

Adam Pinkhurst

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According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a scribe is “a writer; one whose business is writing in various specific or limited applications” (“Scribe”). Adam Pinkhurst was a literary and bureaucratic scribe responsible for the “Hengwrt,” one of the earliest manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*, as well as “Ellesmere,” the later copy, both written by Geoffrey Chaucer (Caon 17). Pinkhurst was first originally known only as “Scribe B” for “he was the second of the five copyists who collaborated in the production of one manuscript of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*” (Caon 2). Before this, some even believed it to be “Chaucer’s holograph itself” who had written “Hengwrt” because compared to the spelling system that Chaucer had used, this scribe’s was nearly identical (Caon 2). Pinkhurst was responsible for various amounts of Chaucer’s works as well as a few others. Almost entirely all of his works are Middle English texts other than two Trinity College manuscripts, making the total number of Pinkhurst’s scribed texts to fourteen (Mooney, “More Manuscripts” 401-403).

In June of 1929, Adam Pinkhurst’s name first appeared. It was in the *Times Literary Supplement* that Bernard Wagner stated to have found his name among the records of the Scrivener’s Company (Caon 15). Only fairly recently, in 2004, Linne Mooney identified Adam Pinkhurst as being the scribe accountable for both the “Hengwrt” and “Ellesmere” (Leeman). From then, Mooney began to dig up some background information about Pinkhurst himself. This was a major discovery for literature because knowing who Chaucer’s scribe was told more about his life, career, and “manner of working” (Allen 278). She believed that Pinkhurst was the son of a “small landowner” from southern England and worked as a writer of Court Letter in London

(Leeman). This was then confirmed, looking back at Wagner's statement to which he found the Pinkhurst name in a list with forty others who were part of the Court Letter of the City of London (Caon 15). On behalf of the Mercers' Company of London, Pinkhurst had also signed the petition to the King's Council around 1387. He even kept accounts for Mercers' Company both steadily and sporadically from 1391 to 1427 (Mooney 98).

It was where Pinkhurst possibly was hired to keep accounts for John Organ, a busy collector of customs whose appointments may have overlapped with Chaucer's, that Mooney believed Chaucer would have first come into contact with Pinkhurst (Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe" 112). However, Simon Horobin believed that it was more accurate for Chaucer to have met Pinkhurst because he wrote petitions (Horobin 353). Chaucer requested an appointment in 1385 to give up his position as "controller of the wool custom" and was officially out of office in 1386. Horobin found this to be a more plausible way of meeting because the hardcopy of this appointment request still exists today and is written by Pinkhurst himself. The date is also quite close to when Chaucer began working on *Troilus* and *Boece* that Pinkhurst was also the scribe for (Horobin 355-56). However, it is still unknown to the exact way in which Chaucer and Pinkhurst had met.

It was also believed at one point that Chaucer and Pinkhurst had a close relationship with one another. Chaucer was thought to have written a short poem about Pinkhurst, teasing him about making so many errors in his writings because of his "inattention" to detail (Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe" 103). From the manuscript of Cambridge, Trinity College R.3.20, Chaucer wrote the poem "Chaucer's Words unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn":

Adam . scryveyne / if euer it þee byfalle

Boece or Troylus / for to wryten nuwe /

Vnder þy long lokkes / þowe wryte more truwe

So offt a daye . I mot þy werk renuwe /

It to . corect / and eke to rubbe and scrape /

And al is thorough . þy neglygence and rape / (Gillespie 271).

Mooney said that in this, Chaucer gave away Pinkhurst's name and job title, as well as telling that Pinkhurst had already copied *Boece* and *Troilus* (Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe" 101). However, Alexandra Gillespie believed that this poem did not show that Pinkhurst was, in fact, Chaucer's own scribe or had a close relationship; only an "ambivalent one" (Gillespie 280). She also believed that Pinkhurst never actually copied *Boece* or *Troilus*, but it was merely a "possibility" that it could have happened. As for Chaucer actually writing Pinkhurst's name, she argued that it was pure coincidence that Adam Pinkhurst's name fit in well to create "a regularly stressed, perfect five-beat half-line" (Gillespie 279). Again, no one knows what Chaucer meant exactly in his poem that showed some sort of relationship with Pinkhurst, but it is known that Pinkhurst had been working as a scribe for Chaucer from the mid-1380s and continued creating copies of his work after Chaucer died (Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe" 103).

Adam Pinkhurst was then officially credited with being the scribe of the "Hengwrt" and "Ellesmere" manuscripts, to which, according to Mooney, were mostly likely created while Chaucer was alive and possibly even under his direction (Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe" 97). Eleanor Hammond Pinkhurst also wrote under the surname "Pynkhurst," and unlike others, Pinkhurst wrote his name in a large and extremely decorated script that took up about two-thirds

of an entire sheet of paper while other typical signatures were very plain and small, making Pinkhurst's signature more identifiable (Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe" 100). He also had an idiosyncratic writing style, also making it easier to identify what other works he had written in his lifetime (Mooney, "More Manuscripts" 401).

Mooney also argued that before he died in 1400, "Chaucer may have supervised" the creation of some of the "Hengwrt" manuscript because there were blank pages at the end of the *Cook's Tale* in *The Canterbury Tales* along with a footnote that said, "Of this Cokes tale maked Chaucer na moore," implying that Chaucer had died while in the midst of working on this tale (Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe" 105). Horobin gave another reasoning for this, saying that since Pinkhurst was receiving the manuscript in pieces, it was only natural to leave a few blank pages at the end in case more portions arrived later. The *Cook's Tale* also did not have a direct link to the tale that followed, and Pinkhurst was probably unsure if it was even finished at all. There were also a few blank pages at the end of the *Man of Law's*, *Summoner's*, *Squire's*, *Merchant's*, and *Franklin's Tales*, making it not entirely uncommon. However, because the link to the next tale was quite unclear, Horobin thought Pinkhurst created the footnote to "assure the reader it was genuinely unfinished" (Horobin 358-59).

Adam Pinkhurst is deemed "responsible for more copies of Chaucer's work than any other" (Mooney, "Chaucer's Scribe" 99). He helped "Ellesmere" to be the best and most often used base for newer versions of *The Canterbury Tales* and "Hengwrt" to be one not far behind (Leemon). Without knowing the foundation of their relationship, Chaucer and Pinkhurst still proved to have a working friendship at the very least. Pinkhurst showed to be an incredible scribe and still continued to copy some of Chaucer's texts even after his death.

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