

## An Early College Bookbinder

The names of men employed by medieval institutions to bind books are sometimes encountered in the records, but being able to point to surviving examples of their handiwork is less straightforward. While we may have the names of many stationers and bookbinders from, say, London in the final quarter of the fifteenth century and some distinctive early London bindings, being able to combine the two streams convincingly is rarely possible.<sup>1</sup> Instead, some later fifteenth-century binders have become familiar by modern nicknames, men such as the Bat Binder, the Fishtail Binder, and the Scales Binder, named for distinctive patterns in the tooling found on stamped bindings, and allowing that the brass stamps and rolls that made them were wielded by one man (which, of course, is not a given).<sup>2</sup> The problem of matching extant bindings to names is complicated by the fact that the artisans are frequently referred to in institutional records by what look like occupational surnames, such as Ralph Scrivener or Thomas Bokebynder, but which are in fact bynames or administrative shorthand. Municipal records of the sort that allow business premises to be identified use the men's surnames.

The stationers' trade in the fifteenth century is richly attested for Oxford. Graham Pollard was the pioneer in this territory.<sup>3</sup> He offered some plausible identifications of binders with men named in documentary sources. The focus of this essay is one of these, Thomas Bokebynder, *alias* Thomas Hokyns, who died in 1465 but is first found mentioned in 1438 when he and his employer, the stationer John Dolle, had to find sureties to keep the peace towards a skinner named Richard Gymlyn.<sup>4</sup> A business disagreement marks a suitably truculent beginning to a career which is told in other, similar scrapes. In 1447 he was imprisoned for having said that the mayor and townsmen should no longer have to take the oath to the university. In September 1448 he had to find a surety that he would henceforth live peaceably in the university and among his neighbours under penalty of ten marks. In 1462 Master Robert Egebury stood guarantor that Thomas Bokebynder of Cat Street, that is Thomas Hokyns, would appear in court to answer the plaint of a chaplain of Hert Hall about a book of decretals, the bargain for which was written into the back of the book.<sup>5</sup> Thomas's wife Margaret seems to have been equally uncollegial. As Pollard tells it, 'in January 1447 she was imprisoned for breaking the peace; in July 1448 a jury of neighbours presented her as a habitual scold; and in February 1464 she was banished from the town of Oxford and its precincts until such time as she should live decently with her husband'.<sup>6</sup> Hokyns died in 1465 when an

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<sup>1</sup> G. Pollard, 'The Names of Some English Fifteenth-Century Binders', *The Library*, 5th ser. 25 (1970), 193–218; Mirjam M. Foot, 'English Decorated Bookbindings', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375–1475*, ed. J. Griffiths and D. A. Pearsall (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 65–86. The London trade has been investigated by Paul Christianson, *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans, 1300–1500* (New York, NY, 1990). For general direction in the subject, see J. A. Szirmai, *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding* (Aldershot, 1999); also A. Gillespie, 'Bookbinding', in *The Production of Books in England 1350–1500*, ed. A. Gillespie and D. Wakelin (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 150–72, and 'Bookbinding and Early Printing in England', in *A Companion to the Early Printed Book in Britain, 1476–1558*, ed. V. Gillespie and S. Powell (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 75–94.

<sup>2</sup> G. D. Hobson, *English Binding before 1500* (Cambridge, 1929), and *Blind-Stamped Panels in the English Book-Trade, c. 1485–1555* (London, 1944); J. B. Oldham, *English Blind-Stamped Bindings* (Cambridge, 1952), and *Blind Panels of English Binders* (Cambridge, 1958). See also Foot, 'English Decorated Bookbindings' and 'Bookbinding 1400–1557', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, III: 1400–1557, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 109–127.

<sup>3</sup> 'The University and the Book Trade in Medieval Oxford', in *Beiträge zum Berufsbenusstsein des mittelalterlichen Menschen*, ed. P. Wilpert, *Miscellanea mediaevalia* 3 (Berlin, 1964), pp. 336–45; 'Names of Some English Fifteenth-Century Binders'; 'The *Pecia* System in the Medieval Universities', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries. Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. A. G. Watson and M. B. Parkes (1978), 145–61. For a masterly overview, see M. B. Parkes, 'The Provision of Books', in *The History of the University of Oxford*, II: *Late Medieval Oxford*, ed. J. I. Catto and T. A. R. Evans (Oxford, 1992), pp. 407–483; repr. in his *Pages From the Past: Medieval Writing Skills and Medieval Books* (Farnham, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Pollard, 'Names of Some English Fifteenth-Century Binders', pp. 202–3, drawing his evidence from *Registrum cancellarii Oxoniensis*, ed. H. E. Salter, 2 vols, Oxford Historical Society 93–4 (1932).

<sup>5</sup> Pollard, 'Names of Some English Fifteenth-Century Binders', pp. 202–3. Pollard was incorrect to say that at this date Hert Hall was occupied by New College men.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* 202.

inventory was made of his goods, then in the keeping of John More, the university stationer, at his premises on the east side of Catte Street (the site of what is now the Codrington Library).<sup>7</sup> It is the earliest known inventory of the equipment of an English binder.

From a record of employment at New College and Winchester College it is possible to add a few details to Pollard's report of Thomas Hokyns. Of more significance, it may be pointed out that there survives at Winchester, in pristine condition, one of his bindings. It makes of him that rare thing, a named fifteenth-century binder whose work we can inspect. Indeed, it makes him one of the earliest binders to be firmly identified.

The accounts of each institution combine to tell that in 1443 Thomas Bokebynder was paid 5s. 11*d.* at New College for binding into the graduals quires in which new masses had been written; he then went to Winchester to do precisely the same job.<sup>8</sup> He was in fact already a familiar face at Winchester: in 1439–40 Thomas Bokebynder had attached clasps to the great legendary and repaired its binding, and for that, and for new binding a processional and mending a gradual, he had been paid 2s. 4*d.*<sup>9</sup> The following year he was paid for a number of jobs on the chapel books, including the repair of the great breviary bequeathed by the fellow John Yve (d. 1432), and the year after that he bound it.<sup>10</sup> In the latter end of 1448, he was summoned to Winchester for a major overhaul of the chapel books, which he worked at for eleven weeks at the rate of twenty pence per week. Associated expenses included the purchase of many skins of vellum, sheepskin and goatskin for book coverings, as well as five pence for 'le joyntyng lether' and leather for fore-edge straps, latten for clasps and bosses, needles, thread and glue. On that occasion it is stated that he worked in the chapel itself where, in the late autumn light, he was helped to see by candles bought for the purpose.<sup>11</sup> He was given commons in hall at the cost of one shilling a week, the same sum that was allotted to each fellow. Two years later he was called back for further repairs to various chapel books, including an old legendary, a diurnal, and two antiphoners, one small and one old. Of course, the name Bokebynder is not uncommon and it is impossible to be certain that we have identified the same man. But the fact that a man of the same name worked for the sister colleges over a similar period says much; certainly, it must have been the same man who bound new masses into the graduals at both places in 1443.

The chief call on any binder's craft was the repair of chapel books such as these, used several times daily in choir and frequently encountered in visitation records with the description 'worn out', 'useless' or 'defective' (the last more often a comment on the quality of the text). None of these service books detailed in the accounts is known to survive, which can be no surprise given the destruction of copies of the old rite at the time of the Reformation.

But one other book does survive, a book of college statutes, which was repaired and bound by Thomas Bokebynder in 1451–2. It is still in the binding he made for it, still in superb condition; it shows him to have been a meticulous craftsman. The book happens to be the oldest surviving copy of Winchester College's statutes (WCM 21470).<sup>12</sup> It had been made fifty years earlier, in 1400 or 1401, at the charge of ten shillings.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Registrum cancellarii Oxoniensis*, ii, 233–5. On John More, see M. B. Parkes, 'A List of Medieval Oxford Stationers', *The Library*, 7th ser. 17 (2016), 167–78, at pp. 176–8.

<sup>8</sup> New College Archives, 7407, Bursars' Roll 1442–3, *Custus capelle*; Winchester College Muniments [WCM], 22119, Bursars' Roll 1443–4, *Custus capelle*. He presumably carried out the work at New College during the summer of 1443 and then travelled to Winchester around Michaelmas to do the same, so that the expenses at Winchester were carried into the following year's account. (The accounting year began at Michaelmas at both foundations.) The following account of his work at Winchester is expanded in James M. W. Willoughby, *The Libraries of Collegiate Churches*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 15, 2 vols (London, 2013), pp. 610–11.

<sup>9</sup> WCM 22115, Bursars' Roll 1439–40, *Custus capelle*.

<sup>10</sup> Willoughby, *Collegiate Churches*, p. 698 (SC335. 29).

<sup>11</sup> WCM 22123, *Custus capelle*.

<sup>12</sup> The statutes were printed by the University Commissioners (1855) as *The Statutes of Winchester College*; also by T. F. Kirby, *Annals of Winchester College* (London, 1892), pp. 455–523.

<sup>13</sup> WCM 22086a, Bursars' Account Roll for 1400–1401, *Custus librorum*.



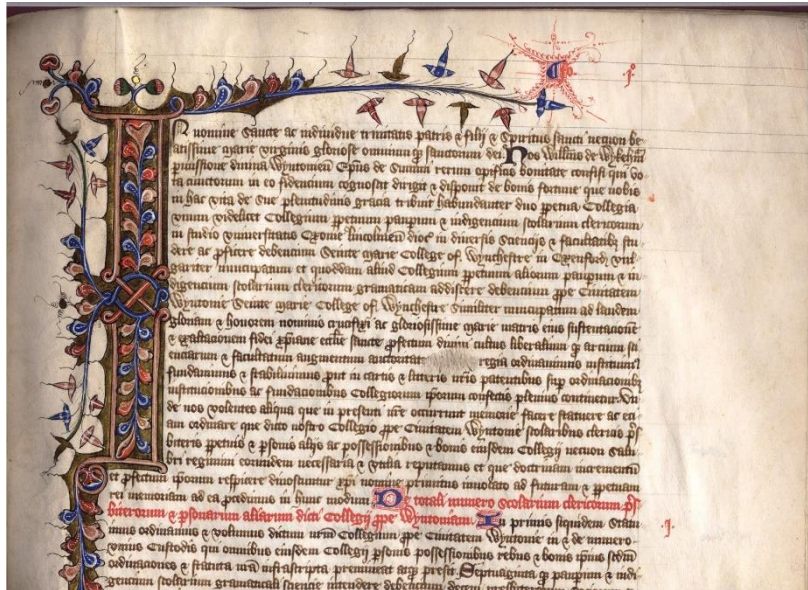
Binding for the Founder's Statutes of Winchester College, Winchester College Archives, Winchester, WCM 21470  
© Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College

The scribe may have been Peter the Scribe, *alias* Peter of Chesil, clerk of the neighbouring parish, who had been given various jobs around the books in this and previous years. The scribe was a fine penman, using here a steady and stylish Anglicana Formata. He was paid a further 6*s.* 8*d.*



Page 1, Founder's Statutes of Winchester College, Winchester College Archives, Winchester, WCM 21470  
© Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College





Page 1 [detail], showing the fine penmanship of the scribe of WCM 21470  
 © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College

for binding the book. The book is mentioned against the total sum of 16*s.* 8*d.* in a memorandum aggregating extraordinary expenses in the early years of the College's existence (which includes the very large total outlay of £43 10*s.* 1*d.* on books).<sup>14</sup> Perhaps it had been given some sort of limp or makeshift cover, and it was decided fifty years later that something of greater dignity was required; perhaps it was simply through continual handling that the binding stood in need of repair by the middle of the century. Whatever the reason, Thomas Bokebynder, the College's normal choice of binder at this time, was brought in to bind it anew. According to the Bursars' Roll for 1451–2, a skin was acquired for the work along with silk for the 'garnishing'.<sup>15</sup> The binding is a reverse skin, perhaps pig, over pasteboard, with a wrap-around flap and three ties of plaited red silk. The stitching is very fine. The seal of the Founder, Bishop Wykeham, is pendant from the spine-fold on a thick plaited cord of red and green silk. The cost of the work, totalled with repairs to a great legendary and a small antiphoner, was 11*s.* 4*d.*



Seal from Founder's Statutes of Winchester College, Winchester College Archives, Winchester, WCM 21470  
 © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College

<sup>14</sup> 'Item pro scriptura et ligacione libri statutorum de nouo scripto anno Henrici secundo, xvj s. viij d.'; Willoughby, *Collegiate Churches*, p. 620 (SC328. 6).

<sup>15</sup> WCM 22126, *Custus capelle*.

Thomas Bokebynder's connection with Winchester gains some importance in respect of the developing taste for stamped bindings in England in the second half of the fifteenth century. It has long been recognised that some tooled bindings, exclusive to Oxford and Winchester at this date, show a revived taste for a style of decorative binding that had sometimes been used on Romanesque books. Between about 1150 and the early thirteenth century a small number of books were bound in polished brown calf and blindstamped. There are twelve surviving Romanesque blind-stamped bindings of English origin, three made at Winchester, three associated with binderies in London, and six of uncertain origin or provenance.<sup>16</sup>

The Winchester group is the earliest, dating from the mid-twelfth century, comprising the Winton Domesday, a Hegesippus, and the Codex Wintoniensis, or cartulary of St Swithun's priory.<sup>17</sup> The group was studied by Howard Nixon, who found they shared unique tools, and on this basis he assigned them to the cathedral priory of St Swithun and dated the group to around 1150.<sup>18</sup> The first tools used for the imitative Oxford stamped bindings of the fifteenth century were modelled on these Winchester Romanesque bindings. Probably the earliest identified Oxford stamped binding, and the first to use the Romanesque style, is BL MS Egerton 2892, which Pollard attributed 'perhaps' to Thomas Hokyns.<sup>19</sup> The manuscript is a copy of *De pluralitate beneficiorum* by Richard Rotherham, who was master of Balliol College in the early 1420s and later chancellor of Hereford and then, from 1448, of Exeter.<sup>20</sup> The binding was roughly dated by Pollard to not later than 1453, on the basis of allowing reasonable time to the author before his death in 1455 to revise and augment his text and have it copied again as Balliol College, MS 80.

The Egerton manuscript, the original version of the work, looks like the presentation copy to a patron: it has the arms of the see of Winchester in the opening initial. The covers of the binding are decorated with concentric rectangles of small tools showing, from outside in, a peacock (tail down) leaning over a garland, a bird, perhaps a goose, with the head of a man in a cap, a swan, and a gryphon. The first two and the fourth are all taken or adapted from bindings in the early Winchester group. Romanesque-style bindings from later in the century attributed to the university stationer Thomas Hunt (d. by 1498) use some tools that seem to derive from the same stock.<sup>21</sup> But the fact that the copy of the work in this manuscript was revised by the author before his death in 1455 means that it cannot have been bound so late as to be by Hunt. The fact that it appears to have been the presentation copy with the arms of the see of Winchester in the opening initial leads in only one direction.

Pollard asked, 'who was the arbiter of taste in Oxford bookbinding who could have known about and encouraged the imitation of Romanesque bindings?' and by way of an answer he offered the name of William Waynflete, bishop of Winchester from 1447 to 1486 and founder, in 1458, of Magdalen College in Oxford.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> M. Gullick and N. Hadgraft, 'Bookbindings', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, II: 1100–1400 (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 95–109, at 106–7; Pollard, 'Names of Binders', 197, 201, 203.

<sup>17</sup> Respectively: London, Society of Antiquaries, MS 154; Winchester Cathedral, MS 20; and BL MS Add. 15350. (The covers of the Codex Wintoniensis were removed in 1961 and are now kept separately under the same mark.) The Hegesippus was given in 1948 and its pre-Dissolution provenance is not known, although its origin at the cathedral seems certain; a cathedral provenance for the other two is certain and their origin likewise.

<sup>18</sup> H. M. Nixon, 'The Binding of Winton Domesday', in *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. Biddle, Winchester Studies 1 (Oxford, 1976), pp. 526–40, at 535–6.

<sup>19</sup> It is illustrated by Hobson, *English Binding Before 1500*, pl. 35, reproduced by Pollard, 'Names of Some English Fifteenth-Century Binders', pl. 3: 'perhaps by Thomas Hokyns' says Pollard in his caption to the plate.

<sup>20</sup> A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD 1500* (Oxford, 1959), 1593.

<sup>21</sup> Pollard, 'Names of Some English Fifteenth-Century Binders', pp. 206–7, 209; M. B. Parkes, 'Thomas Hunt and the Oxford Book-Business in the Late Fifteenth Century', *The Library*, 7th ser. 17 (2016), 28–39, at pp. 37–8. Bindings have been attributed to Hunt on the basis of a consensus of the tools employed and the coincidence of date between the books and Hunt's professional floruit. Parkes made the suggestion (p. 37 n. 46) that Hokyns's tools could have been taken over by Hunt without the intermediation of Hunt's predecessor as stationer, John More (d. 1472), and that the bindings which Pollard attributed to More may in fact have been Hunt's.

<sup>22</sup> Pollard, 'Names of Some English Fifteenth-Century Binders', p. 203.

In Thomas Bokebynder we have an Oxford binder who was a regular visitor to Winchester and who was accommodated there while he worked on the College's books. The binding of the Egerton manuscript, with its decoration modelled on Romanesque books at Winchester and bearing the arms inside of Waynflete's see, might as a result more firmly be attributed to Hokyns. What strengthens the case that Thomas Bokebynder or Hokyns originated the Romanesque style of blindstamped binding is the record of his work at Winchester College, of which the College's statute book stands as a solitary witness.

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