

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 – English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Early Manuscript Design: enhancing public appreciation of medieval manuscript materials and design, and inspiring new works of art		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> October 2011-April 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Prof Daniel Wakelin	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Jeremy Griffiths Professor of Medieval English Palaeography	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2011-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 December 2017-31 July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>An exhibition held at the Bodleian Library from December 2017 to April 2018 gave 51,000+ visitors enhanced understanding of the craft and motivations behind early English manuscript design. Selection and interpretation of artefacts encouraged cultural revaluation of functional (often damaged) texts not normally considered display-worthy; educated children and adults in the agency and craft-mentality of scribes; enhanced tourist experience; and inspired secondary school teachers and art journalists to broaden historical attention to graphic design and book art. Work with 56 designers generated original artworks, bringing intellectual and economic returns to the makers and benefiting public and private collections.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Much of Wakelin's work has focused on medieval scribes as creative practitioners of design. Where the dominant concentration of palaeography in the past has been on external conditions for manuscript production (scribal identifications, dialect, political and religious contexts), Wakelin has explored the qualitative dimensions of scribal work, arguing for attention to scribes as creative agents in page design and textual copying. Earlier research into aspects of manuscript design culminated in the extended articulation of his argument in <i>Scribal Correction and Literary Craft</i> (2014) [3.i], based on a broad survey of corrections made in 80 manuscripts from the Huntington and other collections, alongside specific 'case studies'. Drawing on frameworks from the anthropology of art and craft (Sennett, Gell), Wakelin elaborated the case for recognising the creativity and agency of scribes. Of particular salience to the impact are Chapters 5, 9 and parts of 6 of <i>Scribal Correction</i>. Chapter 5 explored scribes' craft processes across the centuries, archaeologically reconstructing their practical skills in making, mending and decorating books, even where such skills were seldom described in contemporary sources. It noted patterns in visual design, <i>mise-en-page</i> and <i>mise-en-texte</i>, shared across large groups of manuscripts. Chapter 9 and parts of 6 explored scribes' efforts to perfect the visual page design of texts, especially poetry. <i>Scribal Correction</i> was joint winner of SHARP's DeLong Prize in Book History 2015.</p> <p>Research for these chapters led to the historically wider-ranging study of the topics in the book <i>Designing English</i> (2017) [3.ii] accompanying the Bodleian Library exhibition, where the methodological argument is extended by attention to theories of 'folk art'. As Wakelin observes, to argue for scribes as 'designers' (p. 6) or 'critics' (<i>Scribal Correction and Literary Craft</i>, pp. 308-10) is avowedly anachronistic, but the terms act as heuristics, allowing us to recognise a creativity that socio-economic explanations of the history of the book otherwise overlook. <i>Designing English</i> described and interpreted the majority of the books and artefacts exhibited, putting them in a wider context developed from 300 manuscript sources and in dialogue with recent scholarship on scribes.</p>		

The process of curating *Designing English* prompted further research published in 'Urinals and hunting traps: curating pragmatic literacy in the fifteenth century' (2020) [3.iii] (drawing on presentations about the display at the Beinecke Library, USA, and for the UK librarians' body AMARC). Wakelin considers here the impositions placed on the understanding of many early manuscripts by the dominant display criteria for today. He reflects on the experience of curating 'plain' functional manuscripts, as opposed to 'treasures', to ask whether a subset of medieval books – late medieval functional texts – merits aesthetic appreciation. Beginning with one artefact from *Designing English*, he situates these texts among a wider class of (unexhibited) manuscripts and in relation to models of ethnographic curating to make the historical and theoretical case that pragmatic manuscripts were sites of creative agency as well as furthering practical ends.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- i. [Authored Book, listed in REF2] Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft* (150,000 words) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). ISBN: 9781107076228. Joint winner of SHARP's DeLong Prize in Book History 2015.
- ii. [Authored Book, available on request] Wakelin, *Designing English: Early Literature on the Page* (50,000 words) (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2017). ISBN: 9781851244751
- iii. [Journal Article] Wakelin, 'Urinals and hunting traps: curating pragmatic literacy in the fifteenth century', *New Medieval Literatures* 20 (2020), 216-54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449091.007>

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

*Designing English*, an exhibition at the Bodleian's Weston Library in Oxford, 1 December 2017-22 April 2018, **gave 51,268 visitors**, including tourists from around the world, **new appreciation for the craft of medieval manuscript design and inscription** (5.1). Selected and presented by Wakelin, the displays showed an unprecedented variety of English-language manuscript objects from Bodleian, Ashmolean, and British Museum collections. 'Ugly' manuscripts, 'rough, chaotic, unfinished', were given equal status with 'treasures', **demonstrating to viewers the ingenuity of scribes who had to make the best out of bad materials** (Wakelin, exhibition reflections in booktrade journal, 5.2). The (literally) marginal survival of some of the earliest English literary texts was on show, explored in video material by Wakelin and others from Oxford Medieval Studies. **Visitors and school parties were instructed in the practical purposes of many manuscripts**: e.g. swan-handling, or diagnostic analysis of urine samples. **Technical innovations were explained**, with workshop opportunities to imitate concertinaed almanacs and fold-out girdle books.

The novelty of the exhibition concept and object selections (only 4 of the 72 Bodleian manuscripts had been exhibited before) provoked strong media and social media interest. A Facebook post announcing the exhibition attracted 516 responses, 75 shares; a tweet launching the competition for a signed catalogue attracted 703 retweets, 824 likes – outstripping earlier competitions (5.3). National reach, across a broad demographic, was established through newspaper coverage, including the *Daily Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, *Oxford Mail*, and local radio interviews for BBC Oxford, Worcester, and Devon (5.3). Visitor feedback and social media show that the exhibition **stimulated intense imaginative responses to the 'artistry, creativity, and hardwork [sic]' of designers labouring before 'keyboard[s] or ... typewriter[s]'** (twitter response by graphic designer, 5.3, p. 7). Many were emotional: one reported that their visit was the 'Closest thing I've had to a religious experience'; another was 'moved to tears!' (5.4.i). Children relished hands-on experience with medieval craft: an opening weekend Family Activities day (c. 70 attendees) involved riddle worksheets, brass rubbing, and Old English story-telling ('amazing [sic] books ... a lot has been added to my knolige!'; 'Amazed to compare 2 copies of the same illustrated pages & to register how they really did try & "copy"'; 'fantastic,

thorough, informative, entertaining', 5.4.ii). A **Library Lates event educated 260 visitors** in medieval and contemporary book arts and conservation science, with interactive activities including palaeography, calligraphy, risograph printing, digital animation, and questions to a living library of medievalists (5.1). Visitors' books recorded c. **680 responses overall, 99.4% positive**, by people aged 6 to 80 from around the world. Comments in Hungarian, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, French, Chinese, Japanese, Malay, Korean, etc. show **intellectual curiosity provoked** in those with little prior manuscript familiarity and those with much: 'I liked the way it showed you how parchmet [sic] was made' (young visitor); (in Polish) 'very impressed ... I will come back to study' (5.4.iii); it '**shed light on English and Englishness** as tricky concepts' (visiting Scottish art historian on Twitter, 5.3, p. 8).

**590 school students and teachers engaged imaginatively with literature and art beyond set curricula.** Wakelin and the Oxford English Faculty's Masters students led 10 study days, participants including St Andrew's Primary and the Cherwell School, Oxford; Ysgol Y Dderi Primary and the Cantonian School, Wales. Two sixth form visits focused on Chaucer, exploring *Canterbury Tales* alongside other manuscripts (5.1). Teachers took photographic records for classroom purposes ('a gazillion pictures to use in ... teaching (English medieval and Renaissance texts)', 5.4.iv). **Inspiration to younger students' imagination** is evident in feedback: 'mindblowing, fantastic exhibition', 'Disgusting way of making paper! ... I loved It ... five star'; and (around a buoyant sketch of a jewelled reading-pointer) 'ALFRED MADE ME INNIT' (5.4.v).

**New artistic perspectives were enabled and techniques developed** through workshops where Wakelin explained the underpinning insights into medieval design imperatives. 39 workshop places were allocated to professional and amateur artists (132 applicants; 93 participants online) (5.5.ii). Before-and-after Mind Map analysis showed a **change in perception**, from thinking of medieval books as ornately decorated, produced in monastic settings, available only to the rich (with occasional subversive marginalia) to **recognizing a diverse range of manuscript forms** and thinking in terms of **production, collaboration, and communal consumption** (5.5.i). 55 artists, including 21 workshop attendees, from around the UK and beyond entered the linked competition 6 months later. **23 new works applying medieval methods to modern media** were selected for an exhibition in the Bodleian. Highlighted works included a 'whale bestiary', a 'sympathetic Anglo-Saxon style script', and a miniature girdle book to be worn like a medical ID bracelet (5.5.ii). Explanatory materials and artists' blogs evidenced **newly critical curiosity about medieval craft**: is it wrong to relish things made from animal skins? (Mavina Baker, Tanya Bentham); can the experiences of women, often obscured in medieval books, be brought into focus? (Lisa Davies) (5.6.ii, pp. 14, 15, 19). Many reflected **independent inquiry into medieval methods, following Wakelin's example**: Kathy Sedar looked into the archaeology of medieval bookbinding, Jules Allen into 'cordwaining' (shoemaking) and historical maps (5.6.ii, pp. 8, 12). Even artists already familiar with medieval techniques found that '**new variations** of folded papers, the sewing up of holes in the vellum, the "veiling device"' '**sprang out from the books shown to us**' (Carolyn Trant, 5.6.ii, p. 41). **Traditional skills were acquired** including parchment handling, gold leaf, handmaking of board games; also **modern adoptions of old skills**, e.g. digital embroidery. Artists strove to **emulate medieval ingenuity amid today's concern for durability and avoidance of waste**. Roy Willingham recycled junkmail, thinly whitewashed with pictures of snakes writhing through holes; Tanya Bentham embroidered an alphabet scroll incorporating salvaged fabric; competition winner Sue Doggett recycled her own work into a modern feminist almanac (5.6.ii, pp. 9, 15, 6). A retrospective article by Wakelin for *The New Bookbinder* (5.2) drew out the exhibition's backdating of 'graphic design' – also highlighted in art magazine coverage (5.7).

The exhibition of new artworks transferred to the Bower Ashton Library, University of the West of England, April-June 2018, seen by an estimated 1,000 further visitors (5.8). **Professional and financial benefits accrued to the artists.** Willingham testifies that 'the competition has had a lasting impact on my bookworks': 'adopting a policy of improvisation and no rules seems to have become habitual'; Bernstein was made artist in residence at the Royal Astronomical Society

Library on the strength of work inspired; Davies' entry won the Agassi Book Prize and was selected for exhibition in the *Orbit UK Art Graduates Show 2018*; Hufton has used her triptych as a teaching tool in the UK and Belgium (5.9.i, ii, iii, iv). Three works were purchased for public collections (5.9.ii, v, viii; in addition to the Bodleian's acquisition of 5.9.vii): e.g. James's *Gallimaufry* was purchased for the Craft Council's new gallery (5.9.v), and Sowden sold copies of his book to Winchester School of Art's special collection and to a private collector (5.9.viii); an animation made for the competition and based on a *Designing English* manuscript became the centrepiece of an exhibition in the Peltz Gallery, London (5.5.ii); Welch produced a digitally printed edition of her 'medieval book', sold at artists' book fairs and online, and has been inspired to work on natural dyes (5.9.vi); Johnson has sold further unique carousel pop-up books (5.9.vii).

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. 'Bodleian Library *Designing English* Post-exhibition Analysis', 2018, containing 'Attendance Review', 'Education Report', 'Feedback-screen Analysis'.
2. Wakelin, 'In Praise of Ugly' [reflections on *Designing English* exhibition in booktrade journal], *The New Bookbinder*, 39 (2020), 7-12.
3. 'Report on media and news coverage of the [*Designing English*] exhibition', 8 January 2019.
4. Extracts from scanned visitors' books from *Designing English* exhibition (4 vols.; originals available on request):
  - i. 'religious experience' (07/01/18); 'moved to tears' (23/03/18)
  - ii. 'amazing books' (04-05/12/17); 'Amazed to compare' (18/12/17); 'fantastic, thorough' (17/03/18)
  - iii. 'I liked the way' (10/04/18); 'very impressed' (31/03/18)
  - iv. 'gazillion pictures' (08/03/18)
  - v. 'Mindblowing, fantastic' (01/12/17); 'Disgusting way' (09/02/18); 'ALFRED MADE ME INNIT' (02/12/17)
5. Reports on *Redesigning the Medieval Book* artists' workshops:
  - i. 'Report on mind-maps prepared by artists participating in the workshops on 10 and 23 March 2017', 19 December 2018.
  - ii. 'Report on media coverage of the artists' workshops, competition and exhibition', 14 January 2019.
6. Evidence relating to new artistic work inspired by, and exhibited alongside, *Designing English*:
  - i. Photo gallery on Bodleian website, displaying entries to *Redesigning the Medieval Book* competition, <https://visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/redesigning-the-medieval-book>.
  - ii. Bower Ashton Library, *Redesigning the Medieval Book: A catalogue to accompany an exhibition of new work inspired by medieval books and manuscripts from the Bodleian Library*, 2018, <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/pdf/bodleian.pdf>.
  - iii. Webpage on artist's website discussing exhibited entry for *Redesigning the Medieval Book* competition, <http://www.imogenfoxell.com/?p=1705>.
7. Selection of essays and art magazine coverage relating to *Designing English* and *Redesigning the Medieval Book* exhibitions:
  - i. (a) Wakelin, 'Redesigning the Medieval Book', in Helen Brookman and Olivia Robinson, eds., *Creative and Critical Encounters in Teaching Early English: Making New* (York: Arc Humanities Press, (b) email relating to delay due to COVID-19.
  - ii. Klaus Waldmann, 'I Grafici del Medioevo' [review of *Designing English* in Italian magazine specializing in illuminated manuscripts], *Alumina* (Jan 2018), 66-7.
  - iii. Anna McNay, 'Medieval graphic design' [review of *Designing English*], *Art Quarterly* [circulation: 123,000] (Spring 2018), 23.
  - iv. Allison Meier, 'How Medieval Manuscript Makers Experimented with Graphic Design', [review of *Designing English* in American contemporary arts web forum], Hyperallergic [followers: 151,600], 8 December 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/415365/designing-english-graphics-on-medieval-page/>.
8. Email from Senior Research Fellow for Artists' Books / Programme Leader MA Multidisciplinary Printmaking, Centre for Fine Print Research, University of the West of

England, 28 September 2020, containing audience figure for *Redesigning the Medieval Book* exhibition.

9. Selection of statements from artists exhibited in *Redesigning the Medieval Book*:

- i. Email from Roy Willingham (22/11/19)
- ii. Email from Kate Bernstein (21/11/18)
- iii. Email from Liza Davies (28/10/20)
- iv. Email from Susan Hufton (23/10/20)
- v. Email from Angela James (23/10/20)
- vi. Email from Corinne Welch (23/10/20)
- vii. Email from Paul Johnson (23/10/20)
- viii. Email from Tom Sowden (28/10/20)