lost many of their records when their archives were destroyed in 1940, including those that dated back to when the company was founded in the sixteenth century.⁷⁵ And although many of its older documents escaped unscathed, the Parish Clerks' Hall, which was destroyed in the Blitz, lost a dozen or more post-medieval records of note, including a list of masters and wardens dating back to 1609, a minute book dating back to the 1610s, and a 1522 register of deeds.⁷⁶ Some of the deeds in this register were relatively old, dating as far back as the thirteenth century. Of course, these do not count as medieval using the criteria laid out above since the lost deeds were all sixteenth-century copies, but the copies are nevertheless worth noting here since they were the last surviving witnesses to the deeds in question.⁷⁷ All that remains of them

⁷³ Phillips, *Second*, p. 15. The hall was later destroyed in a 1771 fire. But the company's documents were not in the hall at the time of the 1771 fire; see Phillips, *Second*, pp. 45, 16. On the title deeds and charters lost in the fire, see F. Taverner Phillips, *A History of the Worshipful Company of Cooks, London* (1932), pp. 27–8. The original 1482 charter of the company was destroyed but a seventeenth-century 'inspeximus' charter (a charter confirming a previous one) survives in Guildhall Library, MS 9987 (CLC/L/CH/A/001/MS09987).

⁷⁴ Records that were in the company's possession prior to the war include a copy of the rules of the company, a fire-damaged Register of Apprentices (1655 to 1694), a book concerning the Orphan Tax (from 1694) (now Guildhall Library, MS 3114), Registers of Freemen (from 1694 to 1725, 1729 to 1735, and from 1738), fire-damaged Quarterage Books (1620 to 1670), and several court books (one from 1663 to 1682, another from 1738, and a third that, while difficult to date due to fire damage, seemed to date from the intervening period); see the list in Phillips, *History*, p. 149. All of these records survive. They are listed in Derek Keene and Vanessa Harding, eds, *A Survey of Documentary Sources for Property Holding in London Before the Great Fire* (1985), p. 16 and in Guildhall Library, *Guide*, pp. 23–4.

⁷⁵ Their 1558 Charter of Queen Elizabeth and other documents were copied into a memorandum book that is now Guildhall Library, MS 5385A; see Guildhall Library, *Guide*, p. 70. The same memorandum book contains copies of wills dating back to 1427 and it is possible that the originals were in the custody of the Saddlers when their hall was destroyed, but I have found no evidence to suggest it. See also Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, p. 61.

⁷⁶ See Guildhall Library, *Guide*, pp. 63–4. On the preservation of documents see Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, p. 64. See Keene and Harding, eds, *Survey*, p. 29. A transcription of extracts from the lost minute book survives in Guildhall Library, MS 3706; see Keene and Harding, eds, *Survey*, p. 30. A transcription of extracts from the masters and wardens lists survives in Guildhall Library, MS 3705.

⁷⁷ A thirteenth-century deed is described in James Christie's *Some Account of Parish Clerks, More Especially of the Ancient Fraternity (Bretherne and Sisterne) of S. Nicholas, Now Known as the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks* (1893), pp. 78–9. Though Christie does not provide much information by way of description of the volume of deeds, it is clear from his notes on it that the deeds are sixteenth-century copies (so, for example, Christie describes the deeds in the volume as 'copies' and describes the possibility of a particular will having been 'entered in the volume'; pp. 79, 90).

are summaries and short extracts that were printed in a nineteenth-century history of the Parish Clerks' Company.⁷⁸ The Parish Clerks also lost a members list with entries dating back to the 1450s. Thankfully, extracts of this list survive in transcriptions.⁷⁹ The Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers' Company lost some records when their hall was destroyed in 1941, but there is no evidence of any medieval documents having been lost. Perhaps surprisingly, one of the documents initially reported as missing was apparently looted. In 1955, a bookseller on Monmouth Street by the name of Rothschild Davidson told the company he had found a document containing the company's Orders, Rules, and Ordinances. He reported having received it, along with other books, from a collection stored in a garage that had been used in wartime by the Auxiliary Fire Service.⁸⁰

There is one other incident that took place during these air raids that is relevant here. It affected the charters of the Loriners' Company, which had, for their protection, been moved to the safe room of the Carpenters' Hall during the early stages of the war. This storage approach was effective in one sense, since the charters survived when the Loriners' Company Hall was destroyed. Yet the charters suffered some mild damage as a result of this storage approach; when they were retrieved six months after the air raid they were found covered in mildew. The manuscripts were cleaned and the damage was not lasting.⁸¹ Thus while some company's collections suffered damages during the air raids over London, these damages were limited and no medieval manuscripts were lost; their high value had ensured that they had been stored in safety.⁸²

⁷⁸ See Christie, *Some Account*, pp. 76–94. For the date of the volume see p. 77.

⁷⁹ A transcription of extracts from the lost members list survives in Guildhall Library, MS 310942/5. See Guildhall Library, *Guide*, p. 63.

⁸⁰ On the destruction of the Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers' library and the recovery of this manuscript, see Harold Nockolds, ed., *The Coachmakers: A History of the Worshipful Company of Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers, 1677–1977* (1977), p. 86. Although Nockolds does not report which of the company's records were destroyed during the war, there is no evidence of the company having held any medieval documents, and the relatively late date at which the company was incorporated (1677) makes it unlikely that it would have had any medieval documents in its collections.

⁸¹ The mildew was removed through the conservation efforts of one Ernest Zaehnsdorf, a binder from Shaftesbury Avenue; see Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, p. 103.

⁸² Aside from the losses to the archives of these guilds and companies, the records of the Salvation Army suffered damage when their International Headquarters building was destroyed in 1941. On 18 June 1941, Atkinson wrote to the Salvation Army regarding losses to their central records and suggested that they bring any damaged records to his office for inspection (TNA, HMC1/189, 18 June 1941, 'R. L. Atkinson to the Salvation Army'). Since the damage was to modern collections and therefore not of direct relevance to the topic at hand, it is not discussed further here. See Flower, 'Manuscripts', pp. 31–2.

Outside London, manuscript collections fared somewhat worse. In November 1940, the Luftwaffe had turned its attention away from London and towards munitions factories and other facilities beyond the capital. The area that suffered the most damage to its pre-modern records during this period was Coventry. The city, which was an important one for munitions production, fell victim to air raids on 14 and 15 November 1940. The losses to human life were devastating, with 400 people killed.⁸³ Coventry's Gulson Library was nearly completely destroyed, along with its modern book collections. One witness wrote that '[e]verything in the way of book stocks, stock records, catalogues, and equipment was totally destroyed, with the exception of between 20,000 and 30,000 books from the Reference Library stock.'⁸⁴ One wartime account suggested that about 150,000 volumes were destroyed.⁸⁵

Thankfully, most of the city's records were stored in Coventry's Lloyds Bank during the attacks and suffered no damage. Yet important manuscripts that had been stored in the library's strong room were lost in the raids, including several guild records that are considered the sole witnesses to some aspects of the Coventry mystery plays and are thus important for the history of early drama. Estimates of what was lost are, however, challenging. During the war, the situation was extremely unclear. At one extreme, the Historical Manuscript Commission initially reported that during the air raids Coventry's 'guild archives' 'were totally destroyed.'⁸⁶ Yet a different wartime estimate claimed that the destruction of pre-modern material was limited to four sets of records, all of which were produced after 1500, alongside 'various other important MSS.'⁸⁷ Even after the war, the extent of the destruction has remained unclear. A UNESCO report on destroyed books and manuscripts mentions only the modern losses from Coventry.⁸⁸ Writing in the 1980s about the records of early English drama from Coventry, Reginald W. Ingram wrote that some records from parish churches were destroyed during the war, along

⁸³ Yazgoor, 'Survey', p. 11.

⁸⁴ E. Austin Hinton 'Coventry', in 'Libraries in Bombed Centres: Some Further Reports', *Library Review* 8, no. 2 (1941), pp. 3–10, p. 5; the passage is summarized in Yazgoor, 'Survey', p. 27.

⁸⁵ Marian Shaw, *Library Literature, 1940–1942: An Author and Subject Index-Digest to Current Books, Pamphlets and Periodical Literature Relating to the Library Profession* (1943), p. 1127.

⁸⁶ Note by R. L. Atkinson; TNA, HMC1/189, 8 February 1941, 'Air Raid Damage to Municipal Archives.'

⁸⁷ Berwick-Sayers, 'Britain's', p. 96. All of these date to after 1500 but some of them are nevertheless of relevance for the history of medieval Coventry; these are the accounts of the Drapers' Company from 1523 to 1764 and the Whittawers and Glovers, Fell-mongers and Parchment Makers, 1675–1826, as well as the Tanners' Company Ordinances and a 'Grande Subsidy collected in the City of Coventry'; pp. 96–7. The last document was not lost; see Krista A. Milne, 'Early English Drama Records and Other Manuscripts from Coventry Destroyed Before and During the Second World War', *Early Theatre* 26, no. 2 (2023): pp. 33–55.

⁸⁸ Van der Hoeven, *Lost*, p. 13.

with three sets of records—including one set that dates back to the medieval period and that was not mentioned on any of the wartime lists.⁸⁹

Given the discrepancies among these lists, it is valuable to examine what was truly lost at Coventry during the war. It is true that several records that are important for the study of Coventry's mystery plays have been lost, but the reasons for this are complex and stem only in part from the war. The history of Coventry's manuscript losses begins when Thomas Sharp was working on his impressive 1825 volume about the mystery plays of Coventry. Several of the key records from Coventry's archives that Sharp transcribed met a sad fate. After Sharp's work was done, his notes and the manuscripts that he had been using were moved to Longbridge House, near Stratford-upon-Avon. From there, they were moved to the Birmingham Reference Library. It was here that these important manuscripts were destroyed—not during the war, but when the Birmingham Reference Library caught fire in 1879. The manuscripts and documents that had been in Sharp's possession, and that were thus destroyed in the blaze, included a 1392 Cartulary of St Mary's Priory (which contained the earliest known reference to the Coventry Corpus Christi plays), the Shearmen and Taylors' playscript, a 1412 register of the guild of St Anne at Knowle, the Trinity Guild Books, and several other historical records (which likely included the deeds mentioned by Ingram).⁹⁰ Thankfully, since all of these manuscripts had served as sources for Sharp's collection of records pertaining to the Coventry mystery plays, large portions of them appear transcribed in Sharp's collection and the contents of these manuscripts and records are not wholly lost.

Wartime losses to Coventry's guild records and other older documents were relatively light. Indeed, only four sets of Coventry's pre-modern records were lost during the war and of these, only one contained any medieval material (Table 7.1).⁹¹

⁸⁹ Reginald W. Ingram, *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry* (1981), pp. lxxi–lxxvii; the records from St Michael's are mentioned on p. li. Writing of the churches of St Michael's and Holy Trinity, Ingram claims that 'Zealous Coventrians destroyed the registers of St Michael's in 1569 because they saw signs of popery in them . . . others were accidentally burned in 1697 . . . nearly everything else was lost in 1940'; p. li.

⁹⁰ For a fuller discussion of the manuscripts destroyed in the 1879 fire, and a longer discussion of the manuscripts destroyed in Coventry during the war, see Milne, 'Early'. On Sharp's notes being transferred to the Birmingham Reference Library, see Ingram, *Records*, pp. xxv–xxvi. On the fire, see W. G. Fretton's short report, 'Birmingham Reference Library', in *The Old Cross: A Warwickshire Quarterly Magazine*, edited by W. G. Fretton, vol. 1 (1879), p. 314. On the earliest known reference to the Corpus Christi plays, see Ingram, *Coventry*, p. xvii.

⁹¹ See Milne, 'Early', p. 47. Documents of more modern interest that were lost include the Reader collection (a handwritten collection of historical notes about Coventry), and the *Coventry Mercury* newspaper archive (1743–1836); see Ingram, *Records*, p. lxxvi. Reginald W. Ingram, in his REED volume

Table 7.1 Pre-Modern Records Lost at Coventry During the Second World War

Drapers' Company Accounts and Ordinances	1534–1764
Accounts of the Whittawers and Glovers, Fell-mongers and Parchment Makers	1675–1826
Transcriptions of a Collection of Deeds made by Humphrey Burton	c.1600–1684
Tanners' Company Ordinances	1605–c.1742

The most significant losses to Coventry's guild records, then, were caused by the fire of 1879. Coventry suffered very few losses to its manuscript collections during the war itself, and none of these losses was medieval.

In late 1940, the focus of attacks shifted away from munitions factories and towards the ports.⁹² By this period most archives had moved their rarer collections to safety and the losses to book collections during this period were therefore largely limited to modern material. Thus while several libraries in Bristol were destroyed during this series of raids, no pre-modern material was harmed; the oldest archival material that was destroyed was a collection of records of the Bristol Corporation of the Poor, which dated back to the eighteenth century.⁹³ Portsmouth suffered significant damage from bombs throughout the Blitz, but its medieval collections were also safe. Writing to the Historical Manuscript Commission's office on 7 February 1941, the town clerk of Portsmouth reported that a modern boundary map had been destroyed from his office but 'most of the Corporation's manuscripts of any historical value, including the Charters, were housed in the Muniment Room at the Guildhall which happily escaped injury by fire'. The town clerk reported no other losses and the medieval documents appear to have escaped unscathed.⁹⁴ In Great Yarmouth, the Carnegie Library, and the Toll House Museum to which it was attached, were both destroyed by enemy air raids on 8 April 1941 and 25 June 1942, and while the losses included 6,349 volumes and most of the museum's historical artefacts, no manuscripts were destroyed.⁹⁵

for Coventry, writes that many of the primary sources about the mystery plays that he expected to have been lost in the bombing of 1940 were in fact intact in the City Records Office, *Records*, p. xxvi.

⁹² See Yazgoor, 'Survey', pp. 11–12.

⁹³ Flower, 'Manuscripts', pp. 31–2; TNA, HMC1/189, 6 February 1941, 'Bristol Town Clerk to Atkinson'. According to a note of Atkinson's some of the destroyed records from the Bristol Incorporation of the Poor had been 'published by the Bristol Record Society in 1932'; see 'Air Raid Damage to Municipal Archives', TNA, HMC1/189, 8 February 1941.

⁹⁴ TNA, HMC 1/189, 7 February 1941, 'The Office of the Town Clerk, Portsmouth to Atkinson'; TNA, HMC1/189, 15 February 1941, 'Atkinson to The Office of the Town Clerk, Portsmouth'.

⁹⁵ The count of lost volumes given here includes '279 special volumes' from the local collection and 440 'special volumes' from the reference department, but since these are valued at only about twice or three times the value of normal library books they are not likely to be manuscripts, and there is no evidence of the library holding manuscripts prior to the war; see The Tolhouse Museum Archive,

The records of Plymouth faced a different fate. Civic institutions in the area had not taken extensive precautions to protect their historical documents since Plymouth's location in the far south-west of England meant that it had been widely considered safe from aerial bombardment. But after the occupation of France and the expansion of German control on the continent, Plymouth suddenly became the target of frequent air raids.⁹⁶ The Athenæum, a Plymouth institute with a large historical library, lost almost all of its books in attacks in March and April 1941, but its collection of older volumes was evacuated just in time and escaped unscathed.⁹⁷ On the night of 22 April 1941, the Plymouth City Library was hit by heavy bombardment and caught fire. In this attack, the library lost almost all of its holdings—approximately 100,000 volumes in total.⁹⁸

This library had held a collection of about 200 historical charters and deeds from the Plymouth area and the entire collection was destroyed in the attack. Since this group of documents was described as a collection of single leaves rather than manuscripts it falls outside the scope of this investigation, but it is nevertheless worth considering here in brief. Unfortunately most of the lost documents had not been described in any depth prior to the destruction.⁹⁹ They had, however, been calendared by the local antiquarian and headmaster C. W. Bracken, and Bracken had also transcribed about half of them.¹⁰⁰ While most of the lost documents were post-medieval, a few dated back to the medieval period. The medieval losses that can be identified are: (1) a 1418 grant of land in East Stonehouse by the Lord of Eststonhous Stephen Durnford; (2) a 1433 record of indenture between one John Langman

no date [W. Boswell & Son], 'Claim No. 7922: The Toll House Museum and Library, Great Yarmouth'; I am grateful to the Tolhouse Museum for having shared digital reproductions of this claim and of the list of damaged artefacts in a Facebook post dated 9 April 2020.

⁹⁶ C. E. Welch, 'Local Archives of Great Britain: The Plymouth Archives Department', *Archives 5*, no. 26 (1961): pp. 100–5, p. 101.

⁹⁷ In September 1939, the Athenæum placed its oldest and most precious records in a large steel box and brought the box to Lloyds Bank for safe storage. No provision was made for the rest of the books and records. Some of these were destroyed in March 1941, when enemy bombs launched a large paving stone through the roof of the Athenæum. Several staff members, including Mr G. W. Copeland, the librarian, gathered about a hundred of the more precious volumes and these were stored in the home of Mr H. G. Hurrell in Moorgate, Wrangaton. The rest of the books were lost in the Blitz on the evening of 21–2 April 1941; see Shirley Paterson, et al., *The Plymouth Athenæum 1812–2012: Celebrating 200 Years* (2012), pp. 24–5.

⁹⁸ Der Weduwen and Pettegree, *The Library*, p. 332. For the date of the attack, see in C. W. Bracken, 'Monkswell, Martinstow and Language: "Homage" Indentures (Third Instalment of Plymouth City Library Deeds Destroyed 22nd April, 1941)', *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* 22, no. 4 (1942), pp. 138–43, p. 138. See also C. W. Bracken, 'The Will of Justin Peard, Mayor of Plymouth 1644–1656, 1656–1657', *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries*, 22, no. 7 (1943), pp. 10–16, at p. 10.

⁹⁹ On the library's uncatalogued manuscript holdings, see Welch, 'Local Archives', pp. 100–1, 104.

¹⁰⁰ See Bracken, 'The Will', p. 10.

and the prior of Plympton Nicholas Selman; and (3) a group of six indentures related to the priory of Plympton. Since Bracken had taken extensive notes on these deeds prior to their destruction, he published brief summaries and, in some cases, transcriptions, of them to ensure that their contents would not be lost forever.¹⁰¹

The south-west of England suffered another significant bibliographic disaster later in the war. In May 1942, Exeter was hit by heavy air raids, and while the damage to buildings was relatively minimal, one of the buildings that was destroyed contained the Exeter Probate Office. This destruction proved disastrous for the records of Exeter, since at the time of the destruction the Probate Office had held a rich and varied collection of historical documents from the region. In particular, the office had held a large collection of wills and inventories, the earliest of which dated to 1531.¹⁰² While the destroyed documents were all post-1500 and therefore lie beyond the scope of the present investigation, the extent of the damage makes it nevertheless worth considering here. Indeed, the damage has been termed '[t]he greatest disaster in the world of English archives in recent times'.¹⁰³ The wills in question had been gathered together in 1858 from a variety of collections, including the Episcopal Principal Registry of Exeter, and the Consistory Courts of the towns of Exeter, Totnes, and Barnstaple.¹⁰⁴ Most of the wills had been listed in a nineteenth-century calendar. One estimate suggests that the lost documents included 'probably a hundred thousand wills and perhaps half

¹⁰¹ These lost documents are described in C. W. Bracken, 'John Langman: Freed Bondman and Tiler of Plympton Priory, 1433 (Fourth Instalment of Plymouth City Library Deeds Destroyed 22nd April, 1941)', *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* 22, no. 5 (1943), pp. 151–3, p. 151; C. W. Bracken, 'Grant of Land by Stephen Dunford, Lord of Eststonhous, Devon, 1418–1433 (Fourth Instalment of Plymouth City Library Deeds Destroyed 22nd April, 1941)', *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* 22, no. 7 (1943), pp. 181–2, p. 181; and Bracken, 'Monkswell', pp. 138–43. Before they were lost, the collection of deeds was described briefly in C. W. Bracken, 'An Early Plymouth Deed, 1329', *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* 18 (1935), pp. 171–4, at p. 171. The other two instalments detailing lost deeds are C. W. Bracken, 'Raddon's Gift-An Old Plymouth Charity', *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* 22, no. 3 (1942), pp. 90–5, and Bracken, 'The Will', pp. 10–16; the first describes thirty-two deeds that were lost dating from 1617 to 1747 and the latter describes some seventeenth-century deeds that were lost.

¹⁰² See A. Henry, 'Silver and Salvation: A Late-Fifteenth Century Confessor's Itinerary Throughout the Parish of Bere Ferrers, Devon', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art* 133 (2001): pp. 17–96, at p. 58. The editor of the calendar of wills held by the Probate Office gives the date of the earliest will as 1532; see Edward Alexander Fry, 'Preface', in *Calendars of Wills and Administrations Relating to the Counties of Devon and Cornwall, Proved in the Court of the Principal Registry of the Bishop of Exeter, 1559–1799, and of Devon Only, Proved in the Court of the Archdeaconry of Exeter, 1540–1799*, edited by Edward Alexander Fry (1908), pp. v–xxi, p. vii.

¹⁰³ W. G. Hoskins, *Old Devon* (1971), p. 45. The passage is quoted in Eric L. Jones, *Landscape, History, and Rural Society in Southern England* (2021), p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ 'Preface', ed. Fry, pp. v–vi.

that number of inventories.’¹⁰⁵ In order to redress this enormous loss, local historians and enthusiasts have gathered a collection of existing copies of wills into what is known as the *Devon Wills Project*. According to the most recent estimate, the collection currently comprises over 200,000 wills, with contributions from about 400 different sources.¹⁰⁶

Attacks on London continued throughout the Blitz and on 10 May 1941, Lambeth Palace was bombed.¹⁰⁷ Thankfully Lambeth Palace’s 1,300 or so manuscripts were unscathed because they had been evacuated before the war. Other collections at Lambeth, however, suffered in the raids; about 8,000 of the library’s 44,000 printed volumes were damaged, and of these, only about half could be salvaged.¹⁰⁸ For years, though, the number of lost print books was difficult to pin down because Lambeth’s rarer print collections were subject to a prolonged campaign of theft during the 1970s by an employee with inside access to the collections. His predations went undetected for decades and many losses at Lambeth were ascribed to war damage that were, in reality, the result of theft. Partly due to this cover story, the theft was not discovered until 2011, when the thief passed away and the stolen books were discovered in his loft—an incredible 1,400 or so volumes.¹⁰⁹ The losses that occurred at Lambeth Palace in 1941, then, were all to Lambeth’s post-Reformation print collections, and they were for a long time exaggerated.

Later in 1941, bombs fell on Trinity House, the home of the guild dedicated to sailors and navigational signals such as lighthouses.¹¹⁰ After an initial assessment, the secretary of the House reported no damages, writing that most of their archives had been stowed in ‘brick built strong rooms and suffered little damage’ while the rest had been on loan to the Maritime Museum

¹⁰⁵ Hoskins, *Old Devon*, p. 45. The passage is quoted in Jones, *Landscape*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁶ See Kirsty Gray, *Tracing Your West Country Ancestors: A Guide for Family Historians* (2013), eBook, section 11.8.

¹⁰⁷ For the Lambeth Palace Library, see Berwick Sayers’s wartime account, ‘Britain’s Libraries’, p. 97, and Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, pp. 115–16.

¹⁰⁸ Yazgoor, ‘Survey’, p. 26. Yazgoor draws on the work of Kent and Brett-James, *Lost*, p. 116. After the war, the library set about replacing its lost collections through donations. Approximately 6,000 volumes were added to the library, including some medieval manuscripts; see Charles Reginald Dodwell, *Lambeth Palace: An Official History* (1958), p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ Alison Flood, ‘Lambeth Palace Retrieves Stolen Collection of Extraordinary Rare Books’, *The Guardian*, 29 April 2013, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/29/lambeth-palace-stolen-books-retrieved>>, accessed on April 2022. The incident is also mentioned by James Carley in ‘The Libraries of Archbishops Whitgift and Bancroft’, *The Book Collector* 62 (2013): pp. 209–27, p. 221. Since the theft is thought to have begun in the 1970s, I take Yazgoor’s estimate of wartime losses, which was made in 1961, as accurate, since it would not have been skewed by these thefts.

¹¹⁰ Later in 1941, Trinity House suffered some damages. In early July, Atkinson wrote to Trinity House about damage he had read about in the newspaper; see TNA, HMC1/189, 3 July 1941 ‘Atkinson to Trinity House’; and TNA, HMC1/189, [no date], ‘Protection of Archives in wartime: air raid damage (1940–1945)’.

and had been evacuated.¹¹¹ The secretary added that some historical documents that were ‘affected by heat or damp have since the fire been through the hands of an expert.’¹¹² After comparing their remaining collections to those listed in the Historical Manuscript Commission’s 1881 description of their archives, officials from the house discovered that one historical document had, in fact, been lost: the grant of arms of the House.¹¹³ The grant of arms in question is worth noting as an example of wartime losses to historic collections but because it was produced in the late sixteenth century, it does not fall within the purview of this study. No medieval documents were lost in this raid.¹¹⁴

The official public records of the nation also escaped these raids on London unscathed. Writing in 1942, the Keeper of Public Records reported that the historical documents his office was charged with overseeing had suffered very little. Indeed, he reported that ‘The damage done to the records has been trivial—less, in fact, than has in the past been done by a burst water pipe, mildew or energetic rodents.’ He notes that ‘[o]ne or two Chancery Proceedings were injured, but not destroyed, by fragments of shell’ and that some packages of historical documents had suffered some damage from damp transport conditions.¹¹⁵ But this was the extent of the damage to public records in 1942. Thus, England’s institutional collections fared surprisingly well during the war. Few historical documents were lost from these collections, and with the exception of the deeds lost at Plymouth, none of these were medieval.¹¹⁶

On the continent, medieval manuscript collections in allied nations fared far worse. Perhaps the most infamous tragedy that struck these collections happened in Belgium, where the library of Leuven (or Louvain) was destroyed

¹¹¹ The secretary of the House initially reported that there was no damage to any of the historical documents that were listed as being in their collections in the Historical Manuscripts Commission’s 1881 report. But the secretary noted that the House had lost a copy of the report, and requested another copy; see TNA, HMC 1/189, 7 July 1941, ‘Secretary, Trinity House to Atkinson.’

¹¹² TNA, HMC 1/189, 11 October 1941, ‘Secretary, Trinity House to Atkinson.’

¹¹³ TNA, HMC 1/189, 11 October 1941, ‘Secretary, Trinity House to Atkinson.’

¹¹⁴ An official from Trinity House states that the missing grant of arms is described on p. 261, column 2 of the Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts; TNA, HMC 1/189, 11 October 1941, ‘Secretary, Trinity House to Atkinson.’ All of the documents listed in this column were produced after the medieval period and the reference is apparently to the document described as a 1573 ‘Grant of coat of arms to the Trinity House, 24th of January, 16 Eliz., by G. Dethick’; see Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (1881), p. 261. The same grant of arms is transcribed and printed in Joseph Cotton’s *Memoir on the Origin and Incorporation of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond* (1818), pp. 231–3.

¹¹⁵ Flowers, ‘Manuscripts’, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ During England’s vast wartime drives for salvage paper, archivists feared that historical manuscripts would be accidentally donated and destroyed; Thorsheim, *Waste*, p. 185. These concerns were perhaps not misplaced, especially considering that in 1942 King George was said to have donated to the salvage efforts ‘a large consignment of old books and manuscripts from the royal library’; but it seems unlikely that any medieval materials, most of which were made of parchment, could have been swept up in the paper drives; see the discussion in Thorsheim, *Waste*, pp. 185–9, quoted at p. 188.

a second time by German artillery, and 800 manuscripts that had been added to the collection since the previous war were lost.¹¹⁷ But in England, where most institutional collections had had time to prepare for potential damage, the situation was different. The evidence surveyed here indicates that England's institutional libraries suffered considerable damage during the war. Hundreds of thousands of volumes were lost due to enemy action. Yet despite this considerable damage to libraries, institutional manuscript collections on the whole suffered very little. Indeed, in the entire survey outlined here, the losses to pre-1500 manuscript collections are limited to a group of medieval deeds from Plymouth (and which fall outside the purview of this study).

The relative safety of England's manuscripts during the war was not simply the result of happenstance or good fortune. A widely agreed-upon sense of the inestimable value of medieval manuscripts meant that their preservation was a matter of political and cultural necessity. While library books, most no more than a few hundred years old, had in many cases been left in place at the outbreak of the war, the antiquarian value of manuscripts had ensured that they had been moved to safety and, therefore, preserved.

In some ways, the high value and mythic importance ascribed to manuscripts over the past two centuries has become a problem for those who appreciate and study them. While institutions such as the British Library approach manuscripts as shared research and cultural heritage objects that should (within reason) be made accessible, some institutions block access to their collections in order to reduce the potential for damage. Digitization has ameliorated this situation somewhat by making manuscripts available to those throughout the world while also opening up new lines of codicological inquiry, but it has also come accompanied by considerable challenges, including the high environmental and economic costs of maintaining an online database of extremely high resolution images.¹¹⁸ Moreover, digitization and other forms of reproduction have in some cases reified the original manuscript by providing justification for restricting access to the original. Already in 1990, Michael Camille wrote that the hundreds of reproductions of the fifteenth-century Book of Hours known as the *Très riches heures* had come to stand in for the original book, while the original had become completely

¹¹⁷ Van der Hoeven, *Lost*, p. 12.

¹¹⁸ Some of the new lines of inquiry opened up by the digitization of medieval manuscripts are discussed in several chapters in *Medieval Manuscripts in the Digital Age*, edited by Benjamin Albritton, Georgia Henley, and Elaine Treharne (2020). See, for example, Orietta Da Rold's 'A Note on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 210', pp. 57–63; John J. Gallagher's 'Encyclopaedic Notes in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 320', pp. 100–11; and David F. Johnson's 'Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 322', pp. 112–19.

inaccessible to the public due to concerns over its ‘conservation, protection and its incalculable monetary value.’ This situation, Camille suggests, has rendered the original manuscript ‘lost and now forever invisible.’¹¹⁹ Indeed, when a manuscript becomes completely inaccessible and sequestered from all consultation requests as some reified digitized manuscripts have become, we might with some caution count it among the losses considered here.

But the value of manuscripts has also posed more direct threats to their survival. Although modern collections take great care to safeguard their books, theft has continued to pose a risk to manuscripts in modern times. A valuable cartulary from St Albans, for example, went missing at some point in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century when the Bollandists’ library in Antwerp was dispersed.¹²⁰ England has not had any high-profile cases of manuscript theft on the scale of the now notorious campaign of theft at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, but many books have nevertheless been stolen.¹²¹ For example, an important thirteenth-century manuscript went missing in 1879, while it was housed in the British Museum. The manuscript had contained several short works along with three longer Anglo-Norman texts: *Le bestiaire divin* of Guillaume de Normandie, and two chansons de geste, *Titus and Vespasian* and the *Voyage de Charlemagne*. Surveying the evidence, Edward Maunde Thompson, who was the Principal Librarian at the time, suspected that it may have been stolen. One Mr Rothe, the last person to have consulted the manuscript, returned it to the Reading Room desk during a particularly busy time for the attendants, and Thompson suggested that ‘in the crowding and confusion, it would not have been impossible for the MS. to have been removed from the counter without detection.’¹²² Thompson hoped that the manuscript had simply ‘been mixed with the printed books in the

¹¹⁹ The manuscript is Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 65; see Michael Camille, ‘The “Très Riches Heures”: An Illuminated Manuscript in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 1 (1990), pp. 72–107, quoted at pp. 74 and 73.

¹²⁰ The manuscript was no. 73 in the Library of the Bollandists. The loss was identified by Simon Keynes in ‘A Lost Cartulary of St Albans Abbey,’ *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993), pp. 253–79, especially pp. 262–3.

¹²¹ On the theft at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, see Jon Henley, ‘Curator Suspected of Looting Library,’ *The Guardian*, 28 June 2005, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jun/28/books.france1>>, accessed 10 May 2022.

¹²² E. Maunde Thompson, ‘Minute by Thompson Describing the Loss of Royal MS. 16 E. VIII in the Reading Room: British Museum, Central Archives, Original Paper,’ edited by Andrew Prescott in Andrew Prescott, ‘The Panizzi Touch: Panizzi’s Successors as Principal Librarian,’ *The British Library Journal* 23, no. 2 (1997): pp. 194–236, p. 225. The manuscript is BL Royal MS 16 E VIII. See also Andrew Prescott, ‘What’s in a Number? The Physical Organization of the Manuscript Collections of the British Library,’ in *Beatus Vir: Studies in Early English and Norse Manuscripts*, edited by A. N. Doane and Kirsten Wolf (2006), pp. 471–525.

library', but this seems unlikely, since the manuscript has not been found during the century and a half since it went missing.¹²³

Other thefts have been very clearly profit driven. Manuscripts with obvious value, such as illuminated ones, are particularly common targets of these sorts of theft. In 1977, a large single-leaf fragment illuminated with a large gold letter was reported stolen from the Christ Church Cathedral Archives. The fragment, which was dated to the fifteenth century, contained verses of the Magnificat.¹²⁴ To my knowledge, the leaf has never been recovered. On a slightly larger scale, a collection of seven early books and manuscripts were stolen in 1998 from a Durham University Library exhibit on the development of English literature. The thief, one Raymond Scott, intended to sell them. While the Shakespeare First Folio that was stolen was recovered when Scott tried to sell it ten years later, the rest of the stolen collection is still missing. This includes two medieval manuscripts, both of which were from England: a fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century copy of the New Testament in English and a fourteenth-century manuscript containing Henry de Gauchy's French translation of Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*, which also includes a partial version of Chaucer's *ABC to the Virgin* that was added in the fifteenth century.¹²⁵ While these manuscripts are 'lost' in the sense that they have fallen off the record, we may hope that they have not been lost entirely.

The mythic importance and value ascribed to manuscripts has also put them at risk in other ways. There is a worrying but active trade based around splitting up manuscripts into their individual leaves. Perhaps the most famous of these 'book-breakers' was the reseller Otto Ege (1888–1951), although Ege was far from the first and the practice can be traced back to the eighteenth century.¹²⁶ Elaine Treharne has carefully analysed Ege's method of working.

¹²³ Thompson, 'Minute', p. 225. Andrew Prescott, who edits Thompson's letter, notes that the manuscript has not yet been found, but more optimistically suggests that '[p]erhaps it still lurks unnoticed somewhere among the printed books'; 'The Panizzi Touch: Panizzi's Successors as Principal Librarian', *The British Library Journal* 23, no. 2 (1997): pp. 194–236, p. 236, n. 182.

¹²⁴ The fragment was Canterbury Cathedral, Add. 128/7; it is described in Ker, *MMBL*, vol. 2, pp. 326 and 328. The theft is mentioned in Ker, *MMBL*, vol. 5, p. 8. The fragment was reported as stolen in 1977; the theft could not have happened long before that point since it is transcribed in a 1976 article by Nicholas Sandon, 'Fragments of Medieval Polyphony at Canterbury Cathedral', *Musica Disciplina* 30 (1976), pp. 37–53, pp. 48–51. See 'GB-CA Add. Ms 128/7', in *The Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music*, University of Oxford, <<https://www.diamm.ac.uk/sources/350/#/>>, accessed 25 June 2022.

¹²⁵ See 'Durham University's Stolen Manuscripts Appeal', *BBC News*, 19 July 2010, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-wear-10685237>>, accessed 15 April 2022. *The Guardian* reported that a saint's life of Aelfric was also among the missing books; see Martin Wainwright, 'Missing Shakespeare: Stolen First Folio Surfaces in US', *The Guardian*, 12 July 2008, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jul/12/theatre.internationalcrime>>, accessed 15 April 2022. The manuscripts in question are Durham University Library MS Cosin V.v.1 and Durham University Library MS Cosin V.i.9.

¹²⁶ For the breaking up of manuscripts in the eighteenth century see Roger S. Wieck, 'Folia Fugitiva: The Pursuit of the Illuminated Manuscript Leaf', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996): pp. 233–54, p. 234. Elaine Treharne provides an excellent overview of scholarship on the topic and

After collecting manuscripts, Ege broke them down into fragments. Ege sold some of these fragments, especially the illuminated ones, as single leaves. The rest he assembled into 'leaf books', which were collections of twenty or so single leaves accompanied by educational material. Treharne notes that these leaf books were produced 'in short runs of two hundred.'¹²⁷ Some of Ege's manuscript victims have been subject to rejuvenation attempts. Many of these have been undertaken by Frederick Porcheddu and his students, who have created a digital compilation of leaves from the manuscripts that Ege broke up for one of his most famous leaf portfolio collections, *Fifty Original Leaves from Medieval Manuscripts, Western Europe, XIIIth–XVIth Century*.¹²⁸ More recently, a thirteenth-century processional from Whitby Abbey that Ege broke up has received similar treatment by Alison Altstatt. Using digital platforms, Altstatt has digitally reconstructed the manuscript using thirty-four leaves from it that she has identified.¹²⁹ Of course not all broken manuscripts can be reconstructed in this way, and in the sense that they are often irretrievable and inaccessible to both the general public and to researchers, these manuscripts can be considered lost.

It is not clear how many manuscripts from England and its collections were broken up by Ege, but it must be in the double digits. Manuscripts produced in England that Ege broke up for *Fifty Original Leaves* include a thirteenth-century Bible (leaf 6), Petrus de Riga's *Aurora* (leaf 7), a thirteenth-century gradual (leaf 8), a different thirteenth-century Bible (leaf 13), a thirteenth-century psalter (leaf 17), and a fourteenth-century Book of Hours (leaf 24), although this last example may instead have been produced in France.¹³⁰ In just one of Ege's leaf books, then, we find five or six manuscripts from medieval England—and Ege was not the only person splitting up manuscripts in the early twentieth century.

Some books were more likely to be destroyed in this way than others. Ege gives a glimpse of his tendencies in a 1938 manifesto that he wrote in defence

gives the example of BL, Add. MS 6040 (fragments of a cartulary of St Mary's Overy), which were recovered from children's toy drums in the eighteenth century; see *Perceptions*, p. 180.

¹²⁷ Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 182.

¹²⁸ The project is described in Frederick Porcheddu, 'Reassembling the Leaves: Otto Ege and the Potential of Technology', *Manuscripta* 53, no. 1 (2009): pp. 29–48. The project is Frederick Porcheddu et al., 'Otto F. Ege Collection', *Denison University*, <<http://ege.denison.edu>>, accessed 2 May 2022.

¹²⁹ See Alison Altstatt, 'Re-membering the Wilton Processional', *Notes: The Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 72, no. 4 (2016): pp. 690–732 and the discussion of Altstatt's work in Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 181.

¹³⁰ See the descriptions of these leaves in Frederick Porcheddu et al., 'Otto F. Ege Collection'. A more comprehensive catalogue of manuscripts destroyed by Ege is available in Scott Gwara, *Otto Ege's Manuscripts: A Study of Ege's Manuscript Collections, Portfolios, and Retail Trade, with a Comprehensive Handlist of Manuscripts Collected or Sold* (2013).

of book breaking entitled 'I am a Biblioclast'. Here, Ege vows that he would never 'take apart a "museum piece" book or a unique copy if it is complete.'¹³¹ The first criterion seems self-explanatory; it suggests that Ege spared the sort of manuscripts that would be displayed in museums—presumably those with obvious canonical significance or exquisite beauty. The second criterion merits more commentary. Of course all manuscripts are, to some degree, unique, so Ege's claim must mean that he would not break up a manuscript if the text that it contains does not survive in multiple copies. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that many of the manuscripts broken up for *Fifty Leaves* are theological ones: Bibles, service books, and Books of Hours. Although there are unique variations between the copies of these sorts of theological books—variations which, as we have seen, were often so significant that they could cause problems for their medieval users—for Ege, these books were all essentially the same and their destruction was no real loss. The attitude reflects a broader and pervasive depreciation of service books and Books of Hours that, as we have seen, has historically contributed to their destruction and in modern times has led to their being neglected in studies of medieval culture.

Of course, long after Ege's day, the practice of breaking up manuscripts persists. The practice is based on the idea that a manuscript—especially a beautifully illuminated manuscript—will turn a greater profit as a set of individual leaves than it will as a complete book. The logic is simple: the price of a manuscript is prohibitive to most private individuals and a whole manuscript therefore has few potential buyers aside from public collections; if the same manuscript is broken down into a set of less expensive individual leaves, these leaves attract a much larger number of buyers and can collectively generate a larger profit.¹³² It is the crude logic of profit-driven market segmentation. Elaine Treharne finds that 'thousands of books have been lost in the last century because of the vandalism of dealers and art connoisseurs.'¹³³ Treharne gives the example of a Book of Hours from c.1460s France that was sold in 2010 to a reseller in Leipzig and was subsequently broken up into its constituent leaves for resale. She found the leaves of the manuscript online listed at various prices, based partly on how much decoration they contained: 'The miniatures were selling for \$2,300 or so; individual leaves for up to \$150; bifolia for about \$400, depending on the extent of the foliate border decoration.'¹³⁴

¹³¹ Quoted in Frederick Porcheddu et al., 'Biblioclasy', *Denison University*, <http://ege.denison.edu/ege_biography_p3.php>, accessed 2 May 2022.

¹³² Indeed, the bookseller who broke up the Book of Hours mentioned in this paragraph claimed to be doing it to make manuscripts accessible to a broader cross-section of the population; see Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 173.

¹³³ Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 183.

¹³⁴ Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 172.

Examining the descriptions of leaves that were put up for sale, Treharne writes that ‘It appears that leaves are sold as a synecdochic stand-in for the “book” and that the desiderata of value are (1) authenticity; (2) age; (3) scarcity (or perceived scarcity); and (4) aesthetic quality; that is, the presence of decoration, especially gold leaf in any amount.’¹³⁵ But Treharne notes that a rise of interest among what she terms ‘art connoisseurs’ has also led to the destruction of new sorts of books; she finds that ‘For connoisseurs, books like thirteenth-century Bibles or fifteenth-century breviaries that were barely worth a mention in the many contexts of commercial fragmentation are now prime targets for breaking.’¹³⁶ At present, then, any book in the hands of individual collectors—but especially the rarer, older, and more lavishly illuminated manuscripts—are at risk of destruction.

It is by now clear that in England, the general trend of the twentieth century has been towards a near-universal sense of the inherent value of medieval manuscripts. In many contexts, this has assured their preservation. Manuscripts have passed into the relative safety of institutional collections, which tend to have the resources necessary to preserve them and to make them accessible to the general public—protecting not only their physical form but also their availability. This institutional protection was a benefit to many manuscripts during the wars, when a powerful sense of the value of manuscripts and a belief in their importance for the political and ideological foundations of the nation led to their protection at considerable costs.

In recent centuries, then, the cultural and economic value of manuscripts has in many ways served to protect them. At the same time, the high value of manuscripts has also had the devastating effect of putting them at risk of a different type of destruction: that of profit-driven booksellers and collectors. Indeed, the greatest source of loss to England’s medieval manuscript collections over the past two centuries was not the cataclysmic air raids of the wars but rather deliberate, profit-driven theft and dismemberment. If we are to protect manuscripts from further destruction, we must strive to recognize the impact of these more pervasive but often overlooked forms of destruction, and to establish international networks for preventing them.

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¹³⁵ Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 176.

¹³⁶ Treharne, *Perceptions*, p. 187.

Conclusion

The notion that the Dissolution was of singular importance for determining the fates of medieval manuscripts has been powerfully enduring. From it stems a set of interconnected—but at times contradictory—beliefs about the ways in which the surviving record of medieval manuscripts has been skewed. These include the notion that the record has been disproportionately bereft of more orthodox medieval manuscripts, or of more heretical manuscripts, or of large or richly illuminated luxury manuscripts, or of smaller or unassuming manuscripts. In this way, the notion that the Dissolution was a watershed moment for the survival of medieval manuscripts has shaped not only perceptions of how many medieval manuscripts have been lost, but also of what sorts of manuscripts have been lost.

But the evidence presented here contributes to a growing body of scholarship that has shown that the importance placed on the Dissolution in traditional accounts of manuscript loss has, in many key ways, been greatly exaggerated. It is likely that this exaggeration stems in part from the powerful role of the Reformation and its aftermath in the foundation of modern institutional collections, including the Bodleian, Parker, and Wren libraries.¹ But the tendency to emphasize the Dissolution over other moments of book loss is undoubtedly also due to a legacy, found especially in nineteenth-century book history and literary scholarship, of casting pre-Reformation religion as barbaric and its adherents as the enemies of intellectual culture, political stability, and national character. This model, which finds its roots in the writings of the reformers themselves, casts early church reformers as the first liberal humanist subjects, fighting to save the pillars of Western civilization from a backwards, superstitious, and commodity-driven Church and its boorish supporters. It is tied to a broader and more pervasive presentist tendency to view the Reformation as a pivotal moment for the development of liberal humanism and the rise of the modern individual.²

¹ For the impact of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the shape of modern collections, see above, especially pp. 146–8 and 199–219.

² See the discussion above towards the end of Chapter 3, pp. 156–7.

This model has proved tenacious, in part because it appealed so strongly to the religious and ideological convictions of the nineteenth-century scholars who gave shape to the field of book history and to other adjacent fields. But as we have seen, this model is the product of what could be called highly biased accounts. Accounts of the destruction that occurred at the Dissolution and beyond it are marked by the national, religious, and political fervour of reformers, Parliamentarians, and other historical actors who have narrated them. This sort of documentary evidence, invested as it is in the values of reformers and others, must be approached with caution. While no less historically contingent than this sort of documentary evidence, the quantitative evidence explored here serves as a means of sidestepping some of the inherited biases of documentary sources and, in so doing, reveals the extent to which the impact of the Reformation on the surviving record has been exaggerated due to the legacies of sectarian conflicts.

As this investigation has shown, the importance placed on the Dissolution has obscured the significant losses that took place both during the medieval period itself and during the two centuries that followed it. While the dissolutions of religious houses in the early sixteenth century led to the vast dispersal of many manuscripts, and while the Dissolution must have had a large impact on the survival of some medieval collections, it was not, in terms of changes to official policy and in terms of the sheer number of books that were destroyed, the most significant event for determining the broader survival rates of medieval manuscripts in England. Nor was it the persecution of liturgical volumes under Edward, nor the banning of reformist volumes under Mary—though these moments left their marks on the record in significant ways. Rather, the evidence suggests that the most significant event, in terms of its impact on the number of surviving medieval manuscripts, was the injunction against pre-Reformation liturgical volumes passed by Elizabeth.

It was as a result of this injunction that thousands upon thousands of volumes that had survived the tumultuous period of religious upheaval that marked the sixteenth century were consigned to the flames. As we have seen, this is witnessed by a large collection of churchwardens' accounts that were produced during Elizabeth's reign and also by sources with less potential for bias, including pastedowns in early printed books and evidence from the broader survival rates of the books in question. Taken together, this evidence suggests that the impact of Elizabeth's injunctions on the number of medieval manuscripts that have survived in England was considerable.

Yet while the impact of Elizabeth's injunction was extensive in terms of the numbers of manuscripts destroyed, it was highly limited in terms of its targets

and fundamentally tied to the ideological weight of the service books that had fallen under suspicion. It should not be taken to reflect an air of indifference towards medieval manuscripts. Indeed, the destruction of service books that occurred during the reign of Elizabeth coincided with the emergence of a new kind of appreciation for older books as cultural artefacts and as a form of national heritage. As history was increasingly being used as a tool for the development and promotion of the reformed religion, collectors such as Matthew Parker sought out volumes that they thought held religious and historical significance. At the same time that medieval service books were being set ablaze for containing doctrine that was no longer supported by the Church, older books, and those containing historical and theological commentary that was considered relevant, were being upheld as the religious, historical, and spiritual keystones of the nation.

The end of the Elizabethan period coincided with a new development in the collection and preservation of medieval manuscripts. While Leland, Bale, and others among the first wave of early modern antiquarians had prioritized the preservation of manuscripts that were of political or historical importance for the nation—and especially those created before the twelfth century—a second wave of antiquarians began to value and seek out a wider range of medieval manuscripts. No longer the default medium for the circulation of a public-facing text, the manuscript itself had become rarefied, and manuscripts produced as late as the fifteenth century had become collectors' items. In the heat of the Civil Wars, when the conservation of the nation's history had become politically expedient for the Royalist cause, the preservation of manuscripts took on new ideological force. The collection and appropriation of manuscripts was politicized, with Royalists seeking to cast themselves as the saviours of England's cultural heritage and, through it, the spiritual heart of the nation itself.

While manuscripts continued to be recycled and lost during the Civil Wars, these deliberate acts were met with considerable resistance and the period of manuscript destruction was reaching its conclusion. The evidence presented here contributes to, and builds on, the findings of several focused studies that have shown that the turn of the eighteenth century marked the culmination of a significant shift in the conceptualization of medieval manuscripts. Medieval manuscripts, by this stage at least 200 years old, began to be valued regardless of their contents and their preservation was increasingly ensured as a matter of national importance. The response to the Cottonian fire of 1731 can be considered the epitome of this change, in the sense that it helped launch the foundation of a national collection and a nationwide policy

for the preservation of historical documents. From this point onwards, losses to institutional manuscript collections in England have been relatively limited. If a manuscript had the good fortune to survive the tumultuous period between its creation and the start of the eighteenth century, its chances of survival were exceptionally high.

Throughout all the periods under investigation, official policies calling for the destruction of medieval manuscripts were rare. Those that did have an impact on the survival of medieval manuscripts targeted service books and, in the case of Edward's injunction, Books of Hours. Other sorts of medieval manuscripts were largely spared from all official—and indeed, all systematic—policies of book destruction in England. This finding, considered alongside the evidence for how these policies were enacted, has significant implications, because it suggests that the survival rates for medieval service books differed significantly from those of institutional library books, and that medieval manuscript loss must therefore be understood within distinct categories.

The difference is stark. Survival rates for library books, which—judging from studies of the books that can be identified from medieval library lists—typically range from 2 per cent to 25 per cent (1 in 50 or 1 in 4), look very high compared to those of service books, which are estimated in ranges from 0.1 per cent to 0.2 per cent (1 in 1,000 or 1 in 500).³ The difference is important because it indicates that manuscript destruction affected the collections of institutions in significantly different ways. Since service books formed the backbone of any parish church collection, their targeted destruction meant the near-complete eradication of most parish church collections. For a larger institution, such as a priory, the destruction of service books would have left little dent on the institution's book collections as a whole.

But the differences between the survival rates of library books and service books has other, more important implications for the questions at hand. As should by now be obvious, the survival rates of service books, small and dismaying as they are, should be where we start if we seek to make estimates about the survival rates of medieval manuscripts as a whole. Since service books were among the most common sorts of books in medieval England, with an estimated 20,000 Sarum-use antiphonals circulating in fifteenth-century England alone, their survival rates offer a closer approximation of the survival rates of medieval manuscripts as a whole than would the rates of almost any other sort of book. Since vast collections of medieval manuscripts

³ I take the numbers here from the individual collections examined by Sargent (see above, p. 33) and from the discussion of missals and antiphonals above, p. 203.

were stored in a vast number of parish church collections scattered across the nation, and since the vast majority of these collections did not survive, existing studies of survival rates—which are almost all based on the library lists of institutions or on the sorts of books that would have been held in medieval libraries—can offer only limited insight into actual survival rates.⁴ By focusing on the ideologically and politically safer collections of institutional libraries, these studies overlook the tens of thousands of destroyed volumes that were read and heard by local priests and their parishioners.

It is clear by now that existing estimates of medieval manuscript production and circulation that rely on data from institutional library collections are all improbably low, and that we have lost a much larger quantity of medieval manuscripts than is usually acknowledged in these estimates. It might be argued that the point does not matter very much, because the lost manuscripts that are often overlooked, many of which were service books, do not matter very much to modern scholarship. The argument might be made that even if these books were produced in large numbers in medieval England, they were produced for only a small fraction of the population and so can tell us little about the literary and social patterns that are of interest to literary studies, book history, and adjacent fields. But as we have seen, the assumptions underlying this argument are false. Service books were read and used by a large cross-section of medieval society, often passing between institutional and private libraries. And the many members of the laity who never held a service book in their own hands would nevertheless have heard material from these books during mass, or experienced their impact on the liturgy. The vast destruction of service books, then, has had the unfortunate effect of obscuring some of the textual engagement experienced not only by parish priests but also by their communities.

We have seen that in comparison to service books, the sorts of books that were more typically housed in institutional libraries had very high survival rates. For books in institutional libraries, a significant number of volumes were destroyed during the medieval period itself. While service books seem to have fallen out of date faster than other sorts of books during the medieval period, books in institutional libraries could also be decommissioned when they fell out of date. A key factor in this was changing curricula, practices, and tastes. This fate seems to have been especially common among scholastic works and works of canon law that were used in the universities and that were subject to updates in terms of content or layout.

⁴ See the discussion above, pp. 206–7.

Though it seems to have happened relatively rarely, medieval institutions would also destroy or recycle a book when the script in which it was written had fallen out of date. Language was also a factor; there are examples of works in both English and French being recycled during the medieval period, and it is sometimes claimed that medieval manuscripts containing vernacular languages were more prone to destruction than those containing Latin. But as this study has shown, this was true only of medieval manuscripts containing French. These were recycled in disproportionate numbers—probably, though we cannot be certain, as a result of the language falling increasingly out of fashion in the second half of the fourteenth century—and their survival rates are slightly lower than those of manuscripts that are written primarily in Latin. Manuscripts containing English, on the other hand, had slightly better chances of survival than those primarily in Latin. The evidence suggests that this was not, on the whole, due to medieval proclivities, but due to the interests of early modern antiquarians, who saw works in English as holding particular historical and philological value.

Aside from changing tastes, the most important factor in determining the survival of medieval library books was overuse. Although the books that are most often listed as being in need of repair during the medieval period were service books, other books were clearly prone to damage and destruction from overuse. Evidence from lists of loans, lists of refectory texts, and lists of repairs indicates that the library books most prone to overuse were works of canon law (such as Gratian's *Decretum*), the sorts of scholastic works that were used by students (such as Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*), and (somewhat less commonly) guidebooks for priests (such as penitential guides) and patristic works, which were used in the refectory.

Similar patterns can be observed from the borrowing patterns at Christ Church Canterbury, in which works of Thomas Aquinas and Peter Lombard loom large. A quantitative comparison between the more secular works listed on the booklists of Christ Church Canterbury provides further information about changes to the priory's collection, revealing that early medieval philosophical works (such as Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*), texts for teaching Latin, and other educational texts seem to have been in need of replacement more than other sorts of works, while works by 'pagan' authors, such as those of Persius, seem to have been decommissioned or fell out of use. During the medieval period, then, the volumes in institutional libraries that were at the greatest risk, either from overuse or from curriculum changes, were scholastic works and other works that formed the basis of medieval university education, including works of canon law.

As this study has shown, the threat to these volumes during the medieval period was substantial; while medieval libraries are often viewed as static, the evidence presented here contributes to a growing recognition that these libraries were instead in a state of extreme flux prior to the Reformation. In the case of Christ Church Canterbury Cathedral Priory, about half of one section of its collection is missing from a list produced only a century and a half later, and in the following two decades between 2 per cent and 5 per cent went missing at the hands of unscrupulous borrowers. By the time of the Reformation, any older books that had not been cast aside, now viewed as artefacts, had been moved to a flood-safe location and refitted to promote their long-term preservation. Many of these volumes are still with us today. At the library of Christ Church Cathedral Priory, then, the greatest threat to a medieval manuscript's survival was not uncultured indifference to antiquity nor rash political policy, but simply the everyday loss that accompanies use and a preference for the new.

While some books from institutional libraries must have been stolen or destroyed by zealous reformers during the Dissolution, the analysis presented here supports the work of James Carley and others that has shown that the number of manuscripts that were destroyed during this period was far more limited than was once assumed. To this point, there is far more evidence of monks and other members of religious institutions preserving volumes from their former homes than of these institutions being pillaged, whether by boorish opportunists, zealot religious reformers, or anyone else. Some manuscripts were shipped overseas during this tumultuous period, but the evidence for this practice, limited as it is (and potentially misleading for that reason), generally suggests that this was done in the interest of preservation. Of course, many manuscripts were destroyed or broken up for scrap material in the wake of the Dissolution, but there is no evidence that any one sort of manuscript was targeted for this more than any other, or that more 'Catholic-leaning' books were targeted for destruction in this way.

The work of antiquarians during this period was limited and seems to have left little mark on the corpus of manuscripts that have survived. Yet the selection policies that these antiquarians applied to the documentation and acquisition of medieval manuscripts—which centred around older volumes, those of theological value for the reformed Church and those of historical or political value for the nation—would eventually give shape to the acquisition policies of later antiquarians, such as Robert Cotton and Robert Harley. These later antiquarians, whose collections would eventually lay the foundations of most of the major public collections in England, prioritized the preservation

of older volumes and works they considered of historical importance. As we have seen, the impact of their policies becomes obvious when analysing which books have survived from medieval library lists.

Nevertheless, that impact should not be overstated. During the seventeenth century, collectors became increasingly indiscriminate in their acquisitions and exchanges of medieval manuscripts. As medieval manuscripts increasingly came to be viewed as remnants of a lost and inaccessible past—and as that past became politically charged in the heat of the Civil Wars—medieval library books of any sort became increasingly valued and increasingly safe. By the eighteenth century, when all surviving medieval manuscripts were at least 300 years old, their safety had come to be assured as a matter of national policy, and losses have been rare after this point.

Taking all of these historical factors into consideration, we can venture a general statement that a medieval library book was more likely to have been destroyed during the medieval period if it contained scholastic work or a work of canon law, and it had a better chance of survival if it seemed old to early modern antiquarians or if it contained historical material, or other material that antiquarians thought was important for the reformed Church or the English nation. Manuscripts containing English works, which fell into this last category, had slightly higher chances of survival than those containing works in Latin or French, all other factors being equal. With the obvious cases of Books of Hours and service books set aside, there is no evidence of books of a more ‘Catholic’ nature being disproportionately destroyed in any meaningful way, nor of smaller manuscripts, or more lavish manuscripts, surviving less well on the whole. Given that the survival rates of institutional libraries differ considerably, with known survival rates ranging from 2 per cent to about 25 per cent, it is clear that the location of a manuscript during the medieval period had a strong influence on whether it survived.

It is clear, then, that an enormous number of medieval library manuscripts have been lost. A medieval library manuscript’s chances of survival were determined by factors such as its contents, language, and location; factors such as size seem to have had a relatively small influence. If a manuscript had the good fortune to find its way into a medieval library, its chances of survival were improved but in no way assured. Using the analysis presented here, we can return to our question about the survival of versions of the story of Gawain meeting a green knight to make some preliminary observations. It seems highly likely that aside from the two versions of the *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* story that survive, there must have been many more in circulation during the medieval period. On one hand, the language of these versions

would have helped their chances of survival, since all factors being equal, a manuscript containing English tended to have better chances of survival than another manuscript. But as a romance, a version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* would have been more vulnerable than a religious work such as a manual for confessors, since the former was more likely to have circulated in the sort of manuscript that was housed outside institutional libraries. Determining the chances of any individual work's survival, then, requires the careful consideration of its manuscript context and of the broader survival patterns of manuscript survival.

Aside from the survival patterns already considered, one larger pattern emerges from the data presented here. During all periods under investigation here, the manuscripts that were the most likely to be destroyed were between 50 and 200 or so years old at the time of their destruction—put simply, manuscripts that were neither very old nor very new. This was true of the library books that were shown to have been recycled during the medieval and early modern periods and it is also true of the service books that were shown to have fallen out of use during the medieval period. What can explain this pattern?

As we have seen, changes in tastes and in practices proved to have had a powerful impact on the survival of medieval manuscripts—one that has not been adequately acknowledged in previous studies of medieval manuscript loss. During the medieval period, these changes took many forms. Updates to liturgical practice, the introduction of new subjects to the scholastic curriculum, and changes in script and manuscript layout all contributed to the destruction of medieval manuscripts. A manuscript that fell out of date due to these changes was usually no more than a century or two old. During the medieval period, a book was most at risk when it was passing through this unfashionable stage, being neither *au courant* nor yet revered for its age. Once it had survived this risky period, however, it came to be approached with reverence and antiquarian interest and, on this account, had a good chance of being preserved.

We have seen that the same general pattern persisted into the early modern period. As Ker's list and analysis of pastedowns indicates, the manuscripts that were most commonly recycled into the bindings of Oxford manuscripts from the end of the medieval period until about 1540 were works of canon law and other works that had fallen out of date when the arrival of print led to new, more up-to-date editions. As Richard Ovenden has shown, the dispersal of Duke Humfrey's library was not because its contents were offensive to the reformed Church but because the volumes in it had been rendered obsolete

by the arrival of print.⁵ While these episodes of manuscript loss and dispersal tend to be imputed to the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the evidence presented here suggests that we should think of them instead as the result of changing fashion, as the more fashionable and current print books came to supersede older manuscript volumes. Manuscript destruction of this period, much like that of the previous one, was focused on material that was too old to be useful but too new to be antique.

At the same time, the efforts of collectors during this stage of the Reformation unfolded along similar lines. As James Carley and others have shown, the collectors of this period, whose preservation strategies would come to be influential, prioritized the preservation of older manuscripts—typically those produced prior to the twelfth century. On the other hand, members of disbanded religious houses seem to have had a slight preference for preserving newer volumes (although for these members of religious houses, as for other collectors of the time, theological volumes were also important). Volumes that were 50 to 200 years old were not prioritized by either group and were, therefore, more vulnerable to destruction.

As the early modern period came to a close, the passage of centuries had given all medieval writing the allure of antiquity. Medieval manuscripts, most of which were by this stage over 300 years old, had acquired collectors' status regardless of their contents. We have seen that this change played out in the collecting habits of a new wave of collectors, who sought out not just the historic and historical volumes that men like Cotton had prioritized, but almost any medieval text. As the distance from the medieval past has widened, the preservation of medieval manuscripts has become assured. In more recent years, the period during which an object passes from new to antique has shortened somewhat, with the Public Record Office Act of the late nineteenth century suggesting that any document over 150 years old is worthy of preservation. But despite this shift, the general trend is the same: an object is worth preserving if it is new or if it is ancient, and objects that fall between these two stages are most at risk.

This pattern in book deacquisition, which I have been referring to here as the principle of 'age without vintage', is perhaps not surprising when we consider that the same pattern is apparent in many different domains today—albeit on different scales. When I find myself having to cull my personal book collection in anticipation of a move, the books I am most likely to part with are those that are neither up to date nor antique—for my collection, usually

⁵ These topics are discussed on pp. 179–81, 185–6, and 172–3.

books produced between 1950 and 1980. The same general pattern of deacquisition emerges in museums, libraries, and digital archives today; material is thrown aside when it has ceased to effectively serve its intended purpose and has not yet become a witness to an inaccessible past.

Of course, this creates a significant issue for preservation; by the time an object becomes valued for its antiquity, it has had to have passed through a period of marked vulnerability (and undoubtedly this period of vulnerability, by making the object rarer, further contributes to its cachet). We can see the impact of this issue unfold before our eyes in our modern preservation strategies. To use a recent example: one of the greatest changes to communication methods of the twentieth century was caused by the invention of email, and we can envision the possibility that historians hundreds of years in the future will approach early emails with the same fascination and curiosity as we approach medieval manuscripts. How is it then that while we have spent countless resources on protecting medieval manuscripts, we have lost the first email forever? One witness reported that when the first email was sent in 1972, 'it didn't seem worth saving'.⁶ Yet it is not inconceivable that researchers 500 years in the future may lament its loss, the same way we lament the loss of the first written version of *The Canterbury Tales*. At the same time that policy makers, governmental organizations, and public institutions are dedicating considerable efforts to the preservation of ancient texts, important witnesses to the present are slipping away. If we are to preserve cultural heritage for the future, we need to recognize the significant threat posed by any preservation strategy that disregards the potential historic value of the present.

The implications for the preservation of documentary heritage are significant. As this study has shown, it is in a large part due to the high value of medieval manuscripts and the titanic efforts expended on their conservation that they have been preserved so well over the past two centuries, and these efforts are commendable and should continue to be supported as a matter of public policy. But as this study has highlighted, the high value of manuscripts has also made them vulnerable to theft and to dismemberment, which is used as a means of increasing their marketability. One means of mitigating these risks is to support the transfer of manuscripts into public collections, which typically have the resources and accountability required for promoting both the long-term preservation of manuscripts and their accessibility. Better funding for our public libraries and archives can support these sorts of

⁶ This quotation, and a broader discussion of the loss of the first email, appears in Ross Harvey and Jaye Weatherburn's *Preserving Digital Materials*, 3rd edn (2018), p. 27.

transfers by ensuring that these institutions have the acquisitions budgets required to purchase any manuscripts that end up on the market. Ensuring the survival of documentary heritage in the twenty-first century will require ensuring our libraries continue to receive public and political support.

But the findings presented here also have other implications for the preservation of documentary heritage—and especially of more recent heritage. As the example of the lost email illustrates plainly, our digital heritage is at significant risk. This is due, in part, to the perhaps unexpected propensity of digital media to decay. CD-ROMs, hard drives, and server hardware are all relatively unstable media, with lifespans of decades rather than centuries. After England was introduced to paper, it used this relatively durable and sustainable medium for hundreds of years, only to abandon it for less stable hard drives and servers without a long-term preservation strategy in place. The digital photographs we took only twenty years ago are already starting to degrade.

The risk is a serious one, since for many, our digital heritage is increasingly becoming our only heritage. In his recent meditation on the role of the book in human society, Brian Cummings has written intelligently about the scope of human writing that is now digital. Noting that, '[a]s of 20 February 2020, the current size of the web is 6.18 billion pages', and surveying the extent to which human data is increasingly stored online, Cummings concludes that 'an iPhone corresponds to the diminutive *studium generale* of an individual human subject.'⁷ For Cummings, this is a problem because once it becomes digital, our data quickly escapes our control. It can be indexed, searched, and manipulated in ways that were never before possible. By embracing digitization, we have, in Cummings's view, given up control over our data—and, through it, our selves.⁸ Cummings is right to draw attention to the volume of human data that is now online, and the degree to which it records modern life, and Cummings is also right that our lack of agency over this data is a pressing issue that demands attention. But we should not let the volume of this digital data distract from its ephemerality. Too often when we write in digital formats, we yield control over not only how our writing will be used, but also whether it will be preserved.

And degradation is not the only threat to our digital heritage. Experts have warned that digital media is subject not only to decay, but also to obsolescence, as digital media formats evolve. One famous example, the Digital Domesday

⁷ Cummings, *Bibliophobia*, pp. 350–69, quoted at pp. 352 and 368.

⁸ Cummings, *Bibliophobia*, pp. 350–69.

Book, was produced in 1986, but by 2002—only about fifteen years later—had become essentially unusable. As an article about the digital project in *The Guardian* points out dryly, the original c.1086 Domesday Book is, by contrast, still readable.⁹ Over the past two decades, scholars have begun to raise concerns about the sustainability of electronic text projects in the face of ever-changing web and browser technologies.¹⁰

These concerns are well placed, although it is true that they have been mitigated somewhat by developments that have emerged over the past twenty years and that have made it possible to create web resources and digital media in a sustainable way. In the realm of documentary heritage, one promising development is known as TEI-compliant XML, a web markup language used for encoding texts that is designed with sustainability in mind. While most web markup is browser specific and therefore fated to obsolescence, XML is designed to promote long-term cross-platform compatibility and is therefore a recognized standard for web preservation.¹¹ Over the past decade, several other efforts aimed at promoting the long-term preservation of digital texts have emerged, including the greater accessibility of public digital repositories built on sustainable web infrastructure. But while these efforts to promote digital sustainability are admirable, they remain limited, both in their availability and in their use. This should worry us. If we are to prevent further losses to textual heritage, we need to protect not only documents of the past, but also those of the present that will be cherished 500 years in the future.

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⁹ See Robin McKie and Vanessa Thorpe, 'Digital Domesday Book Lasts 15 Years Not 1000', *The Guardian*, 3 March 2002, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/mar/03/research.elearning>>, accessed 1 June 2022.

¹⁰ See, for example, Daniel Paul O'Donnell, 'Disciplinary Impact and Technological Obsolescence in Digital Medieval Studies', in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, edited by Susan Schreibman and Ray Siemens (2008), pp. 65–81; and, in the context of medieval textual editing, Bella Millett 'Whatever Happened to Electronic Editing?', in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson (2013), pp. 39–54.

¹¹ See James Cummings, 'The Text Encoding Initiative and the Study of Literature', in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, edited by Susan Schreibman and Ray Siemens (2008), pp. 451–476.

APPENDIX

A List of Banned Service Books and Related Material

Antiphoner (or antiphonal): collection of antiphons (verses of the Psalms sung during Mass and at other occasions).¹

Couchers: a breviary, and typically one that was intended for the clergy.

Grail (or gradual): collection of chants to be sung during Mass.

Journal: collection of prayers to be recited at fixed hours, typically intended for the clergy.

Legend: collection of texts drawn from sermons, biblical stories, and saints' lives that were designed to be used during preaching or matins.

Manual: collection of texts pertaining to sacramental rites aside from Mass.

Missal (sometimes described as a 'massbook'): book containing texts for the celebration of Mass.

Ordinal: guidebook about how to handle overlapping feast days.

Pie: guidebook for priests about how to handle offices that fell on the same day.²

Portas (or *portiforium*): a portable breviary.

Primer: collection of prayers to be recited at fixed hours, typically intended for lay use.

Processional: collection of material for liturgical celebrations or processions outside of Mass.

¹ These definitions, and the ones in Chapter 4 above, are based on Andrew Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office*, pp. 118–19; Hughes's definitions draw on those of V. Fiala and W. Irtenkauf's "Versuch," pp. 105–37. Material from Hughes's work is condensed here, and it is supplemented with material from Crosse's *A Dictionary of English Church History*, p. 546. These books are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, pp. 61–73, and in Chapters 4 and 5, pp. 158–65 and 187–209.

² See William Blades, *The Life and Typography of William Caxton, England's First Printer*, vol. 2 (1863), p. 101.

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- Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum
16.2 (formerly 47)
M 305 (formerly lat. 57)
16.8 (formerly 190)
- Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België
1650 (1520)
- Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral
Additional 25
Additional 128/47
Box ccc no. xixa
- Cambridge, Corpus Christi College
173
189
402
- Cambridge, Peterhouse College
71
- Cambridge, Trinity College
R. 17. 1
- Cambridge, University Library
Gg. 3. 28
Ii. 3. 12
Kk. 2. 6
Peterborough Dean and Chapter 1
- Chantilly, Musée Condé
65
- Durham University Library
Cosin V.v.1
Cosin V.i.9
- Ghent University
2583/108
- Gloucestershire Archives
D2700/V/1. No 8
- Göttingen, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek
Philologie 184
- Le Havre, Bibliothèque municipale
330
- London, British Library
Additional 6040
Additional 32246
Additional 37787
Additional 49996
Additional 89379
Arundel 57
Arundel 155
Arundel 230

- Arundel 343
 Cotton Domitian A VIII
 Cotton Galba A I
 Cotton Galba A II
 Cotton Galba A III
 Cotton Galba E IV
 Cotton Julius C III
 Cotton Tiberius A III
 Cotton Tiberius B. XI
 Cotton Vespasian E II
 Egerton 1961
 Egerton 1962
 Harley 493
 Harley 636
 Harley 1916
 Harley 2935
 Harley 2985
 Harley 3658
 Harley 3776
 Harley 4835
 Harley 5958
 Harley Charter 83 A 37
 Junius 11
 Royal 1 A xiv
 Royal 1 DV–VIII
 Royal 8 F XIV
 Royal 12 C. xxiii
 Royal 16 E VIII
 Stowe 142
 Stowe 871
- London, Guildhall Library Manuscripts Room
 3114
 3705
 3706
 5385A
 9987
 310942/5
- London, Lambeth Palace Library
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- Oxford, All Souls College
 302
- Oxford, Balliol College
 384
- Oxford, Bodleian Library
 Auct. F. 4. 32
 Bodl. 223
 Bodl. Poet C. 3
 Dodsworth 8
 Douce 384
 Hatton 115
 Rawlinson B. 328

- Oxford, Corpus Christi College
114
- Oxford, Trinity College
23
- San Marino, Huntington Library
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