

John Farley (d. 1464) and the Finessing of MS 281

In spite of having suffered the loss of three illuminated leaves, MS 281 in the College Library remains a refined object. It contains a copy of Ptolemy's *Almagesta* in the translation of Gerard of Cremona, written in England in a steady gothic bookhand, for which a date around the third quarter of the thirteenth century may be suggested. Ample margins were left open for the text's diagrams and tables, which are mostly present, and there is quite an extensive, coeval gloss. Space was also left for decorated initials—but artists for these were not found until nearly two centuries later. When a date for the manuscript has been suggested in the scholarly literature, the tension between the script and the illumination, both pulling in opposite directions, has led opinion to cluster somewhere in the middle. Coxe, in what was the first published description of the manuscript, suggested that it belonged to the late fourteenth century ('s. xiv exeuntis').¹ Dates have been offered in more recent times by scholars whose interest was the text itself: Paul Kunitzsch ('14. Jh.'), followed by Henry Zepeda ('fourteenth century'), and David Juste ('s. xiv').² Richard Hunt had in fact already spotted that the script and decoration belong to different periods, in his essay in the College's sexcentenary volume.³

Both text and decoration have distinct interest. The marginal apparatus, added in a small Anglicana hand not long after the main scribe's work, presents as a gloss on the text excerpts taken from *Almagesti minor*.⁴ Zepeda noted that our manuscript shares a close connection in these notes with one other copy, in the Laurentian Library in Florence, MS Plut. 89 sup. 57 (s. xiii²). Both have the same marginal and interlinear notes that are not related to the *Almagesti minor*, and both have the same short commentary on some of the excerpts, such that these additions in our manuscript are 'able to descend directly' from the one in Florence.⁵ This latter seems to have had a Florentine origin and a certain later medieval provenance from the convent of San Marco in the city. Quite how our manuscript should come, uniquely, to carry the same marginalia as this Florentine copy is a question for which there is at present no answer.

The manuscript served as a plain reading copy until the mid-fifteenth century, when it was 'finished' by two cooperating limners, both very expert.⁶ Major initials with borders stand at the start of each new book: ff. 2r, 42r, 58r (artist A), 122v, 149r, 170v, 184v, 206v, 225v (artist B); three leaves with major decoration have been robbed, ff. 20, 80, 102. Initials are gold champs with sprays and scrolling acanthus leaves—such a typical feature of English manuscripts of the fifteenth century—twisting round the border bars. The work of Artist B is especially fine, with smooth layering of colours taken from a bright palette, finding a different floral scheme for each page. Minor initials are gold champs on quartered or halved rose and blue grounds with white filigree decoration. Artist A left his minor initials unadorned (ff. 2r–41v); in the rest of the book

¹ H. O. Coxe, *Catalogus codicum mss. qui in collegiis aulisque Oxoniensibus hodie adservantur*, 2 pts (Oxford, 1852), [New College] p. 98.

² P. Kunitzsch, *Der Sternkatalog des Almagest: die arabische-mittelalterliche Tradition*, 3 vols (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986–91), II, 22; H. Zepeda, *The First Latin Treatise on Ptolemy's Astronomy: The Almagesti minor (c. 1200)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), p. 76; and D. Juste, 'MS Oxford, New College, 281' (Update: 30 January 2020), Ptolemaeus Arabus et Latinus. Manuscripts <<http://ptolemaeus.baw.de/ms/192>>.

³ 'The Medieval Library', in *New College Oxford, 1379–1979*, ed. John Buxton and Penry Williams (Oxford: New College, Oxford, 1979), pp. 317–45, at 334: 'The manuscript was written in the late thirteenth century, but left unrubricated. The decoration is of Farley's time'. He was cited by J. J. G. Alexander and Elżbieta Temple, *Illuminated Manuscripts in Oxford College Libraries, the University Archives and the Taylor Institution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), no. 543, suggesting that the border and initials are of the mid-fifteenth century, added to a manuscript of the mid-thirteenth century.

⁴ *Almagesti minor*: II 16–18, 21–26, 33, III 3–IV 1, and IV 17–19 (ff. 28r–30r, 32v, 48r–48v, 49v–50v, 51v–54r, 55v, 56v–58r and 76v–77r); the corollary of II 26 is incomplete. For the *Almagesti minor*, see Zepeda, *First Latin Treatise on Ptolemy's Astronomy*, with description of our manuscript at pp. 76–7.

⁵ For example, before the enunciation of *Almagesti minor* II 20, both add: 'Non ponitur manifeste in littera, sed ex prehabitis potest haberi' (f. 57r in our manuscript, 56r in Florence); *ibid.*, p. 77.

⁶ I thank Lynda Dennison for clarifying discussion of the manuscript's decoration.

adornment is general and was presumably the work of Artist B, drawing feather sprays north and south, sometimes with floral terminals in blue or carmine.



New College Library, Oxford, MS 281, f. 2r—the work of artist A



New College Library, Oxford, MS 281, f. 170v—the work of artist B

The circumstances by which the pages came to be finished deserve some consideration, not least because an unusual and welcome feature of the manuscript is that it contains a note of the cost of the decoration, in red ink at the foot of one of the back flyleaves (f. 244v).⁷ The cost is specified as for major initials, minor initials, and paraphs:

littere maiores	viiij	prec' iiiij s.
littere minores	C lxxxviiij	prec' vij s. x d.
Paraffi	iiiij C lv	prec' iiiij d. ob.

This costing note seems to relate to the work of the second artist since it occurs in his section of the manuscript: six of his major initials survive, the other two must have been the ones on the robbed folios 80 and 102, something given strength by the identical style of the minor initials across those breaches.

The man who paid this bill was most probably John Farley, the manuscript's last private owner and its donor to the College.⁸ Farley is a figure of some interest. A native of Winchester, he was a Wykehamist of both foundations, admitted a scholar of Winchester College in 1444 and of New College in 1449, going on to a fellowship after the usual two years' residence. Having taken his degree of Master of Arts he was admitted to the Faculty of Theology. At the same time, he found employment as the university's 'Scribe'—or Registrar, as the role would now be understood. He continued in his fellowship until his untimely death in the winter of 1464, when he must have been in his early thirties.⁹

Farley was in the vanguard of humanistic practice in England.¹⁰ He was one of the first fifteenth-century Englishmen to attempt to learn Greek. He probably began to instruct himself using the collection of Greek books that had been left to the Franciscan *studium* in Oxford by Robert Grosseteste (c. 1170–1253), bishop of Lincoln and the leading English intellectual of the thirteenth century. Grosseteste had served as the friars' first *lector* in theology between 1231 and 1235.¹¹ In the fifteenth century the library at the Greyfriars, including Grosseteste's donation, seems to have been made generally available to scholars. A loyal reader, Thomas Gascoigne (d. 1458), doctor of theology and sometime chancellor of the university, left notes concerning the books he had consulted there.¹² The Franciscans even presented him with one of Grosseteste's volumes, now Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 198; Gascoigne gave another bearing the Greyfriars' *ex libris* to Lincoln College, where it is now MS Lat. 33; that may also have been a present. It seems that Farley was favoured in the same way, for he too came by one of Grosseteste's books, a small Greek psalter of the twelfth century, now Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 480. He wrote

⁷ For a list of seven other manuscripts displaying similar notes, including New College, MS 53, see K. L. Scott, 'Limning and Book-Producing Terms and Signs *in situ* in Late-Medieval English Manuscripts: A First Listing', in *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper (Aldershot: Scolar, 1995), pp. 142–88, at 164, n. 10.

⁸ An *ex dono* inscription was added to a front flyleaf (f. ii^r): 'Liber Collegii beate Marie Wintoniensi in Oxon' Ex dono Magistri Ioannis Farley quondam socii huius Collegii ac Scholaris sacre theologie eius anime propicietur deus Amen'.

⁹ Details of his career were brought together by A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957–9), p. 667.

¹⁰ R. Weiss, *Humanism in England during the Fifteenth Century*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp. 136–8; David Rundle, *The Renaissance Reform of the Book and Britain: The English Quattrocento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 235–9; id. 'The Playpen: Reform, Experimentation and the Memory of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester in the Registry of the University of Oxford', in *Books and Bookmen in Early Modern Britain. Essays Presented to James P. Carley*, ed. James Willoughby and Jeremy Catto (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2018), pp. 22–3, 38.

¹¹ The best discussion is still Richard William Hunt, 'The Library of Robert Grosseteste', in *Robert Grosseteste, Scholar and Bishop*, ed. D. A. Callus (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1955), pp. 121–45.

¹² On this aspect of the Greyfriars library, 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 Ralph Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) [repr. in his *Pages From the Past: Medieval Writing Skills and Medieval Books* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012)], pp. 407–483, at 435–40. For Thomas Gascoigne, see R. M. Ball, *Thomas Gascoigne, Libraries and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge Bibliographical Society, 2006).

into it his name in Greek characters and a few transliterations, comparing the Greek with the Latin of the Psalms he would have known so well. Indeed, the Psalter was the normal source of elementary instruction in Latin during the middle ages, and that may be a signal of how far Farley had gone in his Greek studies. None the less, as Roberto Weiss suggested, knowledge of Greek, however elementary, ‘must have appeared something of a distinction to Farley, who did not hesitate to sign his name on some of his official letters in his register in Greek characters’.¹³ His name is indeed found like that in the university’s letter-book, *Registrum F*, several times between May 1461 and March 1464.¹⁴

In another Oxford library Farley found the material to finesse his handwriting. He was one of the first men in England to employ a fully-fledged humanistic *littera antiqua*, and it is very likely that he was imitating the script of Italian humanistic books that had been donated to the university library by Humfrey Duke of Gloucester (1390–1447) in the late 1430s and 1440s.¹⁵ His is a carefully made, very upright script, the only ligature being the humanistic ct-ligature; of particular note are the straight-backed *d* and straight *r*, and the straight, long neck and upright design of the *g*, all characteristic of his mature style. David Rundle has suggested that Farley found a model for this *g* in the hand of the papal secretary and humanist Andrea Fiacchi, a copy of whose *De potestatibus Romanorum* was available to Farley in the university library.¹⁶ The form is in datable use in a document of September 1462 copied by Farley into the Chancellor’s Register.¹⁷ It also happens to be this form of *g* that appears in our MS 281, in several long marginal annotations by Farley; it shows that he wrote these in the book towards the end of his life.¹⁸ His hand, showing humanist influence, first appears on f. 111v for May 1458 in a Register of Congregation (NEP/Supra/Reg Aa (*olim* Reg. Aa.5)); it may also be seen in Register F, mentioned above, and in the Chancellor’s Register, 1435–69 (Hyp/A/1 (*olim* Register Aaa)), where the list of masters of halls for September 1462 on f. 196r shows the change in his minuscule *g*, now the mature style.¹⁹ Farley was also the scribe of the only original letter to survive from the fifteenth-century university, sent to the prior of Durham cathedral on 29 January 1463.²⁰ These registers witness Farley’s work as registrar, a post to which he had been appointed in 1458 by the university’s chancellor, Thomas Chaundler (c. 1417–1490), who was also warden of New College.²¹ Chaundler’s favour is significant.

The ‘Chaundler Manuscript’ is a treasure of New College Library, where it is MS 288.²² It is also pre-eminently the place where Farley’s hand may be examined, for, barring some additions

¹³ Weiss, *Humanism in England*, p. 138.

¹⁴ Oxford University Archives, NEP/Supra/Reg F, ff. 114r, 114v, 115v, 116v.

¹⁵ The lists of books given by Duke Humfrey to the university are edited by Rodney M. Thomson with the assistance of James G. Clark, *The University and College Libraries of Oxford*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 16 (London: British Library, 2015), pp. 8–54 (UO1–3).

¹⁶ Rundle, *Renaissance Reform of the Book*, p. 237.

¹⁷ Oxford University Archives, Hyp/A/1, f. 196r.

¹⁸ One of his notes mentions ‘Bredon’ (f. 8v), in other words the Merton Calculator Simon Bredon (d. 1372). Indicated would be Bredon’s *Commentum super aliquas demonstrationes Almagesti*, surviving in three copies; no copy is known to have been at New College. John Bale (1495–1552) did report for the College Simon Bredon’s commentary on Alexander of Villa Dei’s *Massa computi* (J. Bale, *Index Britanniae scriptorum*, ed. Reginald Lane Poole and Mary Bateson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902)/repr. with introduction by Caroline Brett & James Carley (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), p. 411 [identified by incipit]).

¹⁹ For all these, see [A. C. de la Mare & R. W. Hunt], *Duke Humfrey and English Humanism in the Fifteenth Century*, Bodleian Library exhibition catalogue (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1970), no. 39a–c.

²⁰ Dean and Chapter Archives, DCD 1.5.Ebor.51; illustrated by Rundle, *Renaissance Reform*, fig. 42.

²¹ For Chaundler, warden of New College between 1454 and 1475, and chancellor of the university between July 1457 and 15 May 1461, re-elected June 1472 to soon after September 1479, see Emden, *Biographical Register*, pp. 398–9, and Jeremy Catto in *ODNB*.

²² The Chaundler manuscripts have attracted considerable attention. For principal discussion, see Montague Rhodes James, *The Chaundler MSS*, Roxburghe Club (London: J. B. Nichols, 1916); Weiss, *Humanism in England*, pp. 133–6. For New College, MS 288, see Andrew Cole, ‘Staging Advice in Oxford, New College, MS 288: On Thomas Chaundler and Thomas Bekynton’, in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 245–63; [de la Mare and Hunt], *Duke Humfrey and English Humanism*, no. 36;

at the back, the entire book is his scribal work. It is datable after 30 August 1462, which is the date of Pope Pius II's Mantuan speech, copied here by Farley, and December 1464, the time of Farley's death. The book is a *de-luxe* Wiccamical production whose purpose was to praise and commemorate the Founder, Bishop William of Wykeham (c. 1324–1404). It is celebrated for four full-page tinted drawings containing the first known representations of the buildings of New College and Winchester College, as well as Wells cathedral, and the depiction of an assembly of great alumni who stand around the figure of the Founder, seated in regal style on a dais.²³ The main texts in the book, *Collocutiones VII de laudibus nobilis antistitis domini Willelmi de Wykeham* and *Allocutiones duae de laudabili uita eiusdem Willelmi*, written by Chaundler, are intended to demonstrate that Wykeham possessed all the Aristotelian virtues as well as all the Christian ones. Throughout, the Latinity, the script, and the decoration are all humanistically influenced. The volume was prepared for Chaundler while he was warden of New College, and presented to another Wykehamist, Thomas Beckington (?1390–1465), bishop of Bath and Wells, himself a champion of good letters and a contributor to the growth of English humanism.²⁴ The book had a companion volume, now Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 14. 5, in which Farley's hand may also be seen, at ff. 46v–49v.

In this tight nexus of production, it is significant to note that the limner who worked on the Chaundler manuscript also worked for Farley on his Ptolemy: he is artist A of MS 281.²⁵ It is entirely possible that Farley had his book decorated especially to refine his gift before presentation, and he used the same man who would decorate, or had already decorated, the Chaundler manuscript so superbly.

In all of this, Chaundler's influence is deeply felt. His is the defining personality by which New College came to promote in the fifteenth century a humanistic moral education for which an elegant, modern Latinity was an aspiration and a sign. In the words of Jeremy Catto, 'his pedagogy, thanks to the distinction of those he trained, constituted Chaundler's most important contribution to the promotion of Renaissance scholarship in England, completing the evolution of the Wykehamist colleges into nurseries of civilized and intelligent public servants which Henry Chichele and Thomas Beckington had inaugurated'.²⁶ The three men, Chichele, Beckington, and Chaundler, are pictured among the group of Wykehamist luminaries in the drawing at the front of the Chaundler manuscript. John Farley, still a mere Fellow, is not there, which is not to say that one day he might not have taken his place among them. Thomas Chaundler had seen his qualities and appointed him as registrar, promoting a good Latin style and a modern hand to improve the elegance of the university's diplomatic correspondence. In the wider world, exactly the same

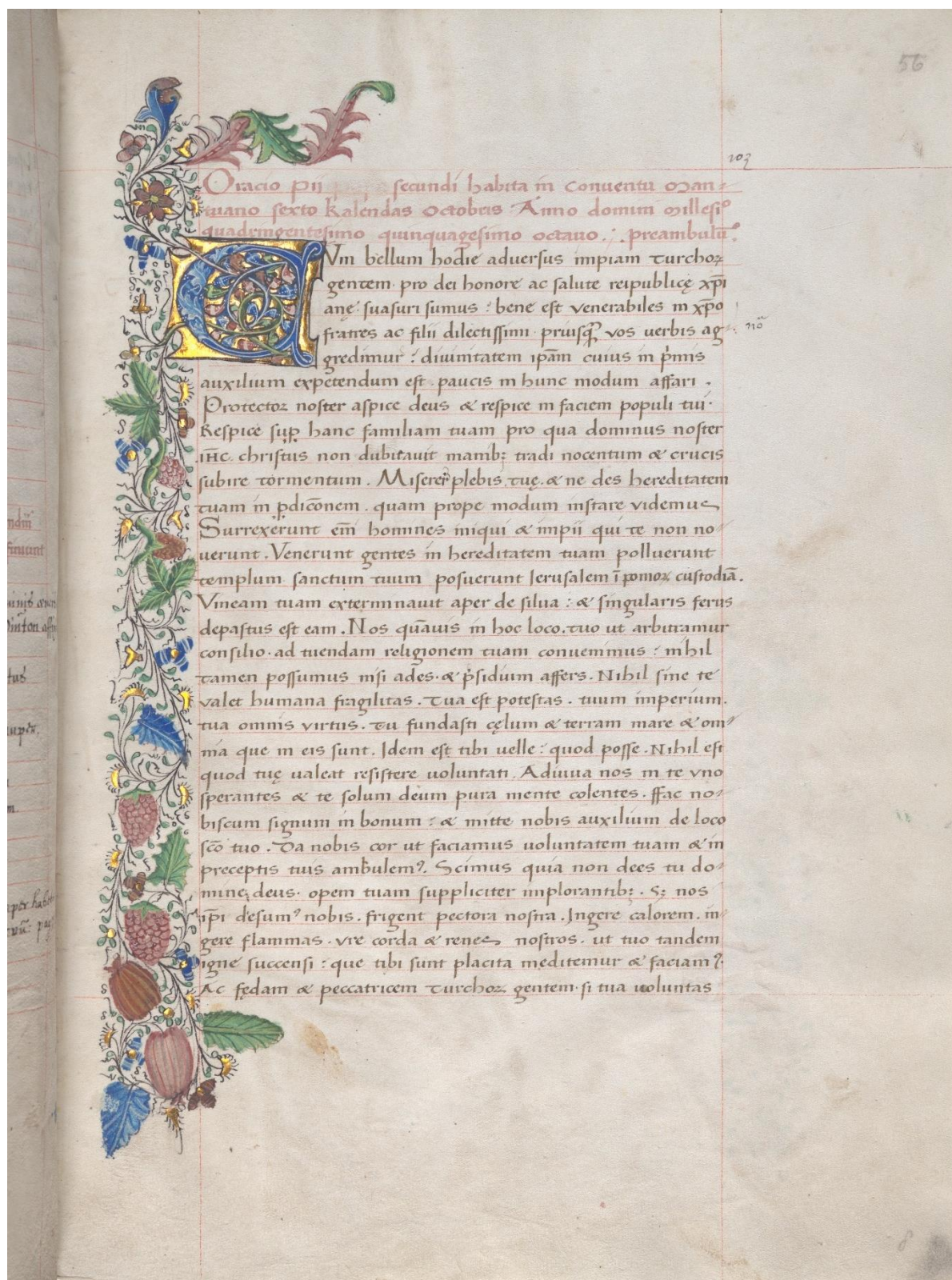
Andrew G. Watson, *Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts c. 435–1600 in Oxford Libraries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), no. 856.5; Alexander and Temple, *Illuminated Manuscripts in Oxford College Libraries*, no. 581; Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts, 1390–1490*, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles 6, 2 vols. (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), no. 114.

²³ Standing around Wykeham are Thomas Beckington (?1390–1465), bishop of Bath and Wells, Henry Chichele (c. 1364–1443), archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranley (c. 1340–1417), bishop of Dublin, William Waynflete (c. 1398–1486), bishop of Winchester. In the foreground in the lower half of the page are other figures of high rank, their hands all raised in prayerful attitude to the Founder: Thomas Chaundler (d. 1490), Andrew Holes (d. 1470), archdeacon of Wells, John Norton (d. 1462), chancellor of Durham and vicar-general of York, Hugo Sygar (d. 1489), treasurer of Wells, John Selott (d. by 1479), archdeacon of Sudbury, Richard Andrew (d. 1477), dean of York, William Say (d. 1468), dean of St Pauls and archdeacon of Northampton.

²⁴ Weiss, *Humanism in England*, pp. 74–5; Arnold Judd, *The Life of Thomas Bekynton, Secretary to King Henry VI and Bishop of Bath and Wells 1443–1465* (Chichester: Regnum Press, 1961), pp. 36–46. For a summary account of Beckington's career, see Rober W. Dunning's article in ODNB.

²⁵ It is necessary to admit the possibility that John Farley and artist A were one and the same. There can be no way of determining the case; but it is a fact that artist B of MS 281 left a bill for his work in the book. If Farley truly were the first artist, then would he not have preferred to finish the entire book himself? It seems more natural to assume it had been farmed out to two collaborating artisans.

²⁶ Catto in his article on Chaundler in ODNB. For discussion of this particularity of Wykeham's colleges, see Guy Fitch Lytle, "Wykehamist Culture" in Pre-Reformation England', in *Winchester College: Sixth-Centenary Essays*, ed. Roger Cusance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 129–66.



New College Library, Oxford, MS 288, f. 56r—
 showing John Farley's formal hand, written sometime between the end of 1462 and December 1464.
 The decoration is by artist A of MS 281.

priorities had been followed by Bishop Beckington when he promoted another Wykehamist, Richard Andrew, to succeed himself as king's secretary in 1443. Richard Andrew is one more member of the group portrait in the Chaundler manuscript. A subsequent Keeper of the Privy

Seal, Andrew Holes, is yet another. The men shared the same interest in good letters that Beckington saw as essential for the modernization of the practice of the signet office and of the civil service more generally.²⁷

However, such stations in the *cursus honorum* no longer led inevitably to the highest offices. Chaundler's preferment, admittedly, was not inconsiderable: chancellor of Wells, 1452–67 (promoted by Beckington); chancellor of York, 1467–86; and dean of Hereford 1482–90, where he died and lies buried; but a bishopric never did arrive. Increasingly, from the time of Henry VI's majority in 1437, the king's favour fell on royal chaplains and confessors for bishoprics, men trained in theology rather than the university-trained lawyers who had been appointed earlier in his reign. Had the younger men standing around the Founder in the Chaundler portrait belonged to the former generation, they too might have assumed places on the bishops' bench. As it was, such men as Andrew Holes, William Say, Richard Andrew, and, in fact, Thomas Chaundler, who was the portrait's designer, had to settle for their archdeaconries and deaneries. In 1458, when Chaundler promoted Farley to an important position in the university administration, future opportunities might perhaps have looked more promising. Farley had Chaundler's good opinion and could have expected to follow him if Chaundler had been raised up. It would explain his fine gift of the Ptolemy to the College, recognizing and cultivating Chaundler as Chaundler had recognized and cultivated Beckington with MS 288. The two manuscripts share an artist; and they also have Farley in common, owner of one and penman of the other. MS 281 is one more book that can be added to the circle of humanistic attitudes and interests gathered around Warden Chaundler.

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²⁷ Richard Andrew's cultivation of good Latin style is witnessed by two collections of model letters which he left to New College: MS 158, of Petrus de Vineia, and MS 128, of the French humanist Nicholas of Clamanges, a rarity in England; both books shows signs of heavy use. For his career, see Simon Walker, 'Between Church and Crown: Master Richard Andrew, King's Clerk', *Speculum* 74 (4) (1999), 956–91.